



Romans

Jesus is the Lamb, the slain Savior, and the crucified Christ. But that is only half of the crucifixion story. Jesus is the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29); He saved us from our sins (Rom. 5:8) and His crucifixion on the cross was for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3). Christ died to save us from our sins. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” You and I are the world. The importance of the cross is cosmic but, more importantly, it is personal. The cross is about you and me.

Before we will appreciate the sacrifice of Christ we must honestly confront our personal need for Christ. That means, we must confess that we are sinners and without hope. The first step on the stairway to heaven is *down*.

Here is the situation: Picture a courtroom. You are the defendant. The prosecutor is Satan. God sits at the bar. Satan begins his questioning, “Isn’t it true...?” and he begins to list your sins one by one. What will you answer? Is Satan lying? You have no sins? Or, will you say, “Yes, but I’m really sorry I did those things...”? Or, will you just admit them and take your medicine? But you don’t want that medicine. “. . .hell, the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43-44).

If we are sinners, the penalty is fixed: “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). There is nothing you or I can do to avoid that punishment. If God is a just God – and He is *perfectly* just – the price must be paid. There will be an execution of the penalty.

That means that we are in a predicament. We are sinners – our first sin made it so. We are, therefore, subject to the penalty for sin. We are locked in a cell with no means of escape. We have no power in ourselves to extract us from the prison. Paul’s purpose in Romans is to bring this predicament into bold relief. It is a universal problem. Every individual who has reached an accountable age is in this quandary.

What happens when the knowledge of our sins begins to stir up the guilt inside? What can we do? Paul’s purpose in Romans is to explain the means through which a perfectly just God has arranged for our salvation through faith in Christ. He says the power of God unto salvation is the gospel itself, for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). The gospel is the story of Jesus and how He laid down His life in place of ours, taking the penalty due us, and paying the debt we owe. Paul’s purpose in Romans is to vindicate the justice of God while explaining, in detail, the basis of our hope.

Think of the courtroom scene again. The Judge passes His sentence: “Death!” But Christ pulls us to the side and takes our place. As He is led away, the Judge says to you, “You may go; you’re free. This man has purchased your pardon. I declare you ‘righteous.’” The word is “justified.” We are *justified* by our faith. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1).

Why would God do that for people who have offended Him again and again? “But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Why? *Because God loves us*. And if God did that for His enemies, how much more will He do for His friends?! If God is for us, who can be against us (8:31)?

Bible quotations and references are from the New King James Version or the New American Standard Bible (1995)

Justification by Faith and Its Significance

Romans 1–8

Romans 1:1–15

Paul refers to himself as a slave (Gk., *doulos*) or “bond–servant” of Jesus Christ, which expresses his attitude toward his calling as an apostle. The gospel was foretold in the Old Testament and was the goal of the promises given to the fathers (Gen. 12:1–3). Everything pointed toward Jesus Christ – to His life, His death and His resurrection. It was through Christ that Paul received grace and apostleship. His calling as an apostle was a pure act of grace and he never minimized that calling (see I Timothy 1:12–17). He preached the gospel for one purpose – to produce whole–hearted commitment to Christ. Prior to his calling, he was “separated” (set apart) to the Law. Now, he is set apart to the gospel, the “good news.”

Paul is pleased to be able to tell the Romans that their faith is the subject of world–wide conversation. Some argue that faith is primarily a passive thing, devoid of works. If faith is a passive thing, it would hardly have been “proclaimed throughout the whole world.” Paul says that grace and apostleship were received for *obedience of faith* (v. 5; cf. 16:19, 26).

The Romans are constantly in his prayers, and he makes frequent request that he might have opportunity to see them. He is not interested in seeing the sights in Rome but he wished to establish them (perhaps through the impartation of spiritual gifts) and be encouraged by them. He informs them that his inability to see them has not been his choice but that he has been hindered by God’s own design. In any case, he is “eager to preach the gospel” to them and anxiously awaits the opportunity (v. 15). He is ready, in fact, to preach the gospel anywhere and to anyone. It is this attitude which prompts the well–known theme statement of v. 16.

Questions

1. List a few Old Testament prophecies about the gospel.
2. Explain “born of a descendent of David” (v. 3). Why does it matter?
3. What is the “spirit of holiness” (v. 4)?
4. What was the ultimate goal of Paul’s, and the other apostle’s, preaching?
5. How are saints “called”?
6. What proves that Christ is the Son of God?
7. How important is the Old Testament in our effort to understand the NT?
8. Why did Paul long to see the Romans?
9. What is the “fruit” was Paul hoping to gather in Rome?



What do brethren in other places think of us?

It's impressive that Paul says the Roman faith is spoken of all over the world. What do you suppose the Roman church had done to deserve such a reputation? Perhaps they were helping support other preachers. Or maybe they were growing rapidly and other brethren heard about it. While local autonomy is important, it should also be noted that reputation among brethren is also important. Paul's commendation should cause us to pause and think about what brethren in other places may think about this congregation, if indeed they know about it at all.

Notice, too, that while Paul was expecting to encourage the Romans, he was also expecting encouragement from them. Do you think preachers and others who come to visit us are more encouraged when they leave? What things can we do to insure that we encourage all of those who visit us, so that they are more ready to preach and practice Christianity?

Romans 1:16–17

Paul felt an obligation to preach the gospel to all men, and he wanted to preach the gospel in Rome, as well (v. 15). The two “for” statements of v. 16 tell us why: first, Paul says he was “*not ashamed*.” Is this just a literary device to emphasize his pride in the gospel? Or is he responding to the real possibility that preaching the gospel can be a source of human embarrassment since, in the words of I Cor. 1:18, it is “foolishness” in the eyes of pagans. Both Moo and Murray take the latter view. His strong assertion that he is *not ashamed* proves his faith since many would be ashamed to come into the capital of the Roman empire preaching the gospel; but not Paul – he is eager to preach there, come what may.

In the next “for” clause, Paul elaborates on why he is not ashamed. This good news is God’s *power* to save.

The Greek word for “power,” (*dynamis*) has its roots in the vocabulary of the Old Testament, in passages such as Ex. 9:16 where Yahweh said that Pharaoh was raised up in order to demonstrate Yahweh’s power in him (cf. Rom. 9:17). David refers to Yahweh as the “power of my salvation” (Psa. 140:7). In the New Testament, Paul often refers to God’s word as *dynamis* (cf. I Cor. 2:4–5; 4:19–20). The word “power,” then, refers to a personal God who uniquely possesses the power to deliver man from danger. The gospel, Paul says, is that power (cf. I Cor. 1:18).

Paul tells why the gospel is the power to save in the next “for” clause (v. 17). The gospel – the good news about what Jesus has done for us – reveals God’s plan to save man, a plan of righteousness. In other words, this is how we are justified, pronounced “not guilty,” freed from our sins. It is a righteousness that comes by faith. The gospel has been revealed with the express purpose of creating the faith that saves (from faith to faith: it is revealed to be a plan of righteousness by faith and it is revealed in order to bring about faith). Those who are justified will be those who live by their faith (cf. Hab. 2:4).

Questions

1. What is "salvation"?
2. To whom is salvation offered?
3. Explain "to the Jew first" (v. 16)?
4. How might one be "ashamed" of the gospel?
5. What is the "righteousness of God" as used in v. 17?
6. Explain the phrase "from faith to faith."
7. Paul quotes the Old Testament at least 65 times in this letter, more than any other book. Why?



Dunamis – Power!

It should be obvious that the only way we will lean on God's power to save is if we are convinced we have no power of our own for the purpose. To what extent have we really grasped the concept that it takes nothing less than the power of God Himself to save us? The use of the word *dunamis* is interesting in light of the great power of Rome. We too have grown used to being the most powerful nation on the face of the earth, giving us a sense of invulnerability, perhaps. But it will still take God's power to save us and it will still require unyielding trust in Him. There is no one and nothing else we can put our trust in and hope to be saved. Only God has the power.

Romans 1:18–32

The next major section of Romans (1:18–3:20) has one basic objective: to establish the *need* for salvation. God's character is not only displayed in His matchless love for man but also in His wrath against sin. It is this characteristic of God which is most often ignored and yet it is terribly real (cf. Heb. 10:26–31; 12:28–29; cf. 2 Cor. 5:11). Paul says this wrath *is* (present tense) *revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness* (v. 18). God is perfectly just; perfect justice requires an element of wrath (Gk. *orgee*: “a settled anger”) against all that is opposed to Him. He is perfect GOOD and the perfect GOOD must deal with EVIL.

Wrath is as true a characteristic of the one true and living God as is mercy, kindness or love. We'll see, later on, that it was God's wrath that put Jesus on the cross, as much as His love. We do not have a properly balanced view of God when we overemphasize one of His characteristics to the virtual exclusion of another. God's nature is a perfect blend of justice and love (cf. 11:22).

