

*Paul's Epistle  
To  
The Romans*



*Bible Study Series  
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# *Romans*

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The Epistle to the Romans is considered to be the most important doctrinal book in the New Testament, and the most difficult book to understand too. Not that other New Testament books do not contain doctrines, for indeed they do, but the whole Epistle is the core of Christian doctrine as we shall see later; and as professor Granfield described it as “a theological whole from which nothing at all substantial can be taken away without some measure of disfiguration or distortion”. Or as described by William Barclay: “a theological treatise”.

## **Purpose of the Epistle:**

- 1- To empathize the fact that all humans are sinners.
- 2- It is only by the undeserved Grace of God that we are saved.
- 3- To correct a Jewish – Gentile conflict that had plagued the church (see background).
- 4- To prepare them for his coming.
- 5- To pray for him.

## **Time of the Epistle:**

About 56 A.D., as he was preparing to leave to Jerusalem carrying the offerings of the Greek churches (Macedonia and Acaia) to the poor saints (15:25)

## **Recipients of the Epistle:**

The saints in Rome (1:7) i.e. the Christians of both Jewish and Gentile ethnic origins.

## **Author of the Epistle:**

Paul, as he mentioned his name in 1:1 as it was the custom in those days.  
No one challenged his authorship.

## **Where was the Epistle written:**

In Corinth, by the hand of Tertius (16:22). But Phoebe (16:1), the servant of the church of Cenchrea (Corinth's port), was the one who delivered it to the Church of Rome (16:1).

## **Historical Background:**

Paul had never been in Rome before writing this Epistle, or precisely before his 4<sup>th</sup> trip which was from Caesarea to Rome for trial by Augustus Caesar; neither did he establish the church there. So, what business had he to write to these people? That was the question asked by scholars over the centuries. But there were problems in the Church of Rome which may have not been clearly defined as problems, but one can sense it in between the lines of the

epistle, as Paul methodically and systematically try to solve it in his own way.

Let us try to dig into these problems:

- 1- The Church of Rome was obviously totally composed of converts i.e. new Christians of mainly two backgrounds, namely Jews and Gentiles. The word Gentiles is generally given to the non-Jews, but not specifically to a certain race, nation, or religion. So, these gentiles were a collection of Pagans, Polytheists, and atheists, and also from different races.
- 2- It is a human nature that people do not easily accept changes. And when they do, they always like to hang on to their old habits, customs, rituals and in this case their ways of worshipping. Not only that, but they may or try to impose it on others, who were the new believers in this case (pagans or Jews).
- 3- So, the Jews wanted to keep their traditions and their rituals such as circumcision, eating or not eating certain foods, not mixing with Gentiles who are defile to them, and above all impose the Mosaic Law and obey it.

On the other hand, the Gentiles wanted also to keep their old rituals and traditions such as eating what is sacrificed to idols (or at least, they find nothing wrong in doing that), Temple adultery, and even extramarital affairs which was not considered adultery to both the Romans and the Greeks at that time.

- 4- Whenever there is a conflict, there are always discussions among them amounting to boasting who is better and who is correct and why.
- 5- Christianity to the converted Jews was an attack on their faith and race, because it called for not obeying the law and the traditions of the fathers. Not only that, but the gospel is preached to the Gentiles, which as they believe, is meant for the chosen people only. As for the Gentiles, Christianity forbade them from eating what they usually ate, and from pursuing their previous life style. So, in effect both sides did not feel comfortable with the new religion.

Paul, hearing about all these conflicts, probably from messengers from Rome, or from friends or merchants who have been to Rome, or from some of the Jews who were originally expelled out of Rome by Emperor Claudius in 49 A.D. and took Corinth as a temporary residence where they were befriended by Paul, then they went back to Rome when the exile was lifted off. These are all mere possibilities.

But Paul being a wise master builder and zeal for serving the Lord Who has personally appeared to him, and personally commissioned him to preach the good news to the Gentiles; foresaw the danger of this conflict, and felt that it is his responsibility to correct these problems, although he never saw or knew these people as we mentioned earlier.

### **Rome:**

Rome, during the Pauline era, was a large and very important city, considered the capital of the world being the capital of the great Roman Empire.

It was founded in 753 B.C., but was not biblically famous till the New Testament time in general, and the Pauline era in particular, since we read in Acts 25:11,12 that Paul appealed his case to Caesar who of course resided in Rome, and that Festus the governor of Caesarea, answered him "you appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you go"; and Acts 27 describes his trip to Rome; and verse 13 tells us that they (Paul and his company, the centurion and his soldiers, and the crew of the ship, and believers friends of Paul) arrived at Puteoli which was the Harbor for Rome since Rome itself was not a port, but it was 15 miles in land away from the sea. But Puteoli was 150 miles away from Rome (acts 28:13).

The population of Rome at that time was about one million, many of whom were slaves. It is estimated that there were 60 million slaves in the whole Roman Empire.

In the city of Rome there were many magnificent buildings, the ruins of some remain till today. There was the Emperor's palace, the circus maximus, and the forum. But there were also many slums in which many had lived.

We also know that Christians were severely persecuted, that they had to live underground in catacombs. The persecution reached its climax during Emperor Nero's reign who burned the city with the Christians, and whoever escaped from the fire were fed to the wild beasts in games amusing the Emperor.

Considering that Rome was the center of the world at that time, Paul rightly thought that, if Christianity is established there on sound doctrines, then it will easily spread to the rest of the vast Empire. And that is probably one of the thoughts that crossed his mind when he was writing this Epistle.

### **Most Important verses in the Epistle:**

1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes."

1:17 "The just shall live by faith." Quoted from Hab.2:4.

2:1 "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge, practice the same things."

2:4 "Or you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

3:24 "Being justified freely by grace through His redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

4:14 "For if those of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect."

5:1 "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

5:10 "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

6:6 "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

6:18 "And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

### **Theme of the Epistle:**

Two paramount themes:

- 1- Justification by God's Grace alone through faith in Christ alone, not by status or works.
- 2- Redefinition of God's people: all the believers are the true children of Abraham regardless of their **previous** ethnic origin or religious background. **Indeed**, the single most important theme of this epistle is the equality between Jews and Gentiles.

### **Challenging verses:**

- 1- The passage 5:12-21 which discusses the perpetuation of Adam's sin and its transference

- to us, the doctrine which has always been a subject of discussion over the ages.
- 2- The passage 7:7-25 has also been a subject of discussion as whether it describes Paul before or after believing.
  - 3- The doctrine of predestination discussed in 8:28-30.
  - 4- The sovereignty of God discussed in 9:6-29.
  - 5- Do Chapters 9-11 teach that God has future plans for Israel? And who is Israel?
  - 6- The teaching of obedience to the human governments mentioned in 13:1-7 confuses some believers. For example, should Christians oppose a tyrant ruler?

## **Outline of the Epistle:**

- 1- Greetings and Introduction (1:1-15)**
- 2- Theme (1:16-17)**
- 3- Condemnation: The need of God's righteousness (1:18-3:20)**
  - A- Unrighteous Gentiles (1:21-32)
  - B- Unrighteous Jews (2:1-3:8)
  - C- Unrighteous mankind (3:9-20)
- 4- Justification: The provision of God's righteousness (3:21-5:21)**
  - A- The source of righteousness (3:21-31)
  - B- The example of righteousness (4:1-25)
  - C- The blessings of righteousness (5:1-11)
  - D- The imputation of righteousness (5:12-21)
- 5- Sanctification: The demonstration of God's righteousness (6:1-8:39)**
- 6- Restoration: Israel's reception of God's righteousness (9:1-11:36)**
- 7- Application: The behavior of God's righteousness (12:1-15:13)**
- 8- Conclusions, Greetings, and Benediction (15:14-16:27)**

## **1- Greetings and Introduction (1:1-15)**

### **V.1 Paul:**

As it was the custom in those days for the writer to mention his name at the very beginning of the letter, Paul followed the same tradition by mentioning his name first, which is not that far from our letters nowadays since we write on letter-headed stationary.

Who is Paul (his Greek name)?

**He** was first introduced in the Bible as Saul (his Hebrew name) at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58).

**He** was born about the same time as Jesus, in Tarsus as a Roman citizen. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, Pharisee as per the law, zeal, persecuted the church, as righteous (blameless) as far as the law can be. (Philippi 3:5, 6)

**Paul's** life history took a sudden dramatic miraculous turn after his famous encounter with the Glorious Resurrected Christ the Lord on his way to Damascus (Acts 9), which changed Paul from the greatest persecutor of the church (Acts 8:3), to the greatest evangelist ever who proclaimed and preached the Gospel (the Good News) of God to humanity; for his three or four missionary trips (counting his 4<sup>th</sup> trip to Rome for trial), and the Epistles he wrote;

have transformed Christianity from a dogma believed by a handful of Christian Jews in Palestine, to a great Christian Empire if we may say so.  
According to tradition, Paul was martyred outside Rome during Nero's reign (54-68 A.D.)

**After** mentioning his name, he proceeded to give his credentials, which I feel while it may have been unnecessary in any other Epistle, it was very necessary here in this Epistle, since he is writing to people whom he neither saw nor knew.  
So, what does he say about himself?

### **Bondservant (slave)**

Usually nowadays, when we write our credentials, we try to impress the reader. We may say I have a Ph.D. or FRCS, or B.Sc. and so on. But some may say these degrees were not known then and I do agree. But, He could have said I am a rabbi, or a teacher of the Law. But Paul would not boast about anything but the knowledge of Jesus Christ his master and savior. Listen to what he says in Phil. 3:7, 8 ***“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”***.

By using this term “slave”, Paul declares that he is a legal possession of Christ.

And as the slave has and serves one master, so also Paul declares that Christ is his only and sole master, and he will serve no one but Him.

And as the slave is in complete submission to his master, so Paul declares that he is living to do His Master's will.

And if you my friend, think that you are not a slave of Jesus Christ, then I would suggest to revise your understanding of redemption, which means buying again, and that is exactly what Jesus Christ did for you and me, for He bought us again by His Own blood. What is more precious than that?

But the word “slave has another meaning which puts every and each one of us in a position to be proud of, because it puts us in rank with the great people of the Bible like Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Isaiah, and all the other great prophets of the Old Testament who were all called servants or slaves of God (see Josh.1:2; 24:9 ; Jer. 7:25 ; Amos 3:7).

### **Called to be an Apostle**

Paul thought of himself as a man who had been given a task. Not in terms of what he wants to do, but in term of what God wants him to do, simply because the word Apostle means messenger.

### **Separated (set apart) to the gospel of God**

God has a plan for every person, and He sets him apart to do it. Paul had that thought in his mind all his life, even that he was set apart before he was born as mentioned in Gal. 1:15. Not only that, but he and Barnabas were set apart by the leaders of the church in Antioch as directed by the Holy Spirit for the special mission of preaching the Gospel (the good news) to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2).

Then we read “the gospel of God”: it is not Paul's gospel, he didn't make it. It is God's gospel, it is God's good news to the lost world, it is the everlasting salvation to whosoever believes.

No wonder why the Angel who appeared to the shepherds said to them: ***“Do not be afraid,***

***for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people, for there is born to you this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord.***” (Luke 2:10, 11)

## **V.2 Which He promised before**

These good news, were promised by God beforehand to Abraham: ***“And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”*** (Gen. 26:4)

And in Isaiah 7:14 ***“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel (God with us).”***

## **V.3 Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord**

The promise mentioned above was fulfilled In Jesus Christ our Lord, who according to the flesh, was born of the seed of David who in turn is the seed of Abraham.

## **V.4 And declared to be the Son of God**

He was called a Son even hundreds of years before His Birth. Listen to what the Holy Scripture says in Isaiah 9:6 ***“Unto us a Son is given;.....And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace.”***

Then in the New Testament, He was declared beloved Son by God Himself in so many references such as Mat 3:17, 17:5; Mark 1:11, 9:7; Luke 3:22, 9:35. This is apart from the numerous references of Jesus saying that about Himself, and other people saying the same like Peter Luke 9:20), the Chief Priest (Mat. 26:63 & Mark 14:61)and the Roman centurion at the cross (Mat 27:54).

### **With power**

Why with power? And the answer soon follows: “according to the Spirit of Holiness, by the resurrection from the dead”

## **V.5 Through Him we received Grace and apostleship.**

So, we receive two things:

### **1) Grace**

Grace is the means by which ***“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*** (Rom. 5:8)

It is unmerited favor. We did not do anything to deserve it. It is something that cannot be earned. It does not require us to work for it. It is granted. It is free for take. We cannot afford to pay the price, because nothing on this earth can equal the price paid for it: the precious blood of His only begotten Son! This is the grace of God. He gave it free, because He Knows we cannot afford it.

Listen to what John Stott says about grace:” God’s grace has turned away His wrath, that His Son has died our death, and borne our judgment, that God has mercy on the undeserving, and that there is nothing left for us to do.”

How can we receive grace? Just by faith; and by faith alone, not by works.

In the Old Testament, **the Law told man what he must do**; but **the gospel** (the good news) **tells us about what God has done for us.**

So, what matters is not what we can do, but what God has done.

### **2) Apostleship**

As we all know, Apostle means messenger. Paul received this task of being a messenger

from God Himself as He appeared to him on his way to Damascus. And in Galatians 1:15, 16 he says ***“But when it pleased God, Who separated (consecrated) me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.”*** That was his task.

Now here is a very important point: according to Philippians 3:5, Paul was a Pharisee; and the Pharisees in the Old Testament separated themselves from ordinary people, let alone the Gentiles who were anyway considered unclean by the Jewish nation. To them the Gentiles were created to fuel the fire of hell.

For a Gentile to touch even the robe of a Jew, let alone a Pharisee, will make him defile and has to go through the lengthy ritual of purification from washing in a certain way to offering certain sacrifices.

Now knowing this back ground, we can see how difficult it was for Paul to accept this task. But let us see what his response in the continuation of Galatians 1:15-17 ***“Immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.”*** This means that he accepted the task without even giving one thought of his background being a Pharisee. No wonder, it was him who said: ***“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”*** (Philippians 3:7, 8).

So, in these first 7 verses of this Epistle, we find that Paul has essentially established:

- 1- His credentials.
- 2- The Gospel he is preaching which is centered around:
  - a- The uniqueness of incarnation.
  - b- The uniqueness of resurrection.

Then in verse 7, he gives them the grace and peace of God.

And as was explained in previous studies of other Epistles, the word **“Grace”** is a Greek expression of greetings, while the word **“Peace”** is a Hebrew expression of greetings, which does not mean peace as we understand it now, but it meant wishing prosperity in every aspect of life.

#### **V. 8, 9 I thank my God.....for you all that your faith is spoken of..... that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers**

I like to discuss these two verses together, for as we discussed earlier in the introduction that Paul never was in Rome before writing this Epistle, nor did he establish the church there, and certainly did not know these people, yet he had deep love to them without even seeing them. Where that love comes from? Certainly it is a reflection of the love of God for him. The love of a Christian to his fellow Christian brother regardless of the distance that separates them, regardless of their ethnic origins, regardless of their languages, and regardless of customs. Does this seem strange? **Certainly not**, aren’t we all members of the same body? Don’t we all partake in the same body and blood of Christ our Lord? Aren’t we all the Temple of God and His Spirit abides in us? Don’t we grieve the Holy Spirit by not showing love to each other (to put it mildly) if not actually hating each other?

Does this mean that Paul did not experience the love of God before? **Probably not**. The Holy Scripture tells us that he hated the Christians to the extent of driving them to blasphemy, and killed and imprisoned many of them.

Does this mean that God did not show His love before His incarnation? **Certainly not.** God does not change by time. He loved them then, He loves us now, and He will always love people, they are His creation, they are His hand-made. **The fact that people in the past did not see, understand, or comprehend the love of God, does not mean that God did not show His love in the past..** How many times did the sons of Israel leave him and worshipped idols? And how many times did He forgive them? Doesn't that alone prove His love which has no end?

Paul was very happy when he heard about their faith, so much so that he is rejoicing and praising and thanking God for them.

Paul was so overwhelmed by the love of God that he wished that each and every person would experience that love. Listen to what the Scripture says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 5:14 ***“For the love of Christ compels us”***. The Holy Scripture tells us also how Paul was grieved deep in his heart that his own countrymen refused the saving Christ: ***“I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.”*** (Rom. 9:2, 3).

So, he praised God for their faith which as he describes it, is well known throughout the whole world. This also in itself indicates that he is pleased and happy for them. One can always get the best of any person just by praising him or saying a good word to him. And that is exactly what Paul is doing here. Then he says that he constantly pray for them. It is said that prayer is a delight to the Joyful and solace to the afflicted. Which of these two was Paul's prayer? It was the prayer of delight and Joy for his fellow Christian brothers in faith whom he never saw.

#### **V.11 That I may impart to you some spiritual gifts.....**

##### **12 That I may be encouraged together with you.....**

Paul in his humility was always ready to receive as well as to give. This should be the attitude of every Christian. He says to be encouraged by the mutual faith of his and theirs. Look at us here; we are not in a class room teaching or being taught. We are here to gain from the experience of each one of us in his or her faith and fellowship with God.

And Paul as great an Apostle as he was, was looking forward to joining them to gain encouragement by their faith.

