

The Righteousness That Is By Faith!



**An exposition of Romans 1-8
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The Gospel Is....

Romans 1:1b-1:4... *separated to the gospel of God (which He had promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures), about His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was marked out the Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead;*

The gospel is:

- a) of God
- b) a promised gospel –as revealed by the prophets in the Scriptures
- c) about His Son
- d) who is a real person, a descendant of King David
- e) and also was declared to be the Son of God in power
- f) by the Holy Spirit
- g) through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The gospel is “of God” – it originated in the mind of the Father who then sent His Son for the redemption of all who believe. The Father was not reluctantly persuaded to have mercy but in fact decided on the gospel course of action “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:1-11).

The gospel of Jesus the Son of God was “promised beforehand... in the Scriptures” – through the prophets. The gospel was not made up in a day, or revealed as a new notion in a philosopher’s brain. God was continually looking forward to the revelation of His Son and gave big hints to those who knew Him best – the prophets. These fragmentary hints (Hebrews 1:1-3) formed the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle with Jesus as the final answer. The gospel is what the prophets longed for. The gospel fulfills the law and the prophets. It is the completion of God’s promise to fallen humanity made as early as Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He will bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

The gospel is “about His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”, in the words of the Purpose-Driven Life “it is not about you”. The gospel is not about the individual Christian or even the needs of mankind as a whole. It is not a program or a doctrine. It is good news about the Son of God. Thus while the gospel enables personal salvation it is not wholly about personal salvation. The gospel is about the incarnation, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection and return of Jesus Christ – whether anyone gets saved or not. The good news would still be both true and good even if no one ever believed it. The fact that millions have believed it is wonderful, but the good news is simply and intrinsically good, because it is about the eternal Son of God.

“Who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” – Jesus is a flesh and blood person with a definite (and royal and traceable) ancestry. Thus Jesus is far more than a conceptualization or a philosophical theory. Jesus could be touched, Jesus got tired, Jesus wept and got angry and suffered and died. Jesus was fully, definitely, historically and genetically human. Yet Jesus was not an “ordinary human”, He was of the chosen Messianic line via Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and David, a line that contained such luminaries as Solomon and Uzziah and Rahab and Ruth. The only reason that Jesus

was a carpenter was because the royal line had been suppressed. If Herod and the Romans had not been occupying Israel Jesus would almost certainly have been King.

“Who was marked out the Son of God in power” – this is translated in varying ways:

The ASV has: who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord,

And the ISV: and who according to the spirit of holiness was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead-Jesus Christ our Lord.

Either way this means that the resurrection validated the claims Jesus made about being the Son of God. Claims such as “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life...” require the strongest possible validation and this was provided by Jesus’ rising from the dead.

This declaration of Sonship was accomplished through the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, whose mission includes exalting and validating the work of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in power at His baptism and during Jesus ministry the Holy Spirit worked in and through Jesus to heal and teach and do signs and wonders that authenticated His gospel of the Kingdom.

The means that God the Holy Spirit used to validate Christ was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This awesome act immediately made Jesus different from all other religious leaders whose graves are with us to this day. The resurrection meant that God had approved of Jesus and that one human being has overcome death – and by implication, many more would soon follow. The resurrection meant that the curse on those “in Adam” (death) did not apply to those who are “in Christ”.

Romans 5:15-19 *But God's free gift is not like Adam's offense. For if many people died as the result of one man's offense, how much more have God's grace and the free gift given through the kindness of one man, Jesus Christ, been showered on many people! (16) Nor can the free gift be compared to what came through the man who sinned. For the sentence that followed one man's offense brought condemnation, but the free gift brought justification, even after many offenses. (17) For if, through one man, death ruled because of that man's offense, how much more will those who receive such overflowing grace and the gift of righteousness rule in life because of one man, Jesus Christ! (18) Consequently, just as one offense resulted in condemnation for everyone, so one act of righteousness results in justification and life for everyone. (19) For just as through one man's disobedience many people were made sinners, so also through one man's obedience many people will be made righteous.*

Loved By God, Called As Saints

Romans 1:5-7 *We have received grace and apostleship through Him to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations, on behalf of His name, (6) including yourselves who are also Jesus Christ's by calling: (7) To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Grace, apostleship, calling, sainthood, love, grace, peace and the obedience of faith....

The gospel is primarily about these spiritual and inward sorts of things. As importance as success and prosperity are they just don't get a mention among the eternal verities that form the bedrock of our faith. This is because our faith is forever, and when something is forever only the eternal is at all important. Even a hundred years of stellar success are as nothing compared to eternity.

The calling of all Christians is to holiness, to sainthood and to perfection. Few will be apostles, but all can be holy. Holiness is a state of being that is perfectly aligned with God. The holy person is the perfect recipient of God's love and the perfect performer of God's will. Holiness is not achieved by striving, but by receiving Christ by faith and living in His grace.

You do not become holy by engaging in an ever-increasing list of do's and don'ts. That was the wearisome burdensome path of the Law and it failed. Holiness comes out from Christ within and comes from "tuning in to God". Holiness is akin to a resonance that we sing to once we learn to sing in tune with God Almighty - in a spiritual sense; I do not mean that we actually have to be musical. Rather that holiness is like a frequency that we "get" and gradually acquire within ourselves as we let our faith apprehend Christ and His glory.

The angels are holy because they sing the hymns of Heaven and do His will swiftly. They were created holy - in tune with divine things, they did not have to strive to become holy, or to do this or that, they simply are at one with the divine nature and will - and that single fact makes them holy. By contrast Satan's profane nature came from simply deciding to sing his own seductive tune.

When Paul says that we are called to be holy he means that we are called to be in loving harmony with the Creator in our nature, our thoughts and our will. This loving harmony means two things:

- a) Consecration to the sweetness of the faith relationship
- b) Not sinning - because that is "missing the mark" or in the analogy I am using "living out of tune with God".

Paul puts two things together in his short phrase: "loved by God, called as saints." The first is that God's love is prior. Once we receive God's love and become consciously aware of His love, then it becomes much easier to live holy lives like the angle sin Heaven, full of praise and consecration and joy and swift obedience. That is why one of

the main jobs of the Spirit of Holiness is to teach our hearts the love of God that makes us holy:

Romans 5:5 *This hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

Ephesians 3:16-19 *I pray that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, (17) and that the Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, (18) may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, (19) and to know the Messiah's love that surpasses knowledge, so you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

God's love poured out in our hearts, tunes us into Heaven and makes holiness a real possibility. That is why worship is so important. Powerful Spirit-filled worship helps us to be truly aligned with God.

Worship and holiness are not duties we perform but attitudes we live out in reverence to God. You cannot force worship - though you can put yourself in the right place and time and frame of mind to worship. Similarly you cannot force holiness, but you can do a lot to help it along the way.

Holiness is not detachment from real life but is rather alignment and resonance with God in the midst of real life.

However to do this we may need to detach ourselves from certain destructive aspects of "the world" - such as violent television programs, pornography, and all that is foul, prideful or wicked.

Because holiness is perfect loving harmonious alignment with the nature and will of God it is not constructed by the natural man (which has no idea of what such harmony means) rather it is received by faith and is from faith to faith. Faith causes us to trust the nature and will of God and thus to understand the nature and will of God and so to come into harmony with the nature and will of God.

External holiness, such as that of the Pharisees, consists of the "rules and teachings of men" and fails to bring anyone into harmony with the nature and will of God (Colossians 2:19-23) but rather makes them "twice the sons of Hell" (Matthew 23:15) For the Law makes nothing perfect! (Hebrews 7:19).

Faith in Christ and the interior work of the Holy Spirit is the ONLY path to holiness and external regulations cannot add to it, perfect it or hasten it (Galatians 3;1-5). The path of holiness is to believe God, receive and apprehend His love and then live a life of love of God and neighbor in the light of God's teachings and promptings and leadings. For it is those who are led by the Spirit that are the sons of God! (Romans 8:14)

Ministering Spiritual Things

Romans 1:8-12 *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, 10 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established-- 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*

Paul did not desire to see the Romans for political or financial reasons, but for spiritual reasons. His aim was to "impart to you some spiritual gift" and he talks about praying for them, encouraging them and also being encouraged by them.

The primary aim of ministry is "spiritual fruit" - conversions, baptisms, repentances, fillings and callings - lives changed and transformed by the powerful grace of God!

Attendance is not a spiritual fruit just by itself - Jesus had some large crowds that quickly fell away. Offerings are not spiritual fruit, unless they come from sincere hearts. And vast edifices and programs are not spiritual fruit unless they result in changed lives and in people living for the glory of God. Let's go verse by verse:

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." Paul is thankful for their FAITH - not their wealth or power or prominence or political influence. Paul is thankful that the Roman Christians were trusting in Jesus!

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son" Paul says that he serves God "with my spirit". That is the deepest kind of Christian service! Sentimentalists serve God with their hearts, intellectuals serve God with their mind, radicals serve God with their will - but apostles serve God with their spirit! Such a person is conscious of God moving powerfully within them and of their own anointing and of the movements within them toward grace and healing and the working of miracles. They are led by the Spirit and know intuitively the right spiritual words to say, and when to heal, and what anointing is on them at what time. They have gone beyond feelings and formulas and methods and paradigms and simply minister from their spirit under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"That without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" - Spiritual ministry begins and ends in prayer, no matter what takes place in-between. Paul is yearning and praying and groaning for the work of God in Rome to progress and senses that he should be there and he prays earnestly for them, and for a chance to see them. Paul does not give up on them, he prays 'without ceasing' - that is not irregularly or in fits and starts but daily, persistently and consistently. "Always in my prayers" - pray was a habit with Paul, a deep ingrained lifestyle and the Romans were always mentioned in his hours of travail for the Kingdom.

"Making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you." Now this verse indicates that Paul subjected his travel plans and ministry itinerary to "the will of God" and that God's will included such mundane details as where and when Paul would preach the gospel. The spiritual minister listens for God's voice on such issues. Not that every appointment needs divine validation, but there should be a sensitivity and a receptivity to God setting our agenda - not man. There needs to be flexibility for "divine appointments" and also time to bring the schedule before the Lord for His sense on things. Many a time I have felt a "check" in my spirit about a certain thing and sure enough that appointment did not come to pass.

"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift". Ministry is about impartation - imparting Christ, imparting the gospel, imparting knowledge of the truth, imparting moral example, imparting spiritual gifts and imparting the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 *So affectionately longing for you, we were willing to have imparted to you, not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you have become beloved to us.*

To impart means to take something that is yours and then gives it to another person so that it becomes fully theirs. It is transferring ownership and is used in that sense in the King James Version:

Luke 3:11 *He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*

Paul ministered with his spirit (which was filled with the Holy Spirit) and from that ministry Paul imparted spiritual gifts to others. This may have occurred through the laying on of hands:

1 Timothy 4:14 *Do not neglect the gift in you, which was given you by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the body of elders.*

2 Timothy 1:6 Therefore I remind you to inflame anew the gift of God, which is in you by the putting on of my hands.

Paul quickly avoids any sense of superiority and "guru status" when he adds: "so that you may be established-- that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." Paul wanted to impart spiritual gifts so that the Romans might be established and so that both they and Paul would be mightily encouraged as they fellowshiped together in Christ. Paul would give encouragement to them and also receive encouragement from them - it was a two-way street.

Spiritual gifts are given to make the church a strong and established community of encouraging people rejoicing in their faith in Christ.

The International Gospel

Romans 1:13-16 *But I would not have you ignorant, brothers, that oftentimes I purposed to come to you, and was kept back until the present; that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other nations. (14) I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the foreigners, both to the wise and to the unwise. (15) So, as much as is in me lies, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are at Rome also. (16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

Paul says the gospel is for all nations (v.13), Greeks and foreigners/barbarians (v. 14), wise and unwise (v.14), Romans (v.15) and Jews (v.16). To all these people the gospel is the "power of God unto salvation" (v.16) that produces spiritual fruit (v.13) and as such Paul is not ashamed of it (v16).

Because the gospel is for all, then Paul saw himself as a debtor to all until they had all heard this gospel, which would save them.

"I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the foreigners, both to the wise and to the unwise."

Those with an apostolic mindset feel a burden to get the gospel to ALL. Ministries like Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Campus Crusade, TWR, FEBC and many others try to reach the whole world. They feel "in debt" to the unreached peoples of the world and cannot rest until the gospel has been preached to them.

This can even apply at national level as in John Knox's prayer "Lord, give me Scotland or I will die!" or on a local level such as Richard Baxter's pastoral concern for his parish and his door to door visitation of every member. These people are concerned that every single soul is reached for God and are not at rest until the job is done.

This sense of being in debt until the job is done is very healthy and should prompt us to deep strategic thinking about our various ministries. We need to ask questions such as:

1. Who should we be reaching with the gospel?
2. What is our calling: global, national, an ethnic group, a city, a neighborhood, a school campus?
3. Who among those we should be reaching - are not yet reached?
4. Where are they? (The unreached)
5. Do those who are not yet reached share some common characteristics? What are these characteristics?

6. How can we meet them where they are at (e.g. if we translate our material into Spanish will that help)?
7. Can we organize people so they are allocated each to a specific group of unreached people with common characteristics?
8. How should we apportion our finances between discipleship to the already reached and evangelism of the unreached?
9. Can we create fast-moving highly adaptable structures for outreach ministry in order to expedite the task?
10. How can we disciple people so they share a burden for the unreached and thus multiply the ministry to those who have not yet heard?

It is not the duty of the unevangelized to go to church - is the job of the church to go to the unevangelized!

It is not enough to have a good Sunday School and a big sign and hope that people turn up! There has to be an intentional observing of the community and the developing of an outreach strategy using the wisdom provided by the Holy Spirit of God. Here are some possible strategies:

- Networking - each member brings an unevangelized friend to church.
- Questionnaires - go door to door and interview the community (which is what Rick Warren did).
- Community Involvement - visit prisons and hospitals and liaise with community leaders get to know the city and its needs and minister to them.
- Media Ministry - tracts, radio, TV, newspaper ads, church websites aimed at outreach.
- Direct Evangelism - divide your neighborhood into blocks and go visit people with a gospel presentation or invitation to an Alpha course etc.

It can help to get census data on your area or missions statistics from sources like <http://www.strategicnetwork.org> , <http://www.census.gov/> and of course Google searches on your town, city or people group e.g. "census statistics Smithtown 12345" or "population statistics Zambia" then create a map or chart depicting who has been reached and who is missing out.

This sounds like hard work - and it is! But we do this hard work because we have the gospel, which means that we have the power of God to transform the world and we want all to know about it and to have the opportunity for salvation.

Paul was an outward looking strategic thinker who wanted all to hear and we should also follow in his footsteps.

The Righteous Shall Live By Faith

Romans 1:17 *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*

God imputes righteousness to us not when we achieve - but when we believe. That is the crux of Paul's gospel. The Christian lives by faith and afterwards, as a consequence, does good works. (Ephesians 2:8-10) The Christian does not live by achieving. Achieving is secondary; even being right is secondary, trusting God is primal and essential. To illustrate this let's pick up where we left off in the last Eternity Bible Study and look at Christian decision-making by faith.

The last Eternity-DBS (on Iran Nukes) was rather depressing in concluding on the note that in some of life's most critical decisions we are left "walking by faith" without a nice, neat assured answer jumping out at us from the pages of Scripture.

"In the end we are left with a large pile of intelligence data and analysis, and a "gut feeling" about what will happen that we hope is from the Lord. We have to trust that wisdom will come from God in our darkest hour. Many have found that to be so, but we still left walking by faith."

In so many key decisions in life there is no easy answer. Should young Bill marry Joanne or Mary or Sue? (As long as the partner is a single Christian of the opposite gender it is OK biblically) But one of these choices might be so much better than another! Joanne may be a splendid wife for a missionary whereas Sue is a fine Christian but not at all cross-cultural or able to cope with change and Mary has a secret mental disorder that makes her witty but unstable. This is not easy to discern at the time.

So many big decisions have no clear and direct guidance in the Bible - including decisions about marriages, houses, lands, cars - which college, which missionary society, which investment to make, which course to pursue.

In the end such decisions are made "by faith" - that is out of our relationship with God.

Walking by faith liberates us from having to be right in order to be righteous. Let me explain. Most of our anguish over decisions is due to a strong desire to "make the right choice" and this can be overpoweringly intense. We feel that we have sinned in some way if we make a wrong choice - even over something like which college to go to or which car to buy. We feel our choices are very, very important and they take on an almost existential significance.

However when we walk by faith we leave our choices in God's hands and providing they are not immoral choices then we have not sinned. Faith, in contrast to law, gives us room to fail. Abraham, the father of those who are of faith made some dubious choices (see the second half of Genesis 12) and poor decisions (see Genesis 20) but was still declared righteous in the eyes of God.

The Christian life is not from law to law, but from faith to faith. It is not a continual searching for exactly the right rule for each of life's circumstances but rather it is a searching for God in each of life's circumstances.

If Bill marries Mary and ends up with a mentally ill wife and cannot go to the mission field is his life and destiny forfeit? Will Bill end up getting little reward in Heaven because he made a wrong choice and ended up with God's "second best plan for his life"? NOT AT ALL!!!

Bill can still earn a huge reward in heaven by tenderly caring for Mary in her illness and showing love and patience and kindness. Bill may even end up being a more saintly person than if he had gone to the mission field.

Living from "law to law", by principles and edicts and decisions becomes a prison - even for the most obsessive-compulsive perfectionists. If you are constantly terrified of making a wrong choice for fear that it will put you on "the also-ran list of spiritual failures" then you have a view of God that is all about judgment and performance. Such a person lacks a grasp of the life of grace and love and being at peace and at rest before God in worship.

Living "from faith to faith" is living a life of calm trust in the love and acceptance of God. It means that you, like Abraham, can make awful mistakes and poor decisions and still bounce back. You are safe!

Living by faith and "being led by the Spirit" are somewhat synonymous in that they both involve being directly led by God. Both involve us in trusting our Spirit-filled Christian conscience - as it is informed by the Word of God.

The life of living by faith is free but it is not perfect. The disciples, in the gospels, were learners not experts. The life of faith is a life of receiving God into us and of learning about Him and His ways. It is NOT a life of knowing about God then "doing it" up to a certain required level of spiritual performance.

In fact the life of faith NEVER "gets it completely right". As soon as you learn to trust and obey God at one level, He moves things up a notch - like a video game with infinite skill levels. The life of faith is continually unfolding and is about progress and pilgrimage and is a journey. It is not about ticking spiritual achievements off a well-defined and easily understood heavenly checklist.

"The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith" - in other words you get the revelation of God's righteousness, as you trust Him more and more. Righteousness is not achieved through the "checklist" or even understood through the law, it is revealed to the conscience of the trusting and obedient disciple by Christ within him (or her).

God imputes righteousness to us not when we achieve - but when we believe because He values our connection to Him more than our independent performance for Him. If we are connected to God by faith then He can work in us and make us perfect in time, and grow us even in eternity. As long as we have the faith connection there is hope we can be

inwardly transformed through the Spirit. Without that faith connection even the best spiritual performance is "dead" and there is no hope of further inward transformation. This is why true righteousness requires faith and is always from faith, to faith.

Without Excuse

Romans 1:18-21 *For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, (19) since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. (20) From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse. (21) For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened.*

Paul says that every human being has a clear witness to God in the form of Creation so that people are "without excuse" in rejecting God.

The world around us is obviously:

- a) Vast
- b) Intricate
- c) Self-sustaining
- d) Intelligent
- e) Well-designed
- f) Functional
- g) Beautiful
- h) Harmonious
- i) Not able to design or create itself (we don't find lions inventing giraffes)
- j) Reliable - in that the laws of nature do not vary from week to week!

Given that it is highly improbable that such beautiful design "just happened". Random assembly (e.g. throwing junk together at a junkyard) tends to produce ugly things with far more useless features than useful features. However Creation is beautiful, functional, interdependent, elegant and self-sustaining, which all points away from randomness and toward intelligent and purposeful design!

Given the high probability of intelligent design, we then must ask logically "Who could design something as vast as this Universe?" Such a being must be:

- a) Very powerful
- b) Very wise
- c) Very ancient
- d) Able to exist for long periods of time

Therefore the Creator must be an extremely wise and powerful eternal being.

This being has authority over all He has made and thus is the true ruler of the Universe and the one to whom all human authority must rightfully defer. Further examination of the way the Universe is made with high regard for beauty, symmetry, order and community would lead one to believe that we are dealing with a very good and benevolent being. This is a Ruler who deserves our full trust and adoration.

All this can be deduced from a deep consideration of the natural world and its order and its beauty. Even without a Bible or a preacher mankind can come to the understanding of a good and wise and trustworthy Creator.

It is possible to know God simply through Creation, though it is exceedingly rare, Abraham was without Bible, or church, or priest yet had a living faith in Almighty God. Abraham walked in deep friendship and relationship with God though his formal theology was a fraction of what we have in textbooks today.

Enough is revealed to make every person stop in wonder and awe and ask the question "who made all of this?". I used to take young people on camping trips in outback Australia and when they stopped at night and looked at the stars around the campfire, - it was then the spiritual questions came easily.

But humanity has pushed the evidence for god aside. Why? Because it limits our "freedom" to do what we like, when we like to His Creation.

Sin is addictive and truth is inconvenient - so it is suppressed: "who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth", however no one can reject the truth and still remain wise (no matter how intelligent they are).

"Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened." Once you reject the idea of God you are left with a huge intellectual vacuum. Since this vacuum wants to be filled, and it cannot be filled with the truth, since that has been rejected out of hand, then it can only be filled with nonsense. And that is precisely what happens.

There is a subtle way to reject God - and that is nominal religion. "For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude." Nominal religion is having God without glory or gratitude. It is God-idea with no personal impact, no hallelujahs, and no behavioral change. It is the cold dead academic God of the philosophers, studied but never adored.

Giving glory to God means seeing Him as more important than ourselves. This is just seeing Him rightly. It is not about us, it is all about Him. And logically once we realize that life is all about God, then our games and ambitions seem small. If we glorify God, really glorify Him and see Him as of ultimate importance, then we have to change. Since most people don't want change, they suppress the knowledge of God.

The other dangerous thing is gratitude. You see gratitude is life-changing. Once we start being grateful to God for our life, then everything changes, His power is released and we begin to pray, and to learn, and to grow.

We need to step back and behold the stars and the penguins and to start feeling awe and wonder and beauty and grace. Once we let that take hold of us we will feel small, and God will seem big, and we will praise and glorify and thank our amazing Creator God.

Degradation

Romans 1:22-27 *Professing to be wise, they became fools (23) and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things. (24) Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves. (25) For they changed the truth of God into a lie, and they worshiped and served the created thing more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (26) For this cause, God gave them up to dishonorable affections. For even their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature. (27) And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another; males with males working out shamefulness, and receiving in themselves the recompense which was fitting for their error.*

People who are disconnected from God are disconnected from the ground of their being and collapse into negative lifestyle patterns. The closest parts of our being to God are our worship life (v.23, 25); our intellectual life (v.25) and our sexual life (v.24 & 26-28) and these are the first to be degraded by the refusal to acknowledge God or to give thanks to Him.

Degradation starts with the mind and the will - "not acknowledging God", proceeds to the worship life "For they changed the truth of God into a lie, and they worshiped and served the created thing more than the Creator, who is blessed forever" and ends up with people enslaved to sexual lusts - "burned in their lust toward one another".

Twice the phrase 'and God gave them up' is used first in verse 24 to indicate inordinate heterosexual lust and secondly in verse 26 to indicate homosexual lust, as an even deeper state of abandonment by God.

A similar sentiment was uttered during the days before the Flood:

Genesis 6:3 *And Jehovah said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, in his erring; he is flesh. Yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.*

God's Spirit strives against our sinful tendencies so the good Christian experiences conflict and struggle. This is a good sign - for it means God has not given you over to your sin!

Galatians 5:16-17 *I say, then, walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do.*

We all contain the potential for grievous sin and many Christians battle with powerful sinful urges. The difference here is that God has stopped restraining them. He has given these people over and walked away, letting them have their perverse desires.

Once we are disconnected from God we are left at the mercy of all that is "not God" and this then controls us. Such control can become a stronghold, a habitual way of life, that is very difficult to break and which can even become part of a person's identity "I am a...thief, criminal, drug addict, sex addict etc."

Addiction is always rooted in a lack of the true knowledge of God at some point, which is why Step Three of the Twelve Step Alcoholics Anonymous program includes complete surrender to God. I even once talked to a non-Christian drug rehabilitation counselor who said "the only way that people get off heroin is to become a Christian".

Moving back away from idols and false worship and into the true knowledge of God and surrender to His will in the power of the Holy Spirit is the key to moving from the lifestyle of abandonment to lust and back to self-control and to fulfillment in Christ.