In 1:18–3:20, Paul argues that all have sinned, whether Gentile or Jew. 1:18–32 covers the Gentiles who, through their pagan affiliations, had corrupted themselves in the most vile ways imaginable (even if 20th century America has come to accept these vices as “alternative lifestyles,” they are the paradigms of evil, as far as Paul is concerned) and thus had become the objects of God's wrath. Three times (vv. 24, 26, 28) Paul says God had given them up to their degrading ways. It is a sobering thought to be reminded that people can become so hardened in their sins that God will finally give up on them (cf. I Tim. 4:1–2; II Thess. 2:9–12; Eph. 4:17–19). §

Questions

1. What had man done with the truth of God?
2. Why does man have “no excuse”?
3. What are the specific sins which Paul mentions of which these people had been guilty?
4. What does “give them up” mean to you?
5. How does one dishonor his body?
6. What is involved in “exchanging the truth of God for the lie” (v. 25)?
7. Can you think of a common thread which runs through all of these sins?
8. What is implied in the phrase “did not like to *retain*” (v. 28)?



Oh, those wicked Gentiles!

The major point of this section is to show that the Gentiles had been sinners. We may feel fairly secure as we read the early part of this indictment. After all, Paul is mainly condemning idolatry and homosexuality. But have you carefully read the last few verses of chapter one? I'm convinced that even before Paul gets to chapter two, he convicts all of us here — unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful. Who can say they have never been guilty?

Romans 2:1–16

Paul turns his attention to the “moralist,” probably the Jew, the “holier-than-thou” person who likes to preach, but doesn’t practice what he preaches. The “therefore” is interesting since one would not normally associate the sins of the pagan world with the Jews. Nygren feels that it is precisely that which Paul addresses: the Jews were practicing the same sins which they accuse others of committing, hiding behind their status as Jews, thinking that would save them (cf. Mt. 3:8–9). This is folly, Paul argues, because the judgment of God is absolutely righteous – it is according to truth and without partiality. You can’t fool God into thinking you are righteous., if you are not practicing righteousness.

These people had forgotten that God will judge each person according to his own deeds (v. 6), a quotation from Psa. 62:12 (there, in a positive context, David was confident in judgment). A man’s claims to a relationship with God mean nothing at all if his actions are unholy. God’s goodness is designed to lead a person to repentance (v. 4). If a man fails to respond to this immeasurable grace, he must face God’s perfect justice. There is no third alternative. “God’s wheels grind slow, but they grind small.”

Some were claiming that having the law was sufficient to save them. Paul points out that it is vain to have the law if one does not keep the law (cf. Jas 2:10). In such cases, the law serves only to judge the man. But even those without the law (Gentiles) may be more righteous than those who have the law if the former, because of conscience, do the deeds of the law (v. 14, “do instinctively,”). God will judge even the secret things by Jesus Christ and that judgment will be according to the gospel (the “truth” – v. 16). He is a God who “shows no partiality nor takes a bribe” (Dt. 10:17).

Questions

1. What kind of judgment is under consideration in v. 1?
2. How does Paul characterize God's judgment?
3. Describe the difference between those who do good and those who do not.
4. With regard to law, who will be justified?
5. What is the function of "conscience"?
6. When will God judge us? In what sense are we judged now? (cf. Jn. 3:18ff.)



Beware "secret things" – God knows

Check the closets of your life – for what *secret* things will God hold you accountable at judgment? A lot of folks in the church are silly enough to think that they can put on a good face and somehow fool God. Sure, they are fooling their brethren, but God sees all things: "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13) Being "in the church" will save no one, by itself.

Why must we be threatened before we do the right thing? Why is it sometimes so difficult to be motivated by the *goodness* of God (2:4)?

Romans 2:17–29

The Jews were very proud to possess the Law of Moses, calling it their own – they relied on it and boasted in God (v. 17) because, after all, they were Jews. They were instructed out of the Law and approved the essential things (v. 18) and even became teachers of the Law (vv. 19–20). But there is nothing worse than hypocrisy, and these Jews, who knew the Law so well, were at the same time failing to practice the Law. Even as they boasted in the Law, they dishonored God through their breaking of the Law (v. 23). There is a strong allusion here to Psa. 50:16–21, which also scorns the hypocrisy of practicing evil while teaching righteousness.

The result was that “the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles” (v. 24). The quote from Isa. 52:5 is interesting since, in its original context, it referred to the blasphemy which came from the captivity of the children of Israel by the pagan nations of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon (cf. Ezek. 36:20). God would redeem them for His name's sake. But what have they done? They have blasphemed God themselves, in the hypocrisy of boasting in the Law while breaking it. Paul is placing them in the same class as those pagan nations who captured them and blasphemed God's name.

Therefore, their circumcision (their heritage as Jews) had become uncircumcision (v. 25). It is not those who are Jews by birth who are the true children of God. Instead, those who serve God from the heart are the true “Jews” (vv. 28–29; see Phil. 3:3; Gal. 6:16). This is so because those who lovingly serve God in faith, with all the heart, soul and mind are the ones who are fulfilling God's original objective for Israel. The church is the “new Israel,” whose “circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter and whose praise is not from men, but from God” (v. 29, NKJV). The point of all this, of course, is to establish that the Jews, like the Gentiles, were sinners, in spite of (and maybe even because of) their confidence in the Law.

Questions

1. What privileges had God given the Jews?
2. What did Paul mean when he said “having the *form* of knowledge”?
3. What is “robbing temples”?
4. When was the covenant of circumcision first given?
5. What was the purpose of circumcision as it relates to the covenant?



The peril of privilege

There is more to apply here than meets the eye. The Jews had great privileges, but were guilty of hiding behind those privileges. We can do the same thing when we think that being a member of Christ's body has some saving significance in itself. Never forget that *Christ* is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23) – this is the church (body, people) of CHRIST.

What privileges do we have and how are we using them – to claim a status, or to practice godliness from the heart?

Romans 3:1–8

If everyone is equally guilty before God, is there any advantage in being a Jew? Paul answers by first reminding his readers that the Jews had a great advantage because they were entrusted with the word of God first (v. 2; cf. also 1:16). The fact that some did not believe God's word did not alter the faithfulness of God to His word (v. 3). God's veracity is not based upon whether or not man accepts what He has said – God is true regardless of man's response (v. 4). He is a God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2), immutable and faithful (see Heb. 6:18).

In v. 4, Paul quotes Psa. 51:4, a Psalm in which David confesses his sin before God and acknowledges that such a confession “justifies (‘declares righteous’) God.” This fits neatly into Paul's argument. He is demonstrating that all men, including the Jews have sinned and come under the judgment of God. But to the Jews were committed the oracles of God and yet most refused to believe and obey God. God remains faithful to His word, however, in spite of their disobedience (cf. Psa. 89:30–37). In fact, the sin of man serves to “demonstrate the righteousness of God” (His plan to save man) and “God will prevail when He is judged;” i.e., He will “pass every test.” His condemnation of sinners, then, proves His own righteousness. Stated another way, God uses everything, even sin itself, to bring about His purpose.

But if our sin gives God the opportunity to demonstrate His plan to save us, could it be said that He is **unjust** if He punishes sin (“inflicts wrath”)? Paul answers: “Certainly not!” If that were true, then God could judge no one, not even those (the “**world**” – v. 6) whom all would agree are deserving of judgment. But “it was axiomatic that there would be a judgment day when some would be acquitted and some would be condemned” (Morris, page 159). Paul continues the assumed objection in v. 7, this time in terms of truth and falsehood. If God's glory, or truth, is enhanced by our sin (“lie”) why are we still judged as sinners? Some were even slandering Paul, mocking his teaching of justification by faith, saying “do evil that good may come!” The blasphemy was, in other words, that *the end justifies the means* – the more we sin, the better God looks, so sin freely! Paul says of those who teach such nonsense: “**their condemnation is just!**” (v. 8).

Questions

1. In what way were the Jews at an advantage?
2. How had the Jews mishandled this trust?
3. What is the effect of man's unbelief on God?
4. Why would anyone raise the argument that we should "do evil that good may come"?



Would anyone accuse us of teaching too much grace?

Consider how it is that Paul's teaching was being used for such slanderous purposes as described in verse 8. Are we presenting the gospel in such a way that slander like this is possible? That is, have we put the emphasis in the proper place (on the grace of God), as Paul always did? Or have we constructed a works-righteousness of our own?

Romans 3:9–20

All have violated law, regardless of the law they had. The Gentile had violated God's universal moral law, and the Jew had violated the law given to Moses, which included the moral law. No one can claim justification on the basis of law because no one has kept law.

To establish his point, Paul combines parts of a number of Old Testament quotations, a method which would be especially impressive to his Jewish readers. Most of the quotations are from the book of Psalms (cf. 14:1–3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; 36:1). The passages prove that the reality of sin is readily observable – “there is none righteous.” For example, look at how the tongue is used (vv. 13–14). Every individual has sinned in speech. Or consider the reality of war: shedding blood is a fact of life, “the path of peace is not known” in this world. The basic problem is spelled out in v. 18, “there is no fear of God before their eyes,” a conclusion David reached in his oracle concerning the wicked (Psa. 36:1).

