

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE LESSONS ROMANS



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Daniel Webster has been serving as a missionary in Ghana, West Africa since 2004. Previously Daniel worked as a Certified Interconnect Designer (CID) listed with IPC (Association of Connecting Electronics Industries). His electronics career spanned fifteen years working in Canada for the Department of National Defense, as well as spending five years designing advanced electronic communication equipment for the Avionics industry. Daniel is from British Columbia, Canada, and came to know the Lord at the age of twenty-five. He is married to Priscilla, and has a daughter living in Canada. Since 1994 Daniel has been involved with bible teaching and preaching to Christian audiences in both Canada and the USA, and also through various ministries in Ghana. Daniel developed this series of New Testament lessons during a five-year study of the New Testament. The Lessons were prepared as part of an on-going radio ministry in Ghana, where the lessons were broadcast on a national FM radio station in Kumasi from 2010 to 2015.

Cover: Designed by Daniel Webster – Photo is magnification of Acts 17:11

Bible Quotations:

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the New King James Version.

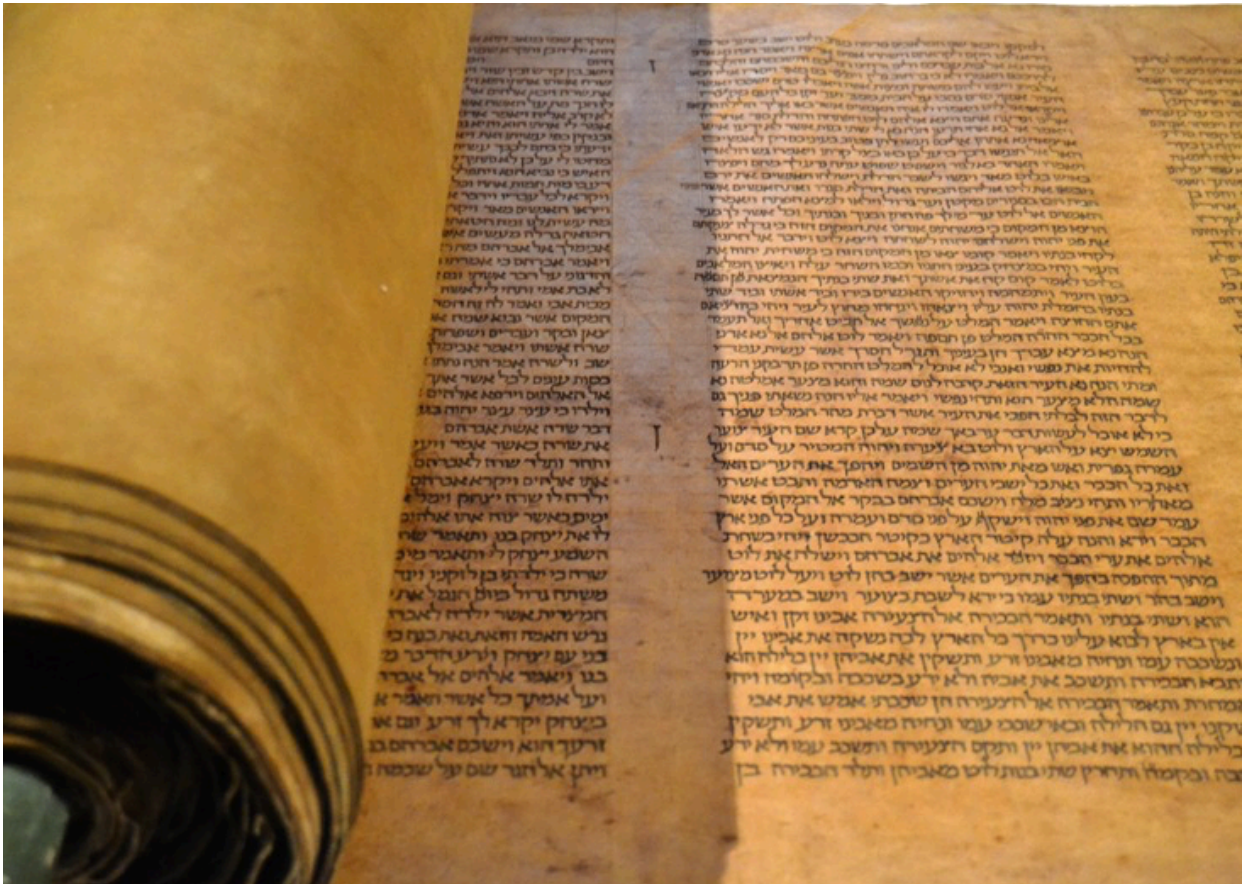
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

RADIO SERIES

DEVELOPED BY: DANIEL WEBSTER (2010)

Torah scroll - on sheepskin dating from 1155-1225



Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna

KEY VERSE:

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND

SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES

DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.

ACTS 17:11

THEME:

AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME,
WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

JEREMIAH 29:13

Table of Contents

	PAGE
Romans Title Page	9
Lesson 118 – Revelation of the Gospel – Romans 1	10
Lesson 119 – Inward Reality – Romans 2	12
Lesson 120 – All Have Sinned – Romans 3	14
Lesson 121 – Abraham was Justified by Faith – Romans 4	16
Lesson 122 – The Blessings of Justification – Romans 5	18
Lesson 123 – Dying to Sin – Romans 6	20
Lesson 124 – The Believers Battle with sin – Romans 7	22
Lesson 125 – Sanctification to Glorification – Romans 8	24
Lesson 126 – God’s Elect – Romans 9	26
Lesson 127 – Righteousness by Faith – Romans 10	28
Lesson 128 – God’s Gospel Plan – Romans 11	30
Lesson 129 – Man’s Response to God’s Mercy – Romans 12	32
Lesson 130 – Proper Christian Conduct – Romans 13	34
Lesson 131 – Walking in Love – Romans 14	36
Lesson 132 – Ministry to the Gentiles – Romans 15	38
Lesson 133– Greetings to the Romans – Romans 16	40

Preface

The lessons from Matthew to Revelation have been prepared through personal study of the New Testament. As an on-going part of our radio ministry in Ghana, it was decided to broadcast a series of teachings that would provide one lesson for each of the two hundred and sixty chapters of the New Testament. This work was completed over a five-year period from 2010 to 2015. These lessons are not intended as a commentary, or as an in-depth exegesis of each chapter. The lessons were written to be a concise, and consecutive teaching of the chapters of the New Testament, while providing practical instructions in Christian living. There is a strong emphasis in these lessons on the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The author's intent is not simply to help people learn the teachings of the New Testament, but more importantly, he desires that all would come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Each lesson contains a section entitled "Today's Bible Question". This section is designed to address a relevant question, pertaining to the chapter lesson, or with a view to the present spiritual climate. The lessons will serve many purposes for those interested in the teachings of the New Testament. I envision this work helping various bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders who wish to use a consecutive approach to presenting the scriptures to those whom they teach. Each lesson has been kept to a standard of two typed pages, or between 1500 to 2000 words. This will allow the lessons to be easily adapted into a regular teaching schedule. Each lesson, including the bible question section, can be read in less than 15 minutes, leaving time for group discussions, or further commenting, during a 30 to 45 minute bible teaching class.

It is my hope that this work will serve many in the Christian community with a greater appreciation of the teachings of the New Testament, and also be used by God to bring people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This work is dedicated to the glory of God, and the expansion of His kingdom both now and forevermore.

Daniel Webster
Oct. 2015

LESSONS IN ROMANS

Statue of The Roman Emperor Nero by Claudio Valenti, Anzio (anc. Antium) Italy



Image courtesy of [NickW55Z] at [Wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org) (CC-BY 2.0)

"SO, AS MUCH AS IS IN ME, I AM READY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOU WHO ARE IN ROME ALSO. FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD TO SALVATION FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES, FOR THE JEW FIRST AND ALSO FOR THE GREEK."

ROMANS 1:15,16

LESSON 118
Revelation of the Gospel
ROMANS I

In our last lesson we completed our study of the book of Acts, and today we are beginning a new study in the next book of our New Testament, the book of Romans. Romans presents to us the doctrine of the gospel. God has provided this book so that all men can have a clear understanding of the gospel message, and so no one will have any excuse on the day of judgment, and say that God did not give them a fair chance to be saved.

God is interested in the salvation of all people, and has sent forth the gospel message so that all will hear and believe. We shall learn that the whole world is guilty because men have turned away from God and his righteousness, and have chosen a path of sin. Romans teaches us that all men are sinners and guilty before God, but because of God's love and grace, God has made a way of salvation for us. The salvation that God offers to mankind is not based on man's efforts, or keeping the rules and regulations of the bible, but it is through faith in Jesus Christ. Eternal life is entirely a free gift that God is willing to give to all who place their faith in Jesus. Romans teaches us that God is not only interested in bringing us to heaven, but also in changing us to be like Jesus, and allowing us to share in his glory. The love of God is for us, and nothing can take us away from that love, once God has called us to be his child. Though God wants the Jewish nation to believe and follow Jesus as their Messiah, they have rejected God's salvation and their lack of faith blinds them. However God's wisdom will use the gentiles believers to provoke Israel to jealousy so that eventually they too will believe in Jesus as their savior. By this God has done all that he can do to convince both Jews and Gentiles to accept His free gift of salvation. Because of the goodness and mercies of God we who know the Lord are called to submit our lives entirely to Him. We are to have transformed minds, serve the church, and demonstrate to the world that we are Jesus, when we display grace, forgiveness and love to others. This is a quick overview of the book of Romans, and I know if you desire to follow God's plan for your life, you will learn from and enjoy this book. I encourage you to pray that God would show you His plan for you. Let us dedicate ourselves to follow along in this study as we learn God's plan to bring us to heaven, and to be like and with Jesus forever.

Romans chapter 1 has three sections: the subject of the gospel, the mission of the gospel, and the revelation of the gospel. In the first section – the subject of the gospel, we learn that the gospel is all about Jesus Christ who is revealed to us as the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. When Jesus calmed a storm at sea, his disciples said 'what manner of *man* is this', and when the women at the well discovered His divine knowledge, she said, "sir I perceive that you are a *prophet*", but it was Thomas who saw Jesus alive after his crucifixion and said, "My Lord, and my *God*". The gospel reveals to us that Jesus is God's Son and therefore equal with God. We must believe who Jesus really is in order to be saved. In the second section we have the mission of the gospel, where we discover that the gospel is sent out to all people, first to the Jewish people, but then also to the gentiles. God wants all men to be saved and so he has sent out the apostles, men like Paul, and missionaries to carry the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. This mission is continuing to this very day. In the third section of this chapter we read about the revelation of the gospel. The gospel is revealing the wrath of God against all the wickedness of man. As the gospel spreads it's message it reveals to man how sinful he is, how he has turned away from God, and chooses to worship created things, rather than God himself. Men should have known and worshipped God, but men do not want to think about God, and they want to make up their own religious ideas and practices. God allows them to follow their own foolish course, and their minds become reprobate, and their practices become more and more evil. The writer explains that as men turn from God to pursue the lusts of their own hearts, they will turn away from God's purpose and design by preferring homosexual relationships rather than the heterosexual relationships God intended. This perversity is an indication of a society that has departed from God, and is ripe for His judgment. We can see the downward trend of those who practice sin. They might begin by turning away from what is good, but eventually they find themselves so immersed in a world of sin and depravity, that they can only be described as haters of God. Today we see some who fight against God, and ridicule religion and those who have their hope in God. These who profess to be wise have become fools, for no one practices sin and gets away with it.

There is much for us to think about in this chapter, and we do not have time today to consider all of its' richness, but let us at least remember that the gospel is God's message for all mankind, and each of us needs to know and trust in Jesus as our Savior, or else we shall have to face God's wrath. Today we read '*the just shall live by faith*', and this means that those who have come to Jesus in faith, and whom God has accepted as his righteous children, will live their lives on earth by trusting in God always.

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

Today's Bible Question:

Today we had our introduction to the book of Romans, which teaches us about the gospel. The gospel we learned was all about Jesus the Son of God, and God's desire to see all men saved. It reveals how men turn away from God to worship created things, and fall into perverse and wicked sins. Someone might ask the question, "How does God make Himself known to men?"

When we see how much sin is in the world we might wonder how people would be so willing to behave wickedly when God hates sin and is ready to judge our wickedness. The problem is that men do not like to think about God. They cannot see God with their eyes, so they like to pretend that He is not really there, and so they are free to act anyway they please. However, God says that men are without excuse, for even though we cannot see God with our eyes we know he is there by the things which he has made.

God makes Himself known to men in at least three distinct ways, and we shall consider each of these. Some men might not believe in God, or feel they are accountable to God. They convince themselves that God does not exist, or that He does not care about how they behave. The reason men choose not to believe in God is not due to a lack of evidence for His existence, but because they want to live however they please. They love the freedom to do anything their heart desires. It is something like children who are left at home alone when their parents have gone out. The children might be careful to behave well because they know that eventually the parents will be back home and punish any bad behavior. But the children might choose to just behave as they want to and eat all the food in the house, and damage things in the house. They convince themselves that their parents will not find out, and so they can get away with it. They think about their present desire, and not the future consequence of their behavior. This is how many people are behaving in the world today, thinking that they are getting away with their sin, and that God will never judge them. If they really believed in God and His righteous judgment, they would never allow themselves to carry on in a life of sin.

So how does God awaken us to know that He is really there, even though we cannot see him with our eyes. Well, as I said, God does this in three ways. Firstly God speaks into man's conscience. Everyone has been given a conscience, and that is the part of us that understands the difference between what is right and what is wrong. A conscience is present in every human being, and they instinctively know that it is wrong to cheat, murder, and steal. No laws have to be written for man to understand this, because the ideas of right and wrong are already built into our minds, since we have been made in the image of God. Our conscience has certainly been damaged because of sin, and can even become wounded, hardened and deadened. This does not deny that we all have a God given conscience. We know some things are wrong because our conscience leads us to understand that someday we must face our judge. Though we may have never seen God, or know much about God, our conscience leads us to know that there must be a God who hates evil and will judge it. If this were not so we would just do anything that we please, and not consider how it hurts others, so long as we gain some benefit. But this is not how we act, and even godless people still have a conscience, and this is the way God makes himself known to men. Another important way that God reveals himself to men, is through his creation. We are part of God's creation, and he has given us minds to think and eyes to see. As we look around us at all that God has made, we are lead to understand that created things must have a creator. When we see something beautiful, or observe the balance, order, and intricate complexity of creation we can reasonably conclude that these things could not have happened without a creator who is full of power and wisdom. Some people have not come from a religious home, or been taught about God, and yet they can see creation and that there must be a creator who made all these amazing things. There are people who have come to know God and trust in Jesus because of the witness of God's creation. In today's lesson we learned that God's invisible attributes are seen and understood by the things which God has made, including his power and Godhead. Men should recognize from the message of creation that God is their judge, and they will answer to His authority some day. Finally and most importantly God speaks to us through His written revelation the bible. We can know God because He has spoken plainly to us. It is the word of God that leads us to know Jesus. Jesus was not just an idea drummed up by zealous people who wanted hope for something better after death. Jesus was a real historical person, who came into this world and walked among men, being seen and heard by countless witnesses. After they rejected God's son and crucified Him, God raised him from the grave speaking loudly and clearly to all men that Jesus is God's Son, and our only hope for eternal life. Yes God has spoken whether by conscience, creation, or the word of God, and so all men may know God. Do you know Him?

"because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them." Romans 1:19

LESSON 119
Inward Reality
ROMANS 2

In our last lesson we were introduced to the book of Romans and the revelation of the gospel. We learned about the subject, and mission, of the gospel. Today we shall learn that men need more than outward Law to make them righteous, but an inward reality of righteous living, that comes by faith.

Romans chapter 1 to 11 presents to us the doctrine of the gospel, and it is laid out much like a careful argument to convince the reader of the justice of God, and the redemptive plan of God. In chapter two we learn that Man is condemned when he tries to judge others where he practices the very same sins that he is trying to condemn in others. We find a story in John chapter 8 that displays this kind of hypocrisy in judging. When the Pharisees brought an adulterous woman to Jesus, and wanted his approval for stoning her. Jesus said the one who is without sin, should cast the first stone, and they all had to leave due to their guilty conscience. It is God alone who can provide judgment according to truth. If we set ourselves up as judges of others, and then think we can practice the same sins that we are judging in others, we are only fooling ourselves. God sees the hypocrisy, and though he is very good and patient with sinners, he will judge us when we do not repent of our hypocrisy.

Some people despise the goodness of God and continue in their sin, believing that God will not judge them, but as they harden their heart they are storing up God's wrath for the day of judgment. The bible is telling us here that some day every man must answer to God for his sin, and if we do not repent of our sin, we shall have to face God's mighty anger, and that is something we will want to avoid at all costs. No one gets away with anything, God will be sure that every man is judged according to his sins.

