

Introduction to the Epistles

With the exception of the last book, Revelation, the remainder of the New Testament consists of epistles (letters). The 21 epistles of the New Testament are actual letters, written by Apostolic Fathers (leaders of the 1st Century Church). These letters were written to real people--some to individuals, some to specific churches, and some (called “general epistles”) were written to the Church at large. Fourteen of these letters were written by Paul; three were written by John the apostle; Peter wrote two; and two of them, James and Jude, were written by half-brothers of Jesus.

NOTES:

a. The word “epistle” is derived from Latin “epistula,” whose root means “to send.” This word is usually reserved for a letter of teaching or instruction, to differentiate it from an ordinary, informal or personal communication. All 21 of these letters are for instruction and teaching (what to do, and how to do it); therefore, to set them apart, they are usually called “epistles.”

b. Most commentators do not accept Paul as the writer of Hebrews; they ascribe 13 epistles to Paul and consider the writer of Hebrews to be unknown. Although the author of Hebrews does not identify himself, the probable author is Paul.

For more information concerning the authorship of Hebrews, see the introductory material in the study guide to Hebrews. For still more information on the subject, see “Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews” (‘Who Wrote that Book?’) in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

Three of the epistles, 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus, are usually called “pastoral epistles” because they were written to two of the disciples of Paul with advice concerning the churches of which they were pastors. Four of the epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, are usually called “prison epistles” because they were written when Paul was a prisoner in Rome¹. The six “general epistles,” Hebrews, James, I Peter, II Peter, I John and Jude, are so called because they seem to have been written to the Church at large. The “general” epistles are also called the “catholic” epistles, because of their universal application². They, of course, like the rest, apply also to you and me.

NOTE: *Some commentators, including C.I. Schofield, exclude I Jn from the General Epistles. Some, more liberal commentators, include I Jn, and add II and*

¹ Although II Tim was written during Paul’s second and final imprisonment, it is counted among the Pastoral Epistles because of its being a personal letter to Timothy, a companion piece to I Tim. The “prison” epistles were written to churches.

² The word “catholic” (beginning with lower case “c”) simply means applying to all, or to a broad-based group. It is derived from the Greek *katholikos*, and Latin *catholicus* meaning “universal” or “all-inclusive.”

III Jn, for a total of eight. I agree with the great scholar, Merrill Unger, that I Jn should be classified with the General Epistles for a total of six. However, what we are dealing with here are only opinions--not facts--and how we classify these epistles really doesn't matter, except that grouping them makes it easier to memorize them. Such opinions as to categories will definitely not change anyone's life.

The letters written by Paul, no matter to whom they were addressed, were copied and circulated throughout the entire Church for their value in teaching, and in doctrinal clarification. This may have been true of all the rest of the epistles. Those written by Paul were immediately acknowledged as Scripture; others were recognized as such at later dates³. By 397 AD the New Testament canon was closed by the Council of Carthage and all 21 of these letters were included.

Paul's letters are so rich in content, and expressed in Paul's profound way of thinking, that at times they can be difficult to follow. When this happens to us we should not be discouraged, for even Peter found them difficult at times⁴. As usual, we will attempt to keep things as simple as possible, see what they have to say to us, and enjoy the riches of his epistles. Because of their richness Paul's epistles, like Revelation, should be read slowly.

Cross-Referencing

Because the lessons and teaching points of Paul's epistles are often repeated, to cross-reference them exhaustively would be exhausting to the reader, and to me. Beyond a certain point, it seems to me, to return to the cross-referenced passages would be an unnecessary and tiresome distraction. I have attempted to find the balance in this and cross reference where it seems to be important; yet, if I have missed some that I should have included, you will find them in other reference works, and/or you can add your own. I strongly recommend, as I wrote in the Introductory Material concerning the study of the entire Bible, that you add your own cross references, marginal notes and other annotations.

Opening Salutations and Titles

In opening salutations, neither Peter nor Paul identifies himself as "The Apostle Peter," or "The apostle Paul," as we might today. Instead, they humbly refer to themselves as "Peter, **an** apostle," or "Paul, **an** apostle," eschewing exalted titles. John identifies himself merely as "the elder." James and Jude, whom today we might think of as Christian royalty, being half-brothers of Jesus, merely identify themselves as servants of the Lord. This, it seems to me, is a point worth pondering.

³ II Peter 3:16.

⁴ II Peter 3:15-16.

Occurrence of “Jesus Christ” and “Christ Jesus”

In the epistles our Redeemer is referred to as “Jesus,” “Christ,” “Jesus the Christ,” “Jesus Christ” and as “Christ Jesus.” All, of course, are correct. However, there is an interesting pattern in the epistles concerning the use of “Christ Jesus” and “Jesus Christ.” The first 14 epistles are written by Paul, a 2nd generation Christian; the remaining seven were written by James, Peter, John and Jude, all of whom were 1st generation Christians, i.e. those who had known Jesus, lived and traveled with Him and listened to his teachings.

Although Paul uses both “Jesus Christ” and “Christ Jesus” in his epistles, he uses “Christ Jesus” 31 times. This combination is associated with Paul, for among the 1st Generation writers, “Christ Jesus” is used only twice by Peter, and never by James, John or Jude. On the other hand, “Jesus Christ” is used by them 35 times.

At this point you may be asking, “So what?”--and I would understand; but the interesting thought is this: the 1st Generation writers knew the Lord first as Jesus, a fascinating man whom they knew and loved, lived with him, ate, drank and slept with him; and only later did they know Him as the risen Christ. On the other hand Paul, the 2nd Generation writer, knew the Lord first as the glorified, risen Christ, in all his heavenly majesty; only later did he also know and think of Him as Jesus, the man. Thus, it would appear, the difference in usage.

If this is interesting to you, I am glad. If it isn't, press on and forget it; it is only a thought.

One Recurring Theme in the Epistles of Paul

One recurring theme in Paul's letters (thus, a lesson that he considered to be particularly important) is a combination of two rules:

1. Quench Not the Spirit. His churches were not to forbid or discourage the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, including the Spirit's promptings, urgings, guidance and supernatural gifts; and;
2. Prove All Things; Hold Fast That Which Is Good. All such apparent manifestations of the Holy Spirit are to be evaluated and judged. Those which are valid and good the churches are to accept and embrace. And, by clear implication, those which are judged to be false or bad, are to be rejected.

The reason for this is that the very effectiveness of the Church depended on the power and actions of the Holy Spirit (and still does). Supernatural things blessed, guided, empowered, and sustained the Church; they also confirmed the proclaimed gospel which was preached to the unredeemed⁵. However, because these perfect manifestations operate through imperfect men and women, there was (and still is) the inherent danger of error. Therefore, all such things **must** be

⁵ See in this regard Mark 16:20.

judged and evaluated; this is the balance required in the manifestation of such great power as that which resides in us: the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

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The New Testament, Book 6

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans

Although Paul's letter to the church at Rome is not the earliest of his epistles to be written, it has been, from the beginning, placed first in appearance in the canon because it is almost universally considered to be the most important. It is also the longest. It is so rich in significant theological content as almost to be in a class all its own. Of all the letters of Paul, Romans contains the most complete summary of the Gospel, God's plan of redemption. Passages from Romans are probably quoted, and used as sermon texts, more than from any other book of the Bible. It is probably his greatest work.

John Chrysostom (ca 347-407AD), Archbishop of Constantinople, considered it to be so foundationally important that he had it read to him twice each week.

Martin Luther endorsed it still more emphatically; in his introduction to Romans he wrote, "This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but [should] occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much..." It was in the reading of the book of Romans that Martin Luther began to receive his great revelation of the central place of grace in the salvation and life of the believer. Luther's study of this book led to the pivotal realization that gave to the Church the understanding that redemption primarily depends, not on what we do for God, but that it rests primarily on what God has already done for us--in the miraculous conception, sinless life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus, the Christ.

The Poet Coleridge called Romans "the most profound work in existence."

Finis Jennings Dake (Dake Annotated Reference Bible) wrote of Romans, "Until its lessons are learned, we are ignorant of true Christian principles."

Because of the richness of Paul's epistles, the vastness of his knowledge, the brilliance of his mind, the depth of his understanding and his passion for truth, they

are not always easy to read and understand. Because of this we should (perhaps I should say "must") read them slowly and carefully--especially this one. We should take our time with Romans; it is probably his most important work--his magnum opus.

A. Author. The human author of Romans is Paul, as he makes clear in the very first verse. He refers to himself as "an apostle," rather than "the apostle Paul" (as we often do), eschewing a high-sounding title for himself. As we have seen, he does this consistently in his epistles, whenever using the word "apostle" in identifying himself; and the same is true of Peter, James, Jude and John. Today, however, many leaders in the Church fail to follow the example of these great and humble men, choosing instead lofty titles, deferential treatment and pomp.

