

STUDIES IN ROMANS

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1. THE CALL IS FOR ALL Based on Rom. 1:1-7

Dr. Paul Brand was called by God to become an expert in treating the deformed hands of lepers. This Christian doctor has done more for restoring the hands of lepers than anyone in history. It all

began in 1947 in a leprosy sanitarium not far from Madras, India. He was being shown around the hospital by Dr. Robert Cockrone the renowned skin specialist. He noticed so many of the patients had twisted, gnarled and ulcerated hands with some fingers missing. He asked how they got that way and what they were doing for them. The answer was that they didn't know, and that nothing was being done.

Dr. Cockrone explained that not one orthopedic surgeon in the world had yet studied the deformities of the 15 million leprosy victims. Dr. Brand was applauded. That was more people than had been deformed by polio or in auto accidents world-wide. Yet there was not a single surgeon to serve this desperate need. He walked up to one of the patients and pried his fingers open. He put his hand in his own and asked the person to squeeze as hard as you can. He was shocked at the power, and had to ask the patient to stop for he was hurting him. He realized that the muscles in this deformed hand were still good, but the patient could not feel the force. At that instant he knew the Spirit of God had called him to find the answer. With that hand shake his vocation for life was determined. He went on to become the leading surgeon in the world for lepers hands.

Dr. Brand's call was as clear to him as was the call of Moses at the burning bush, or the call of Paul on the road to Damascus. Dramatic calls like this are very personal, and they may mean little to others. Paul's call was doubted, questioned, and fought by many. He had to defend his call all his life. The same was true for Moses. A call from God does not mean that even godly people will recognize it as God's call.

One of the greatest missionaries to China was the little British lady named Gladys Aylward. She was converted at a Salvation Army street meeting, and as a cleaning lady she got to reading the books of her employer who had a large section of them on China. She felt God wanted her to go to China to share the Gospel. When she applied to the Mission Board they gave her an intellectual test she could not pass, and they said no. She did not measure up and could not go. She went anyway, and she became so successful that years later a motion picture called "In Of The Sixth Happiness," was made about her ministry. God's call is above man's approval.

We could go on endlessly telling stories of calls like this, for there are thousands of them. But because they are amazing and dramatic they are the only calls that we hear about. The result is that the greater call of God to all His people is obscured and terribly neglected. The very Greek word that Paul uses in verse 1 to describe himself as called to be an Apostle is the word he uses 2 more times in his introduction to the Romans to describe the call of all Christians. The word is *kletos*, and it is used in verse 6 of those called to belong to Jesus, and in verse 7 for those called to be saints. Every Christian is called to belong to Jesus and to be saints. This is a universal calling and one that would be more history changing than any other calls of God if God's people would heed the call. We have so exalted the special call to the few that we have ignored the general call to the many. This is so even though the calling of God to all His people is the primary emphasis of the New Testament.

This same word *kletos* is used by Paul again in Rom. 8:28 where he writes, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." All Christians are just as called as Paul. He does the same thing in I Cor. He uses the word called twice as often for all Christians as for himself. We tend to think of Paul as somewhat conceited because he is always telling people he is called to be an Apostle. But Paul exalts all

Christians, even the poor ones of Corinth, to the level of the called. He begins I Cor. with, "Paul, called to be an Apostle," but in the next verse he refers to the Corinthians as those called to be holy. They are just as called of God as he is.

We do not have time to study all the related words that show that every child of God is a called one. Let me just read the last use of this word in the New Testament from Rev. 17:14. "...the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings-and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." To be a Christian is to be called. There is no special class of Christians who are called and others who are not called. All Christians are called. They are not all called to be Apostles, or pastors, or surgeons, but every Christian is called into the ministry. Any Christian not in the ministry is missing their calling.

This Greek word also means invited, and some translations have it as, "You are the invited ones of Jesus Christ." The Gospel carries with it the invitation or calling to follow Jesus and be like Him. The goal of God is not just to save people for eternity, but to produce Christ-like people in time. The call of Gospel is two fold: Come unto me and be saved, and then come with me and be sanctified. We are called to be saved and then called to be saints. This calling may not be as dramatic as a burning bush, or a blinding light and voice from heaven, but the fact is, it is just as authentic. This universal calling means no Christian has to worry about his or her gifts and abilities, for regardless of their abundance or scarcity every Christian has a calling to be a saint.

Paul makes it clear that anybody can be a saint. In I Cor. 1:26-29 he writes, "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth, but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him." Paul is saying that if you are a dime a dozen, no big deal, and a commonplace nobody, you qualify to be called to be a saint.

The problem is that the Christian world has so copied the secular world that we have lost this biblical truth, and instead we have magnified the super-gifted and talented Christian to the level of stardom, and we assume that only these special people are called to reach the world and accomplish God's purpose. This is why the will of God is not done on earth as it is in heaven. You don't have ten percent of the angels doing the will of God while the other ninety percent watch them do it. All in heaven do the will of God, and when all of God's people on earth will recognize they are just as called as the super star Christians, then God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

One pastor asked another how many people in his church are willing people. He said that all of his people are willing. Ten percent are willing to work, and ninety percent are willing to let them. This is very common because Christians do not realize they are called. Paul was a super star who was called of God to write this letter to the Romans that has changed the course of history. It has been the key influence in the conversion of other major super stars like Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Bunyan. This is Paul's longest and most influential letter. Luther called it, "The true masterpiece of the New Testament." It has been called, "The Cathedral of the Christian faith."

Ray Stedman expresses the conviction of many when he says, "It is safe to say that Romans is probably the most powerful human document every written." Everyone agrees that to know the

book of Romans is to be theologically educated. Godet, the famous Swiss commentator, wrote, "The reformation was certainly the work of the Epistle to the Romans....and it is probable that every great spiritual renovation in the church will always be linked, both in cause and in effect, to a deeper knowledge of this book." Everyone knows that Romans was not Paul's first letter, but it is the first one in the New Testament because it is the most important.

All of this just seems to support the idea that God's plan is to get his will done through superstars. But we need to read the rest of the story. How did this wondrous letter get to Rome? Paul did not take it there. It was carried by someone, and that someone is one of history's most important mail delivery persons. No plane; no train, no pony express rider ever carried a letter with a greater impact on history than did the carrier of this letter to the Romans. But this obscure servant is practically unknown to all of us. It was Paul's faithful female friend by the name of Phoebe. She was an active member of the nearby church in Cenchrea, and Paul asked her to help him out. She did by carrying this letter from Corinth to Rome.

Renan said that when Phoebe sailed away from Corinth she, "Carried beneath the folds of her robe the whole future of Christian theology." Paul the superstar wrote it, but Phoebe the mere helper got it to the people it was destined for, and thus to the rest of the world. Phoebe is only mentioned once in the whole New Testament, and Paul tells us her gift was that one everybody chooses when they feel like they have none, and that is the gift of helps. In Rom. 16:2 Paul writes of her, "She has been a great help to many people, including me." Here is superstar Paul commending obscure star Phoebe, for Paul has the mind of Christ, and he knew that Phoebe was just as called as he was, and just as vital to getting the will of God done with this letter as he was.

Paul and Phoebe were a team, for Paul's gift of apostolic authority would have no impact on Roman Christians without the gift of helps to get the message to Rome. Billy Graham knows that his impact on the world would be minimal without the help of masses of people nobody will ever know. They are just as called to ministry as he is. This is true in every ministry, and in every church. Every Christian who is a part of the ministry and the church is called.

Keep in mind that Paul did not start the church at Rome. He had never been there. The Christians who began this work are so obscure that nobody knows who they were. They are even less visible than Phoebe, but they are the ones who made it possible for Paul to write this famous life-changing letter. If they had not started the church, there never would have been a body of believers who needed this message of Paul like they did. These persons will never be known in time at all. They get no recognition whatever in the great plan of God for this letter, but they were just as called and a vital part of the plan as was Paul.

Paul would have loved the honor of having started this strategic church in the capital of the Gentile world. But God gave that honor to people we do not know. Being called does not mean having special gifts, or getting special notoriety or fame. The obscure and unknown are just as called as those who get the limelight. Paul knew this and he was applauded that the church at Corinth was setting up superstars for special honor, and the people were saying, "I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, or I am of Paul." Paul fought the superstar mentality, for he knew the facts. God calls all His children to be a part of His plan, and every one of them is just as important as those who get the center stage. The behind the scenes helpers are just as called and just as crucial for success.

In verse 11 Paul may sound like a proud superstar when he writes, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong." But he no sooner wrote that, and then continued in the next verse to write, "That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." Paul was saying that he needed their help as much as they needed his. Paul was no self-sufficient superstar who had no time for the little guy in the church. He needed the gifts of the common Christian just as they needed his special gifts. In a truly biblical value system every Christian counts because every Christian is called. There are no non-called Christians, and the sooner we all grasp this, the sooner we will realize that all of us matter to the success of God's plan. All of us can help fulfill the will of God. This is not for the few, but for the all.

Now the question is, what in the world is a saint? This is our calling as Christians. This is the universal vocation of every child of God, and yet most saints would be hard pressed to define exactly what it is they are. Many try to force the word into some canned idea of what a saint should be, and it scares the daylight out of most of us, and we figure we must not be saints. You cannot define a saint by any system of theology, or any pattern of religious behavior. Abraham married, but Jesus never did. Paul spoke in tongues, but Jesus never did. Peter wrote inspired Scripture, but Jesus never did. Barnabas helped start Gentile churches, but Jesus never did.

We could go on and on revealing that the saints of the Bible did many things that Jesus never did. Yet the essence of being a saint is being like Jesus. But this is not helpful, for there are so many ways that no saint is like Jesus. We don't walk on water; we don't change water into wine; and we don't weep over Jerusalem, or ride into it on a donkey. We don't fellowship with prostitutes and tax collectors, or take a whip to religious leaders who corrupt the temple. We can go through the life of Jesus and find so many ways we are not like Him. It makes you wonder what it means to be Christ-like. If most of what Jesus did we can't do, and many saints do what He never did, how can saintliness and Christ-likeness be the same? It is no wonder one child's definition of a saint was, "A dead Christian." The dead you can wrap in legend and mystery, and build an illusion, but how can living Christians who are so unlike Christ be saints?

Alexander the Great had his portrait painted with his face resting on his hand as if in contemplation. The true purpose was to hide the ugly scar that creased his cheek. The Bible does not so paint the saint. The great heroes of the Bible have their scars in full view. The saints are not portrayed as sin free at all, but they are seen as sinful like all. Every saint in the Bible is also a sinner, and not just in his or her pre-saint days, but also in their sainthood days. John tells us that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. So a saint is one who knows he is a sinner. The concept of a saint being a holier than thou self-righteous judge of all others is not biblical at all. A biblical saint is one who is fully conscious of his sinfulness, and so is one who is humble rather than judgmental.

To many Christians interpret humble to mean they are not important, and so they do not get involved. They know they are sinners and that they are not superstars, and so they conclude that they are not called to an active role in the church. They are of the people of God, but they see themselves as the little people. It is as if God has different categories like the Bantam Baptist, or the Midget Methodist, or the Puny Presbyterians, or Lilliputian Lutherans. What they fail to see is that these so-called mini saints are the foundation for the success of God's plan.

The church at Rome and every church in the New Testament was composed largely of these

mini-saints who were unknown and not greatly gifted. Remove these from the church and you have no church for the superstars to minister to, and to minister through. The point is, every Christian is important to the successful working of the church. All are called to be saints.

Paul never even met these Roman Christians he is writing to, but he is sending them the most important letter of his life, and it is because he knows that God's purpose for history involves the average church member. They are all called, and only when all realize they are called can the church be all it was called to be. In Eph. 4:11-12 Paul makes it clear that the whole purpose of specially gifted people like Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Every Christian is in the ministry, and it is the gifted people who are to help them do their job more effectively. The gifted are God's gift to those less gifted. Gifted people are to help all the other believers be able to rise to a higher level of effectiveness.

It is folly to feel that because you do not know the Bible well enough, or because you do not know how to witness effectively, or because you have not learned how to overcome certain temptations, that you are not qualified to be called a saint. The Romans who received this letter did not know the Bible at all, and in fact, they did not have any of the Bible but this letter. They were inferior in many ways to the average believer today, but they were saints. All Christians are saints and called to be better ones. You do not work your way up to sainthood. You start the Christian life as a saint, and as one called of God to live for His glory, and to do his will on earth as it is in heaven. When you trust in Jesus as your Savior you are born a saint. Being saved and becoming a saint are the same thing.

We are all called to be saints, and that just means that we are called to be all we can be for the kingdom of God. We are to be willing to expose ourselves to the Word of God and be growing in the knowledge of God and His will. We are to be more and more conformed to the likeness of Christ in the way we think and behave. We are not expected to be superstars, but to just be who we are seeking to use what we have in ability to serve the cause of Christ. We are to be growing and making ourselves available on any level to be of benefit to the body of Christ. We do not have to be like anyone else at all, but we need to be willing to become the more that we can become by the grace of God. The point is, the calling of God is not just for the few, it is for all of us, for all are called to be saints. That means all are called to be set apart from the secular world to be a part of that group of people who are serving God and His cause in the world in order to bring others into the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus Christ. The call is for all.

2. VOLUNTARY SLAVERY based on Rom. 1:1-7

In the early days of Israel if a man got into debt and could not repay he was not sent to prison, but was allowed to become the slave of his creditor. But it was not to be a permanent situation. When the 7th year came he would be liberated and be free to be his own master again, and begin to rebuild his life. Some of these free men would soon find that their chances of making it on their own was near impossible. They had no future as a free man, and if they liked their master and felt well treated by them they could go back to him and volunteer to stay as his slave. The master would then take him to the tabernacle where the priest would bore a hole in his ear lobe as a sign that he was the

slave of his master.

Here was slavery that was not the result of war, or even debt, but a voluntary slavery by choice because it was the best option available at the time. This might seem crazy to give up your freedom to be a slave, but it is not a lot different than what we have today. Unemployed people have the freedom to stay at home, watch T. V. and go for walks and shop whenever they please, but this can only last for so long. So they go around looking for a place where they can give up this freedom and volunteer to be a slave for 8 hours a day for the sake of a paycheck. We use different terms, but the end result is not all that different. We just get a number today instead of the hole in the ear. It is not all that bad to be a slave to some degree for the sake of the benefits.

Paul was happy to be a slave to his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. The first thing he says in this letter to identify himself is that he is a servant of Jesus Christ. The word for servant is *doulos*, which is the word for slaves all through the New Testament. It is one of the paradoxes of the Christian life that the way to the top is to be a servant. There is no greater title than that of being a servant, and that is why Paul even puts it before his office as an Apostle. He does it again in his letter to the Philippians and his letter to Titus. The top of the totem pole is not chief, captain, kings, or President, but servant or slave of Jesus Christ.

Jesus established this value system when he said in Matt. 20:26-27, "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave." Mark 10:43-45 repeats it with this added slant, "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In the Old Testament in Isa. 52:13 God calls the coming Messiah, "My Servant." Jesus establishes the way by which Christian status will be determined. It will not be by inheritance or by riches or by honor or by power or by any of the methods that the world determines status. The Christian status symbol is a towel that symbolizes the Head of the church wiping the feet of His disciples. The Head serving the feet is the way Jesus wants us to see true greatness. The more needs a Christian meets in others the greater the status of that Christian. That is why Paul is proud to wear the title of slave of Jesus Christ, for his greatest joy is to serve the Head of the church by serving the church which is his body.

Paul knew the teaching of his Lord that the servant is the greatest of all and that the servant will be the one greatly rewarded in eternity. Jesus used this same word for slave in Matt. 25:21 where he said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness." If you want the best that heaven can offer, do not seek to be a king or a noble, but strive to be a servant, for these are the people most pleasing to the Master of all.

The final use of this word *doulos* is in Rev. 22:6 where we read that God, "...sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place." There is no higher honor than to be a servant of God, and this will be an honor for all eternity. Three verses before this we see heaven described as a place where "his servants will serve him." When you become a Christian you are volunteering to become a slave forever. Once a slave to Christ, always a slave to Christ. Voluntary slavery is what the Christian life is all about.

Paul did not hesitate to call himself a slave, for he was sending this letter to many who were actually slaves. If you go to the last chapter you read in 16:11, "Greet those in the household of Narcissus." Before this in verse 10 he writes, "Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus." Paul is referring to slaves. Rome was filled with slaves, and many of them became Christians. These who were slaves by necessity became voluntary slaves of Christ.

Even if one was not a literal slave when he became a Christian, he became a slave for Paul says in I Cor. 6, "You are not your own, for you are bought with a price." Like a slave purchased from a market, so you have been bought out of slavery to sin by the precious blood of Jesus to become His slave. There is no escape from slavery, for everyone is the slave of some master. But not all masters are alike. Some are so brutal, and it is miserable bondage to be in their service. Others are kind and benevolent, and it is a joy to serve them. One does so freely so that it is a choice of voluntary slavery. Paul spells this out clearly in Rom.7:20-22. He describes the Christian life as escape from slavery to the freedom of a new slavery.

"When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefits you reap lead to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

Everyone is either a slave to sin and death, or a slave to holiness and life. The choice is not, should I be a slave or free, but whose slave shall I be, for all who are not slaves of God are slaves of sin, self, and Satan. We tend to think the slavery issue is long past, but the fact is, it is always relevant and contemporary, for every person on the planet struggles with it continuously. We are ever in an age of slavery. People are slaves to every form of addiction on a grander scale than ever before. In our great land of freedom we have people in bondage to alcohol, drugs, sex, cigarettes, TV violence, and abuse of every kind. Until Satan is in the lake of fire slavery will be a major issue of life.

The New Testament answer to all forms of bondage is freedom in Christ. If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. But the freedom in Christ is not a form of total independence, for this will just lead to some other kind of bondage. Freedom in Christ is a liberating form of slavery which is voluntary slavery. It is a choice to be committed to Christ as Lord of one's life. No man can serve two masters Jesus said. But every man has to serve one. Every man has to have a master. The choice is of one that destroys and diminishes the self, or one that enriches and exalts the self to become what it was meant to be. The Prodigal Son wound up as slave to pigs, but he chose to go back home and be a voluntary slave of his father. He made the wise choice, and that is a choice all of us must make.

There is no third choice of being independent and free from all commitments to either good or evil. There is no such ground to stand on between good and evil. You have to make a choice, and so in a very real sense every person is in some form of voluntary slavery. If the Prodigal would have stayed feeding the pigs, that too would be a form of voluntary slavery. When the Gospel is heard one can choose to follow a new master, and by the help of the Holy Spirit come out of bondage to the old master. This is the ministry of the body of Christ in the world. It is to help people be

delivered from one form of slavery, and be set free to choose another form of slavery so radically different that it is called coming out of darkness into light.

The whole book of Romans is about slavery. Paul stresses that Jews and Gentiles alike are slaves to sin. The Jews are slaves to the law also, and the Gentiles are slaves to their evil desires. The result is that the world is full of judgment on the folly of man. The only solution is the Gospel which is the power of God to liberate both Jews and Gentiles. It is hard for us to think in these Biblical terms, but the fact is, the battle with slavery is the crucial battle of life. Paul was a slave to the law and self-righteousness. He had to be set free from salvation by works, and become a slave to Christ by faith. The journey from slavery to slavery is the journey all must take if they are to be used of God to change the world.

In the 13 volume set called 20 Centuries of Great Preaching, most of the names are well known by those who have studied the history of preaching. But one name is very unknown and obscure, for though he was a great preacher John Jasper was born a slave in Virginia in 1812 as the 24 child in his family. At age 22 he married a slave girl, but when his master found he had spent a night away from his plantation he forced them to separate, and he never saw her again. He went on a wild rampage of rebellion as he lived a sinful life.

Then at age 27 he came under conviction and was radically converted to Christ and began to preach. He was so eloquent and full of fire that he soon became the most popular preacher around. Whites as well as blacks would travel long distances to hear him. He was soon preaching to several thousand people every Sunday. So many whites came to the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church of Richmond that they had to rope off a special section for them. For forty years he was a slave, but then the Civil War set him free, and he lived forty years more as a free man. Here was a man who had no training and was terribly ungrammatical, but he became so famous that his sermons stand along side of the most brilliant preachers of the centuries. Was there ever a slave who set so many people free?

Yes there was, for all of the great preachers in that set of books from Paul to Billy Graham were also slaves. They were not literal slaves like Jasper, but they were real slaves before they were set free in Christ to be slaves of a new master. All of this might seem like a trivial play on words, but when you study the history of the word *doulos* or slave you begin to realize just how serious a biblical issue this is. The word *doulos* was a nasty word until the New Testament cleaned it up and glorified it. The Greeks use the word often as a despised word. Plato and Aristotle used it in a derogatory way. We still do today when we say who was your slave last year, or I'm not your slave. Seneca said, "The foulest death is preferable to the fairest slavery."

In the Old Testament you have the concept of a noble slave developing, but the Hebrew mind despised the slave just as much as did the Greek and Roman mind. A Jewish proverb said, "A dog is more honorable than a slave." This kind of thinking entered into the Christian world and many came to believe that slaves were less than dogs, and that they were sub-human. There was a time when calling your neighbor a slave could lead to excommunication from the church. It has been universally despised to be a slave. The only place where the term and idea become one of honor is in the New Testament.

Paul describes his whole ministry as that of a slave. In I Cor. 9:19 we read, "Though I am free and

belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." Notice how Paul stresses it is a voluntary slavery. He does not have to do this. He is not forced against his will, but he chooses to be the slave of everyone. He goes on to say he become all things to all men in order to win them to Christ. He is a slave to what others want him to be in order to win them. He did not try to be anyone's master and win them by authority, but he became their slaves to win them by service. If you can catch the spirit of Paul as a slave, you will never judge him again as a proud or arrogant man trying to impose his will on others. He was a humble servant of Christ and a slave to all men.

It was Paul's writing about literal slavery that led eventually to the abolishment of slavery in the Western world. When Paul wrote to Philemon about his run away slave Onesimus he said in Philemon 15 and 16, "Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good-no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord." These words were the nails that finally put slavery in the coffin where it belonged. But it took centuries for Christians to grasp the implications of Paul's words. If it was not for servants of God fighting slavery we could still have millions today being treated like animals rather than like persons made in the image of God.

Paul has some powerful words in I Cor. 7:21-23, "Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you-although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." The whole point of Paul is that Christians are to be free from all forms of slavery except slavery to Christ. Our job as slaves of Christ is to be rebels against all other forms of slavery, and to help people escape from all other forms of slavery.

The exodus out of Egypt was the great deliverance of God's people out of slavery. Salvation in the New Testament is also an exodus out of bondage to sin. Slavery is the number one problem of man, and freedom is the number one goal. The only adequate answer is a transfer of ownership. The slave to sin has to find a master who will purchase him. That is what the Gospel is all about. Jesus is the new Master who bought us with His blood. We are now free to come under his ownership and be slaves to Him rather than slaves to sin and all of the masters of the flesh. The Gospel revolves around the idea of voluntary slavery. We are freed by faith in Christ to choose a new master, and like Paul, become slaves to the Lord Jesus.

3. GOD'S HUMAN NATURE based on Rom. 1:1-7

Superman has always been popular as a comic book character, and I can remember racing across the snow in a blizzard to trade comic books with a friend in order to get some new adventures of this heaven-like hero of humanity. In our day now the movies of superman have made millions because they appeal to the universal human fantasy that man can be God-like, and fly on his own power, be invincible as he fights the forces of evil. We love to have our super heroes. This is true in every culture.

Some of the early Christians exalted Jesus to the level of a superman. It is understandable why they did, but the majority of Christians got together and declared these Christians heretics by making Jesus a superman. They were guilty of thinking too highly of the deity of our Lord. This seems very strange to us, but the world is full of strange things. There is a rare metal called gallium which melts at 86 degrees, so that if you held it in your hand for awhile it would begin to melt. That does not fit our image of a metal, but it is a fact. It seems equally unlikely that anyone could think too highly of Christ's deity. How could this be possible?

The Christians who were called heretical were saying that Jesus was so divine that he could never be truly human. They so exalted the deity of Christ that they denied his humanity. They said he could not have been a real man for human nature is evil, and a holy God could never take on a human nature. These people were called Docetists from the Greek word meaning to seem. They said Jesus only seemed to be human.

Their theology has come down to us in the Acts of John which was written in the second century. In it Jesus does come down from the cross and does not suffer at all. That would be totally unworthy of the Son of God. The people saw him suffer on the cross, but that was only an illusion. Jesus appears to John and reveals to him that he is really not suffering at all. It is all a trick, and it is like superman acting weak when he is not. This superman image of Jesus became popular, and we have Gnostic documents from the third and fourth century that tell us Jesus did not really die. It was all an illusion and Jesus was really laughing as he watched them nailing him to the cross, for it was not real. The church declared these writings heretical for they rejected the real humanity of Jesus.

The New Testament does not give us this superman concept at all. The Jesus of the New Testament could not stop bullets, for he could not even stop a whip on his back. It cut through his skin and made him bleed, as did the crown of thorns on his head. The spear went through his side and the nails through his hands. He had to endure the pain and suffering of a fully human body.

The battle raged for centuries between the two groups with one saying it was all illusion and the other saying the pain was real in a real human body. Orthodox Christianity said Jesus was not a fake man, but he was totally real as a man. One heresy after another tried to deny the full humanity of Christ, but the church stuck to the Scripture and said he was fully real in his humanity. The battle goes on yet today, for many believe Jesus was fully God, but not fully man. They say his humanity was only a disguise. Charles Colson in *The Struggle For Men's Hearts and Minds* tells of a survey by Christianity Today in which people were asked if they believed Jesus was fully God and fully man. Among the general public only 26 percent said yes. Among evangelical Christians only 43 percent said yes. That means that the majority of believers are still rejecting one of the major doctrines of orthodox Christianity. They do not realize that they are heretical in their beliefs.

All of this brings us again to the introductory paragraph of Paul's letter to the Romans. In it he spells out the essence of the Gospel which centers in the two characteristics of Jesus, which are his humanity and his deity. Like the two ends of shoelaces, these two realities tie up the Gospel package. If you cut one side off you lose it all. Paul says in v. 3 that the Gospel regards God's Son as to his human nature and then in v.4 he says it regards God's Son as to his divine nature. Only a man could come from the seed of David. The word used here is *spermatos*. Jesus had a human nature that came from the very sperm of David. He is called the son of David because he was a physical product of David's body. But then in v. 4 Paul says Jesus was declared to be the Son of God by his

resurrection from the dead. Only one who was God could raise himself from the dead.

So we have here in these two verses the basis for the two main Christian holidays of the year, which are Christmas and Easter. On Christmas we celebrate the humanity of Jesus, for he was God come in the flesh. He was totally human and had to grow in wisdom and knowledge and stature. On Easter we celebrate his deity, for he did what no man can do, as he defeated death and rose from the grave. The full Gospel is Christmas and Easter, and that Jesus was fully man and fully God. He was the God-Man. If you take either one out of the church year you have destroyed it, and if you take either of the natures of Jesus out of him you have destroyed the Gospel and the Jesus of the New Testament.

It can be hard to grasp how Jesus could be both God and man, but this is the clear revelation of the New Testament. Paul could not have made it clearer than he does in Rom. 9:5 where he writes of the Jews and says, "...from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised." There are numerous examples of the dual nature of Jesus. God does not sleep, but Jesus did. God does not get tempted, but Jesus did. God does not pray, but Jesus did. God did not die, but Jesus did. The list could go on and on because Jesus was fully man and experienced life as all humans do. He was one with us and felt all of the human emotions.

A little girl said to her mother, "I just love Marjorie more than anybody else." The mother asked why she loved her more than her other friends and she replied, "Because when I cry she cries with me." That was the kind of friend Jesus was. He wept with those who wept. He could feel what they felt, and he still does have these human feelings so that he can identify with all who call upon him. Paul says in I Tim. 2:5, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." His present and eternal manhood is one of the major teachings of the book of Hebrews. If we did not have a human Savior and mediator how could we have any confidence that he can really understand where we are coming from in our weakness? He says in Heb. 4:15-16, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Some poet has written-

O glorious truth that my High Priest
Who bids me tell him all my need
Is sympathetic with my plight
For He's the Son of Man indeed!

If Jesus is just a fake man and never really felt the power of temptation, and never really felt the weakness of the flesh, and never felt the pain and limitations of the body, then he could never really understand us. We could never identify with his example, for it would be meaningless to have an example of one who was God only, and had no limitations. He would be no more an example for us than superman flying an explosive device into outer space where it can explode harmlessly. This is no meaningful example for our behavior in dealing with the forces of evil.

The only reason we can follow Jesus and go about doing good, loving people where they are, and sharing the good news is because these are all things that people can do. His deity would be no example at all, but his humanity is a powerful example that we can follow. We cannot walk on water

or turn water into wine, but we can do those things he did in his humanity, for we can love and serve and encourage. William L. Stidger said it in poetry.

My Master was a man who knew
The rush of rain, the drip of dew;
The Gentle kiss of midnight air
Upon his face upraised in prayer.
He was a man of lakes and stars;
He knew the Pleiades and Mars;
The silver of the Milky Way
The night, the light, the dawn, the day.
His skin was bronzed like that of one
Who traveled under wind and sun;
His feet were stained by dusty ways;
His cheeks were brown as autumn days.
All men and their need were in his thought.
This man, God-bred, star-led, shy-taught.

It is so important that Jesus had a complete human nature that it was to be an anti-Christ if one denied it. This sounds strange, for it means you can say that Jesus was very God of God and yet still be anti-Christ by a denial of his human nature.

II John 7 says, "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the anti-Christ." We do not really have a choice in the matter. We either acknowledge that Jesus entered into a complete human nature, or we cease to be for the Christ of New Testament revelation.

The Arian heresy said Jesus did not have a human soul. The Apollinarian heresy said the human soul of Jesus was replaced by the Logos, of the divine spirit so that Jesus was only a partial man. He was a brilliant theologian, and he forced the church in the fourth century to struggle with the issue. In 381 A. D. at the Council of Constantinople the church condemned the idea of Jesus being only a partial man. If he was not totally man he could not be a substitute for man. Just as animals could not be an adequate substitute for man, nor could an angel, so it was not possible for a partial man to be so. Jesus had to be a complete man with a human body, mind and soul. His human nature had to be just as complete as his divine nature. He was one personality with two natures. He was complete man and God joined in perfect unity.

Every attempt in history to somehow modify the human nature of Jesus so that it was not totally and completely human has been condemned as heresy. Every conceivable bit of biblical data was weighed for centuries, and the end result was that every hint that Jesus was somehow not a complete man was rejected as anti-Christian theology. This is not an easy concept to grasp that one can be equally God and man, but as Robert Capon writes, "The rule of theology is: when you've got two truths which you can't hold in harmony, you don't solve the problem by letting one of them go. You hold on tight and hold them both in paradox."

The only way you can understand how Jesus could be God and still pray "not my will but thine be done" is to recognize that Jesus had a human will. His human nature had a will of its own, just like ours has, and he had to surrender that will to the will of the Father, just as we do. This is a

major truth and we see Paul beginning this letter to the Romans by asserting this doctrine as the very foundation of the Gospel. You do not have to know that Jesus preached the Sermon On The Mount to be a Christian. You do not have to believe that Jesus took a towel and washed his disciples feet. There are dozens of facts about Jesus you do not even have to know to be a Christian, but you do have to believe that he was fully God and fully man to be an authentic Christian.

This has profound implications for the Christian view of man. Your view of human nature will have an effect on all you are and all you believe as a Christian. Those who have a low view of human nature have a hard time loving lost and sinful people. A police officer was complaining one day when it was dull and nothing was going wrong in society. He was griping because there were not robberies or fights or murders, and not even a stolen car. He said, "If this keeps up they will be reducing the force and we will be out of a job." The chief responded, "Don't worry Pete. Something will happen. I've got faith in human nature."

He was right, and you can count on human nature to be doing something evil and illegal very soon. Crime, war, greed, and folly of all kinds is never far away because of fallen human nature. Jeremiah said that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Paul says in Rom. 8:7-8, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." The Bible repeats this often, but Christians have applied this truth to life in a way that is misleading. They say that since man is such a miserable sinner that means he is worthless. This is not so, for God gave his Son and Jesus gave his life because of a high view of the worth of man.

Man was the crowning work of God in creation, and he said his work was, not just good, but very good. Human nature was his best work for he made man in his image. Man fell and filled the creation with great evil, but God never gave up on this great work. He was determined that man would be restored to the goodness in which he was made, and that he would spend eternity in that state with God. God's view of man is to be the view that we have, and that is that sinful human nature is worth a great price to save and restore to its state of goodness.

We do not look at a rotten tomato and conclude that is what tomatoes are. They are soft and slimy, black and moldy worthless fruit. That may be what a rotten tomato is, but that is not the nature of tomatoes. The tomato as God made it is a firm and brightly colored fruit with hundreds of delicious uses beneficial to man. The rotten tomato is just as real as the ideal tomato, but the ideal one is the one that is what a tomato is meant to be. The rotten one is the product of decay and death. If you apply this illustration to man, you need to see man for what he was meant to be, and what God can make him to be, and not what he is when he is filled with decay and death. Man fell and filled the creation with great evil, but God never gave up on this great work. He was determined that man would be restored to the goodness in which he was made, and that he would spend eternity in that state with God. God's view of man is to be the view that we have, and that is that sinful human nature is worth a great price to save and restore to its state of goodness.

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If you apply this illustration to man, you need to see man for what he was meant to be, and what God can make him to be, and not what he is when he is filled with decay and death. You do not define anything by its worst example, and so you should not define man that way either.

So when we look at man and ask what is man?- we do not go to the drunk in the gutter, or to the sophisticated scoundrel who rips off widows. They are men alright, but they are poor specimens of the species. Even so they are worth saving because of what man is. He is not just a drunk and a scoundrel, but he is one made in the image of God. He can become a being that is so good that a holy God can be pleased with him. Man is always far more than the sum total of his sin and folly. He is a being who can become a child of God. You do not define man by looking only at the first Adam. You need to look at the second Adam to get the real and true image of man. Jesus is what man was meant to be, and he is what man will be again by the grace of God.

You can say all you want about the depravity of fallen man, and you will be right, for it is all true, but the final word about man is not his fallen nature, but his redeemed nature. Satan did his best to spoil the second Adam too, but he failed, and the result is Jesus and his perfect human nature will be the final word about man. We are not to define man by the worst examples. We don't do that with anything else. We don't define a lake as a weed infested swamp unfit for human pleasure just because such things do exist. A lake is a beautiful body of water full of potential for human pleasure. We don't define milk as a soor, bacteria infested liquid that can make you sick. No matter how much of this there really is, that is not what milk is. You define things by their best example and not their worst, and so it is with human nature. What is it? It is the greatest work of God known to us in this world. It is a channel of all that is good and God-like in this world, and the proof of it is the manhood of Jesus Christ. He is what man is.

You cannot look at any other man and say this is the best God could do, and this is what He made man to be. But you can look at Jesus and say that, for He is man as God meant man to be. This changes the entire Christian perspective on what it means to be human. We can get so down on the depravity of man that we come to despise being human, and this is folly. The more human we become, the more Christ-like we become. The goal of God is that all His children become as human as His incarnate Son. The point of redemption is not to take man out of his manhood and make him angelic, or some other creature. The point is to restore him to full and complete manhood. The destiny of the redeemed is to be as fully human as Jesus.

R. Lofton Hudson wrote a book called, *Helping Each Other Be Human*. The point of the book is that the purpose of the Christian life is to be more human. We call it being sanctified, or being Christ-like. Paul says it is being called to be saints. But all of this, in the light of who Jesus was, means we are called to be as truly human as He was. Christians sometimes get all bent out of shape over whether we are God-centered or man-centered, and they forget that if we are Christ-centered the distinction evaporates, for He was God and man. The human and the divine are of equal importance in a Christ-centered theology.

The Psalmist asks, "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" And the answer is Jesus. That is what man is, and that is why God is mindful of him, and why he pays the ultimate price to save him. He is for sure a rotten apple, but God has His own proverb about apples. Our human proverb is that one rotten apple can spoil the whole barrel. God's view is just the opposite, for He says that one perfect apple in a barrel of rotten ones can restore them to what apples were meant to be. Only a

real and perfect man could do it, and that is why Christians have fought off every attempt to minimize or modify the manhood of Jesus.

Only man could offer a sacrifice to please God, but only God could provide such a sacrifice, and so the only hope of man was a God-man, and so Jesus is the only answer. To know Jesus is to know all there is to know of God, and all there is to know of man. He is the best of both. He was man as God intended man to be as one imperfect fellowship and obedience to his creator. How human can God be? The answer is Jesus. How divine can man be? The answer is Jesus.

David Read, the contemporary preacher and author, quotes the Christmas Carol: "The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying He makes." Read says, "I don't believe it. Jesus was a real baby and He cried like all other babies. He wept as a man and He cried as a baby." We dare not deny any aspect of the reality of His humanity, for He was totally human. He is the one perfect apple that will restore the barrel of rotten humanity to what God intended man to be. We are all spoiled apples, but by faith in Jesus Christ we can be assured of enjoying forever a perfected human nature. May God help us to be biblically intelligent Christians who not only enjoy Christmas and Easter, but know why we do, and acknowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man.

4. THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S PROMISE Based on Rom. 1:1-7

Paul Robeson was a famous American Negro singer back in the 30's and 40's. It was announced in London that his great singer would broadcast a concert from Russia where he was then living. The people of London filled the large concert hall to standing room only waiting to hear this broadcast. It was to begin right at noon, but as that moment came and announcer came on the stage, and people could tell by his face that he had bad news. "My friends," he said, "I have a very disappointing announcement to make to you. You have gathered here to listen to the beautiful music of Mr. Paul Robeson. But at the last moment word has come that the Russian authorities have decided not to permit him to make this broadcast."

A murmur of disappointment echoed across the hall from these expectant listeners. They were shocked by this announcement. But then the stage door opened and Paul Robeson himself walked in. The announcer was just as puzzled as the people. But then the crowd burst forth with delighted applause. Robeson explained in these words: "The Russian authorities refused to allow me to broadcast, and, rather than disappoint this audience, I hired a plane at my own expense and flew to London. I just landed at Croyden Field, got a taxi, and here I am. I never break a promise or disappoint an audience if it is humanly possible to keep and engagement."

In the world of entertainment where the theme is, "The show must go on," I am sure there are numerous stories of sacrifice and super-human efforts to see that promises are kept. Whatever the motive, many have said with Robert Frost:

The woods are lonely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Samuel Johnson commended Duke William III back in 1777 by saying of him, "If, for instance, he had promised you an acorn and none had grown that year in his woods, he would not have contented himself with that excuse; he would have sent to Denmark for it." We know politicians are notorious for breaking promises, but it is good to face the reality of the other side, and see that it is also true that many have been famous for keeping promises. Emperor Charles V promised Martin Luther safe conduct to his trial at Worms. His enemies tried to persuade the emperor that a promise to a heretic does not need to be kept. He refused to buy this and said, "Whatever promise has been made must be fulfilled."

The point of all this is that it can be established that even on a human level men can be faithful to their promises. How much more will God be faithful to His promises? An elderly Christian was in distress as he lay dying. He said to his pastor, "I have relied on God's promises all my life, but now in the hour of death I can't remember a single one to comfort me." The pastor knowing that Satan was trying to rob him of his faith said to him, "Do you think God will forget any of His promises just because you do?" A smile came over his face and he said joyfully, "No, no He won't!" He fell asleep in Jesus with peaceful assurance that God would keep all His promises.

One of Satan's most powerful weapons is to get Christians to doubt God's promises. One of the most dramatic true stories I have ever read of spiritual warfare over the promises of God is that of Roger Simons. He was hitching a ride home after he got out of the service. A big black Cadillac finally stopped and he hopped in. The driver was Mr. Hanover, a business man from Chicago. They talked about many things, and Roger felt the Holy Spirit urging him to witness. He resisted because this man was obviously rich, sophisticated, and worldly, and could care less what Roger thought about life and religion. But as they came closer to where he would be dropped off he felt the impulse to witness so strongly that he could not remain silent. He began to share his faith and what Christ had done for him, and to his surprise Mr. Hanover pulled off to the side of the road, and he prayed to receive Christ as his Savior.

Roger was soon let out by his home, and Mr. Hanover gave him his card and told him to come and see him if he ever came to Chicago. Roger had a lot of joy in being home and seeing his family, but no joy was greater than that of being used to lead another into the kingdom of God. Roger married and got into his own business. It was 5 years later when he had an occasion to go to Chicago. When he packed he found the card that Mr. Hanover had given him, and he decided that he would look him up.

When he got to the Hanover Enterprises Building he asked the receptionists if he could see Mr. Hanover. She said she would call Mrs. Hanover. He thought that was strange for he did not know her. Her first question to him was, "Did you know my husband?" Roger said, "Yes. I met him when he picked me up 5 years ago." She asked, "What day was that?" He thought for a while and remembered it was the day of his discharge. "May 7th," he replied. Mrs. Hanover was nervous and asked, "Did you talk of anything special?" Roger said, "Yes we did. I talked with him about his soul." Her lips began to tremble and she asked, "What was his response?" He said, "He pulled to the side of the road and gave his life to Christ."

Explosive sobs gripped Mrs Hanover and she let loose with a flood of tears. Roger was puzzled. Finally she got a grip on her emotions and explained that she had prayed for her husband for years, and she felt God had promised her he would be saved. Roger asked, "Where is he now?" She went on to tell him that he was dead, and that he died in an accident shortly after he let him out of the car. She said, "I thought God had not kept his promise, and I have been living for 5 years feeling that he let me down." God had been faithful to his promise, but she did not have the faith to believe. This has always been man's major problem. They will not believe God's promises. Adam and Eve were assured of the best possible life if they obeyed God, but they did not believe and that was the beginning of the problems of mankind.

God promised Israel the land flowing with milk and honey, but they did not believe and had to march in the desert for 40 years until all the doubter were dead. All through the Bible men are seen missing God's best because they do not believe his promises. The biggest and most central promise of all is the one Paul deals with in this introduction to the book of Romans. This one is also often missed, but Paul is called to take this promise to the Gentiles so that they might get in on it, and not miss out on the greatest promise ever given. It is the Gospel. It is the Gospel he promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

The Gospel is not something new. God's good news is as old as God's heart of love for man. He was promising man all through the Old Testament that He was sending a Savior into the world. No matter how awful life was in the Old Testament, the saints then had a foundation for optimism because God gave them a promise of good news. And when you can anticipate good news, you can handle almost anything. One of the first things Paul establishes is the continuity of the Old and the New Testaments. God never expected anyone to ever be saved by the law. It was faith in his promise that was always the basis for salvation. Salvation by faith has always been God's plan.

You cannot have faith without a promise. Faith has to have some ground to stand on, and that ground is the promise of God. Standing on the promises of God is the theme song of the saints of all time. God promised Adam and Eve that a seed would come from them that would crush Satan's head. God promised Abraham that a seed from him would be a blessing to the whole world. God promised David that his seed would rule in righteousness, and all the prophets pointed to the coming seed who would save the people of Israel, and the Gentiles as well. The entire Old Testament hope was based on the Gospel of God's promise. It is this promise that makes the Old and New Testaments one book. They are different in many ways, but the thread that sews them together as one is the promise of God.