Now the homosexuality debate is a tense and difficult one, and without wishing to offend I must yet make the following points:

- a) In the Bible homosexuality is always viewed as a serious and degrading sin.
- b) In the Bible homosexuality is never viewed as a valid alternative lifestyle for Christians.
- c) Neither is it viewed as permanent or beyond the reach of God's grace but as redeemable. The homosexual can be washed, cleaned and sanctified. (1 Corinthians 6:16-19)

For more on what the Bible says about homosexuality go to:
<http://www.aibi.ph/articles/homosexuality.htm>

However we view the homosexuality debate we must agree that it is a terrible thing to be given over to our own weaknesses and lusts - whether heterosexual or homosexual. We must pray for two things a) the true knowledge of God and b) the daily filling of the Holy Spirit - for it is the true knowledge of God that keeps us at one with our Heavenly Father and the filling with the Spirit that gives us power to resist fleshly urges (Galatians 5:16-18, Romans 8:4-11)

We must also forsake certain things that feed our addictions - even though they may be innocent enough for some other people. Christians with sexual addictions need to install anti-pornography software such as Internet filtering, and accountability software.

Here are a few helpful web addresses:

www.we-blocker.com - Free Internet filtering software.

www.postini.com - Low cost email filtering software

mail.yahoo.com - free email with very good spam filtering

www.techmission.org/resources/net_filtering.php - Resources on Internet filtering etc.

<http://www.integrity.com/> - a ISP that provides a range of filtering solutions and accountability software.

What Paul is telling us is that fallen mankind will not find God on its own. Without the power of the gospel humankind will just plunge into addictions and compulsions and strong lusts that will destroy it spiritually, emotionally and physically. Without the gospel humanity naturally and inevitably goes downward into chaos.

The Reprobate Mind

Romans 1:28-32 HCSB *And because they did not think it worthwhile to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them over to a worthless mind to do what is morally wrong. (29) They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, disputes, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, (30) slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, (31) undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful. (32) Although they know full well God's just sentence--that those who practice such things deserve to die--they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.*

Our inmost being is constructed by God's love and without divine love we are lost. And if we continue to reject God's love and push away even the very knowledge of God, all sorts of evils come to dwell in the inmost vacuum of our souls. Without God we turn inward, into a black hole, which may not seem large at first, but which eventually consumes the entire personality making it ever more dysfunctional.

People far from God devour one another. They become predatory and unsafe, treacherous and deceitful, violent and abusive. The concerns of self are uppermost and concern for others is minimal, they are without empathy or understanding of the pain of others. Eventually they become narcissists - totally in love with themselves and treating other people as objects with complete disdain.

Who we are in our innermost being is determined by just one thing - our attitude to God and in the light of that, our attitude to others. If we reject the knowledge of God we end up rejecting our own growth as persons.

We see this with the most brilliant atheists such as George Bernard Shaw who end up in later life as bitter, acerbic and unlovely. Even a great mind cannot save a person from interior collapse, - if that person rejects God.

Here are some last words of atheists:

Voltaire, the most influential atheist of Europe in his day, cried out with his dying breath: "I am abandoned by God and man; I shall go to hell! I will give you half of what I am worth, if you will give me six months life."

Sir Thomas Scott, chancellor of England: "Until this moment, I thought there was neither God nor hell; now I know and feel that there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty!"

Sir Francis Newport, the head of an English infidel club to those gathered around his deathbed: "You need not tell me there is no God for I know there is one, and that I am in His presence! You need not tell me there is no hell. I feel myself already slipping. Wretches, cease your idle talk about there being hope for me! I know I am lost forever! Oh, that fire! Oh, the insufferable pangs of hell!"

M.F. Rich: "Terrible horrors hang over my soul! I have given my immortality for gold; and its weight sinks me into a hopeless, helpless Hell!"

Thomas Paine, the leading atheistic writer in American colonies: "I would give worlds if I had them, that The Age of Reason had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! . . . No, don't leave; stay with me! Send even a child to stay with me; for I am on the edge of Hell here alone. If ever the Devil had an agent, I have been that one."

Thomas Carlyle: "I am as good as without hope; a sad old man gazing into the final chasm."

That final chasm is the soul's distance from God and from eternal life. We may be able to function in business without the knowledge of God, but we cannot function as full persons. When such folk are finally faced with themselves and eternity it is awful and empty.

The sins of the wicked are simply reflections of the shape their particular inner black hole has chosen to take. One may be selfish, narcissistic, boastful, cultured and vain while another may be violent, coarse and lustful.

Wickedness does not do its deeds alone, but rather excuses them and even encourages others in the same excess. "Swingers" form their clubs, drunkards head to bars, thieves form into crime gangs and so on and so forth, each convinced that others should join them in their sin. Yet they are also the first to condemn others - they are often hard, merciless and unloving. Someone once said "Sentimentality is often just a disguise for cruelty, the most vicious Mafia bosses were the ones who wept the most at movies and who sent flowers to their mothers."

Entire communities can dwell in darkness without the knowledge of God, and these communities frequently have a mentality that is small-minded, petty and nasty. Such places can continue to reject God and become poverty-stricken and lawless, havens for thieves and outlaws, smugglers and pirates.

One such community was the pirate city of Port Royal, Jamaica. Here is what happened to it from: <http://nautarch.tamu.edu/portroyal/>

Once known as the 'Wickedest City on Earth,' Port Royal on the island of Jamaica was one of the largest towns in the English colonies during the late 17th century. It was a haven for privateers and pirates, such as the famed Sir Henry Morgan, due to its excellent geographic location in the middle of the Caribbean. From Port Royal, these buccaneers preyed upon and plundered the heavily laden treasure fleets departing from the Spanish Main.

After 1670, the importance of Port Royal and Jamaica to England was increasingly due to trade in slaves, sugar, and raw materials. It soon became the mercantile center of the Caribbean area, with vast amounts of goods flowing in and out of the port through an expansive trade network.

Unfortunately, the glory of Port Royal was short-lived. On the morning of June 7th, 1692, a massive earthquake hit Jamaica. The tremors rocked the sandy peninsula on which the town was built, causing buildings to slide and disappear beneath the sea. An estimated 2000 Port Royalists were killed immediately in the disaster. Many more perished from injuries and disease in the following days.

Self-Condemned Critics

Romans 2:1-4 HCSB *Therefore, anyone of you who judges is without excuse. For when you judge another, you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the same things. (2) We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is based on the truth. (3) Do you really think--anyone of you who judges those who do such things yet do the same--that you will escape God's judgment? (4) Or do you despise the riches of His kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*

The people Paul is writing to here are the "critics", those who consider themselves righteous and who condemn others. He is outlining an important biblical principle - that we will be judged with the very same judgment which we impose on others.

The following verses illustrate this principle of reciprocity - that God treats us in the same manner that we treat those in our power:

Luke 6:36-38 HCSB *Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (37) "Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.*

Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (38) Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over--will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Matthew 5:7 HCSB *Blessed are the merciful, because they will be shown mercy.*

Psalms 18:25-26 HCSB *With the faithful You prove Yourself faithful; with the blameless man You prove Yourself blameless; (26) with the pure You prove Yourself pure, but with the crooked You prove Yourself shrewd.*

Matthew 18:32-35 HCSB *"Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. (33) Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' (34) And his master got angry and handed him over to the jailers until he could pay everything that was owed. (35) So My heavenly Father will also do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart."*

These critics were not being merciful but were standing over others and condemning them for their faults. However the critics were guilty of the very same things! It is like those ministers who thunder against fornication while having an affair with the church secretary. Sometimes it is those who are committing a particular sin that are most vehement in preaching against it from the pulpit.

God does not approve such sermons, though they may be factually and exegetically correct - they come from a wrong heart with the wrong motive. In fact such diatribes only store up judgment for the person by clearly showing that they knew that what they were doing (the affair or other sin) was absolutely wrong.

Matthew 12:36-37 HCSB *I tell you that on the Day of Judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. (37) For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."*

The fact that they are getting away with flagrant sin at the moment is no indicator of God's approval of their sinning - but instead is a sign of God's great patience.

Do you really think--anyone of you who judges those who do such things yet do the same--that you will escape God's judgment? (4) Or do you despise the riches of His kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Patience with sin is not the same as permission to sin. God wants people to give up their sin, and to come to repentance. God never allows anyone to sin, He always wants him or her to be righteous and is just waiting for him or her to give up the sin and get right with Him.

In the end there is no escaping God's judgment, it will either fall in this life, or in the next, on the cross or on the sinner. Sin always gets paid for, and dealt with. You can

repent and deal with your sin and have it paid for by Christ. Or you can be hard-hearted and impenitent and pay for your sin yourself as God deals with you.

The ideal is to be soft-hearted and of a tender conscience, quickly repenting of sin and coming to Christ for strength and for cleansing.

We are also to be merciful folk remembering that we could easily stumble and fall ourselves:

Galatians 6:1-5 HCSB *Brothers, if someone is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual should restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so you won't be tempted also. (2) Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (3) For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he is deceiving himself. (4) But each person should examine his own work, and then he will have a reason for boasting in himself alone, and not in respect to someone else. (5) For each person will have to carry his own load.*

Paul is slowly building an argument here that will culminate with "there are none righteous, no not one" and show that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". In Romans 2:1-4 he shows that the judgmental hypocrites won't escape, they are just as big a bunch of sinners as those they condemn.

You see living by rules and laws and religious codes, without faith, without gospel and without the power of the indwelling Christ, inevitably leads to hypocrisy. Without God no one can live up to their own ethical code. There will always be a point of hypocrisy where we do something that we condemn others for. Like the plumber whose roof leaks or the electrician with the broken toaster we are apt to mess up in life precisely at our point of greatest strength. None of us can be "experts" on religion and morality, in the end we should all be penitents - casting ourselves on the kindness and patience of God.

There Is No Favoritism With God

Romans 2:5-11 HCSB *But because of your hardness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed. (6) He will repay each one according to his works: (7) eternal life to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; (8) but wrath and indignation to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth, but are obeying unrighteousness; (9) affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; (10) but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. (11) There is no favoritism with God.*

Firstly, the theological dilemma - is Paul preaching "salvation by works" and how does this fit in with statements such as Ephesians 2:8-10?

Ephesians 2:8-10 HCSB *For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift-- (9) not from works, so that no one can boast. (10) For we are His creation--created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.*

In Romans 2:5-11 firstly he maintains: "He will repay each one according to his works" what could be clearer than that?

Paul then says how this judgment will operate: "eternal life to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but wrath and indignation to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth, but are obeying unrighteousness;"

And confirms it further by stating: "(9) affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; (10) but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek."

The answer is complex, let's start with Ephesians 2:8-10 above. Christians are indeed saved by grace, through faith - but it does not stop there, we are saved for a purpose - to do good works, and if we do NOT do the good works we are thereby frustrating the very purpose of our salvation! Our faith makes us a 'new creature' and the new creature is made by God to do good works. So something is seriously wrong if faith does not result in works.

If I type this article and then send it to the printer I expect it to print. If it does not print, I am not satisfied. Something is wrong. The article is there on the computer but it is not hitting the "real world". It is stuck inside the machine. God has never intended for our faith to be merely internal, to be an emotion or thought or reflection that is "stuck inside the machine" - of our soul. Faith is supposed to create output and that output is called "good works".

Faith is closely connected with the kinds of things that Paul mentions here as part of the good person. Firstly if you really have faith you must "seek for glory, honor and immortality". Faith leads us to seek these things. Faith believes that God exists and is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Faith and seeking God's highest good are so closely connected as to almost identical. (Also living faith also leads us away from being self-seeking, disobeying the truth and doing evil. Romans 2:8, 9)

The other requirement is that Christians will be "patiently doing good". This is different from the meritorious works of the religious law. This is "doing good" as in the Good Samaritan - not sacrificing bull and goats. Now if Christ is truly in us, then we will be like the Good Samaritan and patiently do good to others. Faith leads to Christ dwelling in our hearts (Ephesians 3:14-21) and Christ dwelling in our hearts leads to kindness, love, patience and compassion, which in turn surely lead to us doing good works.

Faith and faith's output are connected. You cannot just get your concepts right and be assured of Heaven. Faith is not conceptual it is spiritual. And if spiritual then it moves our inmost being to action. The penitent man leads a penitent life. The man of faith lives

a faithful life and Jesus clearly expects that faithful servants will diligently do good deeds. (Matthew 24:45-51, 25:14-30)

God does not have favorites. He does not say "because you are Jew you are welcome into My Kingdom" not does He say "because you are a Greek you are welcome into My Kingdom". Rather - it is because you have sought me and loved me and believed in me and obeyed my commandments out of your love and faith and hope - then you are welcome into My Kingdom.

Now works alone, without faith can never save us. An unbeliever is an unbeliever no matter how many little old ladies they help across the road. The zealous and energetically religious Pharisees were unsaved, that much is abundantly clear (Romans 10:1-3). Faith in Jesus and reliance on God's grace and the cross is foundational. No one is saved apart faith.

However faith that does not bear fruit is "dead faith" (James 2:17-26), in such a case the tree of faith has no output, no fruit, it is dead, it is useless and barren. We are not meant to live useless and barren lives. The saved man is to become the good neighbor. For what else is meant by the Great Command "you shall love your neighbor as yourselves?" And if that command is neglected then the whole of the Christian faith is also neglected, for all the Law and the prophets hang upon it.

Galatians 5:14 HCSB *For the entire law is fulfilled in one statement: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

Romans 13:8-10 HCSB *Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (9) The commandments: You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment--all are summed up by this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (10) Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.*

God is not fooled by passionate but shallow protestations of faith by those who are completely inactive in living their faith out. God is impartial, which means that He cannot be persuaded apart from the evidence. God is looking for evidence of your faith such as the patient doing of good, and the seeking of glory, honor and immortality.

Signing a doctrinal statement or praying a short prayer will not guarantee Heaven unless you live in the light of that prayer or doctrinal statement. If that prayer or doctrinal statement has begun the process of birthing true faith in you so that you have become a "true believer" then you will find your character and your actions conforming to what Paul asks here - the patient doing of good and the seeking of glory, honor and immortality. This is what God wants of you, this is what God seeks from you and this will be the proof of your living faith on "the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed."

The Law In Our Hearts

Romans 2:12-16 HCSB *All those who sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all those who sinned under the law will be judged by the law. (13) For the hearers of the law are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be declared righteous. (14) So, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, instinctively do what the law demands, they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law. (15) They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences testify in support of this, and their competing thoughts either accuse or excuse them (16) on the day when God judges what people have kept secret, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.*

The first key phrase is: "For the hearers of the law are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be declared righteous."

In other words it is not the church-goers that are righteous, but the commandment-keepers. Of course church-going is good if it helps you to obey God! (I pastor a small church so I have to say that!).

Those who hear the law, have its light, and have an opportunity to obey it. The law is thus meant to be a lamp to the path of the obedient disciple. The Bible is truth and we are supposed to live by it.

But some people who do not hear any bible teaching still do righteous deeds - such as being compassionate, kind and honest and helpful. When people who have not heard the Scriptures, still do God's will, so we say that: "the law is written on their hearts".

Some people still have a lot of the light of God in their conscience - Ghandi I think would be one such person and some folk I met in tribal areas of Papua New Guinea were, intuitively and sensitively, very good people. Such consciences are rare but they do exist and Abraham would be an example of someone who followed God without having any church or Scriptures.

"So, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, instinctively do what the law demands, they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences testify in support of this, and their competing thoughts either accuse or excuse them on the day when God judges what people have kept secret, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus."

Even Gentiles (in modern terms -people without the Scriptures) can be spiritually sensitive and walk according to their consciences. And God will judge them by the light which they have, the light of their own best and deepest understanding of right and wrong, of gratitude and ingratitude, and of the holy and the profane.

Paul leaves us in mid-air on the question of whether such people will go to Heaven. Abraham certainly was justified by following God via his conscience - and perhaps there

are also a few modern examples. But I will leave that thorny question to the theologians!

The question Paul is nudging towards is the location of our knowledge of God. Is the law written in our hearts, or just in our book and in our minds? There is a certain kind of highly conceptual Christianity that spends much time discussing the latest books and ideas - but scarcely obeys a single one of God's commandments. (In fact the very idea of "godly obedience" is scorned as Pharisaical legalism.) Knowing is good, but doing is much better.

The gospel is personal, moral and spiritual (not impersonal, abstract and intellectual) and thus its locus of operation is primarily in the spirit, in the conscience, and in the heart.

Hebrews 8:10-12 HCSB *"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the Lord: "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. (11) And each person will not teach his fellow citizen, and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. (12) For I will be merciful to their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins."*

The "law written on our hearts" is a deeply internalized sense of respecting God's commandments and is part of God's gift to Christians in the New Covenant. In fact it is part of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

2 Corinthians 3:2-3 HCSB *You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, recognized and read by everyone, (3) since it is plain that you are Christ's letter, produced by us, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tablets but on tablets that are hearts of flesh.*

Romans 2:28-29 HCSB *For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. (29) On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart--by the Spirit, not the letter. His praise is not from men but from God.*

So God's rules for living are supposed to operate at the deepest level of our being, through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus a truly Spirit-filled Christian should have a sensitive conscience and a sense that they are ruled "from within" by God.

Ultimately though figuring out who is in or out of Heaven "is not our call" but God's, who is the only one entitled to judge the deep recesses of the human heart: "on the day when God judges what people have kept secret, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus." On that day we may find the preacher did it all out of selfish ambition and that the prostitute knew no other way to keep her children from starving.

The rules of God are not things to be studied and debated, but should be written deep in our hearts and conscience by faith - and lived out in daily life, "For the hearers of the law are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be declared righteous".

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The rules of God are not things to be studied and debated, but should be written deep in our hearts and conscience by faith - and lived out in daily life, "For the hearers of the law are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be declared righteous".

Hypocritical Religion

Romans 2:17-24 MKJV *Behold, you are called a Jew, and rest in the Law, and boast in God; (18) and know His will and approve the things excelling, being instructed out of the Law; (19) and persuading yourselves to be a guide of the blind, a light to those in darkness; (20) an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, who have the form of knowledge and of the truth in the Law. (21) Therefore the one teaching another, do you not teach yourself? The one preaching not to steal, do you steal? (22) The one saying not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? The one detesting idols, do you rob temples? (23) You who boast in Law, do you dishonor God through breaking the Law? (24) For the name of God is blasphemed among the nations because of you, as it is written.*

Many people think that because they "know more" about God that is all that is required to make them a better person. In this view, knowledge and expertise in religion equals virtue - and the more knowledge and expertise, the greater the level of spiritual virtue attained by that person.

But a "look out the window" at the real world tells us that such a view is merely a clever self-delusion. There are many people with lots of Bible knowledge who lack charity, grace and kindness, and even some who are downright mean and nasty - such as the leaders of spiritually abusive bible cults.

We occasionally find people who consider themselves to be spiritual leaders but who do not lead spiritual lives. These false teachers and hypocrites claim to: "know His will and approve the things excelling, being instructed out of the Law; (19) and persuading yourselves to be a guide of the blind, a light to those in darkness; (20) an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, who have the form of knowledge and of the truth" - yet who lead lives that are the absolute opposite of righteousness, who are proud elitist and selfish, who have carnal appetites and numerous sexual affairs, who are financially dishonest and emotionally predatory. They are completely "of the world" and are devoid of the Spirit.

Thus they have the knowledge but not the testimony, they have bible verses but not bible lives, they have degrees and write books, but they do not obey the commandments of Christ. They consider salesmanship and communication skill as a substitute for real righteousness and obedience. They delude themselves that preaching the gospel is their good deed, and that living out the gospel is for those who hear them,

but not for the teacher! They are all talk, all "Lord, Lord.." I lip but not in life, of these Jesus says:

Matthew 7:21-23 MKJV *Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. (22) Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? (23) And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!*

In Romans 2; 21-24 Paul points out the direct contradictions in the lives of some of these bible-believing Jewish Christians: (21) Therefore the one teaching another, do you not teach yourself? The one preaching not to steal, do you steal? (22) The one saying not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? The one detesting idols, do you rob temples? (23) You who boast in Law, do you dishonor God through breaking the Law? (24) For the name of God is blasphemed among the nations because of you, as it is written.

The key to this is the initial volley: Therefore the one teaching another, do you not teach yourself? The true disciple is always trying to learn, to be teachable and "teaches themselves" many things and always tries to put what they learn into action. If we read "be kind to one another" we can then ask "how can I do that?" and then try and put into action, and watch the result and give ourselves feedback and thus, in time, learn how to be kind in wise and practical ways.

Some people can give you the Greek definition of each of the nine fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 - but have they "taught themselves" how to live that way so they show these fruit? Now let me quickly add that knowledge is good, but it is not enough, we need also to act on it.

The result of all this religious talk, (even though it may be theologically correct and deeply insightful) without accompanying action is that god is not glorified - rather He is dishonored and blasphemed:

You who boast in Law, do you dishonor God through breaking the Law? For the name of God is blasphemed among the nations because of you, as it is written.

Thus God is not glorified by Christian communication alone. Communication without action, is the gospel without discipleship, and results in blasphemy, not glory.

The people of this world want to see consistent Christian lives that ring true, and they observe our character, our actions, and our fruitfulness as a person. Do we treat others well? Are we kind to small children? Are we patient with the elderly? These things matter more than a thousand speeches on why they should believe.

God is not looking for knowledge and information; He is searching for genuine faith and obedience. The Gentile who obeys God and is kind and good and patient and honest and faithful to his wife and caring to his children is better than the Jew who commits

adultery and robs temples even if that Jew is a High Priest. Tomorrow we will see that Paul defines a "real Jew" as someone with a changed heart, not a removed foreskin.

God is interested in having people who are real and true and loving and obedient and righteous - even if they are dorky communicators. Now by all means study the Scriptures and think deep theological thoughts (Paul certainly did) but do so with the determination to live it out in real life.

True Circumcision Is Of The Heart

Romans 2:25-29 HCSB *For circumcision benefits you if you observe the law, but if you are a lawbreaker, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. (26) Therefore if an uncircumcised man keeps the law's requirements, will his uncircumcision not be counted as circumcision? (27) A man who is physically uncircumcised, but who fulfills the law, will judge you who are a lawbreaker in spite of having the letter of the law and circumcision. (28) For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. (29) On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart--by the Spirit, not the letter. His praise is not from men but from God.*

Is "membership" of the right race, the right religion, or the right denomination important to God? Or is Christianity an internal and spiritual faith which operates regardless of such external factors as the race one belongs to or the church that one goes to?

Paul says five very important things that answer this question:

- a) Disobedience invalidates the ritual "belonging to God" value of circumcision. (v.25)
- b) Obedience places a person in just as good standing with God as the Old Covenant. (v.26)
- c) A non-Jew who fulfills the law is better than a Jew who breaks the law. (v. 27)
- d) True circumcision is of the heart and not of the flesh. (v.28, 29)
- e) Being a Jew is inward and spiritual - not legal and outward. (v.28, 29)

It is clear that true circumcision and true Jewishness is a "spiritual and inward" reality and not something that can be conferred by man at a ceremony, as important as that ceremony may be, or through inheritance, no matter how noble the ancestry. It is the heart not the membership or the ritual that matters.

By analogy we can make exactly the same argument for baptism – that the unbaptised person who obeys God is regarded as baptized, while the baptized person who disobeys God is regarded as unbaptised! Now this is not to invalidate baptism, which is clearly commanded in Scripture (Matthew 28:18-20) but to say that baptism is ineffective unless accompanied by living faith reflected in an obedient Christian life.

And the same set of arguments can be made even for confirmation or ordination. Thus true circumcision, baptism, confirmation or ordination is of the heart and by the Spirit,

not of the letter or of human externals. Just as a true Jew is one who is inwardly a Jew so a true Christian is one who is inwardly a Christian, and so a truly anointed and conformed Christian is one who has the Spirit within them, and a true minister of the gospel is one who serves Christ from the heart – not one who has merely met the requirements of an ordaining body.

This is a radical affirmation of interior spirituality reflected in an obedient life. No laws, rituals or external human factors are required, just simple, loving faithful obedience to God. Membership of a spiritual group – even of the Jewish race and the Old Covenant, is incomplete and insufficient. The heart must be right with God and in tune with the Holy Spirit.

Judah means “praise” and Jew comes from the word “Judah” and so means (in spiritual terms) one who lives for the praise of God. So a true Jew is a person who lives to praise God and who brings praise to the name God. Thus a disobedient, unspiritual and unbelieving person cannot be a “true Jew” - no matter how many genealogical records they possess. For a true Jew is always a believer in Christ Jesus.

[Now to say that a “true Jew” is spiritual not genetic is not to advocate anti-Semitism, or to deny the Holocaust or to impugn the validity of the State of Israel. I am part-Jewish myself and have studied Hebrew and wish to study in Israel should God give me opportunity to do so.]

No one gets into Heaven based on their ancestry or on a ritual performed on them when they are eight days old! Salvation is entirely by faith and is by the grace of God and is entirely independent of race or gender.

