

Paul's Letter to the

Romans

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The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 56

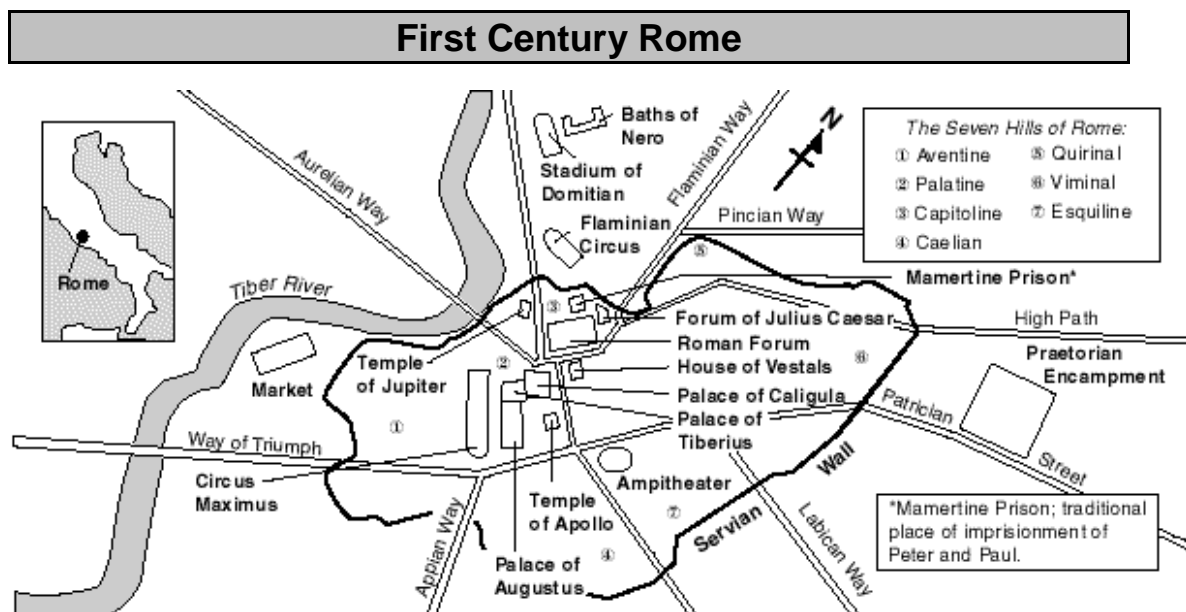
Theme: Paul's systematic theology of the Gospel of God, that the righteous will live by faith

Key Words: Righteousness, Faith, Justification, Law, Grace

Background. When Paul wrote Romans about A.D. 56, he had not yet been to Rome, but he had been preaching the gospel since his conversion in A.D. 35. During the previous ten years he had founded churches throughout the Mediterranean world. Now he was nearing the end of his third missionary journey. This epistle is therefore a mature statement of his understanding of the gospel. The church at Rome had been founded by other Christians (unknown to us, but see "visitors from Rome" in Acts 2:10); and Paul, through his travels, knew many of the believers there (16:3–15).

Occasion and Date. Paul most likely wrote Romans while he was in Corinth in A.D. 56, taking a collection to help the needy Christians in Jerusalem (15:25–28, 31; 2 Cor. 8, 9). He planned to go to Jerusalem with this collection, then visit the church in Rome (1:10, 11; 15:22–24). After being refreshed and supported by the Christians in Rome, he planned to travel to Spain to preach the gospel (15:24). He wrote to tell the Romans of his impending visit. The letter was likely delivered by Phoebe (16:1, 2).

Purpose. In view of his personal plans, Paul wrote to introduce himself to a church he had never visited. At the same time he set forth a full and orderly statement of the great principles of the gospel that he preached.



Outline of Romans

- I. Introduction 1:1–17
 - A. Paul's identification 1:1–7
 - B. Paul's desire to visit Rome 1:8–15
 - C. Summary of the gospel 1:16, 17
- II. All have sinned 1:8–3:20
 - A. Gentiles know of God but reject Him 1:18–32
 - B. Jews have God's laws but are not righteous 2:1–29
 - C. God is just to judge all men 3:1–20
- III. Justification is by faith alone 3:1–5:21
 - A. God's righteousness preserved through Christ's death for us 3:21–26
 - B. Justification is by faith alone 3:27–31
 - C. Abraham justified by faith, not works 4:1–25
 - D. Once justified by faith, we triumph even in sufferings 5:1–11
 - E. We gained death through Adam's sin, but eternal life through Christ's obedience 5:12–21
- IV. Practicing righteousness in the Christian life 6:1–8:39
 - A. Overcoming sin in the Christian life 6:1–23
 - B. We are dead to the powerless system called "law" 7:1–6
 - C. The law cannot empower us to obey 7:7–25
 - D. We fulfill God's righteousness by living in the power of the Spirit and according to the Spirit 8:1–17
 - E. Longing for complete redemption 8:18–25
 - F. Help and assurance in hardship 8:26–39
- V. God and Israel 9:1–11:36
 - A. Though Israel is unfaithful, God is righteous 9:1–33
 - B. Israel has willingly rejected the gospel 10:1–21
 - C. A remnant now remains, and someday full salvation will come to Israel 11:1–32
 - D. Praise for God's infinite wisdom 11:33–36
- VI. Practical applications 12:1–15:13
 - A. Present yourselves as sacrifices to God 12:1, 2
 - B. Use of spiritual gifts 12:3–8
 - C. Relating to Christians 12:9–13

- D. Relating to unbelievers 12:14–21
- E. Relating to government 13:1–7
- F. The law of love 13:8–14
- G. Toleration and love in minor things 14:1–23
- H. Caring for each other 15:1–13
- VII. Paul's own situation 15:14–33
 - A. His ministry 15:14–22
 - B. His plans 15:23–33
- VIII. Personal greetings 16:1–24
- IX. Benediction 16:25–27

Key Terms of Salvation

Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, attempts to portray God’s plan of salvation in a concise and clear manner. In doing so, he uses Greek words whose meanings are not widely known today. Here is a brief glossary of the key terms of salvation in this book:

English Term	Greek Term	References	Meaning
Faith	<i>pistis</i>	(1:17; 4:9; 12:6)	“Belief, trust”; faith is the means by which sinful people can experience and enjoy all the blessings of salvation. It is a complete trust in Jesus for salvation from sin and the coming judgment.
Gospel	<i>euangelion</i>	(1:16, 11:28)	“Good News”; Paul uses this word to refer to the wonderful message of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ.
Grace	<i>charis</i>	(1:5; 5:2; 12:3)	“The unmerited favor of God”; this term refers to God’s inexplicable giving of good things (especially salvation) to undeserving people who could never earn it. Salvation is a free gift made possible by Christ’s death on our behalf.
Justification	<i>dikaiōsis</i>	(4:25; 5:18)	“The act of being declared righteous”; a legal term used by Paul to describe the spiritual transaction whereby God (the Judge) declares those who trust in Christ and what He has done for them on the Cross, to be acceptable before Him. Such a verdict is possible only because Christ has settled all the claims of the Law against sinners.
Law	<i>nomos</i>	(2:12; 4:13; 7:12; 10:4; 13:8)	“The commandments given by God”; Paul emphasizes both the holy character of the Law and the inability of sinful people to live according to it. The Law becomes a burden and a curse, until we allow it to point us to Christ, who perfectly fulfills all its requirements.
Propitiation	<i>hilasterion</i>	(3:25)	“The satisfaction of God’s holy wrath against sin”; rebellion against God results in the wrath of God and must be met with judgment. By dying in our place and taking our sins upon Himself, Jesus satisfies God’s righteous anger against all who believe.
Redemption	<i>apolutrōsis</i>	(3:24; 8:23)	“The act of freeing someone by paying a purchase price”; this economic term is used by Paul in a theological sense to describe how Christ paid the penalty required by God for our sins (that is, death) by giving His own life on the Cross. When we believe, Jesus frees us from sin.
Righteousness	<i>dikaioσunē</i>	(3:5; 5:17; 9:30)	“God’s standard of purity” or “God’s own truthfulness and faithfulness”; God is holy, therefore He cannot tolerate sin. It is through Jesus Christ that we can find righteousness that is acceptable to God. Christ not only takes away our sin, but He grants us His perfect purity.
Salvation	<i>sōtēria</i>	(1:16; 10:10)	“Deliverance”; this word is often used in the Bible to describe someone being rescued from physical harm. The word is used by Paul chiefly to denote deliverance from sin and its deadly consequences.
Sin	<i>hamartia</i> ; <i>hamartēma</i>	(3:9; 5:12; 7:11; 8:2; 14:23)	“Missing the mark” or “disobedience to God’s law”; several different Greek words are used by Paul to describe the tendency of humans to rebel against God. Sin can be broadly defined as any attitude or action that opposes the character and will of God. Sin is what brings death—that is, separation from God.

Chart from Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). *The Nelson Study Bible : New King James Version*. Includes index. (Ro 13:8). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

Key Words and Concepts in Romans

We offer this list of theological terms to help you more fully understand and apply the rich truths found in Paul's letter to the Romans. We suggest you read through the list as you begin your study, then use it as a reference guide while working your way through Romans.

Condemnation: God's judicial pronouncement of sinful humanity's guilt before Him. It is a declaration of our depravity and the punishment we deserve for it. Condemnation is the opposite of justification, which is God's pronouncement of our righteousness in Christ. Once we place our trust in Christ, we are no longer under condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Rather, we are justified-pronounced righteous by God because we are clothed in the righteousness of His Son (Rom. 3:21-26; 5:1-2, 9).

Faith: The unqualified acceptance of and dependence on the completed work of Jesus Christ to secure God's mercy toward believers. It is the instrumental cause of our salvation, the means by which we are linked to Christ and allowed to receive God's gracious gift of justification. True faith includes *knowledge* that there is a holy God who gave His Son to reconcile sinners to Himself; *assent*, which means being intellectually convinced of the truth of that knowledge; and *volition*, being so convinced of the truth that we place our trust in Christ (Rom. 1:17; 3:22, 30; Heb. 11:1).

Flesh: Used in a theological sense, *flesh* doesn't refer to our physical body. Rather, it refers to our orientation and identity before God saved us—we were unbelievers, controlled and enslaved by sin, rejecters of God, people who preferred sin over righteousness. The flesh still tries to control us, but it no longer has any claim on us, since as Christians we now belong to Christ and walk in His Spirit (see Rom. 7:5, 14, 18, 25; 8:9).

Foreknowledge: In its most general sense, *foreknowledge* is God's knowing all things before they come to pass. It is more, though, than God's simply having information ahead of time. God knows what will come to pass because He determines what will come to pass (see *predestination*). When specifically applied to salvation, foreknowledge is God's knowing us before we knew Him, before He even created us. When the Bible speaks of God's knowing people, it means He has made them the objects of His special love. Foreknowledge, then, is a word of determined choosing. God loved believers and chose them to be His own long before they put their trust in Him. To say that God foreknew us is to say He "foreloved" us (Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:1-2).

Glorification: The consummation of salvation. It occurs, in one sense, when we die and enter the presence of the Lord. At that point we will be completely free from the presence of sin. Glorification, however, occurs at its fullest when all who have died in Christ—as well as believers who are alive at Christ's return will receive perfect, incorruptible bodies that will last for eternity. The process of sanctification will then be complete. We will be with Jesus and like Jesus—free from the presence of sin and perfect in body and soul (Rom. 8:23, 30; 1 Cor. 15:50-54; 1 John 3:2).

Gospel: The gospel, in a phrase, is "the joyous proclamation of God's redemptive activity in Christ Jesus on behalf of man enslaved by sin."¹ When we embrace the gospel by faith, we believe that Jesus lived and died for us, paying the penalty for our sins and providing us forgiveness; and that He was raised victoriously and bodily from the grave and lives for us today. All of this is motivated and accomplished by God's grace. This good news of salvation in Christ appears in the Old Testament in the form of promises, prophecies, and foreshadowing images (e.g., the promise of a redeemer in Genesis 3:15, the Passover lamb

in Exodus 12, the prophecy of Christ's crucifixion in Isaiah 53, and the sacrificial system detailed in Leviticus). In the New Testament, the bright truth of the gospel bursts forth in all its glory. The four Gospels present the words and works of Christ. Acts chronicles the spread of the gospel in the known world, and the epistles explain the gospel and all its implications for living the Christian life. And Revelation promises the consummation of our salvation, as Christ returns to claim His church. Not surprisingly, Paul used the word *gospel* some sixty times in his epistles. The message of salvation in Christ and all that means for living was the core of his message and mission (Rom. 1:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Gal. 1:6-9; Phil. 1:12).

Grace: Unmerited favor freely granted to believers in Christ. When we say we're saved by grace, we mean that salvation comes to us, not by our ability to earn God's favor or live up to His standards, but by His free gift to us. Although salvation is a free gift, it cost God a great deal—the incarnation and death of His Son. One writer defined grace with the acrostic God's Riches At Christ's Expense.² Instead of receiving the judgment we deserve for our sin, we will spend an eternity in the blessed presence of our Lord. All because of grace (Rom. 5:15-17, 21; 6:14; Eph. 2:4-8; Titus 3:4-7).

Justification: God's declaration or pronouncement that sinners, upon believing in Christ, are righteous because of Christ—even though still in a sinning state (Rom. 3:23-24; Gal. 3:11). As such, we are assured of God's blessings toward us and need no longer fear His wrath or condemnation. Justification is an instantaneous act of God that begins the Christian life. Once justified (declared righteous), the Christian begins the process of sanctification (growing in Christ).

Law: God's moral demands on His created human beings. The Law reflects God's holy character and His purposes for the people He created. His Law is summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17) and more fully explained by Jesus in the Gospels (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28) and by Paul and other New Testament writers. God's Law in the Old Testament included civil laws for the theocratic nation of Israel and ceremonial laws (sacrifices, kosher diet, etc.) that taught the need for moral purity. God still demands moral perfection from His human creatures. But unregenerate sinners cannot keep God's Law. They hate it, in fact. The Law exposes our sinfulness and our need for God's grace (Rom. 7:7). And that is the Law's main purpose. It cannot make us righteous, but it drives us to Christ, who kept the Law perfectly and who clothes us with His own righteousness (Gal. 3:23-29). Once saved, Christians no longer hate the Law. They agree with God that His moral demands are good, and they strive to obey Him—not to earn salvation, but out of gratitude for salvation (Ps. 19:7-11; 119:35; Rom. 8:3-4; 12:1).

Predestination: In its wider sense, the word refers to God's predetermining whatever comes to pass—His working "all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11 b). In its narrower sense, which specifically relates to salvation, predestination refers to God's selecting out of sinful humanity a multitude of people He would save through Christ (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4-6; see also Jer. 1:5). This narrower sense of predestination is also referred to as election. Election is closely related to foreknowledge but differs from it in that foreknowledge tells us God loved us in eternity past, whereas election tells us what that love accomplished—our salvation.

Propitiation: The satisfaction of God's wrath against sin through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross (Rom. 3:25-26). God is holy; humanity is sinful. Because God cannot excuse or condone sin, He must punish it. In His grace, He sent Jesus Christ to suffer His wrath in our place. Thus, the Cross upholds God's character as both a righteous judge and a merciful Savior—the just One and the One who justifies (Rom. 3:26).

Righteousness: When applied to God, the word refers to His good, perfect, and holy nature and His ability to do only what is right. God cannot sin. He cannot condone sin. He cannot be unjust. And He cannot err. He always and in every way acts in accord with His perfect moral nature. When applied to humans, righteousness is what God demands of us in terms of how we live. He requires that we live in perfect obedience to His moral law that we conform to it inwardly as well as outwardly. Since no one is able to do this (Paul says in Romans 3:10 that "there is none righteous, not even one"), someone must earn righteousness for us. That's what Jesus did. He lived a perfectly obedient life under the Law. His every thought, motive, action, and word was pleasing to the Father. Then He died on the cross to take the punishment for our unrighteousness. When we put our trust in Jesus, His righteousness is imputed to us—that is, God counts us as righteous, even though we still sin . . . because Christ has given His righteousness to us. Believers grow in righteousness in this life but will never be perfectly righteous until heaven. **Salvation:** God's delivering us from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. Immediately upon believing in Jesus, we are delivered from the penalty of sin (eternal damnation) and the power of sin (its mastery over our lives). When we finally see the Lord face-to-face, we will be free from the presence of sin. Salvation includes not only our souls but our bodies as well, which will be resurrected on the last day.

Sanctification: When we put our trust in Christ, we were made righteous positionally; God declared us righteous (justified us) because of the life and death of His Son. But justification also marks the beginning of sanctification—the process of our becoming righteous practically, being set apart to God by the Spirit to grow out of sin and more fully into Christ. We will never be perfectly sanctified until heaven, but we will move toward perfection. We will change. We will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, conform more and more to the will of God and live lives that are pleasing to Him (Rom. 6:19; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; 5:23). Sin will always be present with us in this life, but its influence over us will be lessened over time in the process of sanctification.

Sin: Sin is both a condition and an expression. We are sinful by nature, born corrupt (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:1). And that condition naturally produces thoughts and actions that violate God's Law (Gal. 5:19-21). Salvation in Christ is the only way to escape God's wrath toward sin and enter a life in which sin no longer controls us. Christians have the assurance that we will be free once and for all from the presence of sin when we step out of this life and into the next.

Works: We can view human works in two ways. One is to see them as deeds performed to earn God's favor so that He will repay us with salvation. The Bible is very clear that such a system of salvation is futile, since none of us can live righteously enough to keep God's Law (Rom. 3:9-18, 20; Gal. 3:10). That is why we must trust in Christ, whose works were perfect under the Law (Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-11; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). The Christian, however, has a second way to view works: good works grow out of our new life in Christ (Rom. 6:1-2, 11-13; 8:29; Gal. 5:22-24; Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:14-26; 1 John 3:16-19; 4:19-21). Indwelt by God's Spirit and in gratitude for what Christ has done for us, Christians do deeds that are pleasing to Him. When we sin, however, we need to remember that our salvation is still secure and that we have forgiveness, thanks to the perfect lawkeeping and sacrificial death of Jesus.

1. Robert H. Mounce, "Gospel," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1984), p. 472.

2. As quoted by Ray C. Stedman in *Birth of the Body* (Santa Ana, Calif: Vision House Publishers, 1974), p. 98.

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* = beginner; ** = intermediate; *** = advanced

Lesson 1: Romans 1:1 – 7

*1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,
2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning
his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be
the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the
dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to
bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, 6
including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,*

7 To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the first seven verses of Romans, Paul pens his introduction to his letter to the Christians in Rome. However, because it is the introduction, one may be tempted to read over these verses quickly to get to the meat of the letter. Please don't! These verses contain so much theology that one could write a book just on these seven verses alone. Because words have meaning, we want to look at each word, each phrase, and the whole section in order to get everything out of it we can. It is through this introduction that Paul sets the stage for the rest of the letter, introducing some key terms and establishing the background for what is to come.

The author of this letter puts his name up front, as is customary for a letter in the 1st century. Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, was a Jewish Pharisee of great learning and zeal for the Jewish faith until Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and changed his life forever. Saul was on a mission to Damascus to harass, capture, convert, and kill if necessary Christians in defense of the Jewish faith. However, God had other plans for his life. Acts 9 describes the conversion of Saul, a man turned from a hater of the church into one of its greatest apostles. Put into today's terms, this conversion would be tantamount to Osama bin Laden meeting Jesus on the road to Kabul and becoming a Christian. The conversion of Saul into Paul just goes to show us that with God, nothing is impossible. As much as we run from the Holy Spirit, reject Him, or persecute Him, if God wants us, He will have us, all in His good time.

Paul describes himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. This word translated "servant" in most English bibles is the Greek word *doulos*, meaning servant, bond-servant, or slave. Slavery in our times describes a forced ownership, where one is held against their will in a bondage of drudgery. Paul, however, uses an Old Testament

picture of Israel as a servant of the Lord, where Paul is a slave, or servant, of God. Paul's use of this term connotes a strong dedication and commitment to the service of Jesus Christ, not out of forced drudgery but out of privilege and honor. Paul is a slave, servant, of not just anyone, but of Jesus Christ. While the Jewish Saul was zealous for Yahweh, the Christian Paul is now just as zealous for his Lord, Jesus Christ. In addition, a slave was someone that was purchased and belonged to the owner, or Lord, *kurios* in the original language. When a person was bought and was a slave, that person was not free to come and go as they pleased; nor were they free to do whatever they pleased. Likewise, Paul states that we were bought with a price, by the blood of Jesus Christ, and we were now owned by Him. In 1 Corinthians Paul specifically writes, ¹⁹*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,* ²⁰*for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.* And again in 1 Corinthians 7, ²²*For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ.* ²³*You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.* Christ's atonement, paradoxically, bought us complete freedom with Him being our owner, our master, our Lord (*kurios*). We as Christians are slaves to Christ, meaning that He paid the price to purchase us out of our bondage to sin and set us free. However, we are now slaves to righteousness, and Paul will elaborate on this type of slavery in Romans.

Paul also describes himself as "called to be an apostle." This word *called* denotes that Paul did not necessarily choose to be an apostle of the Lord, nor did he usurp the power and authority of the office as did (and do today) many false teachers. Paul was called by Jesus, chosen by Jesus to be His servant. The word apostle is the Greek word *apostolos*, which means one who is sent, generally as a spokesperson. So Paul was called by Jesus to one of His official spokespersons. Apostles don't go of their own accord or their own desire; they are sent by their master to do their bidding. Jesus sent Paul to accomplish this task. In Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul mentions that God gave or appointed some to be apostles, so being an apostle is a special office held only by those God appoints. Generally, most evangelical scholars hold to the view that the office of apostle is not one that is filled today. The apostle was God's official spokesman, and had the authority to write scripture, speak for God in an absolute and authoritative way, could perform miracles at will, and who witnessed the risen Christ. This office was created by God at the beginning of the church to establish the church on the earth, build credibility, establish doctrine, and write the rest of the Bible.

Paul also describes himself as "set apart for the gospel of God." This word means to mark out with boundaries, and is also used in Matthew 25 when Jesus separates the sheep from the goats for judgment. Paul has been separated for a purpose, which is the gospel of God. Paul in Galatians 1:15 further elaborates on his being set apart, *when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,* ¹⁶*was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles....* Paul had

been called and set apart by God for a specific purpose before he was born. Compare this statement to Jeremiah 1:5, where God says to Jeremiah, ⁵“*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.*” Again, we have the preordained will of God in practice as He calls His prophet Jeremiah and His apostle Paul and sets them apart for His work even before they were born.

And don’t think that the great prophets and great apostles were the only ones that God set apart for the gospel. I would venture to say that every person who is a Christian has been set part by God for the gospel of God. Read Ephesians 1 and 2, how God chose us before the foundation of the world and set us part for good works that He had prepared for us to do, again, even before the creation of the world.

The reason Paul was set apart was for the Gospel of God. The gospel is the good news. John MacArthur writes in his commentary on Romans,

Euangelion was a common term used in the cult of emperor worship that was common in Paul’s day. Many of the Caesars claimed deity for themselves and demanded worship from every person in the empire, free or slave, rich or poor, renowned or unknown. Favorable events relating to the emperor were proclaimed to the citizens as “good news.” The town herald would stand in the village square and shout, “Good news! The emperor’s wife has given birth to a son,” or, “Good news! The emperor’s heir has come of age,” or, “Good news! The new emperor has acceded to the throne.”¹

However, because Paul was writing to Romans, he was careful to explain that this was no ordinary good news, but good news from God. It was not man’s good news, but good news from God to man. This good news from God was the message of salvation that God had arranged from before time for people from the many nations of the world. The Greek uses the genitive possessive that is translated “of.” This means that the gospel belongs to God; it is from God. It is not jus about God. Paul explains this in the next phrase, but is clearly stating that he did not just make this good news up. It is good news that belongs to God, and now He is sharing it with us.

Notice that Paul claims that the gospel of God had been promised from beforehand through the Scriptures. Paul was refuting the accusations that this was some new religion that had just come about. Not so, says Paul. This was the accomplishment of what the Old Testament had been proclaiming for thousands of years. The Jewish prophets had prophesied that a savior would be born and he would save his people from their sins. The Old Testament promised, and the New Testament accomplished. Paul is unifying both of the testaments and demonstrating to Jews and Gentiles alike that God had fulfilled something wonderful in the world that was foretold in his Word. It should

¹ MacArthur, J. (1996, c1991, c1994). *Romans*. Chicago: Moody Press.

have been no surprise for those that were looking for him. Paul calls the scriptures “holy,” showing that they were from God, infallible, and inspired. Because they were inspired and written by God, the prophecies about the gospel were true.

The gospel concerns the Son of God, who was a descendant of David according to his human ancestry. The gospel is Jesus Christ; if the gospel deviates from Christ, it is no longer the gospel. Jesus is the Son of God. The Son means that Jesus was in essence the same as God, was divine, and was the focus of the salvation plan that God had ordained and set in motion. Paul in Colossians 2:9 states that the whole fullness of the deity dwells in Jesus body. In Romans 9:5, Paul calls Christ God over all. In Titus 2:13, Paul calls Jesus Christ our great God and Savior. However, while Jesus is God, he was also a man, born of a woman, and lived a life like you and me, though He was sinless. He was a descendant of David, as foretold in the scriptures, such as Isaiah 11:1-5, Matthew 1:1, and Luke 1:27, among others.

While verse 3 proclaims the humanity of Jesus, verse 4 proclaims his deity. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God, with power, by his resurrection from the dead. While many people focus on the death of Jesus as our atoning sacrifice, we should also not forget to place critical importance on His resurrection as well. It was through the resurrection that Jesus demonstrated his power over death, and demonstrated that one day we who follow Him will also be resurrected in a glorified body, to live with Him forever. If Jesus had remained dead, He would have only been considered a good moral teacher from a backwater Roman province. However, His resurrection declared Him to be the Son of God, and was the most spectacular event ever recorded in human history. Paul’s gospel was established through Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

It was only through Jesus Christ our Lord that Paul received two important things, grace and apostleship. Paul is very specific that these things he received, he received through Jesus. No additional person, and no additional work. Some commentators see this phrase “grace and apostleship” as two words speaking of the same thing, but I see them as two different gifts, and given to Paul, from the human perspective, in the order that they are stated. Paul received grace from Jesus. What is grace? Grace is unmerited favor given by God to a sinner. Grace is essentially synonymous with salvation. Paul first received grace from God, calling him to salvation. Then he received his calling as apostle to the gentiles. While both of these were decided by God before time began, from a human time perspective, grace was given first, then Paul’s calling was made clear to him.

Why was Paul given grace and apostleship? Paul writes, *to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,* ⁶ *including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ....* Paul was given grace and apostleship for a mission. His mission was first to bring about the obedience of faith. This is a very controversial phrase, and a number of commentators have various interpretations. One is that it is an obedience that springs forth from faith. Once faith is present, then obedience comes as

one grows in Christlikeness. Another equates obedience and faith. However, Moo in his commentary on Romans expresses what I think is more logical. Moo explains that neither explanation gives enough emphasis to Paul's task of calling men and women to submission to the lordship of Christ, a submission that began with conversion but which was to continue in a deepening, lifelong commitment. Obedience is always related to faith, initially at conversion as a decisive step of faith, and throughout the Christian life as a continuing faith relationship with Christ. Obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience.²

This mission to bring about the obedience of faith was for the sake of the name of Christ for all of the nations. This term "nations" is the Greek word *ethne*, where we get our term ethnic. It can mean nations in a geographic sense, or usually in Paul's writings it can mean Gentiles. The meaning of Gentiles probably makes more sense here because it reinforces Paul's mission that was given to him by Jesus Christ himself as the apostles to the Gentiles as opposed to the Jewish nation. Paul was given grace and apostleship to bring glory to Christ's name through the evangelization and preaching to the Gentiles.

In verse 6, Paul mentions those in Rome who are *called to belong to Jesus Christ*.... God called those in the church in Rome to be part of the family of God, to be adopted as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ. This is cause for rejoicing! In Ephesians 1, Paul writes, *In love*⁵ *he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,*⁶ *to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,*⁸ *which he lavished upon us....* We have been adopted and now belong to Jesus Christ, and this was not of our own doing, but we were called to belong to Him. Jesus in John 10 explains what this means to "belong to Jesus."²⁷ *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*²⁸ *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*²⁹ *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* When we belong to Jesus, we are secure in that fact. We, like the Roman Christians, belong to Jesus and He will keep us until the final day when we are raised up with Him. Again, John quoting Jesus in John 6 states,³⁷ *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*³⁸ *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.*³⁹ *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.*⁴⁰ *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.* So when we have been called to belong to Jesus, we are His possession, and nothing can take us from His love.

² Moo, Douglas. *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996. p52-53.

After this brief but weighty introduction, Paul let's us know to whom he is actually writing. He is not just writing to everyone in Rome, but to *all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints....* He is writing to the Roman Christians, those that belong to the church in Rome. God loves those who are His people. While God loves all people as part of His creation, He will pour out His holy wrath on those that are not His people, as Paul will describe in a snapshot in the last part of chapter 1. He is making sure those in Rome know that they are loved by God. Why? They have been called to be saints. During this time, persecution of Christians was a popular thing in Rome, and many Christians were being called to give their very lives for the gospel. However, Paul is telling them that regardless of what is happening on the outside, in the political or social arenas, God loves them as His adopted children.

