

A Short Commentary on Romans

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2011

These articles were written as a series on the blog briancoatney.com and are presented here as a booklet for your edification. Thanks to my dear friend and coworker, Sylvia Pearce, for her encouragement in making this a booklet, and thanks to my wife, Tandy, for her encouragement and editing. Thanks to you, dear readers, for your encouragement.

Romans 1-3: All Have Sinned

Paul's letter to the Romans is a fundamental treatise, not that it answers all questions, for no book of the Bible is a systematic theology, and I don't wish that anyway. Life is deeper than that and full of divine riddles. Romans, however, does give a progression of faith. How splendid too that Paul wrote this letter to the capital city of the world's empire. Though respectful of authority, Paul wrote the Romans about the real empire, the kingdom of God, and how that works. That is the point.

The letter opens with the argument that all men everywhere at all times can behold the glory of God via nature and therefore seek after the creator and not merely the creation. As soon as one starts to fixate on the material universe and expel any sense of radiating glory, idolatry is born and darkness and depravity enter in. The conscience hardens, and sin takes over in a hopeless slavery that manifests in every way. No one is locked out of revelation, however, for the conscience operates as a mediator, when allowed, to guide a person to more light. In this way, anyone can begin a life of faith. Paul does not mean, of course, universal salvation, but he does mean universal access to the glory of God and the quest of faith.

Someone might argue then that specific revelation is not necessary, and the law especially. Who glories, however, in minimalism, content not to know more and explore more? It's in our fabric to discover and develop, to press on to completion, to unravel the secrets of the universe. Why sit still; that is indolence, and the Bible is not an indolent book. Because of how God made us and His plan for us to reign and rule as His sons, He could not leave us simply with the light of nature as our understanding. Therefore, He gave the law to show to man what is in man. Can we keep it? Hypocrisy says yes, but plainly, we do not and cannot keep it. We might like to think so, but to believe such a lie keeps one blaming others for the very sins rampant in the person pointing the accusing finger.

Between the conscience of the Gentile and the Law of Moses for the Jew, no one is justified. That means that no one can stand before God expecting entry into the kingdom of God based on performance. Paul is graphic here, citing numerous Old Testament scriptures to show how horrible and total sin is in everyone born of Adam. No one escapes this; no one can even stand claiming only a few wrinkles or minor stains. Destruction and death completely own mankind, and without a remedy, we remain in the state of having fallen short of the glory of God.

This is the worst possible news to pride. Who wants to say, "I have done wrong; I am wrong!" No one, and so don't expect a birthday cake smile on the face of someone coming under conviction of the truths laid out here by Paul. We must be wrong before we

are right. There is no getting around that. When a person sees that, faith can then operate by believing God, like Abraham did, and having that reckoned as righteousness. The faith itself isn't the righteousness; faith is the receiving of the righteousness of God, just like swallowing is not the food but gets the food into us.

I remember my friend Louis Tucker's explanation of how it is that we are righteous. The two of us were sitting in his living room in 1994, and he told me how he likes to speak to a group and say, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how righteous do you think you are? Write it down on a slip of paper." Of course, when it was time for participants to disclose their answers, the most modest and humble answers were forthcoming. Louis would then say that a Christian is a 10! What a shock, but he then backed this up with scripture like Romans 3, where Paul says that we have the righteousness of Christ.

I was taught in my early years that we have the righteousness of Christ but that this righteousness is positional but not conditional. What do I care about a position that doesn't operate as my condition? It looks good on paper but leaves us still wretched to ourselves. We will look into this more later when we get into later Chapters. For now, let me say that to believe the word of God means that I received it—took it into myself; and the word of God is God, and so the word of God is His living word. God always works by mixing Himself with people, and that is powerful and transforming. I only care about food I swallow and digest, sending the food into my bloodstream and every energy operated tissue of my body; I don't care about money in a bank that is positional but unavailable to write checks on. God doesn't care much about aloof truth either.

Paul ends this section with the mercy of God whereby He "passed over former sins" (3:25 RSV). He had a plan, and He used a certain timeline, but His means was always the same even if not fully revealed yet at a certain point in history. Now, however, Paul announces, there is no need for ignorance. Also, the door is open to all humanity regardless of cultural or religious background.

The only thing to decide upon is faith or works. Regarding justification, either I do it, or God did it. The answer is simple. Next time, we will see where Paul goes from here.

Romans 4: "The Story of Every Man"

As we saw last time, God concluded all in sin, whether under the law or not under the law. Fast asleep and out of touch, we have to wake up, and God uses conscience and the law to do that, apart from which we live as animals with better brains. This is hardly the life God planned for his ruling sons, so He undertook to wake up any who will listen. Once concluded under sin, without any righteousness of our own, we're conditioned to accept the righteousness of God by faith, which means that He is our righteousness—that He gives us a property called righteousness, but that we receive all our righteousness from Him. This is splendid; we don't try any more to manufacture some good on our own or from ourselves.

But Paul knows that humanity tends to glorify the idea of elite people striving to attain sainthood, relegating common humanity to a life of meaning well but not being too holy. “I’m only human; I’m not perfect” becomes the less than stellar standard by which a man judges himself and his neighbor, if he is kind enough to apply his self-measure to his neighbor. “All have sinned” turns into “All have made mistakes, and hopefully mine aren’t as bad as those of criminals or miscreants, and hopefully God understands.” This would be comical except for the dire tone of Romans 1-3.

What if sainthood is not the property of the spiritual elite but is instead the promise to every man? Paul needs an every man for a test case, and it so happens that one pops up right out of Genesis, namely Abraham. When we read about Abraham, we don’t find a religious person. We don’t see him in a church, reading, performing rites, or studying over a code to follow its rules. We see a man who heard the voice of God and followed it wherever that voice led, no matter the consequences. When he did lie or act self protective, we don’t even see him making resolutions or doing compensatory acts.

Yet righteousness was reckoned to Abraham because he believed God’s outrageous and impossible sounding promises that he would sire a son who would branch out, making Abraham the father of many nations. Abraham didn’t try to do anything to deserve this; he just believed it. I don’t see any religion that grew up in Abraham’s life to provide scaffolding for his faith. If ever a man was a plain man and just did what he did from his heart and convictions, it was Abraham. He did pay tithes to Melchizedek after rescuing Lot, but other than that, Abraham operated as a family man and protector of his tribe in a land where he lived in a tent and moved around.

God’s promise was not easy to believe with a barren wife, and as years accrued, his body and Sarah’s withered beyond reasonable expectation of fulfillment of the promise. Still, we don’t see Abraham resorting to religion, codes, and performance to be worthy of the promise. He did let Sarah cajole him into a Plan B that divested God’s promise of its miracle element, and as such, Plan B was a flesh plan, though Abraham and Sarah did believe God’s promise: they just thought maybe they weren’t doing their part.

It turns out that God did not want them to do their part other than just to continue on as aging vessels until absurdity provided the occasion for a miracle—one that is still fit for laughter today, not of unbelief, but of God’s sense of humor and His resurrection power in bringing life out of death.

I still haven’t mentioned, though, perhaps the most offensive part about Abraham to a Jew. Abraham believed before he was circumcised. Yes, he was a filthy, uncircumcised guy when he believed and was reckoned therefore righteous. Abraham is every man, the common man, the non religious man, the uncircumcised man; but none of this matters, because he is the believing man. He takes the promise of God into himself, and finally takes it all the way into himself. He never wavers. That means that he never lets go of the promise, and to receive the word of God is to receive God; and to receive God is to receive all that God is.

As Abraham's faith matures, "he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" (4:17 KJV). Abraham believed in resurrection life, life that comes out of death. No wonder Jesus said that Abraham believed the Gospel. Abraham learned the practice of looking at what is not while seeing in it the what is—the invisible getting ready to manifest its reality. It doesn't take a special kind of person to do this. Abraham was every man. Paul uses Abraham at this point in Romans to say that any ordinary human being who wants to live a miracle life can look to Abraham as the example. Since the matter does not depend on what one does, it does not matter who the believer is: God is the doer, and so He does for anyone who hears and believes.

I have to end with a Norman story. As a young man in my 30s, Norman seemed larger than life, as if he had been born Norman Grubb the man of faith. One day I looked at his World War 1 photo in his autobiography *Once Caught No Escape*, and there stood a regular looking young man, and for the first time I thought, "He's like everyone else." The way is open to all. I could see him as being like Abraham in the sense of not becoming a man of faith by works but by receiving.

Norman was a regular guy with a typewriter who answered letters, and some of his letters concerned conflicts among the brethren. I was still one to major on negatives; he was one to see through them and probe for what God was doing. He may not have known what God was doing, but he knew God was doing something, and that the something was the point.

Also, he knew it would always be life out of death in an impossible situation. One letter he sent me quoted Romans 4:17, which I quoted above, and Norman said, "calling the things that be not as though they are" (because they really are). The part in parentheses floored me. I realized that real to Norman meant the unseen. Yet, he did see – by faith. Manifestation eventually follows; it has to. Abraham and Sarah did have that son.

As such, Paul directs us to the ultimate life out of death, the life of Christ in us. Just as Isaac was resurrection life out of a dead womb, Christ is righteousness out of a dead human. We don't make Him happen; He makes us happen.

Romans 5: "Fruits of Justification"

So far we've seen how God concluded all under sin in order Himself to justify through Christ those who believe, and lest that seem the realm of only rare saints, Paul gives us the story of every man, namely Abraham, so that we can identify with an ordinary man who grew into extraordinary faith, one episode at a time.

