

Sermons on Romans-Robert Morgan

Introduction - Robert J Morgan is the teaching pastor at [Donelson Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee](#) and is well known for expository messages that are rich in excellent illustrations of Biblical principles. These sermons are older messages preached on various passages in Romans.

PASSIONATE THINKING, EXUBERANT LIVING

Romans 1:1-17

I'm very excited today to begin a Bible study with you that will take us all the way up to Palm Sunday. It is perhaps the best study we can do leading up to Easter, and to our post-Easter "Forty Days of Purpose" Campaign. It's a survey of the entire book of Romans, arguably the most important book in all the Bible. It is the sixth book of the New Testament, coming right after the four Gospels and the book of Acts. It has sixteen chapters, and it was written by Paul the Apostle in the late 50s of the first century. More than any other book in the Bible, it systematizes and articulates what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is all about.

To show you how important this book is, I'd like to read to you what two different men said about the book of Romans. The first man was the great Reformer, Martin Luther, whose "Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans" is a classic document in church history. He began his preface, saying:

This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.... It is in itself a bright light, almost bright enough to illumine the entire Scripture.

A number of years later, the great English translator, [William Tyndale](#), the young man who determined to translate the entire New Testament into English even if it cost his life (which it did) borrowed Luther's thoughts when he wrote his own preface to the book of Romans. Tyndale said:

Forasmuch as this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and the most pure...Gospel, and also a light and a way unto the whole scripture, I think it (appropriate) for every Christian not only to know it by rote and without the book, but also to exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. No man verily can read it too often or study it too well: for the more it is studied, the easier it is, the more it is chewed the pleasanter it is, and the more groundly it is searched the preciouser things are found it it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein.

So with those two encouragements, let's launch into our study, beginning with the prologue to Romans, which is found in the first 17 verses of the book.

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, I thank my God thorough Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayer, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.

I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;

as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Back in 1991, I preached a series of seven messages from the prologue of Romans, and I could easily do that again. This is such a rich portion of Scripture that I wish I had several hours instead of 30 minutes; but my goal is for us to get a strategic grip on this prologue and to see what it's all about as a whole. And it seems to me that the primary idea running all the way through these 17 verses is this: We are all conveyers of the Gospel. You are a conveyer of the Gospel. At least, you and I are supposed to be conveyers of the Gospel.

A couple of weeks ago on a Sunday night, we had a time of hymn requests from the audience, and someone asked us to sing the old 1970s song, "Pass It Own." No one under the age of 45 had ever heard that song, so it was only us old folks that sang it. But it was our theme song while I was in college, and I'll never forget how passionately we used to sing that last verse. It says:

I'll shout it from the mountaintop.
I want my world to know.
The Lord of Love has come to me.
I want to pass it on.

That's still my theme, and it should be the theme of our lives and the theme of our church. But instead, we're apt to be a little ashamed of Jesus, ashamed of the Gospel, and ashamed to be His witness. Correcting that feeling is what this prologue is all about. Notice that it falls into three very clear sections.

Respond to Your Calling (Romans 1:1-7)

Romans 1:1-7 tell us that we are called to be conveyers of the Gospel. In these verses, Paul is introducing himself and making his salutation to the church in the city of Rome, Italy. In doing so, he uses the words "call" and "called" four times in this passage. It begins: Paul, a **bondservant** of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle. The Greek word that Paul used here is **skletos**. It means "to summon someone to go somewhere. To direct them." It's as though the Lord leaned over the balustrades of heaven and called down to Paul, saying, "Hey, you! Go over there. Go in that direction. Go tell those people. That's your assignment."

Now, does that kind of specific calling just come to missionaries or ministers like the Apostle Paul? No. That's the typical way God works with every one of His children. He has someone specific for us to confront, in one way or another, with the Gospel. Let's keep reading:

...separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name...

The NIV puts it very nicely here. It says: Through Him and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith...

That's the second time we see this word "call" in this passage. Paul said, "I am called by God to call the Gentiles to faith." We are called to call. If someone ever asks you what your life's purpose is, just say, "I'm called to call." And then look at Ro 1:6: "...among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints."

We are called to call, we are the called of Jesus Christ, and we are called to be saints. We have a calling to be conveyers of the Gospel. And you never know when God may use you to plant a life-changing seed in someone's heart. We had over 50 people go out this week making FAITH evangelistic visits for our church. I told some of them that the results might not be seen for 24 years. I was thinking of an article I read the other day about a dentist in New Mexico named Steve White. His mother had died of cancer at the age of 44, but before her death she called him to her bedside and said, "I just want you to know, Steven, that I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior..." He left the room confused. No one in his family had ever said anything like that before. But his mother's words stayed with him, and 24 years later, while looking at a picture of his mother, those words came back to him and led to his conversion.