God's judgment divides all men into two categories, those who are saved and will go to heaven, and those who are lost and go into Hell. In order to enter heaven, and have eternal life, a person must place their faith in Jesus Christ. This faith produces evidence of new life by the continuing fruits of righteousness. Those who demonstrate that they are not following God's righteous standards, and live selfish and disobedient lives will meet with God's anger and wrath and be cast into everlasting torment of Hell.

Now the writer in this chapter shows us the relationship of both Jews and gentiles to the Law of Moses. He addresses the Jews predominantly in this passage; but as we gentiles also listen in, we shall learn that how one responds to and handles the law of God personally will show whether the law is in the heart, or just outward religion. The Jews prided themselves on their knowledge of the Law of Moses. They taught others how they should obey God's Law, and saw themselves as teachers and guides of others, but they themselves were not personally applying the word to their own circumstances. Yet there were gentiles who did not know the Law of Moses as well as the Jews did, but still understood that they should live honorably, honestly and righteously before God. The righteous precepts that God had written in the Law of Moses for the Jews, was instinctively known and practiced by some gentiles who did not have the Law of Moses. Now their righteous deeds did not save them, or make the gentiles fit for heaven, but it did demonstrate that some people due to their sensitive conscience understood how to behave in righteousness without the need of having it written down in a code of Laws. The Jews had their Law written and given to them, and they learned it very well, but it never sank deep into their hearts. God demands righteousness not only in word, but more importantly in deeds.

It might be that the Jew would use the Law to teach others that they should not commit adultery, but they themselves were adulterers. Such hypocrisy is all too common in religious circles, for we often fall into the trap of thinking it is others who need to hear and obey what the preacher is saying, while forgetting the message is also for us, and we must consider how we also have to repent and live in righteousness. The Jews should have known how to behave well, for God had clearly shown them through their Law, but when they preached the truth and lived a lie, all others looking at them and their religion saw the hypocrisy and were lead to blaspheme the name of God. Those of us who profess to be Christians must also remember that the world looks at us, and how we conduct ourselves. If we show by our godliness that we do believe the gospel, and desire to obey and follow our Lord, then others will find our message more believable; but if we should preach one thing, and live another, they will mock us, reject our gospel, and perhaps be lost forever. Think carefully about how you listen to and respond to what God says, for the message is not just to tickle our ears, but to change us into obedient children who bring glory to God.

The Jewish practice of circumcision was to mark out a person as distinctly Jewish. Some Jews might have been lead to think that their circumcision made them God's chosen people. Whereas the rite of circumcision was only an outward witness to an inward reality. If a person was indeed a child of Abraham by faith, then they were a true Jew. What about you can your outward profession be matched with the inward reality of faith in Jesus Christ. Do people see that you are a Christian before you tell them you are?

"but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God." Rom 2:29

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about the hypocrisy of having the Law of God, but not personally obeying it. We also learned that unless the righteousness of God's law in an inward reality in a person's life they are just fooling themselves if they think they are God's child. Someone might ask the question, "How can any sinful man qualify to teach God's word?"

Today we read about the self-righteous Jews, who thought themselves qualified to teach and instruct others how to live righteously before God. The only trouble was they themselves were just sinful men who were not practicing the Law personally, while calling on others to do so. This is hypocrisy, and God hates all hypocrisy. So how is that any man could qualify to teach on God's behalf, and call others to repent of their sin, when we know that all men are sinners themselves. Well it is certainly true that all men are born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and this would morally disqualify any man from teaching the bible. However God does justify some men because of their faith. Through faith God imputes the righteousness of God upon the guilty sinner, and this alone qualifies him to represent the Lord through teaching. If a man stands up to preach, and says to everyone that they should depart from their sin. Someone might rightfully say to the preacher, but you too are a sinner, so why are you preaching at us, are you more righteous than we are? To this the preacher could answer, indeed I am a sinner like anyone else, but I have known the forgiveness and cleansing of God. And now by faith I seek to live in a manner that agrees with my Christian profession. But I would have you know that I am nothing more than a condemned sinner, except for the righteousness of God that has been given to me freely through the love and grace of God. Christ died to pay for all my sins, and now the Lord looks at me as His righteous child. All my righteousness is found in Jesus and not in me. I speak on His behalf, and call you to heed His word, and not my own. Do not look to me, but look to Jesus Christ, for forgiveness and cleansing.

Only a righteous man has the moral authority to call upon others to repent of sin. No one can point the finger and say, "you wicked sinner", without also condemning themselves, for they too are just a sinner. However when a person is saved, God removes from them the guilt of their sin, and makes them clean and holy before God. They may, by God's grace, preach the gospel to others. Any believer who preaches to others about sin and repentance will be personally and deeply aware that apart from the grace of God, they also be condemned. Thus we should see a mark of humility in any preacher, as he remembers that he too is just a sinner saved by grace. Loud and proud preachers, do not have the mark of forgiven sinners, but of self-righteous Pharisees. Be careful to discern whether the preacher you listen to is a humble forgiven servant, or wolf in sheep's clothing.

While we talk about how a man qualifies to teach God's word, we should also notice the instructions of scripture. The men who teach the bible to the church are elders. They are not referred to as Doctors, Apostles, Reverend, or Father. They are mature believers who have ability to teach the bible, and who meet the moral and character qualifications listed in 1Tim 3 and Titus 1. Any preacher who does not faithfully minister the bible to those under his care is being an unfaithful shepherd. Even if he meets the character qualifications, he disqualifies himself by failing to carry out the job God has assigned to him. So qualifying to teach the word, not only requires a humble forgiven sinner, but a man of maturity, who sees his personal responsibility to offer spiritual care by teaching the word faithfully and accurately to others. The bible warns that not many should seek to be teachers in the church, for teachers will receive a greater condemnation. This means that when a man leads people astray from God's word, he will be held to account to a much higher degree, because his responsibility was much greater. No one should presume to take upon themselves the role of a teacher of God's word, without clear confirmation from other godly people who recognize their call of God, and manifest qualifications. No true teacher of the word, would proudly claim that their spirituality, or academic credentials, has made them qualified to teach the church. God often chooses men, whom we would not have anticipated being teachers or leaders in the church. When young David was chosen to be king over Israel, all the older brothers were passed by. God looked within that young man's heart, and saw that He would follow God's righteous ways, and chose him as king. David too was a sinner, but God uses redeemed sinners to share the message of God's mercy and grace, from a grateful heart. If not for God's redeeming grace no man would have the moral qualification to teach others, but praise His name, He has made us fit to serve Him, and preach in His name.

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Ephesians 3:8

LESSON 120
All Have Sinned
ROMANS 3

In our last lesson we learned that having a bible does not make a person righteous, any more than calling yourself a Mercedes makes you a car. It is common for people to have an outward religion without an inward reality, and that is hypocrisy. Today we continue our study of Romans, hearing the author argue the point that all men are guilty before God, and God justifies sinners through faith in Jesus Christ.

The writer of Romans, which incidentally is Paul, answers potential objections that a law-keeping Jew might have against his gospel message. After all, if one who practices the religion of the Jews, is not different than any gentile who lives a godly life, then what advantage is there in being Jewish or being circumcised? Paul argues that the Jews did have a distinct advantage over all other nations, for to them was given the trust of the old testament scriptures. Because they were unfaithful to the scriptures, they were just as guilty before God as any gentile sinner, and they should not blame God for their condition. God is perfectly righteous to condemn those Jews who would not obey His word. Even if man's sin magnifies God's holiness, that does not excuse the sin, or make it less sinful. Men will always look for some way to blame God for their own condition, or excuse themselves from his judgment because they think God is not fair in His judgments. The bible here says, *'let God be true, and every man a liar'*. God is perfect in His justice always, and no matter if all men should think God unfair, God is the perfect and impartial judge.

Some people were falsely suggesting that Paul was teaching others to go ahead and practice evil that good may come. Paul flatly denies this, and wishes condemnation of such sinister accusers. No matter what benefit might result from our actions, we should never think that sin is justifiable, even if it causes some greater good. For instance someone might choose to cheat on their final medical exams at school, and justify this sin because they see the result of being a doctor as a greater good, which outweighs the bad. People frequently do this, but it is usually motivated by selfish or prideful ambition.

Now Paul explains that all are charged with sin, both Jews and gentiles, quoting from the Psalms, which state that *'there is none righteous, no not one'*. He gives us a vivid description of the depravity of man's sinful state, pointing out that his natural tendency is to wander away from God, and not to seek after Him. In this description of man's evil ways, Paul shows that men are entirely corrupt; with mouths that speak lies and cursing, and feet that run after violence and destruction. It is God's righteous standards, given in the bible, that demonstrate how sinful we are, and that no man can make any claim of being righteous before God. We are all guilty, the whole human race. Even when men try to keep God's laws, they are not able to. The law was not given to make us righteous, but to show us how sinful we are.

That all sounds rather sober, but now we have good news. While we cannot be justified by keeping God's law, God has provided us a way to be justified, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. Paul says this teaching about God's righteousness through faith can be found in the Old Testament scriptures, and he makes several quotations to prove his point. He says plainly that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God. This means that no one has measured up to God's standard. Do not ever think that you are good enough, or will ever be good enough to impress God to let you into heaven. The bible says you are a sinner, and you fall short of His glory, meaning you can't get to heaven in your sinful condition. However, we can be justified by our faith in Jesus Christ. This is because Jesus took our sins upon himself, and was judged for our sins. This is called propitiation, which means God is fully satisfied with the payment that Jesus made for our sins. God shows forth his righteousness through the cross of Jesus, for the sins of all generations have been paid by Jesus' death, even those who sinned prior to Christ coming into the world. Because God justifies men freely by grace, and not through their keeping the law, no man can boast of his own righteousness.

Paul has carefully argued to show us that a man is justified before God through faith, apart from the law, whether they are Jews or gentiles. At this point, some might argue against Paul saying that if gentiles can be saved without the law, then of what use is the law, is it pointless? Paul anticipates this objection and says that those who are made righteous by faith do not nullify God's righteous law, but establish it. What Paul means here is that when a person acknowledges by faith that they are a guilty sinner, and that their only hope is in God's redemptive plan through Jesus Christ, they agree with God's righteous standards in the law. The Christian can fully acknowledge his sin and guilt before God, and acknowledge God's righteous judgment against sin. He stands in full agreement with God about his sin and guilt, and therefore shows that God's law is true and righteous. Those who try to justify themselves through the law fail to understand that God can never accept us in our sinful condition. If you want to be in a right standing before God, then realize that you must place your trust in Jesus as your savior. God will only accept your faith in Jesus as the way to be saved. Why not place your trust in Jesus right now by confessing to Him in prayer that you are the sinner, and you want Him to be your savior.

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." Rom 3:28

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard Paul argue that all men are guilty sinners before God, and that a man cannot be justified by the law, but only through faith in Jesus Christ. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to be justified?"

We find several theological terms being used in this chapter, and throughout Romans, such as redemption, propitiation, and justified. If we do not understand these biblical terms we might have difficulty in understanding what the bible is communicating to us. Let's take a few moments to seek a clear understanding of what it means to be justified.

When the bible speaks of being justified, it is a legal term meaning to be fully pardoned. This means that God declares a person to be righteous, and free from guilt. How is this possible, when the bible also tells us that "all have sinned"? If we are all sinners before God, then how is it even possible to be declared righteous? When God declares us righteous, it is the same as if we had never sinned, and we are made perfect in His sight. God does this through imputation of Jesus' righteousness to our account. Because Jesus paid the full penalty for all of our sins, God imputes our sin to His account, and His righteousness to our account. It is a transfer of pardon for adequate payment. We should understand that the only payment that God can accept for our sin is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. When we acknowledge our sin to God, and accept Jesus through faith as God's answer to our sin, then God transfers all the charges of sin against us over to Jesus, and all the perfections of Jesus righteousness over to us. This is a remarkable transaction, and I hope we all understand the extent to which God has provided for our salvation. God did not do this because we deserve it. We deserve His wrath and judgment. Jesus took all of God's wrath that was against our sin. This wonderful grace is something we ought to thank God for each and every day. Imagine if your child was sick in the hospital, and ready to die unless some important surgery was done. The surgery was much too costly for you to pay, and you desperately needed someone's help to save your child's life. Then some kind and rich person comes to your aid and gives you the full payment for the surgery, and thereby your child is saved. I think you would be most grateful to the person who paid the cost of the surgery. You would probably want to thank them each time you saw them. You may want to give something to them to show your appreciation. This is what it should be like for every Christian, because we understand that a great price was paid to remove the disease of sin from our souls.

It is important to understand what justification means, and how a person becomes justified before God. Many people think they are in a right standing with God, and therefore do not fear God's judgment. Let me tell you, it is much safer for you to fear God's judgment, then it is to not worry about the safety of your soul. Not only do we all need to understand the way God justifies a guilty sinner, but we need to be personally confident that we have been given that justification. So how does God provide justification to us? The bible is very clear on this point. We are justified through our faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is essential to our salvation. Even before Jesus came into the world, the old testament believers were also justified by their faith. They could not look to the cross of Jesus Christ, and receive Jesus as personal Savior, for they did not have knowledge about Jesus as the coming Messiah. However what had been revealed to them from God, through the scriptures and prophets, called for their faith and obedience. When God called on someone to obey His word, and they did obey, it demonstrated their faith in God, and this is how God declared them righteous. When Abraham was told that he was going to have a son in his old age, even though this would have been miraculous (for men of Abraham's age did not normally give birth to children) he believed God's word, and the bible says he was credited with righteousness. This means God justified Abraham due to Abraham's faith in God's promise. Abraham's case is very clear in scripture, but for other old testament figures there is not always a clear indication of when, and if, they were justified. It might be difficult to discern, for instance, whether King Saul, or Solomon were justified, because though they worshipped God, they also showed rebellion against God. It maybe that they were true children of God, but disobedient, or they might have just been religious people without sincere faith, like Balaam. To discern if someone is justified we would have to see their faith, but faith is not visible, except for the works that faith produces. If everything in your life speaks of a lack of faith, then it may indicate that you are not really justified. If, on the other hand, your life produces works that reveal your faith in Jesus as Lord, then your justification becomes evident to others. Remember we are justified by faith, but only a faith that produces the fruits of righteousness.

"For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Rom 4:3

Abraham was Justified by Faith

ROMANS 4

In our last lesson we followed Paul's argument to show that all men are condemned as sinners before God, and justification only comes to us through our faith in Jesus Christ. We also saw how Abraham's example of faith demonstrated that even old testament believers were justified by faith. Today Paul continues this same argument, and further develops his point from the example of Abraham's justification through faith.

He points out that if Abraham was justified by his works he would have reason to boast, but not before God. The Jews believed that it was their relationship to Abraham, and observance of the law that would justify them before God. Therefore, because their hope was in their being children of Abraham, Paul uses Abraham himself to demonstrate that justification was not based on good works. He explains that when a man works for something, he is rewarded because it is owed to him. God only justifies freely through grace those who believe on Jesus, apart from their works. He will not justify those who are trying to pay for their salvation. Paul also calls upon David's writing in the Psalms to further his point, by noting that David said, "blessed is the man whom the Lord will not impute sin." This can only happen when a man's sins are forgiven, and the only way to have forgiveness for sins is through faith in Jesus, because Jesus paid for our sins upon the cross. No other payment or method to cover sins has been made available. God is only satisfied with the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, as adequate payment for the forgiveness of sins.

Now Paul takes another turn in His argument about Abraham's justification, asking his audience whether Abraham was circumcised, or uncircumcised, when God declared him to be a righteous man. In case they had never considered this point, Paul reminds them that Abraham was indeed justified before God when he was still uncircumcised. This, Paul says, was done so that Abraham would not only be father to the circumcised, but also to the uncircumcised, so that righteousness could be imputed to them also. The Promise made to Abraham was not just to him, or his physical descendants, but also to all who practice Abraham's faith. Paul argues that if those who follow the law were heirs of Abraham's promise, then faith would be meaningless, and the law brings God's wrath, and without law there is no sin. From this line of reasoning Paul concludes that God's promise made to Abraham and his seed, was acquired through faith and by God's grace, was for all who believe, and not just for those who were descendants of Abraham.

Abraham's faith is set before us as an example of faith that credits him with righteousness. When Abraham was an old man, and his wife was also well beyond child-bearing years, he still believed that God would fulfill His promise to give him a son. Abraham did not consider his own age or his wife's age, when God told him Sarah would bear him a son. He heard what God said, and He believed that if God said it, that He was able to do what He said, for with God all things are possible. His eyes were fixed on the living God, who gives life, and he knew God could and would keep his promise. It was Abraham's faith in God to perform what He had promised that caused God to declare Abraham righteous. The bible states this in Genesis 15, and the truth of justification by faith is reinforced throughout the pages of the bible. God has written about Abraham's justification by faith for our benefit, so we would all understand that our only hope to be righteous before God is our faith in Jesus Christ. It is not a matter of what church you attend, how much you pray or read you bible, or how hard you try to do what is right, you cannot be righteous before God except through faith. We must believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead, believe that Jesus suffered, was crucified, and rose up from the dead. When we believe in Jesus, God will declare us to be righteous, and make us His children.