To the Jew, Paul says the Law “shuts the mouths” (v. 19, NKJV) of those who would seek to be justified by it. Paul is speaking to the Jew in v. 19, because it is to them that the Law (in this case, the Law of Moses) speaks. Ironically, the Law which they are relying on for salvation is the standard by which they are judged to be guilty. But it only serves to illustrate the point that the whole world is accountable to God because of sin. No one (Jew or Gentile) will be justified by (any) law because law, or “the principle of law,” can only provide a standard of behavior, it cannot provide the means of deliverance. It can only provide a knowledge of sin, it cannot overcome sin. It is not the function of law to forgive, a subject Paul will continue to develop in this letter.

Questions

1. What specific examples does Paul use to show that all have sinned?
2. What happens when one confronts the law of God – what answer must he give?
3. What is the purpose of law?



How far removed from Rome are we?

Remember that Paul was writing to a church that existed in the capital of the world's greatest empire. They lived with corruption and the sins of the tongue and the reality of war was common to them. Their nation was built on bloodshed and still held the world by the neck. They feared no one, least of all the God of heaven, whom they could not see. Don't you ever think about how much like Rome we've become?

Do we need to look very far to see the reality of sin in the world, even if we look beyond ourselves?

Perhaps the most rudimentary function of law is to provide a knowledge of sin. Given that function, what reactions can we expect to the law? I.e., what kind of person will be *comfortable* with an increased knowledge of sin? What kind of person will be troubled by it?

Romans 3:21–31

Paul asserts that God's righteousness (His plan to save) is revealed "apart from law" (v. 21), meaning that law will not be the basis used to judge us. Instead, God's righteousness is by faith. The "law" system makes no provisions for forgiveness, but only provides a standard to "keep" (cf. 10:5). Failure to do so results in sin and (spiritual) death. Furthermore, the Law of Moses was a law given only to the children of Israel; if salvation came by that Law, then the Gentiles would have no access to God's righteousness. In any case, however, this plan is *witnessed* by the Law (of Moses) and Prophets. In other words, the Law testified about the coming of Christ and the gospel concerning Him.

In verse 23 Paul makes the point he's made before – all have sinned. But God has provided a remedy and it is "free" (v. 24). God's grace is a freely bestowed gift. That means that we receive it without cost, although it cost God a great deal – His only begotten Son! This is the basis of our salvation, the ground upon which we stand. Without God's initial action of providing a way for us to be saved, our faith would mean nothing. We are saved by God's grace. That's fundamental (cf. Eph. 2:8–10).

This grace was expressed in a monumental historical act. God gave His son to be a "propitiation for our sins." Some confuse the similar term, "expiate" with the word found here, "propitiate." To "expiate" means "to cover"; but "propitiation" goes much deeper. It means to satisfy once and for all. In this context, it means to satisfy the wrath of God. In a sense, the sacrifices under the Old Testament served as an expiation, since they served to cover the sins of the people (this is how God "passed over the sins previously committed," v. 25). But these sacrifices never objectively took the sins away because they could never fully satisfy the righteous judgment of God (cf. Hb 10:4). It took a propitiation to do that. Christ's blood did what the blood of bulls and goats could not do, fully satisfying the wrath of God and taking it out of the way for those who trust in Him.

Thus God, while He justified the sinner, was also proved perfectly just Himself. It was not only His love acting at the cross, but His justice as well (cf. Acts 2:23). No one can charge that God is "all mercy, but no wrath," nor "all wrath and no mercy." Both are active in the cross of Christ.

But what of the law? Does faith void out the law and make it worthless (v. 31)? NO! Our faith establishes the law – upholds it. Our faith places law (as the revealed will of God) on a pedestal where it belongs. Unlike the Jews, who dragged the law down to their own level, our faith raises the law up and displays it as holy and just and good (7:12).

Questions

1. In what ways had the Law and the Prophets witnessed the righteousness of God?
2. To whom is justification offered without cost?
3. What is the significance of blood in securing our justification?
4. When had God “passed over” sins previously committed?
5. How is it possible that God is both “just” (perfect judge) and “justifier” (one who pronounces “not guilty”) of one who has sinned against Him?
6. What is the *law* of faith?
7. In what ways do we “establish the law” by faith?



Getting a grip on grace

Preachers face two major problems in their preaching: (1) convincing people of their sinful condition and (2) convincing people that they have been saved. Few people ever come to grips with the reality that they are sinners. Pride gets in the way and most people, tragically, just can't get to the point where they say they're wrong. But then there are those who do, but who get lost in the despair of sin and never learn about the grace of God.

That man sees his sinful condition and puts a period there. But God sees it and puts a comma there. Grace is masterfully stated by Paul in this passage of Romans. What does it mean to you?

Romans 4:1–8

Many confusing arguments have been based upon this passage of scripture, especially the quotation from Gen. 15:6 (v. 3). Calvinists appeal to the quotation to teach a doctrine of justification by faith only, claiming that “faith” and “works” are always opposites. The “works” of this passage are indeed something opposed to the “faith” of this passage, so we need to know what these “works” are. Are these works the same thing as “obedience,” for example? Was Abraham justified by God irrespective of his obedience? Of course not; even a cursory reading of Hebrews 11 or James 2 will reveal that Abraham was not credited with righteousness, regardless of whether he did what God told him to or not. Abraham obeyed God, which was a product of his faith, and this **obedient** faith was “accounted to him for righteousness.”

The “works” of Romans 4 have to be something which would create a debt from God to the worker. And since the word itself implies “performance,” then it must have something to do with keeping of a standard, or law. In other words, the person doing **these** works would have **earned** God’s wage of righteousness (v. 4) through the keeping of God’s law. But the only way a person could qualify for such a wage would be by **perfect performance** of the law, since failure in one point renders one a “law-breaker” (Jas. 2:10; cf. Gal. 3:10, where the sense is that one must continue to keep all aspects of the law). God “owes” a law-breaker nothing.

Paul argues in this chapter that even “our forefather Abraham” was a law-breaker and therefore had “nothing to boast about before God.” But Abraham had faith and that faith was accounted (or credited) to Abraham as righteousness. It is important to see, at this point, that Abraham was just as right before God as one who had kept the law perfectly. This is because Abraham had faith, the kind of faith we must have if we are going to be justified by God. It has been noted there is nothing here to imply that Abraham’s faith excluded his obedience. Nor does anything said here imply that there were no conditions to be met. David understood conditional justification because in Psalm 32, partially quoted here, he says that he did not receive this forgiveness **until** (condition) he acknowledged his sins before God. Before he confessed, he was lost (see Psa. 32:3–5).

Questions

1. What does “according to the flesh” mean?
2. Where is the quotation of v. 3 found in the Old Testament?
3. Why is one who “works” owed a debt of wages?
4. Does Paul contradict James in this section (cf. Jas 2:23–24)? Explain.



The value of Old Testament study

In 3:21, Paul said that the righteousness of God is “witnessed” by the Law and the Prophets. We cannot really understand the New Testament unless we have a good grasp of the Old. Read Genesis 12:1–3 and dwell on the promises made to Abraham and how those promises were worked out in history.

What does it mean to you to know that you were in God’s plans from the very beginning? Is there a difference between “works” and “obedience” as Paul uses the terms in Romans? How would you summarize the record of man’s relationship with God through Genesis 12? How does that help you understand God’s dealings with Abraham?

Romans 4:9–12

Circumcision was at the center of the controversy in the early church between the Jewish nomists (those who put emphasis on law [Gk. *nomos*]) and the apostles (cf. Gal. 2:3–5; Phil. 3:2–3). Paul argues that Abraham's justification was not tied to circumcision, but to his faith, which preceded circumcision: "not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised." The **sign** of circumcision was given to Abraham in Genesis 17, but he had already proven himself faithful prior to that time. In fact, the sign of circumcision was given to him **because** of his faithfulness. It is not "status" (i.e., as a Jew; cf. Mt. 3:8–9) but faith which is the deciding factor, and Abraham became the father of all the faithful, whether Jew ("circumcised") or Gentile "uncircumcised").

It might be fruitful to point out here that there can be different manifestations of the same faith (see Mott, page 21ff.). Sometimes, faith is asked to **accept** something (cf. Gen. 15:6) and sometimes it is asked to **do** something (Jas. 2:21–23 uses Gen. 15:6 to describe this kind of faith, referring to Gen. 22 and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac). Neither kind excludes the necessity of obedience, nor eliminates the fact that conditions may be attached to the promise which faith must believe. Only a Calvinistic bias would fail to see that obedience is a necessary part of the concept of faith and that faith is implicitly conditional. One who trusts God with all his heart will act on God's word, not only "believing" what it says, but doing God's bidding (cf. Jas. 2:19ff.). Abraham exemplifies the conditional nature of faith. If he had not, for example, gone when God told him to go, we would not be reading about him in Romans 4.

Questions

1. To whom is righteousness imputed (“credited”)?
2. What is a “sign”?
3. Of what value was the sign of circumcision to Abraham?
4. List some other signs which are mentioned in the OT?