And so we say a word for the Lord, we invite someone to church, or we give them a Christian book or some literature. And it's like planting a seed that may take time to germinate and bear fruit. But we have a calling. God is looking over the balustrades of heaven, and shouting, as it were, at you and me. He's saying, "Hey, you. Over there. Go over there and tell that person. Go in that direction. Don't forget that I'm keeping you down there on planet earth a little longer because someone you know needs to hear

about my Gospel.”

That’s the first paragraph of this prologue. We have a calling to be conveyers of His message.

Pray and Plan for Open Doors (Romans 1:8-15)

In the second paragraph, we learn something else. We can’t just wait around for it to happen by accident. We need to be intentional about our witnessing, and we need to pray for open doors. Paul was strategic, and he was eagerly planning his next evangelistic moves, and he was praying for doors to open. Look at Romans 1:8-15:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayer, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.

Notice the words: *if by some means... I long to see you... I have often planned to come to you...* Paul was planning and praying for open doors. I don’t have time to take you to all the Scriptures that provide the background for this letter. We looked at those in our Bible study last Wednesday night, but time doesn’t allow us to study it carefully today. But in brief, we can say that from about AD 47 to AD 57, during that one decade, the Apostle Paul virtually single-handedly evangelized the entire eastern half of the Roman Empire. He went to most of the major cities, and he sent out his followers as evangelists into the towns and rural areas. Of course, he wasn’t working alone. There were the twelve apostles out there, and the 3000 who had been saved on the Day of Pentecost, and others. But the greatest work seems to have been done by Paul. He did it in three great missionary tours.

As he finished his last tour in Acts 20:1-38, he stopped in the city of Corinth where, for three months, he rested in the expansive villa of a Christian friend by the name of [Gaius](#), and there he planned his next move. His ambition was to proceed to evangelize the western half of the Roman Empire. He devised a plan to go to Rome, and from there on to Spain. So there in Corinth, over this three month period, he composed the book of Romans and sent it on his way. He was praying for open doors. He was asking God to send him to Rome, to Spain, to the West. He was pleading for more opportunities to share the Gospel.

As it turned out, Paul’s plans were interrupted by his arrest in Jerusalem and when he finally made it to Rome it was as a prisoner. He was in chains, but he was still evangelizing. He said in Philippians 1 that by being in chains he had been able to evangelize the Roman imperial guard and to take the Gospel into corners of the government of the Roman Empire where it otherwise would not have penetrated.

So the lesson is that we’re to be praying for and planning our next evangelistic moves, always ready to go with Plan B if necessary, because sometimes our Plan B is God’s Plan A.

What does all this mean to you and me? It means this. If you have ever never shared Jesus Christ with another person, if you’ve never witnessed for Him, or if you aren’t doing a very good job of it right now, then let me suggest this prayer: Lord, show me an open door. Lord, open my eyes to the person you want me to evangelize. Lord, give me a soul. Lord, use me in someone’s life.

Pray for open doors. Make it an earnest, daily prayer. Write it out. Compose a prayer-poem about it, if you think in those terms. Recruit a prayer partner to join you, if you’d like. But begin intentionally asking God to open a door somewhere with someone to whom you can share. And then, begin thinking strategically. Begin planning.

Say to yourself: Next Christmas, when I send out my Christmas cards, is there any way to use them to evangelize my unsaved family and friends. As I select birthday presents for my family and friends this year, is there any way I could give them something that would contain the Gospel—a book or a CD or a Scripture verse painting? This year, as I think about Easter, are there people I can round up and bring with me to the Grand Ole Opry House for our Easter service? Is there someone at work who seems discouraged? Perhaps I can pray for that person and share a verse of encouragement?

Pray and plan for open doors. That’s just what we see Paul doing in this second paragraph.

Share the Gospel Without Shame (Romans 1:14-17)

Third, share the Gospel without shame. Look at these verses:

I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

It would have been very easy for Christians in first century Rome to have felt embarrassed about the Gospel, because they were such a strange little "sect." They were singled out and looked at with disdain. People said all kinds of strange things about them. Some said they were atheists, because they didn't bow down to any idol or image that anyone could see. Some said they were cannibalistic because they reportedly ate the Lord's body and drank His blood at their communion services. Others thought they were some kind of moral freaks because their behavior and habit patterns had changed so much since their conversion. They were such a strange little group of people that it was easy, just a few years later, for Emperor Nero to blame them with the burning of Rome, and in so doing he unleashed a furious persecution against them.