It might be difficult for some of us to follow carefully through Paul's scriptural argument here, because the argument is really intended for the Jews, who had their hope in their good works and relationship to Abraham, as their means of justification. We can, however, understand the main point he is making, which is that all men are justified (declare righteous) in the presence of God by their faith in Jesus Christ, and not based on their good works. Though Romans is more technical, and difficult to follow, it was necessary to have such a careful explanation of the gospel for the sake of the Jews, who had misdirected their faith from being in God, to being in the scriptures, and their being born of Abraham. Paul wipes away all these false ideas, through his very careful explanation of justification by faith, whether under the old Jewish covenant, or the new covenant of our present church age. For most of us a simple explanation that we are guilty sinners, and God wants to show us mercy, and therefore sent Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins, will be sufficient for us to believe the gospel and find salvation. We are glad to have the book of Romans though, for we can have the theological confidence of our justification based on it's principle taught in both the old and new testament. Just as Abraham believed God, and God accepted Abraham's faith as credit for righteousness, so we also by showing faith in Jesus can be justified. If you want to be a child of God, and have forgiveness of sins, then believe in Jesus who died for you, and rose from the dead.

"but to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." Rom 4:5

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we followed Paul's argument about justification by faith as illustrated by Abraham's. We also learned that we may receive the promise of being heirs with Abraham, whether or not we are his physical descendants, when we practice the faith of Abraham. Someone might ask the question, "What was the promise made to Abraham to which we become heirs?"

Today we read about a promise made to Abraham, and that all who follow in his steps of faith, also become heirs of that promise. At verse 13 of this chapter we are told that Abraham would be heir of the world, and in verse 17 Abraham is called the father of many nations. When Abraham was promised a son by God, he was an old man, and his wife was also old, and yet Abraham believed God's word. If we look back at the words of God spoken to Abraham in Genesis 17, God said to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. He also told Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land of the Canaanites as an everlasting inheritance. Now we have learned in today's lesson that these blessing for Abraham and his offspring, are also for all those who are children of faith. That means that every Christian will also enjoy an inheritance along with Abraham and his descendants. Now Abraham never did receive the land of promise while he was living. He did receive the son of promise, but that was not the fulfillment of all that God was to give to Abraham. The promise to Abraham is still yet to be fulfilled. Although the Jews did take over much of the land that was promised to their father Abraham, they have never possessed all the land that was promised, for God said the borders of their land would extend from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates river. This land has not yet been fully inherited by Abraham's offspring, through the promised son Isaac, although the children of Ishmael have also inherited much of this land even up to this day. One day when the Lord Jesus returns to rule upon this earth, He will establish His kingdom, with Jerusalem as His capital city, and Israel will be given all the lands that were promised to Abraham by God. When Christ rules over all the nations, the promise made to Abraham that - of his seed all nations would be blessed, and he would inherit all nations; will be fulfilled.

We become part of this great promise made to Abraham, when we as Christians, join our Lord Jesus Christ during his future reign, and are given to share in the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants. Along with the Jewish believers at that time we shall enjoy the land that God promised to Abraham. The earth will be changed to be much like it was originally in the garden of Eden, where plant and animal life will prosper greatly, and people will no longer die after a few years, but will live long lives as did the generations before the Flood. As children of the promise, we shall live in this kingdom of peace, prosperity, righteousness and justice. We shall rule and reign with our Lord. Though the Jews will be the head of all nations, the church will also be with the Lord to execute his righteous command over the kingdom. This is a wonderful time when God shall restore all things that have been ruined and damaged by sin, to return to God's original intent and design, when he made man and placed him in the garden, and gave him dominion over God's creation. Man failed because of sin, was cast away from God's presence, and has suffered great misery because of his rebellion against God. But when the perfect man, Jesus Christ, assumes His rightful throne, His dominion and rule will not be tainted with any sin. Those who belong to Him shall be blessed, as God intended in His original creation, and as promised through Abraham, because of faith. We shall inherit the kingdom along with Abraham, under the perfect king, enjoying life as God intended man to live, with peace, prosperity and everlasting life.

While we talk about the promise made to Abraham and our part in that promise, it brings us to a future blessing in the reign of Christ on the earth. At present we have not see this promise fulfilled, for we are waiting first for the Lord to come in judgment upon all nations, and the church to be taken by rapture out of this world. Once the Lord has judged the nations, and He returns to rule and reign upon the earth, the promise to Abraham will then come to fulfillment. However the promise is an everlasting promise, so the rule of Christ will continue into the eternal ages of the future. There will however be a rebellion against Christ after He reigns for 1000 years, and the Devil and all who follow him will be judged and cast into the lake of fire to suffer forever. Then God will dissolve this world, and this creation, and make a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. All those who are children of faith, who walk in faith as Abraham did, will inherit this new heaven and new earth. This looks even beyond the promise made to Abraham, but must also include something of that promise, for God said his covenant with Abraham and his descendants was an everlasting covenant.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." Rev 21:1

LESSON 122
The Blessings of Justification
ROMANS 5

In our last lesson we heard Paul argue the case for Justification by faith using Abraham as an example. He was, for the most part, trying to convince Jews that salvation was not just for those who were related to Abraham, or followed the Jewish law, but for all who follow the faith of Abraham. Today we shall move on to see the blessings that Justification brings to those who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

When someone has placed their trust in Jesus as their personal savior they acquire peace with God. Our sin made us enemies of God, and subject to His wrath and judgment. When Jesus went to the cross, he took that wrath and judgment for us. Through Jesus suffering on the cross, we can accept Christ and find perfect peace with God, for His wrath has been turned away from us. What a wonderful blessing it is to have peace with God. This should be seen in the life of the believer, by his joyful and grateful spirit. Also believers have access into God's grace. When a person accepts Jesus, he moves through a doorway, as it were, into a new realm, where God's favor is showered upon Him. It is by God's grace we are saved from judgment, and also God's grace that fills us with the Holy Spirit, equips us for spiritual service, and gives us eyes to see, and hearts to understand the great things which God has done, is doing, and will ultimately do. We are highly favored by God, when we are in Christ, and God bestows on us every blessing in heavenly places. The believer is also brought into a glorious hope. When faith opens the believers eyes to God's future glory, he will understand that Christ will come for His church and catch us away to heaven to live with Him forever and enjoy His glory. We shall forever enjoy a relationship with one who is complete in His knowledge and power, and perfect in His love and righteousness. There could be no better place, and no better company than that which is promised to the believer of Jesus Christ.

Paul further says that tribulations are a blessing also from God, for which we may rejoice. This might not at first seem a blessing, for who wants to face problems and difficulties, however God uses trials in our life to help us grow stronger in our determination, character and hope. As we mature in Christ, through the challenges we face, our hope grows even brighter as the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with God's love. The great blessing of knowing God through Jesus Christ, is to explore the riches and expanse of God's love towards sinners. This makes us into humble and grateful worshippers, who love God, and delight to serve Him. This brings pleasure to the heart of God, as His purpose for making man is realized when men witness His love, and are transformed by that love, to reflect God's image in us for others to see.

Paul now takes a moment to reflect on the magnitude of God's love, and it's power to save us from judgment. He says that Christ died for the ungodly, and while some men might dare to die for a good man, God shows us His love by allowing Christ to die for sinners. We have no claim on God's love, our sin called for His judgment and wrath, but instead, God's love won the day, and we were spared by Jesus who gave His life for His enemies. Imagine men on the battle field, and the army commander taking a bullet willingly to spare the life of one of the enemy soldiers. This would be extraordinary, leaving us to wonder why a man would give up his own life for his enemy. But this is what Jesus did for you and I, because he did not want us to face God's eternal wrath. You should take a moment today to thank Him for His wonderful mercy to your soul.

Now Paul helps us to understand the imputation of justice and judgment. To do this he will use two figure heads Adam: the first man, and Jesus Christ: the second man. Each is a representative for mankind, so that their influences are passed onto everyone who is under their headship. Adam was the first man, whom God designated to rule over creation, but when he sinned against God, he lost fellowship with God, and judgment came upon him, so that he was subject to death, and eventually he died. Adam's sin has been inherited to all of mankind, so that we also are subject to death, because through Adam we have all become sinners, born with a sin nature, and are condemned. However God sent a second man to rule over all of creation, Jesus Christ, and Jesus not only was righteous, but He died to pay the penalty for man's sin. God being so pleased with the righteous act of sacrifice by Jesus, took all the judgment belonging to sinful men, and transferred it onto Jesus, and took all the righteousness of Christ, and transferred it onto those who believe in Jesus. Though sin caused death to reign through the human race, the grace of God through Jesus Christ, spreads God's gift of eternal life to a much greater extent to those who believe. The gift of God's salvation measures much greater in its' scope then the judgment of God upon sinners. Though sin has abounded in this world, God through Jesus Christ has caused grace to abound even more, so that men will not be condemned, but can be forgiven and receive eternal life. Your debt of sin is far greater then you could ever pay, even if you owned all the gold in this world. By Jesus death for you, he has supplied enough grace to pay for all of your sins - past, present and future, and also for the sins of the whole world. God's grace is infinitely greater then the sins we have committed. I hope you appreciate the greatness of God's grace, and will confess your sins to Jesus knowing He is ready to pardon you, and give you eternal life. Why not pray to Him right now to receive His forgiveness, and the gift of life.

"but God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Rom 5:8

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson learned about the blessings that come upon a believer when he is justified by faith in Jesus Christ. These blessings include peace with God, the overflowing grace of God, spiritual growth through trials, a glorious hope in heaven, and God's love perfecting us and transforming us into God's image. Someone might ask the question, "If I do not feel God's blessing in my life, can I be sure I am God's child?"

As we review God's blessing that come to all who are justified by the faith in Jesus Christ, we might assume that we should have some tremendous sense of these blessings, which confirms to us our salvation. However for some Christians they do not immediately "feel" the sense of these blessings in their life. This is not because they do not have the blessings, but they have not learned how to apprehend these blessings. The blessings that are enjoyed by the believer in Christ are not readily seen, except for the effects they have in the Christian life. For instance having peace with God is a stated fact for those who have trusted in Jesus as their Savior. But they might still feel some sense of guilt because of their sin, and even feel that God is angry with them and will judge them due to their sin. This is not because he does not actually possess peace with God, but he has not yet apprehended this peace by faith. It might feel like we are still alienated from God because our own conscience tells we are guilty sinners, but the bible tells us we are freely pardoned, and our sins will not be held against us because Christ has paid for our sins on the cross. This must be believed and accepted as true, based on what God has said, and not on how I feel.

The same can be said of the blessing of knowing God's grace. Often times in life, I do not seem to be basking in the grace of God, perhaps because I have interpreted that to mean lots of physical blessings in life, such as physical health, or more money in the bank, a good job, good education, and happy family life. As a person matures in their relationship to Jesus Christ, they come to recognize that our present conditions in life are not necessarily a direct expression of the grace of God abounding to us. God's grace is known in salvation, in the gift of the Holy Spirit living within us, and in the love and hope that fills the believers heart. This is a grace that can be entirely independent of outward circumstances. A man suffering torture in a prison cell, or king feasting at a banquet may all experience this grace from God, for it is a spiritual blessing, and not a physical blessing. There are times when God's grace may indeed affect our outward circumstances, but we must not make our outward circumstances the evidence of whether God's blessing is upon us. The man who wrote these words to the Romans, was himself mistreated, imprisoned and beaten for his faith in Christ, and yet he knew the blessing of God's grace in great abundance. Again this is something we appreciate and grasp through an exercise of faith in what God reveals in His word, and not on my feelings or outward experience.

The hope of the believer is a blessing which all believers should have some understanding of. Every Christian should know that God has forgiven their sins, and that they possess eternal life, and will be with Christ forever. It is also plain that Christ will come again to receive the church into heaven. The believers hope should not be absent, or his salvation would be brought into question, but sometimes when faith is weak, the believer may not have a perfect confidence in himself or his salvation. The believer is not to rest upon his own feelings, but upon the revelation of scripture for his confidence. After all it is not the believer who saves himself, but it is God who does the saving, and He who created the world and raises the dead, it certainly able to perform his promise to bring us safely into heaven. The trials of life happen to all alike, whether Christian or not, so how would the Christian know that his suffering was actually God's blessing to produce character and spiritual maturity. I suppose any of us could question if the trial we are facing is God-approved, or just the result of chance and circumstance. But if we can see the resultant spiritual fruit of growth in character and maturity, then it is not difficult to deduce these have been the instruments that God is using for our spiritual good. The Spirit of God living within us, will teach us how we ought to respond in trials, and strengthen us through trials, and in the end we shall see that it was God working all the while to accomplish His purposes in our lives. This again could be easily dismissed by the skeptic, but the Christian by faith understands that God orders our circumstances for our spiritual benefit. God always does what is best for His children, whether by trial, or by His kind favor.

Lastly God's love is ever growing within the believer, or it should be. When a believer finds it difficult to love others, then it indicates they have not be regenerated by the Spirit, but when God's love is working inside the believer, he will ever be growing in the outward expression of that love, by giving, serving, and suffering.

"...let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. and by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." 1John 3:18,19

LESSON 123
Dying To Sin
ROMANS 6

In our last lesson we learned about the blessings that God gives to those who are justified by faith, which includes peace, grace, hope and love. Today we shall learn about how Christians are to die to sin.

To tie together the thoughts from chapter 5 the writer asks if we should continue to sin, so that grace may abound. We learned last time that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, so someone might conclude, "well why not just go ahead and sin, since God's grace will abound and provide forgiveness". This would magnify God's grace. But Paul quickly replies to this notion and says, "God forbid!" He states plainly that the believer is dead to sin, and therefore should not live any longer in sin. Again some of Paul's thoughts here are not easy to follow, as he switches between two things, our spiritual state, and our spiritual practice. Our spiritual state is what God has made us in Christ, whether we are aware of it or not, and our spiritual practice, is how we behave in Christ, whether or not it agrees with our state. Our state is a fact and does not change. For instance the Christian is dead in Christ. This means that when Jesus died for us, it was a sentence of death for us also. We have not physically experienced death, but from God's perspective, we died with Christ. When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, he becomes our representative, as we discussed in our last lesson, and so what happens to Him, in essence is what happens to us also. We are seen in Him, and so when He died we died also. When he was raised we are raised also. This spiritual fact is symbolically carried out by the act of baptism. Baptism pictures for us our dying with Christ, and being raised up with Christ. These are spiritual facts that are God's assessment, and have nothing to do with our feelings. Paul argues from the fact that we are now dead in Christ, that we are dead to sin. This means that sin should have no appeal to us. We should respond to temptation in the same way that a dead man would respond to temptation.

While the fact is that we have died with Christ, and died to sin, the practice of the believer does not always fit with the fact of who he is in Christ. The Christian still has an old sin nature, and that nature is still active when the believer gives way to its lust for sin. So while the fact is that God sees the believer as dead to sin, and it is the stated fact, the practice does not always agree with the fact. So the Christian is called upon to take action against sin. He is not to allow sin to have rule in his life. He is to actively commit himself in everyway to behave righteously. Since the Spirit of God lives within the believer, and gives power to overcome sin, the believer has the ability to combat sin, and to offer himself to works of righteousness. Every Christian is going to battle with sin in their lives, and sometimes that battle is quite fierce, and can be discouraging when the believer finds that he is consistently losing some battles. Here we learn an important lesson about putting to death sin in our lives, and that is to give ourselves to works of righteousness. The more active we become in doing good things, the less time, and less temptation we shall have to do bad things. Idle time is often the time the devil leads us into sin, so it is best to keep ourselves always active in good spiritual activities, like reading the bible, rather than watching TV, or praying instead of browsing on the internet. Sin is a very powerful force in our lives, and can take over and make us slaves to its' demands, and we must guard ourselves from yielding to it. The Christian must recognize that they are now God's child, and that Christ died to put away sin. He has given us power by the Holy Spirit to overcome sin, and therefore we must enter the battle against sin. Too often believers are not fighting against sin. Perhaps we become weak because we lack a good prayer life, or we make compromises allowing ourselves to taste of the pleasures of sin, and because we enjoy that taste, we just want to keep a secret supply of sin in the closet to visit when we feel a desire for it. God knows about each of our personal battles, but He cannot walk in fellowship with us, if we harbor sins and make compromises. We need to purge out all the things in our lives that do not belong, and do not please God. It would be a good idea for each of us to do some spiritual housecleaning, dusting off the bad attitudes, sweeping out the rubbish of lust, wiping away the filth of dishonesty.

Paul looks back to the time before we knew Jesus as Lord, and how we lived for sin, and our conscience didn't bother us. Now that we have been born again, we hate those sins we used to practice, and we learned to do works of righteousness. If we make ourselves slaves to righteousness, then sin will no longer have dominion in our lives. This takes discipline and hard work, and I don't want to pretend as though I have found the answer of walking in righteousness, for just like others, I also battle with sin. We are all in this battle together, but don't lose heart, for though sin is not easy to overcome, God allows us to struggle with this battle for our spiritual good. When we engage in the battle, showing that we really want to overcome sin and live righteously before Him, he will provide us more grace. The battle will not ever stop, I am sorry to say, until we reach heaven. God uses the battle with sin to test us and perfect us. At the end of this chapter Paul reminds us that sin brings the wage of death, but God gives the free gift of eternal life. If you want to be free from the power and penalty of sin, then place your trust in Jesus as your Savior today, and escape from God's judgment against sin in Hell.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom 6:23

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that, though God sees each of his children as dead to sin, the Christian still has to fight against sin, by practicing righteousness. Either we must destroy sin, or sin will destroy us. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to walk in the newness of life?"