A faith-based vs. a works-based mindset

Those who were claiming that their circumcision put them in a special class were making a very basic error. The righteousness of God is not based on any external status symbol, but upon a faith which appropriates His grace.

In what ways are members of the body of Christ liable to make the same mistake as these Jews? Why is it so dangerous?

What mind-set must we have to avoid such a fatal mistake?

Romans 4:13–25

Paul now turns to a consideration of law as a means of salvation. If Abraham was not justified through his circumcision, maybe it was because he kept the law. Paul's answer helps explain v. 4: if Abraham had "worked," God would have owed him salvation. Was God obligated to save Abraham because he "worked"? In v. 13, Paul says "it is not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise" (NIV). Law, then, corresponds with "works," which must mean perfect performance of the law. If Abraham had perfectly performed the law, God would owe him salvation and the whole concept of grace and faith would be irrelevant.

But Abraham was not justified by perfect performance of law. It was by the grace of God (v. 16), which created the opportunity for Abraham to be faithful and thus please God. Furthermore, Paul reasons, the promise was given *before* the law and if only those "of the law" (Jews) are heirs, then faith is pointless and promise is without effect (see Gal. 3:17–18). The promise is that all nations would be blessed, not just Israel. The reason all nations need the blessing is because all have sinned (3:23; ;5:12). The law had no provision for permanent blessing but could only bring about the wrath of God.

The last clause in v. 15 says that "where there is no law there is no transgression" (Gk. *parabasis*, not *hamartia* – "sin"; important because *parabasis* always means to "go beyond;" *hamartia* is the more general word). The meaning seems to be that there is no transgression of a command if there is no command to "go beyond." The Mosaic Law (referred to here) served to render people more accountable to God because it spelled out in great detail what God expected from them. Therefore, their sin "increased" (see 5:13, 20; 7:7–12; Gal. 3:19) because of the Law. So, instead of Jews taking comfort in the Law, as if it had saving power, the Law actually served to make them worse sinners!

Only faith, not perfect performance, will justify. And the faith Paul is talking about is a faith based not only on what God says, but on who God is. Because Abraham knew God, he believed the "impossible."

Questions

1. What is the function and purpose of law? What law is Paul referring to here?
2. How can faith be made void?
3. Why does law bring about wrath?
4. Is the last clause of v. 15 always true?
5. To whom is Abraham a "father"?
6. Describe the connection between "promise," "grace" and "faith."
7. Upon what occasion(s) was Abraham "accounted righteous"?
8. What are the products of strong faith (v. 20)?
9. In what way was Abraham's faith "contrary to hope"?



Developing faith like Abraham

Is the study of Romans just an academic exercise designed to stimulate the mind and little else? Note vv. 23–24: this was written for our sake also, that we might know how to be justified by faith in the God who raised up Jesus (v. 25).

We need to learn, then, from the nature and quality of Abraham's faith. Note Paul's distinctive language describing Abraham's faith – "contrary to hope, in hope believed"; "did not consider his own body"; "did not waver"; "being fully convinced." This is the kind of faith that justifies, nothing less! When our faith matches Abraham's faith, we can be assured that it is accounted to us for righteousness as well.

Romans 5:1–11

“Therefore” (v. 1) leads us back to the previous chapter: the faith of Abraham was written about in order to help us develop the same kind of faith that he had (4:23). Having been justified by faith, certain results will follow.

The result of justification is that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul is not talking about a subjective peace (“peace of mind”) but about the primary kind of peace which is the absence of hostility between us and God. Before, I was an enemy of God (though He still loved me! cf. 5:8). But now, through the act of God in Christ and by my trusting submission and reliance in the God who acted (my faith), I am a friend of God, totally at peace with Him. We stand in grace – it is the basis of our salvation; without grace we would never have opportunity to exercise our faith. But faith provides the access or introduction because grace requires an answer if it is to be effectual for us. Put another way, grace is the basis of our hope, faith is the means of appropriating it for ourselves.

This peace causes us to “exult in the hope of the glory of God.” A person who is truly at peace with God can endure any affliction, knowing that such afflictions (Gk: **thlipsis**, a word which denotes real hardships) eventually lead to a perfection of hope, through the building of **perseverance** and **character**. This hope is not the kind that disappoints, because it is based in the love of God.

Again, Paul says we exult in God because we have received the reconciliation (v. 11). In vv. 6–10, Paul describes the saving work of Christ in terms of our situation at the time. We were all without strength, ungodly, sinners, and enemies. We were in quite a predicament of our own making. There is no way we could expect to be reconciled to God unless He took the initiative. People do not voluntarily die for other people, even righteous people (a law-keeper); maybe someone will die for a truly good person (the person, perhaps, who cares for others). But we are neither good nor righteous (3:9–20, 23), and yet, “God demonstrated His love” to us by sending Christ (cf. this verse with Jn. 3:16). And, Paul goes on, if He does that for His enemies, will He not do **much more** for His friends (v. 10)?! “saved by His life” (v. 10) may be taken to mean either saved “in the sphere of” Christ (Sanday–Headlam, Nygren) or as referring to Christ’s intercession or mediation for His people (Murray, Moo; cf. Hb. 7:25). I prefer the latter (cf. Heb. 7:16, 25).

Questions

1. What does “therefore” refer to?
2. What does v. 1 tell us about the function of Christ?
3. Upon what is our salvation based?
4. What is the means by which we appropriate God’s grace?
5. Why should we be able to “exult” in bad times?
6. How does the Holy Spirit pour out the love of God in our hearts?
7. How is God’s love demonstrated?
8. V. 9 says we are “justified by His blood.” Reconcile this with v. 1.



Not just acquitted, but reconciled, too!

When reading the term “justified,” think of a *law court*. You stand there, before the judge awaiting your sentence. If you are “justified,” it means you are “acquitted” or “pronounced ‘not guilty’” by the judge. When reading the word “reconciled,” on the other hand, think of a *relationship*. Perhaps you’ve had the experience of being estranged from someone you really love very much, perhaps a parent, child or friend. If you are truly reconciled to that person, then the relationship has been restored to its former state of friendliness and mutual concern. Consider: not only has God loved us enough to “acquit” us, a wonderful act in itself, but has also restored our personal relationship to Him through Christ. While we would be happy with the acquittal by itself, how much more precious is the relationship?! *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (II Cor. 9:15).*

Romans 5:12–21

Paul now contrasts two representatives, Adam and Christ. Adam represents sinful man. He ushered in the rule of death through sin and all have followed him down the same path. But Christ came and proved that grace is greater than our sins – “much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many” (v. 15). Paul’s argument here is designed to demonstrate how God has handled sin from the very beginning (in this case, the beginning of sin). His point is not so much to show the origin of sin as it is to show the **fact** of sin and its remedy (**grace**). The emphasis is on the latter.

The first man Adam sinned and is therefore a proper representative of all men who have sinned (note Paul’s use of Adam as a representative in I Cor. 15 also). Death came to all men “**because all sinned.**” What kind of death is Paul talking about? It is true that physical death came into the world upon Adam’s sin (see Gen. 3:19), but that hardly fits the context here. The death that “reigned from Adam to Moses” was a result of the violation of positive moral law (v. 13 proves that law is a prerequisite to sin and that moral law has always been in force, even before the Law of Moses). The Law of Moses came in and **increased** the sense of sin by providing more codes to be governed (or judged) by (v. 20). So men were dead in their sins and under condemnation, deserving the wrath of God. What we inherited from our physical forefather, Adam, was a world into which he introduced sin, not his sin (cf. v. 14). And all have followed his lead, committing “many transgressions” (v. 16), resulting in death.

Even before Adam’s trespass hurled humanity into the orbit of sin, God had a remedy prepared (cf. Rom. 8:28–30; Eph. 1:4). To explain the remedy, Paul introduces a number of contrasts between Adam’s act and Christ’s act. Adam, as representative of every man, introduced the rule of death into the human family; Christ introduced the rule of life (2 Tim. 1:10; I Jn. 5:11–13). The general point is simply that grace, introduced through Christ, is much greater than the sin introduced by Adam. The words “**much more,**” which occur throughout this section, are significant. It is this emphasis on the “much more” of grace that leads Paul to deal with the questions of 6:1, 15.

Questions

1. Why has death spread to all men? What kind of death is it?
2. How many times does Paul use the term “much more” in this passage?
3. What does the term “gift” imply?
4. Outline the contrasts between Adam and Christ.



Grace greater than our sin

Paul is speaking in cosmic terms here, contrasting the profound unrighteousness of all mankind since Adam with the even more profound gift of grace through Christ, which is accessible to everyone (cf. 1:16; Jn. 1:12). But all scripture is meant to be personally applied, and there is much to apply here. Some people have difficulty forgiving themselves – the past haunts them continually and they never seem to escape the shadows. Let them read (correctly!) Romans 5! And let us refuse to let Calvinists, with their upside down doctrines, take passages like this away from us! Paul’s “much more” (found four times in the Greek) is designed to lift us out of our spiritual doldrums, and help us realize that God’s grace is greater than any sin conceived and committed by fallible man. God gives us eternal life and grace reigns! Don’t you feel better already?