But Paul was saying, "It doesn't matter what other people think of say. I am a debtor. I have an obligation to pay. I owe it to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the lost around me to share the Gospel, and I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

So respond to your calling, plan and pray for opportunities to evangelize, then share the Gospel without embarrassment or shame. Be proud of the Lord. Boast in Him. Brag about Him. Tell others about Him.

You never know what's going to happen when you share the Gospel like this. I want to end by telling you that the Gospel of Christ as revealed in Romans not only changes lives, it changes history.

[Aurelius Augustine](#) was born in North Africa in the fourth century. His town sat among the woods near the Mediterranean. His father was a pagan, but his mother, Monica, was a devout Christian. Augustine was an undisciplined child, who became an immoral young adult. He also joined a cult, and for years he broke his mother's heart. Monica, prayed for him ceaselessly, and one day in Milan, Italy, as Augustine sat in a friend's garden he heard a child singing, "Take up and read!" He opened the Bible near him and read a verse from Romans 13 (Read this fascinating story). By the time he finished the sentence, he later said, he was converted. He went on to become one of the greatest leaders of the early church.

Have you ever heard the name [Johann von Staupitz](#)? He's a man we should all appreciate. In the late 15th century, there was a Roman Catholic monk in German named [Martin Luther](#) who had tried every way in the world to find inner peace. He had done everything he could to fulfill the requirements of his Augustinian order. He was absolutely miserable—a tormented man and on the verge of hopelessness. But he had a mentor, a man in whom he confided. That man was an Augustinian vicar named Johann von Staupitz. Staupitz recognized the fact that Luther's problem was that he didn't fully understand the power of the Gospel. So by deliberate design he sent Luther to the German town of [Wittenberg](#) to teach at the university. And the subject? The book of Romans. And as Luther came to our text today, Romans 1:16-17, his eyes were opened and he became a transformed man and out of that transformation came the Protestant Reformation and its great cries of "Scripture Alone! Grace Alone! Faith Alone!"

Have you ever heard of [John Wesley](#). It was many years later as he was a miserable failure sitting at a [Moravian](#) meetinghouse on [Aldersgate Street](#) in London listening to the reading of Luther's preface of the book of Romans—the very document from which I read a paragraph at the beginning of this message—that Wesley's heart was strangely warmed and he was transformed into a great force of revival in this world.

As the scholar F. F. Bruce once put it: "There's no telling what may happen when people begin to study the Epistle to the Romans." And there's no telling what may happen when people begin to respond to their calling, plan and pray for open doors, and to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ without fear or shame.

I have a feeling that God is going to somehow use my ministry and that of this church to do things we may never dream about or know about on this earth. He may use us to alter all the rest of Christian history. We might have a young person here who will be raised up to change this world for Jesus Christ. We might win someone who will be in the chain of converts leading to the greatest evangelist the world has ever known. There's no telling what will happen if we'll all say:

I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in the Gospel a righteousness from God has been revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, as it is written: "The just shall live by faith."

LIGHTS OUT

Romans 1:1-3:20

Even as our soldiers return from an overseas war, we know that here in America we are facing a war of a different kind. It's a cultural war, a moral war, and a spiritual war. As we saw during last Sunday's Super Bowl halftime show, our society is on the verge of complete moral meltdown.

Well, today, in our study of Romans we're coming to a long section of Scripture that I'm calling "Lights Out." Before we actually read this passage, I'd like to give you an overview of what Paul is going to tell us. The book of Romans explains to us the Gospel. It is the Bible's most systematic elucidation of God's plan for saving the human race from their sins.

But before we can know how to be saved from our sins, we need to know how terribly sinful we are. We have to have some sense of our sinfulness, and some idea about the holiness and the wrath of God, and some understanding of our total inability to save ourselves.

We considered opening this message with a dramatic sketch in which someone would be here on the stage hammering away as I came for the sermon. I was going to ask the carpenter what he was building, and the answer would be a stepladder. He was trying to build a stepladder to lead to the moon.

Of course, such an idea is ludicrous. Yet that's what millions of people are trying to do spiritually. They think they can build themselves a ladder of good works that will take them to heaven. If you ask them, "What do you think that it takes to go to heaven," they'll answer, "Well, you have to live a good life. I'm trying to do good things so that I'll qualify for heaven."

Romans 1:18–3:20 tells us that we can never go to heaven on the basis of our good works or of our good life. You might as well try to build a lunar ladder. God is absolutely perfect and absolutely holy and absolutely sinless, and nothing that isn't absolutely perfect, absolutely holy, and absolutely sinless can exist in His presence. None of us are absolutely perfect, absolutely holy, or absolutely sinless, so we can never, by our good works, qualify for eternal life. We can never establish a righteousness before God leading to heaven on the basis of keeping the law. God has provided another way. But before we can really appreciate and receive it, we have to really understand the futility of trying to build a ladder to heaven for ourselves.