In today's lesson we discussed the facts of being dead to sin, and the reality of our practice not always behaving as though we have died to sin. The process of cleansing our lives of sin is called sanctification, which means to be set apart for God's purpose. God can, and will, use us when we walk in holiness, or newness of life. The sanctifying process happens as the Holy Spirit reveals to us those things which God disapproves in our lives, and we cooperate by putting away those things. It may not happen right away, but little by little God will help us to change, by leaving our sins behind. Perhaps the greatest motivator for fighting against sin, and uprooting it from our lives, is the desire to draw near to God, and enjoy getting to know Him better. As we read our bibles the Holy Spirit begins to work, and He teaches us about the wonderful character of God, His great love, grace, compassion and mercy. This draws us to God, and helps us to love Him more and more. The more you love someone the less inclined you are to want to disappoint them. So as we learn to love God, we shall also learn to hate sin, because God hates sin.

Here in Romans 6 we read about dying to sin, about living for righteousness, and about slavery. These three things are the means by which we cooperate with God's work in our lives, and walk in newness of life. Firstly we must cooperate with God's verdict about sin. God has judged our sin, and condemned it, and we are to agree with his judgment. We must believe that sin is evil, and we deserve to be cast into Hell because of our sin. When we have the correct view of sin, and acknowledge that God has judged sin through Jesus Christ, then we will repent, or change our minds about sin, and destroy sin, and run away from it. Each believer should respond to sin the same way a dead man would respond. This is what it means to die to sin, when we do not allow it to have any attraction to us. But that is not always so easy because a part of us loves the sin, so we must recognize this tendency, and say 'no' to the flesh that wants to sin, and say 'yes' to that part of us that wants to live and please the Lord. One of the keys to walking in newness of life, is to engage ourselves in righteous activities. As we give our time to things that please the Lord it will crowd out those activities that lead us towards sin. Being active in church is an important way that God can help us to walk in the newness of life. The local church when, following all the instructions of the New Testament, is designed to help believers to live this new Christian life. At church we learn from the word, and take part in worship, fellowship, prayer and serving the body of Christ. This leads us in the paths of righteousness, helps us to keep accountable for our Christian walk and service, and therefore helps us to walk in the newness of life. God never intended His children to walk alone and independent from the spiritual fellowship and community that is offered in a healthy church family. This is so vital to our walking in the newness of life. Also the believer must understand the importance of personally nurturing their spiritual life through daily reading of the bible, and daily prayers. When these two important aspects of the Christian life are practiced sincerely, it will allow the Holy Spirit to direct us in righteousness, and also protect us from the trappings of sin. It is not always easy to develop these disciplines, because we don't appreciate how valuable and essential they are. But we need to realize that this has as much importance to our spiritual health, as food and water has to our physical health. Without the daily nurture of the word and communion of prayer, we shall become weak spiritually and fall easily into sin. We may not even realize our spiritual condition, because we have hardly ever experienced what it means to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. God has planned a joyful and abundant life, of power, triumph and joy, but we are in danger of missing out on what He has planned for us, because we have allowed the flesh to rule in us, and not the Spirit. Here are few ideas to help us live in the newness of life:

1. Attend church regularly, and find ways to participate in the spiritual life of the church.
2. Read your bible every day, and set aside some time to pray also.
3. Confess any known sin, and seek by God's help to put away any sin in your life.
4. Nurture your spiritual life by the music you listen to, and the conversations you engage in.
5. Tell others the gospel message, and ask God to use you to bring other souls to faith in Christ.
6. Take time to fellowship with believers as often as you can.
7. Spend time with mature Christians, and seek their advice, and follow their example.

"but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct." 1Peter 1:15

LESSON 124
The Believers Battle With Sin
ROMANS 7

In our last lesson we learned about the Christian's battle with sin, and how to walk in newness of life. Today we shall learn about the believers relationship with the Old Testament Law. The Law awakens sin in the believer and then condemns him to death, but that does not make the Law evil, for the Law only exposes the sin within us, but is not the cause of the sin. The only answer to overcoming the condemnation of the Law is through faith in Jesus who won the victory for us at the cross.

In the first part of this chapter, Paul is explaining the relationship of the believer to the Old Testament Law. He uses the illustration of marriage to help us understand this. When a woman is married to her husband, she is bound to him, and cannot leave the marriage and marry another, because she is bound by a covenant to her husband. But if her husband dies then she is free to marry another man. Each one of us is bound to God's Law, that is His moral standards, but none of us is able to keep God's Law perfectly. In fact we all fail quite miserably at doing what is right before God. Our relationship to God's Law is like a bad marriage, no matter how much we want to do our part to fulfill the requirements we cannot please the one we are bound to. Only if we are separated by death, then we can be bound to Christ, and He fulfills all the requirements of the Law on our behalf. For the Christian then, He is dead to the Law, and is not bound by its' requirements to fulfill them, for Christ has done that perfectly for us.

The Law was given to show us how sinful we are, but not to make us perfect before God. The Law is like a mirror that shows us the dirt on our face, but has no power to remove the dirt. When we look at God's Law carefully, we recognize what sin is, how much God hates it, and we see the filth of sin in ourselves. The Law exposes our sin. The Law also inflames our sin, because when the Law says, "Don't do that", that is the thing that I want to do, because of my sin nature. If the Law says "Do this", my sin nature resists that very thing. So we might come to the conclusion that the Law is our enemy, because not only does it expose my sinfulness, but it also stirs up my desires to sin. However Paul says we should not think of the Law as evil, but as perfect and holy. Yes the Law shows us how sinful we are, and how hopeless our efforts are to live righteously, but that does not make the Law bad. The Law itself is good, showing us what God's standards for righteous living are. The problem is not with the Law, but with sin that lives with each of us. Imagine if I just purchased a used car and I was proudly showing it to my mechanic friend. While I show him the car, he points out that the engine is weak, and the car will soon have to be condemned. I might not like my mechanic friend for telling me that my new car is a pile of junk, but if he exposes the truth it is not his fault that the car is no good, he was only pointing out the facts that were true all along. It is the same with the Law, I might not appreciate when the Law condemns me as a guilty sinner, but it is only telling me the truth about myself.

In this chapter the argument is carefully laid out to help us all understand that the Law can never make us perfect before God. We may accept Jesus as our Savior, and choose to put our faith in Him, so that we can be freed from God's judgment against sin. Then after we are saved we then find ourselves struggling with sin in our lives. We want to please God, but there is still this old sin nature within me that wants to do the wrong thing. Try, as I may, to do what is right, I always seem to end up doing the sin that I know is wrong. Every Christian experiences this battle, and it never seems to subside. In fact, this battle will be with us until we get to heaven. The battle, here in chapter 7, is not easy win and gain victory over sin. Many try to do so by their own strength. They feel if they can just try hard enough to be a good Christian, and keep God's commands then they will be able to defeat their sinful tendencies. But what we learn from this chapter is that we can never win this battle by trying hard to keep God's Law. Just as we needed God to save us from the **penalty** of our sins, we also need to trust in Him to help us win the battle against the **power** of sin. If you are a believer, and you feel defeated, because you have been trying and trying to overcome sin, but you just can't seem to win the battle, then you need to carefully consider what the Lord tells us in this chapter. The battle reveals that you are indeed a true Christian, for your new nature is fighting against the old sin nature, and trying to do what is pleasing to God. The unbeliever has just one nature, his old sin nature, so he does not experience this battle, he just gives way to sin and does not really see any problem. But what is the Christian to do when he battles against his sin nature, and does not seem to be able to win the victory. Well the answer is given at the end of the chapter, and continues into chapter 8. The victory is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. When we recognize how hopeless and wretched we really are, then we must call out to God for His grace and help. Just as we trusted in Him to save our souls from Hell, we also must completely trust in Him to help us gain power over sin. We shall learn in our next lesson that we have been given power to win the victory over our sin nature through the Holy Spirit, who dwells within each child of God.

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death." Rom 7:24

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that the Old Testament Law was unable to fix our sin problem, but only show us how sinful we really are. While every Christian has an internal battle between his old sin nature, and his new nature in Christ, he can find victory over sin through faith in Jesus Christ. Someone might ask the question, "Why would God allow His children to continue struggling with their old sin nature?"

As we consider the Christian's struggle with sin, we are left to wonder why God did not just remove our sin nature when we trusted in Jesus as our Savior. Now that we are God's children, should we not expect that we no longer have to battle with sin? The answer might not come easily to us, and sometimes we might even wonder if we really are God's children, due to the sins that still weigh us down. However, we can find some answers to this problem in the bible to help us understand. In the Old Testament, when Israel was coming into their inheritance, God could have removed all of their enemies, but instead choose to allow some of the foreigners to continue living in the land, and He explains the reason why. He said, "that I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord" (Jud 2:22). The challenges that Israel had to face with the idolatrous nations in their land, was so that God could test them. He wanted to see if they would keep His commands, or follow the foreign gods of other nations. He was testing their resolve to follow God's righteous path, or the ungodly path of idolatry. From this we can see the principle in scripture, that sometimes God will allow challenges to our spiritual life, to prove and test its' reality. It is not difficult for a person to say they are a Christian, except when Christianity becomes difficult. God will not force our will, and He put choices before us to test whether we will choose to do what is right or wrong. The old sin nature within us tempts us to do evil, but we have also been given a new nature, which wants to please the Lord. In the midst of the battle we must call out to God for help, teaching us how to love and depend on God. It also promotes humility in our lives so that we do not become proud. Paul said that God had provided to him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure (2Cor 12:7). Christians might begin to feel they are special, because they are God's children, but we need to be constantly reminded that we were not saved because of good in us, but because of God's grace. The trials we face, as we battle against sin in our lives, help to reveal our sinful nature, and thus promotes humility. This also gives us a greater appreciation of the grace of God that saves us both from sin's penalty and its' power.

We must remember that God has given us a free will to make our own choices. God honors our choices, even when that choice takes us into the flames of Hell. Of course God does not want anyone to end up in the torments of Hell, and He has therefore provided for the salvation of all people. God does offer us a choice between eternal life on the one hand, or eternal judgment on the other hand. If there was only one choice, then it would not really be a choice, for all would end up the same. So the Lord offers us the opportunity to have Heaven, or be lost in Hell, as a genuine choice we can make. This means that while God offers salvation to us, we can only gain it by our own choice. It is the same with our choice to sin. We may either choose to obey sin, or deny sin. This will show God what our true choice is. We shall show God that we love righteousness and hate iniquity as we follow the direction of the Holy Spirit. When our sin nature fights against the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the believer will be troubled in conscience, confess his sin, and seek God's help and grace to overcome the temptation to sin. This sincere desire to abandon sin, is the response the Lord is looking for in us, so that he may bless us. By this we may know, and God will also see, that our true choice is for God's righteousness and not for sin. This could only be done if we are given the choice to sin or not to sin. While we remain in this world, and in these sinful bodies, we shall have this constant struggle and battle with sin. At times we might feel overcome by the powers of sin, but when we call out to the Lord for His help, then He will be ready to rescue us. He is so willing to forgive us, and cleanse us from the sins we struggle with. That is why the scriptures says we need to confess our sins, for He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9).

I am sure that we all, as believers, want to get rid of the sinful nature, that constantly tries to pull us down, and discourage us. It is helpful to remember that God has allowed us to have this struggle to test and prove us as His righteous children. It is not easy, and not pleasant to have this constant battle, but it is God's means to purify us, with the cooperation of our will, as we increase in our desire for godliness, and grow in our hatred of sin. May the Lord help each one of us to win this battle against sin.

"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but god is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." 1Cor 10:13

LESSON 125
From Sanctification to Glorification
ROMANS 8

In our last lesson we learned about how the Old Testament Law condemns but cannot cleanse the sinner. We also learned that God allows every Christian to battle against sin. The process of separating Christians from the power of sin is called sanctification. Today we shall see how God has planned to not only save, but to sanctify and then glorify His children.

Romans chapter 8 is a wonderful study of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of the believer, and a joyful reading after the struggles and battles of sin we read about in Romans 7. The chapter begins with the victorious and sublime truth that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. The chapter goes on to compare the person who is walking in the Spirit, or walking in the flesh. To walk in the flesh means to obey the old sinful nature and submit to its ungodly desires. Because God has given the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer, the Holy Spirit gives them new desires, and new powers to say "No" to sin, and "Yes" to righteousness. The old nature, or "flesh" as it is called in this chapter, is always fighting against God, and cannot in anyway please God. We must recognize that God has condemned our old sinful self, and therefore depart from all of its influence. If we think of our old sin nature, like a bad friend, who is always taking us down the wrong path, and getting us into trouble, then it is clear we must end the friendship and deny any promptings from this culprit. As believers we should be so grateful for the gracious new friend that we have in the Holy Spirit, who is always leading us in the best direction towards God's blessing and favor. If we respond in obedience to our new friend, the Holy Spirit, will then be able to resist the corruptions of old nature. This is the secret to overcoming the sin in our lives, and winning the battle we talked about in our last lesson. It is the Holy Spirit that can lead us to the victory. When we surrender to His influence He will confirm to us our genuine adoption into the family of God. The more confidence we find in our royal status as God's children, the more we come to recognize all that God has in store for us. We are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. We shall be glorified together with Christ in a coming day, and the glory which we shall have then, is so great, that no matter how much we might suffer in this world while battling against sin, the world and the devil, these sufferings will seem like nothing at all in that coming day. All of creation eagerly awaits the glorification of believers, because it is when God glorifies His children that all creation will be released from the bondage of corruption, and will once again flourish with God's blessing. Believers also have a hope given to them of their glorification. This hope does not come from what can be seen, but through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also helps the believer to pray when we do not know what we should pray for. God is so much in favor of His children, that he works out everything for our good, in fact there is no good thing that he will withhold from us, because He has already given us the very best gift that could be given, when He gave Jesus to die for our sins. It sure is wonderful to know that God has so highly favored His children, so that He gives them the very best that He can give. If a boy comes from a poor home, he may not be so happy with the gifts his father gives to him, because they are not of much value. He may wish for nicer things, like a good education, and prosperous future, but that may not be a reasonable expectation when coming from a poor home. However when someone becomes a child of God, they do not need to be concerned about their future and inheritance, because their Father is richer than all, and will make sure to give the best and an eternal future of blessing.

This chapter tells us that Christians shall never be condemned, and nothing at all can be charged against those who have their trust in Jesus as their Savior. No one, not even the Devil can charge God's people, for God has justified His children. God is the greatest authority of all, and He has declared that when a person hears God's call, and responds in faith to the message of the gospel, He will ensure their sanctification and future glorification. In fact God has predetermined that all those who would believe in His Son would be justified, sanctified and eventually glorified. The only one who has the authority to condemn us, has instead died to justify us, and He, that is our Lord Jesus Christ, is now in heaven making intercession for God's children. This gives tremendous hope and confidence to every believer, as he views the determination of God to bless His children, and to carry out His eternal purposes through Jesus Christ.

This chapter ends with an amazing exclamation of what God's love has secured for every believer. This statement says that there is nothing in time, no person, angel, demon, no circumstance, power or position, no creature, not death or life, or anything in the eternal ages to come will be able to separate God's love from us. If God's love for mankind was so great that He was willing to pay the greatest possible price, the giving of His Son to death on the cross for our sins, then nothing can ever diminish or degrade that love. We are secure in Christ, not because we are good, not because we are religious, not because we keep God's commands, or try our best to behave righteously. We are secure because His love is so great for our souls, that He has determined that those who believe in Jesus shall never, ever be condemned. I hope you have turned your life over to Jesus in faith, and can sing victoriously "There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus". Praise be to God!

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Rom 8:1

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that believers are free from all condemnation because they are in Christ. We also learned that we do not have to obey our old sin nature, because the Holy Spirit may direct us. We also saw how determined God was to manifest His great love for us, by predetermining that all Christians would be sanctified and glorified, never to be separated from His great and eternal love. Someone might ask the question, "How can we know if the Spirit of God dwells in someone?"

In today's lesson we learned much about the Holy Spirit working on behalf of the believer, leading him into righteousness and away from sin, giving a spirit of adoption, with a longing for the redemption body. He also helps us with our prayers and reveals to us how rich we are in Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer brings about a wonderful transformation of the person so that they become more and more like the Lord Jesus. We might be wondering though how to recognize if someone truly has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. We cannot see the Holy Spirit with our eyes, but we can see His influence in a person's life. Just as we cannot see the wind, but we can see its effect as it blows through the grass and trees. If we want to identify the presence of the Holy Spirit then we must know those things that the Holy Spirit will do in the believer, and we can observe if these things are true of the person we examine. Let's think of several things the Holy Spirit will do in the believer, as evidence of His presence in a person's life.