Romans 6:1–14

The key argument of 5:12–21 is that grace is greater than sin. If that is true, then why not sin “that grace may abound?” (Cf. 3:8), since sin seems to provide the occasion for the demonstration of grace? Paul’s disdain for such shallow, immature and unspiritual thinking is obvious – “Certainly not!” (Sanday & Headlam translate this “a horrible thought!”). If you “died to sin,” how can you continue to live in it? Paul’s proposition is that it is not logical for one who has become a Christian to “go on presenting the members of his body as instruments of unrighteousness” (v. 13).

If Paul makes such a major issue of dying to sin, then it is important to know how and when this death occurs and what the results of this death are. Paul could not be more lucid: “Or don’t you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?.” Two things are affirmed: baptism puts us **into Christ** (cf. Gal. 3:26–27) and **into His death** (cf. Col. 2:12).

Can you be a Christian and not be **in Christ**? Paul affirms that the only way one can get into Christ is by being “buried with Him through baptism.” The image is clear enough – baptism is a likeness of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. So, we are buried (in water) and we rise (from the water) “to walk in newness of life,” in the likeness of His death and resurrection.

What is the effect of this baptism into Christ and into His death? What does it do for us? The answer is summarized in v. 10. Why did Christ die? As a **once-for-all** sacrifice for sin. Why does He live? “He lives to God.” In like manner, v. 6 says, our “old self was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be done away with” (i.e., our past sins are forgiven; cf. Acts 2:38) “that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (our present life is changed in regard to sin – we are no longer held captive by it). In verse 7, Paul says that “he who has died is freed from sin.” The word translated “freed” is the same Greek word translated “justified” in other places. Paul is saying that our death to sin (which occurs in baptism) is what justifies us. “But I thought Paul said we were justified by faith,” someone might ask. Exactly! Baptism is not a ritual or ceremony or outward sign of an inward reality. It is an **act of faith** which God has prescribed, and when we are obedient, God changes His mind toward us, and cleanses us from sin (cf. v. 17). We enter into a new relationship in which it is illogical for us to go on sinning.

Questions

1. Is baptism either a “sacrament” or a “ritual”? If not, what is it?
2. What is the central point of this passage?
3. What happens in baptism, according to Romans 6?
4. With whom have we been “united together”?
5. What is the “body of sin” and how is it “done away with”?
6. What does the word “freed” in v. 7 mean?
7. Since Christ has no sin (2 Cor. 5:21) how can Paul say He died **to** sin?
8. What does the fact that we are not under law have to do with Paul’s argument?



Dead to sin, alive to Christ

Paul says we died with Christ and to sin in our baptism. He argues from that assumption that it is entirely illogical for us to go on sinning. There are three ways in which it might be said that we are dead to sin: (1) we are dead to the love of sin (2 Pet. 2:12–13); (2) we are dead to the practice of sin and, (3) we are dead to guilt of sin. In baptism, our guilt is taken away and we are put into Christ. While we sometimes make mistakes and fall short, we no longer have a love for sinning and we do not practice sin (cf. I Jn. 3:9). Why? *Because we have been freed from sin* (Rom. 6:7). Therefore, we count ourselves as dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ (v. 11). “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). How do you consider yourself?

Romans 6:15–23

Since salvation is a gift of grace from God and not based upon perfect performance of law (v. 14), perhaps there is no restraint – maybe sin doesn't matter. Like v. 1, Paul's response is an unreserved “may it never be!” He had argued in v. 14 that if we are under grace instead of under law then sin is not a master over us. But holiness is not passive. He had already argued in v. 13 that we were to present ourselves to God and our members as instruments of righteousness. This is something we *do*.

Now Paul says that we are “slaves to whomever we present ourselves to obey” – whether sin or obedience (v. 16). The word “slave” means one who totally assigns all of his personal rights to another. If we practice sin, we are slaves to sin (regardless of what we may claim to be). If to be under grace means that we are not mastered by sin, then to be under grace means we must present ourselves (an activity) to God in “obedience from the heart” (v. 17). Verses 17 and 18 refer back to the beginning of our obedience in baptism. In baptism, we obeyed (past tense – i.e., a decisive act in the past) from the heart (an act that was voluntary and sincere) that “form of teaching (the gospel) to which you were committed.” That voluntary, decisive act made us free from sin (v. 18; cf. v. 7), and we became “slaves of righteousness.” The slave imagery graphically describes our relationship to either sin or God. Speaking “in human terms,” Paul argues that all of us are slaves to someone. We must make the choice to be a slave of evil or a slave of righteousness (which is really a great freedom).

What we choose has eternal ramifications. Those who choose the “slavery” of sin will reap the “wages of (spiritual) death.” But those who submit to God will receive the “free gift of eternal life in Christ.” This important verse nearly sums up the gospel: we either get what we've earned through our sin (eternal destruction) or we accept God's offer of the free gift of eternal life in Christ. The Greek word for gift here is **charisma**, which usually refers to a gift that comes from God, unattainable by man's effort.

The Christian's baptism is the great dividing line across his life. In it, he entered into a relationship full of consequences, looking both backwards to his former sin-filled life and forward to a new sin-free life. He is no longer “under law” but “under grace.” Paul has described the process in terms of slavery. Next, in chapter 7, he uses marriage to illustrate his point.

Questions

1. Jesus said something similar to what Paul says v. 16. Where?
2. What or whom do Christians obey?
3. What “weakness in the flesh” is Paul referring to in v. 19?
4. What is the answer to Paul’s question of v. 21?
5. Read Dt. 30:15–20. What points of similarity do you find?
6. What are the differences between “wages” and “gifts”?



Of what benefit is slavery to sin?

Paul’s emphasis, of course, is on the eternal implications of our actions. It is incredible to Paul that one who has identified with Christ would fall back into the old ways of sin (see I Cor. 6:18–10) or the rudiments of law (cf. Gal. 4:9). For Paul, his baptism (an expression of faith) meant that he was alive to God and on his way to heaven!

What are the day–to–day benefits of this knowledge and attitude? How does confidence help you live better? See Pr. 10:16; 12:28, where Rom. 6:23 is put into practical, everyday terms. What is the better life, even from an earthly viewpoint: the life of sin or the life of righteousness? Can you answer from experience?

Romans 7:1–6

Paul writes to “those who know the law” (v. 1) which sounds like he is addressing Jewish Christians exclusively. However, there were undoubtedly many Gentiles in the Roman church who had been “God-fearers” or synagogue worshippers before coming to Christ. Also, new converts would have been exposed to the OT early in their Christian instruction (Moo, page 436). There is abundant evidence that Gentiles were, in many cases, familiar with the law (cf. Gal. 4:21), so this statement does not necessarily limit Paul’s audience. He may simply be introducing his next subject with this sentence.

Paul uses the illustration of marriage to demonstrate our freedom from the principle of law as an entrance requirement. A “woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives” but when he dies, she is free to remarry. Death changes one’s relationship in marriage and the same is true in our relationship to law. Law (any law) has dominion over a man only so long as he lives. The point of the illustration is that a believer is freed from the rule of law by death and brought into a covenant relationship with Christ by life (grace). When we were converted, we died to the law and that freed us to be joined to Christ. As long as we were “under law” (cf. 6:14), which is the same as being “in the flesh” (v. 5; “characterized by fleshly desires and outlook” – Morris, page 274; not “controlled by the sinful nature” – NIV; cf. Sanday and Headlam, page 174: “Although *sarx* [Gk. for “flesh”] is human nature especially on the side of its frailty, it does not follow. . . that he regards the body as inherently sinful”), the law, in some way, brings out our sins and aggravates them. The much-disputed latter part of chapter 7 addresses how this is so.

The actual result of no longer being under law is that we serve in a new way, a way or state determined by the Spirit instead of the old way which was determined by the letter (v. 6). Paul contrasts the spirit and letter elsewhere, in 2:29 and II Cor. 3:6–7, where he draws a sharp contrast between the old and new covenants or the old era and new (Moo, page 446). While there was more than law in the OT, and godly people like David understood that, its essence was in its code: it had to be kept exactly as written for one to be justified by it (cf. Gal. 3:10). To live under law, which has no provision for forgiveness, becomes misery for the conscientious person. Why? Because the law does not serve to curb sin but serves to arouse it. Paul explains in the following verses.

Questions

1. To whom is Paul speaking in this chapter?
2. Draw out the points of similarity of this chapter with chapter 6?
3. What does the law say about marriage?
4. How does Paul utilize this fact to illustrate our relationship with Christ?
5. How and when did we die to the law?



The sting of law

Since this passage is discussing law and not marriage, is there any *proper* use of this passage when discussing marriage? Why or why not?

We should not be under the impression that discussion of the principle of law has no relevance to us. If we understand that Paul uses “law” not only to refer to the Law of Moses, but as a principle by which we can choose to live and be judged, then we will see the importance of understanding his arguments. In fact, everyone who is not a Christian has chosen to live under law. Why is that such a terrible thing? What does it mean for them? See I Cor. 15:56).

