

# George Philip Bible Readings

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## Romans

1:1	5:1-5	8:28	12:3-8
1:1	5:1-5	8:28	12:3-8
1:1	5:6-11	8:28	12:3-8
1:2-7	5:6-11	8:29-30	12:9-13
1:2-7	5:6-11	8:29-30	12:9-13
1:2-7	5:12-21	8:31-34	12:14-17
1:8-13	5:12-21	8:35-39	12:14-17
1:8-13	5:12-21	8:35-39	12:14-17
1:14-15	5:12-21	8:35-39	12:18-21
1:16-17	6:1-2	9:1-5	12:18-21
1:16-17	6:3-4	9:1-5	13:1-7
1:18-23	6:5-11	9:1-5	13:1-7
1:18-23	6:5-11	9:6-13	13:1-7
1:18-23	6:12-14	9:6-13	13:1-7
1:24-32	6:12-14	9:14-18	13:8-10
1:24-32	6:15-23	9:14-18	13:8-10
2:1-5	6:15-23	9:14-18	13:11-14
2:1-5	7:1-6	9:19-24	13:11-14
2:1-5	7:1-6	9:19-24	14:1-4
2:6-11	7:1-6	9:25-29	14:1-4
2:12-16	7:7-12	9:30-33	14:5-9
2:17-24	7:7-12	10:1-4	14:10-12
2:25-29	7:13-20	10:1-4	14:13-18
3:1-4	7:13-20	10:5-13	4:13-18
3:1-4	7:21-25	10:5-13	14:19-23
3:5-8	7:21-25	10:5-13	14:19-23
3:9-20	8:1	10:14-17	14:19-23
3:9-20	8:1-7	10:18-21	15:1-3
3:9-20	8:1-7	11:1-10	15:1-3
3:21-26	8:1-7	11:1-10	15:1-3
3:21-26	8:8-11	11:1-10	15:4-6
3:21-26	8:12-13	11:1-10	15:4-6
3:27-31	5:12-13	11:11-24	15:7
4:1-8	8:14-17	11:11-24	15:8-12
4:1-8	8:14-17	11:11-24	15:8-12
4:9-12	8:18-25	11:11-24	15:13
4:13-15	8:18-25	11:11-24	15:14-16
4:16-25	8:18-25	11:25-32	15:17-21
4:16-25	8:18-25	11:25-32	15:17-21
4:25	8:18-25	11:25-32	15:22-24
5:1-5	8:26-27	11:33-36	15:22-24
5:1-5	8:26-27	12:1-2	15:25-29
5:1-5	8:26-27	12:1-2	15:25-29
5:1-5	8:26-28	12:1-2	15:30-33

George Philip Bible Reading In Book

15:30-33

16:1-7

16:1-2

16:3-7

16:3-7

16:3-7

16:8-11

16:12-16

16:12-16

16:16-17

16:16-17

16:16-17

16:18-20

16:18-20

16:18-20

16:21-23

16:21-23

16:25-27

16:25-27

## 1:1

Standard Bible Dictionaries and Commentaries give a wealth of background material and provide various outlines and analyses of this epistle. The original recipients of the letter would have had only a simple, factual background regarding the circumstances of the great and well-known missionary apostle who had had no personal part in founding the church in Rome. It is clear from Acts 2:10 that pilgrims from Rome were at Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost and it would be a denial of the power of God by the Holy Spirit and an ignoring of the providence of God, if we failed to see that in all probability this was how the gospel first reached Rome. Both commerce and politics required a great deal of travelling, as did military movements and the slave trade. It was said, "All roads lead to Rome" and quite early after Pentecost there would have been a company of believers there. In Acts 18:2 there is reference to religious persecution under Claudius (A.D. 41-54) and this may indicate there had been trouble between Jews and Christians. Paul wrote his letter to Rome from Corinth towards the end of his third missionary journey and the date of around A.D. 57 is generally agreed. If we look at Rom. 15:23-33 we see some indication of the apostle's thoughts and plans and his expansive view of God's calling to service. He is persuaded that his work in the eastern Mediterranean was virtually fulfilled and that God was indicating a move westward. Being a visionary with realism he saw the wisdom of visiting Rome, the centre of the world empire, and of sharing fellowship with the church there in the interest of even further outreach. Right at the start of our study let us consider prayerfully what God would have *us* do.

[Back to Top](#)

## 1:1

We must consider this great missionary character, not least in his humanity, lest we be discouraged into thinking that only superhuman Christians are of use to God. It is clear from Rom. 15:31 that Paul had fears for his life because of the enmity of the Jews and also fear that his person and ministry might not be recognised or accepted by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. We know from Gal. 4:12-20 and 1 Cor. 9:1-6 that he often had to defend himself from scurrilous criticism and in 2 Cor. 7:5 it is clear he had his fears, nervous strain and reaction; and 2 Cor. 10:7ff makes plain he had his agonising "thorn in the flesh" to cope with all the time. But all these personality and circumstantial considerations are over-ruled by the fact that he is a servant of Jesus Christ, and proud of it. This is astonishing when you think of what a hateful, bitter "anti-evangelical" he had been, as Acts 9:1-2 makes plain. This man was from the university city of Tarsus (Acts 21:37-40); educated, cultured and well versed in literature (Acts 17:27-28) and having had a well-known tutor (Acts 22:3). He was also a citizen of Rome; partaking of its vast system of law, justice and power, and mindful of its privileges (Acts 22:25-29). He was also a product of the Jewish religion at its highest and best (Phil. 3:4-6). But now he is mastered by Jesus Christ. The term "servant" or "bond slave" while indicating lowly position does not carry the idea of unwilling slavery. Indeed, it may carry the idea of privilege and honour, for in Gen. 26:24, Abraham is called the servant of God. If we are servants we are in good company.

[Back to Top](#)

## 1:1

We make slow progress but must grasp the description Paul gives of himself so that we too will recognise what we are as servants of Christ Jesus. In the AV Paul uses three words: called, apostle and separated. He is an apostle by the call of God. He has not taken this office upon himself. But we can see here also emphasis on the "effectual calling" which is the work of God by His Spirit, bringing us to salvation. We are not merely invited to come to Christ, we are called, brought and enabled, all by God's grace. Those who are thus called are also sent as messengers of the God of salvation and in order that they might be effective servants they are separated unto God, that is, set apart for God's holy use. Paul is very conscious of His commission by God for specific service to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-22; 26:16-18), and of his willing commitment to that calling. But no doubt he also has in mind here the amazing "predestinating call" which he refers to in Gal. 1:15. It is the God who makes no mistakes who calls us to salvation and to service, as Jer. 1:4-10 also makes plain. This is

something we must set over against our awareness of unworthiness, limitation and failure. God was not "taken in" by appearances when He called us and chose us in Christ (Eph. 1:4) nor is He unduly disturbed by the present manifestation of our flaws and complications. It is the Devil who insists on making our sins the focus of attention, not God! This is indeed good news. And it is to the service of this glorious Gospel, which is God's Gospel because it is all His doing, that Paul is called and committed. Now we begin to see and to sense the thrill of the man's heart as he begins to write his letter.

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:2-7

The Gospel, or good news of God's salvation, is not a new or novel thing bursting in upon an unprepared world. God did not start to deal with the world of men in a different way at the beginning of the New Testament. The Old and the New Testaments belong together in one glorious unity and continuity. The Old Testament is the Gospel in promise and men and women believed God's promise and were saved by faith. Everything in the Old Testament pointed to the Lamb of God, the Lamb God provided for the salvation of sinners. We have the beginning of the gospel linked with Isaiah in Mk. 1:1-2. We have Christ in all the Scriptures referred to in Lk. 24:27,44-47. The death of Christ for man's salvation is declared in 1 Cor. 15:3 to be according to and in the pattern of the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul is totally in agreement with the method and teaching of Jesus in bringing together the two Testaments in the person and work of the promised Christ (Lk. 4:16-21; 22:37). We are not wise to use the phrase "New Testament Christianity". The Gospel we believe is a totally and comprehensively Biblical Gospel, and it concerns God's Son. Note how specifically Paul calls Jesus God's Son, and calls Him this before referring to His descent from David and His incarnation. It is here that daily notes prove insufficient for full theological statement regarding the Person of Christ. But if we take Rom. 9:5 (AV and NIV but not RSV) and also Paul's own words in Col. 1:15-19 we are left in no doubt that he is referring to Jesus Christ as eternally and truly God and truly and totally man. Without laying aside His divine nature He assumed human nature. "The Lord Jesus Christ, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever." (Shorter Catechism)

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:2-7

Note how Paul is stating so clearly that the gospel of God is totally summed up and expressed in Jesus Christ His Son. Everything God is, does and gives to sinners is in Christ. Christ is the gospel. Christ is salvation, and if we have Him we have all there is to get. All the fullness of God is in Him (Col. 2:9). Though He was rich He became poor, *for us* (2 Cor. 8:9). He emptied Himself (RSV), made Himself nothing (NIV), humbled Himself and became man, *for us* (Phil. 2:5-11), being born of a woman (Gal. 4:4). But His state of humiliation was only for a season and, having endured the Cross, having finished the work He came to do. God exalted Him, setting the seal on His finished work by raising Him from the dead (Heb. 12:2; 1:1-3; Acts 2:22-24, 32-36). In this way Jesus was designated, marked out or invested with power *for us* in the matter of salvation. He, and only He, is given the name whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). The phrase "the Spirit of holiness" seems best understood simply as "the Holy Spirit" and thus we see the whole eternal Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, engaged in the work of salvation (cf. Heb. 9:14). Later we shall find Paul speaking of how Christ, by His Holy Spirit, dwells in all believers (Rom. 8:11) and we are led to consider the mighty power of that Spirit who dwells in us (Eph. 1:19-20; 3:14-21). We begin to see that even in these opening verses Paul is stating the essence of the whole Gospel he is about to expound. Think then what God has done for us, what God has given to us in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Think how all this is ours in living practical dynamic by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. This is good news indeed.

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:2-7

The final verses of this passage (5-6) are full of teaching and encouragement. It is through Jesus Christ that Paul has received the grace-gift of apostleship. It was not that he deserved this calling to be an apostle (Eph.

3:7-8; 1 Cor. 15: 9-10). And, of course, all that he had been able to accomplish in his ministry was likewise all of God's grace (1 Cor. 3:5-7; 2 Cor. 12:9). But Paul seems more concerned here to expound the glorious objective of his calling as an apostle of the Gospel. In proclaiming the power of God unto salvation he is to storm the battlements of sin and unbelief and to bring men and women to the obedience of faith. The faith in Christ that brings salvation is not an easy and superficial believism that allows people to go on living as their inclinations direct. It brings lives into willing obedience to God and this indicates that if we preach a gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation without the call and demand of discipleship we are not preaching a Biblical gospel. Paul may well be recalling his own conversion and calling, as described in Acts 26:15-20. This obedience is expected from the Roman believers also, whom he describes as being called to belong to Jesus Christ. They have yielded to the lordship of Christ and he speaks of them as "God's beloved". They are the objects of and the recipients of love that is eternal in every sense. There is no limit to it nor end to it. Nothing can separate them from it, as we shall yet see in Rom. 8:35-39. The believers in Rome are saints by virtue of their calling and as such the possibilities of life are limitless. And, with the possibilities there is the power, namely grace and peace multiplied (Jude 1-2).

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:8-13

There is a forthright simplicity in Paul but we must not let his uncomplicated words hide the depth of feeling, purpose and patience that mark the man in respect of his person and ministry. It thrilled him to know that the whole world knew that there were Christians in the capital city of the empire. The possibilities of a living church in Rome in terms of worldwide missionary outreach were not lost on Paul. He gladly commends them and assures them of his prayers. It is strange that, so often, *we* are both slow and unwilling to do either. It is not a sign of grace when we fail to express gratitude and fail to tell people that we pray for them. Of course, Paul also prays for himself in respect of the eagerness of his heart to be able, at long last, to visit them. His desire is two fold. He wants to minister to them, and he sees no reason to believe that his ministry, having been so signally blessed to others, will suddenly be void of blessing. But he also sees how he will be blessed himself and ministered to by fellowship with them. There is no suggestion in Paul that he is so totally spiritual, drawing his life's nourishment from God, that he is past the stage of being ministered to by others. Let us all be clear on this point. We *need* each other and we should be grateful to God that we have each other. Remember this: each of us has something to contribute and each of us has need. This excludes all pride. It also encourages, since even the humblest is in fact, necessary (1 Cor. 12:14-22).

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:8-13

It is good to be reminded that the life of a mighty man like Paul was not without its complications, frustrations and hindrances. In v.13 Paul speaks of his intentions which were only then beginning to become possibilities. Even though he was sure that he lived and worked in the will of God and had every expectation of being blessed and being made a blessing to others, all his plans and hopes were submitted to God's good will and over-ruling. He was not always able to do what he wanted exactly when his heart and mind prompted and urged him. He often had to wait. Sometimes he adjusted his plans because other opportunity presented itself (1 Cor. 16:5-9). Some times a new stage of his work emerged when his ongoing work was halted by being sent to prison (Phil. 1:12). At other times he held back from visiting places because his arrival would both minister to the pride of the carnal believers and lead to rebuke and chastisement of rebellious believers (2 Cor. 12:20-21). In many ways Paul waited on God to be led and to be assured that he was right in the centre of His will. At other times, as he says here, he was prevented from paying a visit. It may have been circumstances or it may have been health or it may have been travel difficulties. On one occasion Paul stated clearly that it was a work of Satan that hindered him (1 Thess, 2:17-18). What that hindrance was we cannot tell, but there is no doubt at all that Paul never thought that in any real sense the Devil could frustrate the work of God in its onward course. The Devil can and does frustrate and anger *us* but we must remember that, even in his apparent successes, he is a defeated foe. It may be that the hindrance Paul speaks of is in terms of

Rom.15:17-25. Such were the burdens and demands of the work that even Paul accepted that he could not do everything. Some of us have to learn that lesson.

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:14-15

Greetings and introductions over, Paul is getting ready to launch into his exposition of the Gospel. He speaks of himself as being under obligation, a debt or a responsibility permanently constraining him. He may have had in mind the story of the two debtors in Matt. 18:23-35 or his own earlier persecution of the church which he speaks about with such feeling in 1 Tim.1:12-16. Certainly this sense of obligation was a dominant feature of his life and he expresses it again in 1 Cor. 9:15-18. To what extent do we share Paul's feelings when he says in 1 Cor.9:16, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel"? Do we really believe that people need to be saved from sin, death and Hell? Do we really believe that people can live without Christ and die without hope? What answer could we possibly give on the great day of judgment if the people we lived, worked and played with were to say to us who are believers, "Why did you not tell me?" This is not a challenge to rash and indiscriminate evangelism. After all, we must earn the right to speak to people about the most personal issues of life. But it is a call to be ready and willing to speak a word for Jesus, the Jesus who died to pay the price of our sins. Paul felt this burden of responsibility to the wise and cultured Greeks and equally to the lowly; uneducated "common people" who had listened so gladly to Jesus (Mk. 12:37 AV). All need to hear and some of the most unexpected hearers turn out to be glorious saints and servants of the gospel. Note that Paul is every bit as eager as he is burdened. He does not "labour up the heavenly hill with weary feet and slow". God grant us genuine enthusiasm. It comes through keeping company with the Son of God (Jer. 20:9; Acts 17:16; Ps. 39:2-3).

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:16-17

The idea has got around in our day, as it had in Paul's day, that the Gospel is not quite tenable on intellectual and psychological grounds and that is why many preachers "trim" their message to make it acceptable to "modern man". This Paul will not do. He is not ashamed of the Gospel on any level. It is valid on intellectual, emotional, psychological, spiritual, moral and practical levels because it meets totally the human situation as it really is. This Paul is prepared to reason out in detail, as he will start to do in v.18. Here he declares the Gospel to be the power of God to save sinners of all kinds who believe; to rescue, restore and reinstate them and reconcile them to God. But what do we need to be saved from? Some people need to be saved from their "religion" which is essentially do-it-yourself salvation, trying to reach, find and please God by your own efforts. We shall see as we go on how futile this is, since it evades the real issue of sin. The Gospel is "power", God's power for us in Christ whereby God's "righteousness", a right standing with God, is revealed. This is not righteousness as an attribute of God's character, nor righteousness in the sense of God's judicial acts of righteousness. It is rather God's righteousness over against man's lack of righteousness; and is therefore the righteousness which God effects and gives to believers in sovereign grace. It is "based on faith and addressed to faith" (NEB). It is accepted as a gift by faith. God's righteousness speaks of God's justification or salvation, God's way of justifying the ungodly or unrighteous. It is only the "Gospel power" of God that can remedy the plight and predicament of sinner man. And God has done it in Christ. This is Gospel.

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:16-17

In these two verses Paul brings together the two concepts of "salvation" and "a righteousness from God"; which righteousness is received from God, gift-wise, by faith. It is a righteousness that is given not earned, and it avails before God, so making the sinner acceptable. In Phil. 3:8-9 Paul speaks of a righteousness which is not his own but which comes from God and rests on faith. From start to finish salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. We hear what God has done; we acknowledge it is for us; we confess that we need it; and with nothing to offer or to pay we accept it and rest in it. This is salvation. And, he who through faith is righteous

shall live, as opposed to being dead in trespasses and sins. Paul then is about to expound the glorious salvation that God has worked in Jesus Christ and to do so he launches into an exposition of the need for salvation (1:18ff). We can try to help our study by asking what we need to be saved from. We need to be saved from the world; the whole scheme of things which traps, conditions and destroys us, which steals everything from us and would swallow us up (1 John 2:15-17; 5:19; Gal. 1:4). We need to be saved from the flesh; all that we are as sinners by nature, choice and practice, not least the inner treachery of our personalities (Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 3:9). And we need to be saved from the Devil, from powers and personalities of a spiritual nature outside ourselves, evil that cannot be explained in terms of heredity or environment (Acts 26:18; Eph. 6:10ff). It is only when we begin to see the disastrous nature of our position and our need that we begin to rejoice in the Gospel.

[Back to Top](#)

### **1:18-23**

So far we have spoken of the need for salvation as seen from man's standpoint but that is not where Paul begins his exposition of the Gospel. He starts with a concept that tends to be abhorrent to human thinking, namely the wrath of God. Now, we must never set the attributes of God over against each other. We know that God is Love; but it is not self-evident that God should love unworthy sinners. It has been revealed in Christ that God loves sinners. In like manner God's righteousness has been revealed not least in the Ten Commandments and it is made plain that only on the basis of righteousness will God deal with and accept sinners. But a sinner has no righteousness and cannot produce righteousness. What then is the sinner's position? He is under the wrath of God which has been revealed, or is constantly being revealed. Read John 3:16-19,36. Now, what it means to be a sinner, living life under the wrath of God, is to be spelled out in the rest of this chapter. Paul says God's wrath is revealed, made plain, and demonstrated in conscience, Scripture and history, and supremely in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Where else can we see so clearly God's anger towards and His judgment on sin other than in the Cross where Jesus Christ was made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). God's wrath is not a burst of flaming anger but a steady disposition of disapproval and rejection of all that is meant by sin: sin that He cannot and will not allow to be in His presence. However unpleasant and unsettling it may be to us, we must recognise that God is angry with sinners in their sin. He is not just hurt, grieved and disappointed. The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven and carries the sanction of Heaven. This is the solemn background to the glorious gospel.

[Back to Top](#)

### **1:18-23**

God's wrath is revealed against all forms of human ungodliness and unrighteousness . Note that it is a wrong relationship to God that leads to wrong actions against God, and Paul goes on to speak of people suppressing the truth by wickedness or in the interest of their wickedness. He then goes on to sweep away from sinner-man the excuse of ignorance. The fact of God, His power and deity has been revealed by God to all people in creation, history and conscience. This does not mean that man, in and by himself, has a capacity for knowing, discovering and desiring God, and Paul will later make this totally clear (3:11-12). Everything to do with salvation is a matter of revelation. God is the one who takes the initiative and makes His person and His purposes known, otherwise people would remain in the darkness of sin and ignorance. The Gospel is revealed (16-17); God's wrath is revealed (1.8); the reality of God is revealed (19-20). And because of this last fact no one has an excuse for remaining in ignorance and in sin. By the very nature of things under God's providence and power, all of us are confronted with a recognisable revelation of God who is to be sought after and to whom an answer is to be given. Think of the stabbing unrest of conscience and the deep hunger for fulfilment that so often (but not always) mark human experience. Think of Eccles. 3:10-11. Man, made in the image of God and for God, cannot ever be himself or find himself apart from God. Read Ps. 8:1-9; 19:1-4. Look at the starry heavens, the beauty of a rose; listen to the sighing of the wind and the song of the birds; and consider the rolling seasons. God is, and He is the rewarder of those who seek Him (Acts 17:22-31; Heb: 11:6).

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:18-23

Knowing is one thing, but responding in obedience to knowledge is quite another thing. Right from the Garden of Eden human nature has tended to believe the lie of the Devil rather than the revelation of God, because the Devil's promises appeal to our innate self-idolatry (Gen. 3:4-6). This is what Paul expounds in v.21-23 and he shows us the disobedience, the darkness and the degeneration that mark human experience. People knew God, but it suited their desires to suppress that knowledge (18b). They refused to give God His place high above all and they refused to relate experience and destiny to Him. In total thanklessness they abandoned all thought of a "vertical" dimension to life and chose to deal with everything on the "horizontal" level. That is, people chose to live by human thinking rather than by God's revelation. They became futile in their thinking (21), empty in their " dialogues", sharing their ignorance and their distorted evaluations and becoming ever darker and more ignorant as they went on. They claimed to be wise; and were proud of their wisdom, and that is a mark of our own generation with all its "clever" inventions. But foolish man cannot escape from God, nor from the awareness of God, nor from the need for God. The problem is that having rejected God's revelation of Himself, man proceeds to make "God" according to man's imagination as to what God should be like. But v.23 makes plain that man's concept of God becomes ever more defective and degenerate. He imagines God like man at first, then like birds, then animals, then reptiles. When we start thinking God must be like us (what a desolating thought) we end up thinking God must be like the devil. Best listen to what God says about Himself. Read Exodus 20:1-6; Isa. 40:21-31; Micah 7: 18-20. Or sing to yourself the hymn, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." What a God He is, merciful and mighty!

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:24-32

Our attitudes and actions have consequences in the spiritual and moral realms of life and this affects not only the individual but the whole of society and the course of human history. These consequences are not only the natural (perhaps we should say un-natural) fruit of man's actions, but also the direct and specific action of God, whose wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness is an active factor in human experience. In v.24 we are told of how God gave men over to their own deliberate choices, and the sinful craving of their hearts soon became sexual impurity and a dishonouring and degrading of bodies. Note that people can live like this while maintaining a form of "religion" in which God has been dethroned and man has taken His place. As we read through this terrible passage in which three times we are told that "God gave them up" (24, 26, 28) let us never forget the amazing long-suffering of God in which He puts up with rebellious sinners before bringing His judgment on them. Hendriksen in his commentary refers to God's patience in the days of Noah when man's wickedness was notorious (Gen. 6:5; 1 Pet. 3:20), and also to the thought of judgment being disciplinary in order to bring repentance (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20). But Scripture and experience alike testify that God's patience and grace do not always produce repentance, and we are left with the picture of judgment. Perhaps the most potent comment on this whole passage is, "Sin, *when it is finished*, brings forth death." (James 1:13-15 AV). The appalling and frightening issue of man's sinful potential is summed up in v.32 which pictures so accurately the present day attitude to sin, depravity and perversion. Men and women justify and excuse the grossest forms of sin. They say, "This is the way God has made me." It is a lie. Man was made in the image of God. Something has gone radically wrong, and the righting of that wrong is the message of the Gospel.

[Back to Top](#)

### 1:24-32

If reading this grim but realistic passage again is too depressing, place over against it such passages as Philippians 4:8-9; Colossians 3:12-14; Galatians 5:16-23; and to preserve honesty and balance, Ephesians 4:17-19. Thinking to gain freedom, man refuses to have God as God, but instead of freedom he finds himself mastered by what he is in himself and what he is becoming. Far more than we are aware, all of us are restrained and restricted by "common grace", whether by social convention, by career requirements, by fear of consequences or other self-interests. But circumstances can change and we find ourselves in a new situation with possibilities for sin far greater than we had ever known before. Or, as in our own generation, the social



restraints and requirements change and what was once guaranteed to make you a social outcast now becomes not only acceptable but desirable, making you "one of the club". Many a person has discovered to their surprise just what they are prepared to do, given the temptation and the opportunity at the same time. But we must not concentrate only on the base and ugly forms of sin in the realm of sex and its perversions. Look at the list in v.29-31, especially the last words, "faithless, heartless and ruthless." This is what all of us are capable of becoming apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We err if we think of sin as a mere defect in personality and society, something just needing a little correction. Sin is a fact a malignant fact which needs to be dealt with and cast out, not just in terms of what we call forgiveness, but in terms of its vicious power being broken.

[Back to Top](#)

## 2:1-5

Paul is building up his exposition of what could be called a manifesto for Christian mission. He has declared that there is a gospel to preach (1:16). All people need to hear it because the wrath of God is revealed (1:18). All are charged with deliberate sin against God (1:21-23), against self (1:24-27) and against society (1:28-32). Paul ends the first chapter with a searching and perceptive statement. He emphasises how man (fallen man, but not *necessarily* morally fallen in the ugly sense) always tends to take man's side rather than God's side, and in sympathy for man tends to excuse and even justify him in his wrong doing. But we must recognise that the form which unrighteousness takes is largely determined by the form that ungodliness takes (1:18) and ungodliness can be both moral and religious. Paul is very aware that the religious Jews were clear in their condemnation of the base way of life of the Gentiles and agreed that men who give themselves to evil should be dealt with and judged. In this the religious Jew seems to be on the side of God, as indeed does the moral pagan. Many unbelievers are not depraved and have no intention of becoming so. How then can Paul accuse them of doing the same things as those spoken of in chapter 1? He is not saying that they have the same potential to sin, although that is true, and many a person has had to say, "I never thought I would do that." Nor is Paul speaking of sinning in thought and therefore being guilty (Matt 5:20-22, 27-28). What sin then is the moral man guilty of? Like the others he refuses God's revelation of truth and grace (1:18), and seeks to stand by his own morality and integrity. The good pagan, like the self-righteous religious man, thanks God that he is not like other people (Lk. 18:11). But he is!

[Back to Top](#)

## 2:1-5

Read Matt. 22:11-12, the story of the wedding garment handed out to all invited guests at the door, enabling all to be dressed the same and so to be acceptable. One man refused the gift. His sin was the sin of self-confidence, and arrogance because he refused the host's standard. He took his own way. Now, people often say they are not all they should be, and then add, "but at least I have a sense of right and wrong." They may even add that they are religious, they "recognise" God. But that simply exposes them to greater judgment because the more light you have the less excuse there is. Up to a point you can imagine moral, good-living Gentiles agreeing with Paul's statements in chap. 1:18ff. but hesitating when it comes to 1:32, taking man's side and saying that, of course, some have not had much opportunity, that social conditions and heredity and "religious" fears and inhibitions have all hindered man's climb to dignity and fulfilment. This is the philosophy of the humanists in their rejection of God, God's revelation and God's salvation. They insist that man will do it himself. Both moral and religious man will argue against God's revelation that all have sinned and all need to be saved. Read Rom. 10:3. It is easy to approve of ourselves if we simply measure ourselves with ourselves (2 Cor. 10:12), or if we measure against those who are obviously less moral than ourselves. The point is that it is what God thinks that matters, and God's judgment is based on truth, and rightly falls on those who refuse that truth (2). Thus, when the moral man passes judgment on the degenerate man, pronouncing him to be wrong with God, he is passing judgment on himself also.

[Back to Top](#)

## 2:1-5

Paul is concerned to emphasise that God's judgment is according to facts, not according to man's assumptions and pre-suppositions, and certainly not according to appearances. And God's judgments are "right", that is without partiality (11), and they are inescapable. But note how at once in v.4-5 we are faced first with the amazing kindness, forbearance and patience of God and then with the hard, impenitent and unmoveable hearts of men. If we have indeed preserved our lives from gross and terrible sin, then it is all due to the grace and providence of God and this should make us totally grateful. Instead of criticising or excusing others who have fallen into sin, we should say, "There but for the grace of God go I." How easily our lives could have become disasters if strong temptation and easy opportunity had come at the same time. But more: all God's dealings with men, especially religious men, have been marked by rich goodness bringing privileges and blessings beyond measure. But there is more in v.4 than just providence. We are made to think of God's goodness and mercy in the work of salvation. The redeeming love of God is placarded on the Cross, active for our salvation from sin, and freely offered in Christ. Would the Son of God have died if it was not necessary? Does the Cross not proclaim man's *need* of salvation as well as the *way* of salvation? But people devalue the mercies of providence and deny the need for salvation. They harden their hearts in the presence of Christ crucified. They refuse the message of salvation. And on the day of judgment the final charge against them will concern their greatest and most deliberate sin: they refused Christ.

[Back to Top](#)

## 2:6-11

If we remember that the essential theme so far is judgment and not salvation, we will escape the temptation to think that Paul is in some way here teaching salvation by works. He states that judgment is universal (every man and woman without exception.) and exact, according to what they have done (v.5-6). Then he concludes the section by affirming God's total impartiality (11). But what of v.7-10? Behind a man's way of life lies his choice of life, and his guilt in respect of his choice is determined by the light given to him. This theme goes on to v.16. In today's passage there are two clear categories, each spoken of in terms of their reaction to the riches of God's grace referred to in v.4 Remember that all we are studying is in the light of the fact that Jesus Christ has come, died and risen again. People are not being judged in a vacuum of uncertainty, waiting to see what God will do. God *has* acted. The work of salvation has been done and made known. What people do in response to that is of eternal significance, as many other passages make plain (Matt. 16:27; John 5:25-29; 1 Cor. 3:12-15). Some will hear, believe and press on to live lives that please God, but not trying to establish a righteousness of their own (Phil. 3:8-14). These are the people who seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Faith always produces this desire to press on after Christ, and it has its reward (7, 10). Others who hear refuse to listen; they argue and disobey and choose to go another way (8, 9). For such the only prospect is desolation and rejection, as Jesus made plain when He wept over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37-38). Do not fail to see here the clear presentation of the total difference of the everlasting destiny of faith and unbelief. In the preaching of the Gospel there is the parting of the ways for all people. (Matt.7:24-29).

[Back to Top](#)

## 2:12-16

This passage divides into two sections, as some translations make plain. Verses 12, 13 and 16 state the principle of God's dealing with Gentile and Jew, irreligious and religious alike. There is no mistake because God does not judge according to appearance. God looks on the secret heart of each person. In v.14, 15 we have a revealing statement about those who have lived and died outside the influence and knowledge of the Gospel. The Jews, in their pride of privilege as God's chosen people, found no difficulty in accepting the right and necessary judgment of the Gentiles. But they assumed that because of their favoured position, having the Law, the traditions and the patriarchs on their side (Rom. 9:4-5), that they were in the clear and had no fear of judgment. But they forgot, as we forget, that privilege brings responsibility; and the greater the light, the greater the judgment; and the more knowledge of the truth the less excuse there is for failure to obey it. Think of it this way. Some, at home and abroad, have never had a chance, living in an atmosphere of ignorance, sin, evil and godlessness from birth to death. They are outside of or apart from God's Law. But

even though the "outsider" does not have God's Law written on stone or paper, he is equipped in the providence of God the Creator with an inbuilt sense of right and wrong. For example, he knows instinctively he should be faithful to his wife, kind to his children and honest in his dealings with others. He has an objective (but inner) witness to what is right and wrong and if he sins against that "light" (cf. 1:19-20) then he is held guilty. The judgment is in God's hands alone. But for those favoured with the light of God's truth and Gospel, whose minds and consciences are instructed and enlightened, there can never be the excuse of ignorance. Unbelief, and the disobedience flowing from it, can never be excused or justified.

[Back to Top](#)

## 2:17-24

Paul now addresses himself to the Jew, the religious man, who is conscious of and proud of his religion which, he considers, gives him a special and privileged position in relation to God. But what Paul does is to point out that the religious man is every bit as much in need of salvation as the good pagan and the bad pagan. The Jews had God's Law, knew it and revered it (in theory, at least); they had a special relationship with God as members of the chosen people, and felt virtuous about it as though it was their own doing, forgetting Deut. 7:6-8. The Jew was proud of his spiritual standing, being so instructed in the law that he could discern the things that were important to God, even though Jesus had condemned them for being obsessed with small issues to the neglect of vital issues (Matt. 23: 23-24). The spiritual pride of the Jew was almost unbelievable. He regarded himself as a guide to the blind, a light in the darkness, an instructor of those ignorant of God, and a teacher of those who would grow up in the knowledge of God. This is what they said: "We are the people; we have the Scriptures; we know the truth; we are the spiritual ones." But the truth was that when their promised Messiah came they refused Him (John 1:11). When their king was presented to them, they crucified Him (John 19:12-16). When the gospel was preached after the resurrection they opposed it in every place (Acts 4:1-3, 18). They took the Word of God and replaced it by the tradition of men (Matt. 15:1-9). They went to all lengths to make a convert to their "religion" and made him a child of hell (Matt. 23:15). Jesus said of them that they were of their father the Devil and that all their proud religious traditions were worthless (John 8:42-47). They had made their "religion" and all its system their "god" in the same way as some people make their church building, or their denomination, their "god". That kind of religion has no place for the Gospel of salvation by free grace alone.

[Back to Top](#)

## 2:25-29

We need to read from v.17 to the end of the chapter to see the sweep of this comprehensive exposure of "religion" in order to see how man-centred, man-glorifying, and Christ-excluding it is. Many who are religious, meticulous in all their observances, are anything and everything but Christian. It is all to do with their "good works" and "human merit" and nothing to do with taking the place of the sinner and accepting salvation with empty hands. How different from the hymn *Rock of ages* which "churchy" people like to sing, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy Cross I cling." Religion turns a man in on himself and makes him say, "I thank Thee God, that I am not as other men are I ... I ... I" (Lk. 18:11-12). But, think of Jesus' stern words about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the leading exponents of "religion" (Matt. 25:1-3 ff.). Now read v.21-24. There are good grounds for believing that all these "wrongs" were much in evidence among the proud religious Jews of Paul's day. Certainly Jesus spoke of them robbing widows' houses and laying ruthless demands on people who could not defend themselves (Mk. 12:40). Did not Jesus also cleanse the Temple of unholy profiteering in the name of "religion", castigating false worship as He did so? Circumcision, ordained by God (as baptism is), marked a man out, as one of God's people, but the rite and the sign counted for nothing if the person's life did not conform to God's holy law. The Lord's Table is a holy institution and many are proud that they never miss communion. But it counts for nothing if the heart remains closed to Jesus and the life remains a worldly one. Religion is outward, Faith is inward. The "unchurched" man who goes with Christ and whose life is brought into obedience is accepted by God. But the man who trusts in his religion is not.