When we arrive at Romans 5, the view is from the place of justification, not trying to get justified or hold on to being justified. What God does, God maintains, and so we're not in and out of justification. Either we are or we aren't justified, and considering Christ's

work, the result is eternal and efficacious. Looking at self never gets us to peace and rest; looking at the Lamb does.

In this justified place, the immediate sensation is peace with God. He has not been at war with us, for how could one whose heart planned our salvation from before time, have been a God whose desire against us is war? Rather, we were the rebels and started the war, thus disrupting the peace. We could never, however, strip the peace out of God's heart, for since He has the Cross forever in His heart through His fixed choice to be self-for-others, He can only be a God of peace, no matter what grief and agony we subject Him to, and Paul tells us later in Romans of the longsuffering of God.

Now through Christ, we actually see that our resistance to Him was foolish and self-destructive, enslaving us to sin and Satan, and we had no hope of deliverance except through the Cross of Christ. When I believed this, I discovered peace, the peace in the heart of God, and therefore the peace given to me to live from, that I am no longer God's enemy but His friend. I might be tempted to think that I don't deserve friendship with God, but that is not for me to say. Life is getting God's valuation of people.

Paul says that we stand in this grace, which means it's a place of standing, not shrinking or cowering, and we're plainly there and meant to be there in a secure standing. We're even there despite being in perishing bodies on a corruptible earth full of the sorrows of body and soul, plus the agonies of seeing a world still torn apart by lost sons continuing to participate in the rebellion.

This means suffering, and I found right away when at peace with God, that suffering had not disappeared into a landscape of a trouble free life. All the troubles of body and soul were still there, but a new me, energized by the Spirit, trusted God's keeping and purpose in suffering. Whereas I cared nothing for endurance before, I saw that endurance is precious, and endurance carries with it waiting. Who wants to endure and wait? I didn't want to on an outer soul and body level, but my spirit now rejoiced in it. What was this strange miracle? It was the miracle of grace.

When we endure and wait, steadiness emerges, what Paul calls proven character, which is proven faith. We're not improving; we're settling into faith as a way of life. That means always receiving words from God and housing them within us, where like in a greenhouse, they grow and produce fruit later.

We saw in Romans 4 that manifestation eludes us, often for quite some time. With Abraham, the promise of a son appeared to conflict first with Sarah's barren condition, and then with the elements of time wearing their bodies down to a feeble state, with no strength to procreate. However, God intended all along for the birth of Isaac to be impossible to human efforts.

While we're waiting, we hope. The word hope means a kind of faith whereby we see fully in the Spirit what is real, but the outer manifestation is on the way and not yet seen,

making us look like fools in a way. We hope for what we don't see outwardly manifested yet. That is normal God-level living. What gets us through is the love of God poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. This is our supreme gift, the Spirit of God and the love of God poured out in us.

I see that immediately upon saying this, Paul brings up the nature of God that He did not die for someone in any way worthy of Christ's sacrifice, but rather, He justified by Christ's blood those who were most undeserving. Works have no place in grace, and so Paul no sooner illuminates us on the thrill of God's love and Spirit in us, than He shows how it is that we enter into that same love and forgiveness for others, not through a process we work but by His own indwelling in us and leading us to partake of His nature, as Peter puts it in his second epistle.

Paul says that we have been saved from the wrath of God. I used to see this as anger in God like the anger I lived from, a harsh resentment and ill will towards others because of their sins, never mind my own. Nothing could be more wrong. God's wrath is not a churning seething ball of hatred in God, but the results activated in us when we resist His grace. For example, think of the sun. When rightly related to it, we experience light and blessing, goodness and warmth, with results we like. When wrongly related to it, we get horribly burned. In the same way, God is ever constant, and in our proper created orbit of cohabiting with Him, we enjoy eternal bliss. Out of orbit, we experience a condition never intended for us. Those who choose to perish eternally do not need to do so.

Seeing this means the joy of reconciliation, first with God, and then towards others. Reconciliation isn't a working out of some kind of human bargaining whereby we establish flesh treaties with others. Reconciliation means cohabiting in God's love and Spirit, and as one by one, humans see that, rebellion against God and his family melts into the body life God has for us.

Where did things go wrong though? Paul will now take us back to the origins of why we fell into wrath in the first place. Next time, Adam's fall will be in view, followed in later installments about how deeply the Cross worked to restore us.

Romans 5 (cont.): "A Tale of Two Adams"

One could drill a hole to the center of the earth, or deeper, by reading Romans 5. Just when the reader sees our translation out of guilt into justification and the unfolding meaning of life in suffering, endurance, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, a shift occurs where Paul takes up the roots of sin versus the roots of righteousness. Everything proceeds from its root; all of nature tells us that.

My first training with this came in my 20s when I wore out a paperback copy of Watchman Nee's *The Normal Christian Life*. As you know, with books we love and read endlessly, the glue in the binding dries, pages separate and fall out, it takes tape to hold the binding, and we use a rubber band finally to keep the book from scattering onto the

floor. The book represented what we all know when the Spirit of a thing grabs us long before we see. We sense availability, we intensely desire, we don't let go, and finally, the jewels of another's life get worn on our everyday garb.

When I read this classic, I learned that when Adam sinned, everyone born from Adam sinned. Yes, the whole race of Adam, excluding none, sinned and fell at the same time in the same deed. It doesn't seem fair that a baby born in 1949, namely me, should be born already having sinned. Watchman told me convincingly that this is exactly what Paul means in Romans 5, and if one is scripture minded, the facts stand as they are.

Where is Eve in this? She fell first. I learned, though, that our destiny comes from the father, and so any born from Adam partake of him in all that he was and did. My mother-in-law, Mimi, always resonated with this same truth and lit up when Romans 5 came up. A lover of Romans, Dan Stone always said, "Romans 1-4 talks about sins, plural; Romans 5-7 talks about sin, singular." I noticed the correlation with what I had previously learned, which was this: unless the producer is eliminated, the products will keep on coming. Thus, sins will keep on coming unless the producer is knocked out of business.

This explains why Paul takes up Adam's sin in the shift we find in the middle of Chapter five. Paul knows that without further insight, we will just go on as if we're forgiven sinners, but sinners nonetheless who sin sin sin, but at least are forgiven. This is great, but as Dan would say, it leaves us without an answer for the present: the future isn't here yet, and as sinners, we can only hurry up to get the present moment into the past so it can be forgiven.

Romans 5 digs into the producer level regarding sin. It takes the matter of sin out of the individual acts of Adam's descendants and takes it back to a root; when Adam fell, sin entered into him and therefore also death. The text says that everyone born of Adam dies because of Adam.

Paul gives an easy proof for this. He says that death was the result for only one specific sin, that of Adam in eating from the tree. No other sin by any other person carried that sentence. The law hadn't been given yet, and so no other code of law and penalties existed until God gave the law to Moses. So there was this big gap between Adam and Moses during which everyone died. Paul says, "See, I'm telling you, everyone died for only one reason, that of Adam's sin, which everyone sinned when he fell."

I like lining people up along a wall to illustrate this. Let's say that I have a line of ten people along a wall, and the first one is Adam. He is the only one to violate a law carrying the sentence of death, so he of course dies. But then, no new law gets introduced in the time period between person number one and person number ten, yet they all will die. The reason can only be Adam. Through him, in came sin, death, and condemnation.

Having established this, Paul gives one of the most intricately structured commentaries of any kind I've ever read, and the last half of Romans 5 is a challenge to read, but one thing is clear: overwhelmingly, God changed our outcomes through Christ "much more" than what impacted us through sin. There is no comparison, Paul says, when we look at what we gain by getting birthed into the Last Adam. Yes, Christ is the replacement Adam, such that as devastating as the losses were by being born into Adam the first, incredibly more glorious and not to be compared, are the benefits of being born into Adam the last. These benefits include righteousness, life, and no condemnation.

Paul will very soon tell how this happened. Before he does, though, he makes a clear statement of what one can expect from the law. You see, we start out blinded by sin and sin's daddy, Satan, thinking that God gave the law for us to keep. Nay, God never ever thought that we could or would keep the law. Whereas we thought we could scale our way up to righteousness by law keeping, God forever knew that He meant the law only as a tool to expose our inability to keep the law.

God knew that we had to drown first in our own futility of trying to do the impossible before we would be open to consider that He meant all along a full and thorough exposure of our helpless bondage to sin apart from His saving life in us. Collecting Paul's thoughts from all his letters, we frankly see that Satan and sin owned us before we were saved, and they continue manipulating even God's children until they see that God made us dead to sin in Christ. But we're not quite to that discussion yet.

But clearly, Paul says that the law was given that sin would abound. Why, ho, that sounds awful. God knew, though, that the sin was already there, just not evident to us, and so as Watchman Nee puts it, God gave the law as a broom to stir up the dirt already there. The broom doesn't create the dirt; it gets it airborne and visible to the ones who need to see it.

With that, we're ready for how God knocked out the producer of sin in us so that we can live freely and as those dead to sin, for the scripture says the believer is dead to sin.