Romans 7:7–12

This passage has been the source of a great deal of controversy for centuries. There are at least four approaches: (1) Paul is describing his own present experience (2) Paul is describing his life prior to conversion, when he lived under the law as a Jew (3) Paul is speaking for others in some way (4) Paul is using “I” as a rhetorical device to make his argument and is describing a person who is attempting to, in good conscience, keep the law.

If the law is unable to save us and if it only serves to arouse our passions toward sin, then one may conclude that **the law itself is sin?** Again, however, Paul is emphatic: **Certainly not!** If law were a bad thing, then Paul wouldn’t have known when he was sinning (v. 7). The rest of the paragraph develops this answer.

See Additional Notes, pages 40–41.

Questions

1. What is the function of law?
2. In what sense does “sin seek a commandment”?
3. When was Paul “alive...without the law” (v. 9)?
4. How was the commandment “to bring life”?
5. How does Paul characterize the law?



The benefit of law

When did sin “revive” or come to life for you? Were you ever, like Paul, “alive once without [the] law”?

Why does Paul use the law against coveting for an example? Is that law different in any way than other laws?

Are you happy or not that there are laws to be obeyed? Would you like to be absolutely free of law? What function does it serve for you?

Romans 7:13–25

Paul concludes that the law is good. But, he inquires, “has what is good become death to me?” He answers this question in the rather difficult section which follows, using the first person, probably as a literary device. I believe Paul is speaking as one who is under law, but viewing it from the standpoint of faith. As one who had lived under law, Paul is aware of the conflicts it brings. He may be using himself as an illustration of one who is trying to live the law so as to be justified by it. It does not seem likely that he is speaking as a Christian (for example, a verse like v. 14, “I am carnal, sold under sin,” is not the language of a redeemed man).

See the additional notes which follow on pages 40–41.

Questions

1. Is Paul, in your view, describing the Christian life?
2. Is Paul “making excuses” for sin or indicating he isn’t responsible?
3. Is Galatians 5:17 is a parallel passage?
4. What is the only means of escape from the predicament Paul is describing?
5. How does one *serve* the law of sin?
6. Do you think Christians can describe themselves as “in captivity to the law of sin”?



Reality of law or enslaved to sin?

There are several views of this particular passage of scripture. Some feel that it is an accurate description of a Christian’s life, here and now (in other words, they feel Paul is describing his life as it actually was). This is the meaning one gets when reading the passage for the first time. On the other hand, others feel Paul is dramatizing one’s life under the law, only from the perspective of a Christian (see Additional Notes). In any case, as long as we live, we will struggle against sin. The law always provides an occasion for sin to inflict its sting on us. Galatians 5:17 describes the battle between the flesh and the spirit that goes on until we die.

However, Paul seems to be describing a state of captivity of some sort; he describes himself as being imprisoned by sin, “sold into bondage.” How ever you may interpret this passage, do you believe a Christian should ever be “in bondage” to sin? Can we ever be happy?

Additional Notes: 7:7–25

I'll begin our examination of this passage with some words from Leon Morris (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, page 276): "First, we should be clear that Paul is writing about the law, not trying to answer the questions that modern people ask. The passage is not primarily a piece of autobiography or a psychological study of the Christian experience. It is a sustained treatment of the place of the law."

The context, which starts at least back in chapter 6, establishes the truth of Morris' statement. Chapter 7 is about law, not about "sinning in spite of ourselves." In chapter 6, in fact, Paul emphatically denied that we should sin for any reason, implying that sin is something totally within our control. *We* decide to present our bodies as slaves, either to sin, or to righteousness. The reality of being "under grace" should make our decision an easy one – we will present our members as "slaves to righteousness."

In the first part of chapter 7, Paul uses an illustration from marriage to demonstrate that we are not bound (married) to the law anymore. Instead, we have died to the law (the "oldness of the letter") and have been joined to another (Christ) so that we can bear fruit and serve in the "newness of the Spirit."

All of the talk about the law, thus far, has been negative; that is, Paul argues that law (or the principle of law) serves a purpose but is subordinate to grace and faith. So some might conclude that the law itself is sin. Paul says "may it never be!" and proceeds to develop an argument which demonstrates the value of the law. In doing so, he chooses to speak in the first person. In a study by Werner Kümmel, referenced by Moo, page 452, it was shown that *ego* (in Greek, the first person singular verb) could be used as a rhetorical device without any personal reference being intended at all (cf. Rom. 3:7). So the use of the first person, in itself, is not decisive for determining the meaning of this passage.

In vv. 7–13, Paul argues that the law is good (v. 12) because without it, he wouldn't have known about sin. Coveting (the tenth commandment), for example, is a sin all have committed, but how would one know about coveting except there was a law which defined it as sin? "For through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (3:20). Law defines sin *as* sin.

But Paul affirms another function, or at least an *effect*, of law: it gives sin its *life*. This fact flows from the previous thought. If there is no sin without law, then law

"creates" sin, just as "good" defines "bad." That does not make the law sin, but gives sin the opportunity to do its evil work. Without the law in place, the sin cannot exist. Using the example of coveting, Paul says that the sin of coveting took the opportunity created by the law *against* coveting and produced coveting in him of every kind. Does that mean the law against coveting is bad and therefore should bear the blame when we die spiritually? Of course not! (v. 13). It is sin that kills us, *through* the commandment (because without the commandment, there is no sin). Paul is simply establishing the difficulty of living under law, even though the law is holy and righteous and good.

Paul says that the law functions as an identifier of sin (v. 13). This holy, righteous and good law is the *revealed will of God*. So this law (whether the moral law of God or, more specifically, the Law of Moses) identifies any transgression of it as *sin*, as a missing of the mark of *God*; not just some civil or common law code, but transgression against God. Law, then, identifies sin as utterly sinful.

From verse 14, Paul begins what must be a description of a man who is living under law, but who has the perspective, if not the confidence, of a Christian. He describes the misery of such a state – desiring to do good, but unable to do so, because the law keeps driving him further away from God. It's like a nail in wood, with the law as the hammer. Each blow from the hammer (the law as it is violated) drives the nail deeper into the wood. Even if the blows should stop (by living a sinless life from that point on) there is still no way out of the wood. Years of living perfectly could not make up for the sins of the past. All you can do is cry, "wretched man that I am, who will save me from the body of this death!" (v. 24).

I do not believe this refers to Paul, either in his life as a Christian or before. The language here does not cohere with his statement of Acts 23:1 that he had lived all his life in good conscience. The person described here had a *miserable* conscience! He knew the right thing to do, but didn't do it! (Cf. Jas.4:17). He seems unable to do good, no matter how hard he tries, and he is all too aware of his failings. When Paul was living as a strict Pharisee, he did so in good conscience, not second-guessing himself. He thought he "must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9), but he had always endeavored "to have a conscience without of-

fense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16). Paul was not distraught during his life as a Jew. But this passage is describing someone who is tormented by his failure to keep the law. It has to refer to a different kind of person.

But I’m even less convinced that this passage is talking about the average *regenerate* person. There may be some comfort in thinking that Paul is describing a way of life here, that in reality we are powerless to keep from sinning (isn’t that what these verses are saying? That the flesh is winning handily over the spirit?). In fact, Paul comes very near to saying (if this refers to the Christian) that it is not really his fault, but it is sin’s fault (v. 17). Does that sound like the same Paul who wrote 2:6–8; 6:11–13, 16; 8:5–8? This surely is one of those passages that the unstable twist to their own destruction! If we think that the Christian life is a losing battle against the flesh, we’ve totally missed the point. We might as well jump feet first back into the world and enjoy the ride!

Just what *is* Paul saying? The use of the first person is a not uncommon literary device (though this is an extensive use of such a device) to make a dramatic point. The subject is *law*. Paul is placing himself in the position of one who is living under the law, not as a self-righteous Jew, but as a person who wishes there were a better way. He knows that the law is good because when he does that which he wishes not to do, he confesses that it is good, and that his predicament! (v. 16). If he was, like the good Jew, keeping his conception of the law or, like many pagans, perhaps, ignorant of the law, he would at least *feel* better. But here is a man who knows the law and knows he is breaking it. Sin indwells him (v. 17) because he has found no way out from under the crushing burden of law, and the law-sin principle defines his spiritual life. Eventually, as he continues to compare his deeds with the demands of law, he comes to realize that nothing good dwells in him. He *wishes* to do good (that is, fulfill the law) but he cannot achieve it (v. 18–19) – the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak.

Sin dwells in all of those who are living under law instead of under grace. Law, left by itself, provides a perfect breeding ground for sin. It is like good soil, meant to grow beautiful lawns, shrubbery and flowers. But left on its own, as good as it is, ultimately, weeds will infest it and take it over. The soil was good, meant for life. But when death through sin came, it found a ready place in the soil of law.

