

ROMANS

by Robert C. Walton

ROMANS - LESSON I

Introduction

The book of Romans is widely considered to be the greatest of the Apostle Paul's epistles. It contains the most complete exposition of the doctrine of salvation in the New Testament. If we see the book as no more than a doctrinal treatise, however, we are doing it an injustice. As with all of the books of Scripture, it was written within a particular context in order to accomplish a particular purpose. An understanding of that context will allow us to interpret and apply Paul's great letter with greater faithfulness.

DATE AND PLACE OF ORIGIN

Most scholars agree that the book of Romans was written by Paul from the city of Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey, early in the year 57 A.D. Paul not only mentions his impending journey to Jerusalem to deliver money collected for famine relief in Romans 15:25-26, but also speaks of Gaius, a leading Corinthian Christian, as his host (16:23 cf. I Corinthians 1:14), and names Phoebe, a Christian woman from Corinth's seaport of Cenchrea, as the bearer of the letter (16:1). By this time Paul knew that his work in Asia Minor and Greece was complete. His eyes now turned to the West. He had a vision for bringing the Gospel to the farthest outpost of the Roman Empire on the coast of Spain and anticipated passing through Rome on his way. It is uncertain whether or not Paul ever reached Spain, but we do know that his arrival in Rome occurred in a slightly different manner than what he had in mind - as a prisoner preparing to stand trial before Nero.

THE CHURCH IN ROME

By the time Paul wrote the book of Romans, the church in Rome was well established. We have no concrete evidence as to how it got started, though little credence can be given to the Catholic claim that it was founded by Peter (surely Paul would have mentioned him in chapter 16 if he had been there!). When Claudius drove the Jews from Rome some eight years prior to the writing of Romans, the Roman historian Suetonius says that it was as a result of "a disturbance instigated by Chrestus" - a probable reference to an outbreak of violence in the sizeable Jewish community in Rome over the preaching of the Gospel by Jewish Christians. The most logical explanation is that the church was founded by ordinary Christians who returned to Rome (perhaps even as early as the Pentecost described in Acts 2) or traveled there from other parts of the Empire. The church was clearly made up of a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, and the conflict between these two groups, which dominated the first forty years of the history of the Church, provides much of the context out of which the book was written (e.g., the universality of sin and guilt in chapters 1-3, the status of Abraham as the father of all who believe in chapter 4, Adam and Christ as representative heads of all men and all Christians irrespective of race in chapter 5, the discussion of the place of the law in chapters 6-7, the clarification of the place of Israel in God's plan in chapters 9-11, and the dispute over questionable practices in chapter 14). By the time of Paul's death about ten years later, the church in Rome was the empire's largest. No one needs to be reminded that it went on to become the most influential church in Christendom.

PURPOSE

If the church in Rome was so well-established, why did Paul need to write such a thorough explanation of the Gospel in his letter to them? One possible explanation is that he wanted to defend the legitimacy of his apostleship, which was questioned, especially by segments of the Jewish Christian community. We find in Romans nothing near the attention to this issue that occurs in II Corinthians, however, so it is unlikely that this can be considered the primary cause. Another possibility is that Paul intended to make Rome the base for his operations in the West much as Antioch had been for his work in Asia, and thus he wanted to elicit the support of the Roman Christians by assuring them that the Gospel he preached was fully orthodox. While this is certainly possible, it is out of character for Paul, who typically demanded nothing of the churches to whom he ministered. A far more likely explanation is that Paul entertained major reservations about the outcome of his impending trip to Jerusalem (with good reason, as it turned out). If Paul could not be sure that he would live long enough to make his projected trip to Spain, it would be important for him to leave a thorough account of the content of his Gospel so that it could be spread by others after his death - and who would be in a better position to do this than the Christians at Rome, from which and to which all roads led? Further support for this explanation can be found in the fact that different versions of the text were in circulation in the early history of the Church that omitted both the mention of the church at Rome in chapter one and the specific greetings at the end of the book. In other words, the letter was intended to fulfill a specific purpose for the Roman Christians, but was also sent as a circular letter to other churches to ensure that a full account of Paul's Gospel was preserved in the event of his untimely demise. Thus we have a letter that is both general and specific; while it addresses itself to specific problems in the church at Rome, it also serves as an explanation of the Gospel for the sake of the Church at large. In our study of the book, we will be looking at one chapter each week.

STRUCTURE

Prologue (1:1-17)

The Good News of Salvation by Faith (1:18-8:39)

 Sin (1:18-3:20)

 Justification (3:21-5:21)

 Sanctification (6:1-8:39)

The Recipients of Salvation by Faith (9:1-11:36)

The Outworking of Salvation by Faith (12:1-15:13)

Epilogue (15:14-16:27)

ROMANS - LESSON II

Romans 1

The first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans contains his salutation, his statement of the theme of the book, and the beginning of his argument in which he demonstrates the need of all men for the salvation accomplished by God in Jesus Christ.

SALUTATION (1:1-15)

This salutation is the longest found in any of Paul's letters. This may be because he had never been to Rome and felt the need to go to greater lengths of formal etiquette, or simply that he wanted to be sure his readers knew how much he cared about them and prayed for them.

- Verse 1 - He introduces himself in a way that communicates both his humility and his authority.
- Verses 2-3 - He then speaks of the One to whom his Gospel points - Jesus, the King of the Jews whose coming had been predicted by the Jewish prophets.
- Verse 4 - The Resurrection is here said to confirm Jesus' identity as the Son of God; here the Father demonstrated with great power His acceptance of the saving work of Christ on the Cross.
- Verses 5-6 - Jesus is not only the King of the Jews. He is also the Lord of those who have been called and who belong to Him among all nations. In this careful balance we see the first hint of the conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the church at Rome and Paul's intention to address it.
- Verse 7 - The phrase "in Rome" here is omitted from the circular version of the letter. The references to grace and peace involve not only cardinal Christian virtues and important gifts that God gives to His people through His work of salvation, but were also the common forms of greeting for Gentiles (*χαίρειν* - *chairein*) and Jews (*שלום* - *shalom*). Thus we again find the acknowledgment of both the Jewish and Gentile Christians in the congregation.
- Verses 8-10 - As in most of his letters, Paul then goes on to praise the Romans for their faith and assure them that he prays for them regularly (he clearly cared for churches all over the world, not just those he had founded). He also expresses his long-standing desire to visit them, which he hopes to fulfill following his journey to Jerusalem (cf. 15:23-29).
- Verses 11-13 - His motives for wanting to come to Rome include a desire to build up the church and receive encouragement from them, while at the same time carrying on the work of evangelism that God has entrusted to him. Perhaps he hoped, as had been the case at Ephesus, to plant churches in the surrounding region while ministering in the chief city of that region.
- Verses 14-15 - He also speaks of himself as one who has a debt to pay - preaching the Gospel is not something for which others owe him thanks, but an obligation apart from which his life would have no meaning. Paul cannot imagine a life that did not include preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. Again note the universality of the intended scope of Paul's preaching.

THEME (1:16-17)

- Verse 16 - The fundamental purpose of the book of Romans is to explain the Gospel to which Paul has devoted his life. That Gospel and nothing else has the power to save - not human reasoning or intelligence, not persuasive rhetoric, not emotional manipulation. The statement that the Gospel is to go to the Jew first follows Jesus' command in Acts 1:8 and is also typical of Paul's practice; despite the fact that he was the Apostle to the Gentiles, he always visited the synagogue first in every town where he ministered (if one existed; Philippi, for example, had none).
- Verse 17 - Paul draws his theme from Habakkuk 2:4. Salvation is good news because it is by faith alone, not by human effort of any kind. Only by trusting Christ can a person become right with God. Note that this verse, along with Galatians 3:11, played a central role in the conversion of Martin Luther, and thus in the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Luther had struggled mightily in the monastery because he could never be sure that he had confessed and done penance for all his sins. When, while studying for the classes he was teaching at the University of Wittenberg, he meditated upon these verses and saw their significance, he turned to Christ in faith and God removed his fears and gave him assurance of salvation by grace alone.

SIN - IGNORANCE IS NO EXCUSE (1:18-32)

Having announced his theme, Paul does not turn immediately to a discussion of God's plan of salvation. Instead, he spends several chapters expounding on the subject of human depravity - in effect, he becomes the prosecuting attorney in a court case in which God is the judge and all the world is on trial. Such an approach is necessary because no one can understand the Gospel unless he first sees that he stands condemned before God. The need for the Gospel must precede the presentation of the Gospel. The first segment of humanity brought before the bar of God's judgment is the out-and-out pagans - those who make no pretence of true religion.

- Verses 18-20 - The first point Paul makes is that there is no such thing as ignorance of the truth. What masquerades as ignorance is really willful denial and suppression of the truth. While Paul does not claim that general revelation is sufficient to save anyone, he makes it clear that it is sufficient to condemn. The created universe bears clear witness to the power and divine nature of God, and those who say otherwise are accountable for their rejection of the creation's witness to the Creator.

Note that these verses answer the question that is so often asked about the eternal destiny of those who have never heard the name of Christ. How can God condemn to hell someone who knows nothing of Jesus or His saving work? Paul's answer is that, though the light they have received is limited in nature, they have nonetheless rejected that light and thus have no excuse before the throne of God.
- Verses 21-23 - Paul then speaks of the process by which all people have rejected the knowledge of God that He has built into His universe. The first symptom is ingratitude - refusing to acknowledge God as the source of all blessing. This leads to glorification of man, placing human reason above divine revelation, but does not stop there. Without the God in whose image man is created, there remains nothing to distinguish man from beast, thus the man who begins worshiping himself soon worships beasts as well. The rejection of the true

God does not produce a religionless society, but rather an idolatrous one - whether the idols be forces of nature or creations of man's own hands. In our own day, the deification of man takes forms as diverse as scientism and New Age thinking, while the worship of beasts and human creations varies from extreme forms of animal rights activism to materialism.

- Verses 24-25 - We should also note that an inevitable outcome of the deification of man is sexual impurity. In Paul's day it revealed itself in cult prostitution; in our own day, its primary manifestation is hedonism - the seeking of pleasure for its own sake, irrespective of any moral strictures.
- Verses 26-27 - Those who would compartmentalize religion into a small and insignificant portion of human life are fooling themselves. A person's religion is the basis from which he acts and chooses, and thus has an impact on all he does. Thus the perversion of religion cannot fail to lead to the perversion of society as well. Cult prostitution in Paul's day produced a scandalously immoral society whose casual attitude toward sex may have been even worse than our own (if such a thing can be imagined). Paul pictures this general decline as God's judgment, attained not by direct intervention on His part, but by simply permitting the natural consequences of sinful behavior to run their course in the destruction of human society; note the repeated use in this section of the phrase "God gave them up." The homosexuality and lesbianism (the only mention of female homosexuality in Scripture) referred to here are clearly worthy of God's judgment, but we should note that here they are pictured as *being* God's judgment; a society that worships the creature rather than the Creator will soon go beyond the worship of nature to the *contradiction* of nature, engaging in behavior that even animals do not stoop to practice, whatever apologists for homosexuality might affirm. The growth of the practice and acceptance of homosexuality in the world at large and in American society in particular thus not only invites God's judgment, but is an indication that such judgment is falling upon us.
- Verses 28-32 - The closing verses of the chapter picture this decline, not only in terms of sexual perversion, but also in terms of the total destruction of relationships that comes from a fundamentally selfish attitude toward life. The epitome of all of this, to Paul's way of thinking, is that people not only do what they inwardly know to be wrong, but they openly encourage others to do the same and work to generate an environment in which such behavior receives positive approval - how like our own day! We should also note that the list of wicked forms of behavior in verses 29-31 equates such everyday sins as covetousness, envy, deceit, gossip, boasting, and even disobedience to parents with the perversions on which the earlier paragraphs focused.

ROMANS - LESSON III

Romans 2

The second chapter of Romans continues Paul's "court case" against all mankind. While in chapter one he has addressed the utter pagan and shown him to be accountable before God and without excuse for his sin, he now turns to the supposedly moral, whether religious or otherwise, and indicts them before the court of the Almighty.

THE SIN OF THE MORAL MAN (2:1-16)

A long-standing dispute about the early chapters of Romans centers on whether Paul is addressing three groups of people or merely two. Does he move directly from the pagan Gentile to the Jew, or does he first speak to a third group - the moral and high-minded among the pagans? Neither approach really does justice to Paul's argument in these verses. His explicit references to both Jews and Gentiles show he has neither one group nor the other exclusively in mind. Instead, these verses serve as a transition between his consideration of the overt pagans of chapter one and his condemnation of the observant Jew in the latter portion of chapter two. Here, he addresses all those who cheerfully concur with the indictment of the first chapter.