The question of “membership in a true Church” is an active and vital one for many people. Lets take two cases, Bill goes to a cultist Jehovah's Witness church but is in disagreement with its doctrines and has come to a living and real faith in Christ. On the other hand Jane goes to a good evangelical church but has no living faith evident in his/her life. Which person is more pleasing to God? The one with living faith and an obedient lifestyle! Not the one with the better church! Now this is not to advocate joining a cultist church but to say that organizational membership is relatively unimportant.

It is not where we are in the structure but where we are with God that counts. It is indeed possible to be a Christian leader in a major denomination or mission's agency and rise to the very top and be acclaimed by men – but be inwardly uncircumcised of heart. Our praise is not from men but from God and political skill in Christian circles is no indicator of divine approval. Instead an obedient and loving life filled with grace and full of the Holy Spirit is the indicator of divine approval.

Human nature wants to simplify this, to have clear categories of who is “in” and who is “out” and to have required membership, ceremonies and certificates that denote this. But Paul tells us that this simply will not do. There is no legal standing “of the letter” that can make us right with God (v.28, 29) instead our standing with God is inward and spiritual and by faith!

It is not a matter of being in the right organization, but it is rather a matter of being in Christ. It is not how many sacred ceremonies you have been through but of how deeply you are in the grace of God. No amount of religious belonging can make up for a hypocritical and disobedient life. On the other hand no lack of ceremony and status can truly harm the saint who walks with the Lord righteously and inwardly in Spirit and in truth.

What Advantage Has The Jew?

Romans 3:1-4 MKJV *Then what is the superiority of the Jew? Or what is the profit of circumcision? (2) Much, by every way! Chiefly, indeed, because they were entrusted with the oracles of God. (3) For what? If some did not believe, will not their unbelief nullify the faith of God? (4) Let it not be! But let God be true, and every man a liar; as it is written, "That You might be justified in Your sayings, and will overcome when You are judged."*

Romans 11:28-29 HCSB *Regarding the gospel, they (the Jews) are enemies for your advantage, but regarding election, they are loved because of their forefathers, (29) since God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable.*

Yesterday we saw that salvation is inward, spiritual and by faith alone and that ethnicity and sacramental acts – such as circumcision, baptism, confirmation and ordination make no prior and absolute claim on God. That is you cannot say "I am saved simply because I am Jewish and circumcised, that is all I need" or "I am saved because I was baptized and that is all I need". Thus, salvation does not depend on ethnicity or religious acts; but on living faith working through love.

This of course raises the question of whether these things (ethnicity and sacramental acts such as circumcision) are of any spiritual advantage at all. Paul's answer is that they are of considerable advantage because they expose us to the gospel and to the working of God..

The Jewish race was entrusted with the "oracles of God" or the "spoken words of God" through Moses and the prophets and is beloved because of the forefathers. A Jew was thus far more likely to hear the truth about the nature of God, than a non-Jew and be brought up with a better theology and ethical guidelines than a non-Jew. It is a bit like the advantage of being raised in a good Christian home rather than in a non-Christian home, especially if that non-Christian home contained some dysfunctional elements.

In the first century the Jewish world-view was vastly superior to the idolatrous and superstitious pagan world view. Thus Jews were automatically born into a better understanding of God and all the chosen apostles were Jews and all the Scriptures were written by Jews, and of course Jesus Himself was a Jew. No pagan could come remotely

close to the sophisticated and deep monotheistic view of the Jewish faith. Thus being Jewish was a huge spiritual advantage.

However Jewishness was not a guarantee of salvation. Salvation was by faith for both Jew and Gentile for there is no partiality with God. Similarly today there is no guarantee that those from Christian homes will be "more saved" than those from non-Christian homes. You are not saved by your parent's faith but by your won faith. Both people from Christian homes and people from non-Christian homes can freely come to Christ as Lord and Savior.

This is complicated by the fact that God made certain solemn covenant promises to the Jews – and God is faithful to His promises even if we are unfaithful. Indeed Paul says there will come a day when "all Israel will be saved".

Romans 11:25-27 HCSB *So that you will not be conceited, brothers, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery: a partial hardening has come to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. (26) And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Liberator will come from Zion; He will turn away godlessness from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.*

Even if every person in the whole world denies this, it will still happen - "But let God be true, and every man a liar." God will be true to His Word – and this does not depend on us or on our faithfulness or truthfulness. God will work out His destiny for Israel no matter how many people are in opposition.

The fact that God will be true even if every man is a liar means that God is above all human speech and human consciousness. The whole combined weight of human thought and action are but a drop in the bucket. God is not a projection of the evolved human mind but the primal Creator of all that exists – and has been existing and moving in ancient times before humans existed.

Isaiah 40:13-17 MKJV *Who has directed the Spirit of Jehovah, and what man taught Him counsel? (14) With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and made known the way of understanding to Him? (15) Behold, the nations are like a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the scales; behold, He takes up the coastlands as a very little thing. (16) And Lebanon is not enough to burn, nor the beasts of it enough for a burnt offering. (17) All nations before Him are as nothing; and to Him they are thought to be less than nothing, and vanity.*

"That You might be justified in Your sayings, and will overcome when You are judged." The absolute truthfulness of God means that He prevails in every court. God is impeccable and unimpeachable because all He says comes to pass, every single word and every single promise! Indeed God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable!

God's faithfulness to His Word and His covenant promises means that we will not cease to exist. He will not revoke our eternal life at some point in the future. It will be ours forever! Praise the Lord! It also means that when God has given us a special promise

that we are sure is from Him, that it will come to pass in its time, though that time may seem to be a long way off.

Joseph saw God's faithfulness deliver him from prison and Daniels saw God's promise deliver him from the den of lions. What God has purposed will stand and even your sin and unfaithfulness is unable to stop it. "For what? If some did not believe, will not their unbelief nullify the faith of God?"

But there is a holy limit to God's patience with us:

2 Timothy 2:11-13 HCSB *This saying is trustworthy: For if we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He will also deny us; (13) if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.*

Here is the "fine line" - God is faithful to the unfaithful but denies those who deny Him!

Light and Shadow

Romans 3:5-9 HCSB *But if our unrighteousness highlights God's righteousness, what are we to say? I use a human argument: Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath? (6) Absolutely not! Otherwise, how will God judge the world? (7) But if by my lie God's truth is amplified to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? (8) And why not say, just as some people slanderously claim we say, "Let us do evil so that good may come"? Their condemnation is deserved! (9) What then? Are we any better? Not at all! For we have previously charged that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin.*

A few weeks ago I did some counseling with a very dysfunctional woman who lurched from one crisis to the next. My reaction afterwards was to truly appreciate the wonderfully sensible and wise wife the Lord has given me in my wife Minda. It is as if the darkness of the shadow made the light seem brighter.

So in a way, the darkness of our sin can make God seem more glorious. And this is Paul's point. Sin is still sin, even if in the end it ends up bringing glory to God albeit in an upside down sort of a way.

"If our unrighteousness highlights God righteousness..." - as we have seen our sin can make God seem more holy. Our small-mindedness can make God seem great, and our petty impatience can make God seem long-suffering and kind. Yet these are not good things.

How can God inflict wrath on people that make Him seem more glorious? Surely it is unfair to punish those who make you look good? Not so - a poor student may make the teacher look brilliant - but nonetheless the poor student needs to be rebuked soundly.

"I use a human argument: Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath? (6) Absolutely not! Otherwise, how will God judge the world?" For God to judge the world He must punish evil and reward good. He must inflict wrath on those who disobey Him and those who love and pursue wickedness, that is only right and fair - and thus it is not unrighteous for God to inflict wrath.

In some dysfunctional corporations there is an unwritten rule that you must make the boss "look good" and promotion depends on this factor. If you play golf with the boss you must lose, if you tell jokes the boss must have the last laugh. God is not like that. God does not suffer from ego problems and personal insecurity. God wants us to perform to the very best of our ability and rewards us accordingly, and there is no reward for "making God look good by messing up".

In verses 7 & 8 Paul addresses two misunderstandings of the nature of sin and grace: "But if by my lie God's truth is amplified to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And why not say, just as some people slanderously claim we say, "Let us do evil so that good may come"? Their condemnation is deserved!"

The first misunderstanding is of the nature of sin. There can be two categories of sin, subjective - hurt feelings and reputations and objective - broken rules. A perfect example of this occurred this evening when someone wanted to pass some funds through the church account in a way that was against the IRS laws. I refused and the person accused me of thinking they were dishonest and slammed down the phone. I was made out to be the "bad person" for hurting the relationship and reputation (subjective guilt) while on the other hand I insisted that the request was procedurally wrong and illegal (broken rules - objective guilt).

Now making God seem glorious is subjectively good. But if doing so means breaking commandments then it is objectively wrong. In these verses Paul is staking Christianity as an objective and impartial faith. Paul is repudiating notions that God is akin to some Middle Eastern potentate that must be flattered, cajoled and made to look good.

There is no need to flatter God, to make Him look good, or to make Him feel a certain way. God is not concerned with how you make Him look or feel but how you serve and how you obey His commandments and belief His Word. Christianity is at its core an absolutely objective and impartial faith, with an objective and impartial God who expects us also to act without favoritism:

Romans 2:11 HCSB *There is no favoritism with God.*

1 Peter 1:17 HCSB *And if you address as Father the One who judges impartially based on each one's work, you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during this time of temporary residence.*

James 3:17 MKJV *But the wisdom that is from above is first truly pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

1 Timothy 5:21 MKJV *I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that you guard these things without prejudice, doing nothing by partiality.*

The classic passage on this is the "rich man, poor man" illustration in James 2:

James 2:1-10 HCSB *My brothers, hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ without showing favoritism. (2) For suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring, dressed in fine clothes, and a poor man dressed in dirty clothes also comes in. (3) If you look with favor on the man wearing the fine clothes so that you say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor man, "Stand over there," or, "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," (4) haven't you discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (5) Listen, my dear brothers: Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him? (6) Yet you dishonored that poor man. Don't the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? (7) Don't they blaspheme the noble name that you bear? (8) If you really carry out the royal law prescribed in Scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. (9) But if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (10) For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all.*

Now by God's objective standards there are no favorites and Jews and Greeks stand equally before God and are equally under sin: "What then? Are we any better? Not at all! For we have previously charged that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin," Thus the Jew who commits adultery is as unrighteous as a Gentile that commits adultery. Going to the "right church" makes no difference. And the Samaritan who loves his neighbor is better than the orthodox Jew who passes by on the other side.

Now for the second problem in verse eight - "just as some people slanderously claim we say, "Let us do evil so that good may come"? Since both Jew and Greek are under sin, both need forgiveness and grace from God through Jesus Christ and both receive it because of God's great love. The fact that the often licentious Gentiles could know God's grace along with the generally better behaved Jews created a problem similar to that of the elder son in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The returning wastrel seems to get all the attention and all the "good stuff" so that "let us sin so good may result" could be one interpretation. It was the elder son's interpretation and it was a wrong one!

God (and Paul) wants each of us to dwell in righteousness and not to sin. Grace is given in order to give us a clean slate so that we can get on with being good. Grace lifts the burden of guilt from off our shoulders so that we can better run the race. The whole of idea of grace is in the race. We are not given grace as a way to keep on sinning without penalty. Rather we are given grace so we can pursue righteousness. Fundamental to grace is repentance and contrition and the ardent faith-full desire for personal holiness.

Superficially grace may seem to reward sin but it does not do so. The elder son had the whole farm "all I have is yours", while the wastrel prodigal had nothing except a restored relationship (See Luke 15:11-32). Grace is not to be wasted. Some will get to Heaven "as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:10-15) but I would prefer to have works of "gold, silver and precious stones" that survive the "fire" on that day.

A World Full Of Sinners

Romans 3:10-18 HCSB *as it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one; (11) there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. (12) All have turned away, together they have become useless; there is no one who does good, there is not even one. (13) Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers' venom is under their lips. (14) Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. (15) Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16) ruin and wretchedness are in their paths, (17) and the path of peace they have not known. (18) There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

These pessimistic words are a quote from various Old Testament Psalms (Psalm 14 particularly plus Psalms 5, 10, 36, 53 and 140,) and Isaiah (esp. chapter 59) and indicate a state of national depravity prior to God's judgment. Paul quotes these verses to show that the Jews could go just as badly astray as the Gentiles and that there were times in Jewish history when not a single moral person could be found.

However these verses are not to be taken as permanently descriptive of all mankind - otherwise there would be no hope since "there are none righteous" would apply to everyone everywhere - including Christians. The plain fact of the matter is that millions of people are seeking after God, particularly during times and places of revival. I frequently get emails from people who plainly are seeking after God with great intensity and earnestness. If no-one anywhere, was seeking after God, then Jesus commands about "seek and ye shall find" would be empty rhetoric.

Thus the point of these quotes is to prove that "both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin". Everyone agreed that the Gentiles were under sin, so only Paul needed to prove that the Jews were under sin and that the Law did not make them immune from going astray. These verses indicate that despite having the Law, there were times when the Jewish nation disobeyed it flagrantly and completely and were "just as sinful" as anyone else - and that is what these quotes prove so eloquently. These verses prove that there is no race, no nation, and no group that is free from sin. But they do not support a generalized and total depravity for all mankind.

While all people are fallen some are quite lovable and trustworthy. There are people like Mary and Martha and Lazarus and Peter, James and John. There are indeed good-hearted folk that wait for God and desire to know Him. For every Judas there are eleven disciples.

When Jesus came to earth he came to God-fearing parents in Joseph and Mary. In fact Joseph is described as a "righteous man" - so how can there be "none righteous"? My answer is that at certain places and periods of history there are indeed none righteous - such as Sodom and before the Flood. These verses warn of us of the depravity that human nature can enter into unless grace intervenes. But they are not an accurate general theological description of all people in all places all the time.

Now indeed no one has attained God's level of righteousness and all have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) but the world has had 2000 years of the gospel and

grace of God and today there are many, many people doing good deeds and seeking after God.

On the other hand as a missionary I have been in places where the gospel has had minimal impact - and these verses are indeed true of such spots. Treachery, violence, hatred and gossip are all "normal" in such places. Where radical Islam holds sway "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and wretchedness are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known." seems to be the condition of the entire population.

We live on islands of grace in a world full of sinners but the spread of the gospel is steadily enlarging these islands of grace.

Yet we also need to remember that all is not rosy. There are many dangerous and harmful people with "tongues like asps" in the big, bad world and we need to be aware of them. As Jesus said to his apostles "beware of men..." (Matthew 10:17)

What these verses do tell us is that mankind is capable of going grievously and totally wrong. It can reach the point where there are no (or very few) good people left and judgment falls just as it did during the time of the Flood (See Genesis 6 & 7) or on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18 & 19). Mankind without the gospel can become totally and hopelessly lost.

Don Richardson in his book "Peace Child", writes of the Sawi tribe of Irian Jaya a province of Indonesia next to Papua New Guinea) and this tribe had so descended into darkness that it saw treachery as the highest virtue and when they were taught the Gospel story - they thought Judas was the hero!

Mankind though made in the image of God, can lose all trace of virtue, and as Solomon wrote: **Ecclesiastes 7:29 HCSB** *Only see this: I have discovered that God made people upright, but they pursued many schemes."*

How then do we look at people? Are they all violent and full of cursing? Or are they all God-seekers? Do we guard ourselves at every turn and become suspicious of all? Or do we trust everyone and "believe the best" even when we are dealing with a psychopath? Plainly we need to be able to discern the difference between saints and psychopaths and between those we should trust and those we should not trust.

Jesus gives us one simple guideline - "by their fruit you shall know them". Look at their inner nature, their decisions, their actual output, their deeds, and their lives - especially how they treat others, including the poor and those in their power.

To see the world as totally dark and depraved misses much of what God has done and is doing. On other hand to ignore our sinfulness and our potential to go wrong can be very costly naivety.

Let's put Paul's words in context -as proving a point about how bad we can get and that even people who have the Law can go terribly (and completely) astray.

Righteousness Apart From The Law

Romans 3:19-23 MKJV *But we know that whatever things the Law says, it says to those who are under the Law; so that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may be under judgment before God, (20) because by the works of the Law none of all flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law is the knowledge of sin. (21) But now a righteousness of God has been revealed apart from Law, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; (22) even the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ, toward all and upon all those who believe. For there is no difference, (23) for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,*

Paul's logic goes like this (you may need to read this a few times):

1. All are sinners, both Jew and Gentile, therefore all are law-breakers
2. There is no one who is righteous by the Law's standards.
3. The role of the law is simply to show us that we are sinners and to reveal "the knowledge of sin" - so the whole world may be under judgment before God.
4. So righteousness cannot be obtained via the law because we all fall short and just end up under God's judgment.
5. So if there is to be such an actual thing on this earth as righteousness, it must be obtained some other way than by the Law.
6. There must be righteousness "apart from the law".
7. That is the righteousness that is by faith, the only way out of God's judgment is faith in Christ Jesus
8. This righteousness by faith is witnessed to in the Law and the Prophets and is available to all who believe both Jew and Gentile.

The Law puts righteousness out of the reach of fallen mankind. The Law is so condemning that no one can totally live up to it. No one can make it, no one will be justified by it. The Law is an examination for the human soul - which has a 100% failure rate. That is why Paul says: "because by the works of the Law none of all flesh will be justified in His sight." We can try as hard as we might to be righteous but one day we will sin - and then we will fail.

If this is so then logically there are only two possibilities:

- a) If the law is the only source of righteousness before God, and we all fail the standards of the Law, then logically righteousness cannot exist on planet Earth.
- b) If the law is not the only source of righteousness before God - and there is another way to be righteous that is accessible to fallen mankind, then it is possible for righteousness to exist on planet Earth.

If righteousness is to exist in a fallen world then it cannot come through the Law which requires perfect performance. Now God wants righteousness to exist - but the Law only brings condemnation. The Law cannot fulfill God's desire for righteousness to exist on planet Earth. Not because the Law is wrong, but because we are weak and sinful. It just won't happen. The Law fails because of our weakness. So because God's intention to create a "world in which righteousness dwells" cannot be brought about by the Law, then it must happen "some other way" which does not involve the Law.

If righteousness is to exist in a fallen world it must come through "option b" - there must be another more realistic way to be righteous before God. Faith in Christ Jesus is "option b" - that is faith is another (non-legalistic) way to be righteous. It does not involve obeying the Law. It is accessible to all who believe.

This is what Paul means when he maintains: "But now a righteousness of God has been revealed apart from Law, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." There is another way of righteousness, a better path, a new and living Way that is apart from the Law, and which does not involve having to keep long lists of rules or having to work our way to Heaven.

It is not just a matter of changing a few commandments or of replacing Law X with Law Y. If that was all that was need for this earth to become a place in which righteousness dwells then God would have sent a book or a prophet or a persuader. If all that was needed was a change in the rules then God need not have sent His Son, and Jesus need not have gone to the cross. His teachings would have been sufficient. In Galatians Paul puts it this bluntly:

Galatians 2:21 MKJV *I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness is through law, then Christ died without cause.*

If righteousness could be obtainable by law-keeping then Jesus' teachings and example would have been enough. Just add a few laws and the job is done! But sin is deeper than that and required the radical solution of the cross. Law-keeping is impossible until the human sin-nature is dealt with. And that required Jesus to die on the cross.

The law cannot make any one good. It only points out that we are bad. It is like the California traffic laws which tell me that X is wrong but which give me no help in doing what is right. If you put a bad driver in a place with strict road rules, he just gets more traffic fines! So in a fallen world righteousness does not come through the Law. In fact in a fallen world the Law just brings "more fines" and the Bible calls that "condemnation".

The path of obtaining righteousness through rule-keeping is a fruitless dead-end that only results in guilt, condemnation and judgment. But this is not because the law is bad but because we are weak and sinful (see Romans 7) and cannot keep the Law. In fact the Law is holy, righteous and good.

Faith in Christ Jesus takes us off the dead-end track of rule-keeping and puts us on the new and living Way of life in Christ Jesus.

Faith in Christ Jesus moves us off the path that leads to condemnation and death and onto the path of eternal life and hope. We move from under the law to under the Spirit. We find we are righteous but in a completely different way. The righteousness is not earned from an outside source but flows from an inner dynamic - the life of Christ within us. The righteousness apart from the Law is the righteousness of Christ who comes to live within the heart of the believer.

This righteousness apart from the Law is witnessed to in the Old Testament, especially in the life of Abraham who was declared righteous long before the Law was handed down. Thus Abraham was righteous with this alternative righteousness - the righteousness that is by faith.

Freely Justified

Romans 3:24-31 HCSB *They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (25) God presented Him as a propitiation through faith in His blood, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. (26) He presented Him to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be righteous and declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus. (27) Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By one of works? No, on the contrary, by a law of faith. (28) For we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. (29) Or is God for Jews only? Is He not also for Gentiles? Yes, for Gentiles too, (30) since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. (31) Do we then cancel the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law.*

The problem is - how can a fallen mankind stand before a holy God? How can the creature and the Creator have any fellowship at all? How can God and the image of God be reconnected? Standing before God's throne requires justification - being OK before God and able to stand before Him "just as if I'd never sinned". The Law did not enable mankind to stand before God, in fact it only brought condemnation and death by showing us up as being sinful. Justification cannot come through the Law. So how can it come? How can the problem be solved? By another way, by another means of justification, that involves the price of our sin being paid by someone else.

The argument so far.... (From last week)

1. Justification was impossible under the Law which only brought condemnation.
2. No one can earn their salvation because we are all (Jews and Gentiles) under sin.
3. So an alternative means of justification has to be found - that which is by faith.
4. Justification by faith operates differently and works entirely "apart from the Law".

Now Paul says:

1. Justification by faith is "free" as far as we are concerned because it has been purchased by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
2. Christ was the propitiation - the payment for our sins and God in His patient restraint has passed over our sins.
3. The death and resurrection of Christ makes God righteous in that sins have been paid for.
4. This also enables God to declare righteous those who have faith in Him.

5. This excludes human boasting because we cannot earn our salvation.
6. We are justified by faith part from the works of the Law.
7. Both Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised are justified by faith.

Now let us look at this a bit more deeply:

There are two ways to achieve status. Firstly, you can be born into status and it comes for free through relationship as a son or daughter of a powerful person. Secondly, you can earn status by hard work and climb the ladder by your own sweat. Justification via the Law is like the second alternative. It says "I can make it" and strives to attain righteousness, it suits our pride but ultimately it fails. Legalism fails because we are too fallen and God's standards are too high. We cannot earn salvation by hard work and through our own spiritual sweat.

That leaves being born into God's family as the only alternative. If we could be made a son of God, then we would have status in heaven and everything would be OK. But we cannot become a son of God by following the Law any more than I can become a son of the Queen of England by following English law. The English law will only put me in jail - that is all it can do with a sinner. Being born-again into the family of God is what makes us sons and daughters of God and that comes "by faith".

John 1:12 *But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name,*

Galatians 3:26 *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Status comes through relationship and relationships are built on trust, which is another way of saying "by faith".

But the legal side of thing still has to be dealt with. The legal side of our guilt is dealt with by the cross of Christ. On the cross Jesus paid the price for our sins - that is what Paul means by the word propitiation. God's wrath is satisfied and completed in the death of Christ. God has placed His wrath on His only Son and He has paid the penalty. (See Romans 3:24-26 above)

So the Law is made irrelevant in two main ways:

- a) Heavenly status as sons of God now comes from faith relationship and not from spiritual /legal achievement. (John 1; 12, Galatians 3:26 above)
- b) The power of the Law to punish us is removed by the death of Christ which pays out our penalty.

Colossians 2:13-14 MKJV *(13) And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, (14) blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross.*

So the Law is no longer a factor in achieving righteousness and its power to condemn us and to separate us from God, as a result of or sin, is taken away and nailed to the cross.

We no longer have to live up to a set of spiritual standards to be pleasing to God. We are pleasing to God because of our faith in Christ Jesus.

Not having to live up to a set of spiritual standards in order to please God sounds like spiritual anarchy to some. Which is why Paul adds the comment: "Do we then cancel the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law." Justification by faith is not anarchy but rather involves a repentant sinner being invited to fellowship with God and to a new and holy life empowered by grace.

Faith sets us in a loving relationship with God and causes us to be born-again to a new and living way in which the image of God is renewed in us and we become filled with the Spirit of Holiness and Truth and live godly lives of love and thus uphold the law.

Justification by faith puts the law aside, so we need not feel guilty or condemned. It invites us into an adventure of growth in grace where we ultimately fulfill the law by becoming like Jesus. But we do so not by serving the letter, but by serving in the Spirit.

Romans 7:6 MKJV *But now we having been set free from the Law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of the letter.*

The Gift Of Righteousness Part 1

Romans 4:1-5 HCSB *What then can we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? (2) If Abraham was justified by works, then he has something to brag about--but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness. (4) Now to the one who works, pay is not considered as a gift, but as something owed. (5) But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who declares righteous the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness.*

Did Abraham obey the Law? No, the law was not given until over 400 years later.

