

Romans 16

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
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SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
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God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	God's Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
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Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
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Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
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Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " Jensen's Survey of the NT "				

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The Body of Christ - Part 1

Romans 16

by Dr. Wayne Barber

**Note: There are 8 sermons on this page -
all the messages from Romans 16.**

I cannot believe that we're in chapter 16. We're going to begin a series that will run down through verse 16 of this chapter entitled "The Body of Christ." If you've ever seen how different individuals fit in the body of Christ and how God works through each and every one of them to accomplish this work, you can really see this in Romans 16:1-16.

When you come to chapter 16 and you realize that he's sending his greetings, the temptation is to skip it and go on to something else. When I got to it, I thought, "Oh me! Are we going to wade through all of this?" Oh! Thank the Lord for His forgiveness. The more I got into it the more I realized some of the greatest truths and the summation of so much truth that we've seen in Romans is found right here in the verses that close out Romans.

Paul's going to point out some folks who were the unsung heroes, you could say, of that time. God uses a lot of people to get His work done. We see the people who were out front like the Apostle Paul and others. In today's time, they would have the Billy Graham's, etc. The people who work behind the scenes are so clearly important to what God is doing. Never forget that. Man tends to push people and pump them up, but God sees it all as one great big work that He's doing and He has many who have a smaller piece of the pie. He has others who have a larger piece of the pie that we talked about in Romans 12. But He uses them all to accomplish His will and His work.

Have you ever sat by a campfire or a fire at home in your fireplace and watch it burn and just get mesmerized by the flames? Every now and then something in the fire just flares up. It's like it just gets brighter for a few seconds. Then it just sort of disappears. You don't see it again. The fire has to be at a certain point before that happens. Well, to me, it's kind of like that in Romans 16. These are some of the precious people you haven't heard of before and you'll never hear of again in the New Testament. But because of the Holy Spirit working through Paul, Paul just brings them to the surface. They light up. You see them and then they disappear on the pages of time. They were so important to the work that God was doing in His kingdom. In their willingness they were just as faithful as the Apostle Paul, but they were not seen or heard from like he was. We're going to be surprised one day when we get to Glory at the ones who are up front and what they're going to be rewarded. We think of the ones that are seen down here. But the ones behind the scenes are so very important to what God is doing.

When I played ball in college, I had a friend who was a scorer in basketball and averaged about twenty-eight points a game. He was six-five. He used to walk by my room and say, "Well, Barber, have you been reading my clippings lately?" He was just doing that to goad us. I would always point to my nose. My nose sits over on the side of my face. There's a huge hump right in the middle. My nose has been broken five times; four times in basketball. I would be under the boards getting the ball out to my friend who got all the glory. So every time he'd walk by the room and say, "Hey, Wayne, been reading my clippings lately?" I'd always point to my nose which was sideways on my face and he'd leave me alone and walk on down the hall. Why? Because he might have gotten the points and been the center of attention, but if there hadn't been four other guys out there on the floor getting their heads knocked around, he would have never gotten the points that he had gotten.

That's exactly what we're seeing here, the team effort, the family effort, the body of Christ that is working together. Well, when a believer lives the surrendered life, Romans 12:1-2, that's the well out of which all of this flows. If they're living a surrendered life, "Lord, I present my body as a loving offering to you," then God's going to take them and use them. They're going to get to test for themselves what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. It's the will of God that determines if we will be involved in what He's up to in these days. It doesn't matter if it's man, woman, boy or girl. It does not matter. It doesn't matter if they are educated or uneducated. It doesn't matter if they're tall or short, young or old. God is looking for surrendered people. Some will be more known about than others. But all of us are instrumental and important in the purposes that God has.

Remember, Romans 12:4-5 says, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." And so it is. We need each other. God uses us all to accomplish His work while we're here on this earth.

Now, one of the things that you're going to notice here in chapter 16 is the mention of the women who are being used for Christ. Sometimes women just feel like, "We just have to stay at home and take care of kids. Can't ever do anything. We're just not usable to God at all." That's not right and what we're going to see in this list are particularly the women that God uses.

We're going to begin the list with a lady named Phoebe, a woman who said, "God, I present my body a living sacrifice." God used this woman in His kingdom's work. We must remember God will take anyone who will surrender themselves to Him and make them a part of His eternal work. If you feel like you're not usable then that's just a lie of the devil. You get surrendered to Christ. You say, "Here am I, God. Use me." And God will use you if it's nothing more than having a prayer meeting in your house, if it's nothing more than being hospitable to the saints. Whatever it is, it all pays a role to effect the work that God is doing.

Okay. My points will be the people God mentions all the way down through verse 16. Point one, first of all, Paul mentions Phoebe. Look at verse 1 of Romans 16. "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church with us at Cenchrea;..." Now the word "commend" comes from two words, sun, together with, and histemi, which means to stand. Paul says, "I take my stand with her." In other words, I commend her. I'm right alongside her. I give all of my recommendation to her. When the Apostle Paul, the bondservant of Christ, the great man of God, puts his stamp of approval on somebody sit up and take notice. There's something about their life.

The word "Phoebe" is the word in the Greek that means radiant, even has the sense of being pure. So we have a radiant person

here, a person who is pure in her walk with the Lord God. She is called a servant of the church of Cenchrea. Now where in the world is Cenchrea? Remember Paul wrote the book of Romans from Corinth. Corinth was like an isthmus. It stuck out into the water. It had a seaport on one side and a seaport on the other side. On the eastern side towards Asia was the little seaport of Cenchrea, about seven miles from the main city of Corinth. The church that would have been there would probably have been the daughter church of the main church that was at Corinth.

The term "servant" has been the cause of much confusion in Christianity because many people say that since she was a servant of the church of Cenchrea, then evidently a deaconess was an official position of women in the church in that particular century. I can understand why people see that. Is that what Paul is saying? The word that is used there that makes it more confusing is the word diakonos. In 1 Timothy diakonos refers to the office of deacon, but the word also means servant. A diakonos is simply a menial servant. It's still not a position of honor. It's a position of service. The word means a menial servant. I'm at the restaurant and my tea glass gets empty, somebody walks by and says, "Hey, do you need another glass of tea?" "Thank you. Can you bring some ice?" "Is there anything else you need?" That's what the word means.

So therefore, the thing that causes confusion is you can use it either way. Whether it's in an official position or not, if a position is a servant, that's the word you're going to use for them. It's a menial servant. It's someone who wants to do for somebody else. Now when you try to make it so that a woman, a deaconess, a woman servant, was in an official position in the church the ground is very shaky that you're standing on. I'm not going to fight anybody over it. We have the elder system, and I believe that is exactly right. You have women who serve. You have men who serve. But I want to show you that it's the men who are put in the official position of service, not the women. I didn't make this up. This is from God's word.

Let's go back to the original pattern of deacons. Where did they come from? What is the whole purpose of having these people alongside in official positions anyway? Go to Acts 6. The seven men who were chosen in Acts 6 were not official deacons as they became later on. But this is the very beginning of the early church and the pattern that was set. The apostles, of course, were the ones in official positions. Later on there were elders of the church, etc. But here's the pattern in Acts 6:1. It says, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven women of good reputation.'" Is that what your scripture says? No! Seven men. Okay, "seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.' And the statement found approval with the whole congregation."

Now, two of the most noteworthy of these original seven men who were appointed to come along side the apostles were Stephen and Philip. Later on they became evangelists in the work of the ministry that God had assigned. The day by day care of the churches fell upon the deacons as the helpers to the elders who held the distinct office. The actual office of deacon came later on as the church began to grow and is found in 1 Timothy 3:8-12. This is when they became an official servant of the church, appointed as such to come alongside the elders who were in the positions of leadership.

Nowhere can you find that the deacon had anything to do with leadership in the church. It was the servanthood of the church. It's not a position of honor even here in 1 Timothy 3:8-12. It's a position of service. We must understand that. I tell you what, when you're working against the grain of what people traditionally have understood it's very difficult to tear that down. It's not a position of honor in that sense. It's a position of service, an official position of service. First Timothy 3:8 begins, "Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach."

In verse 8 the word for deacons is the word diakonos. All the adjectives that describe diakonos are in the masculine form, never in the feminine. That gives you a good reason to understand that these are men and not women.

There's some confusion that comes in verse 11: "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things." Some people use the King James Version of this which says "the wives of deacons." It says, "Even so must their wives be grave." You must be very careful here. The King James does not translate that from the Greek. It gives an interpretation with that, and that's why a lot of people have gotten confused. They read into the fact that the word used there must mean wives of deacons because of the context and they stake their whole point upon that.

The New International Version has the translation, "Women likewise grave." That's exact Greek. If you go over to the New American Standard as we read from, "Women must likewise be dignified or grave." It's impossible to determine is he talking about the wives of the deacons or about women in general. It's impossible to determine. If somebody's going to stake the fact that they believe

women were official deacons in the church on this statement, then they really don't have much to stand on. I guess you could bring that up, but that's the only place you can bring it up. And it's shaky waters all around it. So my personal conclusion is women did not have an official position as deaconesses within the church at that time.

Now you say, "Wayne, thanks a lot. I'm a woman. I just think that's not right. Does God not approve of women?" You see, this attitude is absolutely of the flesh. It's not of the Spirit at all. Just because they were not in an official position as a deaconess did not mean they were not usable and needed and critical to the work that God was doing. I've always believed that if a man or a woman is seeking a position, is seeking an office, there's something wrong with them. It does say in Scripture, "If anyone desires to be an elder." But that does not mean to be seen on a platform and to be built up but to desire the shepherding work of the elder and all the things that go along with that.

You see, when you start desiring to be recognized you've completely gone against the grain of the context of chapter 15. Paul says in chapter 15, "I can only boast of the things that Christ has done through me, not what I've done for me, not what position I have as an apostle." He says in 12:3, "It's only by the grace of God that I can write these things to you." He didn't boast in his position. So, the whole attitude of the woman is key here. Women were very critical to the work of the ministry.

I want to walk through with you the women who were critically used in the New Testament to show you that just because they were not in an official position of deaconess did not mean they were not deaconesses, servants in the church. They were so used by God. As a matter of fact, one of the first places you find them is associated with prayer. Women and prayer have gone together for as long as I can remember. We're going to walk our way through Acts, and I want to show you some of these people who God used mightily. Acts 1:14 says, "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." Women were always there. As a matter of fact, there are many times that the women were there when the men were not even there.

You say, "Well, Wayne, that's not a great ministry." What do you mean, not a great ministry? There are some people that if they ever prayed for me to die, I'm going to crawl in the box. You talk about important to the body of Christ. I don't know if you've ever heard of Ms. Bertha Smith. She died when she was one hundred years old. You talk about a lady of prayer. She had a place over in Cowpens, South Carolina, called "Penial" which means a place of prayer. She'd bring people over to teach them to pray. It wasn't a seminar. She didn't get out a pencil and a great big board. She got you down on your face before God.

She was a part of the great revival over in China. One of their missionaries, a man, was going blind. Back then very few men were going into missions and they were critically needed on the field. Here was one of their main missionaries about to go blind. Miss Bertha believed in prayer. She's enjoying heaven right now because that's one lady that just transitioned right over. It's kind of like God said, "You know, Miss Bertha, you're closer to Me than you are to them. Come on over." That's when she died. She walked with God.

But they walked in to pray for this man who was losing his eyesight, and they laid hands on him. When they did immediately they were all convicted of sin in their life. She said, "For three weeks I was confessing sin, things I had borrowed and never returned, things that I had done and never repented of. Finally one day we came back together, and when we began to pray God fell. God moved upon those women praying for that one man. The man's eyesight was restored and remained restored until the day he died."

Tell me that prayer is not important. Just because a woman is not up in front teaching, just because a woman is not traveling, just because a woman's face is not on a magazine, doesn't mean that God can't use you. God needs vessels. Men, women, boys, girls, it doesn't matter to Him. He just wants people who are surrendered to Him, and women are just as critically needed as men are critically needed. They played a very important role in the early church as we can see in the book of Acts. Just because they didn't have an official position, so what.

I remember when I was ordained years ago they asked me, "Wayne, what are you going to do if we don't ordain you?" I said, "I'm going to do exactly what God's called me to do. I know you don't really ordain me, because the scripture says you just set me free to do what God's already ordained me to do." What's wrong with us sometimes? Wanting to be recognized. That's not the heart of the servant.

Well, the scriptures point out that there were multitudes of women who were converted in the early church. Look over in Acts 5:14. It says, "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number." It wasn't a man thing. It was whoever would respond by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, and multitudes of women were constantly added to the

number.

Boy, a beautiful story occurs in Acts 9. This is a wonderful story about a lady by the name of Tabitha. It describes her in Acts 9:36: "Now in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did." There was a consistency in her life of kindness and charity, helping to those who were down and out. Well, she died, but look in verse 40 at what Peter does: "But Peter sent them all out, and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up."

Now, I get fired up when I see stuff like that. Do you know what I believe about that? Don't get hung up in the miracle. It's God saying, "I'm not through with you yet, Tabitha. I like what you're doing. I need you doing what you're doing. Come on, sit up." And she sat up. God raised her from the dead.

Look over in Acts 12:11-12. It was in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, that a prayer meeting was going on when Peter was miraculously freed by an angel from prison. It says, "And when Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.' And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying." Once again, prayer and the women were together. Her house was an open place for those to come to pray.

The first convert Paul saw in Macedonia and Philippi was Lydia. Look in Acts 16:14. Lydia was a religious woman, but she was not a believer. She came to know Christ as a result of the gospel being preached there. Acts 16:14 reads, "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Now, once she's saved she immediately opens up her house, showing her hospitality to the believers. Acts 16:15 continues, "And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us." I want to tell you, people who open up their houses, women who are hospitable, are so important in the body of Christ. You say, "Well, but I don't get to teach and I don't get to do all these other things." So what! You're still performing a very strong function in the body of Christ.

There's a family over in Ft. Worth, Texas who had a prophet's room built onto their house. As a matter of fact, when I got there I was overwhelmed because the prophet's room was nicer than any other rooms in their house. They did that by intention. One time I was speaking in Grand Prairie, Texas on the other side of Dallas, and they called me and said, "Wayne, you're going to be in the area. Would you come and stay in our prophet's room?" I said, "Sure, I'll go." I want you to know, it was better than any motel I'd ever stayed in. It is a great big room which was built strictly for one thing, for people who are preaching the Word and doing the work. By offering this room they are saying, "Come alongside. Come to my house. Stay with us."

They had a prophet's room and anybody who came through there could stay in that house. You say, "Wayne, is that ministry?" What do you mean? Ask someone who has gone overseas about the hospitality of the saints. I guarantee you it's not the man. It's the woman every single time who will say, "Hey, come to my house. Come to my house. We'll feed you. We'll take care of you." Do you think that was not important to what Paul did? Paul's not going to stand alone for the ministry to the Gentiles. There are going to be a mass of people you've never heard of that are going to be right there beside him. God used everyone of them to accomplish His work among the Gentile people, especially the women who were surrendered to Him.

When Paul preached to the Greeks in Athens at the Areopagus over in Acts 17:34, a woman named Damaris was saved. Anytime someone is mentioned in scripture, the most holy book we have, God's word, that must signify something about them. God put her into the Word of God. Acts 17:34 says, "But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."

When Paul got to Corinth, where this book was written, he ran into a couple. As a matter of fact, the man was a tent maker just like Paul. Here was a couple who said, "Lord, use us." Their names were Priscilla and Aquila. Look in Acts 18:2 when he gets in Corinth who he runs into. Most of these people were associated with him in Corinth. "And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome." Priscilla's name is usually mentioned first which probably meant she was more prominent for one reason or another, maybe spiritually or whatever. I think it's significant that Priscilla normally appears first before Aquila. You say, "Well, that's not a put down to women is it?" No, it's not a put down to women. God wants to use women.

In Philippians 4:2-3 Euodia and Syntyche are spoken of as fellow laborers of the apostle Paul. The funny thing about these two ladies is the way they were fighting with each other. I mean, a lot of the time there was contention between these women.

Philippians 4:2 reads, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." Come on, folks! He's saying, "Settle down." Verse 3 goes on, "Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

Paul says, "Hey, they're a little bit of a problem here but get with them and help them. These are fellow laborers. These women have helped me."

Then look over in 1 Corinthians 1:11 at Chloe. "For I have been informed concerning you [This is a lady he trusted so much to bring him information concerning the church], my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you."

You can go on and on and on. There are going to be several more mentioned in this chapter that we'll talk about. But in none of these instances, not a single one, is it said that an individual woman was an official deaconess in the church. The only place you can find anywhere that a woman's name is associated with a church and being a deaconess is Phoebe in Romans 16:1.

Speaking of Phoebe, we kind of left her, didn't we? Go back to verse 2. Welcome back Phoebe. Here's what it says about her: "that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well." The word "receive" is *prosdexomai*. *Dexomai* is the word that means to eagerly receive. "Don't just take her in. Look forward to taking her in," the Apostle Paul says. It means to receive and take care of whatever need she has.

He says, "in a manner worthy of the saints." "Saints" is the word *hagios*. It means now you measure up what a saint ought to be. You take care of this woman. Why? Because she's taken care of us. He goes on to say, "and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you." "Help her" is *paristemi*, you come along side her. The word for "matter" is *pragma*, which could be a business matter. Nobody knows really who she is other than what scripture tells us. Some people think she's the very bearer of the epistle of Romans to the church at Rome. Could be. Paul doesn't tell us for sure. Is she a business woman, a very wealthy woman like Lydia who was over in Macedonia? Could be. Paul says, "Whatever matter she has, you get along beside her and help her out."

Then he goes on and says, "for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well." That word "helper" is *prostatizō*. She's done more than just help. The idea is that this is a wealthy woman and she has taken her money and been a tremendous help to many. Paul's not honoring a rich lady. That's not what he's saying. She has sacrificially given and she has gone the route in being a minister to the saints. Paul says, "You stand beside her and you measure up in the way you take care of her."

Man, woman, boy or girl, God wants to use you. It doesn't matter whether you can teach or you can't teach. We have really done a disservice over the years of telling people that if you're really called to minister, you've got to either lead the singing or you've got to be able to teach or preach. That's ridiculous. We've studied chapter 12. The gifts are in many areas. You can serve, mercy, exhort. You don't have to be out front. God uses those people who are surrendered to Him. It doesn't matter how old you are, how young you are or how smart you are. God uses me. That qualifies that one. It doesn't matter. What He's looking for is a heart that is totally bankrupt unto Him, surrendered unto Him.

I know this is difficult passage for some of us. But I want to share something with you. I think it will help you. Maybe you're not being used and you know you're not being used. You're frustrated. You're a believer. You're about the will of God. You have gotten about everything else but you're not about the will of God. It's sin in your life. It may not be the gross sin of something but it's sin. It's missing the mark of what God's will is in your life. And you're saying to me, "I want to be free to be what God wants me to be. Something's imprisoning me. Something's holding me back. What's wrong with me?"

I don't know specifically, but I think generally I can give you a picture here. As you know from Romans 7 and 8 you're already free. You're already free. Do we understand that? You have been set free from the penalty of sin and you have been set free from the power of sin. You are already free. What does free mean? Not the right to do as you please, but the right to do as God wills. You now have the power under grace. "Well, what's wrong with me? I'm not being used. I come to church every week. Nobody's asked me to teach a class. I'm not used in anything." Hold it, hold it, hold it. You mean you're only used when man asks you? I thought you were used when God said something to your heart. God's the one who initiates ministry, not man. We just come along to facilitate. God initiates it. "Well then, what's wrong with me?"

Let me give you an illustration which might draw a picture for you. "If I'm free, how come I'm bound?" Good question. Do you know how they catch monkeys over in Africa?

We were over there on the Zambezi River by Zambia in Zimbabwe. We were in a hotel and when I woke up I was so hot. I looked

out the window and I saw all of these things in the trees, and I was just sort of foggy. I was looking out the window, and I said to my travel companion, "Man that's the biggest squirrel I've ever seen in my life." I'd hunted down in Louisiana and Mississippi and I've seen fox squirrels. Fox squirrels can be about four feet long from tail to nose. I'm thinking, "Man, that's the biggest fox squirrel I've ever seen." I kept looking and Bill said, "Dummy, they're not squirrels. They're monkeys."

There were thousands of them. You can see them in zoos and stuff but that's nothing compared to the ones just roaming free. Now they're mean too. You have to watch them. But they told us how they catch them. I thought this was the most interesting thing. They have a chain on a pole that is welded to a container. The container is bigger at the bottom and had sort of a bottle neck at the top. They put candy in it because monkeys love candy, anything sweet. So the monkey comes and sticks his hand in through that opening and grabs the candy in his fist. But there's a problem here. Once he gets his fist clenched, he can't get it back outside of the container. Now, the only thing that's keeping him from enjoying the freedom he has is the unwillingness to open his hand and let go.

Put that in a Christian context and to me it preaches volumes. What are you holding onto? "I want to be used. God, I want to be used." God says, "You do not. Look at what you're holding on to." Is it your money? Is that what you're holding on to? You're free, but you've imprisoned yourself. Turn it loose. Are you holding on to your pride? What are you holding on to? Bitterness? Is there something in your life that happened years ago that you will not forgive and ask God to forgive you? God says, "You've imprisoned yourself. I set you free but you won't let go." Just let go. Just give it up and watch what happens. God begins to take your life and make you into a brand new person and uses you like you could not possibly believe.