[Back to Top](#)

### 3:1-4

In studying Romans it is necessary at regular intervals to look back and get a balanced perspective of the argument. It is all about God's power unto salvation (1:16); God's way of righting wrong (1:17), His justifying or declaring righteous and acceptable those who are ungodly (4:5 AV). We must always note how the argument is proceeding and in what direction it is going. At our present stage in the epistle Paul is heading for 3:22-23, and the statement, "There is no distinction, all have sinned." But there is more to the problem than human sin and guilt: for Paul has declared that God's wrath has been revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (1:18). This then is the problem: man sins because he is a sinner; as a sinner he is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1) and therefore helpless to remedy his situation; he is also under the wrath of God, God is against him, and only God can change that situation. But the question arises as to who are to be classed as sinners. All are included: the bad pagan (1:18ff), the moral pagan (2: 1-16) and the religious man (2:17-29). There are no exceptions. Then in today's verses, Paul highlights the arguments put forward by the significantly religious Jews. They believed in the God who had revealed Himself, they had the Scriptures, they bore the mark of the covenant of God's grace (circumcision) and they practised their religion. In the same way many would claim now that they were baptised as children, were instructed in Sunday School, that they "joined the church" and supported it up to a point, and attended every communion service. They have their Bibles (which they don't often read) and believe in prayer (though they don't pray all that much except when in crisis). All of these privileges are a tremendous benefit. Think what it must be like to live in the dark ignorance of Islam. But what a tragedy if all that "privilege" of "religion" does not lead you to Jesus, which is the one thing God wants. Religion which keeps you from Christ is not of God (John 6:28-29, 37,40, 44-45).

[Back to Top](#)

### 3:1-4

It is not easy for a lifelong "religious" man to accept that he is a sinner who needs to be saved. Think of how Paul fought against the conviction of the gospel (Acts 9:1-5; Phil, 3:4-7) before finally yielding to Christ. Have we to give up our "religion" to become a Christian? Yes, if we trust in our religion for salvation. Think of the Jews' story. God chose them, pledged Himself to them, blessed them, gave them light, love and truth, but what happened? All along the line they resisted God (Acts 7:51-53). God came to His own people in Christ and they refused Him (John 1:11). They preferred darkness to light (John 3: 16-21). But, they said, do not our privileges "prove" we are God's people? No! They went on arguing, "Does that mean then that God's faithful promises have fallen down?" No! The faithlessness of men simply highlights the glorious faithfulness of God who is altogether to be trusted. It is the constancy of God who remains true to His promise of grace that demonstrated man to be in the wrong. "The quotation (4) from Psalm 51 pictures a court scene, with God receiving the verdict in the litigation." (J. Philip) Religion is a complicated thing. It can be such a barrier to true faith, and makes the evangelising of church people so hard. They love to sing hymns like "Rock of Ages" but will not accept their gospel message:

"Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears for ever flow,  
All for sin could. not atone:  
Thou must save and Thou alone.  
Nothing in my hand I bring;  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling." (Toplady)

[Back to Top](#)

### 3:5-8

When people who are just "religious" find they cannot escape from the challenge of the gospel they immediately try to discredit it, and this is what Paul now answers. Some said, "If our unrighteousness highlights God's righteousness, what shall we say?" If the sin, failure and unbelief of the people serve to highlight the wonderful grace of God, is God unfair in being angry? By no means, says Paul. That kind of argument slanders the character of God (just as the serpent: did in Eden: Gen. 3:1-5) and suggests God is not competent to judge anything. But it is of the essence of the character of God that He is righteous and will

always do right (Gen. 18:25). But unbelief continues to argue and pervert the truth. "If my lies and hypocrisy of religion demonstrate the truth and reality of God, all to His glory, why write me off as a sinner?" Paul grows weary of this kind of argumentation and we, in like manner, must not be trapped into futile conversation that has no real desire to learn. He adds another slander that people were directing at the gospel. "If salvation is all of grace, then behaviour does not matter, and the more we sin the more we will show forth God's grace." This kind of talk has degenerated to a dirty game of mere words on the part of those who have no intention of believing. They are deliberately presenting the gospel in its worst light in order to hold down the truth and so to excuse their own unbelief (1:18). Their condemnation is deserved, and God will see to it.

[Back to Top](#)

### 3:9-20

In this passage Paul sums up the whole argument which proved that all people lack that righteousness which alone can make them acceptable to God: Jew and Gentile alike, religious, respectable or degenerate, all are without exception charged with being under the power, guilt, curse and condemnation of sin. There is guilt they cannot remedy; bondage they cannot break; spiritual sickness they cannot cure; perversity they cannot change; judgment they cannot meet; and alienation they cannot reconcile. This is the hopeless plight of the sinner, and it can be met only by the power and activity of God, unaided and undeserved by man. To substantiate his charge Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament which the Jews, above all, should be prepared to bow to. He shows that far from being better than others they have less to be said in their defence because, with the instruction they had received down the ages they, above all, should have been able to recognise the truth about sin and salvation. Was not the heart of their religion and worship the Passover Lamb whose shed blood was the only ground and hope of salvation? All the references quoted could be summed up in the words of Isaiah 64:6, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." It is hard to accept this. The reason being that we have never grasped the truth about the sinfulness of sin nor have we seen what real righteousness is. This is seen from looking into the face and life of Jesus who was full of grace and truth. In the hymn, "One who is all unfit to count" the Indian author got it right when he said, "Even the dust upon Thy feet, outweighs me utterly." Whittier also spoke well when he said, "Thou judgest us: Thy purity doth all our lusts condemn." When we see what we really are we see how much we need a Saviour.

[Back to Top](#)

### 3:9-20

The references Paul quotes are from Eccles. 7:20; Ps. 14:1-3; Ps. 5:9; Ps. 140:3; Ps. 10:7; Isa. 59:7-8; and Ps. 36:1. There are no exceptions to this general indictment. In v.10-12 we seem to have reference to sins of disposition, attitude and outlook; an aversion to God and a disinclination to go towards God; with a strange but deep-seated lack of concern about God. It is the indifference that says, "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" (Exod. 5:2). It is in some ways an exposition of Jeremiah's declaration regarding the human heart and its sickness (Jer.17:9 AV). It directs us to the solemn diagnosis of the human condition as being motivated by a spirit of disobedience (Eph. 2: 2-3). One of the devastating discoveries we make in life is the latent capacity for being contrary to God and an awareness of what we might in fact become. In v.13-18 the picture is not of what all human behaviour actually is but what all human nature is capable of. Note how Paul begins the list with the sins of the tongue. An unbridled tongue is a destructive weapon (Jas.1:26; 3:1-10), and our speech often betrays us and gives us away (Matt. 26:73), Listen to what people talk about and notice what they don't talk about and you learn a great deal about their inward attitudes and values. Watch the things they do and the effect they have on individuals and congregations and you will soon see whether, in relation to God, they are peacemakers who are blessed (Matt. 5:9) or troublemakers (Gal. 1:7). How true it is of many that there is no fear of God in them (Ps.36:1-2). The lack of a spirit of reverence is manifest in many churches today, as is the lack of seemliness. Have we all become too "chummy" with God, the high and holy One who inhabits eternity (Isa.57:15)?

[Back to Top](#)

### 3:9-20

We need a final day to consider v.19-20 for they are the climax of the whole argument. Here is where every sinner stands: silent and guilty before God (19). There is nothing we can say in our defence. The evidence has been led and accepted and we stand liable to proceedings of judgment which will demand the full penalty. Paul has not actually quoted from the Ten Commandments therefore when he speaks of "the law" he must be referring to the whole of the Old Testament, all that God has spoken. This emphasises that everything God says confirms the fact that man is a sinner and stands condemned. Every man is born, lives and dies within the sphere of the Law of God and the verdict: is universal and unchanging. But there is more than just verdict. There is a situation of hopeless and helplessness because there is absolutely nothing guilty sinners can do to ease let alone remedy this situation, even if they wanted to. But apart from the life-giving grace of God the sinner has no desire for God let alone capacity to come to God. Read Eph. 2:12 for the description: Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless; then read Col. 1:21 for the description: estranged and hostile in mind. What a condition to be in! And the more you hear the Word of God the more you are convicted of being guilty before God on the grounds of your sins of omission as well as sins of commission. We are guilty sinners by nature, choice and practice. Is there then no hope? None at all, apart from the free and sovereign grace of God, and this is Paul's next theme.

[Back to Top](#)

### 3:21-26

Over against the plight of man Paul sets the power of God, emphasising that it is God's action that brings hope into the human situation. This is exactly what he states in Eph. 2:4-8 using the words, "But God ..."; and in Col. 1:21-22 using the words, "he has now reconciled," having previously spoken of God's saving activity in Christ (Col. 1:12-14), and in 1Cor. 6:11 with the words, "But you were washed." In each case the emphasis is on what God did unilaterally, there being no claim on Him, no merit or deserving on the part of man, and no contribution of effort from man. Salvation is God's work from beginning to end and there is to be seen all the glory of the gospel in the words, "BUT GOD". Paul has painted a picture of total darkness in which man is left silent and guilty before God, lacking righteousness, without which he cannot be accepted. But now, the very righteousness which God demands God makes manifest and provides in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the good news Paul stated in 1:16-17. Of course, having now seen man's terrible and total predicament, we can see how glorious is God's answer. It is God the righteous Judge who proclaims the full pardon and new beginning, because He has met and paid the full price of sin in His Son Jesus Christ. It is a righteousness or salvation that is apart altogether from the works and efforts of keeping the laws of God and it is testified to by the whole of the Old Testament (Law and Prophets). Read Isaiah 53:1-12, and stand in amazement before the Cross.

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place, condemned He stood;  
Sealed my pardon with His blood  
Hallelujah, what a Saviour;" (Bliss)

[Back to Top](#)

### 3:21-26

The theme of justification by faith alone will be expounded by Paul as he goes on and we must try to get a true grasp of the meaning. The Shorter Catechism states: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." When we put our faith in Christ, all that Christ did for us in His life, death and resurrection, is put to our account. All the "wrong" in our situation in relation to God was put "right" by Christ for us, and we receive it by faith *not* by works. "Justification answers to the condemnation and guilt of sin (19); redemption to its power and bondage (9), and expiation (propitiatory sacrifice) to the reality of divine wrath (25)," (J. Philip). Our guilt is real whether we feel it or not. It is an objective fact. God's justification is likewise an objective fact. It is the action and the declaration by the Judge that the sinner stands in the clear and is accepted because the problem (sin) has been dealt with. It is God who justifies

(8:33). It is God who gives the gift, through the redemption which is in Christ. Redemption is a buying back through paying the price so that the slave sold under sin is set free because he belongs now to a new master. When the prisoner in the condemned cell is handed his free pardon, he is free to go. Nothing has the right to hold him any longer. The price of sin has been paid and its dominion broken. This is Gospel indeed, and it is all of God's free grace. Man did not deserve it. Man could not do it. But sinner man heard the message (Acts 16:30-31), "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

[Back to Top](#)

### **3:21-26**

We must be very clear in our thinking and recognise that God never says that sin does not matter. Nor does God "let off" sin, nor does He say, "Just forget it." Sin is always judged and its full price paid. This is what God did when He put forward His Son as the sacrifice for sin. The word "propitiation" used in AV is a more exact term than "expiation" used in RSV and signifies a wrath-removing sacrifice. In His death Christ paid the full price and met the full judgment of God on human sin. This is God's answer to sin. The whole of the Old Testament declares through its laws and its sacrificial system that God judges sin, pays its price through the blood of the appointed sacrifice, and so reconciles His people to Himself. The blood of animals could never take away sin (Heb. 10:4) but the Old Testament sacrifices were accepted as valid *in the light of* the one true sacrifice of the Lamb of God. This is why Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration spoke to Jesus of the death (exodus) He was to accomplish. Everything depended on Jesus seeing it through. There never has been any other way of salvation or acceptance by God than through the atoning death of the promised Lamb of God. God never moves from His position of total righteousness. God never moves from His own stated position that the wages of sin is death. Through the blood of the Cross the judgment is met, the price is paid, and peace is made (Col. 1:20). God so loved the world He gave His own Son (John 3:16). He took our sins in His own body on the tree and He died the righteous for the unrighteous (1 Pet.3:18; 2:24). He was made a curse for us (Gal.3:13). Perhaps Barabbas, the thief, understood it best as he looked at the Cross, saying, "I should have been there." Guilt is the problem on man's side. Wrath revealed is the problem on God's side. Both are dealt with.

[Back to Top](#)

### **3:27-31**

When sin is taken away God's wrath is taken away and, because God has made peace for us, we can be at peace with Him. It is all God's doing, and all men stand in need of it. Where then is boasting? What is there that we can brag about or feel superior about? Nothing at all. The only thing we can rightly claim as our own is our sin and that is the problem, and the barrier which we cannot by ourselves remove. The only thing we can boast in or glory in is the Cross (Gal. 6:14). It is in hearing the proclamation of the glorious message of the saving death of Jesus that God, by His Spirit, quickens our hearts and enables us to see and to believe. There are no special classes of sinners, religious and irreligious, Jews and Gentiles, and there are not two ways of salvation. Every individual who will come must come through the "sinners' gate". There is only one way, and one salvation, and one people of God, sharing one life (Eph. 4:4-6). Note how Paul emphasises all the time that it is faith alone that saves (Eph. 2:8-9). It is a great exposure of human pride that we are so slow to say, "Nothing in my hand I bring". In the last verse Paul seems to be answering the objectors who say that by insisting that justification is apart from law (3:20); that righteousness is revealed apart from law (3:21); and that faith operates apart from law (3:28); then we are in effect removing all value or significance from the law of God, that is from the whole Old Testament. Paul denies this emphatically. The whole of the Old Testament confirms that the way of salvation is by faith, as the story of Abraham will show. But in concluding this section Paul is also preparing to guard the gospel against those who would say that if it is all of faith then the way we live is of no importance.

[Back to Top](#)

#### 4:1-8

It is always difficult to preach the gospel and to proclaim salvation by faith alone to people who have a religious disposition and upbringing. After all, religion is essentially self-centred and has to do with "works": what we do for the church, for God, for our neighbour. It is expressed by many in terms that if we do our bit God will do His and see us safe to heaven in the end. But that has never been the way of salvation. When an evangelical minister comes to a "typical" religious congregation and preaches the gospel he is regarded as preaching "something new", something not quite right in the tradition of our fathers. This is what the Jews were saying, and Paul takes them right back to their source and beginning in Abraham, showing that Abraham was justified by faith alone. Was it anything in Abraham's character or in his manner of life that made him acceptable to God? Paul's answer is an unqualified negative. After all, the story in Genesis reveals many flaws and failures in Abraham's life, some so serious that even pagan men rebuked him (Gen.20:1-10). Abraham believed what God said to him and about him and this was reckoned to him as righteousness or salvation (Gen. 15:1-6). Abraham had nothing to go on except God's word to him but he believed. No doubt he had fears, apprehensions and problems as to how it could be. But he believed God and acted on his faith rather than his feelings. He believed God. He trusted God. And he acted upon it. Faith is not just a mental believism. It is a personal trust, an obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5). It is a leaning in helplessness, putting your confidence and hope in another rather than in yourself. We should ask, not "Have I faith?" but rather "Is my faith in Christ, to do for me and give to me all that is promised?" If not, what are we putting our trust in for forgiveness and salvation?

[Back to Top](#)

#### 4:1-8

From the story of both Abraham and David, Paul makes clear that in the matter of "crediting", reckoning" (AV), "not reckoning", "forgiving" or "blotting out" sin the decisive action is God's. Only God can forgive sin. Only God can blot out sin and make the situation as if sin had never been. Only God can declare anyone righteous when in that person there is in fact no righteousness. There is no question of people having "worked" for salvation because God owed them nothing at all. There was no merit or deserving on their part which obliged God to take a favourable view. In Psalm 32:1-5 David rejoices because, knowing he was stuck with his sin and its consequence and that he could not undo what he had done, in the end he turned to God in the penitence of faith. God forgave him. God no longer reckoned his sin against him. It was God who did the forgiving, the reconciling and the accepting as righteous. David believed what God had said, namely that the blood of the Passover Lamb was the price of sin and the ground of forgiveness. Go back to v.5 and see that it is not trying but trusting that issues in salvation. To trust is to rest one's faith in the God who justifies the ungodly on the basis of the full and perfect sacrifice for sin made by Christ on the Cross. Note that it is not "because of" faith that we are justified. That would make faith a "work" that had merit and which contributed to salvation. It is God who justifies (8:33). It is God who makes the declaration: "Accepted for Jesus' sake". It is *by* faith or through faith that we are justified. Faith is the channel or the instrument by which we receive Christ's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). "Right standing with God is God's gift. It is appropriated by God-given faith (Eph. 2:8). To God therefore belongs all the glory. For human boasting there is no room what ever." (Hendriksen)

[Back to Top](#)

#### 4:9-12

Paul now goes on to show that justification, which is apart from works, is also apart from and in no way dependent on the ordinances of religion. There is nothing "extra" needed over and above faith and anyone who says there is denies the Gospel. Christ is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30) and He is everything else we need in salvation. We must always remember that the sacraments (God-ordained as they are) do not in themselves *do* anything. They are signs of something already done and done by God. They are outward signs of inward grace. They are not mechanical operations of grace. They point away from themselves (as visual aids should do) to the finished work of Christ which is the ground of our salvation, acceptance, justification and righteousness before God. Paul points out here that in Gen.15:6 Abraham was declared righteous in



God's sight when he believed. The rite of circumcision which was the sign and seal of God's covenant was not instituted until Gen. 17:9-10, some fourteen years later. The significance of this must have come home to the Jews with great power because before circumcision Abraham was technically not a Jew. It was circumcision that marked out the Jews as a different people. But if Abraham was justified by faith before he became a Jew then it was open to all Gentiles likewise to be justified by faith. The example given of Abraham (of whom the Jews were so proud) did not teach that men should become Jews; nor that they should trust in privilege as a chosen people; but that they should have faith; that they should trust in the promise of God; and that they should, like Abraham, live the life of obedience of faith. It is not the *mark* of faith (circumcision or baptism) that makes a man a child of God. Paul has already made this plain in 2:28-29 and he speaks of it again in Gal.3: 6-9; 5:1-6.

[Back to Top](#)

#### 4:13-15

Finally Paul insists that justification is apart from law, and to show this he places God's promise over against God's law. There is no devaluation of God's law, nor is there displacement of it from its right place. But the place and function of law have nothing to do with the ground of salvation. Abraham believed the promise of God, that is he put his trust and hope in God (Gen.15:1-6), and his faith was reckoned as righteousness or salvation. He was put in a right standing with God, and it was God's doing. The law of God in all its commandments was not given until Exod.20, four hundred years later (Gen.15:12-16). How then could the law, of which the Jews were inordinately and obsessively proud, have anything to do with Abraham's salvation or any other person's salvation? Did God change His mind about the way of salvation between Abraham's time and Moses? If He did, then Abraham's faith was null and void, and Abraham, the father of all who believe (11), would have died in his sins without hope. The "promise" in Old and New Testaments alike is peace through the blood of the Cross. Think again of the great hymnology of the church, so theological in its terms compared to modern chorology.

“Just as I am without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me  
“Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come.  
"Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve." (Elliott)

After all, says Paul, the law does not help anyone. It makes the sinner aware of his sin, it disturbs his conscience and makes him angry and resentful, and it makes plain that in God's sight he is a guilty sinner deserving of judgment. There is no salvation there. We shall read more about the function of God's law in 7:7-12; cf. Gal. 3:16-19.

[Back to Top](#)

#### 4:16-25

It is best to read this passage as a whole for it is summing up Paul's argument and leading us on into the next section of the epistle. Two themes occupy Paul here: the gospel and the God of the gospel; and both are illustrated from the story of Abraham. In v.16 the promise refers to the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation and which reveals the "righteousness of God", God's way of "righting" the sinner. It is all a matter of faith on man's side and free grace on God's side, and its promise is given and guaranteed to all people of all nations who share the faith of Abraham, that is, who believe as Abraham believed. How did he believe? He took God at His word. And we are in company with Abraham, our spiritual father, in the presence of God, if we also have believed (16-17). In the next verses (17b-22) Paul returns again to the story of Abraham's faith in relation to the promised birth of Isaac and there is reference to God as the One who gives life from the dead. Listening to and looking to his God in faith, believing that God could do and would do what He promised, Abraham believed in hope when on a human level there was no hope. He and his wife were as good as dead as far as having children was concerned. He considered his body and Sarah's womb and

recognised that there was absolutely no hope on the human level, just as there is no hope of the sinner by himself setting himself right with God. On the human level it just can't be done. Abraham recognised it to be so, but yet he took God at His word of promise and he believed. Doing so, he strengthened his own faith and gave glory to God, and God reckoned it to Abraham's account as righteousness and declared him to be justified by faith.

[Back to Top](#)

#### 4:16-25

Read again this glorious passage, not least because, having believed, Abraham went on to live a new kind of life in the obedience of faith. He spent the rest of his life learning to trust God ever more fully, as the story in Heb. 11: 8-19 makes plain. But it is not the *life* of faith, but rather *justification* by faith that is the theme here. Of course, as the beginning of the next chapter will make plain, everything flows from justification (5:1-2; cf. 8:29-30). Once a man is justified that man has life from the dead and nothing can change it. The God who justifies is the God who raises from the dead to newness of life in Christ Jesus. In the last phrase of v.17 the reference to "creation out of nothing" should make us think of the great affirmation in 2 Cor. 5:17 that if anyone be in Christ (justified and free of condemnation cf 8:1) then he is a completely new creation. The old has passed away and all is new. It is indeed resurrection to newness of life (6:1). This is how it was with Abraham, says Paul, and this is how it can be with all who believe (23-25). We too can be accepted by faith in Christ. All the promises of God are for us to believe and to inherit. All the glorious salvation that God has accomplished in Christ will be our possession as an accomplished fact, as Col.1:12-14 makes plain. And it will all be ours as the power and dynamic of life, as Eph. 1:18-21; 3:14-20 proclaim. Perhaps we should have left these references until tomorrow, for we have more than enough to ponder for one day and we must yet look carefully at v.25.

[Back to Top](#)

#### 4:25

Read this one verse in conjunction with the passages referred to at the close of yesterday's reading. Grasp the fact that Jesus died not only to bring sin to an end but to bring life to a beginning. When we take God at His word and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation God accepts us totally and irreversibly. This He does for Jesus' sake, and He regards us as being "in Christ". Our position in relation to God is different and our condition is different. We have been once for all delivered from the total record and guilt of our sins and transgressions. The wages of sin have been paid by Another on our behalf (Rom. 6:23). The gift of God, which is eternal life, is ours instead of our being dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). We have been raised to newness of life and we have inherited all the rich promises of God. The life we now live, we live by faith, resting on the promises and claiming as our own the power of the resurrection life of Christ. It is the resurrection of Christ that brings to light the fact of the completed work of Christ and assures us that sin has in fact been dealt with. Look again at Col. 1:12-14. We have been delivered from the realm where darkness and sin and Satan hold sway. That "kingdom" no longer has any "rights" over us who have been justified and accepted. The realm in which we now live is the kingdom of the Son of God's love. We have everything to live for, and it is this new life, the life of the justified sinner that Paul will now go on to expound.

[Back to Top](#)

#### 5:1-5

These verses need and deserve a series of sermons but we must simply focus on the salient and glorious truths for our blessing and encouragement in the practical business of living the Christian life. The first two verses summarise the position we are now in and the key words are Peace, Grace and Glory, which indicate a salvation that embraces the past, the present and the future. The first four chapters of Romans have laid the foundation. We have seen the need for justification because of God's wrath and man's sin. We have seen the ground of justification in the death of Christ, whereby God dealt with both sin and wrath. We have seen the way of justification to be by faith alone. Now we are taught the business of living by faith the life of the

justified. Look back to 1:17, "He who through faith is righteous, shall live." The sinner who is justified by faith has passed from death to life, and he has a life to live which is rich in grace. The reading of v.1 in both AV and NIV is better than RSV. Paul emphasises the accomplished fact of our justification. It is not something that has to be renewed day by day. *We have been* justified by faith. God has made the declaration regarding us, "Accepted for Jesus' sake," and nothing can change it: not our sins and failures, and certainly not our fluctuating feelings. A salvation that changes with our moods is no use at all. *We have* peace with God. All that is meant by the past, the recent past as well as the distant past, has been dealt with and put away. Indeed, the future is also dealt with, because nothing can change God's mind and action, and *He* has made peace with us through the blood of the Cross (Col. 1:20). It is everlasting peace, and we both stand on it and rest in it. It cannot and will not change (8:33-39).

[Back to Top](#)

### 5:1-5

God is at peace with us. We are at peace with Him. There is nothing between us. God has dealt with it all. The past can be allowed to go. If the Devil accuses us of anything, we refuse the charges (8:33) because God the judge dismisses the case. He will have nothing to do with accusations against His justified ones. We still need the counsel of 1 John 1:8-9, but that is a subject separate from our justification. Everything against us has been taken away; the account is clear; all is well (Col. 2:13-14). We also have free access, with no restrictions or limitations at all, into this grace in which we stand whereby the present is totally provided for. God does not do the "Legal" work, justifying us and declaring us righteous for Jesus' sake, and then leave us to go it alone. We are set in a new relationship with God, one that is personal and welcoming rather than formal. The access we have is into personal fellowship with God at God's invitation. It is God who wants it, and makes it possible. We are not in any sense kept waiting on the doorstep, under suspicion, while our credentials and our worthiness are examined. We are not strangers, but members of God's fireside family (Eph. 2:13, 18, 19). To put it in radical terms: we have as much right to enter God's presence as Jesus has, and we are loved *as* He is loved by the Father (John 17:23). This is the acceptance, fellowship and provision that are ours because we have been justified by faith. We stand in God's grace. We stand complete in God's grace which is all sufficient and will not fail. We rejoice in our position and privilege, not least because of what it means regarding prayer (Heb. 4:16).

[Back to Top](#)

### 5:1-5

If the past is dealt with (Peace) and the present provided for (Grace), then the future is guaranteed and we rejoice in the sure hope of the glory of God. There is immense assurance and confidence here, regardless of our immediate circumstances or condition. We stated this starkly on one occasion saying, "Salvation is God's business and He has never done a bad job yet". Of course our confident hope rests in God's confident assurance regarding Himself and all His work of salvation. According to Rom. 8:30 there is no possibility of the justified man falling away, because he is sealed for glory. His life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). He is destined for glory and it does not yet appear what he is going to be (1 John 3:2). But there is no doubt about it. He has nothing to fear and everything to hope for. And because these are the *facts* of his salvation he makes it his business to relate everything in his life to this sure hope of glory. The man of faith takes his bearings, not on the changeable things of this temporal world, but on the realities of the world to come (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:18; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3). Right through the Bible the men of faith looked to the future, believing that it was God's future. In a very real sense they were "heavenly minded", not in an escapist sense, but in a way that gave them drive and dynamic for the down-to-earth business of everyday Christian living.

[Back to Top](#)

### 5:1-5

Flowing from the message regarding peace, grace and glory is the practical realism with which we address ourselves to life's painful and perplexing experiences. Because we believe that God is "for us" (8:31) we do

not misinterpret such things as tribulations, or sufferings, or trials, or disappointments, or frustrations. Recognising the unreversible nature of our salvation and seeing that its end is not simply the salvation of our souls but the reinstating of our whole personalities and the integrating of them into the glorious purposes of God, we rejoice in all our experiences, however painful or costly. Of course, we must not be morbid and pretend or suggest that what is painful is pleasurable. It is not! And in the glory that is yet to be, there will be no more pain (Rev. 21: 4). It will be banished as unnecessary and undesirable. Struggles, battles, sickness, suffering, privation and persecution are not good things in themselves. But, under the providence of God, they work for our good and our glory. This glory we speak of is not an external, "spray-on" type of thing administered to us on our arrival in heaven. It is an inward work of character and personality, fashioning us into the very likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 4:16-18). To change the figure, tribulations work on us like the process of cutting and polishing a diamond to make it a thing of beauty and value that is admired. Tomorrow we must think of the process.

[Back to Top](#)

### 5:1-5

We know (although we often do not feel) that suffering can be a part of a gracious process producing Christian character. Consider along with today's verses Ps. 119:67, 71. That is realism. It is also honesty that views life from a spiritual standpoint, Too often we try to cover up when we are battling and struggling because we feel it is a denial or a contradiction of our spiritual life and commitment. Granted sometimes we have to struggle because we are doing wrong and are out of God's will. At other times the battles are the specific oppositions of Satan in the context of God-given work. But, whatever the source of the trials and tribulations and costly experiences, and whatever form they take, they are not to be regarded in any way as negative or destructive or unexpected. Read 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 4:12-14; Jas. 1:2-4 (especially J.B. Phillips' translation); and Heb. 12:5-11. Everything in God's dealings with us is positive and contributes to our blessing and glory. Of course it is only faith that can accept the sore pressures of life when they come. And only faith can rejoice in them, because only faith can recognise what these trials and pressures really are. One commentator says, "Tribulations are God's gracious gifts to help us on to glory." That means that when we are growing sluggish and careless in spiritual life, and are losing out in the blessings of life and service, the most effective thing God can do to get us out of the rut and back on to the high road of blessing is to send us tribulations or sufferings. It is not because God is against us. It is because He is "for" us that He deals in this way. It grieves His heart when He sees us losing out on the enjoyment of the riches of His peace, grace and glory.

[Back to Top](#)

### 5:1-5

A tract entitled "Answered Prayer" says that much of what happens to us is the answer to our own prayers and illustrates this by saying, "We pray for patience, and God sends tribulations, because tribulation works patience." This is why the believer must neither rebel nor submit hopelessly in the struggles of life. He accepts and interprets all experiences in the light of God's good purpose. He rejoices in, not because of, sufferings. He does not reckon that suffering is to be avoided at all cost. That is a worldly attitude. It is suffering that produces endurance or perseverance or continuance or patience. Difficulty does not demolish real faith. It strengthens and confirms it. It is flying into the wind that makes an aeroplane rise. The endurance spoken of here is not a cold or harsh thing. It is a work of grace in the soul and we must think of it as "patient" endurance. Those who have suffered most are those who show most patience with both God and man. Endurance produces character which carries the hallmark of authentic Christian experience. The "proof" of reality is to ourselves, not least in discovering what we can do and bear for Jesus' sake. In this way we find confirmation of our conversion and at the same time we prove that God's grace is in fact sufficient for everything. This in turn produces hope, which is confident expectation regarding the future. It is sure hope that does not disappoint because our eyes are on God. We are not in any sense ashamed (1:16) nor do we feel any need to be forever trying to justify our faith to ourselves or to others as if there was something untenable about it. And the reason for such confidence is simply the love of God.

[Back to Top](#)

### 5:6-11

In v.5 Paul has spoken of the love of God having been poured into our hearts by the indwelling Holy Spirit who is God's personal representative. That Spirit is constantly affirming and confirming to us from within our hearts that we are indeed the objects and recipients of the unqualified love of God. The love of God is made real to us, and in that love there is also made real in actual experience the awareness of justification, reconciliation, access into grace, life in His presence and the rejoicing in hope. Real Christianity is not abstract theology but real life and fellowship in the love of God by the Holy Spirit. In v.6 Paul then begins to elaborate his theme of the love of God, describing it in the most marvellous terms that should really overwhelm us. Paul is emphasising that justification by faith is not simply an objective statement regarding our standing with and acceptance by God. It is also a liberating power because, if the whole business of sin and, wrath has been put away, then there is no reason why the liberated sinner should not walk in newness of life in a wonderful friendship with God. That God desires this friendship is made plain by the wonder of His love. There is no point in protesting our unworthiness. That is an accepted fact. We *are* totally unworthy. But salvation has to do with free grace not worthiness, and our salvation is all from God. While we were helpless, not even aware of our need let alone able to do anything about it, Christ died for the ungodly. This is a staggering statement, totally in accord with the words of Jesus when He said that the healthy did not need a doctor but the sick did. He also said that He did not come to call the righteous, or those who thought they were worthy, but sinners to repentance (Lk. 5:31-32).

[Back to Top](#)

### 5:6-11

The theme of the redeeming love of God should fill our minds and hearts constantly. It is unprecedented and unparalleled. There was nothing in us to call it forth. There was no goodness (actual or latent) in us that made us deserving to be loved. This does not mean that we were as bad as we could have been. After all, sheer self-interest at times holds us back from the expression of all the powerful tendencies within us. When Paul speaks of the "ungodly" he is referring to us as sinners alienated from God (Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:21), adrift from God (Eph. 2:12), incapable of desiring to return to God let alone accomplish that return. Being sinners we are under the wrath of God (1:18) and under the power of sin (3:9). If there is to be salvation at all, then it must be by God's sovereign action. And, says Paul, God acted in love, while we were still sinners, and He sent His Son to die for us. This is how He showed His own love for us. Over against this kind of love, human love at its best is seen to be limited. We do not find it easy to love the unlovable. Indeed we are not drawn to love, let alone to die for, a coldly correct righteous man, who as far as we can see never does anything wrong. There is nothing attractive in that kind of righteousness. Perhaps for a good man with a warm, outgoing, caring personality someone might be willing to die. But, let us be honest. None of us, even at our best, is all that good at sacrificing time and energy for others, at least not to an extent that would seriously interfere with our own personal plans and inclinations. The thought of actually dying, or even dying-to-self, is not uppermost in our thoughts. But God is so different. He showed His love in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

[Back to Top](#)

### 5:6-11

Beginning at v.9 Paul begins to draw conclusions that are full of assurance regarding our salvation and the life we must still live here in the world. He emphasises the objective and therefore unassailable nature of our justification, speaking not of our faith but of the blood of Christ shed in His atoning death. God made peace through the blood of the Cross and by that blood we have free access into God's presence (Col. 1:20; Heb. 10:19; cf. Heb. 9: 14; Eph. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:19; 1 John 1:7). Through that atoning sacrifice we are freed from the wrath of God now, through all time, and at the Day of Judgment. We have nothing to fear; nothing that need disturb our peace. Note the emphasis on "much more". If the "great" work of atonement has set right our standing with God, how much more will our life of happy relationship with God be blessed in Christ. This is

why we can rejoice in God, instead of hiding from God and being afraid of God as sinner man in the Garden of Eden was doing. Paul seems to be thinking still of how the heart of God flows out to us in glorious love (8). It is when we begin to believe this that life really begins to change, especially in terms of learning to enjoy God. This is the life of reconciliation, and God enjoys it every bit as much as we do. The picture of God's "fireside family" in Eph. 2:19 and the words about "fellowship" in 1John 1:3 should occupy us a great deal more than they do. The God of salvation has made enemies into friends. "If God justifies and reconciles to himself enemies, he will certainly save friends." (Hendriksen) It really is no secret what God can do.