Romans 6: "How We Died to Sin"

This has to be one of the most incomprehensible Chapters in the Bible, yet it proves to be so simple: all we have to do is throw out time and space and be willing to die a death we would never have thought of on our own. I remember sitting on the steps in front of one of the beautiful, old buildings on campus when I was eighteen. Reading Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20, I didn't see how it could be possible that I was crucified with Christ since He lived 2000 years before I did. It's comical how at an institution of higher learning, one might totally miss higher knowledge. In higher knowledge, a person is not just a person in an independent sense. In other words, it's not correct to say, "I'm just little old me." Paul has already shown us in Romans 5 that when Adam sinned, we sinned because we were in Adam when he sinned. Likewise, Paul will now show that since to be a Christian means to be in Christ, we died when Christ died. This is strange territory but true.

First though, Paul has to clear up a possible misunderstanding on the part of his readers left over from his statement that the law came to make the transgression abound. That could sound like it's time to have a sin circus, a revelry of rebellion. No, Paul isn't sounding the trumpet for that; he says that we are not to continue in sin. The reason isn't so much that sin is evil, though it is, but that we died to sin. Now that has to strike consternation and incredulity in many. It did me for a long time because I interpreted "dead to sin" to mean that sin is now an impossibility, which I knew couldn't be since I found it so easy to sin. Also, since I felt like sinning all the time and knew I was constantly tempted to sin, I reasoned therefore that I could not really be dead to sin, yet here the scripture plainly says that a Christian is dead to sin. I knew that the Bible is true, but I mouthed that it is not true, or at least not true for me.

Interestingly, Paul does not identify sin as a person like he does in Ephesians 2 or in 2 Timothy 2, or as Jesus does in John 8. I have pondered that many times, but then Paul tells the Romans later in this Chapter that he is very limited in how he can address them because they see things so much from a merely human perspective. That's the thing about Paul; he will adapt to his audience if needed and not worry that he isn't filling in every detail. Therefore, to argue Paul's theology from only one passage or one letter misses his wisdom in giving the needed word for an audience of the moment.

Clearly, though, Paul writes of sin in Romans 6 with powerful force, not as simply deeds that we have power to commit as extensions of our own lusts, but as an enslaving entity with all the brute force that the Romans would be familiar with as violent conquerors, whose emperors and generals took captive whole populations and subjected them to whatever whim they desired. The point Paul establishes regarding sin is this: sin is the master of every unbeliever, and the slave does exactly as the master says. The conclusion of the Chapter puts it well by saying that the wages of sin is death. All the wages of sin get summed up there, and what an irony to use the word wages, for who thinks of paying wages to a slave, though wages are affixed in the fallen consciousness as a way of life in that apart from grace we always and only think in terms of what we independently do and what we deserve for what we do.

So there it is; we were slaves of sin in our former condition, which Paul calls here the old man or the old self. What does God propose for the old man? He knows that no reform is possible and that the old man must die, so I like to illustrate Paul's teaching here by saying that God unzipped Jesus on the Cross and put me into Him. Here we see also that Paul uses the term baptism to describe the fact that I was put into Christ's death, His burial, and His resurrection. I do what the one I'm in does. I die, I am buried, I am raised.

The result is that sin is no longer my master; I have a new master, namely righteousness. Here again Paul does not say outright that righteousness is a person, but to say that I am baptized into Christ makes it pretty plain for the reader not shackled by the human limitations Paul says that his audience is constrained by. The more I read Paul, the more I

see that he says so much between the lines that the Holy Spirit makes obvious to us when we connect the dots that Paul does give us.

So now I'm a new man with a new master. Notice that slavery does not disappear; we simply gain the best of all masters, the Lord Himself, who served us by dying for us and as us. I like to say that when we accept this slavery and don't chafe at it, we enter into what Jesus told His disciples, that they were His friends. Underneath, when we know our utter slavery, we are liberated into the realm of friendship. Obedience of faith comes first, however, in our training days.

What does the new man do? We are always presenting our members to a master, so the idea is that we present our members as instruments of righteousness. This could seem cumbersome and laborious, but the leap to faith is simple, regardless of conflicting feelings or thoughts. Paul doesn't even bother to elaborate on the fact that one might not feel like presenting his members for holy use. He doesn't even make that an obstacle; he simply says that is what a new man does. I know I spend years fussing and bothering over how I felt about this rather than just easing into the obedience of faith.

Paul does say that his readers are bound up in their human way of looking at things, and so he is limited in how explicit he can be, but his statement does imply that they are not to see their humanity as an impediment to living out a life where righteousness reigns in their members instead of sin. One doesn't have to make this hard or an ordeal, and as a reminder, Paul says in so many words, "What did sin ever do for you anyway; it always led to death."

The main point here is that in Christ, we did die to sin and do not have to serve it in any way. This includes the consciousness of sin. Why should I live with the consciousness of sin as if I'm always tainted, or dirty, or a creature who constantly is defiled? The devil can thrash around in the outer man on a temptation level, but by faith my members obey my master.

Instead of a consciousness of sin, I can live in the consciousness of the new man who with ease is flinging his members out there for holy use all the time, without fear. That's the life of a son, and that's the life Paul is laying the groundwork in this part of Romans. See you next time for what else we died to. Hmm...what could that be?

Romans 7: "Bye Bye Deception"

No sooner does Paul wrap up his proofs that we're dead to sin than he says we're also dead to law. It would seem that being dead to sin is enough, and it is if one recognizes sin's chief trick. Sin can only operate by law, for law presupposes a self to keep the law, and the question is then, who is that self? We start out thinking, "I must be that self to keep the law." This is incorrect; God created humans as vessels to contain and express the life of His Spirit, not as separate selves empowered to keep the law. However, the fall

obscured this fact, i.e. blinded humanity to its slavery to sin, which keeps sin going through one deception: there's a separate human self that can and should keep the law.

As long as this deception keeps a person in blindness, the struggling person will try and fail repeatedly while continuing to make resolutions and forge ahead with more energetic efforts to obey. Of course the lazy person will reinterpret the standard of the law and lower its expectation so that flesh can keep it. The supposed compassionate person will say that failing is normal, and God only wants to see that we mean to keep trying and improving. However, the person set on holiness will stay with the law as God means it and will do the battle to the ugly end (ugly only to flesh, beautiful to spirit).

Paul says that the law has us in its grip unless we die, and die we did in Christ, as we have already seen in Romans 6. That death was a death to sin and all that causes sin to tick. Sin ticks by tricking people into thinking that God means us to try to keep the law ourselves. The honest person finally has to admit, however, that this doesn't work, and in fact, no matter how many times one tries, the result is always the same, such that Paul calls it a principle that when he would do good, evil is present with him.

He also had to go through a process of elimination to discover the problem. At first it was tempting to blame the law, but the law is holy and good. Well, maybe the problem is the human self, but that isn't correct; God made the human self, and to be human is not a defective thing. Bam! The revelation comes that the problem isn't me, but sin in me.

Now the hope of deliverance is at hand. If the problem isn't the law and isn't the human self, then the problem is sin and only sin. Get sin out of the self, and the answer is complete. It won't work to try to rid the self of sin; only God can do that, and he did it by unzipping Jesus on the Cross and putting me into Him, so that I was crucified with Christ. That cut me off forever from sin. The logic from there is simple: sin is perpetrated by the spirit of sin, who is a person. Paul leaves the Romans to do the math since they are the premier engineers in their world.

Getting to deliverance happens when one concludes, as Paul did, that no hope exists for changing or improving the self. Also, he does not settle for the idea that we have two natures as a Christian, flesh and spirit. Some interpret Paul to mean in this Chapter that his great discovery was that he had two natures and that his flesh would always sin, but his spirit would never agree with it. That's not deliverance!

This whole passage is Paul's autobiography of how he got delivered, not how he settled for serving sin with his flesh while serving God with his spirit. What he means is that he finally saw that when he walked as if he were just a flesh person, he would serve the law of sin. He also saw that he could not deliver himself from sin's power. Christ did that in His body death. Paul's utter inability drove him to say, "Who will deliver me?" Deliverance means that the power of sin is broken and does not continue to manifest. You might think that sounds impossible, but it's not hard for God not to sin, and when we live by His Spirit, we do not sin.

The deliverance Paul found was life in the Spirit. God keeps us by His Spirit. On our own, we would sin, but kept by His Spirit we do not sin, and in fact, we bear the fruit of the Spirit and live the abundant life.

Paul didn't remain in bondage all his days and write this Chapter to give consolation to flesh level living. When he saw life in the Spirit, he zoomed on into the indescribably holy life. There is now no more condemnation. That's worth looking into more next time.

Romans 7 (cont.): "The Hello Chapter"

Deliverance is the answer for chronic, unconquered sin, sin that whips a person repeatedly until the cry, "Who will deliver me?" gets uttered with such force and certainty that the answer carries equal force and certainty. One sin becomes the sum of all sins, and for Paul it was covetousness. He doesn't say what he coveted, and that is wise because no one can relegate Paul's specific form as not applicable, as if to say, "Well Paul was beset with such and such, but I'm not tempted in that direction."

Something a man wants but can't have bores the deepest, persistent hole in him, and he knows that he cannot have it, yet he lusts for it and cannot stop, making him a slave still of that forbidden thing. His craving drives him crazy, and he tries every way to withstand temptation but fails every time, leading him to say, "Wretched man that I am!" As long as he thinks he has power or should have power to rise above it, he will fall yet again. Not until he discovers the keeping of the Lord will peace come in his members.

The doorway through is the discovery of powerlessness. A man has everything but power. Power he does not have over sin, or himself for that matter, and the shock is the lightning bolt breaking through formerly resistant defenses, that God did not create us to have power but to relax as vessels containing power.