In verse 6 Paul tells the Roman Christians that they *are called to belong to Jesus Christ*, and here in verse 7 he states that they are *called to be saints....* The word "saints" in the original language is *hagios*, which literally means "holy" or "set apart." In this case, being holy or set apart is not something that the Roman Christians did, but something God did for them. God, according to His purpose and His will, called them out and set them apart. When we receive the salvation from God, we are the recipients of Christ's payment for the price for our sins. He pays the price of our rebellion, so we don't have to. However, the righteousness of Christ is also given to us, making us righteous and holy in the sight of God. As such, we have been set apart from eternity past, and are currently set apart, for the purpose and will of God. While we still live in the world, we are not part of the world and the world system. However, it is not so much that we are separated *from* something, but more like we are separated *for* something, namely the purposes of God. We should consider our being set apart, or separation, from a positive perspective rather than negative perspective.

Paul's greeting *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* may have been common for Paul in all of his letters, but there is certainly a lot in just this simple greeting. Grace is the free unmerited favor that God has for sinners in the plan of salvation. Grace is always placed first in the list, because it is from grace that all of God's blessings flow. Anything that is good comes from God's grace. All of those who know God, know Him because of His grace. Grace is part of God's character, and was manifested in a supreme way on the cross at Calvary. There are several forms of grace that we can experience. **Common grace** is grace that is poured out by a God that loves His creation in general to all people regardless of their spiritual condition. Common grace keeps people from being as bad as they can be, and holds the universe together in working order. **Saving grace** is the provision, more like divine intervention, God has made through the cross and Jesus Christ for the salvation of God's people. Saving grace is effectual, and planned before time began. Ephesians 1 and 2, among other passages, clearly describe saving grace. God's grace also serves to sanctify us, ensuring we as Christians grow and mature in Christ. Grace secures us through the

working of the Holy Spirit. Just as salvation cannot be earned by works, it also cannot be kept by works strictly on man's part. Like salvation, it is a work of God. Grace also allows us to serve one another in ordinary and special ways, and sustains us through all types of circumstances, trials, and suffering.³ Paul blesses the Romans through God's grace.

Peace follows grace. It is through grace that we now have peace with God. Paul will write in a few chapters later in chapter 5, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* In Colossians 1, Paul writes, *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,*²⁰ *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.* Through Christ we can now have peace with God as we are reconciled to God by the blood of Christ. By this same relationship with God and work of Jesus, Christians can also have peace with one another.

There are two themes that run through the introduction, and they jump right out when the reader considers the number of times Paul uses the terms in just these 7 short verses. The first one is Jesus Christ. Notice how many times Paul extols the name of Jesus Christ in these verses. He can't get away from Jesus. Not that he wants to. Paul is so captured and literally enslaved to Christ that his very being is dedicated and joined to Jesus and the gospel. Paul's love for Christ burns deep within his very soul. Paul's quote of the Greek writers in Acts 17 reflects his attitude about Christ, "In him we live, move, and have our being." Paul lives for Christ, because he has a very real and deep sense of what Christ has done for him. Paul is truly a slave to Jesus Christ. The question for us as readers is how do we view Christ? Are we slaves to Christ, or do we consider Christ slaves to us and our wants and desires? Do we call on the name of Jesus daily, both in suffering and in joy, or are we afraid or ashamed to mention the name of Jesus? Is Jesus just one more thing in our hectic and already filled lives, or is Jesus the one thing that enables us to live, breathe, and have our being?

The second one is the idea of calling. There are several aspects to this idea, many of which Paul will address in Romans and elsewhere in other letters. In all of the instances in which Paul uses the word "call," it is God who is doing the calling, and others are effectively responding. God called Paul to his office as apostle. Hendrickson states about Paul's calling in his commentary on Galatians 1:15,

The expression "separated me from my mother's womb" refers to far more than the divine providential activity revealed in Paul's physical birth. It indicates that God did not, as it were, wait until Paul had first proved his worth before appointing him to an important function in his kingdom. No, from his very birth Paul had already been designed for his specific mission, that design being itself the expression of God's plan from eternity (Eph. 1:11). Hence, the verb separated, as here used, means nothing less than "set (me) aside," "consecrated" (me), "marked (me) off from the rest

³ Several of these examples of grace come from Bob Deffinbaugh, *Fundamentals of Faith*, from www.bible.org.

of mankind.” Similarly, “called me through his grace” refers here not only to the effectual call to salvation through sanctification (see on verse 6), but also to the assignment unto plenary apostleship.⁴

Paul did nothing to earn his apostleship, nothing to prove his apostleship, nor did he do anything to keep his apostleship. God ordained Paul from before he was born to be the apostle to the Gentiles. God prepared him beforehand, and throughout his life, for this monumental task, and at just the right time in history, God revealed to Paul his mission.

Additionally, the word ‘call’ is used in conjunction with belonging to Jesus Christ and being saints, or ones that are set apart. One commentator states, “By this inner or effective call is meant that operation of the Holy Spirit whereby he so applies the gospel to the minds and hearts of sinners that they become aware of their guilt, begin to understand their need of Jesus Christ, and embrace him as their Lord and Savior.”⁵ Paul early on establishes the doctrine of election in which God calls people to salvation. This effectual calling of God is expressed from eternity past, as described in Ephesians chapters 1 and 2, and Romans chapter 8. But it also has a present tense. The Roman Christians are called to be ones who are set apart for the purposes of God, for His glory, and by His grace. Present day Christians are also called by God for His purposes, and for His glory. It is imperative that we are familiar with this doctrine that is introduced at the beginning of Romans, developed later on in the book, and integrated throughout Paul’s and Peter’s epistles. We will explore this doctrine more in chapter 8, but as we can see, it was important enough for Paul to state it up front in these first seven verses of Romans three times.

⁴ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953-2001). Vol. 8: New Testament Commentary : *Exposition of Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

⁵ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953-2001). Vol. 12-13: New Testament Commentary : *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Lesson 2: Romans 1:8 – 13

⁸ *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.*

Before Paul jumps head first into the content of his letter, he wants to thank God for the church in Rome. Look who Paul thanks and how. Paul thanks God, meaning God the Father. Notice that Paul uses the possessive “my,” showing us his intimate relationship with God. Paul doesn’t refer to God as “a God” or “the God,” but as “my God.” Paul, remember from verse 1, is a slave of Jesus Christ. Paul is owned by God, and this term “my” is indicative of Paul’s ownership.

But he prays to God the Father through Jesus Christ. We approach God through the work of Jesus. Remember, He is our mediator. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2 that, ⁵*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.* The writer to the Hebrews also refers to Jesus as our mediator, stating ¹⁵*Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.* The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines mediator as “one that reconciles differences between disputants.” This is what Jesus did on the cross; he reconciled God’s differences with man, and now through the man Jesus we can approach God with our prayers, petitions, and thanksgiving. Jesus is the way in which God reached out to us, and the way in which we now can approach God. Paul gives thanks to God for the Roman Christians through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How is Jesus our mediator? Christ is the one and only mediator between God and man. He makes reconciliation between God and man by his all-perfect atoning sacrifice on the cross. A true mediator between God and man has to be able to relate to both parties. He must be at once divine and human; divine, that his obedience and his

sufferings might possess infinite worth, and that he might possess infinite wisdom and knowledge and power to direct all things in the kingdoms of providence and grace which are committed to his hands; and human, that in his work he might represent man, and be capable of rendering obedience to the law and satisfying the claims of justice, and that in his glorified humanity he might be the head of a glorified Church. Easton in his Bible dictionary states that this office of mediator “involves the three functions of prophet, priest, and king, all of which are discharged by Christ both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation. These functions are so inherent in the one office that the quality pertaining to each gives character to every mediatorial act. They are never separated in the exercise of the office of mediator.”⁶ In other words, Christ is our mediator, and through Him we can approach God and give thanks to Him, because He is both divine and human. He fulfills all of the requirements of the law and satisfies all of the requirements of God. In John 14:6, Jesus identifies Himself and only Himself as the mediator: *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. He is our only one.*

Why does Paul give thanks? The faith of the Romans has been proclaimed in all of the world. A bit of hyperbole, but the church was under persecution. It was during the time that Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome that the Roman Emperor Nero was on the throne, and Nero was later an intense persecutor of Christians in Rome. We do not know how much the church was persecuted during the early reign of Nero when this letter was written, but we do know that Nero was no friend to the Christian religion. The faith of the Roman Christians is known throughout the world, regardless of their circumstances. What a reputation to have! The church in Rome is known for its faith. How many times have we heard of a church that is widely known, except for the wrong reasons? What a commendation for the church for Paul and others to know about their faith, even when Paul had never been there.

Why did the church in Rome have this reputation? There are several reasons mentioned in this one section of text. First of all, it was their faith, and this was a genuine faith, a real faith, not a false faith based on a false gospel. Their faith was not “positive thinking,” nor was it based on something that they hoped to be true, but that they would never know. Many Christians in Rome were either forced to leave, or put to death by a number of cruel ways. This was a faith that was brought about by God, who was transforming lives, and sustaining their faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. John Calvin wrote in his commentary on Romans, “The first thing worthy of remark is, that he so commends their faith, that he implies that it had been received from God. We are here taught that faith is God’s gift...”⁷ There are many people today, and many churches today, that appear to have faith, but it is often superficial, lifeless, and human-

⁶ mediator. (n.d.). *Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary*. Retrieved April 04, 2007, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mediator>

⁷ Calvin, John. (1999). *Commentary on Romans*. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.html>. Christian Classics ethereal Library.

centered. When trouble comes, as it certainly will, this type of faith will not weather the storm. However, the genuine faith of the Romans proved itself over time and through a strong reputation.

A second reason that the church in Rome had a great and far-reaching reputation was that they had a contagious faith. Theirs was a faith that had been heard in many parts of the world, and it had also been communicated to others. The church was growing, and people were coming to Rome and leaving Rome, spreading the good news as they came and went. In Acts 2:10 we read of Roman visitors who heard the gospel preached in their own language on the day of Pentecost through a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. These visitors certainly went back to Rome, and spread this good news to everyone along the way and in Rome proper. As more and more people came to a saving faith in Christ, this good news was spread even farther, even at the risk of the believers' very lives.

A third reason that the church had a praiseworthy reputation was that their faith was encouraging to themselves and to others. Notice Paul speaks of their faith encouraging themselves and himself as one of the reasons he longs to see them. Verse 12 states, ¹² *that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.* Did the Roman church need encouragement? Sure! It was in the capital city of the civilized western world, and was persecuted and dispersed. Rome was also the center of all kinds of depravity, debauchery, crass entertainment, and unethical political intrigue. Roman Christians were probably in the middle of all of these areas, and needed encouragement to continue in the faith. However, the saints in Rome persevered. I am sure Paul's letter was a great encouragement to them. Did Paul need encouragement? Absolutely! Paul was a great evangelist, apostle, teacher, and representative for God, but he was beaten, stoned, left for dead, harassed, and betrayed. Paul also needed encouragement, and the faith of the Romans was the type of faith that would encourage him.

Paul deeply cares for the church in Rome and wants to come to see them. His intensity is expressed by the oath he makes at the beginning of verse 9. Paul prays for the Romans, and that he may come to visit them. Paul is a man of passion, and it comes right to the forefront in his prayers. Again notice how Paul makes it clear that he is in the service of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. With this oath, Paul tells us how seriously he takes prayer. How many times have we been asked to pray for someone, and we immediately forget, or pray once, or perhaps pray a few times but only as part of our routine prayer list we go through in the mornings? Prayer is a powerful weapon in the service of the Lord, and many times we take it for granted, or maybe take it less seriously than we really should. Briscoe states, "Perhaps more missionaries would be prayed for if modern Christians asked God to witness their solemn commitments to pray rather than the somewhat flippant promises which are so readily made and forgotten."⁸ Every time

⁸ Briscoe, D. S., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1982). *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 29 : Romans.* Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.

Paul prayed, he was serious. He saw the power of God enacted through prayer, and he prayed with earnestness and sincerity and power.

Paul also prayed without ceasing for the Romans, and to be able to come to them and visit. We are told in other parts of scripture to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all circumstances. Paul did not pray every minute of every day for the church in Rome, but prayed at regular intervals and frequently. Prayer was not just something Paul did, but was a way of life. Paul thanked God for them, but prayed constantly that he would be able to eventually get to them. Paul had a strong duty regarding prayer, which he always tried to instill in other believers. In Philippians 4:6, Paul states, *The Lord is at hand;*⁶ *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*⁷ *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Paul prayed constantly, and was very specific in his prayers that God would allow him to eventually visit them. “We thus learn the duty of Christians to pray for one another, and that those who believe the Gospel are as much bound to pray for its success, and the prosperity of the churches, as to labor in the work.”⁹

Paul wants to visit Rome so that he may strengthen the church by imparting some spiritual gift, that is to mutually encourage the church. This phrase has been interpreted several ways. One of those ways explains that Paul could actually impart spiritual gifts as an apostle. This was an apostolic gift, to be able to impart spiritual gifts just as he could heal instantly and receive inspiration from God in writing the New Testament. Another is that Paul would encourage through teaching and miracles, and thereby strengthen the church. Moo states that this combination of words, used nowhere else in the New Testament, means “insight or ability, given Paul by the Holy Spirit, that Paul hopes to share with the Romans”¹⁰ This makes sense, given the explanation that Paul adds afterwards in verse 12, ¹² *that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.* Paul was not speaking about spiritual gifts as described in 1 Corinthians 12, but was concerned with believers becoming increasingly established in their faith. He longed to come to visit them so that he could provide spiritual insight and teaching that would not necessarily convert them, but securely ground them in their faith. Paul was not really interested in preaching where someone else had started a work, but as an apostle, wanted to come to them to make sure they had been firmly grounded. This is an insight for us into the ministry of Paul. He was not just the great evangelist and church planter, but a church builder and strengthener. He also fully expected to be encouraged by the faith of the Romans as well.

Paul has wanted to come to Rome, but had not so far. It wasn’t for a lack of trying. Notice the text says that he was prevented from doing so. God’s timing and providence are perfect. One commentator stated, “There is no indication about what had

⁹ Haldane, R. (1996). *An Exposition of Romans* (electronic ed.). Simpsonville SC: Christian Classics Foundation.

¹⁰ Moo, Douglas. (1996). *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. pp. 59 – 60.

hindered his visiting them. The *Living Bible* assumes divine intervention, 'But God did not let me.' Other suggestions include the pressing needs of the churches Paul recently had established, Satanic opposition (1 Thes 2:18), and the organization of the collection (Rom 15:26). Perhaps there is no need to choose between God's direction and the circumstances of life, since God works through everyday circumstances to carry out his will."¹¹ Paul wanted the Romans to know that he was not "blowing them off," but had legitimate reasons for not coming to them. However, he was burdened in his heart for them, and while he could not be there in person, nevertheless wrote to them a letter from his heart.

Paul wanted to preach to the Gentiles there as he did in other places. Jesus had called him to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and this passion burned within his heart. At the end of verse 13, Paul clearly expresses this passion in that he desires to come to Rome to do one thing: reap a harvest. Jesus used the harvest metaphor many times in his teaching of the 12 apostles when referring to those that will be called to believe in Christ. Jesus in John 4 states:

³⁴Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Jesus in Luke 10 verse 2 tells his 72 disciples as he sends them out, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*" And again, Jesus states in John 15 that he chose all of his disciples, and I believe that this applies to Paul as well, for a specific purpose: ¹⁶*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide....* A God-given and Holy Spirit driven passion burned within Paul's soul to reap the harvest and bear fruit for his Lord and Savior. He longed to reap a harvest in Rome among the church there, as he taught them and solidified their doctrine and foundation, and yet he also wanted to reap a harvest where none had been reaped yet, outside of Rome and on to Spain where he intended to go. Paul's passion and mission were ever moving him towards new mission fields and new places from which to reap a harvest for Jesus.

¹¹ Mounce, R. H. (2001, c1995). *Vol. 27: Romans* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (68). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

There are two major aspects in this section we need to look at even deeper, and apply them to our own lives. One is Paul's passion in his prayer. Many times we pray out of routine, or perhaps out of duty and obligation. Duty and obligation are great ways to keep us disciplined when we get tired or unmotivated, especially when we feel we may be a little farther from God than we would like to be. Paul encourages us to pray like God can hear you and He is there with you. Paul's passion for prayer was wrapped up in his service to the Lord. These two cannot and should not be separated. As James Boice states in his commentary on Romans regarding this passage, "A strong prayer life is not the least bit inconsistent with vigorous and fervent service for the Lord."¹² Sometimes we tend to divorce these two activities in our thinking, but they should be fully integrated. Paul's passion in and for prayer is based on his calling, first by Christ to be a follower, and then by Christ in the service of the Lord. Service leads to prayer, and prayer leads to service. Service and prayer both emanate from the calling to salvation through Jesus. Haldane states that "To pray without laboring is to mock God: to labor without prayer is to rob God of His glory. Until these two are conjoined, the Gospel will not be extensively successful."¹³ Passion in prayer is passion for the gospel. Paul modeled that for us.

Another point we must bring out here is Paul's habit of consistent prayer. He admonishes us to pray without ceasing. No church pastor has ever been more pressed for time than Paul. No busy CEO or executive has ever carried a greater burden of responsibility than the apostle. Yet Paul models for us a consistent and strong habit and ministry of prayer. Paul planted churches himself all across the Near East and Southern Europe, and was indirectly responsible for a number of other churches throughout these and other parts of the world. Paul, however, still constantly remembered churches in Rome, Ephesus, Thessalonica, and others in his prayers. He wrote to them, raised money from them and for them, taught them, and prayed for them. We must never think we are too busy to pray. Bill Hybels wrote a book some years back entitled *Too Busy Not to Pray*, and that is a good description of our modern, hectic, and frazzled way of life. We should pray and pray fervently because we are so busy. Paul was incredibly gifted, talented, and intelligent. He was a go-getter and a type A personality if there ever was one. Yet he was humble and understood that all of his time, energy, smarts, and skill all came from the Lord, and without Jesus he was nothing. Paul did nothing outside the relationship with Christ. Constant prayer made sure Paul kept his priorities straight, and frequent prayer kept Christ first in everything he did.

Sometimes prayer may seem like it goes unanswered. I heard a story of a little boy who was praying for a bicycle for Christmas. His family was very poor, and when Christmas morning came, there was no bicycle. A friend of the family, who was not too sensitive about religion and feelings, said to the boy, "Well, I guess God didn't answer

¹² Boice, James Montgomery. (1991). *Romans*. Volume 1: Justification by Faith, Romans 1-4. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House. p. 78.

¹³ Haldane, p. 48.

your prayer for a bicycle.” The boy replied, “Yes He did; He said no.” Nearly everyone reading this knows that “No” is just as much an answer to questions and requests as is “Yes,” especially if we have kids of our own. Many of us pray for things like a raise, a new job, a new car, or something else material, but we almost expect the answer to be “No.” God may give us what we ask for; then again, He may not. But what about something we know is unselfish, or spiritual, or Biblical? What about those prayers that go unanswered? Paul’s prayer that his desire is to come to Rome to encourage them is a noble, spiritual, and missional prayer. But God doesn’t answer it, at least as of the time Paul is writing to the church in Rome. Why not? There may be several reasons why God does not answer prayer the way we would like, or the way perhaps we expect.

One reason is that maybe what we are asking for is not as necessary as we think it is. Let’s face it, the faith of the Roman Christians was being reported all across the world. They seem to be doing just fine without Paul. Now, don’t get me wrong. If God had allowed Paul to visit Rome, I am sure he would have been a tremendous blessing to them, and they to him. But it was not to be, at least in Paul’s way and in Paul’s timing. It was not necessary for Paul to go to Rome just yet. Maybe Paul had other things to do, or maybe God had something else in mind. In fact, we know that Paul eventually made it to Rome, not as a visitor, but as a prisoner. I am certainly glad that Paul was not able to visit and had to instead write the letter to the Romans. This letter that Paul wrote has impacted more people throughout history than any human can ever imagine. Instead of visiting the Romans to encourage and teach them, Paul wrote to them to teach and encourage them, and countless number of people throughout the last 2,000 years have been the beneficiaries of this letter.

Another reason God may not answer prayer is that perhaps God has other plans. The providence of God is such a wonderful thing, but it is often misunderstood by many of us. Perhaps we say that we believe God is sovereign and in control, but we live like we are practical deists. In other words, we believe God is there, but ultimately we act as if He is not really interested or is out there somewhere aloof. We in America are so used to getting what we want, when we want it, and how we want it, that we can hardly fathom a loving God that doesn’t give us our every whim. Paul prayed three times as recorded in 2 Corinthians 12, about an issue he had, but God said, “No.” ⁷*So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated.* ⁸*Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.* ⁹*But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* God had other plans. Paul desperately wanted to go to Rome, and from there continue on to Spain, but God had other plans. So when we talk about the sovereignty of God, we need to come to grips with the corollary fact that we are not in control. Just like a mother or father does not give to a small child everything they ask for or whine about, neither does our Heavenly Father give his children everything we ask for or whine about. Small children just don’t

understand that their parents know what is best for them, and sometimes neither do we know what is best for us, as our Father in Heaven knows. But like our earthly parents, our Heavenly Father knows us and takes care of us according to His good will and purpose. He is faithful, and for that we should always be thankful.

While there may be other reasons God may not answer prayer the way we expect, such as spiritual warfare in the heavenly realms, wrong motives on our part, sin in our lives that must be forgiven first, or a number of other reasons, Paul teaches us that we should keep on praying. We should never give up. And while we pray constantly and frequently, God may just use our prayer to change and mature us in the process. The purpose of our prayer may not be to get something for us or for someone else; it may be used by God to grow us in Him, and to develop us and mature us so that we draw closer to Christ, thereby taking on more and more the mind of Christ.

Another point that we need to look deeper into for a moment is our faith. What is faith, and what kind of faith do we really have? Are we known for our faith as the Roman church was? Or is our faith so weak and shallow that we are not even known as Christians at our workplace or in our neighborhood? Faith in our culture is often misrepresented as a belief in something unseen and unreasonable. Blind faith is not only demeaning to Christianity, but is outrageous to God. In fact, in the original Greek text of the New Testament, faith and believe are translated from the same root word. *Pistis*, the noun, is translated faith, while *pisteuo*, the verb, is translated believe. Hebrews 11:1 states, *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Faith begins with knowledge, but moves to commitment and trust. Faith is essentially trust and confidence. Trust is something that is not just mental assent, but involves mental assent (knowledge) of facts and truths, acceptance of those truths, and finally a personal commitment and trust of those truths. In order to have faith, we must first know the facts about Jesus, the gospel, other points of doctrine. If we don't know what we believe, how can we really believe in it? Second, once we know these facts and doctrines of the Bible, we must accept those as true. Then, once we accept those doctrines and persons as true, we then must make a personal commitment to those doctrines and people. A personal commitment and trust means more than saying "yes" at an altar or "understanding" Christianity. It means we actually do it. We integrate it in our daily lives. This is the essence of a worldview, which is our view of the world and everything in it through the lens of Christianity. Christianity involves everything we are and everything we do not just on Sunday, but every minute of every day. It is not a religion or just a belief, but a way of life. When Jesus calls us and changes us, He changes our way of life.

Again, Hebrews 11:1 states, *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Faith is an assurance. This word literally means proof, or

the title deed to a piece of property, or guarantee of ownership.¹⁴ Faith is itself not only the evidence, but the proof, the guarantee, of things not fully yet seen. It is not just a substitute for evidence, it *is* the evidence! When God gives us faith, He gives us a guarantee that what He promises and what He says will be true, and it will take place according to His will.

¹⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.). (BDAG). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, πίστασις, εως,

Lesson 3: Romans 1:14 – 17

¹⁴ *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.* ¹⁵ *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* ¹⁷ *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*

Paul in verse 1 stated in very strong terms that he was a slave to Jesus Christ. He was literally owned by Christ, dedicated to Christ, and lived for Christ. Jesus Christ was his master. Paul described briefly how the gospel of God was written about in the scriptures and was not some new religion he was founding. The Messiah was spoken of in the scriptures, prophesied about, and was expected by the Jewish people. Jesus was that Messiah, but He was not for the Jews only. Jesus had come for God’s people all over the world. Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus was calling people for God from all nations, from all people groups, and from every language of the world.

Now, Paul in verse 14 is telling us that he doesn’t just preach as a volunteer, nor does he do the work of an evangelist out of a vocational interest or even a general need to help people and minister to them. Paul uses a very strong word meaning that he is obligated, or indebted, to all people. This is not a psychological compulsion, but a divine call.¹⁵ Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 says the same thing to the Corinthian church. ⁶ *For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!* The gospel for Paul is not a vocational choice, or a volunteer work. It is a necessity, an obligation. Another way of translating this word is “in debt.” Paul was in debt to those who he had been called to preach. Briscoe and Ogilvie put it this way:

It is as if he felt that God had revealed the gospel to him not so much for his own benefit as for the benefit of the Gentiles—a situation not unlike that of a trustee banker or stockholder to whom securities are entrusted by an elderly grandparent for the benefit of minor grandchildren as yet too immature to handle their own financial affairs. To the degree in which the trustee holds the securities in his own name he is indebted to the one for whom they were made available. Paul’s compelling sense of indebtedness

¹⁵ Schreiner, Thomas R. (1998). *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, p 55.

to God for His grace and to people because of his ministry meant that he was never free to feel that his work was done. It is hard to imagine how Paul was able to live with such a constant load of spiritual responsibility; yet, at the same time, it is harder to grasp how many believers are able to live complacently without any sense of obligation.¹⁶

Paul was driven by a real divine call to preach the gospel everywhere he could. It was a desire given to him by God as a man on a mission. This divine call permeated everything he did. Paul truly was a slave to Christ.

To whom was Paul obligated? In a word, everyone. He was not discriminatory, just as God does not play favorites. While God had purposefully called him to be the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul still preached to anyone and everyone he could. The terms Greek and Barbarians signified all of those Gentiles that were either Greek speaking nations, or non-Greek speaking nations. In other words, the entire Gentile world. In Paul's day, the term "barbarian" also meant those people outside of the Greek culture that were lowly, despised, and considered "subhuman," such as those races in the East that Greece had conquered. It carried a derogatory sense, and a clear indication of contempt.¹⁷ Paul was not being derogatory or contemptuous, but was simply using the language of the Greeks and Romans to strongly note that he was obligated to preach to all classes, races, and peoples regardless of their perceived status in the eyes of man. The same can be said of the two terms "wise" and "foolish." Paul was not being selective. He was not showing favoritism. Paul was stating in no uncertain terms that he was preaching the whole gospel to the whole world. Because of this obligation to everyone that had been given to him by God, he was also eager to preach in Rome as well.

The next two verses, 16 and 17, are considered to be by most commentators, theologians, and anyone in the know to be two of the most significant verses in the entire Bible. Most people call this the summary statement, or the theme, of the entire book of Romans. Moo calls these verses "theologically dense."¹⁸ Boice calls these verses "the most important in the letter and perhaps in all literature. They are the theme of this epistle, and the essence of Christianity. They are the heart of biblical religion."¹⁹ Mounce states that they are "pivotal verses in the New Testament. They state concisely and with unusual clarity a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith."²⁰ John MacArthur says, "These two verses express the theme of the book of Romans, and they contain the most life-transforming truth God has put into men's hands. To understand and positively respond to this truth is to have one's time and eternity completely altered."²¹ So if these

¹⁶ Briscoe and Ogilvie, p. 33.

¹⁷ Dunn, J. D. G. (2002). Vol. 38A: Word Biblical Commentary : Romans 1-8. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Inc. p. 32.

¹⁸ Moo, p. 63.

¹⁹ Boice, p. 103.

²⁰ Mounce, p. 70.

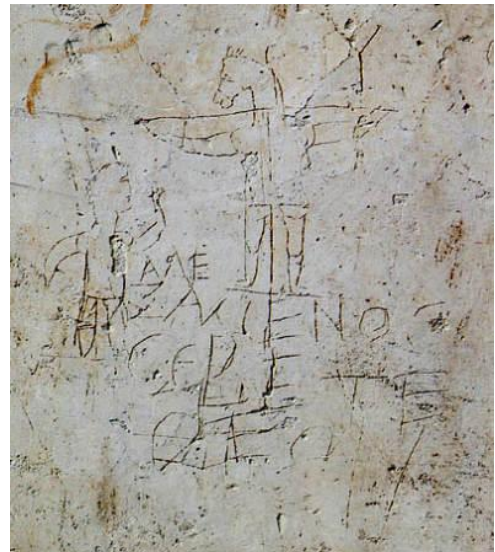
²¹ MacArthur, p. 49.

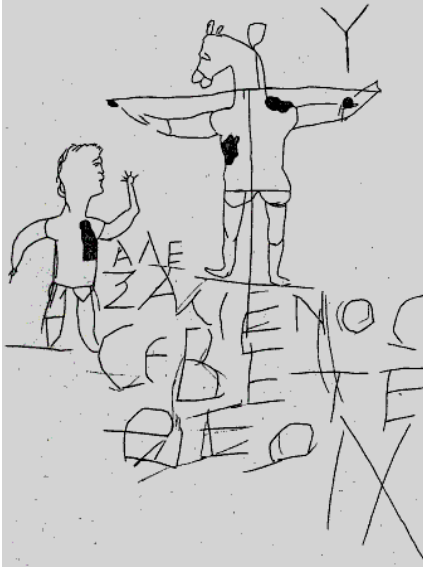
two verses are that important, then we should look at them in such detail and with such rigor as to completely understand their meaning and their richness. Certainly we do not want to miss anything that God would like to us to have. With these two verses, Paul introduces us to the doctrine of justification by faith, or as the Reformers put it, *sola fide*, faith alone.