#### **V.14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians.....**

Here, Paul states a very interesting statement. He says that he is indebted to all kinds of men. Let us see first **why** he mentioned the Greeks and Barbarians, the wise and unwise. That goes back to the time of the Greek Empire. The Greeks had the attitude (and the Romans took the same after them) that they are the people of sound thinking and wisdom, so much so that they called themselves Philosophers (which means the lovers of wisdom); and they were deeply taken by this attitude that they thought of every body else to be ignorant and unwise. So in essence they arbitrarily divided the world into Knowledgeable or wise and unknowledgeable and ignorant or unwise and these they called Barbarians. So, Paul is saying here that I am indebted to you not because of your knowledge and wisdom, for I am indebted also to the ignorant and the unwise.

Now let us see **What** he is indebted for: He received undeserved grace and forgiveness. This, he wants the whole world to know about and experience it. That is the good news (gospel) which he feels indebted to the whole world to know about.

## 2- Theme (1:16-17)

Now as Paul got their attention by encouraging greetings, he gets to the core of the letter.

### **V.16,17 I am not ashamed of the gospel.....**

Why would Paul say that in spite of all the troubles he had, since he put his feet in Europe, from Philippi to Corinth? Yes, he was jailed in Philippi, chased out from Thessalonica and Berea, mocked at in Athens, and had great opposition in Corinth. Yet he does not give up, but declares that he is not ashamed of preaching the gospel.

Then, what is in the gospel that makes him proud? Many at any rate:

#### **(1) Salvation:**

In the Pauline time the whole world in general and Rome in particular being considered the capital of the world was in a state of degeneracy, weakness, and despair. People chose and loved to live a sinful permissive life, there was no morals and certainly no solace for their souls, and there was no way out, nor was there any sign of deliverance or escape.

But that is what Paul was proud of. He is preaching a gospel of deliverance and salvation from all the above.

And what is even better, it is salvation from eternal damnation and the wrath of God which he will soon talk about in verse 18.

#### **(2) Faith:**

Faith simply means believing in some one or some thing that is not seen.

And with faith, comes loyalty, because if I have faith in a person, then automatically I shall be loyal to him. And if I have faith in an idea, I'll be loyal to it till it flares up and be known to everyone.

Also with faith comes hope, because if I have faith in life after death, then I live on that hope.

And for the Christian, faith means absolute and complete trust in God's word. That is why the early fathers of the church composed the Apostolic Creed which is an expression of our faith and what we believe in. **And faith comes by hearing** (Rom. 10:13)

#### **(3) Justification:**

In the English language, to justify means to produce reasoning for what a person does.

But in the Greek language it means to count as or reckon.

So, when we say that God justifies a sinner, this does not mean that God produces reasoning for his sin, which in a sense would mean that God approves of his sin and tries to find reasoning to prove he is right in what he has done. That would be against the nature of God because He hates sin.

So, here comes the Greek meaning which is far more correct than the English translation.

So, it means that God Counts him (the sinner) or reckons him or treats him as non-sinner.

This in turn means that God instead of condemning the sinner to death, He treats him with love as a child of His. It means there is no more enmity between God and us. He loves us.

And the end result is that man gets to that state of not being counted as criminal or law breaker, not because of anything good he has done (remember he already has been condemned to death because of his wrong doing), but because of what God has done for him.

After knowing these three facts, wouldn't you also be proud as Paul to preach the gospel?

### **3- Condemnation: The need of God's righteousness (1:18-3:20)**

#### **V.18 For the wrath of God is revealed .....**

At this point I would like to talk about man and the picture he has of God in his mind. We all believe that God from the beginning created man and gave him complete freedom to do what he likes. This is what we call free will. But He did not leave him without guidance. He put moral laws in his heart, (and later on, the written commandments), by which man knows what is wrong and what is right. Call it conscious or any other name, but it is God's inlaid guidance.

Then comes the concept of punishment and reward. This is man made concept. It is not God's. God does not punish or reward. Man reaps what he sows. The Holy Scripture states **"the wages of sin is death"** (Rom. 6:23)

When a father tells his child not to play with fire lest he gets burned, then the child ignores his father's advice, or if you will, disobeys his father and plays with fire and then get burned. Would you say that the father punished his child and burned him or at least caused him to be burned? **Certainly not.** It was the child who did that to himself. The father is absolutely innocent. On the contrary, he warned his child. Likewise, if one does not study hard, he fails the exam. The examiner did not fail him, he failed himself. One reaps what he sows. That is why the Holy Scripture calls it **wages** and not punishment. (Please see page 25 also.)

On the same token, when God says **"whosoever believes in Me, shall have eternal life"**, He has nothing to do with the end result. If you choose to listen to what He says, you will have eternal life, if you choose not to, then you will not have eternal life. It is as simple as that. It has nothing to do with punishment or reward. God has nothing to do with it.

It is man's free will, and again, it is what you sow, you shall reap.

**But**, would the father be sad for what has happened to his child? The answer is **yes**.

Would he be disappointed that his child did not listen to him? The answer is **yes**.

Would the father forgive his child if he comes to him remorseful, and apologetic, confessing his wrong doing and promising not to do that again (repenting)? The answer is **yes** again.

That is exactly what God feels about us. But what if we do not confess and repent and ask for forgiveness? Would He leave us to Perish? **Certainly not.** He will keep after us reminding us of His laws and commandments (I do not call it as such, but I call it guidance for our life). And if we, after all that, choose not to listen, then He cannot force us.

Remember He originally gave us the free will.

Now, we go back to v.18 where Paul talks about the wrath of God. I really do not wish to get into this subject, because it is one of those words which have been misunderstood by many. Wrath is predominantly an Old Testament word. The people of the Old Testament have painted a very ugly picture of God for themselves. They painted Him as a Monster, who was just sitting up there waiting for someone to sin, so that He gives him hell, and quenches His anger against him and mankind and takes revenge. They did not have the concept of Him as being a loving caring father, who nurses His creation with tender love and kindness as a mother to her children. He even expressed his love to them on many occasions, listen to what He says; **"See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands."** (Isa. 49:16). And

also ***“For he who touches you touches the apple of His eye.”*** (Zech. 2:8).

So, the different writers of the different books of the Old Testament did not find words in their vocabulary to express what they received from God as an inspiration according to their conception of God.

To make myself clear, I'll give a simple example. Suppose God Told Jeremiah ***“I am disappointed in these people because they left me and worshipped Baal”***.

**So**, Jeremiah with the picture he has of God in his mind, would go back to his people and interpret what God has told him as ***“God is mad at you, and will give you hell”***. So it was a matter of interpreting God's words in a language they can understand, in the context of the picture painted in their minds about God.

**Why do I say that?**

According to Webster's Third New International Dictionary – Unabridged edition, the word wrath means ***“A strong enraged feeling expressed vehemently and accompanied by bitterness, malignancy, or condemnation. And it also means a fit of uncontrolled anger or a moment or a period of malignant or indignant feeling.”*** Would you say that God fits in any one of the above? Would you say that every now and then God gets into a fit of anger whether malignant or not? Would you say that God loses His temper? First of all God does not lose His temper, because He is not temperamental, because temperamental means unstable and unpredictable person who cannot make up his mind, and God is not as such. Secondly, God does not get angry, because he advises us ***“Provoke not your children to anger”*** (Col.3:21). So how come that he forbids something and then does it? Certainly this is not one of God's attributes.

**So**, I believe that the word wrath of God is meant to be God's disappointment and sadness in his heart, that is to say His heart is broken to see us down in the deep pit of hopelessness and we still do not want to listen to Him, or you can say He is ***sadly frustrated*** because of our foolishness.

Some one may ask, do you mean to say that the Holy Scripture mentions something that is not meant to be so? And my answer is **No**, I did not say that, and actually what you just said proves my point that man has always interpreted the word of God in a language that fits in his pictorial state of mind about God, as you just now have interpreted what I just said. And let me ask you, “Is the God of the Old Testament the same God of the New Testament?” And you may answer:” Sure He is the same, and I say “well said, because ***God does not change, He is the same yesterday, today, and forever*** (Heb. 13:8 & 1:2). Then I would ask “why is it then that the people of the Old Testament, did not experience the Gracious Love of God as we do? Is it because God did not love them, or because His Character has changed over the years? And I would answer: “neither this or that.” Then why? Because the picture of God in their minds and hearts is different from the one in our minds and hearts, but God did not change.

So, I would say that the word wrath is the wrong interpretation of the character of God.

And I would leave the subject as such. I have nothing further to mention on this subject, but I am open for your inputs and views.

**V.19, 20 What may be known of God is manifest in them.**

I imagine Paul in these two verses, is asking himself a question. “And what if one says I do not know God and I have received no guidance from Him. Then I hear him saying, “You have no excuse O man. God shows Himself everywhere. ***“He did not leave Himself without witness”*** (Acts 14:17). Look at the heavens and earth, look at the sun and the moon, look at

the sea, land, and sky, look at the trees, the greens, the flowers, and the lilies of the valley, look at the animals and beasts, look at yourself. Everything around you including yourself is made by God and talks about Him. And the Holy Scripture says: ***“The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handwork.”*** (Ps. 19:1)

### **A- Unrighteous Gentiles (1:21-32)**

So, Paul says, you have no excuse O man. Man instead of looking up to God who did not leave Himself without witness (Acts 14:17), turned to himself, looking for his wisdom while he is fool, looking for the law of his life instead of the will of God, looking at his self-centered world instead of God - centered universe. And the result was idolatry, worshipping himself, in the form of images of humans and animals made by his own hand, instead of worshipping God the creator.

So, being futile, useless, and beyond remedy, God gave them up to despicable, abhorring, and degrading passion, for their women pleased themselves in the unnatural manner, and their men left their women, for the vile lust with each other.

God **did not** bring them to this degrading status, they brought themselves into it.

God gave them the free will with the inlaid guidance in their hearts as we mentioned above, but they used that free will unwisely neglecting the natural guidance of God.

And we previously touched on the condition they were in, when we said that Paul was not ashamed of preaching the gospel.

As a whole, the society from top to bottom was riddled with unnatural vice. It is reported in history that 14 out of the first 15 Roman Emperors were homosexuals.

I would like to repeat that God does not bring judgment on man; it is man who brings judgment on himself. And he who banishes God from his life, not only loses his Godliness, but he also loses his manhood, doing things which are not fitting, such as sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent proud, boasters, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful.

They do not only practice that, but they also approve those who do it. And the word approve here carries the meaning of encouragement as well.

### **B- Unrighteous Jews (2:1-3:8)**

Jesus said, ***“Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”*** (Mat. 7:5 & Luke 6:41)

Here, Paul is addressing the Jews. For the Jews believed that God would blast the Gentiles out of existence for their sins, but they never for a moment dreamed that they are under the same condemnation, because they are in a special privileged position with God.

God, they say, loves Israel alone of all the nations; God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and the Jews with another. They also believed that Abraham will sit besides the gates of hell, and does not permit any wicked Israelite to go through.

And they also believed that those who are the seed of Abraham by the flesh, though they may be sinners, disbelieving and disobedient, they still will have eternal life.

And lastly, the Jew believed that everyone is destined for judgment except himself.

This is what is called self-righteousness. And that is why Jesus Himself reminded them that ***God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones*** (Mat. 3:9 & Luke 3:8).

The Jew was and still is so wrapped up in his self-righteousness that he cannot realize his

own sins, but his eyes are wide open to see others'.

So, in this passage, Paul reminds the Jews of **four** things:

**(1) Despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long suffering v.4**

You are trading on a thin line. You are ignorant of His patience and kindness.

Let us look into each of these three words one at a time:

**Goodness.** The Greek word for goodness here means kindness. So, in essence, Paul is telling them, you are simply abusing God's great kindness.

**Forbearance.** This is not a carte blanche for you to do whatever you like. You think you are above reproach. You are wrong. You just do not understand that God is giving you another chance to repent and straighten up.

**Long suffering.** The Greek word for that applies to the person who has the power to avenge, but he deliberately wishes not to use it. So, in essence, Paul is telling them: don't you think even for a moment that God cannot punish you, for He can, but He does not wish to do so to give you another chance to turn away from your sins.

The Jews traded on the mercy of God and even claimed exemption from God's judgment.

**(2) The mercy and love of God should not be taken as a license to sin again** and get away with it; it is meant to feel grateful and spend the rest of our lives to prove worthy of that kindness.

**(3) There is no favoritism with God. V.9-11** The Jews never understood that God picked them up as a nation to perform a certain task, not to have special privileges and consideration.

The whole of the Jewish religion was based on the conviction that the Jews held special privilege and favor in the eyes of God.

**(4) Paul is greatly misunderstood by many. V.10** It may not be quite clear here as it is in Paul's epistles to the Galatians and the Philippians. But most Presbyterians stress on faith without works based on the above referenced epistles. But this is not the case. There can be no such thing as a faith which does not issue in works, and there can be no such thing as works which are not the product of faith. They are bound and intermingled together, but we tend to separate them apart.

Now, here remains the fact that the Jews had the law, and they should know better how to obey God, but the Gentiles had no law. Should they be exempted? Paul quickly addresses this in verses 12-16, and he puts it in two important points:

**A) God is Just.** He will judge man according to what he knew at his time. So, for those who have the law, He will judge them according to the law, and those who have no law, He will judge them according to what they know of the morals and spiritual values available to them at their time.

**B) The inlaid guidance.** We mentioned before that God created man and gave him complete free will. But, He did not leave him without guidance. That is what Paul is talking about in this passage. So, man was created with an inlaid knowledge of good and wrong, and consequently he will be judged according to this knowledge even though he has not received any written law.

Now, after knowing these two great facts, what is the end result? **No** body has exemption, neither the Jews nor the Gentiles.

**But what is the Real Law?**

Paul handles that in verses 17-29.

Would every pure descendant of Abraham, be a true Jew? Paul says **no**. Would every circumcised be a true Jew? Paul says **no** again. So, neither the genealogy nor the flesh mark makes a person to be a true Jew. Then who is the true Jew? And the answer comes in the last verse. A true Jew is the one who is inwardly Jew, whose praise is from God not from men. So, it is not the outwardly manner that matters, it is the inwardly manner.

**And** what is the inwardly manner? It is the way a person leads his life to conform with the **ONE** who knows the inward. In other words, it is one's relationship with God.

What about the word **Praise**? When God is pleased with one's inward, He praises him.

Why would Paul include this word or thought here in this passage? That is because, as we mentioned above, a Jew always boasts of being a Jew, descendant of Abraham by the flesh, and circumcised on the eighth's day. Paul shattered all that, and tells him there is nothing in you that you can boast of. The real praise is from God to the real Jew.

Of course, in between all that, Paul hints to the Jew "you boast about the law, but you break it by not following what it says, and yet you have appointed yourself a teacher to whom you consider blind, but you are blind like them."

Then he goes one step forwards and condemn the Jews whose misconduct brought disgrace to the name of God in between the Gentiles.

**Apart** from religious matters, the Jews did several things that caused the gentiles to dislike or even hate them and consequently hate the God they worship. Some of these are:

- They looked down at all other people.
- Every where they lived, they demanded to be treated according to their own law and by their own people.
- They kept smuggling gold and other precious items out of where they lived to Jerusalem. Historians tell us that about 60 B.C. export of currency was forbidden in Asia, and the Jews were seized smuggling over 20 tons of contraband gold to Jerusalem. The thing which was also done repeatedly in Germany before the Second World War, which was a direct cause for the racial genocide campaign against them known to us as the Holocaust. I am not justifying what Hitler had done, but I am mentioning the root of the problem.
- Wherever they lived, they demanded to be exempted from military service on the grounds of observing the Sabbath.
- They overtly showed contempt to other religions.
- Wherever they lived, they segregated themselves from the local communities, and showed complete lack of charity and sympathy towards the others.
- As a spoiled child they get mad when they don't get what they want.
- Wherever foreign country they lived in, they opposed any teaching that is not their's and complain to the authorities against it. An example of that is what they did against Paul in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth (Acts 17, 18).
- They must have done something very bad that forced Claudius Caesar to command them out of Rome (Acts 18:2)

I am quoting here what William Barclay says about that: "Real religion is a thing of the open heart and the open door; Judaism was a religion of the shut heart and the shut door."

Someone may ask, since both Jews and Gentiles are equally under judgment, then what is the advantage of being Jew or circumcised? Paul answers:" much in every way." The commandments, which is the word of God. But what if the commandments are not

obeyed? Would that change God's mind? No, the disobedience of man does not change God's Law, Still the wages of sin is death. That is equally true for the Jew and the Gentile. There is no favoritism with God. The word of God is true and His justice stresses and increases its effectiveness. If my sin increases God's truth, then, why am I being judged? And shouldn't we then sin more to increase God's truth more and more? This is a very interesting argument that Paul confronted us with. But of course he is laying down certain thoughts which we should not miss:

**(1)** He is trying to tell the Jews that this special position with God is not a special privilege as they always thought, but indeed it is a special responsibility. That is why he used the word **entrusted**. God has entrusted them with His word (oracles). God did not entrust them with privilege ! It does not make any sense. For example one can say, I entrust you with my money, but cannot say I entrust you with being special. But the fact is that God entrusted them with something, and that something is His word (the Ten Commandments). So, it was a special duty that God entrusted them with, not special favor or special exemption from responsibility. They never were able to grasp this fact.

**(2) What if some?** This implies that not all the Jews disobeyed. There was a remnant that was not disobedient. And this remnant would be the true Jews as we discussed before. The others have lost their roots, and fell under condemnation. But the door was not closed permanently. It is true the closed door to the Jews opened the door for the Gentiles, yet there will come one day when the Gentiles will bring the Jews in.