Paul sees now that he is a vessel, and that sin is the problem not the man. Now the man who chooses sin when he doesn't have to, that is a problem, but in the time of ignorance, the man still sins because he is deceived, and this necessitates the revelation process showing that an intruder has maintained control in the man who loves God. The intruder does this by concealing the fact that self-effort is the devil's nature and seduction.

Paul tells us that flesh left to itself will always serve sin, but that his mind serves the law of God. How did he line his body up with his spirit? Some think that he didn't, that he simply accepted that he had two natures and accepted that as a way of life one endures until heaven. Frankly, this just doesn't make sense given the passion of his claim of deliverance and his outpouring that there is now therefore no condemnation. What is that about? OK, so let's say that I have two natures as some think. The idea then would be that I don't take condemnation for my old nature, but this isn't the way the two nature theory works out in practice. Christians who believe in that old nature take a lot of condemnation for it.

The passage, however, does not teach two natures, nor does it teach a nature at all. It teaches that a human being is a vessel to contain a nature, and that the human is not himself either of these natures, but is rather the expresser of one or the other. Since Paul here says that with his mind he serves the law of God, we should give him the benefit of the doubt that he is genuine here and not someone who is merely religious but has no love for God. No, this man has suffered precisely because he does love God but can't figure out how to serve Him. Now he knows how to!

He knows that he is a vessel, an instrument as he put it in Romans 6, and that he serves a master; and he sees how that master works. That master has a Spirit called the Holy Spirit, and Paul has discovered that God doesn't condemn humans for not being able to do what only God can do. Do you get it? Why would God condemn you for not doing what only God can do?

So now we have two reasons why God doesn't condemn. First, it's simply not His nature, and second, He wouldn't be unjust to condemn someone for not being able to do the impossible, namely what only God can do.

The deliverance, however, goes deeper in that life is lived by the Spirit, not merely human means. To know that I can never humanly do good or avoid evil is important, but life is actually the Spirit of God, and so Paul goes on to say that the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. This is the miracle life, where we see that we do not live as we formerly did and the reason is that we are carried along in the Spirit of God, living a supernatural life.

How well does this work? It works all the time if you want it to. If you don't wish to be kept all the time, you can have your slice of sin, but if you're done with that and see where that road always leads, then the endless righteous life is yours to enjoy every moment. Oh, yes yes, you can still sin. God bless you; you can still sin if that's your thing, and certainly every craving imaginable is always there to convince you that you really want it. To think that the devil says, "Oh, well now you're delivered, so I'll go take a nap" is ridiculous; to think the body and emotions don't beg for yielding to their urges is not a sage outlook either.

The entirely great news is that we're not condemned for what the devil tempts us to or for what our bodies crave. Not only that, we don't have to give in to either—ever! Can you? Oh yes yes; I'll not pretend that you don't have freedom to sin. But this is the big boy part of Romans where we grow up and stop thinking like children who still need tutors and governors.

This is the part of Romans where we know the Spirit, and we know that we know the Spirit because we have the witness. If you don't have the witness, hang on, and you will. Say that you have it, and God will arrange your special showing. Just don't run out of the theater before the feature starts. Faith stays in its seat until the projector lights up.

So where are we? We're through the door into victory over those old sin habits and the fear that we will never get out of them. We're into a new way of living with our minds set on the Spirit, who then quickens these dead, mortal bodies. Though mortal and dead, they become electrified and dangerous to the devil. He hates a winner, and that is who the Romans 8 man is. Congratulations on graduating into full son-ship.

More details will follow on that.

Romans 8: "Sons of God"

Paul coins two important terms in Romans 8:8-9: "in the flesh" and "in the Spirit." The former designates a non-Christian—a person in whom the Spirit does not dwell; the latter means someone who, by receiving Christ, now lives as the temple of the Holy Spirit, as Paul puts it in 1 Cor. 6:19. Paul doesn't elaborate like he does in Ephesians to say that the Satanic spirit indwells the non-Christian (Eph. 2:2).

His point here in Romans is that temptations for believers relate to flesh-spirit conflicts. Jesus himself demonstrated this when the devil tempted him concerning food, impressing others, and power to rule. Likewise for us, great tensions of temptation come to us now that we have Christ's indwelling in a mortal body. This poses an interesting tension—eternal life in a body that is dead because of sin (Rom. 8:10).

When we walk in faith, having the same afflictions as others, yet praising the Lord, we demonstrate that joy does not consist in the physical. Romans Chapter 8 parallels 2 Corinthians 4 where Paul chronicles many of his sufferings to make the point that we bear about the dying of the Lord Jesus in our bodies in order that they might express the life of Jesus for others. The idea is the same here. Without death and resurrection in us, the life of Christ cannot go forth to others.

In one sense, Jesus can never die again, "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more" (Rom. 6:9); but in another sense, as the body of Christ, the church expresses the ongoing death of Christ for others until the last trumpet sounds and physical death gives way to the bodily resurrection.

The death of Jesus through His church does not mean further atonement for sin; the whole of the atonement for sin had to find completion through the one-time shedding of Christ's perfect blood. However, Christ's dying through His church continues God's expression of love as we lay down the prerogatives of the flesh so that the Spirit might be formed in others. Therefore, Paul underscores that Christ indeed lives in bodies dead because of sin, but not bodies designated to *continue* to sin: "The Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10-13).

But why does Paul say that the body is dead because of sin? He does not call the body sinful; elsewhere he calls it "our earthly house of this tabernacle" and says, "in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2

Cor. 5:1-2). Speaking of the future resurrection he says that God “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). That word *vile* does not imply something to despise, for the NAS translates *vile body* (KJV) as *the body of our humble estate*. Today we often think of *vile* as meaning morally debased or filthy; but the King James English, which dates from the 1600’s, draws on a meaning for *vile* seldom used today: “of little value or account.”[\[1\]](#)”

The “body of our humble estate” or “vile body,” therefore, describes our present earthly bodies as perishable and not comparable in glory to the future, spiritual body of the resurrection. Speaking of the present body, Paul says, “It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:43-44). The humble state and vile aspect of the present body does not make it unimportant; it makes it transitory—passing away—and not the investment for the future.

Since our present bodies serve as the temple of the Holy Spirit, we give them responsible nurture and care and treat them as fitting instruments for God’s grace to flow through to the world. As we maintain our cars and our houses, we all the more maintain our bodies and do not submit them to Satan’s self-indulgent and destructive practices. But we expect our bodies to eventually perish, except for the generation translated at Christ’s bodily return.

In the mean time we live from the eternal life already indwelling us in our spirits where, joined to His spirit as one, we enjoy our assurance that the real “I” never dies; the body just falls away at physical death. Our high calling now means that we “through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body” or as the NAS renders Romans 8:13, we “are putting to death the deeds of the body.”

Obviously we do not attempt to shut down all functions of the body and try to make the body not exist (the taste not, touch not mentality of Col. 2:21). We do, however, say “No” to urgings of the body that do not harmonize with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Our command center is the Spirit, not the body. Therefore, Paul says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14).

Satan likes to create doubt about our son-ship and send shivers of fear to trouble our assurance. He sends waves of condemnation concerning every thought and feeling, trying to convince us that our flesh impulses mean that flesh dominates us rather than Spirit.

Anticipating this, Paul comforts us by affirming our adoption by the Spirit: the fact that we cry, “Abba Father” witnesses to our adoption. Adoption here does not imply the modern Western concept of taking into one’s family a child not born of the adopting family. For one thing, we *are* born of God; that’s what the new birth is, being born “of God” (John 1:13). I call that being in the family by birth.

The usual translation as *adoption* is an effort to translate the Greek *huiiothesia*, which lexicographers interpret as a compound made up from two words, one for son, and one for placement. The idea is son-placement. Since we see obviously from the context of Romans 8 that Paul is building his fullest and most complete picture of a son of God—an heir—we can easily see that the point is a rising family of mature sons who know their place as heirs in the family of God and restore the dominion lost in the fall of man, whom God created to exercise dominion over the earth.

The beginning of this is the confidence we gain when the Spirit Himself witnesses to our Spirits that we belong to Him (Rom. 8:16). Satan tries to lead us into the lie that our bodies still belong to the powers of darkness. But the Holy Spirit all the more assures us that the bodily lusts of temptation do not indicate sin, but rather sin put to death as we use those lusts as springboards to faith and walk on in the freedom and confidence of Christ's Spirit in us, no matter what life brings. This is the son that Paul is talking about in Romans 8!

[1] (*The Random House Collegiate Dictionary* page 1467).

Romans 8 (cont.): “The Glory Chapter”

As soon as Paul mentions son-ship, he brings up suffering, saying that the heirs suffer since that is the means of glorification. This earth does not resemble the earth that Adam fell from, and its misery from nature opposing us—whether from animals, weather, or cataclysms—has continued from Genesis onward. Nothing will reverse that until the sons of God have their hope fulfilled.

Hope is a form of faith whereby we see now only in Spirit that which will manifest on a body level later. Apart from hope, we would be left in futility, thinking nothing will ever change and be transformed. Scripture says there will come a time of transformation when the outer earth and heavens will mirror the new creation already present on the earth in those in whom Christ lives. In the meantime, we get to experience two of God's favorite qualities: waiting and endurance. These come from the Holy Spirit and not us, and we walk in them by faith.

Not only do we not see the outer earth renovated yet, living in mortal bodies on an earth still smitten with sin's opposition to man, we often see more needs than we know how to respond to, and we see hurts deeper and more painful than any rational answer can mitigate, so what remedy assists us in the face of constant overwhelming grief in the world?