Was Abraham circumcised/ Not at this point - that came much later.

Was Abraham righteous in the eyes of God? Yes - indeed he was declared righteous!

Genesis 15:6 HCSB *Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.*

So Abraham was righteous apart from circumcision and apart from obeying the Jewish Law. The normal Jewish spiritual measures did not apply to Abraham. Indeed Abraham had none of the external religious props and did not even have a bible to read or a church to go to.

How then could Abraham be righteous? Indeed how can anyone be righteous without reading the bible or going to church or following religious laws? Abraham's faith is what made him righteous. Abraham was a spiritual giant because he believed God and thus became "the father of the faithful". The only thing that Abraham did was believe and that was sufficient for Abraham to be declared righteous by God.

So there is a way of being righteous that does not involve being Jewish, or being circumcised or following the Jewish law. This is good news for the Gentiles, who can now become righteous, without first having to become Jewish. This seems easy to understand today but was a great controversy back then when many Jewish Christians were insisting that Gentile converts had to become Jewish and follow the law before they could be saved.

So Abraham is Paul's prime example of a "righteousness apart from the Law" . Abraham shows us that the law is completely unnecessary when it comes to being righteous before God because Abraham had no knowledge of the Law and yet was righteous.

Abraham also shows us that no ceremony, no religious rules, no baptism (he was not baptized), nor circumcision (he was not circumcised when he was declared righteous), no confirmation nor ordination or laying on of hands, or any other human thing is needed to be righteous before God. The only thing required is faith!

But what kind of faith did Abraham have that got him approved by God? Let's look at the context in Genesis. It is after the battle of the five kings in which Abram has taken a significant risk in battle and rescued Lot and refused the loot from the King of Sodom "lest it be said that Sodom has made Abram rich" and thus turned away a very large human reward.

Genesis 15:1-6 MKJV After these things the Word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am your shield and your exceeding great reward. (2) And Abram said, Lord God, what will You give me, since I am going childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? (3) And Abram said, Behold, You have given no seed to me. And behold, one born in my house is my heir. (4) And behold, the Word of Jehovah came to him saying, this one shall not be your heir. But he that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir. (5) And He brought him outside and said, Look now toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them. And He said to him, So shall your seed be. (6) And he believed in Jehovah. And He counted it to him for righteousness.

The essential point of Abram's faith is that God rewards those who are faithful to Him:

Hebrews 11:6 MKJV *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

In this case God's opening statement is: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield and your exceeding great reward." in other words - I will reward you more than Sodom ever

could! Abram then gets a bit grouchy with God and complains about not having a suitable heir. God replies with an amazing promise about having descendants as the stars - and Abram took God at His word about the specific reward Abram would receive and this faith was credited as righteousness.

This is not faith in a doctrine, but faith that God will keep His word under even impossible circumstances. This kind of faith, faith for impossible things, is also what Jesus tried to teach His disciples.

Matthew 14:29-31 MKJV *And He said, Come. And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. (30) But seeing that the wind was strong, he was afraid. And beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me! (31) And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him; and said to him, Little-faith! Why did you doubt?*

The faith of Peter and Abraham is 'out of the boat' faith not doctrinal faith. Many people who believe a great deal of doctrine do not have an ounce of saving faith e.g., the Pharisees and High Priests.

In fact so far removed is saving faith from doctrinal or religious practice that Paul says that God "justifies the ungodly". In Greek the term ungodly meant those with no religious practice whatsoever, the irreverent and profane who did not observe the rites of the gods.

"Now to the one who works, pay is not considered as a gift, but as something owed. But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who declares righteous the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness."

Righteousness is a gift, an unearned credit from God and by definition a gift cannot be earned (otherwise it is a wage). And if righteousness could be earned then man could say to God "you owe me" and that is simply not the case.

Righteousness is a gift and God in His sovereignty can give His gifts to anyone He chooses, even the undeserving, and even the ungodly.

So righteousness can come apart from obedience to the Law, apart from ceremonies such as circumcision, and apart from earning it in any way whatsoever. In fact righteousness is a free gift that God gives to those who truly believe in Him and who trust Him to reward them.

The Blessing And The Promise Came Through Faith

Romans 4:6-13 HCSB *Likewise, David also speaks of the blessing of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: (7) How happy those whose lawless acts are forgiven and whose sins are covered! (8) How happy the man whom the Lord will never charge with sin! (9) Is this blessing only for the circumcised, then? Or is it also for the uncircumcised? For we say, Faith was credited to Abraham for righteousness. (10) How then was it credited--while he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while he was circumcised, but uncircumcised. (11) And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while still uncircumcised. This was to make him the father of all who believe but are not circumcised, so that righteousness may be credited to them also. (12) And he became the father of the circumcised, not only to those who are circumcised, but also to those who follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. (13) For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*

Paul's argument turns on two points:

1. David says that God "covers" the sin of some people and will not charge them with sin and that this is a "blessing".
2. That Abraham entered into this blessing while Abraham was uncircumcised, through the righteousness that is by faith.

It is beyond dispute that Abraham was declared righteous, because of his faith, while he was uncircumcised. (Genesis 15:6) Paul then connects this with David's declaration: "How happy those whose lawless acts are forgiven and whose sins are covered! How happy the man whom the Lord will never charge with sin!" In other words Abraham was one of a special class of people whose lawless acts are covered and who God NEVER charges with sin. This is so wonderful that David says "How blessed are..." such people.

Of course Christians enter into this blessing through the work of Christ on the cross, and God forgives all their sin and indeed will never charge them with sin! (See Romans 8:1, 2, 31-34)

How did Abraham enter into this blessing of justification? How did Abraham become one of those that God will never charge with sin? Was it through circumcision? No, Abraham was not circumcised then! Was it through the Law? The Law was not given! How does the Scripture say that Abraham became righteous and inherited the blessing of justification? Through faith!

Verses 9-12 above explore the theme of the blessing of Abraham being for both the circumcised and for the uncircumcised. Abraham did eventually become circumcised but this circumcision was a sign of righteousness that already existed, the righteousness of faith. Circumcision did not confer righteousness, rather it attested to its prior existence. "And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while still uncircumcised."

The righteousness was not conferred by the ceremony, but the ceremony was still important as a seal and a confirmation and attestation that the righteousness that was of faith existed in Abraham's life.

Paul asks the critical question: "Is this blessing only for the circumcised, then? Or is it also for the uncircumcised?" (The blessing is having one's sins forgiven and being one of those whom God will not charge with sin.) The answer is that the blessing is for both the circumcised and for the uncircumcised. (Now the issue of the necessity of circumcision for salvation is no longer relevant for most people in that rather literal form but it was a "hot button" issue in Paul's day and has many parallels today.)

Circumcision was the "sacred ceremony" the sign of the covenant and was what all spiritual people did (including Jesus Luke 1:59, 2:21) up until that time. It was a holy and unbreakable precedent and to let Gentiles become Christians without going through the sacred ceremony seemed unthinkable. To some extent circumcision has been replaced by baptism as the initiation ceremony into the spiritual life. The point of what Paul is saying is that any such ceremony is only a seal - the righteousness of personal faith in God must exist prior to the ceremony or the ceremony has little or no value. The ceremony does not impart righteousness. The righteousness of faith must exist in the person's life prior to baptism (or circumcision) and can exist apart from any such ceremony.

"And he became the father of the circumcised, not only to those who are circumcised, but also to those who follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."

True Christians are those who: "follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised." Abraham's ability to believe the promises of God sets an example that all Christians must follow. This kind of faith is the pathway to spirituality and to the blessing of justification and blamelessness before God. Christians are not primarily anything except believers. Our first and foremost job is simply to take God at His Word.

John 6:28-29 HCSB *"What can we do to perform the works of God?" they asked. (29) Jesus replied, "This is the work of God: that you believe in the One He has sent."*

We are not required to obey laws or go through ceremonies but we are required to simply believe God and especially to believe in the One He has sent - Christ Jesus!

This faith will activate the promise that we will inherit the world: "For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."

To put it bluntly it is not religious activity that justifies us, but our faith and trust in God. It is simply as we believe God that we are accounted as righteous. Works may flow from

faith and such works may be rewarded at Christ's Coming but works do not produce the blessing of justification before God (see Ephesians 2:8-10). Righteousness comes from faith alone and not from anything we do. Why will God forgive us and never charge us with sin? It is because we believe in Him and in His Son.

Real Living Faith

Romans 4:14-22 HCSB *If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise is canceled. (15) For the law produces wrath; but where there is no law, there is no transgression. (16) This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants--not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all (17) in God's sight. As it is written: I have made you the father of many nations. He believed in God, who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. (18) Against hope, with hope he believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what had been spoken: So will your descendants be. (19) He considered his own body to be already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb, without weakening in the faith. (20) He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, (21) because he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. (22) Therefore, it was credited to him for righteousness.*

What is real, living faith and why does God so value it that He makes it the basis of our being with Him in Heaven for all eternity?

The first reason is because of the strong connection between "faith" and "promise". If salvation was dependent on human performance (such as observing the Law) then salvation would be simply a wage paid to good humans. It would be an earned reward, instead of being a promised gift. Paul puts it this way: If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise is canceled. The law actually only gets us into trouble. It is not the way of salvation. Salvation is God's precious gift to fallen mankind. It comes straight from God's grace. It cannot be earned. For the law produces wrath; but where there is no law, there is no transgression. (16) This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace,

The second reason is because faith is available to everyone - even those outside the Jewish law. Having faith as the criteria for salvation makes salvation available to all true believers in God anywhere in the world, not only those who happen to be coached in a particular kind of religious ethical code.

This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants--not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all in God's sight.

So anyone with "Abraham's faith can be saved even if they do not obey the Jewish law in the Old Testament. But what kind of faith was Abraham's faith? Lets look at four aspects of Abraham's faith:

1. He believed in God, who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist.
2. Against hope, with hope he believed,
3. He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,
4. Because he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

Abraham's faith was not a lot more than a creed that he recited. It was deep practical trust in a good personal God. It was a believing "for" based on a believing "about".

Firstly, Abraham believed certain things about the character of God e.g. That God could cause things to come into existence, and that God was capable of fulfilling whatever He promised.

Secondly, Abraham believed these things would have certain tangible real world outcomes - e.g. Abraham would have numerous descendants.

Thirdly, Abraham believed these real world outcomes would occur even when the circumstances were in total opposition and the situation seemed hopeless.

This kind of faith believes God for solutions to "impossible" situations that really matter to you - like having an heir did to Abraham. I call this solution-focused faith (see http://aibi.gospelcom.net/eternity/sf_faith/) and define it as follows: Solution-focused faith believes that God will manifest His wonderful and holy nature in wise and perfect and good ways in the midst of our normal daily lives.

Abraham believed that God had a certain nature (that God was a faithful promise-keeping God) and that this would have certain practical and tangible outcomes - a land and many descendants. And that kind of trust in His nature got God's attention.

God might have said something like this: "Abraham really trusts Me. Abraham trusts Me because he truly knows that I am good. This implicit trust is a clear sign that Abraham knows right from wrong and good from evil and that he only follows that which is good. This is a sign of a true heart and a very good person, for few people think that way in their hearts. So I will declare that Abraham is righteous."

It takes a very brave and good heart to trust God totally with that which is most precious to you. If you can do that, if you can really genuinely trust God's character, the way Abraham trusted God, then you certainly have the righteousness that is by faith.

I am putting it this way in order to draw a contrast with substitute faith. Substitute faith says "If I believe concept W or creed X or doctrine Y or fact Z then I am saved." Or even "If I believe God exists then I am saved". James knocks this on the head with one simple observation: **James 2:19 HCSB** *You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe--and they shudder.*

The Pharisees knew their Bible and believed in God and the High Priests knew their Jewish history, Greek and Hebrew and I suppose that if we had given a Christology exam to Judas he would have passed with flying colors. But none of these had real living Abrahamic "I will stake my whole life on God" kind of faith.

Righteousness For Us Too

Romans 4:23-25 HCSB *Now it was credited to him was not written for Abraham alone, (24) but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. (25) He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

Yesterday we saw that God wants people to trust Him as a God who does the impossible. For instance He was delighted when Abraham believed that God would give him children when both Abraham and Sarah were at a very advanced age. Now just about the most impossible thing is coming back from the dead. So God is also delighted when we believe in Him as a wonder-working, impossible-thing doing God, the God who had the power to raised Jesus from the dead.

It will be credited to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

We are not required to believe a mere doctrine - that God raised Jesus from the dead. Rather we are required to believe in "the God who..." raised Jesus from the dead. That is we are required to personally trust a God who does such things. The faith is not in the fact, but in the God who accomplished the fact.

This astonishing resurrection of Christ was in two movements. In the downward movement Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross. This accomplished forgiveness of sins. In the second movement He was raised from the dead as a declaration that the full price of sin had been paid, that the sacrifice had been accepted and a Man (Christ Jesus) was now right before God - and that many more men and women would follow!

Faith and promise are closely related. We have faith in a promise of God and that faith in the promise unlocks a blessing. Just as Abraham believed the promise regarding having numerous descendants and that unlocked a blessing - the gift of righteousness.

Now Christ has secured a vast range of promises for us - including forgiveness and justification and the gift of eternal life. In fact He has secured "every blessing in the heavenly realms" for us:

Ephesians 1:3 HCSB *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, in Christ;*

So Paul says this gift of righteousness through faith was not just for Abraham but for all "true believers". Including us, who believe in the God who raised Christ Jesus from the dead.

"It will be credited to us who believe" - in other words, God credits our individual heavenly account books, with the "righteousness that is by faith" when we truly believe in Him.

This awarding of credit to our account is only on the basis of our faith, that is our trusting attitude toward God, and not on account of any religious works we may or may not have done.

This righteousness is the same righteousness that Abraham had and which David's Psalm described earlier on in chapter 4:

Romans 4:7-8 MKJV *"Blessed are those whose lawlessness are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; (8) blessed is the man to whom the Lord will in no way impute sin."*

In other words our faith brings us into a blessed state in which our lawlessness are forgiven, our sins are covered, and the Lord will "in no way" ever impute sin to us!

In other words we are made like "Teflon" - no sin can be stuck on to us!

Our past is taken care of: Our lawlessness are forgiven!

Our present is OK: Our sins are covered!

Our future is secure: The Lord will in no way impute sin to us!

If you decide to walk with God and trust God implicitly and love Him deeply, He wipes the slate clean and never allows another bad thing to be said about you to Him! The decision to turn away from a selfish and independent lifestyle and embrace God is what we call repentance and faith.

God is gentle and merciful and joyfully responds to being loved by us - by totally forgiving us. God is like the Father of the prodigal son who rejoices when we come home and wipes away all our past offenses and secures our future.

It should be clear by now the sort of faith that God responds to is personal trust from the heart. It is the sort of faith that enters into personal friendship with God. It is trusting in God's character, God's promises and God's actions on our behalf. It is a lot more than believing a bunch of Sunday school stories. It is entering into the Story yourself!

Your redemption is a story that the Lord wants to tell. And for this story to have a happy ending you must enter into the tale itself with God as your Lord and partner in the journey. Your life must be connected to the life of Heaven through Christ and the very energy of God the indwelling Holy Spirit must enter into the crevices of your life and the corners of your soul and you must trust His work in you and on behalf of you.

This sort of faith has many names - opening up to God, personal renewal, standing on the promises, being a true believer, pilgrimage, the journey of faith, and so forth. They all describe a two-way relationship where we trust God and He enters into our life and circumstances. Basically as we decide to really trust God and relate to Him, then He opens the doors of Heaven to us and for us.

As we love and trust God we are changed by the spiritual relationship and become better people. We are not changed by the law but by love and faith-filled spiritual relationship. God can safely forgive us because He knows what his love will do to us and in us. In His love He will first of all declare us righteous, then in His love He will truly make us righteous and holy and good, far better than religion or Law ever could make us.

Once we start really walking with God in faith, sin no longer matters. It is forgiven, forgotten, never charged to us and eventually uprooted from us and eradicated from us. In fact we become "dead to sin" (Romans 6:5-11). It is no longer a permanent factor in the spiritual life.

Peace With God!

Romans 5:1-2 MKJV *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2) Through Him we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice on the hope of the glory of God.*

Peace with God also means peace with all He controls, just as peace with an earthly king means peace with his army, his diplomats and his servants. So if we are at peace with God then ipso facto (by that very fact) we are then at peace with all that is obedient to Him and at war with all that is joined in rebellion against God.

So we are at peace with God and at war with the Devil. We are at peace with nature and the Universe and at war with sin, the world and the flesh. Peace with God means also that we should be at peace with all other true believers who are also at peace with Him.

Now peace with God has five main aspects:

1. Legal peace - being legally free from accusation and blame and conflict with God.
2. Inner peace - the peace of God poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
3. Peace in our circumstances - the outworking of God's peace in the quiet and godly life of the righteous, divine "Shalom".

4. Peace between believers - dwelling in peace in the Church.
5. Peace as universal reconciliation with all things, harmony with the whole Creation as it also is redeemed along with us. (See Romans 8 and Colossians 1)

(In Romans 5 the emphasis is on legal peace and inner peace but the other aspects deserve mention as well.)

We saw yesterday that the cross has dealt with the guilt of sin in our lives. Our sin is forgiven, covered and never imputed to us ever again. (Romans 4:7, 8) this removes all grounds of accusation before God so we become at peace with God. The relationship between God and the believer is grounded in a deep and lasting peace between the two parties.

This peace means we can approach God without being rebuffed by Him. That is we have access to the throne of God and our prayers are heard. Washington lobbyists are valued according to how much access they have to power. Believers are given access to God and His throne - yet many fail to pray in faith!

This access to the throne of God is not because we have been good boys and girls but rather is because of our faith:

Through Him we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand,

Our throne-access is by faith. Those who fail to believe receive nothing from the Lord:

James 1:6-8 MKJV *But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing. For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. (7) For do not let that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, not dependable in all his ways.*

The throne we have access to by faith is the "throne of grace":

Hebrews 4:16 MKJV *Therefore let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

And Paul tells us that is "grace" in which we stand:

"Through Him we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice on the hope of the glory of God."

We stand in a relationship of grace, a climate of favor and blessing from Almighty God. We can stand before God because He graciously has made a way for us to do just that in order that we may participate, as sons of God, in the courts of Heaven for we are now citizens of Heaven. .

Ephesians 2:17-19 MKJV *And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to those who were near. (18) For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. (19) Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God,*

We are given this marvelous access to God's throne along with heavenly citizenship and blessings so that we may become a certain kind of person - a "son of God" stamped in the very image of the Lord Jesus Christ and bearing the "glory of God" in our character.

When Paul says: "and we rejoice on the hope of the glory of God." he is not just making a vague theological statement. Paul is trying to tell us that we will be changed in people who genuinely reflect the glory of God.

Now those aspects of the glory of God that humans can bear are those that Jesus bore during His earthly ministry. They do not include the "omni" attributes such as omnipotence or omnipresence. They do include love, grace, fine character, and courage, the working of miracles, healing, wisdom and so forth. These characteristics will allow us to reign with Christ during the Millennium.

After the resurrection we will become immortal, imperishable, spiritual and glorious beings (1 Corinthians 15:42-54) "like angels" (Luke 20:36) and covered with glory!

Paul sees what we shall become as a result of the work of Christ on the cross and rejoices and exults! For this mortal shall put on immortality! We shall all be changed, in a twinkling of the eye, at the last trump and we shall stand before a God of infinite love who will never charge us with sin (if we believe).

All of these blessing flows from being in right relationship with God and thus being able to access the throne. Because we stand in grace we can rejoice in hope.

The Path To Hope

Romans 5:3-5 HCSB *And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, (4) endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. (5) This hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

M. Scott Peak started his famous book "The Road Less Traveled with the sentence: "Life is difficult." This shows an essential truth that we are all tested with problems pain and difficulties. Robert Schuller once wrote a book entitled: "Tough Times Don't Last but Tough People Do." Human hope, founded on God can outlast the toughest of times. Or as Corrie Ten Boom said: "No matter how deep the suffering. God's love is deeper still." Suffering is an essential part of life.

This is not to say that you should not take aspirin for a headache or get a sore tooth treated at a dentist. We are not talking about medical pain as much as "life pain", especially afflictions and tribulations from external events such as that stemming from abuse, poverty, injustice and persecution.

The actual Greek word Paul uses is "thlipsis" which is defined in Thayer's Greek Lexicon lexicon as: 1) a pressing, pressing together, pressure 2) metaphorically oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits. So we can probably use "life's pressures" as an accurate literal translation of the Greek.

It is not only God who is interested in how we handle pressure. Executives who have a good attitude towards life's pressures, pain and problems are said to have a "high adversity quotient" and are now sought-out by corporate head-hunters.

Paul tells us of a path that will get us to the "other side of suffering" and it is:
Affliction -> Endurance -> Proven Character -> Hope.

In other words, God makes you stronger and better and that eventually produces a faith-filled attitude which is certain of ultimate victory.

Now many people break down at the first step - they refuse to accept the task of endurance in the face of life's pain. They see pain as evil, as destructive, and as an unwarranted intrusion on life that should simply go away. They simply want the pain to vanish; they have no notion of bravely enduring the pain and becoming a better person. These people often self-medicate with alcohol or drugs, or seek consolation in sympathetic relationships of mutual dependency and manipulation. Indeed they feel our counseling rooms with their strategies to get through life without facing and embracing their pain.

Suffering has to be borne, endured and eventually mastered. God never puts us through a test tougher than we can take (1 Corinthians 10:13) though at times it may seem like it. In fact the doctrine of the cross means that Christians are called to a certain kind of suffering for Christ.

1 Peter 2:20-21 HCSB *For what credit is there if you endure when you sin and are beaten? But when you do good and suffer, if you endure, it brings favor with God. (21) For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps.*

Romans 8:17-18 HCSB *and if children, also heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ--seeing that we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.*

In the New Testament there is a close connection between enduring suffering and receiving eternal glory. This is a two-part connection. Firstly, suffering rightly borne produces a good character in the Christian. The Christian becomes deeper, more solid and worthy, a rock on the midst of the sea of humanity. And secondly, righteous suffering is noted by God and the angels and is rewarded in Heaven.

Psalms 31:7-8 HCSB *I will rejoice and be glad in Your faithful love because You have seen my affliction. You have known the troubles of my life (8) and have not handed me over to the enemy. You have set my feet in a spacious place.*

Paul then tells us that endurance produces proven character. The Greek word is dokime and the Thayer Definition is: 1) proving, trial 2) approved, tried character 3) a proof, a specimen of tried worth. In other words, this may mean a solid, tried, true and dependable person.

It is the exact opposite of a pain-avoiding, neurotic, unreliable, weak and flaky personality.

As the person strengthens he or she becomes patient and wise and learns to wait on God. Over time they are able to say "God is faithful and true" and to believe God will come through for them in the end. This produces hope. And because God is faithful this hope does not disappoint.

This hope-filled ability to work through painful situations and to believe God for impossible things in difficult times is true Abrahamic faith and opens us up to God's favor. Indeed suffering works in us to make us perfect recipients of the love of God that is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Now this is not an easy process and takes a life-time to learn it. Indeed Abraham was 75 years old when he was commended for having such faith! In our younger years we squeal at the pain and protest at the suffering. We are like Peter telling Jesus not to go to the cross. Over time we see God at work and learn to trust Him bit by bit in the varying circumstances of our lives. We gradually develop a sense of when we are "copping out" and short-circuiting the work God is doing in our lives. We need to learn to hang in there and to trust the Lord that good will come from it:

James 1:2-4 HCSB *Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.*

Christ Died For The Ungodly

Romans 5:6-8 *You see, at just the right time, when you were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For rarely will someone die for a just person--though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. (8) But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!*

In the Greek world the ungodly were among "the lowest of the low" because they did not observe the social proprieties and have due reverence towards the gods. Thayer's definition is: "Destitute of reverential awe towards God, condemning God, impious"

The book of Jude gives the general idea of what the ungodly deserved:

Jude 1:14-15 HCSB *And Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied about them: Look! The Lord comes with thousands of His holy ones (15) to execute judgment on all, and to convict them of all their ungodly deeds that they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things ungodly sinners have said against Him.*

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia sums up the word thus (Greek characters have been removed) :

Ungodly in the New Testament is asebes e.g., indicating that the persons so called are both irreverent and impious): Trench says that the idea of active opposition to religion is involved in the word, that it is a deliberate withholding from God of His dues of prayer and of service; a standing, so to speak, in battle array against God and His claims to respect, reverence and obedience. Those whose sins are particularly aggravating and deserving of God's wrath are the "ungodly." And yet it is for such that Jesus Christ died.

These are the god-haters, the insolent, the vigorous atheists and the disrespecters of community standards and conventional religious social mores. They give nothing to God except pain and want nothing from God except never to be bothered by Him.