**(3)** The root of sin is disobedience. The Jews fell in that. Then the wages come in effect. They were rejected. Had they obeyed, would they have been rejected? Certainly not.

**(4)** When a person sins, he always tries to justify himself at least by blaming others as in the case of Adam, Eve, and the serpent. And that was always the Jewish attitude, not by blaming others for their sins, but trading on God's mercy, where they thought that He will always forgive them, because they are special and exempt from punishment.

That is why they never thought of humility, confessing, or penitence. And Jesus Christ painted a good picture of that in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector who went to the Temple to pray (Luke 18:9-14). We all know it.

### **C- Unrighteous mankind (3:9-20)**

From the previous passage we concluded that both the Jews and Gentiles are alike under condemnation so long as they are without Christ and under dominion of sin.

And the word **under** used in the English translation does not really do justice to the original word in the Greek Scripture which really means under the power of or under the authority of or controlled by exactly like the authority of the captain on the soldiers under him. That is why Paul so often uses the phrase "**slaves to sin**" meaning completely controlled by sin. And verse 12 describes the person without Christ as unprofitable, which means useless, or turned bad.

And when we examine verses 11-18 which describe a man without Christ, we find that it falls in three categories:

- 1- A character of ignorance, indifference, crookedness and unprofitable.
- 2- A tongue of destruction, deceit, and malignancy.
- 3- A conduct of oppression, injuriousness, and implacability.

Paul never underestimated the power of sin, but he also never underestimated the

redeeming power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is only he who knows how bad is the power of sin that appreciates what God has done for humanity.

God created man in His image, meaning perfect as He is. But man fell to sin, and sin disfigured him. So, he is no longer perfect. And the imperfect cannot perfect anything.. Those who have the law, should perfect the law to please God, but the imperfect cannot perfect as we said. So, no man can please God.

#### **4- Justification: The provision of God's righteousness (3:21-5:21)**

In the previous passage, we concluded that man being imperfect cannot please God.

Then what is the use of the law? Much in every way:

- 1- To render man aware of his sin. For example, man before the law killed. He did not recognize it as sin. It was part of the society he lived in: kill to obtain, or kill to defend, or kill to revenge and so on. But after the law he recognized killing as a sin, no matter what is the cause. And Paul touches on that in 7:7.
- 2- It brings man to understand his position towards God. For, the more man knows the law, the more he finds out that he cannot fulfill it to perfection, and hence he cannot please God.
- 3- It makes man realize that he is in trouble and needs help.
- 4- It does not help man in his dilemma. So it makes him seek other resources.
- 5- It is like a physician who only knows how to diagnose a disease but does not know how to cure it.

Then who or what cures, if the law doesn't? That is what we shall find out in the next section.

#### **A- The source of righteousness (3:21-31)**

From the above, it seems obvious that the way to God is not the way of the law, but the way of grace. It is not the way of works of the law, but the way of faith.

How does faith and / or grace cure?

##### **(1) By Justification. V.24**

As it stands now, man is utterly guilty and no escape from judgment.

But by God's grace, He justifies that guilty man. He treats, reckons, or counts him as innocent, as we mentioned previously on page 10.

Jesus came to tell us that God loves us, bad as we are.

We are sinners, but we are still loved by God.

This, changes the picture completely. We now can come to Him like a sorry child coming to seek his loving father's forgiveness. And that is what justification by faith in Jesus Christ means. It means that we are in a right relationship with God, the thing which the law could not do. We are now like erring children trusting in their father's love and forgiveness.

##### **(2) By Propitiation by His blood. V.25**

Before Christ, when a man breaks the law, he brings a sacrifice to God, so that he may appease God, and gets back in right relationship with Him. But an animal sacrifice failed entirely to do that. ***"With a burnt offering, You are not pleased."*** (Ps. 51:16)

But, by offering Himself as a sacrifice on the cross, Christ fulfilled the way to appease God, and opened the door for re-establishing the right relationship with God, the thing which the work of the law failed to achieve in the past.

### **(3) By Deliverance.**

We were slaves of sin. It controlled us, and we were obedient to it. It was our master. It owned us. But Christ came and paid dearly to redeem us from this slavery. Now we are his slaves, yet we are free, because we are His Children, and we address Him as our father as he wanted it to be.

So, in summary, instead of being condemned as sinners, God accepted us not as criminals but as sons whom He loves.

And it is obvious that the law and the grace of God work in different ways, for the law is concerned with what man can do for himself, while the grace is concerned with what God has done for man. And as for fulfilling the law, nothing we can ever do can win us God's forgiveness.

Then in the next few verses, Paul points out three facts:

**a- There is no boasting. V.27, 28** In the past, one could boast because every thing depended on his works of the law. But now it is the grace of God which works. Then there is no place for boasting.

As a matter of fact the Jew treated God as such: In his frame of mind, he felt that whatever he does or give to God is credited to his account with God. So, he counts his deeds as deposits in the bank of God. And since it is deposits, then he can cash them or withdraw them whenever he wishes so. Exactly as we do now with our bank accounts. This means that when I deposit say a hundred dollar in my account it is credited to me, which means that the bank is indebted to me for a hundred dollar which will be at my disposal to use any time I want. So, at the end it came to the mind of the Jew that **God is indebted** to him with these deeds. That is how the Jew treated God.

**b- One God for both Jew and Gentile. V.29, 30** You Jews say that you have one God who created the whole world and all what is in it, then why don't you accept Him as the God of Gentiles also? When you accept this fact you find out that He justifies everybody by faith, not the Jews only.

**c- Should we then cancel the law? V.31** On the contrary. Since God has demonstrated His love and saved man freely, then man should not break God's heart by breaking the law. Man now cannot meet the sorrow in the eyes of the one who loves him. He can never do as he likes for he is now and forever sentenced to goodness by the law of love. .

## **B- The examples of righteousness (4:1-25)**

Who would be a better example of faith than Abraham?

So, Paul picked up Abraham not only because of his faith, but also for some other reasons such as:

1. He was regarded by the Jews as the founder of their race.
2. They called him father.
3. They have great admiration and respect for him.
4. It is impossible for a Jew not to know Abraham even after several thousands of years.
5. He proved to have complete obedience and trust in God's words, without any doubt.
6. Paul, being a wise man, knew that when he talks about Abraham, everybody listens.

So, in essence, he says: If you do not understand what faith is, look at father Abraham.

It was not his deeds of the law which put him in good relationship with God, because the law came several hundred years after Abraham lived. Then what? It was his faith and complete trust in what God told him.

The basic thought of a Jew was and still is that man can earn God's favor by doing what the law says; but our basic Christian thought is that man can never earn God's favor except by faith which is believing that God's promises are true.

We do not have to work to earn God's love.

It is given free though we do not deserve it. How marvelous to find out that God treats us with love and mercy, while we should have been treated like criminals.

**Then** in the next few verses 9-12, Paul comes up with two facts which shattered all the Jewish thought. But in order to understand it fully, we must know first what this Jewish thought is. I'll summarize it in the following points:

1. A man is not a Jew if he is not circumcised.
2. A Jew even born from Jewish parents, but not circumcised, is not a Jew.
3. A Jew who is not circumcised cannot eat the Passover.
4. If a Gentile accepts the Jewish faith, he must be circumcised.
5. Circumcision is the sign of being chosen by God.
6. Being a Jew, he is automatically exempt of God's wrath and punishment.
7. If a Jew is so bad that he deserves God's punishment, then an Angel will obliterate his circumcision and makes him uncircumcised before he is punished, because God cannot punish a circumcised Jew!

From the above, one can see how the Jewish way of life was and still is hanging on the word "**circumcision**".

So, in these 4 verses, Paul puts a very valid and fundamental argument:

- Abraham was not circumcised when God gave him the covenant (Gen. 15:6). He was counted as righteous while he was uncircumcised.
- In fact, he was circumcised 14 years later (Gen. 17:10).
- The gateway of his good relationship with God was Faith and not circumcision. In other words, God blessed him and gave him the promises not because he was circumcised, but because he was righteous in His eyes.
- So, circumcision was the sign and not the cause.
- Abraham was not and is not the father of the circumcised in the flesh, because he was told that he will be the father of many nations while he was uncircumcised.
- He is the father of those who are circumcised in their hearts. Meaning every one who takes God at His word and believes in Him as Abraham did.
- So, the real Jew is not the descendant of Abraham by the flesh, or circumcised, but he is the man that puts all his trust in God as Abraham did.
- So, in every nation, those who trust in God are Abraham's children and family of God.

That as I said above, shattered all the Jewish thought.

**Then**, in the next 5 verses (13-17), Paul holds the same argument, not on circumcision, but on the law and its works.

The promise to Abraham came solely and was dependant on:

1. God's grace.
2. The perfect faith of Abraham.

And the perfect proof is the Holy Scripture which tells us that the law did not come till several

hundred years after Abraham existed.

As for the law, no man in his present imperfect state can ever satisfy our Perfect God.

So, if the promise depends on keeping the law, then the promise is doomed and can never be fulfilled.

The word that has been used in both the Old and New Testaments for **Promise** in the Greek language, meant to be out of the goodness of the heart with no conditions attached.

God promised to love the whole world unconditionally. **“For God so loved the world”** (John 3:16). So, God’s love to us does not depend on our merit, but on His generous heart.

What we need is **Faith** which means staking everything on the Love of God.

All is because of His **Grace** which is unearned, undeserved, and unmerited love.

**As** for the law itself and its restrictions, ironically enough it may cause man to sin more simply because every thing forbidden is more desirable. It is a sinful human nature. You tell your son not to play with fire; he goes and plays with fire. The law says do not do this or that and man goes and do it. I am not saying that the law is wrong, but I am describing the human nature. And if we think of religion as obeying the law only, then our life will be a long chain of transgressions waiting to be punished, because we sin all the time.

In summary, Paul had shown us two ways of life:

1. Try to please God by your own effort and works of the law, and we have proved it doesn’t work.
2. Put your full trust in God’s promises, and let Him show you His love and grace.

#### **V. 18-25 Hope means surety**

Against all odds, the word hope to the believer does not mean hope.

Surprised? You shouldn’t, because when one hopes for something, he may or may not get it. When we say that we now live on the hope of resurrection, this does not mean that there may be a resurrection or may not. On the contrary, it means that we are sure that there will come a time when we will be resurrected because God said so and so it shall be.

Please do also read Acts 23:6 & 24:15.

But no one can be so sure unless he has complete faith in God’s word which never fails.

Man cannot make the impossible possible, but man with God can make it.

Abraham at the age of 99 couldn’t make it, nor could he do it at a much younger age. The same with Sara, she couldn’t do it on her own even when she was young. But both with God made it. God gave a promise. Abraham believed that God can deliver what He promised.

That is why the Holy Scripture begins verse 18 by saying: **“Who (that is Abraham), contrary to hope, in hope believed.”** And Paul said: **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”** (Phil.4:13). He did not say I hope I can do all things, but he is sure he can do it all with the power of God.

**So**, the formula is: **God + helpless man = the impossible can be done.**

So, by believing, our hope becomes surety.

#### **C- The blessings of righteousness (5:1-11)**

##### **V. 1- 5 Therefore, having been justified by faith .....**

We said previously that the picture painted about God in the Old Testament was of a monster with an unapproachable enmity. But now, by believing that Jesus Christ killed that enmity, **“That He (Jesus) might reconcile them both to God in one body through the Cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”** (Eph. 2:16); we have access to God’s grace

in which we live, and can approach Him in peace, as a child approaches his loving father. And the word “**access**”, is the King James translation both old and new; but in some other versions, it is translated as “**introduction**”, and in others as “**allowed to enter or ushered in**”, both of which were used for Approaching a Royalty or allowed to be in the Royal presence. As if Paul says, Jesus ushered us into the very presence of God, and opened the door, where we find grace instead of condemnation.

But the same word which is translated access, in Greek it also means safe harbor, which also fits very well here, meaning that Jesus brought us to the safe harbor.

And in that access or safe harbor we rejoice because we see His glory.

Then Paul proceeds saying that not only we rejoice in His glory, but we rejoice in tribulations. But why should Paul spoil that beautiful picture of being in the Royal presence, safe harbor, glory, and rejoice, to mention tribulations? He has a reason, because for the believer it is not exactly safe haven on earth. Didn't Jesus Himself say “***In the world you will have tribulations.***” (John 16:33)? And there are numerous verses in the Scripture, that talk about troubles and tribulations that will accompany the believers in this life.

And the Believers in Rome were not exceptions, they had their share.

Now, we know why Paul talks about tribulations. But after all the picture is not quite gloomy as it seems to be, for he talks about a series of events that lead to hope, and hope does not disappoint.

Now, let us look at these words:

**Perseverance:** which means endurance with active overcoming and conquers. So Paul says we should rejoice in tribulations because it produces active overcoming and conquers.

**Character.** In its original Greek language it is a word given to the pure metal especially gold after it had passed through fire to purge out and eliminate all the gangue from it.

So, Paul says that we should rejoice in tribulations, because it puts us in a battle from which we come out conquerors with the character of pure gold.

**Hope.** I think we discussed this word enough before, but it doesn't harm to mention that to the believer it means **Surety**. And of course surety in God does not disappoint.

**What** a beautiful picture that Paul painted here for a word that no body wishes to have!

**V.6-11 For when we were still .....**

**It is** unheard of for a man to sacrifice himself for another. Or perhaps scarcely a man may die for a good man or for a good cause. But that is not the case with God, for while we were yet sinners, He died for us. So how could it be and where would be any love more than that? That is how God demonstrated His love for us. Does this mean that God change His attitude towards us, from monstrous hatred to fatherly love like that? **Certainly not.** God does not change. He was never monstrous hater as people thought in the past, neither did He have any enmity towards us. We were the ones who showed enmity towards God by our sin and bad conduct. His love was, is, and will be the same all the time, but sin blinded us not to see it in the past and now and in the future if we still hold to our sins. Sure enough God hated the sin in us, but He did not hate us.

And now, since we know that He loved us enough to die for us while we were sinners, how much more, would He do for us while we are justified by His blood? Much more in any way. He is alive in our hearts, holding our hands and guiding our feet so that we will not slip away, guaranteeing us eternal life, and eyeing His Glory forever. What a joyful end!

## **D- The imputation of righteousness (5:12-21)**

## V. 12-21 Just as through one man sin entered .....

This section though long, yet it all works around one fact which Paul had put it in a more simpler and clearer way in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 15:21, 21 where he says: ***“For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive”***. But, Paul as you may have noticed in his epistles, sometimes starts to state a thought, then soon side-tracks it, and then looses the track all together as the case in this passage. Of course, he has a lot on his mind. Look for example at the many trips he made, the cities he visited and preached into, the churches he established, the opposition, the jails, the strikes, the stoning, the lashes, and the handwork to support himself. Who wouldn't be side - tracked and even shattered in thought? I would. But Paul wrote an encyclopedia of Doctrines, nothing can match it anywhere in the Holy Scripture.

Now, since we know what Paul wants to say, we need to know why he put it this way.

First, let us not forget that Paul was a Jew by nationality though he was Christian by faith.

Nevertheless, He thinks in the way Jews think, and in the way he was taught as a Rabbi.

This way of thinking was and perhaps is still basically in two Fundamental points:

**1. Solidarity. One mass**

**2. Physical (not spiritual) death is a direct consequence of sin.**

### **1.Solidarity: One mass**

A Jew is not a person on his own. He is a part of one mass which is the Jewish nation or clan or tribe. There are two examples to illustrate this point:

**a-** The primitive man lived in tribe. He did not identify himself as a one separate person, but as part of the tribe. All the men go out hunting to provide food for the tribe as a whole. If a man is killed by a man from another tribe the whole tribe goes out for revenge, and so on.

**b-** The 2<sup>nd</sup> example is from the Jewish nation itself. Back in Joshua 7, The Scripture tells us that after conquering Jericho, a man called Achan kept some of the spoils to himself. This was a direct disobedience to God's orders which was to completely destroy all the spoils. So, Though Achan was the one who sinned against God, yet the whole nation was considered sinning, and punished by loosing the next battle. That is because there was no existence for the individual himself, but it was one mass.

This is the way that Paul looks at Adam. He looks at him as one mass of mankind, and that one mass of mankind had sinned against God.

That is how Adam's sin became the sin of all men.

Of course there was and still is a lot of confusion, controversy, and misinterpretation of this sentence. Some took it as each one of us is his own Adam and sinned as he did. Some others took it as Adam being the legal representative of man kind, transferred the sin to man. But this does not hold water, since a representative has to be chosen by his people but Adam had no people at that time to represent. Some others took it as that we inherited the tendency to sin not the sin itself.

### **2- Physical death is a direct consequence of sin.**

The basis for this thought is the following:

Adam sinned and ultimately he physically died, otherwise he would have been alive till now.

God said that the wages of sin is death.

No man can be condemned unless there is law to condemn him.

But the law did not exist till the time of Moses.

During that time elapsed between Adam and Moses which was thousands of years, men still

died, though legally they have not sinned because there was no law. Nevertheless, they died. So they must have sinned. How?

They died because they have sinned in Adam.

And that is why Paul used the same term **“In Adam all died”**

**So**, in essence Paul says that because of this solidarity of mankind, all men literally sinned in Adam; and because death is the consequence of sin death reigned over all men.