That's what we have in the section of Romans that begins with chapter one, verse 17, and runs through chapter three, verse 20. That's what this section of Scripture is all about. It's a rather depressing section of the Bible, but it ends with enormous hope and encouragement.

Now one other note. In these verses, Paul is addressing two different audiences. There were two different groups of people in the church in Rome. There were Jews and there were non-Jews. Jews and Gentiles. What was the primary difference between them? The Jews of olden times had been given the Holy Scriptures. They had been given the Covenant of God. The Gentiles did not possess the Holy Scriptures the way that the Jews did. Instead, they had another book—the book of nature. The Gentiles could look up into the sky and learn something there about God. The Jews could look into the Old Testament Scriptures and learn something there about God.

But now, Paul is going to address both groups. And here's what He is going to say. You Gentiles. You had the book of nature. You had evidence for God's existence and of His nature in the skies above your heads. But you rejected it. You have rejected the Creation as a witness to God, and look what has happened to you.

And then Paul is going to address his Jewish readers and say: You Jews! You had the book of Scripture. You had evidence of God's existence and details of His plan before your very eyes. But you rejected it. You have rejected the Scriptures as a witness of God, and look what has happened to you.

And then he is going to finish this section with a summarizing address to all the world, to everyone, Jew and Gentile.

So here is the outline for our study:

1. Lights Out for the Gentiles (Romans 1:18 – 2:16)
The Masses of People (1b)

The Moral People (2a)

2. Lights Out for the Jews (Romans 2:17-3:8)

3. Lights Out for Everyone (Romans 3:9-20)

Lights Out for the Gentiles

So with that, let's begin the last half of chapter 1, and in this section Paul gives us a brilliant description of the way a culture or a society tends to drift. He is speaking of the great masses of people, of society as a whole. He gives us five downward stages that always occur whenever a society begins to experience moral and spiritual collapse.

The first is a rejection of the truth of [Creationism](#). Look at Romans 1:18-32:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Let me just paraphrase this. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against a society that refuses to acknowledge the obvious fact that God is the Creator of the universe. He specifically made the vast, endless ocean of stars, the splendors of the solar system, the burning sun, the glowing moon, and the beautiful earth in order to show us His invisible power and His divine nature. When a society refuses to acknowledge Him as the Creator, it has taken the first step in a downward moral slide that leads to utter and absolute ruin.

The United States of America took that step when it outlawed any other theory of origins except the unproven, baseless, preposterous theory of Darwinian evolution. Now the hypotheses being advanced by the evolutionists are coming unraveled, and science finds itself in a quandary. How can we continue rejecting a belief in intelligent design when all the evidence is pointing increasingly in that direction.

It's quite sad, really. Just consider this: Forty miles south of downtown London is a tiny village named Piltdown. One day in 1908, a lawyer named [Charles Dawson](#) a member of the prestigious British Geological Society, claimed to have discovered an ancient skull. More bones were soon discovered, and suddenly the world had "proof" of Darwin's Theory of Evolution—Piltdown Man. The scientific literature that came out about [Piltdown Man](#) was enormous, with over five hundred doctoral dissertations written about the discovery. School children were shown "pictures" of what Piltdown Man looked like and where he fit into the evolutionary chain.

[Sir Arthur Keith](#), one of the world's greatest anatomists, wrote more about Piltdown Man than anyone else. His works include the widely-acclaimed book, *The Antiquity of Man*, based on the Piltdown discoveries. He had based a lifetime of thinking on his faith and fascination in Piltdown.

Sir Arthur was a frail eighty-six years old when Kenneth Oakley and Joseph Weiner paid a sad visit to his home. They were breaking the news that after a half-century of study, Piltdown Man was a hoax—nothing more than an old human skull, the jawbone of an orangutan, and a dog's tooth.

For forty years, the brilliant old man had trusted in a fraud. "Keith was a rationalist and a pronounced opponent of the Christian faith," writes Marvin L. Lubenow in [Bone's of Contention](#). "Yet in his autobiography he tells of attending evangelistic meetings in Edinburgh and Aberdeen, seeing students make a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ, and often feeling 'on the verge of conversion.' He rejected the gospel, because he felt that the Genesis account of Creation was just a myth and that the Bible was merely a human book. It causes profound sadness to know that this great man rejected Jesus Christ, whose resurrection validated everything He said and did, only to put his faith in what proved to be a phony fossil."