1. The Holy Spirit directs the believer to pray – He should find prayer natural and desirable.
2. The Holy Spirit not only gives an appetite for the word of God, but also provides understanding of it.
3. The Holy Spirit causes a person to flee away from sin.
4. The Holy Spirit provides a love for Christian fellowship – thus regular attendance at church meetings.
5. The Holy Spirit demands honesty.
6. The Holy Spirit directs believers in worship and Christian service.
7. The Holy Spirit controls the tongue for godly use.

Now let's think of some things that the Holy Spirit would not produce as more evidence of His presence or absence in the believer.

1. The Holy Spirit would not lie or use deception.
2. The Holy Spirit would not lead someone to insult, or speak harshly or rudely to others.
3. The Holy Spirit would never lead anyone to cheat in their school or business.
4. The Holy Spirit would never cause a person to continue in a life of rebellion and sin.
5. The Holy Spirit would not cause a person to fight against or resist authority.
6. The Holy Spirit would not cause a person to act proudly.
7. The Holy Spirit would not cause a person to argue and fight.

Now that we have considered some positive and negative evidences (and there are plenty more), we can use this to judge whether someone is indwelt by the Holy Spirit or not. If we meet a person who is gentle, kind, gives to the needs of others, and wants to be useful, prayerful, and worshipful for God's kingdom, then we see evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in their life. One thing that will help us to see the genuine presence of the Holy Spirit is the transformation that takes place in the Christian life. When someone comes to faith in Christ, and suddenly we see them wanting to read and learn the bible, and go to the church prayer meetings, and worship time. When we see them growing up in Christ, and taking on more responsibilities in the church, and showing Christ-like character, then we are seeing the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence. However, if we meet someone who says they are a Christian, and yet we see them lying, cheating, stealing, insulting, and they are characterized by sin and rebellion, then the evidence shows that the Holy Spirit is either not in them, or they are grieving the Holy Spirit by their ungodly conduct.

Now we should point out that some people can imitate the work of the Holy Spirit, and seem very spiritual and godly, but in fact, if we were to watch them closely all of the time, we might observe that their good Christian behavior is all just a show, and that they are not genuine and sincere. For instance perhaps on Sunday they sing very enthusiastically, and pray long prayers, and place some money in the collection. But if we observe them at home or work, we find they look, talk, and behave just like other sinners. They use bad words, cheat in business, and frequently tell lies. While they may seem to have the Holy Spirit, their true nature will ultimately be seen in their actions and attitudes.

"but the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. against such there is no law." Gal 5:22,23

LESSON 126
God's Elect
ROMANS 9

In our last lesson we learned about the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify believers, and God's great love that assures those who have the Holy Spirit in them shall never be condemned. Today we shall learn that God's blessings to Israel did not guarantee them salvation. Salvation is God's gift of mercy to everyone, whether Jew or gentile, who places their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Romans chapters 9 to 11 address questions concerning Israel and the gospel. Paul has been teaching in Romans that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. God freely justifies all who come to Him in faith. But now he anticipates that some Jews might have objections to what he is teaching, since the Jews were God's favored people, and it would appear that the gospel message does not acknowledge God's special dealings with Israel, and His promises made to these people. Paul will clearly show that although God includes the gentiles in His call to salvation, that does not mean that the Jews are excluded, but rather God is calling on all men to enter into His gracious offer of salvation.

Paul begins by expressing his personal love for the Jews, even wishing himself to suffer or die for the sake of his own people. When Paul uses the phrase that he wished himself 'accursed from Christ', it is not to be understood, that he was seeking banishment in Hell to save his Jewish brethren, for that would be impossible, but the sense of the words is that Paul was willing to suffer, and even die, in his effort to reach the Jewish people and convince them to accept God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The Jews were privileged and chosen as God's special people, who enjoyed the presence and glory of God among them. They received the covenants of God, the Law, and were also given the service of God, and the promises of God. The greatest honor bestowed on the nation of Israel was not that Abraham was their father, or the prophet Moses had given them God's Law; but it was that the Messiah came to their nation, and was born of their nation.

Though Israel was specially set apart by God and received many promises, God brought the message of salvation not only to them, but also to the gentile people. God never excluded Israel, and all her blessings were intended to help the Jews to believe in the Messiah. Just as God had shown great favor to the Jews to give them a special place of privilege, God could, if He wished, also choose to bless the Gentiles. It is important as we read this chapter to understand what is meant by God's sovereign election. There has been much debate over the subject of divine election, some believing that God chooses some people to salvation, while leaving others to judgment in Hell, and there is nothing we can do to alter God's sovereign choice. It is certainly true that God is sovereign, and may choose to bless or judge according to His own will and purpose, but that does not mean that God will ever violate his own character or word. God has made an offer of salvation to all people, because He is merciful, and He has chosen to show His mercy. Some have understood that Paul here means that God elected Israel and others to salvation. However, election can be better understood as the election, not to salvation, but to the blessings of salvation, just as Israel was elected by God, not to eternal salvation, but rather to a place of blessing and privilege. The election to the privileges and blessings of salvation belong to everyone who responds to the gospel message and becomes God's child by faith. Paul is not restricting God's favor to a few select people, but rather showing how God has in His generosity extended the blessings of salvation to everyone.

Paul uses the example of Pharaoh to demonstrate his point that, while some choose to resist His will, God in mercy will actually use the rejection of the sinner, to further extend his mercy to others, who see His wrath displayed against those who resist Him. The Lord gave Pharaoh opportunity to repent, and provided ample signs for him to believe. Even his own magicians told him that the signs were from God, but he would not give in, or believe. Therefore God honored his choice by hardening his heart. God did this not because he hated Pharaoh, but because he realized that Pharaoh would not submit to His authority. By doing this God was showing his wrath against rebellion, with the purpose that others would learn to fear, and submit to Him in faith. This is exactly what happened with Rahab at Jericho, and others who heard about God's judgments on Egypt. So God will offer to us His salvation freely, but if we stubbornly refuse his love and grace, then He might use our rebellion to demonstrate his power and glory, in order that through us others might hear and believe. God is always seeking to save as many as would possibly believe in Him.

Paul proves that God's grace is extended to gentiles as well as Jews, by quoting from the prophets Hosea and Isaiah. The Jews might well object to gentiles acquiring God's salvation, while they have missed it. Paul gives the reason why the Jews did not acquire salvation, even though they were given the Law of righteousness. It was because they tried to acquire salvation through the works of the Law, and not through faith. The Law actually became a stumbling block to them, for they thought that it was through their keeping of the Law that they could find life. However, the law could never bring them life. Life only comes by faith in Jesus, of whom the Law spoke. Those who believe in Jesus will be saved, and will never be put to shame. I hope you realize how gracious God has been to offer you salvation, and you will trust in the Lord Jesus today for the salvation of your soul.

"So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." Rom 9:16

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that God extends his grace and salvation to all people, both Jews and Gentiles. The elect are those whom God has chosen to give all the blessings and promises that accompany salvation, and therefore belong to all those who will respond to the gospel and receive Jesus as their Savior. Someone might ask the question, "How can I know if I am one of God's elect?"

Today we learned about God's grace that extends to all people, both Jews and Gentiles. This chapter calls the children of Israel, the elect; but let's consider what that means. It does not mean that God elected the all Jews to be saved. This chapter makes it very clear that not all Jews are children of faith, but some are children of the flesh, as shown by the allegory of Jacob and Esau, the sons of Isaac. The difference between these two is, that the older would serve the younger, and Jacob is loved more than his brother Esau. This simply illustrates for us that the Jews stood in the place of privilege over other nations. Jacob did not deserve special privilege, in fact he stole his brother's birthright by trickery. However He was indeed the son who received the greater blessing, just as Israel was sovereignly chosen (elected by God) to receive special favor. God made a promise to Abraham that he would bless him and his descendants after him. This blessing was not the promise of eternal life, but it was to be God's chosen people on earth, and to have the glory of God among them, to have the Law, the temple, priests and service of the temple. They were indeed blessed by God, above all other nations, to have very unique and special favor, and that should have put them in the best position to find eternal life through faith, as Abraham did. If we understand that God's sovereign selection of Israel was not unto eternal life, it should clear up confusion about election for the Christian. The Christian is also called the elect of God (1Pet 1:2), but they are not elect in the same literal way that Israel was God's elect. Christian's are not given the temple, priesthood, and an inheritance in the promised land. Christian's are however favored and blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. God has foreordained that all who would come to trust in Jesus as their Savior, would be elected to enjoy the blessings of heaven with Christ forever. We might think of biblical election as being granted a special position of favor and blessing due to our relationship to God. For Israel it was the fact that they were descendant's of Abraham, to whom God had made promises, that caused them to be highly favored by God. The Christian has come into relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and in Christ, he is also highly favored and blessed. The election then belongs to all who come to Jesus in faith. If you are a Christian, I mean born again by the Holy Spirit, then you are part of God's elect. Going to church does not make you elect. Hearing gospel messages from the preacher, reading your bible, and saying prayers also does not make you elect. Only when you have surrendered your life to Jesus in faith, trusting in his sacrifice on the cross as payment for your sin, can you be considered God's elect.

There are many Theologians who would argue that God's election means that God specially selected some individuals to be saved, and others he left unselected, and therefore they must go to a lost eternity. They say God does this by His sovereign choice, and because none of us deserves His salvation, we cannot complain that he is unjust. They also point out that man has been given a choice to decide to accept God's salvation or not. This does not make much sense, for if God has already made the choice for us, then our choosing seems to be of no consequence. This also implies that God is not fair to all, for while he wants to save all, and is capable to save all, he has only chosen to save some. Though the subject has created much controversy over the years by theologians, I believe we don't need to have confusion over the issue, if we simply understand what scripture means when it refers to election. If we read the wrong idea into this word, we shall fall into this doctrine that seems self-contradictory, and defames God's just character. If we understand election as previously explained, God's choosing to bless those who are in a relationship to Himself through His Son Jesus, then it solves the problem that comes from those scriptures that seem difficult to understand or explain on the subject of election.

What is most important for us to understand is that God has made an offer of salvation to everyone. If you want to be saved, and go to heaven, then simply call upon the Lord to save your soul. Jesus came to die for you and pay for your sin, and if you will confess to Him that you are a sinner, and place your trust in Him as your Savior, He has promised to save your soul. Why not call upon him right now!

"All that the father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out." John 6:37

LESSON 127
Righteousness by Faith
ROMANS 10

In our last lesson we learned that God extends his salvation to all people, and that election belonged to God's favored people, the Jews, and now also includes Christians. Today we will learn about God's righteousness that is acquired through faith, and not through obeying the Law.

Paul first expresses his desire that all of Israel would be saved, recognizing that they were a zealous people, diligently seeking after God's righteousness. However they sought after God's righteousness without knowledge, because they sought for it their own way, and not God's way. This is a remarkable thing that Paul says about the Jews, and would likely offend many of these proud people, since they were experts in the Law of Moses, and Paul is basically calling them ignorant. The point he is making is that, knowing the scriptures well is not the same as salvation, nor can it be found by trying hard to keep the Law; for no one can possibly keep the Law perfectly. If they could do it, they would be sinless and perfect; and only Jesus is sinless and perfect. Though righteousness by Law-keeping was impossible to achieve, one could find righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. This was a much easier way of acquiring righteousness, than the Jews attempts for righteousness. The salvation that comes through righteousness was something that did not require anyone to go to heaven and bring Christ down, or to go into the depths to bring Christ up from the grave. God had already done this by the gospel, through the incarnation, and resurrection of Christ. Therefore there was nothing left for men to do but believe the gospel.

Paul said this gospel message was very near, even in their mouths, and in their hearts. It was the word of faith that had been preached. The gospel message is so very simple, and is summarized for us here, that if a person will confess Jesus as Lord, and believe in his heart that God has raised him from the dead he shall be saved. Salvation comes through faith in the heart, and confession of the mouth. There is no need to work for it, to labor at keeping God's Law. We only need to confess with our mouth Jesus as our Lord, (our testimony to the world); and believe in our heart God raised Jesus from the dead (our testimony before God). This section in Romans 10:9-10, is perhaps the simplest and clearest place in the bible to understand what a person must do to be saved. I hope you hear today's simple gospel message and believe.

The Gospel is sent forth to both Jews and Gentiles, and whosoever will believe in Christ will be saved. To believe the gospel it is necessary that the message is heard; and the message can only be heard if God's send a preacher to tell us the message. The scripture therefore tells us that the feet which carry this good news to us, are beautiful feet. How grateful we should be to all those who have made sacrifices and traveled distances to bring us the wonderful message of salvation. We should be so thankful for them, that even their dusty well-traveled feet are something we want to admire. If we apply this to Jesus himself, we have so much greater reason to thank and praise God, Because Jesus traveled not over land and oceans to preach, but came all the way from heaven to earth. He does not just tell us the wonderful message of God's love, but demonstrates that love Himself, by allowing his feet to be nailed to the cross where He took away God's judgment from us. Yes how beautiful are those feet! John the Baptist was so right when he said, "I am not even worthy to stoop down and loosen his shoelaces."

The passage about the preacher coming to share the message, and his beautiful feet, was a quotation taken from Isaiah. Sadly, though, Isaiah had to report that the Jews had heard and even understood the message God sent to them, but refused to obey God. He pointed out that God would use others to provoke Israel to jealousy. Such was God's love for Israel, that even though she rebelled time and again, and refused God's salvation, even casting out the Son of God, who was sent to them, yet God would still plead with His beloved children, the Jews, by using gentile believers to provoke them into jealousy. Isaiah had prophesied about the gentiles who would find the Lord, though they were not seeking for Him, but the Jews with all their religious zeal could not, and would not, hear or respond to God's message of salvation.

Paul, who is a Jew himself, as he writes these words, must know that many of his fellow Jews would be indignant and offended by his painful exposure of their sinful rebellion against God. The Holy Spirit lead Paul to write these words, in hope that they might understand and agree with God's assessment of their nation. Even after these many centuries, God is still pleading with the Jews to come to Him for salvation, but they are still resisting and fighting against God, even though they appear to be zealously following the Law which God had given them. This is one the great ironies found in the bible. Paul wants his countryman to find the righteousness that God longs to give them. Perhaps you also have been fighting with God, just like the Jews have been doing for so long. You are trying so hard to impress God, with how good you are, or how much you deserve to go to heaven. But God wants you to see that you are a guilty sinner, a rebel, and deserving of judgment. He wants you to stop fighting, and understand that His love is greater than your sin, and He therefore made provision for you to be saved through Jesus death as payment for all your sins. Stop resisting God's salvation, and today confess Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead.

"that if you confess with your mouth the lord Jesus and believe in your heart that god has raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Rom 10:9

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that the Jews were trying to reach God by their own righteousness. God sent them a gospel message that would give them the righteousness they sought after, if only they would believe in God's message and His messenger Jesus Christ. Someone might ask the question, "Why did the Jews, with all their biblical education, find it so difficult to believe that Jesus was their Messiah?"

As we study Romans, and in particular, the Jews, we are left to wonder and marvel at these people. They certainly were the most conversant with what God had said in the bible. They prided themselves on their studies of the Law, and careful observance of the details of the Law. How is it that these people, so zealous for their religion, could miss the whole point of God's Law. Jesus once told some of the Jews, you strain out a gnat, and yet swallow a camel. They seem to have their eyes so focused on the details of their religion, they never took time to step back, and ask the broader and more serious questions about their religion, such as how does a man become righteous before God. They just seem to have fallen into the trap of thinking that, while they had the Law and did their best to perform the Law, keeping the Law was all that would be required for them to be saved. They held onto the gift of the Law, which God had given them, with great tenacity, but never really understood or asked why God gave it to them in the first place. Had they taken time to hear God's voice speaking to them, they would have recognized that the Law, was God's method of awaking within them their conscience concerning sin, and to show them how desperately they needed a Savior. The Law should have had the affect of making them humble, by recognizing their own sin and disobedience; but, ironically, the Law made them proud of their religion. Their pride blinded them from seeing the truth.

This is the same for all man-made religion, which caters to the pride in man's heart. We must not be too harsh on the ancient Jews, whom God had so often sought to teach, for they were sinners (as we all are), and will follow their sin nature. They were not as fortunate as Christians today, to have the Holy Spirit within them to guide and direct them in the ways that please God. They had to operate in the power of their sinful flesh, and try as they might, the Law only could frustrate them. As hard as they tried to keep the Law, they did not have a nature that would permit them to keep God's Law. The more one tries to perform their religion in the power of their fallen sinful nature, the more they will find themselves only further drawn into those sins which they are trying to escape from. They are all captives of the Devil, and their own sinful desires. That is why Jesus had to tell old Nicodemus, "you must be born again". Without the new birth, and new nature, no one is able to perform the righteousness that is required by God's Law. It actually works contrary to our good, to be shown God's Law, when we do not have power to keep it, for it only excites our sinful nature, and drives us further away from God. But we can be so grateful that God has not left us hopelessly lost to our sin and fallen nature. He sent us a Savior, and the Holy Spirit to renew us, so that we can live a life that is pleasing to God. We no longer have to impress God, by keeping His Law, because Christ has fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law on our behalf. Now we can freely receive God's grace, and seek to live in a manner that agrees with His righteousness. And even if we should sin, (and we will certainly continue to battle with sin, as we learned in Rom 7), we just need to confess our sin, and God is faithful and will forgive us for our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The gospel certainly causes believers to not walk in the pride of their heart, because of their good religious conduct before God. The gospel keeps the sin-sick soul humble, and ever grateful, and constantly dependent on the outpouring of God's grace into their life.