**And** he uses the same argument in much more brighter and pleasant way saying that mankind is also in solidarity with Christ who came in the flesh, and therefore was acquitted, and now has eternal life.

But there is one flaw and one virtue to all the above:

**The flaw:**

Our connection to Adam is purely physical being his descendants, and we have no choice or saying in it; but our connection to Christ is purely spiritual, and we have every choice to accept it or not.

**The virtue:**

Man was in a completely helpless situation, then, by what Christ has done, he enabled us to escape from that desperate situation dominated by sin, to a complete righteousness.

## **5- Sanctification: The demonstration of God’s righteousness (6:1-8:39)**

**V.1-11 What shall we say then? .....**

**Someone may say if sin** brings the grace of God into action, then let us sin.

**O, man**, you forgot that the grace of God was there before sin ever surfaced into existence.

It has been with God since His everlasting existence. It is one of His attributes. The fact that our fathers did not experience it doesn’t mean that it has not been there. So sin did not bring grace out, but for those who look forward to eternal life rather than death, they can appreciate how amazing it is. It is only the sinner who do not appreciate it.

But the answer to your thought is: how can we permit ourselves to sin, and with sin is death, while we have enjoyed life?

**Don’t you know**, O, man, that when you were baptized in the name of the resurrected Christ, you have been resurrected with Him? And you cannot be resurrected unless you have died first? Then who wants to sin and die after been resurrected?

Don’t you know that when you were immersed in the water, you have died and buried in your sins and old life, and when you emerged from the water you were resurrected to a new life?

This picture which Paul has painted was well understood by both the Jews and Greeks, since both had some ritual of burying and coming to life again, whether in their traditions or their myth. They even called the emerged person “born again” or “Child”.

But what we can get out of this passage? We can get three important facts:

1. It is terrible to abuse God’s mercy, and makes it an excuse to sin.  
In our family sphere, it would be considered abuse of love and breaking the parent’s heart.
2. Entering into Christianity, a man has committed himself to a completely new life.
3. It is a union with Christ, so one has to behave like Christ.

### **V.12-14 Therefore do not let sin reign .....**

Christianity is not an emotional experience; it is a living action in the world surrounding us. We may say God does not need man, but certainly Satan needs man, because if it had been no Adam there would have been no sin on earth. But as a matter of fact both God and Satan cannot work without man, because both invitations either to eternal life or to hell are for man, and man has to decide which invitation he should accept. But man may dread to choose. And here comes the encouragement, for Paul says ***“Do not be discouraged, for sin has no hold on you any more because you are no longer under the law, but under the grace.”*** We are no longer trying to satisfy the demand of the law, but we are trying to be worthy of that grace, the gift of God. If you love someone, would you try to hurt him or her? You wouldn't because you want to be worthy of that love. So why don't we treat God the same? And as William Barclay put it ***“At best the law restrains a man through fear; but love redeems a man by inspiring him to be better than his own best.”***

### **V. 15-23 What then, shall we sin because we are under the law?**

You probably may have heard someone arguing that if God's grace and mercy is that great to cover all our sins and forgive us, then why should we bother about not sinning? We ought to do as we like and we will be forgiven at the end anyway.

**That** is exactly what Paul deals with in this passage.

He says when you give yourself to sin, then you are slave to sin. Sin totally and exclusively possesses you. You cannot be slave to righteousness because a slave can only be owned by one master. The same holds well when you turn yourself to God, you become slave to righteousness, which means that you are now totally and exclusively owned by God. Sin cannot master you any more, because again a slave cannot be owned by two masters.

Then someone may say, what is the difference, in either case I am still a slave?

And I say you are wrong. Haven't you ever heard that some good rich people in the past used to purchase slaves just to let them free? **That** is exactly what God did and still does.

The Holy Scripture assures us about that:

John 8:32: ***“and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.”***

John 8:36 ***“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”***

Rom. 8:21 ***“Into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”***

2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 3:17 ***“And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”***

Gal. 5:1 ***“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.”***

And why should we be so skeptic anyway about being slaves to God? Haven't He bought us at a very high price which we ourselves cannot afford, His precious blood?

So, let us state **this fact** ***“We are slaves to God and what an honor and prestige!”***

**Another fact:** if someone wants to keep God as His master, and on the side does few errands to someone else, then he is not really slave to God. A slave should be solely and fully dedicated to his one master. A Christian is a man who has given complete control of his life to Christ and who has held nothing back. And no man who has done that can ever think of using grace as an excuse for sin.

**Another fact.** Paul tells them then and us now, you knew what you were doing, and you did it of your own free will, no body forced you to become Christian. You knew what Christ offers and what He demands, and you accepted the offer on His terms. So, stand fast and be loyal. Christ is in no need for the mediocre. He wants the person who expresses a permanent loyalty based on complete conviction and commitment rather than a whim of emotion.

**The last fact.** The difference between the old and the new life, between lawlessness and righteousness. The life without Christ is horrible, terrible and ugly. To appreciate that, one should look at the Romans and their life style before knowing Christ. Their world was dominated by man who had the last word in everything.

What ever he sees fit or unfit must be done. No one in the family has any saying. He can even disown his own son for no reason at all, sell him, torture him, or even kill him if he so desires. That perhaps sheds light on why the sons killed their fathers especially in the governing class like Caesars and nobles. The wife even in the noble families was isolated. She was not allowed to sit with the men or even with her children or eat on one table with them. The man indulges himself in any pleasure outside the house even extramarital affairs which was a sign of aristocratic or high class life. They had nothing to do all the day and night except indulgence in every thing that they can reach even food and drink. It is said that one of their habits, was to eat till they are full and then go out and induce vomiting to come back in and eat more and so on

I said they did nothing and I mean by that work, because it is a well known historical fact that slaves did every civil work in the Roman Empire and there were 60 million of them in the whole Roman Empire. They used to throw their own newborns especially girls in the forum at night, to be collected by dreadful Characters who bring them up in brothels where they were used for prostitution. And it is said that a father may have had sex with his own child in one of these brothels without knowing. They even indulged in savage games killing human beings just for the pleasure of watching a man killing another or a beast devouring a human being, and we all have heard about the Gladiators and the like games. And the more the pleasure the more the indulgence. Then it becomes the normal style of life and nothing wrong about it. I think we mentioned before that 14 out of the first 15 first Caesars were homosexuals.

That was the old life which the Scripture describes as lawlessness.

Now, what is the new life?

It is a righteous life. And the Greeks defined righteousness as to bring to man and to God their due. So, The Christian life is the life which gives God His proper place, and which respects the life of others, and it will never disobey God. This is the life which is described by the Scripture as Sanctification, which also means to make Holy or to be sorted out for God. And sanctification is not just something that happens or happened, but it is a continuous process that begins by giving one's life to Christ, where the road of Holiness begins.

Then Paul ends this passage by a fact that has a very interesting meaning. He says:

***“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.”***

**Wages** was the pay for the Roman soldier for his services who could face death one way or another.

**Gift** was a sum of money given to the army to be distributed in between the soldiers on special occasions. This was free unmerited present not given as a pay but out of kindness. So, actually Paul is saying that **“Sin earns death, but out of God's grace or kindness, we received eternal life. We did not work for it, nor did we deserve it.”**

**V. 7:1- 6 Or do you not know brethren .....**

As a spouse becomes no longer tied to his or her dead partner, so are we to the law of sin, because we have died to sin with Christ on the cross and buried with Him by baptism. So, we

have emerged or resurrected into a new life with no ties to the law of sin but to the law of grace and spirit, with the Spirit of God in us. So, we are not ruled any more by the law of the flesh, but by the law of Spirit who lives in us (Allegorically married to Him).

#### **V. 7- 13 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? .....**

Certainly not, because the law is Holy, it is God's word, it is divine, and it is just and good.

**Just** in the sense that if it is followed to the letter, it leads to a good relationship with God.

**Good** in the sense that it is designed to give man the highest welfare and well being.

Yet, the fact remains that, it is **the very same law** through which sin gains entry to man.

It is thought to be the source of sin for two main reasons:

1. It defines sin. Without the law no man can recognize sin as sin. Man sinned all the time long before the law was given, without recognizing that he was sinning. As a matter of fact that could be the reason why God brought the law in. Man killed, stole, and committed adultery as a style of life or as the circumstances dictated, without knowing that it was wrong. You cannot punish your child when he takes his brother's pencil; so long as you have not told him before that it is wrong. But after you have told him, it becomes a law, and you would punish him if he takes his brother's pencil. So, in a way, one can say that the law created sin, because it was not counted as sin before the law came in.
2. The forbidden is always desirable. It is a fact of life which has also been proved scientifically. The cookies are there in the jar all the time, and it is accessible for your child all the time. But once you tell him not to eat it, something inside him, makes him disobey and feel the urge to eat it. So, in a way you can say that the law creates sin. That is why in verse 11, Paul says "**Sin deceived me**", and in other translations "**Sin seduced me**". Both may be correct, but I feel that seduced describes much more intimately how much man desires the forbidden. And whether it is by deception or seduction, sin works in three ways:
  - a- The illusion of satisfaction or pleasure, and no man ever found it did.
  - b- Every time man sins, he feels justified to do so, but this is futile in God's eyes.
  - c- Man always feels he can get away with the wrong he does, but sooner or later, his sin will be uncovered.

Shall we say then that the law is wrong? Certainly not. Because:

- a- The good and bad had to be defined, because it is a guide to man's life.
- b- The sin in man took the good intentions of the law and twisted its noble purpose.
- c- The fact that sin twisted the law, shows in itself the utter dreadfulness of sin.

And Carlyle calls it "**The Infinite damnability of sin**".

What would I get out of all that? It is a Divine design that God put the law to show how awful sin is, or as Paul says "**Sin is very sinful**".

#### **V. 14 - 25 For we know that the law is spiritual .....**

In this passage, Paul describes a very confusing picture of what he wants to do and sets it as an example for us, but alas, he cannot do it because of the opposing power of sin.

So, simply he says that he knows what is right and wants to do it, yet somehow he cannot do it. He also knows what is wrong and wants to avoid it, yet somehow he finds himself doing it. He feels himself being pulled in two different directions. He feels helpless and frustrated. A Roman poet once said "**I see the better things, and I approve them, but I follow the**

worse”.

And in this struggle, Paul reaches the climax of hopelessness, and cries out “**O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?**”

But then he ends this passage by thanking God that through Jesus Christ our Lord, he serves the law of God by his mind (Spirit), but serves the law of sin by his flesh.

This is point # 2 under the heading of Challenging verses on page 4 of this study.

And the answer to that dispute is: it doesn't really matter if Paul was describing his life before or after his conversion to Christianity, because he is actually describing the struggle in our daily life now whether we are believers or not although it matters to us as Christians.

#### **V.8:1- 4 There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus .....**

I call chapter 8 the chapter of Spirit and flesh, because Paul uses these two words repeatedly in it. So, let us see why and how he is using them..

- Let us take the word “**Spirit**” first.

In the Old Testament it meant spirit as we know it now, and it also meant wind. And since the wind usually comes on with a mighty rushing power in it, so it also carried the meaning of power that is beyond human sphere. So, spirit to Paul meant Divine Power. And the Scripture tells us that when the Holy Spirit came on the disciples on the Pentecost, it came like a rushing mighty wind (Acts2:2).

- Let us now take the word “**Flesh**”.

Broadly speaking, Paul has used this word in 3 basic ways:

A- Literally meaning flesh as in circumcision of the flesh in Rom. 2:28.

B- As from the human point of view, that is “**according to the flesh**”. A good example of this is “Jesus is the son of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3). Paul also speaks of the Jews being his kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom. 9:3).

C- As behavior, conduct, or life style, that “**in the flesh**”. He often uses this term as in comparison between the life before and after being Christian as in Rom. 7:5 ; 8:4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12. And when he uses it in this last sense he is usually describing the human nature in all its weaknesses, impotence, and helplessness. And by that he means that part of man that gives chance and opens the door for sin to enter his life; which means man's sinful nature apart from God. And in Gal. 5:19-21, Paul lists the works of the flesh as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambition, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like.

So, now after knowing the meaning and usage of these two words we look at the passage itself. Paul here is comparing the state of the sinner before knowing Christ and after.

He says that the sinner who originally sinned in Adam as explained before was hopeless frustrated and defeated slave of his own sin which sprang from the knowledge of the law.

But after believing in Christ, the second Adam, who came in the flesh, in the complete form of a man but without sin, he overcame all the past and became a new and victorious man, not by his own power but by the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit.

Then he stretches this fact to say that as in Adam all sinned, so in Christ all are saved, and as by one man's sin, sin entered the world, so in one's man righteousness, obedience and goodness, and perfection to the world. So, we are no longer dominated by the flesh but by the Spirit of God who lives in us.

#### **V. 5 - 11 For those who live according to the flesh .....**

Again, Paul in this passage is comparing two styles of life that man can live:

1. Dominated by sinful human nature, which is focused on the absorption of self in passion, lust, pride, or ambition. This leads to Spiritual death.
2. Dominated by the Spirit of God who lives in him, where the will of God is his only law. This leads to eternal life.

We all shall die, because when sin entered the world, the inevitable death came with it, but the God - dominated soul shall die to rise again, because since it is one with Christ, and Christ died and rose again so the believer shall die to rise again.

#### **V. 12 - 17 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors – not to the flesh .....**

In this passage, Paul simply says that once a person becomes Christian, he enters in the family of God. But he describes it in a metaphor of adoption.

And I think that we must first know what adoption meant to the Romans, so that we can grasp the full meaning of what Paul wants to illustrate.

The adoption process was quite complicated in the Roman Empire. We are not going to discuss that in detail. But it simply involves symbolic sale (with some copper) of the adopted person by his old father and purchase by the new father, followed by a special ceremony of adoption witnessed by seven witnesses, who (one of them at least), in case of future dispute, will come forward and witness that the adoption was legally performed and executed.

Now, there is some legal consequences to that adopted person:

1. We said he was symbolically bought.
2. Now, he is legally severed from his old family, and loses all his rights as if he never existed under that family name at all.
3. All his dues and debts are completely mobbed out, because there is no such person.
4. He is admitted to the new family and bears their name.
5. He is now a true son with all the moral and status attachments. (e.g. Emperor Claudius, Nero and Octavia.).
6. Inherits equally as other children in the family
7. the whole process of adoption is witnessed by seven witnesses.

That is exactly the picture of the believer which Paul wants to paint in this passage.

1. Likewise the believer is symbolically purchased.
2. Likewise he is severed from his old family of Satan.
3. Likewise all his debts are mobbed out.
4. Likewise he is admitted to the family of God.
5. Likewise he is a true son of God with all the privileges.
6. Likewise he inherits with all the children of God.
7. Likewise his adoption process is witnessed by the Holy Spirit.

Then Paul goes one step further to say that if we are heirs with Christ, then we also share in His suffering and glory.

#### **V. 18 - 25 For I consider the sufferings of this present time .....**

The Jewish thought divided time in the present age and the age to come, and the end of the present age is the day of the Lord which is the judgment day. So, the present age is bad and full of troubles and tribulations. It is decaying and will meet its destined destruction and a new world will be created. **“Behold I create a new heaven and a new earth.”** (Isa. 65:17)

Then Paul talks about a new thought. He feels that man sinned, and his sin did not only

bring death to humanity, but also to the nature which had no choice in the whole matter, yet it was also punished. After all God told Adam after his fall: **“Cursed is the ground for your sake.”** (Gen. 3:17).

And now nature is longing for liberation from death and destruction brought to it by Adam's sin. And of course, man is longing too for the glory to come of which we have a foretaste, by the experience of the Holy Spirit; and then we shall have a full realization of what adoption in the Family of God means. Then he states that man will be a Spiritual body fit for the life of a Spiritual man. And so, he sees our life now but an eager anticipation of liberation, renovation and recreation brought unto us by the glory and power of God.

The Christian looks beyond this world to God, he sees His power of mercy and love which always brings him hope not despair. He sits waiting not for death but for life.

And that is the Christian hope.

#### **V. 26 - 28 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses .....**

C. H. Dodd defines Prayer as the divine in us appealing to the Divine above us.

Paul says that we do not know how to pray as we ought to. Why?

Because we do not know the future and we do not know what is good for us. It is exactly like a child asking his father for a bicycle, and the father does not give him the bicycle because the child suffers from a certain disease that affects his co-ordination, and the father foresees that his child will hurt himself if he attempts to ride the bicycle. The child does not know that but the father does, and it breaks his heart not to fulfill his child's desire. So, in our ignorance of our future, we may ask for things which may harm us, and on the other hand we may not ask for things which may benefit us. But thank God that he is looking after our own good, we who love Him according to His purpose, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit in us translating our desires into prayers for our own good.

So, it would be far better for us to pray saying “Father, in your hands I commend my spirit. Not my will, but yours be done.” And that is exactly what Jesus taught His disciples and us. It is a unique experience for the Christian to know and be sure that God will work everything together for the good of him who loves Him. How many times when one looks back into the past to find out that which was thought to be very bad and helpless ended up for the best? Is that a mere coincidence or is it the unseen hand of God Who worked for our good? Now, should we do something about this, **Yes**, we should just accept it.

#### **V. 29 – 30 For whom He foreknew .....**

**Predestination** is the most misunderstood doctrine by most Christians in general and even by a good number of scholars and theologians in particular.