The first phrase in this section is a transition for Paul. He is obligated to preach the gospel to everyone, regardless of their status, class, intelligence, race, or gender. But it was not an obligation out of duty or compulsion. Paul stated it negatively in that he was not ashamed of the gospel. In other words, he was proud, overjoyed, and counted it a privilege to preach the gospel. This was the good news for mankind. It was like having the cure for all types of cancer; one would want to, actually be similarly obligated, to tell everyone all of the details. But this was not an invention or a discovery by man. The gospel did not come from man, but came from God.

Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel? After all, he wrote in 1 Corinthians 1, ²⁷*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;* ²⁸*God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,* ²⁹*so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.* Again, in 1 Corinthians 1, Paul states, ²²*For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,* ²³*but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles....* The gospel was foolishness to Gentiles, and Jesus the barrier to the Jews believing. The gospel didn't make sense to most people because God spoke in statements contrary to what we may believe to be common sense. Note the opposites used by Paul above. God chose the foolish, the weak, and the low. Most people are ashamed to be low, foolish, or weak. People desire to be strong, smart, and high in stature, wealth, and status, and will usually let you know in no uncertain terms when they are that way. But God in His infinite wisdom did not choose to act that way. Why in the world would God demonstrate his power through an innocent death by crucifixion, probably the most horrible form of death ever devised? Why would the supposed King of Kings, God incarnate, allow himself to be treated as such? Mankind would have never devised such a plan, but God did.

There is a famous engraving on a wall near Palatine Hill, in Rome, which dates back to the first or second century AD and has become somewhat famous. It is a rough engraving which depicts a man hanging on a cross, and another man standing nearby looking up to the man on the cross with one hand raised as if worshipping or honoring him. There is a rough inscription below the drawing which reads, "Alexamenos worships his God." I know some of you are thinking, "Wow! What a great piece of church





history, especially of the church in Rome, preserved for us for 2,000 years.” That’s true. The artist sketched his impression of Christianity, but it is not what you think. The man on the cross is depicted with a donkey’s head. Even in ancient Rome, their plays, comedies, and satires could be as vile and as profane as any sitcom, stand-up comedian, or movie today. They even used some of the same expressions, such as calling a person who was not respected or who someone wanted to insult a “mule, donkey, or an ass.”²² What the artist wanted to show was that he thought the worshipper was a stupid, foolish person. The engraver apparently thought the whole idea of Christianity was idiotic. His idea of Christianity was that it was a “jackass religion.” He was not admiring

Christianity or Christ, but was blasting both of them with contempt and blasphemy similar to what goes on today in many of the sitcoms and “pieces of art” that are displayed in some museums. The graffiti artist was telling us that the whole idea of a crucified God was idiotic, moronic, and just plain stupid. Instead of worship and adoration, the whole idea should make us ashamed.

However, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel, even though most people who did not know God would be. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because *it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*. The word here for power is the word from which we get dynamic, dynamite, and dynamo. It is not just a flash in the pan, but an ongoing, strong, and dynamic force that emanates from God. God in the Old Testament manifests his power in deliverance, providence, protection, blessing, and sovereignty. Notice that the power has a direction. “The gospel is not simply a display of power but the effective operation of God’s power leading to salvation. It has purpose and direction.”²³ The Greek word *eis*, translated unto, or for, literally means leading to a point or a specific goal or place to be reached.²⁴ The gospel is the power of God, leading to salvation. Salvation is the goal of the power of the gospel. What are we saved from? We are ultimately saved from the wrath of God, judgment on the last day. We are not only saved from sin’s guilt, pollution, and slavery, but we are also saved to positive aspects, such as righteousness, holiness, and freedom. We go from being outside the family of God, bound for Hell and eternal punishment, to adoption into the family of God, joint heirs with Jesus of all of the blessings that God

²² Ferguson, Everett. 2003. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. p.560-561.

²³ Mounce, p. 71.

²⁴ BDAG, εἰς

provides. Salvation is not just forgiveness of sins, but includes a host of aspects that we will discuss in later lessons on this wonderful book.

The gospel goes out to everyone, without any distinction of race, color, creed, age, sex, or nationality. But this salvation is not for everyone in an individual sense, but everyone who believes. We discussed this word “believes” in the last lesson, and how it is synonymous with the word “faith.” The key concept in this word is trust. Belief means it is regarded as trustworthy, that one has complete confidence in something. One Greek source states that in translating this Greek word, “it would be wrong to select a term which would mean merely ‘reliance’ or ‘dependency’ or even ‘confidence,’ for their should also be a significant measure of ‘belief,’ since real trust, confidence, and reliance can only be placed in someone who is believed to have the qualities attributed to such a person.”²⁵ I believe that this is significant because some people who call themselves Christians know of Jesus, but don’t trust Him. Faith and belief are not just mental assent. They are not just agreement with the facts. Trust is an action word, a verb as well as a noun. The gospel is the power of God which leads to salvation, and it takes the power of God working in the lives of God’s people to create and sustain this faith.

The phrase *to the Jew first and also to the Greek* describes this all-inclusiveness that the gospel is intended to be preached to all nations. The world call goes out to everyone equally, but to the Jews first. Remember, even Jesus when He sent out the 12 disciples, sent them first *to the lost sheep of Israel* (Matthew 10:6). But the gospel is also for the non-Jew. Jesus himself said in John 10, ¹⁴*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.* Jesus called Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles, to bring in the other sheep into the fold.

How does Paul show that the gospel is indeed the power of God leading to salvation for all of those who believe? This is the content of verse 17, *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”* The gospel is the power of God for salvation, because, as verse 17 states, in it, the righteousness of God is revealed. What is the righteousness of God? Does God reveal to us His attribute of righteousness, so that we see ourselves as filthy rags before Him? Is this a righteousness that is from God towards us? Is it something that He is, or something that He does? I think it may be both. Initially, Martin Luther saw this as God’s retributive justice towards him and all sinners. It haunted him throughout his ministry, often making him miserable. The righteousness of God constantly made Luther see himself as a wretched sinner, and he often strove mightily to make penance through a number of good works in order to appease God. Luther soon began to realize that nothing he did would ever make him righteous in God’s sight, and this realization made

²⁵ Louw, J.P., and Nida, E.A. (1996). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies. 31.85

him all the more miserable. Luther struggled with this verse constantly, praying, studying, and trying to determine how one could be made right with a God that was absolutely perfect.

Then one day, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Luther came to realize that this verse was the key to the gospel message. Luther realized that this verse was describing a righteousness freely imputed, given to the sinner, by God's sovereign grace, on the basis of Christ's substitutionary atonement, and made the sinner's own possession by the means of God-given faith.²⁶ When Luther made this discovery, it was as if the world had been lifted from his shoulders. He was no longer under the pressure and weight of having to earn and keep his own righteousness before God. This was a righteousness that was God's, that He freely gave to sinners through Jesus, so that His wrath would be appeased and His justice might be served. Luther finally let go of the idea of inner goodness, that perhaps he could make it on his own. Luther's experience changed his whole view of the Bible. From this point on, the Bible became a book of light and joy. The peace of God which transcends all understanding now filled his heart and mind.²⁷

How is this righteousness from God that He imparts to us being revealed? The ESV says, *from faith for faith*. The NIV says *by faith, from first to last*. The Greek language literally states, *out of faith into faith*. Just like Martin Luther, we all as humans believe that we can do something to earn or achieve our own righteousness. It is the result of what we do. However, God's righteousness is totally different. This is a right standing before God that has nothing to do with what we do. It is by faith. We trust that Christ has taken care of our wrong standing with God, and put our trust in Him to correct our standing with God. We trust Christ, and in doing so, He gives us His righteousness before God. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 and states the righteous will live by faith. Verse 17 literally changed the life of Martin Luther, and many other Christians throughout the last 2,000 years of Christian history. So many people have tried to live by works, but Paul states quite clearly that it is only by faith that one becomes righteous, and only by faith that one lives in their righteousness. It is trusting completely in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, Paul stated in Romans 1:16 that he was not ashamed of the gospel. Paul was consumed with the gospel and what God through Jesus Christ had done for him. He never hesitated to preach the Word to those in need and to those who were even hostile to the message of Christ. He was not just "not ashamed" of the gospel from a negative sense, but in a positive way was proud of the gospel, humbled by what Christ did for him, and compelled to preach to all of those who did not know the gospel. Are we ashamed of the gospel? Why is it that many of us who are truly born-again Christians

²⁶ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, p. 61.

²⁷ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, p. 62.

and changed by the power of God so reluctant to share the gospel message with others that we know?

What does this shame or reluctance reveal about our faith in God and his gospel? Do we really understand its power? I think if we really understood the power of the gospel, the human situation in sin, and a proper understanding of the whole counsel of God that we would also be compelled like Paul to tell everyone we know. John MacArthur states, “Paul’s supreme passion was to see men saved. He cared nothing for personal comfort, popularity, or reputation. He offered no compromise of the gospel, because he knew it is the only power available that can change lives for eternity.”²⁸

What does it mean that the righteous will live by faith? We will explore his further starting with Romans chapter 4, but what does this phrase mean? It is incredibly important, and we must understand its meaning and implications in order to enjoy the Christian life as God intended. There are three word groups we need to explore: 1) the righteous, 2) will live, and 3) by faith. We will look at these however, in a different order, the order of the Greek text: The righteous, by faith, will live. Faith, however, impacts both the righteousness we receive and the way we live.

Who are the righteous? Later in Romans 3, beginning in verse 10, Paul quotes the Old Testament Psalm 14 and states that *no one is righteous, not even one*. Paul states that no one seeks after God, and that everyone is a sinner. This is a good description of man’s situation in sin. We are sinful, because it is in our nature to be so. Sin is not just what we do, but it is also who we are. So then, who are righteous? The standard of righteousness is God Himself, and therefore no one will ever be able to come close to that standard. Except one person, Jesus Christ. Righteousness is not just a lack of sinning, but it is also positively doing what is right in God’s eyes, and being what is right in God’s eyes. It is a standing before God. Christ was righteous before God, and now those who believe in the gospel of Christ receive the righteousness of Christ. Christ imputes His righteousness to us when we trust Him. Therefore, when we trust Christ, God looks at us through the righteous lens of Jesus, and sees us as believers as righteous as well. Those who believe in Christ, who put their complete trust in Him, those whom God calls, are the righteous.

How do we acquire the righteousness of God? Mounce states, “Virtue has, since the beginning of time, been thought of as an achievement by human endeavor. But God’s righteousness is a right standing he freely gives to those who trust in him.”²⁹ Most people, even Christians, deep down believe that they can do good because humanity is, deep down, good. We all strive to gain favor with someone, even God, through what we do. Whether it is giving to charity, or quitting some bad habit, or simply our daily quiet time, we all think these things will somehow put us in good favor with God. Nothing can be further from the truth! The righteousness we acquire through the work of Jesus Christ is by faith alone. *Sola Fide* became a central theme, a rallying cry, for the Reformation in

²⁸ MacArthur, p. 51.

²⁹ Mounce, p. 73.

the sixteenth century. Faith alone. We do not gain one shred of right standing with God through anything we do. Nor can we, unless we then gain some bragging rights. The work of Christ on the cross accomplished everything we needed. We receive faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, and we use that faith to then receive the gospel.

Finally, the righteous, with a righteousness acquired only through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, live by that same faith. We do not live by works, or accomplishments, or good deeds. We live by faith in the power of the gospel. We live trusting not in ourselves to reconcile us to God, but in Jesus. All Christians say they believe this doctrine, but how many of us truly trust Jesus and not ourselves in our daily lives to keep us right with God? When we miss our daily quiet time, are we overcome with guilt because we deep down feel that we just may miss the way? A.W. Tozer, in a little book called *Knowledge of the Holy*, said this:

*“To believe actively that our Heavenly Father constantly spreads around us providential circumstances that work for our present good and our everlasting well-being brings to the soul a veritable benediction. Most of us go through life praying a little, planning a little, jockeying for position, hoping but never being quite certain of anything, and always secretly afraid that we will miss the way. This is a tragic waste of truth and never gives rest to the heart. There is a better way. God has charged Himself with full responsibility for our eternal happiness and stands ready to take over the management of our lives the moment we turn in faith to Him.”*³⁰

We as humans tend to live as though we were practical atheists, or perhaps practical deists. We live as though it all depended on us. However, God has made it clear that the righteous will live by faith. We trust that Christ has completely atoned for our sins. We trust that Christ’s work imparted to us makes us righteous in the sight of God. We trust that we are forgiven. We trust that God sees us as righteous through the lens of the cross. We trust that when we mess up, we have a mediator in Jesus who has already taken care of that mistake and has already paid for it on the cross. We trust that we have been regenerated, been given a new nature, so that we can desire to do the things of God and grow in Christlikeness. This is living by faith.

³⁰ A.W. Tozer, 1961. *Knowledge of the Holy*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Lesson 4: Romans 1:18 – 23

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

The previous 17 verses were Paul's introduction to his letter to the Romans. He introduced the gospel, described the fact that Jesus was both God and man, and proclaimed in verses 16 and 17 that the gospel was the power leading to salvation for all nations and races (Jews and Gentiles), and that in this gospel the righteousness from God was revealed by faith, and that those that are saved by this gospel live by faith. Paul's introduction, however, begs the question, why do we as human beings need this salvation? Why did Jesus have to come in the first place, and why did He have to die? Why is this message "good news?" In the next several chapters, from Romans 1:18 through Romans 3:26, Paul explains the human condition. In meticulous detail, Paul makes it abundantly clear that regardless of who you are or where you come from, all human beings are sinful creatures. We all sin by nature, are separated from God, and are destined for divine judgment. In order for Paul to fully explain the gospel and all of its glory, Paul must first explain sin.

In verse 17, Paul described a righteousness from God that is revealed by faith, from faith. However, in verse 18, Paul begins a description of the human condition that is disgusting. Contrasting verse 17, in verse 18 Paul explains the wrath of God is being revealed. The wrath of God is something that is not normally discussed much any more, but it is a key doctrine in the study of God and in this study of Romans. A quick search of the word "wrath" and its various Hebrew forms in the Old Testament results in about 200 hits, and about 50 hits in the New Testament for the Greek forms. Boice states that there are over 20 words in the Old Testament for wrath, and nearly 600 passages on the subject.³¹ The word translated "wrath" in Romans 1:18 is the Greek word *orge*, the word from which we get our word *orgy*. It means strong displeasure or strong indignation

³¹ Boice, *Romans* vol 1, p. 131.

directed at wrongdoing, with a focus on retribution.³² The word *orge* in the New Testament is used almost exclusively with God as the subject or possessive, meaning God's wrath. But God's wrath is not the same as human anger. John Murray describes wrath as "the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness."³³ Wrath is God's reaction to that which is not holy. It is not a flare up or an instance of God losing control and getting angry in a human sense. It is a strong and steady opposition to sin and all evil, and God's wrath is a product of His divine and Holy nature. God must punish sin, and His wrath is His punitive justice.

Why does Paul start his discussion of the gospel of God with divine wrath? Because Paul understands that human beings will never appreciate or understand the gospel without first an appreciation of their condition. Boice states, "Paul knew that what matters in the final analysis is not whether we feel good or have our felt needs met or receive a meaningful experience. What matters is whether we come into a right relationship with God. And to have that happen we need to begin with the truth that we are not in a right relationship to him. On the contrary, we are under God's wrath and are in danger of everlasting condemnation at his hands."³⁴ In order for people to understand the gospel, people need to first understand and come to grips why we all need the gospel.

God's wrath is being revealed, or made fully known, against all of the ungodliness and wickedness of men. The verb "is being revealed" is in the present tense, indicating an ongoing and current revealing. It has been going on, and is still continuing to go on. In other words, God is today still revealing his wrath against the ungodliness and wickedness of men. Ungodliness is the irreverent attitude of mankind towards God, while the wickedness is the acts of immoral and unrighteousness behavior that mankind exhibits towards God and others. The reason that God is angry is a combination of these two aspects. There are a number of ways that God is revealing His wrath against this sin, and we can readily see many ways in the world today. Charles Hodge sums it up by saying, "That purpose is manifested in various ways; by the actual punishment of sin, by the inherent tendency of moral evil to produce misery, by the voice of conscience."³⁵

Why is the wrath of God being revealed against this sin? The last part of verse 18 states, *who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*. Notice that these people suppress the truth. They hold it down, keep it down, cover it up, sit on it, and don't let the truth see the light of day. This word is similar to our word "incarceration." The truth is a prisoner and is not being released. This word brings to mind a large steel spring that is compressed by the full weight of a person standing on it. The person does everything he can do to keep the spring compressed, but the spring is ready to shoot up with all of its force. What is implied in this sentence is that these people know the truth, but they suppress it or incarcerate it in order to keep it from becoming effective. This is why God

³² BDAG, ὀργή, ῥῆς, ῥή

³³ Murray, John. 1968. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. p. 35.

³⁴ Boice, *Romans* vol 1, p. 131.

³⁵ Hodge, Charles. 2005. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. The WordSearch Corp.

is revealing his wrath. Mankind, knowing full well what they are doing, is keeping the truth about God held down and suppressed by their wickedness. God's wrath is directed at this particular sin of mankind.

Romans 1:18-20 is probably one of the most crucial set of sentences in the entire Bible, because it completely refutes any excuse man will ever have against God for not knowing that there is, indeed, a Creator God. This is called general revelation, or the revelation of God in nature. ¹⁹ *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* ²⁰ *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* Let's step through this, because it is very important. The big picture is that there are things which can be known about God, and God has made it obvious to mankind. Some of God's attributes can be clearly seen in what God has created, the natural world, and these things attest to the existence, divinity, and power of God. Not only has God made himself known to mankind, but His revelation is understood by mankind. The knowledge has gotten through. Therefore, no one can say they never had enough information, or was unaware that God does indeed exist.

Not everything can be known about God. God is infinite and above us as humans in every way. However, as Paul states, some things can be known about God. Some people believe that since God is invisible and He is infinite, that nothing can be fully known about God. Postmodernism believes that nothing at all can be fully known. However, Paul states emphatically that there are some things that can be known about God, these things that can be known are obvious to people, and God has made it plain to mankind. Some knowledge about God is revealed in His creation, and much more is revealed in His Word, the Bible. Psalm 19 begins with words from David that clearly describe this natural revelation.

¹*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

²*Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.*

³*There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.*

We can all see and know God simply from His creation. It doesn't matter how much of a sinner we are, regardless of our total depravity. Every human being knows there is a Creator God through nature. God deliberately made some things about Himself known and knowable through nature.

What attributes did God make known to us through nature? His invisible qualities, namely His divine nature and his eternal power. These two attributes are enough to show people of all nations that there is a Supreme Being that created the universe. God's divine nature, his deity, is demonstrated in nature. The fact that God is

supreme, is far above any human being, and is deserving of our worship, is evident in nature. Additionally, God's power, meaning His creative power and His sovereignty for instance, are also evident. One cannot look around at the wonders of the world or the remarkable engineering of the human body and not see the divinity and power of God. It literally takes an act of rebellion against God not to see all of this.

What's more, the existence of God is not just seen in the work of nature, but it has *been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made*, or as the NIV states, *being understood from what has been made*. Mankind not only sees it, but understands it. God can be seen, and this knowledge gets through to us! God not only shows us some of His attributes in nature, but He has also made it plain to us. God has not hidden Himself from us in any way. It is like God put up a billboard and made sure it was well-lit and obvious to all who drive by. It has big letters, short words, and bright colors. We look at it, read it, and understand it, but mankind left to his own nature and sinfulness chooses to ignore it. RC. Sproul in summary states,

No one can claim ignorance of the knowledge of God. No one can cite insufficient evidence for not believing in God. Though people are not persuaded by the evidence, this does not indicate an insufficiency in the evidence, but rather an insufficiency in man. This insufficiency is not a natural inability that provides man with an excuse. Man's failure to see this general and universal revelation of God is not because he lacks eyes or ears or a brain with which to think. The problem is not a lack of knowledge or a lack of natural cognitive equipment but a moral deficiency. Hence man is held to be at fault for his refusal to submit to the evidence God plainly provides.³⁶

Therefore, no man will be able to tell God on judgment day that he didn't have enough information to believe. All men have been given enough natural revelation so that everyone knows something about God. Man has no excuse. God has made it plain and simple. There is enough natural evidence to convince a little child as well as the most brilliant scientist that God exists. And it is not like we have missed it, because this revelation was not something God just did recently. Paul writes that since the creation of the world, this revelation in nature has been obvious to us, and has been understood by us! In other words, since the beginning of creation documented in Genesis, God has made himself manifestly clear in all of his creation, even through a fallen creation.

Because God has made Himself known to every person in all of mankind, men are without any excuse when they face God. No one will be able to say, "I didn't know," or "if only I had had more information, I would have believed in you." God has provided the information and has made it plain to everyone. However, even though mankind

³⁶ Sproul, R. C. (1978). *If there's a God, why are there atheists? : Why atheists believe in unbelief* (Revised edition of the book *The psychology of Atheism.*). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

knows and understands this information about God, mankind suppresses this truth. R.C. Sproul calls this the psychology of atheism. Essentially, he compares mankind's reaction to God to one's reaction to a traumatic event. When someone has experienced a very shocking or traumatic event in their lives, they do everything to try and suppress those thoughts and experiences from their conscious minds. Psychologists then try and bring those thoughts and experiences to the surface in order to help people deal with them. The revelation of God, including his holiness, righteousness, sovereignty, unfathomable love, his wrath, and other attributes are so shocking and traumatic to us as mere human beings dead in our sin, that we react to God by suppressing God like we would suppress any other traumatic event. Additionally, in our sinful and selfish nature, we as humans do not want there to be a God that has created all things, governs all things, and holds us accountable for what we do and say and think. This removes control from us. We therefore suppress the truth of God's glory in favor of our own gods and our own self.

For instance, in Isaiah 6, when Isaiah caught just a glimpse of the Lord in heaven, he recorded, ¹*In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.* ²*Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.* ³*And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"* ⁴*And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.* ⁵*And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"* Notice Isaiah's reaction in verse 5. As Isaiah sees just a glimpse of God, he is brought immediately to his knees by the realization that he is nothing. One translation for "lost" is the word undone, or disintegrated. Isaiah comes completely unraveled in the presence of God as he sees God's holiness and then becomes acutely aware of his own sinfulness and unrighteousness before God.

One other example is found in the gospel of Luke 5. Simon Peter and his associates were fishing on the Sea of Galilee, and were not having any luck. In fact, they had caught nothing. Jesus was in Peter's boat, and told him to cast off and throw out their nets. Peter, the professional expert fisherman, responded to Jesus by stating, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." They put down their nets, and just about every fish from the Sea of Galilee jumped into the net, and even with other boats helping them with the huge catch of fish, their boats began to sink! You would expect Peter and the others to fall down in praise and worship of Jesus, who had just proven himself deity in the ability to control nature. You might expect Peter to immediately whip out a contract and a pen and ask Jesus to be a partner with him in Peter's fishing business. Even only a few days a week and they would all be filthy rich! But what happens? What is Peter's response? ⁸*But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."*

Peter's response to Jesus as God was to separate himself from Jesus because Peter knew he was a sinful man, compared to the holiness and power of God.

Mankind knows that God is there and He is not silent (to borrow a title from a book by Francis Schaeffer), but the God that has been revealed to him is much more than we can handle. We saw how Isaiah was completely undone by just a glimpse of the holiness of God, and how Peter was completely humbled and brought to his knees by the power of God. When we as human beings come face to face with the God of the Bible, those who are unregenerate sinners have to repress and suppress this knowledge and experience. But it keeps coming to the surface. So what do we do? We create gods for ourselves, and/or substitute other things for God to fulfill the need and implications of this knowledge and revelation about God, but in a way that is more comfortable for us. We create a god that has no wrath, is all love, is a cosmic Santa Claus, is a harmless statue, or any number of other idols that we as humans create and worship since the beginning of time. Paul says, ²¹ *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* ²² *Claiming to be wise, they became fools,* ²³ *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

God has given us evidence and made it clear to us, yet mankind does not honor God. That is because despite all of the evidence that leads to God, the belief in God is not a decision made from evidence, or proof, or argumentation. Belief in God is a moral decision. Paul states that mankind *became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened*. Moral decisions stem from the mind and the heart. RC Sproul states, "Thus the lack of deficiency in general revelation is rooted not so much in man's natural composition as in his disposition. That is, the matter of the knowledge of God the Creator is not so much an intellectual problem as it is a moral problem. It becomes an intellectual problem because the mind is darkened by man's indisposition or psychological bias against the light."³⁷ Ignorance is not the sin; it is the willful decision to ignore what we know is the truth and follow a path that is not the truth.

Note Paul uses the term foolish. Foolishness is not a lack of intellectual ability, but rather it carries both a moral and religious judgment. Psalm 111:10 states, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*. And Psalm 14:1 states, *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* The Bible contrasts wisdom with foolishness. Wisdom is the honoring of God as He is supposed to be honored. Wisdom begins with God, and then flows outward. However, foolishness begins with the assumption that there is no God, and goes from there. So atheism and agnosticism are not merely defective theories that need to be corrected by further study and more information. They are sin for which men are called to repent because God has made himself known to them. This is the grand paradox. When man thinks he is most wise because he does not believe in God, he is

³⁷ Sproul, *Atheists*.

actually the most foolish, because he is disregarding what is evident to him and choosing to go down a path that he knows in his heart to be the wrong one.

The gospel, then, consists of God opening our eyes to his wonder and splendor in such a way that we now adore and worship him rather than suppress his truth in our wickedness. In chapter 6, verses 6 – 8, Isaiah records for us atonement and the results of that atonement: ⁶*Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.* ⁷*And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”* ⁸*And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”* After God had taken away Isaiah’s sin and atoned for it, then and only then was Isaiah able to respond to the call of God. This is similar to what God does for us through Jesus Christ through the power of the gospel. Through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, we can now respond to God in a righteous manner when He calls us.

There are several important take-aways from this section of Scripture, and one of the most important is that there is no excuse in God’s eyes for not believing in Him. None. We cannot rationalize away the doubts, reasons, logic, or evolutionary theories of our friends and acquaintances in the hopes of God having mercy on someone outside the basis of Scripture. The simple but hard truth is that God will not have mercy on those who rationalize Him away. God has made it plain to everyone since the beginning of time that He is the Creator God, and that He exists and is in charge. He has not only made the evidences about Himself abundantly clear to all people, but has enabled us all to understand it all as well. Even through our total depravity, we as humans can understand the evidence that God has shown us so that we can know He exists. We get it. There is no excuse for someone who has the facts and knows the truth, and then suppresses it for whatever reason. As evangelists and disciplinarians according to the Great Commission in Matthew 28, we must come to grips with the idea that no matter where we are, what our level of intelligence is, or how old or young we are, there is enough revelation about God in the natural creation to point us to Him. When dealing with people of all nations, backgrounds, education levels, and cultures, I believe that we need to maintain this aspect as foundational.

God then holds us responsible for what we all do with this general revelation about Himself. As Christians, this fact should cut us to the quick. Paul specifically states that God is revealing his wrath to those who suppress the truth about God, even though they know deep in their hearts that He exists. While preaching fire and brimstone may be out-of-date in the 21st century, it is nonetheless accurate to state that God will judge those and punish those who know the truth about God yet “incarcerate” it. When we look at our friends, neighbors, and co-workers, and see how they neglect God, refuse to worship and acknowledge Him as God, and in some cases actively work against Him, we should be burdened beyond words by their plight. Because God has revealed to mankind all that

is needed to acknowledge God as God, He will hold us accountable. We have no excuse. No one will be able to say to God, “I didn’t have enough information,” or “I just couldn’t tell you were there.” Therefore, we should do what we can to bring forth the light of Christ to others, and somehow point out to them the obvious signs and wonders that point to God through nature. That said, we certainly must understand that we do not save people; that is the work of the Holy Spirit. We don’t even have the responsibility of making the information and arguments we put forth stick. That again is the Holy Spirit’s job. However, we are called and are responsible for the discussions, for the teaching, and the speaking. Our job as God has commanded is to speak, and His job is to bring fruit. Because people will be held accountable, then, we must do whatever we can to put forth the words of God in Christ.

It is easy for human beings to believe in evolution, because it takes the personal God of the Bible out of the picture. There is no Supreme Being to whom we are subordinate, and there is no Creator God to whom we will ultimately be held accountable. As we discuss God and Christ with our friends, neighbors, and co-workers, we must keep in mind that the normal reaction from those who have not been saved is one of rejection and rationalization. Most people today would love to discuss spirituality, and God as a force, or a spirit, but most people will revolt or reject the idea of a God that is personal, involved, and who holds His creation accountable for their actions, especially to a standard that is far above anything we can ever accomplish. It is far more comfortable for us as human beings to believe in evolution. This belief takes out the hope that we have after death, but it also removes from humanity the idea of a God that is holy, just, and accountable. Evolution, and all forms of idolatry – even self-idolatry such as that which is taught by Hinduism, New Age, and Humanism – is the natural inclination of our friends and co-workers. We are spiritual beings, created in the image of God, and deep within our hearts we know God exists. Those that have not been saved and given a new nature naturally long for spirituality, but it is a spirituality that mankind can control and with which we can feel comfortable. This is a product of fallen state of man. We as believers should keep this in mind as we witness to our friends. This is another reason why our role in salvation and the Holy Spirit’s role must be kept in perspective. Our role is not to convince our neighbors or our friends. Our role is to present the gospel. The role of the Holy Spirit is to convince, convict, and convert.