You see, the will of God is good. It's acceptable. It's perfect. Why would you want to stick your hand back in there and grab hold of that which is the will of the flesh? Do you know what? That's not ignorance, folks. That's just flat out stupidity for a believer not to be willing to just let go of the sick, ugly flesh that he's holding on to and enjoy the freedom of being what God wants him to be. Open handed, I think that's what Paul was talking about when he said, "Lift up holy hands." He wasn't talking about raising your hands in church. He's talking about raising hands that are empty and devoid of self. Holy and set apart that God can use to do His good work.

How does God want to use you? Well, you may never have your name written in the Bible, but oh, friend, it's written down up there. One day when we stand before Him, all the Billy Graham's, yes they'll be there, but I guarantee you there's going some old fellows down in the swamps of Louisiana who said, "God, use me." They're going to be right alongside them. There are going to be some folks over in Moldavia and Russia and Romania and India and Israel, places we'll never see or hear from them down here but, buddy, we'll see and hear from them up there because they just came to God empty handed. "God, I want to enjoy the freedom I have in Jesus Christ. Use me. Use me."

The Body of Christ - Part 2

Romans 16

Paul made some hard choices. Look over in 1 Corinthians 9:23 at some of the commitment that the Apostle Paul had. You've got to remember that you can imprison yourself when you start pursuing the desires of your flesh. But when you only pursue the desires of the Spirit, you are free then to be what God wants you to be and a part of the will that He has for you on this earth. In 1 Corinthians 9:23-24 Paul says of himself, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win."

Now he's not saying there's only one prize and we're competing with each other to get it. He's giving an illustration. He's saying that in a race that's the way they run – they run to get that prize. There's a prize for all of us, folks. He's saying you live the Christian life the same way. He says in verses 25-26, "And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim [I know exactly where I'm headed]; I box in such a way, as not beating the air."

Now you ought to understand that. Do you know what he's saying? "I don't shadowbox." Do you know what shadowboxing is? That's when a person gets in a ring and there's nobody else there and he'll just go through the motions. The Apostle Paul says, "Don't waste that kind of energy. All the energy that I have is not in shadowboxing, but it is in buffeting my flesh."

He says in verse 27, "But I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." Not kicked out of the kingdom. We have a word in athletics that fits that perfectly. It means to be benched. When I played basketball in college, I sat on the bench a lot because there was a player who was much better than I was and two inches taller. Every game I wanted to play but I was sitting on the bench. All of us know what it means to sit on the bench. We want to be

out there in the action. The Apostle Paul says, "You can be out there in the action. You can, as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, be a part of what God's doing, but you've got to learn to turn loose of whatever it is your flesh desires. Come to God with an open hand and God will use you in a powerful way."

Paul did not allow his flesh to hinder what God was doing through him. He had his priorities and he had his persistence that kept him focused on those priorities. Now we know that about the Apostle Paul. It's very clear in the book of Romans.

But we're seeing in chapter 16 that there are some other people who lived exactly the same way. This was encouraging to me. We know Paul lived that way. Some people can say, "Yes, he was an apostle." But we're going down a list right now of common, everyday, ordinary people just like you and me, and they were as much a part of what God was doing to reach the Gentile world as Paul was himself. This is the encouragement. This is what I want you to see. The emphasis is not on your being a woman or a man. The emphasis is on Romans 12:1-2 and you and me being a servant to Jesus Christ. Then God gets hold of that and will use you in His eternal plan of reaching this world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God had others to come alongside Paul, and Paul begins to mention them in verses 1-16. We've only seen one so far and that's a precious lady by the name of Phoebe. She possibly could have even been the one who took the letter of Romans to the people. We don't know that. That's speculation. But she was a very precious person who was very needed in the work that God had assigned to the Apostle Paul.

We're going to pick up there and move on. Now we're going to see a couple. We saw Phoebe in verses 1 and 2. Look at verses 3-5a: "Greet Prisca [and that's short for Priscilla] and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house."

Now I wonder if you're a couple and want to be used by the Lord God. We know what the formula is, if there are formulas or such a thing. Back in Romans 12:1-2, when the two of you come, you could be a Priscilla and an Aquila because God took an ordinary couple and used them in an incredible way to aid Paul in the ministry to the Gentile world. They were an integral part.

We learned earlier that Priscilla's name was put before Aquila's in this passage and in Acts 18:18 and 2 Timothy 4:19. Why would somebody put her name first? Well, some say that she could have been more prominent socially. We don't know that, but that's what some say. Some say she could have been more prominent spiritually. Maybe her gifts were more outstanding perhaps as far as her personality and aggressiveness or those kinds of things. But that again is all speculation. Don't get too hung up in the fact that Priscilla's name is put before Aquila because you don't want to push either one of these two out of the sight of the fact that they were servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Aquila was a Jew, a native of Pontus, and like Paul, a tent-maker by trade. Look in Acts 18:1-3 and you find out when he met these folks over in Corinth. What a couple these people were and how they let God use them in the ministry that Paul had been assigned. Acts 18:1-3 reads, "After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth (that's where he writes the book of Romans). And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome." So they used to live in Rome, were driven out by the Emperor Claudius. "He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers."

According to one source I read, when they would go to the synagogue, the people would separate, the men on one side and the women on the other. If you've been in any of the Eastern European countries, you'll know that's the way they also sit, the men on one side, women on the other. But not only that, many times the men would sit by trade. It could just be that Paul sat down beside Aquila in the synagogue right there. Paul was also a tent-maker. Perhaps that's the way they got to know one another. But just think for a second. Just a tent-maker and yet he's mentioned about six times in the New Testament, he and his wife. A tent-maker and his wife said, "God, here we are. Use us. We come to You open handed. We just want what You want. God use us." And God powerfully worked through this ordinary tent-maker and his wife.

Now, when Paul left Corinth they accompanied him down to Ephesus. When they got to Ephesus, they kind of did the spade work and when Paul returned to Ephesus, the place was right for revival because of the work that this couple had done. Now they're back in Rome. Claudius, you remember, had died. Now they're back in Rome, and their home is once again a center for evangelism.

Notice three things that Paul said about Priscilla and Aquila, this precious tent-maker and his wife. First of all, in verse 3 he says that they were fellow workers. "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." The term fellow workers is *sunergos*. It means to work together. The word comes from *sun*, that intimate together and the word *ergos*, to work. So it means to work together intimately to help share the load in something.

Here's Paul. He's called. He knows exactly what his assignment is. But here's a couple who comes alongside him to help share the load. They're fellow workers with him. Whatever he needs they're there to be servants of the Lord Jesus.

Then secondly, he says that they risked their own necks. That's an interesting phrase, by the way. Romans 16:4 says, "who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." Now, we don't know much about this. The scriptures are silent as to what he's talking about exactly. But the term "themselves" seem to indicate that they put themselves in danger many times for Paul's sake and for the sake of other believers in the churches there in the area. The phrase "risked their own necks" actually is two Greek words. One, *hypotithemi*, means to put yourself under the sword or the ax of the executioner. Then the word *trachelos* is the word for "neck." We get the word "trachea" from that. That's just used as a picture here that many, many times they were in extreme danger for the sake of protecting Paul or other believers who were in the church. So not only does Paul thank them, but all of the churches benefited. They all give thanks for the precious lives of these two people.

Thirdly, their home was where a church met in Rome. Romans 16:5 says, "Also greet the church that is in their house." Meeting in homes was part of the norm of that day and something we don't understand now in our country. If we don't have a church, we don't think we can meet. They met in homes, and their house was a place, a gathering, where many of the believers could come.

In my study I came across a statement from the Acts of Martyrdom of St. Justin. It seems that Justin Martyr was asked the question of a man named Rusticus, "Where do you assemble?", speaking to the Christian. And the answer from Justin Martyr exactly corresponds to the genuine Christian spirit that we're seeing in these people. His answer was, "Where each one can and where each one will." He says to the man who asked the question, "You believe, no doubt, that we all meet together in one place but it is not so. For the God of the Christians is not shut up in a room but, being invisible, He fills both heaven and earth and is honored everywhere by the faithful."

I love that statement. And of course a home is just as important as any place else. Wherever they will, wherever they can is where they met during that time. And in the home, there in Rome, of Priscilla and Aquila a church met. Their home was open to the believers there. What a picture of how God wants to use a couple and will use a couple if they'll just come to Romans 12:1-2 and say, "God, here we are. Use us. We're not holding on to our flesh. We're coming empty handed. Use us."

I keep thinking of how God wants to shake our church. Missionaries are just going this place and that place. Couples are so geared right now to doing the things of the world, but God is saying to them, "I want you to be a part of my will. I want you to come and help Me reach the world for the Lord Jesus Christ." And I tell you, again, when you let loose of that which the flesh desires, there's no telling how God could use you.

What does God want to do in you as a couple? I guarantee you, there are couples who one day will be on the mission field. There are couples who one day will be great supporters of missions. There are couples who God wants to speak to and I think is speaking to as we go through Romans.

Well thirdly, Paul mentions Epaphroditus. He says, "Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia." The New American Standard says "Asia." The King James says "Achaia." Now that's interesting to me. Why would there be a difference? I can't answer that. I'm not theologically trained enough to answer that. However, it presents a problem if it's Achaia, if that's where it really is. Let me show you something. Look over in 1 Corinthians 16:15. If Epaphroditus is the first convert in Achaia, that's real interesting. In 1 Corinthians 16:15 they're two different localities all together. It says, "Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints)." Well that's interesting. I thought Epaphroditus was.

Now there are different answers for that. Some say that Epaphroditus might have been saved at the same time Stephanas was, therefore, shared in being the first convert there in Achaia. Others say that it says his household. Maybe he was a member of the household and therefore could qualify in saying he's one of the first converts in Achaia. I don't know. Let's just say it's Asia, like the New American Standard says. The capital of pro-consular Asia was Ephesus. Ephesus was the area where Paul spent three years in. And if it was in Ephesus, this would have been very tender and special to Paul because this would've been the first convert to come to know Christ in the time that he spent there for three years in Ephesus. You don't get the first convert that comes along.

Well, we don't know who he is. Was he from Achaia? Was he from Asia? That is really not the point. The point is that Paul calls him his beloved. The word for "beloved" is *agapetos*. It's the word that means dear to somebody, somebody who is especially dear to someone. I'll tell you what, if the Apostle Paul says that this man was beloved to him, then take it to the bank. This man was a quality individual, unknown, a nobody, but Paul says that this man is a dear, dear brother. Somehow God had used him in all that God had assigned to the Apostle Paul.

Well, fourthly, he mentions Mary. Look in verse 6. He says, "Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you." There are two problems we've got with the name "Mary." First of all, there are just so many Marys in the New Testament. We've got Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary Magdalene; the sister of Lazarus; Mary the wife of Clopas; Mary, the mother of John Mark. Here's a Mary who is unknown in Rome. There's another problem. Is she Gentile or is she Jewish? The Gentile name is Maria. The Jewish name is Miriam. There's a lot of debate. Is she a Jew or is she a Gentile? We don't really know. The opinions vary. The one thing we know

about this unknown lady named Mary in Rome is that she wore herself out for the saints there in Rome. Look at the word, "Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you." "Worked hard" comes from two different words. One word means much and the other word, kopiao, means fatigue. In other words, she had labored to the point of fatigue.

This is the same word that is used in John 4:6 when it says of the Lord Jesus, "being wearied from His journey, He sat down by the well." It's the same word for the disciples in Luke 5:5 when it says, "They toiled all night long and caught nothing." The term means to work or to labor until the point that you are literally worn out. The Apostle Paul, in giving this list of people he wants to send greetings to, people who were so important in the body of Christ who said, "Yes, Lord. We'll do whatever You tell us to do," mentions this little precious lady. We don't know anything else about her. She's the Mary of Rome. But we do know she wore herself out for the saints.

There are a lot of people like this even today who have come empty handed before the Lord and literally worn themselves out. You know, I hear a lot of people say, "Well, that must be flesh." Wait a minute! When you get in touch with what God wants in your life, He does energize you, and He'll burn you out. You'll work to the end; but listen, it's the best burn-out you ever had in your life. God takes you right down to where He takes you on in to Glory. There's a lot of work. There's a lot of sweat. There's a lot of effort that goes into serving the Lord Jesus Christ and that's not carnal. That's not flesh. That just goes along with it.

We use the analogy of a runner. You know the effort that goes into running a race. We know that goes along with it. Here's a precious lady who has literally worn herself out for the saints. When I was studying this, people just started popping in my mind. Of course I think of people who are close. I think immediately of Mia Oglechia. I want to tell you something, Mia never has a day to sit down and rest. I've never seen a woman quite like that in all my life. I've traveled with her, and I have seen her go until three and four in the morning, fall in the bed, get back up at seven and go all day long. That's all she does. Then she comes home and you'd think she would have time to rest. No. Their house becomes the center for everyone. Her phone rings off the wall. They want to stay at her house. She fixes them meals. She fixes and prepares whatever it is they need. A woman who has literally worn herself out for the saints. I think it's absolutely marvelous that we still have people like that in the body of Christ.

You say, "Well, if I wear myself out in serving the saints, will I get a position in the church?" No, and you don't want it. What happens is God will honor you in a marvelous way one day when you stand before Him. Who is this Mary? We just don't know. But she wore herself out for the saints.

Next Paul mentions Andronicus and Junias. Who in the world are these people? "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." Now if you'll look at that verse very carefully, it tells you a lot about them even though it doesn't completely, specifically define who they are. Junias may be a woman. We don't know. It's hard to tell from the name. We don't know if it's a couple or not. It could be another couple. It could be another Priscilla and Aquila, but we cannot say that for sure. The word "kinsmen" probably does not refer to blood relatives, and there are several reasons for this. You may pick up a commentary and it says they are his relatives but there are some real questions about this.

First of all, the phrase "kinsman" was used back in Romans 9:3. Paul uses it not for personal blood kin, but for those who are his countrymen, those who are Jews, even those who perhaps could be of the same tribe. Romans 9:3 says, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

Secondly, the only relatives of the Apostle Paul that we know about are his sister and his nephew. Look in Acts 23:16. These are the only relatives that we know about that scripture records. Andronicus and Junias are not in that list. Acts 23:16 says, "But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul...." That's when they were plotting against him over there. Remember, that was his sister and her son. That's his nephew. They are the only two relatives that we know about.

Thirdly, they are known as Paul's fellow prisoners. In verse 7 he says, "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners." They shared prison with him at some point. They may have shared it with him over in Acts 16 when he was put in prison. We don't know. It is possible, however, they were not in prison together, but because they had been in prison and Paul had been in prison he calls them his fellow prisoners. There's no note here that this could possibly be his kinsmen.

Fourthly, they are described as those "who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." Now we don't mean that they were in the office of an apostle. That's not what he's saying. But somehow he was well known to the apostles, and they were saved before Paul was. In my study the thought came to me that perhaps they might have prayed for Paul to get saved. But all this speculation doesn't get you anywhere. The key is that they're two servants of Christ. That's all that really matters. As you go through all of this it doesn't matter if it's a woman who nobody knows of, or if it's a couple who were prominent. It doesn't matter. Being servants to Jesus Christ is what matters as you go through this list. That's why God the Holy Spirit even led Paul to put them on the list.

Sixthly, he mentions a man by the name Ampliatus in verse 8. "Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord." Now, we know absolutely nothing about this man from scripture. There's not one thing that you can say. However, in my study I found in archeology we do know something about him. Ampliatus was a popular name among slaves. In fact, in Rome most of the Romans who were prominent had three names, but there's a tomb there in Rome even today that very clearly has one name on it. It has this man's name on that tomb, giving the idea that he possibly could have been a slave. Now the question goes through my mind. I wonder if he's part of Caesar's household that Paul talks about in Philippians 4:22. Remember the verse? Let me read it for you. "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household." I wonder if he was not a slave in the household of somebody who was in Caesar's company.

Well, again, free Romans always had three names and this man only has one. It is definitely marked on one of the tombs there in Rome even today. You know the Apostle Paul just blows me away. He's a man who says in another place that in Christ there's no male or female. As you go down his list, it's just random, women, men, it doesn't really matter. In Christ there's no Jew or Greek. As you go down the list you find some Gentiles, you find some of the Jewish nationality. But in Christ also there's no free man and no slave. He sees them all as one in Jesus Christ. I just love that. There's just something about the heartbeat of the Apostle Paul as he lists these people. They're in no order. They're in no rank or file. They're just people, people who have come to the Lord Jesus and said, "God, will you use me?"

If you had to sit back and look back over your life, is God using you? Now remember, the qualifications are back also in chapter 15. The Apostle Paul says, "I only boast of the things that Christ is doing through me." So unless you have an empty hand, your boasting may be pointing more to yourself than it is to Christ. Is Christ using you? It's so simple. Turn loose of whatever it is that flesh wants to hold on to and enter into the freedom of being what God wants you to be.

Young people always pumps me up because of their potential. We might have another Billy Graham sitting right in the congregation, and if God tarries, we don't know what God might do through a young person who makes up his mind. Daniel was a teenager when they took him out of his land over into Babylon, and Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not sin against his God. He was a man God could use as a teenager. Think about the potential. All that God's waiting on is for us to turn loose and to come to Him with an empty hand.

Look at the list. A prominent lady named Phoebe. Who is she? We don't know. A tent-maker and his wife, Aquila and Priscilla. A nobody named Epaenetus. A lady named Mary who literally wore herself out for the saints. Two saints who perhaps prayed even for Paul's salvation, we don't know that, but two saints, Andronicus and Junias. A slave who loved Jesus. Look at the list. I think of 1 Corinthians 2 when God did not choose the wise but He chose the foolish to confound the wise. He chose the things that were not to confound the things that are. Not many noble, not many mighty are chosen. Why? Because people who are mighty and noble have their hand in the vase. They've got things they're pursuing other than God, therefore, they've imprisoned themselves and shut down God's using them.

People of a humble character are people who have bankrupted themselves before God and said, "God, here I am. Send me. Use me. I don't have to have a position. I don't have to be recognized. God, just use me so that one day when all of the economy of what you have done, I'll somehow be included as being a servant, one who gave himself to whatever You wanted in my life."

Before you can be used you've got to be a part of the kingdom of God. Is that not correct? We've been doing a youth camp for many years. Recently, I had the precious opportunity of just sharing about the Apostle Paul and being a servant to the Lord Jesus to all these kids who were out there, but I was really speaking to their counselors, folks. Because I had a deep conviction in my heart that when you go and try to water it down to reach a kid, you've just missed the whole point of what God has you there for.

We've been doing this for years. We don't sacrifice anything, we just set the table. Eat from it if you won't to. If you don't, that's not our responsibility. When I gave the invitation Thursday night, a man about forty years old walked up. I have never seen a man more emotionally moved in all my. He stood up in front of the kids there. He was one of their counselors from Mississippi. He said, "I just want you to know that for years I've been teaching Sunday School. I've had head knowledge. Oh, I have had head knowledge! But I have never bowed my knee to the Lord Jesus Christ." Weeping he said, "Tonight, I come in repentance and bow before my Lord Jesus Christ and salvation."

Well, that went on for a while. The invitation was about over. A man stood up, and when I saw him walk across the stage I recognized him. He's been with us six years, one of my dear friends, a pastor down in Louisiana. He walked up and began to weep and said, "I have to come tonight to say I have never bowed before my Lord Jesus Christ in repentance of my sins, never. I've known what to say for years but I've never bowed my will before Him."

Do you know why a lot of people aren't getting involved in what we're talking about? It's because they don't even know Jesus. That's why. Now there's a lot of people in church who can get involved in church work. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about in what Jesus and Jesus alone can do through you and gives you the right to boast about. Not what you've done for

Him but what He's done through you. You might have even joined a church, but you've never bowed to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and as your Savior. Maybe that's the whole problem. I don't know. But I'll tell you this, God wants to use every breathing individual who knows Jesus Christ. He wants to use you. And if you're not being used, it's not Him. It's you holding on to what flesh wants, trying to live in two worlds and you just can't do it. God uses the body of Christ to accomplish His work.

The Body of Christ - Part 3

Romans 16:9-12

We talk about freedom, but freedom is not the right to do as you please. Freedom is the power to do as you should. So often we misunderstand that. We think that because we're free we can do whatever. But that's not what the real meaning of freedom is. As a matter of fact, in Romans 8:2 it talks about what real freedom is. It says, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." We've been set free from the law of sin and death that continues to reside in our flesh. We're free from the penalty of sin. We're free from the power of sin, and one day we'll be free from the very presence of sin. True freedom is being about the things that our King and our Lord has for us to be about. When we're in the will that God has for us, when we're living Romans 12:1-2, surrendered, having offered our bodies as living sacrifices, we experience that freedom. We get to participate in that which God and God alone can do in us and through us.

The picture of this is what we've been looking at in Romans 16. We've been talking about the body of Christ. If anyone understood the body, the Apostle Paul understood it. You hear in chapter 16 how unselfish and how pure his heart is towards the body of Christ. Paul is a gifted teacher. He could be arrogant. He could be indignant. He was one of the most intelligent men in the New Testament, other than the Lord Jesus Himself. He studied under Gamaliel, the great teacher of the law who existed in those days. Peter made this statement about the Apostle Paul: "You know, there are some things that our brother, Paul, says that are difficult to understand." A very wise, a very intelligent, a very schooled man.

He could have said to these other nobodies, people who weren't gifted like he was gifted, "I don't have time for you." He could have lived as if they didn't even exist. But the Apostle Paul understood what God was teaching through him. He understood the message. Not only did he understand it, but he lived it. In Romans 12:3 he says, "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." Paul knew that he was the one out front. He knew he was the gifted teacher. But he also knew this was not his work. This was God's work and God has many, many other people who many times we'll never hear about, except in Romans 16. They were important to the work that God was doing.