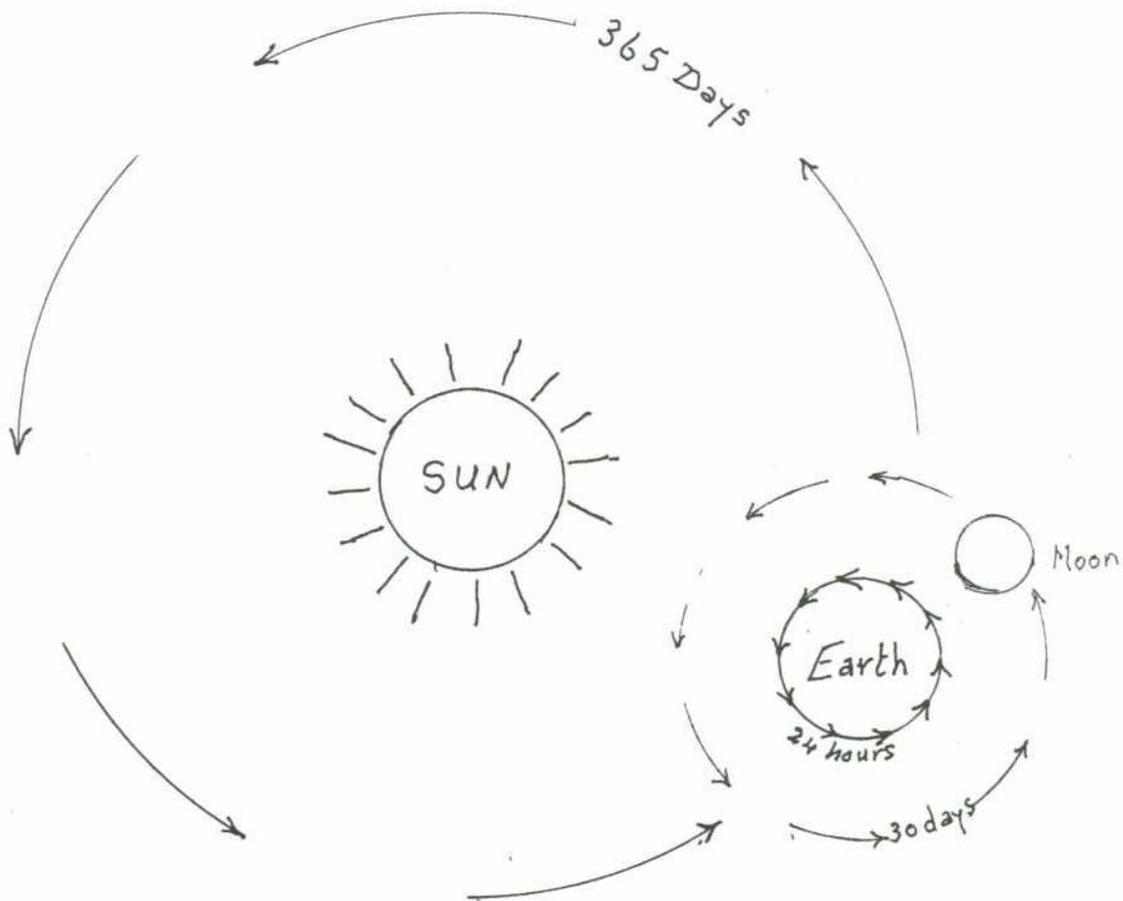
It is all about God's time. That is because very few people think of God as timeless.

**Surprised?** Yes, you should be.

And in order to understand the whole subject, we should go back to Genesis.

So, in Gen. 1:1 the Holy Scripture tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. This in itself means that God has been present before creation. How long before? We do not know; not because it is not recorded in the Scripture, but because God is timeless and we do not know a beginning or an end for Him, the thing which we express as **Eternal**. Then, in verses 2-13, the Holy Scripture tells us that God created several things in the first three days, and in verses 14-19 the Scripture tells us that He created the Sun and the moon on the fourth day.

This is very important. Because we know now that the earth revolves around itself and at the same time it rotates around the sun, which did not exist before the fourth day. We also know that each complete round of the earth around itself is completed in roughly 24 hours, which makes our day and night; and also every rotation of the earth around the sun is completed in one year which makes our Solar year and the four seasons.



Yet the Holy Scripture talks about evenings and mornings and days before the fourth day. Is there a discrepancy here? Certainly **Not**. It is just to tell us that the first 3 days (at least) which the Scripture mentioned are not controlled by the sun or moon or anything else. They were as God counted them according to His own measurement. And consequently they were not 24 hours as we know the days now. How long were they? No body knows. It could be anything from one second to millions or billions of years. And Peter touched on that saying ***“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.”*** (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:8) And what counts here is not the numerical value, but the fact that every time to God is present, not controlled by a certain earthly value. Do you want to know why? Simply because God does not rotate around the sun as we do, so, He is not subject to solar timing as we are. He is Spirit not flesh and blood as we are and He is not limited by space or place, in a way that we can say He dwells east or west of a certain landmark or in relation to the sun or moon, so He is not affected by any of these at all. Consequently, the sun does not rise on Him in the mornings

and the moon does not light His nights, because He has no morning or night as He does not sleep or wake up, otherwise ( just for example) we cannot pray to Him at (our) nights lest we awake him up! Of course there is no such silly thought, nevertheless it is a fact.

And the Psalmist also touched on that saying ***“He Who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep”*** (Ps. 121:3,4).

**Now**, since we have established the fact that God is Timeless, and I mean by that, that He is not affected by the rotation of the earth around itself or around the Sun as it is mentioned in the Holy Scripture: ***“The Father of Light (God) with Whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”*** (James 1:17); we can go to the next fact which is: to God there is no past or future, it is all **present**.

We humans may find it difficult to understand that, because we think and comprehend in a timely fashion. So we talk about yesterday as past, but to God it is present. Likewise we talk about tomorrow as future, yet to God it is present.

So, since God’s time is always present, then He sees our past, present and future all at the same time. So, He sees every person’s life as a movie strip in front of His eyes starting from A ----- Z, even before we are born. And I shall state three Biblical references to that effect, two from the Old and one from the New Testament:-

**(1)** Before they were born and while still in Rebecca’s womb, God said ***“The older shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated”*** ( Rom. 9:13). And why is that? Does God hate?

The answer is **No**, because God is Love (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:8 ), except in one occasion only and that is **Sin**. As it is stated ***“ You reject all those who are stray from Your statutes.*** (Ps. 119:118 and Proverbs. 6:16-19)

So, God did (does) not hate Esau but the sin in him. How did (does) God know? Because all the life of Esau was (is) present in front of His eyes as a movie strip from A ----- Z, even before he was born as mentioned above.

**(2)** The Psalmist Says ***“I was cast upon You from birth. From my mother’s womb You have been My God”*** (Ps. 22:10).

**(3)** Paul in the New Testament says ***“But when it pleased God, who separated (consecrated) me from my mother’s womb and called me through His Grace”*** (Gal. 1:15).

Now after knowing all these facts we can go back to the word **Predestinate**.

It is composed of two words: **Pre** which is a prefix meaning before and **Destinate** (destine) which means determine or ordain. So, it all means predetermine or foreordain.

And the word **predestinate** is a new word to the Scripture in that it was never mentioned as such in the Old Testament.

As for the New Testament, it was only used four times by Paul: twice in Romans 8:29,30 ; and twice in Ephesians 1:5,11.

So, the doctrine of predestination simply means predetermination or foreordination of God for His purpose.

No one can deny that, because if we do, then we are degrading God to a level even below humans, because we all have our free will and determination.

But the word itself as used by Paul (being the only person who used it), was used to designate the ultimate future of the soul foreordained to be with God for eternity. One must

notice also, that Paul did not use it for those who have been designated to be in Hell (away from God), though it may be inclusively understood.

Yes, predestination is a very sound doctrine, because it has been referred to in a different vocabulary in the New testament since we read about the names written in the book of Life in so many different places such as: Luke 10:20 ; Phil. 4:3 and Rev. 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 21:27,22:19.

**What** does all this mean?

It means that God in His gracious purpose has foreordained certain people and has their names written in a record which is called the book of life as mentioned above, even before we are born, or yet still from the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13:8 & 17:8).

**Sounds strange?**

**No.** He is God. He is the creator. He does and can do anything He wants or desires. And this is mistakenly called by some absolute sovereignty.

**Does** this entitle Him to be unfair and unjust, and sets an example of injustice for us to follow?

**Certainly Not.** Injustice is not one of God's attributes. He is not only just, but He is merciful. He would not condemn an innocent, nor even would He condemn a sinner till He consumes all possible means to gain him back, because "**He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**" (1Tim. 2:4).

**So,** since we believe that God is just and merciful, then writing some names in the book of life is not done haphazardly with just a mere sovereign notion as some Christians believe, especially if it is done from the foundation of the world as the Holy Scripture states in Rev. 13:8 & 17:8.

**Now,** here is what I believe: Since we believe that God's time is always present as we have proved before, and that He sees everybody's life as a film strip in front of His eyes as we mentioned before, then it is obvious that He knows that this or that person is going to believe in Him or not, and then his name would or would not be written in the book of life. And what I just said is well proven in the subtitle of this section.

From the first glance, one can see that it is a chain of Five Sequent Events starting by **foreknowing** and ending by **glorification**.

**So,** God **foreknows**, then He **predestines**, then He **calls**, then He **justifies**, then He **glorifies**. And these are not my words, they are Paul's whom I believe have been instructed personally by God during his three years of stay in Arabia which is a region in the north of the present Arab peninsula south of the Dead Sea (Gal. 1:17,18). Not only that, but Paul himself states that God worked effectively in him (Gal. 2:8).

**What** is more simple and clear than that?

**V. 31 – 39 What then shall we say to these things? .....**

Then Paul puts a question to indicate affirmation, saying that if God is with us, who can stand against us. Or in other words, he says God is with us and no body can lay a hand on us.

Why is that? Simply and logically because if He did not spare His only begotten son, and delivered Him to death on the cross for our sake, how would he not give us every thing else?

Paul here gives a picture of God's loyalty to us, He gave us the dearest He has, His Son, how could we not trust such a loyalty in other aspects of our life?

Then in verses 33 – 35 He repeats the same style of putting question to indicate affirmation saying if God has justified us, who can bring charges against us? And if Christ has died for us and risen because of His love for us, then who can separate us from His love?

So, in the affirmative form, these two questions mean, God has justified us and no one can press charges against us again, and also because of His love Christ died for us and nothing can separate us from this love.

Then he says about the risen Christ that He sits at the right hand of God interceding for us. And here William Barclay raises a very interesting point. He says look at the apostolic creed, everything Paul mentioned here is mentioned in the apostolic creed, Paul says that Christ died, rose up from the dead, and sits on the right hand of God, and so says the apostolic creed. But then the apostolic creed says and then He will judge the quick and the dead. But look at what Paul says, He says to intercede for us, which means that He is sitting on the right hand of God not to state a case against us, but to plead for us. And I like that very much because it runs perfectly hand in hand with what Paul says that If God justifies us, then who could bring charges against us again. Christ is sitting there for our defense, not for our judgment.

Then in verse 35, Paul again puts the affirmation in a form of question and says that no tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, nor sword can separate us from the love of Christ, but we come out conquerors from all these through Him.

Then in verses 38 and 39, Paul lists other things that cannot separate us from the love of Christ. The most important of them all are:

**Neither Life or death:** As we are alive, He lives in us, and we live for Him. In death, we already said that we died of our sins with Him on the cross, and we were buried with Him in baptism, and we were raised again with Him new creation. So life or death does not change His love to us. And Paul said ***“For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”*** (Rom. 13:8)

**Nor Angels:** The Jews had and probably still have a profound belief in angels.

They believe that everything on earth has its angel. There is an angel for the winds, the clouds, the snow, the hail, the rain, the thunder, the lightening, the cold, the heat, the seasons and even the blade of grass has its angel.

They also believe that they have ranks. But the most important of all is their belief that angels were very angry when God created man. Perhaps they are, or were very possessive, not wanting to share God with any other of His creation. They even believe that having grudge against mankind, they assaulted Moses on his way up the mountain of Sinai to receive the two tablets of Commandments from God, and they would have stopped him, had not God interfered.

**Not things present, nor things to come:** Again this takes us back to what we said about the Jewish belief of the present age and the age to come. But whether this or that, Paul says it doesn't matter , because nothing can separate us from the love of God.

**Nor height, nor depth:** The ancient world was haunted by the stars and their effect on man's being. They believed that every man was born under a star and his life is completely dominated by that star. The height was the time when the star was at its Zenith, and when its influence was greatest. On the other hand the depth was the time when the star was at its lowest point of influence on man. So Paul says even the stars which you think influence your lives, cannot separate us from the love of God.

**Nor any other created thing: Or creation** in some other versions:

This means even to the wildest imagination if there is other creation or other world, this will not separate us from the love of God.

## **6- Restoration: Israel's reception of God's righteousness (9:1-11:36)**

The following three chapters deal with what did and will happen to Israel. But to understand them, we must remember that Paul though Christian, yet he was Jew by birth. He still loves his people and his nation. He also still thinks and talks with the Jewish thought and attitude. So, he still thinks that they are God's chosen people who paradoxically rejected and killed His son! And though they are cast out as useless bad branches of the olive tree, for the Gentiles to be grafted in, yet they are the origin and will be grafted back. He also talks of God as the potter who does whatever he likes with the clay, and who temporarily hardened their hearts so that the Gentiles may be grafted in. Now we get to what Paul wants to say in these three chapters:

- Israel's chosen status.
- The true Jews are the remnants who believe.
- God can do anything He likes\*.
- God hardened their hearts on purpose\*.
- They believed they earn salvation by works.
- The Gentiles should not boast for they are not the origin\*.
- By way of jealousy and envy, the Jews will come back, through the Gentiles\*.
- All will be saved at the end Jews and Gentiles.

The items marked in \* need further elaboration.

Now, we shall discuss these three chapters in detail.

### **V.9:1- 6 I tell you the truth in Christ, .....**

**With** a broken heart full of sorrow for his countrymen, his kinsmen, Paul sincerely says that he wished he was accursed from Christ. He doesn't want to be any different from his kinsmen, by enjoying something they don't have. Like the mother who rather put the food in her child's plate than enjoying it herself. He wishes that all his kinsmen would enjoy the knowledge of Jesus Christ as he does. And the word that is translated as accursed in our Bibles means in its original language banishment or utter destruction. Which means that if it takes that he would be banished from God, so that his kinsmen would come to God, he wouldn't mind and would accept it happily and deeply from his heart. I am sure that many of us have seen a father or a mother, who wished to take the punishment on their child's behalf

especially if he or she is condemned to death. That is what Paul wished to do, and that is what Christ has done for us.

Why would Paul wish to do that? We all know or say it is because he loves them, which is true, and actually that is why Christ died for us too. But Paul mentions other reasons:

1. They are the adopted children of God, ***“You are the children of the Lord your God”*** (Deut. 14:1). ***“Is not He thy father that hath bought thee?”*** (Deut. 32:6). ***“Israel is my son, even my firstborn.”*** (Ex. 4:22). ***“And called my son Israel out of Egypt.”*** (Hosea 11:1).

But the sad fact is Israel never dealt with God as a father. They deliberately rejected Him. How dreadful to break God’s heart.

2. They had the glory. Obviously Paul is not talking of their own glory, because they had none, but he is talking about the Glory of God Who lived among them in the Holy of Holiness where His Shekinah would shine on them. He is talking about the Pillar of fire that walked in front of them at night and the cloud over their heads in the daytime. They didn’t hear of it but they saw, experienced, and lived in it all their life. How terrible to see the glory of God and ignore it.

3. They had the covenants. God repeatedly entered into covenants with Israel, starting with Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, then the law on Mount Sinai. And in each case, God was the One who took the initiative. It is amazing to see how God always wanted to be on loving friendly terms with them.

He is still doing the same with us today. He stands at the door and knocks.

How terrible and even rude to keep him standing at the door without inviting Him in.

4. They had the law. This is actually against them. They have no excuse. They cannot claim ignorance. They were told what to do. But they deliberately ignored it. How terrible to ignore the light and live in the darkness.

5. They had the service of God, which means that God opened the door to approach Him by serving Him, which is worshipping in the Temple. But they shut the door. How terrible to shut the doors of mercy.

6. They had the promises. From Abraham till Jesus Christ, God never ceased to proclaim His purpose through His prophets, but Israel never cared to listen. How terrible to miss what God has prepared for us.

7. They had the fathers. They had a heritage which any human being would wish to have. How terrible to turn one’s back to his heritage.

8. They had all the above leading to Christ the anointed One, yet they rejected Him. He was not an outsider, He was not a Gentile to be ignored or despised, He was also a Jew.

What an unkind response, God offered everything on a silver platter, but they didn’t wish to feast on it.

How disappointing, frustrating, and heart breaking.

So, God’s purpose was to send His Son to save Israel and the whole world. But they killed Him. Does this mean that God’s plan failed? Paul says **No**. Because not all those of Israel are Israelites. This means that not all the descendents of Israel by the flesh are real Israelites. Then who are the real ones? The answer will come in the next section.