Lesson 5: Romans 1:24 – 32

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

We observed in the last section that God has provided an abundance of evidence to make it clear to us as human beings that God exists. Moreover, God not only has provided the evidence through His creation, He has made the knowledge and its message plain to mankind so that we understand it. Yet mankind refuses to acknowledge God; in fact, mankind suppresses, or “incarcerates” the truth about God through wickedness. Instead of worshipping and honoring God, mankind instead honors and worships idols. Man becomes foolish, disregarding the fact of God while bragging about how smart man has become without God. Despite all of the evidence that leads to the existence of God, that God himself has provided and made clear to us, man creates other more comfortable gods. Therefore, man has no excuse when faced with judgment on the last day. No man will be able to stand before God and say, “I didn’t know,” or “If I had had just a little more information, I would have believed in you.” God has made it clear to man that He is the Creator God, so man has no excuse for not believing.

In this next section, Paul continues his analysis of the human condition in sin and willful disobedience of man towards God. Up to this point, we have seen what man has

done with God. Man 1) suppresses the truth of God, 2) man refuses to honor and worship God as He deserves, and 3) man refuses to be thankful. In this next section of Romans 1, Paul demonstrates what happens when man refuses to acknowledge God and instead creates for himself gods that satisfy man's desire and longing for his creator. These gods are much more comfortable than a Creator God whose holiness stands in stark contrast to the sin of man, and who holds man accountable for his actions and beliefs. Paul begins this section with the word, "Therefore." Paul wants to us to consider what he has stated about mankind in the preceding verses, because what is coming up next is a direct result of man's activities in verses 18 – 23. God is not arbitrary, but His punishments are just and purposeful.

Therefore, God gave them up. This phrase is repeated three times in the next 8 verses. The NIV states that *God gave them over to....* This I think better describes the action of God in relation to the sins of man. Man refuses to acknowledge God, honor God or give thanks to God. Instead, man creates for himself gods that are more comfortable and gods that he is better able to control. In other words, man generally tells God to "leave me alone. I want to run my life, my way, without any interference from God. When I want something, I will ask you. Otherwise, leave me alone." This is the ultimate rejection of God, and man puts himself in God's place. God, then, essentially turns mankind over to their own desires and sins.

What we as human beings often don't realize is how God sustains and preserves the entire created order every second of every day. He maintains the order of the universe so that things don't degenerate into chaos. Paul in Colossians 1 writing about our savior Jesus Christ states, ¹⁶*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him.* ¹⁷*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* God gives common grace to all of his creation so that the rain makes the crops grow, the plants produce oxygen, and we breathe in the oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide so that the plants may grow. God orders and sustains creation, and mankind, so that we don't all kill ourselves. We take this for granted every day. God created natural laws and systems in which the universe operates, but at the same time God maintains the order and ensures that we are able to live and function every day. God is intimately involved in everything that happens or doesn't happen in the entire universe.

However, in Romans 1 we see God giving us just a taste of what we want by removing a portion of this order from the lives of humans. God gives us up to our desires. "You want to be left alone...OK!" I think Paul here in these verses is describing a three stage downward spiral of mankind as God answers our desires and removes some of His order, in effect giving us what we want. However, we must be careful to note that this is not a passive act in which God simply sits back and allows mankind to do what they want. God is never a passive bystander to anything that happens in this entire

universe. God *gave them up* is an active verb. God turns them over to their own desires and wishes. These three stages of this downward spiral are lusts of their hearts (sinful desires in the NIV), dishonorable passions (shameful lusts in the NIV), and a debased mind (depraved mind in the NIV).

Paul writes *God gave them up*. This word is the same word used in the gospels when Jesus refers to Himself being turned over to the authorities before his crucifixion. It implies a handing over to authorities, or turning over control to someone or something else. Paul writes that God turns control and/or authority of those men who suppress the truth about God over to their own desires (strong wants, cravings, etc.). Greg Herrick states this word “means that the process envisioned in 1:18-32 is not simply the natural course of events but an ongoing history directed by a sovereign God who makes decisions which affect people, societies, and cultures. The thought is truly a frightful one.”³⁸ If people really want and desire their sinful lifestyles apart from God, God will give them what they want. The terrible reality is that often, people really do get what they ask for.

God turns people over to their own lusts for sexual perversion with each other, and this implies the ravenous desire for sexual promiscuity, fornication, and adultery. However, don't miss the fact that this sexual abandonment is related and linked to people's idolatry in verse 25. God gave them over to wild and reckless sexual desires and lusts because these people decided to exchange the truth of God, as written in the previous several verses, for idolatry and worship of created things, which is the ultimate lie. Idolatry and wanton sexual perversion often go hand-in-hand, and we can see many instances in the Bible and in culture of this fact. The sexual revolution is strongly linked with the disbelief in God, or the worship of false gods such as New Age, Hinduism, and others. When man makes God in his own image, he is free to do what he wants, and usually that starts with wild sexual orgies, sleeping around with everybody and anybody, and freedom from any and all sexual restrictions.

However, God does not arbitrarily pronounce His judgment on man's sins. Notice that in the previous verses, these people chose to dishonor God by suppressing the truth about Him, refusing to give Him thanks, and worshipping idols in their various forms rather than the Creator God. Therefore, God makes it clear that when man chooses to dishonor God, God's punishment will take the form of man dishonoring themselves through their actions and desires. The end of verse 24 states that through their actions and desires, they dishonored their bodies among themselves. Man gets what he desires, but dishonors his own body and that of others in the process. Stage 1 is God turning people over to their own sexual and lustful desires to do what they want with each other in terms of adultery and fornication, and other shameful acts.

³⁸ Herrick, Greg. 1995. *Romans: The Gospel of God's Righteousness*. Biblical Studies Foundation, www.bible.org. p. 30.

Stage 2 goes even further. Again, for the second time, God turns them over to their own dishonorable passions. The acts in stage 1 are shameful and dishonor God and man, but at least they are “natural.” Now, in verses 26 and 27, due to the effect of God granting people what they desire, man dives even deeper into the pit of dishonor and lust and begins doing those acts that are “unnatural.” This word doesn’t just mean unnatural, but literally “against nature,” meaning that their actions actively strive against the natural order and design of things. Note that again, as in verses 24-25, men and women exchanged a truth for a lie. In the previous verses people could not stomach the truth of God so they exchanged it for the lie of idolatry in order to serve their own sinful desires and wants. In the present two verses, they exchanged the natural order of things for those that are contrary to nature. People can’t get enough sexual satisfaction and stimulation naturally, so they continue along the road to ruin through unnatural homosexual sex. R.C. Sproul comments, “Paul does not set forth a detailed prohibition against certain homosexual acts, but rather he isolates homosexual behavior as the supreme example of the loss of human dignity. When the knowledge of God is suppressed, the nature of man suffers, and it manifests itself in gross, unnatural acts.”³⁹

In stage 2, note again that these passions are “dishonorable.” When man refuses to honor God, then the punishment is God giving them over to lusts that are dishonorable. Paul writes that men *were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.* People become consumed with passion for sexual stimulation, and desire to gratify themselves in whatever way possible. This passion becomes consuming; in other words, it literally takes over the body and mind so that a person craves it. It is an addiction, and in fact can be compared to slavery. The Bible cannot be any clearer that homosexuality is a sin which receives the wrath of God. There have been numerous attempts to twist the words of Paul into making these verses say something that they quite clearly don’t say. The act of homosexuality stems from the abandonment of the truth of God, results in a strong and intense desire to have sex with others of the same gender, and finally receives the penalty for such actions. Sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, are probably some instances of such penalties. Others include the loss of relationships with family, friends, and other loved ones, psychological and relational disorders common with homosexuals, and the general degradation and loss of value for people in general. Sproul explains succinctly, “So one could say that the expansion, proliferation and explosion of homosexuality in a culture is in a certain sense a reflection of a demeaning of man in general and an expression of the wrath of God upon that society.”⁴⁰

But God is not done yet. Because people refused to acknowledge God (literally retain the knowledge of God, or they did not approve to have God in their knowledge), God gave them over to a *debased mind* (the NIV says a *depraved mind*) *to do what ought*

³⁹ Sproul, *The Gospel of God*, p. 41.

⁴⁰ Sproul, *The Gospel of God*, p. 42.

not to be done. This word “knowledge is *epignosis*, and means more than just knowledge or facts about God. In the New Testament it always means moral or religious knowledge. The prefix *epi* on the word is an intensifier that denotes “above” or “full,” so this is not just some stuff one knows, but is “full knowledge of God.” People have tested the knowledge of God and found it wanting, not for lack of evidence, but because people wanted to do one thing while God desired something else. Therefore, people chose not to retain the full knowledge of God, and instead they fulfilled their God-given desire to worship with idols and substitutes for God. Since we disapprove the knowledge of God, God gives us over to disapproved (depraved) thinking!

Paul then writes that people are then filled with all sorts of evil and unrighteousness. The list is long and terrible. What are these evils? The first section contains four words, but I want to stress two of them. Unrighteousness and wickedness have been used by Paul previously to describe mankind’s rejection of God the suppression of His truth.

- **Covetousness** – This is greed. Unfortunately, this one sin is pervasive in our world and economy. While healthy ambition and a desire to innovate are the positive drivers for much of the world’s economy, today they have been replaced by greed, pure and simple. Wall Street rewards companies on their bottom line, no matter how they obtain a profit. Corporate scandals have rocked the business world in the past years as people who run these companies have devised outlandish and often illegal schemes to simply make more money. Ordinary people have amassed huge credit card debt mainly because most of us are never satisfied with what we have. We are told the better life is around the corner if we just buy this or get that. Greed is wanting more even though we don’t really need it. Greed is also the desire for more at anyone’s expense. Higher paying jobs await us if we can just get rid of our competition. Greed is the one sin that has become a primary driver of much of the American Dream.
- **Malice** – A better way to say this is having ill-will towards someone. People who are under God’s judgment not only dishonor and reject God, they do the same towards other people. While their outward appearances may be hospitable and cordial, inside they strive to run over people to get what they want. Many people do not honestly care about others except in situations where they use people to get what they want.

The second section consists of 5 other sins. These are:

- **Envy** – What is envy? Envy is the disdain or hatred of another person because they have what you want. Envy stems from greed, but is directed at the other person. Think about what happens in your family, community, church, or workplace when one person is filled with envy. It literally tears apart relationships, families, and groups.

- **Murder** – Murder is the culmination of a disastrous relationship between human beings, and God considers it an assault to His own dignity. Its prohibition is one of the Ten Commandments, which indicates how seriously God takes murder. Think about the reasons for murder today. People have been known to murder for a pair of basketball shoes, to protect their little secret affairs, to become members in a gang, or just out of the sheer enjoyment of it. Man was created in the image of God, and is the image-bearer of God. Life is so sacred, valuable, and dignified that to kill a life is to commit violence against God, whose image man bears. Once man chooses to dishonor and ignore God, no human life is seen as valuable.
- **Strife** – How many times have we seen people intentionally stir up trouble with a bad intent, or to be argumentative just to be so? How many people consider it a positive quality to be a jerk? People who are intentionally contentious, and do not make any attempts to live at peace with others, are purveyors of strife.
- **Deceit** – Intentionally lying and misleading someone is the heart of this word. The seriousness of this sin is reflected in its inclusion in the 10 Commandments. People deceive others to ultimately hurt them, improve our status or standing by degrading or demeaning others, or to maintain power over someone else. Unfortunately lying has become a pervasive fact of life, from the youngest of children to the various heads of state.
- **Maliciousness (Hostility)** – Man’s commitment to others is based on his own commitment to God. When man is hostile towards God, then he is by default hostile towards other men. This includes violence towards others. How many of us have heard of road rage? Why have we seen a tremendous increase in civil lawsuits? Workplace violence? Hostile work environment? Harassment? Home Security Systems? What about genocide in Darfur? Civil unrest in various countries of the world? Sectarian violence? All of these are indications of the hostility of one man towards another.

The last section contains 12 words:

- **Gossips** – In most of the lists of sins and vices in the New Testament, gossiping makes the list. How many times do we talk about people behind their back with the intent of telling someone what we think we know or have heard about someone else? Sometimes we spread rumors about people under the guise of a prayer chain, but all we are really doing is gossiping about them. This word literally means “whisperer.”
- **Slanderers** – This is someone who defames another, or speaks badly about other people. This is a backbiter. We are all guilty of backbiting our boss, or that person who thinks they know everything, and is the one person whom everyone likes to talk about. When you say something bad about someone behind their back, you are slandering them.

- **Haters of God** – Not only do people not acknowledge God, they eventually come to detest God. They are enemies of God.
- **Insolent** – This word may be rendered as “they insult one another.” This person mistreats others for the pleasure that the affliction brings.⁴¹ This is the person who insults, hurts, or otherwise injures others simply for the fun of it, because other people’s pain and hurting brings this person pleasure.
- **Haughty (arrogant)** – This is the person who shows himself above others, and brags of what they have to those that have not.⁴² This is a person who is obviously very intelligent, wealthy, or otherwise gifted, and brags about their intelligence, wealth, or giftedness to those that are obviously not so. These people are hard to be around because they are always right, and they are always telling everyone how much better they are than everyone else. Our hiring system for jobs often makes people exaggerate and brag on their resumes in order to get an interview.
- **Boastful** – This word is similar to the arrogant, but the person brags about what they don’t have. This person claims to have exceptional intellect, wealth, or gifts, but in reality doesn’t possess any of them, or may possess them to a much lesser degree than the person is saying. This is an imposter who claims to be something they are not. Again, many people do this on resumes in order to get an interview. Kids do this all of the time in order to be with the “in” crowd.
- **Inventors of Evil** – People are not satisfied with doing the evil that already exists, but they have to figure out new ways to dishonor God and dishonor others. Notice how many people figure out how to download illegal music and movies, even with all of the controls and copy protection on CDs and DVD’s. Some of the corporate scandals, such as Enron and Worldcom, have revealed very creative and elaborate ways to hide profit, create false growth, and deceive investors. People continue to dream up ways to rebel against God’s laws.
- **Disobedient to parents** – As with a few of these other sins, this one is also found in the Ten Commandments. Just a brief look at the nightly news or the newspapers will illustrate the disrespect kids have for their parents. Some of the fault lies with the child, and some with the parents. Parents should earn the respect of their children, and kids should respect their parents simply because they are parents. This applies to a child’s own parents, as well as other parents in the community, church, and family. This is the only one of the Ten Commandments with a promise. We should all think about why that is.
- **Foolish** – This word literally means to lack understanding, but also implies a lack of moral quality. In the Bible, foolishness is always contrasted with wisdom. Foolishness is not stupidity or ignorance, but usually a lack of understanding of

⁴¹ Zodhiates, S. 2000. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, NT*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG publishers.

⁴² Kittel, G. et al. 1976. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

God and inability to make moral decisions. Foolishness is summed up by Psalm 14:1, which states *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."*

- **Faithless** – People who are faithless in this sense are those that do not keep their promises, or people who do not do what they say they will do.⁴³ Undependable, inconsistent, and treacherous are similar words. We all know people who occasionally fail to keep their word, but a faithless person never keeps his word. This person cannot be trusted, and is not trustworthy.
- **Heartless** – This person has no feelings for anyone else, nor do they show any kindness towards any other fellow human being. They cannot maintain any sort of meaningful relationship with another human being, except to use them to get what they want. These individuals jeopardize any and all relationships they are in, including familial and community groups. Their heart is hard, and they care of no one but themselves.
- **Ruthless** – This word means without mercy. This person never shows compassion or leniency to anyone. Grace is not in this person's vocabulary.

What we have to remember about people who demonstrate all or some of these sins is that we are just like them, except for the grace of God. All people are made in the image of God and all are still redeemable. What God has called us to do is to bring the gospel message to all people, regardless of their history, attitudes, criminal record, or demeanor. Because all people are made in the image of God and despite our total depravity, we all still retain that image of God. Therefore, we should all strive to bring out that portion of God's image-bearer in all people as we interact and live with them.

In conclusion, Paul offers what seems the worst condemnation yet. *Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.* Paul reinforces the idea that all people, no matter how depraved they are, still know (*epignosis*, or have the full knowledge of God) God's laws, and know that what they are doing is wrong. They know they are doing wrong, but instead of being ashamed and sorrowful, people relish the fact they are doing wrong, and actually encourage others to do the same thing. We can all think of a number of instances today where people have turned right into wrong, and wrong into right. Abortion, homosexuality, lying, adultery, drug use (legalized medical marijuana), pedophilia, and many other sins and vices have all be justified, excused, and even supported as alternate lifestyles, personal choices, and even treated as constitutional rights. On the other hand, abstinence, monogamy, and sin in general have all been ridiculed and tossed out as remnants of an old order that was repressive and stifled human's freedom of expression. In many instances today, right is wrong, and wrong is right.

⁴³ *Zodhiates, asunthetos.*

There are a couple of major points to take away from this section of Romans 1 that we all must keep in mind as we continue on through the study. One is the downward spiral that man takes as he desires to live life independent of God. God will give us what we wish for, and it will not be pretty or pleasant. Once we start down this path, we will find ourselves deeper and deeper in a pit that we will even refuse to recognize as a problem. That is the sad part. Pretty soon, our sin and dishonorable desires actually appear to us to be honorable. We eventually go from being ashamed and aware that what we are doing is wrong, to confused and accepting of our wrongdoing as right. This is a dangerous place to be. Only the power of God working in us can then turn us around and set us again back on the right track, clearing our minds and setting our hearts straight once again.

Paul makes it clear in this section of Scripture that homosexuality is an abomination to God. Homosexuality is without a doubt a result of human beings exchanging the natural for that which is against nature. Today more than ever Christians are threatened with a radical homosexual agenda that is determined to make homosexuals a protected class of people, and any voiced opinion against their lifestyle will be seen as a criminal act. This agenda will eventually run headlong into the Biblical doctrines that are clearly counter to the homosexual agenda. We must keep in mind that homosexuality is a sin, and that it is contrary to nature in God's sight. However, homosexuals are not the enemy. Sin and Satan are the enemy and every gay and lesbian person is still made in the image of God, and is still redeemable through the power of the gospel. That said, Christians must be prepared to support and defend the Bible in a firm but respectful way against the onslaught that would shred it to pieces.

Using the lens of Romans 1 to view our world today, we can get a greater appreciation of what is going on and why. God's wrath is clearly being revealed, and the results that Paul discusses can be clearly seen today. Using Romans 1, we can make sense of what is happening. School shootings, abortion, the intense bombardment of hetero and homosexual sex everywhere we look, the greed in many businesses and on Wall Street, the road rage and criminal activity, and the rejection of Christianity in favor of other more benign religions should not come as a surprise given Romans 1. However, all of these things should make us more aware and sure of the fact that the world still desperately needs the gospel of Christ. We should all hate the injustice and dishonor of God going on today, but at the same time we should all be inspired and motivated to devote more time and energy to the gospel of God and the Great Commission, not just overseas, but in our own backyards.

Lesson 6: Romans 2:1 – 11

2 *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ²We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things. ³Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.*

⁶He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹For God shows no partiality.

We have seen in the previous chapter that God has given all men a revelation of Himself and some of His attributes through the creation of nature. We have also seen what men do with this knowledge of God. They suppress it and substitute the worship and honoring of God with the worship and honoring of idols, which dishonors God. God is pouring out His wrath, his righteous anger and punishment, on mankind who suppress the truth. Man would rather not be subject and held accountable to a God that will actually demand righteousness from His subjects. Man sees the righteous and holy God and prefers to have gods that are less intrusive, less demanding, and quite frankly, easier to control than the Almighty God. Because of man’s dishonoring of God, God gives them over to their own desires, and man spirals downward into dishonorable, unnatural, and depraved actions and thinking.

Pastor Donald Barnhouse states in his commentary on Romans that we need to go from the fact “that all men are sinners to the terrible consequences of that fact. We must see that the inevitable result of our sinfulness is the certainty of God’s judgment upon all

unrighteousness.”⁴⁴ When we know that judgment and condemnation follow from sin, then and only then will we as human beings be brought to the tremendous realization that we need a Savior, and must run to him if we are to avoid God’s coming wrath.

However, there are some people who undoubtedly will say that, “I am not like that! I am a good person. I do what is right, and I live a good life.” In fact, these people probably criticize and correct others based on their own sense of morality. They may or may not know God, but nonetheless see themselves as obeying the law of their conscience and expecting everyone else to do the same. These next two lessons in chapter 2 of Romans address these particular righteous moralists. These people include both Jews and Gentiles who see themselves as superior to other people. Paul understands that some people will look at those in chapter 1 and know that they are better than that. The first chapter of Romans was the definite statement that all men were without excuse because God had written His truth and knowledge throughout the splendor of His creation. In the first half of the second chapter Paul will show us that we are also without excuse because God has written His truth and knowledge on the conscience of all mankind.

Scholars debate whether this section was written specifically to the Jews, or to the Gentiles, or to everyone, both Jews and Gentiles. Later on in chapter two, Paul is clearly speaking to Jews, but in this section at the beginning of chapter 2, I think Paul is speaking to both Jews and Gentiles. Paul uses the word, “O’ man,” in verses 1 and 3 to address his audience. This is a general enough term. In addition, the subject matter of those who criticize others yet refuse to examine themselves is common with the Jews and with the Gentiles. Greek philosophers as well as Jewish Pharisees both had the tendency to be very critical and condemning of others, while at the same time refusing to look in the mirror at their own life and beliefs. Therefore, I would argue that Paul is writing this section in Romans to those that are both Jewish and Gentile. It certainly applies to us today!

Mankind is without excuse, again mentioned here at the beginning of chapter 2. Why? Because as Paul states, everyone of us that criticizes or condemns a person for doing one thing, we do the same things ourselves. When the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery, they accused her and condemned her, doing exactly what Paul was describing in Romans 2. John writes in chapter 8 of his gospel, ⁷ *And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”* ⁸ *And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.* ⁹ *But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.* We are all in sin, and have no right to condemn based on our own merit. This does not teach that we should never judge or condemn, because we are called to discern truth from lies, the true

⁴⁴ Barnhouse, Donald. *The Exposition of Bible Doctrines taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*. Vol. 2: God’s Wrath. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953. p. 1.

gospel from a false gospel, and good from evil. However, we cannot condemn others for their actions when we ourselves often do the same thing or something similar.

The problem is that we as human beings tend to judge others in comparison with ourselves, or other people. Our favorite line is, “Look at what that person is doing. I would never do that.” Yet Paul is saying that we in fact do that very thing. We tend to hold up ourselves as the model of behavior, but if we looked in the mirror, we would see something different. Yet God judges all of us not by comparing us to others, but to Himself, and he is the ultimate source of righteousness and truth. In fact, God is perfect righteousness and truth. In verse 2, Paul writes, ² *We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things.* Literally, this statement is “We have known that the judgment of God, which is according to truth, is upon those who practice them.” One of the keys here is the phrase “according to truth.”⁴⁵ God judges according to truth, not based on preferences, or opinions, or human fallible witnesses. God judges based on truth through His omnipotence, omniscience, and His other perfect attributes. God’s standard is truth, not human laws that are subject to misinterpretation, or human evidence that is subject to falsification and distortion. When God judges anyone and everyone, we can rest assured that He judges righteously and rightly, according to truth.

Yes, there is such a thing as truth. Today, many people, even Christians, have a mindset that “what is good for you may not be good for me.” That is called relativism. Many people will say with the best of intentions that a particular section of Scripture “means one thing to me and may mean another thing to you.” Again, we have been infected by the god of this age and believe that Scripture has any number of meanings depending on who reads it. Scripture has *one* meaning, what the author intended it to mean, but we may be able to apply it differently. However, the meaning is the same. Some people say that “Christianity may work for you, but something else works for me, and who are you to judge.” Again, this is a distortion of “truth” into relativism, where no one religion, meaning, rule, or god is absolute. Tolerance has changed its meaning from the classical definition of “putting up with something that is not right or bad, even though you know otherwise” to “acceptance of the bad or alternative as right.” However, God and the Bible clearly proclaim an intolerant view of truth. There is truth, and there are lies. God is the definition and ultimate standard of truth. The Bible is the revelation and documentation of this perfect truth.

Paul makes it clear in verse 3 that there is no escape from God’s judgment for those who think they might be good, yet aren’t. The one who thinks he is a moral and ethical person will fall under the same judgment as the vile sinner in Romans 1, because the moral critic at the beginning of chapter 2 is in the same boat. Paul uses strong language; there is no escape! Everyone on trial tries to escape judgment. The whole point of having a lawyer is to escape what may or may not be coming to you. Even when the verdict is handed down, if it is a guilty verdict, appeals are made simply because one

⁴⁵ Hodge, *Romans*, verse 2:2.

tries as hard as they can to escape judgment. However, because God's judgment is fair and true, based on truth, there is no appeals process or mistrial. There is no escape.

According to R.C. Sproul, Paul is taking aim at the Pharisees, and at the Jews in particular. He states:

...it was commonplace in the first century, among the Pharisees particularly, to assume that God would excuse certain behavioral patterns in Jewish people that he would condemn among the pagans. Why did they think that God would excuse in them, what he would condemn in others? Because of their conviction that there existed a privileged relationship between God and the children of Abraham. God had made a covenant promise to Abraham and to his seed: a promise of blessing, and a promise of incorporation into the kingdom of God. So there were many who came to the conclusion that redemption on the last day would not come on the basis of individual performance, so much as on the basis of membership within a privileged group, or within a privileged class. Those who were part of the covenant community of Israel had nothing to fear for they were children of Abraham automatically.⁴⁶

The Pharisees, and many other Israelites as well, imagined that since they were the chosen race of God, they were guaranteed their place in heaven. This may seem silly to us today, but how many people do you know expect to escape God's judgment and secure their place in heaven simply through their membership in a church? Or perhaps you know someone who believes, as many Americans do today, because they live in America that they are automatically Christians? Some people believe that since my parents were believers, then I as their child will also be guaranteed a spot in heaven. Paul is making it clear in this verse and section that a membership in a group will not enable a person to escape God's judgment. When we all stand before God on the last day, awaiting God's judgment, we will all stand alone.

Now, let me be clear, though. In a sense, we as believers all get to heaven on the coattails of someone else, and that someone is Jesus Christ. But Paul is not expounding the gospel here in this section. He is exploding the myth that man can think he is morally good, criticize others, and expect God to look upon him with favor. Remember, in the first three chapters of Romans Paul is laying the groundwork that proves all mankind are sinners, separated from God, and are all due to be the recipients of His wrath. We all have no excuse, regardless of who we are, what group we belong to, what we think about ourselves, or as we will see later in chapters 2 and 3, how religious we are. We are all under the righteous judgment of God, and we should all expect to receive the full force of His divine wrath. What a frightful thought!

Verse 4 addresses another issue that the Jews, and many people today, use as an excuse to escape the wrath of God. ⁴*Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?* Many people have bet on God's kindness and mercy as a means of escaping

the wrath of God. They may say, “But God is love and wrath from God is not in His character.” Or “A loving God would never send anyone to Hell.” However, these people miss the point of the matter. God is also just and righteous, and He must punish rebellion against Him. God is kind and patient with all of us, not wanting anyone to perish, but we cannot use that as an escape clause to miss the righteous judgment of God upon our rebellious selves. The point of God’s kindness and patience is not to give us an escape clause, but to leads us to repent of our sins before God.

In fact, how much time have we all given to the patience and mercy of God in our everyday lives? Have we ever stopped to consider just how much kindness God shows us every day? In Jonathan Edwards’ famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, he reminded his people of this when he said, “O sinner, can you give any reason why since you have risen from your bed this morning God has not stricken you dead?” Think about it. Since you have gotten out of bed, how have you rebelled against God? Have you been cross with your kids? Did you speed on the way to work, like I did? Have you lied to anyone? Think about it. Why in the world should God not strike you down now because of your rebelliousness and wickedness? The answer is the kindness and patience and mercy of God.

Does God owe us anything? Really? I have heard some people claim that God owes them a happy and easy life, a good job, healthy kids, and a stress-free, worry-free life. Does God owe us those things? Certainly not! God does not owe us anything, except perhaps judgment for our rebellion. Instead, God lavishes on us mercy, patience, and kindness. When we think that God owes us something, we consider too lightly God’s mercy. The ESV states that we presume on the riches of God’s kindness. Other translations state that we despise the riches of God’s kindness (KJV); we show contempt for the riches (NIV); or think lightly of the riches (NASB). How much do we really think about how much God provides for us on a daily basis? When we think lightly of God’s goodness, kindness, and patience, we take these things for granted. We may believe that God owes us these things, or we may even believe that we deserve them. However, when we think deeply and thankfully on these gifts of God, then we are able to thank Him daily for them. They cause conviction and repentance in our hearts, and we worship God because of them.

Verse 5 is one of those frightful verses that we may gloss over. ⁵ *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.* When we think too lightly of God’s mercy, and it does not lead us to repentance, our hearts become hardened. God points the way towards repentance, but we do not go. Instead, we continue to sin and build up a bank account of sin. We have all seen trials where serial killers have been convicted of multiple counts of murder, and, for instance, are sentenced to 8 consecutive life sentences. Well, a person cannot serve 8 life sentences in this world, but in eternity that

⁴⁶ Sproul, *Gospel of God*, p. 48.

is a different story. When we continue to sin and refuse to repent, we grow our treasure of wrath. Robert Haldane states, “This is a strong expression, and a beautiful figure. It proves that sins will be punished according to their accumulation. A man is rich according to his treasures. The wicked will be punished according to the number and aggravation of their sins.”⁴⁷ At the same time, we are encouraged by Jesus to store up treasures in heaven (c.f. Matthew 19:21 and Luke 12:33-34, 18:22). God’s patience will come to an end on the last day of judgment, and we will all be able to see how our investment did, whether it was an investment in sin or an investment in heaven.