Thankfully, it doesn't hinder that we don't even know how to pray. “The Spirit helps us in our weakness” and “intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (8:26 RSV). If we tried to mentally analyze the needs around us and calculate how to pray, we would be

swamped and discouraged in a short time. God knows this, and He tells us that it is perfectly acceptable to be weak, for He sighs in us in a way too deep for words, and His own Spirit reads the code.

Troubles are so great and full of misery that all we can know at times is that God is working everything for the good for us that love the Lord. We don't have to understand; we only need to believe, and understanding may or may not fall into place, but it doesn't matter. The point is that God completes what He begins in a son. Jesus, Himself, is the firstborn son, and all sons follow His same path, with our justification leading to glorification through suffering. This is not only for ourselves, any more than Christ's glorification was just for Himself. We are eternally for others; love is that way.

Love isn't always understood by others. We can expect to face opposition, whereby opponents thrust accusation and condemnation at us repeatedly. This is harsh and can make us examine if perhaps we are too loose with our freedom. However, we find that we are not; rather, at first, this is good occasion to refuse the scorching blame directed to us and to continue standing in our all out liberty, with even more glorification and clarification of how wonderful that liberty is. This is not to spite others, but opposites act off each other, and refusal to capitulate to law only fuels luminously the Spirit of grace.

Accusers love to suggest that tribulations prove that God does not favor us, and that our faith is a mock and travesty. However, again, the scripture here affirms that absolutely nothing anywhere, any place, of any kind, can separate us from the fixed and constant love of God in Christ Jesus. Paul even quotes from Psalm 44, a grim Psalm where the Psalmist cries out in suffering that the nation was being killed like sheep to be slaughtered, yet it was not because of sin. Really, every believer lives the life of Job some time in some way, finding out that God is not the enemy.

In everything, "we are more than conquerors." This is surely not on a feeling level. We feel what we feel, but spirit runs deeper. I can't begin to describe Paul's sublime poetry here and will not try. This is a place to say, "You just have to read this passage, really all of Romans 8 and experience it; it's far beyond analysis of the concepts." I will say that the conquering place is by faith alone when nothing appears that way. In fact, that outlook appears ridiculous and delusional. But then, remember that when Paul gave his testimony in Acts to King Agrippa, the king thought Paul had lost his mind.

Well, on one sense, he had, but how sweet that he got another mind, the mind of Christ.

Romans 9: "The Most Famous Election in History, Yours"

Romans 9 brings up many conundrums, and how well I remember my systematic theology studies and the many earnest schemata on the doctrine of election, along with attempts to reconcile them with freedom. I'm already tired just thinking about how tired that made me, and surely one can know the sovereignty of God without undue intricacies.

Let me address freedom for a moment. Freedom is not a quality apart from God that He gives us whereby we make choices; freedom, rather, is the foundation of God's being, out of which God operates, beginning in the free sea of nothingness and proceeding to His eternal choice to be for others, which is why there is a Cross in the heart of God. Therefore, when God gives us freedom, He cannot give it apart from Himself, for all He can give is Himself, making even freedom a process in God alone, into which we enter and in which we decide whether to unite with the Cross in His heart or to shrink back from the Cross in His heart into a potentiality of misused freedom that God Himself eternally never enters into.

Having said that, let me get started with Romans 9 and leave my opening comments where they are, with the suggestion that any may see a fuller treatment of freedom in *The Cross in the Heart of God* by Alan Parker. Sylvia Pearce has made this available on her web site theliberatingsecret.org in the reading room there.

Paul no sooner in every way affirms with all passion that nothing can separate us from the love of God than he says that he is willing to be accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his countrymen, the Jews. Notice, though, that this is his voluntary depth of love and not a legalistic constraint. Further, Paul does not think this up himself, but it is the full formation of his own son-ship that leads him to say this, meaning that as a son of God in Christ, he has embraced the same Spirit that Jesus did in going to the Cross, in that Paul is willing for Christ to do in him, Paul, as Christ Himself did on our behalf.

Paul is not saying that Christ did not do in totality all required for our salvation. Nothing can add to the blood and body of Christ that saved us, and no other can accomplish that for us. Paul is not suggesting differently; he is mirroring what he says in Colossians where he makes it plain that once someone knows Christ living within, the full measure of that comes out as passion to be used up in an intercessory way whereby Christ continues laying down His life in the world for others, but now He does it by those in whom He is formed in son-ship.

Also, in case readers might think that Paul's passion for the Gentiles sprang out of disillusionment with the Jews, he tells us how deep and permanently his love in Christ runs for the Jews. His love is no less, no matter how greatly his love for the Gentiles grows. Plainly, though, not many Jews at that time received the Gospel. Numerically, the number of converts from Judaism to Christianity was only a remnant, but this did not indicate failure on the part of the Gospel.

Paul states this in a way similar to his approach in Romans 1 and 2 where he says, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly" (2:29 RSV). Fleshly, external identity does not constitute one's identity; faith constitutes one's identity. Further, works, either good or evil, have nothing to do with God's choice since God's word to Sarah, and then later to Rebecca, had to do with supernatural birthing, not natural birthing. The argument here is that a son of God, no matter who or when, is a true son by miraculous conception in the Spirit and not merely externally by race.

The outcry of the fleshly mind against this concerns a supposed desire for the preservation of justice. If our good or bad actions do not serve as the defining weights on the scales of justice, then how can life make sense? Wouldn't the universe be capricious and random? No, because the new birth must be a birth that doesn't hinge on anything about the human but hinges only on God's mercy. Why God created those whom He knew would reject Him is His business, and Paul says here that God did this in order to birth offspring who are offspring only by His mercy. He called the Jews by mercy, and He now also calls the Gentiles by mercy.

A huge key to understanding Paul's thought here depends on seeing that he writes this Chapter not as an exercise in systematic theology, but as a passionate apologetic for his ministry to the Gentiles. You see, he tells us about Sarah, and Isaac, and Rebecca, and Jacob, in order to get to a huge point: the GENTILES! He is showing that God all along intended to open the door to those not apparently called, just as He has always, even with the patriarchs, called those apparently not called by birth order, rank, office, power, etc.

Clearly in the Old Testament, the Jews were called, and the Gentiles were not called. Paul affirms this in Ephesians Chapters 3 and 4, and he says it was a mystery hidden that the Gentiles would be invited into the family of faith and seen as the elect, and Paul cites Old Testament scriptures down the stretch in Romans 9 to make this very point—that scripture all along indicated really, between the lines, that the nations of the world would be invited into the elect family.

This does not mean that the Jewish nation is now excluded; it means that the non Jewish nations are included, and that Christ fully forms Himself in anyone who receives Him and presses on into son-ship. The Bible does not recognize partial versions of salvation wherein a believer settles merely for going to heaven some day. The all out drive in scripture is for fully developed sons who operate the Father's business of restoration and dominion in the world.

My point in all of this is to say what Paul's point is in all of this. He is not expostulating on ideas about election that have to do with calling or not calling individuals according to an abstract plan. God is calling real people to really know Him and be known as sons, to whom He according to mercy establishes them as His friends and heirs. He does this according to faith, and in Paul's day, God opened up this calling to anyone in the whole world who would like to be included. The means is miraculous birthing in the Spirit into the body of Christ and is negotiated by faith alone.

This is what Romans 9 is about.

Romans 10: "Whosoever Will"

Paul thought a lot about Jews and Gentiles. We might not think so much about them, but if we have a world view, we do think about cultures and nations, and the Bible is not a provincial book but a universal book in that God cares for all of creation. When He talked

to Jonah at the end of the book of Jonah, He even mentioned “much cattle” (4:11 RSV). The idea that God only concerns Himself with the well being of a remnant misses the agony of God over everything and everyone He has created, whether they believe or not.

Love cannot harden itself; it must suffer, and this is the distinctive of the Bible, that God cannot avoid suffering Himself and does not even choose to do so, but reaches out His hand to save all who will believe. It doesn't appear that way in the Old Covenant, but in His wisdom God knew the very best way to proceed, and human reasoning can question it, but Wisdom will be justified by all her children in the end. And so the fact that God's salvation began with the various eras in Genesis and then proceeded to the Old Covenant under Moses is something I bow to and not something I examine to see if it is fitting.

Now to Romans 10, Paul has agonized over his countrymen, stood fast with God's open door to the Gentiles, and now comes back to his fellow Jews to comment. It would be good to add that to a Jew, there existed only two types of people: Jews and those who were not Jews. This was an either/or, and one was a Jew or a Gentile, and in our age of diversity awareness, it can seem strange that to Jews, all the world was an “us or them” world of good guys and bad guys, depending simply on whether one's flesh traced back to the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now comes the scary part: vast numbers of people can have a “zeal for God” that is “not enlightened” (10:2). This means that zeal can be ignorant, and the worst ignorance is zeal for God that comes from living under law, whereby the worshiper measures righteousness by God's standard, but does not measure it by His ultimate standard, which looks at the doer and not the standard itself. As a number of my old mentors often said, “It's not the what but the who.”

I didn't understand this for years, and it was costly ignorance, but thankfully it was ignorance that wore me down and led to Christ's righteousness and not my own. Even when I knew it in my head for a long time, it hadn't settled in as spirit knowing, and it takes a shattering to come to that, but such is good.