B. Place and Date. He probably wrote this letter from Corinth, ca 55 AD, during his three-month stay in Greece, near the end of his 3rd and final missionary journey⁶. He was on his way to Jerusalem for the final time, to deliver money for the impoverished believers in Judaea, gathered from the Gentile churches on his journey.

C. Occasion. The letter was occasioned by his interest in the church at Rome and his ongoing desire to visit the church there. The church at Rome had arisen spontaneously, without apostolic authority, and needed thorough teaching in the fundamentals of the faith⁷. The thoroughness of the letter may have been occasioned because he expected to be executed in Jerusalem and thus would not be able to go to Rome in person. A reason to write it, then and there, is that Phoebe, a woman from the church at Cenchraea, was going to Rome, and could deliver the letter for him⁸.

D. Theme. The theme of Romans is the sinfulness of all mankind, the awful judgment of God on sin, and his gracious provision for man's redemption as a gift of the unimaginable love and mercy of God.

E. Conditions in Rome. Rome was effectively the Capital of the World--the center of the military, political and economic power that controlled most of the known world. The boast that "all roads lead to Rome" was essentially true, for Roman engineers had built roads connecting the capital city to every part of its conquered territories; and, in many cases, they were the first permanent roads to those places ever built. As is the case with Washington, DC today, however, that great power had brought equally great corruption; and the outward beauty and splendor of the city merely concealed its terrible underlying arrogance, wickedness

⁶ Acts 20:1-3.

⁷ Acts 19:21; Rom 1:13, 15:22-29.

⁸ Cenchraea was a seaport town about 8 miles from Corinth; Paul had once sailed from there, with Aquila and Priscilla, on the return leg of his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 18:18).

and corruption. H.H. Halley (Halley's Bible Handbook) described it as, "...Rome, the gilded and haughty cesspool of every foul thing."

Prologue. (1:1-17)

In a lengthy salutation (which we may think of as a prologue to the epistle because it is, itself, rich in teaching points), Paul introduces himself to the believers in Rome, and expresses his long-standing desire to visit them, so that they might benefit from his ministry, and that he might benefit from theirs. He closes this portion by declaring that he is "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" because it is the revelation of the dynamic power of God, which produces salvation from spiritual death for those who believe and embrace it, first offered to the Jews, and now to the Gentiles also. He quotes Habakkuk concerning the centrality of faith in the believer's life ("the just shall live by faith")⁹; and then he launches into a hard-hitting declaration of the innate sinfulness of unredeemed man, and God's attitude concerning it.

G. Highlights. Highlights in Romans include the following:

1. The Wrath of God toward Sin. (1:18-32)

Paul declares the awful wrath of God toward deliberate sin, and establishes the fact that sinful man is without excuse, since the invisible reality of God's existence and power are revealed in the visible realities of his creation. He then tells us that our sin arises from the fundamental sin nature within us, and not from external influences. He clearly and emphatically condemns homosexual sin; and then he enumerates other sins that God hates.

NOTES:

a. It is interesting that Paul puts envy, rumor-mongering and back-biting in the same category with murder.

*b. Sin loves company. If "misery loves company" (I have never been quite sure of what this oft-repeated proverb means), it is even more true that sin loves company. Those who choose to sin, as a way of life, are uncomfortable around those who don't. They seek to recruit the righteous to become sinners with them, and applaud the sinful excesses of those who, like them, live sinfully. Verse 32 expresses this clearly. You will notice that militant homosexuals don't desire just that we be tolerant of them--this doesn't satisfy them. They want the rest of us to **approve** of what they do and to join them in it.*

2. The Choice Is Ours. (2:1-11)

Paul condemns hypocritical judgment of the sin of others when we are guilty of the same sin, and he makes it clear that, although we may fool one another, God is not deceived; He is not a respecter of persons, and He will judge us according to

⁹ Habakkuk 2:4.

truth. The goodness of God should lead us to repentance and righteous living, but the choice is ours to make. We may choose righteousness which leads to good things and, in the end, eternity with Him in Heaven; or we may choose to live sinfully, rejecting the goodness of God, which leads to the experience of God's indignation and wrath. These choices, like the gospel message, apply equally--first to the Jew and then to the Gentile--for God is utterly just.

NOTES:

a. The Didache is the oldest known doctrinal statement--a very ancient catechism¹⁰. Its title is "Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles (nations) by the Twelve Apostles." The Didache is generally believed to have been produced by the surviving apostles sometime in the mid-to-late 1st Century. Its first chapter opens with the statement, "There are two ways, one of life and one of death; and there is a difference between the two ways." And so, it seems, this point made in Rom 2, i.e. that the choice between the two ways is ours to make, is as fundamental (and as ancient) as a teaching point or doctrinal statement can be.

b. In English our verb, "to do" can be unclear as to its precise meaning for we have only this one form. In Greek, however, it has seven precise meanings, and at times they can be the key to clear understanding of a passage. For our purposes, two of these seven verbs are extremely important: they are "poieo" and "prasso." "Poieo refers to a performance, a single or occasional act; "prasso" refers to a practice, an ongoing performance. Thus, we can better understand verse 3, for it says that God will judge us for judging those who practice a sinful lifestyle (prasso), when we occasionally commit (poieo) the same sin. Another place where this distinction is important is in Gal 5:21. In the passage (Gal 5:19-21) are listed the sinful works of the flesh; and verse 21 states that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. The verb rendered "do" there is "prasso"; thus it says that the warning applies to those who practice these sins, allowing them to become a way of life.

3. Circumcision of the Heart. (2:12-29)

Returning to God's anger toward those, especially teachers, who harshly judge the sins of others when they, themselves, are guilty of the same sin, Paul begins to unfold his great revelation that our justification depends not upon our external appearances, but the inward reality of our hearts. Before God, he writes, it is not physical circumcision that makes one acceptable to God; rather, what matters to Him is the change within us--the "circumcision of the heart."

¹⁰ Didache is a Koine Greek word literally meaning "Teaching." For the meaning of Koine Greek see "Languages of the Bible" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

***NOTE:** If taken alone, Chapt 2 could seem to say that we are justified, or condemned, by our deeds--that our redemption or condemnation is determined by what we do. However, in the context of Chapt 1,3, 4, and 5 (plus all the rest of the New Testament), it cannot mean that. If we read carefully, Chapt 2 is saying that our deeds of righteousness should flow naturally, from the inner reality of a changed heart, supernaturally produced within us by the grace of God. Although this book is rich in many other ways, and although Paul elaborates this concept very gradually, this is the central message of the book of Romans.*

4. All Have Sinned and Come Short of the Glory of God. (3:1-18)

Continuing with the thought about the circumcision of the heart, Paul asks a rhetorical question. What advantage, he asks, is there in being a Jew? He then answers his own question, saying that there is great advantage, for to the Jews only were given the revelation and teachings of God; through them the Gentiles have learned of the perfect righteousness of God, and the imperfect sinfulness of man. The Mosaic Law, which he will later call our schoolmaster, teaches us that we are naturally sinful, and in need of redemption. Put simply, the Law shows us that we are sinners in need of redemption; yet we cannot redeem ourselves by trying to obey the Law. Quoting from Psalm 14, he makes it clear that there are no exceptions to this fundamental fact, and he then goes on to cite some examples of our sinful behavior¹¹.

***NOTE:** Because of his vast knowledge of the Mosaic Law, his deep understanding of the atoning work of Jesus, and his passion for declaring the gospel message, Paul is not always easy to read; this passage is an example. He also tended to write in very long sentences, so that it is difficult at times to know where to interrupt him. When we find his letters, such as this, to be heavy going, we should take our time, and take comfort in the words of Peter; he wrote that, although Paul's letters are inspired Scripture, there are sometimes portions of them "hard to be understood" (II Pet 3:16).*

5. The Remedy for This Universal Sin Problem. (3:19-31)

Having demonstrated the bad news of the fundamental sinfulness of mankind, and our inability to save ourselves, Paul goes on to declare the good news that God, knowing that we cannot live up to the law and redeem ourselves, has graciously provided a way for us to be justified. This solution to the problem is to be found in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus the Christ, by faith in his sacrifice (which Paul summarizes as "his blood"). And, he makes clear, this gift of redemption through the blood sacrifice of Christ is available to all of mankind--both Jew and Gentile.

¹¹ Psalm 14:1-3. See also II Chronicles 6:36 and Eccl 7:20.