The next paragraph is one unit and we will look at it that way. ⁶ *He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.*

But doesn’t this paragraph say that we will all be judged by our works? Verse 6 seems pretty clear. How can we be saved by our works? Remember there are really two ways to get to heaven: one is by faith through the work of Jesus Christ, and the other is through leading a perfect sinless and righteous life here on earth. Paul in Romans 1 – 3 is laying the foundation for why we all need the gospel by expounding on the sinfulness of all human beings, no matter what category we may fall into. Paul is expounding on the law, and hasn’t gotten to the gospel yet. Therefore, Paul is explaining to everyone, both Jew and Gentile, that God will render (judge, or reward) to us based on what we have done. For any human being that has any sense of integrity and honesty, this should strike fear into their heart. Everyone knows that no matter how good we try to be, we are always selfish, self-seeking, and rebellious. We think we are better than everyone else. Perhaps we really are like those that God has given up in Romans 1, in some form or fashion. Our thoughts and actions are the basis for judgment from a completely righteous and holy God.

Note there are two paths, one positive, and one negative, and the two are mutually exclusive. The situation will not be such that everything you have done in the good column is added up, and everything you have done in the bad column is added up, and the path you take is determined by the overall winner. Unfortunately, it is all or nothing. Note in verses 7 and 10 that the path is characterized by doing good (verse 10), and patience (or perseverance, persistence) in doing good (verse 7). Do any one of us persist in doing good all the time? At some point do we seek for our own pleasure and self-interests? We must be careful not to fall into the trap of boasting about what we clearly cannot or do not do.

⁴⁷ Haldane, p XX.

Paul smashes the myth of the Pharisees that the Jews will make it to heaven with God automatically, while the Gentiles will be judged according to a different standard. However, Paul makes it clear in this last section that God is no respecter of persons. He will judge everyone on their own merit, regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Paul will revisit this issue throughout Romans, and continuously show that God favors no man or race in particular, but freely gives the Spirit to all mankind, and makes salvation available to all mankind through the gospel preaching. R.C. Sproul states, “All will stand or fall on the basis of their goodness or the absence of goodness. Pedigree, social status, ecclesiastical affiliation and ethnic background will count for nothing at the judgment seat of God.”⁴⁸

There are three things we need to remember from this section of text. The first one is: Moral critics are just as likely to face God’s wrath as those they criticize because they sin and rebel against God like everyone else. People judge and criticize others because they ultimately feel they can; critical people see themselves as superior and have the moral and ethical status from which they can judge and condemn others. However, Paul shows this is just not the case. Those that judge and criticize are just as guilty of some sin as those that they are judging. Remember Jesus’ words in John 8:7, *7 And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”* He didn’t specify the sin of adultery, but sin in general. Many of those people probably had not committed the sin of adultery, but they certainly had committed various and vile sins that were not adultery. Jesus proved the point clearly here, as everyone walked away. They all knew they were sinners, and could just as easily have been the one who was about to be stoned. Paul’s point is not that we should not be discerning, clearly learning and distinguishing right from wrong. We are commanded in the Bible to do so, as well as admonish and correct our brothers and sisters in Christ with truth in love. However, we do this from a sense of humility and gentleness, rather than from a sense of superiority and arrogance. Ultimately we are all guilty of sin and rebellion, and it is by God’s grace that we have been forgiven and that our sin was paid for through the work of Jesus Christ.

The second point is: The fact that God is kind and patient is no excuse for continuing to sin; in fact, this demonstrates contempt for God’s kindness. As Christians, we ought to strive daily to maintain a thankfulness for all that God has done in our lives and in the world in general. As Spirit-filled believers, we should never think lightly of God and His kindness, goodness, and provision in the world. Regardless of what circumstances come our way, despite the consequences in life of a fallen world, we should always look to God as our great provider and sustainer. When we see God through this lens, we are repentant, thankful, and worshipful. The more we dive into God’s word, the more we will think deeply about God and His love and patience for us.

⁴⁸ Sproul, *Romans*, p. 53.

The third point is: Without the gospel, God judges all mankind by what they think and do in life, not on a curve, but against the standards of the truth and righteousness of God. Yes, there are two ways to get to heaven, but both are through holiness and righteousness, because without righteousness, no one can see God. One is through the righteousness of yourself, and the other is through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Many people believe that they can obtain heaven through their own actions, but Paul specifically challenges that notion in this section. If we even half-heartedly look in the mirror at our own actions on a daily basis, we will see that we do not meet the standard, no matter what that is. If we say we will live by the Ten Commandments, we are in for a rude awakening because we cannot meet that standard. How many of us have ever lied? Ever stolen money, time, etc. If you have accepted more change than you should have gotten back, you have stolen. How many of us have ever even thought about cheating on our spouses, or looked at another person with lust? How many of us have put something before God, such as a job, a person, a desire? Our entire marketing and advertising business in the 21st century is based on tapping into the covetousness of the human heart. Even if we decide to live by the golden rule, we still cannot live up to that standard. Have we ever done someone wrong and would not have wanted ourselves to be treated that way? The golden rule has no “Well they deserved it!” clause, either. Whether a person deserves to be treated a certain way is irrelevant, based on the golden rule. So Paul’s challenge is clear enough. God judges by His standard of truth, and we will never be able to meet it. The consequence for our failure to meet God’s standards of righteousness is God’s wrath. In this light, the need for the gospel becomes amazingly clear.

Lesson 7: Romans 2:11 – 16

¹¹ For God shows no partiality. ¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

In the previous lessons, we have seen how Paul is laying the groundwork for the reason and need by all human beings for the gospel of Christ. In Romans 1 He explains how God has made it plain to everyone that He exists and is God through the revelation of creation and nature. When man suppresses this truth, God gives them over to their own desires to do things that are wicked and unnatural. However, many people will look at that section and comment, “I am not like they are.” At the beginning of chapter 2, Paul addresses the critical moralizer, who criticizes and corrects others while boasting about their own good moral conduct. Paul, however, explains that these people are also guilty of sin according to the standard of God’s truth, and will just as well receive the wrath of God as punishment. No matter what standard you strive to live by, we as human beings will never achieve it, and are therefore subject to eternal punishment.

Paul in this section of scripture continues his explanation of how much of the rest of humanity will be judged by God. In this section Paul brings us the concept of “natural law,” and demonstrates that it doesn’t matter whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, God can and will still hold everyone accountable for their obedience because of this concept of “natural law.” This section also reinforces the fact that God is impartial, and will judge all people according to His Justice and their deeds. Verse 11, from our previous section, should be reiterated here as it serves as a good opening sentence to our paragraph. I have heard many people exclaim that all they want to see is God’s justice. Actually, that is the last thing we all want to see! Because God is Just, we are all under condemnation by our own deeds, and God will judge us accordingly, whether we have the Law, Biblical revelation, or nothing. God has ensured that we all have some knowledge of God and His expectations for us, and He will hold us accountable for it.

Verse 11 deserves to be re-emphasized because it is key to our understanding of where Paul is going and why we need the gospel. God is no respecter of persons. It doesn't matter who we are, what title we have, what class we were born into, what country we are from, or quite frankly, what religion we believe, God is not partial and will judge each person according to what he has done in this life. Remember, now, Paul has not yet really introduced the gospel, so he is writing from a perspective outside the gospel in order to make all of his readers aware of their need for something, some good news, outside of themselves. Paul wants to make it quite clear that God will judge us all for our actions, and we have no hope within ourselves of ever getting anything other than what we deserve as rebellious traitors under God's rule. It doesn't matter who we are, we are all in the same boat as human beings.

In verse 12 Paul makes it clear that God judges us based on the revelation we possess. ¹² *For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.* Hodge states, "Men are to be judged by the light they have severally enjoyed. The ground of judgment is their works; the rule of judgment is their knowledge. For as many as sinned without law. That is, God is impartial, *for he will judge men according to the light which they have enjoyed.*"⁴⁹ Even Jesus taught this concept of judgment in Luke 12.

⁴³ *Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.* ⁴⁴ *Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.* ⁴⁵ *But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk,* ⁴⁶ *the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful.* ⁴⁷ *And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating.* ⁴⁸ *But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.*

This is a scary thought, though. Those people who do not have any knowledge through special revelation will not only be judged by what they know, but they will also perish without the law. These people will be judged on the basis of what they know, but it will not be sufficient to save them from the wrath of God. On the other hand, those that have special revelation, such as those that have heard the gospel or have the law of God, will be judged by that same revelation. Again, this is a scary thought because anyone who has the least amount of integrity knows that they can never keep God's commandments all of the time throughout their whole life. Paul specifies that only those who have sinned will be judged, so if you have never sinned, you have nothing to worry about! However,

⁴⁹ Hodge, verse 2:12.

God's standards are clear, even to those who do not have the law, as we will see shortly. Realistically, then, we should be coming to a point where we see that it is impossible to keep the expectations that God has set forth for behavior and righteousness. We should be beginning to see that we as human beings have no hope within ourselves, and that only an answer outside of ourselves and outside of all that we can do is necessary to save us from the wrath of God.

In verse 13, Paul drops a bomb for all “good” people, Jewish people, and even today some Christian people. ¹³ *For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified* (literally “declared righteous”). There were many Jewish people in Paul’s day who would sit in the synagogues and temples day in and day out and hear the Word of the Lord preached from the scrolls; yet they did not live out what they were taught. Today in many, I would even say most, churches across America, there are many people who fill the pews and chairs and hear the Word of God preached and proclaimed from pulpits and platforms every week, and they consider themselves Christians and perhaps even saved. Yet they do not live what they hear on Sunday on the other six days of the week. Paul specifically states that the doers of the Word will be declared righteous before God. Newell states, “There is no form of the ‘deceitfulness of sin’ more insidious and more prevalent (because of its subtle power over the self-righteous heart) than that of settling down into false peace because of merely knowing God’s truth. Nor does God in this verse say any will be justified by ‘doing’ (for He tells us plainly elsewhere that none will be), but He is saying here that doing, not mere hearing, is what His judgment calls for.”⁵⁰ Knowledge of the facts about God is not sufficient; one must put this belief into practice. It is here that Paul is completely in line with what James is expounding in his letter. James writes in chapter 1 ²² *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*. God does not declare us justified simply based on our knowledge, but what we do with it.

Paul uses the term “declared righteous” here and we need to explore this word and its meaning a bit. Paul will use this word many times in the letter to the Romans, and it is a key term in Paul’s explanation of the gospel. Berkhof in his *Systematic Theology* states, justification “is to declare forensically that the demands of the law as a condition of life are fully satisfied with regard to a person.”⁵¹ Jonathan Edwards, perhaps America’s greatest theologian, stated “A person is said to be justified when he is approved of God as free from the guilt of sin and its deserved punishment; and as having that righteousness belonging to him that entitles to the reward of life.”⁵² Justification has two aspects to it. One is that our sins have been paid for by the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and He acted as our substitute for the crimes that we had committed.

⁵⁰ Newell, William R. (1938, 2007) *Romans, Verse by Verse*. WordSearch Corporation.

⁵¹ Berkhof, Louis. 2005. *Systematic Theology*. Electronic version. WordSearch Corporation. p. 512.

⁵² Edwards, Jonathan. *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol 1. “Discourse I, On Justification by Faith Alone.” Banner of Truth Trust.

Once the penalty had been paid, the Law had no claim on our lives. Therefore, we have been declared righteous (declared innocent) by God of all of our wrongdoing. Secondly, and in conjunction with the first point, we have received the imputed righteousness of Christ. The first point is negative; we have been declared innocent because Jesus paid the penalty. The second point is positive; we have been given the righteousness of Christ and now have all of the rights and privileges of that righteousness. This is not something we earn. It is a legal transaction that God declares and Jesus did for us. We are still the same people, with the same sin nature, but because of what Christ has done, God declares us to be righteous. We will discuss this topic more as we get deeper into Romans.

Verses 14 – 16 are complex and have been misunderstood by many people. It is here that Paul begins to expound on God’s gift to man called natural law. ¹⁴*For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.* ¹⁵*They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them* ¹⁶*on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* Some people have misinterpreted this statement to mean that whereas the Jews had the law but did not keep it, the Gentiles, although not having the law, kept it. The idea is that non-religious people can live a good enough life to get them into the kingdom of God.⁵³ This is not the case as we will see, and have seen. Paul also chooses his words carefully, and perhaps this choice of words is not reflected too well in the ESV. The NASB states, ¹⁴*For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves....* The NASB translates this verse more clearly by stating that the Gentiles *do instinctively the things of the Law.* Gentiles who do not have the law in fact do not keep the law fully, but are aware of some of the facets of the law and actually, instinctively and by their nature, do some of the things that the law requires. Newell clarifies this phrase by explaining that Gentiles are not “fulfilling the claims of the Law, for they do not have it, but that they are unconsciously aware, as moral beings, of what is right and wrong.”⁵⁴ The person who pays his bills, respects his mother and father, is faithful to his spouse, and is an honest businessperson most of the time is doing what is prescribed by the law. He is not keeping the law perfectly, but knows that these things are the right things to do.

Paul goes on to say that *their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them....* Not only do all people have the law of God written on their hearts, but their conscience also bears witness to this fact. Note Paul is not saying that the conscience IS the natural law, but that the conscience reflects that natural law. The natural law manifests itself, it shows itself to us, in our conscience. When we are about to do something or say something, and we hear that “voice” in our

⁵³ Sproul, *Romans*, p. 53.

head that attempts to correct us and argue with us, that is our conscience telling us to stick to what is right based on the natural law that God has created and, even in our fallen state, still resides in our hearts in some form.

These verses support the fact that we are spiritually and morally responsible beings. We have the ability to make moral choices in life. We know right from wrong. Our conscience lets us know how to act everyday. We will all be judged by God for what we know and what we do with that knowledge. If we know what is right and do what is wrong, then God will hold us accountable for that action.

Verse 16 specifically states that God will judge the innermost secrets of all of us through His appointed judge, Jesus Christ. At the future judgment, Jesus will judge men's hearts and conscience, revealing what has previously been kept in secret. Notice one of the key points in this last verse is that Jesus will not only be our salvation through the gospel, but He will also be the judge at the end of time. Many people see Jesus and continue to perceive him as a hippie-looking, olive-skinned, soft-spoken, Galilean peasant. Jesus was partly that during his incarnation on the earth. Now, however, He is the risen Savior and Lord, ascended into Heaven, and acting as our mediator. He is Lord, Savior, and Judge. When He returns, He will come back in power and might, as the King of Kings, not as a wide-eyed girly-man as depicted in many paintings and pictures of him. He will be the judge of those that have not devoted their lives to him, and everything about our lives will be laid out in the open.

Paul states that because the Gentiles do the things of the law, they show that the law is written on their hearts. This is natural law. Natural law is the innate ability within human beings that allows us to distinguish right from wrong, or what we ought to do. It represents a standard outside of ourselves as human beings with which we measure our conduct and thoughts. The Declaration of Independence states, "*WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness - That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men....*" Notice the founding fathers in the Declaration of Independence based their desire for separation from England on the natural law of God. Self-evident truths are cited. Unalienable rights (rights that cannot be taken away that apply to every man) are given to us by our Creator. These are all indicative of natural law. These truths are truths because they come from God and not from men. They cannot be granted or taken away from us by government because they are granted by God through His Sovereignty and Creation. In the case of the Declaration of Independence, the founding fathers were making a statement to England that even though the English government was oppressing the colonials, they could not take away their rights because these rights were given by God.

⁵⁴ Newell, 2:14.

For centuries, natural law has been the foundation of governments and legal systems because it serves as a firm basis outside of ourselves by which human beings can measure our own conduct. I believe it was Karl Marx, the founder of Communism, who warned us that in governments such as democracies where the people voted on their own laws, eventually laws would be enacted that reflected not the interests of the people but the interests of the most powerful groups. In other words, left to their own methods, democracies would begin to enact laws that benefited only those who held the most power, or the most influence, or who had the greatest wealth, at the expense of the people. Natural law would be replaced by the law (the standard) of those who were the wealthiest, most powerful, or the most influential. Quite frankly, this is what is happening today in much of our politics to some extent. Lobbyists, special interest groups, and people of influence, have more sway on legislation than do most of the senators and congressmen, and certainly more than the common citizen that the laws will directly affect.

In addition, when natural law is held in high regard, man has a standard outside himself through which to measure his own conduct, and take corrective action in order to live according to the requirements that the law sets down. Natural law (or laws in general), tell us what ought to be done, in contrast to what we are already doing. In addition to special interest groups and lobbyists, we also have opinion polls. These are a direct result from what RC Sproul terms “statistical law.” When natural law dies, something else must step in to fill the gap. If there is no objective standard, then another standard comes into play, and that is a human standard. So what happens is that philosophers, lawyers, politicians, and others look around and observe what the majority of people are doing, and assume that what the majority is doing must be “normal.” Therefore, what is normal must be “human,” and if something is normal for a human being, then it must be good. And if it is good, then we should be doing it. The logic comes full circle so that what the majority is doing must be what everyone ought to be doing! The lines are blurred between ethics (what we ought to be doing based on some objective standard) and morality (what we are in fact doing). What we ought to be doing becomes defined as what we in fact are doing.

This reasoning explains a lot about the world and culture in which we live today, especially in America. Why are people so concerned about what the majority of people think? Why are opinion polls so crucial to decision-making by lawyers and politicians? Why are special interest groups so intent on making their message mainstream? Because we have become a society that has done away with God’s natural and revealed laws and substituted for them a subjective law of ourselves. We seem to think that what the majority is doing, or agrees to do, must be what everyone ought to be doing. When opinion polls show that, statistically, a majority of people agree on a certain issue, then we as a country should act in that direction, regardless of the consequences or results. Why? Because the majority dictates what we ought to be doing, because that is the

standard by which we measure “ought-ness.” This disintegration of ethics and standards of law will have and is having disastrous results on a country that is famous for an established rule of law according to the Constitution. George Washington stated in his Farewell Address, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.”⁵⁵ George Washington continues, “And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”⁵⁶ Can there be any question as to the importance of religion, ethics, and morality to the very fabric of the United States government? When God’s natural and revealed laws are removed from the very foundations of public life, those very foundations will crumble from the substitution of manmade standards of right and wrong. When God’s law is removed from our lives, we substitute a law unto ourselves, and then, as Judges 21:25 states, *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

⁵⁵ George Washington, Address of George Washington, President of the United States . . . Preparatory to His Declination 22-23 (Baltimore: George and Henry S. Keatinge, 1796).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Lesson 7 Addendum: Importance of Morality and Religion in Government

John Adams

Signer of the Declaration of Independence and Second President of the United States

[I]t is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free constitution is pure virtue.

(Source: John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Little, Brown, 1854), Vol. IX, p. 401, to Zabdiel Adams on June 21, 1776.)

[W]e have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. . . . Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.

(Source: John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co. 1854), Vol. IX, p. 229, October 11, 1798.)

The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If "Thou shalt not covet," and "Thou shalt not steal," were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society, before it can be civilized or made free.

(Source: John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), Vol. VI, p. 9.)

John Quincy Adams

Sixth President of the United States

The law given from Sinai was a civil and municipal as well as a moral and religious code; it contained many statutes . . . of universal application-laws essential to the existence of men in society, and most of which have been enacted by every nation which ever professed any code of laws.

(Source: John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams, to His Son, on the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850), p. 61.)

There are three points of doctrine the belief of which forms the foundation of all morality. The first is the existence of God; the second is the immortality of the human soul; and the third is a future state of rewards and punishments. Suppose it possible for a man to disbelieve either of these three articles of faith and that man will have no conscience, he will have no other law than that of the tiger or the shark. The laws of man may

bind him in chains or may put him to death, but they never can make him wise, virtuous, or happy.

(Source: John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams to His Son on the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850), pp. 22-23.)

Samuel Adams

Signer of the Declaration of Independence

[N]either the wisest constitution nor the wisest laws will secure the liberty and happiness of a people whose manners are universally corrupt.

(Source: William V. Wells, *The Life and Public Service of Samuel Adams* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1865), Vol. I, p. 22, quoting from a political essay by Samuel Adams published in *The Public Advertiser*, 1749.)

Fisher Ames

Framer of the First Amendment

Our liberty depends on our education, our laws, and habits . . . it is founded on morals and religion, whose authority reigns in the heart, and on the influence all these produce on public opinion before that opinion governs rulers.

(Source: Fisher Ames, *An Oration on the Sublime Virtues of General George Washington* (Boston: Young & Minns, 1800), p. 23.)

Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Signer of the Declaration of Independence

Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime & pure, [and] which denounces against the wicked eternal misery, and [which] insured to the good eternal happiness, are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments.

(Source: Bernard C. Steiner, *The Life and Correspondence of James McHenry* (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers, 1907), p. 475. In a letter from Charles Carroll to James McHenry of November 4, 1800.)

Oliver Ellsworth

Chief-Justice of the Supreme Court

[T]he primary objects of government are the peace, order, and prosperity of society. . . . To the promotion of these objects, particularly in a republican government, good morals are essential. Institutions for the promotion of good morals are therefore objects of legislative provision and support: and among these . . . religious institutions are eminently useful and important. . . . [T]he legislature, charged with the great interests

of the community, may, and ought to countenance, aid and protect religious institutions—institutions wisely calculated to direct men to the performance of all the duties arising from their connection with each other, and to prevent or repress those evils which flow from unrestrained passion.

(Source: *Connecticut Courant*, June 7, 1802, p. 3, Oliver Ellsworth, to the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut)

Benjamin Franklin

Signer of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence

[O]nly a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.

(Source: Benjamin Franklin, *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, Jared Sparks, editor (Boston: Tappan, Whittemore and Mason, 1840), Vol. X, p. 297, April 17, 1787.)

I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings, that "except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better, than the Builders of Babel: We shall be divided by our partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and bye word down to future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing governments by human wisdom and leave it to chance, war and conquest.

I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.

(Source: James Madison, *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, Max Farrand, editor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), Vol. I, pp. 450-452, June 28, 1787.)

* For more details on this quote, [click here](#).

Richard Henry Lee

Signer of the Declaration of Independence

It is certainly true that a popular government cannot flourish without virtue in the people.

(Source: Richard Henry Lee, *The Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, James Curtis Ballagh, editor (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914), Vol. II, p. 411. In a letter to Colonel Mortin Pickett on March 5, 1786.)

James McHenry*Signer of the Constitution*

[P]ublic utility pleads most forcibly for the general distribution of the Holy Scriptures. The doctrine they preach, the obligations they impose, the punishment they threaten, the rewards they promise, the stamp and image of divinity they bear, which produces a conviction of their truths, can alone secure to society, order and peace, and to our courts of justice and constitutions of government, purity, stability and usefulness. In vain, without the Bible, we increase penal laws and draw entrenchments around our institutions. Bibles are strong entrenchments. Where they abound, men cannot pursue wicked courses, and at the same time enjoy quiet conscience.

(Source: Bernard C. Steiner, *One Hundred and Ten Years of Bible Society Work in Maryland, 1810-1920* (Maryland Bible Society, 1921), p. 14.)

Jedediah Morse*Patriot and "Father of American Geography"*

To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe that degree of civil freedom, and political and social happiness which mankind now enjoys. . . . Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all blessings which flow from them, must fall with them.

(Source: Jedediah Morse, *A Sermon, Exhibiting the Present Dangers and Consequent Duties of the Citizens of the United States of America* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1799), p. 9.)

William Penn*Founder of Pennsylvania*

[I]t is impossible that any people of government should ever prosper, where men render not unto God, that which is God's, as well as to Caesar, that which is Caesar's.

(Source: *Fundamental Constitutions of Pennsylvania*, 1682. Written by William Penn, founder of the colony of Pennsylvania.)

Pennsylvania Supreme Court

No free government now exists in the world, unless where Christianity is acknowledged, and is the religion of the country.

(Source: Pennsylvania Supreme Court, 1824. *Updegraph v. Commonwealth*; 11 Serg. & R. 393, 406 (Sup.Ct. Penn. 1824).)

Benjamin Rush

Signer of the Declaration of Independence

The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments.

(Source: Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), p. 8.)

We profess to be republicans, and yet we neglect the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government, that is, the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by the means of the Bible. For this Divine Book, above all others, favors that equality among mankind, that respect for just laws, and those sober and frugal virtues, which constitute the soul of republicanism.

(Source: Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Printed by Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), pp. 93-94.)

By renouncing the Bible, philosophers swing from their moorings upon all moral subjects. . . . It is the only correct map of the human heart that ever has been published. . . . All systems of religion, morals, and government not founded upon it [the Bible] must perish, and how consoling the thought, it will not only survive the wreck of these systems but the world itself. "The Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." [Matthew 1:18]

(Source: Benjamin Rush, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, L. H. Butterfield, editor (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 936, to John Adams, January 23, 1807.)

Remember that national crimes require national punishments, and without declaring what punishment awaits this evil, you may venture to assure them that it cannot pass with impunity, unless God shall cease to be just or merciful.

(Source: Benjamin Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America Upon Slave-Keeping* (Boston: John Boyles, 1773), p. 30.)

Joseph Story

Supreme Court Justice

Indeed, the right of a society or government to [participate] in matters of religion will hardly be contested by any persons who believe that piety, religion, and morality are intimately connected with the well being of the state and indispensable to the administrations of civil justice. The promulgation of the great doctrines of religion—the being, and attributes, and providence of one Almighty God; the responsibility to Him for all our actions, founded upon moral accountability; a future state of rewards and

punishments; the cultivation of all the personal, social, and benevolent virtues—these never can be a matter of indifference in any well-ordered community. It is, indeed, difficult to conceive how any civilized society can well exist without them.

(Source: Joseph Story, *A Familiar Exposition of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847), p. 260, §442.)

George Washington

"Father of Our Country"

While just government protects all in their religious rights, true religion affords to government its surest support.

(Source: George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, John C. Fitzpatrick, editor (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), Vol. XXX, p. 432 n., from his address to the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in North America, October 9, 1789.)

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of man and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice?

And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. It is substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who, that is a sincere friend to it, can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?

(Source: George Washington, *Address of George Washington, President of the United States . . . Preparatory to His Declination* (Baltimore: George and Henry S. Keatinge), pp. 22-23. In his Farewell Address to the United States in 1796.)

* For the full text of Geo. Washington's *Farewell Address*, [click here](#).

Daniel Webster

Early American Jurist and Senator

[I]f we and our posterity reject religious instruction and authority, violate the rules of eternal justice, trifle with the injunctions of morality, and

recklessly destroy the political constitution which holds us together, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us that shall bury all our glory in profound obscurity.

(Source: Daniel Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1903), Vol. XIII, p. 492. From "The Dignity and Importance of History," February 23, 1852.)

Noah Webster

Founding Educator

The most perfect maxims and examples for regulating your social conduct and domestic economy, as well as the best rules of morality and religion, are to be found in the Bible. . . . The moral principles and precepts found in the scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws. These principles and precepts have truth, immutable truth, for their foundation. . . . All the evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible. . . . For instruction then in social, religious and civil duties resort to the scriptures for the best precepts.

(Source: Noah Webster, *History of the United States*, "Advice to the Young" (New Haven: Durrie & Peck, 1832), pp. 338-340, par. 51, 53, 56.)

James Wilson

Signer of the Constitution

Far from being rivals or enemies, religion and law are twin sisters, friends, and mutual assistants. Indeed, these two sciences run into each other. The divine law, as discovered by reason and the moral sense, forms an essential part of both.

(Source: James Wilson, *The Works of the Honourable James Wilson* (Philadelphia: Bronson and Chauncey, 1804), Vol. I, p. 106.)

Robert Winthrop

Former Speaker of the US House of Representatives

Men, in a word, must necessarily be controlled either by a power within them or by a power without them; either by the Word of God or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible or by the bayonet.

(Source: Robert Winthrop, *Addresses and Speeches on Various Occasions* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1852), p. 172 from his "Either by the Bible or the Bayonet.")

Lesson 8: Romans 2:17 – 29

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

At the end of Chapter 1, Paul describes the plight of mankind, especially the Gentiles, as God has made known to them revelation about Himself through nature and creation. Mankind, however, has rejected this revelation and has indeed suppressed it in wickedness. God then turns them over to their own desires, and mankind falls into a downward spiral of depravity and unnatural acts. At the beginning of chapter 2, Paul addresses those that would say, “But that does not describe me.” He proves that those who are moral critics are just as guilty in the sight of God as those who suppress the truth. No one can attain God’s standards, including those who brag about how good they are and criticize others for not living up to their standards. It is God’s standards we have to live up to, and we can’t do that.

At the end of chapter 2 and into chapter 3, Paul addresses the Jews specifically. The Jews considered themselves privileged people, the people of God. They had the

scriptures; they were chosen by God; and they had the outward sign of circumcision. Today, being called a Jew may be a compliment, or an insult. Zionism is surely a derogatory term, and we see in the international arena how the state of Israel is defamed constantly at the UN and in the world at large, with only a few exceptions. However, in the 1st century, being called a Jew was a positive thing. To be called a Jew was honorable, and their history and culture was often admired.⁵⁷ They had their religion, and it was their revelation from God and their religious practices that guaranteed them a place in heaven with God, and a guarantee of excuse from the judgment of God on the last day. However, Paul will show in this section of Romans that religion in general and Judaism in particular was no guarantee of escape from judgment. There are benefits to religious practices, especially for the Jews, but these were no sure means of avoiding the judgment of God.