## **V. 7 – 13 Nor are they all children .....**

Then Paul proceeds to say nor all the descendents of Abraham by the flesh are Children of

Abraham. Why? Paul argues that, not all the Jews rejected Christ. Because God said to Abraham in Isaac you will have a seed. He didn't say in Ishmael who was the firstborn, but from Isaac who was the son of the promise and the son of a free woman not a son of a slave. And spiritually this means that the promise is for the free children not for the slaves of sin or Satan, in other words the children of the promise of God are the believers not the unbelievers. Some of them he calls the remnants believed. As a matter of fact the first believers were all Jews before preaching the good news to the Gentiles. These are the real seed of Abraham and the real Israelites. So here is the fact, that every person that believes is a real Israelite and a child of Abraham, and has nothing to do at all with pedigree. And these are the elect. And the election is nothing new we hear of in the new testament, it is known in the Old Testament ever since God 's purpose was to choose people from whom will come he who will crush or bruise the serpent's head. (Gen. 3:15)

So, He elected Abram and not any other member of his family, then He elected Isaac and not Ishmael, then He elected Jacob and not Esau. All were true blood descendents of Abraham, yet some were elected and not the others. So, there was election through out the whole family history of Abraham.

Then Paul proceeds further to say that this election has nothing to do with merits or deeds and human earning.

#### **V. 14 -18 What shall we say then? .....**

So, if man has nothing to do with that and it is all from God's side, then one may say that God is unjust. Paul says God forbid. He is God and He can do whatever He likes. God Himself said to Moses that He will have mercy on whom He chooses to have mercy (Ex. 33:19). The other example given by Paul was that God raised Pharaoh up to demonstrate His power and to declare His name through out all nations. Now this argument could prove valid to some and not to others, but man who is the creation cannot judge God the creator. My own view on this matter, is included in what I talked about wrath on pages 11, 12, and about Predestination on pages 29 – 32.

And as you read it again, you will still realize that this misunderstanding is due to the fact that man does not realize that God is timeless i.e. not affected by time, and any time to Him is present.

#### **V. 19 – 29 You will say to me then, .....**

The argument goes on. If it is all a matter of God's election, then why does He blame those who reject Him? Paul said in the previous section that He is God and He can do whatever He likes. And here he gives an analogy of the clay and the potter, in which he argues that the clay cannot question the potter why did he make it this shape or the other. (Quoted from Jer. 18:1-6)

In all honesty, I am one of those who feel that this argument is invalid because:

1. God creates from nothing, but the potter makes (not creates) from something.
2. God creates man, but the potter makes a thing.
3. Man is created in the image of God, but the pot is made in an image of the mind of a creature of God. Exactly like the painting of the last supper by Leonardo Da Vinci which lately raised a lot of controversy. It is man's made expression of thought, which does not necessarily mean that he is right.
4. Man is a living body and soul, but the pot is a lifeless thing.

5. Man thinks, talks and moves and has feelings, but the pot has none of these.
6. Above all, man has free will and power of choice, but the pot has not.
7. God may create the man lame or blind, and sure man has no choice in that, though he may in a sense ask why. But God does not make the choice for man as what or when to do. And as I said before, the concept of punishment is wrong, and man reaps what he sows, and I gave the example of the student who fails the exam because he did not study, not because the examiner punished him. And also the child who burns himself because he put his hand in the fire not because his father punished him.

Then Paul moves on to another argument, which I consider as an excuse rather than a valid argument. He says that the rejection of the Jews to Christ happened in order that the door might be opened to the Gentiles. My objection is what if they had not rejected? Would the door be still opened to the Gentiles, or closed forever? If we say it would still be opened, then it didn't need the rejection of the Jews to Christ. And if we say it would be closed, does this mean that God changes his plans according to what the Jews decided to do? Meaning it was not in God's plan to open the door for the Gentiles till the Jews decided to reject Christ. So, as you see it is again an invalid discussion. But I feel that Paul argued it anyway out of love to his kinsmen, who did wrong and he wants to find an excuse for their wrong doing. So, Paul is trying here to convince himself that though his kinsmen have done wrong by rejecting Christ, good came out of this rejection, for the door was opened to the Gentiles. So far, one may accept this argument though weak.

Then he proceeds to say That God knew about that rejection before hand as He inspired His prophets in the past. Listen to what Jeremiah says: **“And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them you are not my people, there it shall be said to them you are sons of the living God.”** (Hos. 1:10). And **“Then I will say to those who were not My people, you are my people.”** (Hos. 2:23) And **“Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have been made like Gomorrah.”** (Isa 13:19)

As if Paul is telling his kinsmen, had you really read the Scripture and understood it, you would have avoided this horrible mistake.

Then he says shall we say, the Gentiles have attained what the Chosen people of God couldn't attain? Yes, because they attained it by faith while the Israelites tried to attain it by their own works of the law. I like what William Barclay said about that, listen to what he says: “The Jew, by strict obedience to the law, could in the end pile up a credit balance. When he had acquired this credit balance, the result was that God was in his debt; God owed him salvation.” But no imperfect can satisfy a perfect God. They have stumbled on the rock which is the foundation of righteousness or good relation with God, Christ, in whom whosoever believes shall never be put to shame.

#### **V. 10:1- 13 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God .....**

Paul begins this chapter as he did in the previous one, by expressing his heart desire for his kinsmen to be saved, then he adds to say, that they have done that with good intentions, because they are zealous for God but followed the wrong way. They thought that they can earn Righteousness (good relation with God), by obedience to the letter of the law and earn credit and favor with God. (e.g. Shabat). They even classified their attitude towards God in three categories:

- 1- The good, and that is the person whose credit with God is on the plus side.
- 2- The bad, and that is the person whose credit with God is on the minus side.

3- The in-between, and that is the person who, by doing one more good deed, would become good.

But Paul answers by saying that Christ is the end of the law, for righteousness is to everyone who believes. As if he is telling them, "you observe the law in an effort to reach for God? He did it, He Himself came to you, you do not need any thing else to take you there. So the law is of no use to you in this matter. The good relationship between God and man no longer depends on the law, it depends on accepting Christ". And for that, Paul quotes two Old Testament references:

1- "***The man who does those things shall live by them.***" This is Moses talking about the Ten Commandments in Lev. 18:5.

2- "***It is not in Heaven, that you should say, who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it? Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may here it and do it? But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.***"

Again Moses is talking here about the law, the word of God. But Paul is applying it to Christ who is the word of God, who is near us and we don't have to go very far to find Him, He is living in our hearts. What Paul is trying to say here: listen to what Moses had said in the past and obey him because he said that the word of God is in your hearts.

Then in verses 9 and 10, Paul says that man must confess by his mouth and believe in his heart that Christ is Lord, so that he can be saved; though verse 10 should be before verse 9, because one believes first then confesses.

And the question here is, believe in what and confess of what?

We have all that in the apostolic creed: believe and confess that Christ is Lord and he lived on earth, then crucified (sacrificed Himself) for our sins, then died, buried and resurrected, and now He is alive interceding for us.

This privilege is for whosoever believes in Him, and calls on Him, with no distinction of race, sex, nationality, Jew, Greek, or Barbarian.

#### **V. 14 – 21 How then shall they call on Him .....**

This section, we shall take it as a whole, not verse by verse. I believe that Paul here is telling the Jews that they have nothing to stand on to justify their attitude of rejection. They cannot claim that they never heard the word, nor if they heard it, they cannot claim that they couldn't understand it., simply because God never left them without guidance through His word and the prophets, and the word prophet does not only mean a messenger, but a teacher as well. So, they have heard the word, and they had the teachers, and they should have understood it, because the Gentiles did understand it, accepted it, and believed. And he supports all that by quotations from the Old Testament.

Then at the end, he says that God never gave up on them, but all the time He stretched out His hand to them, but they never cared to hold on His hand, and again he supports this by another Old Testament verse.

All the Old Testament quotations mentioned in this section are as follows:

V. 15 quoted from Isa. 52:7 and Nahum 1:15.

V. 16 quoted from Isa. 53:1.

V. 18 quoted from Ps. 19:4.

V. 19 quoted from Deut. 32:21.

V. 20 quoted from Isa. 65:1.

V. 21 quoted from Isa. 65:2.

**V. 11:1 – 12 I say then, has God cast away His people? .....**

Again here, we shall take this section altogether and not on individual verse base.

Paul starts by a question which he means affirmative statement. He says that God has not rejected His people, and I am a living proof of that since I myself is a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin. But as there was in the past, there is now a remnant who believe, and he quotes God telling Elijah, who was protesting against his people, that there is still 7000 men who are still faithful. And the idea of the remnant has been mentioned in the Old Testament in several place such as Amos 9:8-10, Micah 2:12; 5:3, Zephaniah 3:12-13, Jeremiah 23:3, Ezekiel 14:14,20,22, Isaiah 7:3; 8:2, 18; 9:12; 20:21 and 6:9-13.

Now this is very important because it proves that God even from the past was dealing with the people on an individual bases and not as a nation. It is only the faithful person and not the whole nation shall be saved. And as this held good in the past, it still holds good now, for God will justify the individual not a church nor any religious institution. And this equally means that a person is saved not because he is a member of a nation, a tribe, a church or a Christian institution but because he is an individual who believed, trusted, and surrendered his life to Christ. This is the remnant that God talked about to His people in the past through His prophets, and to us now through Paul.

And the idea that Paul chose to quote Ps. 69:22,23 “**Let their table become a snare and a trap.**” Which seems to be out of place here, is really a very important fact even to us now. Paul here is painting the same picture as the Psalmist in the past, that while people were sitting safely at their table eating and enjoying themselves depending upon their own power and might, suddenly there comes the attackers and destroy them. By that Paul means that Israel sat safely depending on their righteousness, heritage and the idea of being the chosen people, then they found themselves missing what others (the Gentiles) have been graciously given. What happened then? They never understood that only by His grace, God has chosen them. And if by grace then it was not their works that made them chosen, because they were not existing when God gave the promise. They depended on a mirage of false beliefs.

Then Paul says that they were blinded, but the original word in Greek means **callus**, which is a term used in medicine to describe the new bone formation around the site of fracture which acts like a very hard cement. So Paul is saying that callus grew around their hearts and rendered it insensitive to the word of God, and they became insensitive to the consequences of sin and kept sinning.

Then he says that Israel's refusal or rejection of the good news opened the door to the Gentiles who joyfully accepted it by faith. And that is what I objected to before. Because what he says implies that salvation was not meant for the Gentiles, but it happened that Israel rejected it, so it was given to the Gentiles; further more it puts God in the position of a double minded person who was not sure as what to do till something else happened that made Him change His mind. And of Course God forbid, He is not like that.

I am a firm believer that the whole world, Jews or Gentiles, was in God's consideration and plan for salvation since before creation.

**V. 13 – 24 For I speak to you Gentiles; .....**

In this passage, Paul speaks as a real Orthodox Jew who believes that Israel is a blessing to

the whole world. They feel that God's promise to Abraham; ***"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."*** Gen. 22:18; 26:4; 38:14 & Acts 3:25, is meant for them as a nation. They didn't understand that God said seed and not seeds, where He refers to a single person who is Jesus Christ.

So, Paul says here that even their rejection to God's grace, was a blessing to the world, which again is not the case since the world's salvation was in God's plan since before creation.

Every now and then, Paul's mind slips back to his previous status as a Jew, and think about his countrymen, who are missing this grace in which we all stand, and wishes that all of them one day may be saved. That is why he says in verse 14, ***That I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.*** And provoke to jealousy here, means that when the Jews see what the grace of God has done for the Gentiles, they may envy them, and come back to faith.

Now please realize that this passage is very difficult to understand and to comprehend, and I have read several commentaries on it, but I am still not satisfied by any. But the way I look at it is as follows. **The original olive tree** is not a certain nation or people as most of the commentators believe, but it is **Faith**, and those who did not feed on this sap of faith died and dried and fell out. Now branches from a wild olive tree were grafted in that tree, and they flourished and grew up because they fed on that sap of faith. That is why Paul says it is because of their **unbelief** they were broken off in verse 20.

Now, should the Gentiles boast? No they shouldn't, first because it was not their work or effort that grafted them; it was the Grace of God. Secondly, because the root which is faith is the one that supports them, not themselves, and if they do not feed on that sap of faith, they also will dry and fell out as well, for God Who did not have mercy on the broken branches which were originally from the tree, He would not have mercy also on the grafted ones. Now, there are two points here, I would like to stress on:

**1-** Those broken branches, God **did not** break them off. We must understand that God does not break any thing. Listen to what the Holy Scripture says in Is. 42:3 & Mat.12:20: ***"A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench."*** So, you see, had they were even a bruised reed or a smoking flax, God would have never broken them off, on the contrary, He would have kept them and nourished them to live. **They are the ones who broke themselves out of the tree, by their own will, by not feeding on that sap of faith, and as Paul said in verse 20 because of their unbelief.**

Not only that, but if God wants to graft different branches why would He brake the original branches especially if they were good and healthy?!

**2-** The first fruit mentioned in verse 16, is translated in other versions first born, and I feel that it is more appropriate, because Israel was the first born to God ***"Israel is My son, My firstborn"*** (Ex.4:22), then came other children which are the Gentiles.

And my own impression on this passage is that Paul wants to say, it is true that Israel had failed God and broke His heart. But it was not all Israel, because there is still a remnant who believes, and one day the rest will believe as well, and all the nations will be one in God whether Jews or Gentiles.

#### **V. 25 – 36 For I do not desire brethren, .....**

Here comes the section which I mostly cannot find logic. This doesn't mean that I doubt or reject any of God's word, for I am a firm believer in the word of God from Genesis to

Revelation, and it is a matter of interpretation; so please be patient with me, hear me till the end and then you may agree or not. That is your privilege, and whatever you disagree with erase it from your mind and remove it from these notes.

Paul in an effort to justify his people for their rejection and disobedience, says:

- 1- God is sovereign, and He cannot go back on His word (We all agree to that). He promised Abraham, then He cannot reject His Chosen. But what was God's promise to Abraham?
  - a- **"Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them, so shall your descendants be."** Gen. 15:5
  - b- **"To your descendants, I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates."** Gen. 15:18

That was the promise, and as you see, God did not promise eternity or salvation. It was all earthly matters and not spiritual. So, Paul's argument is invalid from this point of view.

- 2- But he finds himself forced to admit the fact that they rejected Christ.  
So, he says yes, they rejected Christ, but not all of them, some of them did, **but** it was God Who hardened their hearts. But why?
- 3- God did that on purpose, to fit in His plan.  
So, what is God's plan?
- 4- God's plan was for the Gentiles to be saved as well. So, God had to harden their hearts, so that the good news can reach the Gentiles.  
This is the same argument as the engrafted branches mentioned above. Why would God harden the hearts of Israel so that the Gentiles could hear and accept the good news?
- 5- So, after all what seems to be rejection or disobedience, which is considered bad, it brought something good for the Gentiles.  
So, he says what Israel has done was not bad at all, after all it benefited the Gentiles.
- 6- This is the last argument. He says that God hardens not only Israel, but all the people, so that He may show His mercy! So Israel like other nations was hardened.

I must admit, this definitely I cannot understand. If you do, then please help me. I said it before, and I say it now again, God does not harden any heart, nor does He blind any eye. Look again at Isa. 42:3 & Mat. 12:20: **"A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench."**

The idea of God being described as such was an Old Testament impression of God in their minds, because they couldn't see the love of God as we see it now, because what they saw was that everything depends on works, there is no such thing as a loving God. But God's love was, is, and will be the same till eternity.

Man is responsible for what he does, and don't tell me that God made him do that.

Listen to what James wrote, though he was from the old school of thought: **"Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."** (James 1:13) Isn't this exactly what Paul is saying that God hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes?

Then in verses 33 – 36, Paul praises God for His unreachable wisdom, judgment, and riches.

As for the Gentiles being in God's plan for salvation since the foundation of the world, is quite evident in the quotations which Paul quoted in chapter 15 which I would like to discuss at this time since it pertains to our present discussion, So:

- In verse 9, he quotes 2<sup>nd</sup> Sam. 22:50 and Ps. 18:49  
**"Therefore I will give thanks to You O, Lord, among the Gentiles, and sing**

*praises to your name.”*

- Then in verse 10, he quotes Deut. 32:43  
*“Rejoice, O, Gentiles with His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants.”*
- Then in verse 11, he quotes Ps. 117:1  
*“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us.”*
- And in verse 12, he quotes Isa. 11:10  
*“For the Gentiles shall seek him, and His resting place shall be glorious.”*
- And lastly in verse 21, he quote Isa. 52:15  
*“To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard, shall understand.”*

## **7- Application:**

### **The behavior of God’s righteousness (12:1-15:13)**

It is Paul’s systematic style in his writings, to offer applications to the life of the readers after discussing the theological aspects of his message. And here he is not different. So, in the next three chapters, we are going to deal with these applications.

#### **V. 12:1- 8 I beseech you therefore, brethren, .....**

I petition to you brothers to offer your bodies a living sacrifice.

This could be feasible when talking to a Jew; but certainly it is not so when talking to a Greek. Because the Greeks in their Knowledge (which they never ceased to claim), and the Gnostics after, believed that the body is bad, filthy, despised and even to be ashamed of. But of course, this is not the Christian belief. We believe in worshipping God by the spirit and serving Him by the body. After all our bodies are the Temple of God, where the Holy Spirit abides and works. God Himself does not consider that the body is bad otherwise He would have not taken the body of man (what we call incarnation).

And the word translated as service in our Bibles, still means service but with the best ability and dedication.

So, Paul says here, please offer what you can do best with your body in your daily life as worship to God. So, worshipping God is not only by going to church, singing hymns, reading the word, hearing a sermon, or giving monetary offerings, but it is also what we can do best with our bodies, at work, in the playing grounds, at the market place, and in the neighborhood. That is the real worshipping, or call it the spiritual worship.