[Back to Top](#)

## 5:12-21

Read the whole of this passage but do not be deterred by its difficulty because we will go over it section by section. (One commentary takes two hundred pages to expound these verses). It seems best to link v.12 and 18, taking v.13-17 as an elaboration of the theme. Paul is describing and expounding the human situation as it affects all men. As natural born sons and daughters of Adam we are all under sin and death. As newborn sons and daughters of God in and through Jesus Christ we live in and under the abundant grace of God. For us who have believed the old order has indeed changed and has given place to the new. We who once lived "in Adam" now live "in Christ" and it is this contrast that Paul uses to expound ever more fully the glories of our salvation. Part of our difficulty in grasping this teaching stems from the individualism that marks so much of modern thinking. In terms of history and sociology we refuse to recognise that we are part of the product of the past. But we are not islands newly come into being. In terms of marriage many refuse to see that a new order of existence has begun and they insist on a continuance of individual independence. In terms of Christian life far too many refuse to set their individual experience of salvation into the context of the life of the church. In like manner, many people say, "Why should I be blamed and suffer for what Adam did?" The truth is that we are all inescapably linked with and headed up in Adam, the head of the human race. We are represented "in him" and consequently liable to penalty because of him and his action (5:12; 1 Cor.15: 21-22). Adam is the head of the human race. Christ is the head of the new humanity. This is the contrast.

[Back to Top](#)

## 5:12-21

Take the first three verses today. In v.12 we have the history of how sin intruded into the world. It has no right to be there, and God is totally against it. It was man's doing entirely and it brought death as its consequence (6:23) and the curse spread to all men. Over against that miserable and hopeless situation Christ came into the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26). When Paul says "all men sinned" he means that all sinned "in Adam" and we should remember this when we sing Wesley's great words regarding Christ dying for "Adam's helpless race", or Newman's words about "flesh and blood, which did in Adam fail," and the "second Adam (who) to the fight and to the rescue came." Of course, no one will glory in salvation until he sees the tremendous need for it and that is why Paul speaks of the entrance and function of God's Law (12, 20). In today's verses Paul is concerned to show that sin is not just a matter of actions that break the Law. Sin was in the world and its consequences operated long before the Ten Commandments were given. Being a sinner is not a matter of totalling up penalty points until the stage of disqualification is reached. From Adam to Moses there was no Law and no "counting" or imputing sin to individual accounts. But all still paid the penalty of death because all were fallen sinners. We don't have to *do* anything to become sinners. We are born fallen sinners, children of Adam, and that is why we do sinful acts. We are true to our nature. In this, we are "one" with our father Adam and are guilty in him. But, says Paul, Adam is the type or pointer to the other Man, "God's proper man", as Martin Luther called Him.

[Back to Top](#)

## 5:12-21

In v.15,16, 17 there are three contrasts rather than comparisons. In each case what we have in Christ is stated to be far greater and more glorious than what we lost in Adam. Adam brought into human experience trespass and its deserved consequence, but Christ brought the free gift of undeserved grace (15). Adam's sin had the

effect of bringing judgment but God's grace brought justification, a restored and permanent relationship (16). Adam's trespass brought in death which reigned in power over man. But through Christ abundant grace brought, not merely restored innocence, but positive righteousness. (right-ness with God) which in its God-given dynamic exercises its right to reign in the human situation to bring life. The destructive reign of death, with all its demoralising influence, is over (Heb. 2:14-15). This is Gospel indeed. Note how there is the promise and provision that in Christ we shall reign in life. It is not to be a pitiful and fitful struggle. There is abundant grace, full and free, to wash us clean, to lift us up, to restore, bless, redirect, gather in, comfort, strengthen and to cause us to triumph over every aspect of sin. Christ is the mighty conqueror and we are led along in His triumphal procession (2 Cor. 2:14). We do not battle *towards* victory. We *start* at victory in Christ. A whole new order of existence has been brought into being for those who are in Christ Jesus. This is the theme Paul returns to in the last verses of this difficult passage.

[Back to Top](#)

## 5:12-21

Paul now sums up the glorious transformation that is brought about by the gospel. Apart from Christ we stand in condemnation (18); we are sinners by nature, choice and practice (19); the Law of God declares and confirms our guilt and leaves us without excuse (20); and the whole of our life is lived under the tyrannical reign of sin and death (21). It is a truly terrible picture of a dark and desperate situation. In it the Law of God functions as an exposing light which also brings into focus and magnifies to our eyes and our understanding the sinfulness of sin. We begin to see sin as God sees it, and it is a good day for us when we at last begin to hate sin as God hates it. Now, it is when we see the terrible hopelessness of our position as sinners that we are hurried to Christ to see in Him the salvation God has worked for us who believe. In Christ we have absolute acquittal and life that is eternal (18); by Christ's obedience unto death we are made righteous, we are given righteousness, we are set right with God, we are justified in His sight (2 Cor. 5:21). As the Law reveals the greatness of sin so the grace of God is shown to be aboundingly great, so that not even the greatest sinner needs to despair; and the saving grace of God brings to an end the long reign of sin (21). The picture of "grace" taking the throne by right, and reigning in righteousness, promoting the interests and dominion of righteousness, is a glorious one. It is indeed, "eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." All that this means Paul will now go on to expound in practical terms that make sense of the battles of Christian life, which is the life of faith.

[Back to Top](#)

## 6:1-2

The life of faith involves believing what God has done for us and given to us in Christ, and living our lives from day to day on the basis of and in the power of that truth. It has to do with faith more than feelings, and we must grasp what is true about us (in Christ) even though we may not be aware of it. Indeed, many people find the battle with sin and temptation harder after they have become Christians. That is not surprising since before we became Christians we were not really aware of sin and its power. Now we are dealing not only with the guilt of sin (which has been dealt with in glorious forgiveness) but also with the power of sin, which has been broken for us in the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul now answers a practical question. If sin has been dealt with in Christ do we just stop taking sin seriously? By no means. The one thing a Christian cannot do is to take a light view of sin in the life of the believer. Sin has no right to be there. Before we came to Christ sin "called the tune". But sin has been dethroned. It no longer has any right to "lord it" over us, because we are *in Christ*. We are not under its jurisdiction any longer (Col. 1:13). A prisoner released with a free pardon may still be apprehensive every time he sees a policeman but he has to learn to stand in his rightful freedom. But that freedom is freedom to live in holiness, not to go on living in sin, indeed it is a contradiction that those who have died to sin (in Christ) could possibly go on living in sin. As far as Paul is concerned justification and sanctification cannot be separated, and a Christian who "comes to terms with" sin in his life is no Christian at all.

[Back to Top](#)

### 6:3-4

Paul's theme is the daily practical life of the justified sinner. He is dealing with sin, not just as individual and successive acts of transgression, but with sin as a power. In Christ, sin's guilt has been dealt with. But Christ does more for the sinner than that. "He breaks the power of canceled sin. He sets the prisoner free." (Wesley) When Jesus died and rose again He dealt once for all with sins, with sin (as a power), and with Satan (the source of all sin). This is the Full Salvation we delight to sing about, and it does not come to us on the instalment system. It is one glorious reality in Christ, and the victory Jesus won in His death and resurrection was won *for us*. He did not need it for Himself. His victory was total in the whole of His life. He died and rose again *for us*, on behalf of us: as our representative and substitute, and all He gained is put to our account. Paul expresses it in vivid terms that make plain the real spiritual position. In answering the call of the Gospel, believing unto salvation, and making public confession of that faith, we were baptised into Christ's death. We were incorporated into all that His death signified, namely a complete break with sin. We were effectively "finished off" in respect of the kingdom of sin. We were put to death and buried. And, just as Christ was raised from the dead, so we were raised to newness of life in Him. In Christ we are *in fact* (regardless of feelings or awareness) new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17). But it is only by recognising this fact and believing it and applying it that we can begin to live in the power of it. This theme Paul continues to expound in the following verse.

[Back to Top](#)

### 6:5-11

Keep clearly in mind that in conversion something decisive happened to us by the sovereign, powerful action of God in Jesus Christ. We were severed, cut off, from the past and transported into a new dimension of life, into a new kingdom or "world" in which sin has no rights over us (Col. 1:13). At this stage Paul is not appealing or exhorting, but simply expounding the facts of salvation which he describes as a death and a resurrection. In this salvation our "old self" or "the man I once was" was put to death. The "sinful body", that is, the body in which we live "viewed as sin's stronghold, medium, vehicle" (Moule), is put out of business so that it (and all it signifies of potential for evil) may no longer be available for "sin" to use in order to tyrannise our lives. This must be of glorious comfort and hope to those who are aware of all the complicated propensities of human nature. In Christ there is no longer any need for us to be dominated and tormented by these deep human drives and temptations. Paul speaks in Rom. 7:24 of deliverance from "this body of death" and in Phil. 3:21 of our "lowly body" or our "body of humiliation" being finally and gloriously changed. What he is emphasising here is that what is going to be in the world to come can increasingly be true of us right now in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. After all, he speaks in Ephesians of the power of the resurrection being within us (Eph. 1:19; 3:16-21). As we study these difficult verses keep thinking of the phrase in the hymn, "Think what Spirit dwells within you," (Lyte). If we can grasp the truth then the possibilities will thrill us and will begin to be practical.

[Back to Top](#)

### 6:5-11

Note that six times in v.3-8 Paul emphasises the fact that in Christ we have died a death that is final in respect of all we once were. In v.7 he emphasises that death "pays all debts and cancels all obligations" (J. Philip) not just in respect of guilt but in respect of the power of sin as referred to in v.6. Keep in mind that this chapter began with the question of having an easy attitude to sin and as the argument proceeds we should be finding in our own hearts the kindling of an increasing desire to be done with sin. Now, if we have been "done to death" in the death of Christ, and if sin's dominion has likewise been "done to death" in the death of Christ (cf. "It is finished!") then the resurrection of Christ opens up limitless new possibilities. It means that we are set free to live. Think of the story of the raising of Lazarus and the words, "Loose him and let him go" (John 11:44 AV). The picture being built up is of Christ's total victory over all we mean by sin and death. Death could not hold Him (Acts 2:24). It had no power to do so, and the fact was made public by the resurrection. This victory was indeed once for all, and can never be reversed (10). Now note the sequence of words in v.8, 9, 11. We believe, we know and we must consider or reckon. The facts of Christ's death and resurrection are



known. We believe the significance of that death and resurrection as Paul has been expounding it. And by faith we take our stand upon the truth to live by it. We "consider", we "count", we "reckon" but we do not "imagine" because that last word signifies fiction whereas we are dealing with spiritual facts. Reckon on these facts, and live in Christ's victory.

[Back to Top](#)

## 6:12-14

Read these verses and then consider this quotation from the commentary by Hendriksen. "What has been established, namely, that believers are in principle dead to sin and alive to Christ, must become the abiding conviction of their hearts and minds, the take-off point for all their thinking, planning, rejoicing, speaking, doing. They must constantly bear in mind that they are no longer what they used to be. Their lives from day to day must show they have not forgotten this." The commentary goes on to speak of how we are chosen in Christ, redeemed in Christ, and live in Christ (Eph. 1:4,7; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21; 2 Tim. 2:11). We are also raised from the dead in Christ and seated in heavenly places (Eph. 2:5-6) and because this is so we are called to set our hearts and thoughts on the things that belong to resurrection and glory (Col. 3:1-4). The passage in Colossians goes right on (as Romans 6 does) to call for a putting to death of what has no place in the Christian life and a putting on of the graces of Christ Himself (Col. 3: 5-17). In regard to today's verses we need to grasp yet again the "reckoning" in v.11 because without it we will try to live in our own strength instead of in the strength of Christ. We are not to "imagine" ourselves dead to sin, nor to try to "feel" that we are dead to sin. Nor are we for a moment to think that sin and temptation are dead to us. We will learn as Paul goes on that the old nature and the new nature fight against each other with bitter hatred (Gal. 5:17). But, and this is the vital issue, the battle is not an equal-sided one. The victory has been won and Christ has conquered *for* us. In Him, we are more than conquerors (8:37), and we have to stand our ground and claim the victory that is ours by right.

[Back to Top](#)

## 6:12-14

If Christ has conquered sin and broken its power on our behalf Paul has made clear the practical attitude we must take. Of course, we must keep our eyes on the right place, not looking at our reckoning but looking to Christ's victory. We are summoned to act on the basis of facts. We are to take hold on the life that is ours by right (1 Tim. 6:12). We are to work out the full salvation which God has planted in our hearts by Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:12). Do not be yielding your "members", your capacities and potential, to the military service of sin, as if sin reigned as a king over you. As the natural passions and wrong longings of your personality demand expression, keep them under lock and key in the name of Jesus. They will plead, clamour and blackmail you for opportunity. They will even say that you will harm yourself if you do not "ease the pressure" by giving in, but you must not listen. By whatever avenue sin would approach, you have the right and the authority to raise your hand like a policeman and stop the unholy traffic. You have the "chief of police" within you and all the authority and power of the eternal throne backs you up. Say to yourself, "As a believer, I am in Christ and Christ is in me. Between me and the kingdom of sin a great gulf of death has been fixed. It may shout across at me to entice or threaten me, but I turn my back and give myself now to my rightful King to go with Him and to serve Him." Yield yourself to God. You are under new management, to serve righteousness. Keep thinking of what you are, a man or a woman brought from death to life and from the power of Satan to God, and act accordingly. Think how a newly married bride has to remind herself of who she now is lest she uses or responds to her former name. As she grasps her new position so her manner of life will be established. So Paul insists that if we grasp the facts, live by them, and refuse the false claims of sin, then sin will not have dominion over us.

[Back to Top](#)

## 6:15-23

Paul has declared that we are not under law with its demands, commands and condemnations. In the whole business of salvation and life we live under and in the realm of grace, God's free undeserved grace. But that

does not mean we can go on sinning. There is a practical choice to be made. Once we had no choice. We were under the mastery of sin. But that slavery has been broken by Christ and we are set free. What are we to do with this new-found freedom? Are we to choose to sin and so be led back into slavery and the kind of life that robbed us of everything (21)? Pause here and consider just how the process of slavery to sin operates. The first time we transgress in a certain area we are shocked and resolve that we will never again do such a thing. But we do it again, and our reaction is not so radical. In no time at all we have adjusted our reaction and a habit is formed and we are well on the way to a slavery from which we cannot break free. We come to accept sinning in that area of life as "normal" and "acceptable". Paul insists, as James does, that sin when it is full grown, when *it is finished* (AV) its ravaging of life and personality, brings death (Jas. 1:14-15). No man is ever really free. He is in bondage to what he is and to what he is becoming. His daily choices are of immense significance. Apart from Christ he is lost and hopeless indeed. In Christ the gates of life stand open, but what a tragedy if he does not enter in. He must choose his master and in yielding to that master he will serve either sin or God. This is the choice. What kind of life are we going to live? It is a matter of serving God or serving sin. It is a matter of life or death. Did Paul have in mind the exhortation in Deut. 30:15-20?

[Back to Top](#)

### 6:15-23

Grapple with this passage again. It *is* difficult but repays study. We are not under Law, in the sense that Law is not a means of salvation. We are not justified and reconciled by trying hard but by trusting, by responding in faith to the truth presented to us (17). But faith is married to and authenticated by obedience, which leads us on to live in a way that is pleasing to God. There is no question of believers living in whatever way they feel inclined. The Law of God (The Ten Commandments) still stands as an expression of God's will for our lives and God's pattern for our behaviour. We have been set free from our old master in order to be bound in glad slavery to our new Master and, because we love our Master, our one desire is to live so that He will be pleased. Through all the strong challenge here there is also the note of tremendous hope and possibility. In v.19 Paul seems to refer to greater and greater righteousness and sanctification. In v.20 he reminds us that at one time we were dead in sin and dead to righteousness, for these things were of no significance to us. Now, in Christ, we are dead to sin and alive to righteousness. Do you want to go back to the kind of person you once were and the kind of life you once lived? Do you not remember the bondage, brokenness, darkness and death of it? What do you get now (22)? You get sanctification, all we mean by purity, holiness, health and wholeness: things you will never need to be ashamed of. Let us all be quite clear as to the issue. The wages of sin is death. You get what you deserve, and God is judge. But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The fact that we say with glad warmth of heart, "Our Lord", signifies that we have made our choice of Master. If so, never forget it.

[Back to Top](#)

### 7:1-6

However difficult these chapters of Romans are we must admit they are practical and realistic and they help us to make sense of daily Christian experience. They make sense to those who by God's grace are resolved to be serious about sin, salvation and sanctification. They help us to see that the whole of Christian life has to do with faith, that is, believing what God has done for us, given to us, and made us in Jesus Christ. So often our inward feelings and our outward circumstances, reactions and experiences seem to deny the truths of our salvation and we have to *fight to believe* what we are reading and receiving in God's Word. The challenge is: are we going to believe the steady, unchanging truth of what God says or are we going to believe and be manipulated by the ever-changing feelings and fears that surge in our minds and hearts? If we say that we are going to believe what God says, then we have to get to grips with what is being stated here in Romans in a very systematic way. It takes time and effort. It cannot all be said in a few short, easily memorised verses. We are not yet half through the epistle and Paul is still expounding salvation by statement and illustration, urging us to grasp the truth, saying, "Do you not know?" (6:3). He goes on, "We know" (6:6, 9). The same pattern is repeated in 6:16; 7:1, emphasising the importance of grasping the truth in order to live in the power of it. We will lay out tomorrow a systematic summary of the ground covered so far but finish today by affirming, on

the basis of our studies, that the essential hallmark of true Christian experience is conflict *and* victory. We never leave conflict behind. Indeed, it is only as we take a determined stand against sin in our lives that we begin to know its power and potency. But it is not a miserable, unequal struggle. It is a determined and confident stand in the victory of Christ.

[Back to Top](#)

## 7:1-6

Consider the ground we have covered in these detailed studies.

1;1-17 Theme introduced - The Righteousness of God.

1;18 - 3:20 Righteousness lacking in man - and the final verdict (3:19-20)

3:21 - 8.39 Righteousness provided by God - final affirmation that we are more than conquerors (8:39).

From 3:21 the theme is the new life of the believer and it is expounded in terms of freedom. In Christ, in the power of His death and resurrection, by the indwelling of the Spirit, we are set free to live life to please God. Again and again this is expounded in terms of contrasts.

Under wrath (1:18) is the position of man as a sinner. cf. John 3:18,36.

Free from wrath (5:9) is the position of the man in Christ. This is illustrated by "two men". We are in Adam or in Christ.

Under sin (3:9) is our position and our condition as sinners. We are not free. We are slaves.

Free from sin (6:7) that is, free from its dominion. This is what it means to be in Christ. This is our position; and we are in a position to give sin its marching orders no matter how persistently it approaches us. This is illustrated in 6:1-14 in terms of baptism. We are incorporated into Christ and His death and resurrection are given to us. In 6:15-23 the illustration is of two masters and our position is that of being under new management, a position in which we are free to serve the new master in righteousness. Now, we are ready for chapter seven.

[Back to Top](#)

## 7:1-6

The third illustration of the believers' union with Christ is that of being married to a new husband. The previous illustration concerned allegiance to a new master (6:15-23) and the first concerned our incorporation into the new head of humanity (6:1-14). In chapter 3:19 Paul had declared us *under law* and in 6:14 he declared us *free from law*. This new illustration emphasises again that we have been totally and righteously (nothing underhanded about it) set free from all former legal bondage and obligation and are free to take on another commitment. And it is a commitment of a very personal kind that brings forth fruit unto holiness. A death (and Paul is speaking of the death of Christ) dissolves the union, changes the situation and the position of the one remaining, so that (and Paul is thinking of the resurrection of Christ) a new life of union can begin. Put it this way: our disastrous first marriage to "the self we once were" has been ended by the death of Christ, *so that* we might belong to another (Christ) in a union of life and love that is full of possibilities. In our old "married" position the natural inclinations of personality and appetite confronted by the prohibitions and demands of God's law were aroused into rebellious activity producing a life that called for the sentence of death. The law of God was cold and forbidding, a veritable "hound of heaven" denying us both peace and freedom. But now we are no longer under the tyranny of law but under the freedom of grace, which Paul speaks of here as the new life of the Spirit, which theme he will expound in the next chapter after he has concluded his exposition of the function of the Law.

[Back to Top](#)

## 7:7-12

Paul has already made significant and yet somewhat puzzling statements about God's law (5:20; 6:14; 7:5) so now he proceeds to explain the place and function of Law. He is very aware that the believer being "in Christ" belongs to a new order of life but he still lives out his new life in the context of a sinful and disordered world which still lies under the wicked one (1 John 5:19). Sin is still a factor to be reckoned with

in daily experience. But when the believer sins he goes right to Christ, not just for forgiveness but to affirm and to be confirmed in the fact that sin cannot cancel or undo his salvation. This is an immense relief and a powerful encouragement and incentive in the battle to be good, pure and true. Now, where does the Law fit into all this? The Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3: 23-25 AV). The Law was our custodian, and we needed the custody! But, the Law had a terrible effect. When it stood over against sinful, man it awakened in him an awareness of sin that he had not previously had and it roused in him a determined desire to defy both the prohibitions and the demands of the law. Think how a sign, "Keep off the grass", or "Wet paint, do not touch", makes you want to do the very thing that is forbidden. Think how some religious, self-righteous church-attenders find themselves under a new ministry which simply reads and expounds the Scriptures and how they hate it for no other reason than that it demolishes their self-righteousness and marks them out as sinners who need a Saviour. This is what Paul is saying. Sin saw its chance and made use of the Law which forbade coveting and stirred up in him all manner of coveting which he did not know he was capable of. This thought will lead us on soon to face the battle with sin.

[Back to Top](#)

### 7:7-12

To live under the Law is to be ground into death by failure. It is to be exposed as a sinner to a depth and intensity you never dreamed of. And it is to be awakened to the elemental battle between good and evil. But in Christ we are not living under the Law. Yet the Law still stands as a revelation of God's eternal righteousness of character and standards. For the believer the Law is like a sheepdog. So long as we keep the path and obey the shepherd's will we are free and it will leave us alone. But if we stray or rebel and take ourselves outside our "in Christ" position then the Law will snap and snarl at us in order to drive us back to safety. Even when we know this we still resent it, just as we resent the sermons that probe and challenge our secret conscience. So we see that law and sin are still factors in the life and experience of the believer. "As to his position in Christ, he is free from sin; but this freedom has to be wrought out by the active 'reckoning' of faith whereby he strives to enter into the rest it offers (6:11, 12, 18, 19). This 'fight of faith' is the conflict described in 7:7-25, in relation to the law and its working in the believer's life." (Jas. Philip) There are many arguments and speculations about the interpretation of chapter 7. Is Paul speaking of the experience of a believer or an unbeliever? Is he describing the experience of an unsatisfactory Christian who "needs to move on into the victory of Romans 8"? Is he speaking, as some suggest, of a man who is neither regenerate nor unregenerate? (What other state is there?) Is he speaking of a man under conviction of sin but not yet brought to faith? It seems best to think of Paul looking back on his past experience in v.7-12 and speaking of his present experience in v.13-25. Now we must follow his words closely.

[Back to Top](#)

### 7:13-20

Read carefully and see the vital lesson Paul learned through the operation of the Law convicting his soul. He learned to see sin in its true light (13). How we need to see and to feel the sinfulness of sin! This is the work of God's law, but in a very real sense it is only after we have come to Christ in faith and have grown in grace that we begin to understand sin as it really is. It was at the end of his ministry that Paul described himself in total honesty as the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). The closer we get to Christ the more the light shows the depths of sin. "They who fain would serve Thee best are conscious most of wrong within" (Twell's). Viewing the passage this way helps us to see that Paul is not speaking here of his unconverted days because he hates sin (15) and he delights in the law of God (22) and he wants to be good (19). Nor is he speaking of what we call a "defeated" Christian. He is speaking of a battling Christian in whose life the mighty confrontation with sin is being waged and won. In v.14 when Paul says he is unspiritual ("carnal, sold under sin" AV), he is not making an assessment of his spiritual condition. He is in fact expressing the truth that, Christian though he be, he is still a flesh-and-blood man living in a world marked by sin and open to all the temptations common to man. "For the present the Christian is living in an era in which two ages, the old and the new, overlap. There was a time when Paul was *exclusively a sinner*. There will be a time when he will be *exclusively a saint*. Right now, as he is dictating this letter, he is a *sinner-saint*. A 'saint' to be sure; but also still a 'sinner';

hence the tension, the inner conflict. It is a struggle which every true believer experiences, and about which the apostle continues to speak." (Hendriksen)

[Back to Top](#)

### 7:13-20

It is the shallow man who will think he is "doing quite well". The man in Christ who presses on towards the mark of the high calling of God is the one who will always say that he has not met his own standard, let alone God's. The Spirit of God in his heart has awakened a deep and holy desire to be good, but there is still a perverse contradiction operating in opposition. When he does what that contrary spirit suggests and urges, he hates it. He knows that he is "in Christ" and that that is the truth about him, and he delights in God. But he is still "in the flesh" and that is where sin has its point of contact. Paul declares the conflict and in it he disowns the stirring of the "old nature" within him and he affirms that he is Christ's. When he says "It is no longer I but sin dwelling in me" he is not excusing himself or his sinning. He would make his confession, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:14-15), and he stands by faith to resist and to refuse all enticements to evil. He recognises that there is a Quisling, a traitor element within seeking to bring down the kingdom. But he will not let it do so. Whatever the source of these strong contradictions of all that is holy (and we cannot forget the crafty stratagems and insinuations of the Devil) Paul insists they are no part of his "true self" in Christ. Hold together v.17, "No longer I but sin which dwells within me", and Gal.2:20, "No longer I but Christ who lives in me." There are two natures in the believer and they are locked in combat. But it is not an equal struggle. Christ is the victor. This is what we must stand on. The truth about us is that we are in Christ. Our heart and flesh cry out for the living God. But there is something or someone there, an evil squatter who has no right to be there. It is Paul's own sinful nature and he makes it plain that it is not welcome and every time it shows its face it will be shown the door. He disowns it and all its "smell" and influence, and is determined it will not spoil his new life.

[Back to Top](#)

### 7:21-25

Paul is summing up his argument and says he finds a rule or a principle operating, namely that when he most wants to do right evil lies close at hand (cf. Gen. 4:7). It may not be permissible to introduce the thought of the Devil here (he is not mentioned) or even the undoubted demonic element in all we mean by sin, but we must reckon on the fact that we are in the midst of foes. And the enemies are not always outside our selves. This is one reason why we need to be aware of the areas of our personalities where we are most likely to be assailed. The Devil will not attack us at our strong points but with sleepless ill-will he will stand over against us, stirring up and working through the insistent motions of the old nature that remain within us. The suddenness with which evil passions and foolish notions and irrational impulses and actions can break in on us marks them out as to their origin and nature. Remember how Satan left Jesus but waited for his opportunity to come again to attack His glad commitment to the Father (Lk. 4:13). Go on to v.22. Does not your whole being cry out "Amen" to that statement? That is the truth about us in Christ. We delight to do the will of the Father. We know we are being true to ourselves when we so live. Our inmost self is our "inner man" or "new nature" which Paul speaks of so often (Eph. 3:16; Col. 3:9, 10). He longs to live and serve God with his "true self", unhampered by all the human and bodily complications that are part and parcel of his life. It is as if he cried out, "Oh, to be rid of it all!" Only a believer could long like this to be free to serve God and to live in unbroken fellowship with God. Little wonder Paul longed to be with Christ which is far better (Phil. 1:23).

[Back to Top](#)

### 7:21-25

We still need to grasp the glorious affirmation of the last verse because if we fail to do so we will be left with the impression that Christian life is a costly and disappointing struggle in which failure is the dominant note. We cannot ever stop being sinners so long as we live in this world. There will always be the tension between our "true self" and the "old self" but it is not in any sense a struggle between equals. The "flesh" is the

intruder and will most certainly be driven out. The reality of the continuing battle does not in any sense cancel out the reality of the victory. Think of it in territorial terms to help ourselves to grasp the truth. It is one thing to plant the flag but another to claim the territory and to colonise it to serve the king. It is one thing to have the victory but another to proceed to root out all the remaining pockets of the enemy's power. Think of the story of Joshua. The land of Canaan was given to him by God. It was signed, sealed and delivered, and the land together with all its blessings was his by right. But every step of it had to be fought for and taken possession of and it was not done without mistakes and reverses, even though these reverses were not necessary and could have been avoided. There will always be the sense of wretchedness when we fail, and we should thank God for this. It would be terrible if we, who belong to Christ, could sin and not be miserable. At the same time we must never lose our rightful hope in Christ. Our salvation will not fail nor remain incomplete. We are saved in hope (8:24). It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). We give thanks to the God who gives us the victory (1 Cor. 15:56,57 and because we believe we go on, refusing to let the enemy, be it sin, self or Satan, have the last word (Micah 7:7-8).

[Back to Top](#)

## 8:1

This is a glorious text for life and for death. It is absolute in its affirmation and it brings peace. If we link it with 5:1 and remind ourselves that justification is the act of God in His free grace, then we are made aware that the salvation we have partakes of the perfection of God Himself. There are no flaws or defects or limitations in it. Sin, in its guilt and power has been dealt with. That salvation has been given to us in Christ and we are led on to the end of this chapter. In v.37 Paul affirms that no matter the circumstances of experience nor the complications of personality, in terms of the life of righteousness we are conquerors by a clear margin of victory through Jesus Christ. All this is our practical possession and has become our actual experience through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who has only been mentioned once in 5:5. This Spirit has been given to us, and from 8:1-17 the theme is Life through the Spirit. Now, there is much confusion about this theme, and to set our course through the chapter we make general observations. People ask, "How can I make this life of victory, holiness and sanctification, this life of peace and joy, my own? How can I win the victory over the world, the flesh and the devil when I am so conscious of the persistent stirrings of sin within me?" The answer is, "By the Holy Spirit." Then some say, "How can I find and receive this Holy Spirit through whom I can win the victory?" The answer is, "You have Him. He has been given to you." This is what it means to be a Christian as 8:9-11 makes plain. Some people protest and say that they have not experienced certain things that others have experienced and which they claim to be *the* sign and confirmation of the Spirit's presence and power. But we must live by the truth of God's Word and not by the testimony of other people's experiences. The Holy Spirit was given the moment we trusted Christ for salvation (5:5). The Word of the Gospel is beyond question. The experience of others is open to question.

[Back to Top](#)

## 8:1-7

It seems best to chart our course through this chapter. In v.1-17 the theme is Life through the Spirit. In v.18-30 the theme is Sufferings and Glory. In v.31-39 the theme is More than Conquerors. Within that framework, as we shall see, there are further glorious themes to consider. In v.14-17 Life in fellowship with God; v.18-25 Life of significant purpose; v.26-27 The Life of prayer; v.28-34 The Life of assurance; and v.35-39 Life inseparable from God. This is Christian life and it all stems from v.1 which is in itself a summary of and conclusion from the exposition of the first seven chapters. There is now no condemnation of any kind nor can any condemnation ever intrude to spoil or prevent this glorious life which we now live under new management in Christ Jesus. Anything that could possibly be brought up against us we answer by saying, "Yes, God knows that and He has dealt with it" (33). That is the beginning of freedom from fear, blackmail and bondage. Sin has been dealt with. It is no longer on the agenda for discussion. Everything to do with sin, whether acts or failure to act; sin as a sickness, condition, accuser or power has been dealt with. A new order of existence has begun and there is no condemnation. The new order or principle of life in the Spirit has set us free from the old rule and dominion of sin and death. This is blessed freedom indeed. Think how often we

let sin, past as well as present, intrude to spoil not only our enjoyment of God but our service of God. We are like the characters in a cartoon strip, with shoulders hunched and heads bowed and a dark black cloud over us. It need not be so. There is *now* no condemnation.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:1-7

Under the new regime "in Christ Jesus" we are set free to live. In this new order of things sin has been dethroned and the Holy Spirit within us is the present, constant, living director, controller, restrainer, exhorter, inspirer and enabler. As a result (4) all God's will can be fulfilled in us who no longer walk in the flesh as mere men but who walk in the Spirit as children of God. We have this new life and we must reckon on it (6:11) and we must work out what is in fact within us (Phil. 2:12-13). All that this life is and means is expounded as the chapter goes on. Here in v.3-4 the emphasis is again on what God has done in sending Jesus Christ. This is the basis of the Spirit's work within us. God sent His Son as a true man, just like ourselves but without sin. That in itself makes plain that sin is not needed in order to live a real human life. It is a lie of the Devil that we are tempted to think otherwise. God sent His Son in relation to sin in order to condemn sin, to sentence it to death and to take its power away. The Law could and did express total disapproval of sin but it could never deal with sin, because the weakness of fallen human nature inclined man's choice always towards sin. But now that the sinner is justified and there is no condemnation he is set free to live, and in that life the indwelling Spirit of God creates new desires and a new attitude to life. He sets about the business of moulding and fashioning our whole way of life and producing in us the fruit of the Spirit in the likeness of Christ (Gal. 5:16-25). The possibilities are limitless. They are also sure.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:1-7

In v.5-7 it becomes clearer that in all we mean by justification there has taken place a new spiritual birth. The man who has believed in Christ unto salvation is a different kind of man from an unbeliever and he has a different kind of life. Consider John 3: 3-8; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; 1 John 3:9. Now, a man will express in his attitudes and actions what he is by nature and thus you can tell what a man is by examining what he sets his mind on. We can examine ourselves by considering what are the dominant themes of our own thought life. What are we "keen" on? Is it self, or others, or Christ, or the will of God for our lives? Think of the tremendous change in Paul's own disposition. Before he was laid hold on by Christ he was a ruthless, self-righteous religious man (Acts 9:1, 2; Phil. 3:3-14) but afterwards he counted it his greatest privilege to serve Christ and to live to please Him (Eph. 3:8). Right at the start of the epistle Paul spoke of those who took the side of and lined themselves up with those whose chosen pattern of life was to live according to the dictates of the "flesh" (1:32). How easy it is to take the side of sin because it appeals to us or because we like the people who are sinning. This is not the life-expression of those who live by the Spirit. The disposition of life will take either God's side or the world's side and, as 1 John 2:15-17 says, if we love the world the love of the Father is not in us. As Jesus says, it is out of the heart that the stream of life flows (Matt. 15:19) and a man can be identified by what shows in his life. By their fruits they are known (Matt. 7:16-20). There are consequences which follow upon our chosen life-disposition and choice (6). There is also a condition of life which Paul describes as hostile to God (7; cf. Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 1:21).