- Verses 1-4 - Paul is turning now to those who respond to the first chapter with approving applause. His charge to them is that they are hypocrites - that they practice, albeit in more subtle forms, those same things they condemn when practiced more overtly by others. Paul sees this as the crassest type of ingratitude. If the pagans of chapter one are guilty of ingratitude when they fail to acknowledge their Creator but instead worship the creature, the moral man is ungrateful because he receives the blessings of God and sees them as marks of favor, but associates little or no obligation with these blessings. God's common grace is intended to produce repentance, not complacency.
- Verse 5 - Here Paul emphasizes accountability. The complacent moralizer piles up greater and greater judgment for himself each day he fails to acknowledge his accountability to God.
- Verses 6-8 - These verses at first glance seem to contradict the emphasis on salvation by faith alone that we saw in chapter one. Clearly Paul is not here saying that a person will attain salvation or be denied it on the basis of his works. Instead, he argues that the behavior described here, because it reveals the condition of the heart and the presence or absence of faith, corresponds to the judgment that God will unveil.
- Verses 9-11 - This is true whether the man is religious (Jew) or irreligious (Gentile); Paul emphasizes their equal status before God's judgment seat. In the same way that many Jews in Paul's day saw the mere profession of the name "Jew" as involving possession of spiritual "high ground," so many today invoke the name of Christian as if that alone put them above the normal run of humanity. But such profession means nothing if not accompanied by a life of obedience.
- Verses 12-13 - Paul uses the concluding paragraph of this section to strip away the excuses of the moralizer, much as he had done to the blatant pagan in chapter one. He begins by noting that judgment follows sin, no matter what the state of a person's understanding may be. If ignorance of the law is no excuse, neither is knowledge of the law in itself sufficient apart from obedience. Verse 13 uses for the first time one of the key words in the book of Romans - the word "justification" (NIV "declared righteous"). Interestingly enough, he uses

the word here in a way very similar to that of James in James 2, which has too often been mistakenly contrasted with Paul's teaching on the subject. He notes that obedience to the law declares a person to be righteous, not in the sense that it saves a person, but in the sense that it shows a person to be in a right relationship with God.

- Verses 14-16 - He then eliminates the excuses of all moralists by introducing the concept of the conscience. In the same way that the witness of Creation renders even the pagan guilty before God for his rejection of natural revelation, so the witness of the conscience demonstrates that all are sinners because everyone at one time or another is accused of wrongdoing by his own conscience, even though that conscience is in itself weakened and perverted by sin. He also notes that the conscience, while valuable to demonstrate the guilt of all men before God, is no more able to save than natural revelation, because it "excuses" as often as it "accuses" - the conscience of sinful man is capable of incredible rationalization in support of whatever a person may want to do, and thus can never be a reliable sole guide for human behavior. "Jiminy Cricket morality" simply does not work - "Always let your conscience be your guide" fails, not only because the conscience of man is fallible and sometimes excuses blatant sin, but also because everyone at times violates his conscience, thus condemning himself in the process.

THE SIN OF THE OBSERVANT JEW (2:17-29)

Paul now turns to the observant Jew, who is proud of his heritage and is convinced that he enjoys the favor of God simply because he is a Jew.

- Verses 17-20 - Here Paul, in language reminiscent of Jesus' criticism of the religious leaders of His day, lists the ways in which the Jews typically distinguished themselves from the Gentiles and defined their superiority as God's Chosen People. Note that Paul, in Philippians 3:5-6, speaks of himself prior to his conversion in similar terms.
- Verses 21-24 - Paul echoes the ideas presented by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:17-48), where Jesus says that the very way in which Jews expound the law encourages both them and others to violate it. The law, as Paul makes clear elsewhere, is of value precisely because it opens a person's eyes to his own sin. One who seeks in the law the ground of his own justification is both perverting the law and fooling himself in the most dangerous way possible. Paul also notes that the subtlety of such hypocrisy fools no one and causes God's name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (we need little encouragement to think of examples of those in our own day who, because of failure to practice what they preach, have brought God's name into disrepute).
- Verses 25-29 - Paul closes this chapter by addressing the issue of circumcision, which was to the Jew the mark that not only set him apart from all others, but also served as a badge of his membership in the People of God. Paul punctures this argument rather quickly, reminding them that the prophets in the Old Testament had spoken of the need for circumcision of the heart, apart from which physical circumcision meant nothing (cf. Jeremiah 9:25-26). [It is interesting to note that Calvin applies these verses to the issue of baptism, insisting that it is folly to suggest that the mere rite of baptism includes a person in the people of God - and he was a paedobaptist!]

ROMANS - LESSON IV

Romans 3

In the third chapter of Romans, Paul concludes his argument in which he seeks to establish the universal sin of mankind for which all must stand condemned before God. The early verses of the chapter bring his assault on Jewish pride to a close, after which he concludes his argument on sin, then turns to God's solution to man's problem - the justification of the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ.

THE JEW STANDS CONDEMNED (3:1-8)

- Verses 1-4 - After the lambasting that Paul gives to Jews at the end of chapter two, some may think that he had rejected his heritage. It seems that being a Jew meant nothing anymore. What good was it, then, to be part of God's Chosen People? Paul's response is that being a Jew has great advantages because they had the privilege of being the recipients of God's Word. The fact that many rejected what they had received is beside the point, and does nothing to undermine the greatness of the privilege. [A close analogy might be drawn between Paul's argument here and the status of those who have been raised in a Christian home. While being raised in a Christian family saves no one, it is an inexpressible privilege, an advantage that many lack, though many also turn away from that advantage.]
- Verses 5-8 - Paul moves on next to argue that even the rejection of the law by many Jews serves to demonstrate the righteousness of God because it shows that He is just in passing judgment on the sinfulness of man. At this point he runs into an argument from his readers, however. Some may respond that sin that serves to demonstrate the glory of God more clearly is not sin at all, but merely the means to a righteous end. How can God punish people for something that brings Him glory? Is not such a thing unfair? Paul responds to this argument, even though he clearly does not think much of anyone who would argue this way. He first notes that such an argument would completely eliminate the idea of God judging anyone, since everything in this world ultimately works to bring glory to the God who made it. Since the Bible makes it clear that God will indeed judge the world, such an argument must be false [this is an interesting twist of logic that shows Paul's rabbinical training - if an argument leads to a conclusion that is contrary to fact, the argument must be faulty]. He then refuses even to argue with the immoral notion that the end justifies the means; according to Paul, anyone who thinks so deserves what he gets! [Note, however, that he does respond to a more subtle version of the same argument in chapter six.]

ALL MANKIND GUILTY BEFORE GOD (3:9-20)

Paul is now ready to bring his argument about universal sinfulness to a close. In the same way that a prosecutor in a court of law saves his best shots for his concluding summary statement, so Paul has saved the clincher for last. Having demonstrated by incontrovertible logic that all are guilty before God, he now strings together a devastating series of quotations from the Old Testament to show that God has already reached the same conclusion. The quotations, taken from Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3, 5:9, 140:3, 10:7, Isaiah 59:7-8, and Psalm 36:1, present a powerful litany of man's rebellion against God. How, in the face of such a recital, can anyone claim to be an exception, or to be qualified to enjoy God's favor? Nor can his Jewish readers claim that these quotations speak

only of the Gentiles. The fact that most are from the Psalms means that they unquestionably refer to God's own people. Every mouth is thus silenced, and even the Jewish law is able only to condemn those who, though enjoying the privilege of living under its auspices, inevitably fall short of its demands.

This passage is at the heart of the doctrine of total depravity - the idea that every aspect of every man's being is corrupted by sin and thus deserving of the judgment of God. Scripture does not picture sin as a weakness of the will that can be overcome by moral living or rottenness of the flesh that can be defeated by an act of the will. Man's body, soul, and spirit, his mind, will, and emotions, are all corrupt and subject to condemnation.

GOD'S SOLUTION - JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (3:21-31)

If Paul had stopped there, man's situation would have been hopeless indeed. But Paul is not preaching judgment for its own sake. He brings the bad news only to show people their need to hear God's Good News - the Gospel. He now begins that lengthy exposition with which the major portion of the letter is concerned - God's solution to the sin problem provided in the work of Jesus on the Cross and obtained by faith in Him.

- Verse 21 - If the law cannot save, a means of salvation must be found apart from the law. But Paul wants his readers to understand that he is preaching nothing that contradicts God's previous revelation. In fact, he assures his readers that both the Law and the Prophets testify to God's plan to bring to man a righteousness he cannot possibly attain on his own.
- Verses 22-23 - Paul then reasserts the universal character of the salvation of which he speaks - universal not in the sense that all are saved, but universal in the sense that, as sin afflicts Jew and Gentile alike, so salvation by faith is offered to Jew and Gentile alike.
- Verses 24-26 - These verses are critical because Paul introduces three key words that form part of the fundamental vocabulary of the Gospel. One who understands these words has come a long way in his ability to comprehend the Good News of which Paul speaks. The three key words are *justification* (verses 24 and 26), *redemption* (verse 24), and *propitiation* [NIV "sacrifice of atonement"] (verse 25).

Justification means that one is declared to be righteous. It is a legal term and refers to acquittal, but communicates more than the usual sense of that term. One who is justified is not only publicly proclaimed to be innocent of a crime, but is also held up before others as being positively righteous. It involves not only the removal of a bad record, but also the inscribing of a good one. It is important to note that this term refers to a person's standing before God, not to his subjective condition. The distinction will become critical when Paul turns to the subject of sanctification in chapter six. In fact, it is the confusion between justification and sanctification in the minds of his readers that causes Paul to write chapter six. Here, however, Paul simply notes that justification is an act of free grace brought about by the sacrifice of Christ.

The second key word, redemption, is taken from the realm of commerce rather than law. The word refers to the purchase of a slave for the purpose of setting that slave at liberty. Paul has just pictured the whole world as enslaved to sin; he now pictures Christ as the Redeemer, the liberator who purchases the helpless slaves at the cost of His own life in order to set them free from their shackles.

The third word, propitiation, refers to the removal of wrath by placating the anger of the wrathful person. The term was in common use in the mythology of the Greeks and Romans (cf. the sacrifice of Iphigenia to placate the gods so that the Greeks could sail across the Aegean to attack Troy at the beginning of the Trojan War). The big difference between the pagan and Christian concepts, however, is that while man was responsible to placate the gods in pagan myth (and indeed, in all of man's self-made religions), the gracious God of the Bible propitiates Himself. He alone is the one capable of removing His own wrath, and He graciously has acted to do so through the sacrifice of His only Son. [NOTE: in verse 25, the phrase "through faith in his blood" is better rendered with a comma after "faith"; our faith is not in the blood of Christ, it is in the Person of Christ; propitiation is said by Paul to be received by faith and accomplished by blood; the ESV translates this much more clearly.] The remarkable conclusion to all of this is that God is able to demonstrate Himself to be unimaginably gracious, yet at the same time one who is just in His punishment of sin - He is both just, and the justifier of those who believe! This is one of the places in the book (chapter nine is another) where Paul responds to those who would charge God with unfairness. In fact, the only way in which God could be completely fair would be to condemn every sinner to an eternity in hell, but by paying the penalty of sin through the death of His Son, He can maintain justice while at the same time showing mercy to undeserving sinners.

- Verses 27-31 - Because justification comes by faith, and not by anything a person can do (faith, of course, is not a work, but a gift of God), all boasting is excluded, as is salvation by law-keeping. In this context, Jews and Gentiles stand on the same footing, yet the value of the law is vindicated (this is an idea that Paul will develop further in chapter seven).

ROMANS - LESSON V

Romans 4

Having stated his basic theme of justification through faith alone by the grace of God at the end of chapter three, Paul now proceeds to illustrate his point. He has already stated that the Law and the Prophets testify to the truth he has proclaimed; he now proves his contention. What better example could he use than that of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation? After all, the objections to the doctrine of justification by faith are far more likely to come from the Jews than from the Gentiles among his readers.