The New is in the Old concealed.
The Old is in the New revealed.
The New is in the Old contained.
The Old is in the New explained.

After Jesus rose from the dead the first teaching he did was with the two on the road to Emmaus. Luke 24:27 says, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." Jesus said that he was the focus of the Old Testament promises, and that now he had fulfilled them. Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews in John 5:39, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me." Jesus claims that the focus of the entire Old Testament was on him,

and that he was the Promised One of God's Old Testament Gospel. Paul preached this to Jews and Gentiles alike in Acts 13:23 where he said, "God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised."

People often ask how people were saved in the Old Testament, and the answer is that they were saved the same as people in the New Testament. All people are saved by faith in the promise of God, which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The great faith chapter of Hebrews 11 ends with these words in vv. 39-40, "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." All the Old Testament saints were saved by faith in the promise of God that he would send a Savior, and all New Testament saints are saved by faith that Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise.

Two little girls were playing together and one said, "Let's count our pennies." The one counted and said I have five. The other put down the same number and said I have ten. The first girl protested and said, "You have the same number that I do." "I know," said the girl, "but my daddy promised he would give me five more when he came home from work, and so I have ten." She was counting what was promised to her, for she had faith to believe that she already possessed what was promised. This is how people were saved in the Old Testament. They had faith to believe the promise of God, and so they possessed the salvation he promised, even before it became an historical reality.

Now why does Paul make an issue about the Gospel of God being promised beforehand in the Old Testament, and why does he stress throughout the letter the continuity between the Old and New Testaments? The reason is clear as you go through the letter. Paul was writing in a context where racism and prejudice was even greater than they are today. Why would Paul in v. 16 say "I am not ashamed of the Gospel?" It was because many saw the Gospel as a Jewish religion, and they despised the Jews. And the Jews saw it as a perversion of Judaism and designed for the Gentile dogs. Paul's whole stress in this letter is that God does not have different strokes for different folks, but that all people are the same. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and all have only one way to be saved, and that is by faith in the promise of God.

One of the major purposes of this letter is to make it clear as crystal that all men are in the same boat, and that all are equally lost and all have an equal chance to be saved by faith. There is no special plan for the Jews, or some modified plan for the Gentiles. There is only one Gospel, and there is only one way for all men to get in on this good news, and that is by faith in the promise of God fulfilled in Christ. We enter the Kingdom by faith, we live by faith, we walk by faith, we work by faith, and we worship by faith. Faith in the promises of God is the foundation of all in God's plan.

When we cease to live by faith we become poor, negative Christians, and we lose the joy of our salvation. D. L. Moody said, "...if you would spend a month feeding on the precious promises of God you wouldn't be going about complaining how poor you are. You would lift up your head and proclaim the riches of his Grace, because you couldn't help doing it."

The Old Testament not only reveals the perpetual failure of man, but the perpetual faithfulness of God. He never forgot his promises, and he remained faithful to his people no matter how rebellious and disobedient they were. We need to keep in mind that there were also negative promises, and if

they disobeyed they would be severely punished. These were also kept faithfully, and they suffered much judgment. A young boy was asked, "Did your father promise you something if you cut the grass?" He responded, "No, but he promised me something if I didn't." We will focus on the judgment later in Romans, but now we are focused on the positive promise of the Gospel.

Gen. 8:22 says, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." God promised to be faithful just as surely as they could count on the seasons. Alice Mortenson wrote,

Like Seasons faithful in their change,
God's promises stand out
To cheer the earth-bound traveler on
That none may make him doubt.

Like A Rainbow in the eastern sky
When wind and cloud are still,
They span God's Word with beauty
And our whole horizon fill.

Like Stars upon a lonely night,
When hope seems almost dead,
They shine upon the Christian's path
And point to heaven ahead!

This theme of God's faithfulness to his promises is a major theme of Romans, for Paul is stressing how the Gospel of God was promised beforehand in the prophets. He is calling our attention to the fact that the New Testament has its roots in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is a crucial document that establishes that everything has been tried, and the conclusion is conclusive that man cannot save himself. He cannot even do it with God's help and God given tools like the law. Man just cannot do it.

If we did not have the Old Testament we could always wonder what if we had an all wise, powerful, and rich ruler? What if such a person could solve all the problems of man. Surely with such a leader we could save ourselves and establish a utopia. The fact is that Solomon was just such a man, and he did bring about a golden age to Israel. It was as good as it gets. But the bottom line is that it did not work. Solomon fell into idolatry and the whole kingdom was soon crumbling and again under the judgment of God. The best that man could produce, even with God's blessing, could not save man. His house of self-salvation came tumbling down like a house of cards in a storm.

If there is a lot about the Old Testament that you do not like, do not feel bad, for God did not like it either. His judgment was almost seasonal so frequent was it needed. All that man did failed, and even all the God did failed in the Old Testament. Nothing was able to save man from himself. The law, the sacrificial system, the ministry of priests and prophets, it was all to no avail in saving man. The only hope of the Old Testament was the promise of God to send a Savior into the world, and man's faith in God to keep this promise. God had to let man get all of his theories about saving himself out of his system before he sent his Son. Man in his stubborn pride thinks he can do it on his own, and so God had to give him every chance to do it his way to see how futile it was.

If God had not given his promise of a Savior there would have been only despair in the Old Testament. The only Gospel they had was the promise of God, and that promise was fulfilled in Jesus. Paul stood up in the synagogue at Antioch and said to the Jews in Acts 13:32-33, "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus." Paul goes further in I Cor. 1:20 and says, "No matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ." In other words, every promise of God ever made is fulfilled in his Son the Lord Jesus.

In Jesus the age of promise became the age of fulfillment. But let us never forget that the promise was potent enough to save all who believed it. This is still relevant today because to live by faith still means to stand on the promises of God. J. Richie Smith said, "The Bible opens with the promise of the first coming of Christ and ends with the promise of his second coming, and all the way between is strewn with promises as sky is studded with stars." All of God's people of all time live on the same principle, and that is by having faith in the promises of God.

5. CALLED TO OBEDIENCE based on Rom. 1:1-7

Colonel Wilbur Rogers was ordered to let loose an artillery barrage in a World War I battle. He was right there on the battlefield, and he could see what the commander could not see. If he fired as ordered he would shell 10,000 American infantry just ahead of him. He refused to obey an order that would have killed his own soldiers, and the result was he was immediately removed from his command and arrested. Charges were preferred against him, and he was reduced to a class B status, which means he was deemed unfit to hold commission in active service. Colonel Rogers fought in court for 14 years to prove that there are circumstances where disobedience to orders is a manifestation of common sense. Finally in 1934 he was vindicated and President Roosevelt signed a bill that reinstated him to class A status.

Blind obedience to orders that you know are based on ignorance of the circumstances is not a virtue, especially when you do know the circumstances and can make a wiser decision. On the other hand, when you are the one who is ignorant of the circumstances it is a virtue to give blind obedience to those in authority over you. This is illustrated by the Eastern King who hired two men to pull water out of a well and pour it into a basket. After awhile one of them said that it was foolishness. The water runs through the sides of the basket and the labor was in vain. The other one said that they were being paid good to do it and so it is the master's business. The first man was not satisfied and just threw the basket down and quit. The other man went on doing the job, and when he got to the bottom of the well he learned the purpose of his labor. There was a precious diamond ring that had fallen into the well. Had it been brought up before they got to the bottom it would have been found in the basket. It was not useless labor at all. The worker who remained faithful to the task was greatly rewarded because he worked on when he did not understand the purpose of it.

The king had planned the whole thing, for he was looking for a reliable servant who would obey him even when they did not understand his plan. This has been God's search all through history. He has ever sought for servants who would obey him. Abraham was one of his best servants and we read in Heb. 11:8, "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his

inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going." In blind obedience he did what God ordered, and became the number one example of a man of faith. He even obeyed God when he was asked to sacrifice his own son Isaac. It made no sense, for God had promised him a great host of descendants as vast as the sand of the seashore. But he had faith that God would keep his promise, and so he was ready to do what made no sense to him. God, of course, did not let him do it, and provided the substitute lamb for the sacrifice.

If you study all of the heroes of the faith, you discover that the virtue they all had in common was the virtue of obedience. They were different in many ways, but they were all obedient to what they knew was the will of God. Obedience was the key virtue in the Bible and still is today. The first sin in the Garden of Eden was the sin of disobedience, and this is the essence of all sin. It is those who obey who will have access again to the tree of life in the eternal kingdom.

Some may be thinking that love is the supreme virtue, and this is correct. But the Bible so links love and obedience that they are married and become one. You cannot have one without the other. Jesus said in John 14:21, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." Then two verses later he says, "If a man love me, he will keep my words." We make a distinction between a professing Christian and a possessing Christian because it is not words but obedience that makes a true believer. In Matt. 7:21 Jesus says, "Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." It is in obedience to God that we demonstrate faith and manifest love. Without obedience all the lovely language and professions are mere stubble that will quickly perish in the fires of judgment.

We do not grasp the goal of God at all unless we see that the bottom line is obedience to his will. F. B. Huey Jr. wrote an article for Christianity Today that was titled Obedience A Neglected Doctrine. In this article he tells us that obedience is so practical that we would rather focus on other doctrines that are merely intellectual groping for the truth. Obedience is hard because it demands that you act and back up your profession with behavior. He wrote, "If we are completely honest, we will admit that obedience is the biblical doctrine most difficult to put into practice. We preach, teach, give a tithe or more, go to the mission field, may even be willing to die for the faith; but how many of us will at the end of this life be able to say: 'I led every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.' (II Cor. 10:5)? Total surrender is often talked about, but it is far easier to preach than to practice."

Because we do not like to submit to be a slave to God's will we tend to let obedience slide. Professor Huey wrote again, "The alarming statistical decrease in conversions in recent years is partly explained by the lessened insistence upon obedience of children in the home. A well-known evangelist has pointed out that it is very difficult to win to Christ people who as children never learned obedience. If a person does not respect his earthly parents, how much more difficult it is for him to obey the Father in heaven. Parents who teach their children the importance of obedience are preparing them for salvation." Obedience on any level has eternal implications.

We are spending a lot of time looking at the first few verses of this great letter because it is universally agreed upon that Paul gives us a mini-outline of the entire letter in this introduction. John MacArthur is one of the most popular Bible teachers of our day and he says, "...the entire thrust of all 16 chapters of Romans is distilled into the first seven verses-Paul is so thrilled by what he wants to say that he can't wait to say it. He capsulizes his foundational thoughts in Rom. 1:1-7. It

is as if the seed of the Gospel is sown in the first seven verses and then fully blooms throughout the rest of the epistle."

It pays to go slow when you are panning for gold, for those who go fast are sure to throw away nuggets with the pebbles. Some lost is inevitable for no man has ever gotten them all. Martin Lloyd Jones preached on Romans for 8 years. Donald Gray Barnhouse preached on it for 3 and a half years, and greatly influenced Chuck Swindoll who preached on it for nearly a year. None of them claimed to cover the subject thoroughly, for it is a lifetime task. John Calvin in his commentary on Romans wrote, "...when anyone gains a knowledge of the Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture."

Most of us usually skip through the introduction and miss the treasures. So far we have looked at 1. The Preachers Of The Gospel. 2. The Promise Of The Gospel. 3. The Person Of The Gospel. And now we are looking at 4. The Purpose Of The Gospel. Paul spells it out in verse 5 where he says the whole purpose of his receiving grace and apostleship was to call people from all the Gentiles to the obedience which comes from faith. This is just another way of stating the Great Commission of Christ who said in Matt. 28:19-20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." The bottom line is obedience, for the finished product is to be obedient disciples.

Walter Isenhour tells of the English farmer who saw a party of horsemen riding toward a field that he did not want trampled. He sent one of his boys to shut the gate and not let it be opened. He got there just in time. When the horsemen came they ordered the gate to be opened. The boy refused stating his orders. Threats and bribes failed to move him. Then one of the riders said, "My boy, I am the Duke of Wellington. I command you to open that gate that I and my friends may pass through." The boy removed his cap to honor this man all England delighted to honor, but he said firmly, "I am sure the Duke of Wellington would not want me to disobey orders. I must keep the gate shut and not allow anyone to pass but by my master's permission." Greatly pleased, the old warrior lifted his own hat and said, "I honor the boy or man who can be neither bribed nor frightened into doing wrong." Handing the boy a sovereign, the old Duke put spurs to his horse and galloped away.

The purpose of the Gospel is not just to save people for heaven, but to produce people on earth in all nations who will be that kind of obedient servant, and be loyal to Christ above all others. But notice carefully what Paul says about this obedience in verse 5. It is obedience that comes from faith. There is obedience that comes from force and from fear also, but this is not the kind of obedience that Jesus wants. He wants obedience that is by choice and not by coercion. The purpose of the Gospel is to get people of all nations to be voluntary slaves of Christ. These are people who choose to obey His commands because they want to, and because they belong to Him, and they believe His promises.

Obedience that comes from faith is not an I have to obey attitude, but it is an I want to obey attitude. I want to please my Lord. We have not arrived at God's goal for the Gospel until we do His will because we love Him and want to do His will. If we obey because we feel guilty if we don't, or feel pressured by the need to conform, or by some other external motive, we have not yet arrived at Christian maturity.

A rich man had a son that he loved dearly, but who died at a young age. The father died not long after, and he stipulated in his will that all of his art treasures were to be auctioned off, and to begin with the portrait of his son. He had many treasured paintings, but the portrait of his son was by an obscure artist, and so most just waiting for this to be out of the way. In fact, there was only one bid, and that was by the servant of the wealthy man who had also loved the son and wanted to possess his portrait. The auctioneer handed the portrait to the servant, and then went on to read the net portion of the will. "All the rest of my treasures will go to the one who loved my son enough to purchase his portrait." The parallel is not in the purchase, where there is no price on the Gospel. The parallel is in the love for the Son. Those who love the Son God gave to fulfill His promise will receive with their choice to love Jesus all the riches that go with the inheritance of Him who is a perfect portrait of the Father.

You do not come to Jesus because you have to, but you come because you want to. You do not obey Jesus because you have to, but you obey because you want to. This is the obedience that comes from faith, and this is the goal of the Gospel. It is the very purpose for which Paul is writing this letter, and why he longs to go to Rome and preach the Gospel. The Greek word here for obedience is used 14 times in all of the New Testament. Seven of them are used right here in this letter to the Romans. Obedience is a major theme of this letter.

The entire plan of salvation revolves around obedience. Paul writes in Rom. 5:19, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." Obedience is a major New Testament doctrine because by it Jesus became the perfect man, and so was the perfect sacrifice that made it possible for God to save us. We are saved, not just by the sacrifice of Christ, but by His obedience. His sacrifice would have been worth nothing had He not first been obedient. His death on the cross was His supreme act of obedience.

Phil. 2:6-9 says, "Who, being in nature God, did not consider equally with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name." Jesus made it to the top by obedience. It was not by force, by deeds, or clever maneuvering, but by obedience. To be like Christ is to be obedient to the Father's will. To be a disciple of Jesus, and to be a saint, are just different ways of describing the call to obedience that comes from faith.

Paul makes it clear in this letter that the whole purpose of his ministry was to lead people to obedience. In Romans 15:17-18 he writes, "Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done." Paul would be very pleased if his epitaph read, "Here lies the man who led Gentiles to obey God." This was his glory and in the final chapter of this letter he says in 16:19, "Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you." Paul's joy was not based on the numbers, as is so often the case in our culture, nor on the amount of money given. Paul's joy was in their obedience, for that is the very purpose of the Gospel, and the purpose of his ministry.

In the next to the last verse of this letter in 16:26 Paul sums it up again by writing, "That all

nations might believe and obey him." Nothing, and I mean nothing is more pleasing to God than obedience. God said to Abraham in Gen. 22:18. "Through your offspring all the nations on earth will be blessed." Then he tells Abraham why: "because you have obeyed me."

A. W. Tozer wrote, "The church of our day has soft-pedaled the doctrine of obedience, either neglecting it altogether or mentioning it only apologetically and, as it were, by the way. This results from a fundamental confusion of obedience with works in the minds of preacher and people. To escape the error of salvation by works, we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without obedience. In our eagerness to get rid of the legalistic doctrine of works, we have thrown out the baby with the bath water and gotten rid of obedience as well."

There are two basic things the Bible gives us, and they are promises to believe and commandments to obey. We tend to favor the promises and neglect the commands. This is like trying to plow with one live and one dead horse. It will not work, for you need a team of two live horses to get the job done. Many stress the promises to be believed as if this was the same as obedience. But you do not obey a promise. You believe it and trust it, but you do not obey it. Others will stress the commands to be obeyed and give the impression that you can save yourself by obeying the ten commandments and others. This is legalism and salvation by works and misses the need for faith in the finished work of Christ, and living by faith in the promises of God. You do not have faith in a command, but you obey it, and so they miss out on the need for faith in the promises of God and dependence on God's grace. Both are half right and all wrong, and they produce incomplete Christians.

We all need to listen to Paul's stress on obedience that comes from faith. He agrees with James that faith without works is dead, and also that works without faith is dead. You need both to have a true Christian theology. One without the other is Laurel without Hardy, or Abbott without Costello, or salt without pepper, and a horse without a carriage. If they are not a team you do not have a biblical view of God's plan and purpose for man. It is a common misconception that one is doing just fine if they have correct ideas about biblical truths, even if they do not live in obedience to the commands of the Bible. Such a slipshod Christianity cannot change society, for it does not even change those who profess such a perverted faith. Without obedience to God's revealed will any profession of being a Christian is phony. An authentic Christian will still be a sinner and will fail, but they will be always striving to obey all they understand of God's will for their life.

If you do not remember anything else in Paul's introduction to Romans, remember verse 5 and the purpose of Paul in his ministry to call people from all nations to obedience that comes from faith. A. W. Tozer again wrote, "The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are opposite sides of the same coin. What does all this add up to? What are its practical implications for us plain Christians today? Of this we can be certain: God is waiting in all readiness to send down floods of blessing upon us as soon as we begin to obey His plain instructions. We need no new doctrine, no new movement, no "key," no important evangelist or expensive, "course" to show us the way. It is before us as clear as a four-lane highway. To any enquirer, I would say: "Just do the next thing you know you should do, to carry out the will of the Lord."

If God's people would have obeyed Him the Old Testament would not be filled with violence and judgment, but it would be a perpetual proof of just how close even fallen man can live to

paradise. They failed, and so do we, but the challenge is ever before us. This is God's goal in history to produce in every nation people who will obey Him. Chuck Swindoll said, "Only one decision pleases God-obedience." This means there is only one way to success that fits God's definition of success, and that is by obedience.

Heaven and hell, and everything in between, meaning all of history, revolves around the issue of obedience. Paul wrote in II Thess. 1:18 that when Jesus comes again in judgment, "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus." Not to obey is to reserve a place in hell. On the other hand, we read in Heb. 5:8-9, "Although he was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered, and once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him." Heaven is the destiny of those who live in obedience. May God help us all to recognize this great truth that we are called to obedience.

6. ESTABLISHED BY ENCOURAGEMENT Based on Rom. 1:11-13

One of the greatest heroes in Minnesota history was James Root of White Bear. He was the engineer on the No. 4 Limited the day it pulled out of Duluth heading for St. Paul on Sept. 1, 1894. Before that day ended he saved the lives of nearly 400 people. Unknown to him and his passengers they were heading into one of the worse fires in history. It completely destroyed 6 Minnesota villages killing 420 people, and it turned every thing to ashes over an area of 350 square miles.

As Root brought his train to Hinkley he saw masses of people running down the track toward him. He stopped the train and jumped out of the cab. He soon learned that Hinkley was a furnace, and that a tornado of flame was heading their way. He encouraged the 300 people of men, women, and children to get on board. By the time they did the heat was already so intense that it shattered the window of his cab and cut his forehead. He put the train in reverse and headed back to Skunk Lake, a small station 4 miles North.

The heat was so intense that his fire man climbed into the water tank. He was alone and fighting for his own survival. His hands were so burned he feared rubbing them lest he tare off the flesh. The cars were all on fire and the glass was melting. It was torture for the passengers to breathe, but Root kept the train moving and got it to the Skunk Lake bridge where there was a swamp with a few feet of water. He and the passengers got into this swamp and watched the train be destroyed by the flames. Had Root not been strong in his determination all 400 hundred would have perished.

Hero stories are almost always stories of strength where you see exhibited strength of body, mind and will. All the heroes of the Bible were not as strong as Samson, but they were all strong in their commitment to the God of Israel, who was called the Strength of Israel. Habakkuk ends his prophecy with these words, "The Sovereign Lord is my strength." Over and over the Psalms refer to God as the source of strength, and He is named Strength.

Psa. 18:1, "I love you, O Lord, my strength."

Psa. 18:32, "It is God who arms me with strength."

Psa. 22:19, "David cries out to God O my Strength, come quickly to help me."

There are dozens of references to God as my strength and song. The joy of the Lord is my strength, and the purpose of worship is to enter into the beauty of God's presence to be strengthened by his strength. The saints are urged to seek God's strength and to be clothed with it. They are to walk in His strength for a life of joy and victory. All of this becomes the background for our understanding of Paul's concept of Christian worship and fellowship. He writes to the Romans here in chapter 1 verse 11 that he longs to be with them to impart to them some spiritual gift, and why does he feel this is important? He says the purpose of the gift is to make you strong.

Weak Christians are a great problem. Therefore, the greatest solution to this problem is to make Christians strong. That is the point of the gifts of the Spirit. That is the point of worship and Christian fellowship. Strong Christians are obedient Christians, and weak Christians are disobedient Christians. The only the church can fulfill God's purpose in history is to help Christians be strong. Paul is not so proud as to think that he does not need the strength that can come from them. In verse 12 he says that he wants to see them, not just to give strength but to receive it, and that they might be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Here is the most powerful reason there is for Christians to get together. It is that they might encourage and make each other stronger. Paul knows what anyone knows who tries to live in full obedience to God. It is hard, and there is an ever present temptation to throw in the towel and take the easy way out, and just drift along with the culture. Swimming against the stream and climbing the mountain of the upward call leads to burn out and discouragement. We need to be renewed and strengthened to keep going. We come together to hear the Word of God in order to charge our batteries so that we can go away saying with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." We can then resist the devil; resist conformity to the world, and in spite of our weakness be witnesses for Christ.

The point of coming to church is to come out of the world to worship God, and then be strengthened to go back into the world to work for God. You need energy to be a witness. You need to overcome all the natural weaknesses of the flesh, and recognize that every day you touch lives with either that weakness or the power of God. George Elliot wrote,

Every soul that touches yours-
Be it the slightest contact-
Gets therefrom some good;
Some little grace; one kindly thought;
One aspiration yet unfelt;
One bit of courage
For the darkening sky;
One gleam of faith
To brave the thickening ills of life;
One glimpse of brighter skies
Beyond the gathering mists-
To make this life worth while

And heaven a surer heritage.

This is true if you are strong. If you are weak, you are part of the problem and not part of the answer. Weak Christians offend people and make them doubt the value of being saved. They do not attack but repel people because they operate in their own strength, which is weakness, rather than in the strength of Christ which draws men to Himself.

The Roman Christians had to be fairly strong and mature, for the report of their faith had spread all over the known world. Nevertheless, Paul says they still need to be made strong. The implication is that every Christian, including himself, needs to be strengthened. There is no such thing as a Christian who is too strong. There is no level a Christian can reach where he is no longer in need of encouragement and strengthening that comes from other Christians and their gifts.

If anyone could be a lone ranger Christian it would be Paul, but he admits he needed the encouragement of their faith. Anyone who claims to be so strong that they never need the encouragement of others has achieved a level that is nowhere recognized in the New Testament. Look at verse 13, and you can see Paul admitting to his frustration. He says that he planned many times to come to them but was prevented. Maybe you thought that being an Apostle of Christ was a perpetual joyride where everything worked out and nothing ever went wrong. The fact is, Paul's plans fell through over and over again. He did not get to do what he wanted to do. It is a great disappointment to have your plans not work out when all you want to do is serve the Lord and do good. It is bad enough when the plan goes sour once or twice, but when it happens many times you feel jinxed and begin to wonder if you should just give up.

There are disappointments in serving Jesus, that is why Paul needed the encouragement of others, and that is why we all do. The only way any Christian can be obedient over the long haul, and not get weary in well doing, is to be encouraged by other believers and strengthened to keep running the race. Paul needed it more than most, for he had problems, trials, and burdens that go beyond what most ever have to bear. He writes in II Cor. 1:8-9, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death."

In II Cor. 4:8 Paul says that he was perplexed in all his trials. The word means to be at a loss to explain what is happening. Paul could not understand why he had to experience so much disappointment. Here is a man who has more revelation from God than any man who has ever lived, and yet he does not know all the plans of God. He sees through a glass darkly. There is no one who can rise so far above the rest of us in spirituality that they do not need the encouragement of the rest of the body.

Daniel Tayler tells of his father who had a dream come true. He got to be a bat boy for the Chicago Cubs. All was going fine until in a late inning the pitcher came to bat and got a hit. Someone threw him a jacket and said take it to the pitcher. He did not know that in the major leagues the pitcher put on a jacket when he got on base. He only knew one pitcher in the game and so he ran out to the mound to hand the jacket to him. People were shouting at him to take it to the pitcher, but the pitcher was refusing it. He was totally confused. He thought he was doing what he was told to do, but it was not working. He was perplexed and at a loss as to what was happening.

The manager finally walked out and pointed him to the right pitcher on first base. He was doing his best but did not understand the plan he was supposed to carry out.

It is too bad that such complexity cannot be limited to the experience of little boys, but the fact is that even an Apostle cannot escape it. Paul's sincere efforts to do the will of God were often dashed to pieces and crushed by circumstances beyond his control. He writes in I Thess. 2:17, "...out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you, for we wanted to come to you-certainly I, Paul, did, again and again-but Satan stopped us." God allows Satan to hinder the plans of his servants. God allows him the freedom of will that he needs to be a valid enemy, for if he had no weapons it would not be an authentic conflict of good and evil. We have to wage real warfare as we serve the Lord, and this means that much can go wrong, or not go at all.

It is bad enough that Satan has power to hinder our efforts, but to make matters worse, even the Holy Spirit can and does hinder our will. In Acts 16:6-7 we read, "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to." Now when the unholy spirit of Satan and the Holy Spirit of Jesus are both throwing monkey wrenches into your plans, you need a lot of encouragement. That is why Paul is practically begging Christians in all of his churches to pray for him. The battle is real.

Paul was a wise and brilliant man of God, but he did not always understand the will of God. He just did his best and admitted that he needed the encouragement of others. When you need something yourself you are more aware of how others need it also. Paul is fully aware of how all believers need encouragement and strength that comes from the gifts of others in the body. Paul was not so proud that he would not admit his own need.

The church was meant to be a mutual benefit society in which we strengthen each other's weaknesses and meet needs. John Calvin said, "There is not one so void of gifts in the church of Christ who is not able to contribute something to our benefit." Every Christian is a part of the whole process of encouragement. Sometimes all you have to do is just be present to be an encouragement. Just seeing you helps them to press on and resist the temptation to forsake the assembling of themselves together. We can all give this gift of encouragement, and that is why it is so important that we be faithful in our being present to other believers.

Harold Dye, a gifted Christian writer tells of his experience while fishing in the New Mexico mountains. He was climbing to a high stream when he came to a dangerous spot on the trail. The rain and the snow had eroded the trail and left a chasm he would have to leap across. He write, "As I debated making the leap from this side to the other I noticed something on the trail ahead that made all the difference in the world-the fresh imprint of a shoe. Someone had been along this trail before me. He too had faced the same chasm and had safely crossed it. That was all the encouragement I needed. With one strong effort I was safely on the other side and on my way to that inviting stream."

Just the presence of one other person facing the same decision can keep us climbing. That is why support groups are so popular and helpful. They encourage people in whatever battle they face because they know they are not alone. This is the comfort and encouragement that the church is to give to all who want to climb higher in the Christian life, but who face obstacles that hinder them

and make them want to give up. Paul is not just concerned with starting new churches, but with helping established churches to be constantly renewed. The Roman church was established, but Paul knew that it needed to keep on growing or it would lead to decay. All believers need to be continuously encouraged and strengthened or they will begin to settle down to mediocrity, and cease to grow in their love for God and the doing of His will.

Our presence, our actions, and our words are all potential gifts of encouragement to make each other stronger. If you go away from church without some gift that makes you stronger you have missed the whole point of being in church. You have missed the gift that God intended you to have by hearing some truth, getting some insight, hearing some inspiration, or feeling loved by some other person. We need to come to church ready to give and to receive some gift of encouragement. We are all called to the ministry of encouragement, and all believers can do this. If you come to church and you and nobody else is encouraged by your presence then something is wrong that needs to be corrected. We need to come prepared to be encouraged and to give encouragement to others. If we miss this goal we are not in the will of God.

God wants us all to be a part of making each other strong in the Lord. The Greek word for strong is *sterizo*. It is one of Paul's favorite words. He uses it more than all other New Testament authors put together. It was to him the goal of all ministry. He writes in I. Thess. 3:2, "We sent Timothy....to strengthen and encourage you in your faith." He sent Timothy because his letter was not enough to impart *sterizo*. His letter to Romans was not enough either and so he longed to come to them to impart *sterizo*. There is a strength that you can only get in fellowship. You cannot get it just by reading the Bible or other Christian writings. You need the fellowship of other personalities to be strengthened. Some believers forsake the fellowship of the church and feel they can make it one their own, but they are weak and ineffective Christians, and often live no higher than a gnat's eyelash above the world. God made us to need each other to be strong Christians.

Paul links encouragement and strength because no Christian can become strong without encouragement. Rob a believer of encouragement and you pull the spark plug out of his engine, and he or she will lose power and cease to run the race to new heights. But encourage a believer and they will never cease to press on to new levels of growth and service. That is why Paul ends the second chapter of II Thessalonians with this prayer: "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word." It is not only Paul's idea, but it is God's idea that the bottom line is the need for encouragement.

Paul says here that he longs to see them to make them stronger, and to be encouraged himself. The Greek word for long is *epithelo*, and it refers to a very strong emotion. It is translated desire greatly, or desire earnestly, and long after greatly. In one place it is even translated lust. That is how strongly Paul felt the desire to be involved in the ministry of encouragement. He had a lust to strengthen the body of Christ. This is a rare lust. Martin Niemöller had it. He was the German pastor who defied Hitler and spoke out boldly for Christ.

He was arrested and put in solitary confinement for 8 years. He was cut off from his family and church and had no way of serving them. Then one day he came up with an idea. Each day he moved his table under the high window of his cell. He then put his chair on the top of the table and by standing on tip toe on the chair he could get close to the window. There he waited for the scuffling

that could be heard as the other prisoners crunched the ground on their daily walk. When he heard them he began to read passages from the Bible that would be an encouragement. He did this day after day with no way to know who, if anyone, was listening. That was a lust to be an instrument of encouragement.

It is not likely you and I will ever be so tested to see how strong our desire is to be an encouragement to other. We are free to do it in hundreds of ways every day. Everything we do and say can make the body stronger or weaker. May God help us be aware of this so that we come to church with this spirit of Paul to help contribute to the goal that we are all established by encouragement.

7. THE DUTY OF BEING IN DEBT Based on Rom. 1:14-17

In 1901 Andrew Carnegie sold his Pennsylvania steel mill to J. P. Morgan for 420 million dollars, and thereby became the richest man in the world. That fortune was made by the sacrifice of thousands of common laborers. He under paid them ruthlessly, and he forced them to work 12 hours a day 7 days a week. His labor practices stirred up a lot of hostility, and in Homestead, PA., where our son Mark was born one of the bloodiest strikes in labor history took place at his mill. Fourteen people were killed, and 163 were seriously injured.

The good that came out of this is that Carnegie felt obligated to benefit the masses with his fortune, and so he began to give it away. He endowed 3000 libraries, and I have personally blessed with generous gift, for I have used some of those libraries. Eighty per cent of his money went to educational purposes so that millions have benefitted for the thousands who had to suffer. So many of the blessings of life come to us because of men who felt obligated to do their best to make up for the damage their past has caused. Paul was just such a man, and because of his strong sense of obligation he preached the Gospel and started churches all over the known world. Paul felt like he was in debt to the whole world, and he poured out his life to the fullest of his ability to pay what he felt he owed.

Everyone is in debt to someone, but Paul was in debt to everyone. In verse 14 he says, "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish." What he says just about sums up the entire human race. There might be room to squeeze somebody in between wise and foolish, but there is no room at all between Greeks and non-Greeks. If you are not a Greek, you are a non-Greek, and so everyone is covered.

Our national debt is outrageous, but even we do not owe everybody on the planet. Paul was more in debt than anyone has ever claimed to be, but he was not ashamed of it. He glories in his debt to all men, for what he owes them is, not dollars, shekels, or any other type of money, but the Gospel. That is why he longed to get to Rome and to far off Spain, and to everywhere else in the world. Paul owed the whole world the Gospel, and so he had business everywhere.

Something tells me this is a message we have missed as American Christians. How often have we ever felt in debt to our non-Christian friends, associates, and neighbors? We do not feel like we owe them anything. But Paul says that he felt an obligation to all men to share the Gospel. He was debtor to all because he owed them the Gospel. Why did Paul feel such an obligation? It was because he knew that all men were capable of being made rich in Christ. The Gospel is not-look at how good I am-if you were as good you too could be a child of God. Or, look at how good someone else is. That is not good news. Good news is that you can be saved and be a child of God no matter who you are, or what you have been. No matter how sinful, foolish, or proud you have been, you can be saved and be a child of God. It doesn't make any difference if you are a PhD or a high school dropout. The reason Paul was obligated to all men is because all have an equal right to receive the Gospel and be saved.

The implications of this are staggering. It means that everyone of us is in debt to every non-Christian we know. We owe them the opportunity to be saved. This is an enormous obligation, but I fear we have been so influenced by our culture that we do not take obligations all that seriously. Clerks are obligated to wait on customers, but they often make the customer wait while they do personal business. Manufacturers are obligated to produce a product that is safe, but tons of stuff floods the market that can hurt, or even kill you. The government is obligated to protect its citizens, but often neglects this and lets dangerous drugs and products into the market place. Professionals of all kinds let us down for they set their obligations to us on the back burner, and give selfish goals priority.

We all do our share of griping and complaining, for we are all victims to some degree, but listen to how Paul starts chapter 2 of Romans: "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things." You say that people owe you money and they won't repay. You say you have rights, but they are not being honored. All of this might be true, but what about the fact that every man, woman and child on this planet has a right to hear the Gospel and become a child of God! What about the fact, that we as Christians are debtors to all people, and we have an obligation to share the Gospel with them.

We saw in a previous message that we have an obligation to be an encourager of all in the body of Christ, and now we see that we have an obligation to be an enlightener of all who are outside of the body of Christ. We are debtors to all people, and we owe everybody something. We need to face the reality that we are all in as bad a shape as the government. We let our debts build up and do not pay them off. We neglect a major obligation of the Christian life because we do not have a plan by which we share the Gospel with unsaved people.

I suppose we feel that just because Paul felt such an obligation to all people, it does not mean we have to take on that same sense of debt he felt. But this rationalizing will not hold water, for in chapter 8 Paul uses this same word to refer to all believers having the same obligation as he had to die to self and what the sinful nature desires. We are to live in accordance with the Spirit, and set our minds on what the Spirit desires. The Spirit does not give us all the same gifts, and so we are not like Paul in many ways, but it is God's will for all of us to have that sense of obligation that Paul had, and to feel like we owe this lost world a chance to get in on a saved world that will last forever. We all owe the lost a chance to be saved, and so we are all under the same obligation as Paul to not be ashamed of the Gospel, but to be bold in sharing it with those who will be lost without it.

Notice that Paul does not say I am obligated to God the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit. Jesus saved him even though he was a proud and arrogant man of violence who persecuted and killed Christians. He was a religious bigot of the worst kind, and yet Jesus saved him. He owed everything to Christ, but Paul also knew he owed nothing to Christ, for Jesus paid it all, and he was debt free to God. All he owed to God had been paid by his Savior, and so he was a free man. But it was to man that he was in debt. They did nothing for him, and yet he was in debt to them. He owed them the Gospel because he had received it freely, and when you have a gift that is so valuable that you can share it with everyone, and in so doing have even more of it, then you have an obligation to do so.

If I won the lottery and started sharing my fortune with others I would eventually run out and deplete my resources. But if I share the Gospel I never have less, and I enrich others with that which makes them rich forever. The Gospel is a gift that never stops giving, and that is why we are so obligated to share it. If I discovered a cure for all cancer and just kept it for myself in case I ever got cancer, you would consider me a monster of immorality worthy of a place along side Hitler in the pages of infamy. Yet we have a cure for sin and all of its eternal effects, and still we feel no obligation to share this good news with those who are dying for time and eternity for lack of it.

There is only one way to reduce this deficit, and that is by doing what Paul did. He shared the Gospel with everyone he could in the world. If we do not share the Gospel with anyone, then we are guilty of not paying our greatest debt in life, and we fail in our greatest obligation. We do not like this message of Paul. We like his message when he says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, and we like his freedom message, and his message about escape from the bondage of the law. We love all of his positive stuff, but we do not like the balancing side where he makes us feel the need to bear one another's burdens, and to feel responsible for suffering for the cause of Christ, and being obligated to pay off our debt to all people.

We like the benefits of being servants of Christ, but not the burdens. We want Christianity without the cross, for the cross is costly and puts us into debt. To take up the cross and follow Jesus like Paul did is to feel an obligation to tell the world about the Gospel. We owe everyone the chance to be saved, but we seldom make a payment on this debt by telling anyone about what Jesus did for them. Should we feel guilty? Of course we should! If we have a legitimate debt and do not try to make payments we should feel guilty. A non-witnessing Christian should feel guilty because that is probably the only way they will get motivated to make a list and begin to pray for people, and think of strategies by which to share the good news. We feel the obligation to pay off our financial debts, and we need to match that zeal in paying off our spiritual debts to the lost world.

I was impressed in reading about the life of Sir Walter Scott. In 1826 at the age of 55 he sank everything he had into a book publishing company that went bankrupt. It not only left him penniless, but heavily in debt to the tune of 700 thousand dollars. He was no Pollyanna who said that this was wonderful. He was miserable, as any of us would be in that circumstance. He wrote in his diary that he would like to lie down to sleep and never wake up. He wanted to escape the burden of it, but he did wake up and vow that he would pay back every cent.

He rented a home in Edinburgh and began to write like a madman. In two years he had paid his creditors 200 thousand. He toiled so hard that he became ill, but he never ceased writing. Great

books flowed from his mind. His hair turned white and he became weak with exhaustion, but he had a debt to pay, and pay it he would whatever the cost. He suffered terribly, but when he died he had paid off the greatest share of his debt, and all of his creditors honored him as one of the greatest writers and honorable men of all time. He became great by his labor to pay a debt. So it was with Paul. Do you think we would have ever heard of Paul had he not heeded the call of Jesus to be an Apostle to the Gentiles? Had he not felt the obligation to carry the Gospel into the whole world, we would not have his Epistles. Paul is one of the greatest men who ever lived because he lived to pay a debt.

Paul does not say to the Romans, "You are obligated to Greeks and non-Greeks, to the wise and unwise." He says, "I am." It is individual commitment, and not a committee decision. How many statues have you ever seen erected in honor of a committee? Every Christian has to decide on their own what they will do. Is this my debt as well, and do I owe the world anything? Is it my responsibility to witness and share the Gospel with lost people? If we leave it to the church as a whole it just won't happen. Only individuals can pay this debt. God did not send a committee into the world. He sent His only Son. He did not call a committee to be Apostles to the Gentiles. He chose just one man, and that man was Paul. This does not mean that God does not use groups, but those He uses are only effective when they are made up of individuals who have committed themselves to the cause.

If you do not feel a personal responsibility, it will not happen. I am convinced that every Christian has people in their lives that only they can touch, and nobody else will. Unless we feel an obligation to do our part we will be a hindrance rather than a help to fulfilling the purpose of God. Paul cared about every person that his life could touch. He had no prejudice, and no class spirit. He was a Jew, but he loved all Gentiles. The Greek word for non-Greeks is barbaros, which we call barbarians. They are the uncultured and unsophisticated. Paul was an intellectual, and so we can see why he would love to reach the scholars and the philosophers. But Paul says that he is also a debtor to the foolish, the uneducated, and those of the lowest status.

There was no discrimination with Paul. If you were a human being, he owed you the Gospel, and all the personal love and compassion he was capable of sharing. Paul was the ideal, however, and most have not been able to live on his level. They feel an obligation only to reach their own class of people. That is better than not caring about anybody, but it is far from the Christian ideal we see in Paul. The closer we come to him the more pleasing we will be to Christ.

One of the greatest examples I am aware of in crossing all barriers to reach people was Dr. Frank Laubach. A brilliant man himself, he took it as his goal to help the illiterates of the world to read and to discover the Gospel for themselves. He reduced the Bible to 300 words, and he has taught millions around the world to read it. We need to catch something of his spirit so that we can really care about those who live in a lower state of learning.

Dr. Laubach wrote, "If you sit down beside an illiterate as an equal, your heart overflowing with love for him..., if you never frown nor criticize but look pleased and surprised, and praise him for his progress, a thousand silver threads wind about his heart and yours. You are the first educated man that ever looked at him except to swindle him, and he will be so mystified by your unusual kindness, that he is likely to stop and ask: "How do you expect to get paid for this? I have no money." The only irresistible Gospel is love in action....If we serve the illiterates and then tell the Gospel after we

have won their hearts, they will believe in Christ because they believe in us."

For the Christian to develop this attitude he or she needs to have a deep conviction about the common origin and infinite value of every human life. Paul in Acts 17 stressed this on Mars Hill as he spoke to the Greek scholars and philosophers. He said the God is not far from any of us, and in him we live and move and have our being. He quotes one of their own poets who wrote, "We are his offspring." Paul could find a common ground with all people because of his conviction that all people are loved by God.

Modern science is confirming this conviction by making it clear that all mankind likely came from one mother. The study of genetics reveals that the DNA in the cells of all people has come down the same from the first egg. There is an unchanging line that goes all the way back to Eve. They studied the DNA from women in Europe, Asia, New Guinea, Africa, and Australia, and they found it to be extremely similar. We do not need chemistry to tell us this for the Bible calls Eve the mother of all living.

It is hard sometimes to love the unrighteous just because they are from the same origin and made in the image of God. But the early Christians were just this kind of unrighteous people before their conversion. Paul writes in

Titus 3:3-4, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passion and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another, but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared he saved us..." Paul was in debt to these very unrighteous and foolish people because those are the people Jesus died for. Had he not died for such awful people there would be not Gospel to share with our world. Many faithless fools have become faithful friends of God because of believers who feel the debt they owe them to let them know they can become children of God through Christ.

Our society is producing ruined lives almost as fast as we produce garbage. Thousands of youth run away, kill themselves, get pregnant, and do every foolish thing known to man. The folly of the adult population is too obvious to need listing. It is our duty to try and make a difference in the lives of these masses of unhappy people. There are endless books on how to get out of debt, and this is good economic advice, but for those of us who are rich in the grace of Christ, there is a need to get deeper into debt and feel more deeply our obligation to share the riches with those who desperately need the Gospel.