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:8-11

In v.8 Paul sums up the contrast expressed in v.1-7 and leads on to the affirmation in v.9-11 which deal with the indwelling Spirit of God. Note the emphasis in v.8 of "pleasing God." This is central to the whole of Christian life and service. If God is pleased then all is well. And, by the Spirit, we can live a life that pleases God. But it is vital that we should know and believe that the Spirit of God in all His fullness and dynamic does in fact live in our hearts. The Spirit, being a Person and not an influence or mere power, is indivisible. If He is there in our hearts He is there in completeness. If He is not there we are not Christians at all. Note the interchangeability of the terms used in these few verses: the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ,

Christ Himself, the Spirit of God who raised Christ, and finally, His Spirit which dwells in you. This fact of the indwelling Spirit is quite fundamental to our understanding of the gospel. If we are Christians; if we have believed unto salvation; if we have been justified by faith so that there is now no condemnation, then the Spirit of God, the third Person in the eternal Trinity, the powerful executor of God's purposes in creation and redemption (Gen. 1:1-2; Heb. 9:14) dwells within us to quicken us and to make us alive with newness of life. All that God is and has is in Christ, and Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, in the power of the Spirit (Col. 1:19; 2:9-10; Eph. 1:19; 3:14-20). It is the presence of the Spirit that explains our new desire to go to God and to be with God and to live to please Him. Think of this verse from a hymn on the Holy Spirit:

"And every virtue we possess,  
And every victory won,  
And every thought of holiness  
Are His alone." (Auber)

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:12-13

In v.1-11 Paul has expounded the life we have in Christ by the indwelling Spirit. Now he calls for action on the basis of the facts of life. This putting to death of the deeds of the body is not to be thought of as a "punishing" of the body in terms of strict and radical self-denial, nor is it conforming to a pattern of "holiness" which becomes more and more a strait-jacket of human prescription (Col. 2:20-23). It is a deliberate choice of life in which we will have nothing to do with things God cannot bless. Paul will speak later in 13:14 about making no provision for the flesh and this calls for wise administration of our lives. There is no excuse for going *near* sin, let alone going *into* sin. If we choose deliberately to walk on the edge of the precipice of temptation then sooner or later we will fall. The decision and choice have to be made at the right time. Yes, it is costly, and Paul speaks of it as a death we have to die. Read Psalm 1 and see how specific and practical it is. It has to do with choosing where we sit or stand; who we choose to go with; and what will issue from our choices. If, by the power of the Spirit within, we call the tune, act as censor, and say "no" to sin, then we shall live, and our life will be one of fellowship with God which is the next theme Paul speaks of (14-17). Why must there be this rigorous non-cooperation with sin? Sin shadows the face of God, it grieves the Spirit within us, it spoils our fellowship with God, brings confusion and fear, steals our pleasure in God and hinders and narrows our usefulness in service. Sin has a very big price.

[Back to Top](#)

### 5:12-13

Note that in the previous verses 9-11 the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are spoken of in a way that signifies the essential unity of the Holy Trinity. In our thinking about salvation and life we must keep the three Persons together and in their right order, so that all our worship is directed to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. The significance of v.10-11 is hard to grasp. It seems to be that the believer still has to die just as others do (unless Christ comes 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13). But the believer does not live under the power of death, which dominates people far more than they ever admit (Heb. 2: 15). In Christ we belong to the new order but its full realisation is "not yet". We live our lives in Christ in the context of the world of sin and death, but we are not under its control, and we do not need to go the way of the world. Indeed, we must not. So then (12) because we are Christ's and because the mighty Holy Spirit of God lives within us, we are under obligation to live as men and women who are destined for glory. We owe nothing to the "flesh" and must grant it no "favours" or concessions, for that is the way of death. No matter how much the promptings, the hungerings and the demands of the flesh stir within us, there is no need to capitulate because Christ the conqueror is within us by His Spirit. This is a practical issue and involves the "putting to death" of the deeds of the "body". But the issue is life, and the nature of that life is fellowship with God (14-17).

[Back to Top](#)



## 8:14-17

The life of fellowship with God is a life in which sin is dealt with (12-13), and a life of reassuring sonship, in which we discover increasingly our true identity, our function in service, and our destiny of glory (30). Right through this chapter Paul emphasises the assurance and confidence that should mark the life of the believer. There is no condemnation (1), there are no mistakes (28), no accusation (33) and no separation (38). This is life in Christ by the Holy Spirit. In today's verses the emphasis turns from the resolute battle against sin to the tender awareness of being the children of God. But note carefully the word "for" in v.15. It signifies that it is those who are determined to put to death the sinful deeds of the body who show themselves to be the sons of God. This is how the Spirit of God will lead us, and if we have a careless attitude to sin then we are not being led by the Spirit. The exhortation and the enabling of the Spirit are always urging us to be true to what we are in Christ and urging us to remember that we are able to be this by the Spirit's presence and power. We do not live in uncertainty. And the Spirit leads us on into the life of sanctification so that we who are the sons and daughters of God might live lives that manifest the family likeness in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). In this life we must remember that we are not slaves, serving a master and fearing punishment for disobedience or failure. We are children of God. God is our Father, and the words used signify a Father of tenderness and care. But a true Father is always proud of His children (Heb. 11:16) and even when they sin they are still His children. He will discipline them but he will not dismiss them and replace them as if they were mere servants (cf. 1 John 3:1-3; John 1:12; Heb. 12:5-11).

[Back to Top](#)

## 8:14-17

Link the thought of our being children of God with Paul's words in Eph. 2:19 about our being members of the household of God. (Some commentators say "members of God's fireside-family"). It speaks of our full entitlement as children born into the family of God. We who are children by adoption (God having chosen us, placed us as sons and daughters, and given us the spirit of sonship or adoption) are given the same place and rights as the First-born Son. The Christians in Rome would understand this because by Roman law an adopted son had the full rights of other sons. We are fellow-heirs with Christ of all the future blessings which are planned and purposed by God for His people. That this inheritance is glory, and all that that phrase signifies, is evident in the following verses and is referred to again by Paul in such places as Col. 1:12; Eph. 1:18; and by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:3-5. The children of God have everything to look forward to and need to be reminded that what God has prepared for them that love Him is far above all we can ask or think (1 Cor. 2:9 AV; Eph. 3:20). It is difficult to understand the exact meaning of v.16. It may refer to the Spirit giving us an inward assurance concerning our salvation and sonship (Gal. 4:6); or to the Spirit applying the truth of God to our minds and hearts (John 16:13); or to the fact that our own spirit prompted by God's Spirit, tells us inwardly that we are God's children. The suffering spoken of in v.17b is not a condition of our being children and heirs but rather a confirmation from experience that we are indeed God's children inasmuch as the world treats us just as it treated Jesus (John 15:18-20).

[Back to Top](#)

## 8:18-25

This section deals with life in the Spirit in terms of a life of significant purpose (see earlier summary of the chapter in second reading on Romans 8). Those who are led by the Spirit (14) are led on into Christ and into all the purposes of God in Christ. Led by the Spirit, we are in the gracious, wise and sure custody of the Spirit, the promised Counsellor, Comforter, Encourager and Paraclete (John 14:16, 18, 26). This being so, there will be an eagerness to go with God, a boldness to draw near to God, and a recognition that we are caught up into the outworking purposes of God. This will help us to cope with and to interpret rightly the daily experiences of life, however difficult and costly they may be. In v.17 Paul has already brought together the thoughts of suffering and glory and, far from being taken aback by suffering, we must learn to rejoice in it (1 Pet. 4:12-14; 5:10-11). After all, Christian life is the reproduction of the life of Christ in us and His experience will be ours. He endured the bitter reviling of men and yet, because of the joy set before Him, He endured the Cross and despised the shame (Heb. 12:1-3). Note how Paul reasons very closely, saying that *if*

(or since) we are children, *then* we are also heirs, entitled to the inheritance. But the heir has to be trained and prepared to enter into the administration of the inheritance as well as to the enjoyment of it (Heb. 12:5-10). It is also part of the inheritance that the heirs should enter into the plans and purposes of their Father and take their part in the fulfilling of them. This will involve suffering, as the early apostolic preachers of the Gospel made plain (Acts 14:22). But the sufferings are certainly not negative, as we are about to see.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:18-25

Take these verses one by one. Paul contrasts temporary suffering with permanent glory. It seems that he is not merely referring to the sufferings that come through faithfulness to Christ but includes all the struggles of life from whatever source they come. He seeks to bring all the hurts, battles, disappointments, failures, frustrations, sicknesses and pains of life to be considered and interpreted in relation to Christ, salvation and service. His considered conclusion and conviction is that the sufferings are well worth the glory they produce. It is not just that suffering-experience will soon give way to enjoyment of glory. The sufferings produce glory (2 Cor. 4: 16-18). It is true that glory will be revealed *to* us, and it will dawn on us with astonishment and rejoicing. But it is glory in us as well as for us that Paul is speaking about. The glory that will be ours is not some external thing applied by a "heavenly aerosol spray" when we reach heaven. It is the glory of character fashioned in the likeness of Christ and produced in the refining fires of earthly experience (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5: 10; 2 Tim. 2:12). Paul elsewhere makes plain that it is through sufferings that we learn the faith that truly trusts and puts its confidence in God (2 Cor. 1:8-10). But perhaps most of all here Paul is encouraging the Roman Christians to consider their personal and immediate sufferings for the gospel's sake in the context of the far-reaching and glorious purposes of God for history and its final consummation. This does not come easily to us who are so "time-bounded" but if we regard life simply in terms of our own little corner we will often be baffled and devoid of comfort.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:18-25

Paul elaborates his theme and leads us on to consider the first of three "groanings". Note that the word is "groaning" not "moaning", which is a very different thing! The context is God's purposes of redemption and they are seen here as being cosmic, involving the whole order of the created world, which is described as groaning under the burden and bondage that is the result of man's sin. Sin brought a curse upon the earth (Gen. 3:17, 18). Beautiful as nature is it is full of flaws, storms, tempests, eruptions, blights, deserts, famines and the like. It is a restless creation (Isa. 57:20), and we speak of the roar of the waves and the sigh of the wind. It is a sad creation with an almost inexpressible longing ever-present in its experience. But creation is not without hope, for it is spoken of here as looking forward to the day of the final revealing of the sons of God, when it will be delivered from its bondage and decay and share in the glorious liberty of the children of God. Man and nature are closely involved but not just in terms of pollution and conservation. Some like the thought of "escaping to the country" to get away from grim experience. But running away is not the answer. It is in redeemed man that creation has its hope. And this theme is being dealt with in the context of "life in the Spirit", the life of sanctification for the children of God. What an incentive to be good, pure and holy this is. Our battles are contributing to (or hindering) the out-working of salvation for the whole order of creation which one day will rejoice and sing (Isa. 35:1-2; Isa. 55:12; Ps. 96:11, 12; 98:7-9; Job 38:7). In a way we have never yet seen the earth will be filled with the glory of God (Isa. 11:9) and there shall be no more sin or death and sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isa. 35:10; Rev. 21:4). There is a great day coming and we are part of the spiritual travail that will bring it.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:18-25

These are powerful verses if we grasp them clearly. Among other things they make plain that history, with all its groans and travails is not static. But its progress is rightly spoken of in terms of travail (like the pains of childbirth) and it cannot be otherwise since the world is fallen and under judgment (20). Because this is so

there is always the tendency for "natural" life to regress from the cultivated state to the wild state, and this is what happens socially and morally apart from the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. This was made plain in the downward tendency described so vividly in Rom. 1:21-23 ff. But if we take 8 :20 (and it is difficult to grasp) and read it carefully, we see that even in active judgment God is working hope and therefore we must see all the present and continuing disasters in creation and history as being somehow bound up with God's plan of salvation. It is in this context that Psalm 46 makes practical sense. Now, says Paul, we Christians, individually and gathered as the church, are involved in all this. "When believers inherit glory ..... so will creation. Man's redemption will be the 'signal' for the rejuvenation of the whole cosmos ... Only when man is finally redeemed will the universe come into its own." (Jas. Philip). Now read Rev. 21:1-5a; 2:1-5; and 2 Pet. 3:11-13. Christians should be the most positive and most constructive people on earth in their thinking and in their actions. We are the people who have been given hope that does not disappoint (Rom. 5:5) and consequently we can set ourselves to work in a context that is far from satisfactory and which at times seems to deny and defy all we hold dear. Our position is that we have hope because our God is the God who works redemption for the whole order of creation. Of course, God is not required to explain every detail of all His working. He asks us to trust Him.

[Back to Top](#)

### **8:18-25**

These are practical verses and we must not weary in reading them over and over again. Paul speaks of a "groaning" church (children of God) alongside or at the heart of a "groaning" world. This does not refer to a complaining spirit but rather to a yearning spirit as we shall see in v.26. The Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of the Jesus who wept over Jerusalem and who saw the crowds as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36), lives in our hearts. This is the very Spirit of God who brooded over that chaos of creation and brought light and order into being by His own sovereign activity (Gen. 1:1-5). This Spirit within us causes us to think and feel as the Father and the Son do and consequently we grieve over the sad and sorry world that is so scarred and broken by sin. We are in the world as Christ was in the world and we feel for it as He did. We will also be aware of our contrast to the world, our conflict with it, and our rejection by it. We too will come to "our own" and will not be received (John 1:11), But the "first fruits" of the Spirit are mightily positive and we begin personally to long for, to expect, to claim and to go hard after the victory and the fulfilment that are our rightful home and inheritance in Christ. We are not resigned to making the best of a bad world. We recognise and claim God's future which is far better and which is life indeed. Read Phil. 1:19-26; 3:7-14, 20-21; and 2 Cor. 5:1-9. One real evidence of the Spirit of God within us is an increasing desire to be free from sin in order that we may serve Christ as He deserves.

[Back to Top](#)

### **8:26-27**

We have dealt with the hope spoken of in v.24-25, although we have said little specifically about it. The attitude of the Christian is always looking forward in hope. There is a "not yet" element in Christian life and service. We have full salvation, but we do "not yet" have its full expression or enjoyment. Nor do we yet *see* all that is ours nor all that God is doing. We walk by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We see and know only in limited measure (1 Cor. 13:9-12). We love and look for a Saviour we have not seen (1 Pet. 1:8) and consequently there is a wistfulness and longing as well as a battle and struggle in our lives. These things are confirmations of our salvation and newness of life and not contradictions. If a Christian is too much at home and too contented here in this world he does not seem to partake of the restless and hopeful spirit of the pilgrim who recognises that he does not really belong here at all (Heb. 11: 13-14; 1 Pet. 2:11). Now consider today's verses, which begin with the word "likewise"(AV) or "in the same way". This makes us link with what has gone before. Paul may be referring to the theme of hope in v.24-25 and saying that, just as hope supports and encourages us in our battles, so the Spirit helps us in our weakness when we feel unable to face the odds. But he also may be referring to the threefold "groaning" in the passage (19 ff.). Creation groans, waiting for its glorious day of liberation. The church groans longing for its day of fulfilment and eternal

service. In the same way the Spirit groans, longing for the day when all the perfect purposes of God will have been brought to fulfilment. This longing of the Spirit is on our behalf and for our help as Paul makes plain.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:26-27

Note how Paul includes himself in this matter using the words "us" and "we". He knew plenty about the weariness, uncertainties and confusion that are part of authentic Christian life and service (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5; Phil. 1:22-23). He speaks of our comprehensive weakness and limitation and says that all of us at times just do not know how to pray, let alone what to pray for. On one significant occasion Paul prayed earnestly for something that just was not God's will (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Paul had wanted that prayer answered because in his reckoning it would have made him more useful to God. But he was wrong, and God refused to grant his request. On another occasion it seems Paul was confused about the matter of guidance (Acts 16:6-10) but God, by His Spirit, over-ruled and brought Paul to the right place for significant service. Of course there are many times when we and Paul know what to pray for, and can pray, not least along the lines of the *pattern* of the Lord's Prayer. But such are the pressures of life and the clouds that Satan can bring over our feelings and thinking that at times we just blunder on in our prayers. We must not be frightened about this and say, "What if we pray wrongly?" Remember the blessed Spirit within, the glorious, well-informed Comforter and Counsellor. He intercedes for us and within us and along with us. Sometimes He countermands our prayers, so that for the one situation we can think of two petitions being offered: our defective and limited prayer made on the basis of our partial knowledge and understanding, and the Spirit's prayer made in total knowledge of the Father's will and made in harmony with that will. For the encouragement of our prayer life we continue the theme tomorrow.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:26-27

One of the desolating things in life is to feel all alone in a situation of anxiety, distress or demand. At such a time, we feel the need to pray and yet it seems prayer is harder than ever and we do not know what to pray for or even how to pray. We try, and we get stuck. It is then that we must remind ourselves that the Spirit of God within us is saying, "Pray on. I am crying with you." Paul speaks of this praying activity of the Spirit in terms of "sighs" that cannot be put into words. This is something deeper and fuller than any "special utterances" or "tongues" that can be thought of as the work of the Spirit. There are desires that can never be put into words and the sore longings that can be such an ache at our hearts are shared by the Spirit. The feelings are His and they are ours. There is no question of our stopping praying and letting the Spirit do it all. The two are one. Think of Rev. 8:1-4 and the picture of the smoke of incense rising to God. Our prayers and the Spirit's prayers mingle so that they are indistinguishable, and by the Spirit our prayers are presented in perfection at the Throne of God. If we look down to v.34 we see reference to the Son who intercedes for us in heaven. In today's verses we have the Spirit who prays in us, with us and for us. What an encouragement this is to get on with the business of prayer! And what a contradiction it is if a Christian does not pray. Such a one is resisting and stifling and grieving the Spirit of God within his heart, because the Spirit's whole desire is to do and to further the perfect will of God. Note last of all the Spirit's activity for all the saints. We must never feel alone in the business of prayer. We are in this together.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:26-28

Read along with today's verses Plil.4:4-7; 1 Thess.5:16-18. The poet Wordsworth spoke of, "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." These verses in Romans speak of prayers too deep for words, and the words of this old hymn may help all of us to be encouraged in prayer.

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered or unexpressed'.  
The motion of a hidden fire,  
That trembles in the breast.

"Prayer is the burden of a sigh,  
The falling of a tear,  
The upward glancing of an eye,  
When none but God is near.

"Prayer is the simplest form of speech  
That infant lips can try;  
Prayer, the sublimest strains that reach  
The Majesty on high.

"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,  
The Christian's native air:  
His watchword at the gates of death,  
He enters heaven with prayer.

"O Thou by whom we come to God,  
The Life, the Truth, the Way;  
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod,  
Lord, teach us how to pray." (

Another old hymn that speaks of the hindrances that beset us and keep us from prayer, and contrasts our flow of words in chatter and complaint with our stilted and reluctant words of prayer, has this verse:

"Restraining prayer, we cease to fight,  
Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright;  
And Satan trembles when he sees,  
The weakest saint upon his knees."

It makes you think. If it makes you pray it will be a joy to the praying Spirit within.

[Back to Top](#)

## 8:28

We are dealing now with life in the Spirit in terms of the life of assurance (8:28-34). We concentrate on this one glorious verse which is, in fact, a hard verse to believe, especially when life is difficult and when nothing seems to be working out at all. But we have to start by grasping this verse as a statement of fact and linking it with the theme of being saved in hope (24). If we keep in mind that we have read seven and a half chapters which have expounded that salvation is of God and that the life of God by the Spirit is within us, we will begin to see that the truth of this verse is really self-evident. Everything God does partakes of God's own perfection. Everything God begins, God completes (Phil. 1:6); and He does so by His own perfect methods (Eph. 1:3-12, especially v.11). God feeds His flock like a shepherd and He carries the lambs in His arms (Isa. 40:11). He will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). He orders our way according to His purposes and He keeps our going out and coming in (Ps. 121). The modern translations all make God the subject of the verb "work" but there is a lot to be said for the translation "all things work together for good." It helps us to look at "all things" that happen to us and come our way, however sore or even catastrophic. And instead of rebelling or collapsing (both of which can be merely emotional reactions) we accept them in faith and seek to learn God's lesson in them. The solution and interpretation may be a long time in coming. But that does not alter the fact: God is in all things and is working salvation for His people. This is worthy of more thought and illustration.

[Back to Top](#)

## 8:28

We believe this verse and we note that Paul says "we know", as if to say that both theology and experience confirm the truth of it. We need to look at Paul's own words regarding his imprisonment and his being thus taken out from active gospel service for a season (Phil. 1:12-14). It was in prison that he had time to write many of his epistles. We think of his "thorn in the flesh" which seemed such a hindrance but was in fact the secret of his usefulness (2 Cor. 12:9). We need to think of the story of Joseph whose suffering at the hand of his jealous brothers (whom Joseph enraged by his spiritual boasting- Gen. 37:5-11) was over-ruled in a positive way to serve the salvation of all his people (Gen. 50:20). Again, the slander of Joseph by an evil woman led to his being put in jail, the only place in Egypt where he was actually safe from her. Think of the interpretation of the events of history in Acts 2:23. If we remember what we have learned of the Spirit's intercession we will see that we cannot ever suggest that He prayed wrongly or that God answered the Spirit's prayers wrongly. God's ways with us may be baffling but never wrong or unnecessary. The phrase "all things" is big enough to include all the world's turmoil because neither creation nor history has broken free from God's control. The New Testament teaches that Christ is head over all in the interest of the church (Eph. 1:22). We accept that often it does not seem to be working out for good, but we cannot deny God's word for the sake of what "seems" to us to be the case. We must remember that *we* are not the centre of the world and events must not be interpreted in terms of our personal and temporary situation. We are in Christ involved in God's far-reaching plans. The truth is that all things, prosperity and adversity, joy and sorrow, good and evil, work in the providence of God to fulfil His purpose, which is good. This Paul had learned and in this he was content (Phil. 4:10-13).

[Back to Top](#)

## 8:28

Two further lessons are to be learned from this verse. We must not make the phrase "who love God" into a condition for receiving the blessing of this. That could lead to a terrible tormenting of spirit in which the Devil would have us saying constantly, "If I had loved God more this would not have happened" or "So long as I love God all things will work out for good". That makes us central and makes all depend on us. The phrase "who love God" is descriptive of the Christian, and we love God because He first loved us when there was nothing lovable about us (1 John 4:19 Rom. 5:6-8). All that comes to us is from the hand of the God who has loved us with an everlasting love and who will not let us go or forget it (Jer. 31:3; Hos. 11:8-9). The other phrase, "who are the called according to His purpose", is also descriptive of the believer and not an explanation of why some people are converted and some not. The emphasis is on every link of the chain of salvation being forged by God in his eternal purpose. He pressed in on us in the preaching of the gospel, opened our eyes and quickened us by His Spirit, so that we heard and believed and went after Christ. God purposed to save us and He chose us in Christ from the beginning. This is what we learn in Ephesians (Eph. 1:3-10; 2:1-10). Read 2 Thess. 2:13-16; 1 Thess. 5:23-24. We have scarcely begun to marvel at the wonder of salvation or at the rich and manifold blessings that come to us in this salvation. Have we begun to consider God's purposes which "will ripen fast, unfolding every hour"? Can there then be anything that comes to us which will not work for our good? Our times are indeed in His hand. Why should we doubt or fear? "Our Father's hand will never cause His child a needless tear".

[Back to Top](#)

## 8:29-30

If the previous verse referred to sovereign providence, these verses refer to sovereign grace as the source and power of salvation. The verses before v.28 referred to the struggles of experience which are part of the fury and opposition of anti-God powers who oppose God's purposes in the world. In this purpose of salvation we have the assurance that all works for good and that nothing can countermand the decision and design of God. It is from this assurance that Paul goes on to make the glorious affirmations in the remainder of the chapter. We cannot in these notes go into a long theological dissertation on the mighty subjects of eternal election, predestination and final perseverance unto glory, but we make some general comments. The Bible presents no

conflict or contradiction between God's eternal election and man's moral choice and responsibility. The setting is the proclamation of the gospel which Paul has expounded so thoroughly in Romans. We are all called to believe. But our assurance lies not in our choice but in God's. Think of the sad uncertainty of those who say, "I'm losing my hold on God." We are told here that it is God's "hold" that matters and it is sure from all eternity. When you think of God's eternal choice remember that we cannot insist on free-will for man and deny it to God. Remember too that sinner man is anything but free, as Eph. 2:1-3 makes plain. The truth is that left to himself sinner man has neither the desire nor the capacity to turn from his sins to God. It is by God's grace that we are saved through faith. God is totally free to bestow His grace-gifts on whoever He will. The truth about our salvation is that "while I passed my Saviour by, His love laid hold on me."

[Back to Top](#)

### **8:29-30**

All God's eternal purposes are worked out through Jesus Christ and it was Jesus who said that He had chosen us (John 15:16). Foreknowledge does not mean that God saw beforehand who would have faith and that this is why He chose them. Knowing has to do with love and with setting the heart on the one loved and acting accordingly. Paul has already touched on this in Rom. 5:5, 8, emphasising that while we were sinners and when there was nothing to commend us at all, God loved us. If we ask "Why me?" there is no answer. In the word "predestined" there is the emphasis on the purpose for which God chose us, namely that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. This seems to refer to our progressive transformation in this life, growing more like Jesus by the growing in grace of the life of Jesus in us by the Spirit (2 Pet. 3:18; Heb. 5:11-6:1; Gal. 5:16-24) and also the final transformation of our persons in glory when we shall be like Him (1 John 3:1-3). The objective in all this is that Christ should stand in clear pre-eminence as the firstborn and also that we should be with Him to share in His glory (John 17:24). In v.30 Paul states very briefly but profoundly how all this is worked out on earth through the gospel, of which he is proud to be a minister (1:16-17). He speaks (not for the first time) of "effectual calling" which is the work of God's Spirit in convicting and enlightening the sin-darkened soul and enabling the sinner to hear and believe the gospel. (Read the definition of effectual calling in the Shorter Catechism). Those who hear and believe are justified by faith, and justification is the act of God's free grace (see the Catechism). So sure is God's salvation that Paul can speak of the justified sinner being glorified. The whole of salvation is an accomplished fact. There is no room for doubt.

[Back to Top](#)

### **8:31-34**

On the basis of the glorious, assured salvation he has expounded, Paul now raises questions which are designed to confirm confidence and to kindle hope and joy. If God is for us, or since God is for us, no power can stand against us (31); no lack will beset us(32); no charge levelled against us has a hope of cancelling our salvation (33), whether it comes from a human accuser or the Devil himself; no condemnation remains, because the price of sin has been paid and there is no outstanding balance (34). At every moment of the believer's life and experience, the Jesus who died and rose again stands in the presence of God on our behalf, pleading the full sufficiency of His saving death and resurrection, so that we are instantly and totally accepted, pardoned and blessed. We have nothing to fear and everything to hope for and to enjoy. Note how earlier, in v.27, the Spirit is spoken of as being active within us in all sufficient ministry. Then in v.31 God the Father is active on our behalf in glorious redeeming love in which He spared nothing, not even His own Son, in order that we might be provided with all we need. Then in v.34 Christ is shown to be active on our behalf as the perfect sin-bearer, totally victorious and exercising an endless and unbroken ministry of intercession on our behalf. "He pleads our cause at God's right hand, omnipotent to save." God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the whole eternal Trinity, is active on our behalf. Sin, failure, struggles and uncertainties must all give way before such a mighty salvation. The assured possibilities of life are indeed limitless and glorious. Christians should be the most optimistic and joyful people in the world.

### 8:35-39

It is always difficult to sectionalise the summing up of a great argument. From v.31 to the end of the chapter Paul asks and answers questions and his mind no doubt goes right back to the beginning of the epistle when he spoke of God's revealed wrath being against sinners. But all that is dealt with and all is now at peace. No doubt Paul also had in mind many Old Testament Scriptures because, after all, his whole pattern of thought was moulded by Scripture. Would he not think of Abraham's sacrifice of his own son (Gen. 22:1-8, 16)? Would he not also think of Isaiah 50:7-9 and 54:17? Would he not also think of Zechariah 3:1-5? Let us think of it this way: all the charges are dropped and not a voice is raised to accuse. We need have no fears. But to speak only in judicial terms is too limited. Paul raises his last question in v.35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ, the Son of the Father, who has engraved our names on the palms of His hands and who says He will never forget and will never find Himself able to give us up (Isa. 49:14-16; Hos. 11:1-2, 7-9)? What a wonderful climax we have here, being shown that life in the Spirit is life inseparable from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Paul is very aware of the circumstances surrounding the Christians in Rome and he has already spoken of the sufferings of this present time (18). Now he speaks in v.35 of specific things that were constant possibilities for believers living under a decadent, totalitarian, military rule. Perhaps we should content ourselves today with thinking of the great extent to which we have been spared all these sore trials. But all of them may yet come to us, even in our own land. We had better be ready.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:35-39

The fact that we have been spared so much in the way of the grim circumstances listed in v.35 does not minimise the very real battles and burdens that beset so many, not least in personality and temptation. Never forget that there is a Jesus who knows what it is like and who has been tempted in every possible way that we can be tempted (Heb. 2:18; 4:15). What a range of human experience is contained in the word "trouble" (distress RSV), what upset and tears it signifies. We must also remember that Jesus used the word "persecution" in Matt. 13:21 where it was the instrument to expose a faith that was false. Again Jesus warned about famine, and that is often linked with the kind of poverty that means little or no clothes. How would we cope with that? Do *things* mean too much to us? If we want to consider the meaning of "perils" (dangers) read 2 Cor. 11:23-29. Then there was always the sword (Acts 12:1-3) threatening the servants of the Cross. Paul is not suggesting that his generation was suffering more than those before him and he quotes Ps. 44:22, almost in confirmation of the words of Jesus that in the world we will have tribulation or trouble (John 16:33). "Led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa.53:7) is a very vivid phrase and the possibilities and actualities of experience in the world are not pleasant to consider. But Paul is eager to affirm the positive side, the realities of the situation. None of these things can separate us from the love of Christ. Indeed they often are a means of grace to bring us closer (Ps.119:67). One last comment for today. Paul's frequent use of Old Testament Scripture helps us to understand his plea to Timothy to bring the books (of Scripture) to him in jail (2 Tim. 4:13).

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:35-39

In all the actual and possible experiences of life we are more than conquerors, conquerors by a clear margin, through Him who loved us, who has accomplished so full and perfect a salvation. It is not just escape or survival. It is much more. Was Paul perhaps thinking of Jesus' words about the blessedness of those who suffer for righteousness' sake (Matt. 5:10-12)? Keep in mind also that being a conqueror means you have beaten the enemy, and, as Hendriksen says, being more than a conqueror means you have conscripted the enemy into helping you. From his theology and from his experience in life Paul is fully persuaded in what he says in v.38-39. He speaks of death and life, and the second is perhaps the more dangerous with more "pull" to take us away from Christ. Death may be swift or lingering, and life may be rich and full or sore and empty. But the grace that sought and found us can keep us. What an encouragement it should be to us to see the seventy, eighty and ninety year olds in their places faithfully week after week in God's House. And when death comes it means we shall be forever with the Lord. We shall see Him face to face and we shall serve Him in the full knowledge of His love. Paul insists that the things of natural existence cannot separate us



from the love of God. Then he goes on to speak of supernatural things, good or bad, and their manifestation in world powers and experiences. They do not have the power to separate us, and we are well provided with the whole armour of God to stand and fight (Eph. 6:10ff). This man Paul is mightily assured and he is not finished yet.

[Back to Top](#)

### 8:35-39

Paul goes on to speak of things present and to come. Do we sometimes feel "What next?" Does it alarm us? These verses affirm that neither the world as it is nor the world as it might yet develop (bombs and all), nor "the powers", be they scientific, ideological or occult, none of these have the power to separate us. The same is true of height or depth. No dimension of time or space, no emerging of a master-race, no regime of thought-conditioning, nor anything else in the whole of creation as the power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Whatever the created order of things can produce, however powerful or horrible, nothing can ever be greater than, or outside the power and control of, the God who is both Creator and Redeemer. Not even the final disintegration of the universe can separate us from God's love because we look for a new order of experience altogether (2 Pet. 3:13). We can best end this brief note, brief in words but not in truth and comfort, by quoting the words of Jesus. "In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore be steadfast, and remember your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15: 57-58).

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:1-5

Paul's words (chaps.1-8) are given to minister the assurance of the Gospel to our hearts. Such was the confidence in God motivating the great missionary apostle that we were able, because of his words, to say "No dimension of time or space, no emerging of a master race, no regime of thought-conditioning nor anything else in the whole of creation has the power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." We ended the final note on Romans 8:35-39 by affirming that our labour was not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor.15:57-58). That leads us right into this next section of the epistle, because in the matter of evangelising his own people, the Jews, Paul felt he was making remarkably little progress. It *did* seem to be in vain, and he addressed himself to this situation, his argument developing from what he had already expounded. From the start of the epistle Paul had been speaking of salvation in terms of "a righteousness from God" given and received as a free gift. There is no question of sinner man, who lacks righteousness or a right standing with God, being able to deserve or to work for this salvation. It is a righteousness that comes from God and rests on faith alone. But Israel, God's chosen and favoured people, are the ones who above all were resisting this glorious "free salvation". James Philip's commentary on Romans divides the epistle thus: Mankind's Lack of Righteousness (1:18-3:20); Divine Provision of Righteousness (3:21-8:39); Refusal of Righteousness by Israel (9:1-11:36); and Divine Righteousness Applied (12:1-15:33). Paul has affirmed (1:16-17) that the Gospel is God's power unto salvation to the Jew first, but the Jews rejected it. He referred in Chap:1-3 to the privileges of the Jews and the promises of God that are faithful, in spite of the faithlessness of His people. What does it all mean? What have we to learn? What message is here to help us in our involvement with the work of the Gospel? Paul gives his answer.