NOTE: *The New Covenant is not a contradiction of the Old Covenant, as if God had tried one way of dealing with us and it didn't work, so He then took a different approach. Rather, the New Covenant is the perfect fulfillment of the Old.*

6. Abraham as an Example of Justification by Faith. (4:1-25)

What can we learn about justification, Paul asks, from the life of Abraham? We learn that it was not Abraham's good deeds that justified him before God; rather it was the fact that he believed God, and this believing and trusting God was "counted unto him for righteousness," and this becoming righteous occurred before Abraham was circumcised--not after¹². He also quotes David, saying that those whose sins are forgiven are blessed.¹³ This faith of Abraham is specifically demonstrated in his belief that, when he was 100 years old, his body "dead" in the infirmity of old age, and Sarah long past child bearing age, God would still give them a son. Although he became weary in waiting, Abraham was "fully persuaded" that God, Who had promised the son of their flesh, could do anything and would keep that promise.

NOTES:

a. This is reminiscent of Jesus and the healing of the man blind from birth (Jn 9), and Jesus' explanation that the blindness was not the result of anyone's sin. Rather, He said, it was to glorify God. This is a concept which, on its face seems wrong; but it probably means that the man He healed, in balance, received a greater blessing and, in the process, God was glorified. Abraham and Sarah not only had the joy of being given a son after waiting for so long, but the joy must have been even greater because of the miracle involved, and in it God was glorified.

b. Verses 9 through 22 are one long sentence, and it is easy to get lost in it. For example, v 17 speaks of how God raises the dead to life, and how He speaks of things as existing before they exist (remember that with God there is no past, present or future--He lives in one enormous present). And then v 18 begins with "Who," with a capital "W." The might lead us to think that in v 18 Paul is still speaking of God; but he isn't. The first word of each verse is always capitalized; and, without warning, Paul is again speaking of Abraham, because God doesn't hope (He already knows), and He doesn't become anything (He is pre-existent and never changes)¹⁴

7. Tribulation Produces Patience--and, Ultimately, Hope. (5:1-5)

Continuing his essay on faith, Paul writes that, once we are justified by faith, we can have peace with God, being graciously taken into his family. By implication,

¹² Genesis 15:6. See also Gal 3:6 and Jas 2:23.

¹³ Psalm 32:1-2.

¹⁴ Malachi 3:6.

he is also saying that this peaceful, Father-child relationship with God cannot be had in any other way. But then he goes on to say that, although we become children of God, there will still be trials and tribulations which we must face and overcome¹⁵. The good news, however, is that, in facing and overcoming tribulation, we develop the virtue of patience. This process produces patience, and we experience victories in our lives. Then, when difficult times continue to come, we are not just clinging to a principle; our state is much better than that, for we have already experienced trouble and overcome it. For this reason we have hope that we will overcome the present difficulty, as we have before. Hope becomes established in us, as a light in a dark place, so that we are able to look beyond the problems, believing that Jesus will, once more, give us victory¹⁶. And, he says, we will not be disappointed or ashamed in our hoping, for God's love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and demonstrated to the world. We will neither be ashamed of our hope, nor of our suffering, and this will be spread abroad, i.e. shining out as a beacon of hope to those around us.

NOTE: Because verse 1 begins with the word "Therefore" we must tie what follows with what has just been written in the verses of Chapt 4 above it (which speak of justification and redemption as the result of faith). The rule is: when a verse or chapter begins with the word "therefore," we must look back to the verses above it, to see what it is "there for." We should always remember that each book of the Bible (with the single exception of Psalms) was originally written as one long, continuous, narrative, in a scroll or codex, with no chapter or verse divisions.

8. While We Were Yet Sinners. (5:6-11)

One of the foundation stones in the atoning work of Jesus is that He doesn't wait for us to clean up our lives before He forgives us and enters our lives. While we were still aliens, unredeemed sinners, outside of the family of God, the love of God moved Him to provide for our salvation through the atoning death of Christ. The writer of this letter to the church at Rome had been, literally and passionately, the enemy of Jesus and his kingdom. He had been arresting Christians, putting them in chains and having them put to death. And he was on his way to commit more of his evil deeds, zealously burning with hate for the gospel and for those who embraced and received its unspeakable gift, when Jesus graciously came to him on the Damascus road. Many lost people will say, sincerely, "I would like to have

¹⁵ Some teach that tribulation is avoidable if we exercise faith; we can choose, they say, not to experience tribulation. But this is in direct contradiction of the words of Jesus in Jn 16:33. According to Him, if we live godly lives, in a good relationship with Him, we **shall** have tribulation (and "shall" is an imperative).

¹⁶ See in this regard James 1:1-4).

what you have, and when I get my life straightened up I will become a Christian” (or words to this effect). They fail to understand this two-fold principle:

- a. Jesus always meets us exactly where we are, because that is the only place we can be; and,
- b. During much of his earthly ministry He lived with fishermen in a fishing village, and, in human terms, He knows that one must catch a fish before he can clean it.

NOTES:

a. Verse 10 deserves some thought, because it is supersaturated with revelation¹⁷. We are reconciled to God, i.e. made acceptable to Him, and no longer separated from Him by our previously sinful state, by the atoning death of his Son as a sacrifice for us. But that is not all, concerning this gift of righteousness; we are also "saved by his life." What can this mean? The word here rendered "saved," is a form of the Greek verb "sozo," which means "to be rescued, healed, delivered, caused to prosper, and to be made whole." The sacrificial death of Jesus reconciles us to the Father; his sinless human life, lived before his death, makes fullness of life possible for us in these five blessings contained in the one Greek word, "sozo"¹⁸

b. Verse 11 also deserves a pause for thought. Paul ends this terribly important lesson by telling us that that we can (and should) rejoice at receiving this unspeakable gift of redemption, and he uses the interesting word "atonement." Atonement is an interesting word because it says so much, and because it defines itself. Atonement may be thought of as "at one ment" because it makes us "at one" with God, acceptable to Him as part of his family, in harmony with his nature and purposes. It means that we now "fit" in God's family; and that thought should move us to rejoice.

9. The Two Adams. (5:12-21)

Paul then sums up the story of mankind by the comparison of two principal figures: the two Adams. Due to the sin of the first Adam in the Garden of Eden, sin was allowed to enter God's creation and Satan was given certain dominion as the god of this secular world. As a result, all of mankind has inherited the sin nature that comes with spiritual death. This spiritual death, Paul wrote, reigned from the fall of Adam until God gave a fresh revelation of Himself through Moses and, in the process, laid down the Law so that man could see his own sinfulness, and yet have a way to relate, indirectly and temporarily, to God. Then came Jesus

¹⁷ Supersaturated is a term used in chemistry and physics in referring to a solution that contains more of a dissolved substance than it can contain under normal conditions.

¹⁸ See in this regard John 14:19. For more on the meaning of *sozo* see "The Rich and Wonderful Meaning of the Word 'Saved'" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

the Christ, God's Anointed One, to pay the sin debt and make life in the Spirit available to lost mankind¹⁹. As the first Adam brought condemnation upon mankind by one sin, the second Adam provided, by one sacrifice, forgiveness of many sins; and as one man made sinners of many, the second Man made many sinners righteous²⁰. As sin has reigned, bringing spiritual death, now grace can reign, bringing eternal life, because of the second Adam, his sinless life, and his sacrificial death.

NOTE: Although Paul does not literally call Jesus the second Adam in this passage, he clearly does so by implication. And, in a similar passage in his 1st letter to the church at Corinth, he does so literally²¹. Among the writers of Scripture, only Paul, the Church's great doctrinal visionary, draws this analogy.

10. Death and Burial of the Old Man, and the Resurrection of the New. (6:1-18)

Christians are being accused of teaching that, because forgiveness is a gift of grace, and not a thing to be earned, they can do anything sinful that they want to do²². To refute this lie Paul uses the analogy of water baptism. In baptism, he says, we symbolically enter into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Being plunged under the water, he says, we enter into his death and burial; in this our old, unredeemed, sin nature is put to death and buried; and when we emerge from the watery grave, we enter into his resurrection, coming out of the water a new and different person. We may continue to come short of the mark and sin; but henceforth, sin is not our master. We may sin, and be forgiven; but we will no longer serve sin. We are to reckon ourselves to be dead to sin, and alive to God, through the work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Being redeemed will not make us perfect; but it should produce a fundamental, paradigm, change for the better in our ongoing battle with sin.