Frank Tillapaugh in his book *Unleashing Your Potential* tells of visiting with the pastor of Tremont Temple Baptist Church in Boston. They were eating in a restaurant right next to this historic church. In the 40's a busboy worked in that restaurant by the name of Ho Chi Minh. 2000 Christians in that church were only feet away from one who would lead the Communist Revolution in China. Many of them ate in that restaurant, but there is not a hint that one of them attempted to witness to him. One friendly Christian might have changed the course of history had they felt the debt they owed to that young boy so far from his native land. You might not change the world, but you can change some life you touch if you will just realize, as Paul did, the duty you have of being in debt to the lost around you.

8. SHIPPING OUT SHAME Based on Rom. 1:14-17

It is on the highest interest level to hear of people's most embarrassing moments. Jane Wyman tells of hers. She was preparing for very important guests and she put a note on the guest towels that she had so carefully selected. The note read, "If you use these I will murder you." The note was meant for her husband, of course, but in all the excitement of her preparation she forgot to remove the note. When the evening was over and the guests had departed she discovered the towels were still in perfect order, as well as the note itself.

She wanted to crawl into a hole she was so embarrassed. Something like this happens to all of us at some time or other. Carl Michaelson tells of his little girl coming in with a tear in her pants and his wife was angry. She had done this too often, and she said to her, "Now you go to your room and sew up that tear." The poor little kid never had a needle in her hand. The mother went to check on her a little later and there were her torn pants on the floor, but no little girl. She went searching and when she saw the light on in the basement she called down, "Are you down there running around with your pants off?" There was silence, and then a deep voice responded, "No madam, I'm just reading the gas meter." Talk about embarrassing!

Art Linkletter tells about one of his most embarrassing experiences on his once popular show People Are Funny. They had an auction offering the person in the studio who contributed most to charity the chance to come up and hit him with a chocolate cream pie. The highest bidder was a sweet little gray haired grandmother. She wrote out her personal check for 200 dollars. She picked up the pie and smashed it completely across his face. Then she twisted it which forced the meringue under his eyes. He said he would never forget that experience, but to add to the embarrassment her check bounced, and he knew he had been had.

Life is filled with embarrassing moments. We feel embarrassed as children about our silly mistakes that everybody laughs at. Then as teens we are embarrassed about our zips, our clothes, and quite often about our parents. But it works both ways. And when we become parents, we are often embarrassed by our children, and their behavior.

Shame because of our feelings of inferiority and our sinful desires are a normal part of everyone's life. A Christian father writing in Moody Monthly says the most embarrassing thing he ever did was reading the Bible with his children. The first thing they asked was why did Abraham lie about his wife Sarah? His daughter asked, "Daddy didn't he love her?" Then came Lot in Sodom and they wanted to know why the town homosexuals wanted to beat down the door of Lot to get at his guests. Things did not get better when he got to David. Questions about adultery and murder were not comfortable for him. He switched to Proverbs for a while, but then had to face: "Daddy, what's a prostitute?" It was one of the hardest things he ever did because the Bible deals openly with all the things that shame and embarrass us. But it did force him to prepare his children for the real world.

The feelings of shame and embarrassment are not all bad. Peter the Great was once so angry with a servant on his boat that he was going to throw him overboard and let him drown. The servant reminded him that this would go on his record for all of history. This reminder cooled him off, for he

did not want the shame of that blot on his record. Shame prevented his sin. This is the positive value of shame.

We need to be sensitive in some areas of life or we lose the ability to blush and nothing embarrasses us anymore. We become hardened to the sinful nature of man. This is going on all the time in our culture. People are on talk shows openly sharing their sex life. Articles in the paper deal with the most intimate aspects of life, which were once preserved for the eyes of professional people only. We are an open culture, and our children now watch on TV things that would have turned most people's faces red with embarrassment only a generation ago.

There is no doubt that some openness on sensitive issues is good. The Bible itself is quite open, but the fact is, if the openness does not carry with it a sense of shame and embarrassment it is harmful. Paul in the last part of Romans 1 tells of how God gave people over to a depraved mind. They felt no shame about anything. They did every kind of wickedness and not only felt no shame, but gloried in their evil, and enjoyed the evil of others. The worst judgment that can happen to a culture is to lose its sense of shame. That is the bottom of the pit when man gets so depraved that nothing produces shame. Abraham Heschel, the Jewish author, in his book *What Is Man?* writes, "I am afraid of people who are never embarrassed by their own pettiness, prejudices, envy and conceit, never embarrassed at the profanation of life. What the world needs is a sense of embarrassment."

On the other hand, we have a world filled with people who are neurotic because they are ashamed and embarrassed about their bodies and their normal sex desires. Christian counselors by the thousands are busy every day trying to help Christian people get over their shame that robs them of the joy God intended them to experience in marriage. Shame over the legitimate enjoyment of sex is a curse. In the *Autobiography of Gandhi* he tells of the night his father died. He was by his bedside until 11 P. M. when his uncle came to relieve him. He went to bed with his wife and enjoyed the pleasure of lovemaking. Later the message came that his father had died. He felt shame and wrote,

"So all was over! I had but to ring my hands. I felt deeply ashamed and miserable. I ran to my father's room. I saw that, if animal passion had not blinded me, I should have been spared the torture of separation from my father during his last moments. I should have been massaging him, and he would have died in my arms. But now it was uncle who had had this privilege. He was so deeply devoted to his elder brother that he had earned the honor of doing him the last services! My father had forebodings of the coming event. He had made a sign for pen and paper, and had written: 'Prepare for the last rights.' He had then snapped the amulet off his arm and also his gold necklace of tulasi-beads and flung them aside. A moment after this he was no more.

The shame, to which I have referred in a foregoing chapter, was this shame of my carnal desire even at the critical hour of my father's death, which demanded wakeful service. It is a blot I have never been able to efface or forget."

Over the years I have counseled a number of people who feel this shame and guilt because they were not there when a loved one died. They may have been enjoying some valid pleasure of life at the time, and they are ashamed of themselves for their self-indulgence rather than self-sacrifice. It may be just eating or sleeping, but they feel guilty and ashamed. The goal of the counselor is to help them get beyond their neurotic shame and see that nobody can be in a state of perpetual self-denial. Even in a crisis we need relief, and some enjoyment to balance out the burden.

So what we have is a crazy paradoxical world where there is both too much shame, and also too little of it. This brings us to Paul's dealing with this very issue in writing to the Romans. Human nature hasn't changed, and the issues of Paul's day are the same as those we deal with in our day. In 1:16 Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." So we can deal with the Christian need to overcome shame in dealing with the Gospel and other religious issues. Then in Rom. 6:21 Paul uses this same word in referring to their former lives of sin. He writes, "What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?"

What we have here is Christians who are on both sides of the fence striving to not be ashamed of certain things, and at the same time trying to maintain shame of other things. Unfortunately, it often happens that we feel the shame where we shouldn't, and don't feel it where we should. We have shame we are to ship out, and shame we are to shape up. It is not shape up or ship out, but shape up and ship out. Paul is dealing here with-

SHAME WE ARE TO SHIP OUT.

Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel when he wrote, but he was earlier in his life. He was ashamed that Jewish people were claiming that Jesus was the Messiah. He was a man who was crucified as a criminal, and it was embarrassing for people to honor him. He wanted to hunt them down and rid the world of such people. After Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus he was never ashamed of Jesus again. Then he was ashamed of his stubbornness and blindness that made him a persecutor of Jesus. Not all people have such a dramatic event in their lives.

Timothy was one of the great men of the New Testament and a favorite friend of Paul. He was not a bold personality, but was rather shy and timid. He had to fight with shame in identifying with Jesus. Paul had to give him a pep talk in II Tim. 1:7-8, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the Gospel." Poor timid Timothy had a crucified criminal as his Lord, and he had a jailbird for his leader. It was hard to be bold with these embarrassing credentials. How would you feel if an interviewer looked at your resume and asked about your present status as follower of public rioter and prisoner Paul, and partner in stirring up hostilities in many communities over the teachings of an executed criminal in Israel. This might bring a blush to any man's face.

Peter was a bold man and thought he could take on the Roman soldiers single handed with his one sword. But when he saw Jesus in bondage he denied he even knew him was a servant girl said he was a follower of this prisoner. He was ashamed to be linked with Jesus at that point. We do not have to face what he did, but we all have the battle with shame in identifying with our Lord in a world where his name is often used as a curse word. It is a common battle that Christians have to try and overcome that shame that keeps them from being a witness to their faith in Christ.

Jesus had to endure shame as he hung on the cross, and was nearly naked in public. His disciples had forsaken him, and the people were mocking him. It was the ultimate in embarrassment, but Jesus rose above it and conquered the shame of it. Heb. 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus looked beyond the shame to the purpose of God in saving millions by his act of sacrifice. He shipped out the emotion of shame and took on the emotion of joy, for he saw the unseen values of all eternity that would come from this event.

Paul did the same thing. If he would have looked only at the visible it would have been embarrassing. He was serving the Lord of all and yet was often in prison and going through all kinds of hardships. But Paul did not look at the negative but at the positive. That is why he could say he was not ashamed of the Gospel. He knew it was the power that would save lives for all eternity. He had insight into the invisible and the ultimate victory just as Jesus did. You overcome shame by developing an emotion that is even stronger. Paul writes of his victory over shame in II Tim. 1:11-12, "And of this Gospel I was appointed a herald and an Apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."

We are often ashamed because we do suffer. We are ashamed to be bold for Christ because we fear people will say, "If being a Christian is so great, why are you more poor than my non-Christian friends? Why do you have as many problems as anyone else. Your life is no dream come true." We are embarrassed by this reality. It would be easy if being a Christian made you superior to everyone else, but that is not the way it works, and so we have shame. Almost every educated man alive had a better life than Paul did, and they were not being stoned and run out of town, or being arrested. He was seen as a fool by the wise of his day, but he was not ashamed because of his confidence in what was ahead in Christ.

In our day the shame is made even worse by the preaching of the health and wealth gospel. A true believer is supposedly never to be sick or in debt. Life is just a bowl of cherries for the believer. This perversion so contrary to the New Testament is an embarrassment for we can seldom live up to this false image, and so we do not claim to be believers as we should. Paul, on the other hand, gloried in what he suffered for Christ. Everyone could see he was not rich and was often in trouble of one kind or another, and he also had his physical problems. He was not embarrassed by all of this negative at all, for he saw the positive he had in Christ.

In our culture, however, we are often embarrassed by any level of failure for it looks like we are not blessed of God if we are not on the highest level of success. Anything less than the best is an embarrassment. Beatrix Potter, the English writer, wrote the tale of Peter Rabbit as a girl. As she grew older, richer, and more successful, she became embarrassed by her early work and never allowed Peter Rabbit to be mentioned in her presence. It is a quirk of human nature, but the more successful we become the greater the danger of being ashamed of Jesus.

Charles Colson in his book *The Struggle For Men's Hearts and Minds* gives this analysis of American Christianity: "We live in a time that would seem to be marked by unprecedented spiritual resurgence; 96 % of all American say they believe in God; 80% profess to be Christians. Yet families are splitting apart in record numbers. Countless millions of unborn children have been

murdered since 1973. And there are 100 times more burglaries in so-called "Christian" America than in so-called "pagan" Japan. Why this paradox between profession and practice? Why is the faith of more than 50 million Americans who claim to be born again not making more of an impact on the moral values of our land?"

"The answer is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor martyred by the Nazis, labeled cheap grace: the perception that Christianity offers only a flood of blessings, the rights of the kingdom without responsibilities to the King. This easy believism fails to take biblical truth to heart and fails to act in obedience to the Scriptures. The result is a church which increasingly accommodates secular values. Not knowingly, of course, but simply by gradual acceptance of secular standards which have become comfortable."

He is saying, in essence, that we as American Christians are embarrassed by the Gospel. It does not fit our idea of what is acceptable, and so we have tailored it to fit the way we feel so we can be more comfortable with it. The paradox is that the only way we can get back to Paul's position of not being ashamed of the Gospel is to add to our lives shame for all that is not the Gospel. We need to be embarrassed by all of the false gospels of our day. We need to feel shame for all the perversions and rip-offs that operate under the name of Christian. Shame can be an asset. An honest look at our own sinfulness will prevent us from being hypocritical and holier than thou in our approach to witnessing.

We need to be honest about the reality that we are not saved because we are better than others. We have the same problems and the same tendencies to sin as anyone else. We have the same temptations, and the same desires for success, fame, things and pleasure. People need to know that salvation is not earned by being better, but it is a gift that comes when we have faith in the one who offers it, and that is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not want people to focus on us, but to look to Jesus who alone can save.

Frederick Buechner was a chaplain at a Christian Academy. One day he was walking through the slums of Manhattan, and on the wall of an abandoned building there was a mass of graffiti. There were four letter words, names of lovers, and right in the midst of all of this someone put "Jesus Saves." His first reaction was embarrassment to see that message in the midst of all that profanity. It shocked his sense of Presbyterian propriety. He tried to figure out why he had such a revulsion to that message, and he concluded he was embarrassed for lack of faith.

He really had lost his conviction that Jesus could save people out of the sewer they were living in. He expected Jesus to save only the clean and respectable people. He realized he was embarrassed because he had lost his awareness of the power of the Gospel. That is why any of us is ashamed of the Gospel. It is because we have lost faith in its power to save anyone who will believe. We need to ship out this shame and regain the faith of Paul that made him unashamed of the Gospel. This will lead us to be more bold and powerful in sharing this good news with all whom God brings us into contact.

9. AN ACT OF OBEDIENCE Based on Rom. 6:1-10

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are two of the simplest things we do as Christians. But the fact is, these two simple acts of obedience to Christ have created a great deal of controversy in the Christian world. Every aspect of baptism is a major issue on which Christians differ.

THE TIMING OF IT: Should it be when people are infants, or when they are old enough to be believers and able to make their own choice?

THE METHOD OF IT: Should it be by sprinkling, by pouring, or by immersion?

THE MEANING OF IT: Is it a sacrament by which grace is imparted, or is it a symbol of our obedience to Christ?

THE NECESSITY OF IT: Is it essential for salvation, or is it just a basic step of obedience? Is it essential for church membership, or can one be a member of the church and not be baptized?

Beside all of these issues there is the more subjective issue as to what one is suppose to feel when they are baptized. The author of *How To Live Like A King's Kid* shared this testimony of his baptism: "So I went to his little Baptist Church with him. And when the pastor invited anyone who wanted to, to come forward and make a public confession of faith-a confession with his mouth that he had faith in Jesus in his heart-I went forward and did it. They scheduled a baptismal service for me right away, and I dutifully got wet all over, being immersed in the dunk tank. I didn't mind too much. The Bible said New Testament Christians were baptized by being immersed-that's what the word baptizo means-and if New Testament Christians did it, that was good enough for me. Besides, I read that Jesus was baptized by John in the River Jordan, and so baptism seemed a good thing for me if I was going to follow Him. When I came up out of the water, I was disappointed. I didn't feel anything but wet. I thought I had done something pretty terrific, humbling myself in the little old country Baptist Church like that. And I waited for a ball of fire to hit, but nothing happened, not then. Ed said the feelings would come later."

He went on to say that they did come later, but he was expecting his baptism to be like that of Jesus when the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove, and God spoke from heaven about how pleased He was with His Son. His expectations were too high, for baptism is an act of obedience to Christ, and its value does not depend on how it makes you feel. It should make you feel good to obey your Lord who commanded that all who follow Him be baptized. But He did not promise it would be an experience of ecstasy. In fact, in many parts of the world being baptized is a very scary experience, for it can mean rejection by your family and society. Many obey Christ in fear and trembling, for the consequences of their obedience can be suffering and even death.

Trying to keep up with the changes in churches on this issue is almost impossible. Many churches that practiced only infant baptism are now baptizing by the believer's baptism, and many are doing so by immersion. Some even baptize infants by immersion. John Westerhoff tells of the infant baptism in a Catholic Church. The father came down the aisle with a coffin that he had made, and the mother was carrying a pail of water. The godparents carried the baby. The coffin was placed on the altar while the priest filled it with water. He took the child and held its nose and pushed it under the water saying, "You are drowned in the name of God the Father, the God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit." The congregation then stood and sang joyful Easter songs. The priest said over the head of the child, "You are now resurrected so you might love and serve the Lord."

So now you have even babies being immersed with the same symbolism that Baptists have stressed for centuries. Many Catholic churches now recognize that for centuries Catholics baptized in large baptismal pools, and now they are going back to that original method. Christians everywhere that recognizing that baptism is symbolic of the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul in Rom. 6 makes it clear that we are buried with Christ in baptism, and that we are also symbolically raised from the dead with Christ. The only adequate way to convey this is by immersion. You cannot be buried in a cup or a baptismal fount. You need a large enough body of water to immerse the whole person to convey the idea of burial and resurrection. That is why the New Testament always portrays the quantity of water involved in baptism.

In John 3:23 we read that John the Baptist was baptizing in Aenon because there was much water there. He needed a lot of water because he had to immerse people in it and not merely sprinkle them. In Acts 8:36 we read that Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch were going through the desert and they came to a body of water. The Eunuch who had just received Jesus as his Savior said, "Look, here is water, why shouldn't I be baptized?" Until enough water was available the possibility of baptism was not considered. This man was not heading across a desert without any water. If it was only a matter of sprinkling some water on his head, or of pouring some out of a jug on his head, there was nothing to hinder him from being baptized before they came to this body of water. This new convert knew that he needed to be immersed, and only an adequate water supply could lead to a meaningful baptism. The point is, not any amount of water can give witness to the death and resurrection of Christ. It takes enough to bury a person in.

Now we have to be honest with the historical reason for Christian departing from immersion and going to sprinkling. As the church spread not everybody lived near a river or a lake, and it was a great inconvenience to find a body of water for immersion. Some churches in desert places had no access to a large body of water. They began to argue that even though immersion was the New Testament mode that it is no where stated that it has to be in this mode for all times and places. Added to this there was the problem of the sick and aged who could not travel to the river even if there was one not far away. Even in Baptist churches there are cases of the sick and aged who are taken into membership without immersion. They fall into the same category as the thief on the cross who entered heaven with Jesus even though he could not obey Jesus and be baptized.

The inconvenience of immersion led the Catholic Church to change, and by the 5th century sprinkling was almost universal. When the Protestant Reformation came in the 1500's all the great leaders struggled with this issue. They all agreed that immersion was the New Testament mode, and that believer's baptism was the New Testament practice. But after a thousand years of the tradition of sprinkling it was hard to go back and so Lutherans, Presbyterians and later the Methodists all stuck with infant baptism. There were many practical reasons for not changing back to the New Testament method, and we should not be too critical of the great Protestant leaders, for they went through agony over this issue. Had we been in the shoes of Martin Luther we may have done the same thing, and had we been in the Arabian Baptist Church of 4911 No Water Drive, Sand Dune, Arabia, we may have chosen to sprinkle rather than immerse.

We do not have the limitations that many have had, and so we have no reason not to follow the New Testament pattern of believer's baptism by immersion. There are not persons in the New Testament who were baptized before they were believers. We read in Acts 2:41, "They that gladly received His Word were baptized." In Acts 8:12 we read, "When they believed...they were

baptized." In Acts 18:8 we read, "Chrispus believed...and many of the Corinthians having believed, and were baptized." This does not mean one has to be an adult to be baptized. Many children are believers. I was baptized at age 9, and I remember that as a deacon I voted for a 4-year-old girl to be baptized. She knew her theology as well as any adult. She loved Jesus and understood she was being a witness by her baptism to the death and resurrection of her Savior. Age is not the issue. It is belief.

Baptists have been critical of those who baptize children so young, but there is no basis for it. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." I cannot imagine any child who loves Jesus, and who desires to be baptized in obedience to Him, being to young. If a child knows what it is to obey Jesus, I would not want to be the one who says to them that they are too young to obey Jesus. The New Testament makes it clear that whole families were baptized together, and there is no reason to assume that this did not include small children. You have the family of Lydia and the Philippian jailor as examples. The important thing to focus on is the focus of Paul, which is the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism is our witness to the fact that we identify with the two great acts that made Jesus the Savior of the world.

The cross and the resurrection are the foundation of God's plan of salvation. Baptism is our witness to the world that we are a part of that plan. We are Christians and followers of Christ, and we are committed to Him as Lord and Savior. We are not to pretend that we are superior to others who may baptize in some other way. We only say that the New Testament way best conveys the meaning of baptism. It is the way that gives the most intense witness. Let's say we are going to dramatize the experience of John being caught up into heaven. At one point we are going to bear witness to his vision to the glory of God on His throne. Some on the planning committee suggest that we use a flashlight behind a sheet to convey the glory of God. Others say we should hook up 3 or 4 floodlights. The first group says this last idea involves too much work, and the flashlight is so easy and convenient. But the others persist because they say that you cannot witness to the glory of God's unapproachable light with a flashlight. Even the floodlights cannot begin to convey the glory of God, but the flashlight will convey nothing but the weakness of His glory. It is better to have no witness at all than one that is so pathetically weak.

This is the same issue with baptism. Baptists feel that just as a flashlight bears little witness to the glory of God, so other modes of baptism bear little witness to the death and resurrection of Christ. Immersion was the New Testament method because it does illustrate the experience of death and resurrection. The body is put under the water to be buried with Christ, and it is brought up again like one being resurrected from the grave. It is the only adequate way to symbolize the death and resurrection of Christ. Those baptized by some other mode are not any less Christian, but their witness conveys less meaning. Many of the greatest Christians in history have not been immersed, and they are no less great Christians for it.

John Calvin, the great reformer, wrote in his Institutes, "But whether the person baptized be wholly immersed, and whether thrice or once, or whether water be only poured or sprinkled upon him, is of no importance; churches ought to be left at liberty in this respect, to act according to the difference of countries. The very word baptize, however, signifies to immerse; and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church." This is a view that has been held by millions. Even Baptist libraries all over the world are filled with the books of those believers who were not immersed. Baptists do not persist in defending immersion because they feel it is essential to

salvation. It is because they feel it is essential to adequately convey the death and resurrection of Christ as its meaning.

There are many good arguments for not bothering with immersion. It is so inconvenient and more time consuming, and it far messier. But no one can escape the fact that it is the only way to convey the picture of burial and resurrection. Since that is the point of it all, Baptists say we have to put up with the inconvenience in order to give an adequate witness. It doesn't make Baptists superior, but it does make their witness superior as to what Jesus did for us in His death and resurrection. The purpose of baptism is to point to Him and to indicate our commitment to Him. It is an act of obedience by which we thank Him for what He has done for us in His death and resurrection.

10. WITNESS WITH WATER Based on Rom. 6:3-4

A visitor to a drought stricken area was talking to some of the citizens about their no rain situation. As they were complaining about the difficulties it brought to them he sought to comfort them with the it-could-be-worse philosophy. He said, "If you think it is bad here, you should go South. They haven't had rain for so long that the Baptists are sprinkling, the Methodists are using a damp rag, and the Presbyterians are issuing rain checks." The story is of doubtful historicity, but the point is true that water is essential and the amount of water available can be a determining factor in the mode of baptism. In John 3:23 we read that John the Baptist was baptizing in Aenon because there was much water there. This implies that a large quantity was necessary for an effective witness through baptism.

In Acts 8:36 we read that Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch were moving along and came to a body of water, and he said, "See here is water; what does hinder me to be baptized?" Until enough water was available the possibility of baptism was not considered. He was certainly not traveling in the desert without water, and so if it was a mere matter of sprinkling or pouring a little water on him there was nothing to hinder him from doing so before they came to a body of water. All of this is saying that an inadequate supply of water is a hindrance to a meaningful baptism.

Nature by means of water gives witness to its power in floods, tidal waves and cloudbursts of rain. The amount of water is a determining factor in the intensity of the witness. No one is greatly impressed by a normal rain, but when it falls in sheets and the streets become rivers people are wide awake, and they stand at awe at the power of nature and the witness it can give of that power through water. As Baptists we feel this has a parallel in the spiritual realm. We are to witness with water concerning the power of God in our lives, and the quantity of water makes a difference in the intensity of the witness. We feel that the biblical pattern of immersion of the whole person in water gives the most adequate witness. Those who sprinkle admit that immersion was the biblical mode, but they argue that it is nowhere commanded as essential, and so there is no reason the mode cannot be changed. But any change only weakens the witness.

We do not feel that baptism saves, and so there are millions who have been sprinkled who truly love Christ and are brothers and sisters in Christ. We continue to defend and practice immersion not because we think it is essential for salvation, but because we think it is essential as an adequate witness. If it was just a spiritual matter completely we could forget water entirely, but we cannot do so because literal water is essential to the witness. To get the point clearer, look at another example to get a better perspective. Let's say we are going to dramatize the experience of John being caught up into heaven. At one point we are going to bear witness to his vision to the glory of God on His throne. Some on the planning committee suggest that we use a flashlight behind a sheet to convey the glory of God. Others say we should hook up 3 or 4 floodlights. The first group says this last idea involves too much work, and the flashlight is so easy and convenient. But the others persist because they say that you cannot witness to the glory of God's unapproachable light with a flashlight. Even the floodlights cannot begin to convey the glory of God, but the flashlight will convey nothing but the weakness of His glory. It is better to have no witness at all than one that is so pathetically weak.

We feel that just as a flashlight bears little witness to the glory of God, so sprinkling bears little witness to the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul makes it clear in verse 3-4 of what we are witnessing to in baptism, and so we want to examine these two basic ideas from these verses. First we see-

I. IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST. v. 3

Paul says that in baptism we are identified with Jesus in His death. We are giving witness to the fact that as Jesus died for sin, so we will die to sin. We want to bury the old man of sin that clings to us and holds us back from fellowship with God. This does not mean that the Christian no longer sins after baptism, but that he is committing himself to never again live in sin. He identifies himself with Christ, and in so doing he cannot be un-Christ like without struggle and guilt. In other words, the Christian still sins, but no longer enjoys living in sin because of his identification with Christ. Sin becomes conspicuous and can no longer be practiced without the pangs of guilt that drive us to repentance.

Paul is writing to people who are deceiving themselves and trying to justify sin by saying that if they sin grace will abound all the more, and so we need not fear to sin. It was a subtle way of making sin lawful. Paul demolishes this idea by calling their attention to what they witnessed to in the water of baptism. They gave witness that were identified with Christ in His death. They were buried with Him, and the man of sin was no longer to be allowed to live. No clever reasoning can be allowed to displace this witness. If you allow the old man to revive and live in sin, you reject the witness of your baptism, and are no longer identified with Christ.

Baptism is to be a witness not only to the world, but a perpetual witness to your self in time of temptation. You are to look back, as Paul makes the Roman Christians look back, and remember what you gave witness to in the water of baptism. You said, "I bury myself with Christ. He died for sin and I die to sin. I can never again give myself to a sinful life." Baptism witnesses to what we have determined to do with our wills. By God's grace we will cease to serve sin. We will stand with Christ until death in the battle against sin. The second thing we witness to in baptism is our-

II. IMITATION OF CHRIST. v. 4

As we are to be identified with Jesus in His death, so we are to be imitators of His life. Paul says, "Like as Christ was raised up from the dead even so we also should walk in newness of life." Jesus rose a new person, for when He died He bore our sins, but when He rose He was pure and spotless, and from then on He was eternally holy. It is certainly an ideal beyond us, and baptism will never be able to cleanse us and make us perfect as He was, but it is to be a witness of our determination to aim for this high and holy goal.

We are to imitate Jesus in His holiness, and though we cannot fully attain it, we can go far by His grace. If we consider the context, we can see just how important this concept is and the need for pursuing it. Paul is writing to Christians who were violating their witness. It shows that baptism is not automatic in its effect. It is not magic, and does nothing without the will of the person committed to its meaning. These Christians were trying to be identified with Jesus without imitating Him in newness of life. They wanted the blessings without the responsibility. Paul reminds them that this is folly, for they cannot identify with Christ without imitating Him, for the witness of baptism is in two parts, and they are as inseparable in meaning and life as they are in the act.

If you only go down in the water of baptism and do not come up, there will be no imitating of Christ, for you will be literally dead. Nor is it possible to come up to newness of life without having previously gone under. Without death there can be no resurrection. Both are essential for the full witness of baptism, and both are essential for a full Christian life. Only those who are both dead to sin and alive to Christ are giving full witness to the good news in their lives. Let us, therefore, recognize the serious significance of this witness with water. It is to be a symbol to others and to ourselves of what our lives must seek to always bear witness to, and that is that we are identified with Christ and His death, and we are imitators of His life in how we live.

11. THE ONLY WAY OUT Based on Rom. 7:18-8:2

Floyd Collins was a professional cave hunter. He found the famous Crystal Cave in Kentucky in 1917. It is a popular tourist cave now, but back then it was too far off the road to get people to come to it. Floyd's dream was to find a bigger and better cave, even more beautiful than the world famous Mammoth Cave. So he began exploring, and one day as he went deep into a cave, he squeezed into a narrow opening, and found the cavern of his dreams. It was like a domed cathedral studded with glittering stalactites and stalagmites. He was so excited he became careless, and his foot pushed a small rock that held up a huge boulder, and the boulder came down on his left ankle pinning him there deep in the cave.

He almost pulled his leg off trying to get free, but it was hopeless. For 24 hours he laid there in pain and fear. Finally, he heard someone coming. He yelled, and his two partners found him. They could not budge the boulder, however. He begged them to go get help. In a matter of hours that cave sight became pandemonium. Crowds gathered as the news spread of a trapped man. His brother offered five hundred dollars to anyone who could rescue Floyd. Many tried but failed. For two days these attempts went on, and Floyd was getting weak. Finally, they offered five hundred dollars to

any doctor who would amputate his leg, but there were no takers.

By this time reporters and photographers had made this cave sight the focus of world attention. Fifteen hundred people who camped in the area, and the governor had to call in the state militia to keep law and order. In desperation to get Floyd out they tried to dig a shaft from the top. This led to a cave in that blocked the passage to him, and so they could no longer get food and water to him. Eleven days later they broke through, but Floyd Collins was dead. The body could not be removed, so they held a service right there, and the cave became his tomb.

It was not a very happy ending, for it reveals that with all of man's resources there are some things he just can't get out of. There are traps he just can't escape from. Floyd could not get out himself, nor could anyone else help him out. He had gotten himself into a truly hopeless situation. Now this experience, we must admit, is very rare, but it illustrates a fact of life that is not rare, but it so common, it is true of all of us, and everybody else. Everyone of us has explored the cave of sin and gotten trapped by the boulder of guilt. The Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Once you are in this cave there are no ways of escape that man can devise.

We have a record of all the ways men have tried to get free from the bondage to sin. Men have offered millions of sacrifices to God in order to get Him to forgive and release them from sin. But there is no record that anyone was ever set free by this method, even when they offered their own babies, or young virgins in sacrifice. All of this folly just added to the darkness of the cave in which they were trapped. Two thousand years ago men use to dig a pit, and get down in it, and kill a bull above it. They would then let all the blood come down upon them in the pit to atone for their sin. All they did was make a major mess. They never washed one sin away with all of that blood.

Men have tried other ways to escape their bondage. They have tried to atone for sin and escape it by doing hard things, like crawling on their hands and knees for hundreds of miles; by standing in cold water in a cave up their neck until nearly frozen; by kissing thousands of steps as they climb to a shrine on a mountain top. On and on goes the list of the many things men have done to try and get free from the cave of sin. The tragedy is none of them work, just like nothing worked to rescue Floyd Collins. Man, with all of his progress, and all of his marvelous inventions, is no closer than the caveman to a way of escaping the cave of sin.

Does this mean that man is in a hopeless situation? Yes it does, as far as man is concerned there is nothing he can do to escape the chains of sin. Once you have sinned there is no way to unsin. It is done, and the wages of sin is death, and so man is trapped. The inner anxiety cause from being trapped drives men to all sorts of things to deaden the pain of his fear and guilt. Alcohol, drugs, sex, amusements of all kinds, dominate his life in the hopes of drowning his sense of despair over the fact that he cannot escape. Yet we need not despair, for there is good news. The good news is, man is not alone in his fight for freedom. There is a God who also hates sin, and all that it does to man to rob him of life. God has come up with a plan to deal with the hopeless situation.

It is hopeless for man, that is, but God has a solution. That huge boulder of guilt that keeps you pinned to the floor of sin can be dissolved in the blood of Christ. You can't do anything about sin, but Jesus can. He can forgive it because he paid for it. If I bought a thousand books, I can give them away if I want to, and I can give them to anybody I choose. If I want you to have one, I can give it to you if you will take it. Jesus purchased forgiveness for all men, and He is ready to give it

to any man who will say he wants it. Those who receive it can shout with Paul, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." You are free in Christ and no longer trapped in the cave of sin, but free to come out into the sunlight and live again. There are only two ways to deal with sin: You can try and fight it on your own, and like Floyd Collins parish in a hopeless battle, or you can receive forgiveness in Christ as a free gift.

Forgiveness is complete with God. He does not say I forgive, but I will never forget. I will let you off this time, but if you ever fall again I will drag out all of your failures of the past and show you the scum that you are. The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin, and that means it removes it. There is no way you can know how many gravy spots I have had on my shirt, because when it is washed the spots are removed and gone for good, and there is no mark of its having been present. So God sees you when you are forgiven as clean and pure with no remembrance of your spots and stains.

You have to deal with the new spots and stains, and confess your latest sins, and get them forgiven, but once you come to Christ and ask His forgiveness, you do not have to deal with your past sins any longer. I do not take my suit and rub it where I had soup stains last year. I forgot all the stains of the past, for they are gone. I do not feel embarrassed by what used to be on my sleeve, for it is gone. All I have to do is deal with the now, and keep the shirt clean. Deal with sin daily, just as you wash your hands and face daily. Ask Jesus to cleanse you and forgive you, and start each day fresh and clean. If you get a blot on your clean day, get it cared for so the next day you can start with a clean slate.

Forgiveness is connected with reconciliation with God, for forgiveness has as its goal being restored to a right relationship. If God just said, "I forgive you now, get lost," what good would forgiveness be? We would still be without God and hope. We want more than just not to suffer a penalty, we want life with meaning, joy, hope, and fellowship with God. The story is told of a servant girl caught stealing from the Queen. She was brought before her majesty for sentencing. She threw herself before the Queen, and begged for forgiveness, and pledging complete loyalty in the future. Touched by the tears, the Queen said, "Rise, I forgive you, but I don't want to see you around here anymore. Leave the palace and find employment elsewhere." "But your grace," the servant girl cried, "That isn't forgiveness. That is merely pardoned. I want to be forgiven so that I may remain in your service." The Queen was surprised by this depth of discernment and said, "You are right, return to your duties as though nothing had happened, for you are forgiven."

So God says to those who receive Christ, "Your sins are gone, and you can return to fellowship with Me. The past no longer blocks the way, for it is no longer remembered." Saving men from hell is just a marvelous fringe benefit, but that is not the primary goal of God in saving men. He wants them to be in fellowship with Him. He wants them to be a part of His family forever. The father of the Prodigal Son did not want him home just to get him out of the pigsty and cleaned up, he wanted him home to be with him, and to love him. So God also does not save men just to keep them out of hell, but because he wants them to enjoy heaven with Him. God wants to forgive you, not forsake you. God wants to pardon you, not punish you. God wants to befriend you, not blast you.

All repentance is, is being honest with yourself and God. Repentance means you admit to God you are trapped, and going in the direction that you know is leading to destruction. The reason this is

hard for many is because of our pride. We are like the man who was driving to Detroit. As he turned onto the freeway his wife told him he had turned the wrong way, for Detroit was the other direction. He said, "I know what I am doing," and he stubbornly refused to consider he may have made a mistake. A few miles down the road he saw a sign that said Chicago 75 miles. He was shaken up a bit by that sign, but refused to change his direction. After two more signs, he knew he was headed the wrong way, but he just could not admit to his wife that he made a mistake. He kept hoping there was a way he could get to Detroit without turning around.

That is where man is. He wants to go to heaven, and live forever in the paradise of God, where there is no sin, suffering, or death. Who would not want such an eternal life of joy and abundance? His sin, however, is taking him the other way to a life of loss, and darkness, and the absence of all that is appealing. He knows it too, but his pride makes him stubborn, and he refuses to admit he could be such a fool as to risk the glory of heaven for the sake of his sin. No man wants to admit he gave up the chance to get diamonds because he was too busy going after jelly beans. No man will feel comfortable admitting he gave up a chance to be rich because he wanted to read comic books. Man's pride makes it so hard for him to be honest, but only when he is honest, can he stop being a fool. Repentance is simply admitting I am going the wrong way, and now I am sick of it, and want to turn around and go the way that leads to life.

Repentance is not a one time thing, as if you can only make a wrong turn once in life. Christians who are sensitive to the Holy Spirit will repent frequently, as they grow and walk in the light. They will see they are going the wrong way, and need to repent and turn around time and time again. It is not anything to be ashamed of, for it is something to be proud of, for to repent is to be honest with yourself and God.

A couple of years ago this story came out in the Dallas Times Herald. A man who had been active with the Nazi's during World War II feared reprisals when the war ended, so he hid himself in the attic of his sister's barn. There he lived alone, isolated and cut off from life. He ate only the little food his sister brought him. His whole existence was limited to that small room. When the authorities finally discovered him, they checked their records and could find no charges against him. They had never wanted him for anything, so he had spent 30 years in self-imposed imprisonment. You say, what a pathetic waste of life. What a colossal fool for not finding out he could have been a free man. The fact is, some of you may be just as foolish. God has sent His Son to set you free, yet you live as a prisoner, trapped in the cold dark cave of sin and guilt. All you have to do is repent, and admit you can't get free on your own, and turn to Jesus, trusting Him to set you free. He promises that when the Son sets you free you will be free indeed.

I'm free from the fear of tomorrow.
I'm free from the guilt of the past.
I've traded my shackles for a glorious crown.
I'm free, praise the Lord, free at last.

12. LIBERTY IN THE LORD Based on Rom. 8:1-2

The Civil War was a complex and complicated war. Lambdin P. Milligan was one of the men who got caught up in the complexities of it, and changed the course of legal history in the United States. Milligan was a lawyer active in local politics in Indiana. The war had been on three years and was already the worst in the history of our land. Indiana was on the side of the North, but many were in sympathy with the South. Secret societies were formed which were called Copperheads, and they supported the Confederate cause.

When the Northern general Alvin Hovey heard that Milligan was a part of one of these Copperhead groups, he had him arrested and tried for treason. Milligan charged that the army had no right to try him under military law because he was a civilian. General Hovey ignored his argument and went ahead and tried him. He found him guilty and sentenced him to hang. Milligan's lawyer went to President Lincoln directly to plead his case. All Lincoln could offer was that if the war ended before he was to hang he would give him a prison term instead.

The war did end soon, but Lincoln was assassinated, and there was no record of this private conversation. Nine days before he was to die Milligan's lawyer took his case to the Supreme Court. The court ruled that the military has no right to try a civilian, and only when the civil courts are closed and unable to operate can a military court have any authority over a civilian. Milligan was released and was a free man. It was not because he was innocent, but because he was transferred to a different system of law. The civil law set him free from the condemnation of the military law. The one system of law took away his freedom and sentenced him to die. The other set him free to live his life. What system of law a man is under is literally a matter of life or death.

This is precisely what Paul is saying in these opening verses of Rom. 8. Life and death depend upon what system of law you are under, and the good news that fills his heart with joy is that in Christ we are transferred from the law that condemns us to die to the law that sets us free to live in liberty without condemnation. With a theme like this it is no wonder that Rom. 8 is considered to be one of the greatest chapters of the Bible. It begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation. It is a gold mine of assurance, and a diamond field of gems that makes the Christian who comprehends them rich beyond compare. If the Bible was a ring and Romans its precious jewel the 8th chapter would be the sparkling point, for it dazzles with beauty from beginning to end. We want to focus our attention on just one of the many sparkling points of this gem.

THE EXCLAMATION OF LIBERTY IN CHRIST. v. 1.

G. Campbell Morgan points out that this opening sentence is emphatic and explosive in the Greek. He writes, "It is the glad exultant cry of a soul apprehending the fullest meaning of what the Gospel has wrought for men." Paul souls like a man who has just emerged from the court room where he was on trial for his life. Confronting the reporters he shouts, "I'm free! I've been acquitted! The verdict was-not guilty. There is therefore now no condemnation. I can walk out of here in complete liberty as a free man."

Life is never abundant without liberty. Jesus called Lazarus back into life, but He also commanded that they unbind him from his grave clothes that he might have liberty in life, for life without liberty would have been a burden and not a blessing. Life was and is a burden for all

who live under law, for one is always under the law of condemnation. He who keeps the whole law yet offends in one point is guilty of all. There is no way for sinful men to keep the whole law, and so he is under perpetual condemnation.

Because we, as Christians, have never been where Paul was, under the law, we tend to lose the full appreciation of the liberty that came with the Gospel. Most of us have never felt the bondage and the burden of condemnation. One of the reasons there is more exclamation of joy for those converted later in life is because they have felt this bondage and burden. They have felt the heaviness, and so they more deeply feel the release and the liberty that comes with the Gospel of forgiveness. The majority of Christians do not feel as deeply as Paul about the liberty they have in Christ, for the same reason that the majority of Americans do not feel as deeply as political liberty as did Patrick Henry, who exclaimed, "Give me liberty or give me death."

Only those who have been oppressed and denied their liberties, and only those who have felt the burden of condemnation can burst forth into praise and commitment like Paul and Patrick. Does this mean that those of us who have benefitted by always having the liberty of our Lord and our land cannot join in the exclamation of those who have gone from bondage to liberty? Not at all! We may not be able to fully enter into the intense degree of emotion felt by those who have been through the radical transformation, but by empathy we can approach it.

Empathy is the ability to enter into the experience of another. You do it when you weep at sad scenes on the screen. You feel the hurt of those who suffer. You know in your heart what it must feel like. You do it when your face lights up and you smile when someone you see on the scene is exceedingly happy. By empathy you enter into their emotions and feel with them. You don't have to be a slave and then set free to feel the joy of liberty. You don't have to be a prisoner of war who is tortured and starved, and then delivered by your allies, to have the joy of liberty. You don't have to live in fear that some Pharisee will find you picking up a stick on the Sabbath and have you stoned to feel the joy of grace that sets us free from the many laws that made life a burden under the Mosaic Law.

In other words, you don't have to experience the negative to enjoy the positive. If that was the case, every generation would have to give up its progress and go back to experience all the negatives that were fought and overcome. We don't have to go back and feel the load of the law to enter into the delight of deliverance from the law. All we have to do is understand history. That is what history is for. It is help us to enter into experiences of others so we can feel what they felt.

I can imagine how maddening it would be to not have the freedom to worship as you desire. To have someone else tell you where you could meet, and what you could or could not preach would be intolerable. I've never experienced that, but I can by empathy feel that burden and so be thankful for the religious liberty that I have in our land of freedom. I have never lived under the burden of trying to keep many laws to please religious leaders. I have never had to live in fear that my sin would be greater than my good deeds, and so have to stand before God condemned. But I can imagine that kind of burden and fear, and so I can enter into the joy of the exclamation of no condemnation.