Paul believed what he preached to the Corinthian church, that God gives the gift and the ministry and the effect. He clearly stated in Romans 15:18, "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me." He knew it was God's work. He knew it was not his strategy and his planning. He knew it was God's power and God's presence and God's leading. He understood that. Because he understood that, he saw the benefit and the worth of all the nobodies out there, as far as men are concerned, who don't have the gift that puts them in front of people, the ones who are gifted to serve, and as we studied in chapter 16, to unselfishly be about the work that God has for them. He saw how much value they had. They were like embers of a fire that quickly and brilliantly shone and then suddenly they disappear off the pages of time.

We have seen a group of people who really didn't have the notoriety Paul had. But the Apostle Paul knew they did as far as God was concerned. Back in chapter 12 God cut the pie and gave each of us a measure of faith. We said it doesn't matter how big a size piece you got, just be thankful you got a piece of it. It's God who sliced the pie. To some He gave much, to Paul and James and others, but to some He didn't give as much. But He gave the same command to all of them, to walk presented unto God and to be about the things God has for you.

I want you to see in this passage why you are even living today. What purpose do you have in your life? Do you know that as a believer you're never going to be satisfied until you come to the cross and come to that place of surrender and be about your Father's business? It doesn't matter what you do down here. These things are important. These things require integrity and much effort. But in the midst of it you've got to remember you have a pulpit wherever you are.

God has a will in your life. God has given you a function in the body and God has an assignment for you to carry out. It's not you so much doing it for Him. It's you doing it in cooperation with Him. It's what He is doing in and through you. There is no satisfaction apart from that. So many people go from church to church, from denomination to denomination, griping and grumbling and never finding what they're looking for. You're not going to find it except at the foot of the cross, bowed and surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's when you discover God has a purpose in your life. That's where your joy is going to be found. That's where your patience and all the peace that you're looking for is going to come from, not so much even from serving but from the One who is empowering the service. That's where it all is.

Well, I want us to see this and I want you to be thinking as I go through this list. Sometimes you say, "I'm a nobody. Nobody even knows me. What could I possibly do? How could I be a significant part of God's work?" Well, look at these people and remember they're people just like you and me. Many of them will never be known except for the fact that Paul brought them to our attention, but God knows them and we'll see them one day when we stand before Him. When you live Romans 12:1-2, when I live Romans 12:1-2, God's going to use us as a part of His work that He's seeking to accomplish on this earth.

Well, we break in at Romans 16:9 where we left off last time. In verse 9 Paul mentions two more unknowns. The first man is by the name of Urbanus and the second one is Stachys. Now here again we know nothing about these two except what this verse tells us. It says, "Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved."

Now, the name Urbanus was a common Roman name at that time which gives us the idea he might have just been a Roman citizen. Paul says that he's our fellow worker in Christ. That's kind of hard to figure out what Paul is saying. When he says, our fellow worker, does he mean that he's worked with Paul at some point in time or does he mean that he's a servant that everybody recognizes and is there to help whomever is with him?

Look down at verse 21 of chapter 16 and I'll tell you why I say that. He says "our fellow worker" in verse 9, but in verse 21 he says, "Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you." So he says "my fellow worker" in verse 21 and "our fellow worker" in verse 9. So it leads to a little bit of confusion. We don't know if he ever actually worked with Paul or not. I know one thing, if he ever worked with Paul it could not have been in Rome because Paul had never been in Rome. That's all we know. We just have to stop right there with this man.

Stachys, on the other hand, was an uncommon Greek name. As a matter of fact, it means "ear of corn," whatever that's supposed to suggest. We know that he was closely associated with Paul. Paul calls him his beloved. That term was a term of endearment that was specifically geared to people who you knew well and had great respect for. So he calls him his beloved.

Here again, two unknown men. They appear, then they disappear. One day we'll know them but on this earth man will have very little to say about them. Yet they're significant in the Kingdom of God and the body of Christ.

Look at verse 10. In verse 10, Paul mentions a man by the name of Apelles. "Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ." Now, here again we don't know much about him. All we do know is that he was approved in Christ. (By the way, you're never approved outside of Christ.) He was approved in Christ. What does that mean? What we know about him says volumes. Sometimes what the Bible doesn't say speaks louder than what it says. The significant thing Paul says is the word "approved." The word is dokimos, which means he had been put to the test. He's been through the fires and he's come out with integrity. He's come out proven to be pure and proven to be genuine.

It was the word they would use to refine metal. They'd take gold, for instance, or silver and put it into a pot. They would heat it until it became a liquid and all the dross would begin to come to the top. Then they would take a ladle and scrape off all the dross. When the silversmith could look in it and see his reflection, then he would cool the fire. And that's what it means to go through the fire. That's what it means to be tested and to be approved and to be proven genuine in the midst of adversity. That's what we know about this man. That's all we know about him. The Apostle Paul says to greet this man, that this man is important to the Kingdom of God. He's been through the test and he's come forth and been proven as genuine. And of course the fires that he's been through, obviously in the context, would be the fires of persecution.

You know, you really only know somebody when the pressure's been put on them. Paul says that is significant in the Kingdom of God. Here we have a little lady nobody knows that wears herself out serving the saints. Here we have a man who's just simply come through the fire and been proven. All of this plays a role in what God is doing in accomplishing His work.

Well, in verse 10 also Paul mentions those of the household of Aristobulus: "Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus." Now, who in the world is Aristobulus? One of the things I keep wanting to remind you is so often when you get to the chapter 16 you tend to skip the first sixteen verses. It is all greetings and you tend to think that there's nothing in that. Whoa! There's a lot in here. Paul does not greet the man, Aristobulus, but he greets his household. That's significant. That probably says that the man is either dead or he's not a believer. I think he's not a believer. Paul greets those who are of the household of Aristobulus.

I did a little bit of research and tried to find out who this guy was. J.B. Lightfoot says that there was a man by that name who was the brother of Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great. Now, we don't know if this was the same one that Paul is talking about, but if he is then he would have been a close associate to Claudius, the evil ruler of Rome who drove all the Jews out. If that's the case, when Aristobulus died, his whole household would become property of Rome, property of the emperor there in Rome. So what you have here possibly is a family of believers who are actually in the household of Caesar. Now think about what Paul said in Philippians 4:22. He says, "The brethren of Caesar's household send you greetings." God had people like this even in the higher ups of the government of Rome in that day. Wherever God wants somebody, God puts somebody. So therefore, Paul

says to greet this family. They're believers. They are tremendously significant in the kingdom of God. They are of the household of Caesar, if that theory is correct.

At one time the U.S.S.R. army was about sixty percent Muslim. As a result of that, they looked with disdain upon Christians. When they sent the soldiers to Afghanistan, they personally hand picked, from my information, those who were believers in order to punish them. But what they didn't understand was believers couldn't get into Afghanistan. That was a country that was shut down to Christians of any kind of ministries. So when they sent the soldiers there who were believers, they brought the gospel right into Afghanistan. Now there are Christians all over the place as a result of what Russia did. But Russia really didn't do that. God said, "I want some people over here, and He took these people and put them over there."

You see, each person is significant in what God is doing. Paul said, "I have a calling to take the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world." But there were many who were alongside him, and Paul understands that and gives proper credit and appreciation to those God chose to use.

Well, come on down to verse 11, and Paul mentions a man by the name of Herodion. The very name, Herodion, is interesting. He says, "My kinsman." Some people ask, "Was that a personal relative? Was that like an uncle or cousin?" No. He's used the word "kinsman" before in Romans and has very well qualified what he's talking about. Back in 9:3 he says, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." So the word seems to have more of a meaning that these were Israelites; and not only Israelites, but they were brothers in Christ because they had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. He says earlier of Andronicus and Junias, "my kinsmen." He doesn't mean that all of his kinfolks are in Rome. What he's saying is that these are kinsmen according to the tribe of Israel, maybe even back to the tribe from which he came.

In Acts 23:16 we only know of two relatives of the Apostle Paul. "But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul." So as far as his being a kinsman, all we know is that probably he was an Israelite and especially a brother in Christ. It says that his name is Herodion. There are many who think because of that name he could somehow be directly related to Herod and could have been at least in part associated with this family that we just mentioned of Aristobulus which were the household of faith. Again, we don't know. You have to remember that we know only what the scriptures tell us. But we do know that God said through Paul to recognize this man. He's part of what I'm doing in reaching the Gentile world with the gospel.

Look at verse 11. There's another man very similar to Aristobulus: "Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord." Now, notice Paul doesn't say to greet Narcissus, probably because he was a pagan. He wasn't a believer. But he greets his household just like he did with Aristobulus. There was a man by that name who was the secretary to Claudius. Many people think that's who this is. It would make a lot of sense. The secretary to the emperor was very important in that day. If you wanted to get to the emperor for an audience or you wanted to correspond with the emperor, you had to go through his secretary. So the secretary could become very wealthy. That was a very pagan society. So he would say, "Hey, for a little bribe, I'll get you in." Therefore, this man could have been a very wealthy man and very influential. Again he's not saved, but his household is and Paul greets them. They could be part of the saints Paul talks about in Caesar's household.

The idea I want you to get in your mind is God puts you where he wants you and whatever your gift is it's significantly important in what God is doing through us in the economy of His whole purpose. Look back with me in Matthew 13. I love this. If you have wondered, "Is God really using me? Can God ever use me?", I want you to go back to Matthew 13. He has several parables here. The first one he talks about is the parable of the sower and the seed and the soil. You know that parable, and you know that there's only one good soil, the soil that receives the seed, holds onto the seed, and bears fruit out of the seed. The other soils look like they took the seed. They did not. They were not believers and it has a significant place to play there.

In verse 24 he brings up another parable. You say, "What has this got to do with the people Paul's mentioning in Romans 16?" I hope you'll make the connection. In Verse 24 he says, "He presented another parable to them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this?' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'""

In the first parable the sower is whoever takes the seed of the Word out and scatters it. The soil is the hearts of men. But in the second parable, it is uniquely different. Jesus said in verse 37, "And He answered and said, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man [Jesus Christ], and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom [Christians];

and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels."

I'm not going to go any further because that's not what my point is. My point is this, if God sows you, He sows you where He wants you to be sown. So many of us wonder is God going to use us? We fight against the very thing that God has put into our life. I want to ask you a question. Did you move to your present location from someplace else? Have you said, "I wish I had never moved?" Perhaps you have spent months and months trying to find a job, trying to get someplace else but you keep running into an impasse. You just can't seem to make that happen. Have you ever thought about the fact that the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, has sown you into where you are? Have you ever thought about the fact He has gifted you and called you and empowered you in His Holy Spirit to bloom where He has sown you, to bear fruit where He has sown you?

You go from church to church, trying to find a church where you can at least find a little fulfillment and you're not finding any. Why? You won't find it in a church. You only find it in Christ. You only find it when you die to your stinking flesh. And you only find it when you surrender to Him and when you do that, you begin to participate in what God now is doing in and through you. He's planted you where you are. Now, be a part of the Father's business until He comes for His church.

What's wrong with us? Perhaps you say, "I can take the first two. I believe God's put me in these two places, but I don't like my job." You spend most of your time in the want ads of the paper trying to find another job. Now, I am not saying God doesn't change people from job to job and can't better you and that kind of thing. That's not what I'm saying. But you run into an impasse and you just can't make it happen. You've tried everything that you know and you're still stuck in that same old job. Why don't you like it? Well, the pay. Well, it's more than that. Probably because of the pagans that you work around, the people who are there. You don't find any joy in them.

Have you ever thought about the fact that God has sown you into that place and He has you there as the good wheat? He has you there as a person filled with the gospel of Jesus Christ, a person filled with the Spirit of God, a person who can lead people to the door that could take them into the Kingdom of God which is Christ Jesus Himself. Have you ever thought about that? No. We spend most of our time trying to kick against the very thing, the very soil, that God has sown us into.

Perhaps you don't like your neighborhood. You've tried to sell your house. You've done everything that you know. Have you ever thought about the fact that there may be a sovereign God in control and that sovereign God is trying to say, "You're trying to get out of soil I have sown you into. Bloom where you are. Function out of the gift that I have given to you. Let my Spirit empower you. Be about my eternal work. I have put you where I want you. You don't deserve to be put anywhere"? It's only by grace that we're even in the Kingdom of God. Let God use you where you are.

What is wrong with us? We look around and we say, "Hey! Nobody knows me. How can I ever be used?" It's like God says, "Get off that pride kick and get about the things that I have for you." That's the only place you're going to find your joy. That's the only place you're going to find what you're looking for. Be surrendered to Christ. Be like these people we're talking about here. Be like the household of Aristobulus. Be like the household of Narcissus. These are people who were in Caesar's household. They were functional in the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps, you don't like some of the relationships God has given to you. "I don't have any friends. Nobody calls me. Nobody writes me. I just don't have a friend." Stop it! You have a Friend living in you who the scripture says sticks closer than a brother. Who do you want? He says, "I'll never leave you, and I'll never forsake you. You don't need the friends I've put around you as much as they need you." Bloom where you are. Learn to let God use you where you are. "Well, nobody will never know me." Not down here, but who cares?

Friend, you're not home yet. God knows exactly who you are. Nobody down here may ever put your name in the paper. Nobody here may ever recognize you as a great teacher. I'll tell you what, those of us who have a little bit more of a spotlight need to be very, very careful. It's only by the grace of God that anybody has a clue who we are. And the very moment we start taking pride in it, God's going to take that away from us and then we will be known but not for what it was before.

You see, Paul understood that. Paul knew that there were no big I's and little you's in the kingdom of God. I'm sorry I'm just sharing a lot of my heart, but this thing has so spoken to me as I was studying it. You're catching the overflow of it so you're just going to have to bear with it. You know, part of the problems that I've had are people who come across like they are Apostle Paul. They won't give you the time of day, folks. Some of the greatest disappointments in my life have been people I thought were something that they ended up not to be. We've got to understand it's only by grace we're even in the kingdom of God. Who are we to say, "God you didn't give me the gifts I wanted. You haven't given me the notoriety I'm looking for." God says, "Wherever I have planted you and sown you, I want you to bear fruit. You are important to Me. You may never be remembered except as a faithful convert who just always remained faithful. You may never be remembered except as a woman who wore herself out serving the saints. But you were a part of My work that I was doing through My body on this earth."

One of the things I've had trouble with over the years is listening to my wife. I need to listen to her more. Every time she says something to me, it's right if I just pay attention. But, being hard-headed, it takes me a while. I was in a very difficult place one time. I guarantee you, I tried my best to get out of it, but God wouldn't let me out of it. God was trying to show me, "Son, I've sown you here and until I move you and uproot you and put you someplace else, then you dig roots and you bloom where you are. You be a part of my work."

You know about kudzu. It has very deep roots. It'll spring up a mile away, engulf houses, cars, whatever's in the way. Well, it was a rainy day. I was discouraged and mad because God wouldn't move me someplace else, mad because nobody knew who I. I was upset so Diana suggested that we get out and ride amongst the dead kudzu in the rain. We rode and I tell you it just got worse and worse. Finally Diana reached over and touched my arm and said, "Pull over. I want to show you something." We pulled over onto the side of the road. I'll never forget this as long as I live. Out in the middle of all that old dead kudzu was a dogwood tree. It was the edge of spring and that dogwood had blossomed and bloomed. In the midst of all that dead ugly kudzu was a beautiful dogwood that had bloomed. Diana said to me, "Wayne, you're fighting against the very thing that God has put before you. We need to bloom where we are and be life in the midst of deadness."

That's how God uses us, folks. Do you think it's going to be through the revival? Listen, if having revivals would get this world saved we'd be playing golf waiting on Jesus to come back. It's not having church meetings. It's not having teaching on evangelism and revival. It's having people who live in light of revival. It's having people who live surrendered lives, people who are free to be what God wants them to be. You may never be known, but somehow it's counting for eternity. He says in Galatians, "If you sow of the Spirit you will reap of the Spirit and it will be in due season if you don't grow weary in doing the good things."

What's wrong with us, folks? We're almost through Romans, and I'm going to get it off my chest. There's a world in your neighborhood. There's a world where you work. And if we're going to sit around and put other things as our priority we're not going to understand what Paul is doing here. He's picking out people who caught on that the only thing worthwhile in life is to live the Romans 12:1-2 lifestyle, be surrendered to Christ. Don't retire just retire.

You know, the mentality of America is, "Well, I'm going to get to sixty-five one of these days. I'm going to buy me a motor home and I'm going to see America. I've been saving up my money." You know what folks? That's so sad. Yes, God will take you out of a job because you'll physically not be able to do it. That's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is your eternal purpose never stops until the day God stops your heart and takes you into His presence.

Sometimes we don't know what's out here. Sometimes not only do other people not know it we don't even know it until we get to Heaven one day. But these people finally came to terms with the fact the only joy in life is to be a usable vessel for Jesus Christ. However small or however large, I just want to be about what God wants in my heart.

Well, Paul goes on in verse 12 and mentions three women. "Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord." Now there are two significant things here. Most people think that these first two are twins and I'll tell you why. The name Tryphaena means delicate, and the name Tryphosa means dainty. They possibly could have been twins. The word for "workers in the Lord" is the word kopiao. We saw that earlier concerning Mary back in verse 6. It means they have worked to the point of fatigue. Evidently they had been those kind of servants for the Lord. The word "workers" is in the present tense. That tells you something. They're still busy working for the Lord. They're able to do what God has assigned them to do.

There's another lady there, Persis. Persis can find its roots only in the word Persia. Perhaps that identifies the land she came from. We don't know. We know nothing about her except that the phrase "worked hard in the Lord" is in the aorist indicative. Now think with me. One's in the present and one is in the aorist indicative. This could tell you that Persis is an older person who is not able to do all that she used to do. She's still a worker in the Lord but not as significantly perhaps as the younger ones who could do a lot more.

Who are these three ladies? We don't know. They are just workers in the Lord. Are they important? They're important to all the work that God is doing throughout His kingdom. What a picture for older saints. Now think back with me. We've got women, children and men who nobody knows about. We've got older folks. We have Gentiles. We have Jews. Anybody who is willing to say, "Yes," to the Lord Jesus, God is able to use in what He's doing in the Kingdom.

My question keeps coming back. When are we going to understand that? When am I going to understand that my only joy is in loving Him and dying to myself? I can be part of what He's up to, that which He can accomplish through me to the degree I'm willing to surrender unto Him with my gifts, calling, with whatever He's given me. You are the same way. As we join hands together it's incredible the world that we could touch for the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of us will be known better than others. When we get to Heaven we're going to be surprised at who's in front of the line. God sees it a totally different way. He looks at a man's heart. So if you're miserable, defeated, discouraged, and you're a believer, then I want you to do me a favor. Walk in your bathroom, shut the

door, lock it, walk over to your mirror, and say hello to your problem. Because when you're willing to die to that stinking flesh and surrender to Christ that's when you're going to discover how God can use you for all of eternity. You're going to know it one day when you get to Heaven.

What's God wanting to do in your life? All you've got to do is say yes to Him and strap your seatbelt on because that's when you're going to discover the joy you've been looking for.

Romans 16:13-16

The Body of Christ - Part 4

As believers, the Apostle Paul has taught us in Romans it is not what we necessarily do for God, it is what God does through us that matters. That's what he said in Romans 15:18. He says, "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed."

Now, I want to illustrate this using a glove. Before you knew Christ there was nothing of God in you. That's why religion does not help you at all. Religion is what man does for God. Our righteousness, Isaiah 64 says, is filthy rags in God's eyes. You can't dig your way out of the hole that Adam put us in. When you're in Adam you can't get out of Adam except to be delivered by what Christ has done for you. It's Christ who takes us out of Adam and puts us into His kingdom. Well, that's salvation. We are rescued. We are saved. We are delivered from ourselves and from sin and put into Christ. Something happens. If I said to this glove, "Glove, move around; move your fingers," you know, this glove just hangs there because there's not one single thing in this glove that can respond to what I want it to do. This glove doesn't even want to do what I want it to do. It just hangs there lifeless. That's the way a person is without Jesus Christ. But when he puts his faith into Jesus Christ, life comes into him. That life, now, affects us. I say to the glove, "Fingers move." They can move. Wow! I can say, "Ball your fist up." It balls its fist up. Whatever I tell it to do, it does. Not because of the glove. We've already seen what the glove can't do, but it's because of the life that is in the glove.

Now when Christ comes to live in us He wants to work through us. He has gifted us and called us. We have a function. We have a purpose until the day we see Him face to face. That's why Paul says in Philippians, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." I love the way he said it. There are a lot of people who can't say "to die is gain" because they can't say the first part, "to live is Christ." The very essence of what made Paul tick was not a plan or program but a person who lived in him.

Not only did He live in Paul, but He lived in all the believers of that day and on this earth. He resides in the hearts and lives of believers. The fruit of what He does through us, the ultimate fruit, is the changed lives of people. That's what he's talking about in verse 18 of chapter 15. It says, "resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles." Some of us don't get to see that ultimate end. Paul says, "Some sow and some water, but God gives the increase." So all of us, in whatever we do allowing Jesus to work through us, are a part of that end which is the ultimate transformation of people's lives, the ultimate leading of obedience to Christ in people's hearts.