Going through this process of getting to the end of self righteousness is painful not only to the one going through it but to the grace people around because the person under law goes through upheavals that buffet the grace onlooker or preacher. In Paul's case, he often had angry people trying to kill him, and the persecutors were stirred by his own countrymen. Yet he never wavered from saying, “my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may saved.” He did not wish their damnation but their salvation.

He wished them to see that every single thing that they thought needed law in order to attain a resolution, finds its completion in Christ. All of the law is fulfilled in Christ because Christ is the very nature of love and goodness behind the law. To have Christ is to never have need for a law to bring flesh into compliance. The nature of Christ drives a Christian finally to see this.

When we don't see this, the issues of life look unduly complicated, when in fact, they are so simple that love looks too easy. Moses told the people that their problem was that they kept thinking that someone needed to go up to heaven or beyond the sea to bring them God's answer for their need (Deut: 30:11-14). The answer, however, at every stage of revelation has always been near and "on the lip and in the heart" needing only for faith to pull its trigger to bring life. The devil's lie is that the answer is far away; God's answer has always been near. That answer may not be the full revelation of the mystery, but even nature has always declared the glory of God as Paul says in Romans 1 and says again here in Chapter 10.

This does not mean that no urgency exists to extend the full Gospel to everyone everywhere. That urgency pours throughout Paul's writings, and he cannot rest while there are people who do not know a living savior that they can call upon themselves. Paul's poetry is sublime here in the way he asks how they can call on one "in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?" (10:14-15).

Poetry does not mean sentimental disconnectedness from reality; poetry is born from suffering and the faith that grows out of suffering. The suffering that Paul concludes with in this Chapter is the grief of seeing great numbers of those for whom the Gospel is the fulfillment of their rich tradition, refuse the culmination in Christ of all that their history led up to. Yet this is not new, and Paul recognized this in the whole prophetic tradition in which it was commonplace for the elect nation to turn away.

This discourages all but the stalwart in faith. Just as Abraham could have given up on God's promise because of the long wait, the barrenness of Sarah, and the misunderstanding about Ishmael, Paul could have given up on the promise of a new creation that fulfills God's full elective purposes for heirs in Christ to rule the world.

God used the unbelief of His people to reach out to those "who did not seek me" and His family of sons includes any who believe. How glorious! How thankful I am to be included in that family, and once I truly saw that, I did not turn away because of the disturbing number of those who don't believe.

In 1994, living in a halfway house where so few recovered and so many took their checks and spent them on useless items within a few days, the house parent said to me one day, "Don't get your hopes up for recovering. One in a hundred really recovers."

I said, "I'll be that one!" By this, I did not mean to be arrogant or to wish that others be the ones not to believe. The door is open to all. I had simply come to the place in life where I did not live by percentages but by faith. If anyone can believe, then I can and do believe. That is the message of Romans 10: no matter what others do, or what their background has been, we have been living in a new day since the Gospel's full manifestation and proclamation.

Anyone may believe and live an abundant life.

Romans 11: “The Promises to the Patriarchs”

One of history’s great sorrows is Israel’s national rejection of its messiah, Jesus Christ. How could a nation so gifted of the Lord reject the only prophet that ultimately matters? No pathos rings deeper than John’s “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (John 1:11). Because of this, many commentators focus on Paul’s declaration that “He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly but he is a Jew which is one inwardly” (Rom. 2:28-29). They interpret this as a reason to discard Israel as an elect nation of faith.

Doesn’t Paul also say in Ephesians that the Cross broke down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, namely the law, so that the two are one now. And doesn’t Paul write the Galatians that there is neither Jew nor Gentile. So what about Israel as a nation? What does it matter? The reason that it matters is that *our* intercessions today for impossible looking people and situations are no different in principle than Paul’s intercession for Israel. Fulfillment of an intercession is not based on whether others deserve restoration, it is not based on whether restoration appears likely, and it is not based on how much time has gone by without fulfillment

Paul could not let go of the blessings of God to Israel and cast them off with finality. He grieved so much over his unbelieving countrymen that he said that he would suffer separation from Christ to see them saved. This cannot mean every Jew or every generation of Jews, though God is not willing that any perish. The question is this: “Did God begin a work in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He intends to complete through His elect nation?” Will Israel at some point nationally accept Jesus as messiah?

Paul’s agony for Israel may seem remote to us today. As I said, some thinkers see Israel nationally as forfeit to any future domain because of her rejection of Jesus as messiah. But I find that difficult to reconcile with Paul’s intercession for his people because an intercessor always sees the completion of his calling, even if it’s initially the seeing of faith from afar, as Abraham saw the celestial city from afar.

The roots of Paul’s intercession go all the way back to Genesis and God’s promise, “The elder shall serve the younger.” Paul tells us that God made this choice before the twins were born and before they had done anything good or bad; so apart from works, God reversed the long-standing tradition of primogeniture, according to which the blessing and birthright went to the first born male. God foreknew that Jacob would be the man of faith, and He elected Jacob based on that. This has the ring of Romans 8: 29: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined.”

For Jacob, all his choices concerned the promises of God made to his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. Jacob consumed himself with these promises and how, since Esau

was the elder, these promises could come true. The time arrived when Jacob got the birthright with a pot of stew, and Rebekah later conceived the daring plot to secure Jacob the blessing. We can debate the conniving of mother and son, and I personally think that Jacob operated at root out of faith and his passion for God. But even if one does concede some working of the flesh, Jacob had his mind set on God's business of blessing the world through a nation out of the loins of the patriarchs.

God intended a nation of faith, but for the most part, only a remnant ever believed. Then as a nation, Israel rejected her messiah. What would happen then? By appearance Israel had failed as a nation, and the Gentiles had started coming into the kingdom in great numbers. As wonderful as that is in and of itself, Paul also addresses another point regarding the Gentiles' inclusion in the kingdom of God. This comes out in the last part of Romans 9 where Paul quotes the prophecy from Hosea, "I will call those who were not My people, My people" (9:25) and the prophecy from Isaiah, speaking of disobedient Israel, "It is the remnant that will be saved" (9:27). God gave the Gentiles the gift of righteousness, which they received by faith; and the work-hard, deserve-a-promotion Jews failed to receive the gift of righteousness because of their trying to do it by their own efforts.

This is classic Paul again. Under the theological complexities of Romans 9, here again is the theme of faith versus works in attaining righteousness. The application remains today in the religious world. Consider the regular churchgoer who has never committed any of the grosser sins and has worked hard to earn respect and influence. Yet the anointing of the Spirit is not there. Now consider the flagrant sinner who is the news of the "I would never do that" crowd. Then someone presents Christ to that person, and he or she lights up with forgiveness and God's righteousness by faith. Someone has just been promoted to the top who doesn't deserve it.

Israel fits in the same way, for God does not base election on our works, good or evil, but on foreknowledge that our day of faith is coming. So Paul's intercession for Israel has nothing to do with their present history as enemies of the gospel, but everything to do with God's promise. Underneath the difficulties of Romans 9, we end up with the simplicity of what Paul always says about the flesh and the Spirit—about the way of works versus the way of faith.

This is the glory that produces the agony of Paul's intercession for his countrymen, his fellow Israelites, and this leads to the issue of whether as a nation they will experience restoration through Christ as their messiah. Now we look again at Paul's heart for his countrymen. Paul celebrates God's mercies to the Gentiles and sees them also as what God means to finally provoke Israel to enough jealousy as a nation that she reclaim her election by God. For even though Israel is presently the enemy of the Gospel, she is still loved by God because of the patriarchs. Romans 11 says that God still loves the Jews as a nation because of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He still intends to bring into manifestation a nation of believing Israelites as the completion of His promises to the patriarchs.

Paul has already laid a foundation of believing the impossible with Abraham and Sarah. He has also laid a foundation that God's promises are not based on works but faith, so no amount of sin disqualifies a person or nation. The only disqualification is terminal unbelief. So the question is not the worthiness of Israel, but Paul's intercession for them. Did God give Paul an intercession for his nation, leading him to speak a word of faith about his nation?

It's hard to read Romans Chapters 9 through 11 and think that Paul writes only about a spiritual Israel now comprised of Jews and Gentiles. It's easier to read those Chapters and believe that Paul means that God will someday, because of election based on His love for the patriarchs, bring to completion a work in Israel such that the remnant will blossom into a believing nation.

Underneath the historical point lies the issue of the principles of intercession—the calling the things that be not as though they are and the willingness to go to hell for others. Paul says these things about his countrymen, but the point is also relevant to us in every word of faith that *we* speak and trust God to bring to completion. Consider the fact that words of faith spring out of the faith process built up through the first eight Chapters of Romans. In them Paul establishes justification by faith, death to sin through the body of Christ, death to law the same way, and on into walking in the Spirit as preparation for taking on the glory of suffering in Romans 8. So now Paul speaks his words of faith and shares his agony, and will we say that what he believed for will not happen?

Faith does lead to manifestation, for what is true in the Spirit does come to manifest itself. We may not always live to see the completion, but somebody will see it because we believe. Some may think that I write these things about Israel because I have a penchant for prophecy, but the contrary is true. I have never had the gift of understanding or discussing future events with much confidence. Therefore, Romans 9 through 11 for years always seemed to me a bit of a letdown after Romans 8. Why the big fuss over Israel that comes up?

The big fuss relates to specific words of faith that something will happen because God has spoken those words through us and made us intercessors as part of bringing about His plan. In Romans 9-11, if Paul is not interceding and laying the foundation of how to intercede for others, what is he writing about?

taken from Chapter 32 of my book "Did You Ever Think of This?"