No condemnation, O my soul,

Tis God that speaks the word!
Completely justified art thou,
In Christ, thy risen Lord.

13. THE INDWELLING SPIRIT Based on Rom. 8:9-13

Indwelling has a variety of meanings. It can mean that matter indwells matter as a kernel or fruit within a shell. A yoke indwells the white and both dwell within the shell. It can refer to a situation where one substance is intermixed with another, as with salt and water, or medicine within your blood system. Then there is the non-material indwelling the material. When an artist really puts himself into his art, we say his spirit indwells it. A musician lives in his composition. It reveals his nature, personality, or mood.

This is what we mean when we say God indwells His creation. His beauty and harmony of nature are built right into what He has made. Another type of indwelling is related to heredity. Parents indwell their children in the sense that part of them has been reproduced. Man being made in the image of God conveys this idea, and so God indwells men in the sense that they have qualities that are from His nature. We can speak of one man dwelling in another in the sense of influence or inspiration. If a man is a follower of another's methods or ideas, you can say that he just lives in that man.

All of these ideas of spiritual indwelling fit the meaning of being indwelt by God, but they all fall short of the full meaning. Paul makes it clear in this passage that God's indwelling is not just figurative, and does not just relate to His image, influence, and inspiration, but to a literal indwelling. God actually abides within our literal flesh just as Jesus literally entered the flesh of a human body in the incarnation. The term Christian refers to those who are Christ ones, and that is what we literally are as Christians. We are little Christ's. We have the same Holy Spirit indwelling us as He had. The source of His wisdom and power is within us as it was in Him. In verse 11 Paul makes it clear that the very Spirit of God who raised up Christ is the Spirit that dwells in the believer, and it is He who will also raise us up to life immortal.

It is no wonder that Paul was such a man of assurance and certainty. Paul didn't claim to know everything, for he said that we know only in part. Much was mystery to Paul, but he was sure of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We want to study this passage verse by verse in order to grow in the knowledge that is necessary to have the assurance of Paul.

In verse 9 in the KJV Paul says to the Roman Christians, "You are not in the flesh." If you take this literally you would think Paul was writing to disembodied Christians. It sounds like a weight watchers paradise. But the modern versions make it clear that Paul is saying they are not controlled by the sinful nature. He is saying that the natural man is not controlled by the Spirit, but the Christian is to be so controlled. Those who are in flesh live their life with no regard for God and His will. They live in a sphere that is flesh controlled and dominated. In contrast Paul says the Christian is controlled by the Spirit.

Paul's method of getting people to examine themselves is far superior to that of asking people if they are saved. Instead of asking them, he describes the two spheres in which all people live, and then let's them judge for themselves which sphere they are in. To be in the Spirit is the opposite of being in the flesh. If you are in the Spirit and controlled by the Spirit God will play the dominant role in your decisions, thoughts, and acts. John wrote in I John 14, "Hereby we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." The indwelling Spirit is the key to Christian assurance.

Then Paul says, "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, He does not belong to Christ." We must possess the Spirit to be possessed by Christ. He must be ours if we are His. Mutual possessing and mutual indwelling is what salvation is all about. These are terms that are not familiar to us because we have taken a few biblical concepts to describe salvation and have ignored the rest. This is a statement of absolute finality, just like the statement, "You must be born again." You must have the Spirit of Christ is saying the same thing. Having the Spirit is a good biblical phrase that we ought to use, for it means to be a child of God. We tend not to use this terminology because it brings the Holy Spirit into the center of the plan of salvation, and we tend to be weak in our understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 10 Paul says, "But if Christ is in you...," and so we see that Christ in us, the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of God, are all used interchangeably. They are one, and you cannot have one Person of the trinity in you and not have the others. Where one is, all are. Then Paul says your body is dead because of sin. What does this mean? Does Christ dwell in a corpse? Was He resurrected and ascended, and then sent back to dwell in dead bodies? What Paul means is that the body of the Christian is subject to death. It is in the realm of the dying, and will return to dust because of sin.

In other words, the Christian is only partially saved in the present. Sin still has power over the realm of the flesh, and as Paul goes on to say, not until the resurrection will our bodies be made spiritual and enter into the realm of the Spirit and be saved. Christians, therefore, are half and half. They are half saved and half not saved, but the half not yet saved has a guarantee to be saved if the Spirit indwells them.

Then Paul ends verse 10 by saying, "Yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness." It is alive because of the righteousness of Christ. Jesus said, "He that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." The Christian is alive even if he is dead. Death no longer has dominion over them. The body which is still subject to death is not the controlling factor in the Christian. His body does not run the show as it does for those in the flesh. For the Christian the Spirit is in control, and so the power of the resurrection is already in operation in the Christian life. The resurrection life is a life in which the Spirit is in control, and not the body. There is no difference between the bodies and the lost and those of the saved. The difference is in the Spirit. The spirit of the lost man is a slave to his body, but the spirit of the saved is a co-partner with the Spirit of God.

In verse 11 Paul makes it clear that sin and death will not gain the slightest victory over the children of God. He wants to make it clear that though the body is dead and not in control it is not to be abused, for it will be a part of the total plan of salvation. Jesus indwelt a body, and even though it died it saw no corruption. God will not let any body He has dignified by His indwelling

be left in the grip of death. All that God indwells shall be eternal and so if the Spirit indwells us, we can have perfect assurance of immortality. Just as certain as Jesus rose with a body changed and made immortal, so shall all Christians rise and be changed. The power of the resurrection is the power of the Spirit, and no temple of the Holy Spirit will lie forever in the dust, for the Spirit will give life even to our dead bodies.

In the light of all that the Spirit does for us now and for eternity Paul goes on to say that we have an obligation to live according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. We do not owe the body anything, for its fleshly nature only brings us down, but we owe the Spirit everything, for He lifts us up to the dignity of being God's child.

Paul goes on in v. 13 to say that we will die if we live according to the sinful nature of the flesh, but we will live if we put to death the deeds of the body by means of the Spirit. This is life now and forever. We must be in constant battle with the body to keep it under the control of the Spirit. We must present our bodies as living sacrifices as Paul says in chapter 12 of Romans. We must die daily or the body will dominate us and lead us in many ways that are not truly life, but paths to death. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, and if you let your body determine what you will do, it means you will do much less for Christ and for your own spiritual growth than if you are controlled by the Spirit. The flesh will keep you from doing much that is God's will for your growth.

By the grace of God the Spirit working with our spirit can overthrow the tyranny of the flesh and reign in its place. The Spirit can gain control and discipline the body and bring it under submission. This will lead to the fruit of the Spirit being produced in your life. The Spirit will help us put to death the desires of the body to be lazy and indifferent to the things of God, and the desires to do what is contrary to the will of God. If the Spirit is not in control, the body will quench the Spirit and we will be carnal and not spiritual. Something has to die, and it is either the flesh or the Spirit, and which it is determines the quality of your life now and for eternity. Assurance of salvation; assurance of eternal life, and assurance of abundant life now are all dependant upon the indwelling of the Spirit of God.

14. BLESSED ASSURANCE Based on Rom. 8:14-18

William Stidger tells this fascinating true story out of history: It was the final battle in the war between the Tartars and the Russians as they faced each other across the Oka River in 1462. For several days they were engaged in bitter fighting. Time after time the Tartar hordes tried to drive across the river, but they were thrust back. The Russians were far inferior by number, but the water of the Oka was their protection.

Then something happened that struck fear into the hearts of the Russian defenders. A cold wave swept down from the snow-clad peaks of the Ural Mountains, and the waters of the Oka began to freeze over. Once the ice was strong enough the Tartars could cross over and annihilate the Russian forces. As they sat around the camp fire talking of the advantage the enemy would

soon have, and as they felt the weather getting colder and colder, their fear grew to a panic, and before midnight the whole army was fleeing back to Moscow.

The following morning when the Tartar sentries were able to look across the river, they were amazed to find that the enemy had vanished. The Tartars immediately suspected a trick. They thought that perhaps the Russians had crossed the river several miles down and were planning to attack from the rear. Uncertainty as to what the Russians were up to caused fear to spread through the camp, and in less than two hours the Tartar host had abandoned its tents, and was in full retreat. Two panic stricken armies were running from each other, both having been conquered by fear.

Fear is a great conqueror. It is one of the most universal and powerful forces that man has to contend with. Every man, even the bravest, has to fight with fear on many different fronts. We feel fear because of inadequacy. We fear people who are superior. We fear those with more education, and those with more talent. We fear those who are more widely traveled. We fear dozens of different relationships with others because of our ignorance and inadequacies. The result is that we flee in retreat and let fear defeat us and deprive us of many of life's blessings and opportunities.

Not only do we have social fears that control us, but we have bodily pain fears. Certainly it is a rare person who does not fear a heart attack every time they get a pain in the chest. We hear so much about physical problems in all age groups that we are conscious that no one is immune from serious and fatal diseases. The result is a constant weight of fear pressing down on us. Add to this the fear we have over economics. We fear inflation and depression. We fear we won't be able to afford to send our children to college. We fear a thousand different things in relation to money. When a woman says she hasn't a thing to wear she is saying that she fears to be out of style. Fear even plays a role in determining our wardrobe.

Children fear they will not win their parents affections, and parents fear they will not raise their children right. Parents fear they will not maintain their love and loyalty to each other. Everything seems to be built on shifting sand, and there is no certainty. Therefore, fear reigns, and masses go down in defeat before fear every day. We haven't even mentioned the dozens of religious and superstitious fears that fill our institutions for the mentally ill.

We quote, "I will fear no evil for thou art with me," but then we do not walk in fearlessness as we talk. We shun the conflict with the enemy like weaponless orphans. Boldness and courage are quenched by fear, and we do not witness as we ought. God says to go and conquer, but like the Israelites of old, we let our fear reign and reply that there are giants in the land. Every obstacle looks like a giant, and we feel like pigmies. I can't, I can't, is the theme song of the average Christian. What they mean is, I fear, I fear. There is no victory march of certainty ringing in their ears. They hear only the dismal dirge of doubt which holds them down.

John Masfield in *The Hell-Hounds* tells of a priest who let fear terrorize him into cowardice. He became faithless to his duties, and he hid himself in fear. Then he heard the message of some birds singing-

Open the door, Good saint, they cried;

Pass deeper into your soul!
There is a power in your side
Which hell cannot control.

The story is fiction, but the message is one of the most essential biblical facts that every child of God must grasp. We do not need to be controlled by fear. We have a power within that can control fear. This is one of the major messages that the Apostle Paul communicated in his letters. Here in Romans 8 he makes it so clear that none can miss it. We can be sure, and have complete certainty, and absolute assurance that deprives fear of a foothold in our lives. Uncertainty is what gives fear its power.

People are uncertain about life, its meaning, purpose, and goals. This leaves them helpless victims of fear, but Paul says the Christian can have certainty in all of these areas. We can be certain of being led by the Spirit. We can be certain of immortality of the body as well as of the Spirit. Man fears non-existence, but the Christian need not do so, for he can have assurance of eternal life. Man fears to be nobody, and to be insignificant. The Christian need not fear this, for over and over Paul says the Christian can be assured that he is a child of God. He has a place in God's family for time and eternity.

Men fear that they will have nothing to show for having lived, but Paul says the Christian can be assured of an eternal inheritance. We will be co-heirs with Christ of all the infinite riches of God. With assurance of immortality, identity, and inheritance, you would think Christians could march boldly on to victory unhindered by fear. Unfortunately, this is not the case, for what is possible is not necessarily actual.

William Adams Brown writes, "A noticeable feature of contemporary religious life is the loss of the sense of certainty." It is considered to be pride to be absolutely sure of anything. Someone said that we are not even sure that we are not sure. Men are even fearful of being certain. Part of this is due to the false certainties of past. Men have been dogmatic in science and religion, and they were so sure they were right that they persecuted those who came up with something new. Certainty led to intolerance and narrowness, and a loss of freedom to pursue the truth. In reaction to this the modern man has gone to the other extreme and says that we cannot be certain of anything. The task of the Christian is to find the happy medium between these two extremes.

In the first place, the Christian must recognize that certainty is not essential in all areas. It would be interesting to know exactly who is right as to just how God created the universe. Did He do it in 7 literal days, or 7 ages? Did He do it directly, or by process? It would be interesting to know for sure, but such certainty is not necessary for effective Christian living. It is not essential for life abundant to know if the church will go through the tribulation or escape it. We can survive and even thrive with uncertainty in many areas over which Christians debate. What we need to know for sure is, are we saved, are we children of God, and do we have eternal life? If we have certainty in these areas, that is what really matters, for that gives us a solid basis from which we can fight off all the fiery darts of fear.

The second thing we must recognize is that certainty does not mean infallibility. To be certain of something does not mean you possess full knowledge of it, and can never change. Certainty is not to be confused with changelessness. I can be certain of my salvation as a child, but my

account of it and its basis at that point may be radically revised as I get older, and grow in my knowledge of God's Word. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but in relationship to me He is ever changing as I grow in knowledge. Yesterday Jesus may have been an enemy to a man, today a Savior, and tomorrow a Lord to be followed. Our relationship, our maturity, our knowledge causes us to be changing all the time, but through it all we can be certain that we are children of God.

Paul states it clearly in verse 16 where he says that the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. The value of a testimony depends upon the character of the witness. Paul says we have the highest possible witness to assure us of being children of God, and that is the Holy Spirit Himself. The Holy Spirit is the author of absolute assurance. Conversion is followed by confirmation. God does not leave His children ignorant as to their identity. What a cruel picture is suggested by those who say you cannot know you are saved. It pictures God as an irresponsible Father, who give birth to children, but never gives them a name to establish their identity. If we cannot be certain that we are children of God, then fear must reign supreme, and Christianity has nothing to offer a fear filled world. If all we have to offer is a hope-so salvation, and not a know-so salvation, we are not preaching a Gospel, but a gamble. Take a chance, and maybe you will make it, and maybe not. This leaves you yet in the grip of fear.

Christians who feel assurance is a sign of pride fail to pay attention to God's Word. If it is our spirit only that claims we are children of God then it would be pride, but Paul says there is a dual witness. Not only does our spirit bear witness, but the spirit of God bears witness with our spirit. Assurance is based on a dual witness, and it is not pride to accept the witness and testimony that God has given to empower us to overcome fear and live victoriously. It is pride to refuse the witness and power of God and seek to live in your own strength.

Many Christians develop fear even as they read this verse for the conquering of fear. They never hear any voice from heaven saying they are children of God. They never have any visions or supernatural revelations, and so they fear they lack this witness of the Spirit. What Paul is saying here is that the proof of your sonship lies in how you address God. If you call Him Father, that very fact that you can do so is the witness of the Holy Spirit that you are His child. Luther said, "Whoever believes with a firm faith and love that he is a child of God, is a child of God." The child of God addresses God as Father.

Abba Father here is really Father repeated twice. Abba is father in Aramaic, which was the language that Jesus spoke. When He taught the Lord's Prayer He doubtless said, "Our Abba who art in heaven." In Mark 14:36 Jesus prayed in Gethsemane and said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee." In Gal. 4:6 Paul uses the phrase again, "And because you are sons God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!" It is universally acknowledged among Bible scholars that calling God Father is the witness of the Holy Spirit to our sonship. Even a liberal like Paul Tillich writes, "Only he who has the Spirit has the power to say Father to God." He also says, "The whole message of Christianity is contained in this statement. Christianity overcomes law and despair by the certainty that we are the children of God. There is nothing higher than this."

When even a liberal sees that assurance of salvation is the key to power over all fear, God

forbid that we neglect this precious truth. If we serve God out of fear that He will punish us, this is a slave mentality, and not the spirit of sonship. If you have this attitude toward God, you are living on a sub-Christian level. Many churches in the past have encouraged this sub-Christian living by playing down the doctrine of assurance, and the witness of the Holy Spirit. If men are free and independent, and their assurance of salvation and sonship comes directly from the witness of the Spirit, they will not be dependent upon the institutional church. Therefore, to maintain a loyalty to the institution people were kept blind to the doctrine of assurance. This produced weak and ineffective Christians. Paul's approach is one that needs to be followed. You make individual Christians strong through assurance so they can conquer fear. These kinds of Christians are what make the institutional church strong.

The tragedy is that so few professing Christians have assurance of their salvation. Many times it is due to sheer ignorance of what the Bible teaches. The founders of all the major denominations made it clear in their commentaries on this 16th verse, but the people are kept in ignorance. Protestants are as much in the dark about some vital biblical subjects as are Catholics. The witness of the Spirit, and the assurance of sonship is one of the subjects.

Calvin said, "No one can be termed a son of God who does not acknowledge himself to be one." Our own spirit must bear witness that we are children of God, and then we must have the witness of the Holy Spirit which enables us to say Abba Father, or as Philip has it, "Father, my Father." John Wesley said, "This is the privilege of all the children of God, and without this we can never be assured that we are His children." If you cannot call God Father, you need to make a decision that will open your heart to God and allow you to see Him as your heavenly Father.

H. Harold Kent, an architect and preacher in Canada, bought a dog from a man just to protect him. The man beat the dog repeatedly. The dog was beautiful, but it lived in fear, and even when he first had this dog at home he would call Wolf, and he would snare and slink into a corner in fear. After a time of much love and no beatings he began to realize he was not going to be hurt, and so he began to greet him when he came home with a wagging tail. He had conquered fear by the spirit of love. He had learned that he was a member of the family. Perfect love had cast out fear. It works even in the life of a dog.

One of the main reasons the Lord's Prayer begins with Our Father is so that it might become a habit for God's children to address Him as Father. It is one of the unique aspects of Christianity that Christians call their God Father. God is called God by the billions through history, but Christians call God Father. If you do not then you have not developed one of the key ways to have assurance of your salvation. You can think of God as the Creator and the Lord of history and still be uncertain, but you cannot think of God as your Father and live in uncertainty of His love.

As Christians we need to learn that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind. We are to be assured that we are members of God's family, and this assurance will give us the victory over life's most potent fears. Let us not live on the level of I hope I am saved, or I hope I am a child of God, but let us live on the biblical level of I know. An unknown poet wrote-

What wondrous blessings overflow,
When we can truly say, I know-
I know in whom I have believed,
I know the one I have received,
I know His blood avails for me,
I know that I was blind, but see,
I know that my redeemer lives,
I know the gifts He freely gives,
I know He'll keep me to the end,
I know He's my unfailing friend.

15. ABSOLUTELY PERSUADED Based on Rom. 8:28-39

The 8th chapter of Romans is a spiritual palace of comfort and challenge built for the children of God. Nothing could be more optimistic than the words we find here that all works for good, and that if God is before us who can be against us. God has given His Son who intercedes for us, and nothing can separate from His love. We are more than conquerors. Such an optimistic view of things seems to be more than we can believe. We wonder if the writer is some arm chair philosopher who never got his hands dirty, and never knew what it was to suffer. It would be easy for him to sit in his padded chair and write about life, while his servants bring him his mid-afternoon snack.

But wait! We are talking about the wrong man. The author of this chapter is a soldier from the battlefield. He knows what it is like to be hated, despised, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and imprisoned. The Apostle Paul was not writing from a sheltered life, but from one that knew the stress of constant combat and serious struggles. It is important to keep this in mind as we consider his words.

Let's look first at-

I. HIS CERTAINTY. v. 28.

He says, "We know" and in verse 38, "I am persuaded." In a day when nothing seemed certain, and governments can rise or fall overnight, and where text books change their contents every year, we wonder if we can be certain of anything. We can never be sure if things will get better, and we never know whether or not tragedy is waiting around the next corner. There is a superficial optimism that tries to make things look brighter by whitewashing the dark facts, but no one but the blind can find any comfort in this. We don't find this in Paul, for he never buries his head in the sand saying all is well.

A news item in a Canadian paper during hunting season said, "Sam Higgins was accidentally shot yesterday while hunting. One of the wounds is pronounced fatal, but his friends will be glad

to hear that the other wounds are not considered dangerous." They could have gone on to say half of the shots never even hit him, but what comfort is that when the fact is he is dead? Paul is not whitewashing the facts. He sees the reality of evil in the world. His confidence is not in the world or self. His confidence is in God. He could say with the unknown poet,

Yet in this maddening maze of things,
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed trust my spirit clings,
I know that God is good.

II. HIS CLAIM. v. 28. "All things work together for good."

Certainty Paul is not trying to say that everything in the world is good. Paul knows that the world is evil. He has proof of that in his own body. "He had been to the whipping post so many times that if he had gone to heaven backwards they would have recognized him by his scars." Paul does not mean to give the impression that all that happens is God's will. He certainly knew the Lord's Prayer that said, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We would not need to pray that if God's will was always perfectly done.

Most of the misery and suffering in the world is not God's will. It is not God's will that little girls be kidnaped and murdered. It is not God's will that babies be born deformed. It is not God's will that your appendix breaks and you have to have surgery. In a world where God's will does not fully reign, sin curses all, and all suffer the consequences. What does Paul mean then when he says all things work for good? First of all we need to know what he meant by good. Did he mean that all works together for our health? No, for he just said that we groan in our bodies, and he told in chapter 7 of the war in his body, and in another place of his thorn in the flesh.

Did he mean that works for our happiness and pleasure? No, for Paul was often in distress and his heart was heavy with all of his cares for the churches because of their many problems. He had few pleasures and much pain. Paul's idea of the highest good is seen in verse 29, which is to be conformed to His image. That is the goal of our life, and to that end all things work together. The path may be filled with pits of pain and trails of tragedy may join it, but God in His providence can and will bring you through. You may have to experience the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, but you will also experience the power of His resurrection.

Paul's claim is not that all is good, but that God is great, and He will see that nothing hinders His chosen ones from reaching the highest good, which is the redemption of His soul and its transformation into the image of Christ. Even tragedy will be used in His providence to work toward this goal. In the early 1930's a school bus was caught in a snow drift on a Colorado road. The driver set out for help, but lost his way and perished. Night came and the children were in real danger. The fuel was exhausted and some began to get drowsy. One of the older boys who knew the danger began to aggravate the others and soon had them all screaming and fighting. What a strange sight that must have been, but the fighting kept their blood circulating and saved them until they were found. Some had cuts and bruises and torn clothes, but it was all working for their good. There was nothing good about their injuries, but it led to the good of saving their lives.

Suffering and sorrow are not good in themselves, but God can see that they work toward the best results. It is like the grain of sand in the oyster. It is not a good thing, but in dealing with it the oyster produces a pearl. The boll weevil is not good but destructive. One year it just about wiped out the cotton crop of Coffee, Alabama. It forced them to plant peanuts which restored the starved soil, and it began a new industry that brought wealth. It was an evil event in itself, but it ended up becoming a blessing.

You would have a hard time convincing a child that a spanking is for their own good, for they cannot foresee what it is to be a responsible adult. We do not know all that is ahead for us as we will become like Christ, but we must believe that God will work out all things for the best. This must have been hard for George Matheson to believe. He was engaged to be married but went blind. His fiancée refused to marry him. Many men would see no possible good coming of this, but George cast all his care upon Christ, and he found one whose love did not alter when it alteration found. He went on to write the hymn, "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go." Next, we want to look at-

III. HIS CONDITIONS. v. 28 "To them that love God and are called according to His purpose."

We see this as not an automatic promise to all. It is not even automatic for the Christian. You cannot just lay around and expect everything to be worked out for you. Jesus said, "If you love me keep my commandments." So if you love God, you will not ignore His will and expect a tumor or a tornado to be for your good. In His mercy it may still be because it could cause you to rely on God more completely, but the promise of all working to one's ultimate good is only for those who love God.

Love means life, and life means labor. To love God means to labor to be what He wants you to be. It may be uphill all the way, but He promises that He will never let you go. Some people never get started because they think they have to do it in their own strength. I read a testimony of a man who said he came to Christ with a heavy burden of sin, he placed it at the cross and thought all was right, but the next day his sky was gray. His temptation was strong and he fell. He failed again and again until everyone ceased to believe in him, and he cease to believe in himself. At last in desperation he raised his hands to heaven and said, "Lord Jesus I claim thy promise, I claim thy power, look at me tonight."

He gained the victory and Satan fled. This is a lesson all of need to learn. There is not a one of us who has begun to take seriously all that Jesus has promised. We haven't scratched the surface of the power available to those who claim it in faith, and with a life behind it to prove their sincerity. Our love for God is often not real enough to give us the benefit of this promise of all things working for good. We can praise God that if we miss His best He always has another plan for us. But what a shame to suffer for nothing. The worst affliction is a wasted affliction, and all are wasted that do not draw us nearer to Jesus.

Note the twofold condition, for those who love God and who are called. It is God's role to call and ours to love. Many are called but few are chosen because they do not listen and respond in love. It is the purpose of God that we become like Christ and this high purpose is what enabled Paul and many others who suffered to endure with courage and joy. It was all working for their

good when they loved God and were fulfilling His calling. They could praise Him in all circumstances and like Paul be singing in prison. Next we see-

IV. HIS CONFIDENCE. "If God is for us who can be against us?"

With this confidence one can face anything that life brings. When we see that God gave His Son for our salvation that is the guarantee that God is for us. He has done the greatest thing He could do to demonstrate His being for us, and so we can be assured He will do whatever it takes to fulfill His purpose in our lives. He will not hold back on any lesser gift now that He has given His best.

As we partake of the Lord's Supper, let us remember that what it represents is the basis for all our claims and convictions, and it alone can supply the confidence which we see in the Apostle Paul. God has acted in history to redeem us from this present evil world. How can we keep from lifting our hearts in thanksgiving for such a gift as this?

16. THE HARDEST CHAPTER IN THE BIBLE Based on Rom. 9

At the Southern tip of England there is a well-known spot called Land's End. Fredrick Harris in his book *Spires Of The Spirit* says there is a house there on the edge of the cliff with a sign, which reads, "The last house and the first house in England." It is both at the same time. It is a paradox that is easily explained. If you are facing the sea this was the last house you would see before plunging down the rocky cliff being slapped by the water. However, if you were coming from the sea gazing up at the green and pleasant land, this was the first house to be seen. Depending on the perspective from which you looked at it, it was either the first or the last house in England. Most all paradoxes are resolved by recognizing the importance of perspective.

If you insist on looking from a point of view different from that of the author, you will be puzzled by inconsistencies and wonder confused through the clouds of obscurity and mystery. Truth can only be conveyed from one mind to another when both are looking from the same perspective. If you are standing on land looking out to sea past this last house in England you will feel obligated to call the man a liar and one who is perverting the truth who is saying from his ship at sea that he is looking at the first house in England. On this particular issue most people could quickly adjust and recognize the validity of another point of view, but not all issues are so simple as looking at a house from two different perspectives. Some issues get quite complicated, and you have to be aware that there is a Christian perspective, a Jewish perspective and a pagan perspective. On top of this, there may be several different perspectives within each of these major categories. The point is, you never really understand what a person is trying to communicate until you can see the matter from his particular perspective.

Nowhere is this so true as when we come to this chapter in Paul's letter to the Romans. In the series of volumes called *Proclaiming The New Testament* this 9th chapter of Romans is titled "The Hardest Chapter In The Bible." Alexander Maclaren, the great Baptist preacher of

England, in his Expositions Of The Holy Scripture has 98 pages expounding Romans 8, but not a single page when he comes to chapter 9. Finding sermons on this chapter is like trying to find children who eat no candy on Halloween. They are rare. It is filled with too many puzzles and mysteries. It is one of those sections of Scripture that people hope will go away if they ignore it, but years of good solid neglect has not eliminated a word. Not even one of those harsh words that stun you into silence, or fill you with anger at the apparent tyranny of God because he treats men like lumps of worthless clay.

Nowhere in the Bible is there such a series of powerful and emotion packed words. This chapter is a vial of verbal violence. Without a proper perspective from which to view it you might conclude it is a language bomb planted in God's Word by a satanic saboteur designed to blow the consistency and unity of the Bible to bits. From the very start it is a mystery as Paul uses the strangest language to declare that he is not lying. It is as if everything he is going to say is being challenged as lies. Then in verse 2 the Apostle who urges us to rejoice always, and who has just finished writing one of the most optimistic chapters in the Bible, says he is in great sorrow and unceasing anguish of heart, and could even wish himself cut off from Christ and be a victim of damnation if it would save his people the Jews. How can he love Christ if he is willing to go to hell and be cut off from Christ for the sake of his people? Is this not idolatry and the loving of men more than God? What is Paul trying to do here? Why does he picture God's sovereignty in such a way that it appears to deny man's free will? Is Paul a fatalist?

It is well worth our time to try and unravel the mysteries of this chapter, for the problem Paul is wrestling with here is still a difficult but relevant problem today. The problem is the Jewish question, or the relationship of the Jews to the church and God's plan. Paul is caught up in the midst of this problem in a way that is unique. Paul is the great Apostle to the Gentiles, yet he is a Jew, and one with a great love for his people. This explains the deep emotion as he deals with the issue of their rejection of the Gospel. We must see this whole issue from Paul's perspective if we are to understand his solution to the difficult questions involved.

Paul has just finished saying in chapter 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of God, but the question immediately arises, how do you explain then that God's elect people have been cut off? How can you explain that those who were best prepared for the coming of the Messiah have rejected Him? How can it be that those who were the elect; who had all the promises of God; all the prophets; all the leading of God through history, have not welcomed their Messiah? These are serious questions, and the whole Gospel and assurance of the Christian faith is at stake in the answers to them. The Jews argued that the fact the majority of God's elect people did not accept Jesus as the Messiah proves that He could not have been the Messiah. On the other hand, if He was the Messiah, the Christians had to explain how it could be that God's promises to Israel could fail. For if God rejected His elect people once, what assurance is there that He will not do so again.

Paul has to answer these questions and defend the church as the New Israel. He has to justify God's dealing with Israel in cutting them off and grafting in the Gentiles. The Jews, of course, are calling Paul a traitor to his people and a heretic. It is a bitter controversy, but Paul does not hate his opponents. He deeply loves them. He wants to make this clear so that no one thinks that some of the harsh things he has to say is due to a hateful attitude toward the Jews. This chapter

may sound anti-Semitic, but if seen from Paul's perspective it is just the opposite.

Just one example illustrates just how hot the issue was, and how controversial Paul was. Acts 21 tells of what happened when Paul came back to Jerusalem, and how even the Christians were worried. Many Jews who became Christians heard that Paul was telling Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses and to stop circumcision and observing other customs. The leaders asked Paul to go through a 7 day purification to prove that he was still an observer of the law. This was to satisfy the people. In verse 27 and following this is what happened: "When the 7 days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia who has seen him in the temple, stirred up all the crowd, and laid hands on him, crying out, 'Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place; more over he also brought Greeks into the temple and he has defiled this holy place.'Then all the city was aroused, and the people ran together, they seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. And as they were trying to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion."

If you want to read on you will see a picture of mob violence and police conflict. Paul was rescued, but he also loved that mob in spite of their hatred for him. You can see why Paul has to take a hard line in his argument here in Romans. He is facing opponents whose stubborn resistance is unmatched. Paul is not picturing God as a tyrant in this chapter, but rather, he is trying to make it clear that man cannot tyrannize God. Man cannot bend and manipulate Him. They cannot shut Him up in their system of theology. God is absolutely free in His sovereignty, and He is not bound to Israel as the Jews claim. They said that they alone were the elect people of God, and if they did not accept Jesus as Messiah, then He was not the Messiah, and the church is not Israel, but a group of heretics. They said that God is bound to the Jews through eternal covenants, and nothing can separate them from being the people of God. As we move through Paul's argument to this charge we will see more clearly why he has to state matters the way he does.

To help us see the whole issue from Paul's perspective we want to devote the rest of the introductory sermon to a brief review of the history of Jewish and Christian conflict. Contemporary Jews have the same stand as the Jews who oppose Paul. Dr. Kaufmann Kohler writes, "The doctrine that God chose Israel as His people is the central point of Jewish theology and the key to an understanding of the nature of Judaism." Jews recognized that their God is the God of all men, but they still assert that He is uniquely related to Israel alone. S. Schechter in "Some Aspects Of Rabbinic Theology," states, "He is their God, their Father, their strength, their shepherd, their hope, their salvation, their safety, their heart; they are His people, His children, His first-born son, His treasure, dedicated to His name, which is sacrilege to profane. In a word, there is not a single endearing epithet in the language, such as brother, sister, bride, mother, lamb, or eye, which is not, according to the Rabbis, applied by the Scriptures to express this intimate relation between God and His people."

This unique relationship of God and Israel has been challenged by pagans many times. In 300 B. C. a Greek living in Egypt, whose name was Hecataeus, said that the Jews were descendants of Egyptians outcasts. Josephus, the Jewish historian of Paul's day, said that Manetho and Egyptian priests also expounded the theory, and they claimed that the Exodus was an expulsion of a rebellious group of lepers and criminals. Cicero in 59 B. C. said that the fall of

Jerusalem to the Romans proved that the Jews were rejected by the immortal gods. Roman Satirists scorned the Jewish claim to be God's chosen people. The pagans rejected Israel's election as matter of nationalistic presumption. The Christians, however, had a completely different approach. They did not deny that Israel was elect, but said, as Paul does in Romans 9, that not all Israel is Israel. The church said that many Jews are not any longer God's elect, for they failed to fulfill the purpose of their election. The result is that God has cut them off and made the church the new and true Israel.

From the Jewish point of view Baron writes of the early Christian Jews: "They (the Jews) had to deal with an internal enemy who, even after the separation of appropriated the entire realm of Jewish history as its own and increasingly denied it to the Jewish people itself." The Christians took the Jews Bible and the great heroes of Israel as their own. They reinterpreted the history of Israel in the light of Christ, and they left the Jews on a sidetrack as they went rushing down the main track as the New Israel.

The Epistle of Barnabas was written about 130 A. D., and 5 chapters in it developed the theme that Christians and not Jews are the heirs of the covenant, and the Christians are the people to whom the patriarchs and prophets directed their promises. Also from the second century in the Dialogue of Justin Martyr with Trypho, about one third of which deals with the question of Israel's election. Justin argues, "Those who have followed and will follow Christ are the True Israel, the children of the promise, the true successors of those Jews who found justification in times past." Trypho is shocked at Christians claiming to be Israel, but Justin concludes, "Christ is the Israel and the Jacob, even so we, who have been quarried out from the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelite race."

How did the Jews take this? Not by lying down, for this was blasphemy, and well on into the 5th century there was a bitter struggle for religious supremacy between Judaism and Christianity. Christianity finally became dominant, but the argument has never ceased. Hans Joachim Schoeps wrote a book called The Jewish-Christian Argument. It was suppressed in Germany in 1937 as dangerous. His father died in a concentration camp in 1942, and in 1944 his mother was gassed at Auschwitz with several million other Jews. He has studied Christianity and knows it well, but has said no to Christ and has written his book to justify that no. He is still convinced the Jews only are the true Israel of God. For anyone involved in the relationship of Jews and Christians Paul's arguments here are vital, and the most relevant material we have in the Bible.

You might say, so what? What do we care about Jews and God's plan for them? As Christians we should be concerned about all of God's Word, and not just the easy comforting parts but the hard and difficult parts, which demand discipline of thought. For those who prefer to wade in the shallow water of clear and simple revelation this study will be hard, but for those who are eager to launch out into the deep and wrestle with the waves of obscure and profound revelation, this study will be an adventure. Even this hardest chapter in the Bible is packed with potential blessings for those who are willing to love God with all their minds. If this is the kind of Christian you aim to be, I challenge you to read this chapter and study it, and ask questions you seek to find answers for. Those who will do this will eventually discover that Rom. 9 will no longer be the hardest chapter in the Bible.

17. ANTI ANTI-SEMITISM Based on Rom. 9:1f

A professor of math once said that if his life depended upon solving a problem in 15 minutes he would spend 10 minutes trying to understand the problem. Understanding is so essential if any problem is going to be brought to a satisfactory solution. Misunderstanding of a problem, or of a puzzling passage of Scripture, can be disastrous. This is illustrated in the story of Michael Trevanion by Mark Rutherford. Michael has an only son and he has set his heart on his boys salvation above all else. He is worried, however, and fears that he will fail to realize his supreme ambition because of Susan, who is the pretty girl his son Robert has come to love. Michael feels that her bewitching worldly ways will keep his son out of the kingdom, and he weeps with bitter anguish at the thought.

In his distress he turns to the Bible and opens it to Romans chapter 9. His eye falls upon verse 3: "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh." He reread it and wondered what Paul meant. Could he mean he was willing to be damned to save those whom he loved? Shall I not be willing also to be damned for the sake of my son Robert? He decided to do it. He reasoned that God would not damn Paul for no reason, and so Paul must have meant he would commit a horrible sin for the sake of saving his people. He plotted to do just that for the sake of his son. He first of all hinted to his son that Susan's history is besmirched with shame. Then he left on his desk a fragment of an old letter referring to the downfall of another girl named Susan. He knows it is a terrible deliberate sin, but like Paul he is willing to lose his own soul for the sake of his loved one.

When his son saw the letter he ran away from home, and Michael overwhelmed by his sin tried to drown himself. When he awakens on the bank Susan is bending over him, and he realizes that she is good and has more grace than himself. He finds his son and dies making his humiliating confession. He meant well and thought he had a biblical basis for his folly, but he had misunderstood Paul completely. The Bible misunderstood is a curse, and much of the evil of history has been due to man's misunderstanding of what was meant to be a blessing. Romans 9 had led men to conclude all kinds of terrible things such as, God hates Jews; that man is not free but a mere puppet of God; and that God predestines some to hell so they don't have a chance. All of these conclusions arise from misunderstanding and a failure to look carefully at exactly what is being said. If we are not willing to be accurate in our interpretation of the Bible, we are better off not interpreting it at all. It is our goal in the study of this chapter to understand it and to gain the truth God intended us to gain and so we will study it verse by verse.

VERSE 1. This verse makes it clear that Paul is on the defensive. He has some difficult questions to deal with, and he knows his testimony is suspect. It is perfectly normal for a person who forsakes one religion for another to despise the one he has left. Both Christians and Jews would just naturally suspect that Paul would be anti-Semitic. He forsook Judaism and put Christ above Moses, and grace above law. The Jews charged him with being a hater of the Jews. Much of the evidence would seem to support their charge, but the misunderstood Paul. He denies this charge and begins this chapter with the strongest possible statement of his love for Jews. Paul is not anti-Semitic. On the contrary, he is anti anti-Semitic, for he is opposed to the misunderstanding and prejudice that exists between the Jews and the Gentiles. That is one of the

reasons for his writing of this chapter on the place of the Jews and Gentiles in God's plan.

Keep in mind that Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles, and keep in mind that Gentiles were very anti-Semitic in those days. Most pagans despise the Jews, and it was these very pagans that Paul was winning to Christ. These Gentiles, who are now Christians, did not immediately lose their prejudice against the Jews. It is still true today that people can become Christians and carry their prejudices right into their Christian thinking. As an example of how prejudice can pervert the thinking of the finest Christians let me share a quote from John Chrysostom. He was one of the greatest and most famous preachers in the history of Christianity. He was called the golden mouth orator, and he could lead you into the very presence of God with his eloquence, but listen to this blast of the Jews he made in 387 A. D. "God hates them, and indeed has always hated them. It was of set purpose that He concentrated all their worship in Jerusalem that He more readily destroy it. It is childish in the face of their absolute rejection to imagine that God will ever allow the Jews to rebuild their temple or return to Jerusalem. When it is clear that God hates them, it is the duty of Christians to hate them too."

Many before and after him have felt the same, and so you can see why Paul has to take a triple oath here that his love for the Jews is real and authentic. He says that it is in Christ that he speaks the truth, and that the Holy Spirit bears witness with his conscience. He makes it clear that he speaks from a committed Christian perspective, but that this in no way suggests anti-Semitic attitude. On the contrary, because he is Christ centered he loves them with a Christ like love, which knows no limit of sacrifice.

The key value of these first few verses is that they demolish all basis for Christian anti-Semitism, and they make it clear that Christians are to oppose anti-Semitism in love for the Jews. Christians are to be anti anti-Semitic. Paul did not love the Jews less because he came to love the Gentiles more. Christ never diminishes our love for anyone. If you love others to come to Christ, you will love those you left with a greater maturity knowing that Christ loves them and has made adequate provision for their salvation. Paul, therefore, makes it clear to all from the start that he loves all men, and that includes those who rejected Christ, because Christ still loves them and still has a plan for them. Today a person might express it, "I swear on a stack of Bible and cross my heart and point to God and hope to die if I lie." No person ought ever to doubt that anti-Semitism is contrary to the spirit of Christ.

VERSE 2. Paul here reveals the paradox of life in the emotional realm. He rejoices always in Christ, and he is filled with gratitude for his salvation. Never the less, he has great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart. This is not a contradiction, but it is an experience of life common to all of us if we give it some thought. You can be happy over some aspects of life while sad over others at the same time. If you look at the positive your emotions are positive, and if you look at the negatives your emotions are negative. Both are always present and you select which one you want to come to the surface and control your emotions. Your perspective determines your emotions.

At this point Paul is deliberately looking at the discouraging fact of Israel's rejection of Christ, and so he expresses the negative emotions that this arouses. You can do the same. Just begin to think deeply of a loved one who is unsaved and you can feel sad and even weep for them. This does not mean you are not joyful in the Lord, in fact your sorrow over a loved one makes

you all the more aware of the joy of salvation. Paul's joy and gratitude to God is not lessened because his heart is bursting with grief over the lost condition of his people. Paul's experience is perfectly consistent with what we know to be true of human emotions. Someone has suggested that the original manuscript probably had tear stains on it. With an awareness of the deep emotional state Paul is in we look at the next verse.

VERSE 3. Note carefully that Paul does not say, "I wish to be accursed," or, "I pray that I will be cursed." He simply says, "I could wish that I were if it would help save the Jews." Paul is speaking hypothetically here. He is expressing the depth of his concern with a strong emotional statement. This is not a cool and systematic formulation of a theological statement. He is not laying down a principle for conduct. He is simply expressing a deep love and conviction.

If a person watching the election returns would say, "I would give my right arm to see so and so win," you would not interpret this to mean that the man was persuaded that the sacrifice of his right arm could in some way determine the election. You would take it for what it is, which is a statement of deep concern and desire to help. Paul likewise did not think that his going to hell could save a single Jew. Paul knew that Jesus had paid all the sacrifice necessary for the salvation of the Jews and all others. It is foolish to read into this verse anything but the deep emotions of Paul in relation to his people the Jews.

Spurgeon said, "Such a text as this must be fired off red-hot, it spoils if it cools. It is a heart business, not a head business." To try and dissect it for theological implications about eternal security, for example, is to miss the point completely. This is like trying to analyze a man's emotion packed words as he expresses his love to his wife. He maybe thrilled with her beauty, and express it by saying to her, "You are so delicious I could eat you." It may be a silly thing to say, but not half as silly as the attempt to analyze his words and try to determine if he has cannibalistic tendencies, or hallucinations in which his wife appears to be a hot dish, or a real tomato. The context tells you that the words are an expression of emotion and deep love, and so it is with the words of Paul. Meyer in his poem Saint Paul put it-

Then with a thrill the intolerable craving,
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call;
O to save these, to perish for their saving-
Die for their life, be offered for them all.

Paul was only expressing the same emotion that his Lord expressed when He came to face the fact of Israel's rejection. Jesus looked at Jerusalem and burst into tears because He came unto His own and His own received Him not. He saw that the wrath of God would now have to fall upon them.