Many of us will never go overseas in missions but yet when God leads us to a prayer ministry to pray or to give or whatever, we are just as much a part of what goes on over there as the people who get to go. All of us play a role in what God is up to. The Apostle Paul has been given the ministry of reaching the Gentile world. We know that from the fifteenth chapter of Romans. Paul is the teacher. Paul is the gifted one in the sense that God has just given him an intellect, an ability, that very few have in the whole New Testament. He understands that. He has accepted that. He has fit himself into that role and all the way to the very end he continues to be about the things God has assigned to him and God empowers him to do. But the Apostle Paul is very conscious of the fact that he's not the only one involved in this, that there are many others out there, the unsung heroes of the faith, who will never be known by anyone.

As you come to chapter 16, it's like Paul begins to gather in all of those people who he knows have been instrumental in what God has assigned him to do. It's not just him. He doesn't think more highly of himself than he ought to think. The same Christ who works through him in such a magnificent way so that all the people are able to see also works through a little lady who we don't even know where she's from or her background but she simply has the gift of service and has the calling to serve and she wears herself out serving the saints. She's just as important in God's economy as the Apostle Paul because she has been faithful to do what God has assigned and empowered her to do. Paul was the one who was out front but he knew there were many more who were involved.

Well, we have seen women. We have seen men. We have seen couples. We have seen slaves. We have seen unknowns. The list continues to go on. If we miss this, folks, we have missed something that I think is very precious in the ending of the book of Romans. I think God is saying to us, "I want to use you beyond anything that you could possibly imagine." But it's going to take every one of us, each one individually coming to that place of saying, "God, I present my body a living sacrifice, Romans 12:1-2,

and Lord, I just want to be a vessel through which You can do Your work until the day You decide to come for Your church." Oh, how exciting that is! Missions is not just going overseas. Missions begins when you say "yes" to Christ. This is why we have the little sign over the doors of our church, "You are now entering the mission field." It's not just overseas. It's wherever you are. It's across the street. It's around the world. When people get in touch with Christ by saying "yes" to Him, they become an invaluable part of what He's doing, the whole picture of what He's doing around the world. The key is, am I willing to surrender to Him?

We pick up in verse 13 and find a man by the name of Rufus. It says, "Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine." Now there is a lot of speculation about the man by the name of Rufus. Very possibly he's the son of the one who bore the cross of Christ up the hill of Golgotha. Turn over to Mark 15:21. Oh, talk about a beautiful story here if this is that man. We don't know for sure, but we have a lot of people who think that. I'm one of them. Verse 21 says, "And they pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross."

Now I want to tell you something about Rufus. Cyrene was on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa. This man, if this is who we think he is, was a black man from Northern Africa who was the son of a black man who carried the cross of Jesus up Golgotha. There are a lot of people in the deep south who just sort of cringe when you say that, which shows you they either don't know Jesus or if they do know Him, they're living far outside of His will. God does not see color, folks. God sees hearts. It's amazing to me. I think it's got to be him, just knowing the heart of God and how He uses people. He doesn't discriminate as men do. God takes anyone who says they will do whatever God tells them to do.

We sing the song, "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in our sight. Of course in some cities they don't sing that. It's white and white and white and white, they are precious in his sight. They don't want to add anything else to it. I'm treading on some toes here, because a lot of people don't want you to talk about it. But you had better start talking about it. You start living Romans 12:1-2 and you're going to see immediately the people God wants to use. You're going to see the colors, the different colors, the different races. God loves all the people He has created. What we have done is an atrocity in His sight.

We could add to that red and yellow, black and white, man or woman, young or old. You could just take this list and make a big song out of it. Whoever's willing to say "yes" to God, God will use in a very powerful way.

Well, if he is the Rufus, the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross up, it could be that he came to know Christ as a result of watching Jesus hang on the cross to die for his sins. It's interesting to me that Mark mentions Alexander his brother. Paul mentions his mother. We'll talk about her in just a moment. Paul said Rufus is "a choice man in the Lord." The word "choice" is the word *eklektos*. He doesn't mean chosen. Everybody he talks about is chosen. We studied that back in chapter 9. He means, in the sense of the previous verse, that Rufus is beloved, dear, precious, to him. He's a very precious man. Certainly, if he's who we think he is, he would probably be one of the most respected people in all the Christian church of that day just because of his daddy and what happened in that family.

It says, "Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine." I thought about that. Do you mean that the mother of Rufus was the mother of Paul? No. What he's saying is his mother was like a mother to me. She took care of me. Now we don't know when and we don't know where. Perhaps Simon of Cyrene did, as many Jews did at Pentecost in those times, he just chose to live there in Jerusalem. Maybe that was the contact that Paul had with the family. We just don't know. You've had people in your life who have been like a mother to you. You might even endear yourself to them in that same sense of the word.

When I was in college there was another Wayne Barber. I'm Wayne A. Barber. He's Wayne K. Barber. You talk about confusion. He's younger than I am. We worked at a camp together, and they used to get on the microphone and call us to the phone. We never could tell if they were saying Wayne A. or Wayne K. We'd both show up every time. When I was at college years and years ago, his mother became like a mother to me. She called me over to their house. We had meals together. We did things together. I can truthfully say to this day, even though she's gone on to be with the Lord, that she was like a mother to me.

That's what Paul is saying about Rufus's mom. She had treated even the Apostle Paul like a son. It's assumed that Alexander wasn't in Rome or Paul would have greeted him too. Because Mark mentions him, most likely he is also a believer. So you see a whole family here that came to know Christ as a result of witnessing Jesus hang and die on a cross for each of them. He was a black man who bowed his heart to Jesus Christ when he witnessed the sacrifice that Jesus was making for him upon the cross.

You know, something has been bothering me a long time and whenever the scripture brings it up sometimes the Lord gives me a freedom to touch on it just for a second. It's not an agenda that I have but it's something I think we need to hear. In the South you don't talk about blacks too many times. You know, we're having a resurgence of something in our country. I hope you've noticed it, and I hope you're just as disturbed about it as I am. It's that anti-Semitic thing that people have against the Jews and the racism against blacks. It's been there all along, but it's coming back out now in a way that's actually more frightening than what it used to be years ago.

I was doing a meeting down in the South, and another church called me and said, "Wayne, this is a wonderful church. They just love Jesus and love to hear the Word taught. Will you come down? We'll have a wonderful meeting together." So I went down on a Sunday afternoon. This was years ago, but what I saw then is still happening even to this day. When I got down there I made a statement. You know, sometimes when I preach I sound arrogant. I don't know why. I do. My mom told me that before she died. She said, "Son, you sound like a smart-aleck." I don't mean to. There's nothing inside of me that really means that. It just comes out that way sometimes. But just remember God is not finished with me yet.

I made a statement that night in a text. I don't know what I was preaching on. But I said, "What would God have to do in this church to show you what He thinks of you and what you think of you?" You know there's a difference. There's a difference in what man thinks of man and what God thinks of him. It says in one of the seven letters in Revelation, "Men say that you're alive. I say that you're dead." There's a big difference here. What does God have to do to wake us up and show us what He thinks as opposed to what we think? That's all I said. I didn't really mean to be smart about it.

The next night I found out how prophetic that statement really was. I was sitting in the pastor's office. A woman came to the door and began to beat on the door. I opened the door and she said, "Where's the preacher? Where's the preacher?" I said, "Well, he's around here somewhere. "Can I help you?" She said, "Something awful is going on inside the auditorium." I said, "What? Is somebody sick?" She said, "It's worse than that." I said, "Has somebody had a heart attack?" She said, "It's worse than that." I said, "Has somebody died?" She said, "It's worse than that." Now wait a minute. Time out. What is worse than somebody having a heart attack and dying in the auditorium? I said, "Well, what's going on?" She said, "There are two black people out there." I said, "Well, praise God." Now, I shouldn't have said that. I want to tell you I have never in my life watched anything like what I saw that week. I preached to more people than probably any meeting I've ever done, but the crowd that night boycotted the services and spread the rumor that I started it. I'd loved to have gotten us a van load of the precious black people that are in our church and all of us had gone down there for that meeting. I didn't. That would've been wrong. But I thought about it after they blamed me for it that week.

You see, the blacks were there from a college not too far away. They had seen a sign inside the First National Bank there that said, "If you love Jesus and want to see revival, come to First Baptist Church." Well, they loved Jesus, wanted to see Revival so they came to First Baptist Church. They just didn't read the fine print. "If you're white, upper class, and contribute to the offering." They didn't quite understand that. Well, that night it was like preaching in a snowstorm. It was the coldest place I've ever been in my life. I enjoyed it, personally, because of the fact that the freedom God was giving me. The fellow who asked me was enjoying it. The two black folks who came were having a ball. I want to tell you something, folks. They're the only ones who are going to enjoy Heaven when they get there for the first thousand years. The rest of us are going to be walking around trying to reorganize the place or something. We don't enjoy it now. Why do we think we're going to enjoy it that much more then? They're going to enjoy it. They're flat going to enjoy it.

What I loved about these precious black brothers is they'd finish your sentences. I loved it. I would get in the middle of a sentence, take a breath, and they'd finish it for me. I thought, "This is great. I can preach for twice as long while we're here." I got over on David and Bathsheba. I remember I was sort of mealy-mouthed around. I didn't want to say some of the things that were in that text. One of them said, "Uh-oh!" out loud and the other one said, "Come on Preacher, say it. We need to hear it." You don't have to tell me but one time. I'm going to say it.

Well, that night they came down and one of them said, "Brother Wayne, we have enjoyed the messages but, boy, we don't feel welcome here." I said, "I want to tell you something. As far as I'm concerned and God's concerned, you are welcome here." About that time the preacher walked down and took them back into his office. I knew exactly what was going on. Some of the influential people in the church had objected, and he felt threatened. He decided to go with that rather than his conscious. He took them back into his office and told them they couldn't come back. But on Friday night I witnessed something that I've never seen anywhere else in my life and it's still true to this day. I watched God take His candlestick right out of that church. You can find more light in a funeral parlor now than you can with those people in that place.

You see, folks, we need to wake up and understand something. Our flesh is wicked, deceitful, and it will discriminate and fill with prejudice the moment you'll allow it. But, see, the whole picture of Romans is you live dead to the sick flesh that all of us have, come alive in His Spirit and allow His Spirit to give you spiritual eyes and then you don't see color. You see people. You see need. You see hearts. You see, that's what it's all about. My hope is when I get to Heaven I'm going to find out this really was that same Rufus. Because in the list of slaves, of couples, of women, of nobodies, he puts in there a precious black man whose daddy actually carried the cross of Jesus up Golgotha.

Well, in verse 14 he mentions five men together. Paul says, "Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them." We don't know anything about these men except that they're in the list. Although Paul does not identify them, it says the brethren with them. Now, you've got to think with me. What does he mean the brethren with them? Evidently these were five men who were distinguished somehow within a particular congregation that probably met in a house. Remember earlier we saw

that Priscilla and Aquila had a church that met in their home. There were groups of these people all over, evidently, the city of Rome. He's greeting a group of men who possibly represent one of those house churches by putting the term "the brethren" with them.

Now again, we don't know much from them but, we can look at a few things here. There's an inscription of a slave freed by Augustus by the name of Asyncritus. We don't know if it's the same one. About Phlegon we know nothing. Hermes was a very common slave name. Patrobas was a slave name. History records a man by that name who was freed by Nero. Hermas was also a common slave name. So, regardless of which one you mention, we don't know a whole lot about them. But by studying history and the times and the names and what they were associated with, it appears that you've got five men who had been slaves at that time and had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. They certainly weren't in the upper class. They were in the slave category, but Paul distinguishes them, lifts them up, and says, "Greet these five men in that church."

Paul pays tribute to them. Nobody else would have paid tribute to them except God Himself. God is doing that through Paul. You'll never see them again, except when you get to Heaven one day. They're just like that ember that we talked about in the fire. It just suddenly, brilliantly flashes up and then disappears. That's the way it is. But they were important in the economy of God, just as important as the Apostle Paul. They were not as recognized as he was but they were just as faithful as he was, and he recognizes them in that verse.

In verse 15 he mentions another group of five. It could, again, mean another little house church that's there. He distinguishes five people out of that church. He says, "Greet Philologus." You know, that's an interesting name. The Greek there means "lover of the word." I don't know anything else about him, but I love his name. "Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them."

It's a very similar situation of what he just did. It's probably a church. Paul mentions the brethren with the other five and the saints with these five. Evidently, it was a small house church. We know that Philologus was a common slave name. Julia was the most common name of female slaves in the imperial household. She had a name that would be associated with slavery. Some people say, by the way, that they're husband and wife. We don't know that.

The name, Nereus, is found in an inscription of the imperial household. We don't know anything of his sister. We don't know anything about Olympas. But Paul says, "all the saints who are with them." So evidently, these were five nobodies who had somehow been distinguished by their faithfulness to God in a little house church there in Rome. The Apostle Paul was led to bring them into his list of greetings there that he has in chapter 16.

The body of Christ, to me, is such an enigma of how God chooses the gifts and how God chooses to use people differently. It just blows me away. I remember in my own life in some of the good things that have happened to me. I don't have any understanding of this. Sometimes, you know, you get caught up in this kind of stuff. "Wow! Man, I'm on video! I'm on radio!" Hey, folks, back down real fast and say, "Oh, God, let me not think more highly of myself than I ought to think. You use who You choose to use and everyone fits into Your master plan and everyone is just as significant to You as anyone else." That's the beautiful economy of God. So, if you didn't get the greater piece of the pie and you're not as well-known as somebody else, hey, look who he's mentioning here. You're going to be just as recognized one day when you stand before the Lord Jesus Christ in the gift you have, in the calling you have, in the burden that God has place upon you. When you say "yes" to God, it's amazing how He'll fit you into what He's doing.

We took a course called "Experiencing God." When you say "yes" to God, you get to get in on what God is up to. God will use you in ways that at times you'll just have to bow down on your face before Him and say, "God, I just don't understand at all how you even begin to use me." The world has no way of understanding the depth of fellowship and partnership experienced by those in the body of Christ. The only reason the believer does not sense this is because they're not living Romans 12:1-2. Prominent women, slave women, men, couples, blacks, Jews, Gentiles, God takes anyone who will say "yes" to Him.

Well, in conclusion to his greetings Paul says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." You've got to understand their culture and what was going on at that time. The key here is not the kiss. The key here is the word "holy." Let's look at this. Romans 16:16 says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." In other words, you greet one another.

Let's go back and find out where this practice came from? The best I can discover is the practice of embracing and kissing friends on the forehead and on the cheek was popular way back in Old Testament times. It was first common among relatives and friends especially when they would see one another after a long period of being separated. To kiss a person of high position was to show great respect for that individual. Well, that carried over into the New Testament church. And the New Testament church, primarily made of up Jews in its earliest form, kept up the practice especially with relatives and friends and those in the body of Christ. Many of the Jews, when they became believers, were outcasts to their own families. You've got to remember this. When they were baptized, friends, they were cut off. Funerals were given. They were dead. Their families disowned them and still do to this day.

They had no family. So their family became the body of Christ. To be greeted that way with a holy kiss, to be affectionately loved in the power of the Holy Spirit of God, was special. It was not something sensual, erotic or sexual. But it was something very truly deep and heartfelt of being able to greet one another. It must have ministered to them in a very powerful way.

In no way was it something to be sensual or whatever. That's probably why we stopped doing it over the years. Somewhere along the way it got perverted and therefore it got stopped. We don't really know when it stopped in tradition. As a matter of fact, you can see this with Paul and the church of Ephesus. You know, they loved him and he loved them. Over in Acts 20:36 it says, "And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship." Paul said, "I probably will never get back to you." He's spent three years of his life teaching them. He called the elders down there to Miletus to meet with him. As he was going to the boat they just couldn't stand it. They just fell on him and kissed and hugged and embraced him. It wasn't anything sensual. It was something of a deep heartfelt emotion that they had produced by the Holy Spirit of God, that affection that ought to be in the family of God.

I want to say a word about that. I don't know what's going on in our church, but I feel a fresh wind blowing. Just by being together there's that affection that can only be produced by the Holy Spirit of God that I'm sensing personally and a freedom that I haven't sensed in a long, long time. I think this is exactly what this is all about. When you're in love with Christ and He produces a holy love in you for one another and you see one another, you just come alive because you found another believer and a friend and a brother or a sister in Christ. That's what it was all about. Paul admonished the church to greet one another that way.

In 1 Corinthians 16:20 Paul says, "All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss." 2 Corinthians 13:12 says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." 1 Thessalonians 5:26 reads, "Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss." Peter had the same idea. 1 Peter 5:14 says, "Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ."

When I was over in Romania some of that has carried into the church. Some of it has become very ritualistic. It's almost a formality when they walk up and kiss you on the cheek on both sides. You can tell the difference.

It's like a hug. You know, I was born and raised a hugger. Now some of you aren't and it just drives you nuts to be around somebody like me. My mother was somebody that hugged people. And I've got my mother in me like you would not believe. My mother never met a stranger. Somehow that was born inside of me. I've been in situations and go up and try to hug somebody and it's like, "Ooooooh, what are you doing?" Then it makes me think, "Golly, what am I doing? I don't think I really thought about it. I was just glad to see you."

There's a difference in a hug and a hug. There's a difference in a kiss and a kiss. That's what he's talking about. If you're walking in the power of the Holy Spirit of God you don't really worry about that kind of thing. He gives you integrity. He gives you discernment of times when to and times when not to. But that's something of the body of Christ somehow affectionately being drawn to one another. Both Paul and Peter said to affectionately greet one another. Peter calls it a kiss of love. I think what he's saying is that love just emanates between brother and sister in Christ. That's what he's talking about.

Go back to Romans 12:1-2. That's where it all flows out of. You cannot divorce anything from 12:3 on from 12:1-2. You cannot do it. If you're living dead to yourself and your flesh has been put down by saying "yes" to God, then God in you produces through you the lifestyle that has great integrity but is governed by deep compassion and affection for one another in the body of Christ. You can't help it. You just can't help it.

So Paul says, "You greet one another with a holy kiss." In the 21st century you love one another. Greet one another. Let people know that you love them. That's part of it, folks. When we walk on your church property, if you're walking in the spiral of the Holy Spirit of God, how can you walk by anybody and not put a hand out and shake their hand? How can you do that? I don't understand that. That's just part of coming together, the privilege of the family of God.

You say, "I want to be included in God's list." It's real easy. If God's life has come into you, all you've got to do is respond to His life that's in you with a word. That word is an attitude, and that attitude is saying "Yes, Lord. My hand is open. Lord do in and through me whatever it is You want to do." You may not be known down here, but buddy, you're known up there. One day when we stand before Him, we'll understand who it was that said "yes" to Him. That's what it's all about. The body of Christ requires all of us to be surrendered to Him, and then only He can get the glory for what He does through you and me.

I love you. This has ministered to me. It never gets out of me like it gets in me. But boy what a joy I have had going through just searching these people, these nobodies who God said were somebodies. That's the whole key. Moses spent forty years becoming a somebody. Then God had to give him forty more years to learn to be a nobody before God could ever use him. When you don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, you're a somebody to God but a nobody down here as far as people are concerned. That's the way you live. No reputation to yourself. All of the praise goes to Him.

Romans 16:17-18

Beware! - Part 1

Isn't it wonderful to be in the epilogue of a book and find gems of truth that you normally would not think were there? Sometimes we have the tendency, or I do, to just skip the last part of a book when the author's signing off. But oh, the truth that we have found in chapters 15 and 16 of Romans.

As a matter of fact, the title of this chapter is just a simple word, "Beware." I thank the Lord for the fact that Paul put this warning where he did at the end of this book. He's been talking about all of the faithful people whom God has used to effect the ministry to the Gentiles. Then he just simply stops for a moment and says, "By the way, I need you to focus on something." He gives the church in Rome a warning. One of the toughest things to understand about the Christian walk is that not everybody who comes to church, not everybody who hangs with Christians, not everybody who names the name of Christ, can be trusted. That's difficult because sometimes they use all the catch-all words. "I mean, he mentions Jesus and this person is awfully nice to me. This person must really be a believer." Be very careful. The Apostle Paul is going to tell us why. There are those who are out to bring division and destruction to the body of Christ.

Now Paul, in closing his letter, understands this and he wants no one to come in and compromise the truth that he has taught the Roman believers. He warns that there are going to be those who are going to try to do just that. As a matter of fact, I kind of feel like Paul has the same heart that he had back in Acts 20 when he called the elders of Ephesus down to the island named Miletus and he signed out with them, basically telling them he would not see them again. But he had the same burden there that he has here in writing the book of Romans.

Turn back to Acts 20:28. The Apostle Paul knew that as soon as he was out of sight there would be those who would come in and try to destroy the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ that he had taught them. I'm jumping right into a context but I want to do that to let you see the heartbeat that Paul had when he wrote this. He says in verse 28, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore [he tells these elders], be on alert."

You see the elders were assigned to watch over the flock, to guide them biblically, to guard them biblically, and to graze them upon God's Word. He tells them to look out. Verse 31 continues, "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears." Then he says in verse 32 what they can do. He says, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace [that's the message], which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

That same heartbeat that he had for these elders over the church at Ephesus is the same heartbeat he has now over the believers in Rome. Paul was aware that there would be those who would come in and try to compromise God's message of grace causing people to lose their freedom in Christ, the power to do as God wants them to do. He had taught them about sin in the first part of Romans. He had taught us and them that no man can earn his way into Heaven, that all men are born sinners, depraved. Nothing that I can do is worthy in God's eyes. That's what he taught us about sin. He taught them about salvation by grace, what man cannot do. Jesus, God's Son, came to this earth, became a man and died. He fulfilled the law and, not only that, but also paid our sin debt upon the cross, resurrected the third day and ascended. It's through Jesus Christ man is saved. When you put your faith into Jesus Christ what He did is now written to your account. You're no longer guilty. That's what it means to be justified by faith. He didn't drop the charges. He took the charges on Himself and paid the penalty for us.