In verses 17 – 20, Paul enumerates the advantages of being a Jew. Let's look at some of the advantages that Paul describes. Many commentators have broken this set of advantages down in various groups and categories. The one I like best comes from James Boice's commentary on Romans:

Spiritual Advantages:

1. God has given us the law.
2. He has entered into a special relationship with us.
3. Because we have been given the law, we know his will, and
4. We approve only the most excellent of human moral standards.

Privileges:

1. To be a guide for the blind,
2. To be a light for those who are in the dark,
3. To be an instructor for the foolish, and
4. To be a teacher of infants.⁵⁸

Paul knew very much what it was like to be a zealous Jew for God, because he once was one of the most zealous. And we also have to realize that taken by themselves, each one of those claims by the Jews were true! The Jews were chosen people of God, and did receive the law of God through Moses and the prophets, and did have the revelation of knowing God's will in terms of the revealed things of God.

But Paul here is not really listing a positive list of things that the Jews have. In fact, I think that the list, while true, has a sarcastic ring to it. For instance, Paul states that

⁵⁷ Sproul, *Romans*, p. 56.

⁵⁸ Boice, *Romans*, vol 1, p. 251.

the Jews “rest” in the law. This word literally means “to find comfort in, to find well-being, or inner security in.”⁵⁹ Possession of the law was a real blessing, but the Jews had come to rest in the law. Paul makes the same point as Micah in 3:11, *Yet they lean on the Lord and say, “Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.”* The Jews found comfort in the law not for what it said but for what it would do for them, namely, that it was a guarantee that the Lord would look favorably upon them and keep them from Hell.

Paul also states that they boasted in God. Boasting in itself is not wrong. Note Jeremiah 9:23 – 24, ²³ *Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.”* To the Jew, boasting in God was not wrong, but they had made it a source of pride and arrogance because they used it to separate themselves and looked down on others, rather than to share what God had given to them with the peoples of the world.

The Jews had been given the revelation of God through His Word, the Old Testament, and could use it to approve (or to test, to make a critical examination of something, and discover the value of something through testing⁶⁰) those things which are good or excellent, because they had been instructed by the law. The Jews had weekly, perhaps daily, exposure of the Word of God through their synagogues and temples, and many had memorized parts of the Old Testament. The Jews had the revelation of God and were able to apply this revelation to test and approve what was good to do. Because they had been instructed by the law, the Jews felt that they were God’s instructors to the rest of the world. They had the special privilege of telling the rest of the world what God’s will was for their lives. The problem is that the Jews have fallen far short of their mandate to enlighten the rest of the world, but they have still continued to boast in these mandates as a means of highlighting their importance and the value of their law in the eyes of a skeptical and often hostile Gentile world.⁶¹

Paul acknowledges that the law is the embodiment of truth and knowledge. Sproul states that “The Jews did possess the truth, they did have the law of God, and what they had was a possession so rich, so magnificent, that it transcended the greatest insights and wisdom of even the highest period of classical Greek culture.”⁶² God had Himself written the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, and His prophets had through divine inspiration put down on parchment the very words of God. The Jews had this deposit of

⁵⁹ BDAG, ἐπαναπαύομαι.

⁶⁰ BDAG, δοκιμάζω

⁶¹ Moo, *Romans*, p. 162.

⁶² Sproul, *Romans*, p. 57.

the ultimate truth, and it was no wonder that they were confident and boasting in this situation.

However, Paul is carefully acknowledging all of these advantages of the Jews because he is setting them up for the charge of hypocrisy. They had the law, they knew the law, and they preached the law, but did they actually do what the law said? They taught it to others, but did they do it themselves? 1 Samuel 16:7 says, *But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."* You see, Paul was opening up the character of the Jews and looking inside. They looked like a righteous people, claiming they had the truth, bragging about their status before God and what God had given them, when in fact they said one thing and did another. Paul takes the 10 Commandments and uses them against the Jews. Stealing is from the 8th commandment (verse 21), adultery is from the 7th commandment (verse 22), and the 1st and 2nd commandments are brought out at the end of verse 22. Paul sums up this part of his argument in verse 23, *You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.* Paul is essentially saying that the Jews in his time rightly claimed advantages related to being God's chosen people, and bragged about their special advantages and privileges, yet fell far short of their responsibilities of being caretakers of that law and those privileges. While they boasted about having the law and being teachers for those who did not have it, they actually in action were the ones breaking the law. They dishonored God instead of honoring Him. In fact, they dishonor God so much that the name of God was being dishonored among the Gentiles, because of the hypocrisy of the Jews. This is a severe indictment!

Paul is not done yet. He has abolished the argument that the possession of the law and all of the other advantages listed above would shield the Jews from the judgment of God. However, the Jews still have one last line of defense, one last fallback, to stand securely behind, the command of circumcision. Circumcision was a very important mark for the Jews in the world of Paul. It marked the seal of the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17. ¹⁰*This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.* ¹¹*You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.* As Jews were spread out over the entire world in the Diaspora, the sign of circumcision became even more important than before. It was the distinguishing mark of the Jew, regardless of where he was over the entire world.

The Jews viewed circumcision with the same saving power as they viewed the law. Haldane writes, "Paul here pursues the Jew into his last retreat, in which he imagined himself most secure."⁶³ Hodge even quotes a number of Jewish scholars who clearly saw circumcision as the shield from God's judgment.

⁶³ Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle of the Romans*, p. 100.

The Rabbi Menachem, in his *Commentary on the Books of Moses*, fol. 43, col. 3, says, “Our Rabbins have said, that no circumcised man will see hell.” In the *Jalkut Rubeni*, num. 1, it is taught, “circumcision saves from hell.” In the *Medrasch Tillim*, fol. 7, col. 2, it is said, “God swore to Abraham, that no one who was circumcised should be sent to hell.” In the book *Akedath Jizehak*, fol. 54, col. 2, it is taught that “Abraham sits before the gate of hell, and does not allow that any circumcised Israelite should enter there.”⁶⁴

Therefore, in order to fully show that the Jews are still in need of salvation through Christ, he must show that circumcision is also of no value in and of itself. Circumcision still has value, as he will show in chapter 3, but the act itself does not guarantee any person exempt from the judgment of God.

Paul even goes one step further as he makes a hypothetical situation. If, for instance, someone who is uncircumcised obeys the entirety of the law, then that person will sit in judgment over the person who is circumcised but doesn't obey the law. This was a strong statement to make to Jews, who considered themselves by nature not coming under God's judgment, let alone the judgment of an uncircumcised Gentile! After all, Paul has been explaining that it is the obedience to the law and the holiness of God's people that will guarantee them admittance into the presence of God, nothing else. Paul is not asserting in verse 26 that anyone will actually keep the law, but he is stating a hypothetical situation to prove to the Jew that it is perfect obedience, not the fact that you are of a certain nationality or religion, that will ensure salvation.

Paul then sums up his argument in verses 28 – 29. Notice this inner-outer contrast that Paul makes. Paul's emphasis on the circumcision of the heart is not new, or at least should not be new to the Jew. Deuteronomy 10:16 states, *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.* Deuteronomy 30:6 states, *And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.* Jeremiah 4:4 states (The Lord is speaking), *Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.* So this concept of an inward circumcision in addition to the outward sign had been known to the Jews for some time.

However, Paul adds one little phrase to his explanation of “circumcision of the heart,” and that being *not by the letter*. Paul's contrast between the letter and Spirit is not to be taken as meaning the literal meaning of the text is now replaced by some sort of new and improved spiritual meaning of the text. Spiritualizing the text of the Bible has

⁶⁴ Hodge, *Romans*, p. 63.

been the chief cause of the creation of a number of cults and misinterpretations of God's Word. Neither is it to be taken as the Holy Spirit somehow now supersedes the importance or relevance of the written Word. The claim of the Spirit speaking to individuals can again be very dangerous and has been the cause of many cults, such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. When Paul refers to the letter and Spirit, notice both refer to a God-given entity; both the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are God-given gifts to mankind. However, it is the Spirit's working in man that creates a new nature, not simply the written word, as great as that is. Remember, Jesus chastised the Pharisees for misapplying the Word of God in John 5. Jesus states, ³⁹ *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,* ⁴⁰ *yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.* The Scriptures, as well as circumcision, both do not in themselves actually save; however, they both do bear witness to the one who does save, namely Jesus Christ.

There are a couple of lessons we can learn from this section of scripture. One main one is that religion, strictly speaking, will not save us. We can be very religious, go through all of the rites and ceremonies, attend church every week, even be baptized, and still not be saved. James Boice explains that belonging to the visible company of God's people is important, but "salvation is not won by any external associations if (as we have seen) God looks not on the outward appearances but on the heart."⁶⁵ Church people like Jews have been saved are still being saved, but it is not because they are church members or Jews! Many people think that because they are born in America, which is a "Christian nation," or born into a Christian or catholic family that they will be saved from God's judgment because of these things. Again, Paul debunks the notion that nationality or religious affiliation will guarantee us a place with God. It will not. God's criteria are holiness and righteousness, and that can only be accomplished by our works of keeping perfectly the law of God. Since no one can meet God's criteria, then we as humans need some other way to achieve this righteousness. This is the gospel, which Paul will discuss in detail a bit later. This is the person and work of Jesus, living a perfect life accomplishing full righteousness and obedience in life, and paying for our unrighteousness and disobedience through His sacrifice on the cross. He paid our penalty, and gave us His righteousness.

Additionally, having superior knowledge does not guarantee God's approval; in fact, it obligates the person to an even greater condemnation, if the person does not adhere to the higher standard! The Jews had the Word of God, boasted about that, read it, memorized it, and cherished it, but they did not live up to it. The Jews forgot that the scriptures were given to them not to be held selfishly or to be worshipped in and of themselves. They were given to them and to us to point the way to the savior Jesus Christ. We all know people who know the Bible backwards and forwards, know

⁶⁵ Boice, *Romans*, vol 1, p. 263.

theology and church doctrine better than any scholar, and can recite from memory whole books of the Bible. Yet they have not been changed from the inside. They have not been the recipient of a circumcised heart. Let's not be mistaken on this point, though.

Knowledge is necessary, for without knowing Jesus, we cannot fully worship or put our faith in Him. However, knowledge itself is not sufficient; knowledge must create assent, and assent must then give way to trust and belief. Finally, action must be evident.

Finally, God judges all of us by our actions and performance, and by that very standard, every person is condemned. This is why Paul stresses action so much in the first part of his letter to the Romans. We are all hypocrites in some sense, because we all strive to keep the law, do God's commands, but yet always fall short. We can teach God's law to others, but at some point we will fail and disobey the law. This is the heart of the gospel, and why it is so magnificent. God made a way for us to be reconciled with him without lowering his standards. However, our situation also reminds us of the need to strive to keep the law out of love for God and others. When we intentionally say one thing and do another, other people notice. Paul even says in verse 24 of our section, *The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you*. Our hypocrisy can have disastrous effects and consequences in the lives of others if we are not diligent in our pursuit of God and His holiness. This pursuit of the law is not what saves us, and we know that we can never attain it perfectly; yet we are bound by the grace of God and the love of people to remain on constant watch of our actions and to always endeavor to live as best we can.

Lesson 9: Romans 3:1 – 8

3 *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?* **2** *Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.* **3** *What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?* **4** *By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,*

“ *That you may be justified in your words,
and prevail when you are judged.*”

5 *But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)* **6** *By no means! For then how could God judge the world?* **7** *But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?* **8** *And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*

We have just finished Chapter 2 in this wonderful letter of Paul, and he has proved to his readers in no uncertain terms that we are all deficient when it comes to meeting God’s standards for holiness and righteousness. But there are still questions that remain. Paul takes nothing for granted; so in chapter 3, he wants to put the nail in the coffin and securely and finally deal with questions that may be asked by Jews and anyone else. Many commentators feel that this section in Romans may be one of the most difficult, mainly because of the rapid fire questions Paul shoots at us one after another.⁶⁶ What is Paul trying to do here? In Paul’s most thorough fashion, I believe he is trying to make sure that the Jews understand that they are on equal terms in regards to the means of salvation, but certainly on higher ground in terms of their responsibility and advantages that God has bestowed on them. As a people they certainly do have advantages, but these advantages do not guarantee them exemption from God’s judgment. Moo explains that “In this new stage of salvation history God has provided for equal access to his salvation for both the Jew and the Gentile, but he does so without destroying the genuine privileges enjoyed by Israel.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Moo, *Romans*, p. 178.

⁶⁷ Moo, Douglas. 2002. *Encountering Romans*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, p. 72.

Paul reiterates that the Jews do actually have advantages, and list one “first of all.” Interestingly enough, there is no second or third. I think Paul intended to show that this one privilege was first and foremost that they had to be proud of, and was one of the most awesome responsibilities that God had given to any nation of human beings. The Jews were caretakers, possessors, *were entrusted with the oracles of God*.

What are the oracles of God? This word oracle, *logia*, is used 4 times in the New Testament, in Acts 7:38, 1 Peter 4:11, Hebrews 5:12, and Romans 3:2. However, in the Greek Old Testament, called the Septuagint, it is found 24 times in Psalm 119 alone! In the instances in the New Testament, it is used to refer to the Word of God, or the teachings of God, or the gospel. In Psalm 119, the word refers to the Word of God, or to God’s promises to us. This word is usually used to mean a divine utterance, or messages or words originating from God. God has uttered His truth in words. Lloyd-Jones clarifies the concept here by explaining, “It does not just mean the thought or the idea. An oracle really means the statement itself, not merely the sentiment but the exact words.”⁶⁸ In many instances in Psalm 119, the word *logia* is translated either “word” or “promise.” These are implied to be the very words of God. 2 Timothy 3:16 – 17 describes the words of God: ¹⁶*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* ¹⁷*that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.* John Calvin commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16, explains:

This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

We do not deny that the Bible was written by humans under the inspiration of God, and that each author’s style, personality, and expressions were integrated into the writing. However, even though the Biblical writers were not mere scribes writing what they had been dictated, they did in fact write the very words of God. Verbal Plenary Inspiration, the orthodox view of the Bible, means that the authors were guided by divine inspiration so that both the words and the thoughts were what God desired to be expressed. This is certainly what Paul was referring to in Romans 3:2.

⁶⁸ Lloyd-Jones, David M. *Romans, vol 2: The Righteous Judgment of God*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, p. 166.

⁶⁹ Calvin, John. *Commentary on 1, 2 Timothy and Titus*. Trans. Rev William Pringle. Libronix version from www.ccel.org.

Paul says that the Jews were *entrusted* with the oracles of God. Can you think of a possession that is more dear, more valuable, or more life-changing than the Bible? The Jews were given the words of God by God as its caretakers and stewards for the entire world. Now, in the 21st century, the Christian church has been given the entire Bible by God. We are now the caretakers and stewards of the entire word of God. How incredible a thought is that! The very words of God are the life-blood and inspiration of mankind. It is the revelation that God has given us that reveals His son and His work on the cross. It is through the words of God that mankind may be pointed to the savior of sinners and the reconciliation of sinners to God.

Verses 3 – 8 are a series of three questions that Paul addresses in his discourse. This is a complex argument by Paul, who is trying to clarify any misconceptions relating to his reasoning in Chapter 2 that the Jews will suffer God’s judgment just as the Gentiles will. The first question Paul poses is *What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?* In other words, someone may say that having the oracles of God are great, and that is an advantage. But since the Jews really were not faithful in obeying God’s word, then does that nullify that advantage and make God and His covenant with the Jews null and void? Lloyd-Jones states it this way: “It is no use saying that the advantage of the Jew was that to them had been entrusted the oracles of God, because the oracles of God did not seem to have benefited them because of their unbelief. Their lack of faithfulness has surely nullified and negated all of the value of God’s promises.”⁷⁰ Paul replies with a strong, “Unthinkable!”

Why? Because God’s faithfulness is rooted in His character, not on anything mankind can or will do. Paul states *Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written* and quotes Psalm 51, where David is saying, *That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.* Psalm 51 is a psalm by David where he laments his sin in the Bathsheba affair after being convicted by the prophet Nathan. David thought that all was well, and after he was convicted, did not like it. He thought that God was dealing with him unfairly. At last, David realized that God is God and is always just in His dealings with mankind. David writes,

³ *For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*

⁴ *Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.*

David is essentially saying that there was a time when he thought the judgment of God was wrong, and that he did not deserve what God had given him. However, he realizes now that he had sinned against God, and that God is always just in his righteousness

⁷⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, volume 2, p. 176.

judgment. David is saying that he knows God is completely just and right in all that He is doing.

The point for us here is that we all need to remember that God is always faithful, even when we are not. God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises does not necessarily depend on what we as human beings do or do not do. God is not limited by our actions of whether we obey or not. Despite the failure of the Jews to obey, and despite the failure of the Christian church to obey, and despite our failure to obey, God's purposes still go on. God's promises are still valid. We need to be reminded of a few points repeatedly. One is that God is sovereign and that all He does is just. There are no exceptions. When we can't understand something God does or allows to be done, we have to realize that the fault lies with us and not God. In our limited and finite understanding, we just can't and many times won't be able to see past the here and now to the ultimate purposes God has for us and the world. The fault is not God's; it is ours. Secondly, God will never break His promises, and that as a result, God will fulfill His promises to us and to Israel in the future at some point. Paul explains this in a little more detail in Romans chapters 9 – 11, and we will go over that in more detail then. However, again we have to understand that when it appears that God is being unfaithful or is breaking a promise, we need to rest assured that God is not unfaithful, and that the situation is such that our finite and short-sighted view does not allow us to see the situation in its entirety.

This question and answer brings up another question that Paul will then address. ⁵*But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)* Again, Lloyd-Jones states the issue succinctly, "Their contention is that if the failure of the Jews puts God's justice into greater relief, if that very failure has, in a way, contributed to His majesty and His glory and His greatness, on what grounds is He punishing them?"⁷¹ In other words, how can God punish people who are really magnifying His righteousness and His glory? Isn't that unfair? Does a good end justify a bad means? This is a typical human argument, as Paul even states. We have all heard people use this line of reasoning to get out of some judgment or consequence. "The end justifies the means," they say, "so I do not need to be punished since something good came out of all of this."

This is a typical utilitarian way to reason. Relativism states that there is no absolute right and wrong, and these concepts are determined by their result or culture. Greg Koukl explains, "Moral relativism teaches that when it comes to morals, that which is ethically right or wrong, people do their own thing. Ethical truths depend on the individuals and groups who hold them."⁷² Utilitarianism is basically defined as the end justifies the means. Utilitarianism states that usefulness defines the standard of good. These two concepts go hand-in-hand. If something turns out to have a good result, then it

⁷¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, vol 2, p. 180.

must be right, and this is the definition of right and wrong. The argument in Romans here goes then, something like this: Since my “unrighteousness” brought about good (the glory of God), then what I did must not be wrong, but right. And if it is right, then why am I being punished for it? People today use this argument all the time because they have little to no concept of absolute right and wrong.

Paul again categorically denies this in verse 6, ⁶ *By no means! For then how could God judge the world?* Paul hardly even gives any credibility to this question. Paul assumes that God is the judge of the world, and there is no other way of thinking. Boice states, “The argument is: If there is a world, there must be a God who made it, to whom all who live and act in this world are responsible. Therefore the judgment of God is a given, and any argument that would suggest it is not is fallacious.”⁷³ Paul makes it clear that there is an absolute standard of right and wrong, and it is not tied up to our view of right and wrong, or the outcome of any of our actions. God is the absolute standard of right and wrong, and this standard is based on His infinite wisdom and absolute goodness and righteousness. Therefore, if He makes the standard, then He has the right to judge by that standard, regardless of what we may think of as right and wrong.

The last question that comes up is related to the second one. ⁷ *But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?* ⁸ *And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.* Paul seems to have heard this argument against the gospel a number of times. It goes by the theological name of Antinomianism, which basically breaks down as “anti law ism.” Essentially, this is the opposite of legalism, and a person who is an antinomian shows no concern for the law. Their line of thought goes something like this: If we are saved by grace through faith, entirely apart from any works of the law, then what does it matter whether we live righteous lives or not? If we still continue to sin, then isn’t that good, because through our sin God is given greater glory as our Savior? Many Christians may never say this, but many Christians live like this. The popular bumper sticker that says “I am not perfect, just forgiven” is a great example of antinomian thinking. Salvation without obedience is also another example of this type of life. Is it enough to sin and then claim, “I am forgiven” without genuine repentance expressed in a repudiation of the evil and a decision to live differently, not to mention a desire to make restitution?⁷⁴

This is where Catholics, and some Protestants differ from the most Protestant theology. Catholics state the formula for justification is

Justification = faith + good works

⁷² Greg Koukl and Francis Beckwith. 1998. *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, p. 28.

⁷³ Boice, *Romans* vol 1, p. 285.

⁷⁴ Boice, *Romans* vol 1, p. 286.

Protestants would reply that the formula for justification as defined in the Bible is represented as:

Faith = justification + good works

The difference here is that our faith, which is not even a work since it is given by God, is the key to our justification, and at the same time, good works follow in our lives once we have been justified. Remember, faith is our absolute trust in Christ that He has paid for our sins on the cross, given us His righteousness, and God now looks at us through the lens of Jesus. Because of this work of Christ, good works naturally follow out of love, obedience, and our new nature.

Antinomians would reply that the formula is:

Faith = justification – good works⁷⁵

However, it does not take a rocket scientist or a theologian to see that this last formula is not Christianity. Jesus throughout the gospels demanded a radically changed life, one of taking up our cross daily and following Jesus. In Luke 6:46, Jesus even states Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say? James 1:22 states, ²² *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* Works play a large part after our salvation, but only afterwards, and not as part of it.

Paul concludes this section by stating that the condemnation of those that make such antinomian arguments is just. Paul hardly gives them the time of day. He explains the fact that everyone will be judged by God according to their actions and by the standard of God’s righteousness. If people want to act unrighteously because they think that their evil will result in good, then their condemnation is just. Our part is to do what the law says, and let God be the judge.

A couple of points need to be reiterated and stressed because they come up in the 21st century just like they often reared their head in the 1st century. One point is the often misunderstood notion that our unfaithfulness or disobedience leads to God’s unfaithfulness in keeping His promises. This is simply not the case. Like Paul was strongly stating in this section, mankind’s actions, attitudes, unfaithfulness, or lack of obedience does not in any way mitigate or nullify God’s promises to His people. There are some things that God promises that are contingent, meaning that we only get the result of God’s promise if we do certain things. However, God promised He would make the Jews a great nation from one family, and that He would bless them and bless those that blessed them. Just because the Jews were unfaithful and often experienced cycles of obedience, disobedience, and repentance, does not mean that God gave up on them or changed His mind. In fact, God fulfilled His promises through the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ in many ways. In the same way, God does not give up on the

⁷⁵ These formulas came from Boice, *Romans*, vol 1, p. 287.

church when it appears that most of Christendom is apostate or has fallen away. God preserves His people whether as Jews or as Christians. While the church may experience times as the Jews did of obedience, disobedience, and repentance, God is always faithful.

This issue and question arises from mankind's sinful desire to make God more like us. We have to understand that God's ways are not like our ways, and God's ways are above our ways. Whereas mankind may be unfaithful, break promises, change our minds, and are often undependable, God is not like us. God can make promises, and keep His word because He is God and has the power, knowledge, character, and will to do so. However, we must always remember that God does what He wants to do and our actions do not make God any more or less faithful. Often we look at what we do and then look at God through the lens of ourselves. However, we cannot see the whole picture, but God can. What may look like God being unfaithful in the immediate present is often God working out His purposes unknown to us in different places, people, and/or events.

Another point to remember is that God's standard of righteousness is not based on the end justifying the means. Human beings quite often try and justify their actions based on the end result of something we do. However, God's standard does not depend on the result; it is based on His absolute character and law. Lying about an event or something may actually bring benefit to someone or, in the most extreme circumstances, save someone's life. However, the result of a life saved does not make the lie righteous in God's sight. Our action was still lying, which is sinful. Utilitarianism is rampant in the church and the world today. Pragmatism is an offshoot of utilitarianism. Pragmatism says, if it works, then do it. Pragmatism is the attitude that we should do whatever works to get the job done, to grow the church, to spread the gospel, or to meet the bottom line. However, we must still keep in mind that the end does not justify the means. God's standard does not allow us to compromise in order to get what we deem are good results. Good results ultimately come from righteousness and through God's grace. Good results are measured differently by God than by man oftentimes. So what we may think of as good results may be sinful in God's sight. God will judge the world not based on our results only, but by the standards and laws of God. We may try and justify our bottom line to God, but God doesn't care about the bottom line as we may think of it; He cares about righteousness. That is His bottom line!

Lesson 10: Romans 3:9 – 20

⁹ *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:*

“ None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ *no one understands;
no one seeks for God.*

¹² *All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.”*

¹³ *“ Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.”*

“ The venom of asps is under their lips.”

¹⁴ *“ Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”*

¹⁵ *“ Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

¹⁶ *in their paths are ruin and misery,*

¹⁷ *and the way of peace they have not known.”*

¹⁸ *“ There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

¹⁹ *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*

²⁰ *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

Paul has spent half of chapter 1, all of chapter 2, and the beginning of chapter 3 explaining the foundation of the gospel message: the sin and depravity of man and mankind’s inability to live up the standards which God has set forth. That inability to attain righteousness that God demands puts us in a position where we are the recipients of God’s wrath as a punishment for our unrighteousness. Paul covers several groups of people and demonstrates how every member of these groups is under the condemnation of God. Even the Jews, God’s chosen people, have a number of advantages, responsibilities, and possessions that God has graciously provided for them, but these advantages do not exempt them from the wrath of God in they do not meet and keep God’s standards of righteousness. In Romans 3:9 – 20, Paul sums up all of his previous arguments from Romans 1:18 – Romans 3: 8 in one of the best and clearest explanations of the doctrine of total depravity of mankind and the doctrine of sin in all people. In this

section of Scripture, Paul will make it clear that everyone is in a situation that puts us at odds with God, and that we all need salvation from the wrath of God.

Verse 9 states, ⁹ *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.* Notice the wording that Paul uses in the last section compared to verse 9. Paul states that Jews have advantages because they are the recipients of the Word of God, but they are not any better off when it comes to sin and God's wrath. They have advantages, but are not better off. It is a subtle difference, but it is a significant difference. Paul concludes with a strong statement that he has charged that all, meaning all, everyone, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. In order to make sure his readers understood who Paul was claiming was under sin, he used the word all, and even explained it by elaborating that he meant both Jews and Greeks. In other words, since the entire world was divided into basically two people groups according to the Scriptures, Jews and Gentiles, Paul was making sure his readers understood that everyone in the entire world was under sin, and there were no exceptions. "Greeks" was a term that Paul used to mean anyone other than Jews, and was another name for Gentiles. All of mankind was affected. This may seem to be an obvious point to make, but it must be stressed. There will always be someone who tries to exempt themselves from God's judgment by one excuse or another. Paul clearly states that this is not the case, nor ever has been the case.

Paul says that we are all *under sin*. He does not say that we are all sinners, because he has spent the last 2 chapters proving that.

The entire rest of this section describes mankind in a state known theologically as Total Depravity. Total Depravity, a term that has a lot of baggage attached to it, basically means that every part of us as human beings has been marred by sin. Pastor Chuck Swindoll likes to say that we are not all as bad as we can be, but we are all as bad off as we can be. This is a good summary. Every human being has died in terms of his spiritual nature, and is "dead in sin." However, that doesn't mean that we are all as evil as we can be. James Boice states, "What total depravity is meant to convey is the idea that sin has affected the whole person down to the very core or root of his or her being. That is why many writers prefer the words 'radical depravity' or 'radical corruption' instead."⁷⁶ Another writer states, "This doctrine of Total Inability, which declares that men are dead in sin, does not mean that all men are equally bad, nor that any man is as bad as he could be, nor that anyone is entirely destitute of virtue, nor that human nature is evil in itself, nor that man's spirit is inactive, and much less does it mean that the body is dead. What it does mean is that since the fall man rests under the curse of sin, that he is actuated by wrong principles, and that he is wholly unable to love God or to do anything meriting salvation."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Boice, James M. 2006. *The Doctrines of Grace*. Doxa Digital Press.

⁷⁷ Boettner, Loraine. 1961. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. p. 61.

There are several people down through the history of the church that have denied this doctrine of total depravity. One is a British monk named Pelagius, from whom the term Pelagian comes. Pelagius, in contrast to his contemporary Augustine in the 4th century AD, believed and taught a view of sin as only those deliberate and unrelated acts in which the will actually chooses to do evil. Thus any necessary connection between sins, or any hereditary principle of sin within the race, going back to Adam, was forgotten. Pelagius argued further that:

1. The sin of Adam affected no one but himself;
2. Those born since Adam have been born into the same condition Adam was in before his fall, that is, into a position of neutrality so far as sin is concerned; and
3. Today human beings are able to live free from sin, if they want to.⁷⁸

This is probably the view of most Christians and nonchristians today. However, as we will see in Romans 3, this view is untenable and cannot be supported by Scripture. As a result, Pelagius and his teachings were condemned as heretical in the Council of Carthage in AD 418.