Alas for thee, Jerusalem! How cold thy heart to me!
How often in these arms of love would I have gathered thee.
My sheltering wing had been thy shield, my love thy happy lot.
I would it had been thus with thee! I would, but ye would not.

Jesus did what Paul says he could wish to do. Jesus was accursed. He bore the curse of the cross and was cut off from God and endured hell for the sake of Israel and all people. Paul would

be glad to follow Christ even to this extent if it would save the Jews, but of course, he knew it couldn't. Paul does not think he can make a sacrifice more worthy than that of Christ. Everything has been done, and yet the Jews will not respond. Fred Smith says that as Paul wrote he was, "A man whose heart was pumping blood through the point of his pen."

Failure to be filled with Spirit, which Paul had by imitating Christ, and being filled with the love of Christ, has led to a history of horrible anti-Semitism based on a perversion of Scripture. Christians have called Jews Christ-killers through the centuries. The result is that Jews have become scapegoats for the wrath of anyone who wants someone to blame for their troubles. When the Nazis initiated their measures against the Jews in 1933, Julius Streicher, their propagandist identified what was the curing as Jewish punishment for Golgatha. In other words, they justified anti-Semitism in the name of Christ. Many Christians were brain washed to the point of acceptance of this evil. Listen to Hermann Diem describe the situation:

"When

the sentiment, 'His blood be on us and our children,' through which the Jews had allegedly prearranged a future divine judgment upon themselves! -was presented in the form of a watch ward to the German people, Christian circles 'were thrown into such confusion that any effective resistance to the anti-Jewish measures was rendered impossible. For it was with precisely the same watch ward that the church over a period of 1900 years had not only rationalized and justified, but also advanced the hatred of Jews.....The seed which we ourselves had sown had sprung up, and we stood uncomprehending before its terrible fruits."

The Nazis were clever enough to base their anti-Semitism on the Bible, and thereby leave Christians in a state of confusion. Had Christians not misunderstood their Bible they would not have been such dupes. They were blind to the fact that anti-Semitism is a subtle form of hatred for Christ. That the Savior of the world was a Jew was a truth despised by the world. To lash out at the Jews, and to seek to destroy them is to reenact the crucifixion of the Savior. Sigmund Freud concluded from his study of the psychology of anti-Semitism that, "The hatred of Judaism is at bottom hatred for Christianity." Franz Rosenzweig wrote, "Whenever the pagan within the Christian soul rises in revolt against the yoke of the cross, he vents his fury on the Jew."

To be anti-Semitic is to be anti-Christ, and so those who would be truly Christ like must be anti anti-Semitic. Paul goes on in verse 4 to list all the blessings and advantages that God has given to the Jews. They are not a people to be despised. We are to recognize that they are the source of our great heritage as Christians. Whittier saw this and wrote,

Who taught you tender Bible tales
Of honey lands, of milk and wine?
Of happy, peaceful Palestine? Of Jordan's holy harvest vales?
Who gave the patient Christ? I say,
Who gave your Christian creed? Yea, Yea!
Who gave your very God to you?
Your Jew! Your Jew! You hated Jew.

There are many harsh truths Paul has to write concerning the Jews, and the Bible is filled with words of criticism for this stiff-necked, hard-hearted people. Never the less, none of this is to be

construed as a basis for anti-Semitism. If this strong emotional language of Paul conveys nothing else, it establishes forever the fact that the person truly filled with the love of Christ will love the Jews and be anti anti-Semitic.

18. JEWS AND CHRISTIANS Based on Rom. 9:4-5

David Lefkowitz in explaining why he is a Jew tells the story of Nathan the Wise. A Sultan had just heard a Christian and a Mohammedan give their testimony as to the excellencies of their respected beliefs. It was Nathan's turn to tell why he was a Jew. Instead, he asked the Sultan's permission to tell a story of three rings. It went like this: In a certain family there had been handed down from time immemorial a ring which tradition said possessed the power of bringing happiness and righteousness, honor, reverence and truth to the one who wore it. Each father in his dying hour handed it to the son he loved the best.

There came a time when a father had three sons which he loved equally. To whom should he give the ring? He called a goldsmith and had him make two others exactly like the true ring. In his dying hour he called each of his sons to his bedside separately and gave them each a ring. After the days of mourning had passed the sons noted they each had a ring, and they began to quarrel, each insisting that his was the genuine ring. They finally took the matter to a wise judge. He heard their story and asked, "Is it not true that your father told you that the genuine ring had the magic virtue of beautifying and ennobling the life of the one who possessed it?" They all agreed it was so. The judge said, "Then only time can tell who has the genuine ring."

This story is saying what Jesus said when He stated, "By their fruits you shall know them." The Jews believe that time is on their side, and that Judaism will eventually be recognized as the best and most fruitful religion. They say that all the values in Christianity and Islam are borrowed from Judaism. They believe these two religions are being used of their God among the Gentiles, but the Judaism is never the less the root and the final religion. The Jew is the son with the original and genuine ring.

As Christians we tend to think of Judaism as an incomplete Christianity. They, however, think of Christianity as a degraded Judaism. They feel that their purpose in God's plan is to maintain a pure monotheism. Christianity has departed from this they say, and it has gone back to the pagan concept of incarnation, which reduces God to man's level. It also introduces the concept of the trinity, which is contrary to their understanding of monotheism. The Jews say they can match any claim of the Christian to superiority. They have survived through great persecutions. They have a written revelation and a covenant with God. All of the humanistic values of Christianity are a part of Judaism. No one has a greater past or hope for a greater destiny. Lefkowitz ends his testimony:

"I am a Jew because God choose Israel to reveal Himself and His truth of righteousness. I am a Jew because I glory in the thought that it was the Jew who gave mankind

the Bible, the seers and psalmists and sages, the eternal

providence of a people martyred yet steadfast in the faith, patiently suffering and patiently blessing those who tortured them. I am a Jew because I am proud of Israel's past and sure of its destiny as the witness of God in the earth, in the ages yet to be."

What is a Christian to say to all this? Can we say that Judaism is a false religion? Not hardly-since it is based on that which we too call the Word of God. We have to admit that Judaism is not only a good religion, but is God ordained, and was at one time the best that could be. However, all the positive things we can say for it does not change the fact that since the coming of Christ it is an incomplete, inadequate and inferior religion in comparison with Christianity. The whole purpose of Christian work among the Jews is to lift them to a higher level through conversion by their acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah. The Jews find this very offensive. They are aggravated by the Christian claim to superiority. From their perspective evangelistic efforts are anti-Semitic.

Dr. Claude G. Montefiore declared, "Over and above all anti-Semitism there is nothing which militates against good and friendly relations between Jews and Christians as the efforts of conversionists... If these stopped everywhere tomorrow, these relations would very soon be improved. The missionaries and their efforts are a perpetual irritant, a constantly running sore." Here we see a great paradox. The New Testament says we are to love Jews and be anti anti-Semitic by seeking to bring the Gospel to them. The Jew, however, looks at these efforts of great love as being anti-Semitic. The paradoxical conclusion is that we are to be anti anti-Semitic in the eyes of God and everyone else except the Jews themselves. In their eyes we are to be anti-Semitic because we refuse to let them be lost without some effort to persuade them to receive Christ.

Christians must believe that the Jews need a Savior just as all other people do, and that a part from Christ they cannot be saved. On the other hand, we cannot escape the fact that they are unique, and that even in a lost condition they have a religion of high quality. Paul implies this by the listing of all the advantages they have, and the greatness of their heritage. They are Israelites, which is a name a Jew uses with the same pride we have when we say we are Americans. Israelite was the name they used for themselves while the Gentiles tend to call them Jews. They are called Hebrews in relation to their language; Jews in relation to their nationality, but Israelites in relation to their covenant relationship with God. They were the first to have such a relationship.

Paul says that to them pertain the adoption-that is, they were adopted as sons of God. God told Moses in Ex. 4:22-23 to say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, let my son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son." In Jer. 31:9 God says, "I am a Father to Israel." In Hosea 11:1 God says, "When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." The relation of son and father was a basic part of Old Testament faith, and this led to deep conviction of eternal security among the Jews. The Shemot Robbah says, "Even were all the nations of the earth to join together to put an end to God's love for Israel, they could not do so."

Paul says that they also had the glory-that is the presence of God in their midst made known by a visible luminous appearance in the cloud, on Sinai, and in the temple. Rabbis invented a word for this and called it the Shekinah, which comes from schakam, which means to dwell. The glory of God's dwelling with Israel was the Shekinah glory.

The other blessings are obvious, for you have the covenants with Abraham and David. The law was given to the Jews, and the fact that Paul lists this among their great blessings shows that he was not opposed to the law as such, but only as an adequate means of salvation. It was the Jews who had a God ordained form of worship. They had all the purposes of God, which included that of a Messiah. They are descendants of the great patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This may not seem to be such a great thing to us, but even Jesus made something of it when He said in Luke 13:16, "And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for 18 years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" Jesus considered it no small matter to be a daughter of Abraham, but considered it a heritage of great honor.

Finally, Paul says that of the Jewish race according to the flesh was Christ. The Savior of all men was a Jew, and this alone exalts the name of Jew to the highest degree. No other race can boast of a greater honor. In the flesh Jesus was a Jew, but in contrast Paul says that in the Spirit Jesus was God, who is over all blessed forever. Here is the only place where Paul directly calls Jesus God. He is the Jewish Messiah, but he is the God of all people. The Gentiles had no hope for a Messiah, so Jesus is not the Messiah of Gentiles. He is their God.

No one can look at all these blessings of the Jews and doubt their advantage. It is true that they can have all this and still be lost without Christ, but the fact remains, these values can never be taken from them. Paul says in 11:23-24, "And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." The Jew grows easier on the tree of God than the Gentile, for his heritage prepares him to grow so much faster and better in the knowledge of God. The non-Christian Jew has an advantage over the non-Christian Gentile, even though both are lost and both can only be saved in the same way by faith in Christ. One of the reasons we should be concerned about winning Jews is because, as a rule, they will make more mature servants of Christ. When God wanted a man to be an Apostle to the Gentiles He chose a Jew who was well grounded in the faith of the Old Testament. A good Jew like Saul of Tarsus made the best Christian.

Paul goes on to make it clear that the remnant of Israel alone has carried on with the full advantage of all these blessings. Christians have become children of Abraham, and the church has become the new people of God. Israel of the flesh, however, even though cut off still remained a branch intact. It has not withered and died, but has survived. This is a mystery that has puzzled Christians for centuries, and it still does today. What is God doing through the Jews today? They are divided into three camps. You have the Orthodox, the Conservative, and the Liberal. Their views differ as much as the difference says between a fundamentalist and a modernist. Many Jews in America have no interest in going back to Israel. There are many questions that the Jews are asking about themselves.

Jacob Jocz in "A Picture Of Contemporary Judaism" has this paragraph on the crisis that the establishment of the state of Israel has brought to Judaism: "On a memorial Sabbath in 1948, in the great synagogue of Tel Aviv, the ram's horn was sounded to mark the end of the Exile.no

Jew need live in Exile anymore. He needs no visa, only a ticket and a Jewish nose. What is the effect upon Judaism now that a religious hope has been realized?" He goes on to list 4 aspects of the crisis.

1. The new state is not a Torah-centered, but a nation centered state.
2. Two-thirds of the population is either anti-religious or indifferent.
3. Rebbinic Judaism is unable to adjust to the requirements of modern life.
4. A religious hope, which finds fulfillment in history is of necessity a disappointment.

And so he writes, "We thus face an unusual situation. In the land of the Bible, the historic people of the Bible, without a religious faith, in search of an answer to the question of destiny: What is the Jewish purpose in history?" It is in pursuit of the answer to this question that we are studying this part of the letter to the Romans. The conclusion we come to will determine much concerning our view of history and the whole question of the relationship of Jews and Christians.

19. GOD HAS NOT FAILED Based on Rom. 9:6f

A story told among Jews in Yeman, Afghanistan, Iraq and Russia concerns two beggars who use to wonder in the streets collecting alms. They use to pass the king's palace, and he always gave them charity. One of the beggars always praised the king for his goodness and generosity, while the other always thanked God for being generous to the king, which enabled him to help his subjects. This was painful to the king and he asked him, "Why do you thank someone else when it is I who am generous to you?" The beggar answered, "If God were not generous to you, you would not be able to be generous." The king decided to teach this beggar a lesson. He ordered his baker to bake two loaves of bread and to put precious stones in one of them as a gift from the king. He ordered that his loaf with the jewels be given to the beggar that praised him, and the ordinary loaf be given to the other beggar.

When this was done and the two beggars left the palace, the beggar who praised the king observed that his loaf seemed heavy and badly baked. He asked his friend if he would exchange loaves with him. His friend wanting to do a good turn agreed, and they switched loaves and went their separate ways. The beggar who praised God began to eat and found the treasure. He offered thanks to God that he would no longer have to go to the palace to beg. The king could not understand why he did not return and the other beggar did. He asked him, "What did you do with the loaf given to you the other day?" When the beggar told him of the switch he made the king realize that it was God alone who makes rich. The finest and cleverest plans of men will not realized if God wills otherwise.

God is sovereign and His purpose is accomplished regardless of the actions of men. The Jews have always believed this, and that is how they account for their existence as a people in spite of all the efforts of men to eliminate them from the stage of history. The folk tales of Judaism are filled with stories of the sovereignty of God on their behalf. No people has endured so many efforts to destroy them. Sholem Asch in his book *One Destiny* describes how the

Germans in 1942 set out to eliminate the Jews. They surrounded the Jewish Ghetto and cut off all escape routes, and then they began to round up all Jewish children and pack them into freight cars to be taken to execution centers. Infants were torn from their mother's arms. Many a mother had to be killed before her arms could be wrenched from the child. Others threw themselves and their children down from upper stories to die at their own hands. With bare fists they fought against guns and swords, and, of course, lost. Every child from a day to 16 years old was liquidated.

What they did with the adults then is too ghastly to describe. If ever there was a God-forsaken people, it was the Jews, and yet when the horror was over they not only survived, but in 1948, after many centuries of waiting, they even regained their homeland, and Israel was restored as a nation. Sholem Asch writes from a committed Jewish perspective: "Who will dare to assert that the fact that the Jews have survived every trial of their faith is a completely naturalistic phenomenon—that it was due entirely to their own will and strength of character? He who dares to say this is either spiritually a cripple who is entirely incapable of comprehending a transcendental occurrence, or a godless cynic whose heart is a nest for the lowest passions. Go down on your knees, man, from the miracle in front of your eyes, the miracle of the preservation of Israel. If ever there has occurred in human history and event that frightens us with its incomprehensiveness and unrealizability, an event which is shrouded in a veil of profound mysticism, it is this miracle of the survival of the Jewish people."

The Jews believed strongly in the sovereignty of God, and they know His purpose can never fail. This is precisely the theme that Paul is developing in this passage. He also believes that God's purpose for Israel can never fail, but he also knows that the rejection of Christ by the Jews makes it appear as if God's Word to them had failed. He has just listed all of the blessings of God that the Jews had, and yet he is in deep distress because they are lost without Christ. If they have failed to gain the ultimate benefit of their covenant with God, then the plan of God appears to have failed, and all of His efforts on their behalf seems to have been in vain. This is how it looks, but then Paul says in verse 6 that it is not so.

Do not interpret my sorrow over the lost condition of the Jews in general to mean that the Word of God has failed. This is not the case at all. Paul is a true Christian optimist whose belief in the sovereignty of God is not lost because he is in deep anguish. Paul is saying, "Yes, I lament the defection of the Jews. Yes, I am in anguish over their rejection, but God has not failed. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the Word of God endures forever." Paul is filled with perfect assurance even as he is also filled with sorrow. It is man's sin and failure that brings sorrow, but God's sovereignty still brings assurance. The question is, how does Paul reconcile these two things?

He makes it clear that before you can know if a plan is failing or being fulfilled you have to know exactly what the plan is. If you misunderstand the plan, you are bound to come to false conclusions, which is exactly what the problem was in the minds of the Jews, and also some Christians. If you understand God's promise to be that all the descendants of Abraham would be saved, and would receive the Messiah, and would be a part of the elect to reach the world, then indeed, the events of history would lead you to conclude that God's Word had failed. But Paul says we need to go back and look at the facts before we jump to such a conclusion.

Paul shows that the principle of selection runs all through the history of God's purpose in Israel. The purpose of election of the few is for the good of the many. The more specific the blessing, the more narrow the selection must be. We must grasp this principle to understand God's plan and purpose. If you were God planning to introduce your Son into human history to be the sacrificial Lamb for the sins of all men, would you not need to be selective? Of course you would. God cannot just let history develop haphazardly and expect it to fulfill His purpose. Selection is essential to God's plan. This means there can be only one line of descent chosen, and all others will be not chosen. Only one woman in all of history can be chosen to give birth to the Messiah, and all others will be not chosen. The election of the few for the many gets narrower and narrower until it comes right down to the election of Christ for all. Jesus Christ was the goal of God's plan of election. He is the Elect One who was chosen to die for the good of all. The process began with Abraham, who was the father of Israel.

Paul says that the thing you have to keep in mind is the principle of selection. This means that not all Israel is truly Israel. That means that not all Jews who are physically descended from Abraham are a part of the Israel of God, which is a select remnant within the larger Israel. In other words, there are two kinds of Israel—a physical and a spiritual Israel. You also have the church composed of all who call themselves Christians, and then the spiritual church composed of those who are truly Christian by faith in Jesus Christ. The true spiritual church is the same as the true spiritual Israel. They both refer to the one people of God, who are the elect, and through whom God seeks to bless the whole world.

We must keep in mind this distinction between the two kinds of Israel, says Paul, for when we are talking about the promises of God it is only the true Israel that has any claim on them, and so the success or failure of God's plan does not depend on what happens to all who are called Israel, but only on what happens to the select remnant.

In verse 7 Paul gives the first illustration of the principle of selection. The Jews felt that as descendants of Abraham they were automatically of the elect, but Paul says this is not so. It was only through the line of Isaac that the true Israel was to come. It is obvious that if there was to be one Messiah born to one virgin there would have to be a constant process of selection and elimination. The Messiah could not be born to Israel collectively. He had to be born to some one person. The selection process would start from the beginning because Abraham had two sons—Ishmael and Isaac. God chose Isaac to be the line through which he would fulfill the promise of a Messiah. By choosing the one he had to not choose the other. Even God cannot choose and make it as though He had not chosen. There is selection by necessity, which means that some are not chosen. If you have a capsule of a wonder drug that will save the life of a very ill person, and there are ten sick persons that are dying around you, you can either choose to give it to one, or keep it and let all perish. Which is the wisest choice? It is certainly the choosing of one, for then there are two healthy persons to care for the rest. This is what is involved in election.

In this context, however, we must keep in mind that Paul is talking about God's selection for the special privilege of being the people of God through whom the Messiah would come. He is not talking of selection to eternal life as if those not selected would be damned to eternal hell. By choosing the line of Isaac for the coming of the Messiah God did not cut Ishmael off from his love and blessing. By this choice He simply made it impossible for Ishmael's line to bring forth the

Messiah. When God chose the Virgin Mary to bear His Son He eliminated the possibility of any other woman in all of history to have this great honor. Mary was chosen, but not all other women are damned because they were not chosen.

The point we must make clear is that God's selection or election is not the same as salvation. Gentiles who were not descended from Abraham at all can be saved even under the Old Testament by becoming proselytes to the Jewish faith, and by faith in God in obedience to His will. Ishmael's descendants could be saved, and any one who was not chosen to be in the elect line of the Messiah could still be saved. People were not cut off from God's plan of salvation just because they were cut off from being the line to the Messiah. Reading the false conclusion that being in the line of Messiah was the same as being elected to salvation is what makes it appear that this passage is so harsh. Those who jump to the conclusion that God's selection of some means His damnation of others have come to a false and dangerous conclusion. To clear this up is to clear up one of the most difficult problems in this chapter.

Let's go back to Genesis and see what it says about Ishmael even though he could not be in the bloodline of the Messiah. In Gen. 17:20-21 God says to Abraham, "As for Ishmael, I have heard you, behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of 12 princes, and I will make him a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac..." Abraham loved Ishmael and was hurt that he was not to be his heir, but in Gen. 21:13 God comforts him and says, "And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." When he and his mother Hagar were sent away into the wilderness they ran out of water and they sat down and cried. Then we read this, "And God heard the voice of the lad, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, what troubles you Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him a great nation.... and God was with the lad, and he grew up...."

God's love, providence and promises are all clearly revealed toward Ishmael, and the point is that he was not the one who received the promise of being in the line of the Messiah. Paul's whole argument here is to show that God's promise of a Messiah was very selective, and that He had an obligation to fulfill His promise only to those selected. If it can be shown that the true Israel to whom God gave His promise did receive the promised Messiah, then you see God's plan did not fail even if many Jews did not receive Christ. Those who did not receive Him were merely physical Israel, and not the select group known as the true spiritual Israel.

In verse 8 Paul says it is the children of promise and not the children of the flesh that are the true Israel-the children of God. Now the Jews knew that the Arabs, who were descendants of Ishmael, were not God's elect people, and that the Edomites, who were descendants of Esau, were not God's elect, even though they were of the physical seed of Abraham and Jacob. They were not willing to go on with the process of selection, however. They said all Jews were of the elect and were true Israel. Mere physical descent they said was sufficient. John the Baptist blasted their pride first. In Matt. 3:9 he said, "Do not presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father, for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." In other words, mere physical descent means nothing to God. He wants spiritual children who have the same spirit and faith of Abraham.

Jesus makes it clear what He is looking for in John 8:39-40, "They answered him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them if you were Abraham's children you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; this is not what Abraham did." Jesus is saying that a true child of Abraham will respond in faith to the revelation and promises of God.

Paul puts this into a clear theological doctrine that says the true children of Abraham are those of faith. In Gal. 3:6-9 he writes, "Thus Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture foreseeing God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preach the Gospel before to Abraham, saying, in thee shall all the nations be blessed. So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith." Then he says in verse 29, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

The conclusion of Paul's reasoning here in Romans is this: God has not failed, nor has His Word been unfulfilled, for God's process of selection has narrowed down His elect to those of like faith with Abraham. All who had this faith among the Jews were the remnant, and they were the true Israel of God. They received Christ when He came, and so the promise was completely fulfilled to those who had a right to claim it. We have jumped ahead to Paul's conclusion and have not followed all of his illustrations of the process, but the point is clear: God is sovereign, and He chooses whom He will to fulfill His purpose, and regardless of how men fail Him, His plan and purpose go on, for He is faithful and will always have His remnant through whom He seeks to lift and save the world. The message of this chapter is not a gloomy one about a harsh unjust God, but it is a message about a God of love who sovereign freedom assures us that no matter what men do His purpose for their good shall prevail. God has not failed; God is not failing, and God shall never fail.

20. HOW TO KNOW GOD'S WILL Based on Rom. 12:1-2

There was a day when it was not considered out of order to challenge a preacher from the congregation, even in the middle of his sermon. In that day there was a preacher who spoke in favor of shoeing horses, and a mule skinner stood up and took issue by saying, "If God almighty had thought it right horses should have iron on their feet, he'd have put it there himself. I don't pretend to be a pious man, but I'm not a goner to run against the will of God almighty, though there's some that call themselves ministers that does."

Times have changed, to be sure, but man has not, and conflicts similar as this go on all the time over a multitude of matters. Every serious minded Christian is concerned about the will of God, and must stand for his convictions. The problem comes when equally serious minded Christians have opposite convictions, and both are justifying their convictions by saying they are following the will of God. What if John is convinced that it's the will of God that he marry Jane, but Jane doesn't get that message, but one just the opposite? Obviously we cannot equate the will

of God with man's convictions, even the most godly of men, for man's convictions are always most strong in those areas where men are in most disagreement. Every error that has ever been a threat to truth has been held with deep conviction. Therefore, deep conviction is no adequate measure of the will of God.

If you equate God's will with conviction, then God's will becomes utter chaos, and is used as a weapon to try and block opposition. After all, if you say God led you to your conviction, those who oppose it are oppose to God. This is the logic that leads to so many religious battles. If God's will is at the mercy of man's subjective taste and feelings, then it no wonder that it is such a major problem for Christians to be sure of God's will. Life seems to be so complex, and controversy seems to be so wide spread, that many lose confidence that God's will can be known with any certainty. We know we are in the world to serve Christ, and to strive toward the goal of being Christ-like, but the roads to that goal seem so complicated that we stand at crossroads every day trying to decide which is the best road to take to reach the goal.

We often feel like the man trying to direct some tourists to a certain hotel in downtown New York. After several futile attempts to point out the complicated route he gave up in frustration, and said, "If you're going there I wouldn't start from here, its to complicated." That sounds silly, for you have to start from where you are, but on the other hand, it may provide an answer by which we can make a complicated subject more simple. If we start from where we are, it will be difficult to get everyone on the same road, for we all have different problems, and we all stand at different crossroads, wondering which road will take us in God's will. We cannot begin to cover all of the many subjects that are on the minds of a whole congregation, but we can establish some basic principles that will fit every situation.

We could start with Paul, for he gives us these basic principles, but we want to go all the way back to the beginning in order to get a picture in our minds that can be of help. Back in the days of ultimate simplicity in the garden of Eden God said to Adam and Eve that they could eat of all the trees in the garden but one. God's will for them fell into a simple negative and positive. There were no complex decisions to be made as to what was right, and what was wrong. They were free to do anything but what was forbidden. Even then they stepped out of God's will, and so we see that simplicity and certainty are no guarantee of obedience.

Nevertheless, we can look back and think how marvelous if we could know God's will so clearly. We feel the complexity of modern life has made it almost impossible, but I am convinced this is not the case. Most of our problems are of our own making, and all the fretting and worrying that many Christians do is self-inflicted torment. I cannot believe God has made His will so obscure that His children must go through frustrating and agonizing efforts to discover it. I believe the same basic pattern that was in Eden still applies today.

God did not control Adam and Eve like puppets. He did not say, now eat a banana; now pick a flower; now go for a swim. He created man with a mind and a will, and a system of desires, and let him live freely without dictating every move. He only made it clear what he was not to do. God commanded him to keep the garden, and he was forbidden to eat of a certain tree, but everything else God permitted. So here we have a pattern that fits all time, and all of God's people. God's will falls into these three categories: The commanded, the permitted, and the forbidden.

Because of the fall and man's sin, there are now many more prohibitions, but God's will still falls into these three categories. The very fact that Christians are so often in turmoil over the will of God indicates they are operating under a misconception. I do not believe God expects us to have to worry about His will any more than I want my children to live in constant uncertainty as to what I expect of them. Parents who do so produce unstable children, and we dare not accuse God of this abuse. God's will, like mine for my children, falls into the simple categories of the negative, positive, and the neutral. The first two are to be made clear, and they are free in the third area.

On the level of action, the Scriptural admonition, "Cease to do evil; learn to do well," is a good example of what I mean. Ninety % of God's will is already revealed. No one can read the Bible and not see what God expects, and what He forbids. It is clear and simple. We don't understand it all, of course, but our responsibility is to follow what we do. As your children grow up you teach them what you expect of them, and you teach them what is forbidden for them to do. You don't teach them what you expect and forbid for all of life, but only for what they can understand right now. It would be foolish for me to forbid a young child to stay out until 2:00A.M., or to drive too fast. These things will come in due time, but they are irrelevant right now. God likewise does not reveal His whole will to us right now, but only that which applies to us at the moment. That is why we must continue to read the Bible as long as we live. It has new revelation for every stage of life. Don't worry about all you don't understand, just take what you do and obey it, and greater understanding will come when you need to know. The point is, we are just like Adam and Eve, for we have what is clearly commanded; what is clearly forbidden, and we are free in all the rest.

Vance Havner, the great evangelist and author wrote, "I once thought that every invitation I received as a speaker was the leading of the Lord. But I discovered that I was sometimes invited to speak at two different places at the same time, and I knew the Lord knew I was singular not plural. From that I went on to learn that I had been given some common sense and was expected to use it under the Spirit's direction." We are responsible to choose what God has commanded, avoid what He has forbidden, and then make the wisest judgements we can in all other areas, striving always to choose what we feel would please God.

I may command one of my children to take the garbage out, and forbid them to go across a certain busy street, but after that they may choose to come in and watch TV or play outside. They may choose to ride a bike, or go swimming, or anything else that does not conflict with known rules of the family. None of their choices can be out of my will, and God allows us the same freedom. Many have the idea concerning God's will that it is something that He wants us to do, but which is against our nature and interests, and so it takes real sacrifice to do His will, because you give up what makes you happy to do something you don't like. Why we have this distorted concept of God and His will I do not know, but the Bible indicates everywhere that to be in the will of God is to be in a state of joy. Paul here in Rom. 12:2 calls the will of God that which is good, acceptable, and perfect. Psalms 37:4 says, "Delight thyself also in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

Like a wise father, God wants the best for His children. He wants them to have fulfillment of their desires. Jesus said that He came that we might have abundant life. We need to rid ourselves of the nonsense that God's will leads to misery, and that it in any way thwarts our highest

ambitions. We need to see ourselves as children with a Father who has a negative and positive will which is clearly revealed, and an area of freedom where He wants us to fulfill our desires. God is not like the army, where they take a mechanic and make him a cook. A.W. Tozer put it this way, "Never seek the leading of the Lord concerning an act that is forbidden in the Word of God. Never seek the leading of the Lord concerning an act that is commanded in the Word of God." These two simple rules determine the vast majority of the major decisions of life.

But immediately the problem is raised concerning the 1001 things of which the Bible does not speak, either for or against. This is the area where people torment themselves, and fall out of God's will in their very anxiety over what God's will is. Our problem is that we fear freedom. We fear to take the responsibility which God has given us to choose the best in the great area of freedom. Christ has set us free from the bondage of sin, and given us new desires, and opens up a whole new world of possibilities. But instead of launching out in this great ocean of opportunity, we hug the shore, and remain close to the scene of bondage. We are often like the little girl who was asked how she fell out of bed, and she answered, "I guess I stayed too close to where I got in at." Many Christians stay too close to that line that separates the kingdom of God from the world because they are afraid of the liberty which they have in Christ. This kind of Christian often gets so bogged down in the pit of indecision on the commonplace matters of life that they miss the joy of doing what really counts for time and eternity. God's will for them is to recognize the thrill of living for Christ and exercising their freedom.

A.W. Tozer wrote, "Some Christians walk under a cloud of uncertainty, worrying about which profession they should enter, which car they should drive, which school they should attend, where they should live, and other such matters when their Lord has set them free to follow their own personal bent, guided only by their love for Him and their fellow men." He is simply saying that God deals with us just as He did with Adam and Eve. In those areas of life not controlled by what is commanded or forbidden, we are free to exercise our own intelligent choice. I am neither commanded nor forbidden as to where I buy my gas, my shoes, or my groceries, therefore, I choose where to do so on the basis of my own taste, income, and convenience. God expects me to be wise, but He does not make these decisions for me. This is true for the books I read, the sermons I preach, and hundreds of things in life where God has given me the freedom to choose.

For the vast majority of decisions in this area of freedom we need only to pray for God to give us wisdom, and then go ahead and do the best we know. Even if it turns out not to have been the best decision, you are not out of God's will, for it is His will that you be free to decide, even if it is not always the best. If I give my child a dollar to go and buy candy, I don't tell her what to get. When she comes back and I think she made some foolish choices, she is not out of my will, for I willed her to be free to make those choices. If I had commanded her to buy a certain thing, or forbidden her to buy a certain thing then she would not be conforming to my will, but if I leave her free, she can do what is foolish and still not be out of my will.

If we can just see this, it will challenge us to make a better use of our freedom in Christ, and also prevent us from blaming God for some poor decisions. And unwise action is often justified by the person saying the Lord led me; when in reality the Lord only let you exercise your own freedom, and you possibly did a poor job of it. The Lord led, and the Lord let are two different things, and we need to beware of leaving God holding the bag of our own poor choices, just because He permits our freedom. When you come right down to it there is a great area of

freedom in life where the Christian cannot know God's will simply because God has no will to know. He has given us a mind and a will, and He expects us to use it in a way pleasing to Him. It is our responsibility, and we cannot throw it off on God.

The searching for the will of God in areas of freedom is often an attempt to dodge our own responsibility by our uncertainty as to God's will. Until we see this third aspect of God's will in its full significance, we are missing a necessary factor in the mature Christian life. God has a positive will which is commanded; a negative will which is forbidden; and thirdly, a will that we take the responsibility to choose wisely. As Tozer said, some people think it is more spiritual to seek God's leading rather than just go ahead and do the obvious wise thing, but it is not. We do not honor God by asking Him to guide us to know the time of day if we have a watch to look at. There are many decisions that are up to us, and we are to make them in the light of the revealed will of God in which He has told us what He forbids and what He commands.

21. THE CHRISTIAN MIND Based on Rom. 12:2

The first fly said to the second fly, "Human beings are funny aren't they?" "Why do you say that," responded the second fly?" "Well," said the first, "they spend a pile of money building a beautiful ceiling, and then always walk on the floor." From a fly's eye point of view you have to admit we make very little use of ceiling space. Flies and people look at things from a totally different perspective. This is true of different people as well. We do not see any aspect of life from the same perspective as others do.

Take a football game for example. Physically the man in the blimp over the stadium; the man on the sideline, the man up in the stands, and the man watching from television all see the game from a different perspective. Emotionally men see the game differently depending upon which team they are for, and which one is winning. Psychologically there are many perspectives among the spectators. The father with a son in the game sees it differently than the brother who is forced to watch the game and miss a date just because his brother is in it. The man with a bet on the game sees it differently than the man who had never been to a game and is trying to figure out what it is all about. Some are saying I am so glad I am up here in the stands, and others are saying I wish I could get into the game. This gives us an idea of how the same event can be seen from many different view points.

This should enable us to see that there is more than one perspective that can be legitimate and logical, normal and right. You would not expect everyone in a game to feel the same about a touchdown. You would understand perfectly when rooters for the other side did not join you in rejoicing over the touchdown of your team. The very essence of common sense is to recognize that there is more than one perspective. None are so blind as those who cannot see that there are others who see what they do not. If you expect everyone to see life the same as you do, you will have more mysteries on your hands than you can handle. You will be as mystified as the fly who can understand why people waste their ceiling space.

Durand, the Frenchman, was visiting London and he noticed names like Waterloo station, and Trafalgar square. That is odd he thought and he said to his wife, "The English seem to have a mania for naming places after defeats." What he was failing to realize was that though Waterloo and Trafalgar were great defeats for the French, they were great victories for the English. His being blind to any but his own perspective made him wonder at a mystery that makes perfect sense to those with a broader perspective. He thought the English were being strange, when the fact is, he was being strange.

When we do not recognize other perspective, we become totally self-centered, and limited in our grasp of reality. It is like saying that because I do not like onions, it means they are no good for anybody. This is what happens to those with a narrow perspective. It happened to Mark Twain when he visited the studio of Whistler. He started to touch a certain painting when Whistler cried out, "Oh don't touch that. It isn't dry yet." "I don't mind," said Twain, "I have my gloves on." They were on two different channels, and Mark Twain missed Whistler's point altogether, for he saw only the effect of touching the paint on his finger, while Whistler was concerned with the effect on his painting. It is very rude not to see the perspective of another person.

The point of all this in relation to Paul's practical teaching to the Romans is that Paul is making it clear that if Christians want to know God's perfect will they have to add a new perspective to their view of life. We must be aware of other perspectives which are representative of the world mind, and make sure our minds do not run in the same channel. Your body dedicated is essential, but not enough if your mind is still conformed to the world perspective. It will not be able to see God's good and acceptable and perfect will because it is under the control of patterns established by the world.

In other words, it is possible to be a Christian, and still not see everything from a Christian perspective because of a mind enslaved to other perspectives. Paul is saying that just as our bodies must be yielded to God by an act of the will, so our minds must be renewed, and our thinking must be transformed, if we are to be fully in God's will. This is a process and not a once for all act. It must be going on continuously if we are to be walking in the light, and always seeing from God's perspective. The distinctively Christian mind can only be developed by the two fold process that Paul writes of here. There is the negative process of being non-conformed to the world, and the positive process of being transformed by the renewing of our mind. Let's look at each of them.

I. BE NOT CONFORMED.

Remember, Paul is writing to people already Christian, and he is telling them they have to stop conforming and be transformed in their minds. This means that the work of becoming a Christian with a mind fully conformed to God's will is a process. It is not something that happens at the new birth. Babies are not full grown, and new born Christians are not what they are to become. This is what growth and maturity is all about. It is a process that goes on through life.

A traveler in London was describing his sight of a Quaker swimming in the Thames River. When a friend asked him how he knew the man was a Quaker he replied, "Because he was swimming against the stream." This ought to be a description of every mature Christian. He

should be one who is not being molded and directed by the flow of the world's thinking. The Christian who only echoes the thinking of the world is like David trying to wear Saul's armor. It is nothing but a burden that will make him bungle everything. David had to forsake that armor, and put on the whole armor of God. He had to be unconventional by using stones and a sling. Saul is representative of the world and its wisdom. David represents the believer who swims against the stream, and who launches out in a new direction leaning on God alone for victory.

The perfect will of God can never be identified with the thinking of the world. It is not that the thinking of unsaved people is always wrong. It is just that it is inadequate. It falls short of what is Christian because it leaves God and His will out of the process and conclusion. A Christian may arrive at the same conclusion, but if he is being distinctively the Christian, his reasons for arriving there will be different. Paul says the mind must be renewed, and a Christians thinking must be transformed if he is to know the perfect will of God. It follows then that a mind not renewed, but conformed to the world, can never see from a uniquely Christian perspective. Christian thinking can never be identical with even the best of non-Christian wisdom.

The world mind specializes in half truths. A half truth is the most effective kind of lie. A terrorist in Alabama saw a large sign on a gas station which said, "Mississippi state line two miles ahead-last chance for 98 cent gas." He pulled in and filled his tank. "By the way," he said as the attendant handed him his change, "How much is gas in Mississippi?" He answered honestly, "It is 95 cents a gallon." The sign did not say last chance for cheaper gas, for that would be an out right lie. It served the same purpose, however by giving that false impression. This is a common practice in advertising, and in politics. The Christian is to go against this stream, even though he will be called a square for doing so.

In the book by Bergen and Evans, *A Dictionary Of Contemporary American Usage* we find this definition of a square. "Square in American slang has generally meant fair, upright, honest, open, just, and so on. The term seems to have originated from the carpenter's square-something that drew a hard and fast line, and made you go straight, had nothing crooked about it." The word got twisted, however, first of all by convicts who used it as a description of an inmate who would not conform to the convict code. It became popularized then to designate a goof who refused to be a complete conformist. If, when you are in Rome you do not do as the Romans do, you are a square.

This is what the Christian is to be, a non-conformist. He is to be one who does not fall into any ready made philosophy of the world. He does not echo the wisdom of self-centered minds, and so he does not even conform to the non-conformist. The Christian mind is to be in a category by itself. It is far easier to separate from the world in practices than it is in thought. We can abstain from worldly deeds, and still think like a worldly person thinks. We are bombarded constantly with logic and reasoning from a purely secular perspective, and it is easy for us to fall right into the rut of the worldly mind. We often struggle to choose between two secular views, and not even consider that there may be a third view that is truly Christian. We need to be constantly asking ourselves how our thinking on any issue is uniquely Christian. We need to ask, can a good pagan without Christ, and without revelation think the same as I do? If so, what does Christianity have to say on the issue that is of any unique value?

The Christian is to be different, not just for the sake of being different, but in order to cast light

on every subject from a biblical perspective. It is not enough for a Christian to be right. He must be right for the right reasons, or he makes no Christian contribution to the issue. His witness is only a witness to a position, and not a witness to the person of Christ and His Word, and so it is not truly a Christian witness. The early Christians out lived, out thought, and out died the best minds of their day, and they turned the world upside down. If the church is not doing this today it is because it has become conformed to the world. We cannot know or do the perfect will of God until our minds are fully Christian minds, and our voices speak from a distinctively Christian perspective that no other voice can proclaim. This means that all of our thinking must be Christ-centered. Paul said, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Any thinking that is not consistent with the life and teaching of Jesus cannot be Christian. This brings us to our second point.

II. BE TRANSFORMED.

The negative is essential, but it is only preparation. To escape the prison of worldly thinking only prepares you to take the positive step of being renewed in mind, and, thereby, be transformed, and able to see with the mind of Christ. The negative is like cleaning the dirt out of the carburetor. The positive is like adding gas. When the Christian is truly renewed in mind, he no longer makes himself and his own interests the center of the universe. He does not see all things only from the perspective of his own ego, but he sees from a total perspective that takes into consideration others, and especially others in relation to Christ.

A little boy on an escalator noticed his ice cream cone was dripping, and so he wiped it off on the back of a woman's fur coat ahead of him. "For goodness sake Jimmy stop that," said the mother, "you'll get fun all over your ice cream." This illustrates the self-centered perspective. When the Christian acts like this, they are worldly, and incapable of knowing God's perfect will. Only the renewed and transformed mind can know that perfect will.

Christian influence lifts even the pagan mind to new and higher levels, and so the Christian must be constantly advancing higher lest he be on a pagan level. On the Figi Islands, for example, in 1844 you could buy a human being for seven dollars. You could work him, beat him, starve him, or eat him, and the usually ate them. Missionaries came and chapels were built all over the island. Men were no longer for sale. Christians lifted the pagan mind to a higher level so that they had a greater concept of the dignity of man. But their thinking was still not Christian. One's thinking can only be Christian when he sees every man as one for whom Christ died. It is not enough just to quit eating men to be Christian. One must see that even his enemy is of infinite worth, and by God's grace can become a brother in Christ.

Paul was the great intellectual giant among the Apostles. God used Paul to communicate the New Testament doctrines to the churches. Paul had great mental gifts, and that is why he makes so much of the mind. In his list of gifts in I Cor. 12 the first two are the gifts of wisdom and knowledge. There are those Christians who are uniquely gifted in their ability to grasp the mind of God, and acquire deep insight into divine truth. But Paul makes it clear in this text that every believer is to have a renewed mind, and a unique Christian perspective in their thinking.

Dr. John R. W. Stott in a lecture series at Gordon College spoke on the subject, "Your Mind Matters." He said 4 major doctrines support the need for Christians to be thinkers. The doctrine

of Creation teaches that we are made in God's image, and so we are rational beings. The doctrine of Revelation implies our ability to grasp God's thoughts. The doctrine of Redemption involves the renewal of the mind. And finally the doctrine of Judgment states that knowledge is one factor by which God will judge us. We must use our heads if we expect to please God, for we are to love Him with all our mind. Those who do not develop the transformed mind will miss out on much of the perfect will of God, and they will suffer loss of reward, as well as loss of victory in the Christian life. The mind matters in the Christian life. Christ is the Truth, and in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Some Christians are gifted, but all Christians are to have a renewed mind that makes them wise in the ways of God. Paul prayed for all the Colossians that they, "Might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." (Col. 1:9). If we are not using our minds in this way we will not be able to heed Peter's advice in I Pet. 3:15, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason for the hope that is in you." You need to be able to defend your faith in an intellectual battle. Jesus had to be constantly alert mentally, for he was under perpetual attack. He had to outwit and out think his enemies and confound them with his superior wisdom.