He taught about sanctification. He taught us how the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, comes to live in a believer when he puts his faith into Jesus. It is that Spirit that sanctifies us, that makes us holy. The way we're saved is the way we're sanctified, by God's grace and by His work. He taught us about the security we have in Christ Jesus. He taught us that the Spirit of God is so in us that there's no way we can ever be separated. Therefore, God has already looked ahead and seen us glorified. Even though we're in the process, God already sees it finished. We're secure, as Ephesians says, all the way through. We're kept and guarded until the day of redemption. He taught us about the sovereignty of God and salvation. Have you ever seen these little bumper stickers, "I Found Jesus"? I'm sorry, friend. No, you didn't. Jesus found you. That's Romans 9 through 11. He taught us that He knew us before we were ever born. He taught us about serving Christ in Romans 12 and as we serve Him presenting our bodies as living sacrifices in turn we will become sensitive and we'll become servant hearted to others.

That's been the message that he's given to the Roman believers. He says that there are going to be those who will come in that will seek to undermine the message that I have preached to you. His central focus was Jesus. I guarantee He becomes the attack of all the deceivers who are around us. Paul says to beware and be on the alert. You know, this is a pattern that Satan has used all

through history. In the Old Testament there were false prophets. In the New Testament there are false teachers. If you've ever studied the book of Galatians you know that somebody had gotten into the Galatian church. Paul had to write them and say, "Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" He had to straighten out the mess. Somebody got among them and said, "Grace is not enough. Jesus is not enough. You need to be circumcised. You need to do this. You need to do that." The people lost their freedom and went right back under the bondage to their flesh.

In the book of Colossians, Paul had to write to the church of Colossae. The Gnostic heresy had gotten among them. The Gnostics say that Jesus is not our redeemer. The Gnostics said that there were other ways of salvation, through knowledge, mystical knowledge, and this knowledge does not come from the Word of God. It came from the mystics of that day. Paul had to write and untangle the mess that these false teachers had made in the church of Colossae. He did so by bringing them back to their sufficiency in Jesus Christ.

In the church of Thessalonica Paul had to write to them to help correct the area in their eschatology. Somebody came in amongst them and told them they were in the day of the Lord. A lot of tribulation and a lot of affliction was going on at that time, and this person said the reason was because they were in the day of the Lord. "The wrath of God is falling on you." Paul had to write and say, "No. As believers you're not destined for wrath. Receive the lamb. God's wrath fell upon the lamb. If you have received the lamb, the wrath is not destined for you. The day of the Lord could not have in any way come."

He had to write Timothy and tell Timothy of the deceivers and false teachers who would come in latter days. It's always been this way, folks. So it's nothing new. What Paul is simply saying is that when the truth is preached, Satan always has his people who somehow come in to deceive others and to destroy and erode what that truth has done in people's hearts.

You know, heresy is kind of like water that runs up against a dam. If that dam is not carefully inspected and over and over reinforced, that water begins to wear on that concrete. After a while it'll wear a hole in it and that little trickle of water that first comes through is just the signal of a flood that is on its way. That's the way false doctrine is in a church. You crack the door open. You let a trickle of it get in and there's a flood behind it that's on its way. That's never been any different. So the Apostle Paul says, "You beware of these false teachers who are coming amongst you."

Now the protection that we have, and I hope you've heard this, is Romans 12:1-2. If I'll live daily surrendering my life to Jesus, renewing my mind in the Word of God and allowing Him to transform my character, then God's going to put a grid in my mind through which I can make decisions and have great discernment as to what I'm hearing, whether it be of God or whether it isn't of God. You remember back when the contemporary music scene came along? I wasn't a real fan of that. I like classical music. I like music that has great integrity. I love orchestra music. I love that kind of thing.

Well, my kids started wanting to go hear some of the concerts that were going on. We had some long, lengthy discussions about it, and I came to realize a lot of it is just flat out taste. I understood that. I understand when I was growing up there was a certain kind of music that we liked. I liked bluegrass. We finally came to a place that we realized that yes a lot of it is just simply what you like. But we came to a place that if the method of music destroys the message that you're trying to get across, automatically it's wrong. The message that you're getting across must somehow be documented by God's Word. Then you have the discernment to realize this is of God. It may sound good, but it's not of God. Unless you develop a walk in the Word of God, unless you develop that grid in your mind, then you will not have the proper discernment to know if this is right or if this is wrong.

That's the same exact thing Paul has been telling us in Romans. You may not give the Word of God the time of day. If you're not going to live out of the Word, you are a target for deception. I'll go a step further. You're already deceived, and you don't even know it. You have bought into a lie. It's no wonder you're not living in the freedom of Christ. Only when you come to the Word can you even know what is of Him and what is not of Him.

With that in mind, there is a protection that Paul has already told us we have from chapter 12 up to where we are right now in Romans. Understand why Paul brings this warning. There are two things that I want to show you in verses 17 and 18. Let's read these verses and then we'll take them apart. First of all we're going to talk about what these false teachers do and secondly what they're like. It's a simple message but something I think we need to hear. Verse 17 says, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."

That little word in the first phrase there, "keep your eye on," is the word skopeo. We get "scope" from that word. As a matter of fact, we get the words "telescope" and "microscope" also. Now, I'm going to spend some time on this word because I want you to understand what he's saying. It's not a casual glance. It's not something you think of here or maybe there. It's something that's on your mind all of the time. Who is coming against the message of God's truth and robbing people of the freedom they have in Jesus Christ?

Jesus used this word over in Luke 11:35. He warns them and says, "Make sure that what you're calling light is truly light and not darkness." He says in verse 35, "Then watch out [the word "watch out" is skopeo] that the light in you may not be darkness." In other words, you make sure you give close attention to this. You examine it greatly.

Paul uses the word to the Corinthian believers to tell them to examine the things that are unseen not the things that are seen. He says in 2 Corinthians 4:18, "while we look not at the things which are seen [the word "look not" is skopeo] but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Paul uses the same word in Galatians 6:1. It's in the context when you see your brother in a wrong and then he says for you to go to him. Verse 1 says, "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; (now watch this) each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted." "Looking to" is the word skopeo.

What I'm trying to get across is this is not a casual glance. This is a part of the routine activity of a believer living out of Romans 12:1-2. Protect the doctrine. Be careful about the doctrine. There are people who say doctrine doesn't matter. Oh yes it does. If you're not going to base your life and your faith on what God's Word says, you're going to start basing it on experience. You're going to start basing it on emotion. You're going to start basing it on what is nothing more than a lie from the devil himself, and that will rob you of the freedom you have in Jesus Christ.

Paul said to the Philippian believers in Philippians 2:4, "do not merely look out [there's the word skopeo] for your own personal interests but also for the interest of others." I guarantee you when it comes to your personal interests you don't just give them a glance. It's something you pay close attention to them. That's the word he uses.

He also says to the Philippian believers to watch those people who are obedient to Christ. It says in Philippians 3:17, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." This is in the present tense so this is something that is to be done every day of our life. Close examination, paying close attention. Is this what God's Word says? I want to tell you something. Deception is really just that. It's deception. I'm not deceived to something that is obvious. I'm deceived by something which is so close to the truth it looks real. Therefore, I've got to pay close attention to what I'm hearing.

The phrase, "those who cause dissensions and hindrances," in Romans 16:17 to me is very important to understand. The word "cause," and I know I'm oversimplifying it, means happen. In other words, these hindrances, these dissensions wouldn't be there if someone was not behind them. I don't know how many times I've had pastors come to me and say, "There's division in my church. There are factions in my church. There are people who are taking a stand against what I'm teaching. What's going on?" I can tell them what's going on. Somebody in that church filled with the devil himself is coming against the truth and causing people to turn astray. It goes back to somebody. The devil uses people just like God uses people. And the way he uses them is to bring division and dissensions and hindrances.

The word "dissension" comes from two words in the Greek, dis, which means twice, again, and stasis, which means to place yourself or here it means dissension. People who cause factions within the church take a stand against the truth of God. Now, we're to keep an eye on people who are causing this kind of thing, people who are outside the Word of God who are leading people astray.

It's interesting to me that the Apostle Paul uses that word "dissensions" in the line-up of what we can attribute to the flesh in Galatians 5:20. This is in the list of things that are works of the flesh. He says, "idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions." It's right in the list there of what the flesh does. So we see immediately the outcome of what these people do.

The word "hindrances" is the word skandalon. I want to camp out on that for a minute. Skandalon is the word that really means the trigger of a trap. Now, get this in your mind here. There's another word for trap but this word here means the actual thing that sets the trap off. Have you ever tried to catch a mouse around your house? You know how you pull that trigger back and it has a plate on it and that little plate is where you put the bait. Now, don't put cheese on it because mice have been around for a while. Put peanut butter on it. Crunchy peanut butter, they love the stuff. You put that on there. A mouse comes up and the moment that mouse touches that bait it's on a hair trigger and immediately the trap comes shut.

You've got to think in your mind, skandalon, that little hair trigger trap that is being set among believers in order to deceive them, to snare them. The word skandalon carries with it the idea of not just being entrapped but also the idea of the conduct of one who has been entrapped. Now that tells you something. What Paul is saying is when you start seeing people act against the truth, when you start seeing people in factions rising up within the church, pinpoint it. Somebody in that place has fed a lie to somebody else and has entrapped them in their snare. As a result their behavior has radically changed from what it used to be.

Well, in verse 17 it says, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them." What's the teaching that they had learned from Paul and from other

apostles? We really don't know who had an affect upon those people in Rome. Paul said, "That which has been taught to you by God's anointed, you adhere to, you stay to. These people are going to teach contrary against the teaching in which you have learned." Paul says to turn away from it. The word, "turn away from," *ekklino*, means turn aside, turn away, shun them, walk away from them. One of the most dangerous things you can do, folks, is when somebody walks up to your door professing to have the truth, is allow them into your home. The scripture says don't even sit down and fellowship with them. Get away from them. Run from them. Turn away from them. Because unless you are more solid than what you think you are, some of these people can tie you around a tree. The Mormons have said that Southern Baptists are their biggest prey because they don't have a clue about what they believe.

These people are rampant, folks. They're everywhere. The spectrum of false people is so broad. The way that is narrow leads to life. But there's a way that is broad that leads to destruction. You can just lap all kinds of deceivers into that. You can take a legalist in a church and put him into that category. You can take the antinomians that Paul dealt with in Rome and put them in that category. You can take the cultists, they're all in that category. They're trying to get us to believe a lie that leads us away from the message of grace that leads apart from the centrality of Christ. Immediately that will imprison us back again to our flesh. He says for you get away from them. You shun them. You turn away from them. This is the way we're to treat them because we now know what they do. They're there to cause dissension and ensnare people in their trap. Watch the radical change in a person's behavior who has been deceived and all of a sudden they become hateful. All of a sudden they become arrogant and defensive and everything else. Look out. Somebody's fed them a lie they have bought into. They have been ensnared in the trap of a false teacher.

Well, secondly, he shows you what they're like. First of all he tells you what they do. Secondly, he shows you what they're like. Verse 18 says, "For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." So the men Paul is talking about are men who are out to deceive the believers, and they're good at what they do. Folks, I can't get this across enough to you. They are good at what they do. I want to tell you something. When it's false doctrine, they have their own grid. It's not the grid of the Word of God, and they will not allow you into it. As a matter of fact, they will not answer your questions. They want you to answer theirs. They're always on the offensive. You can never get them on the defensive. They're good at what they do. They have rehearsed this and rehearsed this. We have got to know the Word of God, folks. We have got to know it.

He says, "For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites." Now the word "slave" is the word we have seen already in Romans. Paul says, "I'm a slave to Jesus Christ." They're not. They're quite different than what we're talking about what we should be. They're slaves of their appetites. The word for "appetite" is an interesting word. It's the word *koilia*, which comes from the word meaning hollow. You get the sense of the word that they can't ever be filled. Their appetites are insatiable. They keep trying to fill them, but they just won't get filled.

Isn't that the way it is? Any time we go after flesh, it's always insatiable. It says in Proverbs, "The eyes of man are never satisfied." That's exactly right. If you're not choosing to live Romans 12:1-2, then you're choosing to satisfy your flesh. If you're satisfying your flesh, you're not satisfied right now. The more you get, the more you want. There's no end to it. But when you are satisfied by the Spirit, that's where real satisfaction comes, when you obey Him. That's what the word "blessed" means. It means to be fully, totally satisfied from within.

Well, in Philippians 3:18, Paul says the same thing. He says, "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ." That's what all of these are, enemies of the cross. Verse 19 continues, "whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things." The King James translates the word "appetite" as "belly." That doesn't necessarily mean that every fat person you see is a false teacher. What he's talking about is the appetites of man, the appetites of the flesh, that which they are seeking to satisfy, however they're doing it. Metaphorically, that's what it means.

In no way is a false teacher associated with our Christ. Now, here's what I want you to see. When you're dealing with a cultist, when you're dealing with a person who's totally against everything we represent, remember something. They do not even know our Christ, but they will always mention Christ. I want you to hear this. Some of you are so gullible. I heard a lady one day tell me, "Wayne, don't make such strong statements about some of these people because they talk about Jesus and they cry when they do it and they're so sweet." I thought, "Give me a place to throw up." Is that where we are? Do we think that just because somebody sweetly says is and mentions Jesus he's got to be a believer. Come on! Wake up! Get the Word in your brain and put that grid in there. If it doesn't match the Word you get away from those people. Because they have an agenda, friend, and you are on their agenda.

The liberal mentions Christ. Everybody used to say they're liberal. I say they're lost. A liberal mentions Christ, but the Christ of the liberal is not our Christ because he's not virgin born. Our Christ is virgin born. I want to tell some of these young people, when you get in an academic setting in a college or university, and someone walks in with seventeen degrees behind him, dragging them

down the hall and makes some statement that comes right out of the pit of hell, don't buy it. What does God say in His Word. Understand, you've got to beware there are people who are out to tear down the Christ of the Christianity that we have. In their academic way they say Christ was so good even His followers mistook Him and thought He was God. He was the world's greatest ethical teacher the liberals say. He performed no miracles. The miracles were just exaggerations of events that could be explained by natural causes. He did not rise from the dead. So in no way is the Christ of the liberals our Christ. But they'll mention Christ. They will mention Him.

The Mormons mention Christ. Have you seen their commercials? They say Jesus was the Son of Adam God and Mary. He was a polygamist who was secretly married to the Mary's. Remember there are several Mary's in scripture? His atonement had only to do with the sins of Adam and is not sufficient for our own personal sin. In no way is this our Christ.

The Jehovah's Witnesses mention Christ. Oh yes. He was merely a son of God. Before He came into the Word they say He was only a created angel, namely Michael, the archangel. When He entered this life, He became a perfect being and nothing more. The ransom He offers does not guarantee eternal life to any man. He did not rise from the dead. According to the Watchtower we do not know what happened to the body of Jesus in Joseph's tomb. Huh! In no way, friend, is this our Christ. We know exactly what happened to Him. He got up and walked out. That's what happened. And He ascended one day off the Mount of Olives and the angels said, "As you've seen Him leave, you're going to see Him come back to this earth." We know exactly what happened to the body of Jesus. It rose from the dead.

The Christian Scientists mention Christ. He is merely a divine ideal. His blood was of no more avail when it was shed on the cross than when it flowed through His veins. He accommodated Himself to the immature ideas of His contemporaries and made great concessions to popular ignorance. In no way is this our Christ!

The Spiritualists mention a Christ. He's nothing more than a medium of high order. He was not divine but is now an advanced spirit in the sixth sphere. Lord, help us. His death had no atoning value. He was simply a Jewish enthusiast who met an untimely death. In no way is this our Christ.

Who is our Christ? He's the second person of the Godhead. He was supernaturally conceived of the Holy Ghost and was born of the virgin Mary. He lived an immaculate perfect life, claimed to be God, and proved that claim. His teachings were sublime, perfect, flawless, and He performed amazing miracles. He foretold His death exactly and was crucified just as He predicted. His death was vicarious. He suffered for the sins of the world and He alone can impart eternal life to those who trust in Him. He foretold His resurrection and rose again, physically and literally, the third day just like He said He would. He ascended, bodily, into heaven. He is seated today at God's right hand from whence He will return to judge all men. This is our Christ. We must understand that.

The only God a false teacher knows is the god of his own self. That's all he knows. He'll name Christ. He'll come in among us. But he is directly turned against the message of God's grace and the Christ that came to effect it for us. He says, "For such men are slaves, not our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." The word "smooth" there is the word that means literally, fairly. It comes from the word that means kind or obliging and the word lego, which means to say.

You know, Paul warned Timothy. He said, "In the last days people are going to heap up teachers for themselves that tickle the ears." I'm finding that. There's some people who will not listen to sound doctrine. All they want is emotional experience. Folks, I'm telling you. There's a broad spectrum of what is false. I think the specific thing he's talking about are cultists and people who lead us away from Christ. But there are others who fit into that broad spectrum. They have that smooth and flattering speech.

The word "flattering" is eulogia. We see that in a good way of the praise that we give to God. It's to speak well of Him. These people tell you anything you want to hear. That's what he's saying. Do you want to feel better? Help yourself. A lot of places around here make you feel better. The word of God offends my flesh every time I hear it because the flesh wars against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh that we would not do the things we should. It means to flatter, say nice things. By their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

I think the heart, there, is a key word. It's the control center. It's what makes us what we are. It's going to affect our choices. It's going to affect our emotions. It's going to affect everything about us. They go right for the heart. The hearts that he's talking is the unsuspecting, akakos. It means without any inherent evil in them. What he's talking about are precious people. That's why we as elders are there to protect the doctrine because there are precious people out there. Sheep, they're tender. Some of them don't know the Word of God. I'm sorry to say that but they don't know it. They are the targets. They don't have a motive to leave and get something false. They just want all that God can give to them and these people come along and offer them something that hasn't got to do anything with God. They buy it and therefore are ensnared.

The first thing you watch for is their behavior that is radically different than what we've learned from chapter 12 through chapter 15. There is no more love. There is no more sensitivity. There is no more submission. There is no more servant heart. They draw within,

factly stand aside and become a division in the body of Christ. They say just what you want to hear and lure you into their trap.

What's our safeguard? Romans 12:1-2. That's our safeguard. That's where we've been coming from. Just live that way and you'll have the discernment and the integrity to know what is and what isn't. You'll also have the love for these people but you'll have the wisdom to turn away from them. You won't hate them. You will love them, very deeply love them. Because that love is in you. God's put that within you. God loves them but He's telling us how to deal with them.

Years ago I did a camp down the Delta of Mississippi which is an area known for a type of snake that is very poisonous and very dangerous. I don't if you've ever been around a cottonmouth moccasin. They're mean. They're not very long. They're short, stubby snakes. As a matter of fact, in the middle they get sometimes as big as a fruit jar. Now they're big snakes, and when they open their mouth it's like cotton. It's white as cotton inside their mouth. I don't even like to think about it. They're very, very dangerous. There are some dead people in Mississippi who would have sworn they can't bite you underwater. Huh!

Anyway, I was doing a camp in the Delta. There was a twenty acre lake around this camp and this is where the kids would swim and canoe, etc. It was two weeks before the summer camp session started. While I was there two of my friends said, "Wayne, we want you to help us. We're going down to the lake and we're going to kill as many moccasins as we can tonight. We want you to go with us." "Yeah, man, I'm always ready for an adventure." I always have been. That's why the scars are all over me.

We were in a canoe. None of us weighed less than two hundred pounds. Now, have you been in a canoe lately? I mean, you know, a canoe is made to turn over. I'm in the middle sitting cross-legged Indian style. We've got this huge guy as big as I am on the front and this guy almost as big in the back. Now, I've got a twenty gauge double barrel shotgun with birdshot because you use that smaller shot so you can kill those snakes. The guy behind me has a 357 Magnum. The guy in the front had a paddle and a prayer and that's it.

We would go around and be real quiet for a long time. Then suddenly, we would turn on a spotlight. I want to tell you, folks. What I saw would just make you cringe. Those snakes were all in those bushes. Snakes were everywhere. I mean, three and four and five moccasins, cottonmouth, up in these bushes. They were within four feet of us. We'd go around and we'd try to get them to drop off the branch so we could shoot them. We shot fourteen in forty-five minutes.

There was one particular snake that I won't ever forget. They're not afraid of you. They'll come right at you. He started coming towards us and, I mean, we're only drawing about two inches of water. I mean, all he had to do was just roll over into the boat. He's coming right at us. I've got a double barrel shotgun trying to find him. Have you ever tried to shoot in the night when you can't see the end of the barrel? I couldn't find the end of the barrel. I hadn't shot yet. The wind picked up and started blowing that canoe towards the snake. Gary's sitting in the front saying, "Shoot, shoot!" I said, "I can't see." He says, "I don't care. Shoot the thing." I shot and, boy, water splashed all over the place. The light was still on it, and he's still coming in. That's when I discovered the fellow behind me had that 357 Magnum pistol. It's amazing that I didn't walk out across that lake. I mean, boom! He shot the snake right by the boat.

I tell you that story because all around the shallow part of that water were the poisonous snakes that could take away your life. You see, the water of the Word, folks, is not meant for folks to stay in the shallows. I promise you, some of you haven't got enough biblical doctrine to get in out of the rain. You are a dead ringer for a deceiver. You're a target. Folks, that's why the Word of God is so precious. When you get down in the deep water you don't find cotton mouth moccasins. You find them in the shallow water. The false teachers are those snakes around the water. Look out. Somebody's out to get your mind and put you back under the bondage to your flesh and keep you from enjoying Jesus until He comes back again. Watch with a microscope. Pay attention. Do you know what you believe? Are you standing on it?