NOTE: For nearly 2,000 years Christians have had different opinions concerning water baptism. Some immerse, some pour, and some sprinkle. Some immerse face-forward, and some do it head backward. Some immerse once, and some immerse three times: once for the Father, once for the Son, and once for the Holy Spirit. Some believe that baptism is merely a symbolic act of obedience, and that nothing happens in the water. Some believe that it brings salvation, and that everything we will ever receive from God is received at water baptism; and some have beliefs somewhere between these extremes. I will definitely not presume to

¹⁹ As we have seen before, Christ (meaning God's anointed) is the Redeemer's title; his name is Jesus (or, in Aramaic, the language in which He usually spoke, Yeshuah).

²⁰ It is helpful to remember that "righteous" has dual meaning: it can mean "rightly related (to God)"; and it can mean Christ-like or godly behavior. The first meaning should lead to the second.

²¹ I Corinthians 15:45-47.

²² Romans 3:8.

settle these differences here, except to point out that Paul clearly used the analogy of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

11. The Gospel Explained in One Verse. (6:23)

Here, at the end of Chapter 6, is perhaps the most amazing verse in the Bible. In a single verse of 20 simple words, of which only one word has more than one syllable, Paul has explained:

- a. Unredeemed, our nature is basically sinful.
- b. If we are not redeemed we will remain spiritually dead forever, and this death is something we deserve--it is not an injustice.
- c. God has provided a means of forgiveness and redemption for us.
- d. This redemption is a gracious gift--not something that we can earn or deserve. If we could earn or deserve it, we would not need a Redeemer, and redemption would not be a gift. The atoning death of Jesus would be a needless tragedy.
- e. This gift of redemption will provide us with eternal spiritual life.
- f. And, finally, this gift is available to us only through, and because of, the sacrificial physical death of our Redeemer, Jesus, the Christ of God, to Whom we must surrender our lives, as the Lord of our lives.

NOTE: *As noted in the Introduction to the New Testament, we are indebted to the Greek language, in which most of the New Testament was originally written, for the precise nature of the language. For example, in Greek there are four different words for the four different types of love, whereas we have only one word in English. If we say "I love my wife," we mean something very different from what we mean when we say, "I love peperoni pizza"; and yet, in English, we have only the one word with which to express these two kinds of love (as well as the other two).*

Here, in this remarkable verse, is an important example of the value of this precision in Greek. The word rendered "wages" is "opsonion," which means, literally, what we have earned, what we justifiably deserve--e.g. a day's pay for a day's work. It is actually the word for a 1st Century Greek soldier's pay; it is the just result of what we have done.

On the other hand, the word rendered "gift" in v 26 is "doron," and it has the usual meaning of our English word. It is something unearned that is presented as an expression of love, to celebrate an occasion, or a contribution to the support of a cause.

Thus, the wages of sin means just that--a justifiable, destructive outcome--in this case, spiritual death. And the gift of God is just that--something unearned, presented as an expression of his love: redemption and spiritual life.

12. From Innocence to Accountability. (7:1-13)

Paul rather ponderously summarizes the purpose of the Mosaic law and the death it brings, compared with redemption by grace through faith. He uses the analogy of marriage. Pointing out that a woman whose husband died was then free under the Law to remarry, he summarizes the progress of man from innocence, being unaware of sin, to awareness of sin through the Law, spiritual death under the law, and then to new, redemptive life, in marriage to the Lord²³. The believer, he says, is now dead to the Law but alive in the new birth. At this point we must interrupt him, for he is about to build upon this foundation an extremely important principle which deserves separate treatment.

13. The War Within Us. (7:14-25)

If we have lived long enough to be reading this, we have learned that, no matter how we try to lead a disciplined life as a Christian, we sometimes fail, doing sinful things that we should not do, and failing to do things that we should do. Paul uses himself as an example of this, saying that he fails to do the things that he should do, and does the things that he should not do. Using the analogy of slavery, he says that because of his fundamental sin nature he is, with only his own resources, sold as a slave to the inclination to sin. The unchanging standard of the Law is good; the problem is that, in his own resources, he cannot live up to it. As he puts it, in his carnal (fleshly) nature, there is nothing good. Even though he had delighted in the Law of God, he could not live up to it. There is an ongoing war within him because his fleshly nature tends to sin when he wishes to live righteously. In verse 24 he summarizes this conflict in a cry from his heart, calling himself wretched, and asking, in agony of the soul, "...who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He then answers his own question. Although with his mind he loves the Law of God, but with his flesh he commits sin, he thanks God through Jesus, Who alone is the answer. Jesus has made available to us his gracious alternative to the law of sin and death.

NOTE: Here Paul seems to refer to the ancient punishment of having a dead body bound to a condemned man, forcing him to carry it with him until it decomposed and fell off. As terrible as this alone would be, it seems that, as decomposition proceeded, flies and other animals would bring disease, causing a slow death to the one being punished.

14. Liberation from the Law of Sin and Death. (8:1-2)

Chapter 8 announces the good news that, because of the redemptive work of Jesus, those of us who belong to him, and who seek to walk in the Spirit, are not condemned under the law of sin and death. The first two verses declare this.

²³ The concept of the law's purpose in revealing to man his own sinfulness is also expressed in Galatians 3, where Paul describes the law as our schoolmaster, showing man that he is sinful.

NOTES:

a. Remember that this book (like all others except the Psalms) was not separated into chapters when originally written. The chapter divisions were added, as a convenience in referencing, much later²⁴. Since the 1st verse of Chapt 8 begins with the word “therefore,” we must approach Chapt 8 with Chapt 7 in mind. Rom 8:1 cannot be understood without Chapt 7.

*b. Throughout the Bible we are presented with the fundamental fact that in life there are two possibilities: we can live in blessed obedience to God (here called “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”); or we can live in rebellion against God, suffer and die, forever separated from Him (herein called “the law of sin and death”). There are just these two possibilities, two ways to live our lives, and the choice is ours to make. As we saw in **NOTE a.** to the study guide to Rom 2:1-11, there is an ancient document called “The Didache,” or “The Teaching of the 12 Apostles.” It is generally believed to be the earliest known summary of Christian doctrine, dated in the mid-to-late 1st Century. Its opening sentence is, “There are two ways: one of life and one of death; and the difference between the two is great.”*

15. Walking in the Spirit. (8:3-9)

Paul goes on to introduce us to the concept of walking in the Holy Spirit, i.e. doing those things that the Spirit would have us do, rejecting the sinful things prompted by our sinful, fleshly nature²⁵. Our fleshly nature not only prompts us to do things sinful but, by its very nature, it is at enmity toward God; that is, it hates God and is his enemy. Therefore, those who walk in the flesh, following the leading of our fleshly nature, cannot please God. Again, the good news is that the choice is ours; we are no longer the slaves of sin, proceeding toward eternal spiritual death. We can choose to walk in the Spirit, following his promptings, progressing into ever-more freedom in Him. This is made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit, Who will guide us; and if the Holy Spirit does not dwell in us, He cannot guide us, and we are not truly redeemed²⁶.

NOTE: Verse 9b (“Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”) is the basis for the belief in some Pentecostal circles that we are not born again (saved/redeemed) if we do not speak or pray in tongues. They take this sentence to refer to being baptized by Jesus in (or with) the Holy Spirit, and not to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that comes to every Christian with redemption in the new birth.

²⁴ The first division of the Bible into chapters is attributed to Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, who died in 1228 AD. Chapters weren't divided into verses until the late Middle Ages, by Stephanus in 1550.

²⁵ See in this regard Galatians 5:16.

²⁶ See in this regard II Corinthians 13:5.

16. “Abba Father”. (8:10-15)

If the Spirit of Christ indwells us, then we are ruled by his Spirit; we are no longer ruled by our flesh, and our bodies become truly alive. Thus, we do not owe our allegiance to our mortal bodies, for to serve their carnal desires leads to death; but if we serve God, following the guidance of the Spirit of God within us, we will live in freedom, no longer in bondage to fear. Rather, the work of the Holy Spirit has made us adopted children of God, so that we may be secure in his love and call Him “Abba Father²⁷!”

NOTES:

a. God is not everyone’s Father. In a very real sense He is everyone’s God, for He created all of us and is the absolute Master of the Universe; but He is not our Father until we surrender our lives to Him and are born again, into his family. Then, we become his adopted children, and He becomes our Father. Notice that unredeemed people, those living ungodly lives, when experiencing something unexpected--especially bad or frightening things--will reflexively exclaim, “Oh my God!” He is their God, even though they are living in rebellious alienation from Him. You will not hear such people exclaim, “Oh my Heavenly Father!” That exclamation is reserved for us²⁸.

b. There is great significance in the word “Abba.” It is Aramaic, the language of the common people in 1st Century Palestine--the language usually spoken by Jesus-- and it is the familiar form of “father.” This form could be used only by a man’s children, whether natural or adopted; a household servant or slave could not address his master as “Abba” or his mistress as “Imma,” the feminine form, for he was not a son. To put it in contemporary language, “Abba” is comparable to our word “Daddy.”