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:1-5

It will help us to understand if we face the fact that it is still very hard to bring "religious" "churchy" people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. How many evangelical ministers have watched "longstanding" church members slowly turning away and leaving the congregation as the result of a faithful and gracious ministry of the Word of God. What resentment and bitterness emerge when people who have "been in the church all their days" are shown that their trying to be good and their serving of the church is not the way of salvation. What a grief it is to see their rejection of the Saviour, especially when many of them have shown more loyalty to the

congregation and more willingness to work for it than many evangelicals have. Paul's heart is burdened to breaking point for his kinsfolk, the Jews. They were accusing him of being disloyal to his past heritage as a Jew. But that personal slight was nothing compared to his burden of heart for those he saw as adrift from God and dying in their sins (John 8:21,24). He feels a burden for the "lost"; a burden that our generation does not seem to feel, possibly because of our preoccupation with emphasising the "fulfilment" that the Gospel offers, forgetting about the world to come and the judgment that is appointed. For Paul it was no academic Christmas-time text that Jesus "came to His own and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). He longed for the salvation of his people and in speaking of being cursed and cut off from God for their sakes he is reflecting the similar agony of Moses in Ex. 32:32

Both men seem to partake of the self-sacrificing spirit of Christ who Himself was made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). This is not an evangelistic fervour that can be worked up for the occasion. It is something that emerges from a close walk with God and an ever deepening acceptance of and submission to the truth of God's Word. Do we really believe that people need to be saved, and that apart from Christ they are condemned already? (John 3:16-18).

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:1-5

Paul speaks with the spirit of Christ who wept over Jerusalem (Lk. 13:34; 19:41). If we read Philippians 3:1-9 we see that Paul himself was in fact cut off from his people for Jesus' sake, and lost everything, humanly speaking. But in that passage he also makes plain that as a true Jew he had been like his fellows, going about to establish his own righteousness (Phil. 3:4-6, 9; cf. Rom. 10:3). Paul knew what it was to have all the privileges and benefits of being nurtured in the Jewish faith, being part of the glorious heritage of a people specifically chosen and uniquely blessed and taught. It was to this chosen people that God had been pleased to reveal Himself, to make Himself known, giving them the Law and the prophets to make them wise unto salvation. But their reaction, all along the line of their history, had been to refuse and reject the prophets (Acts 7:51-53) and in the fullness of time, to crucify their Messiah, denying all their proud heritage, saying, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:14-16). It was the supreme bafflement of history that the people chosen to produce the Messiah neither recognised or received Him when He came. At this point Paul speaks of Jesus Christ, born a Jew, and he utters a glorious doxology, the true translation of which is a clear and magnificent affirmation of the deity of Christ. This is no mere man, let alone an impostor, as some Jews asserted. He is "Christ, who is God over all, for ever praised." This was the glorious Christ Paul met on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:6-11). This is the Christ whose claims were so clear to the leaders of the Jewish people (John 8:42,58). This was the heart of the awful sin of the people when they crucified the Lord of Glory (Acts 3:13-15; 1 Cor. 2:8). What a blindness was upon this religious people. It is repeated again and again wherever the Gospel is preached. Some hearts thrill because it is all so clear. Others see nothing at all. The God of this world (and the activities of this world) has blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:4).

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:6-13

We must work hard to understand these verses and we must not jump to conclusions. Everything about salvation has to do with faith, but over against faith stands the mystery of unbelief, an unbelief that stands hard against every plea and exhortation and warning. Now, in facing this baffling fact of experience, Paul speaks of the absolute sovereignty of God and he says things that the human mind and heart are unwilling to accept without argument. But as we look carefully at what Paul says, keep in mind that all through the Bible unbelief is spoken of as something that is evil, deliberate and culpable, and men are warned to guard against an evil heart of unbelief (Heb. 3:12). But at once we are faced with the question: "Is human unbelief stronger than God; do the issues of life and salvation, time and eternity, rest in the power of man or are they in the sovereign power of God?" Put this way we should see at once that the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is indeed a doctrine of great comfort and assurance. After all, if everything depends on us, what happens if we hit a bad patch and our faith staggers and fails? Does our salvation collapse? In the course of Christian life and service, when people we have looked up to backslide and deny the faith, or when people we have prayed

for for years seem to show no response at all, do we yield to despair? Paul faces the problem regarding his own people the Jews, to whom great and gracious promises had been given by God. Does the unbelief of men demonstrate the unfaithfulness of a God who has gone back on His promises? Does persistent unbelief prove that God is "not able" to bring men to salvation? Paul refuses all these arguments and insists that God is a God of integrity and that He is sovereignly free to bestow salvation as He wills. This is unpalatable for fallen man, who is obsessively concerned with his rights. But all that sinner man can claim is justice, which for the guilty means judgment.

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:6-13

The fact of persistent unbelief among the Jews is dealt with by emphasising that they were not entitled to salvation by the mere fact that they were descended from Abraham (7) nor on the basis of works or deserving (11). This is the same emphasis as in John 1:13 where blood relationship (my parents were Christians), human effort (I tried my best), and priestly ministry (I was baptised, confirmed, anointed etc.) are all laid aside. It is God who works the work of regeneration. In today's verses Paul states that there are the natural descendants of Abraham through Ishmael and there are the spiritual descendants through Isaac. In the sovereign purpose of God Isaac was chosen, not Ishmael. Isaac was a miracle son. His birth was God's sovereign act. In the next generation without reference to anything in the children and indeed before they were born, Jacob was chosen; the rights of the elder child were laid aside by the decision of God. It is God and God alone who decides to whom His promises will be given. Go back to Deut. 7:6-8 and read God's clear statement. What we must do as we grapple with the mysteries of life and experience is to let God be God. We must not demand that God should justify His every action to us. We must not require God to think and act as we would. We must not put ourselves on an equal footing with God. This was the devilish temptation that man fell into in the Garden of Eden. Man snatched at the idea of being equal with God, but, having begun in total dependence that was freedom and life, he moved into a state of rebellion that was bondage, limitation and confusion. The reason why we often have doubts about the goodness of God is that we refuse to think of man as being bad (Jer. 17:9). In like manner we refuse to think of God's righteous and justifiable anger operating in judgment against men. This is why we find v.13 so hard to accept. It is a quotation from Mal. 1:2-3. We look at it again tomorrow.

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:14-18

Daily notes must not become an academic commentary and yet we must grapple with the difficulties of Scripture. It is the only honest way, yet we must in the end submit our intellectual limitations to the requirement of faith in a totally dependable God. Our failure to understand the ultimate mysteries of God's sovereign election does not damage the character of God nor does it deny the fact that God is love (1 John 4:8). In connection with v.13 Spurgeon commented that it was astonishing that God could love a miserable worm like Jacob and go on to make him a prince with God. Happy indeed is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help (Ps 146:5 AV). A commentary on Malachi says, "The very fact that Jacob was chosen, 'loved', meant that Esau was rejected, 'hated', rejection being implicit in exercise of choice. Personal animosity towards Esau is not implied. Esau and his descendants however, by nursing resentment and showing hostility towards Jacob, did bring God's judgment on themselves... God's providential ordering of events proved His justice," (Baldwin). But think more extensively: God chose Abraham so that through him all nations might be blessed (Gen. 12:3). God worked specifically and decisively in His saving purpose that stretches down the ages of history. For the past two thousand years the Gentiles (Esau) have been blessed and saved through Jacob's seed (Jesus) while Jacob (Jews) have been cast away and persecuted. Instead of jumping to conclusions and having doubts about God we should stand in awe, considering His purposes of salvation. Yes, there is a mystery we cannot fathom in God's sovereign electing grace. There is a mystery in God's saving love towards us who were dead in sin, deliberate in opposition and alienated in our minds (Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 1:21). There is a terrible mystery in intractable unbelief as portrayed in Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9,11. Are we to say that there is injustice on God's part? That brings us to v.14.

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:14-18

Paul's argument began with the promises of God and to whom these promises applied. He insists that the promises are for those whom God has chosen. Think in terms of a wedding. The bridegroom pledges love and gives promises, entering into a covenant relationship with his bride. But it is not open for any girl in church to claim the position of the bride. The promises belong to the chosen person and to no-one else, and this is not transgressing anyone's free will or choice. It is God who makes the choice as Paul insists in v.15-16, and His choice is in conformity to His character. In the story of Moses (Exod, 33:4-6) plain justice called for judgment on sinning, idolatrous Israel who had forfeited all their rights. But in His sovereignty God "chose" to do otherwise and He had mercy. No sinner man has ever a claim upon God. When we say "God must" or "God should" we are taking a position superior to God, passing judgment on Him, and requiring that God should act in conformity to our limited ideas about Him. So far, in relation to v.14-16, we may have no difficulty in accepting God's right to free and sovereign action and indeed we may rejoice in the emphasis in v.16 that salvation rests not on man's efforts but on God's mercy. But in v.17-18 we are faced with God's "hardening" activity. But, if God is sovereign in giving mercy He is also sovereign in withholding it. If man is to be free (whatever popular opinion means by the word) then God must be free to give or to withhold His grace gifts as He wills and chooses. All our choices and actions are conditioned by what we are and that is why we can act so unreasonably, inconsistently and unfairly, forgiving someone because we like them, making excuses for them, but making no allowances at all for others simply because we do not like them. But in character, God is totally balanced, integrated and righteous, and therefore all He does is right. Our hesitation and reservations about God do not change this. Let God be God. He is more to be trusted than anyone, including ourselves.

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:14-18

Our difficulty with verses 17-18 arises because of our human sympathy with Pharaoh, taking his side against the "hard" God who seemed to be doing him down. But Pharaoh was a ruthless and powerful despot, more involved with and committed to the influence and activities of the "occult" and its "magicians" than we realise. He was a persecutor of Israel long before the encounter with Moses and the story of the hardening of his heart. Remember also that in Exodus chaps. 6-11 there is much recorded historically of Pharaoh hardening his heart, before God judicially hardened his heart. But there is another aspect to this matter. If it was not God who raised up Pharaoh and eventually hardened his heart, who was it? Was the rise to power and the hardening accomplished by Pharaoh's own power or by some other "mighty" power? If so, then either man or some other "power" is stronger than God and able to resist God's will. If that is so, then we have no ground for confidence at all, because we would be overcome by that "other" power. Yes, there remain things that we do not understand, but that should lead to worship, not to fear. In the terrible and complicated world in which we live, with powers rising to scourge the earth, our real comfort and hope lie in the fact that power belongs to God alone (Ps. 62:11 AV). It is God who rules in the kingdoms of men, raising up and casting down as He wills and orders in His purposes of salvation (Dan. 4:17,25,32). Pharaoh was raised up as an instrument of God at a particular stage of redemption history. He is a monument to and a reminder of God's judgment, just as Lot's wife was a monument to human folly and unbelief. Remember, we are dealing with God's plan for God's world. When things are beyond our understanding then is the time to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand (1 Pet. 5:6).

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:19-24

In yesterday's comments we have anticipated the questions here. Sinner man is always argumentative in attitude, always seeking excuses for his unbelief and his refusal to yield to God in loving obedience. Right from the Garden of Eden the Devil has made man question God and be suspicious of His motives. The petulance of man is seen in v.19; whatever does not please him he blames on God. But, since Paul is debating

with the Jews, he quotes their own Scriptures from Isa. 29:16; 45:8-11; Jer. 18:1-6. There is such an obsessive spirit of equality and uniformity amongst fallen men that they cannot accept actual differences, especially if one person is given a calling that is beautiful and recognisably significant, and one a menial or ordinary task. Paul deals with this in a different context in 2 Tim. 2:20-21 and we must remember that the silver plate on the banqueting table is not much use unless there have been the pots and pans in the kitchen. But here, having again emphasised God's total sovereignty in v.19-21, Paul widens his argument to embrace the whole political and religious history of the world. He speaks of the powers of the world, ordained by God (13:1-2), as being vessels of wrath, that is, instruments by which the all-wise God carries out His purposes of judgment in the world to which His wrath has been revealed (1:18). The so-called "mighty men and powers" of history are not, as they think, free agents, but in ways that we may not be able to understand they are held in God's power to do His will. But note the reference to God's longsuffering patience in the face of human wickedness and rebellion, cf. 2 Pet. 3: 9,15. One of the amazing mysteries of human experience is that God does not immediately smite evil in judgment. If *we* react sometimes against evil, how much more must the holy God react against it? But He bears with it, as Scripture teaches, in the interest of man's salvation.

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:19-24

The patience of God is not a theme we spend much time studying but if we consider our own life's experiences we will be aware of just how much time and meticulous care God has spent in making known to us the realities of His salvation in Jesus Christ. The mystery of God's allowing evil in order to further His purposes of salvation is seen most clearly in Jesus Christ, God's Son being delivered up by the hands of wicked men (Acts 2:23). Out of that dark event there shone the riches of God's glory for the vessels of mercy (22,23 AV), objects of His wrath and mercy (NIV). Who are these vessels of mercy, prepared for glory? We are, we who have believed, called by God through the gospel, and called out not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles. But we must never forget that our acceptance involved, and indeed required, the rejection of Christ. He was despised and rejected by men, and God laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa.53:3-6). Jesus cried in agony from the Cross asking why God had forsaken Him. Jesus, who had no sin, was made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). When we look on the Cross and ask why God allowed it, we must reply that God did it. It is a mystery. "Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me?" (Wesley). We cannot understand it, but we stand amazed at it and accept it. In like manner we stand in awe of the facts of sovereign election. We do not philosophise or speculate about it. We take Jesus' words that all who are of God and who are taught of God will come to Him (John 6:45). We must seek, as far as we can, to understand these deep mysteries *in the context of the proclamation of the Gospel*, which Gospel calls people to repentance and faith. It is a real call which demands an answer. What shall we do with Jesus who is called Christ? But we must also recognise that in the work of evangelism the gospel message will be to some a savour of death and an instrument of hardening from beginning to end. To others it will be the word of life (2 Cor. 2:14-17). These issues of life and death are being worked out day by day.

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:25-29

In these verses Paul is quoting from the prophets which the Jews accepted and revered as messengers of God's word. But, like many who say they believe the Bible, the Jews would not accept the message. Think of how they constantly persecuted the prophets (Acts 7:51-53). God had made it clear through Hosea that His plan of salvation reached out beyond the Jews to the outsider Gentiles. God also made plain through Isaiah that only a remnant of the Jews would be saved; that it was *within* the natural Israel that *spiritual* Israel was found. (How this is reconciled with 11:26 is difficult.) But all along the marvel is that of a salvation which is all of God's grace. "While I passed my Saviour by, His love laid hold on me." Why He loved and wanted us is mystery indeed. And the dark mystery of human unbelief serves to highlight the wonder of salvation. But we must ask the right questions. When some asked, "Are there few that be saved?" Jesus' answer was not on the level of a discussion about freewill and predestination. He urged His hearers to strive and to give diligence to make their salvation sure (Lk.13:23-24; 2 Pet. 1:10-11). It is in and through the

preaching and the hearing of the gospel that distinctions begin to emerge, and faith and unbelief are made manifest. Jesus insisted that His sheep would hear His voice, and was sure that all the Father gave Him would come to Him (John 6:37; 10: 27). Mysteries remain that are quite beyond us, but the safe way is to receive, to trust and to bow before the truth of God's word, and by that Word to increase in understanding as God enables us. A spirit of worship is vital; it curbs our natural pride and impatience. Read and ponder the words of the hymn that begins, "Before Jehovah's awful Throne." (Watts and Wesley)

[Back to Top](#)

### 9:30-33

Paul summarises what he has been saying thus far about the unbelief of the Jews. That they were an elect, chosen people to whom the promises of God had been given was beyond doubt. But that election was grounded in sovereign grace and there was no question of their having a claim upon God. Nor could they demand the blessings of the promises apart from the obedience of faith. Of course, from the gospel narratives it is clear that the Jews refused and resisted every call to faith in Jesus Christ and drew on themselves the sternest of Jesus' words (Matt. 23:13-15, 29-36; 21:28-32,42-43). Over against this unbelief and opposition that is recorded right through the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:1-3; 5:40; 13: 45; 17:5) Paul sets the marvel and miracle of the faith of the Gentiles. They had lived in darkness and had not sought after God but when the gospel of Christ had been proclaimed to them they believed and found "righteousness" or salvation. But the Jews, who on their own confession sought after God, went the way of "keeping the law" rather than the way of faith, Their error was major and tragic and they missed the way of salvation. They stumbled over the stumbling-stone that is Christ crucified, because the message of the Cross tells a man that all his religious and moral striving does not constitute righteousness and acceptance in God's sight (1Cor. 1:18-25). It is not easy for a man who has been brought up to be proud of his religious tradition to accept that all his righteousnesses are as dirty rags in God's sight when it comes to the matter of salvation (Isa. 64:6). But how stubbornly men choose to stand on the shifting sand of their own works rather than on the rock that is Christ. How solemn it is to think that the rock which could be salvation is, when rejected, a stone of stumbling and condemnation. The coming of Christ led to the fall of some and the rising of others (Lk. 2:34; cf. Isa. 8:14; 28:16; Ps. 118:21-23; Acts 4:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:4-8).

[Back to Top](#)

### 10:1-4

The tragedy of deep and persistent unbelief stirs in Paul the grief and longing of the true evangelist. This is not a superficial and temporary concern "to get people converted" but rather the deep and solemn awareness that without Christ men and women live and die without hope and go to a lost eternity. Over against the word "saved" we need to set the word "perish" as we have it in John 3:16-18. So much of our gospel preaching today has to do with Christ offering fulfilment and purpose and joy, and this may indicate just how much our whole pattern of thinking is geared to this world to the exclusion of the world to come. Of course, in the work of gospel evangelism and all the biblical teaching that must go hand in hand with it, we must be prepared to meet the terrible blindness and resistance of unbelief without losing heart or losing confidence. Paul is facing the almost total rejection of the gospel by his own people, the Jews, and it nearly breaks his heart. Think of his missionary journeys and how preaching and suffering at times produced only one or two converts (Acts 17:32-34). Think of how in His ministry Jesus faced situations so bound in unbelief that He could do no mighty works (Matt. 13:58). There are many disappointed ministers and evangelists who have stumbled because of the resistance of unbelief, and some have turned to itinerant Christian work that seems to show "better results". It is easier to count decisions at the end of a campaign than to count established Christians after ten years' work in one place! Face the facts. All will not come to Christ. But many will. Read Acts 13:44-52 where unbelief and faith are seen in amazing contrast and where the confidence of the preachers is expressed in v.48. It is God who works salvation. We must recognise that faith is the sign of regeneration, not the cause of it. And we will learn much in this chapter about the emergence of faith.

[Back to Top](#)

## 10:1-4

Those who live and work in a situation steeped in religious tradition, especially if it is Biblical tradition, will know a great deal about Paul's burdened heart. When people "know it all" and when their fathers before them were "sound in the Scriptures" and proud of their heritage and their martyrs, it is very hard to bring them to personal faith and commitment to Christ, especially if they are earnest, hard working servants of the religious establishment. Paul's burdened praying heart (not a critical one) acknowledged that his kinsfolk had a zeal for God. This is true of many "church folk" who have a deeper sense of duty, faithfulness and love for God's House than many evangelicals. Many are far more willing to roll up their sleeves and work at the humble tasks than those who consider themselves more "spiritual". But, says Paul, their zeal is unenlightened. They are doing it all in order to work for or earn salvation. When you speak to them of a salvation that comes as a "grace-gift" apart from works or merit it means nothing to them. Indeed, it can seem wrong because it seems to offer an "easy" salvation. The tragedy was and is that the whole of the law and the prophets, the whole of Scripture and church history testifies to the way of salvation by faith (Rom. 1:17; 3:10,19-20; 4:1-3,22; Lk. 24:27, 45). Note however that Paul links the blindness of the Jews with their deliberate pride and disobedience (3). They held to their "religion" even though the truth of it pointed them to Christ who is the fulfilment of it all. But they so idolised their "tradition" that they made the Word of God of no effect (Mk. 7:13). They refused to see that once Christ was in the field, He and He alone was the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). All else had to stand down as a way of salvation.

[Back to Top](#)

## 10:5-13

Paul is concerned to lay clearly before his fellow Jews the way of salvation and he continues to set over against each other the way of the Law and the way of faith. Of course, the issue is not discussed or worked out in a vacuum, for God has in fact spoken. And, since God has spoken, if men refuse to believe what He has said, especially if they are men taught in the things of God, then unbelief is deliberate. Unbelief is not a weakness or an uncertainty for which excuses can be made. It is a refusal of something that God has made plain. Unbelief is a sinful and evil thing that must be guarded against because of its serious consequence (Heb. 3:12). This is the clear and urgent issue which Paul now deals with. Men may be left perplexed yet still in an attitude of worship when dealing with the mystery of sovereign predestination and human free-will (Chap. 9). But here, God comes near; He presses in on sinner man in the proclamation of the Gospel and calls him to faith. Still there is mystery because those who had been prepared by living in the light of God's truth and blessing were refusing to believe, while Gentile "outsiders" were coming in from the dark into the light of God. Of course Jesus prophesied that it would be so (Matt. 8:11-12; 21:28-32). Unbelief is stubborn and holds to its own way in spite of all evidence and appeal. Paul quotes the Jews' own scriptures (Lev.18:5) in order to show the impossibility of the demand. Who can keep God's Law one hundred per cent, all the time? There is no hope of acquiring an acceptable righteousness by that route. On the other hand righteousness by faith is not hard or difficult. It is immediately accessible. It does not require you to do the impossible by ascending to the heights of Heaven or descending into the depths of Hades. The word of salvation by faith is near, because God has come near in His Son Jesus Christ. We shall think further of this tomorrow.

[Back to Top](#)

## 10:5-13

In v.6-8 Paul is quoting from Deut.30:11-14 and emphasising what he has already stated in 3;21 that the Law testified to righteousness by faith. It is difficult to see exactly why this passage from Deuteronomy is used here or why "righteousness based on faith" is made the speaker instead of Moses. Of course all the words of the Law are the words of the God of grace, the God of the Covenant, who has by His own power worked salvation for His people. It may be that Paul is emphasising that the whole Old Testament has the one objective, namely to point to the Lamb of God. Certainly Paul's concern is to emphasise faith not works as the basis of salvation. The phrases in brackets that Paul adds to the Deuteronomy quotation (6-7) may indicate that he was challenging those who denied the incarnation and refused to believe that Jesus was the Son come down from heaven, and those who denied the fact of the resurrection. Think of the preaching on the Day of

Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:22-36. Unbelief is faced with the necessity of denying or ignoring facts of history. In this way, unbelief is seen to be totally unreasonable. God has come near in His Son and has worked salvation for sinners. This is the word of faith, the message of the Gospel that we preach, pointing to Christ. And, in the preaching of this "word", Christ is presented to sinners as the only name whereby we can be saved (Acts 4:12), the only way of salvation (John 14:6). Paul goes on to affirm in v.13, quoting from Joel 2:32, that everyone who in faith calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[Back to Top](#)

### 10:5-13

See how urgently Paul presses on his people the need for the response of faith to the presentation of Christ in the Gospel. Read the same kind of earnest plea in Acts 3:12-26. To confess is to say yes to what God is declaring and to agree that it all applies to you and that you accept it. You bow your will, confess that Jesus is Lord, and you yield Him the right to rule over your life. You believe in your heart with spiritual conviction and commitment and recognise that if Jesus had not been raised from the dead you would still be in your sins and would live and die without hope (1 Cor. 15:12-17). You stake your whole hope of heaven and of acceptance in the sight of God on what Jesus did for you in His death and resurrection. This is what it means to be saved. Note that in v.10 it is made clear that this involves not only a private commitment of heart to Christ but also a public confession. And there is no doubt that "taking a stand" for Christ by lip and by life leads to a growing assurance of salvation. The Scripture quoted in v.11 is Isaiah 28:16, and has two emphases. It says that the man who trusts in Christ will not be put to shame, nor disappointed, but will be kept by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:5). It also declares that no-one, be he Jew or Greek, is excluded from the great Gospel offer of salvation (12). All stand condemned (3:9-10). All hear the same offer of salvation in Christ. All are called on to believe. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. What a message for sinners to hear!

“Sing above the battle's strife  
Jesus saves!  
By His death and endless life  
Jesus saves!  
Sing it softly through the gloom,  
When the heart for mercy craves;  
Sing in triumph o'er the tomb,  
Jesus saves! “ (Owens)

[Back to Top](#)

### 10:14-17

Paul is still dealing with the devastating mystery of Israel's unbelief and he is concerned to show that this did not stem from any fault in God's handling of the situation. In this passage we are given an outline of God's methods and we can link this with the statement in 1 Cor. 1:17-24 where the preaching of the message of Christ is declared to be God's way of bringing men and women to salvation. People cannot call on a Lord they do not believe in. They cannot believe in this Lord of salvation unless they hear about Him, being told of His grace and goodness, and His power to save. They cannot hear unless someone preaches, and preachers are not self-appointed. They are sent, raised up by God (Jer. 1:4-5; Amos 7:14-15; Acts 13:1-3; Eph. 3:7-8). Those who preach are spokesmen for God (2 Cor. 5:18-20), speaking to the hearts of men, declaring the glory of forgiveness and reconciliation. Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:7, and that chapter speaks of the salvation God works for His people (52:10) and leads on into the theme of the Suffering Servant and the unbelief of Israel (52:13-53:1). This strange and persistent unbelief was not a new thing and Paul found exactly what Isaiah had found, that he was preaching to an unheeding people. This is one of the most heart-breaking aspects of the life of ministers and missionaries. But at the same time it teaches the basic lesson that it is the preaching and proclamation of the Gospel which alone can awaken faith. We must learn to have confidence in God's Word. And we must never lose sight of or minimise the centrality of preaching, which is essentially the declaration of the truth of what God has done, rather than just exhortation to respond. If we learn this lesson



we will pray more than we do for the preaching of the Word, not only prior to the preaching but following the preached Word with our prayers, watering the seed sown.

[Back to Top](#)

### 10:18-21

The preaching and the praying referred to yesterday had been done, and done faithfully, but still the message met the blank wall of unbelief. Israel had heard because the message had gone out all over the earth (Ps. 19:4). Note how well Paul used the Scriptures the Jews claimed to accept and respect. They could not claim ignorance. They of all peoples should have grasped the significance of the Gospel message and should have seen it as the fulfilment of all the promises of the Old Testament. Paul quoted from Isaiah 65:1-2 and Deut. 32:21 and challenged the Jews in their unbelief by emphasising how the ignorant Gentiles, who had no pretensions to spiritual religion as the Jews claimed to have, had in fact recognised the voice of God and had responded to the truth of God. This fact of experience, the eagerness of the Gentiles to believe, was something that enraged the Jews and this is evidenced by the stories in the Acts of the Apostles. Surrounded by, assailed by and appealed to by the Gospel with all its promises of blessing, the Jews had no desire to believe. This was not due to any lack of capacity caused by the decree of an unfeeling, predestinating God. Such a thought would make nonsense of the testimony of God in v.21 to the effect that He had in longsuffering patient love held out His hands of appeal to a disobedient and perverse people. Yes, there remains the mystery of election and predestination which we must still grapple with in chapter 11. But there is no mystery or unreality or empty charade about the tears of the Saviour over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37). He *would have* gathered them, but they *would not*. The issue is not, "Am I elect or not?" but, "Will I believe or not?" If we are sobered by or even frightened by the thought of the evil of unbelief, then we have made progress.

[Back to Top](#)

### 11:1-10

We come now to one of the most difficult chapters to understand and we will not deal with it in too much detail. In the end we will be aware that there remains an essential mystery, and this reminds us that there are always things beyond our understanding in the outworking of world history. What is going on in the world as the generations pass? God's saving purposes which are perfect and complete in every way and never subject to "accident" are being worked out. It is God who determines the course of events, not mere social, political and economic factors, although God works through these things. What we have to recognise is that God's ways are higher than ours and His methods are perfectly suited to the objective in hand (Isa. 55:8-9) even if we cannot understand them. What we must never do when faced with the mysteries of experience is to jump to conclusions. If we do not look through to the end result, we will certainly get a distorted picture, because the picture is not yet complete. We must watch the artist and listen to what he is saying about his work. Here again we must be careful because we tend to underestimate the sheer scale of God's purposes. This is why at the end of this chapter (11:33-36) we have a magnificent doxology, full of worship, and marked by glad submission to the God who is totally trustworthy. It will help us to understand what Paul is saying if we recognise that for his purpose here he recognises two, and only two, categories of people in the world, namely Jews and Gentiles, and their destinies are bound up together. On the other hand Paul also recognises the basic division between faith and unbelief. And it is the deliberate and obstinate unbelief of the Jews (10:21) that causes him to raise the question in 11:1, "Has God rejected His people?" In all the story we are dealing with a God who is actively pursuing and completing His own perfect purposes.

[Back to Top](#)

### 11:1-10

Paul asks the question about God's rejection of the Jews and gives a resounding, negative answer. As a Jew he regards the idea as unthinkable, and perhaps he suggests that his own conversion is proof that God has not rejected all His people. "The apostle has already shown that divine rejection, though in a sense real, is not complete (chap. 9) and not arbitrary (chap. 10). Here in chap. 11 he will point out that it is also not absolute

or unqualified. It is not the whole story. Running side by side with rejection there is also election. Divine saving activity parallels divine hardening .... (and) between hardening and saving, between breaking off and grafting in, there is a kind of cause and effect relationship" (Hendriksen). Right from the start of the chapter Paul stands with the whole of the Old Testament and affirms that the Jews were God's particularly chosen people. It was through them that God's purposes in and for the world were being worked out, and even the crisis moment of history was accomplished by the Jews when they crucified Christ (Acts 2:22-24). Even then there was a "higher" hand, purpose and power at work for it was God who delivered up Jesus, and yet, this did not in any way minimise the enormity of the sin of the Jews when they rejected their promised Messiah, whose coming was the reason for their existence as the chosen people. But the Cross, and the subsequent rejection of the Jews, the destruction of Jerusalem, and their scattering throughout the nations was not the end of history. The plan still goes on and even in their rejection the Jews are still God's "chosen" people. Even in their unbelief they are still the instruments of God's purposes as they unfold and develop. This must confirm to us the unity, continuity and certainty of God's purposes of salvation especially in the areas we do not understand. Even though we may be baffled and even disturbed by some of the statements of this chapter we must not miss its encouragements.

[Back to Top](#)

### 11:1-10

The encouragement we spoke of yesterday lies in the illustration from the story of Elijah to the effect that we must not judge situations nor assess their spiritual significance on the basis of what *seems* to be (1 Kings 19:10). Elijah sincerely believed on the basis of what he could see and assess that all was finished and that God had rejected His people. But he was wrong. There was within the apostate nation a considerable and significant remnant on whom the purposes of God centred and through whom these purposes would move forward to victory (1 Kings 19:18). We must learn that the work of God and the purpose of salvation are never dependent on unbelievers or backsliders, nor can they be frustrated by them. God's plan never staggers for a moment even when things are as black as they were in Elijah's day and when the prophet felt such a total failure. We have to learn in a day when the idolatry of statistics is dominant not to despise the day of small things (Zech. 4:10). Those who want big numbers must remember that Gideon's army was a hindrance because it was too big! Think how few were present at Bethlehem and even fewer, really only Christ in fact, at the Cross. But in all generations, God preserves His remnant. They are the real Israel. This idea of the "remnant" being the real "people of God" is present right through the Old Testament. Right up to v.5 we have no difficulty in receiving the truth Paul is teaching Within the general fold of "God's religious people" there is a remnant with true and saving faith. We even grasp v.6 that salvation is all of grace and not merit or works. Then we tend to stumble at v.7 which speaks of the others being hardened, and that hardening being the result of God's activity (8-10). We must spend one more day considering this.

[Back to Top](#)

### 11:1-10

The main burden of this section is that Paul, in answer to his question in v.1, is emphasising that the rejection of the Jews is only partial; it is neither complete nor final. But how can you have a people chosen, and blessed, and yet hardened? Think of how God lays His hand on a church and congregation which in the eyes of ecclesiastical authority is really "finished". God chooses and blesses, but in the course of time, by the same gracious ministry which melts some, others are hardened in unbelief and depart. The hardening that Paul speaks of here refers us back to 10:1-3 (rather than to the theme of predestination in chap. 9) and links with the stubborn pride of heart that refuses to submit to God's way of salvation. Yes, the action of hardening is God's action but it is judicial, a judgment on the sin of unbelief for which there was no excuse. In a very real sense we cannot discern the process of hardening. Is it the result of disobedience or the cause of disobedience? It is solemn; and it urges us to take great care when we hear the Word of God (Heb. 2:1-3; Lk. 8:18) because there are eternal issues being worked out all the time. That is the urgency of the call, "Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts." (Ps. 95:7-11). To revert to the illustration of the congregation, is it not the case that some who were hardened, perhaps returning to the same congregation or perhaps in

another, are later brought to repentance? But Paul does not evade the fact of God's activity in sending the judgment of hardness upon proud unbelieving hearts. He refers to Deut. 29:4; Isaiah 6:9-10; 29:10; and Ps. 69:22-23 and causes us to think of those who are totally insensitive to every word or influence that comes to them. The Gospel is indeed light. But light refused is darkness that has no relief in it.