Romans 12: "Living Sacrifices"

Romans 12 brings a sudden shift, yet Paul uses the word *therefore* to introduce it, so how interesting to find an eschatological discourse followed by practical admonitions with a consistency like Proverbs. Yet, as eschatological as we find Chapter 11, part of its argument is that just as Jewish disobedience brought consequences, Gentile disobedience

would do the same. Election does not exempt from corporate discipline, whether the scope nationally is Jew or Gentile.

Therefore, Paul proceeds in Chapter 12 to the kind of exhortations, which if heeded, will avert hardening that abandons faith. The tone for these exhortations is not dark and foreboding, serious as they are, for Paul appeals “by the mercies of God,” which puts the emphasis on God’s mercy and not our works.

According to God’s mercies, we see the appeal to “present” ourselves, and the word *present* here is the same word used in Romans 6, where Paul says to present ourselves as “those alive from the dead” and our members as “instruments of righteousness” (13,16,19 NASB). He’s not talking about presenting an old self but rather a resurrection self. This means seeing who we really are, new beings born of God.

Here in Chapter 12, the appeal deepens into the idea of our bodies as living sacrifices unto God. Sacrifice means voluntary accepting of physical and emotional distresses as part of being for others. In this section of Romans, Paul expands the presenting of ourselves beyond the consideration of our own standing, to our redemptive role in the lives of those in our sphere. Practically speaking then, one stops asking, “Why am I going through this?” as if everything is intended just to teach us another lesson. A new focus emerges in which one asks, “How can I see this as God’s plan for expending me for others?” No wonder Paul says that this takes renewing of the mind.

Renewing of the mind is not what most people think, however. The idea is not self-help altering of human reasoning, which will never be more than just that—human reasoning. The idea is supernatural, whereby transformation is accomplished by the Spirit of God, and we go along without resisting, and then as we do, find ourselves carried into the passion of the Spirit expressed as us.

At this point, Paul anticipates the self assessment process in his hearers and tells them a simple way to go about it. God has given each believer a “measure of faith,” and included in that is the Holy Spirit’s own witness of what is “sober judgment” as the KJV puts it, or “sound judgment” as the NASB puts it.

I would like to say that if a person walks day to day in the power of the Holy Spirit and knows victory over sin, then clarity about gifts will surface. After all, Paul assumes here that walking in righteousness has been established as described in Chapters 6-8, and the focus now is on service. Paul names various gifts, and I won’t reiterate them here except to say that Paul makes his familiar point that Christ’s body is one body made up of many members.

The next section of Chapter 12 brings up the idea of passion—not contrived passion, but passion that exudes from “What you take, takes you,” as my old mentor, Norman Grubb often said. I remember when I first launched out as a Bible teacher under his tutelage in

1981. One day at summer camp in Hixton, Wisconsin, it was my turn to give a lesson, and it was always hard to teach with Norman sitting right there in front.

Here I was 31 years old, and he was a renowned 86. After my talk, I heard him say in a low voice to someone, "Where's the fire?" It stung me, but though I felt hurt, I knew that he was right. What can one do? Well, Norman also often said not to try and get the witness of the Spirit but to just say in faith that one has the very thing one has driven a stake in faith for.

I would like to say that the witness came soon after that, but it didn't. In fact, I put Norman to sleep at times. Yet here in Romans 12:3, Paul says "Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit" (12:11 RSV). I like that. What you take will take you. So what is the idea in Paul, and in Norman's expression of that same truth? Don't give up on fire; it will set you ablaze. I found that true. I didn't like how it happened, but I learned that liking things doesn't matter.

The context here also includes encouragement to see through appearances, turn negatives into faith opportunities, hang with your prayers of faith, and keep helping others. This is especially an issue when others oppose us. We learn from this passage that God's way by us is others-oriented, whereby we aren't so much tools of justice as we are faith opportunists to seek the best for others. This does not mean that we seek injustice; it means that we seek what justice alone cannot reach: mercy and grace.

The Chapter ends with the famous saying that by reaching out to an enemy in need, we "heap burning coals upon his head." I think the idea here is the same as in Isaiah 6 where one of the seraphim took a burning coal from the altar and cleansed Isaiah, turning him into an intercessor. We want for others the same cleansing experience that we needed and experienced.

That is a service worthy of where Paul has taken us so far in this great epistle called Romans.

Romans 13: "Authorities"

Sooner or later questions about the government arise, which is normal since cultures operate by some kind of leadership. Also, history is full of governmental forms giving way to other forms according to changes in theory and military strategies. Until we know better, we think a change of government will usher in a better life. How can an external form bring internal peace? It can't.

With Paul, we know by now that he goes for the internal first and then expects outer changes to manifest from resurrection life within. Without that, external changes only perpetuate what is already at work in a person's heart. No wonder he brings up the government so late in Romans. It isn't the main point.

However, there is a vital point that Paul makes about government, which is this: authorities are instituted by God, and though we may not like them or agree with them, favor comes by seeing them as instituted by God and worthy of respect and assigned revenues. It goes without saying that citizens are not bound to carry out works of the flesh if such is demanded. Also, using disapproval of the government as a cloak for wrong doing isn't justified.

I find it interesting that Paul makes no pitch to get involved or not get involved with the government. Obviously, like anyone, he would prefer righteous people in charge instead of unrighteous people, but he doesn't argue getting involved as a point here. I would say he assumes that as the Gospel takes root in more people that its influence will work its way into every aspect of culture.

One thing is sure: Romans 13 is not a mandate for trying to change the government or not trying to change the government. The Gospel is simply the Gospel, and part of the Gospel is the sovereignty of God, which enables us to see through forms we disagree with and to affirm God's control in our own lives, with His indwelling wisdom to know how to respond in each situation as those who honor authority and see God as the authority behind all authorities.

The next main point in the Chapter looks like a change in topic, but it closely relates to the point about government. The point is love. Love is the fulfillment of the law. Wow, what a huge point. Instead of expecting reform through more and better laws, or even the old laws reemphasized, the idea here is that only love will change the world. As more people come to know that God is love and that through being crucified with Christ and buried with him, we rise as new creations in which God Himself lives out His life of love in us as vessels, the new kingdom grows and swallows up more of the old kingdom operating in the world.

Laws, old or new, do not change people but only prove transgression, and so to think that a change of government or a change of laws is the answer only shows ignorance of what the Gospel really is. Are there bad laws? Of course. Are there good laws? Sure, but no one can keep them. Until a person knows that law transforms nothing and no one, the fight will always keep swinging to the external, and reform will be seen as outer instead of inner by the Spirit.

The last section of this Chapter aims straight at the very thing we miss until we move off of the government as our answer and move into Spirit living as what keeps us. Frankly, who was in government never kept me from hitting bottom and never resurrected me out of that pit. Flesh level living can persist under government we approve of, and Spirit level living can flow on uninterrupted under government we consider woefully in error.

The driving point of this last section of Chapter 13 is the appeal to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (13:12 RSV). I find this a stunning and beautiful exhortation, and when I'm tempted to get entangled in any outer forms, whether good or

evil, I find my settling in the fact that the defeat of every form of lust, greed, and wrath is what counts. A kept life will act purely; a life full of resentment over authorities will act impurely no matter how good the cause.

How can one do better than to defeat darkness and don the armor of light?

Romans 14: “Who’s Cooking the Correct Supper?”

After writing about how we relate to governmental authorities, Paul takes up eating. Oddly, people define themselves often by what they eat. Instinctively, we know that there’s something fundamental about eating, and so the media is full of tips about food, whether related to cooking, choice of ingredients, health benefits, or health detriments.

One main controversy arises over the value of vegetarianism versus the diet with meat. Paul’s approach to life never varies, in that something of the earth cannot make you holier; it might or might not make you healthier, but food never equates to holiness. Food cannot make one better or worse.

The Old Testament did have food restrictions, listing clean and unclean foods, and Peter wrestled with this when the sheet of animals came down during his vision at Joppa in Acts 10. One can’t blame Peter for holding to his upbringing according to the scriptures, but God made it plain that He had cleansed both animals and people that had been unclean under the Old Covenant.

Notice now how Paul deals with those who still consider meat itself unclean, or at least suspect enough to eat only vegetables. He does not make a rule one way or other about eating but says that eating is a matter of one’s faith. Of course, Paul knows that all foods are clean, but if one does not know this, then the matter is one of weak faith, not sin. Therefore, foods are not a sin issue one way or the other and are merely the choice of faith in the one who eats.

What is weak faith? Well first of all, it is faith. Unto the Lord, the person eats or does not eat, and that is the point. With Peter, the command was clear: eat! With others, however, God accepts the worship of the one who has faith, be it weak or strong. Truly, each person will stand before his master, and when we know that we are individuals first and corporate beings secondarily, a lot of liberty gets enjoyed. The sooner we get past earthly food and onto the bread that comes down from heaven, Jesus, the sooner we see earthly food as transitory and get on with the eternal.

The text then shifts briefly to observance of special days, and the fact that various worship calendars appeal to people for different reasons, and one might think his or her calendar or non-calendar is the ideal one. The key is “Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind” (v 5 RSV). The short summary of what Paul has said so far then mentions food again, and the text follows with the point that we do not live or die to ourselves but

to the Lord. No matter what we eat or what days we observe, we will live our span and then die, and God is the Lord of our living and our dying.

