

DEVOTIONS

IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

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INTRODUCTION

The book of Romans is about the Gospel as the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Salvation is more than just gaining heaven and escaping hell. Salvation for the sinner ultimately means being transformed into the very image of God's own Son. For all creation salvation means the total banishment of sin with all of its destructive effects and the ushering in of a perfect new heaven and a new earth.

My humble wish is that this devotional book in Romans will be placed in the hands of every Christian believer. My prayer is that God will use these devotional meditations to launch them into a life-long exploration and appropriation of the power and blessings of the Gospel. As a result, they will become disciples who consistently experience victory over self, sin, the world, and the devil through the Spirit of the crucified, risen and enthroned Savior and Lord. And, enabled by that same Spirit, they will make a redemptive difference in the lives of others and, ultimately, help complete the Great Commission in our generation.

Day 1:

THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS

What is the Gospel? The Greek word, EUANGGELION, is made up of two words EU (good) and ANGELION (news). The Gospel is GOOD NEWS. So good that the apostle Paul was consumed by his passion to proclaim it. He wrote to the Christians in Rome:

¹⁴ I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵ So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:14-17, NKJV used throughout unless otherwise indicated)

But there is something a little strange about this statement. If the apostle Paul was writing to people who were already Christian believers, what need was there to preach

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

the gospel to them? Was Paul maybe referring to the general non-Christian population of Rome? Yes, maybe. But in Romans 15, he clarified that he was writing specifically to the Christians in Rome, who, by his own admission, were quite mature already in the faith:

¹⁴ Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵ Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:14-16)

The Living Bible paraphrases verses 15-16 as follows: ***”But even so I have been bold enough to emphasize some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder from me; for I am, by God’s grace, a special messenger from Jesus Christ to you Gentiles, bringing you the Gospel and offering you up as a fragrant sacrifice to God; for you have been made pure and pleasing to him by the Holy Spirit.***

The Roman Christians already knew the Gospel but Paul was deeply desirous to emphasize certain things from his perspective as a special messenger of Jesus Christ.

Like the Christians in ancient Rome, we today need Paul’s perspective as expounded in his letter to the Romans. Most of us have come to know the Gospel through summary presentations like the Bridge, Four Spiritual Laws, Gospel Hand, or some similar presentation. In some way, the core truths of the Gospel are contained or hinted at in those presentations. But what we need to have is a deeper understanding of those truths. It is when the depth and breadth and wealth of those truths grip us that we will, like the apostle Paul, be inflamed with such a passion that will overcome all shyness or timidity or fear on our part in proclaiming it.

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation, that is what gripped Paul’s heart. But for him salvation is more than just salvation from an eternal hell, important as that is. Sadly, that seems to be all the salvation that we offer to people through our presentations (like the ones mentioned above).

No, in God’s plan, salvation is making right everything that is wrong in the whole universe. Someone said, “Everything is wrong until God makes it right.” Yes, there is something wrong with everything in our universe. The Gospel is the divinely designed solution that will make everything right.

This book of devotions is an invitation for you to go on a 60-day journey of discovery with the apostle Paul into the glorious meaning of the Gospel as unfolded in his letter to the Romans.

Day 2:

PAUL: DEVOTED DISCIPLE,

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

PASSIONATE GOSPEL PROCLAIMER – A SLAVE OF CHRIST

Paul was a passionate proclaimer of the Gospel. His letter to the Christians in Rome expressed his passionate convictions about the Gospel. But, first, some background regarding this letter.

“Paul probably wrote Romans from Corinth, on his third missionary journey, in A.D. 57 (Acts 20:2-3). Having completed his work in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, he hoped to travel to Rome and then on to Spain; but first he needed to go to Jerusalem to deliver the money he had collected for the church there (Rom. 15:19-32; see Acts 19:21). Paul commends Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2), and she was likely the person who brought the letter to Rome. She resided in Cenchreae, which was near Corinth and was one of its port cities.” (from the ESV Study Bible)

From Romans 1:1-17, we see that Paul had four qualities as a passionate Gospel proclaimer. To become passionate proclaimers, we need to have these same qualities as well. These four qualities are:

- TOTAL DEVOTION TO CHRIST;
- LOVE FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS;
- ZEAL IN THE LORD’S SERVICE;
- FULL CONFIDENCE IN THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

In the next several meditations, we will look at these four qualities one at a time. First, let’s look at Paul’s total devotion to Christ. From Romans 1:1 let’s note the words which he used to describe himself in relation to Christ: bondservant, called, set apart.

(a) BONDSERVANT

How would you feel if your employer required you to always introduce yourself, “I am Juan dela Cruz, a slave of Mr. So-and-so.” I would feel very depreciated, wouldn’t you? But for Paul it was with pride that he introduced himself as the DOULOS (slave) of Jesus Christ.

In Paul’s time, DOULOS referred to the lowest class of servants. A slave had no rights; he was considered as a property, not very much more than the horse or sandals or any other thing that his master owned. The master could do anything he wished with his slave; overwork him, sell him, or even kill him. Nobody would protest because the master had absolute right over his slave.

That was how Paul considered himself to be, a SLAVE, someone completely owned and at the disposal of his Master, Jesus Christ. And that is the first quality we also need to have.

But haven’t you noticed exactly the opposite attitude on the part of many so-called Christians these days? For them Christ seems to be the slave who they expect must fulfill whatever they ask in prayer. “Lord, please do this for me” or “Lord, please give that to me”. Christ is someone they received in their hearts to supply their needs and to

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

solve their problems and to make them happy. And when they are confronted by Christ's hard command, such as, "Love your enemies" they find excuses for not obeying Him.

It is to such so-called followers that Christ directed these words: "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46)

If we wish to be true followers and passionate proclaimers of Christ, we need to offer ourselves as genuine slaves of Christ. Do we hear someone protesting, "I did not realize that that's how difficult it is to be a Christian"?

O brothers and sisters, that's how shallow our understanding of what kind of Master Christ is. He is no other than the One who gave His life on the cross for us. Before we become Christ's slaves, Christ first became a slave for us. Read Philippians 2:5-11 from your Bible right now. Then literally get down on your knees and thank Him for giving Himself totally for you. And as a proof of your gratitude, acknowledge Him to be the absolute Lord of your life and recommit yourself to Him as His lifelong slave.

Day 3:

PAUL: DEVOTED DISCIPLE, PASSIONATE GOSPEL PROCLAIMER – CALLED TO BE AN APOSTLE

In yesterday's meditation we saw that the apostle Paul possessed four qualities as a devoted follower of Christ and as a passionate proclaimer of the Gospel:

- TOTAL DEVOTION TO CHRIST;
- LOVE FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS;
- ZEAL IN THE LORD'S SERVICE;
- FULL CONFIDENCE IN THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

Paul's total devotion is seen from three words which he used to describe himself in relation to Christ: slave, called, separated. We have already discussed what Paul meant by being a slave of Christ.

(b) CALLED TO BE AN APOSTLE

Now let's look at the meaning of "called to be an apostle". The word "called" points to a crucial truth in the Christian life. Do you know how we can prove that salvation is by grace alone? This is proven by the fact of God's call. Before we believed in Christ, we had to hear God's call. If God did not call us, we would never have been saved.

How did this call come to us? God called us through the Gospel. One day, God sent one of His servants to tell us about the Gospel of Christ. It was only because God first called us that we had the opportunity to respond in faith.

This was demonstrated in the experience of the apostle Paul. We know the story of his life. At first his name was Saul, a murderous persecutor of Christians, who relentlessly

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

pursued them even unto foreign cities. His hatred motivated him to travel to Damascus, a foreign city far from Jerusalem, to search out and arrest Christians who took refuge there. However, it was on the road to Damascus that the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to him and called him.

Do you recall how the Gospel call first came to you? Many of us probably responded negatively at first. Looking back, aren't you thankful that God did not stop calling you? He gave you more opportunities to hear the Gospel. The Holy Spirit continued to convict your heart until one day, you opened your heart and received Christ. Truly salvation is by God's grace.

The Lord called Saul first to receive salvation (forgiveness of sins and the baptism of the Holy Spirit). Then the Lord commissioned him to be an apostle.

The word APOSTLE means someone sent on a mission. Saul (later called Paul) was called by Christ and sent on a mission to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jewish peoples). The word apostle has a special and general meaning. The special meaning applies to the twelve apostles of Christ, and to others (like Paul) who were personally commissioned by the Lord.

The general meaning of apostle applies to all Christians. We Christians are all sent by Christ to proclaim to others the Good News of salvation found in Christ. Acts 1:8 is a promise and a command to all Christians: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Do you wish to become a genuine follower of Christ and a passionate proclaimer of the Gospel like the apostle Paul? Always keep in mind that you are Christ's SENT ONE. Therefore, you must always seek to fulfill your assignment to be a witness for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, wherever you are.

Day 4:

PAUL: DEVOTED DISCIPLE, PASSIONATE GOSPEL PROCLAIMER – SET APART FOR THE GOSPEL

The apostle Paul showed his total devotion to Christ by describing himself not only as a slave of Christ; not only as an apostle sent on a mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. He also described himself as someone SET APART for the Gospel of God.

There was something very deep regarding this setting apart of the apostle Paul. He talked about this in Galatians 1:15-16: ***"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood."***

Paul's experience mirrored that of the prophet Jeremiah, who was told by God: ***"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations"*** (Jeremiah 1:5).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

This is truly amazing, that a person is chosen and set apart by God before birth for a special purpose in life. We know that was true of the apostle Paul and of the prophet Jeremiah. But is it also true of ordinary Christians like us?

Yes, the Bible gives us enough revelation to prove that (as someone said) “Every man’s life is a plan of God”. You and I are no accidents. God purposed everything about our life. Psalm 139:13-16 applies to all of us:

***13 I For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother’s womb.
14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.***

Like Paul, God saved us so that our unique salvation story will be used by God to help certain specific individuals within our circle of influence to come to Christ.

“15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life” (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

Because God has set us apart, 2 Timothy 2:20-21 tells us that we have the responsibility of setting ourselves apart from things that will diminish our usefulness for God:

“20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”

Christians are like vessels in a royal house. What is interesting is that each person is given the privilege and responsibility of choosing how he/she will be used – for a special purpose or for menial use, as a vessel to be used in a royal banquet or as a trash can in the dirty kitchen. God uses only clean vessels for His higher purposes.

What kind of vessel do you want your life to be?

Day 5:

PAUL: DEVOTED DISCIPLE,

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

PASSIONATE GOSPEL PROCLAIMER – LOVED OTHER CHRISTIANS, ZEALOUS FOR GOD'S SERVICE

The apostle Paul possessed four qualities as a devoted follower of Christ and as a passionate proclaimer of the Gospel:

- TOTAL DEVOTION TO CHRIST;
- LOVE FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS;
- ZEAL IN THE LORD'S SERVICE;
- FULL CONFIDENCE IN THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

We have already discussed the first quality. Let's look at the second and third qualities.

(2) LOVE FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS. Let's read Romans 1:8-11 again. How did Paul show this love for other Christians?

(a) Through PRAYER. In verse 9 Paul tells how unceasingly he remembered the Roman Christians in his prayer. This is quite a challenge for us today. Do we pray for our fellow Christians on a regular basis? How can we pray for them consistently?

One helpful way is by maintaining a prayer list containing names of persons God puts on our hearts to pray for. Some organize these names according to the days of the week when they pray for them, on Monday, or Tuesday, etc.; still others schedule some names to pray for on a monthly basis. Usually, current and urgent requests are prayed for daily, until they are answered or are transferred to a different schedule. Of course, we must always pray under the leading of the Holy Spirit, who may remind us at anytime to pray for someone or something not on our list.

If you have not done so already, this will be a good time to begin making your prayer list.

(b) Through MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT. In verse 11 Paul told the Romans that he was eager to visit them so that he might impart to them some gift to strengthen their faith. As an apostle he certainly had received much from the Lord that would be of benefit to the believers in Rome. But in verse 12 it seems that Paul took back what he said in verse 11: "that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."

What humility on the part of Paul. More importantly, he truly believed and lived by the truth that Christians are one Body with Christ as the Head, and that the health and growth of each member literally depended on the other members.

How about our own attitude? Do we sincerely acknowledge that we need encouragement and building up from other Christians, and that they need ours too?

(3) ZEAL FOR THE LORD'S SERVICE. Let's review Romans 1:14-15: "¹⁴I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also." Compare this with Romans 15:20-21: "²⁰And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written: 'To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand'".

Let's examine ourselves in the light of Paul's example. How far does our zeal reach in serving the Lord? Are we seeking to share Christ with our family members and relatives? Our friends? Our neighbors? Our co-workers and officemates? Everyone within our circle of influence? What is our involvement in the effort to bring the Gospel to the whole world?

If we wish to become devoted disciples and passionate proclaimers of the Gospel, we must continue to cultivate these two qualities: love for other Christians and zeal in the Lord's service.

Day 6:

PAUL: DEVOTED DISCIPLE, PASSIONATE GOSPEL PROCLAIMER – CONFIDENT IN THE GOSPEL'S POWER

As a devoted disciple of Christ and as a passionate proclaimer of the Gospel, the apostle Paul possessed a fourth quality: FULL CONFIDENCE IN THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL. Let's read Romans 1:16-17.

For the apostle Paul, the Gospel was God's power for salvation. For this reason he wrote his letter to the Romans in order to lay out to them what the Gospel was. This is also the reason for these devotional meditations: to help us understand more fully and grasp more firmly the meaning and power of the Gospel for ourselves, and in order to share it more passionately with people around us.

The word power translates the Greek DUNAMIS; hence we may write verse 16 as follows:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the DUNAMIS of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

If the Gospel is God's power, how much energy does it contain? Well, my elementary science can calculate the amount of energy easily. The Gospel's power is equivalent to the amount of work it is able to do, both negatively and positively.

Most of us are familiar with at least two English words that come from the Greek word DUNAMIS: dynamite and dynamo.

Though we must be careful not to read the meanings of English derivative words back into the Greek, yet in this case the two English words are very suggestive of the two aspects of the Gospel's power.

Negatively, the Gospel is God's DYNAMITE with which He blows up and destroys sin and its strongholds. Can we ever measure how much energy is required to get rid of

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

sin? Good news! The Gospel has more than enough energy to put an end to sin and its results.

Positively, it is also God's DYNAMO which empowers a believer to live a life that is wholly pleasing to God. Have you ever sat down to estimate exactly how much energy is required in order to live that kind of holy life? Good news! The Gospel imparts all the needed power and more!

We shall go into the details of these wonderful truths as we progress in this study of Romans, but let's mention some of the hard things that the Gospel must accomplish.

- 1) The Gospel must save us from the PAST guilt and penalty of sin.
- 2) The Gospel must empower us to gain consistent victory over the PRESENT power of sin. In addition, the Gospel must give us power to endure and overcome the opposition and persecutions that the world and the devil mount against us in their effort to get us back under their dominion.
- 3) The Gospel must deliver us from the FUTURE presence of sin.
- 4) The Gospel must create a new heaven and a new earth, thus completely releasing us and the whole creation from the bondage to decay and death in order to enjoy the glorious liberty of God's children in the eternal kingdom of God.

If we have the same absolute confidence like Paul had that God will do all this and more through the Gospel, we shall also become devoted disciples of Christ and passionate proclaimers of the Gospel.

Day 7:

THE GOSPEL: ITS SOURCE

The Gospel is good news. The very first good news about this Gospel is its origin. God Himself is the source of the Gospel. Let's read Romans 1:1-2.

God Himself first announced the Gospel at the very beginning, immediately after our first parents fell into sin. Interestingly it was part of the curse that God pronounced on the ancient Serpent, the devil, after he had apparently succeeded in ruining God's glorious plan for humanity. Let's read Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

Theologians call this passage the proto-evangel, the very first announcement of the Gospel. Following that original announcement, as Romans 1:2 succinctly informs us, God then sent a succession of messengers to repeat the promise and to reassure people that the fulfillment of His promise would surely come. These prophetic reassurances are all recorded in the scriptures.

We may say that the Bible contains the Gospel. We may also say that the whole Bible is Good News from God for all people. In fact, there is a translation called Good News

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Bible. You probably have heard it said, “The Bible is God’s love letter to you” That is a very accurate statement. Every time we open the Bible to read it, we must remind ourselves, “God is now communicating His love to me.”

The scriptures referred to by Paul in Romans 1:2 are the Old Testament writings. Later on the New Testament scriptures would be written to show how the promises made by God in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the coming of the promised Seed of the Woman, Jesus Christ. Christ Himself explained this relationship of promise and fulfillment between the two testaments. Let’s read Luke 24:44-47:

⁴⁴ Then He said to them, “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.” ⁴⁵ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Notice the phrase “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms”. During the time of Christ until today, the Jews grouped the Old Testament scriptures under three categories: Torah (the five books of Moses), the Prophets (inclusive of the historical and prophetic writings), and the Psalms (inclusive of all the poetical books). The important thing for us to notice is that according to Christ, all three categories of Old Testament scriptures contained promises and prophecies concerning Him, which He fulfilled at His coming.

Godly men and women have waited for the promised Messiah longingly through the dark nights of the passing ages. Simeon represented all the faithful ones who had waited: ²⁵ And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸ he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: ²⁹ “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation ³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, ³² A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” ‘ (Luke 2:25-32).

Today, we are more blessed than Simeon was because we now have the full blaze of the Gospel announced to us.

Day 8:

THE GOSPEL: ITS SUBJECT

God is the source of the Gospel. But what or who is the Gospel about? What or who is its subject? According to Romans 1:3-4, the Gospel is all about Christ. Specifically, there are three truths from this passage that we must be clear about Christ.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

1. SON OF DAVID ACCORDING TO HIS HUMAN NATURE

This title Son of David refers to Christ's human birth in the family lineage of king David. Christ's birth, life and death happened at a definite time and place in human history, just like the birth, life and death of any human being, albeit with a difference.

- Christ was miraculously born of a virgin (Matt. 1:18-23; Luke 1:30-35)
- He lived a normal human life on earth but without committing any sin (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:21,22)
- His death was different from that of other human beings in that he willingly offered His life as an atoning sacrifice for the salvation of people (John 10:11,17,18; 1 Pet 3:18)

2. SON OF GOD ACCORDING TO HIS DIVINE NATURE

As Son of God, Christ already existed before the creation of the world and before He was born as a human being on earth. In His pre-incarnate state He was called LOGOS, and the whole of creation came into being through Him (John 1:1-3).

3. SON OF GOD WITH POWER

This description refers to Christ's exalted position after His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father (1 Pet 3:21-22). When Christ went back to heaven, He returned not merely to His former position as Son of God. Rather, He ascended to heaven bearing both His divine nature and His glorified resurrected human nature. And in His position as GOD-MAN, God gave Him complete authority and power as Savior and Lord. Note these scriptures:

Acts 2:36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Philippians 2:9-11: ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Gospel is the good news about Christ. When we preach the Gospel we preach Christ. Our focus must be on the person of Christ. The focus of most present-day evangelistic approaches is not on Christ but on what He can do for people. The difference is very subtle but absolutely crucial. Christ commands us to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). And who is He that we bear witness to? We bear witness to the King of kings and Lord of lords and the conquering Savior who will make everything right. He has come to establish His kingdom first in the hearts of people and then in the world and in the whole universe.