[Back to Top](#)

### **11:11-24**

Paul emphasises that Israel's rejection is temporary (1-10): Israel's rejection is partial, not complete, and he makes the great statement in v.23 regarding their being gathered in again. Follow his argument carefully. In v.11 we are told that Israel's transgression opened the gate of salvation to the Gentiles. They crucified their King and they rejected the Gospel and Paul turned to the Gentiles (Acts 18:5-6). But Paul is viewing this whole matter from the standpoint of God's over-ruling purpose of salvation. It was God who delivered up Jesus. It was God who laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Acts 2:23; Isa. 53:6,10; Gal. 4:4). The reference to jealousy seems to indicate that some of the Jews, seeing the blessing of God on the Gentiles through the Gospel, will desire it for themselves, and they will be awakened to seek it. We must see that there is nothing static or defeatist in Paul as he deals with this vexed problem and mystery, and in v.12 he is reaching forward in his mind and spirit to the outworking of God's purpose as history proceeds towards its climax of fulfilment. In v.11-12 he contrasts the stumbling of Israel with their fullness or full inclusion, but he does not state clearly exactly what he means by that full inclusion or fullness. In v.13-14 he speaks as the missionary to the Gentiles, making much of his ministry, in order to show its glorious outreach and ingathering. We too need to have a larger vision of what God is doing and intending. After all in Rev. 5:11;7:9 we read of countless numbers from all nations gathered into the everlasting kingdom of God and we must not allow any manifestation of unbelief among Jews or Gentiles to cloud this glorious vision. The end, which is victory and completeness, is never in doubt.

[Back to Top](#)

### **11:11-24**

In v.15 Paul states that the rejection of the Jews led to the reconciliation of the world. And, of course, the casting away of the Jews was real. The kingdom was taken from them and given to others who would produce its fruit (Matt. 21:43). This was God's specific action. But in 2 Cor. 5:19 it is stated clearly that it was God's action in the death of Christ that led to reconciliation. Can both statements be true? They are not contradictory. They belong together. Think of the story of the "scapegoat" in Lev. 16:5-10,21-22 which foreshadows what was to be accomplished in Christ for the salvation of men. One goat died in sacrifice and the other was sent away to wander in desolation; it is not too much to say that the wanderings of the Jews over the face of the earth, homeless and rejected and persecuted, constitute a dark shadow of the Cross. Salvation is from the Jews, Jesus said in John 4:22; and the experiences of the Jews cannot be separated from God's saving activity in the world. Whether the Jews themselves believe this at any particular stage in their experience does not change the fact. They are a "sign" of God's activity in the matter of salvation and they themselves are not excluded from it. Paul speaks of their acceptance which will mean life from the dead. Commentators debate at length just what v.15 means and whether or not it should be applied to the events pertaining to the end of the age. Paul certainly speaks of an "acceptance" of the Jews by God, that is, a restoring to favour of a people cast off. This will bring blessing beyond measure, described as life from the dead. Without getting lost in the debate, and confessing a real measure of ignorance about the interpretation, we remind ourselves that at least these words mean that the story of God's saving activity is by no means finished, and is certainly not petering out. It is moving to a glorious climax of fulfilment.

[Back to Top](#)

### **11:11-24**

Jesus told His disciples to be alive to the "signs of the times" and we too must be sensitive to what is going on in the world, not that we might jump to conclusions on limited evidence or understanding, but that we might ever look to God in faith. Paul spoke in Eph. 1:10 of God's plan for the fullness of time. Peter spoke in

Acts 3:21 of the time of restoration (NIV) or establishing (RSV) or restitution (AV). This speaks of a time still to come when the outworking of God's plan of salvation will become gloriously visible and complete. We say that coming events cast their shadow before them, and there is no shadow without light and reality. Now, if the coming of the Jews to Canaan heralded the approach of the coming of Christ to Bethlehem in the fullness of God's time, should we not see a similar significance in the return of the Jews to Israel in our day? Granted they are still an unbelieving nation and (although there are many Jewish believers), at odds with and facing the criticism of a great part of the world of nations. They are still a persecuted people, but still a "sign" that God's saving plans go forward. The illustrations in v.16 indicate that Paul is speaking of the Jews as a people and not of individual Jews who believe. By the offering of "firstfruits" the whole harvest is regarded as set apart for God. The Jews were set apart for God in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If the root from which the people sprang was holy, then the people are holy (set apart) unto the Lord. God is not going to go back on that earlier consecration and so Paul is continuing to speak of the fulness and restoration of Israel, an argument that climaxes in v.26a, a verse that is exceedingly difficult to understand. But remember this: lack of understanding on our part does not minimise, let alone cancel out the reality signified. We must wait and watch for the coming of the Lord draws near (Jas. 5:8).

[Back to Top](#)

### **11:11-24**

In v.17-24 Paul gives a solemn warning against spiritual pride, presumption, and complacency. Paul is speaking particularly to believing Gentiles (13) who seem to have been in danger of despising the Jews who, of course, had despised them down the ages. It is still all too easy, even in the church, to devalue those who do not come from the same background and heritage as ourselves and whose language may be difficult for us to grasp. The great danger is that a people blessed by God can begin to feel "superior", forgetting that all they are and have is the gift of God's grace (1 Cor. 4:7). Paul reminds the proud, converted Gentiles that they were like a wild olive shoot grafted into the "tree" of Israel to share its blessings. Paul agrees that this "grafting" is contrary to nature because normally it is the cultivated branch that is grafted into the wild stock. All of us need to remember that by God's grace we were grafted into something already there; we were brought by grace into something to which we had no natural right. That is why we must never be proud Christians. That is also why we must be careful of our criticism of the church as we find it. Young people especially, in their enthusiasm for Christ, need to remember that but for the perseverance of the faithful remnant through costly days and years there would not have been a church for them to criticise. What is more, some critics need to be challenged to prove what they can do, starting from a totally virgin and undeveloped situation. Paul here is telling the Gentile Christians to remember how much they owe to the Jews, their Scriptures and their history. We do well to remember our debt to others and to be grateful. The Gentile replies in v.19 that branches were cut off so that he could take their place. Think of those who say, "I am the real church." Beware pride!

[Back to Top](#)

### **11:11-24**

Paul has not forgotten his main theme concerning the rejection of the Jews. It was because of unbelief that they were cut off (20) and it is only through faith that the Gentiles and we ourselves are included and stand by faith. Be careful then, and give diligence to make your calling and election beyond doubt (2 Pet. 1:10). If God did not spare the Jews in their unbelief neither will He spare anyone else whose heart is hardened in unbelief by pride. Note how solemnly Paul makes men consider their dealings with God and His dealings with men. There is both kindness and severity (or sternness). "Paul is not teaching that salvation can be finally lost after it has been bestowed; but that it is he who endures to the end that will be saved, and that this is the only proof that the graft has 'taken'" (J. Philip). Then (23) Paul again turns to his hope for Israel, declaring that if they do not persist in unbelief they too can be grafted in again, into their "own" tree (24). He seems to suggest that it is "easier" to graft in "natural" branches than "wild" ones. But he emphasises the matter of faith. The promises of God's grace are indeed unconditional; but the Bible never separates the receiving of the promises from faith, and from the life that is in accord with a confession of faith. No matter how Paul emphasises God's sovereignty in Romans chapters 9,10 and 11 he always brings to its true place the matter of human

responsibility. But to return to the main and perplexing theme of the Jews, Paul has insisted that whatever glorious future remains to them in the economy of God, the issue of their participation in it is dependent on their not remaining in their unbelief (23). One last comment: Paul speaks of only one "olive tree" thereby signifying that the church of God is one, down through the generations, and comprises the whole number of the elect from beginning to end, gathered into one under Christ (Westminster Confession).

[Back to Top](#)

### **11:25-32**

Paul is summing up his whole argument and he counsels the Christians in Rome to be careful in their thinking and attitudes, especially in relation to the Jews. He reminds us all that we are dealing with a "mystery", that is, something which cannot be worked out by mere human reason but only by God's revelation. He speaks of the hardening that has come upon part of Israel, or a hardening in part that has come on all Israel. We have been faced with this fact right through this chapter and now Paul states that this hardening will continue until the full number of the Gentiles has been gathered in. This means that the mysterious hardness of heart in the chosen people which continues down the ages is a necessary and working part of God's plan of salvation. Then, when their hardness and rejection have fulfilled God's purpose and are no longer needed, there will be a gathering in of Israel into God's salvation. The full number of the Gentiles will have been gathered in at Christ's return in glory and therefore we are dealing with matters going right through to the end of the age. This is an emphasis that we are tending to forget in the evangelical church in our generation. We forget that there is a terminus to the course of history, and the day and hour no man knows. This means there should be immediacy and urgency in all our dealings with life and work and witness, not least in Christian witness to the Jews. Right through this epistle we have been made aware that not all (Jews or Gentiles) will be saved, but only those who believe. This also must give a solemn urgency to all our dealings with the Gospel. The issues are eternal. Read Jesus's words in Luke 16:19-31.

[Back to Top](#)

### **11:25-32**

Commentators debate at length the meaning of v.26a and it is a difficult statement. Some apply it to a "spiritual" Israel referring to the total number of the elect through all the ages, Jews and Gentiles alike. That would simply mean that Paul was saying all whom God determined to save would be saved (cf. 8:28-30). But that interpretation does not seem to fit with the great emphasis right through the chapter on the Jews as Jews.

Some apply "all Israel" to the generation of the Jews living on earth at the end-time of history. It cannot mean every single Jew just as the fullness of the Gentiles does not mean every single Gentile. But it refers to a vast ingathering of Israel into Christ, something far beyond our expectations and far beyond anything indicated by the continuing hardness of heart of the Jews against Christ as we now see it. A third interpretation refers "all Israel" to the full number gathered out of Israel down through history, the sum total of the "remnant" of every generation. Whatever interpretation we take, and the writer of these notes still grapples with the problem of interpretation, we must think of a spiritual gathering rather than a merely national or ethnic gathering. There is only one way of salvation for Jew and Gentile alike, as Paul made plain at the start (1:16-17). It is the way of faith in Christ. The references Paul brings forward to substantiate his claim about "all Israel" seem to be a weaving together of Isa. 59:20-21; Isa. 27:9a; and Jer. 31:33. These verses seem to refer to the significance of Christ's first coming to earth to work the work of salvation and forgiveness of sins, but may well point forward to His second coming and the final completion of His work. Whatever our difficulty with v.26 it should make us look to and long for the appearing of the Saviour (2 Pet. 3:12; Titus 2:11-13).

[Back to Top](#)

### **11:25-32**

As a preparation for the worship and the reading of the final doxology of this chapter ponder deeply (rather than study clinically) v.28-32. How can people be both enemies and beloved at the same time? How can Jews and Gentiles, natural enemies, be reconciled together in one body as Paul speaks of it in Eph. 2:13-16? We

need to learn to stand in awe of the wonder-working God of salvation. We tend to make things too "easy" and to regard the gospel as too "simple" and in consequence we devalue it. We must not reduce God and His purposes to the small size of our limited thinking. We are so changeable and so manipulated by circumstances and our reactions to them, that we can scarcely grasp love that never changes. Nor can we grasp easily the thought of gifts once given never to be withdrawn or effectual calling that can never be contradicted. But if we thought more of these things, and of the wonder-working God who brings us to salvation, we would know far more of the joy, peace and pleasure of assurance. We would learn to trust God through thick and thin, and would begin to rest in Him in the deepest and darkest perplexities. Read about the "love that will not let us go" in Hosea 11:8-9. It is almost unbelievable. Remember, says Paul to the Gentiles (30) and to us, what you once were and how God came to you in mercy and saved you. Now, in some way there is working out, through you and your experience, salvation for the Jews. This salvation is all of God. He has shut up or consigned Jew and Gentile alike to the judgment of disobedience (3:19-20) so that He might have mercy on Jew and Gentile alike without distinction. The Bible never says that all without exception will be saved. That is why we must be in earnest about our own salvation and in our witness to others.

[Back to Top](#)

### 11:33-36

This doxology of praise contrasts gloriously with the anguish and heaviness of heart Paul spoke of in 9:1-3. At the same time, v.32 seems to suggest he is looking back over the whole exposition of the gospel which he has given in this epistle. He is full of admiration for God in all His wisdom and knowledge. He cannot plumb the depth of God's riches of mercy and kindness (2:4); nor the depth of His wise ways and methods which are perfect; nor the depth of His knowledge, for He is all-knowing, omniscient. God's judgments, His sovereign decisions, dispositions and actions are unsearchable (Isa. 55:8-9). His ways are inscrutable and cannot be found out by man's searching (Job 11:7) not least because He is a God who hides Himself (Isa. 45:15) and makes no display of His power (Habakkuk 3:4). Who can probe the mind of God (Isa. 40:12-14)? Who has ever counselled God or put God in his debt (Job 41:11)? From God in the past, through God now in the present in things both human and demonic (Phil. 2:10-11) and to God in the future are all things. All is from Him and for Him (John 1:3; Col. 1:12-19) whether in creation or redemption. God is the source of our salvation. God is able to save to the uttermost and to keep us from falling (Heb. 7:25; Jude 24) and He is able to do far more abundantly above all we are ever able to ask or think (Eph. 3:20). Little wonder Paul says, "To God be the glory, great things He hath done." "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." (Shorter Catechism) How to do that in practical terms Paul will now go on to teach in the rest of the epistle.

[Back to Top](#)

### 12:1-2

Some people object to the close study of the first eleven chapters of Romans because it is too spiritual and theological. Such persons usually object to chapters 12-15 because they are too practical, radical and demanding. But Paul moves right on from the glorious doxology just studied to the down-to-earth business of living life as a Christian here in this wicked world. In eleven chapters we have studied the theology of salvation, seeing that salvation is the work of God's grace, that justification is by faith alone, and that the righteousness we lack is provided by God in and through the death and resurrection of Christ, in whom we have been raised to newness of life. Now Paul begins to insist that the theology of grace that we believe must be expressed in the behaviour of grace, in lives that manifest the grace and goodness of Christ. The believing and the behaving belong together and *in that order*. It is the believing that brings you into possession of the life of salvation and provides the dynamic, by the indwelling Spirit, so that you can in fact walk in newness of life (6:4). The behaving, the working out in your life of all that you have been given in Christ, confirms your conversion. It is no use having all our Christianity in our heads for that will make us cold, logical, theological machines quite unattractive and totally different from Jesus. Nor is it any use having all our Christianity in our feelings for that means we will be constantly turbulent and changeable. Nor are we called to be super-spiritual because it is down here in the realities of the world that Christ has to be manifested in us. This is

why Paul starts by calling for a consecration of bodies and minds which, he says, is "your spiritual worship" ("reasonable service" AV). Look back to 6:3-4,12-14,19; 8:1,12,28-30. The possibilities are limitless. The standard is high.

[Back to Top](#)

## 12:1-2

The mercies of God can be summarised as Salvation from the guilt and power of sin; Justification and acceptance in the sight of God; Resurrection to newness of life; and Redemption in which we see ourselves incorporated into the purposes of God for the whole sweep of history which is moving to a glorious climax, guided by God's wise and sovereign providence. The need of every aspect of human experience has been met and provided for in Christ. We can be and can do all that God calls for, because all that is needed has been provided in the death and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, present your bodies a living sacrifice. It is an act of total surrender to the will of God in a way that cannot ever be recalled. Is that too much? You are not your own, you are bought with a price, therefore it is totally reasonable (1 Cor. 6:10). Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:15,19). When Paul speaks of the body he recognises that the body is the vehicle of expression for the whole personality, and, since we are "new persons" then our new life will be expressed through our bodies. We give ourselves (our new selves), to God. The reason is that our old selves being no use for anything have been put to death in the death of Christ. Our new selves, alive in Christ, holy in Christ and acceptable in Christ are out spiritual worship and the reasonable response to the great mercy of God. The call is for an enthusiastic response, a complete dedication and a wholehearted commitment to God. This does not in any sense deny our personality, humanity, temptations or trials. Our Lord Jesus, who gave Himself so freely and willingly to God to do His will, knew what it was to be tempted and to suffer and to struggle (Heb. 2:18; 4:15; Mk. 14:33). But He conquered, and in His victory we too are conquerors (8:37). Considering the mercies of God, why should we even hesitate to make this living sacrifice?

[Back to Top](#)

## 12:1-2

In v.2 we begin to see that this once-for-all surrender to God involves a continuing fight against powers and influences that are set to keep us from serving God. We must refuse to be conformed, squeezed or conditioned into the mould of this world. The reason for this is that the world is not neutral in respect of the Christian (1 John 2:15-17; 5:19; Gal. 4:3,8-9; Eph. 6:10ff; Col. 1:13; 2:8,15). The world is more than just the sum of the material and the people. It is a system that is essentially anti-Christ and its "spirit" and atmosphere are constantly influencing and indoctrinating us, brainwashing us and leading us into a drab and dominating materialism in which there is neither the time nor the energy to think about God. Worldliness is dangerous and we need to set a guard on our souls for we are all far more influenced than we are aware of. We must learn to think things through; being "not conformed" is accomplished by being transformed by the renewing of our minds. That renewing process is all bound up with hearing, believing and obeying the Word of God, which has a cleansing as well as an instructing effect (Eph. 5:26). It helps us to think what we are doing and in what way our attitudes and actions are affecting us for good or ill in relation to God's good and perfect will for our lives. Think, for example, of the company we keep, since wrong company ruins morals and corrupts character (1 Cor. 15:33 RSV and NIV). we must use our heads, because cool thinking is the corrective to hot emotions and confused actions. This kind of consecration may be costly but in it you prove that God's will is in fact good, altogether acceptable, and perfect. To live in God's will is life indeed, Nothing can compensate for being out of His will.

[Back to Top](#)

## 12:3-8

Paul's call for personal surrender and for willingness to be changed and conformed to God's will is now applied to both individual life and life in the fellowship of the church. The searching counsel of v.3 is given in a very wise way. Paul speaks of the grace given to him, almost as if he is reminding Christians that if they feel they are important in any way in God's work or have some particular gift, then it is all the gift of God's

grace and nothing to be proud of (1 Cor: 4:7). He may have been thinking of his own calling and appointment (Rom 1:5; 1 Cor. 15:9-10; Eph. 3:7-8) and of how God had hemmed him in with difficulty lest he ever became proud and so limited his usefulness (2 Cor.12:7). The greatest danger we ever face in Christian life and service is spiritual pride. Think of Jesus' words in Luke 14:7-11, and of how the disciples argued as to who was the most important (Lk. 9:46). We can have such a high opinion of our own spirituality and significance that we go through life amazed and hurt because we are not properly appreciated. Of course, we can so denigrate and devalue ourselves that life becomes something of a Hell. That can be the work of the Devil to crush us but it can be a false humility which is really a form of pride in order to draw attention to ourselves. Feelings of superiority or of inferiority must give place to realistic thinking, namely that God has taken us up, made us His own, set us in our place and given us the gift or capacity to do what He wants us to do. By God's grace each of us, in our unique personality with capacities and limitations, is important and necessary (1 Cor. 12:22). But we must not aim too high nor be extravagantly spiritual. There is a measure of faith, and whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23).

[Back to Top](#)

### 12:3-8

Having given his great call to willing consecration, and having applied it to the individual (3), Paul now applies it to the life of the fellowship. He emphasises first that within the unity of the body of Christ, which is the church, there is a glorious diversity of personalities and gifts. Each one is uniquely important yet interdependent. We must see ourselves as a necessary part, but only a part. There is never a time when we can "go it alone"; never a time when we do not need our fellows (and they us) for spiritual health and effective service.

We are members of each other, closely integrated, drawing life from the one sovereign source which is Christ, and it is together that we are able to become our true selves and grow to be all that God has made us capable of being. Consider Eph. 2:19-22; 4:15-16; and 1 Pet. 1:23; 2:1-5. It is in this context of growth in grace within the diversity and unity of the fellowship that Paul gives a list of the "grace gifts" that are given to each believer. Inasmuch as they are gifts there is no ground for anyone boasting or feeling superior to another. The list is not exhaustive and there are other lists in 1 Cor. 12:4-11 and Eph. 4:11. This should make us aware of the fact that all gifts have their function *and* their limitation. Paul makes it plain that these gifts are to be used for service. The more "gifted" we are the more hard-working we should be. And, we must recognise that there is an enemy who is always trying to introduce confusion and tension into the fellowship. That is why we must not try to be something we are neither called nor fitted to be. Nor must we refuse to be and to become what we should be. Nor must we try to make other people be and do what is not for them in God's wise providence. Consider this: if there are too many people of one kind in a congregation there is something wrong. If there are too many tongues, all wanting to preach, and not enough hands to do the practical caring and scrubbing and routine work, the body will not work well.

[Back to Top](#)

### 12:3-8

In the practical exercise of our gifts within the life of the church there must be no exaggeration. All must be done in proportion to our faith, or according to the standard of faith. All that appears or claims to be spiritual is not necessarily so, and there must be discernment and assessment as Paul makes plain in 1 Cor. 14:29. In prophecy, which is speaking the Word direct from God since the New Testament Scriptures were not yet available, there must be no wildly exaggerated statements. If we proclaim with conviction what we do not believe we are hypocrites, not spiritually gifted people. There is a sureness and certainty which is not necessarily honouring to God. After all, we know only in part (1 Cor. 13:9). Think of the wise caution of faith in the statement of the young men in Dan. 3:16-18. They were not "hedging their bets" when they said, "But if not ..." They were simply acknowledging that they made no claim to know perfectly what God intended doing. Paul speaks here of "serving"; which is practical "non-spiritual" work and yet of the highest spiritual significance. Do those who benefit from these notes ever pray with thanksgiving for those who type the plates, those who get tired and dirty managing a printing machine, those who fit pages together and post them, and those who clean the church hall and keep it warm? We get confused sometimes in our assessment



of what is "spiritual" and "gifted" and we need to examine ourselves to see whether or not we are really taking our rightful share of the work. Note the words in v.8 "generously", "diligently" and "cheerfully". They signify the singleness of mind and motive, the diligence in leadership, and the cheerfulness (literally hilarity) that should mark all our service for Christ. Why should it be otherwise? We owe so much to Him.

[Back to Top](#)

### 12:9-13

Paul now deals with inter-personal relationships within the church and in a few verses he presents us with a comprehensive call and challenge. This is not too high a standard. Indeed it should be "natural" for us to be like this if Christ lives in our hearts by His Spirit. Of course, love and laziness are mutually exclusive, and sheer lack of effort is often the reason why we make so little progress. Let love be genuine, and if we do not immediately *feel* love then *act* on the basis of love and our attitude to the one who is "difficult" to love will change. Read Matt. 18:21-35. Love does not count how often it has forgiven, but love does remember how much it has been forgiven. It is easier to love than to hate. But we must hate what is evil, in ourselves first and then in others. It is dangerous to have sympathy with sin, for God is against it (Rom. 1:18, 32; Ps. 97:10). The best way to hold off evil is to hold fast to what is good. If we do this in our thinking our feelings will be more easily disciplined (Phil. 4:8-9). Be devoted to one another in brotherly love because you belong to one another and value one another. This is "family" love and in a world in which family life is disappearing the church must be a place where people matter and are cared for. In the RSV "outdo one another" seems to introduce a spirit of competition, which could easily lead to a "Uriah Heep" false humility which is quite offensive. The NIV says, "Honour one another above yourselves," and the AV says, "In honour, preferring one another". This links with Phil. 2:3 and speaks of that humility which simply forgets about "self" and is genuinely appreciative of others. The standard is high, but human, and attractive.

[Back to Top](#)

### 12:9-13

Verses 11-13 are crowded with truth. Never lack zeal, although at the right time make allowance for mental and bodily limitation. Zeal is not the same as a driving spirit. But thank God for tireless workers who keep on going on and doing it in a spirit of warmth and approachability. Such people are glad to be working for Jesus. "Being aglow with the Spirit" (RSV) is not the same as running an emotional temperature. Remember that a head of steam can blow a whistle or drive a train, and those who serve the Lord are to be preferred to those who just make a noise, often shrill, and usually attracting attention to themselves. "Keep your spiritual fervour" (NIV). How do we do that? By keeping our minds and hearts fixed on Jesus, remembering the glorious salvation He has brought, and rejoicing in the glorious destiny to which He calls us. Serve the Lord. Whatever we are doing, do it as unto Jesus (Col. 3:17). Verse 12 seems to echo 5:2-3; 8:18,26-27. Hope in Christ is sure and enables us to look beyond the horizon of immediate experience and indeed beyond life itself. This is how Paul himself lived (2 Cor. 4:18). Because hope is sure it anchors us in times of tribulation and trial (Heb. 6:19) and we become aware that difficulty often is the doorway to opportunity (1 Cor. 16:8-9). This makes us pray. It is astonishing how severe God's dealings with us have to be before we become really earnest in the matter of prayer. This kind of prayer is not just for the easing of our own burdens. It becomes intercessory prayer and prayer for the going forth of the Word of the Gospel (Eph. 6: 19-20; Col. 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 3:1). This kind of life is not "ultra spiritual" because it will lead us to contribute to (the word means "have fellowship with") the needs of the saints. This in turn will lead to the practical grace of hospitality, in which we will sometimes entertain angels (Heb. 13:2) and sometimes less desirable visitors. In the latter case, we must be quite decisive (2 John 10-11).

[Back to Top](#)

### 12:14-17

The standard of behaviour set would be impossible and the exhortation to reach it would be demoralising but for the fact that Christ lives in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20). Paul has spoken of the expression of that life in our own persons, in the life of the church, in relationships within the church, and now he speaks of

it in terms of the whole range of human relationships and associations. Paul is speaking of those times in life when things are hard and go wrong, especially when things hit you when you are most set on being and doing right. We will only cope if we remember that these hazards and unfair experiences are to be expected and carry their own reward (Matt. 5: 10-12; 1 Pet. 4:12-19). But we must keep clearly in mind that Paul is dealing here with personal hurt and his words must not be twisted to make nonsense of the judicial system which is instituted by God for the punishment of wrongdoing. That comes in 13:1-7. There is no question in today's verses of people being allowed to do whatever they want with impunity, as we shall see in v.19. There are times when the work and testimony of God and His servants are being slandered, and it would be wrong to be silent and submissive. Think of Acts 16:35-40; 1 Cor. 9:1-3ff; 2 Cor. 10:7-18; Gal. 2:11ff. Now, this whole twelfth chapter becomes a practical possibility only when the mind is renewed (12:2) and we think in spiritual categories, seeing the whole of life in terms of God, the Devil, and the ultimate victory of the purposes of God. We can afford to be calm and patient and longsuffering, not least because we can recognise often that those who would harm us are dupes of the Devil, and therefore to be pitied. They need to be prayed for. That is why we must bless them rather than curse them. After all, we are in the business of salvation not condemnation.

[Back to Top](#)

### **12:14-17**

To bless is to speak well of and this must be our attitude to those who persecute us unjustly. But it also involves holding back those inner thoughts that wish harm on our persecutors even though we do not take any action against them. If we give way to the bitter spirit it will simply poison our own souls. We must recognise how much these people need to be prayed for and therefore we ask God to bless them. Our efforts to create harmony may fail (1 Col.4:12-13) but we try with all our power to maintain harmony, remembering that a soft answer often turns away wrath (Prov. 15:1). Of course, if we remember just how magnificently kind God has been to us, and how in Christ we have a guaranteed and glorious future, we will be more able to take a Christ-like attitude to others. We will have real sympathy for and fellowship with others. It is easier to weep with the sorrowful (unless our hearts are very hard) than to rejoice with those who have been given what may have been denied to us. We must guard against envy, believing that God's ordering of life, even in its denials, is for our good, our safety and our rich blessing. To live in harmony is to be of one mind ( Phil.2:1-2). But being like Jesus does not mean we are colourless, soft, and blind to facts. Think of some of the very disturbing things Jesus said to the Pharisees, the disciples and the general crowd. He could be very searching and challenging. But He was in all situations the Prince of Peace, and His objective was to bring the peace of God to people. Now, the way to bring peace is to lay aside the haughty spirit that thinks it is better than others (Mk. 9:33-37) and tends to be willing for the "big" spiritual tasks but not interested in the humble ones (John 13:1-5).

[Back to Top](#)

### **12:14-17**

Pride is such a sinister thing that we consider these verses again. Read also Lk. 22:21-27 and see how in even the holiest of atmospheres the disciples were totally unaware of how they had given way to self-admiration. They were so very sure of their own spirituality. They were not the last to be like that (3 John 9) and it is still so easy to hold to our own opinion over against the conviction of the whole church. Remember Paul's words in Rom. 12:3. In today's passage he is warning against being snobbish and James 2:1-7 has the same message. It was easy in Paul's day, as it is in ours, to be preoccupied with those who have "got on" and to assume that those Christians who have advanced in their chosen profession are necessarily spiritual giants. The real giants are those who carry the load of "ordinary" work and who do it with a cheerfulness of heart that is infectious. Conceit (16) is an unpleasant thing, and indicates that the person has forgotten that all he is is the gift of God's grace (1 Cor. 4:7). It makes us like the Pharisees who were so good at seeing and correcting the faults of others that they failed to see their own manifest defects (Matt. 7:1-5). When we want to correct someone we should always consider whether or not it is our rightful task to do so. We may be taking upon ourselves authority that is not God-given. When Paul speaks again of vindictiveness, repaying evil for evil (17), he

seems to be thinking of the general spirit manifest in society then and now and goes on to say that Christians must be different. Remember that God says, "I will repay" (19). In NIV the second half of v.17 seems to suggest we should do what people think right and that does not seem a Christian or even sensible attitude. The RSV of "being noble" has to do with living as those with a "royal" calling". The AV stresses the need for honesty in all our dealings. There is much to think about here!

[Back to Top](#)

### **12:18-21**

In v.17 and 18 Paul is concerned with Christian behaviour and witness amongst "all", outside as well as inside the church. Following the comments in the last reading, we must think of how dignity and seemliness of behaviour are disappearing from society. This is a realm for witness in everything from speech to dress. It is not a Christian attitude to say, "I don't care what people think." We must care, for the Gospel's sake (2 Cor. 8:21; 1 Tim. 3:7; 2 Cor. 4:2; Eph. 4:1-2; Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:14-16). In a world where peace is very scarce and where so many seem to devote themselves to causing disturbance, Christians must be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9). Think of those who start an argument "just for the fun of it" and consider how great a fire that can cause (Jas. 3:1-10). Of course even if we hold rigorously to v.18, others may deliberately cause strife, but their attitude must not determine ours. We must look to God and leave the righting of the wrong to Him. After all, He is fully aware of all the circumstances and is always totally capable of dealing with the situation and the people involved. And God deals with it in right measure and in perfect method, whereas we can so easily be prejudiced, impetuous and unbalanced. How we need to learn to trust God and to lean upon Him (1 Pet. 2:23; 4:19). It is God who is the righter of wrongs, and there is a "due time" in His actions (Deut. 32:35 AV and NIV). One of the best illustrations of what Paul is counselling is found in the story of David in 2 Sam. 16:5-14. It is a story worthy of deep consideration.

[Back to Top](#)

### **12:18-21**

Paul speaks of enemies and of evil and he is realistic. Of course behind all the enmity and opposition there lies the instigator of all evil, the Devil himself, whose presence and activity we forget at our peril. In this area of human attitudes and reactions we do well to see to it that we give no opportunity to the Devil (Eph. 4:27) who is raging to attack and to win supremacy over us (1 Pet. 5:8). Paul is quoting from Prov. 25:21-23, 28 and we do well to think of Jesus addressing Judas as "Friend" in the very moment of betrayal (Matt.26:47-50). That repaying of evil with good must have been a factor that impelled the remorse of Judas. But in that case it did not have a happy ending. Here we seem to be talking of situations in which the kindness of the Christian does in fact awaken not only shame and remorse but a repentance that leads to life. That seems to be the point of v.21 where the victory of good over evil is the final issue. It is a fact of experience that kindness does not always melt the hardened heart. It can do, as in 2 Kings 6.20-23. It can also silence prejudice and gossip, as in 1 Pet. 2:12, 15. But we must also accept that there will be unbelief and refusal of Christ and His people right to the very Day of Judgment. Consider Rev. 16:9, 11. What we have to remember about evil is that its days are numbered and its operations are controlled. The Devil is not free; neither is he strong, for he has been conquered. That is why we must never be tempted to adopt the evil method of retaliation and vengeance. We must look for, pray for and act for the conquering of evil in those we meet and work with day by day. It is a costly road but in it we have the comforting assurance of the on-going work of the Holy Spirit who alone is able to convict and convert. Our business is to live like Jesus.

[Back to Top](#)

### **13:1-7**

The principles of Christian behaviour must be applied, not only to the matter of personal relationships but also to the life of the Christian as a member of society. We cannot contract out. Whatever our opinion of the existing pattern of law and authority, whether it be democratic or totalitarian, we have to recognise it and deal with it as Christian members of society. Remember that Paul was writing to believers in a society where slavery was the norm and where government was military and often ruthless and corrupt. Many had heard the

Gospel proclamation that Christ had made them free (John 8:32, 36) and they rejoiced in their liberty as the sons of God (Rom. 8:21; Gal. 5:1). They learned that their citizenship was in Heaven (Phil. 3:20). They heard of the apostolic affirmation that they should obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). It would have been very easy for hot-headed enthusiasts, thinking only of the short-term results, to start a revolution and to try to overthrow existing governments in the name of "liberation theology". But it is the very opposite that Paul insists on when he calls every person to be subject to the ruling authority. No doubt there would be those who would call on Christians to separate themselves from society and to form "Christian communes" complete with everything from Christian schools to Christian sports clubs. But if that was done who would witness to the world? Who would act as the salt of society? After all, salt needs to be "in the soup" if it is to do any good. And Christians are called to function as lights, not as dust storms. Confusion and disorder serve no real purpose and commotion must subside and give place to order before real advance can be made Read 1 Tim. 2:1-4.

[Back to Top](#)

### 13:1-7

Remember Jesus' words about rendering to Caesar (government) what rightly belongs to Caesar (Matt. 22:21). The Jews did not like that teaching and had to be made to recognise that it was in the providence of God and as a result of their unfaithfulness to God that they were in subjection to Rome. In like manner every generation has to realise that the prevailing situation is not accidental but the fruit of past generations. The developing of the human situation is not accidental, nor simply the result of the interplay of economic and political factors. Yes, there is human action and responsibility, but the over-ruling providence and government of God the righteous law-giver is the final explanation and interpretation. We read in 12:2 of God's good will and learned in 12:19 that God's will is not an abstract concept but an operative fact in the affairs of men and nations. Read Epb. 5:6 and learn from Jesus' words in Matt. 23:34-36 why some generations seem to meet a climax of judgment. In all this situation Paul declares that power belongs to God alone (v.1; cf. Ps. 62:11 AV) and that it is by God's power and providence that kings, and emperors and empires rise and fall. Read Col. 1:16-17; Jer. 27: 3-7; Dan. 2:20, 21, 37, 38; 4:17,24-25,28-32,34-37. Now, if it is true that in the widest sense power and government belong to God at all times and in all places (Isa. 9:6) then we must be very careful before we start kicking against a government even when we do not like its political flavour. This does not mean we must approve of everything a government does, even when we do approve of its political stance. Nor are we forbidden to work by all legitimate means to influence and change a government, provided we recognise our limited understanding and accept that we *may* be wrong. The trouble with so many of us is that we pray so seldom for our rulers and for the affairs of state. Why should this be so?