A major aspect of Paul's evangelistic outreach was through argument and debate. For 2 years he daily argued in the hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus. He disputed in Athens in the synagogue and on Mars Hill. He appealed to the minds of men proving from Scripture that Jesus was the Christ. Paul had a mind dedicated to be ever growing in knowledge of Christ and passing that on to others. That is why God used him to write a major part of the New Testament. We cannot all be like Paul, but we can use our minds to understand Paul, and by doing so we too will have the mind of Christ. Bible study is the key to getting our minds renewed.

That which most uniquely characterized the Christian from the non-Christian is the mind, or the way they think. There is no way the Christian can claim to have a healthier body, stronger muscles, or better looks than those of the world. Their superiority is in the Christian mind that is transformed to be like the mind of Christ. When we do not think like a Christian because we do not know the mind of Christ, because we do not study His Word, we are a poor witness. Many times the Christian spouts foolish nonsense because he is ignorant of what God has said on an issue. He has no better insight than does the pagan and worldly mind. Someone said, "He that thinketh by the inch but talketh by the yard deserveth to be kicked by the foot." Christians will be judged by their words and lack of thought before they speak.

We must give heed to Paul, for he tried to make this truth clear to all the Christians he wrote to. In Eph. 4:17-18 he wrote, "...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them.." He goes on to tell them to put off the old nature and in v.23 says, "and be renewed in the spirit of your minds." You cannot escape the reality that your mind is a key factor in your Christian life. We need to be students all of our lives, and be ever growing in the knowledge of God. We are to love God with all of our mind, and this means we must be ever working to be non-conformed to the world, and be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

22. HOW HIGH CAN WE GO? Based on Rom. 12:3

An officer of the American Flying Corps told of his experience during World War II. He went out over the ocean alone, and he saw a storm coming rapidly toward him. It was blacker than midnight. He looked down to see if he could go beneath it, but the ocean was already boiling with fury. His only alternative was to climb. He turned his frail craft upward and began to mount. He reached 2000 feet, then 2500, then 3000, then 3500, and then the storm struck him. It was like a hurricane, cyclone, and typhoon all in one. It was so black he couldn't see, and the hail struck like bullets.

He kept climbing to 6500 feet, and suddenly he broke through into the glory of sunlight like he never saw it before. The splendor was so dazzling that he felt he was in another world. He began to quote Scripture and to praise God. His way out was up, and this is the way to deal with all the storms of life—look up and climb. Set your affections on things above, says Paul. His own testimony in Phil 3:14 was, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." I'm pressing on the upward way to higher ground is to be the theme song of every Christian. The Christian is to constantly hear the call expressed in the poem of James G. Clark.

I saw I the mountains stand
Silent, wonderful and grand,
Looking out across the land.
When the golden light was falling
On distant dome and spire,
And I heard a low voice calling
Come up higher, come up higher,
From the low lands and the mire,
From the mist of earth desire,
From the vain pursuit of self,
From attitude of self,
Come up higher, come up higher.

Every aspiration, however, calls for a balancing attitude to prevent a virtue from developing into a vice. Paul is well aware that you can never climb too high, and you can never set your sights too high. The sky is the limit. We aim no lower than perfection and Christlikeness. But Paul also knows that the higher you go the greater is the danger of pride. Pride can bring you toppling from the heights of heaven to the depths of hell. Pride goes before a fall, and the history of Satan and men illustrates this truth abundantly.

Paul, therefore, right after urging Christians to total surrender of their bodies and minds to Christ, which will lead them to the heights of knowing God's perfect will, gives a word of warning. Those who climb high and have their minds transformed so that their thoughts rise above those of the world are in danger of thinking of themselves more highly than they ought. Paul is a master of the balanced life, and that is why we see both the negatives and the positives so often in his writings. Be not conformed, but be transformed he says in verse 2, and now in verse 3 he gives us another negative and positive to keep us steady as we climb. Let's look first at the negative advice.

I. NEGATIVE.

Paul is very serious about this matter, and so stresses the fact that he speaks with authority as one to whom God has shown special grace. He also stresses that it applies to every man that is among them. The danger of pride is not just for a few. It is for all. No Christian can avoid this danger. Those in higher places are more conspicuous in their danger, but Paul urges this truth on every believer not to think of himself more highly than he ought. We can never climb too high in Christlikeness, nor can we ever think too highly of Christ, but we can think too highly of ourselves. Paul says do not do it, for this is a kind of conformity to the world that can hurt you and your testimony seriously.

A contemporary example of this is the experience of J. B. Phillips who became famous for the Phillips Translation of the New Testament, plus a number of other books. As a parish priest in London he began to translate the Bible for youth who would no longer read the KJV. This was in 1941. C. S. Lewis saw part of his translation and was impressed. He wrote to him saying, "It is like seeing an old picture which has been cleaned." He urged him to do more of the New Testament. He did, and the response was amazing. He became world famous, and was asked to preach and lecture everywhere. His life was suddenly one of travel and honor. His books were sold all over the world. He wrote, "And all the while something was going on which I did not see until it was too late. Satan was mounting his most devastating attack on me. He was building an image of J. B. Phillips that was not Jack Phillips at all. I was no longer an ordinary human being; I was in danger of becoming the super-Christian!"

He began to think of himself more highly than he ought, and the result was that he fell. He lost his gift of writing, and he entered the experience of the dark night of the soul in which there is a deep sense of the absence of God. Fortunately he was able to come to an honest view of himself, and God began to use him again.

Pride is an ever present danger, and C. S. Lewis points out that it is based on a comparison of ourselves with others. If we would compare ourselves with Christ and His best followers, we would be humbled, but we tend to delight to comparing ourselves with those who are inferior. Pride does not take pleasure in having something, but only in having more of it than others. People are not proud of being rich, but of being richer than others. They are proud, not of being clever or good looking, but of being more clever or better looking than others. If all others became equal to them, there would be nothing to be proud about.

That is why Paul goes on to stress that we are all members of the body of Christ, and that we all have our function and differing gifts by the grace of God. In other words, there is no basis for pride in being superior to others anymore than the eye has a basis for being proud because it can see better than all other organs of the body. That is the function and gift God gave it, and any gift we have is given by God, and we are not to be proud, but to thank God and use it. Avoid every allowing yourself to think of yourself as the origin of any good gift or quality. These are gifts of grace for which to be grateful, and not proud. Now let's look at the positive, and see just how we are to think, and how high we can go in self-esteem.

II. POSITIVE.

Paul says we are to think with sober judgment, or in absolute honesty. To be honest with the facts is to be humble. Sober thinking is just having sound and sane evaluation of yourself. It means you do not exaggerate nor depreciate yourself, for both of these are not being honest. Many Christians misunderstand humility, and think it is self-depreciation. This is not so, for it is basically just plain honesty. It is being an Apostle Paul with the highest authority a man can have from God, plus the highest revelation, and yet confessing that he sees through a glass darkly, and that he has not yet arrived. It takes a big man to write like that. A small and proud man feels he has to present an image of absolute perfection, but it doesn't work, for everyone can see his flaws. The man with a sober and honest view of himself can face the facts of both his gifts and his limitations.

Listen to Charles Spurgeon, that prince of preachers and one of the greatest Bible expounders of all time. It takes profound humility for a man of caliber to write like this. "I confess that sometimes I come across a text that does not at the first blush agree with other teachings of Scripture which I have received, and this startles me for the moment. But one thing is settled in my heart, namely, that I will follow the Scripture wherever it leads me, and that I will renounce the most cherished opinion rather than shape a text or alter a syllable of the inspired Book. It is not mine to make God's Word consistent, but to believe that it is so. When a text stands in the middle of the road I drive no further. The Romans had a god they called Terminus, who was the god of landmarks. Holy Scripture is my sacred landmark, and I hear a voice which threatens me with a curse if I remove it. Sometimes I say to myself, 'I did not think to find this truth to be just so, but as it is so, I must bow. It is rather awkward for my theory, but I must alter my system, for the Scripture cannot be broken.' Let God be true, but every man a liar."

A man with such an attitude as that cannot help but be used of God, for he is flexible and every open to the leading of the Spirit. Spurgeon was sober and honest in his judgment. He knew he was a great Bible scholar and preacher, but he also knew he was only one member of the total body of Christ, and that other members of the body had other gifts which could open up God's Word and give new light to him. Sober judgment of self is based on one's keeping ever in mind that he is only one member of a vast body, and that no one member can fulfill the function of all the members. All Christians can gain something from every other Christian, and that is why broad Christian fellowship is so essential to a healthy church and Christian life.

Note that Paul says our sober judgment is to be according to the measure of faith which God has given us. Paul is clearly teaching us that not all Christians have been given equal faith, or equal function in the body. Some Christians must have superior gifts to others, just as some organs of the body must be more vital than others. If we are leaders, or if we have a gift that is very helpful to the body, we can legitimately recognize this, and think of ourselves on that level. In other words, we can go just as high in our thoughts of self-esteem as the facts will allow, but always in gratitude rather than pride.

If God has given me the gift of teaching so that I can hold interest and impart truth to others, I am not to deny that I am able to do so, but to recognize that I can, and then do it well to the best of my ability. If you have the faith to launch out for Christ in any area, you should think yourself capable to do it. Aspire to climb to the full height of your God given ability. Do not go higher, however, for that is to think of yourself higher than you ought, and that is not a sober and honest judgment of the facts. Do not think yourself capable of doing what it is not your gift to do.

Accept your limitations, and do what you can. Do not be an eye complaining because it cannot hear or smell, or an ear complaining that it cannot see. Each is to do what they are made to do.

Paul knew he was uniquely chosen of God, and he could say, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." Paul had authority direct from God, and could say that he was not one bit less than the greatest of the Apostles. But Paul also said, "I am the least of the Apostles and not worthy to be called an Apostle." This paradox gives us an insight into how we are to think of ourselves as Christians. When Paul said he was the least and unworthy, he was looking at himself alone, but when he exalted his authority and example, he spoke as one looking at himself according to the measure of his faith, or in other words, according to what he was by God's grace.

An honest look at ourselves will lead to humility. An honest look at what we are in Christ will lead to a sanctified self-esteem in which we praise God for what we are in Him. We are children of God, and our life is hid with Christ and God. We are a chosen race, and a nation of kings and priests, and every Christian should have a high sense of self-esteem, but without the pride of thinking he is what he is by his own merit. How high can we go? As high as the facts and our faith will allow, and this enables the Christian to have a high sense of self-esteem as well as a sense of humility, for all that he is, is by the grace of Christ.

The approach of Paul seems to be just the opposite of what is popular in our day. It is the day of self-assertiveness and possibility thinking. Self-exaltation is in, and the book stores are full of books to build your self-image by telling you that you are more than you are. Your problem is that you think of yourself more lowly than you ought. If you could think of yourself even 10% more highly than you do now, you could double your potential. All of us have a great reservoir of potential we haven't even tapped. Is this all a bunch of bunk to get you to buy books? Not at all. This philosophy of life is packed with truth, and every Christian will be more of a Christian if he heeded it.

These authors are striving for the same goal as that of Paul. The rest of this chapter deals with all the marvelous effects that the ideal Christian life can produce. This is a history changing chapter packed with the power of Christlike living. This is the same as the goals set by contemporary authors. The only difference is Paul has brakes on his van to victory. Many get so enthused about our potential for growth that they forget entirely about our potential for evil and pride. They leave out a crucial element for success. Their van looks as neat and sleek as Paul's, and their van will move down the road just as fast, and climb hills equally steep, but Paul has a piece of equipment that spells the difference between success and failure, and that is brakes.

In other words, Paul's success formula includes pencils with erasers. He has a back up plan that takes into consideration that sin and failure are still a real part of the Christian journey. Paul knows the trip to heaven is not like an elevator ride with a continuous upward movement. It is more like a roller coaster with ups and downs, twists and turns, and so he adds to all his positive counsel this negative caution, "Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought." The self-exaltation books tend to forget the reality of negative side, and this leads self-confidence to become pride. The Christian with a renewed mind will always be humble, for he knows that without Christ he can do nothing.

Modern studies reveal that your self-image is not a mere reflection of who you are, but it is the

determiner of who you are. You are what you think you are. The mind then is the key to your life. How you think about yourself will determine the life you live. This is not small matter then, but the very foundation of life. Daniel Steere describes it like this: Your mind is like a computer, it stores up all kinds of facts, experiences, feelings and emotions, but it also plays back what it is programmed to play back. Your self-image is that program. If you tell your mind your average or below average you lock your mind into that program, and that is what you get. Your mind has great capacity like a computer, but if you program it to work third grade math, that is what you'll get, and its vast capacity will be unused.

If you think you fail at everything, and that you do not relate to others well, especially the opposite sex, you have programmed yourself to behave on that level. You are what you think you are. This is no mere theory. I see it in the lives of others, and in my own life. Myself image is either my greatest friend, or my greatest foe. The whole idea of Paul is that by the renewing of the mind we can be re-programmed so as to be more than we have been. With the mind of Christ seeing all of our potential as a child of God, we can get out of the program of our past, and out of the program produced by our environment that locked us into the level of mediocre and inadequate. Paul assumes that every Christian can go on to become an ideal member of the body of Christ functioning on the level of excellence. In other words, the computer has the capacity for excellence, and so all that is needed is the proper programming.

Henry L. Mencken, the noted author, once received a letter from a woman in a state prison. She was on death row awaiting execution. She wrote to say that she read his book, *In Defense Of Women*. Then she added this sad sentence: "If I had only known how smart I was, I would not be here now." She programmed herself to be nothing, and that is what she got. This is the tragedy of a lost world of people. They are made in the image of God, but they are fallen and programmed for folly rather than faith; for sin rather than salvation; for crime rather than Christ. The Gospel is the good news that they can be reprogrammed and become what God wants them to be. How high can we go? We can all go as high as God says we can if we program our minds based on the value that He places on us.

23. DOING YOUR OWN THING Based on Rom. 12:3-8

Doctor A. J. Cronin, the famous physician and author, had a very critical professor when he was in medical school. He told Cronin that he might make a general practitioner, but he was hopeless as a surgeon, and Cronin believed him. Completing his medical training, he went to a remote village in the Scottish Highlands to practice. One winter day a tree fell on the son of the local pastor. It crushed his spine and left him paralyzed. Cronin knew a delicate neurological operation was necessary to prevent permanent paralysis, but he also remembered his professor's evaluation of his skills. He was afraid to take the risk and refused to operate. But the constant begging and pleading of the pastor finally got through to him, and for the first time he began to question the validity of his professor's verdict.

"Who was he to tell me what I can or cannot do?" His self-image was released from the bondage to another's opinion, and with his newfound freedom he went on to successfully operate.

Here was a man who had been thinking of himself lower than he ought to have, and this hindered him from being what he was capable of being. This is just as much a violation of God's perfect will for your life as it is to think of yourself more highly than you ought. It is just as wrong to bury your talent as it is to be sinfully proud of it.

Paul makes it clear to the Romans that they are to avoid both extremes of self-exaltation and self-devaluation. They are to think with sober judgment and just be honest about themselves. And in being honest he knows they will be able to see that some of them are better at certain things than others. The Christian who is being honest about himself will be able to say, "I have been blest of God to be able to do this better than most other Christians." In other words, they will recognize they are gifted in certain areas of Christian service. This is not pride but just an honest evaluation, and it is necessary for Christians to do this in order to function as God wants.

In verse 6 Paul begins to list 7 examples of the specialized gifts that exist in the body of Christ, and he urges those who have these, and all other gifts, to get busy and use them. In other words, he is saying not to worry about what you don't have, but just use what you do have, and that is all that is necessary to be in the perfect will of God. The eye that weeps because it cannot hear like the ear only blurs its vision and fails to be the best of what it can be for the body. Too many Christians are so concerned about the gifts they do not have that they neglect the ones they do have. They think of themselves more lowly than they ought.

When the Indian chief Crowfoot gave the Canadian Pacific Railway the right to cross his land he was given a lifetime pass. He could ride the train anytime to any place at no cost. He carried that pass in a leather case around his neck for the rest of his life, but he never once used it. He had a gift of great value but he never took advantage of it. This is the tragic reality you see when people never use the gifts God gives them. Paul says that having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, "Let us use them." Of course, we should use them. What else can you do with a gift? You either use them or you neglect them and leave them unused. You can say in pride, "I do not like the gift God has given me. I like the other gifts that I don't have, and so I will strive to be something I am not." This determination to neglect obvious gifts and strive to be something you are not is one of the greatest causes for problems in the church.

The Hebrew Christians are scolded in Heb. 5:12: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's Word. You need milk, not solid food." Every Christian has an obligation to learn the basics well enough to teach them to another. If he needs them taught to him self over and over, he is a baby that just won't grow up. Every Christian must grow up and be a teacher so that he can communicate the basic truths of Christ's death, resurrection, and how by faith in him a person can be saved.

Beyond these basics there is a vast body of wisdom and knowledge, and that where the gift of teaching comes in. Only those gifted by God can enter the depths of the knowledge of God and His wisdom, and then share it with the rest of the body in a way they can understand. Gifted teachers have played a major role in the history of the church. Origen was the greatest Christian teacher in the first 3 centuries after the Apostles. He was born to Christian parents in 185 A. D., and he attended the first Christian school in Alexandria. Violent persecution led to his father being beheaded. He had to care for his widowed mother and 6 younger brothers by teaching at the age of 16.

Persecution forced the closing of the school, but he gathered a group of young Christians and taught them free of charge. He was so successful that people flocked to him and the bishop Demetrius officially assigned him to the position of teacher. He lived in poverty but hardly even noticed it, for he spent day and night in study. He became so famous that the bishops wanted to sit under his teaching. This made Demetrius angry, for no layman was to teach ordained bishops. He tried to put a man-made system above the gifts of the spirit, but it didn't work. Origen was such a marvelous teacher that wealthy Christians began to support him so he could give full time to exposition of the Bible, and other bishops ordained him. He spent 20 years in Palestine doing research and writing. Another persecution broke out and he was imprisoned in Tyre where he died at age 69.

Origen's gift of teaching changed all of Christian history, and we are affected by his gift even today. Before Origen, sermons were a collection of thoughts unrelated to a biblical text. He was the first to take a Bible text and explain it, and then apply it to life. He was the one who started the verse by verse Bible study where he sought to get at the historical and grammatical significance of the text, and then apply it to the present life. What we take for granted as a part of the body life of the church came to us through this man who had the gift of teaching. The gift of teaching is more than the ability to teach. The gift of teaching enables the teacher to communicate biblical truth more effectively. Usually it is because, like Jesus, they have the ability to tell stories or use illustrations that make profound truths simple enough to be grasped by the average person.

It is possible to be a teacher who communicates all kinds of truth and fact, but in such a way that it is boring and hard to listen to. The gifted teacher takes the same information and makes it fascinating so that your interest is held as easily as if you were watching the monkeys at the zoo. The common people heard Jesus gladly because He was interesting and understandable.

In 1973 Miss Becky Alexander became the Washington Wheat Queen. What an embarrassment when she had to put down the sheaf of wheat she was carrying and confess to the State Senate that she was allergic to wheat. She really did not fit the role, but she had won it. By hard work, deception and help you can arrive at many places where you do not belong. Paul would say that this is thinking of yourself more highly than you ought, for you are not accepting yourself as God made you. You are not presenting your body as a living sacrifice, but are taking it off the altar to shape it according to your will rather than God's. Your mind is not being renewed but you are conforming to the world mind, which says you can be whatever you want to be. Paul says we need to be what God made us to be. We are determined how God has gifted us and then we are free to do our own thing.

If prophecy is your gift, then let your service to the body conform to that gift and minister to others by that gift. If service is your bag, then be a servant and serve the body. If teaching is your specialty, then make sure you are teaching. And so it is with all the gifts. When each member of the body does his own thing he is in the perfect will of God, and the body is a healthy and harmonious organism fulfilling the purpose of God. We want to look at each of the 7 particular gifts Paul lists here as examples of specialized areas of Christian service.

Prophecy is the first one, and it is somewhat controversial. When you think of prophecy you think of the Old Testament prophets who received the Word of God direct from God and pass it

on to the people. Charismatic Christians say this is the just what Paul is getting at here. He is referring to members of the body who receive direct inspiration from God. It is a supernatural gift, and the one who has it does not study for his message, but gets it from God directly. The majority of non Charismatic believers follow the view expressed by Calvin who wrote, "I prefer the opinion of those commentators who take the word in a more extended sense, and apply it to the peculiar gift of explaining revelation." In other words, some have a gift for explaining the Word of God. They can do so with authority, for they know what God wants people to hear and know.

The reasons the majority follow this view are very convincing.

1. First of all, none of the other gifts in this list of 7 are supernatural in the sense that they are miraculous gifts direct from God that do not involve the human personality.
2. Secondly, the gift of prophecy is one that Paul urges all Christians to strive for in some measure in I Cor. 14. It is not likely that God would make all members of the body prophets in the Old Testament sense. It is likely, however, that He would let all of them enter into this gift of being able to read the Word and know Him well enough to communicate it to others.
3. The 3rd and final reason is Paul's limitation on the gift when he says it is in proportion to our faith. In other words, we are dealing with a gift that has a variety of degrees. I cannot imagine this in relation to a supernatural direct gift from God. How can it have any relationship to our faith if God gives the message directly? I cannot imagine some of the Old Testament prophets being less inspired than others. They all spoke equally from God.

The gift Paul is dealing with here is one that has a variety of degrees depending upon the faith of those who have it. The New Testament prophets of the Word could be more or less inspired than others with the same gift, and so they would be more or less inspiring as preachers. This view fits the facts of life in the body as we know it. There are many differences between those who expound the Word of God. If prophecy was a direct message from God it would be equally valuable regardless of who gave it. It would also be more likely to lead the person who had such a gift to think of himself more highly than he ought. If this was a direct message from God, it would seem logical to collect all such messages and publish them in a book as a supplement to the Bible. This would lead to the Bible not being the complete revelation of God to man. All of this leads to the conclusion that the gift of prophecy is the gift of proclaiming the Word of God with authority. Those with this gift study the Bible until they hear what God is saying to man, and then they proclaim it to man.

The preacher is to exercise this gift in proportion to his faith. In other words, the preacher does not automatically understand everything in the Bible. Some can proclaim the book of Revelation or Daniel, but others do not have the conviction they understand it well enough. A preacher should only expound that portion of God's Word that he understands, and which he can expound to others with confidence. I remember when I began to study Rom. 13. After long and hard study I was in a state of uncertainty as what to proclaim about God's will from that chapter. I wanted to preach on that chapter, but I could not feel free to do so because I could not say, thus says the Lord. I did not have the faith to say that I knew what God wants people to hear from this passage. The result was that I never preached on that chapter. It is good for people to know that not every preacher has the authority to speak on every subject. It is possible for a good preacher to be ignorant on many subjects.

Before we leave this gift we want to say that the charismatic view goes to far, but it does have some truth to it in that preachers all through history have sensed the direct power and inspiration of God to enable them to use their gift. I have experienced this and history is full of accounts of it. One of the greatest is that of George Whitefield who started revivals all through the colonies of early America. From 1736 to 1770 he preached 18,000 sermons in the open fields. Benjamin Franklin checked him out and wrote that Whitefield could be heard clearly by 30,000 people in a field, and that in a day before there were any loud speakers. Whitefield was not weary of the Lord's work, but he did become weary in it, and he had to stop his strenuous preaching.

Whitefield was asked to preach one more time in Exeter, New Hampshire. A great crowd gathered on a Saturday afternoon. Whitefield was so feeble he could hardly be heard, and he could not focus his mind. He stopped and stood in silence, and then he said, "I will wait for the gracious assistance of God, for He will, I am certain, assist me once more to speak in His name." It was as if he was rekindled by an inner fire, for his voice broke loose and he was heard by all for an hour. He shouted in conclusion, "How willingly I would ever live to preach Christ! But I die to be with Him." The next day Whitefield was in heaven with God. God had given him direct special power to use his gift of prophecy that one more time.

We do not want to pretend that we can limit God by our not following the charismatic view of this gift. God can and does do many marvelous things directly, but the evidence concerning this gift of prophecy is that it refers to all in the body who are preachers of the Word. Paul says if you can do it, then do it. There are laymen who also have this gift.

The second gift Paul refers to is service. There are many who cannot stand up in front of people and expound the truth of Christ, but they can make that truth come alive in deeds of service. Maybe they can't explain what loving their neighbor even means, but they can live out the meaning of it in loving service to their neighbor. The Christian with this gift may not be very intellectual at all. They may not even like to read or study. They are activist. They would rather do right than think right. They are the practical part of the body. The hands are not into the more intellectual pursuits like the eyes and the ears. The hands would rather be doing than seeing and hearing. Paul does not say shame on them for not loving to study and wrestle with profound truths. He says that if your gift is service, then serve. If that is what you love to do for God, then do it and don't worry about the fact that you are different from other members of the body. We are not to conform to the world, and we are not to conform to other members of the body who have gifts we do not have. We are to do our own thing according to the gifts that we possess.

Every church has those who do an enormous number of things. They are not always the most recognized because much of what they do is unseen. They are not up front where the one with the gift of prophecy is. Their gift is experienced often when no one is around to see the service performed. Is it a lesser gift on that account? Not so, for Jesus said even a cup of cold water given in His name would not go un-rewarded. Jesus knows what all parts of the body are doing, and those who do what He designs for them to do are great Christians, even if no one else knows it.

Christians with this gift has escaped the me-mania of life where all energy is consumed on the self. They have the ability to burn up some of their fuel for the good of others. You will

notice that every one of these gifts are characteristics of Christ. Jesus had all of the gifts of the Spirit. The goal of the Christian life is to be like Christ, and so it follows that all of these gifts represent goals every Christian is to strive for. Every Christian is to be a servant. The point of the gifts is that some members of the body are uniquely enabled to be Christ-like examples for the rest of the body.

All Christians are to aim for all of these values, but many of them will not be achieved until we are resurrected and made like Christ. But all through history there will be members of the body who give visible and practical evidence that Christ is alive in the body by their unique gifts. All are servants, but some are gifted servants who excel in serving the body and the world. They thrive on serving others. Others are not very good at serving, but they are not to feel guilty just as those with the gift of service are not to feel guilty because they do not have the gift of prophecy. Paul says clearly in verse 4 that all members do not have the same function. This means many are just not cut out to be Good Samaritans. This does not mean they pass by on the other side, for they must stop to meet the need the best they can, but they may not enjoy it like the one who has the gift.

The Christian who feels guilty because they do not love what other members of the body love tends to make their Christian life a burden rather than a blessing. Many can give testimony of how they became excited about Christian service. They got involved in many things, but it soon became a burden. They felt obligated to continue even though it was distasteful to them. They felt trapped, and their Christian life was a treadmill of slavery to despised duty. Such folly is obviously not the perfect will of God. Honest self-evaluation would allow them to recognize that they were trying to do a job for which they are not gifted. They are like a little finger trying to play the role of the thumb. It can do some things, but it soon tires and feels totally inadequate. Seeing this, they should cease trying to be what they are not, and yield themselves to be what they are best designed to be.

The whole point of Paul's body analogy is that every member has a specific function, and that only when all members are in their proper place can the body be at its best. When the church fails to function as it should it is because members are either thinking too highly of themselves, or too lowly. Success for the individual and for the body is in doing your own thing. It is in being who you really are and doing what you do best.

Madam Yojima was an 80-year old woman in Japan shortly after World War II. She heard of the World Disarmament Conference to be held in the U. S., and so she persuaded hundreds of thousands of Japanese women to sign their names to a petition for peace. She put them in a heavy suitcase and traveled across the Pacific to present them in person to Mr. Kellogg. Why would a frail old woman go to such trouble and enormous expense? Her own words give us the answer: "I live in a very small room, but when I kneel to pray there is plenty of room for Jesus Christ and the whole world to come in." She had a love for the whole world, and so she had a unique gift for service. She did what she did because she loved it and enjoyed it. She was just being herself and doing her own thing as a member of the body of Christ.

There is much we are obligated to do as Christians. We do not always enjoy everything, but we must do it out of a sense of duty. But every Christian should have a major part of their life doing something they just love to do, and which they would choose to do even if nobody expected

it. When you discover that enjoyable function, then you are experiencing the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. May God help us each one to, in this sense, be doing our own thing.

24. UNITY IN DIVERSITY Based on Rom. 12:4-5

Back in the 1600's William Lantan was the captain of a ship headed for Barbados. A thousand miles off the coast his vessel sprang a leak, and he had the crew take refuge in their longboat. They had a plentiful supply of bread, but little water. After 18 days of drifting they were down to a tablespoon per man a day. They knew their days were numbered.

Meanwhile, another ship captain by the name of Samuel Scarlet was having his problems. They were almost out of food, but had plenty of water. They spotted the longboat and rescued them. Each party discovered the other had what they lacked. One had bread for all, and the other had water for all. Both crews would have perished without the other, but together they supplied each other's need for survival.

None of us can begin to be all that God wants us to be until we grasp the value of interdependence. All of life; all of nature; all of history, and all the universe is based on the principle of interdependence, and the fact that everyone needs what someone else has, and everyone has what someone else needs. Only God is totally independent and self-sufficient. All else, and everyone else is interdependent. Satan fell from his lofty heights because he thought of himself more highly than he ought. He thought he too could be independent and self-sufficient.

Relative independence and self-sufficiency are virtues that all of us should cultivate, but when you strive to make them absolutes in your life, they become vices that destroy rather than develop your potential. The Christian who really has it altogether is the Christian who can see what Paul is saying in Rom. 12. He is saying that all Christians are members of a body, and they are all interdependent. The Christian who cannot grasp this truth will be constantly frustrated by the fact that there are so many Christians who are different from himself. He will be puzzled by the diversity of views, convictions, and behavior. The end result will be his fear, uncertainty, and insecurity with all of this, and it will lead him to make diversity a foundation for division.

This is why Paul is writing as he does here in Rom. 12. His goal is to prevent this negative response by helping Christians to see that diversity is not demonic nor dangerous, but it is divine and delightful. It is the differences in the members of the body that make body life so interesting, enjoyable, and fruitful. Paul uses the analogy of the body to describe the church, because the body is the ideal example of the value of diversity.

An old fable told of how the stomach was once accused by the rest of the members of the body as being lazy. The stomach just sits there consuming everything, but doing nothing. So the hands and feet and teeth decided to go on strike, and refused to do anything to help the stomach. The stomach depended on them for its supply, and so when they refused to send it food the stomach began to shrink, and soon it ceased to function. But the other members of the body were not all

that happy with their teaching the stomach a lesson, for they soon learned that when the stomach got weak, so did they. They discovered that they were just as dependent upon the stomach as it was dependent on them. With that discovery came reconciliation, and the body began again to function in healthy interdependence.

Diversity is not only a value, it is a necessity in the body. A body is only at its best when the eye sees a value, the feet carry the body to that valued object, the hand reaches out to bring the value to it, the mouth and the teeth pulverize it for swallowing, the taste buds and nose add the fringe benefits of taste and smell, the throat swallows it, the stomach digests it, the blood carries it to all parts of the body, including the brain, which has the capacity to take into the whole positive process for future reference when the body comes into contact with that value again. In other words, the body is at its best when all parts of the body are working together toward a common goal, each depending on the other to cooperate in reaching that goal.

In contrast to the beauty of such harmonious interdependence, imagine the pitiful existence of anyone of these members of the body on its own. An eye that can see, but can make no response that vision, or feet that can move about, but with no vision of where or why, teeth that grind up food but with no goal for the food beyond the grinding. We could go on and on and show how any member of the body which is alone and absolutely independent is a monstrosity, and a meaningless appendage with a function that has no purpose. Nothing is so purposeless as a member of the body without the body.

The body needs the members, and the members need the body, and so there is this principle of interdependence. That is the key to healthy living. This principle fits all realms of life. The physical, mental, and spiritual, all depend on this principle for meaning. Diversity finds its value in unity, and unity finds its value in diversity. This is a paradox that is written into the very fabric of reality because it is a part of the very nature of God. God is one in three, and three in one. He is trinity in unity. The three persons of the Godhead combine in absolute oneness a profound diversity of function. All that God has made takes on this basic characteristic of diversity in unity with each dependent upon the other.

Unity is not good without diversity. Imagine some scientist finally capturing big foot only to discover that it is just that, one huge giant foot hopping through the woods. You would say that such a freak of nature is meaningless. Such unity without diversity is inconceivable. The Frankenstein monster makes sense, but not such a monster as this with no diversity of members. On the other hand, if God lets history go on for a while longer man hopes to develop body banks where any part of the body may be ordered for transplant. Imagine the diversity of such a place. Here is a box for livers, and there is one for hearts. Here is the eye box, and there is the ear file. Then you have the right leg and the left leg crates. It would be a marvel of diversity, but ghastly to behold, for such diversity has no function without unity. It has to be a part of the body to have meaning. Only when you get diversity and unity together in a state of interdependence do you have that form of life that can fit into the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Now you see why Paul warns Christians not to think of themselves more highly than they ought. The Christian who begins to think of himself as self-sufficient, and no longer in need of the body, but superior to it, and independent of it, is pulling at the seams of the garment of reality. If he succeeds in such folly he will only end up as worthless as an arm that is removed from the

body. It will have no function at all, and without the body it will perish. Paul says the church must recognize and rejoice in the values of diversity in unity. Thank God all members of the body do not have the same function. We should not waste our energy in trying to get all Christians to be alike. It is not only futile, it is folly. God does not want them all alike, for the members are meant to be different.

William James said he heard a carpenter say one time, "There is very little difference between men, but what little there is, is very important." It is very important to God, and to the health of the body. Christians often hinder their own growth and the work of the body by their inability to tolerate differences. Many Christians feel that everyone should be saved according to a certain pattern, even though you can pick 10 Christians at random and be amazed at the variety of ways they were brought to open their heart to Jesus Christ and receive Him as Savior.

C. S. Lewis once told Sherwood Wirt, "The Lord has a habit of bringing people into His kingdom in ways that I specially dislike; therefore I have to be careful." The way he disliked was the way many of us have come to Christ. It is by going forward in an evangelistic service. But you see Lewis was wise enough not to think of himself more highly than he ought. He allowed the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be the Head, and though he did not always like the way the Head worked, he submitted to the Lordship of Christ, and excepted those members of the body who came into the body in a way so different from his own conversion.

Many are not so noble as C. S. Lewis, and the result is division in the body. This is the very thing Paul is fighting against, and why he uses the analogy of the body. There were serious debates among the Roman Christians, and there were issues among them where they did not see eye to eye. Chapter 14 gets into some specific areas of their conflict. Paul is laying down here the foundation for resolving conflict in the body. Recognize the necessity of diversity in unity, and the interdependence of all members of the body with one another. A church where these two values can be kept in balance is a church where people can become the best possible Christians. The church which emphasizes diversity to the exclusion of unity tends to water down its loyalty to Christ, and loses its central focus on doing His will. The church that stresses only unity tends to exalt a man made standard of conformity to the place of Christ, and becomes intolerant of all who do not conform to that idol.

I read of a woman who asked her butcher if he could cut a rabbit in half because all she wanted was half a rabbit. He said he could not do it because he didn't like splitting hares. Unfortunately, many Christians do not mind splitting hairs, and the result is a great deal of unnecessary and unfruitful conflict in the body of Christ. If Christians could see that differences are good, and that they help the church have a wider perspective that can understand the whole world they are trying to reach, they would not fight those who have different views.

Each member of the body had a different background, and they have different gifts. The church is an organization of various specialists, each with a special function in his or her area of expertise. Each member is to recognize the function of the other, and not try to make the others conform to their area of expertise. Some may be gifted to reach certain people that it would be a sin for others to try and reach, for they could be led into sin by trying. Some are gifted to go to certain mission fields, which others could never survive. Some are called to work with alcoholics, which others could never tolerate doing. Some have the gift to love certain people that others find too obnoxious

to love. The church is called to reach the whole world, and this means people as different as the whole world that is to be reached. It takes many kinds, and many gifts, and many different personalities. You cannot paint with a hammer, and you cannot pound nails with a paint brush. To get the job done you need different tools, and so does the Lord in the task of reaching the world.

God was way ahead of the modern business methods. If you go to a car dealer he has a great variety of cars, and each car has a variety of options. Diversity is the name of the game. He wants to have something that appeals to everybody at some point. People have all different tastes in color and design. They have different options they prefer. He cannot afford to have just one kind of car. He needs variety to win as many customers as possible. That is why the church is so full of diversity. It would not need to be if all its task was the reaching just one kind of person, but it is to reach everyone, and so diversity is a necessity. To try and eliminate it is as foolish as a car dealer getting rid of all cars that are different from the one model he has decided to be the only one he will stock.

God is not surprised that there are people who want to worship Him with solemn rituals, and others who want to do so by shouting at the top of their voice. The lost world is full of people who will respond to both approaches, and there needs to be a body of Christ that can bring them in to the kingdom. Variety and diversity are essential for reaching a diverse world of people.

The largest room in the world is the room for improvement. This is where we are all at. That is why Paul warns us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. You can only be a growing Christian if you are aware of the fact that you have a long way to go, and you can only do so by the aid of other members of the body. Every gift and virtue that Paul deals with in this chapter can only function in relationship to other people. You cannot be a Christian alone. There are 4 possible attitudes you can have in relationship to other members of the diverse body called the church.

1. The Superiority attitude which says, "I am a winner, and you are a loser."
2. The Inferiority attitude which says, "I am a loser, and you are a winner."
3. The Hopeless attitude which says, "We are both losers."
4. The Accepting attitude which says, "We are both winners."

This last attitude is the only one consistent with biblical principles in general, and Paul's specific teaching in this chapter. The degree to which you can love and accept the diverse nature of the body of Christ is the degree to which you are becoming the mature Christian God wants you to be. May God help us all to be growing in this maturity, and to be able to rejoice in the nature of the body of Christ as a unity in diversity.

25. THE GIFT OF TEACHING Based on Rom. 12:7-8

Ray Ashford, the Canadian preacher and author, tells of his good friend who invested all his money in a grocery business in a large city in Canada. It was a thriving business he was told, but

soon it was in trouble. He contracted scarlet fever and while he was in the hospital the business collapsed and he lost everything. It was the low point of his life. He began to dream about what he always wanted to be, which was a teacher. It seemed like a foolish idea to all who knew him, but he was captivated by the idea. So much so that when he got out of the hospital he went back to finish high school. Then he went on the university and finally to teachers college. He was close to 30 when he finished, but he was an excellent teacher.

He became a leading teacher in one of the largest school systems of Canada. Whenever he talks about the strange twists of his career he says, "What a good thing it was that I failed as a grocer! At the time, of course, I was absolutely devastated. But I see now that if it hadn't been for that failure, I would likely have spent my life muddling along in a business for which I am not equipped at all."

Here is a man who ended up doing his own thing in life-the thing he was best equipped for because of the blessing of failure where he did not fit. This happened to a very famous man that all of you know. George had a troubled youth and had no direction, but then some Hollywood directors discovered him and were convinced that under all his toughness there was a making of a star. They were right, but they went the wrong road to bring it out. They made him a star in a film, and they were so confident it would make money that they gave George a check for \$25,000. He was so proud of it that he did not cash it. He carried it around showing everyone. It was not a wise move, for the film was a total flop and the producers went bankrupt. The check bounced when he finally did take it to the bank. George had an ego as deflated as his bank account. He was one of the greatest failures of all time as an actor, but he didn't give up. He found his niche in life elsewhere, and he became a star after all. We know him as Babe, or George Babe Ruth.

Numerous are the stories that reveal failure to be one of the steps on the road to success. It is failure that helps us learn not to waste our lives trying to do what we are not fit to do. A pastor learned that a call to preach did not include the talent of barbering. He cut his little boys hair so that he looked as if he had been to a butcher. The boy was so ashamed to be seen in public that he pulled his cap over his head with the ear flaps pulled down. He went to a real barber down the street. It was quite a job to undo a haircut, but at least he came out looking presentable. That night the boy ended his prayer so that dad could hear: "And, dear Lord, please help every man to stick to his own trade."

Unfortunately, not everyone fails at what they are poorly equipped to do. They either succeed, or do an adequate job of it, and so they stick with it and never discover their potential for some other field. What is true for secular life is also true for the body life of the church. We should not fear failure as Christians, for the fear of failure keeps us from experiments that would help us discover our gifts. The church should be a group which is constantly striving to help each member to find the role they play best. Every Christian should have opportunity to experiment with a variety of roles because a gift can go undetected if it is never put to use.

Back in 1968 there was a Billy Graham day in Charlotte, North Carolina. Billy's younger brother Melvin was given the privilege of saying a few words. He told the story of the farmer who had seen the letters P and C in the sky, and being a dedicated Christian he figured it meant preach Christ. So he left his farm and started preaching. After many fruitless months he decided he must have misinterpreted the letters. They probably meant plant corn, and so he went back to the farm.

Melvin said, "I don't want to make that same mistake here, so I'll let Billy spread the Gospel, and I'll spread the fertilizer. He was being humorous, but serious at the same time. For he recognized that not all the Graham boys had the same gifts. So it is in the family of God. There are a variety of gifts, and all members do not have the same function. Paul lists 7 examples of the different gifts in the body, and we are now focusing on the third gift, which is teaching.

Jesus had all the gifts of the Spirit, but this is one in which He excelled. He was the master teacher, and even at age 12 He had adults listening to Him. Socrates taught for 40 years; Plato taught for 50 years, and Aristotle taught for 40 years. Jesus taught for only 3 years, but His teaching has had infinitely greater impact on the world than the combined 130 years of these greatest of philosophers. He was truly a gifted teacher.

It is also one of the greatest tasks of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer to teach all things, and lead them into a deeper grasp of the teachings of Jesus. Teaching will always be a major part of the church's task in history. Jesus sent the church into all the world to make disciples and to teach them all He had commanded. The church cannot be the church without teachers. As you read through the book of Acts you discover that teaching was a major task of the Apostles. In 5:21 they, "Entered the temple early in the morning and taught." The Sanhedrin was told, "Behold, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching people." Even after they were beaten we read in Acts 5:42 that they, "cease not to teach Jesus Christ."

Paul in Corinth continued a year and six months, "Teaching the Word of God among them." (Acts 18:11). He taught in Ephesus for 2 years from house to house. Paul stressed the importance of teaching in the church. He wrote to Timothy to give attention to teaching, and in II Tim. 2:2 he wrote, "The things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Teaching is what keeps the truth of God communicated from one member to another, and from one generation to another. Every Christian is to get involved in teaching on some level, for it is vital for the functioning of the body. Paul writes in Col. 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom."

Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse felt that teaching was his special gift, but he also felt, and rightly so, that every Christian is to be a teacher. He writes, "I believe that every member of the body of Christ is called upon to tell someone else every fresh bit of truth learned, every new knowledge of Christ received, every pitfall seen and avoided, every distant glory brought near, and every lesson learned that will help us to be more like Christ." When you read or hear of a new truth from the Word of God share it with another member of the body while it is fresh in your mind. This will multiply the fruit of the gift of teaching.