Romans 16:19-20

Beware! Part 2

If you could sum up everything that Paul is saying in these last verses and really the whole book of Romans, it's this: Our protection against any deception the devil throws at us is our submission to Christ and our obedience to His Word. Do we understand that? If I'm not submitted to Him, if I'm not obedient to His Word, then I'm not protected from the deception that is around me. James 4:7 says, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." You see, our resistance to the devil and all the deception he throws at us is our submission unto God.

That's why you cannot teach Romans 16 except out of the context that started back in Romans 12. If you just jumped into chapter 16 it's just a group of rules; it's just a group of verses. But go back to Romans 12:1-2 one more time. You've got to get the context down. This is the well that all of the rest of the book flows out of. The first eleven chapters are on the grace of God. Then from

chapter 12 on it centers on the responsibility that man has because of grace. It's a twofold thing. In verse 1 of Romans 12 we find we are to surrender, first of all, to Christ. We don't surrender to His Word; we surrender to Him. That's the first surrender we have. He says in verse 1, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Now, Christ is God. He's the highlight and the focus of Romans. So we submit, first of all, to Christ. Secondly, once we're submitted to Him, presented to Him, then we submit to His Word. It says in verse 2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." The mind is the facilitator of sin that resides in our flesh. In other words, as a man thinks that's the way he's going to live. Therefore, we have got to get our minds renewed, totally renovated, by what God says and how God wants us to think. So first I surrender to Christ. Secondly I surrender to His Word. And with that surrender and obedience what results is a protection against false doctrine, a protection against deception that's all around me.

Well, let's look at Romans 16:19. The second thing Paul warns us about is to beware of the fleshly evil that's around us that seeks to seduce and destroy us. Verses 19-20 say, "For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil. And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you." We're going to focus on those two verses.

The believers who lived there in Rome were at the very heart of worldly and sophisticated things. There was always the danger that these things would creep back into the church. Into Rome's markets poured the multitudes and the merchandise of the world. You've got to remember what we're dealing with here. You're talking about a Rome that was rich, worldly city in the day that this was written. Her citizens and nobles were rich. They were privileged. They were polished. They were everything that you would think that everybody would want. Vice was so prevalent that it was even lifted up to a higher level by putting it into the pagan temples of that day. They had prostitutes who were called priestesses in that day in the pagan temples. They drug immorality into their religion. This was a very, very pagan area.

The believers Paul is writing to have come out of all of it. But Paul is warning them that they may not have realized the lure that their flesh still had to this kind of stuff. In other words, you can't come into Christ and bring this garbage with you. When you come into Christ, it's a brand new life. It's a life of obeying Him and obeying His word. You cannot allow this stuff to get into your life. This is what he's dealing with here in verse 19 of chapter 16. He says, "I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil."

The term "wise" is a *sophos*. This term doesn't mean just to know about something. All of us know about good. We studied it in Romans enough. But to be wise according to what is good, that's a different thing. To be wise means to know how to appropriate what you know to be good. In other words, it has to do with the way you live. If a wise person is present amongst us today, then it'll be seen in the way you live. If you know about good and you're not living that way, you're not a wise person. You're a very unwise person. It's not just the knowledge about something. It's the ability to appropriate what you know and live out what you know about good.

Now the word for good is *agathos*. There are two words for good. There's *kalos* which means inherent good, constitutional good. But then there is this word, *agathos*. It's the word that has more to do with that which comes out of the other. It is deeds. It's that which is useful and profitable, that which is spiritually beneficial in your life. Now Paul has taught us about this good in Romans. He says you be wise accordingly. He could have put it another way. You live out what you know. Stop talking about it and live it. It's a wise person who understands how to appropriate this in the day by day situations he faces.

Let's look and see how the word "good" is used in Romans. Turn back to 2:7. That's the first place I want you to look. The Apostle Paul uses the word and refers to the behavior of a person who has inherited eternal life. Now if you want to know who the Christians are, watch the way they live. Now that doesn't mean perfection. It means predictability. When a person begins to seek after these things it doesn't mean that he doesn't fail. It doesn't mean he doesn't sin. That person's heart is geared into wanting God to produce this good in his life. Romans 2:7 reads, "to those who by perseverance in doing good [now this is the living out of this] seek for glory and honor and immortality [and what's the result?], eternal life." So there's an eternal result to those who are living good. This is the lifestyle of the righteous.

In verse 10 of chapter 2 he says, "but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." So it's a lifestyle, a behavior, of those who have inherited eternal life. Secondly, it can no way be produced by the flesh. Now, this is what separates religion from Christianity. Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship. There's a huge difference here. As we know God through His Son Jesus Christ and His Spirit now living in us, we obey Christ. His Spirit produces in us the good that we're required. It's not something we can do. You couldn't do it before you got save. You can't do it after you get saved. It's what God has to do. That's why I have to be obedient to Christ and submissive to His Word.

Look at this in Romans 3:12. It uses another word. It is translated good, and it's synonymous with it. It says, "All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good." I can hear the religious person say, "What do you mean none who does good? Why I give money to the church. I send money to missions. I've been on mission trip. I come to church. I'm here, aren't I? I do good things." Now, hold on now. Isaiah would say right back to you, "Our righteousness [or better translated 'our goodness'] is filthy rags in the sight of God." We can strut sitting down. Don't start thinking you can do good. You cannot do good. Your flesh cannot produce good. That's what kept you lost for so long. Your flesh could not get out from that dilemma. We have to be saved, delivered and rescued. Once you're saved, you still can't produce that good apart from loving Christ and obeying His Word.

Look in Romans 7:18. Here's Paul confessing the fact that he discovers how wicked his flesh still is even after he's saved. He says, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh: for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." So when you think about this good we're required to be about, to be wise toward, we have to remember we can't produce it. It comes out of obeying Christ, obeying His Word. God produces this good through us.

Thirdly, it's the spiritual, profitable outcome of every circumstance that we ever go through. A lot of believers don't see this yet because they're not yet living obedient to Christ and to His Word. In any circumstance you go through God produces a profitable and beneficial spiritual result in your life. Romans 8:28 says, "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."

If you ever want to examine the will of God, this good is the very quality of the will of God that Paul is talking about here. Look in Romans 12:2 again. It says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is [What is the will of God?], that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

The fifth thing, it's the lifestyle of the one who is filled with the Spirit. In Romans 12:9 he says, "Let love be without hypocrisy". That's a Hebraism. There's no verb there. That just raises it up and makes it that much more emphatic. When God the Holy Spirit produces love in us there is no pretense about it. It goes on to say in the same verse, "Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good." That word "cling" is in the passive voice. When I'm obeying Christ and obeying His word, the Holy Spirit of God glues me – that's what the word means – He glues me to the attitude of only that which is good, spiritual, profitable, and beneficial to others.

Sixthly, it's what overcomes the pain, the injury that we receive when somebody else is not living toward the good. They're living out of the evil in their life. Look in Romans 12:21. He says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." You can go on and on and on. This good is that which springs out of the heart of God Himself. It's what God does through us. Paul says to be wise concerning that which is good. Don't just know about it. Practice it. Live it. Appropriate it. How? Romans 12:1-2.

Let me ask you a question. What is it in your life that you're holding on to that's not Jesus? That tells you immediately that you don't understand what Paul's saying. You've been deceived. Do you think it's worth holding on to? Do you think it provides you anything that's worthwhile apart from Jesus Christ? That's what he's trying to say.

Paul goes on to saying 16:19, "I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil". I love this. You've got to get excited about it. He didn't say be unaware of evil; but he said, "innocent in what is evil." Now there's a way to do that. I'm going to try to show you. The word for evil there is kakos. It's the word that means inherent evil, fleshly evil. It always has to do with the flesh and it's out of this kind of well, out of this kind of source, this fleshly evil, that evil deeds come.

There's another word for evil. But that comes out of this constitutional, inherent evil, that which our flesh has inherited. He says, "You be aware of it, but you be innocent in what is evil." Whereas the good things that bless others and are beneficial to us come out of good and spring out of God and out of our relationship with Him, all the evil things that we do and are done to us spring out of this inherent fleshly evil, whether we're lost or whether saved.

If you want to see the deeds and how they come out of that, look back in Romans 1:29-30. I want to show you the pit out of which evil deeds come. This word, kakos, is inherent evil, that which is constitutionally evil. It's out of this that all the garbage comes, from which we are to die to our flesh daily. It says in Romans 1:29-30, "being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil [That's the word. Look at what comes after that.]; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents." There's all kinds of wickedness that comes out of this wellspring of the flesh. The Apostle Paul says, "Hey, you be aware of this garbage, but don't you be part of it. You be innocent in what is evil."

Well, look over in Romans 2:9. The destiny of people who habitually live out of this source is perdition and tribulation. It says, "There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek." Now, again, remember this is what the flesh produces. We've already gone over that. Romans 7:19 says, "For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish." Verse 21 says, "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes

to do good."

Now, this evil is all around us, folks. I'm not sure we're catching it. I'm not sure we understand how wicked this world is and how wicked our flesh is and how devoted to this wickedness our flesh really is. The only answer is to say "yes" to Christ. The only answer is to surrender to His Word. Otherwise, we have bought the lie and our lives are reflecting it every day of our life. There is nothing the flesh offers that is worthwhile to me, ever. There's nothing the flesh offers.

In Romans 12:9 he says, "Let love be without hypocrisy." Listen, this love the Holy Spirit produces in you is without pretense. It says, "Abhor what is evil." When you come to church sometimes, does this happen to you? We're praising God, and you're thinking, "This is where I want to be. This is what I really covet in my life." Then somehow a thought goes through your mind that's lustful or something else and suddenly your flesh, something inside of you is just repulsed by it. You say, "God, get that thought out of my mind." Has that ever happened to you? That's exactly what Paul's saying. When you're pursuing good, you can't stand the garbage that the flesh offers. That's the whole point. This evil, this fleshly evil, whether it comes in the lost world or the saved world, we still have a body of flesh to deal with. Paul says, "You be innocent to what is evil." As a matter of fact, it's because of this evil that Romans 13 says that God had to appoint governmental authorities. You don't like the government. Well, friend, it's because of our flesh and the evil of flesh that God had to put some kind of order in this world after the original sin. So we realize that this stuff is all around us.

Paul says, "Don't be unaware of it, but be innocent." Now the word "innocent" is a great word. It comes from two Greek words. The first word means without, without something. The second word is the word, *kerannumi*, which means mixture. In other words, don't have any of this garbage, this evil, mixed in to your lifestyle. Here's where the downside comes, folks, if you're not living out of the Word, if you're not living daily submitted to Christ. "Well, Brother Wayne, you're a preacher. You get to do this all the time. We work for a living. We don't have time to do that." Hey, don't tell that to me, friend. Tell that to God, because you'll definitely answer to Him one day. I'll tell you another thing; you have become so deceived already you don't even know it. That's what he's trying to warn the Roman church about.

Listen. Think about what I'm saying. Where's Christianity in Rome today? Paul tried to warn them of that. Don't let the wealth of the world, don't let the glamour or the world somehow seduce you. It'll somehow destroy you in your walk with God. It'll take every bit of joy away from you. It's a subtle type of thing the way evil gets into us, folks. You try to coexist with it, and you're dead in the water. The Apostle Paul says, "Yeah, you better watch out for those false teachers, but I'll tell you something much more serious: you better watch out for the false doctrine of the world that does nothing but deceive and deceive and deceive." Once you buy it you'll find your walk goes downhill from that point on.

What is it that you really want to defend in your walk? You can always tell a man by what he defends, what he spends his time trying to convince others is right. Look out! That's what's wrong in your life if it's not Christ and if it's not His Word. A boat in water is by design. Water in a boat is disaster. You can't mix the water into the boat, friend. You can't put water in the boat, but you can put the boat in the water.

Now, the way you know about the evil that he's talking about here and not be a part of it is to practice doing good. The more I obey Christ, the more I obey His Word, the more I become sensitive to the evil that's around me. The less I obey Christ, the less I obey His Word, the more insensitive I become. Therefore, I'm made wide-open by the lie, you see. But the more I'm living in His Word, the more I'm obeying Christ the more open I am.

They tell me in banks that they don't get the employees to study counterfeit money. You don't have to know what a counterfeit dollar bill looks like. They get them to study what a real dollar bill is all about. And the more they study what is real, the more they become aware of that which is unreal. That's what Paul says. Be wise in doing good. Get after it, man. Like the commercial, just do it. "You've studied Romans," he would say to us today. You know what Paul says is good. Get after it, man. What are you waiting on? Live it. And as you do, you'll become innocent to what is evil. You're not unaware, but they'll be no mixture of evil that's in your life. That's what he's saying.

Beware of the false teachers who seek to seduce and deceive you. Beware of the fleshly evil that is around us that seeks to seduce and destroy us. But the third thing I want you to see is in verse 20. Be aware not beware; you don't have to worry about him – be aware that Satan is the source of all this evil that we're talking about. He's the source. Do you understand that? Look again at verse 20. "And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you." I hope you're aware that if you could pull the curtain back behind all the false doctrine in this world, behind all the evil and the temptation of this world, you would see old sluefoot back there working the controls. He's behind every bit of it. He's masked by what our flesh looks for so we can't see the other side, the flip side of where that evil comes from. Paul points to him right here.

You know, Satan lurks behind all the systems of deception that plague mankind. I read a statement on this. He's the weaver of all the various, religious delusions with which fallen men clothe the nakedness of their soul. Do you want to know who's in back of it?

It's Satan, himself. No wonder, after dealing with all this, Paul unmask the culprit behind it all. Not only is Satan behind the false teachers, but he is also behind the false teachings of this world, the false message this world offers you that says anything would be better than Christ. He's the weaver of all the deception the world offers.

Verse 20, again, reads "And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." I hope you understand that Satan is the one on a leash. Do we understand that? That's one of the reasons I play him down. People say, "You ought to be more respectful of Satan." No sir. I'm going to be much more respectful of Jesus Christ who has defeated Satan. I'm not going to focus on darkness; I'm going to focus on light until Jesus comes back. What's wrong with us, man? He's on a leash. He's allowed to do a lot of things right now, but we have the victory in Christ Jesus. If you spend all your life trying to figure out what the devil's going to do, you've missed the joy of finding out what Christ wants to do in your life. So we're going to focus on him.

Have you ever watched a dog on a leash and that dog takes after a car or whatever and forgets he's on a leash? Have you ever watched that? There's a reckoning coming in his life. He doesn't understand that. That leash that he completely ignores while he's roaming the yard is something that's going to catch him by surprise one day. As a matter of fact, the word "soon" has within it suddenly without any warning. He's running and all of a sudden that leash runs out. It just jerks his feet out from under him. Well, we've got a message for Satan. He's on a leash, and our God is one day going to jerk that chain and he's going to find out who's in control of this world. Understand that. He will soon crush Satan.

The word "crush" is the word that means to just obliterate, suntribo. It's the word that means to just smash, to destroy. It has the idea of taking something and mashing it. Have you ever taken a grain of something and rolled it between your fingers. It just mashes it. It just obliterates it. Have you ever done that? That's exactly the word. He's going to take him and just crush him. That's exactly what Genesis 3:15 said, wasn't it? As God spoke to Satan. He said, "You're going to bruise his heel, the seed of woman but he is going to bruise or crush your head." Which would you rather have? A bruise on the heel or a crushed head? That's what Jesus is going to do to Satan. It's going to come.

He said, "Soon the God of peace will do that." I checked out that phrase, "the God of peace." That's a great phrase. Paul used it in 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians. He uses it over in Corinthians and Philipians, but the place I found that's the most meaningful to me is Hebrews 13:20. This is the God that's going to crush Satan one day. It says in verse 20 of Hebrews 13, "Now the God of peace [same phrase], who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord." That's the God who's going to crush Satan one day under our feet.

The word "soon" is where you have problems. All of us do. Anytime you refer to time you've got to remember something: time is nothing to God who's writing this. If you go back to when this was written, they would have said, "Next week He's going to do it." Next week rolls by. A century rolls by. Two thousand years roll by and here we are 2,000 years later and we say, "Soon, well when?" But remember a day is a thousand years to God. One day when we're in eternity and look back it's going to be a speck and we're going to realize what He meant by soon.

As a matter of fact, in Revelation 6:9 it says, "And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' [Here's their answer.] And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they would rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also." So when you think of soon don't think of soon the way we think of it. Think of it the way God thinks of it because He's timeless. He doesn't see it the way we see it.

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

When I was growing up we had a cat. My sister wanted a cat. My mother got her one because my mom was that kind of mother. I named it Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great was the wimpiest animal that had ever been created. It just laid around and did nothing. I mean, it was good for nothing. They had a dog next door that was named Fritz. It was a boxer bulldog. When it walked, the muscles would ripple down his shoulders. It was a mean looking dog. Well, we used to throw Alexander out the door just to make him do something, walk around, do anything, instead of laying around eating all the time.

Well, it wasn't long until I heard the worse turmoil on our porch that you've ever heard in your life. I walked out and Alexander had gotten cornered by Fritz. He had it backed up against the wall. This good-for-nothing cat got something through its thick head. "My days are numbered. My minutes are numbered." It made a decision that made me have a little more respect for it. It decided to go out with a bang. Fritz had him cornered, and that cat jumped up on his head. Three paws had clawed into his head and the other one was free. That cat just began to claw on that dog's face. The dog couldn't go anything with that cat on its head. It couldn't. So he was trying to shake that cat off. Our whole family came out and really started rooting for Alexander. "Come on Alexander. Come on, man. Do it." I mean, that dog was having a fit. They got off the porch out in the yard, but that cat would not turn loose and was

just raking that dog with that claw.

Finally, the dog threw the cat off and it took off yelping. You've never heard such yelping in your life. Alexander kind of got gained a little self-respect. We gained some respect for it. The next day Fritz walked out and came right to the edge of our property and turned just like it was in a military fashion and walked down, turned at the sidewalk, walked in front of our house and would not step foot in our yard. Alexander was walking out there saying, "Come on, big boy. You want some more? Come on, big boy."

Well, you know, I tell that because to me the devil knows what this verse says. Don't think he doesn't know scripture? He gets it perverted half the time but he knows it. He knows his days are numbered. And, friend, he's cornered. What do you think he's going to do to the church when he is cornered like he is, knowing that his days are numbered, knowing that the One is coming to crush his head? What do you think he's going to do? He's going to throw every bit of hell he can throw at you and me while we're living down here. But if you want to focus on that help yourself. I'm going to focus on the One who's already defeated him, the cross.

Go back and read Ephesians 1:1-2:6. Above every power, above every name in this age or the next age. Do you hear that, devil? Above all of them. He's defeated him. They're under His feet.

But now wait a minute. It says that He will soon crush him under whose feet? Your feet. What? Yes sir, we're going to be there, friend, and he'll be under our feet as our Lord throws him into hell forever. I want to be there. I'm going to be there but I want to be on the front line right before he goes in. Just let me, with all the strength that my glorified body can offer, just run up and hit that Satan right in the mouth before he goes over into hell forever. Put out of business. Destroyed, crushed by the One who we live obeying and surrendered to everyday.

You say, "Well, He hasn't done it yet. What am I going to do until He does it?" Ha! Look at the last part of verse 20. He doesn't finish it with that. Because there's going to be a time lapse Paul says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."

Look back in Romans 5:1. I want you to see this. Oh, folks. You think surrendered to Christ, walking by faith is not the answer? You think you've got a better way to serve God? Help yourself. You're deceived, brother. Verse 1 is a very good verse. "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, when we got saved and put our faith into Jesus, like the Japanese when they surrendered, we walked up, laid down our sword and said, "We're not going to fight you anymore." We have peace with God. Not only are we at peace with Him, He's at peace with us. Then it says in verse 2, "through whom [Christ] also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace." Now what was it that accessed grace in our life? Faith. And what is faith? It's obedience, folks. You cannot say it's anything else. It's not what you believe. It's how you live as a result of how you believe. It's action. It's obedience. Alright, faith accesses this grace. By putting our faith into Jesus we accessed His grace. Now watch. "in which we stand." "What does that mean?" It's in the perfect tense. Back here when we accessed His grace, He now allows us to stand in it for eternity.

What is grace? What we don't deserve, folks. But it's also His transforming power in our life. "You mean to tell me I'm standing where I can access His transforming power in me?" Absolutely. "How do I access it?" By faith which is where we started, remember? Our protection is obeying Christ and obeying His word. That is what faith is, believing what God has said. Faith comes from hearing. Hearing comes from what? The word of God.

What does James say? You can say you have faith but you have nothing to back it up. That's not faith. That's not saving faith for sure. So faith, then, is obedience. When I surrender to Him, bow down just bankrupt before Him, I have just accessed His grace. In the Old Testament they used to say, "Oh Lord, don't turn Your face away from me." He can't do that to you and me because we're eternally in His grace. He turned His face on His own Son on the cross so that He would never have to turn His face from you and me. You bow down to Christ and you're going to find His transforming power like you've never known it before. But if you have bought the lie that you're flesh or this world offers you anything that's worthwhile how deceived can we be? You pursue Christ. He's the One who gives what He wants to give to you and me. What we're looking for is found in Him.