TWO EXAMPLES OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (4:1-8)

- Verses 1-2 - Paul has already established that, as far as salvation is concerned, boasting is excluded (3:27). Abraham is a good choice to illustrate his point because, if anyone could boast, it would certainly have been Abraham, the Friend of God.
- Verse 3 - By quoting Genesis 15:6, Paul shows that Abraham's standing before God was not a just payment for his righteous works, but righteousness *imputed* because of his faith. The concept of imputation, which involves crediting something to someone's account, is one Paul returns to on several occasions in the book of Romans. Here, Paul proves that God credited Abraham with being righteous, not because he was righteous, but because he trusted God. The passage Paul quotes is particularly telling. In Genesis 15:7-21, God tells Abraham to take five animals, cut them in half, and lay the pieces in two rows. God then puts Abraham into a deep sleep and passes between the pieces of the sacrifices alone. The significance of this is that in the typical covenant-making ceremony, the participants in the covenant would pass together between the pieces of the sacrifices, confirming their oaths by signifying that, should either one break the covenant, what had happened to these animals should happen to them. But God passed between the pieces alone, showing that He, not Abraham, bore the responsibility for fulfilling the covenant. Abraham need do nothing - in fact, could do nothing - but trust God.
- Verses 4-5 - One who does nothing earns no wages; anything he receives is a gift. The language of verse 5 is particularly strong. The Old Testament blatantly condemns any judge who would condemn the righteous and justify the wicked (Proverbs 17:15), and yet Paul here maintains that God Himself justifies the wicked! Paul has already alluded briefly to the way God accomplishes this in chapter three and he will discuss it more fully in chapter five, but here his job is to prove it from Scripture.
- Verses 6-8 - To do that, he turns from the example of Abraham to that of David. Abraham did sin, of course, but the general aura surrounding his life as described in the book of Genesis is one of righteousness. David, on the other hand, was a godly man, but fell into serious sin - adultery and murder. Thus, when that same David speaks in Psalm 32:1-2 of God *not* charging his sins against him, Paul has the other side of the coin of the point he is trying to illustrate.

Imputation, in fact, works two ways. Not only does God impute righteousness to the one who believes, but he also refuses to charge that person's sin to his account; as we will see later, He is able to do that because He imputes it to the account of another - Jesus Christ, His perfect Son.

THE UNIVERSAL SCOPE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (4:9-12)

So far, Paul has not really confounded his Jewish readers to any great extent. They would probably have little trouble acknowledging that Abraham was justified by God because he believed God and acted on that belief. They would have a great deal of trouble universalizing the example of Abraham, however. For them, the blessing given to Abraham was only available to the covenant people who descended from him.

Paul responds to this by showing that the declaration of Abraham's justification by faith occurred prior to his circumcision (in fact, fourteen years earlier; see Genesis 17:1). Thus the circumcision that he received was not an instrument of his justification, but rather a sign and seal of it. As with all works, circumcision was the result of justification, not its cause. Thus the true children of Abraham are not all who have been circumcised, but all who believe.

THE LAW CONTRIBUTES NOTHING TO JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (4:13-17)

As is the case today, some of Paul's readers clung stubbornly to the notion that they had contributed to their salvation through their own acts of obedience - that in fact such obedience was essential in order to obtain salvation. Paul now turns to meet this very persistent argument.

- Verses 13-14 - We should note first of all, though Paul does not state it explicitly, that the promise preceded the giving of the law. Even if the concept of law is understood in the broadest possible sense, the fact remains that God promised to make Abraham the father of many nations when He called him out of Ur, before Abraham had done anything (Genesis 12:1-3). Paul goes on to argue that adding law-keeping as a requirement for salvation nullifies both faith and God's promise. The reason for this is that, whenever anything is added to faith, that added factor becomes *decisive*. In other words, one who sees salvation as a cooperative effort between God and man by so doing makes man the decisive factor in salvation - justification ultimately rests in the hands of man rather than God. Similarly, the one who teaches that men are saved by faith and kept by works makes man's effort determinative of his final salvation. In both cases, faith is pushed into the background while works take center stage; worse yet, God and His grace are minimized at the expense of glorifying human effort.
- Verse 15 - Paul here squelches all such argument by one simple declaration - "law brings wrath." His point is that anyone who wishes to make obedience a qualification for justification has sealed his own doom; no one can possibly live righteously enough to gain salvation, as Paul has amply demonstrated in the first three chapters.
- Verses 16-17 - Paul then hammers his point home by noting that justification is granted to all who are Abraham's descendants by faith; law does not enter into the picture at all. In fact, anyone who knew the Old Testament should have realized that this was the case, since God had promised to make Abraham the father of many nations, not just one. He then concludes by reminding his readers that the God who justifies is the One who gives life to those who are dead - the position in which everyone finds himself as the result of his sin.

AN ILLUSTRATION OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH (4:18-25)

- Verses 18-22 - The illustration he gives is of Abraham's faith in response to God's promise of offspring despite the obvious physiological impossibilities involved. [NOTE: Verse 19 is peculiar because of a major textual variant; some manuscripts say that Abraham acknowledged that his body was dead, while others say he did not. Interestingly enough, both readings convey the same idea. Either he faced the fact that what God promised was impossible and believed God anyway, or he refused to consider the physiological impossibility of what God had promised a barrier to his faith; in either case, he trusted God despite the obstacles of his age and his wife's physical condition.]
- Verses 23-25 - In the same way that Abraham believed that God could give life to a dead womb, so Christians are those who believe that God can give life to those dead in sin by the death and Resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

ROMANS - LESSON VI

Romans 5

Having established from the Old Testament the principle of justification by faith, Paul now turns in chapter five to two related issues. The first is the blessing of justification, in which he turns from the objective standing of the believer to the subjective state that results. The second is the justification of justification, where Paul returns to explain how it is possible for God to be just and at the same time justify sinners, and in so doing gives his readers an important insight into God's governance of the universe.

THE BLESSINGS OF JUSTIFICATION (5:1-11)

- Verses 1-2 - In the first paragraph of chapter five, Paul, having led his readers to the conclusion that Christians are indeed justified by faith, lists three wonderful blessings that proceed from that fact. These blessings are peace, access, and joy. Peace refers, not to inner tranquility, but to a relationship that is the opposite of war. The one who has been justified is no longer God's enemy, but His friend. A treaty of peace has been granted in place of the deserved annihilation. While inner confidence and tranquility certainly flow from a right relationship with God, that is not the primary focus of Paul's teaching here. The access of which Paul speaks may refer either to access to God's family (through adoption) or access to God's presence (through prayer). The fact that Paul speaks of standing, a present condition rather than a past event, tends to weight the case in favor of the latter interpretation, though both ideas are clearly taught in Scripture in other places. The joy he refers to is a joy grounded in hope - the confident expectation of future glory.
- Verses 3-5 - Paul goes on to explain that the Christian's joy does not merely involve enduring the present while looking forward to eternity, but actually includes rejoicing in the circumstances of this life, despite the fact that those circumstances are often notoriously unpleasant. The reason why the Christian is able to rejoice even in suffering is because he recognizes that God is using that suffering to build character, so that even in times of trouble we can see the loving God at work in our lives.
- Verses 6-8 - Having mentioned the love of God that the Christian experiences even through suffering, Paul then turns to speak more about that love. It is a love unlike even the best of human love. The world has known selfless martyrs who have given their lives for others, but such are few and far between. Besides, those for whom others have given their lives have generally been those whom the world would consider to be good or righteous. What sets God's love apart from that of man, however, is that God was willing to send His Son to die, not for good and righteous men, but for powerless and ungodly sinners who not only had rejected Him, but continued to do the same to the very Son He had sent for their benefit. The God whose love would lead Him to do something like that will certainly sustain the ones He has saved during the trials and tribulations of this life.
- Verses 9-11 - Paul here goes on to argue that the hope in which Christians rejoice is a legitimate hope because of God's love. Twice in this paragraph Paul uses the phrase "how much more." This technique is called an *a fortiori* argument, and was one often used by Jesus Himself (e.g., the parable of the Friend at Midnight - Luke 11:5-13). Paul argues that God has shown the ultimate in love by sending Christ to the Cross; how then could He fail to finish what He had started? If God loved lost sinners enough to reconcile them to Himself

in Christ, then surely He will bring those reconciled sinners safely to glory. The Christian's hope is indeed sure because Christ has already reconciled sinners to God through His death.

The concept of reconciliation, introduced here by Paul, is another one of those key theological ideas that Paul uses to explain the nature of the salvation Christians enjoy in Christ. The term refers to the removal of alienation; those who are enemies are made friends, indeed more than friends, being incorporated into the very family of God through Christ. This, too, is a gift that believers have done nothing to earn or deserve. Christ accomplished this while we were still sinners.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF JUSTIFICATION (5:12-21)

As Paul comes to the end of his discussion of justification, he turns at last to the question that many of his readers have probably been asking since his statement of the doctrine in chapter three: How can God possibly retain His justice while justifying rebellious sinners?

In order to answer this question, Paul introduces the concept of corporate personality. He speaks of Adam and Christ as the heads of two humanities. This headship does not simply mean that the descendants partake of the consequences of the ancestor's actions (Paul states in verse 12 that *all* sinned), nor does it mean merely that the descendants partake of the character of the ancestor (Christians do not yet share the character of Christ, though the Spirit is accomplishing this progressively through sanctification), nor does it mean that the descendants partake of the actions of the ancestor by virtue of physical descent (the argument here is not the same found in Hebrews 7:9-10; besides, Christians have no physical relationship to Christ). Instead, what he has in mind is a federal or representative headship. God designated Adam as the head of the human race, so that when Adam sinned, every member of the human race sinned *in Adam*. Similarly, Christ was designated by God as the federal head of renewed humanity, so that when He died, God reckoned it as if all who belonged to Him had suffered the penalty for sin, and when He rose from the dead, His people also partook of His new life. In essence, what Paul is doing here is expanding and expounding upon the concept of imputation introduced at the beginning of chapter four.

- Verses 12-14 - As far as the specifics of the argument are concerned, Paul begins by noting that death provides clear evidence that all of humanity partook of the guilt and penalty of Adam's sin, because all die. While it is true that the law defined clearly the matters of sin and righteousness, sin existed even before transgression of specific commands was possible. All died because all had sinned, whether they had known the law of God or not. Many see in verse 14 a reference to those who die in infancy, since they could not be said to have willfully broken a command, but the verse is really much broader than that - all who live without knowledge of the law sin, and thus die. [NOTE: Paul is not saying that all have died because of the individual sins they have committed. While they have undoubtedly committed sins, whether without the law or with it, and while they undoubtedly share a sinful nature, these are not what Paul has in mind. The fact that he repeats several times in the succeeding verses that he is talking about the transgression of one man shows that he sees all as actual participants in the sin of Adam.]
- Verses 15-17 - Paul here contrasts the complexes of ideas associated with the old humanity of Adam and the new humanity of Christ. Those who are in Adam partake of sin-condemnation-death, while those who are in Christ partake of righteousness-justification-life.

Thus the hopelessness of chapter one through three is seen as the consequence of the sin of Adam, while the hope of the Christian, mentioned early in this chapter, is pictured as the consequence of the righteousness of Christ.

- Verses 18-19 - These verses serve as a concluding summary of his argument. One must be careful not to take these verses out of context. The reference to “all men” in verse 18 has been used by some to argue against Particular Redemption, implying that the death of Christ won justification for all but is effective only for those who accept it, while universalists go even further to affirm that all, whether they believe or not, have been justified by the blood of Christ and are therefore saved. Neither of these interpretations fits the context of the passage; “all men” in verse 18 and “the many” in verse 20 refer to all who are *in Christ*, not all who are in the world.
- Verses 20-21 - Here Paul returns to the omnipresent Jewish concern with the place of the law. The law even might be said to make sin increase (one commentator cited the example of the little old lady who objected to the recitation of the Ten Commandments during worship because it gave people too many ideas), but the grace of God is far greater than man’s sin. God will never fail to bring eternal life to one who is in Christ.

[NOTE: The shrewd reader may at this point note that Paul has still left a critical question unanswered that lies at the very heart of the charge of unfairness many level against God. While Paul has explained satisfactorily how God can be just and at the same time the justifier of sinners, he has not really addressed the issue of how God can justify some sinners, but not others. This, of course, is a subject to which Paul will turn in chapter nine.]

ROMANS - LESSON VII

Romans 6

With Romans 6, we reach a major new division in the epistle. Paul, who has been expounding his doctrine of justification by faith, now turns to the doctrine of sanctification. This is not merely a step in an abstract theological outline, but grows directly out of his discussion of justification. In fact, while Paul initiates his discussion in response to an imagined question about a specific statement at the end of chapter five (“where sin increased, grace increased all the more”), we must recognize that the objection with which he deals is not merely an objection to an isolated statement, but in reality a major challenge to Paul’s entire doctrine of justification.