What this means is that you do not have to have the gift of teaching in order to teach. Even the non-gifted teacher can share truth learned with others. The Hebrew Christians are scolded in Heb. 5:12: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's Word. You need milk not solid food." Every Christian has an obligation to learn the basics well enough to teach them to another. If he needs them taught to him over and over, he is a baby that can't grow up. Every Christian must grow up and be a teacher who can share the basic truths of Christ's death and resurrection, and how by faith in Him and His finished work a person can be saved.

Beyond the basics there is a vast body of wisdom and knowledge, and that is where the gift of teaching comes in. Only those gifted by God can enter the depths of the knowledge of God and His wisdom, and then share it with the rest of the body in a way they can grasp. Gifted teachers have played a major role in the history of the church. Origen was the greatest teacher in his day. He was born to Christian parents in 185 A. D. He attended the first Christian school in Alexandria. Violent persecution came to the church and his father was beheaded. He had to care for his widowed mother and 6 younger brothers by teaching at age 16. Persecution forced the closing of the school, but he gathered a group of young Christians and taught them free of charge.

He was so successful that people flocked to him and the Bishop Demetrius officially assigned him to the position of teacher. He lived in poverty but hardly noticed it, for he spent day and night in study. He became so famous that the bishops wanted to set under his teaching. This made Demetrius angry, for no laymen was to teach ordained bishops. Demetrius tried to put a man-made system above the gifts of the Spirit, but it did not work. Origen was such a marvelous teacher that wealthy Christians began to support him so he could give full time to exposition of the Bible, and other bishops ordained him. He spent 20 years in Palestine doing research and writing. Another persecution broke out, and he was imprisoned in Tyre where he died at age 69.

His gift of teaching changed all of Christian history, and we are still being influenced today by his gift. Before Origen sermons were a collection of thoughts unrelated to a Biblical text. He was the first to take a Bible text and explain it, and then apply it to life. He is the one who started the verse by verse Bible study where he sought to get at the historical and grammatical significance of the text, and then apply it to the Christian life of the present. What we take for granted as a part of the body life of the church came to us through this man who had the gift of teaching.

The gift of teaching is more than the ability to teach, for all can do this to some degree. The gift of teaching makes the teacher uniquely able to communicate Biblical truth. Usually it is because they have the ability, like Jesus, to tell stories or use illustrations that make profound truths simple enough to be grasped by the average person. Men like C. S. Lewis and William Barclay have the gift of teaching. Their books are read by millions because they say the same things as other writers in a way that makes the truth more interesting and easy to understand. Gifted teachers are interesting and easy to listen to. The common people loved to hear Jesus tell his stories. Gifted teachers are blest with the same kind of ability that Jesus had in telling stories to communicate truth.

One of the evidences that one is a gifted teacher is that their teaching will change lives. Miss Henrietta Mears built up an enormous class at the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood. When Billy Graham was asked what women most influenced his life he replied, "Except for my wife and my mother, it was Miss Mears who had the greatest spiritual influence on my life." In the course of her teaching career more than 600 young people made decisions to become missionaries. This is clear evidence that she had the gift of teaching. Gifted teachers have this kind of practical effectiveness in lives of others.

The story is told of a centipede suffering from arthritis. He went to the wise old owl for advice. The wise owl said that he had 100 legs that were suffering and that he should become a stork, for with only 2 legs he could cut his suffering by 98 %. Then by using his wings to stay off his legs he could eliminate his problem. The centipede was so excited about this clear solution to his problem

that he wanted to know at once how he could become a stork. The owl replied, "I only give advice. The details you have to work out for yourself." There is the rub, and that is why the owl was not a gifted teacher, for his teaching could not be applied in any practical way to make a difference. The gifted teacher gives insights that can be applied in life to change things and make them better.

The gifted teacher combines depth of truth and simplicity. Shallow and superficial thinkers do not make convincing teachers. When Yuri Gagarin, the Soviet Cosmonaut, came back from his first orbit around the earth he announced that he had not found God in space. He might just as well have visited a pet shop and announced that he had not found Moby Dick. Shallowness is not the same as simplicity. The gifted teacher is able to take deep and profound truth and make it simple to get a hold on, because he or she can by stories, analogies, word pictures, and illustrations make it clear to the average person. Paul is doing this in this very passage, for he is making the subject of gifts simple to grasp by his analogy of the body.

Paul is urging those with the gift of teaching to us it, but he is not saying that those who do not have the gift should not be teaching. Many Christians teach because there is no one else to do it. They may not be the best teachers, but they may be the best in their situation, and they are essential for the body at that point. The timid Sunday School teacher who persistently picked up the little Morrison boy for her class was not noted as a gifted teacher. But she loved children and did her best. This helped that boy along to become Dr. Morrison, the first missionary to China, and the translator of the Bible into Chinese.

Gifted or not, she helped a gifted member of the body reach a position where his gift changed the lives of millions. None of the gifts are limited to those who have them. Gifted people are just superior in areas where all Christians should function in some measure. The non-gifted can still bear fruit in all the areas of the gifted, and they can enjoy them and be blest by them. We are to seek to do our own thing and discover where we are gifted, but we are to keep growing in doing things in all areas of the Christian life even where we are not gifted.

Next to receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord, the most important task of the Christian is to learn what Jesus taught and then live it. The priorities of life are Lord, Learn, Live, and Love is to unite them. We are to Love the Lord, Love to Learn, and the Love to Live for the Lord we have Learned to Love. Learning is the link between the Lord and Living, and that is why the gift of teaching is so vital to the healthy church and life. No Christian is all that God wants him or her to be who is not learning.

26. THE GIFT OF EXHORTATION Based on Rom. 12:8

Several years ago I went to hear J. Allen Peterson one of the nation's most dynamic leaders in ministering to families. He told this true but tragic story. One of the finest couples laboring in the field of marriage enrichment, who had written 5 books that were very helpful, and who had held seminars all across the country, had suddenly gotten a divorce. He was so shocked that he flew to the city where they lived and called it their home. The wife was grateful he had come, and she

shared with him what had happened.

She explained how she and her husband had been so busy trying to enrich other people's marriages that they neglected their own. They had all the answers, but they forgot the most important part, which is the doing of what they already knew. That is why the body of Christ needs the gift of exhortation. It is never enough to know. We must also be motivated to do, and that is the job of those with the gift of exhortation. The teacher shows us the way, but the exhorter moves us to walk in it.

John the Baptist is the first person in the New Testament who demonstrates this gift. Luke 3:18 says, "So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people." John did not just tell people the good news of the coming Messiah, but he moved them to actions, and to do something about it, which was to repent, be baptized, and to live a life pleasing to God so as to be ready for His coming. Exhortations are an appeal to the will to act on what is being taught to the mind. Teaching and exhortation go hand in hand, but teaching appeals to the mind to understand truth. Exhortation appeals to the will to act on what is understood. The goal of teaching is knowing; the goal of exhortation is doing.

The fact that Paul separates these 2 gifts means that it is possible for an excellent teacher to impart valuable knowledge to others, but not have the gift to motivate them to do anything with it. That is why Christians need exposure to many different types of leadership. One or two may have excellent gifts that benefit you greatly, but may not have that which motivates you to action. Every Christian needs to be exposed to exhortation. The word covers a lot of territory. It includes comfort, consolation, counsel, and such words as entreat, beg, implore, and persuade. It covers about anything you can think of that motivates people to act, or to change their behavior.

It usually follows teaching and preaching as it did on the day of Pentecost when Peter ended his great message. In Acts 2:40 we read, "And he testified with many other words and exhorted them saying save yourselves from this crooked generation." That exhortation moves three thousand to be baptized and join the church. It is not enough that they were taught the truth about Jesus. They had to be motivated to accept Him and obey Him as Lord of their lives. Preaching tells of Jesus being the Messiah. Teaching explains how He fulfills Old Testament prophecy. Exhortation motivates people to do something about it.

It is not enough to teach a child how to hang up his coat in the closet. You can show him just how it is done over and over, and still he will throw it on the floor. What is needed is some exhortation. You say something like, "You hang it up like this or else." Some words that go beyond teaching are often needed to motivate the child to do what he knows. We all know more than we do, and so our greatest need is to be exhorted to do it, and sometimes we need the threat to get us going.

Paul used this kind of exhortation in writing to the Thessalonians. In II Thess. 3:10-15 we read of how Paul dealt with some lazy Christians. "For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If anyone will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busy bodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living." Then in order to motivate them to give heed to this exhortation Paul says to the body in verse 14-15, "If anyone

refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother."

Here we see exhortation operating in the family of God just as it does in your family. You tell the rebel child who will not obey to go to his room, or in some other way you isolate them from the rest of the family in order to motivate them to conform to what is best for them and the rest of the family. The exhorter puts on the pressure to persuade the offender to change his behavior so he can get back into the valued position of harmonious fellowship with the rest of the body. Some people are good at this, and others are extremely ungifted, and only drive people out of the body.

I know of parents who are so ungifted in this kind of exhortation that they drive their children out of the house and into the world. Where the gift of exhortation is not possessed there needs to be a great deal of caution. It is not everybody's job in the body to tell others what they ought to do. When the gifted exhorter does it, people tend to respond and the whole body is benefitted. When the non-gifted do it there is conflict, rebellion, and division. You know from experience that some people can counsel you and you are grateful for the advice, but if another person gave you the same advice you would be offended and inclined to do just the opposite.

What makes the difference? It is the gift of exhortation. If we examine one of the main synonyms of this word, we will get the clue that helps us understand the key ingredient of the gifted exhorter. The Greek word is *paraklasis*, which has as its primary meaning comfort and consolation. It is the same as the name of the Holy Spirit, which is *Paraklete*-the Comforter. It means one called along side to be an encouragement. Some versions call the gift of exhortation the gift of encouragement. This is a valid conclusion and helps us to see why the gift works in some and not in others. Only those who tell others what to do, and urge them and persuade them to do it as a method of encouragement will succeed. If there is any other motive but the good of the person exhorted, there will be rebellion.

Only the encourager can be a gifted exhorter. Back in 1973 Tom Weiskopf of the United States was playing the British Open Golf Tournament in Scotland. He got off to a bad start by missing a 3 foot putt on the first hole. As he stood ready to tee off for the second hole and elderly Scot leaned forward, patted him on the shoulder, and said, "Cheer up, laddie don't let your putt brother you." The encouragement loosened him up, and he went on to win the tournament. Many others could have tried the same thing and been told to mind their own business. This man got a positive response from his exhortation because his motive was clearly to encourage.

The Greek word for exhortation starts with *para* from which we get parallel lines run along side each other, and the true exhorter is one who does not rub you the wrong way because he is not trying to cross you, but to run parallel with you. He comes along side you to be a comfort and companion. Even if he has to tell you where you are wrong, you know it is out of love and concern for you, and that the goal is help and encourage you to be your best. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are both called *parakletes*. They both come along side to comfort and encourage, but the very fact that members of the body are given this gift means that Christians need comfort and encouragement from the body as well as from Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It seems like Jesus and the Holy Spirit should be enough, but as long as we are in the flesh we also need human companionship and encouragement.

The body plays a role in the Christian life that even the Trinity cannot play, and that is why Jesus gifted the body with these various functions that we all need. It is not being unspiritual to want human companionship and encouragement. It is being what Jesus intended you to be, and that is why He gave the body exhorters. Jesus had fellowship with the Father in Gethsemane, but He felt so lonely because He did not have the human companionship and encouragement of His disciples. We all need the human as well as the divine.

When Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes was appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court, he moved to Washington and transferred his church membership to the Baptist church there. The day came for new members to be welcomed into the fellowship, and the first one to be called was Ah Sing, a Chinese laundry man. He stood at the far side of the platform, and as the others were called they stood on the other side. It was not an attempt to snub Ah Sing. They just happened to be seated on the opposite side of the sanctuary. When Justice Hughes was called he deliberately walked to the other side and stood by Ah Sing so he would not feel isolated. This was an example of exhortation in action. He did not say words to encourage him, but by action he encouraged him, and made him feel a part of the body.

Elton Trueblood said, "A person has made a step toward genuine maturity when he realizes the greatest gift he can provide others consists in being a radiant and encouraging person." Every Christian is to strive toward this goal, but this is the unique ministry of the exhorter. If you find you tend to be judgmental, and your advice turns people off, and they do not appreciate your exhorting, then it will be wise to let someone else do this vital job. Parents need to learn which of them is the gifted exhorter in the home. If the non-gifted parent does all the exhorting, you will be asking for rebellion.

Edward Steichen became one of the world's greatest photographers because his mother was an encourager. When Edward took his first pictures only one out of 50 were half-way decent. His father told him to put away the camera and try another hobby. That was his exhortation, but mom took another approach. She said that the one picture of his sister at the piano more than made up for the other 49. She encouraged him to try again and not let failure stop him. Her encouragement was his beginning of the climb to the top. History is filled with examples of how one person's encouraging word or action motivates another to press on to victory.

Robert Fulton was utterly discouraged with his invention of the steamboat. The public laughed and said it would never work. If you study famous people, you discover that most of them had to endure endless exhortations to give up and stop being fools. Negative counsel and advice is one of the hardest obstacles to overcome. Fulton was about to give in to this burden when a man came on to his boat and asked if he could get him to New York with it. Fulton said he would try. The man asked how much it would cost, and Fulton had not even thought about that, but after a moments hesitation he told him it would be six dollars. That man became the first person in history to pay for a trip on a steam boat. This act of confidence so encouraged Fulton that it changed his whole life.

Four years later he met this first passenger and said to him, "The vivid emotions caused by your paying me that first passage money will always be remembered. That, sir, seem the turning point in my destiny-the dividing line between light and darkness-the first actual recognition of my usefulness from my fellowmen." Without that encouragement to go on he may have given up.

Millions do because they don't get it.

Every man needs encouragement. Henry Ford said, "The ability to encourage others is one of life's finest assets." He knew, for he was the object of severe criticism and ridicule when he invented the gasoline engine for the automobile. Most mechanical engineers were convinced electric carriages were the cars of the future. Thomas Edison heard his plan, however, and with one sentence of encouragement he changed history. He said to Ford, "Young man, that's the thing! You have it!" That was all Ford needed to motivate him to press on to perfect his engine.

Everyone needs to be motivated to be his best, and encouragement has been proven to be the most powerful motivation. The heart of being an exhorter is in having the ability to stand alongside another and motivate them to action by means of advice and counsel that encourages them to overcome obstacles and press on to victory.

A gracious word may smooth the way;
A joyous word may light the day.
A timely word may lessen stress;
A loving word may heal and bless.

The gift of exhortation means that though all Christians may be capable of seeing what is wrong and what needs to be done in another's life, not all are capable of motivating that other Christian to do something about it. What we call personality clashes tend to happen when people do not have the tact necessary to be gifted, but they try to be exhorters anyway. It makes me think of the old story of the king who dreamed all his teeth fell out one by one until there was just one left. He called for one of his wise men to explain the dream. The wise man with sad and mournful voice told the king that the dream meant that all of relatives would die and he would be left alone. This angered the king and he drove the servant from his presence.

Another was called and the king told him the dream. This wise man was a little wiser. He smiled and said, "Rejoice O king. The dream means that you will live many years yet. In fact, you will outlive all your relatives. When all have fallen you will still stand." This pleased the king greatly and he gave the interpreter a rich reward. He had told the king the same thing as the first man, but he told it in such a way that it seemed like good news. The other made it sound negative and even tragic. The gifted exhorter is one who can deal with life's problems with a positive perspective, and make tough decisions seem like enjoyable progress.

Exhortation is to be helpful and aid people to advance in their walk with God. One of the great biblical examples of this is Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. When Jethro saw Moses trying to settle disputes all day long among the children of Israel where the line was formed from morning to night, he spoke up and said in Ex. 18:17, "What you are doing is not good." He went on to show Moses the folly of wearing himself out by this method. He advised him to set up a system where other men hear the lesser problems and bring to him only the major problems. In other words, he advised him to set up a court system just like we have today where only major disputes go to the Supreme Court. Moses saw the wisdom of this and he did it. This word of exhortation was helpful to millions.

A truly gifted exhorter does not just judge what is wrong, but also has a helpful answer as to

how to set it right. No doubt many were critical of Moses, and many advised him to stop being so slow. But only Jethro had a solution. The gifted exhorter is able to give counsel that moves people to actions that solve problems. The exhorter gets the creed into deed, and the prayer into the answer, and the vision into accomplishment. The cross was a Sermon on the Mount in action. It was Jesus doing what He taught, and doing is the goal of the exhorter.

Part of man's depravity is that he hates advice. It is his pride that makes him feel he can make it on his own. God knows better, however, and Jesus built His church with advisers, for He knew no Christian could become all he was meant to be without counsel and advice. Those with the gift of exhortation are the advisers.

Not all advice is based on a mature view of life. A 6 year old decided to offer his advice to the TV repair man who was having trouble fixing a set in the home. The boy said, "If you'd clean out all the old dead cowboys at the bottom it might work again." There are adults who have a compulsion to offer advice on every subject even if they know as little about it as this young boy knew about television. Such people do not become good exhorters, for they lose their credibility and are not taken seriously. If you want people to notice your faults, just start giving advice and they will spot them instantly. Somebody said that the reason God made Adam before He made Eve was because He didn't want her giving Him advice while He was making Adam. But the fact is, most of the bad advice in the Bible comes from men. Women are usually portrayed as exhorting their husbands to do what is wise, like Pilate's wife urged him not to be get involved with the case of Jesus.

Jesus had to endure a lot of bad advice. James and John urged Him to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans. The disciples urged Him to send the people away but he fed them instead. They advised him to send the kids away, but Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." If Jesus would have followed the advice of these good men, He never would have gone to the cross. The best of men can be poor advisers and exhorters. You are in good company if this is not your gift, for most in the family of God do not possess it.

This being the case, we need to make sure that when we practice it, it is on the highest possible level of the positive, and leave the touchy issues to the truly gifted. In other words, if your clothes are full of spots, stains, and wringing around the collar, don't tell others how to do their wash. We do not like others to give us advice. Someone said, "A cold wouldn't be half bad if it wasn't for all the advice from our friends." Let us refrain from trying to advise and exhort when we do not have the gift of exhortation.

27. CONTROL IS THE GOAL Based on Rom. 12:9-21

John Powell, whose books have now sold over 11 million, begins his book *The Christian Vision* with the request that we run a short home made movie on the screen of our minds. Imagine

that you have come home on a dark night and to your horror you see a long snake on your front lawn. Your heart begins to pound wildly and the adrenaline starts pumping into your blood stream. You quickly grab a garden hoe and in your frenzy you hack the wreathing snake into pieces. Satisfied with your heroic deed you go inside and try to settle your nerves with a warm drink. Later, lying in bed you still see the wriggling form on your front lawn.

The next morning you return to the scene of the slaying and discover you have chapped your garden hose into a dozen pieces. It was a garden hose, but now it is green macaroni. Last night it was a snake. It was always a hose, of course, but when you thought it was a snake it aroused your emotion of fear and you attacked it like a foe with deadly force. The point is, our emotions are created by our perceptions. They are caused by what we think, and the way we think. Emotions are only as authentic as our grasp of reality. If we misunderstand or misconstrue reality, we will have motions that are unrealistic. We will all agree that attacking a garden hose with a hoe is an over reaction. The whole man is out of order. The mind is thinking wrong. The emotions are motivating wrong, and the will is choosing wrong behavior. This is assuming that you need one long hose and not a dozen real short ones.

What we need to realize is that though emotions are vitally important in our lives, they are not infallible. Dr. James Dobson has written a book titled *Emotions: Can We Trust Them?* His answer is no we can't. They are not reliable guides because they can be stimulated by so many variables and, therefore, they lack stability. Not only can drugs affect your emotions, but the internal chemistry in your body can make radical differences in them. The emotions are too subjective. They can be aroused and you can be made to feel very strong about something that has no basis in reality. He gives some illustrations out of his own life.

He tells of the high school where the football team consistently lost to their arch rival in a nearby community. It was getting depressing and embarrassing. Finally a wealthy oil producer decided to change things. He offered each boy on the team and each coach a new Ford if they could defeat their bitter rivals in the next game. The team went wild with excitement, and for the next 7 days they ate, drank, and breathed football. The entire school was caught up in the spirit of ecstasy. Finally, the big night came, and you never saw a more excited team rush to the field. But they were demolished 38 to zero. All the whoop-de-do could not compensate for their lack of discipline and practice.

Dobson points out that the Jesus movement of the 1960's did not last because it was too emotion oriented. These youth were highly emotional, but had little theological and Biblical understanding. The result was many of them were soon caught up in various cults and sects. Emotions are just not enough. Then he tells of his good friend Steve Smith who was with a company of soldiers in Vietnam. Their first night out they were terrified as the sun went down and they sat in their fox holes on a hill. At about midnight guns began to blaze away on one side of the mountain and soon all of the soldiers were firing frantically and throwing hand grenades into the darkness. The battle raged through the night. Finally the sun came up and they sent out men for a body count. Not one enemy soldier was found. This whole company had fought furiously through the night an enemy who was not even there. The emotions had stirred up this battle and not the enemy.

His final illustration is of his mother and father who lived in Los Angeles in 1967 when the

Charles Manson murders took place. Everyone was on edge and one night they heard an intruder in their house. They listened as they breathed shallowly and then another sound caused them to leap out of bed in the dark and head for the door. Each had their own plan of action. His mother's strategy was to put her foot up against the door and throw her weight into keeping the intruder out. His father's strategy was to throw the door open and confront the intruder head on. When he pulled the door he met the resistance of his mother, and she felt it was the killer trying to force his way in. There they stood in the pitch blackness of midnight struggling with each other, and terrified in the thought that they were in a tug of war for their lives. His mother could feel she was losing the battle and so fled to the window and screamed at the top of her lungs. His father was then able to open the door and pursue the villain, which he never caught, of course, for he was a product of their emotions.

We could all add some stories of our own of how emotions have led us astray. But this is not to say that emotions are not an extremely precious part of what God has made us to be. We are emotional beings and there is no way we can be what God intends for us to be without emotions. You can be a good computer without emotions, but you cannot be a good Christian without them, for a large part of the Word of God is directed toward Christian emotions. That which makes a Christian different from the world is largely a matter of emotions. The passage of Rom. 12 is an excellent illustration of just how emotions are a key element in the Christian life. The Christian life revolves around the expression and control of emotions.

I find in these few verses a host of emotions. You have love, hate, brotherly love, inferiority, zeal, joy, hope, patience, compassion, rejoicing, mourning, pride, humility, revenge, and peace. These are just the main emotions Paul deals with here. Before we begin to focus on specific emotions we want to see from this passage as a whole some important truths about emotions. First we want to focus on-

I. THE VALUE OF EMOTIONS.

Just because they are not always to be trusted does not mean they are not valuable. A diamond watch is not infallible either, and cannot always be trusted to give you the right time, but it is still of great value, and even the cheap watch can serve the purpose of letting you know the approximately accurate time. Things are not valuable only when they are perfect, for if that was the case there is very little a part from God that would have any value.

Defective as they might be, emotions are among our highest values. Would you sell your right to feel love, joy, and peace for any amount of money? There is no wealth that can take the place of positive emotions. We would gladly pay to have the negative ones hauled away, but as we shall see in our studies, even the bad ones have their positive values. The good ones, however, are priceless.

The emphasis of Christian psychology is that emotions are not either good or bad in themselves, but have the potential for both good and evil. Joy in sin can lead one deeper into sin. All that is pleasurable can be used to lure one to evil. This does not make the feeling of joy and pleasure evil, for there is joy in serving Jesus also, and the pleasure of the Christian life motivates the Christian to obey Christ and to serve Him more intensely.

Sadness can lead to depression and despair. It can cause one to surrender to the forces of darkness and evil. But it can also lead to repentance and to victory over the forces of darkness by surrender to God. Hatred can lead to murder, or it can lead to confession and control which produces behavior beneficial to all the parties concerned. The key to all emotions becoming a positive value is Paul's closing verse of this chapter where he writes in verse 21, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

No emotion is evil in itself. It is what you do with it, or what you allow it to motivate you to do that becomes either evil or good. The key is in control. Emotional control is the goal, for by it we can overcome evil with good. Emotional health and stability begins by recognizing that all emotions are okay. You cannot feel anything that is evil in itself. Anger, hatred, resentment, and jealousy can all be felt legitimately, and not lead to evil when they are kept under control. God made you with the ability to feel these emotions. They are a part of what it means to be human. Don't get all bent out of shape because you feel feelings that are negative and potentially dangerous. It can be an authentic response to your situation. The real issue is not your feelings, but what you choose to do because of them. This is where you either overcome evil with good, or let evil overcome you.

Jesus felt all the feelings of man. He felt irritation, anger, and hatred, but He never let it lead Him to sin, for His emotions were always under the control of His will. He could be angry and sin not as Paul said we should all do. It was because His emotions were not in control of Him, but He was in control of them. But the point is, it was good for Him to feel the emotions He felt, even the negative ones. He would not have been a real man, and He would not have lived an authentic human life had He not felt these negative emotions.

Have you ever wondered why the Psalms are so full of negative emotions as well as positive ones? It is because the Psalms are a depiction of the human spirit and of all the emotions of man. Many are horrible and depressing. They are awful things to feel, but they are felt by godly people. They are not sinful. They are just human. The more we accept them as legitimate and acknowledge them as real, the more we can gain control of them so that they become assets rather than liabilities.

Paul in verse 9 says that love and hate must share the space in our emotional system. In verse 15 he says that rejoicing and mourning must also share that space. In other words, it is not only the positive emotions but the negative emotions that are a valuable part of the Christian life. This means we must stop thinking that feeling good is the goal of the Christian life. Sometimes feeling bad is the only way to be Christian in your emotions. Jesus wept, and so must we if that is the emotion that is most fitting for the situation. The idea that a Christian should go through life always feeling good is contrary to God's revelation in His Word, in history, and most of all in His Son.

Feeling bad and feeling negative is sometimes the best way to feel. If you do not see this as real, you will be in danger of falling for the cult of good feeling. Dr. William James, the famous psychologist said, "If merely feeling good would decide, drunkenness would be the supremely valid human experience." Why not escape all negative feelings by means of alcohol, or get into the drug religion where they use drugs to escape and leave the real world in order to feel good in a realm that has no connection with reality?

Christianity says, and the whole Bible says, all feelings are to be a part of this life. We are to feel the good and the bad to be authentically human, and then we are to choose behavior in the midst of these emotions that is consistent with God's will in order to be authentically Christian. This means that every human emotion provides us with an opportunity to grow. If we can control our emotions so that they provide the energy to move in the direction God wants us to move, then every emotion is an asset. Emotion is just that E for energy and motion. Emotion is energy for motion. It is that which motivates the will to choose good or evil. Control of emotion means the mind is able to evaluate what the emotion is pushing us toward, and then choose to either cooperate because the objective is pleasing to God, or retreat because the objective is contrary to the will of God.

The emotions are the key to success or failure; the good or the bad life. C. B. Eavery in *Principles Of Mental Health For Christian Living* writes, "Nothing in us so defiles and destroys the beauty and the glory of living as do emotions. Nothing so elevates, purifies, enriches, and strengthens life as does emotion. Through our emotions we can have the worst or the best. We can descend to the lowest depths, or we can rise to the highest heights. Emotions of the right kind, expressed in the proper way, make life beautiful, full and rich, rob it of monotony, and contribute much to the enjoyment and effectiveness of living." Emotions are not infallible, but the whole Bible makes it clear that they are of great value, and Paul makes it clear that they are vital to the fulfilling of God's plan for our lives.

II. THE VARIETY OF EMOTIONS.

In these few verses Paul makes it clear that he expects Christians to express a host of different emotions. We are like zoo keepers with a great variety of creatures to feed and control. Beyond this we are circus trainers who are to train these various creatures to perform for the benefit of God, others, and ourselves. We are like Noah in the Ark, and each of us has within us this zoo of creatures called emotions. They can come in two by two with each positive having its negative counterpart. Along side of love is hate, and along side joy is sorrow, and along side humility is pride.

I have no idea how many emotions we are capable of feeling, but it is a far greater number than we would at first guess. We are oceans of emotions, and have flocks of feelings, and piles of passions. Consider the variety of their general character.

1. First look at the variety of colors. You can have dark emotions of dread and black despair, or bright emotions of love, joy, and peace.

In between are the blues. You can have the blue of mild depression. On the other hand, you can feel in pink and be feeling very positive. If you are turning red it could be because of shame or shyness. You may be in danger of letting anger so color your life that you will act as to sustain your life with regret. One might even become purple with rage, or ghastly white with fear. Emotions are like flowers, and they come in a variety of colors.

2. Their variety in temperature. Some are hot like anger, and they can make you boil, and you need to let off steam. Love also can be a flame which generates heat too hot to handle. Others like fear can make you shiver and even freeze up. In between is apathy which is neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm.

3. Their variety of flavors. You have the bitter emotions that nobody likes to taste, like grief and rejection. Or you can have the sweet emotions of love and security, and the bittersweet like empathy which can feel both sweet and bitter as it makes you rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

There is no exhausting the variety of emotions because the same emotion can be expressed in opposite ways. Some laugh with joy and others cry. The effects of emotion on the mind and body are endless in their variety, and produce the whole vast world of the psychosomatic. Emotions can make the muscles relax or become rigid. They effect the internal character of the body, and they do so with so many variations. The same ethnic joke will bring laughter and inner healing to some, and to others tension and resentment. Man is like a great cathedral which admits light through many windows each stained by its own color, and so be rich in diversity.

Variety is the spice of life, but we don't like all spices, for some of them are not to the liking of our taste buds, but fact is, God made us with the flexibility to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to mourn with those who mourn, and these peoples are not always miles and months between. They may be only moments apart. Some may have a wedding and a funeral in the same week, or even on the same day. John Lagemann said, "We mistrust moods because they change. Yet changing moods are perhaps the surest indication of a healthy personality. It is when a mood doesn't change that we should be concerned."

This is not to be taken as a stamp of approval on the instability of the manic-depressive who is in the pits today and on the mountaintop tomorrow, and swinging radically from downs to highs and back again. The point is emotions are to be realistic, and so to be always happy and rejoicing is to be out of touch with the reality of life's sorrows. But to be always sad is to be blind to life's joys and glory. To be in touch with reality is to feel the full variety of emotions at their appropriate time. In other words, any emotion is right if it fits the reality of what you are experiencing.

If there is danger fear is appropriate.
If there is death grief is appropriate.
If there is victory joy is appropriate.
If there is peace contentment is appropriate.
If there is aggravation irritation is appropriate.

Eccles. 3 says that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to love and a time to hate. All emotions are appropriate at the right time. There are no wrong emotions, but only wrong timing. There is no emotion you can feel that is not legitimate in the proper circumstance. It was not out of line for David to see Bathsheba taking a bath and feeling erotic. That, like all other emotions, is God given and an appropriate response to erotic stimuli. It is what David chose to do because of that emotion that became his great sin. His emotion was legitimate, but his action was illegitimate. He sin was lack of control.

We have all heard it dozens of times that temptation is not sin. It is yielding that is sin. What is temptation but the stimulating of an emotion. Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin. That is saying that Jesus experienced all of the variety of human emotions, but He never sinned by having any of these feelings because there is no sin in feeling. There is only sin in

willing. This means that the goal of the Christian, which is to be Christ-like, can be stated in other words.

The goal of the Christian is to so gain control of his emotions that all of them in their vast variety might become valuable in making him what God wants him to be. Control is the goal. Control begins at the cross, for it was here that Jesus became the perfect man, and the perfect sacrifice for sin, because He gained control over the strongest emotions ever felt. His battle was beyond our comprehension. He sweat drops of blood in the garden so intense was His battle for control.

The fear and agony of becoming sin for us, and the ending of such shame, scorn, hatred, and the sheer physical pain was the battle He fought. Jesus kept all of these powerful emotions under control, and He conquered them with another emotion. Heb. 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus gained control of His emotions, and became the example as well as the Savior, for in the next verse the text goes on, "Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Our focus on Jesus and the cross is to help us develop the perspective that gives us the victory over all our emotional battles. Jesus did it, and by His grace so can we. Let us thank Him and seek His help to gain the goal of control.

28. THE REVERSAL OF REVENGE Based on Rom. 12:19

The Revolutionary War was complicated by the fact that it was often also a Civil War. Families were on both sides of the conflict. William, for example became the governor of New Jersey because of the influence of his famous father. The shocking thing was that William wanted to be loyal to the crown of England. This led to a crisis, and after a heated battle with his legislature he was sent to prison for two years.

When he was released in 1778 his heart was filled with anger for the colonies, and he fled to the British to join them in the fight. He became a leader in terrorist activities against the very colony as he had served as governor. When King George created an official guerilla army in 1780, William was made its leader. Revenge drove him to lead his men to arson, rape, mutilation, and murder. He was so obsessed that even when the war ended in 1781 he kept up the violence and brutality in New Jersey into 1782. Benjamin Franklin called the war in New Jersey a Civil War, and he knew, for the revenge-ridden man who kept it going was his only son-William Franklin.

What a paradox that one of our founding fathers had a son who sought to destroy our nation in its infancy. History makes it clear that one of the quickest ways to ruin your reputation, and put a

blot on your name is to let the spirit of revenge take control of your life. Much of the evil of this world is due to the seeking of revenge. The problem is, it is a vicious circle. When you get even, the one you got even with does not feel the score is even until they get in another hit, and the result is the spirit of vengeance winds up as a Hatfield and McCoy type conflict where there is no end to the injury.

Revenge itself must be avenged. It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and that goes for the fire that destroys as well as the fire that warms and uplifts. That is why vengeance is an emotion that a Christian must always keep under control. It is not that it is not a legitimate emotion. In a world of evil and injustice where you or others are hurt by man's inhumanity to man you cannot escape the feelings of anger which cry out for vengeance on those who inflict such suffering. Even the saints in heaven cry out in Rev. 6:10, "How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood." God does not say shame on you, but just be patient.

Never to feel the desire for vengeance is to lack the Spirit of God who feels it constantly. Numerous are the text which say vengeance is mine saith the Lord. The vengeance of the Lord and the day of God's vengeance are common themes of the Old Testament. The point being that evil will not escape, and the injustices of life will not be ignored. God will set everything right, and so the feeling of the need for this is not wrong. I am not expected by God to feel guilty about the desire for vengeance. It is a normal feeling for anyone who cares about justice. The feeling is God-like. The problem is in the actions this feeling generates. This is where we need to face up to our limitations and surrender to God's authority. That is why Paul says in verse 19, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves." Notice it is an absolute-never. Human revenge is never the will of God.

I read of a college professor who was awakened at 3:00 A. M. by the phone. The caller said, "This is your neighbor. I just wanted to let you know your dog is barking and keeping me awake." The professor thanked him and hung up. The next morning he called his neighbor at 3:00 A.M. and said, "This is your neighbor. I just wanted to let you know that we don't have a dog." That was clever, but not Christian. The original caller made a blunder, but revenge did not likely make him a better neighbor.

The point of our text is, you will feel like taking revenge in life, for nobody gets by without being the target of some injustice or some foolish mistake, or even pre-meditated meanness. The feeling for the need for revenge is normal, but Paul says not to act on it, for when you do you become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. This text is almost identical to the teaching of Paul when he said, "Be angry and sin not." The emotion is not forbidden, for it is impossible not to feel it. But do not follow through and let this emotion determine your actions which will then make you a contributor to the total package of evil. The Christian is in the world to reduce the level of evil, and not to add to it. Therefore the Christian is to be one who does not let his feelings run his life.

The reason a savage is a savage is because he does just what he feels. He feels you have offended him by stepping on his territory, and so he feels angry at you, and feels he should get revenge, and so he kills you. The more civilized men become the more indirectly they kill the intruder. The more Christian men become the more they leave judgment to God and concentrate on the hope that their so-called enemy may yet become a friend. The Christian agenda in life is

not to get even, but to get ahead by overcoming evil with good.

It is a curse to become obsessed with the need to get revenge. When you are the victim of injustice this does not mean you are not to press charges as a Christian, and seek to have criminals arrested. This does not mean you never take people to court that justice might be done. Paul demanded his rights as a Roman citizen. The Christian has all kinds of rights, and he ought to demand that they honored. Paul is talking about the Christian becoming a peacemaker in his society, and not a trouble maker. The Christian is to live peaceably with all men in so far as this depends upon them. In many cases the enemies of the Christian will not permit this peaceful relationship, and so the ideal will not be achieved. Paul's point is that it ought never to fail being achieved because of the Christian.

You cannot make other people choose to live in peace, but it must always be your choice. The Christian must be one who is ever ready to forgive rather than get back at another for the evil they inflict upon him. The Christian has a choice to make as to how he deals with the emotion of anger that leads to the desire for revenge. He will either choose to be overcome by evil, or overcome the evil with good. Paul says it is a matter of choice, for he commands us to choose the second and not the first. This means that if a Christian becomes obsessed with the need for revenge it is because he made a choice to go that route. He chose to let his feelings rather than God's will determine his action. The result will be that the Christian will not set the record straight, but will add to the record of folly, and add himself to the list of those to be judged.

David Augsberger said, "Revenge is the most worthless weapon in the world. It ruins the avenger while more firmly confirming the enemy in his wrong." Paul says if there is ever a time to apply your Christian faith it is when dealing with an enemy. This is where the Christian can really be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Do just the opposite of what is normal. You feel like getting revenge, but that is the time to act in love and feed the enemy. It is so contrary to human nature that the enemy will be defeated by your love. This reversal of revenge will as powerful a force for good as revenge is for evil.

Paul gives an illustration that is so obsolete in our culture that it is hard for us to see his point. He says that if you feed your hungry enemy and give your thirsty enemy drink you will heap burning coals on their head. This almost sounds like Paul found a loop-hole in his own high standard. It is as if he was saying you can't get revenge directly, but I found a back door by which you can get into the arena of vengeance and watch your enemy burn. This is not what Paul is saying at all. He is using a familiar image of his day to say that by love you can do what hate will fail to do. It was a very common practice to eliminate an enemy scaling your city wall by dropping from the top of the wall heaps of burning coals that would destroy both the enemy and his ropes and ladders.

Paul is saying that in Christian warfare we do not fight with such weapons, but rather with love, care, and kindness in meeting the enemy. But in so doing we heap coals upon his head. That is, we defeat his enemy spirit and eliminate his threat. But not by wiping him out, but by winning him over into our friendship. This is what he means by overcoming evil with good. He is not referring to literal hot coals, but to the burning passion to win the enemy with love.

The good news is that it works. Back in 1818 Tamatoe, the king of a South Sea Island,

became a Christian. He discovered that some of his fellow natives had a plot to seize him and other Christians, and burn them to death. He captured them all, and instead of killing them when they were in his power, he had a feast for them and talked with them. He shared his goals with them. They were so overwhelmed that they burned their idols and became Christians.

During the Korean War a Christian leader of an orphanage saw his 19 year old son shot before his eyes by a young communist leader. Later when that communist leader was about to be executed by the United Nations forces who had captured him, this Christian father pleaded for them to spare him and release him into his custody. His request was granted. He took the murderer of his own son and trained him, and he became a Christian pastor. Just as a firing squad would have eliminated the world of this enemy, and just as heaps of burning coals would have eliminated this rebel, so the love of this Christian father banished this enemy from existence. But the Christian way was far superior, for it not only got rid of an enemy, it added a friend to the family of God. It overcame evil with good, which is the only real way to win.

Christians have proved all through history that what Paul describes here is the Christian strategy for conquest that works. Food and drink have brought millions of people into the kingdom of light. The director of the Christian Student Center in Bangkok and a dynamic leader of the church in Thailand was once an enemy of the church, just as was the Apostle Paul. He was a Buddhist who won a scholarship to go to a Christian college. For the first time in his life he had enough to eat. Some of the Christian students found him crying and asked why. He explained that he now had so much, and his family still had so little. So the Christians took up an offering at the school. They packed a large sack of rice and it was taken to his family. They could have rejected this man for being a Buddhist, and had no compassion on him for his need. But because they went out of their way to show love by meeting his need, he became a Christian, and one of the most dynamic Christians in his land.

Of course, not all respond to love. Many rejected the love of Christ, and many will reject our love, and so not all enemies will be eliminated by this strategy. The point is, this is how the Christian is to deal with the negative emotions of anger and hatred, and the desire for revenge. They are felt, and they are real when the Christian is hurt by injustice, but the Christian who goes by the Word of God does not let how he feels dictate his action. It is probably life's most common form of idolatry, however. The Christian who lets his feelings be his guide rather than the Word of God is an idolater. The Christian lives by his feelings, he lives on the same level as those who have no other standard. This explains why Christians can do so many things that are so sub-Christian. They simply do not control their feelings, but let their feelings control them. This leads to the loss of sanctification in that particular area of their lives.

Francis Bacon said in his famous essay on revenge: "This is certain, that a man that studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal." This illustrates why Christians are not to handle their own revenge, but are to surrender it to one who can handle it, and that is God. Man is not made so that he can express this emotion wisely. God can do so with perfect justice, and make sure that the measure of judgment fits the crime. Man does not have the wisdom or control to be this precise.

The wise Christian surrenders this right to God. You have a right to feel hurt and offended. You have a right to feel the offender should pay for his evil. But you do not have the right to

exact the payment. That is presumptuous, and is a taking on of a responsibility that only God can justly carry out. So Paul says to leave it to the wrath of God. Don't worry that in the end injustice will triumph. The God of all justice will make sure that all evil not repented of will be justly punished.

So you see, your emotion or feeling of revenge is not wrong. It is a justified feeling, for God has it Himself, and He will satisfy all the legitimate vengeance that is necessary. What is wrong is for you to take God's job into your own hands and try to meet out judgment. Revenge is rejected, for it is a form of idolatry whereby a man says, "I will rise above God and take over His duties and crown myself the Lord of all." Such was the spirit of Satan, and such is the spirit of all who will exalt themselves above God rather than submit to God.

Terrorism which is so much of a part of the world scene is a primary example of the result of men taking upon themselves the task of getting revenge for life's injustice. Man is constantly trying to usurp the authority of God, and the result is that we live in a world of terror. There is room for revenge in God's plan, but it is His job and not man's to execute it. The wrath of man does not work the will of God.

No one has ever wronged you more than you have wronged God, and so just as you place yourself in God's hands of mercy, so you are to yield up all your enemies into those same hands. If they never repent they will be justly punished. If they do, they will be your brothers and sisters in the family of God, and like you be saved by grace. Either way the destiny of your enemy is not in your hands. If he repents, only God can save him. If he continues to rebel, only God can judge him. God has not delegated these two functions to anyone. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord." God reserves this right to Himself.

History reveals the horror of what happens when Christians have assumed that God had vacated his office of Judge, and left man free to take over the reins of revenge. The Inquisition in Spain, and the witch hunt of Salem, Mass. are two terrible examples. 20 people were executed for witchcraft in 5 months in 1692. But what we seldom hear is that it was Christian leaders who put a stop to this spirit of vengeance. They prevailed upon the governor William Phip to stop the proceedings as contrary to the will of God. Samuel Sewall, one of the judges, publicly repented for being used by the frenzy of the masses. He admitted that it was likely that innocent people were condemned. The spirit of vengeance had led many good people into evil and folly. It is an obsessive emotion, and if it is not surrendered to God it can become a cancer of the soul.