Looking again at the Jews of the Old Testament era, we realize their predicament, as those who were very zealous to keep God's Law, and often made valiant attempts to do what was right. However, we see throughout their long history, the demonstration that it is impossible for man, in his current sinful condition, to please God, or keep his righteous standard. This was the message God needed the Jews to hear and understand, and through them all the world was also to learn their lost and hopeless condition before God. We can thank the Jews, because God has used them to teach us that no matter how hard we try to use our religion to satisfy God, it can never be done. God had to satisfy His own righteous standard through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. That is the only thing that will ever satisfy God. So we like the Jews, must give up on all our religious efforts, and attainments, and humbly admit before God, that we are guilty sinners, lost, ready for judgment, and plead for Him to save our souls. Why not accept God's salvation today, by believing in Jesus as Lord & Savior.

"you search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me." John 5:39

LESSON 128
God's Gospel Plan
ROMANS II

In our last lesson we learned that the Jewish people had been given much advantage, but could not attain to God's righteousness because they did not seek it God's way, through faith. They thought they could attain acceptance with God by keeping God's Laws. Today we will learn of God's plan to show mercy to the gentiles as a way to show more mercy for Israel, and by this, to save as many souls as possible.

We must remember that Paul is writing this book to the Roman believers, who were gentiles. It was for the benefit of these gentile believers to learn about God's dealings with Israel. It is clear that all Christians will be helped by a careful study of God's dealings with these beloved people of God. Though failing to attain God's righteousness, and so often falling away from God into sin, God has never forsaken and utterly abandoned His plans and purposes for these people. He has not cast them off. Paul quotes the prophet Elijah to remind his gentile audience that God will preserve a remnant in Israel, even when it appears they have all fallen away into rebellion and disobedience.

God preserves a remnant of His people on the principle of grace, and not because of works for those two principles are mutually exclusive. If grace then it cannot be by works, and if by works it is not of grace. Though Israel has stumbled through unbelief that does not mean their complete ruin. God will use the gentiles to provoke the children of Israel to come to faith and salvation also. If God has used the failure of Israel to bring such great blessing to the gentiles, then when Israel is blessed by God this will bring about a even greater blessing and fullness to all who believe. Paul writes about God's plans for Israel, how He would not give up on them, and how He would use other nations to provoke them. He uses this point, here in Romans 11, in order to stir up the Jews who may read this letter. He wants them to consider how God is pleading with them to turn to Jesus as their Messiah, and place their trust in Him. Then Paul writes, that if God's turning away from Israel to save gentiles meant a reconciling of the world, it would mean that their future acceptance would be like being raised from the dead. We have seen a resurrection of sorts with the forming of the nation of Israel in 1948, but we are yet to see this nation turn again to the Lord, and place their trust in Jesus their Messiah, a spiritual resurrection.

Paul describes an olive tree as a picture of God's family tree. The Jews who would not believe were cut off as unfruitful branches, and the gentiles who believed in God's Messiah were grafted into the tree. Paul reminds his gentile audience that they are very fortunate that God has grafted them into his purposes, and brought them into His salvation, but they must be careful not to follow the sins of Israel's unbelief. If they should also fail, then God would not spare them, just as he did not spare the Jews who rebelled. It was by God's goodness that gentiles could be grafted in, and God's judgment that took away the unbelieving Jews. Now for gentiles to think correctly about the Jews, they must remember that if the Jews reject the gospel, they are being disobedient to God; however we should not despise the Jewish people, recognizing that these are still beloved by God, and those to whom He has made many promises. God will eventually fulfill all His promises made to Abraham and his children, for God's gifts and promises are irrevocable. This means God will never go back on His word, but will always give what He has promised to provide. This is a wonderful truth that can bring great comfort to those who believe in the Lord, because we know that while men often fail to keep their promises, God will never break His promise to us.

God's plan for the gentiles and Jews, through the ages, is a remarkable plan to show mercy to as many as possible. Since the Jews, who were so favored by God, have rejected their Messiah and acted disobediently, God has judged them with a temporary spiritual blindness. Now God is saving many gentiles from all nations on the earth, and He will use the faith of gentiles to provoke the Jews to jealousy, so that they too will be drawn to come and place their trust in Jesus also. A Jewish person, if he is honest, will marvel when a gentile Christian explains how he believes in Abraham, and can explain many of the teachings of the Old Testament, which the Jews hold in such high esteem. As the Christian speaks of the hope of the Jews for their Messiah, then tells them about the Jewish Messiah who has fulfilled all those Old Testament prophecies, the Jewish person will wonder at how God has used these gentiles to know and explain the scriptures and salvation to them. Through this means many of the Jews will eventually come to faith in their true Messiah, Jesus. As Paul contemplates the amazing plan and mercy of God he burst into words of praise, finishing this portion of his letter. He speaks of the surpassing wisdom and knowledge of God, such that His ways are beyond our comprehension. Paul asks rhetorically, who has been God's counselor, or known His mind, or has given something to God with expectation repayment, for of Him and through Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Just like the Jews, we are prone to the same problem of being proud of our knowledge. We gain a little knowledge and then think we understand, but truthfully we are so very ignorant, and therefore need to exhibit humility. If we recognize God's wisdom, we shall come to Him in faith, and humble dependence, finding the answers we need for life, godliness and eternal salvation. Why not turn to the Lord today, and trust in Him for your soul's salvation?

"For the gifts and the calling of god are irrevocable." Rom 11:29

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about God's plan to show mercy to the Jews, by showing mercy to gentiles, so that all the world may come to faith in Jesus as their Savior. When Paul is overcome with awe and admiration He writes beautiful words of praise to God, because of God's wisdom and knowledge, which exceed man's comprehension. Someone might ask the question, "Does God have a plan for my life?"

In today's lesson we learned about God's plan for the Jewish people. He made promises long ago to bless this nation, and He will certainly fulfill all of His promises to them. We might wonder though, if God's great plans include our own little lives. We are prone to think that our lives are not that important, and wonder if God would really care about our lives, or have a plan for us. Our lesson today helps us to see into the heart of God, and understand that He is interested not just in the Jews specifically, or the gentiles specifically. He used the Jews as a testimony to others, and he uses the gentiles to also show mercy to the children of Israel. He does this in order to show mercy upon all. God does his work in such a way as to gather the attention of as many as are willing to listen. This shows us that God cares about all people. The bible tells us "that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son". But you might still question, that while God loves all people in a general sense, does He actually care individually for people, and does He care about me and what I do? The answer is "Yes", God does care about you, and we can show this from many places in the scripture. Jesus when talking to the crowds in Matthew chapter 6 uses the illustration of nature to show how God feeds the birds, and how he clothes the grass with beautiful lilies, to prove that God loves each individual person, and will look after their needs. When Jesus said not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from God's will, and that even the hairs of our head are numbered, He was pointing out how precious our life is to God.

The Lord wants you to understand that you are very precious to God, and he cares about every detail of your life, and God certainly has a plan for your life. He makes general plans for all of mankind. These general plans include plans for you, but He also makes specific plans for individual people. The general plan of God for your life can be easily understood from reading the bible. This includes coming to Jesus in faith for the salvation of your soul. It includes obeying the Lord by being baptized, and joining with a local church where you can learn and grow in your Christian faith. It also involves being a faithful witness to others of God's love and salvation. It includes all the instructions of how to live a godly life. These are general plans God has for each and everyone of His children. They are good plans, for God is good, and all His plans are the best possible plan for our lives. God does have special plans for each of our lives. It is not as easy to figure out these individual plans, because God does not take time in His word to address every person on an individual basis. So how can we know what God's plan is for our lives? Using scripture as our guide, we can certainly apply ourselves to do those things that God expects from all of His children. Often when we are busy doing all that God calls us to do in scripture, His plans for our individual lives become evident, and we move effortlessly into our life's calling. The secret to discovering God's will for your life, is to become entirely dedicated to the Lord. We shall learn more about this in our next lesson from Romans' chapter 12. We will think about why it is reasonable to sacrifice our lives to God, loving and serving Him all of our days, for in doing so we prove His will and plan for our lives.

Many people struggle with finding out what God's will is for their lives, but if they are too busy trying to run their own life, running after their own goals, they will always feel like they are missing out on their life's calling and purpose. It is quite possible to be a Christian and be on your way to heaven, but fail to fulfill the purpose God has for you. There are scriptural examples of people who God called to himself, but failed to fulfill what God called them to do. One example of this is a man in 2Timothy called Demas. He was a Christian serving the Lord, but abandoned God's work, because of his attraction to the world. Many like Demas are still living their lives for self, and not for God.

Yes God does call us to some specific plan and purpose. We will discover His Plan as we dedicate ourselves to the Lord, seeking to do all that He has directed in His word. I wish I could convince you to dedicate your life entirely to the Lord, but only the Holy Spirit can convict, and convince you, of this reasonable service. I can assure you, though, that if you dedicate yourself to the Lord entirely, you will learn His perfect will for your life, and you will also find the greatest joy and purpose by obeying His plan, rather than your own plan.

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11

LESSON 129
Man's Response to God's Mercy
ROMANS 12

In our last lesson we heard Paul praise God for his great mercy extended to both Jews and gentiles. Today we are going to hear Paul exhort Christians to respond to God's mercy in the only reasonable way, which is through a life of dedication to God, and godly Christian behavior.

As we have been studying the book of Romans from chapters 1 to 11, we have covered the doctrine of the gospel. We learned that all men are guilty sinners before God, and that God has provided justification through faith in Jesus Christ. We learned not only about God's justification, but also the about doctrine of sanctification, that is making us more and more like the Lord Jesus in character and conduct. Then we also learned about God's eternal plans to glorify all those who have trusted in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. And the past three chapters have been an explanation of God's dealings with Israel in the past, present and future, and how the gospel also includes them, though for now they have been set aside due to unbelief. Now after unfolding God's wonderful love and mercy through the gospel, Paul will now call upon Christians to respond to this gospel in the only fitting manner. The gospel is the most extraordinary message of God's favor towards mankind. When we come to realize all that he has done for us, and shall do for us, it ought to make us very grateful, and also willing to live our lives entirely for God and His purposes. Imagine if you were diagnosed with a terminal sickness, and the doctor said unless you receive a kidney transplant, you will surely die. Then some very kind person decides that they will offer to you their own kidney, and as a result of the operation the donor loses his own life, but you are spared. You would be very grateful to that donor, and probably want to honor their name. If you knew that the donor's dying wish was that you look after the welfare of his children, I think you would be quite motivated to do so, since someone lost their life to save your life. Really you would owe your life to that donor wouldn't you? Well that is similar to what Jesus has done for us, but He has done so much more than this. Jesus died to give us eternal life, and to save us from death, and the tortuous flames of Hell. His dying wish was that we would serve in His kingdom, and bring others to know Him also. It is only fitting and reasonable that we should dedicate ourselves entirely to His cause, for He is our Savior. So Paul writes to the Roman believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God. This is not dead sacrifices as in the Old Testament times, but this is means that a person is willing to dedicate their lives to serving the Lord. He adds that we need to have our whole way of thinking transformed, no longer thinking as the world thinks, but thinking according to the mind of Christ, and eternal realities.

Next Paul will talk to the Christians about how to serve within the body of Christ, that is His church. Just as a body is made of many unique parts, and each one serves a specific function, so each member in the body of Christ has been specially gifted by the Lord to perform some specific function or ministry. No one should think of themselves too highly, but should think soberly, and according to the measure of their faith. God honors honesty and humility among His children, but pride will be resisted. This is especially important if everyone in the church is to get along, and each performs according to the gift they have received from the Lord. There are many spiritual gifts listed in this section, and we do not have time to describe each of these gifts, but we would note that these gifts are supernatural abilities, given by God, for the building up of the church. The gifts are not the same as natural talents, like singing or cooking. Spiritual gifts are discovered through applying oneself to the Lord's work, and encouraged by spiritual leadership. The gifts are not meant for selfish gain or pride, but for the spiritual help of others. Paul lists only six spiritual gifts here in Romans 12, namely prophecy, teaching, ministry, exhortation, giving and mercy. There are many more spiritual gifts mentioned at other places in the New Testament, but these are given here to encourage the believers to become familiar with them, and use these gifts effectively and appropriately.

The remaining part of this chapter provides a list of things that should characterize Christian conduct. All these things should be the results of our fitting response to God's mercy shown to us. Paul speaks of loving without hypocrisy, clinging to what is good, and hating evil. He speaks also of kind affection and brotherly love, honoring and giving preference to others, being diligent, fervent, serving, rejoicing, patient, prayerful, generous, caring for others, and blessing those who persecute us. Christians are also called on to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. This shows not only a selfless attitude, but a genuine love and concern for others, which helps others to see Christ in us. Christians should share the same mind with each other. This does not mean my opinion or your opinion, but both of us sharing in Christ's opinion. We should be willing to associate with those in a lower position than ourselves, whether by age, wealth, or circumstance. We are not to be wise in our own opinions, or repay evil with evil, but rather with good. We are to strive for peace with everyone, and leave vengeance to the Lord, for He is a just judge. We are to treat our enemies with kindness, and thereby overcome evil by our good. The Christian life is a remarkable life of love, sacrifice and humility. When others see these things in us, they will see Christ, and perhaps they too will be drawn to place their trust in Him for salvation.

"be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." Rom 12:10

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned how Christians should respond to God's mercy by living a dedicated and godly life, serving with the spiritual abilities which God has given to each of His children. Someone might ask the question, "How can I know what my spiritual gift is?"

It is clear from the teachings of the New Testament that God has given a gift to each and every child of God. Peter speaks of this individual gifting in 1 Peter 4:11. We also find teaching about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, and in Ephesians 4. When we put all these passages together, we shall find that there are at least 21 various spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament. Time will not allow us to describe all these gifts today, but if you take time to study these passages you will learn more about the gifts and their specific use. We mentioned in our lesson today that spiritual gifts are usually discovered while we are busy doing the Lord's work. Often younger believers may not have a clear idea about what their spiritual gift is, but they can apply themselves to some work for the Lord. Often it will become evident when working in some ministry for the Lord, that certain spiritual abilities will be seen and this will help identify a spiritual gift. For instance, let's say a young Christian wants to help in a church ministry, and the leadership asks them to help with setting up chairs for the Sunday school class. That might seem like a trivial responsibility, but it will show if a person is willing to serve no matter what task they are given, and by looking at their attitude, the leadership can determine if they can handle greater responsibilities like teaching, or evangelism. If someone is given the chance to try to evangelize, it might be evident that they enjoy sharing the gospel with others, and are actually quite gifted to do so. As they apply themselves more and more to this, the gift begins to shine brighter and brighter, and everyone becomes aware of their gift operating in this area. The same holds true for ministries in teaching, giving, visitation, administration, leading, serving, shepherding, etc. While working in any of these various ministries a person's spiritual gift will usually become evident to themselves and others. When leaders recognize the spiritual gift, they can encourage a direction in ministry which is best suited to that gift.

We must not be overly concerned with trying to know, or even boast in some gift, for it is not always easy to discern a gift, particularly for immature Christians. Our responsibility is to serve in the church, and find a ministry where we can be useful for the Lord. Sometimes a gifted evangelist may be called upon to preach to the church. He will likely focus his preaching on the gospel, but that is okay, since that is where his gift leads him, and undoubtedly there are people who will need to hear the gospel preached. Their maybe someone gifted to teach, and yet they find themselves involved with an evangelism ministry. Again this too is fine, for the Lord will use that teaching ability to help people understand the gospel message, and respond to it. Spiritual gifts do not need be isolated to some particular ministry, and no ministry should be isolated to a particular gift. It is often the case that God will direct gifts to be used in a variety of ways, and in a variety of ministries. Of course it will be ideal for the teacher to find himself in a teaching ministry, and the evangelist to find himself in an evangelism ministry, but we need not be so restrictive when the need calls for teaching evangelists, or evangelistic teachers.