Abba expresses the very personal relationship in which we, as children, can approach our earthly fathers and crawl up into their laps. It is important to remember, however, that this very personal relationship in no way diminishes the awe in which we hold the God of the Universe. I called my earthly father “Daddy”; but in no way did I consider myself his equal, or in any way less his subordinate. It is one of those wonderful things about the family of God that we may find difficult to define with precision, but are free to enjoy.

17. Joint Heirs with Christ. (8:16-18)

²⁷ See also Mk 14:36 and Gal 4:6-7.

²⁸ Jesus always called God his Father, with one exception: the terrible sin-bearing moment when, on the cross, He **became** sin for us. He cried, “my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” With his next breath, he again called Him “Father,” and yielded up his spirit. In this regard see also the study guide to Mark 15:34-37, **NOTE a**, and II Corinthians 5:21.

The Holy Spirit makes it clear to our human spirits that we are God's children. If we are the adopted children of God, then we are heirs to his inexpressible riches; we are joint heirs with Jesus, the Christ of God, and this means that our inheritance is unimaginably, and inexpressibly, wonderful. He is the "firstborn among many brethren," and so He is the inheritor of things unavailable to us and inappropriate for us; and yet our inheritance, as mere mortals, is more than we can imagine. Being joint heirs with Jesus, however, means that we inherit also suffering--not his substitutionary suffering as the sinless Lamb of God, however; for He alone was worthy of such suffering. But we will suffer. If we live godly in Christ Jesus we **shall** suffer persecution; and "shall" is an imperative, which means that it **is** going to happen²⁹. As the world hated Him, it will hate us; and, as He suffered, we will suffer³⁰. This suffering, however, no matter how severe, will fade into unimportance when compared with the glory which will await us in Heaven. We don't need to know exactly what that glory will be--or its magnitude; in fact, we almost certainly cannot know it. It is a dimension far beyond the ability of our mortal, finite, minds even to imagine³¹.

18. The Whole Creation Groans. (8:19-25)

Suffering is part of life on this sin-sick planet; however, when all things on Earth are accomplished, not only we, but the Earth itself, and all creatures on it, shall be delivered from the curse of sin. Meanwhile, God's entire creation moans and groans as if in the pains of childbirth, waiting to be made perfect and free. We also, who have the first fruits of glory (the Holy Spirit within us) long for that day when we are free from all this disaster and heartbreak--when there is no more sickness and pain--when we will have perfect, pain-free, sickness-free, fatigue-free, resurrection bodies. In the meantime, this hope within us sustains us through trials and tribulation. We have not arrived there yet, but we have the knowledge of how things will end, and so we have hope. And, if the victorious end of this struggle on Earth were something that we could experience now, it would be a present reality, and not a future thing hoped for³².

***NOTE:** Although Paul here speaks here of the groaning of nature metaphorically, and not literally, there is literal truth in the passage. It is interesting to note that the Earth's crust, far under the surface, is fractured, consisting of vast pieces that we call tectonic plates. These pieces of the crust press against one another, under great pressure. Under this enormous pressure, struggling against one another, these pieces of the Earth's crust actually make moaning and groaning sounds.*

²⁹ John 15:18-21, 16:33; II Tim 3:12.

³⁰ This suffering, of course, will vary--all the way from rejection and ridicule, to torture and death as martyrs.

³¹ Isaiah 64:4; I Cor 2:9.

³² Hebrews 11:1.

You and I don't hear them as a rule; we are much more likely to hear the rumbling sounds, and feel the ground tremble, when a plate moves, producing an earthquake; but these groaning sounds can actually be heard with scientific instrumentation, and thus v 22 is literally confirmed. Paul, writing in the mid-1st Century, of course, had no such knowledge and probably wondered what was meant by his own words; he was just obedient in writing what the Holy Spirit gave him to write.

19. Praying Perfect Prayer in the Spirit. (8:26-27)

One wonderful thing that the Holy Spirit will do for us believers is to make possible perfect prayer. With his help we can pray according to the will of God and, among other things, we can intercede correctly and appropriately for the saints--i.e. the other believers. In this way, if we surrender to the Holy Spirit within us in prayer, we cannot pray outside the will of God, for God is not confused; He will pray through us, according to his will. Such prayer in the Spirit will be as "groanings which cannot be uttered" through prayer guided by our minds, for our minds and our understanding are imperfect. If, however, we surrender our voices in this way to the Holy Spirit, Who is never wrong, we can pray perfect prayer. What a wonderful privilege³³!

NOTE: In most situations, if not all, such prayer will be in private. D.L. Moody, writing of this kind of prayer, said that, in the privacy of his study, "I poured out the unutterable gushings of my heart." We shall see much more about this kind of prayer in I Cor, Eph and Jude.

20. Are All Things Good? (8:28)

Verse 28 of Romans 8, standing alone, constitutes a wonderful promise. Life brings good times and bad, pleasure and pain, wins and losses; this is the very nature of life. This verse, however, promises that all things, even the bad things, will somehow work together to bring some good result if we love God and are among his called ones, pursuing his will and purposes. This does not say that all things are good; obviously, some things are bad, painful, destructive, or evil. However, if we are his children, pursuing his will and loving Him, all things, the mix of good and bad, will eventually result in something good.

21. The Troubling Matter of Predestination. (8:29-30)

One thing that Christian scholars have pondered, and over which they have disagreed, at least since the 6th Century AD, is the matter of predestination, i.e. the belief that the decision has already been made by God as to whether any one of us will be redeemed and become his child or, conversely, will die unredeemed and be forever separated from Him. These are, after all, the only two possible outcomes

³³ I Corinthians 14:14-15; Eph 6:18; Jude:19-21.

of life; and how very different, and ultimately important, are these two outcomes! Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, writing in the 6th Century, called these two groups the “elect” and the “non-elect.” John Calvin, 16th Century French reformer, seems to have based his belief concerning predestination on the writings of Augustine. Christians today are deeply divided over this doctrine, but it seems to me that all of this conflict and division may have been unnecessary. In two rich verses, here in Chapter 8, there appears to be a sequence of events:

- a. Those whom God **foreknew** (knew what decision would ultimately be made) concerning acceptance or rejection of Jesus as Redeemer, He did **predestinate** (to be eventually redeemed)³⁴.
- b. Those whom God did predestinate (to be eventually redeemed), He also **called**³⁵.
- c. Those whom He called, He also **justified** (redeemed).
- d. And, those whom He justified, He also **glorified** (equipped for living in his presence in Heaven).

Can this mean that it is all a matter so simple that it begins with the fact that God knows in advance who will say “yes” to Him and who will say “no”? And does it mean that those whom He knows will receive the Redeemer’s gift of salvation are the elect, and those whom He knows will reject the gift of redemption are the “non-elect”? Could it be this simple? It seems to me that it is at least worth consideration, and I cannot think of any other way to interpret these two plainly written verses³⁶.

NOTES:

a. Predestination is a foundational principle in Presbyterian, or Reformed, theology, the direct product of Calvin’s teachings. Some carry this belief to such an extreme that they believe that it is unnecessary (if not sinful) to witness to the unredeemed, sharing the good news of the gospel. It has already been decided by God, they will say, who will go to Heaven and who won’t; so there is no point in trying to bring the lost to a redemptive knowledge of the Lord. But this, it seems to me, constitutes a rejection of the commandment of Jesus which we call the Great Commission. Although most Baptists don’t realize it, they are also Calvinistic in that most Baptist groups accept at least some of Calvin’s teachings, especially “perseverance of the saints” (eternal security). Most of the rest of Christendom accepts part of Calvin’s beliefs (most commonly, the total depravity of unredeemed man) but not all.

³⁴ John 6:64-65.

³⁵ John 6:44, 64-65.

³⁶ For more on this vital subject, see I Pet 1:1-2.

b. I approach this theological conversation with utter humility, if not fear and trembling. After all, who am I, just a broken-up old Marine and a long-ago, utterly obscure, biologist, to question, or even comment upon, either Augustine or Calvin, two of the most brilliant theological thinkers in the history of mankind? Yet, with my simple mind, I cannot escape the belief that it really is this simple: God knows in advance who among us will choose Him and who among of us will reject Him.

22. Our Redeemer Is Also Our Intercessor. (8:31-34)

Paul then follows with a message of wonderful encouragement. If God be for us, he asks rhetorically, who can be against us³⁷? If God spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up to suffer and die for our redemption, would he withhold any good thing from us? And, this risen Savior who paid our sin debt, the just for the unjust, did not stop there in blessing us; He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us.