A person who desires with all his heart to please God will begin to search for God in His word. When he finds law, he will begin to understand how inadequate he

is, that he is an utter spiritual failure. The more law he learns, the more intense the feelings of delinquency. It will drive the spiritually sensitive person to his knees which is a chief function of the law! Paul’s “O, wretched man that I am” is a dramatic way of restating the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in spirit. . .blessed are those who mourn.” Until this person experiences his complete spiritual bankruptcy, he will never answer Paul’s question: “who will set me free from the body of this death?” But if he keeps looking in God’s will, he find the good news – “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

I admit that the latter part of verse 25 presents a problem for this interpretation. It seems that Paul should finish with his answer, but he goes on to say that he serves God with his mind, but with his flesh, the law of sin. My only explanation is that he is staying on course with his argument and simply repeating it: under law (i.e., in the flesh), we serve sin – there is no possible alternative; this is so even though we are seeking to serve God in the mind. The implication is that we must go back to the Answer of 25a – through Jesus Christ, we can be more than conquerors! (8:37) That is why he can say with confidence in the next verse (8:1) that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (as there is for those who are “in the flesh” – 8:8; cf. Paul’s argument in Gal. 5:16–18).

I believe this interpretation harmonizes best with Paul’s view of Christianity as a life of uncompromising holiness (I Cor. 6:18–20). We are held responsible for our needs (2:6–8) and will give an account for how we lived (2 Cor. 5:10); Christ dwells in us and we are pure and holy; we have no fellowship with the works of darkness (Eph. 5:11) but walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8). Since we have been raised with Christ to sit in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6) we seek those things above, where Christ is (Col. 3:1) considering ourselves heavenly citizens (Phil. 3:20). We have put off the old man and put on the new, and put to death the members which are on the earth (Col. 3:5–11); we have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires, and walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:24–25). Given that description of the Christian life, it can hardly be said that “sin dwells in me” can it?

Romans 8:1–4

The “therefore” sends us back to chapter 7 where Paul made it clear that living under law (cf. 6:14) brings misery and shame. The only way to be delivered from the death which law brings is through Jesus Christ (7:25). There is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1).

“Condemnation” (Gk. **katakrima**) is a legal term which includes both judgment and execution and is used as the antithesis of “justification” in 5:16, 18. If one is in Christ, he will not be judged and punished. Why? Because one rule sets us free from the other (cf. 6:14). If we are under grace, we cannot be under law and vice versa. The “law (‘rule’ or ‘principle’) of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law (‘rule’ or ‘principle’) of sin and death.” The rule of the spirit of life is the gospel, the life-giving good news of Jesus, which is the “power unto salvation” (1:16). Unlike law, this “rule” has as its central principle the ideas of grace, mercy and love, though it contains an element of law. Law itself never forgives, it just makes ever-increasing demands. Therefore, while not through any fault of its own, but because of the “weakness of our flesh,” (v. 3) it brings sin and death.

But God did what the law could not do. What could the law not do? The law could not justify us because we could not keep the law. But God sent Jesus who accomplished our justification (cf. 3:21–26; 4:25; 5:6–11) through the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. He came in the “likeness of sinful flesh,” but never sinned (Hb 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21) and at the cross, in His fleshly body, He “condemned sin” once and for all (see Hb. 10:1–10), by taking all of our sins onto Himself.

“That” (v. 4) introduces a purpose clause. What is the effect of Christ’s death for us, relative to the law? Paul says that, through Christ, we **fulfill** “the righteous requirement of the law.”

We’ve come full circle, now. While we could never hope to keep the law in ourselves, through Christ, we fulfill it! As long as we remain in Christ, it is as if we had lived all our lives in perfect harmony with God’s will; such is the effect of Christ’s death.

Questions

1. For whom is there “no condemnation”?
2. How would you define “law” as it is used in this passage?
3. In what sense is the law “weak”?
4. What is the only possible way to fulfill the “righteous requirement of the law” (cf. 3:31)?



No condemnation!

Imagine that coming under the condemnation of the Roman government — what a frightening thought! It was the government of Rome that invented crucifixion as a means of punishment for criminals, and all knew that it is a most horrible way to die. So when Paul says there is “no condemnation,” his Roman hearers had to be relieved and full of joy. Being acquitted, pardoned, justified *in Christ* means a life lived without fear of eternal punishment. It means living as a child instead of a prisoner.

How then do “children” live? What is the result, in terms of our behavior, of our justification?

Romans 8:5–11

But salvation is not unconditional, much to the chagrin of Calvinists who embrace the “once-saved, always-saved” fallacy. Paul says we must “walk (v. 4; “live,” v. 5) “according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh.” This is the prerequisite for remaining “in Christ.” “Those who walk according to the flesh cannot please God” (v. 8) and such fleshly-mindedness is “death” (v. 6). What does “flesh” mean? Not the NIV’s “sinful nature,” which is an interpretation, not a translation. The Greek word is *sarx* and is everywhere else translated “flesh.” It is best to let Paul interpret Paul: living by the Spirit or by the flesh is determined by where the mind is (v. 5), what the “walk” is (v. i.e., your day-to-day life – cf. Eph. 5:2, 8, 15), and how subject one is to the law of God (here is law in the gospel!).

Living, walking and setting our minds “in the flesh” is equivalent to being poured into the world’s mold (i.e., “conformed to this world” – 12:2). While we must exist in the flesh, we do not have to be controlled by the things of the flesh. We can set our minds on things above, realizing we citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) just waiting for our final conveyance to our ultimate home. Those who are truly “in Christ” will keep that perspective (cf. Col. 3:1–11).

Paul says that if the Spirit of God dwells in us, then it is not possible to be in the flesh. Spirit and flesh do not mix (compare interpretations of chapter 7 which insist that they do!). One excludes the other. Paul’s point, however, is not sinlessness but focus and direction of life – our mind-set and “walk.” Those who are in the Spirit are those who have changed their minds about the world (i.e., they’ve repented) and are relying upon the Spirit to direct them along the paths of righteousness which leads to God.

But how does the Spirit do this? Earlier, Paul said that we are saved (“justified”) by our faith in the gospel (cf. 1:16–17). Later, he’ll say that faith comes from hearing the word of God (10:17). The Spirit is responsible for revealing the gospel by which we are saved and telling us about the God in whom we trust. The Spirit of God dwells in us when the word of God dwells in us. Our minds are transformed by the renewing of the Spirit (12:2). The Spirit dwells in us when the word – which is living and active (Hb 4:12) – dwells in us.

Note that all three persons of the godhead are said to dwell in the Christian in this passage. It is curious that many only refer to the “personal indwelling” of the Holy Spirit when this passage seems to say that all the godhead dwells in us.

Questions

1. For whom is there “no condemnation”?
2. How would you define “law” as it is used in this passage?
3. In what sense is the law “weak”?
4. What is the only possible way to fulfill the “righteous requirement of the law” (cf. 3:31)?



Living in the Spirit (or spirit)

The Holy Spirit is the most mysterious person of the godhead to most people. I wonder if that is because of the King James version translation of “Holy Ghost” – certainly “ghosts” are mysterious. But the Spirit is said to be in every Christian (v. 9). Read the passage (8:5–11) carefully and write down what Paul says the Spirit does for those in whom He dwells. Is it really that mysterious, after all?

Romans 8:12–17

Our mortal bodies will be enlivened by the Spirit to live the Christian life (v. 11 – not the resurrection, since the dwelling of the Spirit is something which takes place now. And, as Whiteside asks, is it our mortal bodies that are going to be raised? And aren't the wicked to be raised as well?). “Therefore,” if the Spirit is dwelling in us – that is, if we have made a choice to live by the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, are we not obligated to live in a manner which reflects that guidance? If we reject the Spirit's guidance, we live in the flesh and we will die. But if we live in the Spirit then we will “put to death the deeds of the body” (note, this is something we do, again – the Holy Spirit provides the power, but we must do it). Life will come from this “death,” one of the gospel's most common and beautiful paradoxes (cf. Mt. 5:29-30; Jn. 12:24-26; Jn. 5:24).

It is those who are “led by the Spirit who are the sons of God” (v. 14). As children of God, “we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear” (v. 15), but the spirit of adoption as sons which gives us the right to cry out, “Abba, Father!” This may well be the traditional cry of the slave who has been graciously adopted by his master who has conferred upon the slave all of the rights and privileges of the family, including his share in the inheritance. Paul adopts this term to describe our change of status – from slaves to beloved members of the family of God.

Paul says that “the Spirit Himself bears witness (‘testifies’) with our spirit (the inner man or the heart of a person) that we are children of God” (v. 16). This is a difficult verse for those who interpret the Spirit as dwelling personally within them. They look for some feeling or sign to know that the Spirit is truly “testifying.” But if we understand that the Spirit works with and through the word of God, it is easy to understand. When we read the word and obey it, we can have confidence that we are “in step” with God – the Spirit, through the word, testifies to that. We believe it and we know it.

If we are children, Paul adds, then we are “heirs of God (we will inherit all that He has promised – see I Pet. 1:3-5) and joint-heirs with Christ” Himself! (v. 17). But, he says, we are children only if we “share in His sufferings” (NIV). Suffering for Christ is a common New Testament theme, probably because it was a common first century experience. In every case, the admonition is to suffer whatever consequences may come which are due to your confession, realizing that there is something better in store (see I Pet. 1:6–9; 4:1–19).