And yet Christ died for them! "For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly." This is so that grace might be totally free and undeserved. If God saves the ungodly then grace is truly free! God does not save us because of our piety, or because of anything in us that merits salvation in any way. We saved entirely by the love of God that loves even the least lovable among human beings.

God does not save us because our beauty, intelligence or wealth or because of some religious ceremony we have performed (for the ungodly perform no such ceremonies) or because we will be useful to Him in some way after our redemption. We are saved simply because of God's great desire to demonstrate His love.

"But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!"

There we were helpless, ungodly sinners condemned by the Law, and at the appointed time Christ died for us! This assures is of God's love, for if God has loved us when we were bad, how much more will be saved now that we have the righteousness which is by faith, the very righteousness of Jesus Christ?

Romans 5:9-10 HCSB *Much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath. (10) For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life!*

In other words if we received justification even when we were ungodly, helpless sinners in rebellion against God - how much more will we receive from God as the Christian life unfolds from glory to glory? (More on this tomorrow)

Paul sets forth the process of this great sudden justifying leap from sinner to saint in his epistle to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:1-5 ISV *You used to be dead because of your offenses and sins, (2) in which you once lived according to the ways of this present world and according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient. (3) Indeed, all of us once behaved like them in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of our flesh and senses. By nature we deserved wrath, just like everyone else. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love for us (5) even when we were dead because of our offenses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*

So there we were, dead in sin, animated by evil spirits and worldly desires, helpless, ungodly and sinful and just like everyone else - and God's love came to us and saved us! No sinner is too sinful for God. Indeed the harlots and tax-gatherers enter the Kingdom before the scribes!

Matthew 21:31-32 MKJV *...Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you that the tax-collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. (32) For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him. But the tax-collectors and the harlots believed him. And when you had seen it, you did not repent afterwards so that you might believe him.*

This seems a topsy-turvy religion where the ungodly who do not revere God at all are saved while the scribes who studied the Bible daily were lost. The key point is openness to God. The harlots and tax-gatherers listened to John the Baptist while the scribes were offended and failed to repent. Some rather wicked people are actually more open to God than some pride-filled religious experts.

God is not so worried about where we are as about where we want to end up. God loves to take us "from the gutter most to the uttermost". He is our Redeemer and no case is past His power. All we have to do is to see ourselves as helpless lost sinners and to call out on Christ:

Romans 10:11-13 MKJV *For the Scripture says, "Everyone believing on Him shall not be put to shame." (12) For there is no difference both of Jew and of Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call on Him. (13) For everyone, "whoever shall call on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

The Reconciled Life

Romans 5:9-11 HCSB *Much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath. (10) For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life! (11) And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

There is a lot more to the Christian life than forgiveness. Forgiveness is just the commencing of the journey. There is also an ongoing transformation which Paul calls "being saved by His life".

The death of Jesus Christ reconciles us to God (v.10) By His death we are declared righteous. (v.9) So we START the born-again Christian life as righteous and reconciled children of God. Then what? We live by the life of Christ.

Paul's logic is this. If when we were bad people, in fact "enemies" and God still saved us then what will God do for us once we are reconciled to Him? If the person who leaves Satan's camp for God's Kingdom is welcomed, then how much more will he or she be blessed when they fully join in the life of the Kingdom?

Paul is implying that the blessings that come after justification are so great that the blessing of justification itself will appear small by comparison although it is still a very great and foundational blessing. If we compare justification to the marriage ceremony, which happens in a moment and is beautiful and greatly celebrated, then the reconciled life is like the many years of marriage with children and love and anniversaries and so forth. In the end the blessings of marital life far outweigh the blessings of the wedding day.

The blessings that follow on after forgiveness include the baptism of the Holy Spirit, various spiritual gifts, the fruit of the Spirit and personal transformation from glory to glory including receiving our resurrection bodies at the return of the Lord. After we are justified by grace, then God pours out blessing after blessing upon us. Justification is like crossing the Jordan, the reconciled life is like living in the Promised Land.

Now Paul sums up all these experiences in one phrase: "then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life!" This ongoing salvation is the work of the life of Christ within us.

The indwelling Christ is the power that transforms the entire Christian life. We do not get forgiven then have to struggle on in our own strength. When we are forgiven we are also made new, and we receive Christ within us, as an active power, and we gain the ability to live the Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Colossians 1:27 HCSB *God wanted to make known to those among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Galatians 2:19-20 HCSB *For through the law I have died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; (20) and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

"Being saved by His life" means relying on the life of Christ within you. Jesus in you wants to do the same sorts of things He did when He was on earth. His resurrection life wants to live through you and as you allow this, you will learn to live a joyous and victorious Christian life.

The New Testament is full of hints on how to live life this way, they include:

1. Setting your mind on things of the Spirit. (Romans 8:4-6)
2. Putting off the old man and putting on the new. (Ephesians 4:20-32)
3. Obeying the promptings of the Spirit not the promptings of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-23)
4. Cultivating godly practices such as praying without ceasing and living thankfully. (1Thessalonians 5:16-24)

The reconciled life is not a life full of onerous and difficult rules but is a life that is spiritual, free and holy and which flows from the presence of Christ dwelling in us. It flows from our relationship with God, from our abiding in Christ, through prayer and through the power of the Holy Spirit both in us and upon us.

We are not saved or improved by our own efforts, no matter how scholarly or strenuous they may be. We are saved by Jesus living in us and through us. I cannot change myself much by my own striving. But God can change me by reprogramming my heart and mind at the level of the spirit. This is most clearly observed in alcoholics who get saved and then give up drinking without further effort because their spirit has been touched by God and they lose all desire for alcohol.

Powerful sudden personal transformation is possible when the "life of Christ" is at work within the believer. I have seen inferiority complexes vanish, painful memories of abuse healed and people changed from being clamorous and eccentric to normal and loving.

[http://aibi.gospelcom.net/articles/heal_my_spirit_prayer.html is a prayer for inward spiritual healing]

Christ in us can accomplish far more than we even can ask or think:

Ephesians 3:20-21 HCSB Now to Him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think--according to the power that works in you-- (21) to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

God does not just want to forgive you, he also wants to transform and glorify you (Romans 8:29-31) into the image of His beloved Son. God has a whole mighty package of transformational blessings He wants to unleash in your life. Like everything else in the Christian life these blessings come through faith, not works, and through Jesus Christ, God's Son. We need to trust Jesus Christ to live within us in power and to change us deeply from within.

Adam and Christ - Part 1

Romans 5:12-16 HCSB *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned. (13) In fact, sin was in the world before the law, but sin is not charged to one's account when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression. He is a prototype of the Coming One. (15) But the gift is not like the trespass. For if by the one man's trespass the many died, how much more have the grace of God and the gift overflowed to the many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. (16) And the gift is not like the one man's sin, because from one sin came the judgment, resulting in condemnation, but from many trespasses came the gift, resulting in justification.*

These verses try to answer the implied question: "How can one man's life affect so many people? How can Jesus' work on the cross save all who believe?"

The answer is that both sin and salvation can spread to all humanity. Sin came from just one man Adam and spread to all mankind and salvation came just from one man Jesus Christ. Likewise, salvation has the potential to spread to all mankind. However, salvation wins out in the end because it can undo the work of sin. James puts it this way "mercy triumphs over judgment" James 2:13

Adam is called a type or prototype (Gk. *Topos*) of Jesus (v.14) which means that there are spiritual correlations between Adam and Jesus such as:

1. Both Adam and Jesus are called sons of God. (Luke 3:38, 1 John 5:5)
2. Both Adam and Jesus were created directly by God and were sinless.
3. Both Adam and Jesus were directly tempted by Satan.
4. Adam's fall was by a "tree" (Genesis 3) while Christ's death and our redemption was by "being hung on a tree" (Galatians 3:10-14)
5. The first man Adam was "of the dust" the last man Jesus was "of Heaven". (1 Corinthians 15:47)
6. Adam was the ancient head of the human race. Jesus became the new head of the human race. (Ephesians 1:22, 1 Corinthians 11:3)
7. Sin came through Adam, righteousness came through Jesus Christ.
8. Death came via Adam; eternal life is a free gift through Jesus Christ.
9. Christians inherited the earthy body from Adam and will inherit a heavenly body from Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:42-49)
10. The first Adam became a living being, the last Adam (Christ) a life-giving spirit. (1 Corinthians 15:45)

1 Corinthians 15:42-49 HCSB *(42) So it is with the resurrection of the dead: Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption; (43) sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power; (44) sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (45) So it is written: The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. (46) However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. (47) The first man was from*

the earth and made of dust; the second man is from heaven. (48) Like the man made of dust, so are those who are made of dust; like the heavenly man, so are those who are heavenly. (49) And just as we have borne the image of the man made of dust, we will also bear the image of the heavenly man.

Thus there are, in a sense, TWO human races, the race that is still in Adam that is earthy, dusty, in the flesh, under the law of sin and death. And there is a second race, that is in Christ, and this race is spiritual, heavenly, glorious and under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

We can live either the life of the earthly man - and perish, or choose to live the life of the heavenly man and receive eternal life.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 HCSB *(21) For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. (22) For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.*

In our verses in Romans Paul contrasts "the gift" and "the trespass" and says there are two major differences:

1. The trespass led to death for the many, whereas the gift leads to eternal life for many.
2. The trespass led to condemnation whereas the gift leads to justification.

The gift is seen as having greater power than the trespass. No matter how low the trespass drags humanity, the gift can still lift them out of the mire. No matter how deep the hole a helicopter can pull you out. Even many trespasses cannot defeat the power of God's gift in Christ to bring justification. The gift may take us to minus one hundred, but the gift takes us to plus one trillion. "But from many trespasses came the gift, resulting in justification." Salvation is far more powerful than sin.

Because salvation is far more powerful than sin the Christian is safe. God can undo the works of the Devil and redeem us completely. (1 John 3:8) The ruin that Adam brought to the world will be triumphed over by the salvation that is in Christ Jesus:

Romans 5:15-18 *For if by the one man's trespass the many died, how much more have the grace of God and the gift overflowed to the many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. ... Since by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is life-giving justification for everyone.*

This is not universalism (the doctrine that will eventually be saved) because the phrase "how much more will those who receive" conditions the whole argument. Those who receive Christ will have all the damage done in Adam undone and will receive blessings far beyond those which Adam forfeited.

The Devil cannot damage the ultimate purposes of God for humanity. God can redeem all that Satan has defiled and then bless it abundantly. Adam may have dwelt in a wonderful Eden, but those in Christ will dwell in the New Jerusalem forever.

Adam and Christ - Part 2 "How Much More!"

Romans 5:17-21 HCSB *Since by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (18) So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is life-giving justification for everyone. (19) For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (20) The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more, (21) so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The four main points in today's passage are:

1. Christ undoes the damage done by Adam, (for those who believe).
2. Christ's obedience leads to life for many just as Adam's disobedience led to death for many.
3. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more.
4. Grace and righteousness conquer sin and death

Paul uses the rhetorical "how much more" to point out that the blessings from Christ far surpass the curses from Adam.

This expression "how much more" or "much more than" (Gk "pollo mallon") is used four times in this chapter (verses 9, 10, 15 and 17).

Romans 5:9-10 HCSB *Much more than, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life!*

Romans 5:15, 17 HCSB *But the gift is not like the trespass. For if by the one man's trespass the many died how much more have the grace of God and the gift overflowed to the many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. ... Since by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.*

This expression is used 11 times in the NT (HCSB) and is always used in the context of Jewish rabbinical arguments from the lesser to the greater. The argument is of the

form: "If the lesser results in X - then the greater will do much more than X." - here are three examples:

Matthew 6:30 HCSB *If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't He do much more for you--you of little faith?*

Matthew 7:11 HCSB *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*

Matthew 10:25 HCSB *It is enough for a disciple to become like his teacher and a slave like his master. If they called the head of the house 'Beelzebul,' how much more the members of his household!*

Paul sees God working in Christ as far, far greater than the Devil working through Adam. He sees grace resulting in righteousness as far, far greater than sin which results in death. The greater must conquer the lesser. Sin may abound, but grace because it is the greater will even more abound.

God's work will completely conquer the Devil's work so that at the resurrection we will say:

1 Corinthians 15:54-55 HCSB *Now when this corruptible is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place: Death has been swallowed up in victory. (55) O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?*

Even the damaged creation will be restored to the glory God intended for it:

Romans 8:19-22 HCSB *For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility--not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it--in the hope (21) that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God's children. (22) For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.*

God will completely undo all the damage done by sin and death, especially for those who believe. Those who believe are not left struggling against sin in their own strength but are indwelt by a powerful, holy redemptive power who changes them from glory to glory:

2 Corinthians 3:18 HCSB *We all, with unveiled faces, are reflecting the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

Some of you may have very damaged lives. You need to lay hold of the "how much more" and believe that God will do much more good for you than the Devil did you

harm. God will forgive your sin, heal your spirit, and redeem the years the locusts have eaten,

Joel 2:23-26 HCSB *Children of Zion rejoice and be glad in the LORD your God, because He gives you the autumn rain for your vindication. He sends showers for you, both autumn and spring rain as before. (24) The threshing floors will be full of grain, and the vats will overflow with new wine and olive oil. (25) I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust ate, the young locust, the destroying locust, and the devouring locust--My great army that I sent against you. (26) You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied. You will praise the name of Yahweh your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. My people will never again be put to shame.*

A New Way Of Life

Romans 6:1-4 HCSB *What should we say then? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may multiply? (2) Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (3) Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in a new way of life.*

Is grace a license to sin? No at all! Rather grace is an invitation to a new (and righteous) way of life!

Paul tells the Romans that they have "died to sin", that is that the "sin life" came to an end when they repented of their sin and placed their faith in Christ Jesus. This is symbolically reflected in baptism, when the believer dies with Christ and rises again to new life.

The expression "dead to sin" means "separated from sin". Just as someone who is sound asleep is "dead to the world" - that is unconscious of its activity and appeal, so the person who is "dead to sin" is unconscious of the activity and appeal of sin. Now at first that may seem to be wishful thinking; the activity and appeal of sin is present in the lives of all Christians. To understand what Paul means you first have to understand that there are two people the Bible calls "I". There is the "I" that you see in the mirror and there is the "I" that is seen by God and which inhabits eternity - your true self. These are different. Your true self is born-again, born of God, made of eternal stuff and is seated in heavenly realms with Christ Jesus, free from condemnation and dead to sin.

Your "mirror" self is the old man, "born of woman" and inhabits this earth and bears the image of the earthly and will perish. It is closely tied to your physical flesh and is sin-indwelt. "For I know that in my flesh dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:14-18)

Your eternal self is the new man, who is "born of God" and is closely tied to the Holy Spirit and is made in the image of God (Colossians 3:10), and does not sin, not can it do so, because that which is born of God cannot sin (1 John 3:9).

Because of this we are BOTH a sinful person and a sinless person! This is why Paul can make the following extraordinary statements in which he claims that it is not his true self who is sinning:

Romans 7:17, 20, 25 HCSB *So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. ...*

(20) Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but it is the sin that lives in me. ...

(25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh, to the law of sin.

Paul says, "I am no longer the one doing it"... which is strange because a video camera would show Paul sinning! Yet God would see Paul sinless, and even unable to sin, because God looks at the new man, not the old sinner, that is passing away. The sinful person is temporary but the sinless person is eternal. [We will go into this in greater depth when we do Romans 7.]

So our true self is dead to sin, and we know that, because we hate it when we sin, we do not agree with sinning, sin bothers us and distresses us. We have died to it and in our better moments we no longer want it as part of us. And indeed we will leave sin behind - either at our death or at the coming of the Lord whichever comes first. Sin will not bother us in heaven where we will be fully free to be our true selves.

Since our real nature is no longer a sinful nature, then living the Christian life is not about having a license to sin. It is not about how much we can "get away with" and still go to Heaven. It is about leaving sin far behind us and living a new life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul uses baptism as the point where the old life vanishes and the new life begins. Baptism and believing often happened on the same day (see Acts chapters 2, 8, 10, 11, 19 etc.) so baptism became synonymous with the commencement of the Christian life of faith. At this point we die to sin and also rise to new life in Christ. The person we were before this point passes away and behold all things become new:

2 Corinthians 5:17 HCSB *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.*

2 Corinthians 5:17 ASV *Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.*

(I have given two translations as they both help bring out different aspects of this truth.)

The old life animated by sinful impulses is finished and a new life animated by holy impulses is brought into being by the Holy Spirit. Thus the idea of continuing in sin is abhorrent, a step backwards, and a complete denial of what Christ had done both in us and for us.

The Christian is "in Christ" and is identified with what Christ did. The Christian thus dies with Christ, rises with Christ and ascends with Christ, and is seated in the heavenly realms with Christ. (See Ephesians 2:4-7) Because we are Christ's body, where Jesus go, we go. If Jesus goes to the grave, those who are in Christ go with Him, and there they die to sin. If Jesus rises from the dead, then those who are Christ's body and are in Christ, rise to newness of life. Now Christ is sinless and is separated from sin and cannot sin. So we who are in Christ must also be separated entirely from sin. Indeed through repentance and faith as expressed in baptism we died to sin.

Grace may prevail over sin, but grace is not an excuse to continue in sin. Rather grace helps us to die to sin and to rise to newness of life.

The Old Man Is Crucified With Christ

Romans 6:5-10 MKJV *For if we have been joined together in the likeness of His death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection; (6) knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, that from now on we should not serve sin. (7) For he who died has been justified from sin. (8) But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, (9) knowing that when Christ was raised from the dead, He dies no more; death no longer has dominion over Him. (10) For in that He died, He died to sin once; but in that He lives, He lives to God.*

Our "old man" is crucified with Christ, so that the "body of sin" - that part of us that is sin-indwelt and perishing - may be destroyed. This body of sin needs to be destroyed so that we should not serve sin. For Christ takes us from the service of sin, to the service of the will of God.

As pointed out previously, we saw that in our present state we are both a sinful person and sinless person. We have both a temporary sin-indwelt self that we see in the mirror and a perfect eternal and true self that is hidden in Christ with God.

Colossians 3:1-4 MKJV *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. (2) Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ our Life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

1 John 3:1-3 MKJV *Behold what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God. Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when He shall be revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope on him purifies himself, even as that One is pure.*

Our true self is this Christ-like self which is raised with Christ and hidden with Him in Heaven and which is a child of God. We are not fully aware of this true eternal self or what it is like but when Christ returns we will "be revealed with Him in glory" and "when He shall be revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Now the gulf between the two states, between what we see in the mirror today and the eternal being of Christ-like glory that will be revealed, seems vast and unbridgeable. Yet a very great start on the process has been made. The old man has been crucified with Christ. The old sin nature was put to death when we repented and believed and its power is waning within us. Sin is no longer inevitable, sin is no longer our master, and we do not serve it.

This all revolves around the believer's identification with Christ: For if we have been joined together in the likeness of His death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection; but if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

Faith joins us to Christ in a deep abiding spiritual way. We become branches in the vine, the body under the Head, and stones in a living structure. This joining is so intimate that it is said that we are "in Christ". We become totally identified with our Living Head. So if Christ dies, we die, if He is raised, we are raised with Him, and if He should ascend into Heaven we are carried there along with Him.

Now at our new birth we transitioned out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved son (Colossians 1;13) and our old man, our body of sin, was put to death on the cross and then by the grace of God we were resurrected by the infusion of new life from the Holy Spirit. This created a distinct break in our life, sin lost its appeal and its power and we became filled with a genuine desire for righteousness.

What happened to Jesus was applied to us who follow Him. We died with Him and we rose to new life with Him. And this happened so that we could be like Jesus and be free from sin in every way.

So sin can be conquered, in fact it has been conquered and we need to lay hold of that which is why Paul goes on to say "so reckon yourselves as being dead to sin" (Romans 6:11).

Many Christians do not believe that God can kill the sin instinct in them and give them righteous impulses instead. Yet these same Christians will applaud an alcoholic who becomes Spirit-filled, loses all desire for alcohol and takes on a responsible job. Here is a very clear example of the sin instinct being killed off and replaced by righteousness through the power of God - and yet they do not apply it to themselves.

God has given us the cross as the means to deal with sin and the Holy Spirit as the power of a righteous life. When Paul says: "that from now on we should not serve sin" he means that Christians can live without serving sin. We should not just aim to receive grace and be forgiven of our sins, we should also aim to be rid of them entirely.

We should not ever say "I will never be able to deal with this sin" because that is to limit the power of the cross and of God. Such statements are without hope and without faith. They are the words of unbelievers.

Instead we should say: "I have been crucified with Christ and I am dead to sin, and I will not serve it any more." It is as we focus on the reality of our new nature, and our status as children of God, and on our sin-free eternity of Christ-like living that we purify ourselves and become pure and He is pure. (see 1 John 3:1-3 above).

Sin is "not really you". It is inappropriate, an intrusion, and even an impostor. Your real self is holy and you should be holy as well. That is why the Bible calls you a saint! (Ephesians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 3:13)

1 Peter 1:13-16 MKJV *Therefore girding up the loins of your mind, being sober, perfectly hope for the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (14) as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, (15) but according to the Holy One who has called you, you also become holy in all conduct, (16) because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

Yielded To Righteousness

Romans 6:11-18 MKJV *Likewise count yourselves also to be truly dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. (13) Do not yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but yield yourselves to God, as one alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (14) For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under Law, but under grace. (15) What then? Shall we sin because we are not under Law, but under grace? Let it not be! (16) Do you not know that to whom you yield yourselves as slaves for obedience, you are slaves to him whom you obey; whether it is of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness. (17) But thanks be to our God that you were the slaves of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. (18) Then being made free from sin, you became the slaves of righteousness.*

Paul says two seemingly contradictory things:

A) That we are dead to sin, and free from sin, and that sin shall not have dominion over us (verses 11, 18, 14).

B) That we are not to yield to sin or to let sin reign over us. (Verses 12, 13, 14)

It is as if we are free men walking in bandit country. We have to be alert and we need to resist the bandits and beat them off or they can capture us and drag us off into slavery. While we are in the flesh and while we are in this "present evil world" the big bad bandits of sin and lust and temptation are all around. But the fact that bandits exist does not mean that freedom does not exist. We are free from sin, we are dead to sin and there is no actual compulsion for us to serve sin.

To continue the analogy, if a sin-bandit comes up and says, "You must serve me!", the right response is, "I refuse to yield to you, because I am dead to sin and alive to God and sin shall not have dominion over me so goodbye and good-riddance!

But when Christ turns up we eagerly say: "I yield myself to serve Jesus Christ and to righteousness, Master I am gladly Thy slave!"

Now a very clever sin-bandit might say "Aha I have you, see this is the Law, you are convicted as a sinner and by the law of sin and death you must serve me" To which the saint should firmly respond: "I am not under law but under grace and sin has no dominion over me. I am dead to the Law and free from it. I serve in the newness of the Spirit instead." (More on that will be in Romans 7).

A still cleverer sin-bandit might respond: "If indeed you are under grace then why not sin all you like so that grace might increase!" To which the saint should say: "May it never be - for how can we who have died to sin still live in it! (Romans 6:2) Besides I am a slave to righteousness and cannot serve sin any more, I have a new Master. (Romans 6:16-18)

Now as free men we must stay free, for Christ has redeemed us for that very purpose (Galatians 5:1) and we are not to be enslaved by sin again (2 Peter 2:19).

Staying free from sin involves a series of daily choices - particularly about what we will do with our bodies. Sin tries to come in through the flesh, through what we do with the members of our body - our hands, feet, tongue and other members. That is why Paul writes: Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. (13) Do not yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin,

So if you find a fleshly impulse taking hold of you, do not yield to it. Deny it, do not let your body go along with it. Hold back your hand from hitting, your foot from going into a wrong place, or your tongue from speaking a sharp word. Restrain your body from acting on the sinful impulse. Do not let sin tell your body what to do, instead let God tell your body what to do.

Yield your members to God and to righteousness, so when you have a holy impulse yield to that! Follow the nudges of the Holy Spirit so that your feet go to good places, and your mouth speaks kind words and your hand is put to constructive work to the glory of God the Father!

So God's work in Christ, which wins our freedom from sin, needs also to be made effective in our life by the myriad daily decisions for God and for righteousness that

committed Christians make. We need to be prepared to face the sin-bandits and to tell them that we are freedmen. We do not serve sin, we are dead to sin, we are Christ's slaves and slaves of righteousness and we do not belong to the world of sin and death any more. We need to convince ourselves of this or we will give in far too easily.

That is why Paul says "reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to God". We need to put it in our mental notebook, and count it up and reckon it about ourselves that we are dead to sin and alive to God. It has to be a noted part of our personal identity that we are dead to sin and alive to God.

With this firmly fixed in our minds we then need to escape from the tyranny of the law. Legalism drags down many well intentioned saints. We do not serve as slaves of the Law, rather we walk in the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-14, Galatians 5:16-25)

Then we need to firmly resist fleshly lusts and to surrender to God and joyfully yield ourselves to our new Master - Jesus Christ.