Two serious problems must be avoided in dealing with the matter of sanctification. The first is the one addressed by Paul in this chapter - antinomianism. When Luther began teaching justification by faith alone at the time of the Reformation, the Catholic Church objected strongly to the teaching on the ground that it encouraged immoral living. In short, the Catholic Church of the sixteenth century raised exactly the same objection to Luther that many Jews in the first century were raising against Paul. Unfortunately, Christians in the first and sixteenth centuries, as well as all the centuries between and since, have too often given credence to those objections by acting as if justification rendered sanctification unnecessary. Paul therefore addresses in strong language the folly of those who would argue that those who have been saved by grace can live as they please and that, in fact, the grace of God is brought out in bolder relief by continued sin and repeated repentance. [NOTE: Augustine’s oft-repeated maxim, “Love God and do as you please,” makes sense only in the context of a life that has been transformed by Christ. One who has been born again can do as he pleases simply because his deepest desire is to please God.]

The second major problem connected with sanctification comes from those who, rather than thinking that justification renders it unnecessary, believe that justification renders it complete. Those who take this position have no sense of resting in the love of God, since every instance of sin causes them to question their salvation. Paul will address this matter later in chapters seven and eight.

UNION WITH CHRIST (6:1-14)

- Verses 1-2 - In response to the charge of antinomianism by his enemies and the desire for antinomianism by some of his followers, Paul returns again to the corporate personality concept that played such an important role in his concluding justification of justification in the previous chapter. If Christ indeed suffered the penalty of sin for all who belong to Him, then it may be affirmed that, since He died, so did His people.
- Verses 3-4 - Paul presents baptism as a symbol of the believer’s union with Christ in His death and Resurrection. If Christ paid for sin by His death on the cross, the Christian is in a position to enjoy a new life every bit as much as Christ Himself is. [NOTE: It is interesting to observe how hard paedobaptist commentators must work to undermine the implications of immersion and believer’s baptism in this passage.] Baptism is not Paul’s main point, of course, though he does assume that it has been the experience of every believer. His emphasis is on the new life that the Christian should lead as a result of the fact that he has died and been raised with Christ.

- Verses 5-7 - Paul here explains what he means by death with Christ. By using words like “powerless” and “slaves,” he shows that what makes the Christian’s life new is that he no longer *has* to sin. He will, of course, but his life is not defined by sinful behavior. It is now sin, not righteousness, that is alien to what he is in the core of his being.
- Verses 8-10 - Paul then goes on to argue for the permanence of the change. Christ died once, and His death never needs to be repeated. Similarly, the yoke of slavery with which the Christian was once bound to sin has been broken and need never be put on again.
- Verses 11-14 - Paul then turns to address the gap between what Christians are and the way many Christians perceive themselves. Paul has already affirmed that Christians are dead to sin, but he knows that many have never taken the fact seriously enough to live in the light of it. Living in the light of freedom from sin means refusal to give in to its commands. Too many Christians treat sin like a detested but powerful master who simply will not take no for an answer. They view failure as inevitable and apathetically fall into a pattern of little sins that usually escalate into greater ones, doing terrible damage to the conscience in the process. The good news is that the Christian has the power to say no. “Just say no” is no better advice for the unregenerate man than it is for the drug addict or hedonist, but for the Christian it is good advice indeed because he has within himself the power to resist, while dedicating himself to the new life that flows from within through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the same way that law stimulates the desire to sin, grace stimulates the desire to live righteously; but grace also gives the power to fulfill the desire it stimulates.

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM (6:15-23)

- Verses 15-19 - Of course, as soon as some people hear the word “freedom” they substitute the word “license” for it. Paul therefore turns to the analogy of the slave market and points out that this freedom from sin about which he has been talking is not the freedom of a slave who has purchased his own liberty and thus is accountable to no one but himself, but instead is the freedom of a slave who has been bought from a tyrant by a loving and generous master. He remains a slave still, but what a difference! On the other hand, those who willingly continue to practice sin are in reality slaves of the wicked master they need no longer serve.
- Verses 20-23 - Paul explains the difference by contrasting sin and righteousness. The one who is a slave to sin is “free” from righteousness (what an ironic phrase!); it is outside the realm of his experience and he has no need to concern himself with it. How much better is the state of the person who no longer is accountable to sin, but instead gives his attention to holiness. The old way, despite the boasts of many who profess to enjoy it, led to shame and ultimately to death. The new life given by Christ leads to holiness and eternal life. The just wage is replaced by the unearned gift.

ROMANS - LESSON VIII

Romans 7

The book of Romans contains a number of controversial passages, but Paul's description of a struggle in chapter seven is among the most frequently debated. In chapter six, Paul had asserted that the Christian was not under the law. While he has already responded to those critics who charged him with antinomianism, he recognizes that his Jewish readers in particular will want to hear more about the role of the law in the life of the Christian. Chapter seven answers that need, while at the same time addressing the second major misunderstanding many have when confronted by Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. If chapter six serves to show that justification does not render sanctification unnecessary, chapter seven shows that justification does not render sanctification complete.

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LAW - THE MARRIAGE ANALOGY (7:1-6)

- Verses 1-3 - Paul uses the illustration of a woman who is married. If she marries someone else when her husband is alive, she is an adulteress, but if she becomes a widow, she is then free to marry someone else.
- Verses 4-6 - Paul then pictures an unbeliever as one who is married to the law. When that person dies with Christ, he is no longer bound to the law, but is free to live a new life in the Spirit. Freedom from the law does not mean freedom to do what we please, of course. It is important to remember that Paul has spoken of the law's bondage earlier (5:20) as tied up in the fact that the law stimulates sin in the sinner. The one who has been born again through the death of Christ is a new person who no longer responds to the law by wanting to do exactly the opposite. In verses 5-6, Paul contrasts the old attitude of rebellion with the new desire for obedience stimulated by the Spirit of God, a theme to which he will return in greater detail in chapter eight.

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LAW - THE LAW IN REGENERATION (7:7-13)

- Verse 7 - Does this mean that the law itself is sinful? Such could never be the case because the law is an expression of the character of God, who is perfectly holy and righteous.
- Verse 8 - Paul then moves on to share something from his own experience to illustrate his point further. As he tells us in Philippians 3:5-6, he had been as self-righteous a Pharisee as one could find anywhere, convinced of his own obedience to the law (not unlike the Rich Young Ruler who came to Jesus in Mark 10:17-22). The turning point for him (and we might note that such insight as Paul expresses here can only come to one who looks back on his sinful life from the perspective of the Kingdom and sees what God was doing in leading him to salvation) came when he began to meditate on the Tenth Commandment and saw that God cared not only about outward acts of righteousness, but also about the attitudes of the heart.
- Verses 9-11 - He had been able to resist with some measure of success the instigations of the law to violate God's commandments in some overt way, though it must have taken considerable rationalization to excuse his persecution of Christians. Covetousness was another matter, however. The more he looked into his own heart, the more he realized that he not only desired those things that were wrong, but desired to continue desiring them. Here

he finally saw the extent of his own wickedness, and God used this to bring him to salvation. [Could he have been meditating upon these things on the road to Damascus? We have no way of knowing for sure.]

- Verses 12-13 - He thus concludes that the law has value, not only because it pictures the character of a holy God, but also because it reveals sin for what it is. No one who takes the teachings of the law seriously can continue to maintain his own righteousness.

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LAW - THE CONFLICT OF THE REGENERATE (7:14-25)

The second half of the chapter has been a major source of conflict among interpreters for many years. Three basic interpretations exist, along with numerous minor variations. The first approach concludes that Paul is in these verses continuing to describe the experience of the unregenerate man. They cite not only the context provided by verses 7-13, but also the strong statements of verses 14 and 24, which they maintain could never be said by a believer.

A second group of interpreters see these verses as descriptive of normal Christian experience. They cite the change from the past tense to the present tense in Paul's writing and add that the phrases of verses 18, 22, and 25 could never come from the mouth of an unbeliever. The Christian, they say, is one who lives in the midst of continual conflict. Unlike the unbeliever, whose desires correspond with his sinful actions except for the pangs of conscience that come from God's common grace, the Christian hates sin and is frustrated beyond measure to find that he continues to commit it.

A third interpretation sees Paul as describing in the first person, not the struggles of a normal Christian, but the dilemma of a Christian who persists in seeing his own efforts to obey the law as the key to his sanctification. They say that Paul, in demonstrating the relationship of the law to the Christian, shows that, while the Christian's desire to keep the law has been completely transformed, his ability to keep the law has not been.

Another variation on this third view, which also sees the passage as describing an abnormal Christian experience, claims that Paul here gives a description of the carnal Christian, the man who has been saved, yet continues to give himself over to worldly practices.

The first and last views must be rejected in their entirety. The first simply does not correspond to Paul's description of the unregenerate man in Romans 3, while the last fails to take seriously the fact that Paul speaks of carnality, not as a description of a type of Christian, but rather as an aspect of the Christian's life that conflicts with the work of God in him (see I Corinthians 3:1-4). The middle two both contain grains of truth, however. The description here is normal in the sense that the Christian should not expect to be free from sin in this present life; the struggle will continue as long as we live on this earth, and we will not know total sanctification until we reach heaven. On the other hand, we must recognize that Paul's description in these verses is of an abnormal condition *if it is taken in isolation*. The picture painted by Paul in these verses is one of defeat; to stop there and fail to continue into chapter eight is to miss the whole point of the passage, which is that the Spirit of God can do for the Christian what the law can never do. The law may stimulate rebellion in the unbeliever and the desire for righteousness in the Christian, but it cannot produce righteousness in anyone. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

Any careful examination of the language of these verses makes it clear that these words could never have been spoken by an unbeliever. How could anyone who was without Christ possibly say that “I hate what I do” (verse 15), “I know that nothing good lives in me” (verse 18), etc? Only a Christian knows the conflict of these verses, but it is not a hopeless conflict. Victory is indeed attainable - not the victory of complete sinlessness, but the joy of life in the Spirit.

- Verse 14 - The only possible understanding of the strong language Paul uses in this passage is that he does not mean the same thing by “slave to sin” (or “sold under sin” - ESV) here as he does in chapter six. In the earlier chapter, he spoke of one whose entire lifestyle was one dominated by sin, one in which he was “free from righteousness.” Here the situation is different. The sinful nature remains, but it no longer goes unchallenged. That nature will continue to produce sin as long as a person lives, but the result is conflict, not domination. “Slavery” here speaks, not of a condition that can *never* be overcome, but of one that can never be *totally* overcome in this life.
- Verses 15-17 - The redeemed will desires to do right and please God, but the sinful nature remains and continues to plague the believer. If disobeying the redeemed conscience troubles the Christian, he confirms the righteousness of the law that he seeks to follow.
- Verses 18-20 - The conflict described here does not involve dualism between flesh and spirit in the sense that the body is the seat of sin while the spirit seeks only righteousness. Instead, the conflict is between the sinful human nature, which remains as long as we are in this life, and the redeemed and transformed person who hates the deeds of the nature to which he is no longer bound, but with which he must continue to struggle.
- Verses 21-23 - This struggle is unavoidable; the Christian delights in the law of God, but sin, as it did for Cain (Genesis 4:7), crouches always at the door seeking entry.
- Verses 24-25 - Such a condition is not an enjoyable one. The believer longs to be free from the influence of the sinful nature. But does this mean that defeat is inevitable? Certainly not; the grace of God in Christ gives victory even though sin is always a present reality. This is the theme of the chapter that follows.