True evangelism is not merely telling people about how they can gain heaven and escape hell. True evangelism is making a proclamation that a new king has ascended to

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

the throne and He is establishing His kingdom, and everybody better submit to His rule or be cast out. We should take as our pattern the example of the apostle Paul and his twin-emphasis on the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ in Acts 28:30-31:

³⁰ Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, ³¹ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Day 9:

THE GOSPEL: NATURE, PURPOSE, METHOD & OBJECT

Let's read Romans 1:16-17 again:

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

From this passage we see the following truths about the Gospel:

- NATURE of the Gospel: It is the power of God.
- PURPOSE of the Gospel: For salvation.
- METHOD of the Gospel: Through faith.
- OBJECTS of the Gospel: Everyone who believes.

Romans 1:17 explains why the Gospel is God's power for salvation. It is because in the Gospel is revealed the righteousness of God. Commentators tell us that the righteousness of God has two meanings:

(a) The righteousness of God refers to His attribute of being righteous in His nature and work. He is by nature righteous, and He is righteous in all that He does and in all His dealings with His creatures. As the righteous God, He must uphold the moral order of righteousness which He has established for His universe. This means that God must reward the good and punish the guilty.

(b) The righteousness of God also refers to the method He has designed for restoring people to right relationship with Himself. This is through the free gift of righteousness that He gives to the person who believes in His Son Jesus.

In this letter to the believers in Rome the apostle Paul will show how these two aspects of God's righteousness are not contradictory but compatible. The crux of the problem is highlighted in Romans 3:26: "[T]o demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

The question is: How can the righteous God both be just and be justifier at the same time? How can God punish the sin and still save the sinner? Putting it another way: How can God's justice and love be reconciled? God's justice demands that the sinner

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

must die for his sins; God's love pleads that the sinner will be spared from death. How did God reconcile these two seemingly contradictory demands of His own nature?

The solution is proclaimed by the Gospel. This is the good news of the Gospel. The Gospel announces that, yes, God has punished sin to the full extent of His law; and, yes, God has found a way for the sinner to be set free and live! The Gospel proclaims that God's justice has been fully vindicated, and that God's love has been completely satisfied!

God's design in the Gospel was so profound that the Old Testament prophets could not understand what God was going to do even if He actually gave them the words describing what He would do. Even angels desired to look into the mysteries. The apostle Peter described the predicament of both prophets and angels this way:

¹⁰ Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, ¹¹ searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:10-12)

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul makes the mysteries of the Gospel plain. And, with the Spirit's help, we will unfold those mysteries as we go on with these devotions in Romans.

Day 10:

GRACE, APOSTLESHIP, OBEDIENCE

Let's read Romans 1:5 again: "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name."

"THROUGH HIM" – through the risen, ascended, glorified and enthroned Lord and Savior we have received an APOSTLESHIP (an assignment, a commission) and along with it we have also received GRACE (all the resources) to enable us to accomplish a humanly impossible task, to bring about OBEDIENCE to the faith among all nations for the glory of His name.

Romans 1:5 is a mirror-image of Matthew 28:18-20:

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

THROUGH HIM: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

APOSTLESHIP: ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

OBEDIENCE: “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”;

GRACE: “And lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”

Some things stand out from this passage:

(1) The King of kings and Lord of lords is giving the commission. He is issuing the command from the position of absolute authority. He had engaged the enemy and all his forces in the decisive battle at Calvary and emerged triumphant. In His sovereign wisdom, the unquestioned Victor decided to allow the enemy forces to remain at large but shorn of their powers; their only remaining weapons are those of falsehood and deceit. They could continue to hold people in bondage only as long as they keep them from knowing the truth that Christ had already won the victory. This is why the Victorious King commissioned His servants to go to all the world and proclaim the Gospel, the Good News, the truth of the victory (Col. 2:14-15).

(2) When God gives an assignment, He also gives the needed equipment; when He gives a commission, He also gives the required provision; when He gives the apostleship, He also gives the grace. You may claim this promise regarding the assignment God has given you. You can accomplish your assignment because God will provide all that you need to do it. All the resources can be found in that one promise, “Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.”

(3) It’s been said again and again, Christ did not send us to accumulate converts; He commanded us to make disciples. He who believes obeys; he who obeys believes. The obedience of faith involves knowing all that the Lord has commanded and obeying it in all its applications in life.

(4) “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations FOR HIS NAME.” Everything must be CHRIST-centered. We must always beware of the subtle trap of loving the ministry more than the Master. This was the sin of the church in Ephesus; they were so busy serving Christ, they lost their first love for Him (Rev. 2:4). Have you fallen into the trap of loving the work instead of the Master?

Day 11:

CALLED, BELOVED, SAINTS

The apostle Paul had never yet had the opportunity of meeting the Roman Christians personally. Actually, he was writing to them in preparation for that much-awaited first meeting. But even before meeting them, he already was sure of three things about them, according to Romans 1:6-7:

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

“... among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The believers in Rome represent all believers in all times and places in possessing three characteristics:

- Called of Jesus Christ;
- Beloved of God;
- Called (to be) saints.

CALLED.

As we pointed out in an earlier meditation, one evidence that salvation is by grace is the fact that we Christians have been CALLED and that's why we believed. No one can believe without first hearing the call. We were totally lost like wandering sheep, but the Good Shepherd came looking for us. What would have happened if He did not look for us and called us back to Himself?

As the Lord was about to conclude His earthly ministry, He told the disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you ...” (John 15:16). Hearing that, I suspect that at least the two sets of brothers (Andrew and Peter, James and John) remembered that day on the beach when this Stranger walked by where they were tending their boats and nets and He spoke to them with authority, “Come, follow me” (Matt 4:18-22). And, of course, all twelve would surely have remembered that morning after the Lord had spent a whole night in the mountain praying, He called twelve of them from among the crowd, one by one by name, and gave them the designation of apostles (Luke 6:12-16).

We must never forget and we must always be thankful that God called us through the Gospel. Again, let me ask you, do you remember when you first heard the Gospel? How many more times did God give you the opportunity to hear the Gospel before you finally received Christ?

BELOVED.

Like the Roman Christians, we too are BELOVED of God. Can any truth be more comforting and reassuring? The same word was used by the Father of His beloved Son, at His baptism and at His transfiguration (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Jesus Himself assured His disciples that He loved them with the same love that the Father had towards Him (John 15:9); and that the Father Himself loved them (John 16:27). Later in Romans 8:38-39 the apostle Paul would write that absolutely nothing can separate the believer from God's love. We must take time as often as we can to meditate on the truth that we are beloved of God.

SAINTS.

The original reads literally “called saints”; scholars tell us the words “to be” are not in the original. They tell us that the word “saint” has the primary meaning of “separated (unto God)”, referring to position not to character. God's action of choosing and calling us to

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

belong to Him placed us in the position of “saints”, those who are separated unto Him. We are saints now by position.

This leads us to the secondary meaning: Because we are called SAINTS, then we are called TO BE saints. Because we have been separated UNTO God, therefore we must develop the corresponding character of being separated FROM everything that is not of God and to become more and more like God in His righteousness and holiness. In his letter to the Romans Paul has two emphases. First, he tells about how God gave us the POSITION of saints; second, he tells us how, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we may develop the CHARACTER of saints.

Day 12: **BAD NEWS**

The Gospel is GOOD news, but to appreciate how good it is, we must see the BAD news that made it necessary.

The bad news is that God is righteous, holy and just. He created everything good in the beginning, but sin came in and brought disorder and ruin into God’s perfect creation.

God’s character is so righteous, holy and just that He cannot allow sin, no matter how small it is, to remain in His universe. 1 John 1:5 (NKJV) tells us: “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” The Amplified Bible brings out the full force of this verse: “God is Light, and there is no darkness in Him at all [no, not in any way]”. Habakkuk 1:13 declares this about God: “*You are* of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.” Against sin, Hebrews 12:29 describes God as a consuming fire.

It has been reported that in the atomic explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, victims experienced the power of nuclear light even at a distance: the light burned out the colored portions of their clothing; those who wore white suffered no burns.

God’s holy character is like nuclear light, it instinctively breaks out as a consuming fire against the dark colors of sin. Two tragic incidents in the Old Testament provide dramatic illustrations of this.

The first involves the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, as recorded in Leviticus 10:1-3: ¹ Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. ² So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. ³ And Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD spoke, saying: ‘By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.’”

The second example is found in 2 Samuel 6:3-7; it concerns Uzzah, who had only the best of intentions: ³ So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart. ⁴ And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill, accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark. ⁵ Then David and all

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

the house of Israel played *music* before the LORD on all kinds of *instruments of fir wood*, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals. ⁶ And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out *his hand* to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. ⁷ Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for *his error*; and he died there by the ark of God.

GOD HATES AND DESTROYS SIN

This is the bad news: God hates sin and, apart from His grace, will destroy sinners automatically. The apostle Paul wants us to understand this immediately in Romans 1:18 before we can begin to understand the good news of the Gospel: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

We have been deceived by Satan with the lie that God is a doting, absent-minded grandfather who just laughs at our naughty escapades and says, "It's all right, you're only human, I love you no matter what."

No, to appreciate the love of God, we must first of all have a healthy fear of the righteousness, holiness and justice of God. According to Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding."

As we continue these meditations, let's pray that the Holy Spirit will teach us to have this holy fear of God.

Day 13:

GOD'S BOOK OF CREATION

How do we know God exists? We know He exists from the two books He has given. The first is the Book of Creation; the second is the Book of Revelation (the Bible). Romans 1:19-20 talks about the first book: "¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

Modern science is helping us to appreciate God's power and wisdom in creation. Those of you who enjoy science, you'll find this very interesting. Apart from any theistic presupposition, scientists have discovered what they call the ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE in creation. The *anthropic principle* (Greek: *anthropos*, "human being") states that the universe was fitted from the very first moment of its existence for the emergence of life in general and human life in particular. Dr. Norman L. Geisler (*Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*) enumerates facts so far discovered by scientists that seem to prove this principle; we quote a few of these facts below. Dr. Geisler writes, "For life to be present today, an incredible restrictive set of demands must have been present in the early universe..."

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

- Oxygen comprises 21 percent of the atmosphere. If it were 25 percent, fires would erupt, if 15 percent, human beings would suffocate.
- If the gravitational force were altered by 1 part in 10 to the 40th power (that's 10 followed by forty zeroes), the sun would not exist, and the moon would crash into the earth or sheer off into space (Heeren, 196). Even a slight increase in the force of gravity would result in all the stars being much more massive than our sun, with the effect that the sun would burn too rapidly and erratically to sustain life.
- If the centrifugal force of planetary movements did not precisely balance the gravitational forces, nothing could be held in orbit around the sun.
- If the universe was expanding at a rate one millionth more slowly than it is, the temperature on earth would be 10,000 C. (ibid. 185).
- The average distance between stars in our galaxy of 100 billion stars is 30 trillion miles. If that distance were altered slightly, orbits would become erratic, and there would be extreme temperature variations on earth. (Traveling at space shuttle speed, seventeen thousand miles an hour or five miles a second, it would take 201,450 years to travel 30 trillion miles.)
- Any of the laws of physics can be described as a function of the velocity of light (now defined as 299,792,458 miles a second). Even a slight variation in the speed of light would alter the other constants and preclude the possibility of life on earth (Ross, 126).
- If Jupiter was not in its current orbit, we would be bombarded with space material. Jupiter's gravitational field acts as a cosmic vacuum cleaner, attracting asteroids and comets that would otherwise strike earth (ibid., 196).
- If the thickness of the earth's crust was greater, too much oxygen would be transferred to the crust to support life. If it were thinner, volcanic and tectonic activity would make life untenable (ibid., 130).
- If the rotation of the earth took longer than 24 hours, temperature differences would be too great between night and day. If the rotation period was shorter, atmospheric wind velocities would be too great.
- Surface temperature differences would be too great if the axial tilt of the earth were altered slightly.
- If there were more seismic activity, much life would be lost. If there was less, nutrients on the ocean floors and in river runoff would not be cycled back to the continents through tectonic uplift. Even earthquakes are necessary to sustain life as we know it.

More “anthropic principle” facts are continually being discovered (google “Hugh Ross, Design and the Anthropic Principle”). Confronted by such hard facts, what should be our sane and logical response?

Day 14:

SUPPRESSING THE TRUTH

Confronted by such hard facts that seem to prove the “anthropic principle”, which point to the existence of design, and hence, point to the existence of an infinitely wise and powerful Designer, what should be our sane and logical response? Our response should be one of awe and worship and thanksgiving and submission.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

And yet what is the response of most scientists? They refuse to accept a Designer to explain the literally innumerable mysteries of the universe. They say, "That explanation is too easy." They believe that with further research they will eventually find a non-theistic naturalistic and evolutionary explanation for everything.

Scientists aside, however, what is the response of people in general? Most everybody believe that a Creator is behind all creation. But Romans 1:18 (NKJV) tells us something totally inconsistent in people's belief: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." The classic King James Version renders this verse: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

The KJV rendering "hold the truth in unrighteousness" pictures people who believe in God but whose belief does not make a difference in how they live; they keep on sinning anyway. These people live as religious hypocrites.

The NKJV rendering "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" points to the end result of religious hypocrisy: it causes the truth to be suppressed and inoperative. The Amplified Bible attempts to bring out these two meanings together: "For God's [holy] wrath *and* indignation are revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who in their wickedness repress *and* hinder the truth *and* make it inoperative."

We wonder how scientists, who keep on discovering mysteries in creation, can remain atheists. But more to be wondered at are religious people who actually live as practical atheists. Who is a practical atheist? Someone who believes in God but who operates as if no God exists at all.

In Isaiah 1, the Lord exposes the practical atheism of His chosen people.

² Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!
For the LORD has spoken:
"I have nourished and brought up children,
And they have rebelled against Me;
³ The ox knows its owner
And the donkey its master's crib;
But Israel does not know,
My people do not consider."
⁴ Alas, sinful nation,
A people laden with iniquity,
A brood of evildoers,
Children who are corrupters!
They have forsaken the LORD,
They have provoked to anger
The Holy One of Israel,
They have turned away backward.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

In Romans 1:18-32 the apostle Paul goes on to describe the anatomy of sin in its two aspects: ungodliness (asebeia) and unrighteousness (adikia). He also goes on to show how God's wrath is manifested in the downward spiral of sin towards self-destruction. We will continue to follow Paul's exposition in the succeeding meditations.

The question of our devotional today is this: How realistically does your faith in God make a difference in your inward and outward life?

Day 15:

SIN IS UNGODLINESS

As we read Romans 1:18 again let's notice the two words for sin that the apostle Paul uses: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness (asebeia) and unrighteousness (adikia) of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

Sin has two aspects: (1) towards God, sin is ungodliness (asebeia); (2) towards people, sin is unrighteousness (adikia). Let's look at the God-ward aspect first.

UNGODLINESS

The Greek word is made up of two parts, A (without), SEBEIA (respect for God). The English translation is apt: UN (without), GODLINESS (respect for God). This aspect comes first and it uncovers the true root of sin.

We have an instinctive sense for the priority of ungodliness over unrighteousness. Very often, we hear someone commenting about a very bad person, "That person has no fear of God." That's the absolute truth; it's because a person does not fear God that he is not afraid of committing crimes against people.

From Romans 1:19-23 let's discover the ways by which people commit ungodliness.

When we look at the wonderful sights in the world of nature around us, what is our instinctive reaction? Don't we feel compelled to look up and say, "Truly, God is great who created all these things"? Before my family and I had the chance to visit it ourselves, we've heard friends say exuberantly that they've gained a greater appreciation for God's power and wisdom when they saw the Grand Canyon. When we finally got to visit it and saw the awesome sight, we understood how they felt. That's what Romans 1:19-20 tells us; all of creation declares the power and wisdom and greatness of God. And yet, in spite of all the wonders of creation, what do people do, according to Romans 1:21?

(1) They do not worship God and do not render to Him the honor due to His name. We see this all the time. Isn't this the reason why people cannot give God even just a couple of hours for Sunday worship. Instead they rush to shopping malls, beaches, movie houses, sports stadiums, or just go about doing their pleasure.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

(b) They do not give thanks to Him for the life and the blessings He showers upon them everyday. One businessman pointed to his possessions, saying, “All these I owe to my own hard work and business savvy, not to anybody else.” Did he ever sit down to ask who gave him his life, health, and knowledge that he uses to run his business?

One wealthy farmer boasted to a pastor. Pointing in all four directions, he said, “Pastor, do you see all that land? That’s all mine, as far as the eye could see.” The pastor gently answered while pointing upward, “But, my friend, do you have any treasure up there?”

An old farmer’s saying is funny but may have a grain of truth in it: “The chicken is more godly than most people. Whenever it drinks water it looks up to give thanks.”

Godliness begins with just looking up. And as you look up, take two simple steps:

- Step 1: Recognize that there is Someone wiser and mightier than you, who made you and everything else – that’s God. Humbly say to Him now: “God, I acknowledge you as the Creator of the whole universe and of my life. Thank You for giving me existence so that I may know You and enjoy Your creation.”
- Step 2: Thank God right now for giving you life and health and all that you have, your family and job and whatever earthly possessions that you think you own.

Day 16: **IDOLATRY**

People commit ungodliness (ASEBEIA) by not giving God the worship that’s due Him and by not giving thanks to Him for His gracious and abundant blessings. Such refusal to worship and thank God results in a worse sin – idolatry or worship of false gods.

When a person refuses to give God proper worship and thanksgiving, he becomes foolish. And how does this foolishness show itself? It shows itself in idolatry. God made human beings with the instinct of worship. If a person refuses to worship the true and living God, he/she will surely end up worshiping someone or something else. In so-called primitive societies they worship images of humans or animals or crawling things.

“²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (Romans 1:21-23).

Idolatry is the height of foolishness. Only a foolish person will turn his back on the God who created all things in order to worship someone or something in His creation. Some who claim to be Christians use images in their homes and in their churches. They say that they do not worship the images. Images are like pictures of your mother, so they say, they only help to remind you of her. That’s the same with images in church, they remind us of God. Besides, didn’t God Himself command the image of cherubim to be

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

carved and placed on top of the Ark of the Covenant? Well, let's note exactly what God prohibits in Exodus 20:3-5:

³“You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁴“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth;⁵ you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. “

- (1) Do NOT have other gods;
- (2) Do NOT make a graven image;
- (3) Do NOT bow down to images;
- (4) Do NOT serve the images.

Those who use images in their churches say they do not worship the images. However, God says, “Do NOT MAKE graven images.” You should not make images in the first place; and if you do not make them, they won't be there at all. God also says, “Do NOT BOW DOWN to the images.” What do people do when they come before an image in church? Finally God says, “Do NOT SERVE the images.” Well, is not dressing up the image with expensive clothes and jewelry and carrying it in religious processions serving the image?

And as for the argument that God commanded the making of images, the Bible is very clear. God commanded the making of the image of cherubim to adorn the top of the Ark of the Covenant, but this image was never seen by the public and people did not pray directly in front of the cherubim. God commanded Moses to make the image of a brass snake which was lifted up on a pole so that those who were bitten by poisonous snakes in the desert would look at the image and receive instant miraculous healing, as per instruction of God (Numbers 21:4-9). But when in latter times this image became an object of worship, it was destroyed (2 Kings 18:4). Bottom line: Beyond these two instances, God did NOT COMMAND any other image to be made.

But an idol is not necessarily a physical image made of metal or wood. Some of us proudly say, “As for me, I absolutely don't worship any idol.” But do we realize that an IDOL is anything or anyone that becomes more important to us than God. Our loved ones can come between us and God (Luke 14:26,27). Our pleasures and lusts can become idols (2 Tim 3:4), or our appetites (Phil 3:19); and greed is condemned as idolatry (Eph 5:5).