The acronym READY encapsulates the teaching of today's passage:

Reckon yourself dead to sin and free from sin. (Romans 6:11, 18)

Escape from being under the law (Romans 6:14, 15)

Affirm you are alive to God (Romans 6:11, 13)

Deny fleshly lusts (Romans 6:12, 14, 16)

Yield yourself to God and to righteousness (Romans 6:13, 17, 18)

You are free from sin and dead to sin and sin shall not have dominion over you but you must not let it fool you, and you must never yield to it no matter how tempting and nice it seems. Rather you must refuse sin and yield yourselves instead to God and to the work of righteousness.

Different Destinies

Romans 6:19-23 HCSB *I am using a human analogy because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you offered the parts of yourselves as slaves to moral impurity, and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness, which results in sanctification. (20) For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from allegiance to righteousness. (21) And what fruit was produced then from the things you are now ashamed of? For the end of those things is death. (22) But now, since you have been liberated from sin and become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification--and the end is eternal life! (23) For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul describes two very different life paths here: A) Slaves of Sin --> Greater and Greater Lawlessness --> Shame --> Death and B) Slaves of God --> Righteousness --> Sanctification --> Eternal Life

It is as if there are two different locomotives. One locomotive is the Hell-Bound Train and its destination is Perdition. This train runs on the twin rails of sin and death, and is powered by lust and lawlessness. The other locomotive is the Glory Train and its destination is Heaven and the Presence of God. This train is powered by grace working through faith and is glorious with righteousness, sanctification and eternal life.

Now we cannot change where each train is going, but we can choose which train we ourselves will ride on. Just as when I was at school I could go down to Roma Street Station and choose to get a train that went West to Indooroopilly, or one that went the other way to Central Station. As a school student I had no power over the train schedule or destinations, but I could choose where I personally would end up.

In these verses Paul says that we choose where we end up by choosing the spiritual master that we will serve. We can either offer our bodily members "as slaves to sin" or offer them as "slaves to righteousness". The choice is ours.

If we perhaps choose to go to wild parties, get drunk, take drugs and engage in gross sexual immorality we will become shameful people, controlled by our sin and lusts, and reaping the wages of sin, which is death.

If on the other hand we use our bodily members in Christian service, worshiping God and helping others then we will become practiced in righteousness and reap sanctification and along with it eternal life.

One way to picture this is to imagine sin as a cartoon demon, a spirit standing outside the body with tails and a pitchfork, beckoning people into various forms of wickedness. This spirit of lawlessness wants to control a physical body – yours! When you sin you are serving this spirit. You are aligning yourself with a spiritual reality that wants to possess you, control you, enslave you and destroy you.

On the other hand we can imagine Christ the Good Shepherd, standing outside us beckoning us to the paths of righteousness and the ways of holiness that lead us to green pastures by quiet waters. To follow Him we must pass through the Narrow Gate and take the way of Faith. When we follow Christ we become grander and grander and stronger and deeper until one day we find that we are clothed in eternal life and in the great glory of a son of God.

Paul points out the folly of backsliding from the faith: "And what fruit was produced then from the things you are now ashamed of? For the end of those things is death." A wild weekend in Las Vegas may be a "good time" but at the end it just results in shame. The long-term cost of the gambling, the affair, or the STD that is acquired outweighs the transitory pleasure of sin. This "fruit of sin" is seen in bankruptcies, broken homes, jail cells, hospitals and city morgues.

Even a “small sin” such as materialistic envy can have devastating long-term consequences – as the credit card bills pile up, the second-job is taken in order to “keep up with the Joneses”, and relationships are strained by jealousy and hidden hostility. In fact there is no sin that does not seek to become life-controlling and eventually totally destructive. Anger when entrenched leads to violence, laziness leads to poverty, lust leads to sexual addictions, disease and death, pride leads to isolation, and eventually to humiliation, and so on and so forth.

On the other hand each virtue makes us stronger and better. Patience leads to proven character, joy leads to the strength of the Lord, faith enables us to move mountains and mercy means that God will be merciful to us. Virtues build community and enable love to flourish. The service of righteousness, especially in faith-filled community, leads to quietness and confidence forever.

Isaiah 32:17-18 HCSB *The result of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quiet confidence forever. (18) Then my people will dwell in a peaceful place, and in safe and restful dwellings.*

Thus the life of sin, and the life of righteousness are entirely different ways of being - with entirely different eternal destinies.

The Christian is not to go back to the life of sin because its outcomes are totally incompatible with the Christian life. Rather we are to become slaves of righteousness, committed to staying on the Glory Train and thus receiving eternal life.

Sin is a horrid thing, and we are not to offer ourselves to its service. Its fruit is shame and its wage is death. Christians have died to sin and must not live in it any longer.

Instead we should be “enslaved to God” offering the members of our body for works of righteousness and receiving in our innermost being God's free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We Have Died To The Law

Romans 7:1-6 MKJV *Or are you ignorant, brothers; for I speak to those who know the Law; that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? (2) For the married woman was bound by law to the living husband. But if the husband is dead, she is set free from the law of her husband. (3) So then if, while her husband lives, she is married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress. But if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress by becoming another man's wife. (4) So, my brothers, you also have become dead to the law by the body of Christ so that you should be married to Another, even to Him raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit to God. (5) For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sin worked in our members through the law to bring forth fruit to death. (6) But now we having*

been set free from the Law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

Just as the law of marriage is revoked by death so that the wife is free, so too are Christians freed from the Jewish law by the death of Christ.

Some people interpret this to imply that marriage is for life and still exists "spiritually" after a divorce has been finalized. But Paul is not really writing about marriage or divorce here – he is primarily writing about Christians no longer being bound by the Jewish Law – and simply uses one aspect of marriage as an illustration. When Paul actually discusses divorce he says that a believer is "not bound" if an unbelieving spouse leaves - thus asserting that marriage was to be honored but was not permanently binding (1 Corinthians 7:15).

The point that Paul wants to drive home is that we are "dead to the Law":

So, my brothers, you also have become dead to the law by the body of Christ (v.4)

But now we having been set free from the Law, having died to that in which we were held, (v.6)

and later on in Galatians: Galatians 2:19 HCSB For through the law I have died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ;

To do this Paul uses the example of a woman under the authority of her husband just as the Jews were under the authority of the Law. The Old Testament often refers to Israel as being married to God. (Isaiah 54:5 Jeremiah 3:20). Paul argues that a woman under the authority of her husband cannot "be joined to another" without being called an adulteress. When Israel worshiped idols and went away from her "husband" it was called "spiritual adultery" (see Ezekiel chapter 20).

Paul then goes on to say that the woman is blameless once her husband has passed away. When Christ died on the cross the Old Covenant was finished and lost its power and the Temple curtain was torn in two. Now, just as a widow is free to marry another, so too are Christians freed from the Law so we may serve in the Spirit.

The Law has no more authority over the Christian than it would over a dead person – and that is none at all! We are freed from the entire Jewish Law, all of it, including the Ten Commandments and Sabbath-keeping (Colossians 2:8-23). But as we will see that does not mean that we are lawless! We serve in the newness of the Spirit who is holy! (As we go through Romans chapters 7 & 8 this will unfold).

Christians are no longer under a set of Jewish rules laid down by Moses in order to instruct a tribal people as they became a nation. They were good rules, righteous laws and even holy precepts, but they are not the laws of the Christian life. The Christian life is not about conformity to a written code, even a very good written code. If rules could have saved us and made us good, then God would have sent a rule-book, not His beloved Son.

Paul makes this point at some length in the book of Galatians:

Galatians 2:16-21 MKJV *knowing that a man is not justified by works of the Law, but through faith in Jesus Christ; even we believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith in Christ, and not by works of the Law. For all flesh will not be justified by works of law. (17) But if, while we seek to be justified in Christ, we also were found to be sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Let it not be said! (18) For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I confirm myself as a transgressor. (19) For through the Law I died to the law that I might live to God. (20) I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf. (21) I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness is through law, then Christ died without cause.*

- a) No flesh is justified by the works of the Law. (v16)
- b) To rebuild the Law is to transgress. (v.18)
- c) We have died to the Law (v.19)
- d) If righteousness could come through the Law then Christ died for nothing. (v.21)

The dynamic power of the Christian life is not our own human will working hard to observe a written code. We are too weak for that and it simply does not work. In fact we have died to that manner of being religious. Its over, it failed, it ended on the cross, and we are not to go back to human effort and rule-keeping in order to please God.

In fact when the Galatians did try to go back to human willpower and rule-keeping Paul called them "foolish" and "bewitched": Galatians 3:1-5 MKJV O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you not to obey the truth, to whom before your eyes Jesus Christ was written among you crucified? (2) This only I would learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing of faith? (3) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, do you now perfect yourself in the flesh? (4) Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it is even in vain? (5) Then He supplying the Spirit to you and working powerful works in you, is it by works of the law, or by hearing of faith?

The Law cannot perfect the Christian! "For the law made nothing perfect" (Hebrews 7:19) and was even unable to perfect the most ardent worshipers (Hebrews 10:1) - because the Law is external and legal and cannot work to inwardly transform the human heart.

The Christian is not changed by law but rather is transformed by grace, which is received by faith, and this is made possible by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and this grace is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 MKJV *And the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (18) But we all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord Spirit.*

We have died to the Law, so that we might live in the Spirit!

The Law Is Not Sinful

Romans 7:7-13 HCSB *What should we say then? Is the law sin? Absolutely not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin if it were not for the law. For example, I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, You shall not covet. (8) And sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind. For apart from the law sin is dead. (9) Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life (10) and I died. The commandment that was meant for life resulted in death for me. (11) For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. (12) So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. (13) Therefore, did what is good cause my death? Absolutely not! On the contrary, sin, in order to be recognized as sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment sin might become sinful beyond measure.*

This confusing paragraph is basically saying this:

- a) We have a sinful rebellious nature.
- b) This nature is concealed until the Law comes along and we rebel against its rules.
- c) Our automatic rebellion against the Law shows we are sinful.
- d) Our automatic rebellion also incites us to commit sin.
- e) So the Law, which is good, causes us to sin.
- f) Since sin leads to death, and the Law provokes us to sin, then the Law leads to our spiritual death.
- g) But the Law itself is holy, righteous and good.
- h) It is the rebellious sin nature, the flesh, which is the true source of sin and this shows that sin is perfectly sinful.

Deep in every unredeemed person there is the urge to defy Heaven. This is the true source of all sin. This defiance stays underground until some rule or Law is created that gives it a clear "something" to rebel against. Sometimes when you put up a sign saying "Wet Paint - Do Not Touch" every person who walks by will lightly touch it to see if it is so! This is a small illustration the human urge to lawlessness at work and as 1 John says "sin is lawlessness".

1 John 3:4 MKJV *Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.*

And the Anti-Christ is also called the Lawless One:

2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 MKJV *For the mystery of lawlessness is already working, only he is now holding back until it comes out of the midst. (8) And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming,*

There is a tendency in every human being to prefer our will to God's will. And when the Law says our will is wrong, our tendency is to defend ourselves and to say that the Law is wrong. So the unbeliever prefers to be without God's Law and this is lawlessness!

So as the Law is given we challenge it. We disobey the clearly revealed will of God because we prefer the pleasures of sin. We want to do what we like, even if we know that what we like is wrong. However regeneration works deeply within us to change what we like, so we start to love God's will and it becomes "written on our hearts".

Hebrews 10:16 MKJV *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord; I will put My Laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,"*

When the person is born-again of God, and the law is written on their hearts, the sin-principle of lawlessness is broken. We now prefer God's will, and we love righteousness and become enslaved to it. Now let's look at today's verses:

"I would not have known sin if it were not for the law. For example, I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." The Law tells us what sin us and makes us conscious of it. Just as an art critic becomes aware of faults in paintings that no-one else sees after learning the laws of art so the person who has the Law becomes aware of their own sin.

And sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind. For apart from the law sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. The commandment that was meant for life resulted in death for me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. When the Law is given sin springs to life, our lawlessness jumps into action, and we rationalize away the Law. We do not like the feel of authority so we rebel. And sin makes up all sorts of excuses for why we are right and the Law is wrong – and deceives us. Then we rebel against the Law and deliberately disobey it.

If an evil man wanted to kill people, and not get caught, he could put a fence near a crumbly dangerous cliff that has a good view, but would set it back about ten feet from the edge and cover it with signs saying "Danger - do not climb over the fence". Of course because the fence is so far back some would climb over "to get a better view" and the crumbly edge would give way and they would plunge to their death. Is the sign evil? No! But because of rebellious human nature it works evil!

So the Law, which is holy, righteous and good, provokes our sin nature into rebellion, so that we sin, and sin brings forth death.

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Therefore, did what is good cause my death? Absolutely not! On the contrary, sin, in order to be recognized as sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment sin might become sinful beyond measure.

Sin is "that bad", it is not just ignorance, or a series of small faults that are easily remedied. It is lawlessness, it is an aggressive dislike of God's order and control, and this is proven by the fact of the way it reacts to the Law. The Law shows up sin for what it is – rebellion against God. Because sin takes something good, the Law, and uses it to

tempt us, trap us and condemn us and produces "death" in us, then sin is utterly sinful. There is nothing wrong with the Law, but there is a lot wrong with unredeemed human nature.

Conflicting Natures

Romans 7:14-21 MKJV *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. (15) For that which I do, I know not. For what I desire, that I do not do; but what I hate, that I do. (16) If then I do that which I do not desire, I consent to the law that it is good. (17) But now it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing. For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I do not find. (19) For I do not do the good that I desire; but the evil which I do not will, that I do. (20) But if I do what I do not desire, it is no more I working it out, but sin dwelling in me. (21) I find then a law: when I will to do the right, evil is present with me.*

Paul deals with the problem of involuntary sin – such as an obsession or compulsion. With involuntary sin, even though you do not want to do it, you still do it. For instance a young man walks past a magazine stand and sees a scantily clad woman and his gaze is trapped by it. He immediately regrets it and thinks "why did I do that!" but at the next magazine stand he does the same thing! This is sin happening without the person's consent, sin with a life of its own.

I knew a wonderful Spirit-filled Christian leader who had Tourette's syndrome where he would suddenly start swearing at the top of his voice with the worst possible language. This was totally involuntary and deeply humiliating. It was sin acting out despite the person. It was eventually healed by Theophostic prayer ministry.

When a person sins, without wanting to, and does so compulsively, we sin at work apart from the person. The sin dwells in them, but is not them. As Paul says:

But now it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.
But if I do what I do not desire, it is no more I working it out, but sin dwelling in me.

So the sin dwelling in the person is taking control of their body and causing them to sin "despite themselves".

For that which I do, I know not. For what I desire, that I do not do; but what I hate, that I do.
For I do not do the good that I desire; but the evil which I do not will, that I do.

The origin of Paul's experience is unclear. As a counselor I have my own theory to add to the long list of theories about Paul's sin in Romans 7. Perhaps Paul's background as a Pharisee may have led him into perfectionism and perhaps into some obsessive-compulsive behavior which he then had to deal with as a Christian and be redeemed

from by the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul certainly has some of the traits of a perfectionist!

Whatever the origin of the struggle with sin, there was something that made Paul sin, despite the best efforts of his own will. Sin dwelt in Paul, in his flesh, and from time to time sin "acted out" in behaviors Paul disapproved of.

Thus Paul was able to distinguish between "the sin in me" and "me". The sin was something apart from his true eternal self. It was an evil thing, resident in his flesh, that he would be rid of when he went to be with the Lord. It was not a permanent part of his character. The fact that sin is "not us" and is not a permanent part of our essential self is very good news.

Now there are various kinds and causes of common involuntary sins. The first is weird thoughts in a tired mind. When the mind becomes tired and overwhelmed by life's complexity its ability to suppress unwanted sinful thoughts diminishes as its inhibitory mechanisms lose strength. The tired person experiences weird thoughts, which it then struggles to suppress, and only becomes more tired, so more weird thoughts pop-up and the person struggles against those down and down in a circle of defeat. If you are having weird thoughts, don't fight them, just go to sleep and rest easy and go watch TV and beg out. To your weird thoughts just say "Oh I know what you are, you are signs that my mind is tired, I am not going to bother with you at all, I am just going to take a nap". Once you are rested the weird thoughts will go away.

The second source is a controlling fantasy or delusion which can sometimes occupy hours of the day. This may require professional help. It is often an injured part of the personality trying to get an emotional need met.

The third are the "irresistible" urges and impulses. These can be greatly diminished through prayer. They only get worse if you fight them. Simply identify them and place them at the foot of the cross. The attitude should be "I am not going to bother about you any more; I am going to let Jesus deal with you."

The fourth are the urges that come from a sense of hurry, urgency, doom or guilt. "I have to do this or else something bad will happen and I must do it now." Such urges are nearly always Satanic. As Luther said "Hurry is not of the Devil, it IS the Devil". Such urges enslave us, but Christ has set us free. Just say: "Go away! God is not in a hurry, and Christ has set me free!"

The fifth are the dark sinful moods that accuse us to despair, complain and blame God. They arrive suddenly and can depart suddenly. I used to be greatly bothered by them until my friend (the one who had the Tourette's) told me to rebuke them in the name of Jesus. I reluctantly tried this and had a great victory; the mood vanished in just a few seconds! I have found I must be stern with my moods and rebuke them harshly. "Mood of despair I rebuke you in the name of Jesus, now go!" and it does! You may think this nutty; I certainly did, but try it three times and tell me how you go!

Sin does not just vanish at conversion. We have practiced it too long for that! However it is forced underground and we are at war with it and sin will lose, but until that final victory it will seek to "act out" now and then. The greatest power in overcoming sin in the flesh is to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-18 MKJV *I say, then, Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

So our four main lessons from today are:

1. Sin may still dwell in us and act out now and then.
2. This sin is "a thing apart" and is not our truest eternal selves. Our truest selves love righteousness.
3. Sin in the flesh can be defeated by walking in the Spirit.
4. Sin in the flesh can also be defeated by prayer ministry and spiritual warfare.

Conflicting Natures Part 2

Romans 7:22-25 MKJV *For I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man; (23) but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin being in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.*

In the above verses Paul makes a distinction between "I myself" and "the flesh". This is the same distinction as between "the inward man" and "my members". There is also a law "of my mind" and a law "of my members".

Let's arrange Paul's descriptive terms in two distinct groups:

Group A) Inward man = law of my mind = Law of God = I myself = me = the mind

Group B) Law in my members = law of sin = law of sin being in my members = flesh = body of death

There is a distinct body-mind dualism here. Not that the body is naturally and intrinsically bad as Plato taught, but that it has been corrupted by sin since the fall and was now sin indwelt so that "in my flesh dwells no good thing".

Romans 7:18 MKJV *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing. For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I do not find.*

The body stores our history, our past, in associations and memory traces, and in habits and reflexes, some of which are good and some of which are bad. The body has everything from physical scars to psychological scars. The body also acts in its own interests for its own comfort and for the satisfaction of its own appetites. It seems to have its own will. If you don't believe this try fasting. Your mind wants to fast, but your body has other ideas!

There are at least three areas in which the body will oppose the will of God in your life. The first area is strong physical cravings of an illicit nature. For sex outside marriage, for excessive alcohol consumption or drug use, or for the physical high that comes from rage and violent outbursts. The body will say "I want it" when you know it is wrong. Sin in the flesh will devise many strategies for getting these physical cravings satisfied.

The second area is the uncontrolled "fight or flight reaction" which is the body's response to perceptions of threat whether real or imagined. Hormones such as adrenalin are released, blood flow to the extremities to prepare for action and away from the brain and the person decides whether to stay and "fight" or whether to take "flight" from the perceived attacker. One the feeling of threat intensifies very poor and unbiblical responses are common - such as rage, abuse, fighting, fleeing responsibility, and causing divisions and retaliation of all kinds.

The third area is quiet subtle. The body has been trained in certain sinful patterns and it wants to repeat those patterns. As a young boy I suffered much at the hands of bullies and had to learn how to fight. Many years later and well after my conversion, I was at Bible College when some friends played a prank and jumped me from behind some bushes at night. In less than a split second my fists were up and I was ready to hit them.

The old ingrained reaction surfaced, sin in the flesh manifested before I had time even to think. Fortunately I caught myself before I could actually thump anyone. In a similar manner a godly Christian may kick their toe and say a swear word they learned prior to conversion. It just slips out, it is just an old pattern of associations in the brain that is "fired" by a certain specific stimulus. It is sin that dwells in the flesh, resident evil that is deeply programmed into our bodies.

In marked contrast to these is our real self (if we are saved). This true self joyfully agrees with the law of God. The mind of the Christian loves the law of the Lord. The inner man, which is our real eternal selves, has no desire to sin, because it is born of God and loves God. When Paul uses the terms I, me and my, he is referring to his inner man, not the flesh. For Paul the unredeemed flesh was "something other" than his true self.

Now this is not saying that everything mental is good and everything physical is bad. After all we celebrate the Incarnation! Our bodies will one day be resurrected and redeemed. And the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. But at the moment the body is indwelt by the law of sin. The body obeys one master - sin, while the mind obeys another master - Jesus Christ.

I know one woman where this distinction is quite startling. She has a terrible history of alcohol and drug abuse, yet when you talk to her she seems to be genuinely a very keen Christian. The body is doing one thing and the mind quite another. This is due to a great lack of personal insight and inner integration.

Paul gets so frustrated by this duality that he cries out "who will deliver me from this body of death". Paul desperately wanted to be perfect, sinless and guilt free, but his best intentions were being subverted by sin in the flesh. For Paul this battle was so intense that it literally split him in two. One half was the mind which served God, the other half was the flesh that served sin.

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then with the mind I serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

As we shall see in chapter eight of Romans the answer to the question: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" is Jesus Christ our Lord working through the power of the Holy Spirit in those whose mind is set on the Spirit. The mind is on the winning side, and the mind can be used to win the battle against sin:

Romans 8:1-6 MKJV *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (2) But the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. (3) For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; (4) so that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (5) For they who are according to the flesh mind the things of flesh, but they who are according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. (6) For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

There Is No Condemnation

Romans 8:1-2 ASV *There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death.*

When you see a "therefore" you have to ask what it is there for! It is pointing back to Romans 7 and the fact that our sin nature, the flesh, is a temporary aberration and is not part of our true eternal selves in Christ Jesus. Our sin nature will not be with us in Heaven. So Paul was able to say "It is not I who sin, but sin that dwells in me." (Romans 7:17, 20, 21). If it is not Paul who is sinning, then it is not Paul who is guilty, and therefore Paul is without condemnation!

Paul is also without condemnation because he has "died to the Law". The Law brings condemnation and death, but Paul is dead to it, and all its convicting power, so Paul is not condemned.

What Paul applies to himself can be applied to every Christian. If we are in Christ, then we are freed from guilt, condemnation, and spiritual death. In fact God defends us from every charge that is brought against us:

Romans 8:33-34 MKJV *Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies. (34) Who is he condemning? It is Christ who has died, but rather also who is raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.*

The Christian lives by another law, by a new set of spiritual dynamics called "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus". This law is based on grace operating through faith on behalf of the repentant believer. When someone decided to give up sin and follow Christ then God washes away their guilt and condemnation so that it no longer exists. We are called into a fellowship of believers who have given up sin and desire holiness.

The Spirit of Life is based on the power of the resurrection and works life out of death. It takes someone who is "dead in trespasses and sins" and makes them alive in Christ.

Ephesians 2:4-7 MKJV *But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us (5) (even when we were dead in sins) has made us alive together with Christ (by grace you are saved), (6) and has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

Colossians 2:13-14 MKJV *And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, (14) blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross.*

Thus the law of the Spirit of Life operates in the contrary direction to the law of Sin and Death which takes a person who is alive and condemns them bringing spiritual death.

Romans 7:9 MKJV *For I was alive without the law once. But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.*

So the Spirit of Life brings life from the dead, and brings righteousness out of sin and guilt. Just as God brings order out of chaos, He can bring life out of death and righteousness and holiness out of sin and iniquity. This means that no one is so messed up, so chaotic, so dead in trespasses and sin, that God cannot reach down and bless them and bring grace into their life and free them from all guilt and condemnation.

The apostle Paul does not want Christians to go around feeling guilty all the time. Christians who feel guilty all the time have not realized they are free from the law and from all obligations to perform to a certain high standard. Their Christianity is still

focused on their performance and their spiritual achievement rather than on God's love and grace working in their lives.

When the Spirit of Life comes to work in our lives the focus shifts to the changes that God is working in us as we are transformed from glory to glory by the Holy Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:16, 17). We sense God is at work in us in a powerful and good way. We know the energy of God within us, doing things that are impossible for man, but which are very possible with God.

That which is sinful and deserving of condemnation is simply placed on the cross. It is dealt with by the work of Christ. We do not have to struggle with it in a complicated morass of sin and guilt. Rather we rely on God to change and transform us day by day.