However, this doctrine of “partial depravity” was again made popular in America during the mid-1800’s by an evangelist named Charles Finney. Finney held to the notion that physical depravity and moral depravity were different aspects of our sin. Finney taught in his *Systematic Theology* that mankind did not inherit the sinful nature from Adam, and that we all as human beings had and still have a choice whether we sin or not. He states, “Moral depravity, as I use the term, does not consist in, nor imply a sinful nature, in the sense that the substance of the human soul is sinful in itself. It is not a constitutional sinfulness. It is not an involuntary sinfulness. Moral depravity, as I use the term, consists in selfishness; in a state of voluntary committal of the will to self-gratification.”⁷⁹ In fact, Finney believed that human beings could actually abstain from sin, and thereby obey God’s laws. He even stated that obedience was necessary for one to be saved, for without obedience to the moral law, no one could be saved. We were not sinful creatures, as such. While I cannot go into greater detail in these notes, Finney denied the doctrine of original sin, total depravity, and substitutionary atonement. He followed in the footsteps of Pelagius.

Unfortunately, Finney and his theology has been adopted by a number of well-known contemporary pastors and Christians who teach his doctrines without realizing that his teachings have been condemned as heretical. Comparing Pelagius and Finney with Paul in Romans, we will see that the Bible clearly states that man is incapable of doing good and drawing close to God on his own in a number of different aspects.

⁷⁸ Boice, *The Doctrines of Grace*.

In the next several verses, Paul will explain this concept of radical depravity through the testimony of the Old Testament. Verses 10 – 12 are quotes from Psalm 14:1 – 3. Look at the Psalm:

1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

2 The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Psalm 53:1 – 3 repeats almost verbatim Psalm 14. Each one of these verses tells us something about ourselves as human beings that has been corrupted by sin. Our moral, mental, and spiritual selves have been corrupted.

Note Paul states, *None is righteous, no, not one.* Paul is telling us that we are morally depraved, that we cannot do good according to God's standards. We still have a bit of the image of God in us since we were created that way, but that image has been completely tarnished by our sin nature. While we are never as bad as we could be thanks to the grace of God and His sustaining power in the lives of everyone in the world, we cannot do good in the sense of meeting God's standards. Paul states that **no one** is righteous.

Next, Paul states that *no one understands.* Because of sin, our mental faculties have been affected such that we are ignorant of the spiritual things of God. Yes, we still long to worship something, which is why Paul explained in Romans 1 that we suppress the truth and worship the created things instead of the Creator. One of the best commentaries on this passage is Paul writing in 1 Corinthians 1: ¹⁸ *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ¹⁹ *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."* ²⁰ *Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* ²¹ *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.* People are unable to discover God through philosophy because we are unable to discern these things. Again, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2: ¹⁴ *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.* Human beings in themselves cannot discern spiritual things, because they have not been born again with a new nature. In our sin nature, we

⁷⁹ Finney, Charles. 1878. *Systematic Theology*. CCEL. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/finney/theology.html>.

are incapable of understanding God and discerning spiritual things. Man is not insane, with no mental and intellectual faculties at all. Mankind has made great strides in technology, longevity, health, education, and any number of other areas, and mankind will continue to do so. People who don't know God can even read the Bible, memorize verses, recite doctrine, and use all of the right religious words. However, unspiritual people cannot read and study the word of God and discern spiritual lessons and ideas from the Bible because the Holy Spirit does not reveal them to them.

Paul continues with an indictment of our will, stating *no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless*. Looking at this in human terms, it would appear that Paul has gotten this all wrong. After all, isn't the history of the human race a story of man seeking after God? Isn't man a religious being? Yes, we are a being seeking after god, but not God. As Paul has already stated, we seek after our own gods, in order to fulfill our longing to worship that God has implanted in our hearts. However, we choose to suppress the truth and chase after created gods instead of the one true God. We do not seek after the real one true God. A popular term today is a 'spiritual seeker,' which accurately describes a person on a spiritual journey seeking after spirituality. However, if one were to ask them what they were seeking for, they would certainly not describe their "spiritual goal" in terms of the God of the Bible. It would be karma, or fulfillment, or happiness, or inner peace, or something else they define as God, but it in no way, shape, or form resembles the God of the Bible, the one true Creator God. Only those that have been drawn by the Father to the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit are able to seek after God because they have been given a new nature.

Paul then describes the entire human body in terms of depravity, using a list of Scripture verses from the Old Testament. There is mention of the throat, the tongue, the lips, the mouth, the feet and the eyes. The body that God has given to all of us is used by sinful people for purposes of evil.

¹³ “ *Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.*”

“ *The venom of asps is under their lips.*”

¹⁴ “ *Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.*”

Notice how Paul describes the tongue, the mouth, and the lips. In Matthew 23, Jesus makes a similar remark when chastising the Pharisees. ²⁷*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.* ²⁸*So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.* The Jews had a number of restrictions on open graves and the dealing with dead corpses, because of sanitary conditions and diseases that could be present. Paul remarks our throat is an open grave, the pathway to deadness, vile and “unsanitary”

things of the body. Remember, Jesus said out of the heart the mouth speaks. It is out of the vileness of the heart, our sin, from which we pour out speech.

God gave us the gift of communication to praise and worship Him. However, we tend to speak with cursing, backbiting, arrogance, boasting, and pride. This is the description Paul gives in the remainder of verses 13 and 14. James 3 compares the tongue to a number of things, and states, *7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.* When Jesus was speaking to the Jews in John 8, he described Satan as the Father of Lies. *44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* Paul is taking this same picture and painting a portrait of sinful man.

Paul continues with his not-so-pretty picture of the human race.

¹⁵ “ *Their feet are swift to shed blood;*
¹⁶ *in their paths are ruin and misery,*
¹⁷ *and the way of peace they have not known.”*
¹⁸ “ *There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

Note the violence, disrespect, and evil that is associated with these verses. Verse 18 sums it up best when Paul states that there is no fear of God in those that are depraved. No one holds God in high esteem, nor does anyone view Him as Holy. No one respects him, nor is anyone literally afraid of Him. Many people may disagree with Paul’s assessment of the human race, but our separation from God and suppression of His truth may not necessarily lead us to ruin and bloodshed individually while we are here on this earth, but certainly overall the history of the human race has not been as stellar and as peaceful as we would have liked. The War to End All Wars (World War I) began a century of the most bloody and horrific fighting in the history of mankind. Individually we are no better off. Rebellion against God is punishable by death and everlasting torment; yet our lack of fear for God causes us to dismiss this idea as trite and old-fashioned. Nonetheless, that is our punishment without the gospel of Jesus Christ.

These last two verses are Paul’s great summation of the state of mankind in the eyes of God with only the law to save him. ¹⁹ *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* ²⁰ *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.* The standard of God’s law is made only for those who are held accountable by God’s law. Who is held accountable under God’s law? Everyone. God’s law is for the Jews as well as the Gentiles, for everyone regardless of nationality, religion, class, or gender.

What is the purpose of God's law? One purpose is naturally to govern the way in which God intended human beings to live. However, another purpose, according to Paul, is to "stop every mouth." Dunn explains that, "The metaphor is of someone being prevented from speaking—here not simply by the weight of evidence brought in accusation, but also by its authority as the law of God, the scriptures, the sacred oracles entrusted to Israel."⁸⁰ When God judges the world, no one will be able to offer any excuse, or explanation, or reason why they did not live up to the laws of God. Their mouths will be silenced, and no excuse will be given before the Holy God.

Verse 20 is the final nail in the coffin for the human race. ²⁰ *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.* The law is the revealer of sin as sin. Without the law, man would not know with certainty what sin was. We would not have a measuring stick for our actions and attitudes towards God. Boice states, "The law is given to strip away the hypocrisy of the human heart, which constantly imagines that it is right before God, and to show its depravity."⁸¹ One thing the law cannot do, though, is put us in right standing with God. It can provide the standard by which we are judged, and it can clearly demonstrate to us that we fall short. However, it cannot declare us righteous before a Holy God. In fact, it does just the opposite. It shows us that we can never stand before God and prove to Him we have lived up to His standards.

Therefore mankind is in a quandary. God has established His law, His standard of conduct and worship, and it is clearly been put in writing, imprinted upon our hearts from birth, and revealed to some extent in creation. However, all it does is reveal to us that we can never attain that standard. We are thus in a position of standing before God and receiving His just and holy divine punishment. Is this what is left for the human race? Divine punishment and eternal torment? The bad news is that, yes, that is the fate of mankind without some intervention on a scale of God Himself. The good news is, well, literally the gospel of Jesus Christ, the ultimate intervention on a God-scale that was accomplished on our behalf by Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man. That is the subject of the next lesson.

⁸⁰ Dunn, J. D. G. (2002). Vol. 38A: *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 1-8*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated. p. 152.

⁸¹ Boice, J. M. (1986). *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press. p. 222.

Lesson 11: Romans 3:21 – 25a

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Over the past 10 lessons, for 3 chapters, Paul has expounded on the situation of mankind in respect to the law of God. He has laid out with the precision and logic of a lawyer the fact that all mankind has knowledge of God through general revelation and natural law. We were created in God's image, and still retain that ability to know something about the one true God through these means. However, because of our sin nature, instead of embracing God, we suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. We exchange the glory of God for various parts of creation in our worship. We choose to serve created things rather than the Creator because we are more comfortable with them and can control them. When we observe The Holy God, the contrast shows us our sin and our unrighteousness. In our natural sinning state we recoil from that Holiness. Even those that seem to be good and righteous are in dire need of help. Everyone, both Jews and Gentiles alike, will suffer the wrath of God because we have a law from God that is intended to govern us yet we cannot live up to it through our own means. The law demonstrates to us our sin, our missing the mark. Paul says that no one through the law will be justified in God's sight. No one by living according to all of the requirements of the law will ever be declared righteous by God. If that is the case, then we are in a predicament in which we cannot help ourselves. But all is not lost.

In the next several lessons, beginning with Romans 3:21 – 31, Paul will expound on the gospel and all of its characteristics and benefits. These verses are at once a conclusion to what Paul has been discussing in the previous chapters, and at the same time an introduction to the details he will present beginning in chapter 4.

Let's look at the first verse in this section, but I don't want to separate this verse from the rest of the section. Remember, chapter and verse breakdowns are artificial, and we need to be able to look at any book of the Bible as a whole, and break it down into its natural sections that the writer determined. Romans has a theme, and so do the first three chapters as a whole. We won't be able to correctly understand this section of Scripture without referring back to what Paul has previously written.

²¹ *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.* Initially, the righteousness of God was reflected in the law of God. Over the past three chapters, Paul has elaborated on how mankind will never become righteous in God's eyes because the standard of righteousness is God's law, and mankind can never reach that standard. Paul's whole thrust of his previous writing in Romans was the righteousness of God through the law. If human beings could attain righteousness through works of the law (in other words, keeping the full extent of the law ourselves), then we would see God yet we would be able to brag about it. We would receive all of the credit, and God would receive none of it. Righteousness from the law is right up our alley as human beings. We all want to work for our place in life, and we constantly desire to earn our way, either in life or in heaven. Works righteousness fits our human nature. The problem is that God's righteousness as reflected in the law is so far above what we can do ourselves (realistically speaking, regardless of what we think we can do), that we can not attain it.

So God, in His infinite wisdom, instituted a radical plan, one that is completely opposite our human nature. We want to earn, but we can't. So God gives through grace.

The righteousness of God has now been revealed in a new way, apart from the law. This new way doesn't do away with the law, or nullify the law, but God's righteousness is revealed in a new and different way. However, while it is apart from the law, the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it. In other words, there is a righteousness apart from the law of God that the Scriptures bear witness to. This is not some brand new, made-up teaching that Paul is imagining in his mind. The Old Testament itself pointed to this new way even before Jesus Christ came as the Word incarnate. Paul mentioned this important aspect in the first chapter, verse 2. The gospel was promised beforehand in the Holy Scriptures. The Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament) tell about it.

What is this righteousness of God that has been revealed apart from the law? ²² *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.* There is a lot that can be said from this one incomplete sentence. However, we should first define some terms because the two terms "faith" and "believe" are extremely critical to any

understanding of this passage and of the gospel itself. Faith and Believe are essentially the noun and verb form of the same underlying Greek word. It means to consider something to be true, and therefore worthy of trust, or to entrust oneself in complete confidence to someone or something.⁸² Faith is the trust and confidence in the truth of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Faith is trust in objective propositions, not subjective feelings, wishful or positive thinking, or some sort of Star Wars like force. Faith is more than mental assent; it manifests itself in action. For instance, I may know that the pilots and crew of the 757 have been trained and are competent pilots, yet not board the plane for fear of flying. However, when I know that the pilots are trained, competent, will get me to my destination, AND board the plane, then I have believed and acted on my faith (trust) in the pilots. I may know the facts surrounding the historical Jesus, and the nuances of the gospel message, but it is when I TRUST that Jesus is who He said He is, and TRUST that He did accomplish my redemption through His death and resurrection, that I have saving knowledge and saving faith. The analogy only goes so far, though, and please don't mistake the idea that I am saying that we play a part in our salvation (boarding the plane in the above analogy). My point is that we may have factual knowledge, yet not have saving grace because we do not trust that Christ has accomplished our salvation.

Paul continues, *For there is no distinction:* ²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ²⁴ *and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* ²⁵ *whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.* A cursory reading of this sentence seems to indicate that all (everybody) has sinned, and all (implied everybody) are justified. Does Paul suddenly become a universalist here, believing that at some point everyone will be saved? That would not make sense because Paul states elsewhere that salvation is only for those who believe. Let's look at this sentence in a broader scope first, then we will dive down into the details.

The key to this sentence is the introductory clause, *For there is no distinction.* There is no distinction between what? Looking back at Romans 1:18 – 3:20, it is clear that there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, the categories in which the world was divided at that time. While this may not come as a big shock to us today, it was incredibly shocking to the Jew and the Gentile of Paul's day. Jews considered themselves different, set apart, and saw the Gentiles as dogs. However, Paul says there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, because both groups have sinned (past tense) and continuously fall short (present tense) of the glory of God. Paul demonstrated this fact in Romans 1:18 – 3:20. However, Paul continues on with his thought and explains that just as there is no distinction in the sinfulness of Jews and Gentiles, there is justification for both Jews and Gentiles by God's grace. Both groups have sinned and continue to sin, yet God's grace is available to both groups, not just the Jews. This is

⁸² BDAG, 3rd edition, πιστεύω.

again another shocking piece of news to both the Jews, especially, but also to the Gentiles. We take this for granted today, but the fact that Paul is explaining here is that people from all groups (Jews and Gentiles) will be justified by God's grace. God is pouring out grace to all kinds of people in this world, not just to the Jews.

Also note Paul's construction here: all have sinned (past tense) and fall short (present tense) of the glory of God. Jews aren't exempt, and Gentiles aren't exempt. Paul meticulously demonstrated this fact in the first part of Romans. In our past, we have all sinned. Yet Paul uses the present tense meaning continuing to fall short implying that people still sin on an ongoing basis. Yes we sinned in the past, yet we still continue to fall short of the glory of God. The ESV translates the verb "to justify" as "are justified" in verse 24, but the verb is a present participle. It might be better to say that we are "being justified" by God's grace. Paul uses this present tense to span the gap between the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the final judgment. Note that this is also a passive participle, which means that the action is being done by God, not by us. We have sinned and continue to fall short of the glory of God in an active sense, but as far as justification goes, we are the ones who are being acted upon by God. We are not doing any acting! The act of justification by God's grace is something completely out of our control, and we in no way play any part in it.

Both Jews and Gentiles are *justified*. Let's look at this word again, to make sure we understand the meaning. Berkhof defines justification "as *that legal act of God by which He declares the sinner righteous on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ*. It is not an act or process of renewal, such as regeneration, conversion, or sanctification, and does not affect the condition but the state of the sinner."⁸³ Justification affects how God views the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ. There are two aspects to justification, one negative (takes away) and one positive (adds to). The negative aspect is the forgiveness of sins of the sinner on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. The positive element is the adoption of the sinner as sons and daughters, and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the sinner, thereby becoming heirs of Christ and inheriting eternal life. In this sense we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Justification and sanctification are different, though, and are often confused. Again, Berkhof states "Justification takes place outside of the sinner in the tribunal of God, removes the guilt of sin, and is an act which is complete at once and for all time; while sanctification takes place in man, removes the pollution of sin, and is a continuous and lifelong process."⁸⁴

How are we justified? Grace. Nearly two-thirds (100 of 154) of the instances of the Greek word for grace occur in Paul's letters, and most of those occur repeatedly in Romans and both Corinthian letters. Obviously this is an important term for Paul. What is grace? The common definition of grace is the unmerited favor of God on sinners who

⁸³ Berkhof, Louis. 2005. *Summary of Christian Doctrine*. Doxa Digital Press. p. 138.

⁸⁴ Berkhof, *Summary*, p. 138.

have rebelled against God and are under the just condemnation of God. Grace involves mercy, forgiveness, and loving-kindness, and is similar to the Hebrew word *hesed* which is so beautifully pictured in the book of Ruth through the relationships between Ruth and Naomi, and Boaz and Ruth. Divine grace in the NT is supremely embodied in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Grace manifested in Jesus Christ provides the means by which God can forgive sinners and bestow righteousness upon them, and allows those saved sinners to reflect God's grace in our character and relationships. Because grace is *unmerited* favor, it is something that God alone can bestow to sinners. Nothing we can do as sinners, as created creatures, can earn or persuade God to act in our favor. It is God's prerogative alone to act or not to act.

This grace that God provides is a gift. Gifts are things which no one earns. One does not usually earn a gift, and there is no expectation of repayment when a gift is given. Note what Paul writes in Ephesians 2 regarding the gift of God: ⁸*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹*not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* This was a radical plan by God. We humans are so used to trying to earn our way to God. We desperately want to prove ourselves by doing, earning, and working. Getting something for free despite the fact that we deserve otherwise goes against the grain of every human being. Sayings such as "There is no free lunch," and "God helps those who help themselves" sound realistic and motivational, but God does not need such sayings or attitudes to fulfill His plan. In fact, he chooses the opposite so that we know as humans who actually does the work and who gets the credit. It doesn't even make sense to us as humans. Paul explains that the gospel is foolishness to those whose eyes have not been opened: ²²*For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,* ²³*but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,* ²⁴*but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵*For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* The gospel just makes no sense to a human that wants to work for his salvation, but it is the wisdom of God!

This righteousness of God is by God's grace as a gift, *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* The word here for redemption was used in Biblical times to refer to the purchasing of a slave out of the slave market, and include the terms loosing, delivering, or unbinding. Redemption is the act of Christ on the cross buying us back out of the slave market of sin and back into right standing with God. We are set free from the slave market. But to whom was the price paid? Many people believe that Christ died on the cross to pay a ransom to Satan in order to deliver us from our sin. However, this is completely wrong. The purchase price was paid to God, because our debt was to God for our rebellion against Him. God was the offended party.

Paul continues and explains this: *whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.* Jesus was a propitiation. In other words, Jesus' sacrifice

was the price paid to God in order to satisfy His righteous demands of a Holy Wrath on us sinners. R.C. Sproul explains this idea of propitiation clearly:

God's intent in sending Jesus into the world was to placate his wrath. His sacrifice was made to fulfill all of the demands that God had imposed as sanctions upon the committing of sins. God never pronounces guilty people innocent. The atonement does pay the penalty for the one who is judged guilty. The sinner is not cleared or exonerated, the sinner is declared guilty. It is not at the point of judgment that he is redeemed, but at the point of sentence.

Not only does Christ offer the sacrifice to reconcile the sinner to God by paying the ransom that is required, but a double transfer takes place. Not only is the sinner's guilt transferred to Christ, but in God's sight, his merit is given to the sinner. After the transfer takes place, God looks at the sinner and declares him to be justified. Not because he has been cleared of his sin, but because he has been redeemed from his sin.⁸⁵

Propitiation, atonement, and justification all go hand-in-hand. And all of this is God's doing. Notice that we can do nothing to make any of this happen. It is all an act of God by His grace and mercy.

The beauty was that God put forth Jesus Christ as a propitiation for Himself. There was no cosmic intra-trinitarian argument which some people advocate that says that God was angry with sinners; and Jesus begged a mean God to allow Him to go and sacrifice Himself. God initiated the gospel and sacrificed His own to accomplish the redemption of His people. Again, R.C. Sproul states,

It is God the Father who sends the Son into the world. It is God the Father who by his grace freely justifies us through the merit of Jesus Christ. It is God who sets forth his only-begotten Son to be a propitiation. So there is agreement within the Godhead. God himself initiates and sets into motion this grand plan of redemption, whereby he reveals a way to satisfy the demands of his own righteousness. In doing this God does not compromise himself, nor does he take lightly the transgressions against his holiness. God deals with his own justice by requiring the price of sin at the hands of his only-begotten Son.⁸⁶

This is an ultimate example of the love of God for sinners. This fact should make us all humble, falling down on our knees weeping and praising God for all that He has done for us. It should cause us to devote every ounce of life we have for Him and His glory.

One last point in this long lesson before we move on. Paul writes ²⁵ *whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith*. All of this is received by faith. This does not happen for everyone. It is not effective for everyone. That would

⁸⁵ Sproul, *The Gospel of God*. p. 76.

⁸⁶ Sproul, *The Gospel of God*. p. 77.

be universalism, and we know that not everyone accepts the work of Christ, unfortunately. One must receive what God has done through Christ in faith, in other words, through trust in the work of Christ. Again, we do not play any part. This glorious gospel is not accomplished by any means of our own. This is the heart of the conflict between Protestants and Catholics: justification by faith alone. Protestants hold to the doctrine that the gospel is received through faith alone. However, Catholics hold that we must have faith and do some sort of penitent works in order to be justified by God. Paul writes the propitiation is received by faith alone; while Catholics state that this gift of God is received through faith plus works. The Bible clearly states that we as human beings cannot add anything to the merit of Jesus Christ; Catholics add their own merit to that of Christ for their justification.

Romans 3:21 – 31 is one of the best summaries and explanations of the gospel in the Bible. There are a lot of theological terms in this section as well as a lot of doctrine. It behooves all Christians to know this section of Romans inside and out. Why? Because we cannot have faith in, trust in, something or someone that we really don't know. Many church-going people in 21st century America profess to be Christians and profess to "love Jesus," but most of them have no idea what they are talking about or why they actually say those things. This is a hard and sad truth. The gospel is not about successful living, having a better marriage, financial security, or breaking bad habits. It is not even about felt-needs. It is about the one unfelt need that every human being has but doesn't know it or refuses to admit it.

There are two ways to get into the Kingdom of God. Yes, you read me right. One way is to keep the law in all of its provisions perfectly and completely throughout your entire life. You have to live a perfect sinless life, AND live a righteous life. Paul has already crossed out that option for us when stated in chapter 3 ¹⁹*Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* ²⁰*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.* That leaves only one other alternative: the gospel. We can't do it, so God does it for us. This is justification by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

Lesson 12: Romans 3:25b – 31

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

This is part two of the extraordinary section in Romans on the gospel. Previously Paul presented the gospel in very clear terms. Paul stated: ²¹ *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—* ²² *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.* This is indeed good news. For the first two-and-a-half chapters Paul has been proving to his readers that all of mankind was sinful and was subject to the judgment of God. God had established the law as His standard and we as humans had not been able to adhere to it. Therefore, no one would be justified through the upholding of the law. This was the bad news! However, God had provided another way to become reconciled to God without abolishing the law, a way not through works of obedience but through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ satisfied the righteous demands of God and the law, atoned for the sins of His people, and imputed that righteousness to those who have faith in Him.

The rest of chapter 3 continues to explain the gospel that God put forth. *This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.* Note what Paul is saying here. The cross, the fact that God put forth Jesus Christ as a propitiation by His blood, was done to show the righteousness of God. Many unbelievers just don't understand why God allows bad things to happen to good people, or good things to happen to bad people. They don't understand why Christ had to die, and many people even disparage Christianity because of the sacrificial nature of the whole process. The fact is that mankind, when developing religions or spiritual guides or

processes, usually bases these on nothing more than mankind himself. Thus, our own man-made gods and idols will never transcend beyond mankind's own level of sophistication or imagination. In fact, man-made religions and idols often look like us, act like us, react like us, and make sense to us. However, the One True God often baffles the unbeliever because his mind cannot comprehend the mercy and righteousness of God. Therefore, many times we cannot understand the righteousness of God unless God Himself opens our minds and our hearts and gives us understanding through the work of the Holy Spirit.

What Paul is saying here is that the gospel displays God's righteousness. God set the standard of the law for man to obey, and yet did not, and in our fallen nature, cannot. God would have been completely just in punishing for eternity all of mankind. Yet what He decided to do before He even created mankind was to set forth the gospel to demonstrate His righteousness in such a way that He saves some human beings from sin, reconciles them to Himself, upholds the requirements of the law, satisfies His own divine wrath through the punishment of one substitute, and ultimately still glorifies Himself through this whole process.

Paul writes that the gospel displayed God's righteousness *because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins*. Again, how many times have we prayed to God to rectify a wrong done to us by someone else, or seen sin in the world and even in our own lives and honestly asked the question, Why doesn't God just strike us all down now? Paul answers that question at the end of verse 25. God is not unaware, neglectful, or even winking at our sins as He turns the other way. His forbearance is not a sign of negligence or disregard, but of patience and mercy. Paul speaking to the Aeropogus in Athens, told them in Acts 17, ³⁰ *The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,* ³¹ *because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.* God's timing is perfect, and in the Old Testament times He instituted the sacrificial system to temporarily atone for sins and provide a way for repentance and payment. However, that system was only a foreshadow of the gospel. God is patient, as 2 Peter states, ⁸ *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* ⁹ *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* God passed over former sins in order to display His righteousness at the present time. He is patient, merciful, yet still righteous. His timing is perfect.

Paul continues in verse 26, ²⁶ *It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* Note the gospel demonstrates that God is both just, and the justifier. How does the gospel demonstrate God is just? The gospel shows God's justice by upholding His own law.

God did not lower His standards in order to come down to the level of humanity. He maintained the high standard of the law, and it was met by the one man Jesus Christ. The penalty for sin was not brushed aside or overlooked, but was ultimately paid by the death of Jesus on the cross. God's wrath had to be propitiated, and it was, through the cross. Blood was shed; a sacrifice was made; and sins of God's people were permanently atoned for through the cross. How does the gospel show that God is the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus? God is the justifier because the entire work of the cross was not any of mankind's doing, but was entirely accomplished by God Himself. God came down to man in Jesus Christ. The second person of the Trinity, fully God and fully man in Christ Jesus, lived the life we could not. He also died the death to sacrifice Himself and atone for our sins. His life was the ransom for the many. God draws people to Himself; God gives us a new nature and a faith to believe; and God then sets us right with Himself. As Paul writes to the Ephesians, ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* The Psalmist illustrates beautifully the cross of Christ when he writes, ¹⁰ *Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other (Psalm 85:10).* God is both just and the justifier.

Paul next bombards us with a series of questions to show the scope and intent of the gospel. These verses summarize what he has been writing, and prepares his readers for his discussion of faith in chapter 4.

The first set of questions and answers confirm that the gospel is accomplished by God's grace alone, and not through anything we might do. ²⁷ *Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.* ²⁸ *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.* Man has no right or ability to brag about anything he has done before God, because, as Paul says, boasting is excluded. Man cannot congratulate himself on what he has done, nor can man put himself on some high pedestal or elevate himself above anything. Why? Because boasting is excluded. The Jews boasted about their rights, privileges, and covenants with God, but all of that boasting is excluded because it is not through the law that people are saved. Paul has stated the assertion that one is justified by faith, but it is worth repeating. In today's age, especially among Catholics and even many other cults and religions, works are a huge part of our being set right before God. Man can't fathom being put right with God unless we have something to do with it. However, it must be understood that mankind has NOTHING to do with our being set right before God. There is nothing we can do to facilitate this act of God, and there is nothing we can do to ensure it happens. Paul reasserts this conclusion in his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 2: ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

The second question confirms that the general gospel call goes out to all people, both Jews and Gentiles, not just for the Jews. ²⁹ *Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,* ³⁰ *since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.* This is a very shocking pronouncement by Paul in the first century. Remember, many Jews believed that they had a special relationship with God, and that they were to separate themselves from the rest of the Gentile world. God would certainly deal with the Gentiles differently than He would deal with the Jews. However, Paul makes a shockingly egalitarian statement that says God will deal with both Jews and Gentiles in the same way, through faith. Throughout their history, many Gentiles had found favor with God. Rahab the harlot, was the mother of Boaz, and Ruth the Moabitess, became Boaz's wife and together they were the great-grandparents of King David. Amazingly, David's own lineage weaved together both Jew and Gentile. However, Jews still held great prejudice against the Gentiles.

Paul states clearly the Jewish scriptures that there is only one true God. However, if there is only one God, then He must be God of all of His creation, not just a part of it. Therefore, God is the God of all. Furthermore, it is God who will justify both Jews and Gentiles by faith. Just as there is one God, there is also one way to God through faith for all people. Jews don't have one way, while the Gentiles have another way. Both Jews and Gentiles, in other words all people, have been given one way to be reconciled back to God. That way is faith in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to Timothy ⁵ *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time* (1 Timothy 2:5,6). There is one true God, and one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ. There is no room for another mediator, or another way. Catholic doctrine teaches that people must approach Christ through a priest, or through prayer to Mary. Catholics are encouraged to pray to Mary because, as the mother of Christ, she holds influence over Jesus and can intercede on a person's behalf and persuade Jesus to answer a person's prayer. This is clearly not Biblical. The Bible is very clear that there is one God, and one way to justification. God justifies sinners through their faith in Jesus Christ, who is the one mediator between God and man.

The third question confirms that God's standard of the law is still in effect, and that the gospel upholds the law. ³¹ *Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.* The cross does not do away with the law; rather, the cross actually upholds the law as God's standard of righteousness. We cannot meet that standard, but Jesus did. He met the law and took the punishment for our sin in our place. God justifies us by faith in the work done by Christ in meeting and upholding the entirety of the law.