ROMANS - LESSON IX

Romans 8

As we saw last week, the end of Romans 7, if read in isolation, could leave the believer in a pitiable state of defeat. Paul's cry of anguish is one with which any Christian can identify, but mercifully he does not leave matters at that point. Instead, he closes his section on sanctification with one of the most uplifting and encouraging passages in all of Scripture, in which he affirms the victory enjoyed by the believer through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

SANCTIFICATION - VICTORY OVER SIN (8:1-17)

- Verses 1-4 - Paul now begins to give the response to the anguished cry of chapter seven. The Christian is one who need no longer experience the penal servitude (the better sense of the word usually translated "condemnation" in verse 1) of sin in his life; he may sin, but that horrible bondage in which sin is the only option, in which the sinful nature rebels against the law of God by sinning all the more, is a thing of the past. The law, good though it was, could only stimulate more sin and make me more aware of my misery; Christ paid the penalty demanded by the law, and the Spirit gives a new heart to those who are in Christ.
- Verses 5-8 - Paul next talks about the new heart given to all Christians by the Spirit of God. That new heart no longer rebels at the demands of the law, but instead desires what God desires. The sinner can do nothing to please God.
- Verses 9-11 - The Christian, on the other hand, is indwelt by the Spirit. Because of this, he has operating in him a principle of life unknown to the unbeliever. [NOTE: Verse 9 gives the definitive answer to the question, "What is the fundamental difference between the believer and the unbeliever?" While both Christians and non-Christians do things that are outwardly good and outwardly evil, the difference lies in the presence of the Spirit of God. All Christians have the Spirit; no unbelievers do.] The Christian life continues to be one of struggle - believers live in a sinful world and feel the consequences of sin through both their natures and their circumstances. But the struggle is one in which the Christian can know steady progress leading ultimately to eternity.
- Verses 12-13 - Paul then concludes this section with several practical applications. To begin with, he points out that it is incongruous for a Christian who has been delivered from bondage to sin to live as if sin were still his master.
- Verses 14-15 - Living according to the guidance of the Spirit is a tremendous source of assurance for the believer. The Christian can come to God with confidence, using an affectionate term that is probably the same used by Jesus at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer - a liberty the Jews never would have dared take in their prayers to God. The mention of adoption in verse 15 in no way mitigates the Christian's confidence. In the first century, adoption was a means frequently used to carry on the family line in the absence of natural offspring. Roman emperors would often adopt the men they wished to have succeed them, sometimes pushing aside their natural children in the process. Adopted sons were thus carefully chosen and were sure of their father's affection.
- Verses 16-17 - Paul goes on to point out that the Christian enjoys a subjective assurance that comes from the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Christian, as a child of God, thus has an inheritance to look forward to - an inheritance of glory, but one which, as in the case of the Son of God with whom he is a joint-heir, must be obtained through suffering.

SANCTIFICATION - VICTORY THROUGH SUFFERING (8:18-39)

Paul now concludes his discussion of sanctification by speaking about the matter of suffering. Too many Christians look upon suffering as a mark of God's neglect. Paul points out that suffering is not only a way in which believers can share in the experience of Christ Himself, but is also the very means used by God to accomplish the work of sanctification.

- Verse 18 - Suffering is never pleasant, but Paul here encourages his readers to think of it in relation to the glories of heaven. He is not trying to minimize suffering; his own experience was certainly severe enough that he would not attempt such a thing (cf. II Corinthians 11:23-29). If suffering led to glory for Jesus Himself (Hebrews 2:10), why should that not be the case for those who belong to Him?
- Verses 19-21 - Paul next points out that suffering is a universal result of the entrance of sin into the world, experienced not only by Christians, but indeed even by the inanimate creation. In the same way that suffering will result in eventual glory for the believer, so it will be for the creation itself. The New Heavens and the New Earth represent the cosmic results of the saving work of Christ.
- Verse 22 - The mention of birth-pangs is a reference to the Jewish belief that a period of suffering in the last days would precede the advent of the Messiah. This time of suffering was called "the birth-pangs of the Messiah." Paul identifies this, not with the first coming of Christ, but with His second advent.
- Verses 23-25 - The groaning of the creation parallels the groaning of the Christian, who longs for the completion of the work that has been begun in him. What we experience of the presence of the Spirit now is merely the firstfruits of something much better to come. We have already been adopted as children of God, but the full meaning of that awaits future fulfillment, which Paul associates with the resurrection of the body. In the light of this he counsels patience, as the present suffering helps us to focus our attention ever more clearly on the glory that is to come.
- Verses 26-27 - Furthermore, Paul assures us that the groans of the suffering believer are transformed by the Spirit of God into prayers, and that even the unutterable pains of the heart are intelligible before the throne of God. The Christian is indeed blessed, for he has an intercessor in his heart and another at God's throne - the Spirit and the Son together work to bring the Christian into the presence of his loving Father.
- Verses 28-30 - Just because Paul describes suffering in terms of "groaning," however, does not necessarily mean that the Christian should view it as a bad thing. In these verses, Paul pictures the suffering of this present life as an inherent part of God's great plan of salvation. God uses suffering for good. It is part of that great chain of God's love that brings the believer from the knowing eye of God in the councils of eternity past to final glorification in eternity yet to come. Suffering is the means by which the believer is conformed to the likeness of Christ and is brought from justification, in which God declares him to be righteous, to glorification, in which that righteousness is finally attained in actual experience.

Questions are often raised about the relationship between foreknowledge and predestination in verse 29. Suffice it to say that those who seek to make foreknowledge of faith the precondition for predestination fail, because doing so still does not leave room for the free exercise of the human will that they wish to see as a necessary part of salvation. Simply put, if God foresaw in eternity past that a person would believe, he surely will do so,

and those who were known to God as unbelievers from all eternity have no more chance for salvation than if God had declared them to be reprobate. Though there are a few passages in Scripture where the term “foreknowledge” is used in a cognitive sense, it is much more frequently used in a relational way. This fits the context much better, anyway. Paul is here saying that God, in eternity past, set His love upon certain individuals, whom He then predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ; He then proceeded to carry out His intention by calling, justifying, and glorifying those same people. Though glorification awaits future fulfillment, it is no less certain than the other links in the chain, and thus Paul feels justified in using the past tense to describe it. This chain is unbreakable; those on whom God set His love in eternity past are certain to experience eventual glorification because, as Paul has argued throughout the first half of the epistle, salvation is all of grace and the grace of God never fails.

- Verses 31-39 - Such a picture of the plan of God sends Paul soaring in a panegyric of praise. How could any Christian doubt God’s love in the face of such a marvelous salvation? A God who gave His only Son for His people would not deny them anything that was for their own good. No one can bring any charge against God’s people, for their sins have been paid for completely and the one who paid the price is the same one who is seated at the right hand of God the Father interceding for believers. Nothing in the universe - suffering, persecution, the evil powers of Satan and his cohorts - is capable of separating Christians from a love like that!

ROMANS - LESSON X

Romans 9

The ninth chapter of Romans begins a new section of the book, and one which seems in many ways disconnected from the flow of Paul's argument. Many have observed that chapters 9-11 read like a parenthesis, and that the end of chapter eight could very easily have been followed by the exhortation of Romans 12:1-2. These chapters are both necessary and integral to Paul's argument for several reasons, however. First of all, the audience in Rome to whom he was writing necessitated treatment of this subject. His exposition of the Gospel differentiated not a whit between Jews and Gentiles; surely by this time the question of Romans 3:1 was being repeated in the minds of many. The relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the Church and in the plan of God was clearly a sore point in Rome, and Paul knew he had to treat it at some length.

Secondly, Paul had argued that the Gospel that he preached was completely coherent with the Old Testament Scriptures, and had even used Abraham as an example of the faith by which a man was justified. How, then, could he explain the fact that the very people from whom this great message had sprung had almost universally rejected it, while large numbers of Gentiles, who had had no preparation apart from their own sin and shame, had joyfully turned to Christ when the Good News had been preached to them? Paul can only answer this question by giving his readers some insight into God's grand plan in history for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles alike. Romans 9-11 gives us the outline of this plan.

Thirdly, Paul had asserted that the propitiatory work of Christ allowed God to be both just and the justifier of those who believed. In the second half of chapter five, Paul had demonstrated how God could be just and at the same time justify sinners. Now he goes on to demonstrate how God can be just while justifying *some* sinners and not others. [NOTE: The first question has generally been a matter of concern to unbelievers, who cannot understand how God can justify sinners purely on the basis of faith; the second question is more one of dispute among believers, some of whom charge God with injustice when He chooses some and not others.]

PAUL'S SORROW OVER THE UNBELIEF OF ISRAEL (9:1-5)

- Verses 1-3 - Many of his Jewish readers may by this time have been convinced that Paul had shed all remnant of his Jewishness. Though he had addressed their concerns with the law on numerous occasions, he had made no distinction whatsoever between Jew and Gentile in his exposition of the Gospel. He now asserts, in necessarily strong language, his continued emotional bond with his own people. His words in verse 3 echo those of Moses in Exodus 32:32, following the incident with the Golden Calf.
- Verses 4-5 - He then reiterates the advantages enjoyed by the Jewish nation as God's chosen people - they were called God's children, they had the glory of God in their midst in the Temple, they had received the covenants (Abraham, Moses, David, etc.), they had received the law, they had the privilege of worshipping God for centuries in His sanctuary, they were given the promise of the Messiah, and they had the patriarchs in their lineage and Christ Himself as their relative in the flesh. Despite all this, however, they had turned aside from the Gospel. Did this mean God's word had failed?

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY - HISTORICAL INSTANCES (9:6-13)

Anyone familiar with the Old Testament will recognize the fact that God consistently chose the younger son over the older one to bear the promise of the covenants: Isaac was chosen over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over ten older brothers to enjoy the right of primogeniture, Judah over three older brothers to give birth to the monarchy, David over his older brothers, etc. The entire point of this was to emphasize the sovereign power of God in bringing about salvation for His people. In this passage, Paul makes use of this well-known pattern.

- Verses 6-9 - He uses the truth of God's sovereign election to establish the fact that God's promise had not failed because of Israel's rejection of the Gospel. To begin with, he shows that just because Israel was chosen as a people does not mean that all individuals within Israel were elect of God to salvation. The obvious example chosen is that of the sons of Abraham. The promise was given to Isaac, but not to Ishmael.
- Verses 10-13 - Furthermore, in order to stem any incipient pride that may be building in the Gentiles in Rome at this point, Paul uses the example of Jacob and Esau to show that God's electing grace is totally apart from any merit (or lack thereof - the first three chapters should have settled that issue) in the recipient. Note that the application to Jews and Gentiles as groups is totally appropriate, since the passage quoted in verse 13 (Malachi 1:2-3) refers to the nations of Israel and Edom rather than to Jacob and Esau as individuals (this is not to say, of course, that election is not individual - Paul has already established that truth by showing that not all individuals in the chosen nation of Israel were themselves elect). Notice, too, that the hatred spoken of here cannot be explained away as a lesser degree of love (cf. Jesus' commands about hating father and mother in Luke 14:26), since Malachi shows that this hatred results in the utter destruction of Edom.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY - IS GOD FAIR? (9:14-24)

Having established that, while the Jews are chosen by God, that does not mean that all Jews will be saved, and also that the inclusion of the Gentiles should be no source of pride in them, Paul now addresses the obvious question that people always ask: If God chooses who is to be saved, is He not being unjust when He condemns those who do not believe?

Growing up in a democracy makes it difficult for Americans to imagine life in a monarchy, let alone a dictatorship. We just feel that it is our natural right to have a say in the way our lives are run. But because of our tendency to equate absolute rule with tyranny, we sometimes struggle with the concept of the sovereignty of God. Many object to the very idea of the sovereignty of God in salvation, convinced that a person's eternal destiny must at least to some extent depend on his own works, or at least his own decision. Others cannot fathom how a sovereign God could allow horrible suffering to exist in the world, while others have trouble on a much more immediate level, objecting to the circumstances God brings into their lives. This passage is perhaps the most troublesome in all of Scripture for those who struggle with God's sovereignty in salvation. They tend to look at these verses and charge God with being unfair. Paul's readers did the same.

- Verses 14-16 - Paul gives two answers to the charge, then follows with a famous illustration. Though most people look at this section of the chapter and focus on the idea of God's

judgment, Paul begins by emphasizing the mercy of God. He makes use of a quotation from Exodus 33:19, the narrative where Moses asks to see the glory of God. Here God demonstrates His mercy to Moses in two ways - first of all by granting his request, and secondly by doing so in a way that will protect him from something far beyond his capacity to endure. The point Paul makes is that God is free to bestow His mercy on whomever He chooses. If God treated man with strict justice, all would perish. Paul has already shown that God has maintained His justice when He justifies sinners through the death of Christ.