When the Christian stands before God, he hears "I love you so much!" and he does not hear a word of condemnation, of any sort, ever. When Paul says "there is no condemnation" he does not mean "there is a little bit of condemnation" - rather he means there is NONE, zero, nothing, none at all, none whatsoever, zip. While the Bible indicates variations in reward, it never indicates any condemnation of any sort exists for the born-again believer.

In fact the Bible tells us that God "justifies" the born-again Christian, giving them a status of someone who is completely OK in God's eyes - just as if I'd never sinned. The born-again believer is OK in God's eyes, is granted citizenship in Heaven, and access to the throne of grace in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

John's gospel tells us that this happens when we are believe in Christ and are born-again:

John 5:24 MKJV *Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My Word and believes on Him who sent Me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life.*

If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior then you have passed from death to life and you shall not come into condemnation. Rather you shall inherit eternal life!

The End Of Sin In The Flesh

Romans 8:3-4 MKJV *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; (4) so that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

In chapter 7 Paul pointed out that sin dwelt "in the flesh" as a disruptive presence. This "sin in the flesh" was not the true nature of the Christian believer who stands righteous

before God. "Sin in the flesh" is a rebellious spiritual entity that will be subdued in time and eliminated altogether at death or the resurrection.

Today's verses make some very important points, namely:

1. The Law was unable to make anyone righteous because sin in the flesh weakened people so they could not fulfill the Law's demands.
2. So God sent Jesus "in the likeness of sinful flesh".
3. Jesus was also sent "for sin" (as a sacrifice)
4. When Jesus died on the cross He condemned sin in the flesh.
5. Because Christ condemns sin in the flesh, the believer has the power to fulfill the righteousness of the Law.
6. This is done through the power of the Holy Spirit, in those who walk according to the Spirit.

This tally closely with Paul's teaching in Galatians:

Galatians 5:16-18 MKJV *I say, then, walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

So the believer has two helpers in his/her battle against "sin in the flesh" and they are:

- a) The work of Christ in His incarnation and death which condemned sin in the flesh.
- b) The inner working of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thus the Christian has no reason to be a slave to sin, but instead can become a slave to righteousness fulfilling the whole Law in one commandment "love your neighbor as yourself" for love is the fulfillment of the Law. Sin may always be within our members until we die or are resurrected to meet the Lord in the air - but we need not surrender to its power. Sin may be present, but it is not inevitably controlling. Sin is not a part of your true character. Sin will not be part of you in eternity. In eternity you will be holy, sanctified, spotless, blameless, spiritual, eternal, immortal and incorruptible (see 1 Corinthians 15:35-55).

This pernicious intruder called sin may seem "part of human nature" but it is not part of your nature as a child of God, as one "born from above", born of God, by the imperishable seed of the Word. The following verses indicate the spiritual state of a person who is born of God. Please read them carefully:

John 3:5-8 MKJV *Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again. (8) The Spirit breathes where He desires, and you hear His voice, but you do not know from where He comes, and where He goes; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*

1 Peter 1:22-23 MKJV *Purifying your souls in the obedience of the truth through the Spirit to unfeigned love of the brothers, love one another fervently out of a pure heart, (23) having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living Word of God, and abiding forever.*

1 John 3:9 MKJV *Everyone who has been born of God does not commit sin, because His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.*

1 John 4:7 MKJV *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God.*

1 John 5:1 MKJV *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. And everyone who loves Him who begets also loves him who has been born of Him.*

1 John 5:4 MKJV *For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.*

1 John 5:18 MKJV *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not continue to sin, but the one born of God guards himself, and the evil one does not touch him.*

Our bodies are not "born of God" they are born of the flesh, "born of woman" as John says. They become sin-indwelt over time. We become "dead in trespasses and sins" then grace appears and we are born-again by the Word of God and behold all things become new. A new man, anew inner person is created, who is righteous and holy in the image of Him who created him. This new man is born of God and cannot sin. While the new man is eternal and sinless, the old man is corrupt and is perishing. We have eternal life in earthen vessels. If I was to shoot a born-again believer the body would die but the spirit would live and they would find themselves as sinless and holy in the presence of God. They would fully discover the nature of the new man within them. They would be fully ware of Christ in them the hope of glory. So when the apostle John says "Everyone who has been born of God does not commit sin, because His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." he is talking about the new man within us, our real eternal selves. Our new man is sinless, and does not want to sin, and cannot sin, because he is born of God and made in the image of Jesus Christ. Thus sin in the flesh is temporary, and has been defeated and will not ever be part of us in eternity and is alien to our true selves which are indeed slaves of righteousness.

Now we do not yet fully understand what God has done in us in Christ. Indeed the glory of it will only be revealed on the Last Day:

1 John 3:1-2 MKJV *Behold what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God. Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when He shall be revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*

Romans 8:18-19 MKJV *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God.*

Colossians 3:3-4 MKJV *For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ our Life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

Born-again believers are sons of God, new creatures, full of glory, whose lives are hidden in Christ with God. On the Last Day we will be revealed with Christ Jesus and this will result in the liberation of the entire natural order from bondage (Romans 8:18-21). You were a sinner, you were saved by grace, now you are a saint, which means a holy one, and you are destined for holiness. Sin in the flesh may plague you now and then but it is not part of your spiritual identity any more.

Christ has crucified sin in the flesh and the Spirit opposes it and you are no longer attached to it. You are to live a higher life of love as is appropriate for the children of God. You are to live by your new nature, not your old nature and you are to walk in the Spirit. When you walk in the Spirit you will not carry out the lusts of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).

The Mind-Set Of The Spirit

Romans 8:5-7 HCSB *For those whose lives are according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those whose lives are according to the Spirit, about the things of the Spirit. (6) For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. (7) For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God's law, for it is unable to do so.*

The Greek word translated mind-set is "phronema" and it is used of a person's inclination, mind-set, outlook or mental framework. It is not so much the individual thoughts themselves as the inner "peg-board" that they are hung on. For instance a paranoid person has a certain suspicious mindset that places the incoming data into certain mental pigeon-holes that fit their conspiracy theory. The mental framework gives context and meaning to events and colors them.

There are "higher" and "lower" ways of viewing the same reality. Some people when given a gift see the love and thoughtfulness, while others just work out how much it cost the giver and simply see it in monetary terms. Or on visiting a forest some stop and sense the beauty, while others trample noisily and heedlessly around oblivious to the speech of Nature. Or in reading a book some try and find the deeper meaning and learn from it, while others just want to get through it and write the term paper. Take a bunch of teenagers to an art show and a few will stop and ponder, while many others will simply point and giggle.

This higher way of thinking is the "mind set on the Spirit" and is equivalent to the mind set on things above.

Philippians 4:8 MKJV *Finally, my brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are right, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue and if there is any praise, think on these things.*

Colossians 3:1-3 MKJV *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. (2) Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.*

Isaiah 32:8 HCSB *But a noble person plans noble things; he stands up for noble causes.*

The Christian is called to higher ground, to a noble way of thinking. We are to think about lovely, good, high-minded things and to set aside the vulgar, trashy, fleshly and selfish thoughts so common to our age. We have to start thinking differently, following the Spirit and thinking our own deep inner thoughts, hearing the tune of a "different drummer".

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. (Henry David Thoreau, Walden, Conclusion, 1854)"

The mind set on the flesh is death. The lower way of thinking leads to loss of impulse control, addictions, and many frustrations in life. The mind becomes filled with the psychological equivalent of rotting garbage and "stinking thinking" develops. Sin is never fully resisted or transcended. Instead it is often pondered, and even indulged. Gradually the soul becomes darkened and deadened to all that is higher in life - including God.

The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. The higher and better way of viewing life leads to the ability to function properly in life, to achieve goals, to react rightly to life's problems and to master numerous skills with grace and wisdom. Sin is resisted and uprooted and transcended by walking in the Spirit. This is not necessarily a very religious life, full of church services. Rather it is a noble life full of quiet and good thoughts and actions.

A rough analogy would be the contrast between fine classical music and punk rock. Fine classical music leaves me feeling peaceful and mentally alive, full of good thoughts. Punk rock is full of violence and anger and sin and leads to rage and to suicide. (I am not saying you have to like classical music to be a good Christian.) These are illustrations of ways of thinking - higher and lower.

Now the mind set on the Spirit mediates on Scripture, sees beauty in nature, prays often, thinks on Christ, and looks for beauty and truth in all things. The mind set on the

flesh is only interested in gratification of one kind of another - from sexual gratification, to revenge.

So the mind set on the Spirit puts aside the clamor for instant gratification and goes on a quest for God, for beauty and for truth of all kinds - whether it be cultural, historical, scientific or theological. The mind set on the Spirit is saturated with reverence and awe and lives in the constant joy of the surprises of God.

Hebrews 12:28-29 HCSB *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us hold on to grace. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe; (29) for our God is a consuming fire.*

The spiritual mindset judges all things spiritually and is able to understand Scripture and view life with purity and grace.

1 Corinthians 2:12-16 HCSB *Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, in order to know what has been freely given to us by God. (13) We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. (14) But the natural man does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually. (15) The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone. (16) For: who has known the Lord's mind, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

James 3:17-18 HCSB *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy. (18) And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Paul seems to have had areal problem with "lower thinking" on Crete and accused their inhabitants of being liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons. When he sent Titus there he said:

Titus 1:15-16 HCSB *To the pure, everything is pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; in fact, both their mind and conscience are defiled. (16) They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, and disqualified for any good work.*

So we see that the lower nature, and the lower way of thinking, makes people unfit for doing God's will. "For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God's law, for it is unable to do so."

Indulging sin, coarseness, vulgarity and fleshly appetites is not harmless. It subverts our whole being as Christians and makes us useless to God. People may mock us for aiming to live by a better rule, but still we must always head for "higher ground". Make the choice to set your mind on the things of the Spirit!

In The Spirit

Romans 8:8-11 ASV *and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. (9) But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. (10) And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. (11) But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*

These verses contain some very absolute and categorical language such as:

1. Those in the flesh cannot please God.
2. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.
3. The body is dead because of sin.

This makes clear that there is an absolute separation between those in the flesh and those in the Spirit. Those "in the Spirit" are not an advanced group of Christians; they are in fact the only Christians. People who do not have the Spirit are quite simply unsaved. Those "in the flesh" who live by the baser values of the world, without spirituality, without sensitivity to Scripture or to spiritual things, without prayer and lacking the fruits and gifts of the Spirit - cannot please God.

And it is not just any spirit, as if New Age spirituality or channeling the spirits of the dead was enough to make one spiritual and not carnal. Rather it is only the Spirit of Christ that makes alive. Christ must be in the Christian.

In verse 9 we see Paul making God and Christ equivalent: "But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The Spirit of God is obviously the same as the Spirit of Christ. This supports the idea of the Trinity.

So Christians are God-indwelt people, who have Christ in them, and Christ in us is what animates us and makes us spiritually alive. In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul even says that our bodies are temples - places where God dwells, our bodies are a sacred site and are to be honored as such and not defiled by immorality.

The problem of what to do with the body carries over from Romans chapter 7 where it was revealed that the body was the dwelling place of sin. So Christ dwells in us, and sin dwells in us, both at the same time. However they seem to dwell at different levels of being. Sin dwells in the outer level of being known and the flesh, while Christ dwells in the inmost level of being known as the spirit.

Translations differ on verse 10, most capitalize the word "spirit" which I cannot see as justified from the Greek. The ASV version is I think most correct:

Romans 8:10 ASV *And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness.*

The body, which has become the dwelling place of sin, must die, for indeed flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). Yet God does not give up on our bodies but instead resurrects them and makes them glorious and immortal.

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

Our mortal bodies shall be resurrected and somehow that transformation will be a work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The immortal body is somehow connected to the mortal body. It is as if the "mortal body" is the seed of the eternal spiritual body. Just as there is little resemblance between a pumpkin seed and a pumpkin but yet there is continuity. Though the seed is destroyed in the ground, the pumpkin surely came from it. The following verses from 1 Corinthians 15 illustrate the organic seed-to-plant connection between the sin-indwelt and temporary mortal body and the glorious, eternal spiritual body.

1 Corinthians 15:35-54 ASV *But some one will say, How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come? (36) Thou foolish one, that which thou thyself sowest is not quickened except it die: (37) and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind... (42) So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: (43) it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: (44) it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body..... (49) And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. (50) Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. (51) Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (53) For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (54) But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

The death that our bodies experience through being sin-indwelt is "swallowed up in victory". Thus sin's effect on us will be nullified. Death will be transcended. The mortal shall put on immortality for those who are indwelt by the Spirit of God.

Thus being a Christian cannot be defined in social terms, such as "being gentlemen" or "being kind to others". A Christian is a distinct category of spiritual being. We are, to use some long words, "existentially other" to the rest of humanity. Christians are God-indwelt people. All who have the Spirit of Christ are Christians and all true Christians have the Spirit of Christ. Our bodies have the life of Jesus dwelling in them in spiritual form. We have a power operating in us that enables us to be acceptable to God. We are able to please God because Christ is the power of our lives. Those without Christ dwelling in their bodies cannot please God, since they do not have the power that leads to righteousness and sin in the flesh subverts every move.

Being in the Spirit is not optional, rather it is absolutely essential and defining for all Christians. God has come to dwell with us and in us and desires to transform us into the image of His beloved Son through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mortifying The Flesh

Romans 8:12-13 MKJV *Therefore, brothers, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (13) For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die. But if you through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live.*

How can a Christian "mortify the deeds of the body"? The answer is "through the Spirit".

Mortifying the body is often incorrectly associated with extreme penances such as flagellation, extended fasting, or even self-castration. But Paul says that these practices are of "no value".

Colossians 2:20-23 HCSB *If you died with Christ to the elemental forces of this world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations: (21) "Don't handle, don't taste, and don't touch"? (22) All these regulations refer to what is destroyed by being used up; they are human commands and doctrines. (23) Although these have a reputation of wisdom by promoting ascetic practices, humility, and severe treatment of the body, they are not of any value against fleshly indulgence.*

So Paul's idea of mortification does NOT involve things such as:

1. Asceticism
2. Overdone humility
3. Severe treatment of the body
4. Taboos - such as do not handle, do not taste, do not touch

These belong to the religion of those who "still belong to the world" and have not ascended into heavenly realms with Christ and known His power and the filling of the Holy Ghost. It is no coincidence that the Church has been weakest and worst when Christians have most assiduously practiced such things. They have the "appearance of wisdom" but are in fact a useless waste of energy.

True Christian mortification is "of the Spirit" and simply involves "stopping dead" certain sinful practices and substituting them with righteous practices.

Colossians 3:5-10 HCSB *Therefore, put to death whatever in you is worldly: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. (6) Because of these, God's wrath comes on the disobedient, (7) and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. (8) But now you must also put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. (9) Do not lie to*

one another, since you have put off the old man with his practices (10) and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator.

The "putting to death" is of the deeds of the body, not of the body itself. For instance we are put to death "greed". So when greed rises up within you, you are to stop it, to refuse it, to kill it in its tracks, and to do this over and over again.

Now one of the best ways to "kill" a practice is to make a definite decision to stop it and then to retain yourself in a different and better direction. For a very simple analogy, when I moved to the USA I had to "put to death" my habit of driving on the left hand side of the road. I did not go around saying "I must not drive on the left" or wrestling against "leftness" instead I simply made a decision not to drive on the left and concentrated on driving on the right hand side instead. Now I am in the "right" habit!

If we redirect ourselves from the wrong way to the right way then the wrong path will gradually become extinguished. It is like the grass that grows on a track that is not used. The old way, the old life path will slowly fade away. Soon we will be left only with the righteous habit. This is why Paul often combines the two statements "put off X" and "put on Y".

This is in two parts:

- a) Putting Off- involves realizing you have a problem and making a definite and clear decision to quit from X. This is the "dying", the stopping, the decision that it will never be a part of you again.
- b) Putting On - involves adopting a new behavior and moving towards the opposite of X which is Y. This is using the power of Christ in you to adopt a better lifestyle.

To stop lying make a decision to quit lying, and then concentrate on speaking the truth at all times.

To stop worrying, make a decision to quit worrying and then focus on presenting your needs to God in prayer.

To stop being greedy, make a decision to quit coveting and then focus on living simply and lightly.

To stop being angry make a decision to quit from your rage and then focus on being cool and in control.

To stop being lustful make a decision to quit your wild imaginings and then concentrate on treating women as sisters in all purity.

To stop being stingy and mean make a decision to quit such selfishness and then set your heart on being generous and kind.

To stop being timid make a decision to quit your fears and then ask God to make you bold by the power of the Holy Spirit.

To stop being resentful make a decision to quit digging up old bones, and then work on resolving your issues and forgiving others quickly.

Now making the decision to quit can be tough. Again let us take the case of greed. It can be hard to give up being a shop-aholic, and the thought of living simply and in a godly fashion may seem terrifying. But when an enormous credit card bill looms, and when someone is 60 days behind, then a person may see the folly of their ways. They may say 'enough'! Once they have really genuinely said "enough" then they have put greed to death and can start putting on simplicity and godly living.

Or take the case of resentment where it may take an ulcer or a divorce or even a nervous breakdown to get someone to be aware of how resentment is ruining their life. But once they decide to deal with it, and perhaps even see a pastor for counsel, and irrevocably decided they will no longer be resentful, then they have "put it to death" and they can move on to being loving and merciful and forgiving.

Now it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the insight to see that we have a problem and the will to deal with it and who shines the light of the Scriptures on it and who points out a better way. So it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to put to death the old nature and put on the new nature, which is Christ.

One great mistake made by many Christians is to try to replace the Holy Spirit with human will power or rather won't-power and to make "resolutions" not to do such and such ever again. This rarely works. Fighting against sin is futile. You have to kill it stone dead. You need to make a cold-blooded decision that you are finished with it, then leave it behind, without another thought or even a look back. And then simply move on to the right behavior. Just as if you were simply choosing to drive on the other side of the road.

So we do not have to fast on top of a flagpole for forty days or cut off parts of our body in order to defeat sin. We just have to calmly decide to quit. Then we replace the old sinful behavior with a better righteous alternative. The Bible often places the righteous alternative right next to the sin we need to stop.

Ephesians 4:28-29 MKJV *Let him who stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, so that he may have something to give to him who needs. (29) Let not any filthy word go out of your mouth, but if any is good to building up in respect of need, that it may give grace to the ones hearing.*

So we see in verse 28 above - don't steal instead move to the positive and replace it with constructive work. And in verse 29 don't let any filthy language go out of your mouth and instead move to the positive - gracious edifying speech.

Today's Eternity-DBS has been a bit longer because this is so important and people get it so wrong so often. You need to put sin to death, but all the willpower in the world will not do it. You need inner power, the power of the Holy Spirit, to convict you, to give you insight, and to enable you to adopt a holy and good replacement behavior for that

context. Pray now and ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit so you can mortify the deeds of the body.

Galatians 5:16 MKJV *I say, then, "Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."*

Children of God

Romans 8:14-17 MKJV *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (15) For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba, Father! (16) The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. (17) And if we are children, then we are heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; so that if we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified together.*

Paul takes the term 'son of God' with literal seriousness, for him we have been adopted into the very family of God and are joint-heirs with Christ, part of the family of the God-head, and even able to judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:2,3) in Hebrews 2 we are even considered as "brethren" - literal brothers of Jesus . There is no hint that the term "son of God" is "merely just an analogy". Not at all! The New Testament sees Christians as becoming immortal world-liberating beings full of eternal glory who will even rule with Christ and share His throne (Revelation 3:21). Grace takes us from the gutter most to the uttermost (Ephesians 2:4-7)!

Now the one characteristic of sons of God that Paul singles out is that they are "led by the Spirit of God". That is they are susceptible to spiritual influence, motivated by holiness, and obedient to the promptings of the Spirit within their conscience. They are tuned in to God and to His various communications with them. They are not led by mere men, or by politicians or generals or doctrines or by the ever-varying trends of the age. Instead they are led by the voice of righteousness and truth and by the word of the gospel.

To be led by the Spirit is to be led into truth. The person led by the Spirit is attracted to beauty, truth, and noble and higher thought, wisdom, righteousness, peace, and love. These voices provide the intuitive inner guidance of the saint and are the different drummers that the Spirit-led person hearkens to and marches in step with.

To be led by the Spirit is deeply personal and intuitive. It is following a leader and hearkening to a certain calling. It is deep sense of inner direction and decision. It is not legalistic, nor is it a cobbling together of rules and practices and notions into a sort of life-code.

Now the Scriptures are very important and we are to study them and know them as Christ studied them and knew them. But when Jesus came to life's situations He followed the Spirit, not a strict set of laws like the Pharisees did. Jesus was without sin,

He was perfect, and He loved the Scriptures. Yet His life direction came from above, via the Spirit, through His spiritual perception of situations and His sense of what "the Father" was doing.

The Bible has to be interpreted by the Spirit-filled believer with a sensitive and Spirit-led conscience. If the conscience is hardened and dead (as it was with the Pharisees) then the Bible simply becomes a weapon with which to condemn others and works death not life. The Bible is a Spirit-breathed book that needs to be spiritually discerned. Only the Spirit-led sons and daughters of God can read it rightly!

Now the Spirit of God leads us out of fear and condemnation and into child-like intimacy and fellowship with God.

For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba, Father!

Paul contrasts two "spirits" here, the "spirit of fear" and the "spirit of adoption". The spirit of fear operates on the assumption that God may punish us and even reject us unless we keep all His rules. In this scenario we are "in" but can be cast out at any time. The spirit of adoption operates in reverse, we are outside, not God's children and we are accepted in, chosen, taken on board, and redeemed from our sin and messy lives. On the one hand we have rules, fear and rejection and on the other hand we have grace, adoption and acceptance. Adoption is inclusion. God includes us in His circle, and brings us into His family of love. We can call God "Daddy" which is what "Abba" means. The term "Abba" is shocking and violates many people's ideas of reverence and repudiates all notions of a distant philosophical and impersonal God. This is intimacy with Deity and it is encouraged!

The spirit of adoption tells us that we are children of God. This is God's never-ending message of love and it comes not in a book or on tablets of stone, or even through a prophet but is witnessed to the very deepest part of our inmost being!

This tells us that we have a spirit "our spirit" and the Holy Spirit talks to it and imparts information. In Acts we see the phrase "the Holy Spirit said" referring to such internal communication from God. Paul outlines the mechanism in 1 Corinthians 2.

1 Corinthians 2:9-12 MKJV *But as it is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard," nor has it entered into the heart of man, "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (10) But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. (11) For who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit of man within him? So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) But we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God.*

God reveals non-sensory spiritual data (which eye has not seen, nor ear heard) to us via the Spirit, and this Spirit searches out the deep things of God and reveals them to our spirit so that we might know the things freely given to us by God. One of these precious

truths that is revealed to us is God's loving adoption of us as His sons and daughters in the Kingdom.

Now adopted children have rights and share in any inheritance, so as adopted sons and daughters of God we are "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ". We inherit the things that God has - such as immortality, glory, and eternal life. We become imperishable and holy, and or on a feather cushion. For we also inherit Christ's rejection by the world and persecution by the Devil.

(17)And if we are children, then we are heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; so that if we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified together.

We are joined with Christ in both suffering and in glory and the one cannot be had without the other, even though we may fervently wish it otherwise.

The Glorious Liberty

Romans 8:18-22 MKJV *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. (20) For the creation was not willingly subjected to vanity, but because of Him who subjected it on hope (21) that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (22) And we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.*

Imagine a mighty and noble Duke who rebels against the King and is banished to the desert lands along with his family. The family is under the headship of the father, when he rises in social stature they enjoy the good things of life, when he is banished to oblivion, they end up in the desert still under his authority. As the head of the family goes, so the whole family goes.

Now Adam was created as the earthly head of Creation. When Adam fell he did not lose this headship, he just dragged his "family" down with him! All of Creation was put into bondage "not of its own will", it was kept under Adam so God could preserve the order of things. God did this because He knew Adam would give rise to Christ and that Creation would be liberated when the sons of God were revealed at the resurrection.

Just as we become immortal and glorious and rise to spiritual realms, so Creation will rise with us into a new order called "the renewal/restoration of all things" and become "a new Heaven and a new earth". There seems to be two stages to this, a millennium when the earth receives its Sabbath under the reign of Christ, then an eternal state of great glory.

Matthew 19:28-30 MKJV *And Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His*

glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (29) And everyone who left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. (30) But many who are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

Our transformation is the key to the transformation of the whole world! For, because of the order of things, Creation can rise no higher than those God has placed over it, the sons of Adam. That is why Jesus called Himself "the son of Man" because He came to take that role and raise the sons of Adam up into becoming sons of God! So our redemption allows the redemption of all things on earth.