Well, beware of the false teachers who seek to seduce and deceive you. Beware of the fleshly evil that's all around you that seeks to seduce and destroy you. And be aware of who's behind all of it. It's Satan himself, old sluefoot. Jesus will soon crush him. The God of peace will soon crush him under our feet. Until then may the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. Boy, what a message!

Romans 16:21-24

Relationships

One thing that's interesting to me is that in Romans 12:1-2 the Apostle Paul begins talking about a very important subject, the subject of relationships. As a matter of fact, there are two relationships he speaks of. First of all, there is our relationship to God which is encompassed into two verses that we've just about brought into every message since that time. We daily present our bodies. We surrender to Christ. Daily we surrender our minds to His Word. Obeying Christ means to obey His Word. Our

relationship is one of obedience and surrender to Him.

Then from Romans 12:3 all the way to the very end of the book he's talking about our relationships to one another. As I think of all the relationships that are in a congregation. I think about all the circles of each person's relationships. Somebody said that humility is giving credit to the people God has used to get you where you are, the relationships you've had along the way, people God has put into your life. The Lord Jesus had twelve disciples around Him. But even out of that twelve there were three who were the closest to Him, Peter and James and John. Relationships, relationships, relationships.

Well, the Apostle Paul comes to another list of some relationships, some companions who were very close to him. It's not so much now Paul sending his greetings, but now his companions speak up and send their greetings to the church that is in Rome. Somebody asked me one day, "How do you do all the things around the church?" Well, I've been leaning on our staff for a long time. I want you to know there are some guys on my staff who are some of the most precious guys I've ever been associated with in all of my life. The elders and the staff are like another family to me. I trust every one of them with my life. Sometimes they're not noticed. They do things behind the scene. But they're companions in the ministry.

If for some reason I was writing a letter to someone and wanted to send greetings from the church, I would bring in these companions because they're the ones in the thick and the thin. When it gets difficult they're the ones who are right along beside me. Again, you may not see them, but I know better than to think that I'm doing anything. God's doing it and He's using many people to get the job done. That's the way I think it was with the Apostle Paul. He's given us a list earlier, but that list was the greetings that he sent to those he knew, maybe not intimately, but by acquaintance or by association of some kind. Now his companions in the ministry step forward. It's almost like Paul's saying, "You know, guys, if you want to see the success of what God has been doing through me, I've been leaning on my staff. They want to say a word before I close the letter. They want to send their greetings to the Christians who are there in Rome."

Remember relationships. As we're going through this, think of how these people were companions to the Apostle Paul and how precious they were to him and now they send their greetings to those in Rome.

We're going to look first of all at Romans 16:21. "Timothy my fellow worker greets you." Timothy is sending his greeting. It's no wonder the Apostle Paul puts Timothy first. Of all the companions of Paul, Timothy is the best known. He's mentioned in twenty-four verses in the New Testament. We're going to spend a little time on Timothy, because we know more about Timothy than we do anybody else in the list that Paul mentions.

First of all, it seems likely that Timothy came to know Christ when Paul was on his first missionary journey over in the area of Derbe and Lystra. Look over in Acts 14:1 so we can see this in scripture. We're going to just take from the Word to see how Paul met Timothy, where he got saved, etc. Paul calls him his son in the faith. Acts 14, and we'll begin in verse 1: "And it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, and embittered them against the brethren. Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region;..."

Now when they first went into this area, obviously, they were preaching the gospel of grace, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Later on they come back to this area. Turn over to 16:1. Here's where we see the mention of Timothy. It says, "And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek." So in other words, Timothy's mother and grandmother were Jewish, but his father was a Greek. He was half Jew and half Gentile.

It becomes obvious from 2 Timothy 1:5 the influence that his godly mother and godly grandmother had on him. Paul talks about this, and this is important in understanding the upbringing of Timothy. It says, "For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well." The seed was planted deep in his life by his mother and grandmother, and when Paul came to Lystra and that area he became a believer. Paul comes back to that area and sees that Timothy stands out among the group. Everyone spoke highly of Timothy.

Acts 16:2 continues, "and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium." Now, you've got to remember something that's going on about this time. The Apostle Paul became very disappointed that John Mark had left him. By the way, have you ever wondered why he did that? I think John Mark left him because he couldn't handle the message of grace. John Mark, a Jew, had grown up under that influence; and when he heard Paul preach nothing but grace and not works, I don't think he could handle it. He bailed out on the Apostle Paul, and Paul had become very disappointed in John Mark. As a result he turned his attention towards this man who stood out in the area of Lystra and Derbe.

Paul knew that Timothy was only half Jew and had never been circumcised. That was important because the Jews were very bitter. If he brought a half Gentile amongst them who was not circumcised, that would cause problems. So therefore, he circumcised him before he allowed him to be on the team. Acts 16:3 says, "Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." He was then set apart as an evangelist by the church who expressed great confidence in him.

Paul talks about that confidence. In 1 Timothy 4:14 he says to Timothy, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery." When they laid hands on someone it was nothing spiritual – well it was spiritual in a way, but it was nothing of God. They were not bestowing power on anybody. They were recognizing that God's hand was already on this person. Therefore, they would lay hands on them and thereby, show the great confidence of the calling God had put upon their life.

Well, Timothy's loyalty began to spread and people began to find out about him and by the time that Paul wrote the book of Philippians everybody knew about Timothy. It says in Philippians 2:22, "But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father." There is no more beautiful picture than that of a man who is a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, a man loyal to a man like the Apostle Paul. It didn't matter the credit that came to him. He was willing to serve him like a child would serve a father. People knew this about Timothy. Wouldn't it be wonderful if people could say that about you and me? There was a loyalty there. There was a servant heart in Timothy.

Paul trusted Timothy probably as much as he trusted anybody in his lifetime. He and Barnabas had some problems; but it was Timothy who he seemed to give the assignments to that were the most difficult and the most critical. I'm going to walk you through some of those. When Paul was forced out of Philippi, it appears that he left Timothy there to help in caring for the infant church. Timothy followed Paul to Berea where once again he was left behind by Paul, this time in company with Silas to minister to the new church. I mean, constantly he has this responsibility placed upon him. He met Paul in Athens where he rejoined him but not for long. He was again assigned the task of going back north to Thessalonica to encourage and strengthen the church that was there. Paul left Athens and went to Corinth and it was not long before Timothy joined him there.

We don't know much about the next five years of his life but we do know that he must have been with Paul for some of his ministry in Ephesus on Paul's third missionary journey. Paul writes the Corinthians from Ephesus that he's sending Timothy to them. So he must have been with him. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 he says, "For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church."

Then he says in 1 Corinthians 16:10, "Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid; for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am." When Paul arrived in Corinth after his completion of his work in Ephesus Timothy was with him. How do we know that? Because that's where he wrote the book of Romans and we're reading the fact Timothy's with him sending his greetings. We know that he had to be with Paul.

When Paul's work in Macedonia and Greece was over he made final preparations to go to Jerusalem. Timothy was one of the party sent on ahead to await Paul's arrival at Troas. Acts 20:3ff, "And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia. And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas." Timothy was in that group.

Verse 6 goes on to say, "And we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days." Once again Timothy drops out of sight. You see him at critical times in Paul's life. Timothy was in his first imprisonment with Paul when he wrote the letters to Philippi, Colossae, and Philemon. After Paul's release from prison it appears that Timothy went with Paul when he visited Asia. Paul continued on to Macedonia, but he left Timothy behind in Ephesus to take care of some of the problems in the church.

Paul writes to him from his last imprisonment in 2 Timothy. Now I want to tell you, when you've worked beside somebody for a long period of time and you've watched that individual not willing to take any credit for themselves but just to step alongside and be loyal and faithful and a part of the work, you begin to learn you can trust this person. You begin to learn that they can carry out responsibility. That becomes very dear to your heart. All the way from the very first meeting Timothy had been alongside Paul. He appears everywhere. Everywhere Paul went Timothy appeared. Paul would assign him here and assign him there or leave him here or whatever. When he's in a prison in Rome, the last imprisonment that Paul was in before he was martyred for the faith, he wrote to Timothy. Listen to what he says to him. How precious the relationship with Timothy had become. It says in 2 Timothy 1:4, "longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy." Then down in the last part of the book, in 2 Timothy 4:9, he says, "Make every effort to come to me soon." You've got to hear the heartbeat of this guy.

You work together. You go through the thick and the thin. You begin to share together in the heart and what happens is down the

road that becomes very tender in your relationship to somebody else. Paul in his last days, knowing that he was going to be martyred for the faith, says, "Timothy, make every effort you possibly can to come to me soon. I miss you, Timothy."

Then in 2 Timothy 4:21, "Make every effort to come before winter." The last recorded words of the Apostle Paul were written to Timothy. No wonder he heads the list in sending his greetings to the people in Rome. Let me ask you a question as we're going through this. Who do you know who would come alongside you that way? Think back over your life and the ministry God has given to you or the work that God has put around you and the people who are faithful to Christ who are friends in the ministry. I look back and remember the valleys we have been through in this church. I remember the tough times and the tough decisions we've had to make as elders and the weeping that we've gone through in making those decisions. I think about the staff and all the fun we've had but all the difficulties we've worked our way through. And I tell you what, folks. When it comes down to it, those relationships are what it's all about in the Christian walk.

The Apostle Paul is allowing these companions to come alongside him now and send their greetings to Rome. They're very special people to Paul. The people in the other list were special, yes. These were even more special. These he knew intimately. These were his companions. This is the staff stepping forward and sending their greetings to the Christians there at Rome.

Now, you can't miss this. These are guys who have walked right alongside Paul. Here's Timothy. He's the main one. We don't know that much about the rest of them, but we know Timothy. We can understand why the Philippians said there's nobody like Timothy because of the servant heart this man had. He steps forward and says, "I want to send my greetings to Rome because I'm with Paul over here in Corinth."

Well, Paul moves on from Timothy to some others. Verse 21 reads, "Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater." There are three mentioned there. Then he says, "my kinsmen." We struggle with that word "kinsmen." Does that mean his cousin or his uncle? No. He means my Jewish kinfolk. In other words, because of being of the nation of Israel we are all kin together. We've addressed that already. I'm not going to go back and do that again.

Who were these people? Lucius was probably the Lucius mentioned in Acts 13:1, if you want to turn over there. He would have been one of the ones who commissioned Paul and Barnabas to the mission field. Verse 1 says, "Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." Lucius was from Cyrene. That's basically all we know about him but he must have been very close to Paul and with Paul on many occasions. He was there when Paul was commissioned to the mission field.

Jason was most likely the Jason who entertained Paul and Silas in his home when they first came to Thessalonica. Now if you have studied 1 and 2 Thessalonians, you remember the problem Jason got into by being associated with these guys. It was no fun, really. Let me go back and remind you of Acts 17:5. Now this is when he was dragged out of his house. He was taken before the magistrate and finally had to be released on bail. "But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. And when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason (This is one of those times Jason probably wondered as he was being dragged out of his house, 'Am I sure I'm glad to be Paul's friend?') and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.' And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge [or bail money] from Jason and the others, they released them." That's all we really know about Jason. But he was a close companion to Paul and was with him when Paul was writing his letters so Jason steps forward and sends his greetings.

Then Paul mentions Sosipater. The name, Sopater, is mentioned in Acts 20:4. Apparently they are the same person, but we don't know much about them. If they are the same person, he was one of Paul's first converts at Berea and one of the delegates Paul took with him to Jerusalem.

So again, three more companions. We've got Timothy. We've got Lucius. We've got Jason. We've got Sosipater. Then the next name, Tertius, is mentioned. I like this one. Look in verse 22. "I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord." Now, wait a minute. What did he say? I, Tertius, who what? Who write this letter. I thought Paul was writing this letter. Well, now, hang on before you get all nervous and bent out of shape. Paul was dictating this letter to Tertius. Now why was Paul doing this? We don't really know this, but there seems to be some suspicion that Paul had a serious eye problem. I want you to look over in Galatians 4:13. This is where it comes from. We don't know this for a fact, but it appears this way. There is a possibility that he contracted some kind of eye disease and as a result of that had difficulty seeing and had to get somebody else to write his letter. He couldn't see to write.

In Galatians 4:13 he says, "but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time." Now

what kind of bodily illness? We don't know. Verse 14 continues, "and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself." In other words, you really did a wonderful job in receiving me. Verse 15 reads, "Where then is that sense of blessing you had?" Remember Galatians is written to a church that's lost their joy because they got their focus off of Jesus and grace. Then he says "For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me."

Many people think that Paul picked up some kind of fungus in his eyes going through Pamphylia, which was a low country region. There was such a disease at that time. It was a disease called Ophthalmia, and it was disease of the eye. Perhaps somehow it affected his eyesight. He said to the Galatians, "You would have given me your eyes if you could have." That's where the idea comes that Paul had a very significant problem with his eyesight.

Well, he's giving Tertius, who's actually transcribing the letter, the courtesy of greeting the believers in Rome. How would we ever know about Tertius if Paul hadn't brought him in this picture? That's what I'm trying to show you. You know, again, it's just a list of people. But if you think about it, these were the relationships that God had given to Paul, and each one of them played an intricate role in his life. Now they come forward as the staff, so to speak, and send their greetings. You begin to realize how God can use any of us at any time we're willing to say "yes" to Him.

Well next, in verse 23, he mentions Gaius. "Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you." Gaius was probably the same Gaius that's mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:14. It might be a little better for you if you watch these and follow along. Paul says in verse 14, "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius." He was actually baptized by Paul. You ask, "Why is that significant?" Well, because Paul didn't baptize many people. Did you know there are many people who say that water baptism is absolutely necessary for your salvation. I know some folks, very close to me and my family, who believe that. Now, if that's the case, then Jesus dying on the cross, shedding His blood, raising from the dead, all of those things are important in the gospel but to have the true gospel you've got to add in baptism by water. Is that correct? Is that's what they're saying.

Well let me just read a verse to you and see if this will go home and worry you a little bit. I hope it does if you believe that other stuff. 1 Corinthians 1:17 says, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Now wait a minute. I thought baptism was a part of the gospel. You see, it's amazing to me. Some people make a cookbook out of the scriptures. He says, "but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void."

So Gaius has the distinction of being one of the few people who Paul himself ever baptized. Paul didn't do that much. Paul was out to preach the gospel. Somebody else took care of the baptizing. This is a significant point I just thought I'd throw in, because that's one of the verses that is very difficult to deal with when you believe that water baptism could save anybody. You know, some people even go back and refer to Noah and the ark and say those who were "in the water" were saved. No. Those in the water drowned. Those in the ark were the ones who were saved. No water touched them because the ark is our Lord Jesus Christ and that's what salvation is all about.

Next he mentions Erastus and Quartus. Look in Romans 16:23 again. "Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother." Now the city treasurer was a very high important office in that time. It was of great importance. This man Erastus is usually identified with the Erastus who was with Paul at Ephesus and who was sent by Paul along with Timothy into Macedonia while the Apostle remained in Asia. Look over at Acts 19:22. We find him mentioned there in that group that was sent over into Macedonia. "And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while."

Erastus was still at Corinth when Paul wrote his last letter, which tells us that this must have been his usual place to stay. 2 Timothy 4:20 says, "Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus." Again, you wouldn't know him if Paul did not give him the courtesy to send his greetings there to the church at Rome. So often you think Paul is the only one doing anything and you forget he had a staff built around him. You don't hear from them very often. That's why you need to look at the last verses of every book because he brings these people to life.

All we know of Quartus is that he was called the brother. This could mean that he was the brother of Erastus or that he was just a brother in Christ.

Then Paul says again in verse 24 what we heard in verse 20. He says in verse 24, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." That's the benediction. Hey, folks, we're getting right down now to the very close of the letter. Every time I see that phrase, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you," it just quickens me as to the whole message of the book of Romans. We're no longer under law, he says over in chapter 6, but we're under grace. What does it mean to be under grace? Well, we're no longer under the condemning nor controlling power of the law. We're now under grace. Christ has paid the penalty and has also settled the power of sin. He's put His Spirit within our life. When we choose to live Romans 12:1-2 we appropriate the grace of God and the grace of God means: I can't; God never said I could. He can; He always said He would. Christ lives in me. The Apostle Paul, as his team

steps forward to send their greetings, makes that benediction. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ also can be seen in 2 Corinthians 8:9. It says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." Now that's grace. That's grace carried out. That's grace in operation, what Christ did for you and me that we do not deserve. That's our Lord Jesus Christ. From His highest heaven He never ceases to pour out upon His own the inexhaustible riches of grace.

We might sing, "Hallelujah, What a Savior." We're coming down now to the final few words of the book of Romans. He has sent greetings to those he knows. He's come back and warned them of deception. He's warned them and also encouraged them that Satan who's behind it all will one day be crushed under our feet by the God of peace. Then he comes back to another list and his companions come forward. They send their greetings. Then Paul wishes a benediction on them. "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

Have you ever been on a journey and you've been walking a long way up a path or a hill and you turn at the end of it and look back and realize how far you've come? Well, think how far we've come in the book of Romans. What have you learned from the book of Romans?

In chapters 1, 2, and 3, what do we have? He speaks about sin. Do you know anybody anywhere around you who believes they can earn their way into heaven? Well, have them go back and read chapters 1-3. They're going to find out that no man can earn his way to heaven. Every man is born a sinner. The depravity of man is all over chapters 1, 2, and 3. From 3:20 all the way through chapter 5, Paul talks about justification by faith and faith alone. If you happen to know anybody who thinks it's any other way, take them back and show them. Even Abraham had to be justified by his faith. He goes back and shows you this is the way it's always been. This is the covenant God made with Abraham.

Then we come to chapters 6-8, and we find the sanctifying experience of the Holy Spirit of God living in us. We find out that in 6:6 that we have a body that's called the body of sin. No wonder I have all these problems, man. My body is still tempted by the things of this world. That's why daily I have to say "yes" to Christ; and I can only say "yes" to Christ because of His grace. In chapter 7 he shows you what it's like when you don't say "yes" to Christ and you try to do it in your own strength. Oh the desperation of chapter 7. Then you come into chapter 8 and realize the role of the Holy Spirit of God. Then you find the security we have in Christ. We find some family words like foreknowledge and predestination are brought in to help us understand we didn't find Jesus. Jesus found us.

In chapters 9-11 you have the sovereignty of God and salvation. Oh, these are chapters that I just hope someday I can begin to understand. I still have a lot of wrestling in my mind of what's going on there. But the overwhelming thing is the last few words that Paul mentions in chapter 11 when he says, "Oh the wisdom and the majesty of God." He says that all things are of Him and through Him and to Him. Amen.

Then he starts chapter 12 and says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren." All of this the grace of God is extended. He tells them the relationship we have to God daily. There's no other way. Why present my body? It's a potentially sinful body and the mind is the culprit. Therefore, I have to have my mind renewed everyday by the word of God. What's that going to do? First of all, it'll make me a servant to others and to Christ. It gives me the servant heart. It's the Holy Spirit working in me. In the middle of chapter 12 it gives me a sensitive heart to love without hypocrisy. In chapter 13 it gives me a submissive heart because I'm even willing to submit to governmental authorities. In chapters 14-15, we begin to realize how we treat our weaker brother and realize that God's love in us gives us a sensitivity even to them. Then in the last part of chapter 15 we come to the epilogue down to where we are in chapter 16.

Paul says in his benediction, "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." You think you don't need grace? Let's challenge you a little bit. Wake up tomorrow and say, "Today, Lord, I'm going to live like Jesus." You do that. I promise you. You don't think you need His grace, you say that in the morning. Say, "God, I don't need that preacher. I don't believe anything he's talking about. I can do this. Good grief! Anybody can do this. I'm going to love my brother today." Well, call me about two o'clock tomorrow when God puts a brother in your life you didn't know existed. You're going to say, "Oh, God, I can't. Oh, God." You're going to begin to understand what grace really is. It's not only that which you don't deserve but it is the transforming power of God in your life giving you the ability to love those people who you didn't know were out there. You start realizing why he said, "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you". You can't live apart from it, folks. You are desperate for it and so am I.

In the circumstances that you're facing, it's God's grace that gets you through. It's God's grace that gives you that love for the people who you have to deal with. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Well, I hope you've enjoyed this journey as much as I have. We're not quite through it yet but we can see it. It's kind of like somebody said, "It's not the end of the world but we can see it from here." It's not the end of the book yet but we can see it from here. We're standing right on the edge of it. I just hope you'll go back through it and say, "God, I want to be one of those mentioned some day. I want to be one who can be counted on Your team. I want to be a part of Your work." The only way to do that is to bow

down and say, "Here am I. Send me." God will take any vessel and use you beyond your wildest imagination. He's waiting on us. He's waiting on us. I love you.

Romans 16:25-27

The Power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

We're going to look at the last few verses, verse 25-27, and I want to talk about the power of the gospel. Paul stated in 1:16 that he's not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for in it is the power of God and salvation to everyone who believes. The Apostle Paul starts with the gospel and ends with the gospel, which tells you what he's been talking about all the way through the book of Romans. The word "gospel" means good news, the good news about Jesus Christ.

Look back at 1:1 and just see how the gospel began this book, how it was carried through it and now how it ends with speaking of the good news of Jesus Christ. It says, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." That word there, "set apart," does not mean he set himself apart for the gospel of God. Oh yes, he did once he was set apart, but God had sent him apart. Man can set himself apart to religion. God sets him apart to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul's assignment as an apostle was to take the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world. We found in the later chapters of Romans that he was going to preach where Christ's name had not been named. He did not build upon another man's foundation. As a matter of fact, God through His grace enabled Paul to take the gospel from Antioch all the way to Ilyricum, which is modern day Bosnia. Fourteen hundred miles the Apostle Paul took the gospel of Jesus Christ. That was his assignment, to take the good news of Jesus to the Gentile world.