How can we do that? Here, he used two words: not to conform and transform.

The word he used for conform, deals with the outward form, appearance or attitude, which is changeable in every minute or hour of our life, since one can behave or act or behave according to the needs and circumstances of life and the society or community he lives in. So, Paul says do not live a changeable life according the world.

Then the word transform, deals with the unchangeable inward being. To illustrate this, a person’s inward being does not change whether he is dressed in a suit or in a pajama, but his outward appearance changes.

So, this whole paragraph means that Paul is appealing to us to worship God the real way

which we explained above, by changing our inward not our outward which changes anyway by the world around us. How do we change our inward is by renewing our mind. What does the mind do? It discerns what is good or bad, what is acceptable and in the perfect will of God. In other words, think of what is good in God's standards not ours.

In short, if Christ is in us, we think and behave differently, and that is the real daily worship. So, what is the practical application of that, or how can we put that to work?

The answer is to be and live as one body. The body is one, but it is composed of many members and each has its job to do. They work in harmony to keep the body going.

So also should the church or the Christian community be. How?

- 1- Know thy self. That is the first thing to do. One must know what he can do.
- 2- Accept thy self as God meant you to be. Do not complain. Do what God have given you the talent to do, no matter how high or low it may be, recognized or not. Whatever you contribute how trifle it may seem to be, it will build up the church community.
- 3- Always remember that whatever gift you have is from God. And a gift of God means something given to man by God which man himself could not have acquired or attained. It is personalized or custom made to fit that particular person. A poet, writer, performer, teacher, preacher, singer, and so on, each has his own custom made gift. Whatever it is, every person has it. It is a free gift and he or she must use it as God meant it to be.
- 4- Use it for the Glory of God, not your own.

And out of God's numerous gifts, Paul singled out some, worthy to be looked at:

#### **A- Prophecy:**

The word prophecy is rarely used in the New Testament as foretelling. It is the action of announcing the word or the message of God with authority according to one's faith

So, when the Holy Scriptures tells us in Mat. 7:29 that Jesus taught the multitude as one with authority, it means prophesied.

#### **B- Service:**

Not every person has the gift of standing in public to proclaim something, but certainly every person can serve his fellow man in one way or another.

#### **C- Teaching:**

When Phillip, directed by the Holy Spirit, met the Eunuch of Ethiopia who was reading the Scripture (Acts 8:27-39), he asked him if he understands what he is reading. Not that Phillip thought the Eunuch is ignorant or stupid, but he thought by the Holy Spirit that the Scripture needs understanding. That is the job of the teacher.

It may well be that one of the reasons of church failure as a whole nowadays, is that the people do not understand clearly what they believe in.

#### **D- Exhortation:**

Encouraging is the first step to success. A good word and pat on the shoulder is the best reward that can be offered to a person (not necessarily a child) who has done something. Criticism never leads to advancement ever. There is no such thing as constructive criticism. Criticism always carries the sense of discontent with what the other has done; and human nature does not accept someone telling him or her that what they have done is wrong.

**Why?** Because every one does to the best of his ability not to the ability of others.

#### **E- Give with liberty:**

Give with generosity and simplicity. Give with loving kindness. Do not let the receiver feel that he is indebted to you. Let him feel that if he is indebted, he is really indebted to God who gives to all liberally and without reproach (James 1:5).

Avoid giving a moral lecture of criticism along with your gift. Delight in what you do for others.

**F- Leadership:**

Paul is not necessarily talking here about leading, but about willing to do something for the church (I prefer to call it Christian community). Many of us nowadays avoid or find excuses not to participate in the church's work.

Now, if you accept to do a task, do it with zeal and love. After all it is God's work; He will reward you, not the people whom you serve.

**G- Mercy:**

Paul urges us to offer mercy with cheerfulness, with the understanding that we all shall stand at the seat of God's judgment.

So show your mercy to others, as God Shows His mercy to you. Show it with love and without contempt or criticism.

**V. 9-21 Let love be without hypocrisy .....**

In this passage, Paul lays out what a Christian daily way of life should be towards God and people. So he says:

**A- Sincere Love:**

It is not self-centered. It is not to gain far more than to give. It is not acting.

It is pure outgoing of the heart to others. And sincere means without wax or without cheating.

**B- Abhor what is evil:**

One thing which God teaches to hate is evil, because He hates it. There is great difference between hating evil because it is evil and hating it because of its consequences. If one hates evil because of its ill effects, it may indicate that he may love it if it has no ill effects.

Barclay says that no man is really a good man when he is good simply because he fears the consequences of being bad. Not to fear the consequences of dishonor, but to love honor with a passionate love is the way to real goodness.

**C- Be kindly affectionate to one another:**

The Greek word for affectionate is not merely so, but it means family love or affection. So, Paul is stressing that we are all one family. We are brothers and sisters having one Father.

**D- In honor giving preference to one another:**

It is not easy to give one another priority in honor, but it is very easy to deprive one another from the honor he or she deserves. That is our sinful human nature. But the Christian must know that there is no right of honor for him to claim, but only duty to do.

**E- Not lagging in diligence:**

Life is our battle ground between good and evil. It prepares us for eternity. It is a full time duty. There should not be any laxity. The machine cannot run if the joints are rusty.

It is more beneficial for the Christian to burn out rather than to rust out.

**F- Fervent in Spirit:**

The Spirit told the church of the Laodiceans, "**So then because you are luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.**" (Rev. 3:16) We certainly do not want to be vomited out By God. God likes the fervent spirit. The spirit of man today is that he doesn't care less.

**G- Rejoice in hope:**

There is no such thing as hopeless Christian, because we have put all our hope in God **Who did not spare His Son, but delivered Him for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?** (Rom 8:32).

#### **H- Patient in tribulation:**

God promised us eternal life with tribulations in the present time, and He is keeping His promise. Why don't we also keep our side of the promise? Or should we choose the easy part for us where we didn't do anything to earn it, and leave the rest? But God is always with us and we should not fear. ***"And Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*** (Mat.28:20).

#### **I- Continuing in prayer:**

The only support for us in our life is God. If we loose contact with him, our lives will be meaningless. We have to be in continuous communication by continuous prayer.

#### **J- Distributing to the needs of the saints:**

Are we going to meet God with all our earthly possessions? The answer is no. Then why should we keep it? Why don't we share it with others who are in need, especially the saints our fellow believers?

#### **K- Given to hospitality:**

Christianity is the religion of Open heart, open hand, and open door.

***"Be hospitable to one another without grumbling."*** (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:9).

**And now**, how about dealing with others? This is the subject of the next few verses.

#### **1- Bless who persecute you:**

A faithful slave follows his master's foot steps. WE should do the same. Our Master prayed for those who crucified him, and we should also pray for those who inflict harm on us.

#### **2- Sincere sympathy:**

We should share other's joy as well as grief. Nothing leaves a sense of deep appreciation in a broken heart, than seeing that others feel and share the agony he is in.

#### **3- Live in harmony with one another:**

In the new King James Version, it says ***"Be of the same mind toward one another."***

I used to tell my patients that a scrambled musical note is nothing but noise which annoys, but when it is in harmony it is such a delight to hear. That is the way to live with one another.

#### **4- Do not set your mind on high things:**

God does not look at one's social status or rank; He looks at one's spiritual status.

In the Roman Empire, where it was so fundamental to segregate the common from the elite, let alone the slaves; Christian gatherings were the only place where the slave sat side by side with his master.

#### **5- Show your Christianity by your conduct:**

Be kind. Be fair. Don't give place to anger. Don't behave self-righteously. Don't be critical. Don't be self- opinioned. Give others chance to show their views. And so on.

#### **6- Live at peace with all men:**

Paul have put two phrases here; ***"if it is possible"***, and ***"As much as depend on you"***

It is not an absolute peace. Sometimes one has to stand up for the right, or even fight.

Also even the best Christians may differ in their level of tolerance.

Paul knows that, and that is why he put these two phrases.

#### **7- Do not avenge yourselves:**

For three reasons:

1- Vengeance is not ours, it is God's.

2-Treating with kindness, softens the hard heart, and moves it to burning shame.

3- The real effective way to conquer an enemy is to make him a friend.

So far, Paul has discussed how the Christian should behave towards God and man. In the first 7 verses of chapter 13, he discusses the Christian behavior towards the ruling authorities.

And this is not a one time teaching of Paul, for he advised two of his disciples, Timothy and Titus about that. Please read 1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 2:1-2.; and Titus 3:1

Also Peter advised about it too. Please read 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:13-17

And it is very interesting to note that the Christians even during their darkest time of persecution in Rome never rioted against or opposed the authorities.

One of the Christian leaders of that time wrote to the ruler of the state;” *Everywhere, we, more readily than all men endeavor to pay to those appointed by you the taxes, both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by Jesus. We worship only God, but in other things we will gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that, with your kingly power, you may be found to possess also sound judgment.*”

Most of the early fathers wrote about that, and it was their consistent teaching to obey and pray for the ruling governments even at the time of the famous emperor Nero who burned Rome to kill the Christians in their catacombs.

Why does Paul insist on this teaching? There are few reasons:

1- The Jews were known to be notoriously rebellious against any government whether at home or abroad. There are two incidences I can think of now: at the time of Jesus the Scripture tells us that there were several groups of rebels lead by such names as Barabas who escaped death by the desire of people and their chief priests, and also Theudas, Judas of Galilee mentioned in Acts 5: 34 - 37,

The other incidence was casting all Jews out of Rome at the time of Claudius Caesar as mentioned in Acts 18:2. We should not also forget the Zealots who were so notoriously anti-government that they killed and burned the houses of their own country men who paid tributes to the ruling Roman government in Judea.

So, Paul was very careful to dissociate Christians and Christianity from the Jews and their terrorist actions to prove to the whole world that Christianity does not tolerate such actions.

2- Man cannot isolate himself from the country he lives in. He enjoys certain privileges and he also has certain obligations. One cannot take one and refuse the other.

3- Man is protected by the state and its laws; otherwise he will be ruled by the law of the Jungle which is survival for the fittest or the strongest.

4- Paul did not view the Roman government as the Jews viewed it, for though in chains, and legally a state prisoner, he enjoyed complete freedom to preach the Gospel and live on his own and receive friends; which no prisoner in any civilized country enjoys now.

5- Paul viewed the different governments as instruments in God’s hand to keep the world in order. They are stewards entrusted to do a task for God, then as Christians we should respect and help them, lest we would be hindering God’s work.

**V. 8 – 10 Owe no one anything except to love one another .....**

In these 3 verses, Paul concludes that love fulfills both the laws of the spirit and the flesh; for if you love your neighbor, you will not covet his wife, daughter, or maid, nor any person who belongs to him (Thou shall not commit adultery); and you will do not kill him or anyone belonging to him (Thou shall not kill); and you will not steal his ox or donkey or rob him of any of his possessions (Thou shall not steal); and you will not falsely witness for or against him (Thou shall not bear false witness); and you shall not covet His wife, daughter, maid or any

thing that belongs to him (Thou shall not covet).

And we must notice that Paul considered love as a debt we owe to our neighbor, and being good Christians we must pay this debt. But love is not a material thing that once you pay it you are free of it and no obligation any more; it must be paid on daily bases, any time, any where, and what ever the occasion may be.

In summary, the law of love makes all other laws unnecessary.

#### **V. 11 -14 And do this, knowing the time that now it is high time to awake .....**

We mentioned before, that people in the old times believed that every person is born under a star which affects him all his life. And there was a time when that star will be in the proper position in orbit near to earth that it will bring the zenith of effect on the person who becomes most vulnerable, and they called this high time; on the other hand when it is away in orbit its effect is weak and they called that low time.

So Paul is telling them;” that is your high time where you will benefit the most, catch it before it slips away from you.”

By faith we believe in our salvation; and it is a true and sure fact. But this is an event which will not be completed till we are with Christ in heaven at His second coming (please read 1<sup>st</sup> Thes. 4:14 – 18). The early church was expecting this to happen any moment in their life time, and so Paul always reminded them that it is very near. We also believe the same. How near, no body knows, but it is near. So Paul is exhorting them then and us now to be ready, for the day of the Lord will come like a thief.

How could we be ready?

1- By casting away the works of darkness (That is the time before Knowing Christ). **”The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light”** (Mat. 4:16. Quoted from Isa. 9:1, 2).

2- By putting on the armor of light, which is by not doing the works of the darkness such as:  
**Revelry:** describes a noisy group of people usually drunken, who sweep their way through the streets of the city at night causing disturbance and nuisance to others.

**Drunkenness:** Greeks drank wine which was much diluted and used it instead of their water supply which was inadequate and dangerous. But to be drunk of wine was very shameful. So drunkenness was a vice condemned by both Greeks and Christians.

**Lewdness:** In its original language it denoted the desire for the forbidden bed. It also describes the person who sets no value on fidelity, and who takes his pleasure when and where he desires.

**Lust:** It describes the person who is deeply in the grip of sin and beyond control. He doesn't care what the others think of him. He doesn't mind making nuisance of himself in public. And he doesn't mind degrading himself to the animal level.

**Strife:** It describes the person who lusts for the first place, power and prestige, no matter how it takes to take him there.

**Envy:** When used wrongly, it describes the person who grudges others for what they have and wishes that they wouldn't have it so that it can be his.

And then Paul puts a remark in verse 14, which urges us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ which means to conform in His image, and not to give place for the lust of the flesh.

#### **14:1 – 12 Receive one who is weak in the faith .....**

Paul starts by urging them to accept the weak in faith as he is, and try not to make him stumble, and to help him to stand up on his feet when he falls down.

And the question here is who is the weak in faith?

It could mean several situations:

- It could mean the young in faith, and this means the believer who accepted the faith recently regardless of his or her age, which still means that he or she did not have the chance to experience the fruits of faith and Christian fellowship with Christ and fellow man.
- It could mean that he is a strong believer, yet he believes in eating special food and observing special days and feasts.
- It could mean that he is a strong believer, yet he is not deep enough in the word of God.
- It could mean that he has strong faith but he still feels that works have a very important role in gaining or earning God's favor. Remember that all early Christians believed in that till the time of reformation.

Of course the same happens now in all Christian communities. But Paul says treat such a person with respect, don't irritate him, don't ridicule him, don't take the attitude of contempt, and don't be cynical.

This whole verse may as well mean to accept the weak in faith, but because he is weak, do not jam what you believe is right and fundamental down his throat. He may not be able to digest it. And Paul touched on that in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:2 ***"I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able."***

And in Heb. 5:12 The Holy Scripture says; ***"And you have come to need milk and not solid food."***

Then Paul adds not to dispute over doubtful things simply because no one knows whether it is right or wrong.

Then Paul moves to deal with the problem of food that plagued the Church in Rome. Some believed in eating everything, others believed in eating special foods, and abstaining from others. Some believed in certain rituals before, during, and after eating, some did not. Some believed in eating foods prepared in a special way, some did not, and so on.

So Paul urge them not to criticize or despise who eats or eats not, because each one of us is answerable to God Who examines the heart and deal with the person accordingly.

Then, he moves to the problem of observing certain days saying it is the freedom we have inherited in Christianity. Let everyman observe what day he likes, he is free, who are we to judge him, If observes it, he is for God and if he does not observe it, he is still for God.

Of course Paul does not condone such thing as observing certain days or feasts, for he warns the Galatians: ***"You observe days and months and seasons and years; I am afraid for you lest I have labored for you in vain."*** (Gal. 4:10, 11).

And to the Colossians he writes: ***"Let no man judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come; but the substance is of Christ."*** (Col. 2:16, 17).

Paul is not teaching against observing the Lord's Day, but he is teaching not to be obsessed by observing a certain day and neglecting the others, for all the days are for the Lord.

All believers are serving or worshipping God, each in his or her own way, each follows his or her own way and conscience. Leave each other alone, let the task of deciding which is correct and which is wrong to God, and to God alone.

O, man how do you know that your way is the correct one?

If we all think the same way, then we are robots.

The logic behind all this is that no man can live to himself or die to himself.

He cannot detach himself from the past, or the present or the future, because things had happened to him in the past, and is happening to him now, and it will happen to him in the future. And who created the past, the present and the future? It is God. So, no man can detach himself from God His creator. So if we live, we live for God and if we die, we die for God. So whether we live or die, we are for God.

A believer is attached to his master while living, and when he dies he is with Him.

If I shall stand at God's judgment seat as all others, then how can I judge others?

And at God's judgment seat, man will stand alone naked of all his earthly achievements, his honors, medals, decorations, and glory will not help him there. But the believer will not stand alone, for Christ our advocate will plead for him.

#### **V. 13 – 23 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore .....**

**“Love thy neighbor as thyself.”** (Lev.19:18; Mat. 22:39; Mark 12:31; Rom.13:9; Gal.5:14 and James 2:8.). This is the second most important commandment after Love thy God. That has been stressed on By Jesus in His teaching.

Now, if a person loves his neighbor, he wouldn't wish to offend him, or would he?

Of course he wouldn't. That is the whole essence in this passage. I like to do something, and I find no harm in doing it; but my neighbor may not like it, or even he may be offended if he sees it done or asked to do it. Would I still love my neighbor if I do it? Of course not. So, what should I do? Simply don't do it, and this way I show that I really love my neighbor..