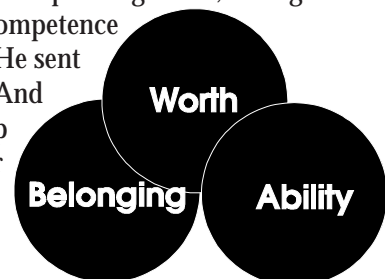
Questions

1. How and why do we “put to death the deeds of the body”?
2. Read Gal. 3:26 and Rom. 10:17 and reconcile with v. 14.
3. How do we know whether we are children of God or not?
4. What is the benefit of being “children” and what is the condition?



Children!

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God, and such we are” (I John 3:1). What a wonderful thought! Are you aware of the high place to which God has raised you? Just consider the love which exists in the perfect Father–child relationship. God gives us, through His matchless grace, a sense of worth, belonging and competence (ability). God decided that we are worth saving, so much so that He sent Jesus to die. He has built us into a family, with His name at the head. And He has made every provision to enable us to do His will and keep His commandments, “which are not burdensome” (I John 5:3) for those who love Him.



Romans 8:18–27

Paul says these sufferings are “not worthy to be compared with the glory which is to be revealed to us” (v. 18; see 2 Cor. 4:17). “Glory” in the OT was often used to describe the brilliant appearance of God on earth in various “epiphanies,” such as the cloud or the pillar of fire which led Israel through the wilderness (cf. Ezek. 1:28; 11:23). It is in this sense that John uses the term in John 1:14, “we beheld His glory” (perhaps referring to the transfiguration). When used in this sense, glory means radiance or brilliance and, in some sense, we are going to share with Christ this “glory” when He comes again (cf. I Jn. 3:2; Col. 3:3-4). Compared to that, sufferings, which are troublesome now, will pale into insignificance.

There are many difficulties in vv. 19-23 and it is not within our scope to detail all of them. Much of the difficulty would be solved if we could determine with certainty what Paul means by “the creation.” It could mean everything that God has created, or it may be limited somehow. My study leads me to believe that Paul is talking about irrational creation (i.e., plants, animals, etc; no human beings or angels) and that he is using figurative language. Thus he is describing the figurative “waiting” (the idea of the Greek word is waiting with an “outstretched head”) by “creation,” alongside those who are children of God, for the coming day of the Lord. He is contrasting the groanings of this life with the glory of the next and pointing us toward the hope of our final redemption.

Hope is the major theme, here, and Paul says that it is in hope that we have been saved (v. 24). Hope, like faith, takes the place of sight. Once we see what we hope for, we hope for it no longer. But if we truly hope for that which we do not yet see, then we will “with perseverance eagerly wait for it” (v. 25). Hope involves both a desire for something and an expectation that it will be received (see Hb. 11:13–16 for a similar discussion regarding faith). Eagerly waiting for something we long for more than anything else helps us through our trials.

In the meantime, the Spirit helps us pray. Since we do not know how to pray as we ought, He intercedes for us (vv. 26-27). This is a difficult verse, especially if we get too distracted trying to figure out how the Spirit and Christ “work together” in our prayers (cf. I Jn. 2:1; Hb. 7:25, etc). It is probably better just to take the great encouragement which this passage offers and leave it at that.

Questions

1. To what does Paul compare the suffering you experience in this life?
2. What is Paul referring to by the word “creation”?
3. What is hope? In what way have we been “saved” in this hope?
4. What function of the Spirit is Paul describing in vv. 26–27?



How's your hope?

Hope is the “point of departure” in discussing Christianity. How's your hope? Do you feel strong about your place in the next world? What can you do to improve your hope?

Read 5:1–5 again and think about how your troubles can help you in the long run. What does Paul say in chapter 8 about suffering? What kind of suffering do you think he is talking about?

Are you eagerly awaiting the realization of this hope?

Romans 8:28–30

Paul sums up God's plan in these three verses. "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (v. 28). This statement is not just a maxim about how God takes care of those who love Him. In the context, Paul is saying that "all things," even suffering, can be instrumental in bringing about God's purposes in those who love Him. The "all things," of course, is limited to those things which can be used to glorify God, only by a certain kind of person – one who loves God and is called according to His purpose. He has entered the partnership with God and is being led by the Spirit of God (8:14). There is no promise here to one who is in rebellion or out of sympathy with the purposes (even unrevealed) of God.

Briefly, "good" is anything that causes us to draw closer to our Father in heaven. Thus suffering, in that sense, is good and, in fact, has often been the conduit through which lovers of God have glorified Him (cf. the book of Acts, especially from 8:1 on).

Paul goes on to describe how God's purpose has been worked out. In planning for the redemption of man from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), He foreknew that a certain class or kind of person would love Him and agree to His purposes. He predestined, or chose out beforehand, this kind of person, with the aim of that person being conformed to the image or likeness of Christ. Paul says that Christ is the "first-born" of that "class" – we are in the class (i.e., we are the kind of person God predestined) when we are conforming ourselves to Christ. The call (v. 30) of the gospel is designed to attract this kind of person (cf. 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:13–14) and those who are thus called by the gospel are justified and (will be) glorified when Christ returns (Paul states the latter has an accomplished fact. Why? Read vv. 31–39).

There is no hint of Calvin's idea of unconditional election in this passage, though Calvinists appeal to it. Paul says God called those whom He predestined. If predestination means that certain individuals were chosen, no "call" would be necessary.

Questions

1. What is included in “all things”?
2. For what class of people do “all things work together for good”?
3. Explain the biblical doctrine of “predestination.”
4. Does foreknowing something necessarily foreordain it? That is, if we affirm that God knows something is going to happen is that the same as saying He determined for it to happen? Explain.
5. How does God call people?
6. What does it mean to be “glorified”? When will it happen?



All things working together for good

There is great power in these three verses! Paul is telling us that God had a plan from the beginning and it includes us! If we love God and if we are called according to His purpose (as opposed to “other purposes,” including our own selfish ones), then we fit into the class of people whom God chose to save long ago. How does that make you feel?

What is our ultimate goal, then, as far as the personal development of our character and the final state of our souls? (You find the answer in these verses.)

Romans 8:31–39

We must first determine what “these things” refers to. There are a number of alternatives: it could refer to the paragraph immediately preceding this one or to the whole letter up to this point. It seems to make the most sense to think of the discussion which began in v. 18 about suffering, with the teaching of the rest of the letter in the background. The emphasis here seems to be upon trials that Christians face because of their faith. Paul seems to be anticipating that the Romans were in for a great deal of suffering, though it probably had not begun as yet (in AD 55). We do know that Nero began a campaign against Christians in Rome by AD 64.

So Paul says if God is for them, no one, not even the Roman emperors, are strong enough to defeat them. God plus 1 is always a majority! All we have to do is remember what God did – He sent His Son to die for those who were hostile toward Him (v. 32; 5:6–10). If we truly believe He gave us such a gift, then how could we ever fail to lean on Him for **all** things? Paul is teaching that faith is something that continues throughout our life and is the secret to overcoming any trouble that may come our way.

Paul uses the language of the legal system in vv. 33–34: “Who shall bring a charge?” It makes no difference because “it is God who justifies!” “Who condemns?” It makes no difference because “Christ died and is risen” and it is He who “makes intercession for us” – Christ Himself takes our case to the Judge of the Universe (I Jn. 2:1). Those who are “in Christ” (v. 1), are not under judgment, no matter what any person may say or do.

Love is the theme of the final verses of the chapter. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Paul’s unequivocal answer: nothing! What love is Paul talking about, our love for Christ or His for us? Most every scholar feels Paul is clearly talking about Christ’s love for us, and that seems to fit the context best (cf. v. 37, 39). There are adversities which the Roman Christians must face, the kind of trouble that would seem to say that Christ’s love for His people has vanished. But Paul quotes scripture (Psa. 44:22) to show that God’s people have always suffered for their faith, but such external suffering never severs a person from God. Nothing in this life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ. What a promise!

Questions

1. What are the “all things” that God will freely give us?
2. Who are God's “elect”?
3. What is the connection between “charge” and “justifies” (33)?
4. What is the connection between “condemns” and “intercession” (34)?
5. Is v. 35 talking about our love to Christ or His love to us? Support your argument.



Dying for Christ – literally

From AD 64 to well into the second century, Christians suffered often at the hands of the Roman government, which was determined to stamp them out. The emperors (like Nero in AD 64) began to resent the fact that Christians confessed another king besides them. In fact, the Romans coined a word, *contumace* (Latin for “contempt of court”), for the failure of a Christian to confess the emperor. It was a crime worthy of death. The

Christian was clothed with the skin of a lamb and sent onto the grounds of the Coliseum to face the hungry lions, in front of delirious crowds. Do you think he or she, at that time, not only believed Paul's words that are found here, but trusted in them? I wonder if we believe it like that.