NOTE: Why, we may wonder, does the risen Savior need to intercede for us with the Father? After all, God knows everything already. My suggested explanation will be an extreme oversimplification to theologians, but it may be helpful to the rest of us here. The Godhead is truly a mystery, one beyond our comprehension; but I like to think of it this way. Of the three Persons of the Godhead, only the Son has experienced being human, subjected to our limitations, our infirmities and our temptations. We have in Him the perfect intercessor; He is the sinless Son of God, reunited, after his 33 years on Earth, with God the Father. Since the Father has never experienced being Human, He listens to the explanations and petitions of his Son, pleading for us. We will see this more clearly in Hebrews Chapt 4.

23 Nothing Can Separate Us from the Love of God. (8:35-39)

Chapter 8 closes with the beautiful and reassuring promise that, no matter what happens, no matter what we do, or fail to do, no one, nor any thing, can separate God's children from his abiding, unchanging love. To make the point as strongly as possible, Paul enumerates the things which, on our own, might overcome us. He lists things that we might fear: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword; and then he says that, not only do we need not fear them--it is even better than that. We are not just conquerors--we are "more than conquerors" over such things, through our relationship with God who has loved us and will continue to love us. He then takes this promise to a new level--the heavenly realm, and to dimensions of time and space. Not even death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth nor anything

³⁷ A wise woman whom I have known for more than 60 years, and who would not want to see her name here, has an interesting answer for Paul, and one that I think is theologically unassailable: it is "Only ourselves."

else in creation, can separate us from God's love, which is ours because of our Redeemer and Intercessor, Christ Jesus.

NOTES:

a. There is nothing here that says that we cannot be separated from God; sin, for example, at least temporarily, automatically separates us from God³⁸. But nothing--absolutely nothing--can separate us from his love; love, after all, is the very essence of his being³⁹.

b. "More than conquerors," here, is an interesting concept. To be a conqueror means that we win the battle or the war; it doesn't allow for degrees of winning. Yet God, speaking through Paul, wants to lift our eyes a little higher. This English phrase is expressed in only one Greek word, "hupermikeo," which means, literally, "to be above [i.e. more than] conquerors." We have something that goes beyond mere victory--we are, to transliterate the Greek, "hyper conquerors."

24. Christ the Stumbling Stone. (9:29-33)

Quoting Isaiah, Paul states that if the Lord had not preserved the Israelite people through their centuries of unbelief, there would not be a people, descended from Abraham, through David, to produce the Messiah. Otherwise, he says, they would have vanished from the Earth like Sodom and Gomorrah⁴⁰. While the Jewish leaders and those who followed their teaching have failed to achieve righteousness (a right relationship with God) by trusting in the law, the Gentile Christians have achieved righteousness. Why, he asks, is this so? He then answers his own question: the Gentile Christians achieved righteousness by exercising faith in the risen Messiah--not by serving the law. In this way, Christ is a stumbling stone for the Jews; if they don't accept Him as Messiah and worship Him, they will trip on his reality, fall and be hurt--perhaps fatally⁴¹. To the Gentile Christians, on the other hand, Jesus is their Redeemer, the great Cornerstone on which their individual lives, and the Church, are built. To the Jews, who have rejected Him as Messiah, he is not the Cornerstone; instead, He is "the stone which the builders have rejected," and, for them, a Stumbling Stone.

NOTE: *When Paul was writing this, he was referring to the majority of Jews, under their leaders, those who had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. By the time of this writing, many Jews had, as individuals, accepted Jesus as Messiah and achieved this righteous relationship with God, most famously 11 of the 12 original apostles. Paul himself was one of these redeemed Jews.*

25. The Two Essentials for Salvation. (10:1-13)

³⁸ Isaiah 59:1-2.

³⁹ I John 4:8.

⁴⁰ Isaiah 1:9.

⁴¹ Psalm 118:22-24; Is 8:13-14; 28:16.

The first 13 verses of Chapter 10 contain an amazing summary of our means of redemption, which consists of two things: believing and confessing. The Law of Moses cannot produce righteousness; the purpose of the Law was fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and only through faith in Him can we become truly righteous. In this sense He is “the end of the law” for He is its fulfillment. And, Paul says, faith in Him takes effect in two locations: the mouth and the heart. For, he says, we must confess with our mouths that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord. And, he says, we must believe in our hearts that the Father has raised Him from the dead; if He is not alive, of course, He cannot help us. If He is not alive, He is not the Messiah and cannot be our Redeemer. In the heart we believe, bringing righteousness; and with the mouth our public confession of Him as Redeemer seals our salvation. And this passage is closed with the promise that this two-part process is available to both Jews and Gentiles--i.e., to everyone who will believe and confess.

NOTE: There are many Christians who strongly believe that there are requirements for salvation beyond these two elements, most notably water baptism. But I am not trying to make a doctrinal statement here; I am merely summarizing what Paul has written.

26. Faith Comes by Hearing the Word Proclaimed. (10:14-17)

This great chapter is closed with a summary of how this redeeming faith comes to the unredeemed. Beginning with a question, as he often does, Paul asks how those who have not heard the good news of Jesus can call upon Him to be saved. Then, of course, he answers his own question--but with a series of rhetorical questions: he asks, how can they call on Him if they have not believed; and how can they believe on Him of whom they have not heard; and how can they hear of Him without a preacher to proclaim Him? Again quoting the Prophets, he utters the great summary of the process: “So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God⁴².”

27. But What About the Jewish People? (11:18-32)

Chapter 11 is devoted to the eventual fate of the Jewish people. Using the analogy of an olive tree for the Kingdom of God, he warns those of us, who find redemption through faith, not to feel superior and look down upon the Jewish people who have rejected Jesus. God, Paul says emphatically, has not cast them away forever. He points out that if God would remove the natural branches (Jewish people) so that wild branches (Gentiles) might be grafted into the tree, He might also prune wild branches (us) if we become proud and haughty. Not only that, he says, but the Jewish “branches” can be grafted back into the tree. Their

⁴² The prophets he quotes are Isaiah 52:7, 53:1; Nah 1:15.

alienation from the Kingdom is only temporary; when the full ingathering of Gentiles is complete, God's plan for his chosen people will be fulfilled, and they also will be saved. Thus God's covenants with nation Israel will finally be fulfilled.

NOTES:

a. The opening statement of v 26 is the subject of disagreement among commentators. Some take it to mean that there is no need to share the gospel with Jews because, eventually, they will all be saved anyway. Yet, v 25 tells us that the blindness of the Jewish people, i.e. blindness to the truth of the gospel, is only "in part"; and we see this manifested before us, for there are definitely some ethnic Jews who do hear the gospel, see the truth, and receive Jesus as Messiah. Not only that, but this general spiritual blindness of the Jewish people is temporary; it will last only until "the fullness of the Gentiles" (the ingathering of Gentiles into the Kingdom) is complete. The explanation of "all Israel shall be saved" seems to be found in Ez 20:34-38. Here the prophet speaks of the Lord's coming to confront rebellious Israel "face to face," and to separate those who are his own through submission to Him, from those who rebel and reject Him at the time of his return and final judgment. Using the language of a shepherd, the Lord says that He will cause the Jewish people "to pass under the rod." This was the way shepherds used to examine each individual sheep, determining which were his, and counting them. Since in the Bible "rod" represents authority, "Pass under the rod" also speaks of submission to the Lord's authority. In this sense, "all Israel shall be saved" would refer to all of the Jewish people, once the rebellious ones are identified and removed, when Christ returns. Thus, God's original plan and covenant concerning Israel will be fulfilled⁴³.

b. Verse 29 is worthy of contemplation. In simplest terms, God does not make mistakes. More precisely, it seems to say that God, who knows all things, and knows the end from the beginning, does not make mistakes in calling men and women, and in imparting gifts. He does not withdraw his gifts and callings when someone, so gifted and called, fails Him; for God can neither be surprised nor disappointed. It is a simple declaration of a fundamental fact. In its context, beginning with the word "For," it is referring to what is discussed above, i.e. to the Israelite people as a whole; but it seems also to refer to individuals who fail to live up to the calling of God. One may fail to live up to his calling by sinning, or even turn away from it; but, like the corrupt prophet Balaam, God may still use him⁴⁴. And, if he repents, God may restore him fully to his calling.

⁴³ The late Moishe Rosen, founder of Jews for Jesus, once told me how it hurt him for Billy Graham to publicly denounce Jewish evangelism, the cause for which Moishe devoted his life.

⁴⁴ Numbers 22-24.