Lucien was a highly respected leader in the state of Kentucky many years ago. A good friend of his ended up in the state pen. He went to the governor and asked if his friend Sam could be pardoned, and put in his custody. He was basically a good man, and he would give him a job in his business and provide a place for him to live. He would be doing the state a favor, and the governor owed him a favor.

The governor agreed on one condition, and that was that he talk to his friend for two hours before he was released. "If you still think he should be pardoned, I will do it." Lucien sat in the warden's office and said to his friend Sam, "I can get you out of here, and you can come to work for me." Sam said, "I can't until I do something very important." "What is it?" asked Lucien. Sam said with hatred in his face, "I am going to get the judge who sent me here, and the one

witness, and I am going to kill them with my bare hands." Because he was so obsessed with revenge Lucien had to leave him in prison and forget the pardon that could have set him free.

There is not way to calculate the blessings of God that cannot be received because people have their heads filled with schemes of revenge. "And infernal round of revenge is danced ceaselessly around the earth." Getting back and getting even are the themes that lead to perpetual warfare between nations, communities, institutions, and people. Revenge is also a major cause for suicide. People kill themselves just to get back at parents and others for their failure to meet certain needs. Sometimes it is to get even with their own evil nature. But in any case it is folly and a trying to play God.

The Christian has the answer for this destructive emotion, and that answer is to leave it to God. Don't suppress it, but feel it, and then surrender it to God. Lady Carew wrote,

The fairest action of our human life
Is scoring to revenge an injury,
For who forgives without a further strife,
His adversary's heart to him doth tie,
And tis a firmer conquest, truly said,
To win the heart than overthrow the head.

The bottom line is, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Evil overcomes us when we as Christians fight evil with the same spirit and weapons that evil uses. Even if the Christian wins the battle, if he wins it by use of evil means, evil is the real winner. Luther wisely said, "See to it that he who hurts you does not cause you to become evil like him." If a man curses you, you do not rise above him by cursing back. If you do, he has now succeeded in making you one who curses, and evil has overcome you. The only way to win and overcome evil is by means of its opposite, which is good. Good can overcome evil. It is a superior weapon. The battle can go either way, and both are happening all the time with evil winning over good and good winning over evil.

Paul's message is that the Christian can shift the balance of power to the side of righteousness by leaving vengeance to God and concentrating on doing good. Never is doing good more needed than when you feel like revenge. Victor Hugo tells of Jean Valjean whose only crime was that he stole a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving children. After 19 years in the galleys he was released. Not able to find work, he came to the home of the bishop who gave him supper and a bed for the night. He yielded to temptation and stole the bishop's silver and slipped away. He was caught and returned to the home. The bishop had a choice to make. Should he get revenge and punish him for his ingratitude, or help him escape from his life of crime. The bishop chose the latter and told the authorities that he gave him the silver. He said, "Jean you forgot the candle stick." He was off the hook, and was so astounded by this act of love that he repented and was saved.

There is no guarantee that all evil will dissolve in the presence of good, but it is for sure that evil will multiply in the presence of more evil. The Christian has no other wise choice but to control the desire for revenge and surrender it to God.

We cannot all be heroes
And thrill a hemisphere,
With some great daring venture;
Some deed that mocks at fear.

But we can fill a life time
With kindly act and true;
There's always noble service
For noble hearts to do.

Author Unknown

The three steps to overcoming evil with good are, feel the negative emotion of anger and revenge. Forsake these as motives for action. Focus on the good you can do to counteract the motivation of evil. This puts revenge in reverse, and the reversal of revenge does not get you even. It gets you infinitely ahead.

29. CHRISTIANS IN CONFLICT Based on Romans 14:1

Dr. Biederwolf tells a true story about two Christian women that illustrates how Christians can be foolishly divided through controversy. These two women were both active in the church. They planned socials together, and shopped together. Finally, they even planned a trip to Europe together. When they reached Paris and went to the hotel one of the women told the porter to bring la baggage up to the room. "Oh my dear," said the other, "It is not la baggage but le baggage." "No it isn't," said the first, "it is la baggage." "Not in my book," snapped the second, "It's le baggage." They were tired from the trip and irritable, and so they quarreled. The result was they slept in separate rooms; went back to America on different vessels, and divided their church by getting people to take sides. Paul had this same problem in the church of Philippi where he wrote in 4:2, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord."

Quarrels like this would be funny if they were not so tragic. Nothing is funnier than the human tendency to swallow a camel and strain at a gnat. Even Christians are plague with this tendency to get tripped up on trivia, and to clash over mere words. Paul warned Timothy in I Tim. 6:4 to beware of the man who was always ready to start an argument. He writes of him, "He has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions." Paul knew from personal experience the folly of angry debate with a fellow believer. He got to angry at Barnabas when they had a dispute over Mark that they split up. Paul, however, had the spiritual strength to swallow his pride and admit he was wrong about Mark, and welcome him back into fellowship as his friend.

Paul knew that strife and quarreling was one of Satan's effective weapons against the church, and, therefore, he did all he could to prevent it. In his letters he is constantly urging Christians to avoid strife. He is seeking always to help them settle their disputes. He wrote to the Corinthians and said they were men of the flesh and not spiritual because there was jealousy and strife among

them. In II Cor. 12:20 he tells them he is afraid to come to them for fear of what he will find. "For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not what I wish....That perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder." He had to warn the Galatians, and even the Philippians, the most loving church of all, to avoid strife.

Now Paul was not a man to set back and let error run wild without any effort to stop it, and when the Jewish Christians began to impose Jewish laws and customs on his Gentile converts, he withstood them to their face, and through powerful debate made them back down and let Gentile Christians remain free in Christ from the burden of the law. Paul was not opposed to controversy when the issue was a vital one, but he was opposed to strife over trivialities, and even when it was an legitimate issue he expected a Christian to be a gentleman in controversy. Listen to his advice to Timothy in II Tim. 2:23-25. "Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels and the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone. And apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth.

We are going to study an illustration of how Paul follows his own advice on being a gentleman in controversy. The Roman Christians were divided on several issues that led to strife in the church. Paul, as an Apostle of the Master Peacemaker, is going to do his best to reconcile them so their conflict does not hurt their witness for Christ. This passage is of extreme value because it establishes for all time some basic principles for dealing with Christians in conflict. It covers conflicts between conservatives and liberals, legalists and those who stress freedom, and traditionalists and non-traditionalists. These conflicts can all be settled by the principles laid down in this chapter. A good understanding of it will enable a Christian to be an effective peacemaker within the church.

The first thing we need to do is to establish who the contending parties are. Paul speaks of two kinds of Christians: Those who are weak, and those who are strong. It is clear that the majority are the strong, and the minority or the weak, for Paul begins by urging that the weak be accepted. The danger was that the strong majority may just tell the weak minority to get lost. The strong majority are obviously the Gentiles in the Roman Church, and the weak are the Jewish Christians. The conflict arises from the fact of their two completely different backgrounds. This is one of the problems most every church faces. Some of its members come from a background with deep roots in Christian tradition of some denomination. Others come from a purely pagan background with no roots whatever. What one counts as being very precious, the other feels is no big deal at all.

This was the case with the church in Rome. The Gentile Christians had been pagans all their lives until they came to Christ. They had no traditions or laws about eating habits or special days. On the other hand, the Jews who became Christians had a great heritage of tradition on what to eat and what days were important. You can see how people with such opposite backgrounds could have conflict. This issue became serious because of the practice of the Gentiles eating meat offered to idols. Pagan worshipers would take their sacrifices to the pagan temple, and the priest would offer it to a pagan god. Then he would take some of the meat for himself and sell it in the market place at a discount price. The Gentile Christians who had been eating this meat all their lives did not change their eating habits, or shopping habits, when they became Christians. They still went to the market and bought that same meat. This was a scandal to the Jewish Christians,

for they said how could one worship the true God and still eat meat that had been offered to a false god? To avoid this they just gave up meat altogether and ate vegetables.

Paul writes to prevent this issue from dividing the church, and he begins by addressing the Gentile majority. He says in verse 1 that they are to receive those who are weak in the faith. Why did Paul call the Jews the weak in the faith? In so doing he establishes a basic principle that any person who is bound by laws and traditions is not strong in faith. The legalist holds on to the letter of the law for dear life, and by so doing fails to grasp the gospel of Christian liberty. Anyone who thinks their salvation is in any way dependent upon what they eat, or how they observe certain days, is clearly one who has a weak faith in the all-sufficiency of Christ.

The strong in faith are released from the bondage of the law, but the weak in faith still lean on the law for support. They cannot trust in Christ alone, but need the crutch of legalism to stand. Paul has much sympathy for these tradition bound Jews, and he urges the Gentile majority to receive them, but he clearly labels them as weak. Paul was not going to be deceptive in this debate. He states his own position clearly that he is on the side of the strong, but he warns the strong of their responsibility toward the weak. Paul pulls no punches, yet he is balanced and a gentleman, and he seeks to satisfy both sides.

What we need to see is that a Christian can be saved by faith in Christ and yet have a weak faith, and have a very poor grasp of the fullness of the Gospel. It is very important that Christians recognize this fact that you can be a poor Christian and a weak Christian with some strange and weird ideas and convictions, and yet still be a child of God. Paul knew this and so he urged the strong to accept and welcome the weak. We are never in the right to reject a believer because he differs with us on a non-essential issue.

If Christians cannot accept the fact that they differ on many issues, and still maintain their unity in Christ, they live on the same level as those in the world. It is a sub-Christian attitude to say, since they don't agree with us we will not have fellowship with them. Paul says that we never have the right to demand of others what God does not demand for fellowship with Himself. If God will accept a man whose faith is imperfect and weak, then we cannot be in the will of God if we fail to accept Him.

If we refuse to have fellowship with any Christian over differences of opinion on anything that is non-essential to salvation, we are acting contrary to Biblical principles. Newell in his book on Romans rebukes those groups of Christians who are exclusive. He writes, "Unless a man pronounces 'shibboleth' their way, there is not the thought of receiving him. This is the Phariseeism of the last days. And sad to say it is most found among those most enlightened in the truth, for 'knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up.' Where faith in Christ in the least degree is found, we should be thankfully delighted, and should welcome such believers."

Harry Ironside has an interesting paragraph on this in his book on Romans.

The weak in faith, that is, those whose uninstructed consciences cause them to be in trouble as to things indifferent, are to be received and owned as in this

full Christian position and not to be judged for their

questioning or doubtful thoughts. The principle is a most far-reaching one, and indicates the breadth of Christian charity that should prevail over the spirit of legality into which it is so easy to fall. Light is not the ground of reception to Christian privileges, but life. All those who are children of God are to be recognized as fellow-members of the Body, and unless living in evident wickedness, to be accorded their blood-bought place in the Christian company. Wickedness and weakness are not to be confounded.

Notice, that Paul says the weak brother is to be received with a proper motive, and not to be a target of dispute over opinions. Some strong Christians might say okay, let them come in so we can show them how stupid their views are. If we open the door to a brother just so we can clobber him, and prove him wrong, the door is not really open. He must be accepted without any attempt to torment him. Welcome him in Christ even they never do see the issue from your point of view. This is the fundamental principle on which Christians begin to deal with conflict. We are one in Christ even if we are divided on many other things. Accepting this reality is the key to staying Christ like in controversy.

30. STRONG AND WEAK CHRISTIANS Based on Rom. 14:2-3

A man wondering in the woods was caught in a bad storm. It was very dark, and the only light he had was from the flashes of lightening which were followed by deafening thunder. He fell to his knees and prayed, "Lord, if it will be all right with you, please give me more light and less noise." This should be the standard prayer of believers when wondering through the dark woods of controversy. In a religious argument the louder the noise the less anyone has a chance to see the light and learn anything. A Christian controversy should always be kept in the realm of light and not sound.

Man is made in the image of God with an infinite capacity for variety. Each man has a unique individuality that he is to develop for the glory of God. This means men will differ in their likes and dislikes; in their tastes and interests ; in their personalities, and everything imaginable. The glory of man is that he is not like a herd of cattle or flock of sheep.

This blessing, however, leads to inevitable conflict of opinions. Differences are impossible to escape, and unless people learn to accept differences they cannot live in association. You may have heard the story of the three monks who lived in the woods and seldom spoke. One day a knight came riding through the woods past their place of seclusion. About six months later one

monk said, "That was a beautiful black horse that knight was riding." About six months later another monk said, "That was no black horse, it was white." Several months after that the third headed for the door with his belongings in a bag. He said as he left, "If you two are going to argue, I'm getting out of here."

Such an excessive dislike for disagreement would make it hard to live anywhere but alone. No marriage can be happy even without an acceptance of the inevitability of differences. Richard Armour may be putting it too strong, but he has a point that cannot be denied when he writes-

Some

Some hoist the windows, gasp for air,
While others find it chilly.
Some turn up thermostats a hair,
While others think them silly.
Some like cold, some like hot,
Some freeze, while others smother.
And by some fiendish, fatal plot
They marry one another.

Differences within marriage between two people who love each other are so common that it is a mystery why anyone would ever expect conformity of views within a church where people of every conceivable background and personality are mixed. There is no organization on earth that includes a greater variety of people than the church. This means acceptance of differences is a must for Christians. None is all wise but God, and none except God is wholly good. This then makes it folly for the Christian to expect unity of belief or action on the part of men who are both sinful and ignorant. Paul said at best we know in part, and this means every Christian is ignorant about many things, and imperfect in all things.

Humility and honesty demands that Christians be tolerant of differing views among themselves. Not to be tolerant is to set one's self up in pride as having reached the ideal. Even if this was true, if we from our platform of perfection reject those who do not conform, we are not being Christ like at all. Christ in His perfection does not reject the imperfect, but in love seeks to lift them to his level. This means that if we cannot accept those whose opinions differ from ours, we are sub-Christian and worldly. Many Christians who do not do all of the things we usually consider to be worldly are still worldly because they live on the worldly level of pride which says, "If you don't agree with me, you are wrong, and I am not interested in you." This is worldliness at its worst, for it is being sub-Christian in the inner man where Christ is to reign as Lord.

Paul makes it clear in this passage that both the strong and weak in faith are in danger of slipping to a sub-Christian level. The issue here is not to determine who is right and who is wrong, for the fact is you can be wrong even if you are right if your attitude is wrong. If your attitude toward a fellow believer is not one of acceptance, and open-minded toleration of his differing conviction, than you are wrong and sub-Christian even when your particular conviction on the issue is right, and the one God hopes all Christians will come to in full maturity.

A Christian must be one who is concerned, not just about the truth in a conflict, but about the person he disagrees with, for if he is right about the truth but wrong in his attitude toward his

opponent, he is still missing the boat and is out of God's will. It is never enough to be right, for we must also be loving. Paul says in I Cor. 13:2,

"If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." Tom Westwood points out that of 16 chapters in Romans Paul devotes one and a half chapters to the issue of Christian dealings with other Christians with whom they disagree. He rightly concludes, "I believe we have altogether underestimated the magnitude of Christian courtesy and consideration." We are studying this passage in detail in order to magnify in our minds the importance of Christians courtesy in controversy.

In verse 2 Paul states the position of the strong believer. He believes he can eat anything. This does not mean he thinks he is a superman who can eat nails and arsenic without injury. It simply means he feels that no food is defiling and, therefore, forbidden. He accepts the words of Christ that it is not what goes into a man but what comes out that is defiling. Peter had to learn this truth that all that God has made is clean. Paul warned Timothy about those who would come urging Christians to obtain from meats, and he rejects this and writes in I Tim. 4:4, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with thanksgiving."

The strong Christian, therefore, has a solid Biblical foundation for his feelings of liberty from all rules and regulations concerning his diet. He will not go hungry for any sacred cow as do millions in India. He will not give up meat because of some fear of contamination from an idol. He may give up certain things because they do not agree with him, or simply because he does not like them, but he does not give up eating anything with the idea that he is thereby pleasing God. He is convinced God is pleased with anything he eats if he does so with thanksgiving.

He says I can eat swine and love it even if the Jew gets squeamish at the very thought of it. Not only that, he can eat it on Friday too, even if the Catholic gets nervous at that thought. Julicher says, "He believes magnificently in the conception of the unfettered conscience of the believer." He is at liberty to eat as he pleases without feeling obligated to any law. He gives God thanks and enjoys it, and does not worry about any tradition or regulation. This was Paul's own personal position. He gloried in his freedom from the bondage to the law, and encouraged others to do so. He wrote in II Cor. 3:17 that, "...where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." To the Galatians he wrote in 5:1, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Paul was the Apostle of liberty, and he did not want his life to be bound up by other people's superstitions and hang ups. He said in I Cor. 10:29, "For why should my liberty be determined by another man's scruples."

There is no doubt as to where Paul stands. Here in verse 14 he says he knows and is persuaded that nothing is unclean in itself. He knows the strong Christians are right, but Paul has one virtue he places even above his liberty, and that is love. Therefore, he is not going to tell the strong Christian he agrees with to sock it to the weak one who has scruples. Instead, he is going to warn them about the very dangers they face in being on the right side of an argument. In verse 3 he commands those who feel free to eat anything not to despise the brother who cannot. With all of his strength this is where the strong Christian is weak. He has a hard time keeping from despising those who do not have his light. In pride they feel all Christians should be where they are, and not hung up on obsolete regulations.

Martin Luther felt this way when he was a Catholic priest. He wrote, "Nobody cares whether perjury, lies, or slander are committed, even on holidays. But if somebody eats meat or eggs on the sixth day of the week people are stunned. This is how silly almost everyone has become nowadays." Luther was among the strong believers of his day, but his danger was that in his strength he would despise those who were weak. It is natural for the strong to do so, but Paul says a Christian is not to be natural, or live on the level of the natural man. He is to love and not despise those believers who have hang ups that obstruct Christian liberty.

A strong Christian has to have the mind of Christ, and distinguish between the sinner and the sin. Jesus despised sin, but loved the sinner. So a Christian is to distinguish between the person and the position. The strong Christian can despise the position of a weak believer, but he dare not despise the person holding it, or he loses the advantage of his liberty, and becomes sub-Christian. In other words, no matter how silly and foolish I think another Christian's convictions are, I am obligated to love them as a brother in Christ.

Now lets look at the position and danger of the weak Christian. In verse 2 Paul says the weak Christian eats vegetables. He is so sensitive about defiling himself with meat offered to idols that he just gives up eating meat altogether. That sounds like a noble sacrifice, and it would seem that such a believer would be commended for his commitment to remain undefiled. He is considered the weak one, however, because he has sacrificed his liberty in Christ for the sake of the law. It is no virtue to be fussy where God is not. To abstain from something that God does not forbid is to add laws to life which hinder ones liberty in Christ. Men who do this reveal a weakness in their faith, and reveal that they depend upon the law as a crutch. It is easier to live under law than under grace. Freedom and liberty in Christ demand a great deal of soul searching in making decisions. Freedom is ambiguous, and one is left open to risk and mistakes. It calls for maturity to be free and remain in God's will.

On the other hand, the man who depends upon law to regulate his life has it made. There is no ambiguity, for it is all black and white and clear cut. There's no risk whatever, for all of the thinking is done for you. Your mind is made up by rules, and all you have to do is follow the rules. Your religious life is just a matter of following the rut that is cut out for you. This is the religion of the immature and the weak. The sin is not in being weak, however, but in judging and condemning the strong for their liberty which they do not understand. The weak feel they have Scripture on their side, and they can quote Ex. 34:15 where God warns against eating with the Canaanites lest they eat meat offered to idols. Here was a clear command, and the strong Christians were violating it. They felt justified in judging the strong, but Paul says it is wrong to do so, for God has accepted them.

Many of God's children feel that many others of his children are to liberal and do not deserve to be in His family. They judge them and say they are not children of God. This is a great evil that Paul is fighting. Karl Barth wrote, "Weak is the man who allows himself to be pushed into a position from which he judges others. Who is the Lord? Who has authority to judge? Who has power to exalt or cast down? Man or God?" If God receives the strong, who are you to condemn? The weak have a tendency to condemn, for it is their only weapon of defense. In a debate reason will not support their position, and so they have to shout condemnation for support.

Have you ever had one of your children come and demand that another of your children

deserves punishment, and if you don't do it they get mad? They feel you should take their side and vindicate them by judging the other. You would be a foolish parent to judge on the basis of your children's judgment. So God would be foolish to judge His children on that basis as well. Paul says God welcomes the strong who lives on the level of liberty in Christ. God delights in this kind of Christian. Paul warns the weak to stop playing God and leave judgment to Him who is God. The weak Christian needs to learn the attitude expressed by Walter Van Kirk who said, "I will attribute to those who differ with me the same degree of sincerity that I claim for myself." Both the weak and the strong need to learn this. One is sincerely right, and the other is sincerely wrong, but both are acceptable to God because the weakness is in a non-essential area of life. Whatever camp you are in, Paul demands that you live in love, and accept both the strong and the weak.

31. A GOOD QUESTION Based on Rom. 14:4-5

A crystal gazer collected 25 dollars for a reading and told the visitor, "This entitles you to ask me two questions. Isn't that a lot of money for only two questions?" Asked the startled woman. "Yes it is," answered the fortune teller. "Now what is your second question?" Many of the questions people ask are as wasteful as the first one of this unfortunate woman. They are as irrelevant as the question of the secretary who was to spell Mississippi, and she asked, "The river or the state?"

If all foolish questions were limited to the realm of the trivial, there would be no problem, but they invade theology also, and waste time and energy that could be put to a useful purpose. For example, someone asked Anselm, the leading theologian of the 11th century, why the second Person of the Trinity, rather than the first or third, became incarnate? Rather than dismissing it as irrelevant and beyond the finite mortal mind, he not only answered it, but he published his answer. It is very complicated, but one of his reasons is that if the Father or the Holy Spirit would have been incarnated, there would have been two sons in the Trinity: One before the incarnation and one after. It makes sense, but it is of no value. It is on the same level as the question on how many angels can stand on the head of a pin? Even if there was an answer, it would be worthless information.

A good question is one that leads to an answer that really matters. Paul's question in verse 4 to Christians in conflict is a good question because it forces Christians to come to conclusions which are healthy for Christian maturity. He asks, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" It calls for self-examination and evaluation, and this is vital for Christian growth. Christians who face up to this question will be among the great protectors of Christian freedom. Paul shows in the context that a proper answer to this question will protect us from a perversion of freedom, and provide us with a positive freedom. Paul stresses both the need for freedom from, and freedom for. The negative and the positive are both essential. We need freedom from condemnation, and we need freedom for conviction. We need freedom from perverted self-exaltation, and freedom for positive self-examination. In the simplest terms, we need freedom from idolatry, and freedom for investigation. Let's consider first:

I. FREEDOM FROM IDOLATRY.

How does this question free us from idolatry? If we ask ourselves who we are when we judge another person we are forced to either produce our credentials, or get off God's throne. Joseph Parker said, "That is the annihilating question. It brings every man up sharply, when he is asked to produce his title." Paul's question demands that we come up with an answer that authorizes us to sit in judgment, or get down with our fellow servants where we belong. This question is a sharp rebuke to the weak Christians who were playing God and condemning the strong Christians. What was happening in the Roman church was a common problem all through Christian history, and is still a problem today. Christians have a tendency to identify their convictions with the convictions of God, and, therefore, if anyone disagrees with them they interpret this as an attack upon God and so they feel obligated to express God's wrath and condemnation.

This eagerness to defend God was well known to Paul, for he was convinced that he was defending God when he persecuted the church. Paul learned in a shocking way that he was playing God and doing an exceedingly poor job of it. Man never does a decent job at being God. That is why God insists on handling his own affairs when it comes to judgment. Vengeance is mine I will repay says the Lord. Christians are notorious, however, for being impatient with God, and they take judgment into their own hands. Such an attitude is a sign of weak faith and self-idolatry. It leads one to worship his own ideas and convictions as if they were equivalent to God's.

This was the major problem that developed within the Catholic Church. It was her weakness that led to her to self-idolatry. She set herself up as judge of all, and suppressed the freedom to differ. All who did not conform to her pronouncements were killed or excommunicated. This is idolatry when any man or organization puts itself on the judgment seat of God. Protestants have done the same thing, and all of us are in danger of it. How do we gain freedom from this idolatry? We simply ask ourselves this question of Paul—who are you, or more personally, who am I to judge another man's servant. A servant stands or falls before his own master and not me.

If I can produce evidence authorizing me to be the master of my fellow Christians, then I can justify my judging them, but if I ask who I am, and have to confess that I am merely a fellow servant, then I will be set free from the dangers of idolatry. I must be fully aware that no Christian has any obligation to conform to my will. He is obligated to please Christ, and if he does that, it is none of my business that his conduct does not please me. Saddler writes, "In indifferent matters Christ leaves His servants at liberty, and if anyone of their fellow servants presumes to deprive them of their liberty, he puts himself between them and Christ, and this intrusion Christ will sooner or later resent."

Paul is telling us that Jesus is a master who does not desire all His servants to conform to one another, but rather to Him who is the author of infinite variety. He who made every snowflake; every blade of grass, and every finger print different, does not change His love for variety when it comes to His highest creation in man. Paul says to those who want to judge other Christians—don't do it. He will be upheld by his Master, and you will only be putting yourself in a position of insubordination to the Master.

The conservative is sure that the more liberal Christian will fall into sin and be swept away, but if he does what he does with a clear conviction, Paul says he will stand. The strong Christian will stand even if the weak Christian is sure he will fall. Jesus will not let a piece of meat bring about

the fall of any of His servants. Peter said to Jesus, "What about John?" Jesus said, "If I will that he tarries till I come, what is that to thee, follow thou me." So Jesus is saying, it is not your business to judge another of my servants. Your business is to do what you feel is right in obedience to My will. If we keep the right question in our minds, we will keep ourselves free from idolatry, and be able to say with Joaquin Miller-

In men whom men condemn as ill
I find so much of goodness still;
In men whom men pronounce divine,
I find so much of sin and blot.
I do not dare to draw a line
Between the two, where God has not.

Freedom from idolatry is only one part of Christian freedom. The next part is the positive part that Paul stresses in verse 5.

II. FREEDOM FOR INVESTIGATION

In this verse Paul brings up another completely different issue. It was not only on the matter of meats that the Christians had a problem, but also on special days. The Jews had long traditions of observing the Sabbath, and special days of feasting and atonement. The Gentiles had no such traditions, and they were not about to introduce a lot of new holidays into their schedule. Nor were they interested in fasting on certain days as were the Jews. Thus you had another hot issue of radical disagreement.

It was the weak Christian who said, just as vegetables are better than meat so certain days are better than others to be set aside for fasting or feasting. The strong Christians said all food is good, and so are all days. You can see how the Jews would be hurt to think that fellow Christians thought nothing of the Sabbath. The Gentiles would think the Jews were foolish for thinking Sunday-the Lord's Day was not to be preferred. Ignatius, who was martyred in 115 A.D. wrote, "Those who were concerned with old things have come to newness of confidence, no longer keeping Sabbaths, but living according to the Lord's Day, on whom our life, as risen again, through Him, depends." This shows that it was a slow process by which the Jewish Christians eventually got away from their loyalty to Old Testament law.

Paul was, of course, on the side of the strong Christians. He wrote to the Gal. 4:10-11, "You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain." It is never good to become superstitious about anything and think there is some special grace in certain days or seasons. The Old Testament did make much of these, but Paul writes to the Colossians and makes it clear the Christian is free from all of this. He writes in Col. 2:14, "Having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross." "Therefore," he says in verse 16, "Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath."

The famous missionary Mary Slessor spent 3 lonely years in the bush and had no calendar. She frequently got mixed up on her days. Once she was found holding her service on Monday, and again on one Sunday she was found on the roof hammering away in the belief that it was

Saturday. Were her services any less valid or valuable? Not according to Paul. In the New Testament we are not bound by any laws of days. Martin Luther said that if all Christians agreed to worship on Tuesday, they could do so without breaking any laws of God. Paul recognized that Christian freedom allows worship on the Sabbath or the Lord's Day, or any other day.

The Seventh Day Adventists and Seventh Day Baptists have a right to worship on Saturday and be pleasing to God. Their only danger is in thinking they have a superior day to those who worship on Sunday. If they think that, they are weak Christians, and fail to heed Paul's command that each be fully persuaded in his own mind. This is a very important principle, for it clearly opens up the way for the freedom of investigation and persuasion. If each Christian is to be free to choose, it means both sides of an issue must be free to express their views and present evidence. Any Christian church that sets down as an absolute standard to be conformed to on controversial issues, not clearly revealed in Scripture, is not a church based on New Testament principles. If Christians equally committed to Christ feel differently on an issue, it should be open to investigation, and never settled by a decree of the majority or a strong minority.

Paul says, let freedom prevail, and suppress no aspect of the truth, and let each be persuaded in his own mind. This, of course, means that some will be persuaded one way and others another way, and so there will never be full agreement. What is needed is not full agreement, but full liberty to obey the truth as you see it. Where this is lacking unity of agreement is of no value, for all agree, not out of conviction, but out of ignorance or necessity. Truth is only effective when it is held by conviction. Paul could throw his weight around, and by his authority command all to worship on Sunday and forget the Sabbath, but this is not an issue to be settled by authority. It is to be settled by evidence, persuasion, and conviction. This freedom to investigate, inquire, and search is essential for the Christian.

We have here the principles of liberty of conscience and toleration of differences. These are principles for which many Christians have fought and died. No church can eliminate these principles and be pleasing to God. Christians need to be free to take opposite sides on issues of controversy such as war and various views of the second coming. This freedom of investigation will keep Christians ever open to new light and truth, and prevent them from identifying Christianity with any particular position or party which has always been a curse to the church through history. This principle is a challenge for all Christians to be thinkers. It is never a Christian attitude to follow any path just because someone else says it is the right path. All a Christian does he is to do out of conviction, having looked at evidence and been persuaded.

Since I will not have to answer to my professor, pastor, teacher, or any other Christian leader, but to God alone, I am under obligation to disagree with them all and obey my convictions before God. These convictions, however, must be based on investigation and persuasion by evidence. Every Christian is to stand on his own two feet. You might take a position that differs from your mate or men of God whom you love and admire, but God says stand on that ground if you are fully persuaded in your own mind. This means Christians can disagree on many issues, and all be equally acceptable to God. It is not a New Testament principle that all Christians should agree on everything, but, that they should be fully persuaded in their own minds. I must respect another position even if I am convinced that it is wrong if they are fully persuaded that it is right.

This leads to the paradox that what is wrong for you may be right for me, or vice versa. Luther

said, "Because of the diversity of consciences, therefore, it can happen that one man sins and another does the right thing in one and the same action...." This opens the door to many exciting ideas. We can only conclude that freedom of speech and debate is a basic part of Christian living. If Christians could see this, they would not be offended when others reject their views, and try and present evidence to show it is inadequate. This is part of the process of growth in truth. No group on earth should be more open to new light than God's people. Therefore, no group needs to ask themselves Paul's good question more often than Christians-who are you? This is a good question because an honest answer will give us as a church, and as an individual, freedom from idolatry and freedom for investigation.

32. PHOEBE THE DEACONESS Based on Rom. 16:1-16

In May of 1972 deacons from Baptist churches throughout Virginia gathered for a special conference dealing with the work of the deacon. The leader noted a number of women in the crowd. He welcomed them as wives of the deacons. He was quickly set straight when it was pointed out to him that they were full fledged deacons sent by their churches to the conference. He was surprised, as are many Baptists, that deacon is no longer a male term or office. Scores of Southern Baptist Churches now have women deacons.

Leon McBeth in his book *Women in Baptist Life* estimates that the number of female deacons in Baptist churches run into the thousands, and in many cases they are the chairman of the board, or rather, the chairperson. A number of churches have changed their bylaws to require that 50% of the deacons be women. This is only new in the sense that it is a trend of the times. There are records of women deacons that go back into the 1920's in Southern Baptist Churches. It has only been since 1965, however, that many churches have changed their policy from men only on the deacon board.

Why this change? There are a number of factors that caused the church to change. One is the change in society. Daughters now get as good an education as sons. This means they grow up to be as well informed and prepared to be of service in the church. Women now work in every field, and they lead men in all kinds of ways in industry. These things have affected the life of the church. Secondly, the main reason for change is new insight into the Word of God. Biblical research has caused many Christians to change their minds about God's will for women in the church.

The idea that the Bible requires women to be kept in silence in the church is fast eroding as the Bible is searched for light on women. The negative restrictive passages of Paul are being seen in the light of Paul's positive passages, and they are being seen in context. The general positive attitude of Paul toward women is becoming a focus. Modern Baptists are discovering that they have been victims of a tradition detrimental to over half of the members of the church. Intensive research into the New Testament reveals that God does recognize the other half of the human race.

One of the key passages that becomes a foundation for what is happening today is right here in Rom. 16. Nowhere in all the Bible is there a chapter that does more to exalt the role of women in

the church. In this chapter we see Paul not dealing with controversial issues, but as a loving leader showing how he really felt about women. It is something of a shock to those who think of Paul as one with a negative view of women, for here he treats them as equals, and as fellow laborers in the work of Christ. This chapter forces us to go back to the negative passages and find out what is so wrong in those contexts that Paul seems to be so down on those that he is so up on here.

He begins this chapter of greetings to 26 individuals with a commendation of a woman, and Phoebe is her name. It means shining, and she was, indeed, a light in that dark world. Here was a woman that Paul loved, respected, and trusted on the same level as he did any of his male partners in the ministry. All agree that Phoebe was the carrier of the Epistle of Romans to Rome. Paul let a woman carry his letter that changed history, but more important, God let her carry this letter which was to become one of the most important parts of his revealed Word to the church. Here was responsibility on the highest level entrusted to this godly woman. Any idea that Paul was in any way opposed to women serving the cause of Christ is based on ignorance of his clear statements.

In Phil. 4:3 he wrote, "...help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the Gospel." And we know they were not just washing dishes. Paul did not hesitate to work with women, and to give them tasks of the highest level of importance. There is no support from Paul to keep women limited to the kitchen. They work side by side with Paul in the Gospel, and that means they were witnessing and sharing the faith in preaching and teaching.

Phoebe was the name of the moon in the ancient world. It was the object of pagan worship, but this Phoebe had found new light in Christ, and she was now shining for Him. She did not change her name when she became a Christian. Many Christians have pagan names. It is the life and not the label that needs changing. Phoebe made a radical change, and she became a servant in the church of Cenchrea. Some translations have it that she was a deaconess of that church. The Greek word is diakomos, which is the very same word that is translated deacon when it refers to specific men. Paul is the main user of this word in the New Testament. Out of 30 uses of the word 22 of them are by Paul.

In every case but one this word is made to refer to ministers or deacons. 18 times it is translated minister, and 3 times deacon. Only once in all of Paul's uses of the word is it translated servant. This one exception happens to be when Paul uses it to refer to a woman, and that woman was Phoebe.

Is it any wonders that modern women who study Greek begin to get suspicious about this, and resent the fact that tradition rather than honest dealing with the Scripture has influenced how this word is translated in its one reference to a woman? It is not just women who have protested this discrimination in Bible translation. Back in 1891 Louis Albert Banks, one of the great evangelical preachers of the day, and author of numerous books, made this strong statement in his book *The People's Christ*: "It is one of the strange illustrations of the power of prejudice and conservatism on really good men. For if this same word had been used to describe the church office of a man, it would have been translated deacon.....But because it touches the vexed question of a woman's right to official relations to the church, it was impossible to bring the word deaconess nearer than the margin."

He was making the point that men refuse to let the Bible say what it says when they do not like

what it says. Men have not liked the idea that Phoebe was a deacon in the early church, and so they made an exception, and just this once made it seem like Paul only considered her a servant. Deacon, of course, does mean servant, and Jesus said that the one who is a servant is the greatest of all. But this single exception in translating all 22 uses of this word by Paul achieved its purpose for centuries. It kept the masses of people, myself included, blind to the fact that Paul considered it legitimate for a woman to be a deacon in the church.

This fact brought to light has revolutionized the thinking of Christians all over the world, and the church is returning to the pattern of the early church by ordaining women deacons. Only those who do not know history view this radical change with alarm. Those who know the history of the church know that every great revival is marked by the increased liberty of women to be a force for God in the world.

Pentecost was the beginning where women as well as men were filled with the Holy Spirit. We have a record of women deacons that goes back to the start of the second century. Pliny wrote to the Roman Emperor Trajan about his dealing with Christians. He wrote, "Upon receiving this account, I judged it more necessary to examine and that by torture to maid-servants who were called ministers." He could not torture them into betraying their Christian friends. They remained faithful unto death.

In that ancient world men could not minister to women. Often a man could not even go and visit a woman. Women had to be appointed as deacons to meet the needs of women in that culture. Christian women in prison could never have any ministry without Christian women appointed to do such service. Both sexes were called deacons until the 2nd century when the word deaconess was developed to distinguish the female deacon.

Phoebe was a deacon in a town about 8 miles from Corinth. She was likely a wealthy widow, and like Lydia was able to travel because of her independence and resources. Such women have been key people in the progress of the church all through history. Even today there are hundreds of millions of dollars given to support Christian ministries by widows 55 and older. Paul gives this dear sister the highest commendation, and he urges them to assist her in any way that she may have need. Paul wanted no restrictions put on this woman. We do not know why she was there, but Paul wanted the Romans to support her in whatever it was.

William Barclay, the great English commentator, wrote, "If we really wish to see Paul's attitude to women in the church it is a passage like this that we should read. Here his appreciation of the work that they were doing in the church shines and glows through his words. The Baptist in England recognized that Paul was open to female deacons. The result was that the first Baptist church on this planet had women deacons, and when the early Baptists spread to Europe and America this practice continued. It died out eventually because of the changing role of the deacon. It used to be the role was ministry to human need. But times change, and deacons became managers of the church instead. This change from ministry to management pushed women out, for they were not needed for management. In modern times the ministry role is being revived, and with it the need for women as deacons.

It is not new, but it is a return to the equal status women had in the early church. Over half of the church is female, and it is only right that they have equal representation in all that concerns

them. The spirit of the times, and views of male leadership have made the equality of women in the church a very up and down experience. In the 4th century women's equality in the church was at a peak, and all the leading church fathers were in favor of it. John Chrysostom, the Bishop of Constantinople from 397 to 407 A.D., whose sermons are still read all over the world today, saw the great value of women in Christian service. He had 46 deaconesses in his church. There were 40 in another church in the city, and 6 in a small church in the suburbs.

His concern was not men's work or women's work, but God's work being done by God's people regardless of sex. The queen of deaconesses was Olympias. She was born in 368 A.D. to a wealthy pagan family. Her parents died early in her life, and she was educated by Christians. At 17 she married, but her husband died after 20 months. She was an 18 year old widow. She refused to marry again, and she devoted her life to being a deaconess. She spent her life using her wealth to minister to the needs of others. We have 17 letters that Chrysostom wrote to her, and from them we learn that she was so generous in giving her money away that he had to caution her to use more wisdom, for she would have to give an account of her charity before God.

Here was a woman who had the freedom to serve Christ as a leader in the church. This freedom spread all over the world but then the role of the deaconess began to decline in the 5th century. Men dominated the church councils, and the men began to take away the power of women. In 593 A.D. at the Synod of Orleans the men abolished the office of deaconess, and they declared it forbidden for any woman to be ordained as a deaconess. Believe it or not, women were forced to go underground and serve Christ in secret without official office. They did so with the help of men in authority who chose to go by the Bible rather than the authority of councils.

The rise of celibacy is what pushed women off the stage, and the church went into what is known as the dark ages. It was dark in part because of the suppression of women. The Reformation brought a restoration of women to service in the church. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was a key doctrine of the Reformation, and this doctrine leads to the equality of the sexes in Christ. There is no way to escape this basic biblical truth that every child of God is equally able to approach God and serve Him. Luther made it clear that women are just as much a part of the priesthood as men, and that if they have the gift they should preach the Word. Calvin also considered the deaconess as filling, "A most honorable and most holy function in the church."

But keep in mind that by this time there had been centuries of tradition of women not serving, and it was hard to find Protestant women who would break with that tradition. The Anabaptist and Moravians had deaconesses from the start. The Reformation began the vast work of women in hospitals, orphanages, and schools that has touched more lives with the love of Christ than can be calculated. In Germany the deaconess movement developed thousands of women who began the nurses of that day. They saved countless lives by their service in times of plague and war. The deaconess movement of Germany was so successful that calls came from around the world to help get the deaconess movement started in other lands. The movement spread to England and America and influenced many other churches to ordain women deaconesses.

This is not to say that the churches of England and America did not have women in service already. The Puritans of England back in the 1500's were ordaining women deacons. It was just that the movement out of Germany opened up many new doors for women. Sometimes their tasks

were very limited. One 60 year old deaconess in the Pilgrim church sat with a rod in her hand to keep children from disturbing the congregation. The German movement put women in leadership positions, however. Florence Nightingale got her training in this German school for deaconesses. The whole world has been changed by the labors of love that came from this movement.

What does history tell us? It says that the church rose and expands its ministry when it uses all of its resources, and does not suppress women. It says that the church withdraws from the world and ceases to develop ministries of compassion when it denies to women the equal right to serve Christ with their gifts. The church is at its best when both sexes can function freely according to their gifts. History also reveals that the Bible is not the problem. The Lord used women freely in his service. Paul rejoices in women laboring side by side with men in the ministry. The priesthood of the believer means that there is neither male nor female in Christ. The problem all through history has been male prejudice. Males have always had the power to give women equality, or to deny it. That is why history is a washboard on this issue. Some men feel comfortable with female equality, and others do not. These male feelings are the reason for the ups and downs of the history of women's equality.

Bishop Lightfoot, one of the most gifted Bible scholars of modern history, wrote about these two verses of Paul-Rom. 16:1 and I Tim. 3:11. He said, "If the testimony borne in these two passages to a ministry of women in Apostolic times had not been thus blotted out of our English Bibles, attention would probably have been directed to the subject at an earlier date, and our English church would not have remained so long maimed of one of her hands."

It is regrettable that men of God have been the cause of the suppression of women, but the good news is that light has broken through, and it is not likely there can ever be a going back into the dark. We are living in a period where the church is letting the body use both hands. It is a time for rejoicing, for every time women are allowed to serve the church, the church marches forward to victory faster than ever. The mission outreach of the church has always been dominated by women. Whoever heard of a men's missionary society? There are tens of thousands of women's missionary societies, and ten of thousands of women missionaries who do everything that men do. They preach the Gospel, and teach the Bible to men, women, and children. They baptize, serve communion, marry and bury, and carry on every function of the church to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ.

Women do not just pray for the missionary task, they do it. They go and do the very thing Jesus commanded, and not one voice of protest is raised, for every body knows Jesus did not say for men to go into all the world to preach, teach, and baptize. He said go ye, and that ye covers all who acknowledge Him as Lord. Paul says amen, and he rejoiced in women of his day who worked side by side with him in carrying out the Lord's command. Thank God for a woman like Phoebe who was so dedicated and so committed to serve Christ that she became the only woman of the Bible called a deacon. Without her and Paul's recognition and honor of her, there may never have been the history of the deaconess, and such a loss would be beyond calculation.

By her faithfulness and service this one godly woman has changed the course of history for the church, and she became by her influence one who touched multiplied millions. We can all be thankful that Paul was thankful to Phoebe, for these kind words to her have in the past, and continue today to lift women to the highest levels of Christian service.