The apostle John warns all Christians: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

Day 17:

SIN IS UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

We have already discussed ASEBEIA (ungodliness) as the first and basic aspect of sin: it is sin against God's character and honor, refusing to give the worship and fear and thanks that He deserves. ASEBEIA results in ADIKIA (unrighteousness), sin against people. The word is made up of A (without), DIKE (justice, righteousness). When a person has no fear of God, he loses any fear of doing what is unjust and unrighteous. In

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Romans 1:24-32 the apostle Paul examines three ways by which people practice unrighteousness.

- (1) Unrighteousness is MISUSING OUR BODIES (our persons, who we are).
Read Romans 1:24.

First, let's look at the opposite. According to the following verses, what is the proper way to treat our bodies (Eph 5:29; 1 Cor 6:19-20). In contrast, mention some ways by which people misuse their bodies, according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-16?

- (2) Unrighteousness is MISUSING SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS. What kind of misuse is described in Romans 1:26,27? It is very embarrassing to talk about the perversions practiced by homosexuals, but these sinful practices are the results of first rejecting and dishonoring God and disobeying His laws. And these perversions lead to something worse (below).

- (3) Unrighteousness is MISUSING THE MIND. According to Romans 1:28:

a. Whom did sinners refuse to retain in their mind?

b. Because sinners refused to retain God in their mind, to what did God give them over?

In our day, in what ways do people refuse to retain God in their mind?

From Romans 1:24, 26, 28 notice the downward spiral of sin, signaled by the awful phrase: "God gave them up" (or "God gave them over"). The picture suggested is that God built three fences; if we keep on sinning (keep pushing against the fences), He will remove the fences one by one until we fall off the cliff into eternal destruction:

- DOWNWARD STEP 1: Wrong use of the body (immoralities and injustices that people do);
- DOWNWARD STEP 2: Wrong use of sexual relationship (homosexual perversions, gay marriage);
- DOWNWARD STEP 3: Wrong use of the mind (resulting in the sinful practices and attitudes listed in Romans 1:29-31), culminating in this indictment in Romans 1:32 (J. B. Phillips paraphrase): "More than this—being well aware of God's pronouncement that all who do these things deserve to die, they not only continued their own practices, but did not hesitate to give their thorough approval to others who did the same."

In Romans 1:18-32 the apostle Paul may have described the most depraved pagan society in the Rome of his day. But we see his words depicting more and more accurately the deteriorating moral conditions of our day. However, let's always remember that in our own breast beats the same wicked heart that's at the root of all morally corrupted societies. The Lord Jesus described this heart in Mark 7:21-23: "21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye,

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

blasphemy, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

For this reason, we need to pray as often as we can the Psalmist’s prayer: “²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; ²⁴ And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).

Day 18:

GOD’S JUDGMENT – Part 1

The apostle Paul has been describing the utter depravity of Gentile peoples in Romans 1. Commentators tell us that at this juncture he begins to address the Jews, as representative of religious people, who may feel that the problem of sin does not affect them. He tells them, “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (Romans 2:1).

To show religious people (like the Jews) that they cannot hide behind their religiosity, the apostle goes on to explain five qualities of God’s judgment, and in the process he proves that Jews and all religious people like them are as guilty of sin as the Gentiles are.

ACCORDING TO TRUTH

The first quality of God’s judgment is that it is according to truth. “But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things” (Romans 2:2).

According to truth means not according to external appearances. In the Old Testament the Lord God says, “I, the LORD, search the heart, / test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:10). Christ says the same thing in the New Testament, “I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works” (Revelation 2:23).

At this point the apostle Paul answers a question that seems to be in the background about why, instead of retribution falling upon sinners, God continues to shower blessings upon them instead. He says, “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). God’s grace and patience are meant to call us back to Him, but when we continue to ignore His calls we end up doubly liable to God’s fierce wrath (Romans 2:5).

Are you experiencing God’s generous blessings right now? That is a call for you to get even closer to God and to get farther away from sin.

ACCORDING TO WORKS

A second quality of God’s judgment is that it is according to a person’s works. “[God] will render to each one according to his deeds” (Romans 2:6). Revelation 20:11-

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

15 tells us that at the Last Judgment books will be opened and people will be judged according to what is written in those books. Someone may ask, "Does God really need books to record our deeds?" Whether we treat these books as literal or not, the point is that God knows and remembers everything that we have ever done, and someday He will judge us accordingly. Brain scientists have discovered that memories are permanently stored in the brain and whenever areas of the brain are stimulated events in our past are replayed in all vividness and freshness.

If, as Christians believe, we are souls that merely inhabit and use our physical bodies, isn't it realistic to believe that memories embedded in our consciousness will never be erased and God has only to replay those memories as evidence that His judgment is just because they are based according to our works?

What is amazing, however, is God's promise of forgiveness, as summarized in two verses.

In the Old Testament: "I, *even I, am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43:25).

In the New Testament: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

Day 19:

GOD'S JUDGMENT – Part 2

NO PARTIALITY

A third quality of God's justice is that it is without partiality. "For there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:11).

Very often we see justice pictured as a blindfolded lady holding a scale in one hand and a sword in the other. This means that justice makes no distinction and shows no favoritism whether you are rich or poor, educated or not, famous or unknown. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in our society. Money talks, influence does exert its power, and those vested with authority to enforce justice are the very ones who pervert it.

But not with God. His judgment will always be without partiality, not because He is blindfolded but because He sees and knows all the facts of the case regarding the act and the motive behind it.

ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU KNOW

However, a question looms in the background, which the apostle takes time to address. The question is this: How about those who have never known the Law as given through divine revelation? In our day, the question takes this form: How about those who have

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

never heard about Christ? Is God truly fair to send them to hell? The apostle answers that question as follows:

“¹² For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law ¹³ (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; ¹⁴ for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them* ¹⁶ in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Romans 2:12-16).

In short: God will judge you according to what you know. Those (like the Jews) who knew the Law would be judged according to the Law. Gentiles who did not know the Law have the law written in their hearts and they will be judged according to what they did in the light of that natural law.

Nevertheless, the sad outcome for both Jew and Gentile is the same: nobody would be found to have obeyed 100% all the demands of the law whether that of revelation or of nature.

As to the question, “How about those who did not know Christ?” I sometimes answer: Do you know all that God is doing in the world to bring people to faith in His Son?” For example, more and more stories are coming out of how God is bringing Muslims to Himself through visions and dreams and miracles. God is not obligated to report to us the many ways He is speaking to people even in so-called inaccessible places.

Of one thing you can be certain: He is faithful to you right now because He has given you the opportunity to know Christ. The question for you is this: What will you do with Christ right now?

Long time ago, Abraham asked God a question: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25). Abraham asked this in another context but the question also applies here to our discussion. The answer is loud and clear: God is a just Judge, and in the Last Judgment all will know that they get exactly what they deserve.

And yet for the redeemed, they will declare to all eternity: “It is all by grace that we have been saved through faith. Not of works lest anyone should boast. Our salvation has all been of God’s gracious doing. Hallelujah! Amen!” (Ephesians 2:8-9). In the words of Charles Wesley’s hymn:

Amazing love, how can it be
That Thou my God shouldst die for me?

...

’Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God it found out me!

Day 20:

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

GOD'S JUDGMENT – Part 3

ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL

A fifth and final quality of God's judgment is that it is according to the Gospel of Christ: "... in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (Romans 2:16).

Christ has been appointed by God to be the Judge over everyone. The following verses state that fact very clearly.

John 5:22: "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son."

Acts 17:31: "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

Philippians 2:9-11: "⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

We have meditated on five qualities of God's judgment: (a) It is according to truth; (b) It is according to works; (c) It is without partiality; (d) it is according to what you know; (e) It is according to the Gospel of Christ.

The core truth we must remember about these five qualities is this: We will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

We have a saying in Tagalog: "Pagkahaba-haba man ng prusisyon, sa simbahan din ang tuloy." (No matter how long the religious procession is, it will always wind its way back to the church.)

So many people keep on avoiding Christ, some intentionally, even with a hostile attitude; some with plain indifference, feeling they have no need of Him. But the Bible is very clear: at the end, guess who you will have to face after all? Christ will be your Judge on the day of the Last Judgment.

We have another saying in Tagalog: "Kung di ka makuha sa santong dasalan, kukunin ka sa santong paspapasan" (If you won't listen to pleadings, you will be treated with beatings).

God's decree cannot be broken. At the present time, God is calling us with gentle pleadings to believe in Christ as our Lord and Savior. If we ignore or refuse Him,

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

someday, whether we like it or not we will be forced anyway to bow our knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Many people protest: Is it fair that God will send people to hell? They forget that before anyone goes to hell he/she must first pass over the Cross of Christ that stands as a warning sign and a barrier at the mouth of hell.

The message of the whole Bible is summed up in one verse: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Who is this Jesus anyway?

- He was the One who made us (John 1:1-4).
- He came to give us life abundantly (John 10:10).
- He is the Lamb of God who died to pay for our sins and rose again to give us eternal life and an eternal home (John 1:29; 14:6)
- Someday He will be our Judge. But today He is knocking at the door of our heart. Why shouldn't we ask Him in our heart? Why shouldn't we entrust our lives into His hands?

Day 21:

THE JEW:

ORTHODOXY WITHOUT ORTHOPRAXY

In Romans 1:18-32 the apostle Paul proved the sinful condition of pagan peoples. In Romans 2:17-29 he proved that God's chosen people the Jews were no better. If anything, their sinful condition was worse because they had the benefit of spiritual knowledge received through divine revelation. Their sin was orthodoxy (correct belief) without orthopraxy (correct practice). They had a nominal relationship with God; they were Jews in name only, not in actual lifestyle. And aggravating their sinful condition was spiritual pride. Please notice their high opinion of themselves:

"¹⁷ Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, ¹⁸ and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. ²¹ You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²² You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴ For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written" (Romans 2:17-24).

The apostle Paul went on to question their confidence in the main religious symbol, which they prided in as the divinely given mark of their unique position as God's chosen people: the physical mark of circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14). He reminded them that the core meaning of that mark was that they were in a covenant relationship with God, and

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

that covenant (later clarified in detail under Moses) required them to live in obedience to all the covenant laws. Because the Jews, for the most part, did not fully obey the covenant laws, they had proven their circumcision as a meaningless symbol, and their claim as being God's people was an empty boast. The apostle concluded:

"²⁵ For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷ And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ 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" (Romans 2:25-29).

The Jews stand as a perennial warning specially to us who claim to be Bible-believing Christians and who know and believe all the correct doctrines of the Christian faith and who look down on others who do not have the same Bible knowledge that we have. The question is the same for us as for the Jews: "You have all that Bible knowledge; the question is, do you practice what you know in your daily life?"

This is the problem with the Philippines, known as "the only Christian nation in the Far East." And yet in one survey, it ranked in the top three of the most corrupt nations in the world. One Jesuit scholar coined the term "split-level Christianity" to describe the disconnect between the faith and the practice of the majority Catholic population. But the minority evangelical community stands in greater peril because they claim to study the Bible all the time.

But never mind the other people. The question ultimately comes down to the personal level: You claim to be a follower of Christ, do you live like Christ in thought and word and deed?

This reminder from the apostle John should be our daily watchword: "By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." (1 John 2:5-6).

Day 22:

GREATEST TREASURE VERSUS WORST FAILURE

If the Jew is judged equally as a sinner like the pagan Gentile, one obvious question arises, which the apostle Paul answers:

"¹ What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? ² Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. ³ For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? ⁴ Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged."

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

The foremost advantage of the Jews was that they were entrusted with the greatest treasure, the Word of God. Their glory was not about them, it was about what they received. It was not about the container, it was about the contents.

God chose Abraham and his seed for a special relationship with Him, described in these words: "I will be your God, and you will be My people" (see Genesis 12:1-3; Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18). But that relationship was in order that they might be a blessing to all the nations. The greatest blessing was the Written Word, which in due time was born as the Living Word.

Sadly, as far as the history of their own faithfulness went, they miserably failed. Because of their unbelief and disobedience and idolatries, they were eventually exiled. From that exile only a remnant returned, and that remnant rejected their promised Messiah when He came. But did their failure mean God's failure as well?

This is a vital existential question as well for us Christians today. What happens when our sins and weaknesses seem to put God in a bad light, even seemingly to put Him to shame?

The lesson from Israel's experience of repeated failure is this: God can protect the honor of His own name. He is precisely God because He does not need humans or any of His creatures to defend Him.

This reminds me of an interesting conversation I had with a Roman Catholic priest friend of mine back in Cavite City. He invited me one time to his priest quarters and in passing pointed to a statue of Jesus in his room. He told me, "You know, that statue used to be in the church lawn but children played around it and broke one of its fingers. So I decided to put it in my room so it can protect me."

I had to bite my tongue because I was about to say to him, "It could not even protect itself, now you expect it to protect you?" I was tempted right then and there to give my priest friend a biblical lecture on the folly of idolatry from Psalm 135:15-18.

The living God can and does and always will protect His honor. God will be glorified even when His servants fail Him miserably. One of the most dramatic and most powerful instances of Israel's failure and of God's power to safeguard His honor came about when the Ark of the Covenant was captured by Israel's enemies, the Philistines. The enemies thought they had defeated even Israel's God. They did not realize what was coming. God's Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Philistines' temple of their god Dagon. In the morning they saw their idol fallen before the Ark, with its head and arms broken off! Read the whole story from 1 Samuel 4-6.

God knows the value of His treasure and the frailty of His vessels. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). In spite of our weaknesses, let's keep lifting up Christ! Yes, we will keep asking God for the grace to keep us from failing and falling, but when we do fail and fall let's let the Almighty Savior raise us up, and that will be additional testimony to His saving grace and power (1 Corinthians 4:5-6)!

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Day 23:

BAD NEWS! ALL UNDER SIN: NONE RIGHTEOUS

Theologians use the term “total depravity” to describe the condition under sin of everyone without exception. What does this term mean exactly? Does it mean that there are absolutely no people around that are capable of doing something good toward others?

No, this term total depravity does not deny that people usually treat others decently and fairly, otherwise we would have a total breakdown in society. Rather, total depravity means that the poison of sin has totally infected the human personality, such that every person, apart from the restraining grace of God, has all the potential of becoming and behaving like the worst criminal on death row. It means that his most noble act of goodness is as contaminated with the deadly infection of sin as is his most wicked action.

Romans 3:9-18 describes the condition of a person under sin, when sin has achieved complete domination, when the infection of sin has produced its deadly effects on the three areas of the human person:

(1) The area of the heart, the seat of the three faculties:

- Mind: No one understands; this points back to the reprobate mind in Romans 1:28;
- Will: No one seeks for God; all have turned aside; this describes a person who has completely turned his back on God and has completely given himself to the unrestrained pursuit of his desires;
- Emotion: No kindness (no goodness); this is the condition of self-centeredness and selfishness unmitigated by any consideration for others.

(2) The area of speech:

- Throats are open graves, which contain all the corruptions mentioned by Christ in Mark 7:21-23;
- Tongues deceive; Christ exposes lying as one of the two chief marks of the devil’s children (John 8:44);
- Lips spew poison; slanderous words do kill;
- Mouths filled with cursing and bitterness; why is it that persons who hate God usually have hateful words towards other persons?

(3) The area of behavior:

- Feet swift to shed blood; reminds us of Cain who, under the domination of sin, murdered his brother;
- Ruin and misery mark their way; another translation: sinners leave behind ruin and misery wherever they go;
- Don’t know the way of peace; they are strangers to the way of forgiveness and reconciliation;
- Show no fear of God; this is the description that summarizes the sinner’s character and behavior. No wonder, the book of Proverbs says, “The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). This links back to the first evil effect

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

of sin: no understanding. And why is there no understanding? Because there is no fear of God.

BAD NEWS FOR ALL This is bad news for the whole world and for every individual person: everyone is UNDER the dominion of sin and is infected with sin, both the pagan sinners (Gentiles) and the religious sinners (the Jews). The Jews cannot use their possession of the Law as a shield. The apostle Paul goes on to explain one of the reasons why God gave the Law: to show people their problem of sin so that they might turn to God for salvation.

“¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:19-20).

Connect the above passage to Romans 11:32: “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.” In other words, through the Law God has backed everybody into a corner as sinners, with no possibility of escape, so that He Himself will provide them the only way of escape!

Day 24:

BUT NOW – THE GOOD NEWS!

BUT NOW! After the dark pictures of the bad news painted in Romans 1:18-3:20, these two words, like sudden sunlight piercing the black storm clouds, break before our eyes, announcing the Good News that the world is waiting for.

“²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-26).

Every word in this paragraph trembles with exciting news.

(1) “But now!” – after waiting such a long, long time, from the moment when God first announced the Gospel in Genesis 3:15 until the Sun of Righteousness rose in the coming of the Messiah, God’s only begotten Son.

(2) “The righteousness of God is revealed.”

(a) This marks a second division in contrast to the first division which was indicated by “For the wrath of God is revealed” (Romans 1:18). The first division announced the BAD NEWS: God’s wrath is revealed against sin. The second division announces the GOOD

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

NEWS that God has provided the way to avert that wrath. This way is in full accord with His righteous character.

(b) Earlier we explained briefly the two-fold meaning of God's righteousness:

- God's righteousness – His attribute of doing everything right and in accordance with His holy and just character.
- God's righteousness also means God's plan of putting people in right relationship with Him such that His justice toward sin is fully vindicated and His love toward the sinner is wholly expressed.

(4) "Apart from the law, but witnessed to by the law and the prophets" – This righteousness does not depend on perfect human obedience to the law. However, the Law as given to Moses (inclusive of the legal and sacrificial requirements) together with God's revelations through the prophets, testifies to God's plan of putting people in right relationship with Him. This is the essence of Christ's succinct exegesis of the Old Testament which pointed to His redemptive life, death and resurrection (Luke 24:44-47).

(5) "Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe" – Note the emphasis on faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9: "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast." Note also the inclusiveness of "to all and on all" believers.

(6) "For there is no difference" in two ways:

(a) The same needy condition of everyone: all have sinned, whether the "good religious people" or the "bad religionless people".

(b) Only one way of salvation for everyone: all who believe will be justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

- Justified – forgiven of all sins and restored to full acceptance before God;
- Freely (as a gift) by God's grace (unmerited, unearned favor);
- Through the redemption (the ransom price that paid the sinner's debt) that is in Christ Jesus (provided by Him through His death on the cross).

We will continue digging into this rich paragraph (Romans 3:21-26) in our next meditation.

Day 25:

CHRIST OUR MERCY SEAT

We continue to plumb the depths of Romans 3:21-26. We look more closely at verses 24-25: "24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith."

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

God set forth Christ Jesus as a propitiation (Greek, HILASTERION) by His blood. Translators are divided in rendering the Greek word, either as propitiation or as expiation. The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary explains in part: “Although the terms *propitiation* and *expiation* are related, they need to be distinguished. Propitiation is something done with reference to a person: Christ propitiated God in the sense that he turned God’s WRATH away from guilty sinners by enduring that wrath himself in the isolation of Calvary. Expiation is done with reference to crimes or evil deeds: Jesus expiated sins, that is, he removed them or wiped them away.”

There’s no need to choose between the two translations. Both meanings are contained in the symbolism of HILASTERION in connection with the Day of Atonement. Hilasterion refers to the MERCY SEAT, the covering lid of the Ark of the Covenant which the High Priest sprinkled with blood once a year on the Day of Atonement (Hebrews 9:5; Exodus 25:17ff.; Leviticus 16:15-22).