28. The Majesty and Perfection of God. (11:33-36)

The last four verses of Chapter 11 express something that is utterly fundamental to our lives as Christians; it is something that we must know and keep in mind as we make our way through life. It is simply that God, the creator, is perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful, and is never wrong. We, his creations, although made in his image and adopted into his family, with his Spirit dwelling within us, cannot begin to know what He knows or understand all that He does. This is, at best, a difficult thing to express adequately, and Paul is attempting here to express the inexpressible; but he summarizes, saying that of, through, and to, God, all things exist. And, because of this fundamental cosmic fact, **all** glory belongs to Him alone, and will belong to Him throughout eternity. And this sets the stage for the first verse of Chapter 12.

29. Living Sacrifices. (12:1)

Referring to the summary of the awesome, absolute majesty and perfection of God, that he has just expressed at the end of Chapter 11, Paul tells us that, because of it, we should present our bodies to God as living sacrifices. Whereas in times past God required the sacrifice of dead animals, sanctified, burnt and presented to Him, that covenant was fulfilled with the ultimate physical sacrifice, God's sinless, perfect, only begotten Son.

Now, under the New Covenant, that is all passed away. We no longer need to offer roasted animals; God instead desires us as living sacrifices, living daily, moment by moment, for Him. Our praises and prayers that ascend to Him and are sweet and like incense; we therefore need no longer burn incense to Him as morning and evening sacrifices. Each of our lives is to be an ongoing, living sacrifice, and our prayers and worship to be morning and evening sacrifices pleasing to Him. David saw this coming covenant in the Spirit, and prophesied beautifully concerning it, 3,000 years ago, and the writers of Hebrews and Revelation 2,000 years ago⁴⁵.

This verse, so supersaturated with truth, ends by saying that this presenting of our bodies to God as living sacrifices is "reasonable." To our minds this can seem unreasonable, for we may want to do things with our bodies that are not pleasing to Him. It can at times be a struggle and, at such times this demand seems **unreasonable**. However, in light of the last four verses of Chapter 11, it is not just reasonable, it is the **only** reasonable course of action⁴⁶.

NOTES:

⁴⁵ Psalm 40:6-8; 51:15-17; 134:2; 141:2; Hebr 13:15-16; Rev 5:8. See also Ex 30:1-8, the origin of the incense offering.

⁴⁶ For more on the system of Old Covenant sacrifices, compared with sacrifices under the New Covenant, see "Sacrifices under the Old and New Covenants" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

*a. In the Word of God, sometimes a single word, easily overlooked, can speak volumes. Note that in Psalm 40:6 David wrote “Sacrifice and Offering thou **didst** not require....” It was required in the day when David wrote; but it had **not** been required in the beginning. Thus, David is speaking in the past tense, and this single word takes us all the way back to the Garden of Eden, before sin entered human history. There was no need for animal sacrifices and ritual offerings then, and God had no interest in such things.*

Once sin did enter, however, these requirements were made of man in order for him to stay in a tentative, temporary, right relationship with God. This was the situation existing when David lived; yet he saw in the Spirit a coming time when such offerings and sacrifices would no longer be required or even allowed. He saw the coming time when the sacrifices that God desires would be living sacrifices--our lives, lived daily for Him, and in sweet communion with Him. Thus, it seems, this single word, in the past tense, takes us back to the Garden of Eden, and then forward 3,000 years to the time of David; thence it takes us another 3,000 years forward--to the present--the moment when we are reading these words. It is really, I think, a marvelous thing.

b. The problem with living sacrifices is that, while dead lambs, calves and bullocks on the altar didn't move, at times, when temptation comes, or the fire is getting hot, living sacrifices are inclined to crawl off the altar. However, if we repent, we can crawl back onto the altar, be forgiven, and press on with life. And so, it seems, life will go, until we are at last perfected in the final days of Rev Chapters 21 and 22.

30. Renewing the Mind. (12:2)

When we are redeemed, we are definitely not made instantly perfect, except in our spirits. Our bodies may be imperfect or damaged, and our minds will definitely need improvement. Old attitudes and values will need changing; and our knowledge and understanding will need to develop. Thus verse 2 begins by telling us not to be conformed to the things of this world; we are not to allow the secular world around us to force us into its mold, and it will be constantly attempting to do just that. At times we may enter that mold voluntarily, wishing to be like those around us; but this is a trap, and the battle is in the mind. The remedy is simple: we must be changed--transformed--and this is done by the renewing of our minds. This means that we develop new attitudes and values; only then can we know and experience the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. We cannot experience the wonderful things that God has in mind for us if we continue to have the old attitudes and values of the secular, sinful world around us. The change comes by filling our minds with healthy, godly things--with the Word of God, with prayer and communion with Him, by setting our minds on

things above, not on things below, and by avoiding exposure to ungodly influences. And a part of this renewing process is becoming doers of the Word and not forgetful hearers only. This process, this path to freedom, is called "the renewing of the mind," and it is an ongoing process; for, "the inward man is renewed, day by day"⁴⁷.

NOTES:

a. The Greek word rendered "transformed" in v 2 is "metamorphoo." It means a total change. It is the word from which we derive the English word "metamorphosis"; and, biologically, this is the process by which a tadpole becomes a frog, and a caterpillar becomes a butterfly⁴⁸. It means that the creature is of essentially that same essence, but changed into a into a completely different form.

b. Some Christians take v 2 to mean that God has three levels of his will for us: his good will; his acceptable will; and his perfect will. Others see it as saying that God has one will for each of us, and it is good, acceptable and perfect. This latter interpretation seems to be the better one, for God is definitely not triple-minded concerning his will for us, with Plans B and C to fall back on, if we should fail in Plan A. Nor am I aware of any scriptural basis for the former interpretation, other than this verse.

31. Various Ministries in the Church. (12:3-10)

One of the great lessons in Romans is that there are various ministries and necessary functions in the Church, and each is important. Inherent in this is the principle that those of us with certain functions in the Church are not to look down upon others who have what might be thought of as more lowly functions. Some in prominent positions as leaders or teachers may have more responsibility than others, but they are warned not to think of themselves as better, or more important. All of us in the Church are to treat one another with respect, kindness and brotherly love⁴⁹.

32. Balance Is Essential. (12:11)

The remainder of Chapter 12 consists of rules for successful living as Christians. Verse 11 is so packed with significance as to deserve individual attention. Pages could be written expressing the truth that is distilled into this one brief verse. It tells us that it is not enough to be diligent about the business side of life, working

⁴⁷ II Corinthians 4:16.

⁴⁸ This same Greek word is rendered "transfigured" in describing the supernatural change in the appearance of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:2; Mk 9:2).

⁴⁹ Here "brotherly love" is rendered from the Greek *philadelphos*, which means exactly that. It is one of the three words in Greek found in the Bible expressing three of the four different kinds of love. The fourth, *Eros*, erotic, sexual love, does not appear in the Bible.

hard and carefully, if we neglect our spiritual lives. Likewise, it tells us that it is not enough to be zealous in the spiritual side of life if we are lazy or indifferent about business and practical necessities. And, in so doing, this verse introduces us to the concept of balance.

There is a common saying used to express this: that we are not to be “so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good.” Actually, I don’t think it is possible to be too heavenly minded; I also believe that the Bible teaches us to take our spiritual lives into our working lives. Being diligent in business and fervent in spirit are not two options from which to choose; rather, they are two parts of a whole. It could be expressed mathematically as an equation: diligence in business + fervency in spirit = the right way to live⁵⁰.

33. Rules for Successful Living. (12:12-21)

The remainder of Chapter 12 summarizes the way that we should live. We should be hopeful, patient, prayerful, and generous. We should not curse those who wrong us--rather we should return kindness; and we should enter into, and share, both the joy and the grief of others⁵¹. We are not to think of ourselves as better than others; rather, we are to relate equally and fully to those of both high and low rank. We are to live honestly and, when possible, we are to live at peace with others⁵². We are not to seek revenge; this is to be left up to God⁵³. Finally, we are to overcome evil by doing good. In fact, it can be a benign form of vengeance to do this, for when we return good for a wrong done to us, we “heap coals of fire” on the head of the one who wronged us⁵⁴.

34. Submission to Secular Authority. (13:1-7)

The first seven verses of Romans 13 deal with a concept that is often misunderstood; it is that we should obey secular authorities and not rebel against them. The concept set forth in the first two verses is that God is the ultimate authority, and that secular political leaders are in office with the sanction of God, to enforce civil law; and to resist them is to bring judgment upon ourselves, for in resisting them we are resisting God. Thus many Christians believe that we should obey secular authorities, no matter what is required by them.

But what if secular authority requires us to do something wrong--something sinful? For example, in July 1942 a unit of German military police in occupied Poland was given an order that they did not want to obey. They were ordered to

⁵⁰ This vital principle may also be seen in Hebrews 13:15-16.