If you are wondering what your spiritual gift might be, you might want to ask some mature believers who know you well, or the spiritual leaders in your church. Mature Christians should have learned what their own spiritual gift is, and what the bible teaches about gifts, so they should be able to help you recognize your own gift. It is important for every Christian to think about their spiritual gift, and seek to discover what it is, because God has provided that gift for you to use it to help the church. Remember, if you can sing well, that is not a spiritual gift, it is a talent. It might be a wonderful talent which you can use to glorify the Lord, but it is not your spiritual gift. There are some spiritual gift questionnaires available online, which are not the best way to discover spiritual gifts, but they can certainly help a person to consider what their gifting might be. It has been my observation, that those who are most busy for the Lord, often display a greater degree of gift in several areas, though one gift usually stands out as the strongest. And the opposite is also true, that those who do little for the Lord, display the least amount of gift, and any gift is difficult to discern. So find a work to do for the Lord. If your church does not provide you any ministry opportunities, perhaps you can think up something on your own to do for the Lord, like distributing gospel tracts, visiting the sick in hospital, or teaching bible stories to the neighborhood children. Keep busy, and God will direct you and increase and bless your work, and by this you will discover your spiritual gift, and be able to fulfill the ministry that God has called you to do.

"there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. there are differences of ministries, but the same lord." 1Cor 12:4,5

LESSON 130
Proper Christian Conduct
ROMANS 13

In our last lesson we saw how the appropriate response to God's mercy in the gospel, was to give our lives to God as living sacrifices. We also considered how this works itself out in our daily conduct as Christians. The remaining chapters of Romans, continue with practical instructions to believers on how to live their Christian lives in a manner worthy of being a child of God.

Our lesson today from Romans 13 will show us how a Christian should behave with respect to governing authorities, and towards his neighbor. We will also learn what is proper personal conduct as a Christian, living in the light and not in darkness.

Firstly we have a lengthy discussion about how we must subject ourselves to the governing authorities. The authorities that are in power are appointed by God. This might seem hard for us to understand, when we realize that in democracies, government leaders are elected by the people. If people elect their leaders, why does the bible tell us there are from God. I think the point we should understand, is that positions of authority are generally in accordance with God's will and purpose to maintain civil order, and execute justice. That is why this chapter warns us not to resist authority, because God has granted power to them to execute justice and judgment against evil. If we do good, then we do not need to fear any authority, for they will rather give praise to those who do good. Authorities are called God's ministers to execute his wrath against those who practice evil. Having said this we must also acknowledge that men in positions of power, have often abused their power for their own gain, or act corruptly themselves. The more responsibility a person has, or the higher their position, the greater will be their accountability to God. What we must remember, is our responsibility to respect the authorities placed over us, if not for the sake of the individual leader, at least for the office he holds. Because Christians live in a governed society with law and order, we are required to pay our taxes and customs, showing due fear and honor within the society in which we live. It will not help the cause of Christ to rebel, or dishonor, the authorities of the country in which we live.

Next the writer turns his attention to how Christians should relate to their neighbor. We are commanded to love one another, and be free from any debts. Love is the sum of all the Old Testament commandments. When we borrow from others, we are burdening them because for our personal welfare. To maintain a good testimony, we should always avoid having debts. It is not always possible to avoid debt, but to live an honorable Christian life, we should do our very best to keep away from any debt. Our only debt should be to love God, but when we are bound to men because of debt, we are not as free to serve our God. The Law commanded that we should not commit adultery, murder, steal, or bear false witness, or covet. All these commands can be summed up by saying, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself". Love does no harm to his neighbor. Our neighbors include all people we come in contact with daily, as well as family and friends. Everyone should see the marks of genuine Christianity, by the love we show to them.

Finally, Paul exhorts believers to awake from sleep. This means we need to become more and more aware of the time in which we live. Soon the Lord will return to judge the world, and reward the righteous. If we are living with a conscious awareness of this, then it should affect our personal conduct. Believers are warned to cast away all the works of darkness, and to put on the armor of light. The works of darkness are all those sins that characterize unbelievers. They do not know God, so they do not care about their behavior; and even when their conscience tells them their behavior is wrong, they still go on loving and practicing sin, hiding in the shadows of darkness. The Christian, though, has the light of the gospel, and knows that his sins have been washed away. He now lives free from condemnation and seeks to please God in all that he does. Light is an armor, because, the truth of God's word can protect us from the accusations of Satan, as we know and rely upon the promise of God, that our righteousness is by grace.

Since we are children of light, we are to walk properly, not following the same sinful pleasures of the world like parties and drinking, lust and sexually immoral conduct, envy and strife. The world falls into these sins without resistance, and think it is normal, so they don't fear judgment. However the Christian knows that God's anger burns against this wicked behavior, and God's judgment will soon fall upon this evil world. Therefore the Christian should stand apart from the world, and its' corrupt ways. We are told to make no provision for the flesh. We have already discovered in our study of Romans, that the Christians still have an old nature, the flesh, and if we give in to it's desires, we shall find ourselves running after the same sinful things the world is going after. Not only should the Christian be motivated by God's great mercy to live a life of holiness, he is also given power through the indwelling Spirit, who helps us to know and follow the ways of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus we are commanded to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and by this the author means to live as Jesus lived, and think and act as Jesus would. You can only put on the Lord Jesus, if you have asked Him to be your personal Lord and Savior, so why not make today the day of your salvation, by turning to Him in faith, and asking Him to wash away all your guilt and sin.

"but put on the lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." Rom 13:14

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned how Christians should respect the governing authorities, love their neighbors, and separate themselves from all the lustful and wicked behavior of unbelievers. Someone might ask the question, "Why is light and darkness used to describe the behavior of the righteous and the ungodly?"

The bible often uses figurative language to illustrate its teaching. The word 'Light' as used in scripture carries a greater meaning than simple physical light, such as a candle or light bulb produces. Light also refers to the means of acquiring spiritual knowledge, and the discernment and guidance that scripture provides, as in Psalm 119:105. Light has the unique property of aiding our vision so that we can discern our environment. With the absence of light our vision is rendered useless. We are dependent on light to make our way through this world, and make the most of our experiences. Just as physical light is our source of discerning our environment, and guiding our steps, so the bible also does this in the spiritual realm. We need to discern our condition as sinners before God. We also need, as the author said in this chapter of Romans, to awake, and live in the light of day, by which he means that Christians should live with an awareness of the Lord's soon return to judge the world. This knowledge, which comes to us from the bible and by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, will guide Christians to behave accordingly. The Christian will use the light of God's word to stay away from sinful practices, and seek to help sinners to repent, and trust in Jesus as their Savior. Christians should live in the light of God's word, and also be a light to unbelievers. When sinners see the godly conduct of Christians, this should convince them that the Christian message is true, and that they also need to respond to God's mercy through the gospel. But while they live in their sins, and are spiritually ignorant, then they are described as living in darkness. Darkness is the absence of light, and for the unconverted his world is enshrouded by ignorance of God's word, and God's mercy. The Darkness is where a person cannot find his own way, and is therefore lost. The bible uses these words to vividly describe for us the spiritual condition of those who do not know God, and do not have salvation. When ungodly people live to fulfill the lust of their flesh, giving way to drunkenness and sexually immorality without any fear of consequence they are lost and in darkness. If they could have their eyes opened to see God's anger and judgment against sin, then they would be in a hurry to repent of their ways, and come into the light where they can find mercy and forgiveness.

We should be ever thankful that God has given us the light of His word to guide us to Jesus. Jesus is not only called the light of the world, he is the way, the truth and the life. It is through Him that we can obtain the salvation we all need. Only Jesus can shine the light of God's love into our hearts, and give us the free gift of eternal life. When you see your friends running away from God, and living a life of sin, partying with the ungodly people of this world, do not be so quick to judge them, for they are in the darkness. They live in a world of iniquity because they have never seen the true light shining. We have a responsibility to share the light of God's word with our lost friends. We should also pray for them, because spiritual darkness can only be dispelled by the entrance of spiritual light, and that takes both the word of God, and the illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit convicts the sinner of his sin, and of God's righteousness and judgment, the sinner will have God's light shine into his heart, and as he receives that light and believes on the Savior, he will be reborn and become a child of the light. We are all dependent on the gracious work of the Holy Spirit to reveal to us our sinful condition and need of a Savior, so that the word of God can then be applied as medicine to a sick soul. The word provides the answer to our need by showing us the person and work of Jesus, how He died on the cross to pay for all of our sins, and how he by the power of His resurrection offers salvation to all who believe in His name.

I wonder how many listening to this message today can make an honest claim to be walking in the light. So many people call themselves Christians, and yet live ungodly lives. Others do not even understand why Jesus died on the cross, and yet claim to be a follower of Jesus. There are a good number of people who believe the devil's lie that good people can go to heaven, while bad people go into Hell. Most people want to believe they are among those who would be considered good. The trouble with this is that it is nowhere found in the bible, and is Satan's clever way to make people travel through life happily deceived, not even realizing they are about to fall off a cliff into the pit of God's judgment in Hell. Perhaps you are one of those who needs to be awakened to your sinful condition and need to believe in Jesus for salvation. Allow God's light to enter your heart today, and respond to His invitation to come to Him in faith.

"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt 11:29

LESSON 131
Walk in Love
ROMANS 14

In our last lesson we learned that a Christian should be subject to all authorities, love his neighbor, and show proper personal conduct as one living in the light and not in darkness. Today Paul continues his practical exhortations, showing how Christians ought to walk in love towards one another, by not allowing one's behavior to stumble a fellow believer.

Chapter 14 envisions different Christians, who may have differing opinions on things that are not clearly spelled out in God's word. Paul speaks of a '*weak brother*', and a '*strong brother*'. We might find it difficult to know why one is called weak and the other strong, but given the circumstances, we could take this to mean that one brother has a strong faith which grants him certain liberties. Whereas a weaker brother would not feel the same liberties as the strong brother, because his faith is not as mature in its understanding of Christian liberties. When the one with stronger faith has concern with someone of weaker faith, the stronger should accept the weaker into fellowship without engaging in heated debates about their differences. The general subjects of disagreement have to do with issues that are not of primary doctrinal importance, but are secondary issues, like what is lawful to eat, or observing Sabbath days. When Christians find themselves disagreeing about matters of secondary importance, they should find the grace to demonstrate love and humility, preserve peace, and not harm or offend a fellow believer.

The principles of love which Christians are to follow when dealing with disagreements are given here as follows:

1. Do not allow issues that are of secondary importance, or difficult to discern from scripture, cause quarrelling.
2. Christians are to show mutual grace, giving way for those who have differing views on secondary issues.
3. Christians should refrain from judging one another since the Lord will be the judge of His servants.

Now Paul looks at some specific examples of contention. He says that some will regard certain days above other days, while others esteem all days alike. This was likely some of the Jewish influence among the believers, who regarding the Sabbath as sacred, where no work was permitted on that day of the week. Others from a gentile background may have held the Lord's day as more significant for religious devotion; or every day might be considered equally before the Lord. These matters were perhaps not easy for believers to sort out among themselves, but since it was not a critical issue, it should not hinder their fellowship or love for each other. The same is true about certain dietary restrictions which some observed, while others did not make restrictions on what Christians could eat. Although this was again likely an issue between Christians from both Jew and gentile backgrounds, there are principles which we can apply to ourselves. For instance some Christians might have certain convictions about not working on the Lord's Day, while others feel at liberty to do so. When issues like this arise it is important to not let these issues become a point of contention or division. Some things are clearly spelled out in the scriptures for us, and can be clearly taught and exhorted on. Not all issues are all that clear, however, and we must leave room for others, who are less mature in their faith, to come to similar understandings on issues that are not so clear in scripture. It is not right for any Christian to disregard the convictions of his fellow believers, even when he is not in agreement with those convictions. For instance a Christian who thinks he has liberty to drink alcohol, should not do so if he knows that some other Christian would be stumbled by his actions. We do not live unto ourselves, and our actions do affect others. Therefore we have to make sure that our conduct as Christians has a positive influence on our fellow believers, not offending or upsetting their conscience about issues on which Christians differ. This is simply teaching us to give way, and show love and grace towards others. When pride fills our hearts, we will want to fight to prove our point is correct, and not be concerned if we injure the conscience of other believers. The bible is teaching us that when we behave this way we are in the wrong. We should never put a stumbling block before a fellow Christian that would cause them to fall. While some Christians were free to eat all foods, others may have taken offense by eating certain foods they believed were not acceptable to God's people. The Christian who feels he can eat anything, should not eat items that he knows are thought to be unacceptable to his brother. By refraining from eating this food, he will prevent an offense and not stumble his brother in Christ. Christian liberty has not been granted to us, so that we should just regard our own liberty, without consideration of how our behaviour is viewed by other believers. The goal of every Christian should be to pursue peace, and anything that builds up the church in unity and love.

It is important to recognize the importance of maintaining peace and harmony between believers. Christ came to die and give his life to bring us to God, and bind us together into God's eternal family. The Spirit of God gives the church unity, but we must always endeavour to maintain that unity, by the loving and gracious way we treat and respect each other as God's beloved children. If I make my opinions or conduct more important than Christian unity, then I will bring division among God's people, and God will not be pleased with my conduct for I am destroying the work of God. Our own view on secondary issues does not need to be imposed upon other believers, as though everyone must believe exactly as I do, or I argue with them. That is not loving or gracious, and does not represent Christ. Paul says here that happy is the man who does not condemn himself in what he approves. It is important for every Christian to develop their personal convictions based upon what God has said, and live according to their convictions. We do not have to impose our convictions on others, for God may show them a need to change their convictions, or perhaps God will show that it is we who need to change our view. It is important that we are walking consistently with what we believe scripture teaches, for if we do not walk in faith, it is sin. The bible is not to be used as a weapon to

destroy fellow believers, but should be used to govern and shape our own convictions and practice. When we walk in love we shall fulfill the requirements of the word of God, and foster unity and growth among God's people.

"therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another." Rom 14:19

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that Christians who have different view on secondary issues, should not use their differences to argue and divide, but should always act in a manner that binds Christians together in love. Someone might ask the question, "What would be considered secondary issues?"

We have been discussing matters over which Christians can contend, because they are not so clearly spelled out for us in scripture, and are what we have termed secondary issues. What we mean by this is that they are issues which godly Christians may differ, without any compromise of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. It would be important for us to understand these fundamental doctrines, so we can better understand what the secondary issues could be; so let us consider a few fundamentals of the faith.

Fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith:

1. *Jesus Christ is the Only Way to Eternal Salvation*
2. *We Are Saved by Grace Through Faith – Not by Works*
3. *Jesus Christ is the Son of God*
4. *The Incarnation of Jesus Christ*
5. *The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ From the Grave*
6. *The Ascension of Jesus Christ*
7. *The Doctrine of the Trinity*
8. *The Bible is the Inspired and Infallible Word of God*
9. *We Are Baptized With the Holy Spirit at the Moment of Salvation*
10. *Regeneration by the Holy Spirit*
11. *The Doctrine of Hell*
12. *The 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ to Earth to judge the world and reign as King.*

To deny any of these fundamentals is a serious problem, and brings into question whether a person has the Holy Spirit, or is a child of God. All these fundamentals deal with God, His nature and salvation, and man's condition before God. These are essential for all Christians, and even the youngest believer should be easily convinced of these teachings from scripture.

Doctrines that do not affect salvation or an understanding of the nature of God may still have importance but not to the same degree, for a person may be a Christian but just uncertain about some bible doctrines. Those doctrines which are clear, should be taught, and Christians willing to hear and follow the word of God. The issues however that are not so clear, and are debated by theologians are issues where Christians need to show grace, patience and understanding for those who differ from their view. Lets now consider some of these issues which would not be considered fundamental, but are secondary issues.

Secondary Issues of the Christian faith:

1. *baptism*
2. *divorce and remarriage*
3. *the outline of prophecy*
4. *the eternal security of the believer*
5. *women's head covering*
6. *women's public ministry in the church*
7. *the gifts of the Spirit*
8. *divine election and human responsibility.*

These secondary issues have importance, but are not critical to one's salvation, and although there is teaching on each of these subjects in the scriptures, there are varying views among bible teachers and scholars on these topics. Other issues could be added to the list also, but these will help us to recognize the difference between the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, and those doctrines that are not critical to one's salvation, and are matters on which some Christians differ. It is possible for Christians to have fellowship together, even while they hold to different understanding on these issues. This is because we are not so smart as to have all the answers, and should be humble enough to recognize that when others disagree with us, there is room for either of us to be wrong in our understanding. With a humble and respectful spirit, we should be able to allow others to hold a different understanding, without feeling it necessary to convince them of our own point of view. We do not want to give the impression that these biblical issues are not important, for if God wrote to us instructions about these matters, that makes them of great importance, and we should seek to understand and develop a correct understanding and response to God's word. The point, however, is that we can show grace to our brothers and sisters, as we are all seeking to gain a better understanding of scripture. There is no profit in contending for the sake of merely winning an argument, when it is at the expense of Christian love and fellowship.

"therefore, as the elect of god, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering." Col 3:12

LESSON 132
Ministry to the Gentiles
ROMANS 15

In our last lesson we learned Christians should not stumble fellow Christians through their liberties, and thus learning to walk in love promoting unity among believers. Today Paul will finish off his message about how Christians ought to treat one another, and then he talks about his ministry to the Gentiles, and his plans to visit the believers in Rome.