The symbolisms of the MERCY SEAT as related to the Ark of the Covenant and the Day of Atonement include the following truths:

(1) Inside the Ark of the Covenant were placed the two tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments. Every year on the Day of Atonement there was a national confession of the sins of the people, acknowledging their continual breaking of the commandments;

(2) The mercy seat was placed as a covering for the Ark of the Covenant. The Day of Atonement had two aspects, the first involving the first goat which was killed and its blood sprinkled on top of the mercy seat. Thus blood-sprinkled, the mercy seat “covered” the people’s violations of the Ten Commandments so that the Lord’s wrath was turned away. This first ritual on the Day of Atonement symbolized the PROPITIATION accomplished by Christ through His death. His blood now covers those who believe in Him so that when God sees the blood His wrath is turned away from them.

(3) The second aspect of the Day of the Atonement involved the second goat which was not killed. Rather, the High Priest would confess the sins of the people over the goat’s head symbolically transferring upon it all those sins. The goat was then led far away and released into the wilderness, thus carrying the people’s sins with it. This second ritual on the Day of Atonement symbolized the EXPIATION or the taking away through Christ’s sacrifice all the sins of those who believe in Him, so that these sins are forever forgiven and forgotten and erased from God’s record book.

We often quote Romans 3:23 in isolation. We usually do this to emphasize the BAD NEWS of our sinfulness. In fact, we should read the whole passage inclusive of these three verses, where the bad news is announced only so that we might be prepared for the GOOD NEWS. A slight rewording of the passage may help us see the contrast better:

Romans 3:23-25: “²³ BAD NEWS: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ but GOOD NEWS! All will be justified freely by His grace through the redemption

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith.”

Who is the Author of this plan of salvation? God Himself!

What do we need to do to receive this salvation? Simply believe and receive!

Day 26:

JUSTIFIED IN CHRIST JESUS

In our previous meditation we saw how Christ was set forth to be our mercy seat (Romans 3:25). That was what made possible our being JUSTIFIED (Romans 3:24): “²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith.”

We will now look at this word JUSTIFIED. Justification is God’s solution to the double problem of our sin as stated in Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Figure 2 (below) shows the double problem of sin. Setting aside for the moment the fact of original sin (that we were born with a sinful nature), we start out at birth in the neutral position of having done neither good nor bad. But upon reaching the age of accountability (that age in childhood when we begin to have the sense of right and wrong), we begin to commit sin as well as do “good” (as we understood good to be). Romans 3:23 tells us that we have sinned or missed the mark; this happened in two directions: (1) we did not go in the way God wanted us to go; and (2) we willfully went in the way we wanted to go.

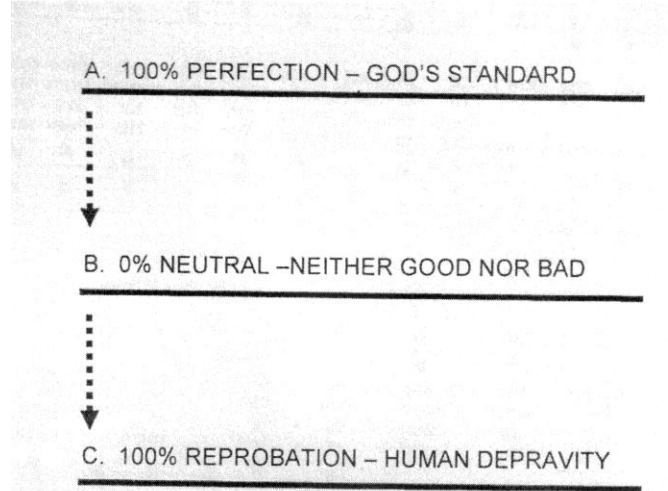


Fig. 2: Double Problem of Sin

We have fallen from God’s perfect standard (Fig. 2, arrow from A to B) and we have fallen down to the level of complete reprobation (arrow from B to C), deserving only of God’s wrath and eternal separation from God. We need to solve two problems:

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Problem 1: How to achieve forgiveness and cleansing from all our sins (How to climb up from C to B)?

Problem 2: How to accumulate enough goodness to be accepted by God (How to climb up from B to A)?

The answer is, of course, BAD NEWS: There is no way that we can solve the two problems on our own.

Many people say that accumulating more “good works” than “bad deeds” will get God to accept us. The issue is not the amount of good works versus the amount of bad deeds. The issue is this: To be accepted on the basis of good works, you must be 100% good. “You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48; Isaiah 64:6). 100% perfect means you should not have done even one sin, and you should have done only good things all your life.

This is what Romans 3:23 means: “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” No matter how hard we try, we cannot on our own erase the record of our sins; and we can never be good enough to be accepted by God (Fig. 3).

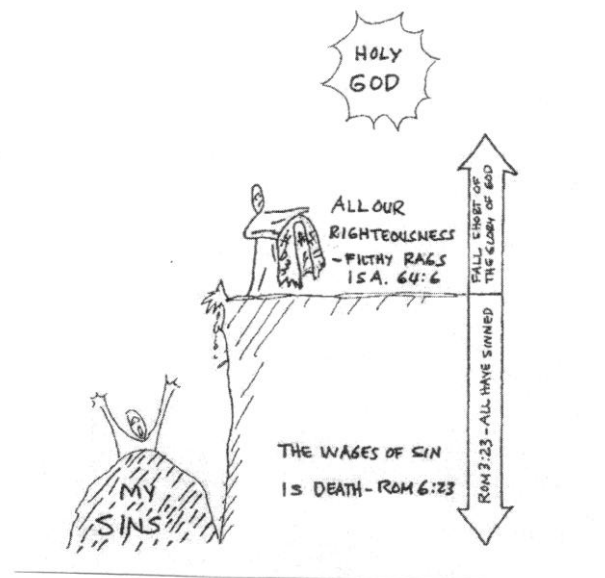


Fig. 3: The Problem of Sin

There is only ONE WAY, and God Himself provided it! You will be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

Justification solves the two problems of sin: (1) through Christ’s redemption, all our sins are paid for and forgiven, and (2) we are given His perfect righteousness as our pure white robe that makes us completely acceptable to God (Fig. 4).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

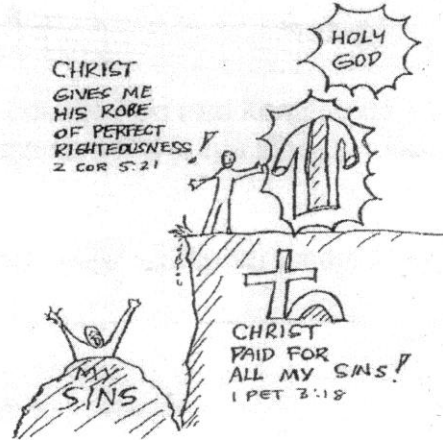


Fig. 4: Christ Solved the Problem of Sin

Our sins have been laid upon Christ, and His righteousness is clothed around us.

This double truth is profoundly summarized in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Day 27:

GOD: THE JUST AND THE JUSTIFIER

Martin Luther wrote about Romans 3:21-26, that it was “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible” (quoted by Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Book 6). Indeed, this paragraph from Romans may be considered as a most succinct and complete commentary on John 3:16.

“²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all^[u] who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-26).

The main theme of this passage is the righteousness of God revealed. We have already seen in previous meditations the man-ward aspect of God’s righteousness, that is, what benefit it brings to human beings. That benefit may be summed up in the word JUSTIFICATION, God’s way of putting sinners right with Himself through the redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Now we will look at the God-ward aspect of His righteousness. How does this particular way of putting sinners right with God “benefit” God? Verse 26 explains: “... to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Through the redemption accomplished in Christ God is declaring and proving to all heaven and earth that He has not violated His own nature or His own standard. As the JUST God, He must punish sin to the full extent of His divine law. As the LOVING God, He must show His full mercy toward sinners. How could God “reconcile” His justice and His love? How could He be the JUST Judge who must punish sin and at the same time be the JUSTIFIER who will declare the sinner as not guilty and accounted as completely righteous in His eyes? How could God punish your sin and save you the sinner at the same time?

How? Through the cross. There on the cross all the sins of the whole world were transferred upon the person of God’s Son, and the fullness of God’s wrath against sin was poured out upon Him, inflicting upon Him the most shameful and most painful death. And with God’s justice satisfied, God now offers through that same Son complete justification (restoration to relationship with God) to every sinner who believes in Him.

‘Glorious paradox! “Just in punishing,” and “merciful in pardoning,” men can understand; but “just in justifying the guilty,” startles them. But the propitiation through faith in Christ’s blood resolves the paradox and harmonizes the discordant elements. For in that “God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin,” justice has full satisfaction; and in that “we are made the righteousness of God in Him,” mercy has her heart’s delight!’ (JFB Commentary, Romans).

One hymn writer expressed her wonder in these words:

Upon that cross of Jesus
Mine eyes at times can see
The very dying form of One
Who suffered there for me.
And from my stricken heart with tears
Two wonders I confess,
The wonder of redeeming love
And my unworthiness.

Day 28:

JUSTIFICATION: ABRAHAM’S EXPERIENCE

From Romans 3:24-25 we learned the following truths about justification:

- (1) Justification is a free gift of God’s **GRACE** alone;
- (2) Justification is based on the **REDEMPTION** accomplished by Christ through His blood (His death on the cross);

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

- (3) Justification is received by **FAITH** alone, unaided by any good work on our part.

And because justification is by grace alone through faith alone based on the redemptive work of Christ alone, all forms of human boasting are excluded (Romans 3:27-31).

The apostle Paul knew that the devout Jew, who conscientiously sought to obey all the demands of the Law, would raise objections. So in Romans 4 the apostle explained that in the Old Testament God already gave justification through faith apart from works, as illustrated by two leading Old Testament believers, Abraham and David. We will focus on the experience of Abraham.

How was Abraham pronounced as righteous by God? With Genesis 15:1-6 as a background, the apostle explained:

³For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” ⁴Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (Romans 4:3-5).

Notice the emphatic contrast between faith versus works. Let’s note the main points in Paul’s argument:

²²And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

²³Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, ²⁴but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

- (1) Justification does not depend on **WORKS (Romans 4:1-8)**. Both Abraham and David were counted righteous not on the basis of works. Work deserves payment or reward (Romans 4:4). To the contrary, justification is a free gift of God’s grace to the person who believes (Romans 4:4-5).
- (2) Justification does not depend on ceremonies or rituals of **RELIGION (Romans 4:9-12)**. The ceremony or rite of circumcision was given to Abraham in Genesis 17. But when was Abraham accounted righteous? Back in Genesis 15, before receiving circumcision. Therefore, justification does not depend on ceremonies or rituals of religion.
- (3) Justification does not depend on fulfilling the **LAW (Romans 4:13-25)**. The apostle Paul clarified that God gave His promise to Abraham long before the giving of the Law to Moses. It was because Abraham believed this promise that God counted Him as righteous.

What does the experience of Abraham mean to us today? It has a very crucial application for us today. Like Abraham, our justification (our being counted righteous before God, our being restored to right relationship with God) does not depend on works of morality, or on ceremonies or rituals of religion, or on the fulfilling of the law. Our

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

justification depends on God's grace through faith alone. Let's read Romans 4:22-25 again:

²² And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, ²⁴ but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."

Day 29:

BLESSINGS OF JUSTIFICATION – Part 1

What a great blessing justification is! Through justification, we were raised from the depths of sin (Fig. 5, arrow from C to B). All of our sins were forgiven by God because of Christ's death on the cross, and these sins were all cast into the bottomless sea of His forgetfulness (Hebrews 8:12). That's not all.

Through justification, we were placed in a position of complete acceptance as God's children because of Christ's perfect righteousness wrapped around us (Fig. 5, arrow from B to A). This acceptance is permanent and will never change through time and eternity.

Justification was given as a free gift of God's grace which we received by faith apart from any meritorious work on our part. "... being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). "Therefore, having been justified by faith..." (Romans 5:1).

Justification is truly a tremendous and amazing blessing because it contains blessings that pertain to the past, the present, and the future.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

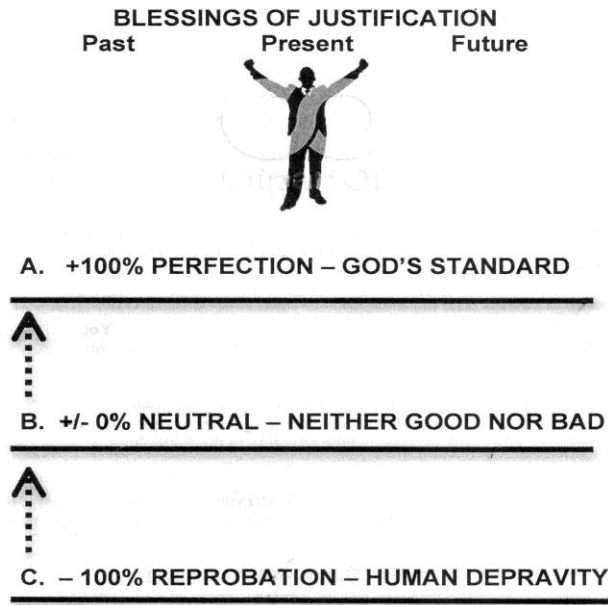


Figure 5

BLESSINGS OF THE PAST

(1) When we were without strength (Romans 5:6).

God manifested His love toward us through the death of His Son. We ask, “Did Christ die for us, when we already had the ability to love and serve Him?” No! Christ died for us when we were weak and without use to God. To the contrary, we were living in ASEBEIA, in ungodliness, not only refusing to worship God but actively dishonoring God. At that time when we could offer God nothing, when we refused to offer worship and service to Him, it was when we were in that worthless condition, Christ died for us.

Justification gives us the assurance that God loved us when we were of no benefit to Him.

(2) WHEN WE WERE SINNER (Romans 5:8).

According to Romans 5:8, when did Christ die for us? He died for us when we were yet sinners.

Some parents (sad to say) warn their children against doing bad things with these words: “If you do that, I won’t love you anymore.” Meaning, love is conditioned on the child’s good behavior. Well behaved, more loved; less behaved, less loved.

But when did God love us? When did Christ die for us? When were yet sinners. The word for sinner here means to commit moral wrong against God; it also means to fail to measure up to God’s standard. That was our condition in the past. We were disobedient toward God and we failed to measure up to His standards, such that we

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

became dirty and odious in God's eyes. And yet when we were in that condition God showed His love toward us through the death of His own Son!

Justification gives us the assurance that God loved us when we were most underserving of His love.

(3) WHEN WE WERE ENEMIES (Romans 5:10).

In ordinary human relationship, it is difficult to love someone who is weak and who offers no possible advantage for you. It is even more difficult to love someone whose personality and lifestyle are contrary to your principles and below your standards.

Most difficult of all is to love someone who is actively opposing you and planning to do you harm. We were like this in the past, we were enemies, hostile and rebellious toward God. But God loved us even then.

Justification assures us that God loved us when all we deserved was only vengeance because we were His enemies.

Day 30:

BLESSINGS OF JUSTIFICATION – Part 2

Justification brings BLESSINGS IN THE PRESENT, which include the following (please look at Figure 5 again):

(1) PEACE WITH GOD (Romans 5:1).

Justification brings peace with God. The Bible uses different metaphors. Peace is the result of reconciliation between two enemies, though in this case, all hostility is from the human side. We were in rebellion against God and we accepted His offer of reconciliation; we laid down our arms and surrendered to His rule and He has granted us pardon, with all the rights and privileges of lawful subjects restored (Romans 5:11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Peace is the result of pardon for the fugitive criminal, who may now return to a life of security and safety as a lawful citizen (Romans 8:33-34; Philippians 3:20). Peace is the result of restored relationship, when the prodigal son or daughter returns to the waiting Father (Romans 8:15-16; Luke 15:11-24; 1 John 3:1-2).

As a related gift to peace WITH God, we also enjoy the peace OF God. “⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7; see also John 14:27).

(2) GRACE ON WHICH WE STAND (Romans 5:2a).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Justification established us upon the foundation of grace, on which we stand from the initiation to the culmination of our salvation. This means that all of God's dealings with us is based on His grace alone. We are saved by grace from beginning to end. Let's always keep in mind that grace is God's favor, free and undeserved, and is not influenced by good works on our part. And we receive the blessings of His grace as we respond in faith to His promises.

(3) REJOICING IN TRIBULATION (Romans 5:3).

As followers of Christ, we are forewarned that tribulations will be part of our normal experience (John 15:18-21; 16:33). As you will notice, some translations render the word "rejoice" as "glory" or "boast". In fact, both ideas are contained in the word, which may be translated more fully as "joyfully boasting" or "boastfully rejoicing".

As Christians we rejoice in tribulation, in fact we boast in it. Why? Because we are assured that God is in control of everything for a purpose, in order to bring about the good and beautiful fruit of our spiritual growth and also to reveal the glory of God (Romans 8:28; James 1:2-4; Philippians 1:18-20).

(4) GOD'S LOVE IS FILLING OUR HEARTS (Romans 5:5).

Justification assures us of God's love now and always. As we have already seen, God already loved us when we were worthless sinners and enemies, and we know He will love us to the end (Romans 8:37-39). Because of His love in our hearts, we continue to grow in our love for Him (1 John 4:19) as well as grow in our love for other Christians (John 13:34-35).

(5) CHRIST'S LIFE IS SAVING US (Romans 5:10).

Note that the death of Christ brought about our reconciliation with God, so that we are now in a permanent Father-child relationship with Him. Now that we have this relationship with Him, the life of Christ is the all-sufficient resource that gives us the ability to live worthily as children of God as well as the resource that supplies all our needs.

The life of Christ refers to His present ministry as our High Priest who is continually pleading on our behalf before the Father's throne in heaven (Hebrews 4:15-16). It also refers to His indwelling presence made real by the Holy Spirit that is powerfully working out His will in and through us (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27-29).

Day 31:

BLESSINGS OF JUSTIFICATION – Part 3

Finally, justification gives us BLESSING IN THE FUTURE. This future blessing may be viewed as a two-sided gold coin from the mint of heaven (please see Figure 5 again).

(1) HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD (Romans 5:2b).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

One side of the coin proclaims this truth: Justification enables us even in the present to “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” which we shall experience in the future.

What is this hope of the glory of God? It refers to our final salvation when we shall see the glory of God in the eternal kingdom (Revelation 21:22-23; 22:3-5).

The hope of the glory of God points to the fulfillment of Christ’s prayer for all who have believed in Him, that they may see His glory.

John 17:24: “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”

And not only shall we Christians see Christ’s glory. We will share in the glory of being glorified and made perfect like the Son of God. This glorification is part of the eternal plan of God for our salvation, a plan that the Triune God conceived in His heart long before the foundation of the world.

Romans 8:29-30: “²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

In this hope of the glory of God we rejoice boastfully and we boast joyfully. This hope is not the “knock on wood” kind of wish that the world tremblingly holds in its heart. This Christian hope is deeply anchored in justification which is a gift of God’s grace that also contains in it the guarantee of our glorification, which glorification is the assured end result of God’s foreknowledge and predestination!

(2) SAVED FROM THE WRATH OF GOD (Romans 5:9).

The other side of the coin proclaims this truth: Justification assures us of our salvation from the coming future wrath of God that shall surely be poured out upon the world.