[Back to Top](#)

### 13:1-7

If power belongs to God; if the initiative is always with God and not men; if God's power is actually operating as He works all things in accordance with His will (Eph. 1:11); if God orders all things to work for the good of His people; and if all this is going on whether or not we are able to recognise it in any given situation or generation, why is it that we pray so little? It may be that the spirit of the world has so influenced us (Rom.12:2) that we think of the state in terms of its duty to provide and to give people what they want rather than in terms of *our duty* to the state. But more, we seem to have forgotten that God is a God of method and government and that He has ordained the means whereby His will is carried out. One such means is the system of law and order, and He has made plain His Law and Commandments which are the ground of all law. This is why we must be concerned when a nation's laws increasingly depart from the principles and standards of God's Law. We should be deeply concerned by the increasing breakdown of law and order and the anti-law spirit manifest even among Christians when they laugh at parking and speeding laws, sit lightly to tax rules, and are careless about vows of church membership. Lawlessness is bondage not freedom, because human nature is fallen and unbalanced. One of the functions of law is to lay constraint upon men lest they destroy both themselves and others. And, one of the elements of law is retribution, as this passage makes

plain. It is significant that in the contemporary debate on punishment all the emphasis tends to be on restraint and reformation rather than retribution. But if a man does not *deserve* to be punished there is no case for it. God's system as declared here concerns law, rule, authority and punishment.

[Back to Top](#)

### 13:1-7

For our last study in this vast subject let us summarise. God's government over the world of nations is absolute. It rules, restrains and directs. God's government is delegated as God ordains, and He uses even pagan men and systems to be His instruments for both salvation and judgment. It was a pagan empire that took Israel into captivity and a pagan emperor who set them free again (Isa. 45:1-7). God's concern in the system of law is to protect the good and punish the evil (4). The powers that be serve the purposes of God, whether consciously or willingly or not. We must be subject (5) lest by wrong doing we incur God's anger. But we must also be subject because we recognise "magisterial authority as divinely instituted, and therefore to be obeyed as a matter of conscience." (J. Philip) This applies to all men and not just to Christians and we must recognise that some of those who are most vocal about the ills of society and the defects of government are themselves living in sin, in open rejection of God's Law. In v.6-7 people are called to give all respect as well as obedience to those who, under God, are His ministers guiding the affairs of the nations. Many problems remain, not least when living under corrupt and ruthless government or working for a heartless and unprincipled boss. There does come a point when conscience toward God demands the refusal of authority (Acts 5: 27-29). We have in the story of Daniel examples of disobedience in respect of the government but they are far from "flaming" rebellion. The secret is a heart set on God and a mind willingly under the instruction of God's Word. There is no substitute for a close walk with God.

[Back to Top](#)

### 13:8-10

In the first section of this chapter we were given teaching about Christian duty in secular society. But it was in terms of principles rather than instructions about specific issues. One thing is clear: as Christians we must take our rightful share in the administration of society and that may well demand time and energy in attending, for example, trade union meetings and holding office there and in areas of church administration. Too many people criticise "those who run" our own denomination but they themselves are not prepared to stand, witness, work and suffer in that area. Perhaps they choose to serve in or even institute "more spiritual" areas of activity. Of course, to be at the front of the battle or to be slogging on the supply line and support services (prayer for example) can be costly and at times dull. But we need to face the fact that vast areas of society are not hearing any Christian voice nor getting any Christian example or lead. The spirit of the world is to demand all you are entitled to and grab all you can get. But the Christian lives by the principle of sacrifice and seeks to give all he can, whether or not it is appreciated. This is the principle of love which Paul calls for in v.8. In the end love is willing to die for the sake of the loved one; it will go to all lengths to be able in love to bring salvation and hope to even one soul. (Rom. 1:14-15; 9:1-3; 1 Cor. 9:15-23). When a Christian has fulfilled all his rightful duties to society and its administration he has no right to feel satisfied (7). There is a debt which is never discharged: it is to love others in the love of Christ (8). We look at this in detail tomorrow, but here we must remind ourselves that the "powers" operating in the providence of God may well be raised up to work judgment as well as salvation. There is an urgency in all we are discussing.

[Back to Top](#)

### 13:8-10

The theme is Christian love. Verses 1-7 dealt with Christian duty. Paul speaks of this as a debt. There is of course a wrong kind of debt, living beyond our means in terms of cash, time, and spiritual resources, which results in life always being under pressure. We become preoccupied with the effort of trying to fit everything in; life lurches from crisis to crisis; and neither God nor man gets any real benefit from us. This is not living in love. But note how living in love affects society. The evils listed in v.9 which summarise the things that scar and corrupt society are all denials of love. They stem from the spirit of greed which demands its

satisfaction no matter who is hurt. But love works no hurt to its neighbour. Love does not do despite to another person's feelings or dignity. Love does not make use of other people. Love serves. Love cares. Love suffers long and is kind. Love goes on and on, giving and giving, yielding its rights again and again. If we say that people will take advantage, we are right. If we say people will trample on us, we are right. If we say living like that in a world like this will be the equivalent of being thrown to the wolves, we are right. But we are in good company, for Jesus was led as a lamb to the slaughter. Read 1 Cor. 13, if possible in J. B. Phillips' translation. It is our business to see that love, not hate, permeates society. But we had better start putting it into practice with the people nearest to us. That way we will begin to establish a little colony of heaven and it will attract others. We will also discover the thrill and delight of being loved. Love is a very dynamic thing.

[Back to Top](#)

### **13:11-14**

Christian duty and Christian love are now set in the context of Christian hope, which hope is sure and certain. We can live in difficult circumstances, under evil rulers, facing tribulation and still going on because we live our lives on the frontier of the world to come. The pressures, denials and bafflements are only until Christ comes, and Paul reminds us that that day is nearer than we think. This is why he urges the Christians to wake up. It is so easy to get spiritually drowsy, especially when things seem to be going on always the same, with monotonous regularity. The rhythm of noises on a journey can "switch us off" even though we are not properly asleep, and in something of the same way we can become so accustomed to regular biblical preaching that it slips into the background of life and no longer has the immediacy and earnest attention it should have. This is one of the warnings in Hebrews 2:1 where the word "drift" suggests a boat slipping past the mooring place because the pilot has fallen asleep. When that happens the vessel is at the mercy of the current. It can happen so easily to life. But in Romans Paul is emphasising to the Christians the thought of journeying to a clear destination. Every step brings the day of arrival nearer. We need to recover this thought of "going places" with God, not least to remind ourselves of many things that we will soon leave behind for ever. When you think of some of the things of personality and circumstances that trouble us sorely, it is a glorious relief to think that soon they will trouble us no more. The night is far spent. The whole scheme of darkness which is in the world has almost run its course. It is the Devil who has deceived us into thinking of things getting darker and darker. We are in fact travelling towards sunrise.

[Back to Top](#)

### **13:11-14**

Since we belong to and are travelling towards the full shining of God's day, we must see to it that we have nothing to do with darkness. We must put away (it won't go by itself) anything that contradicts our Christian faith and life. It won't be easy. It is a battle. The things that are wrong make us vulnerable while the things that are right constitute an armour of protection. In v.13 Paul speaks of conduct, because our profession of faith must be accompanied by and confirmed by our whole disposition of life. The world's way of life is described starkly and accurately, and Paul is fully aware of the down drag of the flesh. That is why at the start of this whole section in 12:2 he warned the Christians not to be conformed to the world. Never forget the solemn statements in 1 John 2:15-17 and 1 John 5:19. The world in which we have to live as Christians is not neutral. Everything about it is loaded against Christian living. The things Paul mentions have all to do with indulgence and self-will and we are foolish if we think these warnings do not apply to us. Do not be too quick to say, "I would never do that". Many have been surprised and shattered by things they have actually done and have become involved in. Many have been frightened by how difficult it is to shake free from these entanglements. Let him who thinks he stands, take heed .... (1 Cor. 10:12). Over against the danger Paul urges us to put on Christ. He is our full and perfect salvation. All we need is in Him; we have Him; and He dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. We stand in Christ and in His victory and we make no provision for the "flesh", no concessions, giving no opportunity to those surges of feeling and temptation that wage war against our souls (1 Pet. 2: 11). In all the business of life, whatever the circumstances, we look to Christ and we stand in Christ. We had better read Epb. 6:10ff. It is a battle. But we *have* the victory.

[Back to Top](#)

#### 14:1-4

The whole section down to 15:13 deals with the life of the congregation and the various tensions that arise. This is an area in which the Devil is very active seeking to set Christians at variance with each other, and he has great opportunity because we all find it very easy to pass judgment on other people, especially regarding their spiritual attitudes and activities. In the church at Rome, and everywhere else, there were new believers from very different backgrounds. Some came from long Jewish tradition, some from Gentile backgrounds, some from intellectual and well educated backgrounds and some from poor and deprived backgrounds. Some grasped very clearly right from the start the full significance of salvation, life and liberty in Christ, but some were slower to understand all that being a Christian meant. If we add to all that the differences in personality, extrovert and introvert, brash and sensitive, gifted and ordinary (whatever is meant by these terms) we can see the dangers of a fellowship being fragmented into groups who were always in conflict and tending to criticise and despise each other. Think how a total abstainer can devalue the Christian worth of another who takes a different attitude to alcohol. Of course the "broad-minded" believer likewise devalues his brother, considering him foolishly narrow, and this attitude can lead to suspicion of every conviction the other person holds. Both parties must recognise just how much their attitudes may be conditioned by background culture and former experience and that they have really nothing to do with real Christian conviction or principle. Read 1 Cor. 4:1-5 and note how Paul says that having a clear conscience does not necessarily mean we are in the right.

[Back to Top](#)

#### 14:1-4

Read 1 Cor. 8:1-13 in conjunction with this passage to see how real an issue this eating or not eating was. The background is that most meat on sale had come from the carcasses of animals slaughtered in the context of pagan and idolatrous ceremonies. A convert from a heathen background, having had earlier association with that kind of "worship", would wonder if he was "going back" from Christ if he was "partaking" of that meat. The butcher's shop may well have been on the premises of the pagan temple. Was he getting involved by going there and was he compromising his testimony? Now it can be a very good thing to be concerned about such things and it may be that many of us are far too careless about where we go, what we do, in whose company we do it, and what excuses or justification we give for so doing. We may feel strong in the Lord and in the power of His might and indeed we may be strong and not be in any spiritual danger. But what we must not do is ignore the feelings and problems of the believer who is as yet uncertain about many issues. We must accept and welcome such an one, but not in order to browbeat him or to pass judgment on him in matters that are not fundamental to faith and life. We are not to hurry people on to adopt a pattern of behaviour about which they are not yet persuaded in their new found faith. Nor are we to badger the new Christians to give up certain activities when, as yet, they do not see that these are incompatible with professing Christ. There are issues and there are times when we can and should tell people to take a certain course of action and to copy those whose faith and life confirm their spiritual integrity (Phil. 3:17; Heb. 6:12). But that requires us to be God's trusted men and women, for God will be angry if we lead others astray (Lk. 17:1-2). At the same time (3b) the weaker brother is not to impose his limitations on others. Let God be judge. Time will tell who is weak and who is strong.

[Back to Top](#)

#### 14:5-9

It is very difficult, even impossible, to know exactly what "days" Paul is referring to here, or what activity or refraining from activity is involved. One thing is clear: Paul cannot be referring to the observance of the Sabbath or Lord's Day. That is not an issue on which we are free to make up our own minds, although the detailed way of observing or preserving that Day may vary. The Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:8-11) make it plain that we are to keep holy the day God has made holy, and to do otherwise is to defy God. The first day of the week, emphasised so clearly in the Gospels as the day of resurrection, was without question held as a "special" day in the early church (John 20:1,19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). The issue Paul is dealing with here is that of Christians criticising and despising each other in the realm of matters that were secondary and not in any sense fundamental to faith and salvation. He seems to be urging the Christians not to allow

their lives to be patterned on a set of arbitrary rules which inevitably become man-centred. This was the error of the Pharisees who eventually set human traditions above the Word of God (Mk. 7:13) and in so doing became quite heartless and graceless, and indeed, a hindrance to God's work (Matt. 23:13-15). In v.7-8 the emphasis is on the fact that life is a stewardship, and it is to be lived for God, not for self. We are not our own, we are bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and the whole of life must be lived directly under the Lordship of Christ. He and He alone has the right to pass judgment. Our business is that, whether by life or by death, we should honour Him (Phil. 1:19-24).

[Back to Top](#)

### 14:10-12

Paul is aware that some believers are "weak" in that they are hemmed in by many "scruples" and are always afraid that their "spirituality" might be soiled or compromised. If that kind of fear is dominant in our Christian lives there is something far wrong. We have not grasped the forgiveness, the love and care, and the liberty that God would have us enjoy in Christ. Paul is also aware that some people are deliberately weak and prefer to be so because it guarantees them a lot of attention. It enables them by emotional and spiritual blackmail to get their own way, to impose their wills, and to keep their friends in their power. But Paul also knows that some live narrow and very careful lives because they know their own personality weaknesses and they are not prepared to take any risks. Others are new Christians or just slower than others to grow and develop. In this context Paul insists firmly that the "strong" believer must not pass judgment in the sense of condemning. We do not close our eyes to the facts nor to the needs of the other person. But we must not despise or devalue, especially because we never really know all the facts. We can see quickly when someone falls into error or sin, but we cannot tell how often they may have fought and won bitter battles against the temptation. On the great day we will not be asked about other people's lives. But regarding our own we will be asked what we did, why we did it, and with what spirit and motivation. Was it to be seen of men or to please God (Matt. 6:1-6)? We do well to consider the words of the poet Robert Burns addressed to the over-righteous.

"Then at the balance let's be mute,  
We never can adjust it;  
What's done we partly may compute,  
But know not what's resisted."

[Back to Top](#)

### 14:13-18

The influence we have on each other is greater than we think. This calls for the great resolution of love that we will never be a hindrance or cause of stumbling to another person. Paul is speaking particularly about Christians helping or hindering each other, but the principle applies devastatingly also to our influence on those who are not believers. What a tragedy it is when the lifestyle of a Christian is so self-centred and unattractive that it keeps an unbeliever from desiring and seeking Christ! Provided we keep in mind the danger of manipulation that we spoke of yesterday, and recognise that there are times when we must refuse to yield to people's demands, there is no limit to the sacrifice that a Christian should be willing to make for the good of another. This is the pattern of Jesus who freely gave up all His rights (Phil. 2:3-8). Let this mind be in you. Paul is simply stating the pattern for his own life, for he was willing to be all things to all men in order that some might be saved (1 Cor. 9:19-23). But Paul would never have anything to do with what was morally wrong and this must be kept in mind when we read v.14. We must not think as the world thinks (12:2), for people say, "It's all right if you think it is right", or "There is nothing wrong with it so long as it is a loving relationship". Paul disagrees radically, as Eph. 5:3-7 and 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 15-20 make plain. In today's verses Paul is speaking of non-ethical issues and in v.14 he stands with those who are "strong" in the faith and who recognise that nothing in this issue of 'meats' and "days" can harm them spiritually. Think of Jesus' words in Mk. 7:14-23. Think also of Peter in Acts 10:9-16, where he is rebuked for trying to be holier than God. But Paul's concern is for the Christian who is timid and fearful and he wants to encourage him.

[Back to Top](#)



## 4:13-18

In this matter of "walking in love" Paul uses very strong language. He speaks of ruining or destroying someone for whom Christ died. That signifies just how precious the individual is in God's eyes and requires us to give the same valuation. It also indicates what a devastating effect our attitudes and behaviour can have. We may not express verbal disapproval and criticism but by our obvious refusal to come near the person in fellowship and friendship we can crush him. When we consider various issues regarding what a Christian may or may not do it is so easy to say, "There is no harm in it". But the question is: no harm to whom, you or your weaker brother or sister? Some things that are quite permissible and even beneficial to you (certainly enjoyable) may be so misunderstood by your fellow believer that you must re-think your attitude to these things. Paul has no doubt at all that life in Christ is rich and full and free and, because it is the gift of God, it is to be received with thanksgiving and enjoyed (1 Tim. 4:3; 6:17). But the care of others is a higher duty than pleasure. After all, it is not compulsory for us to have and to enjoy all our Christian privileges and our spiritual life, growth and service do not depend on these external things (17). And besides, what conclusions do unbelievers draw from the behaviour of Christians which they can only observe, not knowing the basic principles of a Christian's motivation? There is a behaving side to the Gospel as well as a believing and preaching side, and we are required to abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22 AV). If we object to the restrictions on our personal liberty, are we truly following Jesus?

[Back to Top](#)

## 14:19-23

Paul has built up his argument to the point of serving Christ, pleasing God and witnessing to men (18). That is far more important, or should be, than enjoying full Christian liberty. By self-denial a true Christian's life will always be narrower than it really needs to be. So Paul calls all to go hard after and to make every effort towards the things that will lead to peace within the fellowship and to mutual upbuilding and encouragement. In v.20 he goes on to emphasise a consideration that we all too often forget because we are preoccupied with our own interests. The work of God in its corporate and continuing aspects has a tremendous claim upon us in terms of time, energy and commitment. It is shattering to read a phrase like "destroy the work of God". We say we would never do so, at least not deliberately. But we can do it by neglect. We can do it by insisting that we exercise our rights. We can do it by giving priority to our "extra" commitments and involvements in Christian activity so that we are not available (and sometimes not willing) to take our rightful share of the work to which by profession and membership we are committed. History testifies to evangelical churches which have died because so many of the Christians gave their love and service to outside good causes. History testifies to ministers and missionaries who have stumbled under the burden because so many of their people have given their support and encouragement to other areas of work. To encourage one another and to strengthen one another in the Lord is Christian business that must not be neglected.

[Back to Top](#)

## 14:19-23

There is no limit to the acts of self-denial which we may make in the interest of our brother (21). What is right is more important than our rights. There is a 'total abstinence' in various areas of life that is a secret covenant between a Christian and his God that is undertaken freely and gladly in order that he might be like Jesus, and live to serve rather than be served (Matt. 20: 25-28). We may be mightily strong in faith and be able to live gloriously, but that is something we should keep to ourselves and God. There is no need to make a public display of our emancipation in Christ, save only at certain times and in certain ways that will draw attention to Christ and not to ourselves (Matt. 5:16). If we are as sure of our faith as we think, we shall be men and women of prayer (in secret), moving the hand of God to move mountains. But in the fellowship of the saints we will not 'show off' our faith. In the ordering of our lives we will be happy if our conscience towards God (Acts 24:16) is at peace regarding the things we allow ourselves to do. "Our liberty is fullest when we are not involved with, or are in view of, the weaker brother, but on our own with God. This is the practical safeguard against the paralysis that would otherwise result from impossible limitations imposed on Christian freedom by the weakness and scruples of weak brothers." (J Philip) A group of Christians who

know and trust each other in the bonds of Christ may speak and act among themselves with a lightheartedness that would not be appropriate if younger and weaker Christians were present. It is a matter of wisdom and caring. It is part of growing up humanly and spiritually.

[Back to Top](#)

### **14:19-23**

We must look carefully at the last verse of the chapter and we could well read the story of John and Peter in John 18:12-18ff. For various reasons it was safe for John to be in the courtyard of the High Priest's house, but it was not safe for Peter. He had gone into a place which was beyond his capacity of faith to cope with. This seemed to be a recurring area of temptation for Peter. He was eager in faith to walk on the water, but he sank (Matt. 14:28-31). We have to learn not to be extravagantly spiritual or aim too high. We must also recognise that there is a hesitation and an uncertainty that stem from faith, even though that faith is weak. If we are not sure about some course of action, or if our conscience towards God is ill at ease regarding some decision, then we need to be very cautious. Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). The whole life of the believer must be lived on the basis of faith, looking to God, leaning on God, waiting on God, refusing to give way to impatience and refusing to do things just because other people do them. We must not disregard the promptings and restraints of our Christian conscience. After all, under the gracious influence of the Word of God, as we receive it in faith (Heb. 4:2), and by the gracious working of the Spirit of God within us, teaching us and leading us into the truth (John 14:17; 16:13), we are in a position to be able to think things through and to learn what the will of God is (Eph. 5:10, 17). We must learn to walk with God and in so doing we learn what God is like. That is how we learn to live by faith. Nothing matters to us but doing what is pleasing to God.

[Back to Top](#)

### **15:1-3**

Paul summarises this whole section dealing with those who regard themselves and evaluate others strong or weak. He makes plain what we ought to do and he sets this in contrast to pleasing ourselves (1). When he says that the spiritually strong must 'bear with' the failings of the weak, he seems to suggest an attitude of patience, and this is very necessary. But the word also means 'bear' in the sense of sharing a load or getting alongside someone to support, encourage and help. Being 'patient' with people we consider weaker than ourselves can make us adopt a rather unpleasant superior attitude and we can end up 'talking down' to them. This will never lead to the edifying, strengthening or encouraging of the weaker person. This is true in the realm of friendships. It applies in the area of witness at work or the neighbourhood. And if a preacher in a pulpit talks down to his congregation the result is disastrous, for it creates a resentment against the Gospel. It was so different in the case of Jesus, the strong Son of God, great and glorious. He came down, right down to the side of those He came to save, sharing their feelings and fears as well as their hopes and successes. There was no 'side' with Jesus. His rights, His liberty, His reputation, His creature comforts and His personal human satisfaction were all yielded to God for the sake of those who needed to be ministered to. Yes, He had compensations. He had food to eat the disciples knew nothing about (John 4:31-34), and He had the delight of doing the Father's will. But He also endured the slander of sinners against Himself (Heb. 12:3) and reproach was heaped on Him (Ps. 69:7-12 AV) which He could have avoided had He taken the easier way of looking after 'self'.

[Back to Top](#)

### **15:1-3**

These verses have to be read very carefully. The strong are those who stand in the liberty of Christ and face life in the assured power of His victory. The weak are those who as yet have a defective grasp of the meaning of their salvation and who live beset by fears and uncertainties. They are preoccupied with worries about little things lest they lose their 'grip' on Christ and spiritual things, forgetting that it is Christ's grip on them that constitutes salvation. Their lives are joyless and inhibited even though they are trying very hard. This is the 'weakness' that we must be patient with and undergird. The issue is not moral weakness. Paul is clear and

radical about what to do in that kind of situation (1 Cor. 5:11). Moral wrong in the life of a believer is a denial of faith and must be dealt with on that level. At the same time it is a fact of experience that believers do fall into sin and they have to be helped, lifted and restored, according to Gal. 6:1-2. But a great deal depends on the attitude of the sinning saint. Where there is an absence of repentance, a wrong kind of sympathy and patience can simply lead to the person making light of their sin and becoming both casual and accommodating with regard to their temptations, weaknesses and presumptions. Read 1 Cor. 5:1-5 and 2 Cor. 2:1-11. We must never allow Christian love to degenerate into a sentimentality that is far less practical than worldly realism. The spiritually strong will be realistic but will be aware of the shattering complications of sin and will be ready, like Jesus, to heal and restore. But, like Jesus, the spiritually strong will also say, 'Go and sin no more' (John 8:11).

[Back to Top](#)

### **15:1-3**

We continue With this short but comprehensive passage which deals with pleasing ourselves, pleasing our neighbour and pleasing God. The prohibition regarding living self-pleasing lives is clear. We are to die to self. Although we are rich in spiritual blessing we are to become poor for the sake of others in the interest of their salvation (2 Cor. 8:9; 1 Cor. 10:31-33). When it comes to pleasing our neighbour (and some will never be pleased, no matter what we do) we must remember that Paul himself taught that 'pleasing' men was not the motive of a Christian's life (Gal. 1:10; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; Col. 1:17; Eph. 6:5-7). We are not called on to defer to the whims of our neighbours or companions, nor to tolerate or excuse their petulance. But we must be willing to meet them, more than half-way, and to go the second mile with them, all in order to help them to grow in grace. In this we are to pattern ourselves on Christ our great High Priest, who was gentle without ever being weak (Heb. 5:1-2, 7-10). Consider how emphatic Paul was about this gentle, 'pleasing' spirit which is so different from those who seem to operate almost as demolition agents in their dealings with those who are difficult or who have gone wrong (1 Thess. 2:7; 2 Tim. 2: 24-26; Titus 3:2). Our calling is to be like Jesus and to please God. We will be misunderstood as He was, and people will say all manner of unkind and unjust things about us. We will be misunderstood and people will deliberately put the wrong construction on our actions, as they did when they saw Jesus associating with 'sinners' (Matt. 9:10-13). But if, 'touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness', a weak one is led and encouraged into being strong, then we Have done what pleases God (James 5: 19-20).

[Back to Top](#)

### **15:4-6**

Having quoted Scripture in v.3 Paul goes on to speak of the God of the Scriptures and he begins a series of statements that are gloriously encouraging and should awaken a real spirit of praise in our hearts (9-11). It is important that we should know our God. He is not fictitious, nor adjustable, and certainly not unknown (Acts 17:22-28). He is the God who has spoken, making Himself known as the God of creation, of history and of salvation. He is the God of the Scriptures, and all that is written, in the Books of the Old Testament (the new Testament not having been written at this point) points to Christ and is fulfilled in and through Christ. Think of Jesus' words in Luke 24:27, 44-46. Think of how James 1:17-18 and 1 Pet. 1:23; 2:2 emphasise the activity of God in and through His Word, which makes us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15-17) and which brings forth faith (Rom. 10:17). In today's passage Paul speaks of steadfastness or steadiness or patience (4). This is in connection with what he has been teaching about coping with the relationship of strong and weak. Now, it is by the encouragement of Scripture that we are enabled to be steady, holding to the great and precious promises of God (2 Pet. 1:4), holding fast to them by faith, even though time passes without the fulfilment of the promises being granted (Heb 6:11-12; 11:13,17, 33, 39-40). But delay does not mean denial and, because our confidence is in God, encouraged by the Scriptures to believe that God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), we have hope, which is sure and steadfast and proves to be the anchor of our souls (Heb. 6:19). God is always saying, "Look unto Me ...." (Isa. 45:22 AV) and our response should always be, 'Our eyes are on Thee ....' (2 Chron. 20:12).

[Back to Top](#)

## 15:4-6

Paul goes on to speak of the God of the Scriptures as the God of steadfastness and encouragement (6) and we have so much to learn about encouraging our hearts in God (1 Sam. 30:1-6 AV). We have so much need to remind ourselves that God is not against us but for us (Rom. 8:3). How we need to hear God saying of His children, even when they are in a mess of sin, evil, rebellion and backsliding, that He finds it impossible to give them up (Hos. 11:8). We need to think of how steady God is, never off balance, never caught out, never slow, never tempted to change (Jas.1:17; Heb. 13:8). We must learn to have great confidence in God, because He is confident in Himself. That is why He is the God of peace (Rom.15:3). What He begins He brings to completeness (Phil. 1:6) in both the individual and in the arena of world history (Eph.1:11). Little wonder Paul goes on to speak of glorifying and praising God (6). He speaks of doing this in harmony, the strong and the weak together. And by thinking of the whole Old Testament story we can see grounds .for the strong being patient with the weak, because there is no limit to what the weak may yet become. Think of how God worked so patiently and persistently with the 'worm' Jacob (Isa.41:14) and made him eventually Israel, a prince with God. It took a long and indeed a painful time, but the Psalmist was right when he said, 'Happy is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help' (Ps. 146:5 AV). Read also Ps 37:24 and Micah 7:8. What encouragement this should give to us. And, as we sense the goodness of God to us and how much we owe to Him, a new kindness, patience and encouragement should mark our dealings with others.

[Back to Top](#)

## 15:7

Still in the context of the strong and the weak tension, Paul speaks of the God of fellowship and his words here are very telling. He reminds his readers what they were and what they were not, when God welcomed them for Jesus' sake. Read Rom. 5:6-8 and

Ps. 40:1-3. Think of how the gospels declare that Jesus receives sinners and welcomes them into fellowship with Himself (Luke 15:2). How much then we should welcome all who come: the penitent sinner, the confused believer, the returning backslider, the critical one and the one who has opposed and persecuted but who has undergone a change of heart. Was Paul recalling how slow and reluctant some had been to accept him after his conversion (Acts 9:13, 26)? We are to welcome others with the same generosity of love that Christ has shown to us and we must not feel we are being unduly spiritual in so doing. There is so much to learn from Jesus about the right way to treat people so that even when they must be rebuked there is no devaluing of their persons. It is in this kind of fellowship that God is glorified, for through it there is shown forth the magnificent kindness of God towards us (Eph 2:7). But all the goodness of God has to be shared. Indeed it cannot be enjoyed to the full on our own but only in the life of fellowship. Read 1 John 1:1-2:2. It is so much easier to walk in fellowship than to be coldly withdrawn and secretive. It is certainly much sweeter.

[Back to Top](#)

## 15:8-12

The God of our salvation who blesses us so richly is the God of the faithful promises (8). Right through the Old Testament there is testimony to the faithfulness of God in respect of the covenant He made with His people. Such is God's faithfulness that even the faithlessness of His people could not make Him go back on His Word (Rom. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:13). In respect of the promises Christ, the King of Glory, was made a servant to the very people who rejected Him, in order to confirm and to bring to realisation the promises God had made (2 Cor. 1:20). But the plan of God's grace was far more extensive than just for the Jews because Paul speaks of the Gentiles glorifying God for His mercy. Just think of the bleakness of life if the whole of the Gospel was a closed book to us and all our Gospel light and privileges were withdrawn! But the faithful promises of God make us look to the future with confidence, joy and expectation. When worldly people are on a peak of happiness they say it is too good to last, but for the Christian the best is yet to be. We have not yet begun to grasp the glory and wonder of what God has prepared for us (1 Cor. 2:9). Nor have we really thrilled as we should to the confidence that is ours because of God's promises. Think of what he said to Jacob

in Gen. 28:15. Think of Paul's testimony while in prison in Phil. 1:12, 19-26. Little wonder v.9b-11 is all about praise and rejoicing.

'Thy mercy not fail us,  
Nor leave Thy by work undone;  
With Thy right hand to help us,  
The victory shall be won.' (Plumptre)

We can be sure, because the God who promised is faithful.

[Back to Top](#)

## 15:8-12

We continue with these verses to consider the importance of praise and thanksgiving in the life of a Christian. At the end of his exposition of salvation Paul gave a great doxology of praise (11:33-36). In chapters 12-15 there is the underlying theme of the praise and the God-glorifying nature of a surrendered life (12:1-2). In 15:6 the word 'together' (RSV), one heart and voice (NIV), signifies something of congregational praise. We often underestimate the significance of this part of our worship, not least in terms of evangelism. One of the first impacts made on an unbeliever coming into a service should be the living, full-hearted, Spirit-inspired praises of the congregation. No amount of 'performance' in the realm of music, however gifted and dedicated, can take the place of congregational praise, especially the metrical Psalms and the great heritage of the hymns of faith that have lasted for generations. Amongst other things, this should make those with musical capacity eager and willing to lead the praises of a congregation. What a glorious piece of Christian service! Praise is a neglected grace, not least because our lives are too turned in on ourselves. But praise is a duty, a privilege, a means of grace and a vehicle for glorifying God (Ps. 50:23 AV). It is commanded in Scripture. We are to make a joyful noise to the God of our salvation and enter His presence with thanksgiving (Ps. 95:1-2). We are to bless the Lord with all our capacities and not forget all His benefits (Ps. 103:1-5; Ps. 106:1; Ps. 107:1; Ps. 108:1). In our prayer life we need to praise and give thanks (Phil. 4:6-7; Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:16). And in heaven we will be able to praise as we ought. Read Ps. 51:10-13, 15, and then marvel when Ps. 22:3 tells us that God is *enthroned* on the praises of His people (RSV, and NIV footnote).

[Back to Top](#)

## 15:13

How dim our Christian hope can be at times! It is because we do not think enough about God, the God of hope. Because our salvation is all of God and because our times are all in His hand and because God ordains that all things will work together for good, we have every reason to let the God of hope fill our hearts with joy and peace, so that, by the confirming work of the Spirit within us, we might indeed abound in hope. It does not yet appear what we shall be .... but we shall be like Him (1 John 3:1-3). We do not yet see all things put under Christ ...but He must reign until all His enemies are under His feet (Heb. 2:8-9; 1 Cor. 15:25). God has ordained that every knee shall bow to Jesus (Phil. 2:9-11). When we turn to the doxology in Jude 24-25 we cannot but be thrilled by the terms of it. Because of this we must refuse to be bogged down by the limitations, disappointments and complications at any interim stage in the journey of salvation. The end is not in doubt. The victory is sure; we are partakers of it in its working and in its final manifestation; we are led along in Christ's triumphal procession (2 Cor. 2:14), whether it feels like it or not; and our labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). God is going to do for us far more abundantly above what we ask or think (Eph. 3:20,21). God has made up His mind about it and neither men nor devils can countermand His will. Little wonder the Psalmist challenges his soul as to why it is cast down (Ps. 43:5). He has a God who saves. So have we. And because that salvation is marked by divine plan, divine energy, and divine confidence, we praise the Lord who gives us all joy and peace in believing so that we rejoice hope.

[Back to Top](#)

## 15:14-16

The main exposition of the epistle is now ended and what follows is an extended conclusion covering a variety of subjects. Such has been the note of authority right through the epistle, not least in dealing with the

controversial aspects of Christian behaviour, that Paul may well have wondered just how the Roman Christians would react. He assured them that he had not in any way been 'talking down' to them (14) nor suggesting that they had not teachers among themselves. At the same time he emphasised how important it is to be reminded again and again, sometimes through different voices, of the basic lessons we all need to learn ever more deeply (Phil. 3:1; cf. Isa. 28:10,13). He backed up his attitude and action by reminding them of his God-given commission to minister to the Gentiles (15-16). In this sense he was emphasising for himself and for them the grace of obedience. This is something we all must grasp, because there is both liberty and peace in it. We are given a job to do by God and all we have to do is to obey. We do not have to be clever or successful. We do not have to defend what we are doing or the way we do it, although we must not deliberately confuse people who may well be lacking in understanding. We have to be faithful in what has been given to us. When he spoke in v.16 of the priestly service of the Gospel, he was not speaking of being a 'priest' in the way we regard that nowadays, in a sacramental or sacerdotal sense. But at the same time he was seeing his work as a minister of the gospel being the appointed means of bringing men and women to God. He was careful to make plain that this is the work of the Holy Spirit (16b). The Gentiles also will bring their offerings to the Lord and the whole Gospel scheme operates so that in all things Christ will be pre-eminent (Col. 1:18).