One of my favorite quotes related to this comes from Brenda and Ronny Luttrull's 2010 September conference in nearby Pembroke, KY. Jenny Fienning expressed her appreciation for input from a friend but said to this friend, "When I die, I don't report to you." She said it in a way both sweet and tart, in sharing how it's the Lord with whom we deal.

Paul now tells how one can know when trouble threatens to creep in with how one sees others' practices. He says, "Why do you pass judgment on your brother?" I have found that one may not even know that judgment is judgment. Legalism can appear so holy and well meaning, so Paul gives another clue when he mentions despising others. It's hard to miss when things go that far. The cure for that is praising the Lord and knowing that I give account for myself to God, and others will give their account to Him, not to me.

The emphasis now moves to how the stronger in faith relates to the weaker in faith. The undergirding issue concerns not stumbling others but acting out of love. If the Holy Spirit is the point, why then would it be necessary to insist on food freedoms in a way that stumbles others? How though will I know? Can the weaker brother just shut down my freedom to eat meat? Clearly, the Holy Spirit lets us know how to walk in wisdom and how to not stumble someone.

The goal is faith, "for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." If someone cannot handle a freedom I enjoy and will stumble from doubt, why plow on? I don't need to fear that someone can take away my freedoms; I can keep my faith to myself between me and God, as the passage says.

A natural fear is this: "Am I really a second class citizen?" Nobody wants to be in the second tier of humanity, the lesser in the house when it comes to identity. Wouldn't it be great if everyone sired came into the world as the offspring of a king? Unfortunately, the fall poisoned humanity with the devil's penchant for comparison and denigration, such that a horrible self consciousness fills us unless liberated by Jesus Christ into a new view of who we are.

Romans 15: "No 2nd Class Citizens"

Let's think of the Romans for a moment. No matter how scurvy a citizen a Roman was, he could at least boast, "I am a Roman, and Rome rules the world." Whether rich or poor, acclaimed or of no notice, being a Roman constituted an identity. Now consider what it was like to be a Roman Christian and then suddenly realizing that as a Gentile, you were the pig-pool of humanity in Old Testament nomenclature.

Paul solves the whole dilemma of identity in his letter by setting forth the revelation that a new humanity was birthed through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To be born again makes for a new man, the old man having been put to death, so that it

does not matter what or who we were in terms of old, flesh identity; everyone raised supernaturally from death by Christ stands in the same resurrection.

Not all believers apprehend this immediately; I sure didn't. Paul here addresses responses to those weak in faith, saying, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak" (RSV). It's tempting to suddenly want all around to pop through into what we see. However, we know from all that Paul has already said that by "strong," he does not mean Christians who are strong of themselves, but those who know that the strong one lives in them and is their strength. That is strength of faith.

Also, the emphasis here is not only on individual faith but on corporate life, the life of fellowship, not one of rules but of the fact that those who believe, touch each other in daily life, and rub each other. This rubbing can be to chafe or to soothe, according to how we see it. Paul goes for the rub that's soothing and allows for a harmony despite differing levels of maturity. The body of Christ is not like a professional sports team on which only the upper echelon of talent operate together. I love sports and like my teams to have the best players possible, but in the body of Christ everyone is a player.

Operating as such, Paul says that Christ bore the reproaches of others and "did not please himself." Thus, since Christ lives in us, how can we help but continue in the same Spirit vested in Him? One can fight it, but eventually we just do take our licks and suffer them willingly, even if not wanting to at first. That's the life of the Cross in us: what we at first resist, we learn to embrace. So then, we welcome people that we never would have before.

Paul then goes on to buttress up his affirmation to the Romans that indeed they are not second class citizens but standing on the same footing as the Jewish believers, for the prophets told that this would be so. As recipients of this, they experience the maximum possible joy, peace, and power in the Holy Spirit. Also, Paul affirms that he is "satisfied" about them. How effervescent!

He tells them he knows that they are competent in faith and able to teach, and that he is reminding them so as to be part of the work in offering the Gentiles to God as his work in the Lord. He has even gotten as far geographically as Illyricum, which is just across the water from where they are in Rome, and he hopes to get to them eventually on his way to Spain. He wants to see them face to face.

Paul wasn't one to build on others' work; he was one for fresh fields, and what a driving spirit he possessed in his pioneer virgin callings, and Rome offered a lot of opportunity. As such, he wanted to see the Romans but first had to expedite help for the poor in Jerusalem, taking offerings collected from many for that purpose. The saints there needed material help, and there they were in the cradle of opposition from their own countrymen, plus suffering as they were, they were also a mother of faith to the emerging Gentile part of the body.

This section closes with Paul's appeal for the prayers of his readers, for he did not see himself operating apart from the web of grace that included all he knew in Christ. He knew that he would likely meet fierce opposition from the unbelievers in Jerusalem, and he willed if possible to enjoy protection from their devices.

As a closing thought, one thing I gather in Paul's various thoughts is his spirit of pulling together Christians from everywhere in one Spirit of fellowship, not that he was trying to organize on an external basis, but that he could see the unity that is the truth in Christ's body, despite the unlikely appearances.

Romans 16: "Wow, the Saints"

Until a few years ago, I skipped over Romans 16, not interested in the many names. Then during Bible study at Mimi's I noticed the beauty and warmth of Paul's expressions to so many people, and no longer were they obscure, but they lit up as living lights, and they dot the cloud of witnesses even now, and our heritage today is theirs and theirs is ours.

How noteworthy that Paul's first named person is the deaconess Phoebe from a town close to Corinth, not even a Roman city but a Greek city. She is visiting Rome, and Paul sees her as one who knows how to lead and get things done. Next he mentions the famous Prisca and Aquila, who host a church in their house and who have risked their lives for Paul personally and for the Gentile churches. This was quite a husband and wife team. The list goes on affectionately mentioning fellow workers, leaving a warm sense of connection in sharing the work of the Gospel.

He ends with "All the churches of Christ greet you," which sounds like a desirable unity indeed. How might that happen again? Perhaps it is happening and needs only recognition. On the one hand, obviously, churches in our day range from apostate to Gospel preaching, and in the Gospel churches, one can find an exponential range of views about anything in Christianity one might think of to study and articulate.

After years of seeking uniformity, I concluded that uniformity will never be external in origin but must be internal, in that we start at the top with who every Christian really is—Christ living in that person. That is the defining aspect, not differing views on points that aren't basic to who Christ is and the necessity of His death, burial, and resurrection for us to be saved.

Just as humans wear an endless variety of clothes and we see a human underneath the clothes, humans also wear an endless variety of ideas about how to apply the truths of the Gospel, yet underneath it is Christ in that person. Liking or not liking isn't the point; freedom is the point as long as we're talking about a real Jesus who is the one and only messiah, who was incarnated, and who died and was raised from the dead to save us, which includes the fact that it is no longer I who live but Christ in me (Galatians 2:20). I find it interesting that Paul says "churches of Christ," so they are churches of a person, namely Christ.

It's always true that no matter how well a church starts or how stable its condition, "dissensions and difficulties" arise from those who do not mean well. How enlightening that Paul doesn't get into complex analysis here but simply identifies two kinds of people: those who sincerely worship Jesus Christ and those who really only use flattery to serve "their own appetites." That sums it up.

It reminds me of how many times my old mentor, Norman Grubb, used to start a talk by saying, "we're spirit people, not matter people." By this he wasn't espousing Gnostic denial of life in the three dimensions; he was affirming that we are created as spirits who express ourselves through our outer emotions, reasoning, and bodies. As my friend in Los Angeles, Bill Bower, likes to say, "I am a spirit, I have a soul, and I live in a body." As Christians, we learn to discern the difference, and that saves us then from taking needless condemnation for all the wild and disturbing emotions and thoughts we experience, or bodily urges so easy to take condemnation for. We rightly divide all this out by the Spirit's illumination and grasp what Hebrews 4:12 means. We know how costly that is.

Think though of those who are not even believers but don the cloak of religion and seek to stir up dissension and difficulty in the church by opposing basic Christian truth of who Jesus is, and who He is in us. We don't need to judge them, but we do start to catch on when someone is not crucified to the world and the world to that person. It's frightful to say, but necessary. I remember watching "The 700 Club" one day, and a lady called in to ask Pat Robertson about her church. Quickly, he said, "Does your minister preach the Gospel?" When she replied no, he said, "You need to find another church."

Then too, Christian carnality can provoke unnecessary dissensions and difficulties. Paul frankly told the Corinthian church that it was carnal and thought like mere humans without the mind of Christ. He didn't say they didn't have the mind of Christ, but he said they didn't realize that and thus lived as anointed people who when not experiencing the spectacular in gifts, didn't know how to operate in daily life to resolve conflicts. They still found themselves mired up in fleshly lusts instead of cutting through by faith to Spirit level living.

Paul urges wisdom, and wisdom rescues us from the guile of evil and the tricky situations where some are not serving Christ but appetites. He says that wisdom is the key to guileless handling of tricky knots of dissension. Just when the rope appears certain to entangle, the wise saint discerns the way of escape. Further, Paul says that though Satan appears to have the upper hand, really, "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." He doesn't say how, but he does say who will do it and that it is soon.

Paul continues with a few more greetings from coworkers, and we learn that Tertius penned this letter for Paul. That must have been a fabulous experience, both for Tertius and for Paul.

The epistle closes with one of Paul's purple passages, a beautiful song and poem affirming Christ's keeping of us and the beauty of the Lord. It reminds me of Jude 24 &

25. And so ends Paul's epistle to the Romans, a glorious letter and endless in its riches. We are eternally blessed to have it.