We were considering in our last lesson how Christians should treat one another when they find themselves disagreeing about secondary issues. Now we hear Paul talk about a believer's attitude when he finds himself not agreeing with fellow believers. He points out to us, that we are not to please ourselves, but concern ourselves with pleasing others, for even our Lord Jesus did not please Himself. If this simple instruction were followed by sincere believers, the strife and divisions among God's people would all but disappear. Our attitude as believers is very important to God. We cannot afford to exalt ourselves, and our own opinions, at the expense of unity among brethren. The task is certainly not an easy one, so Paul says that we need to look to the bible to find examples of those who were patient under trials. Lessons from the bible can encourage us, and give us hope for peacefully abiding in fellowship with others of a different mind. We are to receive one another, even when we find it difficult to sort out our differences, and this is for the sake of preserving Christian unity. This brings glory to God. Remember each time you quarrel with fellow Christians, and will not relent, you are fostering division, and robbing God of glory that is due Him.

God intended to provide blessings to the Jewish people through the promises of the coming Messiah, and those blessings were also intended for the joy and blessing of the gentiles. Paul uses several quotations from the Old Testament to show that the gentiles were to be included with the Jews in God's plans through the Messiah. Paul brings up these gentile references, because the issues dividing the Roman believers likely had to do with disagreements that arose between the Jewish and gentile believers. Paul desires that God would grant them all joy and peace through their common faith in Christ, abounding in hope through the Holy Spirit. Having said all this Paul now expresses his confidence in the Roman believers to be full of the goodness and knowledge of the Lord so that they can admonish one another without creating unnecessary rifts in the fellowship of believers. Though Paul expresses confidence in the Roman believers to show grace to one another, Paul still feels a boldness to address the Romans on some of these issues, as potential problems. It was God's calling of Paul to minister to the gentiles that gives him this boldness. Paul wanted to ensure that the gospel would bring glory to God, as both Jews and gentiles were joined together into peaceful fellowship in the Lord.

Paul was able to glory in the work that God had done through Him for the sake of the gentiles, because it was indeed God's work and not His own. He would not dare speak of the work of other men, as though that were something to his credit. Paul sought always to preach the gospel to those who had not yet heard, and not build upon another man's foundation. It was this reason that had kept him from coming to Rome, even though for a number of years he had wanted to visit the Roman believers. However Paul was now finding that his work among the gentiles in Asia and other regions was well established, and he could now take time to travel further afield with the gospel. He wanted to make a trip to Spain, to spread the gospel message further towards the Western borders of the Roman empire, spreading the good news as far as possible. During this planned trip to Spain he hoped he could also come to Rome and spend sometime with the believers there, and that together they would find encouragement in their mutual faith. Paul said that his travel plans to Rome and Spain would be delayed for sometime because of a trip to Jerusalem he had to make. Paul was going to bring a gift from the gentile Christians to the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Paul wanted to seal fruit for the gentiles. By this we understand that Paul wanted the love of the gentile believers to be known to the Jewish believers, confirming the power of the gospel among the gentiles, and bridging the fellowship between Jewish and gentile believers. Paul's plan was to leave for Rome and Spain after he brought this gift to Jerusalem. He asks the Romans to join in praying for his being delivered from the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, who would likely oppose Paul when they found him in Jerusalem. He also asked them to pray that his service for the gentiles would be acceptable, and that he would be brought with joy, and by the will of God to Rome, so that he could be refreshed together with them.

This passage in Romans gives us much insight into Paul's ministry, as the apostle to the gentiles. We notice his sense of responsibility to the ministry which the Lord had given to him. Although he would have liked to travel to Rome to meet the believers, he just felt he was not free to do so until he had completed his mission, which God had assigned to him in Asia, Achaia, and Macedonia. He felt it was very important to personally deliver the gift of the gentiles to the poor Jewish brethren in Jerusalem, even though that was risky to his own welfare. Paul was not only very dedicated to God's purposes in the gospel, but he was also a very discerning believer, making sure that he moved only in the Lord's timing, and not for his own convenience, comfort or personal ambitions. Another thing we can notice about Paul's attitude in working for the Lord, was his care in not building on another man's work, but establishing himself and his own work. Paul did not want to glory in another man's work, but recognize God at work in His own life and ministry. As Christians we often try to live off of the spiritual merits of others. Perhaps we enjoy attending a church, where the preacher is well-known, and notable for His abilities and work. But our association with a good church, or a good preacher does not in itself add anything to our Christianity, or the rewards we shall receive from the Lord. Our

individual work, carried out by the Holy Spirit in us, and bearing fruit for God, is what brings glory to God, and that for which he will grant us reward. The gospel draws men together in Christ, and Paul dedicated all his energies to God's purposes in the gospel. What are you doing to support the spread of the gospel, and the binding together of God's children? May the gospel so affect us, as it did Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ. *"now may the god of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy spirit."* Rom 15:13

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that our Christian attitude should cause us to want to please others rather than ourselves. We also learned about Paul's mission to the gentiles, and how God included the gentiles in His promises to the Jews through the coming Messiah. Someone might ask the question, "Is it okay for a Christian to boast in their accomplishments for the Lord?"

Today in our lesson we heard Paul mention that he could boast in those things that God had done through him for the sake of the gentiles who believed through his preaching. This might seem to give us license to boast about our accomplishments for Christ. Perhaps we have helped others to trust in the Lord, and so we want to boast about this to others, so they will see how God has been using us. We do need to be careful to understand what Paul was saying in this chapter when he mentions his boasting. His boasting, or glorying, was not for himself, or about himself. He was glorying, and rejoicing in the fact that God was indeed using him as His servant to the gentiles, and through Him, God was declaring the gospel widely to the gentiles. It is one thing to glory in God, and what he is doing through us, and quite another thing to glory in what we perceive as our own accomplishments. The first is our joy in the Lord for being used, the second is our pride, falsely thinking that there is something in us that has accomplished something for God. If it were our doing, than it was not from God, and it means nothing.

Any work for God, must find its origin in God Himself. We can do nothing spiritually speaking without God doing it through us. It is vital for every Christian to realize that while God is pleased to use us for the spiritual benefit of others, it is not our doing the spiritual work, but God in us doing the work, so the glory goes to Him. This then becomes a test of whether our boasting is proper before the Lord. For we can ask the question, "who is getting the glory?" If we can honestly say that God is the one who is getting the glory, and we are only speaking of His work, in order to magnify Him and His grace, then boasting is scripturally acceptable. If on the other hand boasting draws attention to myself, and leads men to praise me, then my boasting is not for God's glory. In fact, I am stealing God's glory for myself. The Lord spoke through Isaiah (Isa 48:11) saying, "I will not give my glory unto another". God is zealous for the glory which belongs to Him, and when men bask in self-glory, God is displeased, and will judge them for their evil. This was seen when king Herod was being praised as a god, and rather than act humbly, and deflect the praise towards God, he accepted the glory and praise that belongs to God alone. The result of this stealing of God's glory, was that God struck him dead on the spot, and he was eaten by worms (Act 12:21-23).

Paul said in another place, "he that glories, let him glory in the Lord". And we find a similar statement in the book of Proverbs where it reads, "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips" (Prov 27:2). Boasting for the most part is an evil practice, and men seem to love to engage in it. Unfortunately many preachers, and so called men of God, like to speak well of themselves, and their works for the Lord. It is a rare thing to find a true servant of Christ, who while accomplishing things for God, is always quick to deflect any praise, or glory, to God. God's servants recognize that apart from God's grace they would be burning in the eternal flames of Hell. They also realize that their abilities, intellect, and blessings in ministry are all gifts from God, and not for men to think highly of themselves. God gives success so that his servants might enjoy fellowship with Him in His work, and the joy that accompanies God's work in others. The servant must so absorb himself in the Lord's work, that he simply gets lost in the purposes of God, denying his own wants, ambitions, and reputation. Perhaps an illustration will help us to get the point:

Two geese were about to start southward on their annual autumn migration, when they were entreated by a frog to take him with them. On the geese expressing their willingness to do so if a means of conveyance could be devised, the frog produced a long stalk of grass, got the two geese to take it one by each end, while he clung to it by his mouth in the middle. In this manner the three were making their journey when they were noticed from below by some men.

The men loudly expressed their admiration for the device and wondered who had been clever enough to discover it. Whereupon the vainglorious frog opened his mouth to say, "It was I," lost his hold, fell to the earth, and was dashed to pieces. The Moral of the story: When you have a good thing going, keep your mouth shut!

It is only on those occasions where our boasting centers attention on the Lord, and what He has accomplished, that our boasting is acceptable. Whether the thing we boast about were by our hands or another is really not relevant, if God's glory is what is in view. In fact if we are walking right before the Lord, we would prefer that all attention is removed from ourselves, lest we run the danger of feeling some secret sense of pride.

"but he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." 2Corinthians 10:17

LESSON 133
Greetings to the Romans
ROMANS 16

In our last lesson we learned Christians should not seek to please themselves when disputes arise, but to please others, and maintain peace among brethren. Paul's ministry to Gentiles was something he could boast in, not for his own sake, but because of what God was doing to save people through him. Today we shall finish our study of Romans, and I trust God has been richly blessing you through this study. It is fitting that the book of Romans should end on such a personal note, since the gospel draws together individuals into God's family, where every believer and name is precious to the heart of God.

Paul concludes Romans with a lengthy greeting to the individual believers in Rome, mentioning also the various believers with him who wanted to greet their brethren in Rome. Such is the family into which God has gathered us, that we find ourselves making more and more friends, enjoying the blessings of having brothers and sisters everywhere we go. Paul first mentions a sister named Phoebe who was from Cenchrea, near Corinth in Achaia. Phoebe was of much help to Paul and others, and so he commends her to the church at Rome. Phoebe is likely the one who delivered this letter to the believers in Rome. He asks the church to assist her in all her needs. Commending a brother or sister, with a letter of introduction to another group of believers, is a biblical practice, and a courtesy for Christians who visit a church where they are not known, so they can be warmly received by the saints.

After speaking about Phoebe, Paul presents his greetings to many others in the church. These many names likely hold little meaning for us today, but let's think of some things we can learn here. Paul mentions 34 Christians by name in this chapter besides himself. It would have been rather easy to simply say, "Greet all the brethren there in Rome", and be done with it, but he rather chooses to mention each by name. It is a wonderful measure of care and interest to specify each individual. What is remarkable about this, is that at the time of writing Romans, Paul likely had not ever been to Rome, and only knew these believers by meeting them on their travels, or hearing about them from other Christian associates. However he writes as though these were his dear and close friends. From reading this chapter alone, we would have guessed that Paul was quite intimately acquainted with the church at Rome. This demonstrates to us something of what the love of Christ does in the heart of believers. As God's love is shed abroad in our hearts, we increasingly become aware of others, and take a special interest in them, and their relationship to the Lord. Of the 34 Christians mentioned, we learn that one was Paul's scribe writing this letter to the Romans, one a mother whom he called his own mother, a sister is mentioned, 5 of his own countrymen are mentioned, 2 fellow prisoners, 8 fellow workers, 2 are referred to as beloved, 15 are specifically referred to by their relationship to Christ. There are also two groups of people mentioned, along with the brethren with them, so perhaps this was two individual families, or two smaller church groups that met together. Of all the names mentioned in this chapter there are only 5 names that are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. This shows us the significance of each individual in God's church, and that every detail about them is important to the Lord who loves them each so dearly. Something we should take note of is the emphasis Paul places upon individual relationships to the Lord, and their work for the Lord. These are the two aspects of our lives that make us notable in God's kingdom. First we must have a relationship to God through faith in Jesus Christ, and then as we find our place serving among God's family, we take on more significance in God's kingdom. These people are not recorded as great achievers in their society, and did not leave any special mark upon human history, other than they were God's children, and found a place of service for God in the church. Yet their names are recorded in the sacred text of God's eternal word. I wonder where you would rather have your name remembered? Would you like the world to write you down in its history books as someone of fame or significance in this world, or would you rather be known and beloved in heaven? I for one, am glad to take my lot with God's children, and forsake any significance in this world, because I know this world is passing away, and even great men of achievement, wealth and fame have faded from our memories.

Finishing off his notes to the believers in Rome, Paul calls on them to receive one another with a holy kiss. This was a common form of greeting during biblical times, and showed a warmth and love, as opposed to cold formalities. Today in some cultures a kiss is still a common form of greeting, but in some cultures this is not the common manner of greeting, and would be uncomfortable, or even seem inappropriate. A handshake will afford the same sense of love and warmth as a manner of greeting for those not comfortable with kissing.

Paul gives a final warning to the believers to note any individuals that caused division or offense in the church and to avoid them. He speaks of those who serve their belly and not Christ, who deceive the simple through smooth words and flattering speech. Here then is a good test of men who are seeking to lead God's people. We just need to examine their motives carefully to see if it is self-interest or the interest of Christ they are following. If they use Christianity to feed their belly, while neglecting the needs of the church, then we know they are not God's vessel. Paul also leaves the Romans with a wonderful promise that very soon God will crush Satan under our feet. This shows us that Satan's days are numbered, and soon we shall triumph over him, when he no longer will have any influence or power to do us harm. The book of Romans concludes with Paul's desire for the Grace of Jesus Christ to be with them all, and a beautiful benediction. *"now to him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began, but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the*

everlasting god, for obedience to the faith. "I hope that you are included among those who have been obedient to the faith. Today, why not surrender your life to Christ in faith, and join God's family.

"to god, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen" Rom 16:27

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we finished our study of the gospel in the book of Romans, with a review of the people who comprised God's family in Rome. God's family is made up of individuals, each unique and special to God. The more we grow in Christ, the more God will foster love within us for God's people. Someone might ask the question, "Can women serve in the church as deacons?"

In this chapter we meet Phoebe from the church at Cenchrea, and she is called a servant of the church, and some translations have called her a deaconess. This is a fair translation for the original word, but seems to imply more than is meant by the apostle when he made reference to Phoebe. From studying 1 Timothy 3 we would learn that a deacon was a unique role held by some in the church. The office of a deacon was certainly intended for males, as was the role of the elders of the church, for in both cases reference is made to their roles as husbands or fathers. From 1 Timothy 3 we would certainly conclude that leadership in the local church is held by responsible men of excellent moral character, excluding woman from leadership in the church. This agrees with other teachings we find in the New Testament about woman's subordinate role. Women are not permitted to teach or have authority over the men. Doctrinal reasons for this are; her being first in transgression in the garden of Eden, and also the order in which God created humans, Adam first, then Eve. These are theological reasons for women not being permitted leadership roles in the church. This is the consistent teaching of the New Testament, and we do not have any examples of women who lead in teaching, prayers, or other leadership roles in the church. This was specifically given to men, who are created in the image and glory of God, and are to be his representatives to the church, and to the world.

But then what do we say about Phoebe, whom Paul calls a servant of the church. The difficulty is with the word for servant, which is the same word used for a deacon in 1 Timothy 3, for the officers in the church. The difficulty is solved when we consider more widely how the word servant, or deacon, is used throughout the New Testament. This same word is used 31 times and can refer to servants of Christ, but also for kings and governors, and even Satan's servants (false teachers in the church). From this we gather that the term is used in the general sense of a person who serves the interests of a higher authority, and this could be God's authority, civil authorities, or even Satan's authority. Thus we can not limit the word to mean in particular those who serve Christ through public roles within the church. Therefore we can safely conclude, that when Paul calls Phoebe a servant of the church, he simply means that she was helping in the ministries of the church, but that does not imply that she was holding some official office or title in the church. We have already seen that the New Testament teaches that women are not to lead over men in the church, so it would be inconsistent to see Phoebe as being an officer in the church. This should help us to clear up any questions about woman holding an office as deacon within the church. The bible does not permit woman to hold a position of leadership, including the office of deacon, elder, preacher, or pastor within the local church.

Now having said that women are not to lead in public roles in the church, some might say, 'well then what can women do for the Lord?' Though women do not hold positions of leadership within the church, or lead the congregation, that does not mean they do not play an important and vital role in the spiritual ministries of the church. The sisters are to be active in prayer, service, worship, evangelism, and godly living. One does not have to lead to be active. In fact it takes but one coach to guide the team, but the team players do all the physical work to achieve the goal, and all rejoice together when victory is accomplished. The sisters in the assembly have a ministry primarily to their husbands and children in the home, where God asks them to keep the home, train their children, and show support to other believers through ministry in the home. This might include inviting guests in, sharing meals, or tending to the sick or discouraged. Women also have a ministry to teach one another both by example and word, primarily about their responsibilities in their domestic ministry to their families. Men are responsible for doctrinal teaching of the word of God. God values the ministry of women in the home, and nurture of children, and keeping of a godly home. We might think the preacher is the one who is important because of his significant role in the church, and there is no doubt that his role is important to the spiritual care of the church; but that is not to say that the role of a godly mother is any less significant, as she shapes the spiritual lives of her children, or stands beside her husband as a support and encourager in his work and labors. Her role is necessary and important for the health of the church, and if neglected the whole church will suffer. God in His wisdom has designed unique roles for both men and women in the church, and we will do well to learn our respective roles, and fulfill them to the glory of God.

"That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." Titus 2:4,5