Lesson 13: Romans 4:1 – 12

4 *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?*

2 *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.* **3** *For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”* **4** *Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.* **5** *And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,* **6** *just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:*

7 “ *Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;*

8 *blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”*

9 *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.* **10** *How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.* **11** *He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,* **12** *and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

Paul has spent the first three chapters dealing with the human condition in sin, and how we are subject to the judgment of God because of our sinful nature and disobedience. At the end of chapter 3, Paul presented us with a clear statement of the alternative to God’s wrath and judgment, the gospel of Christ. After hearing and reading with great intensity a prolonged view of the sinfulness of all mankind, the gospel comes as a sweet message of hope. John Newton wrote, “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.” After being told in no uncertain terms that no one will be justified by the law, and that the law serves only to show us our own sinfulness, the

gospel shows us God's mercy, faithfulness, and righteousness. When we as humans could not achieve a right standing before God from our own works and our own doing, God provides the way for us through faith in His son Jesus Christ.

However, as meticulously as Paul laid out his argument for the condition of mankind, and for the gospel, Paul still would like to bring forward another witness to seal the case once and for all. Justification by faith alone, through Christ alone, is a tough doctrine to swallow, especially for the Jews who thought that much of our salvation was by works of the law, and even for us Christians in the 21st century who believe deep down that we have to do something ourselves to ensure our standing before God. So Paul brings in the witness that every Jew would certainly believe, Abraham, the father of the nation. If what Paul is teaching is hard for the Jews to swallow, then Abraham as the key witness would certainly seal the case. So Paul asks in verse 1, *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?*

The Jews and those influenced by Judaism in Paul's day were convinced that Abraham, the forefather of the Jewish nation, was set right before God, justified, by what he did. In other words, Abraham was justified by works according to the primary Jewish faith. The apostle James could ask without fear of rebuttal, *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?* (James 2:21). So the claim that God accepts people on the basis of personal trust rather than adherence to the law seems to run counter to the principle in force with Abraham.⁸⁷ However, if Abraham was justified by works, then he would have something to boast about. But Paul has already shown that boasting was excluded, in verse 3:27. Note what Paul says, ²*For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.* Abraham may have had something to boast about before people, but not before God. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, ³*For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* His Jewish counterparts would understand this as meaning that Abraham did something to earn his righteousness. It was common belief that the Jewish Rabbis understood faith as a meritorious act originating from and the person.⁸⁸ However, Paul was about to argue using the example of Abraham that works were not involved at all.

Paul pauses a moment and makes a generalization about what people earn by doing. ⁴*Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.* If I work for a company, then that company is obligated to pay me for my work based on what we both mutually agreed to. If a person doesn't work, then a company will never agree to pay that person anyway, out of the generous nature of the CEO's heart, paid vacation notwithstanding! Wages are an obligation. If we earned our salvation through merit, then God would be obligated to give it to us, and we would have the right to boast

⁸⁷ Mounce, *Romans*, p. 121.

⁸⁸ Hendricksen, *Romans*, p. 145.

about what we accomplished. John MacArthur states, “If man were able to save himself by his own works, then salvation would be apart from God’s grace, and Christ’s sacrifice on the cross would have been in vain. If such righteous works were attainable by men, then salvation would not be a gift of God’s grace but would be a wage that is due. Not only would works righteousness obviate God’s grace, it would also rob Him of glory, for which all creation was made.”⁸⁹ Therefore, men may work and receive a wage that is due, but we cannot work to save ourselves and thereby earn our righteousness before God.

However, Paul contrasts the idea of obligation and wages with the idea of righteousness by faith alone. Paul states, ⁵*And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness....* Rather than attempting to earn God’s favor through works, Paul is saying that one should simply trust in the One who justifies. Paul’s designation of God as one who justifies the wicked would come as a shock to the Jews. The Scriptures seem to teach otherwise. Exodus 23:7 states, *Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked.* Proverbs 17:15 states, *He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.* There are other examples as well. However, in the gospel, God does not acquit the wicked in and of themselves, but only through Christ can we be declared righteous by God. We are able to be justified in the sight of God, counted righteous by faith, because of the One Person, Jesus Christ, who stands in our place as the One who is truly righteousness and has indeed earned it. We trust in the person and work of Christ, rather than in the person and work of ourselves.

Paul then turns to David as another example. ⁶*just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:* ⁷*“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”* David also speaks of righteousness that is imputed to a man’s account without works. The word in verse 6 translated as “counts” can also be translated as reckoned or imputed. In other words, God regards and treats those as righteous, even though they are not righteous, apart from anything they do. Again, this word “counts” is a transaction that takes place in the sight of God towards the sinner. RC Sproul states,

But when a person believes in Christ and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, the argument of Protestantism is that the transfer of the merit of Jesus Christ to the account of the believer is a real transfer. It is, therefore, real merit, Christ’s merit transferred to the believer. So when

⁸⁹ MacArthur, J. (1996). *Romans*. Chicago: Moody Press, p. 238.

God looks at that person who has trusted in Christ, he sees the unrighteous person covered with the righteousness of Christ.⁹⁰

We as sinners are still unrighteous, but God has credited our account with the righteousness of Christ and we now therefore have these merits counted towards us. Hodge states,

Here then is an imputation to men of what does not belong to them, and to which they have in themselves no claim. To impute righteousness is the apostle's definition of the term to justify. It is not making men inherently righteous, or morally pure, but it is regarding and treating them as just. This is done, not on the ground of personal character or works, but on the ground of the righteousness of Christ.⁹¹

This is a definition of justification by faith alone using the examples of Abraham and David. When Paul stated that Moses and the Prophets testified to this gospel, this is what he meant!

The next rather long section is all one train of thought. Paul once again jumps back to the example and witness of Abraham to decisively prove that the righteousness from God, justification, was through faith alone, and not by works. ⁹*Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.* ¹⁰*How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.* Paul has already discussed the fact in detail that both Jews and Gentiles are under the law, and will both be held accountable to God through the law. He also discussed in chapter 3, verses 29 – 31 the idea that God is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles, and that both will be justified by faith. Now Paul is going to show that Abraham was the father of not only the Jews, but the Gentile believers as well. And it all hinges on when Abraham was circumcised. Was he justified by God before circumcision or after? Clearly it was before. Genesis 15:6 records God justifying Abraham. However, it was 29 years later when Abraham was given the sign of circumcision in Genesis 17:23 – 27. Therefore, Abraham was declared righteous well before circumcision was given to him. Again, Paul shows that it was not works (circumcision) that justified Abraham, but faith alone in what God would do.

Why was Abraham declared righteous before circumcision? ¹¹*He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,* ¹²*and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the*

⁹⁰ Sproul, Romans, p. 83.

⁹¹ Hodge, Romans, vv. 6 – 8.

footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. There are a couple of points here to note. Circumcision was a sign given by God that represented a seal that guaranteed God would keep His promises, and that Abraham was indeed justified in God's sight. John MacArthur states:

Although they convey similar ideas, a sign points to something, whereas a seal guarantees it. When an official seal was stamped on a letter or decree, for instance, its authenticity was guaranteed. In that sense, circumcision was the authentication that God's covenant promises would be fulfilled. It pointed to the fact that God wanted to circumcise, that is, place His authenticating seal upon, His people's hearts, not simply their bodies.⁹²

To Abraham it was a guarantee of the trustworthiness of God's promise. It meant that this patriarch could depend upon it. By way of faith, and the obedience resulting from faith, the righteousness of God was reckoned or imputed to him.⁹³

The purpose of Abraham being declared righteous by faith before circumcision, as Paul states, was so that he could be the father of two distinct groups of people with one thing in common. One group is explained at the end of verse 11, *The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well....* So this first group was those who were Gentile believers who were not circumcised. They held the same faith in God as Abraham, but were not circumcised. This group would be declared righteous by faith. The second group Paul covers in verse 12: ¹² *and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.* The second group was the Jews who were circumcised AND who held the same faith in God as Abraham held and that the first group held. Note this last verse specifically notes that not all Jews will be declared righteous; it is only those who may be Jewish and who have the same faith as Abraham that will be justified. So Abraham is not the father of an ethnic group (Hebrews), or merely a religious group (Jews). He is the father of a spiritual group consisting of both Jews and Gentiles who share a common bond of faith in a Holy God. Paul will come back to this in Romans 9 – 11.

Let's examine a couple of practical applications of this section of Scripture and highlight the differences between Protestants and Catholics. One is baptismal regeneration, and the other is justification by faith alone. Baptismal regeneration is the Catholic belief that baptism is a means by which God imparts saving grace; it results in the remission of sins. By either awakening or strengthening faith, baptism effects the washing of regeneration. The Roman Catholic view is that faith is not

⁹² MacArthur, *Romans*, p. 251.

⁹³ Hendrickson, *Romans*, p. 150.

necessary; the rite itself, properly performed, is sufficient.⁹⁴ However, we need to compare this practice with the Jewish practice of circumcision, especially their thoughts and views in the first century. Remember earlier, we discussed how the Jewish leaders believed that circumcision actually saved Jews from God's wrath. Paul explains in Romans 2:25 – 29 that circumcision does not save one from the wrath of God. Hodge even quotes a number of Jewish scholars who clearly saw circumcision as the shield from God's judgment.

The Rabbi Menachem, in his *Commentary on the Books of Moses*, fol. 43, col. 3, says, "Our Rabbins have said, that no circumcised man will see hell." In the *Jalkut Rubeni*, num. 1, it is taught, "circumcision saves from hell." In the *Medrasch Tillim*, fol. 7, col. 2, it is said, "God swore to Abraham, that no one who was circumcised should be sent to hell." In the book *Akedath Jizehak*, fol. 54, col. 2, it is taught that "Abraham sits before the gate of hell, and does not allow that any circumcised Israelite should enter there."⁹⁵

So the Roman Catholic view of baptism and the early Jewish view of circumcision are exactly the same. However, we can use the arguments Paul made against the saving power of circumcision against the very same issue regarding baptism. Paul clearly shows that circumcision is of the heart. The act itself does not guarantee salvation. By the same argument, baptism is a symbol of the spiritual regeneration accomplished by the Holy Spirit; the act itself is not an actual cleansing of the soul. Mounce sums up clearly, "Those who consider baptism as the New Testament equivalent of circumcision should take note that the comparison undermines, rather than supports, any doctrine of baptismal regeneration. If circumcision by itself was powerless to alter a person's relationship to God, the same would be true of its counterpart baptism."⁹⁶

The second aspect is the difference between the Catholic and the Protestant view of justification, specifically the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner through faith. The Roman Catholic view states that when God looks at the sinner, unless he finds true righteousness within the sinner, he cannot be justified. So, in a certain sense, before a Roman Catholic can be justified, he must first be sanctified. Protestantism teaches just the reverse: before a person can even begin to be sanctified, he must first be justified.⁹⁷ Therefore, when a Catholic puts their faith in Jesus Christ, that alone is not enough to save the person. A person must also do works of penance in order to fully accomplish his righteousness before God. However, Paul specifically states in Romans 3:20 that no one will be justified before God by doing works of the law. The formula is not faith plus

⁹⁴ Enns, P. P. 1989. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press. p. 363.

⁹⁵ Hodge, *Romans*, p. 63.

⁹⁶ Mounce, *Romans*, p. 124.

⁹⁷ Sproul, *Romans*, p. 84.

works, but faith alone. Paul has spent the better part of chapters 2, 3, and 4 in explaining this!

Another distinction that is also crucial in understanding the differences between Catholics and Protestants in the justification issue is the difference between two words, “imputed” and “infused.” To impute something is to transfer to someone’s account. To infuse is to pour in. Both Rome and Protestantism believe that there is no justification apart from the work of Christ. However, the difference hinges on how the righteousness of Christ becomes ours. How is the objective work of Christ subjectively appropriated? Protestant Evangelicalism teaches that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to any believer by a Divine declaration, so that God counts us righteous. This is what Paul has been talking about in Chapters 3 and 4. The Roman Catholic view is that, in baptism, the grace of justification is infused into the soul. Sproul clarifies that this is not a clear cut statement, but the tendency is to think of grace in quantitative terms, as something that can be added to or lost, augmented or diminished. They speak of “losing grace” or “adding grace” or “increasing grace” to the soul. As that added measure of grace is infused into the soul, there is a greater opportunity, a greater strength, a greater power, to actually become righteous. This is why the Roman Catholic Church believes that the commission of mortal sin destroys salvation, and a person must start over again, as it were, through the sacrament of penance.⁹⁸ In fact, many evangelicals believe this view of grace to some extent. However, according to the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, this view of grace is nowhere to be found. The word used in the letter and translated “to count” is the word impute, not infuse. Justification is an either/or deal. God does it, or He doesn’t.

This brief discussion touches on two differences between Roman Catholics who take their doctrine from an undefined “sacred tradition” and an infallible pope, while Protestants take their view of these issues from the Word of God. While it is not quite as simple as that, it becomes obvious in comparing these views that there is a vast difference between Catholic and Protestant doctrines in several critical areas.

⁹⁸ Sproul, *Romans*, p. 85.

Lesson 14: Romans 4:13 – 25

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” ²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Paul continues his exposition of the witness of Abraham, explaining the fact that the righteousness that was credited to Abraham was not due to the law, but to Abraham’s faith in God. Paul emphasizes again, ¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. God promised to Abraham that He would be the father of many nations. However, this promise did not come about through “law.” One of the things that the English translation doesn’t show is the fact that the word “law” in verses 13 – 16 does not have the definite article “the” in the original Greek language. Many commentators indicate that the law Paul was referring to was not specifically the Mosaic Law, but “law” in general. In other words, it is not through any kind of law, which stipulates a list of requirements, that Abraham received the promise. It was not what he

did, but in whom he believed. Barnhouse states, “When Abraham was justified before God, he had no law and he had no ceremony or sign; he had nothing but faith. This shows us very clearly, then, that faith does not depend on anything other than the pure and unadulterated grace of God.”⁹⁹ This is a summary of what Paul has been talking about for the past 20 or so verses. He wants to make sure we understand, as well as his original Jewish hearers, that God counted Abraham’s faith as righteousness, not his works. Hebrews 11 makes this even more clear: ⁸ *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.* ⁹ *By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.* ¹⁰ *For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.* ¹¹ *By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.* ¹² *Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.* There are two points to remember here: one is negative, in that the promise did not come through the obedience of the law, or of law in general; and the other one is positive, in that the promise did come by the righteousness of faith in God.

Paul continues, ¹⁴ *For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.* In other words, if the promise was meant for those that obeyed the law, then no one would receive the promise. Paul has already stated that no one would be declared righteous by observing the law (Romans 3:20). God’s promise would have been in vain, and this does not reflect the character of God. In addition, if the promise was only obtained by the obedience of the law, then faith would be useless. No one would need faith if the promise could be obtained through the obedience of the law. This is strong language. Paul makes a similar statement in Galatians 2, *for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.* Again in Galatians 3:21, *For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.* D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones states, “The law means failure. Therefore, if the promise had been made through the medium of the Law, what God was giving, as it were, with His right hand, He would have been taking back with His left hand. There would have been no promise at all; it would have no value whatsoever.”¹⁰⁰

What is the promise that Paul speaks of? Genesis 12 starts out, ¹ *Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.* ² *And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.* ³ *I will bless those who bless you,*

⁹⁹ Barnhouse, D. G. (1954). *God’s Remedy : Romans 3:21-4:1-25*. Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 277.

¹⁰⁰ Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Romans: Exposition of Chapters 3:30 – 4:25, Atonement and Justification*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, p. 194.

and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God reaffirms his promise in Genesis 15, and in Genesis 22:16 – 18. The promise is more than the Promised Land. We are told that Abraham would be the heir of the whole world. We need to certainly remember that this promise by God was made over 400 years before the Law of Moses was given to the Israelites. So we need to note two points: one is that the promise to Abraham included the whole world, not just Canaan, and two, that the promise and Abraham’s obedience occurred over 400 years before the Law. As Genesis 15:6 states, *And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

Paul completes his thought with this very importance sentence: ⁵ *For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.* Paul states, as we have said many times, that no one will be justified (set right with God) by the law. Paul makes this statement clearly in both Romans and Galatians. However, now, Paul is not just saying that no one will be justified by the law, but that indeed the law actually brings the wrath of God. The law can do nothing but condemn; it cannot make one righteous. Quoting Lloyd-Jones again from his fine work on Romans, He states, “what the Law does is to produce wrath; and wrath is the very opposite of the promise of the blessing. Wrath means punishment. The promise offers an inheritance, and life, and joy, and glory. Wrath means punishment and suffering. So Paul argues that to speak of a promise being made through the medium of the Law is a contradiction in terms, because law always works wrath.” ¹⁰¹

Paul continues, ¹⁶ *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,* ¹⁷ *as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.* Paul states that the law can’t do anything but condemn, so that is why it depends on faith. Why? There are three reasons that it depends on faith. One is so that the promise may rest on grace. Law points to deeds, actions, and conduct. It is what we do. However, because our actions will never be enough, we would never gain the promise, and neither would Abraham. Therefore, the promise to Abraham, and to us, rests on God’s unmerited favor to those who cannot receive the promise through what we do.

The second reason it depends on faith is that the promise can only be guaranteed through faith, and not by works. If the promise was guaranteed through what we do, to our obedience of the law, then it would be no guarantee at all. Anyone who is saved by the standard of works can never know if they are truly saved or not. Catholics are in this position. They never truly know if they are saved or now because theirs is ultimately a

¹⁰¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, p. 194.

works-based salvation. Where do we draw the line? How much is enough? Is one lie too much, or how about two? How can we make up for the one lie? Can we do something to counter that one lie? These questions cannot be answered because there is no answer, except to say that any infraction of the law is too much. Then there would be no guarantee of salvation. We would go through life working harder and harder to obtain a right-standing with God never knowing if we got there or not. That is why it depends on faith. Salvation is certain not because of anything we can do, but because God is faithful and does not waver in his promises. Christ's perfect life and work on the cross is all-sufficient. Nothing can be added to it, and it was done once and completed. Consequently, our faith (trust) is in the completed and perfect atoning work of Christ, and never in ourselves.

The third reason that it depends on faith is so that all nations can be made recipients of the promise, not just those who are of the Law. In other words, Paul clearly describes that Jews and Gentiles are offspring of Abraham in accordance with the faith that Abraham had, as well as that same faith that the Gentiles and later Jews have. Abraham is the father of all people who share the same faith in God, not only those who are actual descendants physically, but also those who are descendants of Abraham spiritually. Paul will show later in Romans how Israel is not simply those who have been circumcised and are descendants of Abraham, but Israel are those who are composed of all who are spiritual offspring of Abraham.

Abraham had faith that God would fulfill His promise. God gave life to a "dead" man Abraham, who could not have children, and He gave life to the barren Sarah who could not have children. Yet through their faith, God gave them physical offspring, and also gave them spiritual offspring through the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ. Additionally, and this may be stretching the meaning of this verse a bit but it still applies, God gives life to the dead and creates something out of nothing in Christians as well. Ephesians 2:1 states, *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked....* Ephesians 2:4 – 5 states, *⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved....* You see, God gives life to those who are dead in sin, and creates a new nature out of nothing. He gives us faith from nothing to receive His grace. We can be saved just as God gave life to Abraham and Sarah. He creates life from that which is dead.

Paul then shows us the nature of Abraham's faith. ¹⁸ *In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."* ¹⁹ *He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.* ²⁰ *No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,* ²¹ *fully*

convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² *That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”* There are several characteristics of Abraham’s faith in this section that we need to examine and learn how to apply them to our own life.

One characteristic is that he had hope and faith beyond all appearances. God promised Abraham that he would have offspring, even though he and Sarah were both beyond the years of childbearing. Yet Abraham took God at His word and trusted that somehow in God’s divine power and providence that God was faithful and would fulfill His promises to them. Sure, Abraham grew impatient, and at times tried to take matters into his own hands. Yet, despite his shortcomings, his faith never wavered.

A second characteristic is that Abraham relied solely on the word of God. God told him that these things would happen, and that was enough for Abraham. Lloyd-Jones calls this the “bare Word of God and on nothing else whatsoever.” And later he states, “There was nothing but the bare word of God. That is always true of faith, and it is one of its most marvelous characteristics. There is always this naked element of faith. It does not ask for proofs, it does not seek them; in a sense it does not need them. Faith is content with the bare Word of God, because He is God.”¹⁰² This is the same faith that trusts in God for salvation today. The Bible states that whoever believes in Christ will be saved. The Bible tells us that it is through the work of Christ that we can be saved, and it is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we can be assured of our salvation. We know this through the “bare Word of God” and nothing else. It is not a blind faith, but a trust in the object of our faith, which is God alone.

A third characteristic is that Abraham’s faith grew strong as he gave glory to God. Note the order of this: Abraham gave glory to God, he worshipped God, and as a consequence, his faith grew stronger. Worship makes faith stronger. Why? Because when we worship God for who He is, and when we give Him glory as He deserves, then we understand God for who He is and this strengthens our faith. Knowing God and His attributes, knowing the character of God through proper worship, strengthens our faith because we have a strong appreciation of the object of our faith. Abraham’s faith was directed towards God, and not towards himself. God is faithful; God cannot lie; and God is all-powerful. God is sovereign. If we understand and see God as He is, then our faith will inevitably grow.

Finally, Paul begins to bridge the gap between Abraham and his Roman readers, and subsequently to us as well. ²³ *But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone,* ²⁴ *but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,* ²⁵ *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* Verses 24 and 25 are one of those wonderful summaries of the Christian gospel. We have the basic Christian gospel in its most compact form.

¹⁰² Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, p. 211.

Lloyd-Jones quotes Martin Luther saying “In these verses the whole of Christianity is comprehended.”¹⁰³ Let’s break these verses down and examine the different components of the gospel message.

One is that the gospel involves faith in God. Paul states, *It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.* We must believe in Him who raised Jesus. We must have faith in God. We must desire to glorify God, to please God, and to glorify his great and holy name. Much of what passes as evangelicalism today never mentions the name of God, let alone glorifies Him or exalts Him as God. Much of what we hear in churches today centers around us, around man. It is all about what I bring, what I say, what I do, and how God loves me. Rarely do we hear a sermon about the great and wonderful works of God, or about His attributes, or about His character. Rarely do we sing a song that focuses completely on the nature or character of God, without mentioning what God has done for me, or what I bring to God. Faith in God glorifies God and God alone. Remember, what Jesus has done on the cross was designed to reconcile us back to God. Everything starts with God and ends with God.

Secondly, again look at what Paul states. *It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.* Many people believe in God. Jews believe in God; Muslims believe in Allah, which is Arabic for God. However, believing in God is not enough. We must believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. We hear a lot about the cross in Christian circles, and we should. However, it seems we hear little about the resurrection. The resurrection is one of principal importance. The resurrection of Christ defines Christianity. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15, ¹⁴ *And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.* ¹⁵ *We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.* You see the point? If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our faith is in vain and we should go about our business and live our lives in our sins. However, we are to believe in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. We may believe in God, but to be truly saved, we must believe that He raised Christ from the dead.

In verse 25, Paul specifies some things about Christ that we must also take onto account if we are to be justified as Christians and of the same faith as Abraham. He states about Christ, ²⁵ *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* Jesus was not put to death, or dragged off to the cross against His will. He was delivered up. By whom? By God. God delivered Jesus up for our sins. This is the love of God for His people. God sacrificed His own so that sinners could be reconciled back to Him. Paul later in Romans 8 states this again, ³² *He who did not spare his own*

¹⁰³ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, p. 236.

Son but gave him up for us all.... This word gave him up is the same as delivered up. God gave up His son in order that sinners might be set right with God.

Jesus was delivered up FOR our trespasses. For means “on account of.” It was because of our sins, our trespasses, that God delivered up His son. Paul is narrowing the definition of the gospel. First it started with God. Then he narrowed it a bit more when discussing what God did in the resurrection of Christ. Now he narrows it even more by stating that God delivered up Jesus for the sins of His people. The word “trespasses” means disobedience, violations of the law, sins against God. God has taken all of our sins and put them on Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul explains this: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* God laid all of the sins of His people on Christ in order to secure salvation for sinners. Do we truly believe that Jesus took the sins of sinners and paid for them with His life? This is part of the gospel.

Paul finally states, Christ was *raised for our justification*. But I thought Paul elsewhere stated that Christ’s death on the cross secured our justification? We need to take Paul’s statement as a whole: ²⁵ *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*. The cross and the resurrection cannot be separated, for they are all part of the same plan. You can’t have one without the other. Paul wants us to remember that Christ’s death and resurrection go hand-in-hand. Lloyd-Jones states, “If God had not raised Him from the grave we might draw the conclusion that our Lord was not able to bear the punishment of the guilt of our sins, that it was too much for Him, and that His death was the end. But He was raised from the dead; and in raising Him up God was proclaiming that His Son had completed the work, that full expiation has been made, that He is propitiated and completely satisfied.”¹⁰⁴ We cannot have Christ’s death without the resurrection. Christ’s death on the cross secured justification for us, and His resurrection demonstrated that it was completed.

We as Christians must always remember the example of Abraham. He took God at His word, and acted on it. His faith was solid, despite what he knew about himself. Furthermore, Abraham did not look at himself as the one who secured the promise, but to God and God alone. He worshipped God and consequently his faith grew stronger. It was not works or anything that Abraham did, but it was the trust that he had in God that justified him before God. In fact, it was his faith, despite everything else he did to the contrary, that secured his justification. Abraham messed up plenty of times afterwards, but it was not works that secured justification in the first place, and it was not works that kept his justification afterwards. It was God and God alone that justified Abraham, and it was God and God alone that kept Abraham. We can rest assured in the promise of God because it is God who ultimately is faithful, and keeps His promises.

¹⁰⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, p. 244.

Lesson 15: Romans 5:1 – 11

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Therefore is one of those key words in Scripture that should cause the reader or student to pause, and look back on what the writer, in this case Paul, has been discussing. The word usually causes us to look backwards in the text, because the consequences or results of what has already been written is about to be explained. Throughout chapters 3 and 4, Paul has been explaining how no one will be justified by the works of the law, but only through faith will any man be reconciled and set right before a holy God. In Chapter 4, Paul brought forth the ultimate Jewish witness for his case, the father of the Jews, Abraham. Paul demonstrated through Abraham that all people, both Jews and Gentiles, would be justified by faith, just as Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness by God.

Now Paul assumes justification by faith, since he has taken great pains to prove it through logic and Scriptures. *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Notice that he states that justification is a past event. Justification is not an ongoing process, or something we continue to have to have done by God over time. It is an event that happens by faith. Abraham was at once

and for all justified by faith, and he didn't have to be "rejustified" when he slept with Hagar. Genesis 15:6 states, *And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.* All of the verbs in this sentence are past tense. It does not say, and neither does Paul, that God continued to count it to him as righteousness. It was an event accomplished based on the faith of Abraham.

After justification, Paul states that we now have peace with God. This is almost an "if-then" statement. If we have been justified, then we have peace with God. What is peace with God? It is not the peace of God. It is not the subjective comfort or assurance we get from the Holy Spirit through our trials or circumstances, as Paul indicates in Philippians 4: *The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Paul in Romans 5 did not write the peace of God; he wrote peace WITH God. What is peace with God? Paul is not talking here about inner peace, peace of mind, or tranquility. In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul has written how we are enemies with God. We are really at war with God as sinners without justification and reconciliation. However, for those who God justifies, we now have peace with God. We are no longer at war. The conflict has ceased, and the fighting has stopped. We are no longer enemies. We are no longer under the condemnation of God's wrath.

How do we have this peace with God? Only through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 14:27, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.* The world thinks of peace as inner satisfaction, peace of mind, or everyone getting along. However, Jesus gives us peace not as the world knows or sees. Once our enmity with God is gone, we have a peace that is not of this world. This can only be accomplished through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul continues, ² *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* First, justification can only be accomplished "through him," in other words, through Christ. Through justification we have peace with God, and we are no longer at war. However, through Christ we have also obtained one other thing: access. Access how? By faith. Access to what? This grace in which we now stand. Let's look at grace first. What is "this grace in which we now stand?" We have to look back at verse 1. This is our justification. Access means the right or freedom to enter, or introduction. So in a sense this verse is saying that through faith in Christ, we have obtained, we have been granted, the freedom and right to enter into this right standing with God. James Boice states, "By the mercy of God we have been brought into the grace of justification, and that is the grace in which we now have the privilege to stand. Before, we were standing without, as children of wrath. Now we are standing within, not as enemies or even as pardoned criminals, but as

sons and daughters of Almighty God.”¹⁰⁵ What’s more, we now stand in this grace. It is not tenuous, nor do we stand on shaky ground. Justification is by faith in the promises of God, and God is faithful in His promises. We could not be standing on more solid ground!

Paul states that we now, because of this access an justification, *we rejoice in hope of the glory of God*. Because we have been justified by God, and have peace now with God, and have access into this grace all through Jesus Christ, we can now rejoice as we hope in the glory of God. “Hope of glory of God” is typical of Paul in referring to the final destiny of believers. Justification ultimately leads to glorification.

I want to pause right here and sum up these two verses because they teach us some very key points about justification, and where Paul is going with this chapter and the next several chapters.

¹⁰⁵ Boice, J. M. (1991-c1995). *Romans, vol 2: The Reign of Grace*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, p 514.

Lesson 16: Romans 5:12 – 21

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lesson 17: Romans 6:1 – 14

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Lesson 18: Romans 6:15 – 23

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²⁰ When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