[Back to Top](#)

### **15:17-21**

If glad obedience was the theme of yesterday's verses, then holy ambition is the emphasis today. We must always be aware of the sense of confidence that runs through Paul's ministry. In v.14-16 he spoke of his call and commission for the specific purpose of blessing to the Gentiles. Since this is God's purpose, Paul concludes that God will do it, for His own honour is at stake. Being then very aware that all the creative, redeeming and providential power belongs to God, and since he was quite persuaded that it is God alone who grants the fruitful increase (1 Cor. 3:6-7), Paul was not in any sense embarrassed at making the statement in v.17. There is no false humility. God had blessed His work through Paul and it would be dishonouring to God to fail to say so. What is more, today's verses seem to indicate that Paul was confidently expecting God to go on blessing him and his work. There was no reason, so far as Paul knew, why God should stop using him. His great concern was to remain useful (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He believed that no matter what came his way, God would over-rule, whether he lived or died (Phil. 1:20-24). He made no mention of all the costly suffering his service had involved (Phil. 3:7-11; 2 Cor. 11:21-12:10). That was counted a privilege (Acts 5:41; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). There was no question of Paul regarding himself too highly. That is clear from Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15. It was Christ's work, done by Christ through him, but far from sitting back in a spirit of self-congratulation, he evidenced a truly holy ambition to go on in obedience right to the end. This was indeed a man who would not boast except in the Cross (Gal. 6:14).

[Back to Top](#)

### **15:17-21**

We continue the theme of faithfulness to God in whatever task is given us because it is so important. The Devil will always tempt us to get involved in things that are not our given work, perhaps tempting us through envy at another person's success. Some are given what seems to be very attractive work carrying obvious success, and the temptation to join the 'band-wagon' is great. But this can often leave very necessary work undone, simply because we have chosen more pleasurable activities in company with our friends. This is not fellowship: it is disobedience. Paul would have none of this. His work was pioneering work: the costly digging and laying of foundations for the future, knowing that others would build on what he had started and, no doubt, get the credit and praise for it. But this was not a concern to Paul. He simply wanted to work for Christ, and he was glad to go to the outsider and to the hard and difficult people and areas (21). He was also careful that he did not cast a shadow on what others were doing, unless they were doing what he believed to be a hindrance to the cause of Christ. Think how, on occasion, he withstood Peter (Gal. 2:11). Of course, not all are called to be pioneers. Some have to go into shallow, sidetracked Christian situations and retrieve these situations for God in the face of sour and sullen indifference and even opposition from converted people who

have lost their first love and who have gone back from their first vows of dedication. Some find it too costly and crack under the strain, sometimes because they have been left to go it alone (2 Tim. 4:10, 16). How grieved God must be when His faithful servants are ignored and neglected when they needed to be strengthened and encouraged by a little human kindness.

[Back to Top](#)

### 15:22-24

Look back to v.19 and with the help of a map consider, and be staggered by, the vast area referred to as 'from Jerusalem and as far round as Ilyricum.' Read also Acts 20:20,27 to see something of the pattern and content of Paul's ministry. Then realise that the main thrust of his :ministry was that of planting churches in significant areas, as God led him, so that from these churches the surrounding areas would in time be evangelised (Acts 19:8-10). Without in any sense being precipitate, Paul always had his eyes on wider horizons (2 Cor.10: 13-16), always conscious of the debt and obligation that were his to make the Gospel known (Rom. 1:14-15: 1 Cor. 9:16). But his desires, intentions and promises could not all be fulfilled immediately and he explained this to the Romans in v.22. Perhaps he felt they were likely to misunderstand his absence, possibly thinking he was deliberately choosing to go to the 'better' churches. Of course, the indication that his visit was to be a 'passing' one might also have been taken up wrongly as a slight, suggesting either that Paul was not all that interested or that he thought them not worthy of a long visit. How easily Christians can take offence at times placing the wrong construction on things said. It is evident that as a minister of the Gospel Paul did not have an easy, ideal, trouble-free situation with everything clicking into place and everyone being appreciative and responsive. Of course that does not excuse people's lack of appreciation or response. There is a human debt of love and loyalty owed to those who, under God, have brought us spiritual riches and blessing in abundant measure. Are you, who read these verses, grateful, wherever you are? And have you expressed that gratitude in the right way and at the right time, both to the people concerned and to God?

[Back to Top](#)

### 15:22-24

We mentioned in yesterday's note the complications and difficulties that Paul encountered, and we can read of them in Acts 16:6-10 (guidance by way of frustration); 1 Thess. 2:18 (no detail of the nature of the hindrance); 2 Cor. 1:8-9 (faith for service learned by being driven to despair); 2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5 (anxiety and nervous tension that distracted him from opportunities of service, because he was over-concerned about certain people). But in and through all these things he was held fast by God and continued, even though at times, because of Satan's hindering tactics, it *seemed* as if the initiative had passed out of God's hands. In today's verses (23) there may be a suggestion that Paul felt he was being edged out of the major scene of God's activity. At least it *seemed* to be the major scene because so much was going on. But Paul's usefulness and his sphere of service were not determined by the reactions and prejudices of mere men. That is why we should understand this verse more in terms of Paul's feeling persuaded in his own spirit that his work in that area was done, that it must now be left to others, and that his continuing presence would be a hindrance. That is wisdom indeed. It is also humility and it highlights the man's mighty spiritual character. In spite of our comments on the possibility of the Romans misunderstanding Paul's indication that his visit would be a passing one, we emphasise here how openly Paul indicated his desire and expectation that they would in fact be his partners and helpers, speeding him on his God-appointed way, having refreshed him by their fellowship. He was not disappointed. As Acts 28:14-15 tells, they came to meet him, and he took heart.

[Back to Top](#)

### 15:25-29

We do not know for sure if Paul ever reached Spain, or further north in Europe, or even Britain, which was part of the Roman Empire. Some early documents suggest he did reach Spain, and we can only marvel at the drive and dedication of this man of God who seems to have taken Jesus' words about witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) to himself in a very personal way. His spiritual commitment to the Gospel is glorious to

see and should inspire as well as challenge us. But we must also see the great emphasis Paul put on the right administration of the material business of the church. He had a tremendous vision of the expansion of Gospel outreach but here he gave priority to the carrying of financial help to Jerusalem from the churches of Greece. Dealing with the financial affairs of the church is not an inferior form of service. It is a duty, and an honourable one, because in it we are administering the offerings of God's people which are often sacrificial in nature. There are references to this 'offering' in Acts 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-9 and it is clear from Gal. 2:10 that this sharing of material possessions was an integral part of Christian life and service. If God loves the cheerful, giver, then there should be a spirit of glad generosity, to the point of sacrifice, in all who name the name of Christ, because He was willing to divest Himself of riches and become poor for us (2 Cor. 8:9; 9:6-8). Paul was hoping that the generosity of the Gentile believers would in some way reduce the suspicion and tension between Jewish and Gentile converts. But even if it did not have this effect Paul was clear that the Gentiles had a spiritual debt and duty to repay in material terms what they had received in spiritual blessings. This deserves much thought.

[Back to Top](#)

### 15:25-29

In this matter of financial stewardship Paul is very clear. If the church is spiritually healthy then its finances will also be healthy. If the individual believer is spiritually healthy then there will be a right attitude to money and to the support of God's work in the home congregation and in the outreach to the wider field of witness and need. The Gospel work, its servants, and the poor and needy will all be ministered to and, provided for in a right and seemly way. Those who are themselves blessed will be the most willing to give and to serve and it will not be left to the few to carry an undue burden (Cor. 8:12-15). There is obviously a particular and primary responsibility for the congregation of the church to which we belong and with whose missionaries we are partners. To neglect this and instead to give to other causes is not the biblical pattern. Note how Paul in v.27 recognises both willingness and duty and shows that we must not ever take spiritual blessings as if we were entitled to them. There must be gratitude and response. At the same time, as the earlier reference (2 Cor. 8:11-15) makes plain, Paul recognises just how much circumstances can change. Sometimes we are able to help materially as well as spiritually and at other times *we* are in need of help. We must never be too proud to accept help. Jesus allowed others to minister to Him! Even when we accept that it is more blessed to give than to receive, we know also that we find it easier to give than to accept help. But it must be a partnership, exercised graciously, so that even the most needy will be able to preserve their human dignity. Love is one thing, but 'charity' is another.

[Back to Top](#)

### 15:30-33

Having stated in v.29 his unqualified confidence that he would come to them in the full blessing of Christ and the Gospel, Paul went on to make a significant appeal. He had no big ideas about himself, nor fixed ideas as to how exactly he would be a blessing to them in Rome. At the start of the epistle (1:11-12) he indicated that the process of blessing was a mutual one, not one-sided. And, writing from prison in Rome, he had to explain to others how mysterious God's ways sometimes are (Phil. 1:12-14). Being used by God does not necessarily mean either success or acceptance, let alone prominence. On the day when all things are revealed we may well discover that some of our own 'success' in Christian service was due to the faithful prayers and quiet loyalty of someone we may have discounted as being 'not significant' in the work. Paul was not slow to ask for help and to let it be known that he needed help. He had no time for that attitude which thinks the big men of God (whoever they may be) are so strong and stable that they do not need the help, support and encouragement of others. He pleaded for prayer and called it a partnership in striving. He spoke of his service in the gospel as a struggle which others must share with him. Elsewhere he spoke of it as 'travail' by which souls are brought to the birth (Gal. 4:19). He spoke of the need for deliverance from those who would ensnare him and work against him. He spoke of his anxiety lest spiritual service be refused and spiritual love be rejected in Jerusalem. You can almost imagine him dreading that things would go wrong and you can sense



that he almost felt the disappointment and hurt that go so deep. How human this great man of God was, chosen, of God and made a blessing to so many.

[Back to Top](#)

### 15:30-33

When Paul appealed for help and for support in prayer, could he be thinking of the story of Moses, Aaron and Hur in Exodus 17:8-12 and saying that this is how victories are won for God's cause? But what if the helpers are not ready or willing? Think of the story of Elijah who 'broke' in the weary exhaustion of feeling so desperately alone. Even when we allow for his own misunderstandings, the fact remains that he was humanly alone. Should some of the other prophets have been with Elijah instead of being in the cave (1 Kings 18:4)? Of course, some Elijahs are harder to help than others, and it calls for more effort as well as care. The time came when Paul was mightily glad of one man who sought him out, and the name Onesiphorus stands on record for all time because he refreshed the apostle in a time of need (2 Tim. 1:16-18). Perhaps Onesiphorus felt he was the kind of person who could not do anything much that was "spiritual". But he visited Paul in prison, and that counts as visiting Jesus (Matt. 25:35-46). At the end of his mighty ministry it is quite heartbreaking to find Paul alone, and even abandoned (2 Tim. 4:9-18) and feeling it sorely. Only Doctor Luke was there. Some had turned back to the world. Some were away on Christian service. Some he sent for, and they would come. The memory of some who had pierced him deeply was vivid, and sad. When he first stood in court not even Luke was with him. But Jesus was there and gave him strength. Perhaps at that moment he would remember that the saints in Rome would be praying for him. How many have testified that in deep need they have been so aware that they were being prayed for. Christians, do not fail in the matter of prayer. And, if you are blessed by these notes month by month, then pray for all those who have had a part in printing and sending them, and pray also for the one who expounds the Word.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:1-7

It is difficult not to look back to previous verses and sometimes it helps to focus the message. In 15:32-33 Paul speaks of God's will, God's joy, God's refreshing and God's peace. Everything stems from God and His good and perfect will, and there is no substitute for being right in the centre of God's will. No amount of Christian activity or enthusiasm can substitute for this. There is a peace in God's will, because God is the God of peace. Everything about God is peace. He has neither doubts nor uncertainties. He is never in a hurry (save only as He ran to meet the prodigal in Luke 15:20). There is serenity about God that sometimes makes us forget His mighty power. Think of some of the references regarding the God of peace and the peace of God before we go on to think of all the fascinating names that Paul mentions: Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20-21; Col. 3:15 (AV). Think of the great affirmation in Isa. 26:3 (AV): "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." Think of the Prince of Peace, by whom the God of Peace is known, saying, "My peace I give unto you." It is the God of Peace who sometimes stills the storms and at other times steers us safely through the storms to our desired haven (Ps. 107:23-32).

"Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown;  
Jesus we know, and He is on the throne." (Bickersteth)

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:1-2

Would Phoebe be surprised or even shocked by the mention of her name? There is reason to believe she was the person who carried this letter from Cenchrea, the seaport of Corinth, to Rome. Presumably she carried also a letter of commendation so that the church in Rome would accept this person unknown to them. Her introduction to the church at Rome would have taken place before the reading of the letter. Now Paul bears testimony to her worth as a deaconess, that is a servant of the church at Cenchrea. Such a description is significant because it means she was the kind of worker who, with stability and continuance, carried out a

particular piece of service. Paul commended her and asked that she be accepted in warm and open fellowship and be given any help she needed. The nature of the 'help' needed is not quite certain but Paul seems to suggest that what this lady needed was the same as she had so often given to others in the seaport town of Cenchrea, namely hospitality. Very possibly Phoebe, like Lydia in Acts 16:11-15, was a reasonably wealthy business-woman whose home was dedicated to the Lord so that many strangers, unsettled because on a tourney, were ministered to. Not many of us these days are wealthy in this world's terms and some are more gifted in the matter of exercising hospitality than others. But without question this kind of practical, human fellowship is a real part of Christian service and, as is so often quoted, we may well entertain angels unawares (Heb. 13:2). We may also at times find that we are entertaining fraudulent Christians and even devils and that is why we need to exercise care. There is a time for avoiding people (v.17) and a time for making it plain why our homes are not open (2 John 9:11), Only by keeping close to God will we know what to do and how to do it.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:3-7

We are told in Acts 18:1-4,18, 26 of this married couple who had to flee from Rome in a time of persecution and who obviously turned what seemed a disaster into a new life of Christian service. We note how this couple were left in Ephesus to 'hold the fort' until Paul's return (Acts 18:18-21). They were with Paul in Ephesus when he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:19). Now they were back in Rome, and it is clear that wherever they went they were at once identified with the on-going work of Christ. Paul wanted it to be known that they, like Phoebe, had manifested a tremendous loyalty to him both as a man and as a minister of God's Word. No one will ever really know just how much this loving loyal care meant to Paul, and how much it enabled him to go on as resolutely and as fruitfully as he did. He testified that they had 'risked their necks' (AV) for him. How different that is from the spirit that says, 'I don't agree with all he says.' If God so accepts a man, knowing *all* his failings, and is prepared to bless that man in his ministry to others, how slow we should be to be disparaging about the flaws we see in him! We can only speculate as to the circumstances in which this couple risked their lives, perhaps more than once. It could have been at the time of Paul's impetuous concern in Acts 19:28-31. It was not easy to restrain a man like Paul. What is clear is that Paul never forgot what they had done, and from his last imprisonment he was still greeting this loving, loyal couple (2 Tim. 4:19). The memory, let alone the company, of some people is a blessing.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:3-7

People are fascinating and Paul loved them. We must not build a 'house-church movement' on a single verse (5a) but simply recognise that there were few Christians in these days with homes big enough for a growing church to meet in. No doubt even in these days there were those whose concern was to build a little 'kingdom' in which they were the final authority. But Paul was not dealing with that theme. He was making plain how much he valued people both as individuals and for their partnership in the Gospel (Phil. 1:5). Paul told them this publicly, and one wonders how many told Paul how much they regarded him. Reference is made to Epaenetus, Paul's first convert in Asia (No! *Christ's* first convert in Asia) who was still going on in the Lord. If someone wrote to your minister asking how you were doing, what would he have to say? Think of the questions that may be asked. Is he or she still a pillar of the congregation? Is he still a distraction? Is she still a problem and a disappointment? Some grow in grace. Some go back. Some are a sweet savour of Christ for years and years. Of course, in referring to Epaenetus as the *first* or the first fruit, Paul seems to be looking back and marvelling at how much God had done, far beyond all expectations. This is something we must do when we find ourselves cast down. Whether in respect of our own lives or that of the church think what has been accomplished and look to God to continue His gracious work. He is able, eager and willing. Do not despise the day of small things. There is joy among the angels over one sinner that repents (Lk.15:7,10).

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:3-7

We are making slow progress but we are meeting fascinating people and learning from them. Who was this Mary and how did Paul know about her hard work in the church in Rome? We cannot identify her, but the news had certainly reached Paul that this was a woman who was a real worker among the saints. Perhaps Aquila and Priscilla had spoken of her. The real saints cannot be hidden. The real saints are not self-conscious in their service (Matt. 25:38-39) and they do not look for praise. Andronicus and Junias may just have been fellow Jews or they may have been relatives of Paul. They had become well known Christians and Paul emphasised that they were converted before he was. If they were relatives, uncles or cousins, can you imagine them in the early days of their conversion praying their hearts out for the bitter, belligerent Saul of Tarsus, wondering if such a hardhearted self-righteous bigot would ever be converted? Their prayers were answered far beyond their asking (Eph. 3:20). They could have had little idea of the vast dimension of God's purposes that they were involved in as they prayed. Do *we* really grasp how much we are at the heart of things when we pray? What an encouragement there is to pray. Is anything too hard for the Lord (Gen. 18:14)? These two men had been in jail together with Paul. Can you imagine the conversations, the recalling of past mercies, and the times of prayer together? This is fellowship indeed.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:8-11

This list reads something like Hebrews 11, especially the last section (Heb. 11:32-40). There are too many of these unsung heroes to speak of their details. But God knows both them and their service. Their names are in the Book of Life and they have their reward (Rev. 20:12). God is not ashamed to be called their God (Heb. 11:16). Ampliatus and Urbanus were common names among Roman slaves. But the men were not ordinary or insignificant. They were beloved fellow-workers. Stachys is an uncommon Greek name. We do not know who he was. Perhaps he was one of the shy, retiring kind who fade into the background and tend not to be noticed. Paul noticed. So does God. Apelles had been put to the test in some way and had proved himself, or had been proved real and authentic by God. Think of how Peter spoke of the testing of faith (1 Pet 1:7). Does Paul mention him here because other Christians had been too preoccupied with this man's struggles, taking more notice of his battles than his victories? But Apelles had passed with flying colours. How careful we must be before we 'write off' struggling believers, no matter how often they may seem to fall. Their failures tend to be obvious, but we seldom know how often they have battled and won in secret against fierce temptation. Our business is to see that *we* present ourselves 'approved' (2 Tim. 2:15). It is best that we should examine ourselves, and let God examine the others. Aristobulus may have been the grandson of Herod the Great. Had the Gospel penetrated that 'royal' family? Was it his family or household that had been reached and brought to faith just as some of the family of Narcissus had been won? What a thrill it must have been to Paul to discover how God had been working in so many places, often unknown to him.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:12-16

There is quite a variety of expressions used by Paul in commending his friends and fellow-workers. In v.5 he refers to 'my' dear friend and in v.12 to 'the beloved' (AV) Persis. It may simply indicate that the latter person was generally regarded with particular affection. Most congregations have someone like this. It is not that they are perfect or faultless, but simply that they are artlessly affectionate and genuine. You cannot help loving them and you are prepared to make all manner of allowances for them. Some Paul spoke of as 'my' fellow-workers because they had shared so much together that there was a particular bond of love, loyalty and appreciation. Others (12) he simply called 'workers' in the Lord. He did not have any reservations about them. They were known for their willingness to work. Perhaps when he said that Persis worked hard he was encouraging one who had seen very little result for her work, or who had been working on the kind of service in which "results" (whatever we mean by that word) are simply not of the visible or measurable kind. Rufus now a well-known, eminent Christian, is thought to be the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried the Cross (Mk 15:21). He would have been only a boy at the time of the Crucifixion and you can imagine his mother telling him as a 'bedtime story' how his father had carried the Cross on which the Prince of Glory died. Never

underestimate the impact on young lives of the teaching of the Scriptures. Never underestimate the deep impression made on children as they share in a service of worship and sit under the reading of and the ministry of the Word, even when much of it is too hard for them to understand. The Word and the Spirit form a mighty evangelistic team.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:12-16

Paul does not mention Alexander, brother of Rufus, nor Simon the father. Perhaps both were now dead. But he speaks in a wonderful way of how Rufus' mother had been a mother to him. Whether Paul was unmarried or a widower there must have been a great loneliness in his life because, like his Master before him, he had no place of his own. He was always 'out front' and as C H Spurgeon once said, 'There is no loneliness like that of a soul that has outstripped its fellows.' But the Lord provided, and in that gracious home there was a woman who treated Paul like a son. It makes one think of that home in Bethany where our Lord Jesus found such love and care (John 12:1-8). Sometimes we have such an admiration for the mighty missionary apostle that we forget just how totally human he was. Often, just by making him feel at home and treating him as a person rather than a mighty man of God, this woman ministered to Paul. That service and the service of all the womenfolk mentioned in this chapter make it very plain that Paul was not in any sense anti-woman. When Paul speaks of 'those who are with them' (14, 15) he is possibly speaking of small groups of believers meeting together in various areas of the great city of Rome. The church in these days was not 'obvious' nor was it held in esteem either by government or popular opinion. The Christians had to be wise. But they bore a witness.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:16-17

We take these two verses together to study the first one and to note the contrast with the second one. In the first verse Paul is totally occupied with the reality of Christian fellowship in the joy of God's blessing. But he is not blinded to reality by God's blessing nor is he lulled into a sentimental optimism that pretends all is well. After all, he was writing from Corinth where the church was being torn to shreds by factions, each of which was inordinately proud of its own spirituality and over sure about its own convictions. But consider the first verse. There is no clear instruction or obligation for us in our generation to incorporate into our services either a kiss of greeting or the equivalent handshake that is more natural to our culture. In some cultures one kiss would be almost a slight because two or three kisses are the accepted greeting, and they are on the cheek with almost no contact. In some churches we have been in, the whole coherence of the service has been disrupted as people have charged around in a giggling frenzy of embraces. It certainly shifted the focus of attention from God to people. But that having been said, there is still need, whenever Christians meet, for genuine affection to be expressed and for it to be expressed in a way that is seemly. We live in a loveless world, and many people in our congregations come from homes and backgrounds where there has been little if any love shown. Many people feel that no-one cares. The Psalmist felt that in Ps. 142:4. And care is not just personal. It must be expressed between congregations. It is care not competition that pleases God.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:16-17

Hendriksen, in his commentary on Romans, makes interesting observations on the "holy kiss", not least in a footnote pointing out that in the early church this greeting was given between people of the same sex. He refers to Lk. 7:36-50 and points the lesson that affection must be expressed by some suitable token. (It need not be a kiss or a box of precious ointment. It could be a letter, a card, a phone call or just an open 'How are you?' instead of always talking about ourselves). He goes on to refer to the kiss of Judas (Lk. 22:47-48), emphasising that it must be real and sincere. If not, it is a betrayal. The commentator refers finally to the kiss within the Christian community spoken of here and in 1 Cor.16:20 and 2 Cor.13:12. It must be a holy kiss. 'In other words, it should never imply less than three parties: God and the two who kiss each other.' (Hendriksen) It all has to do with a sharing of the love of Christ and speaks of harmony that we are determined to maintain

and of peace that will be the fruit. This is something far removed from any carnal association and from mere habit of courtesy. It speaks of those deep bonds of service and suffering for Jesus' sake that create a relationship of tremendous depth; a relationship so tender and precious that when anything shadows or tears it, there is sorrow that goes to the innermost depths of the heart. Read of Paul's farewell to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:36-37, following the review of his ministry and the solemn charge to faithfulness. How much do we know of this kind of care? How much do we express it? How many struggle and lose heart because we have not shown care?

[Back to Top](#)

### **16:16-17**

Consider now the solemn reality of the second verse. The contrast between the affectionate praise of v.1-16 and the rebuke of v.17 is startling. Paul was aware that there were those within the church who made it their business to disturb the harmony of the fellowship and to set individuals and groups against each other. In Paul's day some of his critics and detractors followed him from place to place and he had to stand against them. There were also groups who came from other 'churches', joined themselves to some company of believers and with an air of superior spirituality, began to criticise everything and to contradict and defy the leadership of that church and to ignore its disciplines. It has been happening right down church history to this very day. Paul was quite clear about what had to be done. When these people come in (or emerge within the fellowship) and begin to try to change the doctrine, order and practice that have been established and have been manifestly blessed by God, they are to be avoided. He does not say to oppose them, although that is necessary at times. But to enter into debate with them can often give them a false sense of their own importance and, of course, it can become a distraction from the true on-going work of the congregation. That would be giving the Devil an entrance. Avoid them. Do not go with them. Trust your leaders who, at great cost, have led you to Christ and on into some degree of spiritual growth that is the safe way. Such leaders watch over your souls as men who must give account to God (Heb. 13:17).

[Back to Top](#)

### **16:18-20**

Faced with those whose attitudes and actions disturbed, divided and distracted the fellowship, Paul was quite clear he was dealing with a work of Satan. As we read his strong words in v. 18 remember that some are dupes of Satan, having been ensnared by clever words and false spirituality. For those so deceived Paul had a great concern. He was indeed a true pastor and he would defend his sheep against the wolves and the sheep-stealers with rigour. Think of his words to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:28-30, warning them against certain people and tendencies within the one congregation. Think of his urgent call in Eph.4:12-14 to grow in grace and so be safe from deception. Think of his stern words to those who had gone away after 'new' truth and in so doing had gone away from Christ (Gal. 1:6). Think of Paul's counsel to the young minister Timothy, regarding the danger of false teaching and false influence that must be guarded against (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 6:3-10; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:1-5). We must grasp the fact that our business is not only to preach the truth but to preserve the truth from corruption, so that the next generation will have God's truth to live by. Reading Paul's words here in Romans you cannot but think of Jesus and His holy anger as He cleansed the Temple and His devastating words of rebuke to the Pharisees who, under the guise of being spiritual leaders, were in fact leading the people away from God. We must remember we *are* our brother's keeper and we cannot stand by and allow him to be plundered by self-centred, self-motivated men and women, who know full well what they are doing, unless they are already totally blinded and de-sensitised. Read the sad and grievous words in Phil. 3:17-19. Paul was speaking of people who claimed to be Christians.

[Back to Top](#)

### **16:18-20**

Take up the passage at v.19 and see Paul's concern lest the believers be drawn away from obedience to Christ. Who was hindering and distracting them (Gal. 5:7-8) ? He had already said enough in v.7-18 by way of description to enable the Romans to recognise the unhealthy influences and the people exercising them. Now

he became more positive and urged them to be 'experts in good, and not even beginners in evil' (J B Phillips). There are things it is best to know nothing about, because they pollute and infect, and their influence can linger long after repentance and sorrow. Be wise, says Paul, and go God's way. Be careful whose advice you take and whose advice you refuse, because once you start a course of action it may be difficult to change. Be careful also if you have to give advice and exercise influence on others. What a terrible thing to have on your conscience that you set someone off on the wrong road, simply because you spoke carelessly when you were yourself out of sorts spiritually. How terrible if you misguided someone deliberately, to hurt them or to hurt someone else through them. This is indeed Devil's work. Be wise and recognise the danger of temptation and the areas in which you are most likely to be tempted. Be simple and straightforward with regard to what is evil. Remember that in the Garden of Eden it was the *forbidden* fruit that was attractive to the point that both the man and the woman were prepared to risk everything for it. They did take the risk because it appealed to their senses (Gen.3:6) and they ignored the spiritual consequences, having been deceived by the Devil. The forbidden fascinates. The actual having it may thrill but it soon disappoints and then destroys. You end up hiding from God.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:18-20

We still have the glorious affirmation, confidence and encouragement of v.20 and we must grasp it firmly lest we end up being afraid of the Devil. Paul was clearly thinking back to Gen. 3:14,15 and the promise of the One who would bruise Satan's head. He may also have been thinking back over his exposition of salvation in which he has shown the total victory of Christ over the world, the flesh and the Devil. He may well have been thinking also of Jesus and His quiet command of the powers of evil, whether manifested in the tortured outbursts of complicated lives or in the storms at sea that so frightened the disciples. It is God who is the Victor, and He is the God of peace. The best way to cope with Satan is to be at peace, assured of this, that we are sharers in Christ's victory. That is why Paul says the God of Peace will crush Satan under *our* feet, that is, in our experience. God will not allow the Devil to have his way. But this calls for the obedience of faith. That in turn requires the armour of God (Eph. 6:10ff). It also calls for us to set our thoughts on what is good and to turn away from what is evil (Phil. 4:8,9). 'This is the first open reference to Satan in the epistle, and it suggests that through the power and grace of the Gospel of Christ he may be kept strictly in his place and given a back seat in our lives.' (J. Philip) How we need to grasp this truth and to rejoice in it. What a way to finish a letter! What hope it must have kindled in the hearts of the believers in Rome. Little wonder Paul is about to lead into a final doxology of praise.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:21-23

What a minister Paul was and is! Eager to rise to the heights of rejoicing, worship and assurance, he yet pauses to look kindly on his companions. He would take them with him in everything, making them a part of his own work. That is how it should always be, provided people are willing to be drawn in and to let all secondary considerations be lost in the great privilege of serving Christ. There are no stronger or sweeter bonds of fellowship than those of service, and people who have gone through deep and costly battles together have a relationship both human and spiritual that is a treasure beyond price. Think of Timothy's reaction as he heard Paul dictating these words about him. He was a timid soul, not all that strong physically, but he was a fellow-worker, valued and trusted. Read Phil. 2:19-24. What a testimonial to get from your senior colleague! The NIV puts a comma after Lucius, and the name may be that of the beloved Doctor Luke (Col. 4:14) and the next two men may be fellow Jews. Jason may be the man in Acts 17:5-9 and Sosipater may be mentioned in Acts 20:4. Even if all three are unknown men they were with the apostle and he was glad to associate them with this letter. Tertius, the secretary, is allowed to write his own personal greeting and this signifies the value to the work of God of those who are the secretaries, typists, printers and clerical workers. When Aquila and Priscilla left Corinth, Gaius took over as the man with an open house to give hospitality to Paul and to countless other Christians. What a ministry! We can but hope that people expressed their gratitude, not least in returning hospitality when it was needed and when opportunity presented itself.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:21-23

We linger with this catalogue of names, not least to remind ourselves of how many different people are needed to do different duties, some of them very humble duties, in order to keep a church going. Many a minister would like to think that one of the men named might have been the equivalent of a 'church officer', or caretaker, who sees to doors being opened and shut, floors swept, light bulbs replaced and many other tasks often taken for granted. When thinking of Gaius, remember that there was much coming and going in the apostle's time and in every church there would be 'new' people, who would not know anyone and who would feel strange and even tongue-tied. Gaius would make them feel welcome. He would be serving and giving all the time, but then he was doing it for Jesus. Erastus, the city treasurer, would find all his financial and administrative expertise eagerly made use of, because there would be many occasions when letters would have to be written to local government offices. What a pity if this man were to prefer other work, preaching for example, at which he might not have been very good. Perhaps both Erastus and Gaius were needed to serve and witness, not within the structure of church services or administration, but in their places of secular employment. That is a hard calling. But someone has to shine for Christ there. Perhaps the easiest form of service is to take part in some organised Christian activity. In that setting you are *expected* to give a clear witness. It is much harder at home and at work. It is not for nothing that Paul speaks of fellow-*workers*. Gospel service is no place for those who want to play at being Christians.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:25-27

This is a great doxology and those who know the three verses of the hymn, 'To God be the glory,' should speak or sing them, for they echo the marvellous sweep of God's saving purposes as Paul rehearses them here. This man had tremendous confidence in God and he sought to encourage the Romans to have the same confidence and encouragement. He assured them that God is able to strengthen and to establish them, and that He does this through the Gospel which Paul had expounded to them. The salvation he proclaimed is not a mere compendium of doctrinal truths but, as he said at the beginning (1:16), the very power of God. The word 'strengthen' (RSV) or 'establish' (NIV) has the meaning of 'rooting down', making fast and giving permanence. Think of the doxology in 1 Thess. 5:23-24. The faithful God who called us will see His work through to the end (Phil. 1:6). We must learn to have assurance in God, for this will hold us in all manner of storms in ourselves and in our circumstances. The detailed statement beginning 'the revelation of the mystery.....' right down to 'the command of the eternal God' (25-26) could take a series of sermons to expound. But that was not Paul's intention here because he had expounded this theme right through the epistle. He was speaking of God's glorious intentions, planned in eternity, worked out on earth in the death and resurrection of Christ, and now made known gloriously in the preaching of the gospel. He emphasised yet again the unity and continuity of the Old and New Testaments. All that was promised by the prophets, seen and claimed by faith, has been performed. The great objective at all times is to bring men and women to the obedience of faith. You can imagine Paul in his public ministry ending his sermons with the great, gracious and urgent call that we all need to hear again and again: 'HAVE FAITH IN GOD'.

[Back to Top](#)

### 16:25-27

If we have caught any glimpse of the glory of the Gospel, the wonder of salvation, the blessing of life eternal and the riches of God's grace toward us, we will be content simply to read the last verse of the epistle and to say our 'Amen'. We could turn to similar doxologies in 1 Pet. 5:10-11 and Jude 24-25, and the blessed Spirit of God whose delight it is to point to Jesus Christ the Son will enable us through the Son to fix our hearts on the only wise God. That is where our hearts should be, and we have every cause to put them there. Away back in 1964 when we first expounded Romans in the Record, we ended the last note with these words: 'Paul lays down the pen and having worshipped, he lies down to sleep. Had we seen him then we might have noticed

## George Philip Bible Reading In Book

the smile of peace upon his face. Jesus was there, and, where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there.' How glad some of us are that we learned some of the old Redemption hymns.

'Oh! the love that drew salvation's plan,  
Oh! the grace that brought it down to man,  
Oh! the mighty gulf that God did span  
At Calvary.

Mercy there was great and grace was free,  
Pardon there was multiplied to me,  
There my burdened soul found liberty,  
At Calvary.'

[Back to Top](#)