- Verses 17-18 - The second argument makes use of the experience of Pharaoh during the Exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 9:16). Pharaoh, Paul says, was raised up by God for the purpose of destroying him, and was deliberately hardened by God in order to bring about that destruction. He could have chosen many examples, of course. In fact, all who reject Christ wind up suffering eternal destruction, and the only way to avoid the conclusion that God created them for that purpose is to conclude that God lacks either the knowledge of each man's destiny from the beginning or the power to bring that destiny to pass (or both). The key concept here is that the ultimate purpose of God is not the salvation of man, but His own glory. He gains glory both by displaying His mercy through the justification of those who believe and by displaying His justice through the judgment of the wicked.
- Verse 19 - Paul immediately recognizes that what he has just said will raise an objection in the minds of his readers: What about man's free will? If God creates some for salvation and some for destruction, how can anyone be blamed for rejecting Christ? The example of Pharaoh is helpful here as well, however. In the course of the Exodus narrative, the hardness of Pharaoh's heart is mentioned thirteen times. Five of these speak of Pharaoh hardening his heart (Exodus 7:14, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35), while the other eight speak of God hardening Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:13; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8). The point here is that God was not working against Pharaoh's free will; He was simply giving Pharaoh what he freely chose. The same is true with all who reject Christ.
- Verses 20-21 - Somewhat surprisingly, however, this is not the answer Paul gives. Instead he argues that the question itself is illegitimate - that the creature has no right to question his Creator concerning the purpose of his existence. God, as the Potter, has the right to do whatever He wants to do with each lump of clay in His possession. If He chooses to make some into beautiful vases that will be on display forever as examples of His workmanship, while making others into chamber-pots that are eventually to be smashed and discarded, that is His prerogative (note that Isaiah 29:16 and Jeremiah 18 use similar images).

These undoubtedly are harsh words, and deeply offensive to many believers. We rebel against these ideas because they strike at cherished ideas of God and man. Those who picture a God of love while forgetting His holiness take offense at such a picture. Even more frequently, men hate or try to explain away the teaching of this chapter because it strikes a death blow at human pride. Unless I may view my salvation as being in some way the work of my own hands or the result of my own merit, I balk. Surely God could not be so arbitrary as to choose men without reference to their innate worthiness, or at least their independent response to the Gospel. If God chooses without grounds rooted in the character of the one who is chosen, He must be unfair. Such a doctrine is abhorrent to all who cling to any vestige of salvation by human effort.

- Verses 22-24 - Paul finally argues that God's work as the Great Potter ultimately results in His Name being glorified. Both the experience of the wicked - longsuffering patience on the part of God leading to ultimate destruction - and the experience of the elect - sharing in the

glory of God for all eternity - bring glory to God. If we find this troublesome, it is only because we fail to understand that the ultimate purpose of God in the world and in human history is not to glorify man, but to glorify Himself, which is a far more worthy goal than elevating poor, weak, and sinful humans.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY - JEWS AND GENTILES (9:25-33)

- Verses 25-26 - Paul now applies his discussion of God's sovereign election to the Jewish-Gentile question with which the chapter had begun. The quotations from Hosea (Hosea 2:23; 1:10) speak of the final restoration of Israel as a nation of which Paul will speak at greater length in chapter eleven. [NOTE: Some ambiguity exists here. While the passages in Hosea clearly speak of the future restoration of Israel, the same verses are quoted by Peter to speak of the salvation of the Gentiles (I Peter 2:9-10). Which Paul has in mind here is a matter of debate, though verse 30 seems to favor the latter interpretation. We shall allow the issue to rest until we get to the crucial discussion in chapter eleven.]
- Verses 27-29 - The quotations from Isaiah (Isaiah 10:22-23; 1:9) support Paul's contention that the salvation of a mere remnant is not a violation of God's plan, but a fulfillment of it.
- Verses 30-33 - Paul concludes the chapter by trying to explain why only a remnant from Israel is being saved, while Gentiles are flocking into the Kingdom. The answer, he says, is faith versus works. While the Jews continue to try to justify themselves by the works of the law, Gentiles willingly put their trust in Christ. The Gospel continues to be a stumblingblock to the Jews, who insist on seeing it as a repudiation of their history rather than a fulfillment of it. He finishes with a quotation from Isaiah 28:16 (cf. I Peter 2:8). Christ is the stumblingstone to whom Isaiah refers, but He is also the cornerstone of God's holy Temple; some encounter that stone and are broken in repentance, while others fall over it and are crushed to powder (cf. Matthew 21:42-44).

What can we then conclude about the sovereignty of God as Paul here presents it? Note the following:

- God's sovereignty in salvation is an act of mercy because if everyone got what he deserved, all would suffer eternal destruction. Furthermore, apart from the grace of God, this is what we would *choose* (cf. C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*).
- The sovereignty of God is a horrible concept under two circumstances - if you don't trust God or if you have an inflated, and indeed mistaken, view of what you deserve.
- The sovereignty of God is a source of great comfort, however, if you know how little you deserve and trust God implicitly to do what is right, both in the big picture and in the details of your life.
- Does not the Gospel make this obvious? God's sovereign mercy led Him to sacrifice His Son on the Cross in order to bring to pass what His mercy had already determined for those who deserved nothing but His wrath.
- God is even merciful enough to turn chamber pots into magnificent works of art if you recognize that you deserve His wrath, repent, and trust the One who died on the Cross to bring about that change.

ROMANS - LESSON XI

Romans 10

In Romans 10, Paul continues his discussion of the unbelief of Israel. In the process, he contrasts the Gospel of faith with the bondage of seeking righteousness by means of the law. He also reiterates the rejection of the Gospel by Israel in the face of its widespread acceptance by the Gentiles.

ISRAEL'S MISGUIDED ZEAL (10:1-4)

No one was in a better position to understand Israel's rejection of the Gospel than the Apostle Paul. As he himself had experienced, they turned violently against the Gospel, not because of their hatred for God, but because of their misguided zeal for His glory. Their adherence to the law as the means of righteousness shows that they have not understood the fundamental purpose of the law. Instead, they have distorted it into something it was never intended to be - a means by which the favor of God may be earned. They know nothing of the joy that comes with deliverance from the law and its bondage. Only the Christian knows that freedom.

THE WAY OF FAITH VERSUS THE WAY OF LAW (10:5-13)

- Verse 5 - Paul now turns to Old Testament quotations to expound his contrast between the way of faith and the way of law further. Leviticus 18:5, quoted here, is the perfect statement of legal righteousness (Paul is not saying that God here ever intended salvation by works; he is merely affirming that this passage perfectly capsulizes the Jewish understanding of the law).
- Verses 6-8 - Paul then contrasts this with the way of faith. He starts with a rather free allusion to Deuteronomy 30:12-14, the purpose of which is to show that righteousness is not something after which one must strive, but rather something which is ready at hand, "yours for the taking." In typical rabbinical style, Paul intersperses his own applicatory comments between phrases of the text. He infers that the Jews, by pursuing righteousness through the law, are acting as if the Incarnation and Resurrection had never occurred, so that they are seeking to enter God's presence and gain new life through their own efforts.
- Verses 9-10 - Paul then seizes upon the words "mouth" and "heart" and shows how these appropriately convey the good news of salvation - that a Christian is not one who earns his way to God, but rather one who believes in his heart that Jesus is Lord and confesses his faith publicly before men.
- Verse 11 - The allusion here is probably to Isaiah 28:16, which Paul already quoted in the last verse of the previous chapter.
- Verse 12-13 - This faith, he continues, is open to both Jews and Gentiles alike, and no one who comes to Christ will be turned away.

ISRAEL'S PERSISTENT UNBELIEF (10:14-21)

- Verses 14-15 - Paul now returns to the problem of Israel's unbelief. He starts with an explanation of the means God has established for the spread of the Gospel. He shows that God has chosen to do His work of saving men and women through the preaching of the

Gospel, and that those who preach the Gospel are those who have been sent for that purpose. The glory of that task is then emphasized by a quotation from Isaiah 52:7, which describes the “happy feet” of those messengers who crossed the mountains to bring word of the end of the Babylonian Captivity.

- Verse 16 - Despite the greatness of the news of salvation, however, the majority of Israelites rejected it, even as they had rejected the prophetic ministry of Isaiah, who had spoken so eloquently of the coming Messiah (Isaiah 53:1). How could this be?
- Verses 17-18 - Paul now removes all excuses. Could their failure to believe have stemmed from the fact that they have not heard or understood the message? This is hardly the case. In fact, the spread of the Gospel through the work of Paul and others like him had produced a situation where the extent of Gospel preaching practically rivaled the extent of natural revelation (the point of the quotation from Psalm 19:4 in verse 18) - wherever the sun rose and set upon a community of Jews, there the Gospel had gone.
- Verse 19 - Furthermore, lack of understanding was no excuse, because it was clear that Jewish rejection of the Gospel was related directly to Gentile acceptance of it. The Jews understood what Paul was preaching, but they hardened their hearts against it *because* it included the Gentiles on equal footing with themselves. Their envy had turned them away from the Gospel rather than drawing them to it (he quotes Deuteronomy 32:21).
- Verses 20-21 - Paul then closes the chapter with two quotations demonstrating that it had been God’s intention all along to expand His kingdom among the Gentiles (quoting Isaiah 65:1), while He had continued to be unbelievably merciful in extending His arms to a rebellious and disobedient nation which had been the recipient of so many blessings, yet had insisted on taking them for granted (Isaiah 65:2).

If Paul’s exposition ended here, things would look bleak indeed for the Jewish nation. But that, fortunately, is not the case. God’s grace is far greater than that. In the chapter to come, Paul puts all of this into the context of history and shows how God’s merciful intention toward man is to be worked out among Jews and Gentiles alike.

[NOTE: It is worth observing that, immediately following his great exposition of the sovereignty of God in salvation, Paul speaks in this chapter, without any embarrassment or thought of contradiction, of the importance of praying for the lost (verse 1), the necessity of responding to the Gospel by turning to Christ in faith (verses 9-10), and the essential role of preaching the Gospel to all (verses 14-15). Paul would surely turn in dismay upon those who would use God’s sovereignty as an excuse for refusing to pray, preach the Gospel, or challenge lost men and women with their need to repent and believe.]

ROMANS - LESSON XII

Romans 11

Paul now comes to the conclusion of the argument that he has been developing since the beginning of chapter nine. The rejection of the Gospel by Israel may be asserted by some as an argument against it, but Paul now reveals God's plan for the spread of the Gospel through the sweep of history to its glorious conclusion as an expression of His mercy.

THE REJECTION OF ISRAEL IS NOT TOTAL (11:1-10)

Chapters nine and ten have combined to give a dismal picture of Israel. Paul thus far has explained Israel's condition, both in terms of God's sovereignty and Old Testament prophecy, but has not satisfactorily responded to the argument that Israel's failure to respond undermines the Gospel he has been expounding. He now proceeds to show that the current dismal condition of Israel is not to be taken as God's final word on the subject.

- Verses 1-4 - He begins with a rhetorical question in the first verse, and then proceeds to justify the obvious answer that he gives to it. He begins by showing that, though Israel to a large extent has rejected the Gospel, not all Jews have done so. Paul sets himself forward as Exhibit A, then goes on to compare his age with that of Elijah, when few openly followed God, yet a faithful remnant remained (cf. I Kings 19:10-18).
- Verses 5-10 - He reaffirms that those who have been saved have obtained salvation by the grace of God, then proceeds to allude to Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10 and quote Psalm 69:22-23 to show that the spiritual blindness under which the majority of Jews suffered was God's judgment against them for their disobedience.

THE REJECTION OF ISRAEL IS NOT FINAL (11:11-24)

Having made the obvious point that the rejection of Israel did not involve every single Jew, Paul now goes on to make the more crucial point that this rejection is not God's final word on the matter, but simply an aspect of His plan for the spread of the Kingdom.

- Verses 11-12 - He starts by asserting that rejection of the Gospel by the Jews does not constitute failure, but rather the means by which God brought the Good News to the Gentiles. The book of Acts repeatedly notes that, when Paul would enter a town, he would go first to the synagogue, but after being rejected, he would turn to the Gentiles. The rejection of the Jews thus was turned into opportunity for the Gentiles. How much more, then, will the Gentiles benefit from the "fullness" of the Jews (a word Paul clearly uses in contrast to the remnant who now believe in this time of rejection)?
- Verses 13-16 - In verse 13, Paul then turns to address the Gentiles, confirming his love for them while at the same time expressing his hope that his ministry among the Gentiles will be used by God to hasten the conversion of Israel. The reference to "life from the dead" in verse 15 could be taken eschatologically to indicate, as some believe, that the restoration of Israel will occur only at the return of Christ, while others see it as expressing the magnitude of blessing that will be poured out upon the world at the time of Israel's restoration. In verse 16, he speaks of the present remnant of believing Jews as the "firstfruits" of the multitude

to follow, then changes metaphors to speak of the nation of Israel as a tree growing from the root of the patriarchs; this leads him into the famous analogy of the olive tree.