⁵¹ Jesus did this: Luke 10:21; Jn 11:33-35.

⁵² Key words in v 18 are “if possible...as much as it lieth in you.” A foundational fact of life is that it takes two to make peace, but only one is required to start a fight. There will be times when we must fight; however, we are told, when the decision is ours to make, choose peace. When we do this, Jesus said, we will be blessed (Matthew 5:9).

⁵³ Deuteronomy 32:35; Ps 94:1; Prov 20:22, 24:29; Hebr 10:30.

⁵⁴ See also Romans 12:20; Prov 25:21-22.

round up all of the 1,800 Jews in the Polish village of Jozefow. They were then to put all able-bodied men in railroad cars, ship them to slave labor camps, and murder all of the remaining Jews--the elderly, the women and the children, including infants. They did it, murdering 1,500 of them in one long Summer day of slaughter⁵⁵. Had they refused, would they have sinned by refusing? I think not; in fact, by obeying their orders they committed terrible sins.

Then how do we reconcile refusing to commit sins by obeying secular authority, with the clear wording verses 1 and 2? The answer is to be found in verses 3-7. Here we see that Paul is writing with the fundamental assumption that the authority over us enforces laws rewarding good behavior, and punishing bad behavior. The authority is the agent of God “for good”; and he is a punisher of “those that doeth evil.” We are to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, but we are also to render unto God that which is God’s, for He is our ultimate authority. We are to pay our taxes and obey the secular law--but not when that law requires us to commit evil deeds. This principle is found throughout the Bible⁵⁶.

35. Love is the Fulfilling of the Law. (13:8-10)

Continuing from the discourse about obeying secular law, Paul says that our single, fundamental obligation is to love one another; for, he says, if we love one another we cannot do wrong to our neighbor. This is another principle repeated in the Bible, from Leviticus to James⁵⁷. Jesus summed it all up by saying that if we love God with our whole being, and love our neighbor as ourselves, we have fulfilled the essence of all of God’s law⁵⁸.

36. Live in the Dark of Night as if We Are in the Light of Day. (13:11-14)

In reminding the Romans to live in a Christ-like manner, he lists some common forms of sin that result from indulging the lusts of the fleshly nature. Examples he cites are drunken carousing and violence, sexual sin (“chambering”), debauchery, strife and envying the possessions of others⁵⁹. In stating this, Paul recommends a useful guideline for our behavior: live in the dark of night as if we were in the light of day. It is true that we are more likely to do wrong things unseen, in the darkness, than in the revealing light of day⁶⁰.

37. Avoid Controversy Over Non-Essentials. (14:1-13)

⁵⁵ Browning, Christopher R. *Ordinary Men; Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) 71-77.

⁵⁶ For example, Micah 3:1-2; Matt 22:21; Mk 12:17; Lk 20:25; Acts 4:13-20 and 5:26-29; Hebr 11:23, 13:17; I Pet 2:13-17.

⁵⁷ Leviticus 19:18; Jas 2:8.

⁵⁸ Matthew 22:37-40.

⁵⁹ In v 13 the Greek word rendered “chambering” is *koite*, from which we derive the English word “coitus.” It is used here to mean sexual promiscuity, in the sense of visiting the bed chambers of many others. In Hebr 13:4 the same Greek word is used in speaking of the sanctity of the marriage bed (i.e. marital love).

⁶⁰ Jesus made this fundamental fact of human behavior clear, early in his earthly ministry (Jn 3:19-21).

In our relating to other Christians, some will be well-established and strong, while others, especially new believers, will have little knowledge and are vulnerable to deception. We are to receive the weak into our fellowship readily; but we should avoid loading him with pressure or doctrines concerning non-essentials, such as dietary restrictions. One regards one day as sacred, while another considers every day to be sacred. Leave those who are weak in the faith alone concerning non-essential doctrines, and let him grow and become well-established in the faith. Non-essentials, such as what to eat and not eat, and which days to observe, should be left to the individual, between him and the Lord⁶¹. We should deal with our own shortcomings, rather than criticize our brother over his (or what we perceive as his)--especially if he is a new, or struggling, Christian. All of us will someday stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

38. The Kingdom of God Is Not Meat and Drink. (14:14-23)

Some consider a type of food unclean, while others see nothing wrong with it. One drinks wine and another doesn't. We should not divide over such things; however, to him who believes it to be wrong, to him it is wrong. We must not, in the matter of food or drink, cause a weak brother to be confused and stumble, for in so doing we would be interfering with the redemptive work of the Lord. Such non-essential matters of right and wrong are personal, between the believer and his Lord; they should be followed privately, but not paraded before the weak.

The Last Two Chapters of Romans

In Chapter 15 Paul expands on the responsibility of strong Christians to the weak ones, and summarizes the nature of his calling to carry the gospel to the Gentile world. Hitherto, he says, his apostolic ministry to the far reaches of the Gentile world has kept him from visiting Rome⁶². Now, however, he feels free to make the trip, on his way to Spain⁶³. He ends the chapter with a request for prayer, that he be delivered from his enemies in Judaea, and that he might come to them in Rome. He closes Chapter 15 with a brief benediction; but he is not quite finished.

Chapter 16 opens with the recommendation of one Phoebe, "a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea⁶⁴." He also commends to the Romans Priscilla and Aquila, his close companions in ministry who have risked their lives for him; they

⁶¹ I Timothy 4:1-5.

⁶² Paul had begun his mission to the Gentile world at Antioch, working westward through Asia Minor and Greece. His reason for not beginning in Rome, and working eastward, was probably the fact that there had been a church at Rome since shortly after Pentecost (Acts 2:10).

⁶³ There is nothing in Scripture or in other ancient literature to indicate that Paul ever went to Spain. Rather, it seems certain that he went to Jerusalem to deliver the money donated by the Gentile churches, and from there was taken as a prisoner to Rome, where he was eventually martyred.

⁶⁴ It is probable that it was this Phoebe who delivered Paul's letter to the Roman church.

had once lived in Rome, but they have returned and are now back there⁶⁵. He sends greetings to the congregation that meets in their home. He then commends several others, some of them his relatives, who seem about to make the trip to Rome, presumably to await him there while they lay the groundwork for his ministry in Rome. One of these, Rufus, may be the son of Simon of Cyrene who assisted in the carrying of the cross⁶⁶. Whoever he is, his mother has apparently taken a special interest in Paul, caring for him as if he were her own son⁶⁷. Timothy and others, including Tertius the scribe and certain in the church at Corinth, send greetings. Paul ends his magnificent epistle with a grand benediction for the Roman church) vv 24-27.

NOTE: *Controversy is ongoing over the position of Phoebe. While she is here identified as “a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea,” some modern versions refer to her as “a deaconess in the church at Cenchrea”; some even identify her as “minister (pastor)” of the church at Cenchrea. Those who believe that women can hold positions of leadership in the Church as deacon and elder, seize on 16:1 to support their belief. Others, who believe that only men can scripturally hold such positions, of course, disagree, based primarily upon I Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9 and I Pet 5:1-4.*

Based only upon the rendering of the Greek word which here describes her function, both renderings are correct. The Greek word for “deacon” is “diakonos,” and it literally means “a servant.” The word here rendered “servant” is “diakonon,” the feminine form of “diakonos.” Thus, based only upon this one word, it is correct to call her a female servant in the church; and it is also correct to call her a deaconess, which means the same thing. And so, it is clear that we should admire and emulate this Phoebe; but it is impossible to know with certainty, based upon this single word, whether she was a deaconess in a position of leadership, or simply a devoted female servant of the church, performing various forms of service.

One Additional Bit of Evidence. There is, for our consideration, also an interesting statement in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles” (ca 375 AD), concerning the position and function of a deaconess: “A deaconess does not bless, nor perform anything belonging to the office of presbyters [elders] and deacons, but only is to keep the doors, and to minister to

⁶⁵ Priscilla and Aquila had left Rome when all Jews had been driven from there by Claudius; by this time Claudius was dead, and the banishment of Jews had ended. There are inscriptions in the catacombs at Rome which suggest that Priscilla was from a distinguished family; perhaps this is why her name is often placed before her husband's, when mentioned in tandem.

⁶⁶ Mark 15:21.

⁶⁷ It is possible, based upon the wording of verse 13, that the mother of Rufus was literally Paul's mother (thus making Rufus his natural brother); but this is highly unlikely.

[assist] the presbyters in the baptizing of women, on account of decency⁶⁸.” This document was recognized as valid by 1st Century Church Father, Clement of Rome, who was contemporary with, and knew at least some of, the original apostles (he died ca 97 AD).

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⁶⁸ ANF Vol. 7, Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, iii, p 494.