In Romans 1:18 we learned that God’s wrath is being revealed against sin. God is punishing sin even now in different ways and varying degrees. Some theologians see God’s wrath in the ruinous consequences of people’s rebellious actions against God and hurtful actions against others. There is some truth in that. Indeed, sin carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction; God doesn’t need to do anything but stand back and let sin self-destruct. This is certainly suggested by God’s action of “giving people over” to worse and worse wickedness. People will go to hell on their own; God doesn’t need to send them there.

The wonder of grace is that God planted the cross at the very gates of hell, as a sign post that points to the way of life that leads to heaven.

The cross also stands as a warning that, beyond the self-destructive fruits of sin, God has definitely set a day and hour when He will pour out His wrath upon an unrepentant world.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

But praise God! Justification assures us that those who have put their faith in Christ's redeeming blood will be saved from that Day of Wrath (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 6:12-17.)

Day 32: **IN ADAM OR IN CHRIST?**

In Romans 5:12-21 the apostle Paul enumerates further blessings of justification. To understand what he is saying, we need to recognize one great principle which God uses in dealing with people. This is the principle of the REPRESENTATIVE HEAD. In the Bible there are two representative heads, Adam who was the first representative head and Christ the second representative head. Based on this principle, all that the representative head is and does affect all the people united under his headship.

All humanity from the beginning was united under Adam the First Representative Head. Because of Adam's sin in the beginning, all the curse that fell upon him also fell upon all humanity. The big question is: How do we get delivered from under the headship of Adam and thereby also get delivered from the curse of sin?

God provided the only way. He sent His Son to become the Second Representative Head. The moment a person puts his faith in Christ, at that moment God takes him out from under Adam and places him under the headship of Christ. This transfer happens at the moment of justification.

Once placed under the headship of Christ, all the blessings resulting from Christ's obedience will accrue to the believer. Let us prayerfully go through Romans 5:12-21 to see the comparison between the CURSES in Adam and the BLESSINGS in Christ (the list below is suggestive not exhaustive).

CURSES IN ADAM

1. Death entered the human experience (Romans 5:12, 15)
2. Judgment and condemnation fell on humanity (Romans 5:16, 18)
3. Adam's descendant became sinners (Romans 5:19)
4. Disobedience multiplied (Romans 5:20)
5. Sin reigned through death (Romans 5:21)

BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

1. God's grace abounded to many (Romans 5:15)
2. God's free gift resulted in justification (Romans 5:16)
3. Many are made righteous (Romans 5:19)
4. Grace abounded all the more (Romans 5:19)
5. Even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21)

Another key scripture where this comparison is made between Adam and Christ is found in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49:

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

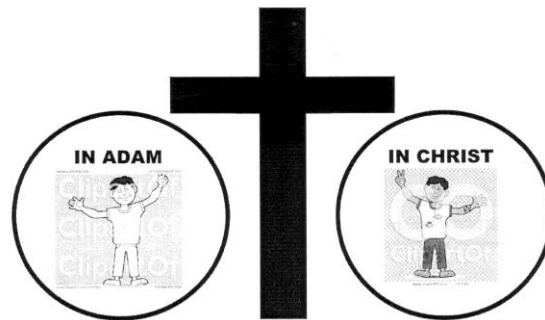
⁴⁵ And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. ⁴⁸ As *was* the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *Man*, so also *are* those *who are heavenly*. ⁴⁹ And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*.”

In summary:

- Under Adam, we became slaves of sin and became liable to all of its destructive results.
- Under Christ, we receive the gift of justification and will reign in life together with Him!

The life-and-death question then is this: Under which Head are you, Adam or Christ? (Please see Fig. 6.) And again we ask, how do we get transferred from Adam to Christ? Through faith in Christ. Galatians 3:26-27 talks about this transfer using baptism as a symbol of faith: “²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (See also 1 Corinthians 12:13.) The importance of baptism and its signification will be explained in Romans 6. But here in Romans 5 we are encouraged to boast joyfully and to rejoice boastingly of our deliverance from Adam to Christ and of the amazing gift of justification we enjoy in Him!

Figure 6: In Adam or In Christ?



Day 34:

UNION WITH CHRIST OUR REPRESENTATIVE HEAD

The apostle Paul was aware that some people might draw the wrong conclusion from what he said in Romans 5, particularly in verse 20: “But where sin abounded grace did much more abound” (KJV).

He actually brings up proactively this mistaken conclusion himself in Romans 6:1 in the form of a question: “¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

In answering that question he pointed to the believers' union with Christ as their Representative Head, and what their union with Him meant in actual life.

Let's look carefully at Romans 6:1-5:

"¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection

According to the above passage, we were united with our Representative in the following ways:

- (1) We died with Him;
- (2) We were buried with Him;
- (3) We were made alive with Him.

Romans 6 is not the only place where our union with Christ our Representative Head is discussed. Ephesians 2:4-6 takes our union with Him several steps higher: "⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and RAISED US UP TOGETHER, and MADE US SIT TOGETHER in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus" (emphasis added).

Colossians 3:3-4 carries our union with Christ to the end of time: "³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

Putting these three scriptures together we get the complete meaning of our participation with our Representative Head (Figure 7 shows the whole process from beginning to end):

- We died with Christ;
- We were buried with Christ;
- We were risen with Christ;
- We were raised (ascended) with Christ;
- We were seated (enthroned) with Christ;
- Our life is presently hidden with Christ;
- We will appear with Christ (will be glorified) at His Second Coming.

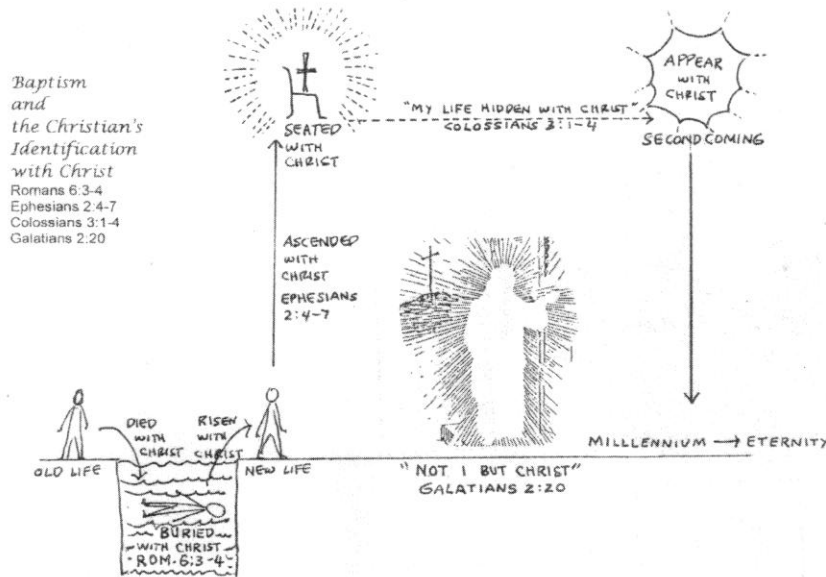
Please note that, according to Colossians 3:3-4, the current status of the Christian is that of a LIFE HIDDEN WITH CHRIST in the heavenlies. Question: If my life is now hidden with Christ above, who then is this person that is living in me in this world?

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

The apostle Paul gives us the answer in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

As we continue our study of Romans 6, we shall see the practical steps we need to take in order to live the crucified, hidden life of "NOT I BUT CHRIST".

Figure 7: Our Union with Christ



Day 35:

KNOW, RECKON, YIELD

Romans 6 opens with the question: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" And the answer is an emphatic "Certainly not!" Why not? Because, as we have pointed out in the previous meditations, we have a completely new relationship and standing. Through faith (as portrayed by our baptism) we have gone through death and resurrection with Christ. The death (symbolized in baptism by our getting into the water) ended our relationship to Adam the First Representative Head along with our relationship to sin as a master which enslaved us. The resurrection (symbolized in baptism by our getting out of the water) inaugurated our relationship to Christ the Second Representative Head and at the same time inaugurating our relationship to righteousness as the new master that we now serve.

Our new relationship in Christ naturally manifests itself in a new lifestyle of righteousness and service to God (Romans 6:4). Now the practical question is this: HOW will we be able to walk in newness of life? Romans 6 shows us how in three powerful steps.

STEP #1: KNOW THAT YOUR OLD MAN IS ALREADY DEAD.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

“ . . . knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Romans 6:6).

Let's be clear about something: Sin did not die; it was our old relationship to sin that died, that relationship being personified in Romans 6:6 as “our old man”. In other words, the old self over which sin had control is dead, buried, and gone. The fact of this death is something we must know as God's declaration of the truth about our position and condition in Christ. Our old man that had a relationship to the First Adam died and ended his history in the death of the Last Adam. God simply wants us to KNOW that's the truth about our old self. However, we must immediately go on to the next step.

STEP #2: RECKON YOURSELF INDEED TO BE DEAD TO SIN BUT ALIVE TO GOD.

“ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:11).

This second step means that you agree with God, saying, “Yes, Lord, I am dead indeed to sin, but I am now alive to God.”

This is the step of faith in response to God's truth. Abraham's step of faith serves as our pattern here. God told Abraham that he would have a son, and that through that son he would have descendants as many as the stars in the sky. Abraham was confronted by two conflicting truths: revelation truth (God's Word) versus sense truth (the actual physical age of both himself and Sarah). He had a decision to make: Which truth would he accept, agree with, and stand on? Romans 4:17-22 describes Abraham's bold step of faith:

“¹⁷ (as it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; ¹⁸ who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” ¹⁹ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹ and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²² And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Abraham rejected SENSE TRUTH (that he and Sarah were practically dead in regard to having a son) and chose to stand on REVELATION TRUTH (that God would give them a son and countless descendants). In the same way, we must reject SENSE TRUTH (that sin is very much alive and that I still feel attracted to it) and choose to stand on REVELATION TRUTH (that God tells me my old self is already dead (cut off from and unresponsive to sin) and that I have a new life that's connected and responsive to God. Please see Figure 7_A.

(We'll discuss Step 3 in the next meditation.)

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

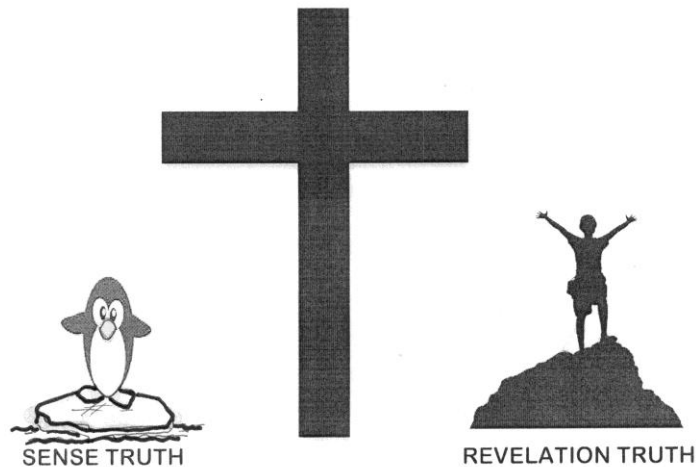


FIGURE 7 A

Day 36: **KNOW, RECKON, YIELD** **(concluded)**

STEP 3: YIELD YOUR BODILY MEMBERS AS INSTRUMENTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

“Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:13, KJV).

As the popular expression goes, this third step is where the rubber meets the road. With this step, you actually perform the obedience of faith; this step puts your faith to work. Faith without works is dead. This step is the work that proves your faith is alive.

The healing of the paralytic in John 5 demonstrates the importance of the obedience of faith. The Lord Jesus already pronounced the word of healing by commanding him, “Get up, pick up your pallet and walk!” Like Abraham in our previous meditation, this paralytic had to choose between SENSE TRUTH (that he had been a paralytic for 38 years) and REVELATION TRUTH (that the Lord had healed him and was commanding him to get up and walk). God be praised, and good for him! He chose to accept, agree with, and stand on the Lord’s revelation truth. Even as he obeyed, he actually received the strength to get up and walk.

This step of obedience of faith is needed in claiming all of God’s promises. I am reminded of the experience of my mentor Gene Tabor while he was in the US Navy. One weekend he wanted to attend a Bible study meeting at the study leader’s home outside the base. The problem was, he did not even have money for the bus fare. He knew it was God’s will for him to attend the Bible study; he prayed, claiming Philippians

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

4:19, and based on 1 John 5:14-15 God had already answered his prayer. So, if he believed in God's promise, what was he to do? Well, he decided, he must get dressed and get going, even if he still had no money in his pocket. He walked to the bus stop, and several Navy fellows got off the bus and asked where he was going, and he told them, "To Bible study." To his surprise, the fellows took coins from their pockets and, with mocking laughter, threw the coins at him saying, "Here, attend the Bible study for us!" When he gathered the coins, he had enough bus fare going and coming back! REVELATION TRUTH assured him that God promised to provide for his needs and that He would answer prayer according to His will. SENSE TRUTH told him, his pocket was still empty. But he chose to stand on revelation truth and took the step of obedience of faith. And he experienced God's miraculous provision.

Here in Step 3, God's Word is commanding us to YIELD our bodily members to God in order for them to be used as instruments of righteousness.

The Greek word for instruments here is HOPLON (armor or weapon), same word as in Ephesians 6:11. In Romans as in Ephesians the picture of a soldier in battle is suggested. In Romans 6 there are two soldiers, one is named UNRIGHTEOUSNESS and the other is RIGHTEOUSNESS, and these two soldiers are poised for combat against each other. Standing on the side is the armor bearer (that's you). Both soldiers are asking you to give them the armor they need; it's up to you to decide which of the two soldiers will get the armor.

Please mark this important truth: A soldier is only as good as his armor. In the battle between sin and righteousness, the winner will be the soldier that you give the armor to. That is what Romans 6:13 is telling you. Stop giving the armor to sin; from now, exclusively give the armor to righteousness.

Victory over sin in your life begins here. Remember that every part of your body is an instrument or armor for spiritual battle. Two soldiers are continually clamoring and calling for you to give your body parts for them to use as instrument or armor for battle. The decision is all up to you.

You will continually hear the voice of the Holy Spirit telling you to give your bodily parts to be used as instruments for righteousness. Many times because of your former habits, your senses and feelings seem overpoweringly attracted to sin. But in the name of Jesus, get up and walk, and YIELD YOUR BODILY MEMBERS AS INSTRUMENTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS!

Please mark another important truth: Satan usually tempts you in one particular area or appetite of your body. And usually he begins by putting a thought or desire in your mind regarding that area of your body. But thank God, He designed you in such a way that your mind can only entertain one thought at a time. God has given you the most powerful weapon for victory in His Word in Psalm 119:11: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."

First and always, yield your mind to God by filling your mind and heart with His Word. And when Satan tries to plant a sinful desire in your mind, immediately replace that evil thought with God's Word. And then, in the power of the Holy Spirit, take the actual step of yielding and offering to God the body-part under attack. If you need to run away from

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

the temptation, then RUN, like Joseph, from Mrs. Potiphar in order for your body not to be used for sin!

Day 37:

DELIVERED FROM THE LAW

In Romans 7 the apostle Paul explains another important aspect of the believer's participation in the death of Christ: he died with Christ to the Law (Romans 7:4-8). Why is this death (separation and deliverance) from the Law important? The answer is clearly spelled out in the last part of verse 8: "that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

The New Testament is very clear about the stark distinction between the Spirit and the Letter: "[C]learly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:3).



The Law Outside the Heart

The Letter represents the Old Covenant based on the Law as a code of rules OUTSIDE of a person, a list of dos and don'ts posted on a wall which we look at and which (admittedly with all our best intentions) we seek to fulfill as closely as we are able to. But all to no avail. Why? Because the Law was given not to help people to be righteous but to show them how hopelessly unrighteous they are; so that when they realize their hopelessness, they will turn to the only one who can make them righteous, Jesus Christ.

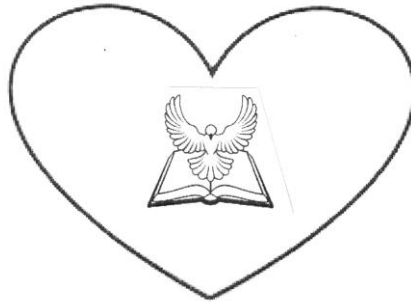
Galatians 3:21-22: "21 *Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.* 22 *But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*"

The Spirit represents the New Covenant containing God's promise, quoted in Hebrews 8:10-12:

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

“¹⁰ For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ¹¹ None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. ¹² For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

Under the New Covenant, God’s laws are no longer on the outside but they are written INSIDE the heart by the Holy Spirit who gives the corresponding ability to obey those laws. For this reason, it is important that we die to the old way of the external Law of the Letter in order to live in the new way of the internal Law of the Spirit of Christ.



LAW OF THE SPIRIT INSIDE

The misery, if not the tragedy, of a well-intentioned follower of the Law is pathetically exemplified in the apostle Paul’s testimony. But God be praised! He eventually found true deliverance in Christ.

“¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. ¹⁷ But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. ²⁰ Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The new life in Christ is not a life of slavery in following external rules. The new life in Christ is a life of freedom under the continual leadership and enabling of the Holy Spirit.

Day 38:

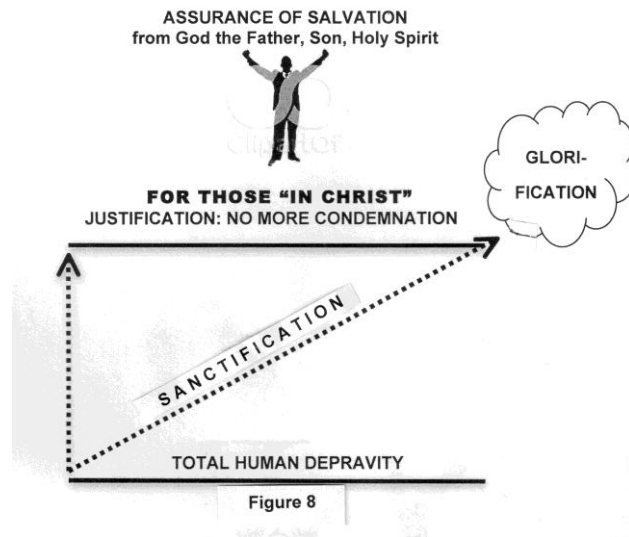
LIFE IN THE SPIRIT: ASSURANCE

Part 1

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

How does it look like to “serve in the newness of the Spirit” (Romans 7:8)? The apostle Paul explains how in Romans 8. Foundational to the life in the Spirit is assurance: “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1). The phrase “in Christ Jesus” alerts us that we are still very much concerned with JUSTIFICATION since we encountered this truth in Romans 3:21-26. Justification is God’s gracious action of taking us out from the old Adam and placing us into our new Representative Head “in Christ”. From Romans 8:1 we may define JUSTIFICATION as that spiritual condition in which there is no longer condemnation for the believer.

In other words, to use the more common vocabulary today, justification means assurance of salvation. This is the foundation on which life in the Spirit is established. Amazingly, in Romans 8 we discover that assurance of salvation comes from the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



Please study Figure 8:

- (1) From the position of TOTAL HUMAN DEPRAVITY a believer is lifted up by grace through faith (vertical arrow) to the position of JUSTIFICATION “IN CHRIST” in which there is no more condemnation.
- (2) Through justification the believer is forgiven of all sins (past, present, future) and is given the perfect righteousness of Christ as a gift (2 Corinthians 5:21), guaranteeing that the believer can no longer lose his/her salvation as well as guaranteeing his/her ultimate GLORIFICATION.
- (3) The believer, however, has to go through the life-long process of SANCTIFICATION (diagonal arrow) in which Christ’s righteousness that’s wrapped around him/her on the outside will be built into his/her character on the inside. A true Christian is someone who is being conformed to the image of the Son of God.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Romans 8:29: “Conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Ephesians 4:13: “Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Colossians 1:27-28: “²⁷ To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”

But, again, we repeat: through justification a believer is perfectly accepted as forgiven and righteous before God as he/she will ever be. Increasing degrees of sanctification will not make him/her more accepted. His/her salvation is secure right from the start.