- Verses 17-24 - Paul uses the olive tree analogy to warn the Gentiles against arrogance. They are to see their dependence upon those Jewish believers who have gone before, bringing them the promises, the law, and the Messiah Himself. Furthermore, the rejection of Israel because of unbelief should cause the Gentiles to fear and strive to persevere. [NOTE: The warning here is certainly pertinent. The same arrogance displayed by the Jews of Paul's day, who assumed that they belonged to God simply because they bore the name of Jew, may be seen in thousands of professing Christians today, who assume that they are bound for heaven because they grew up in a "Christian" family or church.] The restoration of Israel is something Paul here treats in a theoretical way, but this tentativeness is only laying the groundwork for the amazing assertions to follow.

THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL AS A DISPLAY OF GOD'S MERCY (11:25-36)

Paul now prepares to uncover a mystery. The use of this term in Scripture involves, not some secret that needs to be puzzled out, but a truth previously unknown but now revealed (see 16:25-26). Paul thus is ready to tell his readers something they had not known previously, but which God has revealed to him. That great truth is that God is not yet finished with the nation of Israel. While only a remnant of Israel may believe at the present time, all Israel will be saved once the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Needless to say, the meaning of these words has generated enormous controversy among interpreters of Scripture over the years. Some of the variations are as follows:

- Some insist that Paul is using the word "Israel" differently in verse 26 than he has been using it in the rest of the book, and instead here reverts to the meaning used in Galatians 6:16 (which is itself somewhat controversial). They see Paul as arriving at the conclusion that all the elect of God, both Jews and Gentiles alike, will be saved. There are two major variations on this position:
 - Some argue that this result will be attained through the bringing in of the fullness of the Gentiles, while Israel remains in a state of hardening (with the exception of the remnant) until the end of the age. Such an interpretation, which is virtually unique to the Puritans and other covenant theologians, completely undercuts Paul's entire argument in this section, in which he contrasts God's future plan with the current rather dismal situation.
 - Others (such as Calvin) maintain that God will some day restore Israel to Himself, and that verse 26 speaks of the totality of the elect, Jews and Gentiles alike. While it is undoubtedly true that all the elect will ultimately be saved, it is hardly a startling new revelation.
- Among those who apply the reference in verse 26 to national Israel, two major variations also exist:
 - The first, and perhaps the most familiar, sees "the fullness of the Gentiles" as a reference to the total number of Gentile believers. In other words, they argue that the restoration of Israel should be viewed as an eschatological event which will take place following the return of Christ. Such an interpretation is inextricably related to

a premillennial view of eschatology and is often associated with dispensationalism, though the connection is not a necessary one.

- Others take a somewhat looser view, arguing that “the fullness of the Gentiles” need not mean the completion of God’s work among the Gentiles, but could instead speak in general of a time when the Gentile world as a whole responds to the Gospel. In the light of verse 12, they assert that God plans even greater blessing for the Gentiles following the eventual conversion of the Jews. Thus such a view could be used to support a postmillennial or historic premillennial eschatology.
- Verses 28-32 - Paul then concludes that God, in His mercy, is in the process of bringing in the “fullness” of Jews and Gentiles alike. God has no more turned His back finally on the Jews now than He had finally rejected the Gentiles in the Old Testament era, when His attention was fully directed toward the nation of Israel.
- Verses 33-36 - His final words, quite naturally, are words of praise to God. Like the praise that flows from his mouth at the end of chapter eight after expounding the theology of God’s plan of salvation, Paul here shouts out the glory of God in response to the working out of God’s plan of salvation in history. Who would have thought that God would have used the rejection of the Gospel by Israel to save the Gentiles, and then turn around and use the salvation of the Gentiles to restore Israel? What marvelous wisdom and mercy!

ROMANS - LESSON XIII

Romans 12

In the final major division of the book of Romans we find, as with most of Paul's epistles, a section in which he applies the truths he has enunciated to the lives of the recipients of the letter. Paul has already responded to the charge of antinomianism, but he wants to be sure that not only his enemies, but also his friends, do not read antinomianism into his teachings. One who has been saved by the grace of God will always be changed by that grace. Paul now turns to applications that are particularly suited to the circumstances of his readers in Rome.

LIVING SACRIFICES (12:1-2)

Paul states the theme of his application section in the familiar verses with which chapter 12 begins. He uses the image of sacrifice surely for the benefit of his Jewish readers. The old sacrifices have passed away in Christ, who died for the salvation of His people. Their responsibility is not to offer animal sacrifices, but to give their own lives to the kind of obedience that is pleasing to God. Anyone who truly understands what Christ has done could hardly live a life that shows no concern for what pleases Him. This sacrifice is pleasing to God, not because of our merit, but because of the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed to those who belong to Him, and is a form of worship that God accepts and values. Such a life will naturally be out of step with the surrounding pagan world, but will produce results that demonstrate the wisdom of God's revealed will for His creatures. Note that Paul's appeal here is to the mind and the will, the body and the spirit; all that we are is to be offered to God in response to His gracious work of salvation in our lives.

THE BODY OF CHRIST (12:3-8)

- Verse 3 - What does this offering of a living sacrifice look like? The mixed Jewish-Gentile congregations of the first century tended to have a problem with disunity, as most congregations since have experienced. Paul knows that pride is at the root of such conflicts, so he speaks immediately of the Romans' need to evaluate themselves and others realistically, recognizing their own weaknesses as well as the strengths of others.
- Verses 4-5 - He then turns to the image of the body that he used earlier to such good effect in his first letter to the church at Corinth. As members of the body have different functions, so do members of the church. All are important, and all benefit from the diversity of gifts. Paul emphasizes that all gifts are given by grace and are to be exercised in faith. No one can exercise a gift of God profitably in his own strength. Instead, he must trust God to work through him as he uses the gift he has been given.
- Verses 6-8 - Note that the gifts listed here apply both to the designated leaders of the congregation and to its members. Prophesying, teaching, encouraging (i.e., counseling or exhorting), and leadership are all functions of elders, while serving (the word comes from the same Greek word that gives us "deacon"), contributing, and showing mercy are related to the role of the deacon. All of these gifts are also found in members of the congregation. If all use their gifts diligently, the entire congregation will benefit, and God will be honored. There is no room for the pride that disparages the contributions of others.

LOVE FOR OTHERS (12:9-21)

In a passage that recalls the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul now exhorts the Romans to show love for one another and for those outside the church, even those who are actively persecuting Christians and opposing God's work.

- Verse 9 - Paul here speaks against hypocrisy. It is easy to love someone to his face and tear him to pieces behind his back. The Christian must openly encourage good wherever it exists, and oppose evil wherever it is found, whether in his own life or in the lives of others.
- Verse 10 - This speaks of the selfless love that should characterize the Body of Christ (cf. Philippians 2:1-4).
- Verse 11 - Paul encourages the kind of zeal that is so difficult to maintain as one moves beyond the early years of Christian experience.
- Verses 12-13 - Here he reminds the Romans of the basic Christian virtues and speaks of the importance of fundamental outward expressions of Christian love to other believers.
- Verse 14 - Paul then moves on to speak of the Christian's conduct before the world, which in this case was not a friendly place. He first speaks in words that are almost identical to those of Jesus (Matthew 5:44), telling his readers to bless the persecutors rather than cursing them. In saying this he surely meant to pray for them, but he also had something else in mind, as he makes clear at the end of the chapter.
- Verses 15-16 - These verses are often used in the context of relationships among Christians. Though that may be a legitimate application, it seems that Paul is here speaking of the way Christians relate to the unbelieving world. Surely sharing in the joys and sorrows of unsaved friends and neighbors, living in harmony with those around, and associating with people of all classes can be a terrific testimony of the love of Christ and the change He makes in those who trust Him.
- Verses 17-18 - Of course, there are those who will not respond positively to acts of kindness, but will persist in mistreatment of those around them. When faced with this sort of behavior, the Christian must be careful not to respond in kind, but instead to maintain a spotless reputation. If there is conflict, the Christian should never be the cause of it (verse 18 does *not* mean "live peaceably with others as long as you can stand it!").
- Verses 19-21 - It is not up to the Christian to punish evildoers in the world; God will assume that responsibility, and He can handle it quite nicely, whether in this world or in the world to come. Instead, the Christian should go out of his way to be kind to those who make life difficult for him. The result will be that the offender will either feel so guilty that he will change his ways, or will be further hardened and thus bring greater judgment on himself. Evil truly can be overcome with good. [NOTE: This section should not be applied to the behavior of governments; like Jesus in Matthew 5:38-42, Paul is here speaking of relationships among individuals. These verses should not be used to argue against war or capital punishment, for instance. Paul speaks of the Christian's relationship to government, and the responsibilities of that government, in the next chapter.]

ROMANS - LESSON XIV

Romans 13

In the closing verses of chapter twelve, Paul has been dealing with the responsibilities of Christians to individual believers and unbelievers. He now turns to the Christian's responsibility to the state in what has become the best-known passage in Scripture relating to that subject.

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE STATE (13:1-7)

Though the first great persecution of Christians was still almost a decade away when Paul wrote this letter, there had already been many occasions on which Christians had had brushes with the law, beginning with the experience of Jesus Himself. Many over the years have mistakenly taken Jesus' teaching at the end of Matthew 5 and applied it to the state, but Paul prevents any such misuse here by juxtaposing his treatment of the Christian's responsibility to the state immediately after his echoing of Matthew 5 at the end of chapter twelve.

- Verses 1-2 - Paul begins by noting that Christians should obey the government because the rulers held their places of authority by divine sufferance. This does not by any means imply divine approval of everything done by civil rulers (contra. the theory of the divine right of kings), though it certainly suggests that, since rulers have been placed in their positions by God, they are accountable to God for the way they exercise their authority. Paul firmly rules out rebellion, and says that those who rebel justly receive punishment.
- Verses 3-4 - The following verses sum up in very general terms the major function of government - to protect the righteous and punish the evildoer. In other words, the function of government is to bring order to society.
- Verses 5-6 - Paul goes on to say that Christians are to obey, not only out of fear of punishment, but also as a matter of conscience before God; if one truly honors God, one will also honor the rulers whom He has established. Obedience to law involves civil as well as criminal matters, and certainly includes the paying of taxes.
- Verse 7 - Note that the final sentence of the paragraph emphasizes that the Christian's response to the government involves not just obedience and paying taxes, but also includes attitudes of honor and respect; too often we follow the former without adhering to the latter. When you are tempted to speak disrespectfully of the governing powers, remember that the emperor when Paul penned these words was Nero.

The extremely general nature of the passage has always invited controversy. To begin with, Paul mentions no exceptions to the Christian's responsibility to obey the government. We have enough other examples in Scripture, however, to assure us that the Christian has not only the right, but the duty to disobey the government when the state commands something that would be sin against God (e.g. Peter and the other apostles in Acts 5:29, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, etc.). Paul also fails to define the limits of the state's duty to preserve the peace. Does this include relations with other governments as well as its own people? Does the power of the sword include the right to wage war? to execute criminals? under what circumstances? Can a state ever behave in such an ungodly manner as to disqualify itself as a legitimate government, thus meriting revolt? Needless to say, Christians have differed on many of these issues for almost two

thousand years now, and any attempt to answer them here would go far beyond the teaching of the book of Romans and the scope of this course.

THE LAW OF LOVE (13:8-10)

Paul now returns to the general theme of love about which he had spoken previously in chapter twelve, noting that, while we owe certain things to rulers, we owe a debt of love to everyone. The principles here are not in the least startling, but involve simple restatements of several of the Ten Commandments (the ones dealing with man's relationship to man) and some of the teaching of Jesus about the summary of the law. In passing, we should note that verse eight has occasionally been misinterpreted to forbid the borrowing of money (if this were the intent, Jesus never would have told His followers in the Sermon on the Mount to lend to those who wished to borrow from them); instead, it should be read as an admonition to pay one's bills on time. There can be no doubt that financial responsibility can do as much to enhance the reputation of the church as financial irresponsibility can do to damage it. Finally, verse ten may seem a bit weak in its statement of Christian responsibility, but the negative cast of Paul's language reflects the commandments he has just quoted from the Decalogue. Love provides the positive side of these negatives.