Colossians paints a picture of what some theologians call a Cosmic Christ reconciling all things to Himself:

Colossians 1:12-20 ASV *giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; (13) who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; (14) in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins: (15) who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; (16) for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; (17) and he is before all things, and in him all things consist. (18) And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (19) For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fullness dwell; (20) and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens.*

Paul moves straight from our redemption out of the kingdom of darkness to the inheritance of the saints in light, to Christ's nature as the image of the invisible God, and His Master-Work of reconciling all things to Himself so He might be "before all things" and the One for whom all things were created. The world was not created for you and I, it was created for Jesus - but we have been made His brethren!

For the creation was not willingly subjected to vanity, but because of Him who subjected it on hope (21) that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (22) And we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.

The present Creation "groans and travails in pain together" and is waiting to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. They have liberty from death, liberty from sin, liberty from corruption, liberty from defilement and liberty from ignorance and mortality. The whole world will shine with its true innate glory, the glory we just get a glimmer of in the best nature photography, when the sons of God are revealed. But what shall we be like? We don't know exactly but we know that we shall be like Christ!

1 John 3:1-3 MKJV *Behold what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God. Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when He shall be revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope on him purifies himself, even as that One is pure.*

We will be immortal beings like angels in nature:

Luke 20:36 MKJV *Nor can they die any more, for they are equal to the angels, and are the sons of God, being the sons of the resurrection.*

Paul is so convinced of this that he is prepared to put up with anything:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed in us.

The trials and tribulations that we go through now are working for us "an eternal weight of glory" when the sons of God are made manifest.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 MKJV *For the lightness of our present affliction works out for us a far more excellent eternal weight of glory, (18) we not considering the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are not lasting, but the things which are not seen are everlasting.*

Groans of Hope

Romans 8:22-25 HCSB *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. (23) And not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the first fruits--we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (24) Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? (25) But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.*

The world is waiting for something, groaning, hoping - the whole of Creation is shaking and shuddering with the long labor pains of the last two thousand years since Christ. The Universe wants to give birth to a new spiritual age of immortality and glory and see the back of the "present evil age" and all its turmoil. The long shadow of sin and death and the rule of darkness will be broken by the revealing of the sons of God and the return in triumph of the Lamb That Was Slain.

Colossians 3:3-4 MKJV *For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ our Life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

The key to the new age of immortality and glory is the redemption of our bodies. Matter transformed and made spiritual and eternal and taken up into Heaven as the physical

body of Christ was. For it was the physical body on the cross, that rose from the grave along with the nail scars, and ascended into Heaven and which sits at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Creation is going to be made new. There will be a new heaven and a new earth and we will dwell in it. The last enemy - death and decay will be banished and immortality will reign. All will be pure and will be light and sin will be no more and people and relationships will be perfect and will last forever.

2 Corinthians 5:17 HCSB *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.*

Isaiah 65:17 HCSB *"For I will create a new heaven and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind.*

Revelation 21:1-5 HCSB *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea existed no longer. (2) I also saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. (3) Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look! God's dwelling is with men and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. (4) He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away. (5) Then the One seated on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new." He also said, "Write, because these words are faithful and true."*

The present tedious order of things, of sin and death and wars and pestilences and pain and grief and pointless suffering will come to a complete end and be utterly forgotten as a bad dream indeed "the past events will not be remembered or come to mind."

Just as no-one has nostalgia for the food at boarding school so no-one will have nostalgia for the things of the past - for the glory that is to be revealed will far surpass them.

Somehow deep in ourselves we know this for God has communicated it to us by His spirit which He has given us as the first-fruits of things to come. Intuitively we know that this age will pass, and be replaced by something much better, and that it will happen 'in the twinkling of the eye, at the Last Trump.' Yet we also know that this world and its ruling spiritual powers and principalities will not go quietly.

Matthew 24:21 HCSB *For at that time there will be great tribulation, the kind that hasn't taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again!*

So we wait in hope, patiently, knowing that we who have eternal life, will far outlast all the troubles of this age and attain to eternal glory.

2 Timothy 2:10-11 HCSB *This is why I endure all things for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. (11) This saying is trustworthy: For if we have died with Him, we will also live with Him;*

1 Peter 5:6-11 HCSB *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you in due time, (7) casting all your care upon Him, because He cares about you. (8) Be sober! Be on the alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. (9) Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your brothers in the world. (10) Now the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will personally restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little. (11) To Him be the dominion forever. Amen.*

Something is seriously wrong if a Christian is not troubled by this age! If some days you feel that "something is amiss with the world" you are right. If you are outraged by death and frustrated by sin and ungodliness - then your heart is one with God's heart! This is our groaning and it is produced by the Holy Spirit within us who causes us to both rejoice in God and to mourn for this world.

The Christian cannot be fulfilled in this life or satisfied with this world just as it is. We are made for eternal realms and we need to breath the air of Heaven. We groan within ourselves waiting for the return of the Lord and the resurrection of our bodies and the transformation of all things.

And its not just us, this is not just a pious affection or a religious sentiment, for the whole of Creation groans with us in hope and God the Holy Spirit groans with us (see verse 26). This is a vast yearning of all things for their true meaning and glory. Even the trees and the rocks cry out for Christ to be revealed.

Revelation 5:13 HCSB *I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say: Blessing and honor and glory and dominion to the One seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!*

The Holy Spirit Our Intercessor

Romans 8:26-27 MKJV *Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (27) And He searching the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

Because of our earthly limits we have no idea how to pray. One way to illustrate this is to think of the task of taking a person from the state of sin to being perfectly Christlike in the image of God.

To accomplish this we would need to know exactly who we are, and where we needed to change, and who Christ is and what exactly the image of God is, then we would have to pray accurately and exactly about each step of the process, and in the correct order that such changes were required to be made in. Now we simply do not know ourselves exactly, nor do we know exactly who Christ is and what the image of God exactly is, and nor do we know how to get from A to B and what steps we should undertake. Nor do we have the power to make these changes on our own. We are thus clearly ignorant and powerless when it comes to our own salvation and sanctification. In other words we do not know how to pray, even for ourselves!

In our weakness God supplies the Holy Spirit. In 1984 I had just graduated from Bible College and was pastoring my first church and feeling inadequate. One afternoon, as I sat on the back steps I asked God for a magic wand so I could change all that was wrong with me. God simply asked "where would you start". I thought with X, then no I would have to do Y before that, no I would have to start with Z... and so forth and soon I became aware that I had no idea of where to even start the process. Then God said "Just leave it to the Holy Spirit". And I was flooded with peace at the thought and from then on I simply stopped struggling over myself and left "changing me" up to God.

The Holy Spirit knows who I am, and knows who God is, and knows which things in me need to be changed and in what order such things need to be done. Since no one else knows these mysterious things the Holy Spirit is the ONLY person who can rightly change me! Thus the Holy Spirit is the one who must help me to pray for myself and to bring my soul before the Lord.

Now what I have applied to changing myself also applies to changing the world or changing others. Only the Holy Spirit knows the future of the nations or the hearts of men and women. So the Spirit must guide our prayers for all things.

Now this applies even to healing prayer. We can be praying say for someone to be healed of a certain disease and the Spirit may say something like "Pray that they forgive their mother" and lo as the person forgives their mother, they are then healed of the disease. We have to be very sensitive to the Holy Spirit as we minister to others.

Paul writes of the prayers of the Holy Spirit being beyond easy verbal expression: but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered.

This may refer to the gift of tongues, but it may also refer to direct mystical Spirit to spirit communication, the deepest movement of persons in prayer. This phrase reminds us that the spiritual realm cannot be neatly packaged in logical propositions. Heaven contains inexpressible divine mysteries that are far beyond the reach of human speech.

We are ignorant, we are weak, we are full of infirmity and we see through a glass darkly. No one is an expert on what to say in prayer. We need an intercessor to pray for us and to pray with us. This intercessor is the Holy Spirit.

This is why some quite non-theological people can have wonderful Christian testimonies. Despite their lack of theology they have a deep intuitive sensitivity to God at work in their life and God the Holy Spirit has interceded for them and they have been transformed by the Lord the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 HCSB *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (18) We all, with unveiled faces, are reflecting the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

You see it is God who changes us, not we ourselves. Intellect plus willpower plus theology will not necessarily make you into a saint. Some people with great bible knowledge have little grace, while others with little knowledge experience great grace. Now Scripture clearly asks us to get knowledge and wisdom, and we should study the Word. But it is the Spirit that changes us and transforms us.

Paul connects God searching our hearts with the intercession of the Holy Spirit. And He searching the hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

This is a deep insight into how God works within us. God searches out human hearts (Jeremiah 11:20, 1 Corinthians 4:5, Hebrews 4:13) and as He does this mysterious work He does so mindful of what the Holy Spirit has said to Him about us and our needs. Mary needs patience, and James needs inner healing and guidance and so on. The Holy Spirit intercedes "according to the will of God" so that we are equipped for life and ministry and become blameless and holy. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us so that God's will may be perfected in us.

We need to ask the Holy Spirit into our lives to help us to pray and to move within us so that we are made into a Christian that fully does the will of God. Ask God to fill you with the Spirit that you may pray well and be sanctified in all the will of God. And ask the Holy Spirit to teach you to pray for yourself, for others and for the world at large.

All Things Work Together For Good

Romans 8:28 HCSB *We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose.*

Does God really work everything for good? What about birth defects and AIDS and natural disasters and betrayal and divorce just to name a few? There are two sets of answers to that question - the long-term answer and the short-term answer.

The long-term answer is that no human suffering can permanently scar our eternal inner being. Even if we are killed, in the resurrection we will be glorified and transformed.

Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. We will always end up dwelling in eternal goodness and light.

Romans 8:35-39 HCSB *Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or anguish or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (36) As it is written: Because of You we are being put to death all day long; we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered. (37) No, in all these things we are more than victorious through Him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!*

To use a rough analogy, sufferings may put a few dents in the car but in the end it will arrive at a glorious mansion where we will live forever. The journey is not about the car, it is about the destination.

Since we are wonderful eternal beings, who will be radiant with glory as sons of God, no pain or sorrow on this earth has the final say. For us God always has the final say and He always brings us through to the point where we have joy in His Presence. The journey may be rough but at the end of the pilgrimage lies the goodness of God. Not only that; God also redeems every point in the process:

Trials and tribulations work patience which gives rise to proven character and this in turn develops hope and the sense of God's love. (Romans 5:1-5)
 Our temporary afflictions give rise to an eternal weight of glory. (2 Corinthians 4:17)
 Persecution means our reward in Heaven is great. (Matthew 5:10-13)
 Enduring trials turns us into mature saints who lack nothing. (James 1:2-4)
 If we suffer with Christ we will also reign with Him. (Romans 8:17,18 2 Timothy 2:12)
 Suffering causes us to be able to rejoice in the end when Christ returns. (1 Peter 4:13)
 Suffering for Christ means the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us. (1 Peter 4:14)
 Suffering for Christ is even a privilege and a gift from God. (Philippians 1:29)
 If we share in the sufferings we shall also share in the comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

As someone once said "Suffering either makes us bitter or better". So God can turn the scars into stars and the mud into diamonds!

Now for the short-term answer. God can use individual circumstances to form a life tapestry of love and grace that blesses many other people and which makes us better not bitter. God also makes all things work together for good in the short to medium term. This goodness involves making us better people, and the world a better place and bringing glory to God. The goodness that God is working out is very good indeed. It is a deeper and more lasting kind of goodness than just being rich and famous.

Now as I write this I have the 'flu and I am wondering "What good can God work from this, it is just slowing me down." Who knows, but He will work good from it somewhere along the line. Perhaps I will increase in patience; perhaps I just need a rest. But good will come of it. Now that is just a "small thing". It is often hard to see God working good out of the death of a child, or a divorce or some great natural disaster or personal

tragedy. But God does work good, though it may take years to see it, the faithful saint will see good in the end.

God works "all things together" that is He weaves the events of our life into a tapestry. Thus, an event in our past may be used years later to comfort someone else in the same situation. Nothing in the saint's life is ever wasted. Our mistakes and our training, our failure and our success can be used by God. It is only now as I am turning 50 that I am seeing some of the "circles" beginning to close and to connect the threads of my most unusual and at times difficult life.

Just a few minutes ago I saw a photo essay of tornado damage in Tennessee and Kentucky, homes were destroyed but people were consoling one another and helping one another. You could sense an attitude of folks being determined to bring good out of evil. This is a fully Christian attitude- that of digging for the gold, trying to find the nugget of hope in the midst of trying circumstances. Romans 8:28 assures us that the "nugget of hope" is always there for believers.

We are "called according to His purpose" - God has purposes for us and they are good and loving purposes. God's general purposes for us go from being called to being justified, and from being justified to being sanctified and then to being glorified. (Romans 8:29-31). God also has individual purposes and callings, every one of which is "for good" and "for hope".

Jeremiah 29:11-13 HCSB *For I know the plans I have for you"--this is the LORD's declaration--"plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. (12) You will call to Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. (13) You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.*

But Romans 8:28 only applies to those who love God. The God-seekers ultimately find good but the pleasure seekers ultimately find Hell. It is only as we seek Him with all our heart that Romans 8:28 and Jeremiah 29:11-13 come into effect. The wicked have no such consolation. There is no peace for the wicked says the Lord! (Isaiah 48:22, 57:21)

In the dark and difficult moments persist in hope for God will work it for good in the end. This holy and hopeful persistence requires that rare quality called endurance:

Hebrews 10:35-39 HCSB *So don't throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. (36) For you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised. (37) For in yet a very little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. (38) But My righteous one will live by faith; and if he draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. (39) But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and obtain life.*

God's Wonderful Grand Plan

Romans 8:29-30 HCSB *For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified.*

God's plan for you and I is for us to be "conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers." What an astonishing, wonderful, mind-boggling and utterly glorious privilege! God wants us to be the younger brothers of Jesus Christ and to have a nature like His! In fact we are to be in His very image!

As the apostle John says so well:

1 John 3:1-3 HCSB *Look at how great a love the Father has given us, that we should be called God's children. And we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn't know Him. (2) Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure.*

God has a plan! And what a plan! We will be creatures of great glory, immortal, loving, holy, imperishable as the angels, death-less, eternal and spiritual, radiant with the grandeur of Heaven and known as the children of God! Oh wonder of wonders Jesus will not be ashamed to call us "brother" and to own us as part of His heavenly family!

Hebrews 2:11-13 HCSB *For the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. That is why He is not ashamed to call them brothers, (12) saying: I will proclaim Your name to My brothers; I will sing hymns to You in the congregation. (13) Again, I will trust in Him. And again, Here I am with the children God gave Me.*

Now how does this come about? Paul gives us the stages, the big steps with seven-league boots, the grand strides of the process of redemption:

Those He foreknew -> He predestined -> He called -> He justified -> He glorified

Now the word for foreknew is "prognosis" from which we get "prognosis" as a medical term - knowing how things will turn out with a soul. Indeed this term is only used 5 times in Scripture. Twice it refers to God's planning for the cross and knowing how redemption would turn out, even before the foundation of the world (Acts 2:23, 1 Peter 1:20). Once it refers to God's long-term plans for the redemption of Israel (Romans 11:2) which means He has not cast them off. And twice (Romans 8:29, 1 Peter 1:2) it refers to God's certain plans for the redemption of the saints. God's foreknowledge, His prognosis, is like the Divine Physician looking at a fallen world and saying what it needs and how He will bring about its healing with the Blood of the Lamb!

The word predestined simply means "sketched out a plan for" like an architect building a house. From this it means to "decide beforehand" just as an architect decides

beforehand what shape a house will take and what will be used in the construction. God's predestination is God's "project planning" and the project is our redemption! So God beholds the need for redemption, makes a prognosis, and then comes up with a plan, a "predestined" sketched-out beforehand strategy for fixing it.

"And those He predestined, He also called". As a result of God's plan for our redemption He calls us to Himself and to faith in Christ. The first thing that God fixes is the relationship. Everything else is secondary. Like the prodigal son, the relationship is fixed first, then everything else follows in time. Our redemption is a series of loving acts that follows the restoration of relationship.

The Greek word for "called" mainly means to "call aloud" but can also mean "to give a name or title to" just as Jesus renamed Simon to Peter. This calling is to a new identity, we become a new person in Christ with a "new name". God calls us into being as new creations.

Romans 4:17 HCSB*He believed in God, who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist.*

Calling also refers to the event we call conversion so that early Christians could say "when I was called" and name a day and hour when God saved them!

1 Corinthians 7:17 HCSB *However, each one must live his life in the situation the Lord assigned when God called him. This is what I command in all the churches.*

2 Timothy 1:9 HCSB *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.*

This calling is faithful and irrevocable (Romans 11:28,29, 1 Corinthians 1:9) and involves a "higher calling" to glorious spiritual realities.

Ephesians 1:18-19 HCSB *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the glorious riches of His inheritance among the saints, (19) and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power to us who believe, according to the working of His vast strength.*

Now to enter in these glories we must be able to stand before the Throne of Heaven and God has taken care of this: "and those He called, He also justified". God's stamp of approval is placed upon us and we are made "just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned". We are made OK, and all our un-OK-ness is forgiven and redeemed.

Then we are given angel's wings, and made citizens of Heaven to reign with Christ for evermore - and those He justified, He also glorified. We are raised up and sit with Christ in heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6) and given the power to become sons of God (John 1:12) and brought into divine fellowship with God and with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9, 1 John 1:1-3). We do not just "go to glory", we ourselves are made to be glorious with the glory Christ had (John 17:22)! We will be clothed with immortality and light because

of what God has done for us! (see 1 Corinthians 15) Praise be to God for His wonderful plan!

God Is On Our Side

Romans 8:31-34 MKJV *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) Truly He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (33) Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies. (34) Who is he condemning? It is Christ who has died, but rather also who is raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.*

"God is for us!" - What wonderful news! God is on the side of the Christian and wants the very, very best for us. All pictures of a scolding deity vanish with this one thought! God is for us! In these few verses Paul bombards us with good news:

1. God is for us - so who can be against us?
2. He did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all.
3. He will freely give us all things.
4. God has chosen as we are "God's elect".
5. No one can accuse us because God has justified us.
6. No one can condemn us because Christ intercedes on our side in every such dispute and He is at God's right hand.

Now is God is on our side then His Creation, which obeys His will, the Universe, is also on our side. The elect angels, the planets, the stars, the trees and even the weather are on the side of God's saints! We can expect things to work out for us, and to work together for our good (Romans 8:28). Here is the ground for optimism and the cure for cynicism. Here is the cure for all our paranoia in a world that seems to have gone crazy. God is for us and has no interest in harming us whatsoever, and will work all things, in this world, and the world to come, together for our good. We have all the "luck" we need in the goodwill of the Almighty.

God has given Christ for you and I - and if He will give us His own Son, how much more will He give us other things - the Holy Spirit, grace, redemption and glory? And He will give us also "our daily bread" - all the ordinary material needs of a saint. This is good ground for confident prayer! God loves us, has chosen us, and is willing to give us "all things" but these things are given "with Christ" and not apart from Christ: how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

God can give you anything that can come "with Christ" - joy, peace, hope, love, sanctification, glory, immortality and eternal life. But God will not give you things that do not come "with Christ" - such as wild living, carnality, fleshly indulgence, wrath, dissension, ego and vanity!

When we pray for the things that come 'with Christ' God cheerfully gives them to us - because God is the most cheerful giver of them all! God gives to us exuberantly because God loves us and is for us. We do not have to earn them from a grudging and reluctant God - indeed He freely gives us all these things!

Much of these verses seem to be concerned about living the Christian life in the midst of hostile opposition - which the Roman Christians were then dealing with. The very next verses are:

Romans 8:35-37 MKJV *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep of slaughter." (37) But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us.*

Paul talks about "if God is for us, who then can be against us?" and then goes on to talk about being "charged" and "condemned". Romans was written probably just before the savage Neronian persecution in AD 64 when Christians were later fed to lions and even covered in tar and used as human torches. But even in AD 57-60 when Romans is thought to have been written, Christians were considered "odious". The whole Roman imperial power was against them, and was charging them and condemning them! Physical victory was impossible but a victory of the spirit, the ability to pray and rejoice even in persecution and even in martyrdom was theirs.

Though the whole empire charges them God would justify them! Though the Emperor would condemn them - Christ would intercede for them. And Christ is higher than the Emperor, for Jesus stands at the very right hand of God!

So we have two opposing thoughts here. God, His angels and His Creation is for us, but the world and its arrogant demonic empires are against us. God will give us all things, but our persecutors may try to remove them from us. There is a tussle, but God will win in the end, for this world and its empires and persecutors are simply passing away.

Now this can be confusing for us. How can God be "for" the Romans and yet allow them to be "slaughtered like sheep all day long"? Is God so powerless? Can He not protect us from persecution and disaster? Sometimes God does protect us and place a hedge around us. At other times He gives us the glory of suffering for His name's sake. This is His choice, not ours, for I think that every sane person prefers to be protected!

God only allows the suffering in our life that will glorify both us and Him. The suffering of a lonely missionary on a remote outstation can be intense and prolonged. But Christ is forged in that heart, and the saint is made glorious and the gospel is preached to those who most need to hear it. With the suffering is given the means to spiritual victory over it, and the way to pass through the fire and the flood unharmed in our inmost being.

The key to victory for the Roman Christians as they saw family members abused and cruelly treated by imperial guards was to know that God was with them even in this. Indeed that this trial was not because of their sins, nor was it for something they had done wrong. God deals with our sin by declaring us to be OK. God justifies us, and Christ Himself intercedes for us! This trial was not punishment from God, it was from the Devil who would soon be crushed under their feet (Romans 16:20)! God was on their side and the reward that was to come would far outweigh the sufferings of the present time.

Romans 8:17-18 MKJV *And if we are children, then we are heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; so that if we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified together. (18) For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed in us.*

More Than Conquerors!

Romans 8:35-39 MKJV *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep of slaughter." (37) But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In the Old Testament God's love was often shown by His creating ideal circumstances for those He loved. The cattle increased, the battles were won, the sun shined longer, the exiles returned shouting for joy. But between those times and the time of Christ had been four hundred harrowing years and persecution and occupation. In these days God's love seemed remote from the Jews. Then a new idea dawned - that God could love people right in the midst of the fiery furnace. The story in Daniel represents a subtle change in the paradigm:

Daniel 3:16-26 MKJV *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to return a word to you on this matter. (17) If it is so that our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, then He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. (18) But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods nor worship the golden image which you have set up. (19) Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and the form of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He spoke and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. (20) And he commanded mighty men in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to throw them into the burning fiery furnace. (21) Then these men were tied up in their slippers, their tunics, and their mantles, and their other clothes, and were thrown into the middle of the burning fiery furnace. (22) Then because the*

king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. (23) And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. (24) Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was amazed. And he rose up in haste and spoke and said to his advisers, Did we not throw three men bound into the middle of the fire? They answered and said to the king, True, O king. (25) He answered and said, Behold! I see four men loose, walking in the middle of the fire, and there is no harm among them. And the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods. (26) Then Nebuchadnezzar came near the door of the burning fiery furnace. He answered and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come forth and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth from the middle of the fire.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not assured of deliverance: "If it is so that our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, then He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. (18) But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods nor worship the golden image which you have set up." Yet Christ appears with them right in the midst of their affliction, and delivers them.

Christianity teaches that the saint personally transcends suffering by becoming better. No suffering can destroy the saint because God dwells within the saint and imparts the power to endure the suffering and grow in grace. All the suffering does is to mature the saint in Christ and thus to add to the "weight of glory" that he or she will carry into eternity.

"As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep of slaughter." But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us."

We conquer the suffering by becoming more patient and loving and forgiving and gracious as a result. Our outward circumstances may be as terrible as the Roman persecution or the concentration camps that Corrie Ten Boom went through but inwardly we can be full of glory and grace in the midst of our sorrows and afflictions.

The first category of sufferings mentioned by Paul is external circumstances: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" No matter how embarrassing and humiliating our circumstances, God still loves us! In all our troubles God is with us and we will become stronger and greater and better people as a result of these troubles.

The second category consists of various cosmic agents of separation: For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. No part of the spiritual or temporal hierarchy can organize itself so as to deny us access to the love of God and to personal growth in Christ. This refutes various pagan and gnostic views that taught that the Christian as separated from God by various layers of angels and cosmic powers. Christ ascended through all these powers and took captivity captive

so that we are now seated far above them in the heavenly realms with Christ and have direct personal access to God (see Ephesians chapters 2,3 and 4).

Nothing in the created order or in the spiritual and existential realms can separate us from the love of God. The obvious question then is "What about sin? Surely sin separates us from God? No! No! No! The cross has taken care of that, we are justified, no one can condemn us any more, the blood of Christ cleanses us and we have fellowship with God. Our sin is taken care of and we stand in the love of God and in the righteousness that comes through faith!

No sin and no circumstance can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus and this love will work within us to make us righteous and holy and transform us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 3:14-21 MKJV *For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named, (16) that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; (17) that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, (18) may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, (19) and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. (20) Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, (21) to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever. Amen.*

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