ASSURANCE FROM THE SON

- (1) Christ has solved once for all the problem of sin and death (Romans 8:3-4).
- (2) Christ has removed all possible grounds for condemnation against the believer (Romans 8:33a).
- (3) Christ serves as the believer’s permanent High Priest, advocate and intercessor before the Father (Hebrews 4:14-16; Romans 8:33b; 1 John 2:1-2).
- (4) Christ is the pattern to which God will surely conform all His children. He is the Firstborn in the eternal Family of Christ-like members that God is forming, and He is not ashamed to call believers His brethren (Romans 8:29, Philippians 4:13; Hebrews 2:11-13).

Day 39:

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT: ASSURANCE FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT

Romans 8 teaches us that believers have ASSURANCE OF SALVATION FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT (please review Fig. 8).

- (1) The indwelling Holy Spirit is the mark of a true Christian; He is the seal that guarantees the Christian’s final salvation (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13-14).
- (2) The Holy Spirit witnesses with the believer that he/she is a child of God (Romans 8:15-16). Included in this witness of the Spirit is certainly the power that He grants the believer to endure suffering that he/she must undergo as a follower of Christ (1 Peter 4:14).
- (3) The Holy Spirit leads the believer; this leading includes His multi-faceted ministry as Parakletos (Romans 8:14; John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

(4) The Holy Spirit is the God-given power that enables a believer to gain deliverance from and victory over the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

(5) The Holy Spirit helps the believer in his/her weakness, especially as relating to prayer (Romans 8:26).

(6) The Holy Spirit Himself ministers as Intercessor for believers (Romans 8:26-27).

(7) The Holy Spirit gives life to the believer's mortal body (Romans 8:11). Ultimately, this means bodily resurrection for the believer. But in this life, this includes physical strengthening and healing and deliverances (Colossians 1:29; 2 Corinthians 4:7-16; 12:7-10).

The life "in Christ" is life "in the Spirit" and life "according to the Spirit". To live according to the Spirit the Christian must consistently practice two disciplines, one positive, the other negative:

DISCIPLINE #1: SET THE MIND ON THINGS OF THE SPIRIT (Romans 8:5 ESV),

DISCIPLINE #2: PUT TO DEATH THE DEEDS OF SINFUL FLESH (Romans 8:12-13).

The apostle Paul talks more fully about these two disciplines in Colossians 3:1-17:

"⁵ If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. ⁵ Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. ⁸ But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰ and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹ where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all. ¹² Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. ¹⁴ But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. ¹⁵ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷ And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

Day 40:

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT: ASSURANCE FROM GOD THE FATHER

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Romans 8 teaches us that there is no more condemnation for believers, those who are IN CHRIST. To be “in Christ” means that a person has received the gift of justification by grace through faith. Justification gives the believer ASSURANCE OF SALVATION from the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have already looked at the assurance given by the Son and by the Holy Spirit. (Please review Fig. 8.) We will now look at ASSURANCE OF SALVATION as a gift of God the Father.

(1) The Father sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh in order to solve the problem of sin and death (Romans 8:3).

(2) Having already given His own Son, His most precious treasure, the Father is also giving with His Son all other treasures that He has to give (Romans 8:32). This is probably the greatest promise regarding prayer that a Christian can ever claim.

(3) The Father has dismissed all charges against His elect believers and has given them His gift of justification, which (as already noted several times previously) means that there is absolutely no more condemnation for the justified person (Romans 8:33).

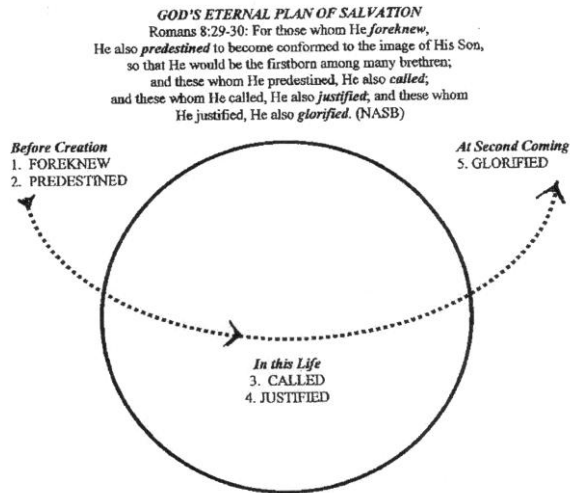
(4) The Father has adopted believers as sons and daughters in His family and made them joint-heirs with His Son (Romans 8:16-17; Hebrews 1:2).

(5) The Father gives the most complete assurance of salvation of all by planning and implementing His eternal plan of salvation described in Romans 8:29-30 (please see Fig. 9):

“²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Figure 9: GOD’S 5-STEP PLAN OF SALVATION

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS



Just a side note: Many people stumble over God's action of PREDESTINATION. They immediately think of what a cruel God He is to send people to hell. That's not what predestination is about at all. God does not send people to hell. Left to themselves, people want to go as far away from Him as possible; at the end of that road is hell. To the contrary, God in His mercy plucked out some people from those on the road to hell and set them on a path with a different destination: TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF GOD'S SON.

By the way, how do you know you have been predestined? Do you feel even a faint desire to know God and to live a righteous and purposeful life? If you do, then that's a sign that God is calling you to believe in His Son. Call upon Christ right now to save you.

Now let's go back to Romans 8:29-30.

Please notice that God's plan of salvation involves 5 actions and they are all stated in the past tense. The first and second actions (FOREKNEW, PREDESTINED) happened before the creation of the world. The third action (CALLED) refers to that specific time when God confronted a person with the claims of Christ through the message of the Gospel; and, when the person believed, God JUSTIFIED that person (forgave all his/her sins and accepted him/her into His family). The fifth action is supposed to happen sometime in the future when Christ comes again. But why is it in the past tense: GLORIFIED? The simple answer is: When God begins a work, He will surely finish it. That is the MOST COMPLETE ASSURANCE that God the Father gives to every Christian believer. When God set His heart on you before the creation of the world, His whole plan of salvation for you was as good as finished; He already saw you as GLORIFIED with Christ at His second coming!

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Note: Someone might ask: Where is SANCTIFICATION in this plan? Sanctification is the process that happens between JUSTIFIED and GLORIFIED. It is assumed that a justified person is by definition someone who will go through sanctification which culminates in glorification.

The summary of all these aspects of assurance enumerated above? One sentence: GOD IS FOR US! (Romans 8:31). Since God is for us, then we are more than conquerors through Him against anything and anyone that will come against us (Romans 8:37). Most of all, we can be sure that nothing and no one can ever separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39)!

Day 41:

WHO MAY CLAIM THE PROMISE?

When trying to comfort someone who is going through some difficult trial, especially a severe loss of some kind, many of us automatically quote Romans 8:28:

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.”

But do we realize that this promise is not for everyone? This promise actually contains two very restrictive conditions. To be genuine and honest comforters we must make sure that the person we are sharing the promise with actually (to the best of our knowledge) manifests evidences that he/she fulfills the conditions. Otherwise, we will be assuring the person that God will do something which God clearly does not guarantee to do for him/her.

This promise applies only to the person: (1) who is called according to God's purpose; and (2) who loves God.

THOSE CALLED ACCORDING TO GOD'S PURPOSE

Romans 8:28 must never be separated from Romans 8:29-30 where God's purpose is clearly defined: God has purposed to form a special family, every member of which will be conformed to the image of His Son. Hebrews 2:10 talks about this purpose from the “heavenly perspective,” which involved things that God the Father would subject His Son to undergo in order to bring about the fulfillment of God's purpose: “For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

Think about this: For the sake of God's intense purpose to have a special Family, the Father was willing to subject His Son, and the Son was willing to undergo sufferings, which no human being had ever experienced or ever will experience again. Romans 8:28 shows the “human perspective” which involves all the trials that the called-out ones would undergo by God's design or by His permission, in order to make them worthy members of His family. The promise is that everything will ultimately result only in good, that is, in the fulfillment of God's purpose.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Only a called-out one has a right to claim the promise of Romans 8:28. And if you are trying to comfort someone, you may share the promise only if you are certain that the person shows evidences of being a called-out one. And for a called-out one, there are tons of other promises to back up Romans 8:28, including these well known passages: James 1:2-5; 1 Peter 1:3-8; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 12:8-10.

THOSE WHO LOVE GOD

There is a second condition attached to Romans 8:28: the promise is only for those who love God. Romans 8:28 must be firmly grounded in Romans 8:1-17. In these verses the love of God is not mentioned but the evidences of such love are clearly defined, particularly by two disciplines (pointed out in an earlier meditation) which the called-out ones habitually practice, See also 1 John 2:15-17 as to how these two disciplines manifest the love of God.:

DISCIPLINE #1: SET THE MIND ON THINGS OF THE SPIRIT (Romans 8:5 ESV),

DISCIPLINE #2: PUT TO DEATH THE DEEDS OF SINFUL FLESH (Romans 8:12-13).

Is there then no comforting scripture we can share with friends who do not positively fulfill these two conditions of Romans 8:28? Of course, there are lots of general, unconditional promises. For example, why not begin with Matthew 11:28-29?

Day 42:

WHAT CREATION IS WAITING FOR

Romans 8 has a very intriguing but exciting passage in verses 19-21:

¹⁹ For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

This passage seems to imply that creation has consciousness and feelings. And there seems to have been some kind of “conversation” between God and creation in the beginning, when God put a curse upon creation because of Adam’s sin. Undoubtedly this passage points back to Genesis 3:17-19:

¹⁷ Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat *of* it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. ¹⁹ In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return.”

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

The curse of decay and death was supposed to be upon sinful humanity alone. But creation, through no fault of its own, was subjected to the same curse. However, in pronouncing the curse, God assured creation that He had set a day for its liberation from that painful, undeserved bondage.

We may picture the situation as similar to two friends, Mr. A and Mr. B. Mr. A commits the crime and is sentenced to 20 years in prison, but at the same time innocent Mr. B is also sentenced by the judge to suffer the same penalty with the promise that when Mr. A will be released after 20 years Mr. B will also be released with him.

Here in our passage from Romans, creation is pictured as longing and groaning for that day to come. Poignantly, that liberation is tied to the redemption of the very culprit who was responsible for this bondage in the first place.

What is intriguing and exciting is that the apostle Paul uses the hope that God gave to creation to encourage believers. He seems to be saying to Christians, "Yes, you are groaning under this bondage of physical decay and death just like the rest of creation. But your day of deliverance is coming and it will also be the day when the whole creation will receive its deliverance. Hold on to your hope, it will surely come and soon!" J. B. Phillips paraphrases Romans 8:22-25 beautifully:

"It is plain to anyone with eyes to see that at the present time all created life groans in a sort of universal travail. And it is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension, while we wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that at last we have realised our full sonship in him. We were saved by this hope, but in our moments of impatience let us remember that hope always means waiting for something that we haven't yet got. But if we hope for something we cannot see, then we must settle down to wait for it in patience."

What practical truths can we glean from this meditation?

- God loves and cares for His creation;
- As Christians, we can and should show proper care for creation, being careful not to make creation as an idol but as an object of responsible stewardship;
- However, we must keep in mind that ultimately only God Himself can restore His creation to its proper state – and He will! This is the hope of a new heaven and a new earth, part of the future God is preparing for those who love Him, a future that the most wildly creative imagination can never conceive (1 Corinthians 2:9)!

Day 43:

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

In Romans chapters 9-11 the apostle Paul seeks to explain Israel's national rejection of Christ and to show that, in spite of that, God still has a future plan for His chosen people. However, the doctrine of divine sovereignty in election which he uses in his explanation

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

has challenged the sharpest theological minds through the centuries. The problem really boils down to the seeming contradiction between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. This contradiction is probably best summarized in one passage:

Romans 9:10-21: ¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?”²⁰ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

We cannot deny the fact of divine sovereignty as stated, for example, in the following passages:

Romans 9:19-12: ¹⁰ And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac ¹¹ (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),¹² it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.”

Romans 9:16-18: ¹⁶ So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” ¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

Romans 11:5-6: ⁵ Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

How can we reconcile divine sovereignty with human responsibility?

This is a question we cannot begin to answer in this short devotional. We wish, however, to share an illustration that has helped many Christians to gain a handle to this big issue. Obviously the illustration is not perfect, but it goes this way:

Divine sovereignty is like a big ship under the absolute authority of the ship’s Captain (God). The Captain has already decided on the route and the destination of the ship. We (human beings) are passengers on that ship. Though we have no say about the route and destination, the Captain has laid down rules for how we conduct our lives and relationships on board the ship. There will be a final evaluation of how well or poorly we followed His rules and that rewards or punishments will be given accordingly at the end of the voyage.

With this illustration in mind, we are better able to adopt some attitudes implied in Romans 9:19-21 (quoted earlier):

- **HUMILITY.** We must acknowledge that God is the Creator and we are His creatures, and that He has a good and wise sovereign plan for all His creation.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

- FAITH. We must believe that God will always be loving and just in executing every detail of His plan.
- RESPONSIBILITY. It is not ours to ask about what destiny God plans for other people. Our responsibility is to answer the question He sets before us: What will you do with Christ, who died and rose again for your redemption? Will you receive Him as your Lord and Savior? If you have received Him, are you growing in your relationship with Him? Are you fulfilling His purpose according to the light that He has given you?

Day 44:

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND EVANGELISM - 1

Another seeming contradiction posed by Romans 9-11 is that between divine sovereignty and evangelism. Since God has elected those who will be saved, of what use is evangelism?

In fact, there have been and continue to be people who emphasize divine sovereignty in election to the point that they see no need to evangelize. In church history, one of the more notorious examples happened at a ministerial meeting in 1786 where the young minister William Carey brought up the need to bring the gospel to the heathen world. *“Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your help or mine”*, said the elderly Chairman. Carey though, was undeterred. He went on to write and print a tract, published in 1792 where he wrote up the arguments for missions. And in 1793 he sailed for India as a missionary. Church historians credit the beginnings of modern Christian missions to his efforts (from www.HistoryMakers.com).

The seeming contradiction between divine sovereignty and evangelism may be viewed as similar to the mystery of the Trinity. The same Bible reveals both that there is only ONE God and that there are THREE persons who deserve to be called God. This is why we believe in the doctrine of the TRINITY: ONE God in THREE Persons, though we cannot explain the seeming contradiction. Similarly, the same Bible reveals both that God has sovereignly elected from eternity those who would be saved and that the Son of God, the Savior of sinners, commanded His disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all the world.

A careful study of Romans 10 reveals to us the absolute importance of the human side of evangelism, with divine election as the equally important other side. The human side of evangelism is firmly grounded in God’s gracious promise in Romans 10:11-13: ¹¹For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

Let’s mark this very well: Here in Romans 10:11-13 God says WHOEVER CALLS on the name of the Lord will be saved. This is the same promise in John 3:16 which says WHOEVER BELIEVES in Him shall have everlasting life. This WHOEVER serves as the mandate and as the warrant to share the Gospel to the whole world. Because of this

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

WHOEVER-promise, Romans 10:14-15 challenges Christians to take the necessary steps that will make it possible for people to BELIEVE and CALL upon the name of the Lord:

¹⁴ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"

Please note the sequential steps in the human side of evangelism:

- SEND the evangelist;
- The evangelist PREACHES;
- The sinner HEARS;
- The sinner BELIEVES;
- The sinner CALLS on the name of the Lord;
- The sinner is SAVED.

To use the illustration of the ship again from our previous meditation, it is very clear from Christ's Great Commission that we must proclaim the Gospel. We are responsible for obeying this command, and we do not need to understand the divine side of election in order to share the Gospel.

Questions: Are we helping SEND evangelists? Are we ourselves going forth as evangelists to PREACH the Gospel?

Day 45:

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND EVANGELISM - 2

Instead of becoming a reason for uncertainty or hesitancy in evangelism, the truth of divine sovereignty in election should be a source of tremendous encouragement and confidence. To begin with, let's consider the natural condition of people in relation to God.

From Romans 3:9-18 let's pick three verses: "¹⁰ As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. . . ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 8:7 also says, "Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." (See also 1 Corinthians 2:14.) On top of people's natural rebellion against God, Satan the god of this world has also blinded their spiritual understanding so that they are totally incapable of receiving God's word (2 Corinthians 4:4).

With such a spiritually blind audience, evangelism is a humanly impossible task. How, then, can evangelism succeed? Only one way: the Holy Spirit must lead and empower evangelism. The experience of the apostle Paul and his missionary partners illustrates this (Acts 16:1-15). Let's note the following significant details:

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

(1) In obedience to Christ's Great Commission they normally followed their "sanctified common sense" in sharing the Gospel wherever they went.

(2) But at critical points the Holy Spirit gave them specific directions, by closing doors (verse 6-7) or by opening a door (verse 9).

(3) After the Holy Spirit positively directed them to Macedonia they made the common-sense decision to start at Philippi, a leading city of the region (verses 11-12). Then they made the common-sense decision to go to the riverside where they supposed a prayer gathering usually happened on the Sabbath (verse 13).

(4) As they talked to the women who were gathered at the prayer meeting, a business woman named Lydia (so the Book of Acts tells us) "was listening, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul" (verse 14).

From this account we may deduce some guidelines:

- GUIDELINE #1: Successful evangelism seeks to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit as to where and when and with whom to share the Gospel. The Spirit's leading does not rule out using our sanctified common sense. A practical rule is this: Attempt to share the Gospel at every opportunity unless the Holy Spirit definitely closes that opportunity.
- GUIDELINE #2: Successful evangelism is sharing the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God (Bill Bright). Our responsibility is to proclaim the Gospel; the Holy Spirit's responsibility is to open hearts.
- GUIDELINE #3: Successful evangelism seeks to present the Gospel in a balanced manner, magnifying its promises and blessings BUT NOT diminishing its cost and demands. For example, John 3:16 must be balanced by John 8:31; John 6:35 must be balanced by John 6:56.
- GUIDELINE #4: Successful evangelism does not seek mere converts but true believers who will go on to become faithful and fruitful disciples of Jesus. By all means, let's follow the example of Christ when He forewarned enthusiastic followers with statements like Luke 9:23 and Luke 14:25-33.

In summary:

(1) We know that people are naturally unable to understand the Gospel and naturally hostile to the Gospel (John 3:19);

(2) But as we faithfully share the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are assured that those whose hearts have been opened by God will respond in repentance, faith and obedience (Acts 13:48; 18:9-10).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Day 46:

GOD'S FUTURE PLAN FOR ISRAEL

Romans chapters 9-11 is essentially an explanation by the apostle Paul regarding God's plan for Israel. However, we must be aware that theologians have two views regarding God's plan for Israel: "replacement theology" and "dispensational theology".

Roughly stated, REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY teaches that the physical nation of Israel has been replaced by "the Church, the spiritual Israel" composed of all who believe in Jesus whether Jew or Gentile: "15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. 16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:15-16).

DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY teaches that God's covenant promises to Abraham and Israel have continuing validity until the end of time. An unbiased reading of Romans 11 seems to support the dispensational view. Let's study a key passage:

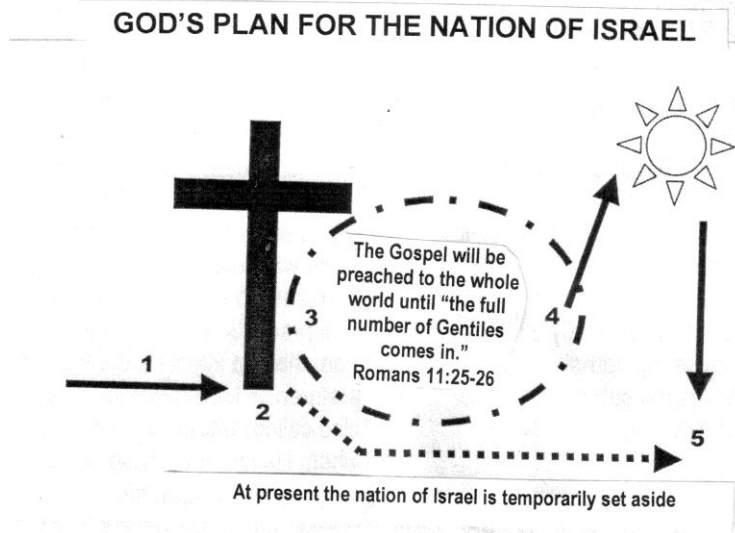
Romans 11:25-27: 25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved,^[a] as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 for this *is* My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

Figure 10 shows us the outline of God's plan for Israel and for the Gentiles from the dispensational viewpoint.

- (1) God made a covenant with Abraham which included the promise that through his Seed the whole world will be blessed (Genesis 22:15-18).
- (2) This promise was fulfilled in the coming of the Seed of Abraham, Christ, the Messiah that the nation of Israel was waiting for (Galatians 3:16).
- (3) However, Israel as a nation rejected Christ; as a result a partial blindness has come upon Israel causing them to be temporarily set aside while God turned to the Gentiles. In Dispensational Theology, we are now in what is called the "Church Age" in which the Gospel is being preached to the whole world to gather a specific "number" of people from every tongue, tribe and nation who will be saved (Matthew 24:14; Romans 11:25).
- (4) When that divinely ordained "number" has come in, phase one of the Second Coming will happen; the Church will be "raptured", taken from the world to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).
- (5) Then will follow phase 2 of the Second Coming; Christ will come down and reveal Himself a second time to His people Israel. They will finally recognize and accept Him as their Messiah, and God's program for Israel will resume during Christ's one-thousand year reign on the earth after which the Eternal Kingdom of God will be set up to continue on and on forever (Zechariah 12-14; Revelation 20-22).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Figure 10:



You may do a web search to read discussions pro and con regarding these two topics (Replacement Theology, Dispensational Theology). Regardless of which viewpoint you take, two things are certain:

- (1) God has set a timetable for the end of the world;
- (2) Between now and the end of the world, God is calling people to believe in Christ as Lord and Savior.

Are you wondering if you belong to the "magic number" of saved people? Stop wondering: the FACT that God has given you the opportunity to hear the Gospel means that He is calling you to put your faith in Christ. Will you surrender your life to Him today?

Day 47:

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S MERCIES

In Romans 12 we come to what Bible teachers usually describe as the practical or application (as contrasted with the doctrinal) portion of the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. Actually, we have been applying the doctrines as we have discussed them in Romans 1-11. But there is a sense in which Romans 12-16 deals with day-to-day practical discipleship, beginning with this appeal: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*" (Romans 12:1).

The appeal in Romans 12:1 follows the same spirit found throughout the scriptures. It is because of what God has first done that we are called upon to live in a certain way.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

“We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

Romans 12:1 reminds us of God’s abundant mercies which we have been shown in Romans 1-11. Because of those mercies, we are now challenged to respond in an appropriate, acceptable way.

First of all, what are those mercies? They are the mercies involved in God’s 5-step plan of salvation as revealed in Romans 8:29-30: the mercies of foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. Just think: What if He did not send the call of His Gospel to me? Even if I heard the Gospel, what if His Spirit did not open my heart to believe and receive Jesus?

But all glory to God!

He called me because He had already foreknown and predestined me before the creation of the world. He justified me and, as far as He is concerned, He has already glorified me!

However, as far as I am concerned, I still have to go through the spiritual journey between JUSTIFICATION and GLORIFICATION. We call this journey SANCTIFICATION, a term interestingly not included in Romans 8:29-30. But that is what Romans 12:1 is now calling me to do, go on this life-long journey of sanctification which begins with this step: to offer my body as a living sacrifice to God.

But why body?

Because of what Romans 6:13 says: “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God”? Sin and righteousness are both like soldiers battling each other, and only the soldier with the instruments (weapons and armor) wins. My bodily members are those instruments, and I have to choose which soldier will use my bodily members.

But why living sacrifice?

Sacrifice means exclusively and inclusively devoted to God. A dead sacrifice serves God once and for all; a living sacrifice serves God throughout its earthly existence: God wants me to serve Him the rest of my life. This living sacrifice must be (1) holy, cleansed from pollutions; (2) acceptable, free from defects and blemishes; and (3) dedicated to the intelligent and intentional worship and service of God. The sanctified life is a life of continual worship and service to God.

But a very important reminder: A living sacrifice (someone said) can still crawl off the altar. Therefore (someone else said), we must make a vow similar to that in marriage: Initially we must say a big “YES” to God, followed by small “yeses” continually, daily, step by step, moment by moment, for the rest of our life.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

QUESTION: Have you said your big YES to God to be a living sacrifice for Him? Are you consistently following up that big “YES” with small “yeses” moment by moment, day by day?

Day 48:

RENEWING THE MIND

How do we actually live out in the real world a wholly sanctified life – a life entirely set apart unto God? The apostle Paul gives us very realistic, do-able steps in Romans 12:1-2.

- STEP 1: Offer your body as a living sacrifice.

We have already seen in our previous meditation what is involved in this step.

- STEP 2: Do not be conformed to this world.

We must beware of the world’s relentless pressure from the outside trying to “squeeze us into its own mould” (J. B. Phillips). How is this pressure exerted? Through its fashions, its trends, what’s popular and approved by the majority. Stop and think about it. What’s the reason why teenagers (adults too!) are not comfortable wearing last year’s clothes? Because they’re no longer “in fashion”. Most clothes are durable and they can last for years. Why can’t we wear them while they last? Because we will look “out of fashion”.

The word conformed may be translated “to adopt the outward appearance (schema)” of the world. Being pressured to follow the changing fashions of the world, that is what Step 2 is telling us to fight and refuse.

- STEP 3: Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Two powerful words for change are used here. “Transform” comes from METAMORPHOSIS (the change that the worm goes through in becoming a butterfly). “Renew”, from ANAKAINOSIS, used in Romans 12:2 “the renewing (of your mind),” i.e., the adjustment of the moral and spiritual vision and thinking to the mind of God, which is designed to have a transforming effect upon the life” (Strong’s Expanded Concordance). The METAMORPHOSIS of character begins with the ANAKAINOSIS of the mind. How then can our minds be renewed? Here are some mind renewal principles:

- MIND RENEWAL PRINCIPLE 1: STAY YOUR MIND ON THE LORD (Isaiah 26:3). To “stay” your mind on the Lord has the sense of to establish, to rest, to anchor your mind in the Lord.
- MIND RENEWAL PRINCIPLE 2: SET YOUR MIND ON THE SPIRIT (Romans 8:5-6).
- MIND RENEWAL PRINCIPLE 3: HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST (Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 2:16).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

- MIND RENEWAL PRINCIPLE 4: FILL YOUR MIND AND HEART WITH THE WORD OF GOD (Colossians 3:16; Psalm 119:9-11).
- MIND RENEWAL PRINCIPLE 5: THINK ON THE GOOD THINGS (Philippians 4:8).
- MIND RENEWAL PRINCIPLE 6: MEDITATE CONTINUALLY ON GOD'S WORD (Psalm 1:2; Joshua 1:8).

We need to talk a little bit more about how the world is squeezing us into its mold. Not only does the world do this through its fashion in clothes, but also through fashion in thinking and speaking and taste and values. More dangerously, the subtle pressure that the world exerts upon us through modern multi-media is so pervasive and lethal because it is so "natural" and "normal". Everybody is exposed to the avalanche of uncensored information on the internet through iphones, ipads, computers, social media, tweeters and instagrams, not to mention the "old" technologies of music videos and movies and print media.

But the bottom line question is always the same: What are you consistently and continually feeding your mind?

Jesus warned us: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). The Book of Proverbs says: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7 KJV). You are what you think; you become what you fill your mind with. The psalmist discovered the power of God's Word long ago: "Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).

Day 49: **THE WILL OF GOD**

In yesterday's meditation we discovered from Romans 12:1-2 three steps to living a wholly sanctified life in the real world.

- STEP 1: Offer your body as a living sacrifice.
- STEP 2: Do not be conformed to this world.
- STEP 3: Be transformed by the renewal of your mind

There is actually one more step...

- STEP 4: Discern and do the will of God.

Do you see the relationship between the steps? The three steps lead up to the fourth step, which brings us to the level where we actually live out in practice the sanctified life. The sanctified life is a life set apart unto doing the will of God. Christ is our real pattern of the sanctified life (John 17:16-19).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Before He stepped out of eternity into our world, the Scriptures testified of Him:

⁵ Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me.

⁶ In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure.

⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.’” (Hebrews 10:5-7)

While He was on earth, He said, ““My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34).

Hence, as followers of the Son of God who are in the process of being transformed into His image, our life, too, should be totally committed to fulfilling the will of God. We need to discern and then do God’s will.

But what is the will of God? Romans 12:2 may be literally translated: “[A]nd be not conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, for your proving what [is] the will of God -- the good, and acceptable, and perfect” (Young’s Literal Translation).

God’s will is that which is...

- GOOD – it is characterized by God’s quality of goodness;
- ACCEPTABLE – it is beautiful and pleasing in God’s eyes;
- PERFECT – the word comes from a root suggesting purpose as well as completeness. God’s will fulfills His purpose of bringing wholeness and completion in His creation.

Why do God’s will? Because God’s will is...

- GOOD – it always results in life, love, joy and peace;
- ACCEPTABLE – God’s commands are not grievous but kind and loving and utterly desirable;
- PERFECT – it will result in my becoming perfect like the Son of God and in my achieving eternal meaning and significance.

In contrast, three of several ways that sin is described in the Bible are:

- Missing the mark;
- Vanity or emptiness;
- Causing injury and pain to others and to oneself.

How much more preferable then is God’s will because it is good, acceptable, and perfect!

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15-17).

Day 50:

ONE BODY, MANY MEMBERS

In Romans 5-6 we talked about how we were incorporated, through baptism, into our new Representative Head, Christ, thus effectively ending our connection with the old Representative Head, Adam. Here in Romans 12:4 we are reminded of our new relationship to Christ from the perspective of His Body. To be connected to Christ means to be connected to His Body in a way that affects everything.

This is a radical paradigm (perspective) shift. In our old life in Adam we operated from the “I-ME-MY PARADIGM” of sin, because, as someone said, sin is spelled S-I-N with the big letter “I” in the middle. In our new life in Christ we must now operate always from the “WE-US-OUR PARADIGM” of righteousness (Figure 11).

Here in Romans 12:3-13, we answer the question: How do I conduct my life in relation to other Christians in the Body of Christ? The apostle Paul, being the practical pastor that he is, gives us the most realistic advice, which consists of what we will call BODY LIFE GUIDELINES.

³For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them . . .*” (Romans 12:3-6).

Figure 11: Body of Christ



BODY LIFE GUIDELINE 1: GET RID OF WRONG ATTITUDES.

Someone wisely commented to this effect: Whenever a person joins a new group, he/she always tries to find a position of power, superiority and security. For example, he/she may think, I am smarter than everybody in this group. Or, I am not smart, but I

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

am more handsome/beautiful. Or, I am not smart or pretty, but I am humble. And so on. The apostle reminds us that feelings of superiority (and inferiority, for that matter), as well as the “Lone Ranger” mentality, have no place within the Body of Christ.

BODY GUIDELINE 2: FIND SECURITY IN GOD’S GRACE ALONE.

Everyone has been placed into the Body of Christ by grace through faith alone. Everybody came to Christ by way of the cross. And, someone said, “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.” Also, another said, “Everybody’s somebody in the Lord’s Body.”

BODY GUIDELINE 3: USE YOUR GIFT(S).

Just as in the physical body, every part has a specific task and a corresponding ability for that task, even so the Lord assigned us a definite function in His Body and He also equipped us with the necessary ability (gift) to fulfill that function. Our attitude to one another should always be, according to one Gospel song, “I need you and you need me.” The apostle Paul deals more fully with this topic of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14. But the emphasis is the same: Use your God-given gift(s) to build up the Body of Christ. Ephesians 4:15-16 tells us why: The Body of Christ will grow to Christ-like perfection only as all the parts of the Body do their respective functions faithfully and well.

¹⁵ [B]ut, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head— Christ— ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

APPLICATION ACTIONS

- Are you a committed member of a Christian local church?
- Are you actively using your gifts to build up your church?

Day 51:

USE YOUR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS – 1

As members of the Body of Christ we have both the privilege and duty to build up one another until we all attain perfection in Christ (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:28). What an exciting destination to look forward to! And what a challenging journey to take from now until we get there! We need to help one another get there. “No soldier left behind!” That’s the order from our Commander-in-Chief. To enable us to help one another He has given us spiritual gifts. A popular definition states: A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to do a spiritual work and to meet a need in the Body of Christ.

LIST OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Spiritual gifts are listed in other key scriptures (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10). We will focus on the seven gifts given here in Romans 12. We will study

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

the seven gifts, not in the order they are mentioned, but in the light of the needs that they meet.

⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith;⁷ or ministry, *let us use it in our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6-8).

(1) LEADERSHIP (verse 8)

Church members are made up of people from different backgrounds, with varying personalities and habits, and with conflicting passions and ambitions. How do you unite these members so that they will love one another and commit to the same goal? God has given some members the gift of LEADERSHIP in order to unite the members and guide them toward God’s purpose for the church.

Who do you think has the gift of LEADERSHIP among our church members?

(2) PROPHECY (verse 6)

The church is made up of believers who need to be built up by the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:32). How can they receive the Word of God that meets their present needs and situations? God gave the gift of PROPHECY to some members to enable them to give to the church the TIMELY Word. Usually, prophecy means FORTH-TELLING or declaring the needed truth to strengthen, guide and protect God’s people in the present hour. Sometimes, prophecy means FORE-TELLING events in the future, as the biblical prophets did. Today, this aspect of prophecy is usually the ability to interpret prophecy that’s already found in the Bible.

Who do you think has the gift of PROPHECY among our church members?

(3) TEACHING (verse 7).

Christians have been called “People of one Book”. Every Christian needs to master this Book. How can he/she do this? God has given some members the gift of TEACHING to enable believers to know and understand God’s Word and apply it to their daily life. Teaching is different from prophecy in that prophecy delivers the TIMELY word needed at critical moments and situations; teaching leads believers through the TIMELESS word from Genesis to Revelation.

Who do you think has the gift of TEACHING among our church members?

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Day 52:

USE YOUR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS – 2

(4) EXHORTATION (verse 8).

Sometimes, church members need to be talked to individually and personally regarding certain situations. God has given the gift of EXHORTATION to enable some members:

- (a) To encourage believers who are weakening or getting cold in their faith;
- (b) To comfort and support believers who are going through trials of loss, disappointment, suffering, spiritual conflicts, etc.;
- (c) To warn believers who are going astray in order to restore them.

Who do you think has the gift of EXHORTATION among our church members?

(5) SERVICE (verse 7)

Often believers need not only the Word but also practical assistance in material things. God gave the gift of SERVICE to enable some members to supply the material needs of people in the church. For example, in Acts 6 there were members, among them widows, who were in need of food. The church chose certain persons to manage the food distribution; these people had the gift of SERVICE. All of us have the duty and privilege of serving one another, but some have been given the personality and aptitude to serve above and beyond the call of duty.

Who do you think has the gift of SERVICE among our church members?

(6) GIVING (verse 8)

The local church is continually in need of financial and material support. To provide this support God has given some members the gift of GIVING. These members may be financially well-off; or they may be believers with ordinary means. What God has given them is a tremendous concern for the Lord's work such that they are motivated to give generously, gladly, even sacrificially, of what they have. All Christians have the duty to give toward the support of the church. But some members have the gift of GIVING which enables them to contribute more than others can.

Who do you think has the gift of GIVING among our church members?

(7) MERCY (verse 8)

Some members have problems that are long-term and beyond the ordinary, such as chronic or terminal illnesses, of the body, mind or emotion. We may include here those with special needs, those with handicaps and disabilities. Persons like these need constant, long-term help. Most of us are able to help these people only briefly because of time limitation, but mostly because we do not have the emotional strength to do so.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Thank God, a few believers have received from God the special gift of MERCY, which enables them to minister to long-term patients willingly, cheerfully and effectively.

Who do you think has the gift of MERCY among our church members?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Please put a circle around the spiritual gift that you think God has given you:

PROPHECY SERVICE TEACHING

EXHORTATION GIVING

LEADERSHIP MERCY

Day 53:

THE RIGHT ATTITUDES

The sanctified life, the life that is a continual worship and service to God, involves not only actions but also attitudes. Romans 12:9-16 emphasizes some attitudes that should characterize Christians as they offer themselves to God as a continual living sacrifice. Let's meditate over this passage line by line. Please encircle the appropriate mark, the ASTERISK [*] if you think you usually demonstrate this attitude; or the QUESTION MARK [?] if you think you often fail to show this attitude.

[*] [?] V. 9a: *Let love be* without hypocrisy.

[*] [?] V. 9b: Abhor what is evil.

[*] [?] V. 9c: Cling to what is good.

[*] [?] V. 10a: *Be* kindly affectionate
to one another with brotherly love,

[*] [?] V. 10b: In honor giving preference to one another;

[*] [?] V. 11a: Not lagging in diligence,

[*] [?] V. 11b: Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

[*] [?] V. 12a: Rejoicing in hope,

[*] [?] V. 12b: Patient in tribulation,

[*] [?] V. 12c: Continuing steadfastly in prayer;

[*] [?] V. 13: Distributing to the needs of the saints,
given to hospitality;

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

[*] [?] V. 14: Bless those who persecute you;
bless and do not curse.

[*] [?] V. 15a: Rejoice with those who rejoice,

[*] [?] V. 15b: Weep with those who weep.

[*] [?] V. 16a: Be of the same mind toward one another.

[*] [?] V. 16b: Do not set your mind on high things,
but associate with the humble.

[*] [?] V. 16c: Do not be wise in your own opinion.

The paraphrase of J. B. Phillips provides a very illuminating commentary of Romans 12:9-16:

⁹ Let us have no imitation Christian love. Let us have a genuine break with evil and a real devotion to good.

¹⁰ Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers, and a willingness to let the other man have the credit.

¹¹ Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work and let us keep the fires of the spirit burning, as we do our work for God.

¹² Base your happiness on your hope in Christ. When trials come endure them patiently, steadfastly maintain the habit of prayer.

¹³ Give freely to fellow-Christians in want, never grudging a meal or a bed to those who need them.

¹⁴ And as for those who try to make your life a misery, bless them. Don't curse, bless.

¹⁵ Share the happiness of those who are happy, the sorrow of those who are sad.

¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't become snobbish but take a real interest in ordinary people. Don't become set in your own opinions.

Day 54:

RELATING TO NON-CHRISTIANS

The first arena where Christians must live out their life-style as a living sacrifice to God is within the Church, the Body of Christ. The second arena mentioned in Romans 12 is the unbelieving world around them, particularly in relation to those who oppose them.