THE LAST DAYS (13:11-14)

- Verse 11 - Paul concludes the chapter by presenting further motivation for the Christian to live a life of obedience to authorities and love to all men. He reminds the Christians at Rome that they are living in the last days. In saying this, Paul is not intimating that the Consummation is right around the corner, although he clearly believed that it *could* be. The point is that the present age is the age between the comings of Christ - what has been begun by Christ's first coming will be completed by His second one. Christians should not live as if the status quo will go on forever. Our era is only a temporary one in which God is working out His salvation in preparation for the end of the age.
- Verse 12-14 - Paul thus exhorts his readers to live, not as children of their age, but rather as those who anticipate and look forward to the age to come, not only by their words, but also by their manner of life. It is vital in such a transitional age that the believer stand out in contrast to the darkness all around him. To see that these warning were needed, one need look no further than the church in Corinth, the city from which Paul was writing this letter.

It is also worth noting that verses 13 and 14 were the verses used by God to bring about the conversion of a dissolute young man in the city of Milan by the name of Augustine. Fleeing the call to moral living that was at the time much on his conscience, Augustine was walking in the garden of a friend when he heard children playing, chanting "Take up and read." Seeing a Bible on a bench before him, he opened it to these verses and was convicted of his sin and transformed. He went on to become the greatest theologian of the Ancient Church and a writer who emphasized salvation by the grace of God alone (see his *Confessions* for an account of his spiritual pilgrimage and conversion).

ROMANS - LESSON XV

Romans 14

When Christians from different backgrounds come together, the most frequent conflicts arise, not over major theological issues, but over relatively minor matters of practice. These conflicts are often associated with the divergent cultures from which the Christians originate. The church in Rome was no different. Rome was a highly cosmopolitan city that included a large Jewish population (Claudius had earlier banished the Jews from the city, but they had returned in larger numbers than ever after his death). The Roman church therefore faced conflicts stemming from cultural differences between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. The instructions Paul gives here in chapter fourteen are very similar to those he earlier gave to the church in Corinth in I Corinthians 8.

THE PROBLEM (14:1-12)

The “disputable matters” with which the church in Rome was preoccupied seem to have been dietary practices (verse 2) and the observance of religious holy days (verse 5). The former issue could have arisen from Jewish dietary restrictions, about which the Gentiles would have no compunctions, or the matter of meat offered to idols, which often was a greater problem of conscience for Gentiles who had been recently converted out of paganism than it was for Jews. The religious observances in question were probably the Jewish feasts, though Colossians 2:16 suggests that Sabbath observance was also a bone of contention in some Christian churches.

When such differences arise, those whose consciences cannot permit them to engage in the questionable practice tend to condemn those who engage in it, while the latter sniff haughtily at the spiritual immaturity of those who are still bound by old legalisms. Paul says that these differences are to be tolerated without mutual recriminations. The “weak” (those who do not engage in the practice) are not to condemn the “strong” (those who do), while the strong are not to look down upon the weak. Each is accountable to the Lord and are not to be judged by one another.

Several cautions should be mentioned at this point. First of all, Paul is not saying that all moral questions are fair game and that all divergent opinions on matters of Christian practice are to be tolerated. The issues in question involve practices that are not wrong in and of themselves, but are considered wrong by some because of the cultural context involved. The principles in this chapter might well be applied to Christian use of alcoholic beverages, but could not be applied to the matter of extramarital sex, for example.

Secondly, it should be noted that “weak” and “strong” here need not refer to classes of Christians, but instead to where certain people stand on a particular issue. All of us are “weak” on some things and “strong” on others.

The third caution has to do with motivation. The behavior that is not to be criticized or looked down upon is behavior that is done “unto the Lord.” Paul does not intend in this passage to give a license for all forms of questionable self-indulgence.

A final caution comes from an important point made by Paul in this initial section. He notes that Christians are servants of God. While this fact may seem rather obvious, too often Christians forget that others do not need to seek our approval for the things they do. Their primary loyalty, and ours, belongs to Christ.

THE SOLUTION (14:13-25)

Having said these things, Paul then goes on to exhort the Roman Christians about the proper use of their liberty in Christ. While Christians are free to live apart from legalistic restrictions as they seek to honor God, love for their brothers and sisters in Christ should motivate them to use their liberty to refrain voluntarily from those practices that may do spiritual damage to others. Paul is not here establishing a “tyranny of the weak.” When he talks about not offending other believers or putting a stumblingblock in their path, he means that we should do nothing that would cause another Christian to sin, not that we should avoid any practice at which another Christian might gasp! Paul’s position here is that, as far as the specific issues he has raised are concerned, the strong Christians are right - but this does not mean they have the right to flaunt their behavior before those who cannot engage in such practices, nor do they have the right to browbeat their weaker brethren. The weak, furthermore, have no business condemning the strong for their lack of scruples about such things.

It is worth noting, however, that Paul addresses most of his comments to the strong. They are in a position to alter their behavior, while the weak brothers are not. The strong should refrain from behavior toward the weak that is psychologically coercive. If that means keeping their practices to themselves and not engaging in them in public, so be it. The weak, on the other hand, may not alter their practices unless they first alter their perceptions of the behavior. For one whose conscience balks at a particular practice, to engage in that practice to please some other Christian is clearly sin even if the practice is not really sinful because he is doing what he believes to be wrong in order to please men.

Paul again expresses three very important cautions, all of which have to do with the perspective in which this whole issue must be placed. First of all, he points out that the way Christians act toward one another should be motivated by love and a desire for peace among the brethren. We should be willing to “bend over backwards” for the good of other Christians. Secondly, he reminds the Christians in Rome that these issues really are not very important. Disputes over such matters often dominate the thinking and relationships of Christians, but this should not be the case. These issues are not of the essence of the faith, and Christians who treat them as such tend to divide brethren. The third caution is that convictions in these matters are best exercised privately. Each Christian should do what his conscience demands or permits, but the more he keeps his practices to himself, the more he will contribute to the peace of the church.

ROMANS - LESSON XVI

Romans 15-16

The concluding chapters of the book of Romans, while containing allusions to some of the issues covered in earlier chapters, consist mostly of personal comments and greetings from the apostle Paul to his readers in Rome.

MUTUAL ACCEPTANCE AND EDIFICATION (15:1-13)

- Verses 1-3 - Paul here continues the subject of the previous chapter by encouraging the Christians in Rome to maintain unity among themselves by putting up with one another's failings, being willing to suffer deprivation themselves rather than imposing it upon others. He uses Christ Himself as the supreme example of such an attitude of self-sacrifice.
- Verse 4 - Having just quoted Psalm 69:9, Paul reminds his readers that such Scriptures not only refer to Christ, but also are intended to address their own experience.
- Verses 5-7 - Furthermore, the Christians in Rome should accept one another because Christ had accepted each of them.
- Verses 8-9 - Should they be less open than their Master? When Christ humbled Himself to become a servant, He did so for Jews and Gentiles alike. Should they not then do the same for one another?
- Verses 9-12 - Paul then closes the section by quoting verses from the Old Testament (II Samuel 22:50 cf. Psalm 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1; Isaiah 11:10) to show that it was God's intention all along for the Jews and Gentiles to be united in worshiping Him in the Kingdom of His Son.
- Verse 13 - Joy and peace in the Body of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit leads to an abundance of hope, the expectation of the final fulfillment of God's promises for Jews and Gentiles alike.

PAUL'S MINISTRY TO THE GENTILES (15:14-21)

- Verses 14-16 - Paul has now finished the substantive portion of his letter. He acknowledges the spiritual strength of the congregation in Rome, and humbly states that his exhortation was not because of their weakness, but because of the apostolic duty that God had given him to carry the Good News to the Gentiles.
- Verses 17-21 - Paul then goes on to speak of his ministry throughout Asia Minor, noting that his desire was to be a pioneer missionary, taking the Gospel where it had never gone before. Before this, pioneering work was still needed in Asia Minor, but now that work has come to a close. He concludes this section with a quotation from Isaiah 52:15.

PAUL'S FUTURE PLANS (15:22-33)

- Verses 22-24 - Having seen the Church established in the eastern half of the Roman Empire, Paul now plans to turn his attention to the West. Spain was at this time the western frontier of Roman power, and that was where Paul desired to go. On the way, it was his intention to fulfill his long-delayed desire to visit the imperial capital.

- Verses 25-27 - First, however, he needed to visit Jerusalem in order to deliver an offering taken among the churches in Greece for the assistance of the Jerusalem Church. Not surprisingly, Paul speaks of this offering in language that emphasizes his desire for unity among Jewish and Gentile Christians.
- Verses 28-29 - Paul is confident that when he is able to visit Rome, he will bring with him blessing from Christ for the church. This, of course, is precisely what happens even though Paul's visit to Rome was as an imperial prisoner rather than as a traveling evangelist and church planter.
- Verses 30-33 - Paul asks the Romans to pray for him because he is aware of the potential danger associated with the trip to Palestine. He knows that those dangers come not only from unbelieving Jews, but also from Jewish Christians who may have heard disturbing things about his ministry among the Gentiles. As matters turned out, of course, Paul did run into trouble in Jerusalem. He was well-received by the Christians, but the Jewish authorities trumped up charges against him, and he was arrested and imprisoned after a near riot in the Temple. He then spent several years in prison in Caesarea, appealed to Caesar, and was transferred to Rome, where he finally got to meet the Roman Christians under circumstances quite different from what he had originally envisioned.

PERSONAL GREETINGS (16:1-16)

The concluding chapter has been the target of considerable speculation. Many have questioned that such a long list of greetings could be appended to a letter sent to a church that Paul had never visited. They suggest that a copy of the book had also been sent to other churches, and that the sixteenth chapter was really the list of greetings sent to Ephesus. Such a suggestion is totally unnecessary, however, given the ease of travel in the Roman world and the fact that the Jews who had been driven from Rome by Claudius returned when Nero ascended the imperial throne. Paul undoubtedly had met many of these exiled Jews in his travels, and it is no surprise that he knew many people in the Roman church even though he had never visited the city.

A few comments about the list might be helpful:

- Phoebe (verses 1-2) was apparently the bearer of the letter. She is called a "servant" - the same word used for deacons in I Timothy 3. Whether this term was intended to imply church office or general Christian servanthood is obviously a matter of considerable dispute, though the word is the common one used for household servants and is only used in the New Testament to refer to church office when the context indicates that this is the writer's intention. She clearly was a woman known for supporting Paul's work and the ministries of others as well.
- Priscilla and Aquila (verses 3-4) are certainly the best-known names on the list. They did get around. Paul had already encountered them in Corinth and Ephesus, and now they were back in Rome, where they had lived prior to Claudius' expulsion of the Jews (cf. Acts 18:2,18,26; I Corinthians 16:19; II Timothy 4:19).
- The mention of Mary in verse 6 means little. Mary was a common name, both in the New Testament and in the Roman world. It is impossible to identify this woman with anyone in particular, least of all with the mother of Jesus, who according to tradition went to Ephesus with the Apostle John and lived there until her death.

- Andronicus and Junia, mentioned in verse 7, are said to be Paul's relatives, which may mean no more than that they were Jewish. They are also said to be "well-known to the apostles," which is not surprising given the fact that they came to Christ long before Paul himself and had partaken of the persecutions to which Christians were subject. Some translations describe them as "outstanding among the apostles," and feminists have pounced on this translation to suggest that Junia (which may be a feminine name) proves that the New Testament church ordained women. Even if the second translation is correct, however, the term "apostles" must be taken in a general rather than a specific sense (cf. New Testament use of other terms such as "disciple," "deacon" - see above, and "elder" - a term which can apply to older men as well as church officers). In the same way that all followers of Christ may legitimately be described as disciples, so may all be called apostles in the sense that all have been sent by Christ into the world to be His witnesses.
- The Rufus mentioned in verse 13 could well be the son of Simon of Cyrene (cf. Mark 15:21), but need not be. The name was a very common one.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND BLESSING (16:17-27)

- Verses 17-19 - Paul concludes the letter with a warning about those who would try to stir up conflicts out of ungodly motives.
- Verse 20 - Paul alludes here to the promise in Genesis 3:15.
- Verses 21-23 - He then sends greetings from his companions. Note that Timothy was in Corinth with Paul at the time the letter was written, Tertius was the scribe who wrote Paul's words as he dictated them, and Gaius, who was a prominent figure in the Corinthians church (I Corinthians 1:14).
- Verses 25-27 - Paul ends with a blessing, alluding to the mystery of the union of Jews and Gentiles in the Kingdom that has played such a major role in the epistle.