That is exactly what Paul is saying, not necessarily about eating but about anything that may offend my neighbor, I should not do it. I should not be a stumbling stone to my neighbor, because Christ died for him also.

One may say, in that case your neighbor controls your life. Certainly not, we are talking about things which offend others. On the contrary, there are other instances where one has to put his feet down and do it even though it may offend others, and that is when one has to stand for his principles and faith; because there is no place for yielding here.

Then, Paul moves on to say that we should not abuse the freedom we got in Christianity.

And the freedom he means here is the freedom from the old cumbersome rules, rituals, traditions regarding different foods, what and how to eat, certain days and festivals, pagan traditions and rituals, and different practices. It is not a cart blanche to do what you want.

It is a matter of love and consideration to others and their feelings. Why Paul says that?

Because the kingdom of heaven does not consist of eating and drinking, it is righteousness, peace, and joy. Let us take these one at a time.

#### **Righteousness:**

We said before righteousness is giving God and man what is their due. And we discussed what is due to God before. Now what is due to man is love and consideration. An unbeliever may not be conscious of that, but once he believes, he puts others first in his mind and actions.

#### **Peace:**

Peace in the New Testament does not only mean no quarrels or wars, but it mainly means internal feeling of comfort deep in the heart. How can one have comfort in his heart while he offends his neighbor?

#### **Joy:**

Again this word in Christianity adds a different meaning. It is not the happiness that we feel

by pleasing ourselves, it is by making others happy. When one helps his fellow man that is joy. When one gives to the needy, that is joy. When one helps in any good deed that is joy. When one shows sympathy to his neighbor that is joy.

So, in essence Christian freedom, is not doing what man likes, but what Christ likes.

Do you think that the unbeliever has freedom to do what he likes?

**No, he is slave to sin. So he does what sin commands him to do.**

Then Paul summarizes this paragraph saying let us then pursue peace because without it our unity is broken, and let us do what builds us up.

Then in verses 21-23, Paul goes back to the subject of eating. The way I look at it, is that it must have been a very serious problem perhaps dividing the Church of Rome that Paul keeps coming back to it. So here, he handles the practicality of the matter. He advises:

1. **Advice for the strong in faith:** We reflect God's image to people. As a matter of fact some of us may have been thought of as a model or an example. So, let us set that model in the proper way, that it may reflect the Glorious image of our God. So, one has to abstain from doing things which he has every right to do as a Christian, if it is going to be a stumbling block to others. Paul uses the example of eating meat and he says "***if eating meat will offend my brother, then I will not eat meat forever.***" (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 8:13) But I would like to say the same about practically everything, from foods to drinks to the way of dressing to habits of pleasure to the way one talks and so on.
2. **Advice for the weak in faith:** Don't do anything that you believe is wrong, just because others do it, or you do not want to single yourself out. Because if you do it, then you are guilty even it is right for others. Follow your own conscience.

#### **V.15:1 -13 We then who are strong ought to bear .....**

So what ought we to do?

1. Be considerate to each other, not to think for ourselves as we often do, but for the good and up building of others. This way we can win others to Christ.
2. Encourage each other by studying the Scripture. The word of God is the only guide which leads us to a better life.
3. It also teaches us about God's promises which never fail.
4. Be patient and comfort one another in difficulties.
5. Always have hope which reflects assurance because our hope is in God who never lets us down.
6. Live in harmony with each other. The beauty of music which makes it enjoyable is its harmony. Scramble the music notes and all what you get is meaningless noise which upsets the ears. Likewise life without harmony is annoying and meaningless.
7. Be thankful and give praise to God for all what He gives you, remembering that what we feel or think that it is not good or insufficient, will actually prove its goodness and sufficiency on the long run, because God does every thing good for those who love Him.
8. Always set Christ as your example and guide in life. He did not come to please himself but to die for others.

And in verse 7, Paul states as a sequence to the above, we should receive one another in the one body of Christ, no matter what or who we are, weak or strong in faith, Jew or Gentile, free or slave, master or subordinate, man or woman.

We are one family, and our loyalty goes to the head of the family, Jesus Christ. After all, Jesus Christ was a Jew, and He came to fulfill God's promises to the fathers, yet He did not sacrifice Himself for the Jews only but also for the Gentiles. Then in verses 9 – 12, Paul puts the four quotations which I mentioned above on page 41 as evidence that the Gentiles were in God's plan for salvation, since the foundation of the world. Then in verse 13, Paul prays that God through the power of the Holy Spirit may fill them with hope, joy, and peace, the three pillars of Christian faith. Our God is alive and mighty and there is no such thing as hopelessness with Him. And as He is living in us, nothing can separate us from Him, and this is the joy of our life. And in His promises, we can always find comfort and peace.

## **8- Conclusions, Greetings, and Benediction (15:14-16:27)**

And now as Paul approaches the end of his letter, he gives some more advice, then the usual greetings and benediction.

So, he addresses them as brothers. And in sincere modesty he tells them that he is just reminding them with what they already know, because since he was entrusted by Christ to carry his gospel to the Gentiles, then he feels that it is his duty to do so by writing to them. Then he did not claim that he is some where above them, but he declares that he is a servant of Christ ministering to them, and he is proud of that. And in doing so, he is not boasting of what he has done, but proud of what Christ has achieved through him, so that the Gentiles would be an acceptable offering to Him. Then he quotes Isa. 52:15 which again is a proof of including the Gentiles in God's plan for salvation.

Then in verses 22 – 29, Paul tells them about his immediate and future plans.

For the present time he feels he should go to Jerusalem because he was entrusted by the believers in Macedonia and Achaia to deliver their gift to the poor saints there. This gift, adds Paul, is long due since the Gentiles have shared the good news with them, so it is not too much to share the material things with them as well.

Then he says that after that he intends to pass by them on his way to Spain

Why would Paul be obsessed by preaching the Gospel in Spain? My feeling is that since Spain at that time was considered to be the end of the known world westward; and Jesus Christ at His great commission, told the disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations (Mat. 28:19), Paul wanted to make sure of that.

And in verse 29 he assures them that when he comes, he will come in the fullness of the Gospel of Christ. Paul planned to visit them, but they visited him in the prison. He was not free, but in chains guarded day and night by a soldier or two. He was waiting to be tried by Caesar, yet by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, he was able to preach the Gospel and write four of his famous Epistles. So in a sense his prediction of coming in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ has been fulfilled.

Needless to say, that like his Master Jesus Christ, he entered Jerusalem knowing what is awaiting him, yet as his Master, he faced everything courageously. Then he was caught by the Jews, and was put in prison for four years before being tried by Caesar, two of those years he spent in Caesarea and two in Rome.

And in verses 30 – 33, he asked the Church of Rome to pray for him for this particular reason, but God did not answer their prayers for a far fetched purpose, for as he was in prison, he did more for the glory of God than any one can imagine.

Then he gave them the blessings and peace of God to abide with them.

**V. 16:1 – 2 I commend to you Phoebe our sister .....**

As we mentioned at the very beginning of this study, Phoebe was the servant of the church of Cenchreae which was the port of Corinth. She carried this Epistle to the Church of Rome. So Paul here in actuality is introducing the carrier of his letter to the church in Rome, and asking them to welcome her, to treat her well, and to look after her needs if she needs any help, the welcoming which should be rendered to any brother or sister who is arriving anew to any church. Traveling for men in those days and for such a long trip was very dangerous, let alone for a Woman. Of course we do not know if she was traveling alone or in company, but most certainly she had no husband otherwise Paul would have mentioned his name or even hinted that she was in the company of her husband. This may seem unimportant, but I think one cannot but admire her courage and credit that for her.

Then from verse 3 to 16, Paul gets busy sending greetings to a long list of people by name. He starts by **Priscilla** ( sometimes referred to as Prisca which could be an affectionate short name), and her husband **Aquila**. They were Jews who have fled when Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome in 52 A.D, and settled in Corinth where they were met by Paul who worked and lived with them since they were all of the same trade as tent-makers (Acts 18:2). And when Paul left to Ephesus, they went with him to serve the Lord there. (Acts 18:18).

Then the Scripture tells us that When Apollos, a very zeal and knowledgeable Jew from Alexandria, came to Ephesus, whose knowledge was only up to the baptism of John the Baptist, they took him in with them and instructed him about the Christian faith (Acts 18:24 – 26).

Then in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 16:19, we hear about them and the church in their house. And now in these few verses we know that they were in Rome. Perhaps they elected to go back to their home in Rome after the order of Claudius was lifted up. And again we know that they opened their house for the congregation to meet.

Then the last we hear of them, is in 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 4:19, where they were in Ephesus.

From this short resume about their lives, we find that they moved a lot, but wherever they settled, they made of their house a place for Christians to gather for worship, radiating love, friendship, fellowship, and zeal for the word of God.

To this day in Rome there is a church of St. Prisca, and there is also a cemetery of Priscilla. One thing we are sure about this couple, is that many in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome owed their knowledge of Christ to them and the church in their houses. Paul himself in verse 4 writes that he owes his life to them. What a great couple!

Then Paul sends his greetings to 24 names, whom we know very little of, nevertheless they must have been very important pillars in the Church of Rome, that Paul cared to mention by name. We don't know about their social status either, nevertheless, one should envy them for their names were recorded in the Holy Scripture.

And the fact remains that six out of these were women, which shows us against all thoughts, how much Paul appreciated the work of women in the church.

There is another name that is important from the historical point of view, and that is Rufus who was the son of Simon of Cyrene (which is either Libya or Tunisia of North Africa now) who was compelled by the Roman captain to carry the cross of Jesus Christ as mentioned in

Mark 15:21. Not only that, but Rufus' mother must have been very kind to Paul that he called her mother. But it was not only Rufus and his mother, it was also his brother Alexander who protected Paul against the mob's riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:33)

All the rest of the names mentioned are practically unknown except for being mentioned in this section, and to talk about them is mere guess. But I must say that some of them may have been slaves or from the household of Caesar, yet they were all equally named and recorded in the Holy Scripture and perhaps in the book of life as well (no one knows).

So much for the names; then Paul instead of finishing the letter at this point and give them the Grace and blessings of God, as it seems, he must have felt it is necessary once more to urge the church to take note of and avoid the trouble makers especially those who teach different doctrines from what they have learned. Then he describes these trouble makers as:

1- They are proud of causing problems and divisions.

2- They enjoy putting obstacles in the way of others. This weakens and ultimately destroys the faith which they pretend to protect. The best example of these are the Scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus mentioned in Matthew 23:4, 5.

3- They are deceivers saying something and meaning another. So do not let their flatter deceive you.

Then he proceeds to say that he is confident that they will be able to deal with this when it happens. But being a wise pastor, Paul thought of throwing this in for their attention before it happens and divides or even ruins the church.

And then he ends this section by Praying that the God of peace will crush Satan and overthrow the power of evil.

Then in the next three verses, Paul mentions the names of those who were accompanying him, saying that they too send their greetings. Tertius who was the scribe of this letter who sneaked his name in. Seven names were mentioned, but one may relate to two or three.

#### **Timothy:**

He was a long time companion and a fellow worker of Paul.

A Greek young man, from a Jewish believer mother Eunice (Acts 16:1 & 2 Tim. 1:5) and a Greek father (Acts 16:1). His mother was faithful in teaching him the Holy Scriptures since his childhood.(2 Tim. 3:14,15)

Him, his mother and his Grandmother Lois, probably were converted to Christianity during Paul's first missionary visit to Lystra, their hometown. (Acts 14:21).

On his second missionary trip, passing back by Lystra (Acts 16:1), Paul found in Timothy a man of love and zeal to serve the Lord. So, he asked him to join them (Paul and Silas) in the work of God. But because he was Greek, Paul had to have him circumcised (Acts 16:1-3) so that he would not be a stumbling block to the Jews, because as we notice, although Paul was called the Apostle of Gentiles, yet the Holy Scripture tells us that in every city Paul passed by, he preached the good news of salvation in the Synagogues first.

Apart from accompanying Paul in his travels, we should not forget his great work of correcting the Heresies and false teachings and also establishing the governing system in the churches of Ephesus and Corinth. (1Cor. 4:17 & 1Tim. 4:12)

On many occasions, Paul called him "Son". And he was well entrusted by Paul (Phil 2:19,20) as being as faithful and caring as he is.

Having full confidence in his abilities, Paul sent him to few side missions (Acts 19:22; ! Cor. 4:17 & Phil. 2:19).

Paul mentioned him in several of his Epistles such as 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians and Philemon.

He was imprisoned in Rome and then released; for The Holy Scripture tells us that Paul asked Him to go to Rome (2Tim. 4:9, 21). Then he was released from Prison (Heb. 13:23). And that is the last we hear of him in the Holy Scripture.

**Jason:**

He may be the one who gave Paul hospitality in Thessalonica and subsequently suffered at the hands of the mob as recorded in Acts 17:5 – 9.

**Gaius:**

We do not know much about him except that he was a man of hospitality.

Then he closes his letter by the benediction.

He prays to God that:

1- They may stand firmly against all tribulations and temptations

2- They may work in the vineyard of God to reach others and lead them to the gospel of Jesus Christ our savior. This is the Christian privilege and the Christian duty.

Jesus died for us on the cross, and He counts on us to spread the good news to all men.

3- They may realize that salvation was God's plan for the whole world since the foundation of the world, but it was hidden till the right time which is the first advent of Christ

4- They may realize that the Gospel was meant for the whole world and not the Jews only.

5- They may realize that the end of the gospel is an obedient world to one king Jesus Christ our Lord. An obedience which is founded on faith, love and grace.

To Him and Him alone be the glory forever , Amen.

*+++ May God Bless You All +++*

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## Quick Review

### Chapter 1:

- v.1 The saints are the believers.
- v.14 Indebted to the Greeks and Barbarians. Means under obligation. So also, we are indebted or under obligation to the whole world to preach the gospel.
- v.16 Not ashamed of the gospel. So also we should be.
- v. 24-33 Left them to their own lust.

### Chapter 2:

- v.1 No excuse.
- v. 4 We should not underestimate God's patience. It will lead us to repentance.
- v.12-15 God will judge people according to their knowledge of Him at their time.
- v. 24 The Jews did not glorify God among the Gentiles. How about us, do we?
- v. 29 Who is the real Jew? He who has circumcision of the heart.

### Chapter 3:

- v.12 All are sinners, No righteous, not even one.
- v. 20 No one can be justified by the works of the law.
- v. 30 No preference of the Jew over the Gentile.

### Chapter 4:

- v. 3 Abraham was counted righteous, because of his faith. He was not yet circumcised yet.
- v.13 The covenant given to Abraham, was not because he obeyed the law. The law came centuries after.

### Chapter 5:

- v.1 Now, we have peace with God, because through faith, we are counted as righteous.
- v. 8 Amazing love, for while we are yet sinners, Christ died for us.
- v. 12-18 Sin entered the world by one man (Adam). So also the grace of God entered the world by one man (Jesus Christ).

### Chapter 6:

- v. 3-8 We are buried with Christ in baptism, and we are resurrected with Him a new life.
- v. 15 We are now under an umbrella of His grace, but this does not give us a license to sin.
- v. 22 We were slaves to sin, then we are set free, and now we are slaves to God.

### Chapter 7:

- v. 14-24 Describes Paul's and our struggle to do good.
- v. 24 "O wretched man that I am". This does not describe Paul only, but each one of us.

### Chapter 8:

- v. 1 Assurance of no condemnation to those who are in Christ.
- v. 8 Those who conduct according to the flesh, cannot please God.
- v. 15 We have been granted the Spirit of adoption.
- v. 28 All things work together for good to those who love God.
- v. 29-30 Describes the doctrine of election.
- v. 35-39 Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

#### **Chapter 9:**

- v. 1-5 Paul's sorrow for his kinsmen and brothers the Jews for rejecting Christ.
- v. 14-27 Describes the absolute sovereignty of God.

#### **Chapter 10:**

- v. 1-4 Again expresses Paul's sorrow for his brethren and kinsmen the Jews; because they were seeking their own righteousness through works and not by faith.
- v. 6-9 The word is near us, we do not have to go far to seek it
- v. 17 Faith is by telling and hearing the word of God.

#### **Chapter 11:**

- v. 22 Let us not fall in the same mistake of unbelief as the Jews did.
- v. 25 The remnant shall believe.

#### **Chapter 12:**

- v. 1,2 We should offer ourselves a living sacrifice acceptable to God.
- v. 9 Love without wax (sincere).
- v. 19 Seek no revenge, be at peace as possible.

#### **Chapter 13:**

- v. 1 Respect the laws of the country you live in and its rulers.
- v. 9 Love your neighbor as yourself.
- v. 12,13 Take off the works of darkness and put on Jesus Christ.

#### **Chapter 14:**

- v. 1 Be considerate to those who are weak in faith.
- v. 13 Make sure not to be a stumbling block for the weak in faith.
- v. 15-23 Examples as how to behave as required above.

#### **Chapter 15:**

- v. 1 The strong in faith ought to bear with the weak
- v. 2 We should not please ourselves but consider the others.
- v. 7 God accepted us Jews and Gentiles, we should accept others as well.

#### **Chapter 16:**

- v. 1 Paul commends Phoebe as a sister and a servant of the church in Cenchrea.
- v. 13-16 Greetings and salutes to all his brothers and sisters in the Lord.
- v. 17-20 Urges them to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses.
- v. 21-24 Greetings from his companions.

**v. 25-27** Benediction.