During His last night with them before His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus warned His disciples very specifically about this, in order for them not to be caught off-guard. We, Christians today, need to be reminded again and again of this as well. In our time when democracy seems to have spread to more and more countries, so that freedom of religion has become a right guaranteed by many governments, we have tended to take for granted that the world has become friendlier to Christians. But times are rapidly changing, and the warning of our Lord must be heeded more seriously by Christians

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

today. With militant anti-Christian religions and ideologies increasing, incidents of persecution are also multiplying.

The Lord warned us not to be deceived about the true nature of the world:

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me” (John 15:18-21).

The Lord also warned us about what the world will do, and their self-deceived reason for doing it:

“¹ These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. ² They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. ³ And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. ⁴ But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them” (John 16:1-4).

So, when unbelievers persecute us, or just make life difficult for us, what should be our attitude toward them? Here’s what the apostle Paul encourages Christians to do in Romans 12:14, 17-21:

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep... ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

The apostle is just echoing what the Lord Jesus already taught in the Sermon on the Mount:

⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust... ⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:44, 45, 48).

PERFECT

We are to be perfect like our Father in heaven is perfect in our love even toward enemies! Confronted with such a high standard, all we can pray is: “O God, only with Your Holy Spirit empowering me, can I be like Christ, perfect like You!”

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Day 55:

LIVING AS CHRISTIAN CITIZENS

There is a third arena in which the Christian must live as a living sacrifice for God, in the political arena where he/she is a citizen under the authority of a human government. God Himself has set up this order of authority:

- (1) God is the Sovereign Ruler over all (Daniel 4:1; Matthew 28:18).
- (2) God instituted human governments to maintain law and order in general society (Romans 13:1-4).
- (3) Within the family God instituted parents as authority over their children (Ephesians 6:1-3).

A government that follows God's plan promotes law and justice and provides protection for its citizens, enabling them to live orderly, peaceful and secure lives. This is the whole point of Romans 13:1-4. When there is no government two dangerous things could happen:

- DANGER 1: Anarchy could break out, in which people do whatever they wish without regard for others.
- DANGER 2: Oppression, might becomes right; only the fittest survive. The weak will be taken advantage of by the strong.

For these reasons, people, particularly Christians, must fulfill their duties as citizens, obeying the laws, paying taxes and giving respect to the government and its officials (Romans 13:5-7).

WHEN A GOVERNMENT IS GODLESS

But what if the government becomes godless, unjust and oppressive toward its citizens, and in some cases, hostile toward Christians? What should Christians do? In such cases, we have examples in the Bible to guide us; let's look at two responses.

RESPONSE #1: OBEYING GOD'S HIGHER AUTHORITY

Look at two examples:

(a) OLD TESTAMENT: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were being forced by a godless government to worship a false God. What was their response? Let's read Daniel 3:16-18:

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷If that *is the case*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

(b) NEW TESTAMENT: Peter and the apostles were forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus. What was their answer? “²⁹But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

We must be clear about one thing: When the laws of a human government contradict the law of God, we must obey the higher law of God. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and like Peter and the apostles, we must be willing to take the punishment, but always believing that God is able to deliver us. But if it is God’s will not to save us, we must be ready to die for the sake of our faith. We must take heed to the words of the apostle Peter:

“¹³[B]ut rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you... On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified... ¹⁶Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter... ¹⁹Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:13-14, 16, 19).

RESPONSE #2: BEING GOD’S PROPHET

God may call us to be His prophet to expose the sin and wickedness of rulers and governments. As in RESPONSE #1, we must be prepared to suffer persecution and death for declaring God’s prophetic message. Practically all of God’s prophets in the Old and New Testaments paid dearly for their bold stand for justice and righteousness. The prophet Jeremiah probably stands as a leading exemplar among his peers (Jeremiah 1:4-10). Most of the time he was fearless, there were moments when he experienced doubts and discouragements, but he remained faithful and suffered greatly for his faithfulness.

Day 56:

DON’T MAKE IT COMPLICATED

From Romans 12 to this point, we have studied many “steps,” “guidelines” and “actions” to demonstrate our lifestyle as a living sacrifice. Someone might protest (correctly!): “But I thought in Romans 7 we were delivered from the external Law of Moses and we are now living under the internal law of the Holy Spirit? Aren’t you imposing a new list of external laws with these steps and guidelines and actions? Aren’t you making the Christian life complicated again?”

The original readers in Rome of the apostle’s letter might have felt that way. Particularly in Romans 12, the apostle issued rapid-fire one-sentence injunctions to guide Christian moral conduct.

No, the apostle Paul was not imposing a new list of external commandments, nor should we do that. That is why here in Romans 13:8-14 the apostle seemed to pause and say, “Brethren, let’s take a break. If all that I’ve been saying seems to confuse you, stop!

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Let's not make it complicated. The Christian life is really simple. Just three words: LOVE, LIGHT, CHRIST."

"⁸ Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law. ¹¹ And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its lusts*" (Romans 13:8-14).

LOVE (verses 8-10)

There are only two commandments for Christians: LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS. Though the apostle Paul did not mention love for God, we are quite certain that he had in mind the Lord's twin-summary of all the commandments given in the Bible (Mark 12:28-31).

If my memory serves me right, it was John Wesley who said, "Give me ten brave men who love no one but God and hate nothing but sin and I will change the world!"

The Christian life is simple: Love God, love others!

LIGHT (verses 11-13)

The apostle reminded the Roman believers, and he reminds us today, "Christians, you no longer belong to the night (the old life of sin), you now belong to the day (the new life in Christ). Walk in the light!"

- The light of God's continual presence (1 John 1:5-7).
- The light of God's Word (Psalm 119:105).
- The light of Christ's judgment seat (2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1).

CHRIST (verse 14)

Someone said, the Christian is CHRIST plus I-A-N (I am nothing)! The apostle Paul said in Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." And in Galatians 2:20: "Not I but Christ!" Let's always depend on the Holy Spirit to fill us with Christ's life, and then let Christ's life overflow through us to others!

Let's keep the Christian life simple: LOVE, LIGHT, CHRIST!

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Day 57:

WHEN CHRISTIANS HAVE DIFFERENCES

Commentators tell us that the church in Rome was probably made up of two groups of people: Jews who had become Christian believers, and non-Jews who came to Christ straight from pagan backgrounds. These two groups seemed to have had differences in their attitudes and practices regarding two matters:

- About foods – what Christians should or should not eat;
- About the day of worship – which day or days should Christians hold as sacred for worshipping God.

Today, some Christians and churches continue to have differences in regard to these same two matters. But with the proliferation of different Christian denominations other issues have become points of contention among Christians. The apostle Paul listed what we will call LOVE PRINCIPLES to guide the Roman Christians in dealing with differences. These principles continue to be relevant and helpful as well to us modern Christians.

- LOVE PRINCIPLE 1: ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER (Romans 14:1, 3)

This is the first and most important principle in settling differences. We must accept one another as Christ has accepted us.

- LOVE PRINCIPLE 2: AVOID JUDGING ONE ANOTHER (Romans 14:4, 12)

Second, we must avoid judging one another. Only God has the right to judge His people. Romans 14:4 gives a powerful rebuke as well as encouragement: God holds the sole prerogative to judge His servant, whether he/she stands or falls, and God is able to make His servant stand!

- LOVE PRINCIPLE 3: RESPECT EACH OTHER'S MOTIVES (Romans 14:6).

Thirdly, let's respect each other's motives. Let's give the other person the benefit of the doubt, that he/she is doing what he/she is doing in order to honor and serve God.

- LOVE PRINCIPLE 4: AVOID CAUSING A STUMBLING-BLOCK (Romans 14:15, 21).

This fourth principle is specially directed to the so-called "strong" Christians who believe that they have the freedom to do whatever is not specifically prohibited in the scriptures. For example, wine or liquor is not really prohibited in the Bible. Should I then be free to drink the stuff? The question to ask is: Is there a young Christian, who is too immature to drink responsibly, who might be encouraged by my action to indulge in the habit to his detriment?

- LOVE PRINCIPLE 5: ALWAYS FOLLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT (Romans 14:17).

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

We must always use this fifth principle in tandem with all the previous principles mentioned: “[F]or the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” This verse gives us the 3-way test: Will it promote righteousness? Will it bring peace to all involved? Will it result in joy for the Body of Christ?

- LOVE PRINCIPLE 6: WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T! (Romans 14:22-23).

Lastly, “When in doubt, don’t!” When the Holy Spirit leads He gives a deep sense of inner peace even in the most turbulent circumstances. On the other hand, He gives us a sense of inner doubt when a matter is not according to God’s will. It may be the wrong thing. Or, if it is the right thing, it may not be right time or situation. In cases of doubt, it is better to wait and do nothing until God gives a clear direction. We must always do things from a deep sense of inner conviction and assurance that it is God’s will.

Day 58:

CHRIST’S GREAT COMMISSION TEAM

The main reason the apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians was to brief them about the Gospel which he eagerly hoped soon to preach in the imperial capital itself (Romans 1:14-16). He had a second reason: to prepare them for his solicitation of their partnership in his Great Commission team (Romans 15:22-23).

But there was one problem: There was disunity within the church in Rome. Before they could become effective Great Commission team members, this disunity had to be healed. In Romans 14 he had begun and, here in Romans 15, he continued to diagnose the problem and to prescribe a cure.

One cause of disunity in the church (indeed, in any team, specially in sports) is the mixture of strong and weak members. In ordinary human experience (again using sports as an illustration), what attitudes do strong members show toward weaker team mates? These attitudes may include the following:

- Making fun of weak members;
- Being impatient with weak members;
- Harboring resentment toward weak members;
- Showing anger toward weak members;
- Demanding weak members to be kicked out, because they are holding back the team from achieving greater success.

Attitudes similar to those above also often flare out in the church. How do we deal with these negative attitudes of the strong toward the weak? The only real effective solution comes from the example of our Lord Himself (already referred to in Romans 14 but given more emphasis here): “Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

us, to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). Most probably, the apostle had in mind two particular “one another” commands given by the Lord to His original disciples (of which possibly he had heard from eyewitnesses).

- John 13:14-15: “¹⁴If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”
- John 13:34-35: “³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

For the church to become a winning Great Commission team, there must be this Christ-like acceptance of members toward one another. This must be an unconditional acceptance and it has to be coupled with untiring mutual support and building-up of one another.

Two additional elements are necessary to make the church into a winning Great Commission team.

- A passion for world evangelism (Romans 15:20-21). To be an effective Great Commission team, we must catch the apostle’s passion.

“²⁰And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, ²¹but as it is written: “To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.”
- A commitment to complete discipleship (Romans 15:16). The apostle Paul’s life ambition was for the people that he won to Christ to become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. This is how he expressed this same ambition in Colossians 1:28: “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

How are you nurturing the attitudes of mutual acceptance and mutual building-up in your church? What are you doing to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth? What discipleship program(s) are you using to help believers reach full maturity in Christ?

Day 59:

CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP

Through our meditations in Romans we have seen that Paul was truly a bondservant of Jesus Christ, an apostle called and separated to the Gospel of God. What a tireless missionary, what a sympathetic pastor, and what a profound theologian he was! But in this last chapter of Romans, we see that he was an ideal Christian friend as well.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Note the friends that he greeted and the personal details he wrote concerning them, 27 persons in all, which included 10 women and 5 groups of people. They were related to him in one of three ways:

- (1) First, some were his co-laborers in the Gospel;
- (2) Second, some were friends with whom he went through memorable experiences and to whom he owed some debt of gratitude;
- (3) Third, others were friends who became precious to him because of some special Christian qualities that they possessed.

This did not mean that the apostle played favorites. Friendship is like a plant that grows when cultivated and watered; it grows deeper and stronger because of experiences that we go through together, and which make us get to know each other better. We love (or ought to love) all Christians with the love of Christ; but there are Christians that the Lord brings into closer fellowship and partnership with us and as a result we feel deeper affection for them.

So, here's a personal question for us:

- Who do you consider friends because you have worked as partners in the Gospel ministry?
- Who have become your close friends because you have shared unforgettable experiences together, and to whom you owe a debt of gratitude?
- Who do you consider as your friends because they possess qualities that you greatly admire?

FRIEND LIKE NO OTHER

Let's emulate the apostle Paul in his quality as a true friend. Truth is that Paul was just emulating the Friend who was like no other, the Lord Jesus. Remember what the Lord said in John 15:13-15? From Jesus we learn how to be a real friend.

- First, a friend sacrifices himself/herself for his/her friend (John 15:13).
- Second, friends are committed to the same moral and spiritual standards (John 15:14).
- Third, friends are committed to the same purpose in life, to follow the plan of God (John 15:15).

WRONG FRIENDSHIPS

Based on Christ's pattern, true Christian friendship means that we must avoid the wrong friendship. James 4:4 warns us against the most dangerous wrong friendship of all: "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

1 John 2:15-17 clarifies what world we must not be friends with: “¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

How do your friendships measure against the example set by the Lord Jesus and by the apostle Paul?

Day 60: VICTORY OVER SATAN

Praise the Lord! And congratulations for completing our 60-day journey through Romans! It is only fitting that our final meditation is about VICTORY OVER SATAN. This is part of the blessing of the Gospel. Through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord we have victory over sin, self, the world, death, and Satan. “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen” (Romans 16:20).

But Satan is an invisible enemy. How are we able to gain victory over him? Romans 16:17-18 gives us the key: We defeat Satan by exposing and defeating his agents. There are four signs to watch out for, which warn us that Satan is working.

(1) SATAN’S AGENTS CAUSE DIVISIONS.

Satan’s most effective strategy is well known through this motto: DIVIDE AND CONQUER. He uses one very effective tactic: gossip. Be warned: When gossip starts, kill it immediately by three powerful counter-attacks: (a) Don’t listen to it; (b) Don’t spread it; (c) If there is some truth in it, resolve the problem by STRICTLY FOLLOWING the 3 steps commanded by the Lord in Matthew 18:15-17.

(2) SATAN’S AGENTS CAUSE STUMBLINGBLOCKS.

Two leading types of stumblingblocks: (a) wrong doctrine being taught by false teachers; (b) unholy lifestyle by some members and leaders. Once again the 3 steps commanded by the Lord must be followed strictly in dealing with these two stumblingblocks (Matthew 18:15-17).

(3) SATAN’S AGENTS SERVE THEIR BELLIES.

You can discern Satan’s agents by examining their motives. They always have a self-serving motive in what they teach and promote. And they advance their schemes by promising some personal gain to those who follow them.

(4) SATAN’S AGENTS FLATTER AND DECEIVE.

Flattery is saying something to puff up the ego of another person. Satan’s agents are experts in puffing up egos in order to manipulate people to accept or do what they

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

(Satan's agents) are promoting. A related form of "flattery talk" is described in 2 Timothy 4:3-4:

"³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

This kind of "flattery talk" ("inspirational teachings" which promise blessings without life-change) is possible only when the people themselves can no longer "endure sound doctrine". The only defense against flattery is (a) seeking God's glory alone; and (b) faithful teaching/preaching of sound doctrine.

Though Satan is invisible, we can overcome him by unmasking and defeating his human agents and their teachings and schemes. But always remember, we cannot do this in our power; we must always depend on the leadership and power of the Holy Spirit.

FINAL VICTORY

It is most fitting that we conclude by giving a panoramic view of the final victory of God's salvation plan. God's plan from eternity was to form a special family for Himself. Notice that the focus of predestination is the formation of brothers and sisters conformed fully to the image of the Son of God as the Eldest in that family.

Romans 8:29, 30:

²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Hebrews 2:10, 11 describes the "investment" God put into His plan:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Satan thought he had frustrated God's plan when he succeeded in causing Adam and Eve to fall into sin, and thus bringing the curse of pain, disease, decay and death on all humanity. But God had, from eternity, foresaw what would happen and He announced His salvation plan devised from before the foundation of the world.

Genesis 3:15:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

The Book of Romans showed us how this salvation plan was accomplished in and through the promised Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This is the GOSPEL – GOOD NEWS – that we proclaim.

- The Redeemer solved the problem of sin!

Romans 7:24, 25-8:1, 2:

²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Romans 8:1-4:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who^[a] do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- The Redeemer conquered Death!

Romans 5:15-17:

¹⁵But the free gift *is* not like the ^[a]offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. ¹⁶And the gift *is* not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. For the judgment *which came* from one *offense resulted* in condemnation, but the free gift *which came* from many ^[b]offenses *resulted* in justification. ¹⁷For if by the one man's ^[a]offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

- The Redeemer conquered Satan!

Hebrews 2:15, 15:

¹⁴Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

It is true that in God's sovereign wisdom and for His own purposes, He allows Satan still to tempt and deceive people until the Second Coming of Christ, believers now have the power to overcome him and his demons. Eventually, Satan will be permanently cast into the lake of fire, along with his evil principalities and powers and along with all sinners who refused to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Luke 10:18, 19:

¹⁸ And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Romans 16:20:

And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

Revelation 20:10:

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where^[b] the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

BENEDICTION

In view of our final victory in Christ through the Gospel, there is no prayer more meaningful and powerful than the apostle Paul's prayer of benediction, in which we can join with our heart and soul:

"²⁵ 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 ²⁶ but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— ²⁷ to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen" (Romans 16:25-27).

A DISCIPLE'S COMMITMENT

By Bien Llobrera

To my mind's eye a carpenter appeared;
Around him lay his tools – a saw, a hammer,
A measuring rule, and many other tools
With which he built, perhaps a rich mansion,
Perhaps a lowly bench – all arranged and ready
For his use, though he did not use them

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

All at the same time. I wondered:
What if, say, the hammer said, "I'm not
Being used. I'll go off and help a person
On my own," what would the master say?

The master said to the hammer, "You are
My servant, a special tool of mine.
I decide when to use you, where and how
And why, and for how long I want.
You are not more busy when I take you up;
You are not idle when I put you down.
In or off my hand you are busy, if you're
Constantly yielded to me, ready at any time,
Never leaving your station as a tool
Of mine, nobody else's, mine alone."

And so I looked up to my Master and said,
"Yes, Lord, I am Your servant, Yours alone,
To live only because You want me to,
Or to die. I am Your instrument for building up
Or tearing down; to declare Your grace
Or wrath; through me let Your wisdom,
Power, and love flow forth, until You have done
What's in Your heart and mind. I am
Your servant now and evermore, and I wish for
No other station, no other work, no other life."

DEVOTIONS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

CHART: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

INTRODUCTION: Theme – The Gospel: God's Power for Salvation Romans 1:1-17		
JUSTIFICATION Romans 1:18-5:11	SANCTIFICATION Romans 5:12-8:39; 12:1-15:32	GLORIFICATION Romans 8:18-21, 29-30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem: Sin Romans 1:18-3:20 • Solution: Christ's Redemption Romans 3:21-26 • Justification: By Grace thru Faith Romans 3:21-4:25 • Justification: Blessings Romans 5:1-11 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positional Romans 5:12 – 7:25 • Personal Romans 8 (Romans 9, 10, 11 – see below) • Relational Church – Rom 12 Society – Rom 13 Doubtful Matters – Rom 14:1-15:7 • Missional Romans 15:8-32 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redemption of the Body and of all Creation Romans 8:18-21 • God's Whole Plan Romans 8:29-30 Foreknew Predestined Called Justified Glorified
GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE The Chosen People and History – Romans 9, 10, 11		
CONCLUSION: Farewell Greetings – Romans 16		