He says in 15:15-16, "But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles."

In 1:2 he goes on talking about the gospel. He says that this good news was prophesied by the prophets of the Old Testament. Verse 2 reads, "which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures." As a matter of fact, this was God's plan before the foundation of the world. You realize that these people preached the gospel out of the Old Testament. The Roman road is nothing more than Old Testament scriptures brought in light of the New Testament. They did not have the New Testament. They were writing the New Testament. The gospel is all over the Old Testament.

Well, we see in verse 3 that the gospel concerns His Son, Jesus Christ. It says in verse 3, "concerning His Son," and then it tells us what we need to know about Him. First of all that His Son emptied Himself of His glory, came to this earth, and became flesh. He didn't enter a body. He became flesh. In fact, he says, "who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh." Jesus Christ, God's Son, was the God Man, born of a virgin, the Virgin Mary.

In verse 4 he didn't say He came to die for mankind, but it talks of His resurrection so it implies the gospel message. Jesus came, lived a sinless life, went to the cross, paid our sin debt, died on the cross, then raised the third day, ascended, and is glorified and lives today to offer man this eternal life. It says in verse 4, "who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord."

But in verse 5 the Apostle Paul is still talking about the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. He says "through whom [Jesus] we have received grace." Now I want you to think with me now lest you think of the gospel as something that happened back here and doesn't have anything to do with me now but hopefully one day will guarantee me Heaven when Jesus comes for His church. There are many people thinking that way. They're no longer thrilled with the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul says through Him we have received grace. Grace, first of all, means the undeserved favor of God. The Psalmist asked, "What is man that thou are mindful of Him?" When you get to that point in your life that you can't understand how a loving, holy God considered man His creation and sent His Son for them, you begin to understand a little bit about grace. It's not deserved. It came out of the very heart of God.

But not only is grace the undeserved favor of God, it's the enabling power of God. This is what I want you to see. It's in Jesus Christ. This is good news. We tell most people, "Hey, it's good news. Jesus died for you. Now get saved, put your faith into Him and join our church. We'll teach you how to be bitter. We'll teach you how to mess up relationships. We'll teach you how to be overburdened by too many assignments. We'll teach you all of this stuff. We'll let you know what it means to be discouraged until Jesus comes and then one day, hopefully, you'll have a shack over there in Heaven." The good news, folks, started at salvation, but oh, it's so much richer than just what got me away and free from the penalty of sin. We receive grace from Christ, enabling power.

Now this grace enables me to be set free from the penalty of sin. Romans 3:24 says, "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Jesus did for me what I couldn't do for myself, and when I put my faith into Him, then what He did is written to my account. That's what it means to be justified. Acquitted, I'm no longer guilty before God, not in Jesus.

Romans 5:1 says I have peace with God through Jesus Christ. But not only that, this grace enables me to be set free from the power of sin. Now this is what makes the good news good news. Every day of my life Jesus Christ living in me gives me the power to say "no" to sin and to say "yes" to Him. He's given me victory over the power of sin. Romans 6:14 says, "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace." You are under the enabling power of God. Grace enables me to be and to do what God commands me to do.

Folks, we need to realize it is in Jesus that now we receive grace, the grace to be set free from the penalty and from the power of sin. This is the beauty, the good news of Jesus Christ. It's not only for the nonbeliever. It's for the believer.

Ephesians 6:15 is a very important verse. Look over there with me for a second. I want you to see something. There are a lot of people who don't understand the gospel. They're preaching nothing more than a message of works, a form of the gospel, but they deny the power thereof. It's for that reason they are absolute targets of the enemy, the adversary, the devil. Ephesians 6:15 is talking about Christ being our armor. But look at what it says in verse 15, "and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." That word "preparation" means a firm grasp of something, a firm footing into something. If we don't understand the preparation of the gospel, if we don't understand the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus Christ, we're defeated before we get started in the warfare we live in every day of our life. We must understand that it was Jesus back then, it's Jesus today and it'll always be Jesus. That's the good news of the gospel.

What is the victory that Jesus has in your life right now? In Romans 6:3 it's no wonder Paul says, "do you not know," agnoeo, present tense. Are you walking around without this understanding? Yes, there are many believers walking around without this understanding. They don't understand salvation. They don't understand the gospel. He says that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. You see, the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ is not just that Jesus got us out of hell and one day will get us into heaven. The good news is He took heaven and put it into us. He lives in us. That's the good news.

I want you to go back to Romans 6:5 one more time. This is the last message in Romans. I want to make sure we understand this one verse that simply rocked me when I was studying it. In Romans 6:5 the King James Version uses the word "planted with Him," but the word used in the New American Standard is "united with Him." I like that much better. It says, "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." The word "united" is *sumphutos*. We are planted together with, you could say that. You almost get the idea of two things side by side, but the idea I get out of this is not that. There are two words for "with" in the Greek language as I understand it. There's one word, *meta*, which is the with of association. We're with each other in church. That's the word *meta*. We love the Lord. We're drawn to church by the common denominator of our love for Jesus and our love for His Word. But when the service is over we all go our own way.

But there's another word for "with." We only have one in English and that's why it's so hard to understand. But the Greeks had more than that. It's the little word, *sun*. It's the word of intimacy, of when two things come together to where they cannot be separated. We are united together with Him when He died and we are united together with Him as He arose. Though we died with Him, now so we live, *sun*, with Him.

Remember the illustration we used. You have some ingredients of a biscuit, and you put all of those ingredients on a baking sheet. You put the flour and the baking powder and the salt and somebody said to put the lard. You put the lard down on there and whatever else you put in the biscuit. Those ingredients on that baking sheet are with one another. They're with each other, *meta*, the with of association. You can separate them at any time. But take those same ingredients and mix them together. Put that into the oven and bake it, and those ingredients together come out as a biscuit. I want to tell you. When you bake it, after it's been in that oven under that heat and that pressure of what it does to it, there's another word for "with." Those ingredients are still with each other but the word changes now to *sun*. They're so entwined together that nothing, no scientist who has ever lived, can separate those ingredients from one another. I'm united together with Him in His death. I'm united together with Him in His resurrection, in His life. Jesus has "baked" His life into me.

That's the good news. The good news is that when I wake up tomorrow morning Jesus lives in me. The good news is when I have to go through whatever valley I go through Jesus lives in me. Through Him I receive grace. Grace is the enabling power to do what I could not do but now I can do it in His power. That's good news. The gospel means more than just getting in the kingdom. Now that you're in the kingdom, how are you living? Are you enjoying the marvelous power of the gospel in your life? That's what he's saying, folks. He starts with the gospel, continues with the gospel, and ends with the gospel. The whole book of Romans is the good news of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Well, no wonder Paul said in Romans 15:17-18, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me." How many times have you heard this? "Jesus be Jesus in me. No longer me but thee. Resurrection power fill me this hour. Jesus be Jesus in me." That's the

message. That's the good news. Grace enables us now to do what God has commanded us to do. It is this gospel, the good news of Jesus, that he starts and finishes with.

When you put your faith into Christ, He went down into the darkness of your sin, took you out of that pit, took you across the threshold from death into life, ushered you into heaven, seated you in the heavenlies and put His Spirit into your life. That's good news, folks. There's not one single thing on this earth that can ever defeat us if we'll keep our eyes on the gospel, if we'll live in light of the good news, if we'll live in the light of the power of Jesus Christ living in us. It's the gospel that Paul is talking about here in Romans. He starts with it. He finishes with it. No wonder people don't know what the gospel is any more.

We're not living in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus Christ. That's what Romans has been all about, folks. There was sin in chapters 1, 2, and 3; salvation in chapters 3-5; sanctification in 6-8; security and sovereignty in 9-11; then finally the joy we get in the privilege of serving Him in 12-16. The gospel, what else is there?

There are two things about the gospel we're going to bring out as we close the book of Romans. First of all is the fact that God establishes men through the gospel. Secondly, God enlightens men through the gospel. Those two things Paul brings out about the gospel as he signs off the book, as he tries to get this point once again across to us of the good news of Jesus Christ.

In verses 25-27 he says, "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever, Amen."

That's a lot of words, and it's not that easy to discern from the original language. But I want to attempt it in two things. First of all, God establishes men through the gospel. The Apostle Paul is writing to believers. He's interested in believers being established in the gospel. That's interesting to me. Go back to 1:11. He says, "For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, (now watch) that you may be established." In closing he says almost the same thing. "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel."

He, first of all, points to God through Jesus Christ, the One who's able to establish us. The word for able is *dunamai*, which means He has the ability to do what the gospel cannot do, but He can do it through the gospel. It's Him doing the establishing. The means that He uses is the gospel. Paul is lifting up the Father who is able to establish us as believers. What does it mean to establish us? The word is *sterizo*. It comes from *histemi*, to stand. It means to set fast, to fix firmly. Here in this verse it means to make steadfast in mind, to confirm, strengthen. It's like if you wanted to put something down and make it stand where you put it you would put it in something that's solid and concrete. The thing that's concrete, the thing that is solid is the gospel. God will use the gospel to fix our minds to strengthen our minds, to confirm things in our hearts.

To put it another way, He uses the gospel to help us live sane in an insane world. Now, folks, it's the gospel that establishes a man's mind. It's the gospel that confirms to him truth, keeps him on target, keeps him on the path. How does He choose to do it? It's with the gospel. Verse 25 again reads, "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel." Some people view Paul in funny ways. They see him as an egotist. They say, "Yeah, Paul. Look at him. Here he goes, 'my gospel.'" Now be careful when you read that. That's a surface translation, and not even a good one. We know more about that in the Apostle Paul. We know he's a bondservant of Christ Jesus. So what would he mean when he says "my gospel"? He simply means the same gospel that Peter preached, the same gospel that John preached, the same gospel that was revealed to each of our hearts as apostles.

Look over in Galatians 1:11-12 and it answers that. There are some people, the liberals (who I call the lost), who believe that Paul is one of those egocentric type of people. They don't take much of what he says seriously. You better take him seriously. He's one of the greatest Christians in the New Testament. These guys who say that have absolutely no founding behind them. Verses 11-12 say, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel [good news of Christ] which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." So it's not his gospel. It's God's gospel that He revealed to Paul, revealed to John, revealed to Peter and transformed their lives. Then they were assigned to take it and give it to us.

When a believer looks back at when he was lost he realizes how God used this gospel to reveal to him through the scriptures, through these men who wrote it. You understand that it was the gospel that first grabbed your mind and established it. You think about what I'm saying. Even though Paul is saying, "You believers, be established in the gospel," it was the gospel that first got them established.

Now what am I saying? Well, I'm saying that we're products of Romans 1:28. We came out of this, folks. Every one of us came out of this. Romans 1:28 says, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper." You see the result of men without the gospel, when men refuse to acknowledge God. They worship the creation and not the creator. Romans 1 says that God turned them over to a depraved mind generation after

generation after generation. That's where you and I came out of.

I want to tell you something. The mind of a lost person is insane, folks. He doesn't have any values. He's confused. He's depressed. We're seeing all kinds of perverted acts going on in our world today and people are saying, "Where does it come from?" I'll tell you where it comes from. It comes from sin. It comes from a mind that's not been renewed by the truth of God's Word. It's never been established with the gospel of Jesus Christ. A mind that's never been transformed. Man, what kind of pervert would put a bomb on a airplane, or in a crowded mall? What kind of person rapes and kills little children? What kind of person would do that? I want to tell you, friend. Exactly what all of us were before the gospel established our minds. I tell you what. You want to point a finger. You better remember there are three more pointing right back at you. The only way to live sane in an insane world is to be established by the good news of Jesus Christ in your mind. It's the Word of God that turns it around. It's the Word of God that gets hold of you and turns it.

One man was talking about a time in his life when he first came to know Christ. He said, "My wife was seeing another man, and I did not know it. One day another man came to me and told me about it. I went back to my home (three days after he got saved), went into the garage, picked up an ax and put it in my truck, and I was on my way to kill that man." He said, "When I got there, I waited for him to get home. I got out of my truck and the man began to tremble as I was walking towards him. I hadn't grown very much in the Lord. I just had gotten saved. But there were two things God had in my mind that I remembered even from childhood, a seed that was planted there. One was you've got to love your enemy. I remembered that over and over again. John 3:16 was the other, God loves you and you once were His enemy."

He said as he was walking across the yard God just stopped him. He dropped that ax and asked the man if he could talk to him. The man said, "For what?" He said, "I just wanted you to know that my Jesus died on the cross to forgive you for what you and my wife are doing together." From an insane world into the sanity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's the truth that establishes a man's mind. God does it that way not only when you're lost to get you saved, but listen friend, he's writing here to the believers. He wants their minds to be established with the good news of Jesus Christ.

I don't know all the different applications of this. I know one that God spoke to my heart when I was studying this. How many times in my life have I as a pastor, as a believer, as a husband, as a father gotten my eyes off of the fact that I can't and God never said I could? The good news is He can and He always said He would. How many times my mind turns to the insane thoughts of my flesh and of this world. How quickly my behavior is affected by that and how quickly I'm out of the Word of God and no longer focused on Him. The very moment that I turn away from the light that is within me and the enabling grace and the power of God that's within me is the very moment I need to be reestablished in my mind by the good news of Jesus Christ. The very moment a circumstance comes into my life that I can't handle and I begin to try do it in my own energy is when my mind becomes insane. It gets off track of what God would want it to be and immediately I start acting the same way. I wonder what you're going through.

Have you come to understand the good news that whatever's going on in your life God is using it to transform and conform you in the image of Christ Jesus? He's not trying to add something to you. He's trying to cut a lot of things out of you to get the image that He wants in you, which is of His Son Jesus Christ. You see, that's the good news of the gospel. Life never works against you. It works for you. God establishes men in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus Christ. Hopefully our minds have been established by what Paul has taught us in Romans.

I want to make another point here about circumstances in your life. You know, it says over in Romans 8:28, "For we know that God causes all things to work together for good in our life." A man in our church told me that he and his wife built a house in a subdivision that was brand new. He said that the developers needed to use his water line for other houses that were being built there. They asked him if they could use it and he said fine, so they hooked onto his water line. Well, you know, in a new subdivision everything's dirt. He said that it wasn't long before his water line began to leak. He called plumbers. He did everything he knew to do to try to stop that leak. That water was seeping out into his backyard and it was becoming overnight a gigantic mudpie. He said that he did everything. About a month and a half into it he and his wife got before the Lord and said, "Lord, if You just want our yard to be a giant mudpie, it's Your yard. Help Yourself. I can't do anything. I can't find a plumber to fix it." The verse that kept coming to them was Romans 8:28. God causes all things to work together for good to them that love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Almost two months to the day their little child fell about ten to twelve feet off a deck in the back, headfirst into two feet of mud. When they got him to the hospital the doctor there in the emergency room said, "Son, your child would be dead had it not been for that mud in that backyard." That man said to me, "I know something about Romans 8:28. It took God two months to prepare my yard to catch the fall of my son." You see, folks, God's always working that way in our lives if we will just look for it.

Well secondly, God enlightens men through the gospel. Paul says in verses 25-26, "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God,

has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith." The words "revelation" and "mystery" work together in tandem. The word "revelation" is the word *apokalupsis*, which is the word used for the book of Revelation. That's the word used there. It means take the lid off something that has before been covered or hidden. It means to take the lid off. The word "mystery" is the word *mysterion*. It does not carry the connotation that we think of in English, because we think of it as something we can solve.

Well that's the way we view a mystery, but that's not the way God views a mystery. When it's in the Christian vocabulary, it's something that God has hidden, and we will never discover it in a million years unless God chooses to reveal it and take the lid off of it. It can not only be that which is completely hidden. It can also be that which is partially hidden. However, it has to do with God taking the lid off, uncovering, and helping us to understand.

Now, what was hidden in the Old Testament that the preaching of Jesus Christ, the gospel uncovered? The prophets had something to do with it. What was it that was uncovered by the gospel? Well, there could be several things. If you'll take the word "mystery" and run it through the New Testament it goes in many different ways. I think contextually, because he's just been talking about his ministry to the Gentiles back in chapter 15, the main thing seems to be that both Gentile and Jew can be a part of the Kingdom of God. In the Old Testament the Jews felt like that the Gentiles were dogs. You come to the gospels, and that's what they're called. They never had a place for the Gentile world. But, you see, the mystery I believe that Paul, by writing to the church at Rome, would probably more than anything else be talking about would be the mystery of how anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, can become a brand new person in Christ Jesus.

In Ephesians 3:3-6 Paul says that. He says, "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel... [verse 9] and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things."

So it seems to be that the gospel of Jesus Christ takes the lid off of this which people did not understand. That is, why does the Gentile world even exist? All of a sudden to the Jewish mind he understands the Gentile is as much a recipient of God's grace as the Jewish person is the recipient of God's grace. It was already predicted by the prophets. In verse 26 of Romans 16 Paul says, "but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith." If they could have seen that, but they couldn't because God has to reveal it. It was right there in their very prophets in the Old Testament that the Gentiles were included in the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus.

Listen to Isaiah 53:11. He says, "As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities." Now the many does not mean all those different people in Israel. It means the many of all mankind, whether Jew or Gentile.

Jeremiah 31:31 says, "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.'" Verse 33 says, "'But this is the covenant which will I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the Lord, 'I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'"

Ezekiel 11:19 reads, "And I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them. And I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh," a tender responsive heart. Now, the Jews would have said, "That's only to us." However, as you come into the gospel of Jesus Christ, which Hebrews calls the better covenant, the new covenant, and then Romans says in 11:25 that we're grafted in to that vine by faith, you begin to realize that also included the Gentiles. That was the mystery the Jewish mind could never have understood. Paul was a converted Jew writing all this. No wonder he saw the revelation of what God had shown to him. But the full meaning of these prophecies was a mystery even to their own prophets.

Peter says in 1 Peter 1:10 they didn't understand. He says, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry." They didn't understand it. Verse 11 continues, "seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow."

It goes all the way back to the Abrahamic covenant. God told Abraham that it would not just be Israel that would be given this opportunity. That it would also be the Gentiles. It says in Genesis 12:3, "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth [not just Israel] shall be blessed." You see, Israel was to be a light to the nations, to bring forth the Messiah, the one who would come to redeem us all. But they rejected Him.

It says in Isaiah 42:6, "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I

will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations." Speaking of the Messiah, Isaiah said in Isaiah 49:6, "He say, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel.'" It's too small a thing. "I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." That's the passage that Paul and Barnabas quoted to the Gentiles and Jews in Antioch in Acts 13:46-47.

A mystery, a mystery, the whole church is a mystery in the Old Testament. It begins to be revealed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth of Jesus, what He came to do. His fulfillment of the old enlightens man's mind. God used that to reveal, to take the lid off things that had previously been hidden.

Ephesians 2:14-16 says, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity."

In other words, God doesn't make a Jew who puts his faith into Christ a completed Jew, and He doesn't make a Gentile who puts his faith into Christ a completed Gentile. He makes them both into one brand new person in Jesus Christ. That's a mystery, folks. That is the mystery. They did not understand that in the Old Testament and only by the light of the gospel revealed to Paul could it even be understood by us because now it's made known through the church of the ages.

But the mystery doesn't stop there, folks, with the Gentiles and the Jews being one. One day all believers in Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile, will be taken out of this world to be with Christ. Do you know why? Because we received the Lamb, therefore, we're not destined for the wrath. We've received the Lamb. One day that's going to take place. 1 Corinthians 15:51 calls that a mystery that the gospel unveils. "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."

It's repeated again in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first." Verse 17 continues, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." You see, if you've received Jesus Christ and have become a brand new person in Him, you're not destined for wrath. You're looking forward to a day. That's your hope that He's going to take you out of here. That was a mystery before, but it's become clearly revealed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It doesn't stop there. Once we're out of here 2 Thessalonians 2:8 says, "And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming." The gospel revealed that there are going to be seven years down here. A mystery, yes, but the gospel's going to reveal it. Even the book of Daniel was sealed until those days because God is not through with the nation of Israel yet. That's going to be the time of their atonement. Seven years is planned there. The worst, most awful time on this earth is coming, folks. I want you to understand that. It's going to get a lot worse. Thank God He's taking us out of here first.

But the mystery even goes beyond that, and the gospel clears it up. It goes all the way to the thousand year reign of Jesus on this earth. It goes all the way to that final rebellion of Satan. It goes to the great white throne judgment. It goes to where Satan and all of the unrighteous are thrown into hell for the first time. They've been in Hades until then. Then you see from that point on a brand new heaven and a brand new earth. The gospel has taken the lid off what people did not understand in the old. It has clearly revealed. The prophets had a part in it, but now the gospel has enlightened man's mind as to what the future holds for those who believe Him.

I love the way Paul ends it by giving tribute to the One who is able to do these two things through His gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. The last verse says, "to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen." Now why wouldn't he say to the only powerful God or to the only gracious God or to the only loving God? He didn't say that, did he? He said to the only wise God. Why would he? I don't know but I think what he's doing here is saying "Only God, folks, only God could effect and perfect a salvation such as ours, only God. Only God could come up with a salvation like ours." He not only comes up with it, but He sustains it and carries it all the way through. That's the salvation that we have.

The good news is today and Jesus lives in you. He's delivered you from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, and one day, the mystery's been revealed, He's going to deliver us from the presence of sin when He comes for us and gives us a brand new resurrected body. What an ending! It's not really an ending, is it? It never ends. It just goes on forever.