So the first downward step is a rejection of Creationism. Now when you reject God the Creator then what happens? You begin creating god. A society that rejects the Creator then has to go about creating its own gods, and we call that idolatry. Look at Ro 1:21ff:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Today our gods aren't typically images of birds, animals, and reptiles. We're a more sophisticated society, but isn't it interesting that

we still call our television and movie stars “idols.”

The third downward step is a descending into immorality. A society becomes increasingly immoral and sexually permissive. Look at Romans 1:24ff:

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another....

The fourth step involves the homosexualization of society. As a society becomes increasingly permissive in its morals, it becomes a seedbed for homosexual activity and acceptance. Romans 1:26-27:

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Now when a society rejects the reality of creation, descends into idolatry, passes into sexual immorality and into the homosexualization of the culture, there's only one final step, which is total moral collapse. That is described in the remainder of the chapter.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Yes, yes, you say. This society is going to the dogs. This culture is on its last legs. It's terrible what these people do. There's no excuse for Janet Jackson or Justin Timberlake. There's no excuse for MTV. Shame on Bono using obscenities at the Golden Globe Awards. Shame on Madonna and Britney Spears kissing on TV.

But keep reading! Paul is going to tell us that we're all in the same boat. He isn't just referring to the masses of immoral people; he's also talking about the individuals within that society who think they are more or less moral, that they are different, morally upright. He is saying: We're all sinners who are facing the wrath of God. In our hearts we are all just like Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake. Chapter 2 begins:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

You say, “I don't do the same things!” Yes, we all do. We do them in our minds. Or least, given the right opportunity and circumstances, there's no sin which we're incapable of committing. Look at verse 5: But because of your stubborn and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed.

Lights Out for the Jews

Well, some in Paul's audience might say, “But this doesn't apply to me. I'm not just a moral person; I'm a religious person. I go to church. I read and study my Bible. I was raised in a religious family.” Well, now beginning in Romans 2:17, he is going to address his Jewish readers:

Now, you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship with God; if you know His will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preached against stealing, do you steal?

You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?

Lights Out for Everyone

Now let's see all this as it is unfolding in Paul's analysis. He begins in the last half of chapter one to say that society as a whole is sinful, and that there is a chain reaction that occurs in a sinful society. A culture rejects the Creator, creates its own idols, moves towards sexual and homosexual permissiveness, and ends in total moral collapse. He goes on in the first half of chapter 2 to tell us,

“Wait a minute. I’m not just talking about Justin Timberlake and Janet Jackson, I’m talking about you. You do those same things in your mind, or least you do them potentially in your sinful nature.” In the last half of chapter 2, he says, “Even if you think you’re religious, you’re in bad shape. Because you can never do enough religious things to wash yourself clean of your sinful nature.” He continues this theme through Romans 3:9.

Now beginning with Romans 3:9, he is going to sum it all up by quoting a series of Old Testament verses as confirmations. He is going to string together verses from the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, the theme of all of them being the exceeding wickedness of each and every person in God’s sight.

Look at Romans 3:9ff:

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are under sin. As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

What does it all say? It says, “We are all sinners. We are all exempted from heaven because of our sins. We can never build a stepladder to heaven. We can never get there by keeping the law or performing good works. The whole world is guilty before God and hell bound. No one will ever be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the law.

Now, of course, I can’t leave it there. Let’s at least just go on to the next few verses, which takes us to the very heart of the Gospel and which we’ll look at tonight:

But now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Jesus Christ, seeing our condition, came and shed His blood to make atonement for our sins so that through Him we might have eternal life, and He bids us come to Him and to proclaim Him both Savior and Lord.

But it’s very dangerous to put Him off, to delay, to procrastinate.

Recently I was reading the autobiography of [Peter Cartwright](#), the Methodist revivalist preacher. He told of preaching in a particular city, and he met a young man from one of the Eastern states. This young man was well-educated and well-mannered. He was staying in the same hotel as Cartwright, and the two men struck up a friendship. He was serious, and as Cartwright talked with him he shared with him the Gospel. The young man said (in paraphrase), “I know I need to get myself right with God. I certainly intend to do it. It’s just that I’m not quite ready right now.” Nothing Cartwright could do or say would change the young man’s mind.

As the revival meeting drew to a close, Cartwright developed an intense burden for the young man, and tried again and again to lead him to Christ. But the young man continued to put him off.

The next day Cartwright was given a message. The young man had fallen ill and was suffering from a dangerously high fever. His body began shutting down, and the doctors fell back in helpless horror as some kind of disease took over his body. There was nothing they could do. Peter Cartwright rushed to the young man’s bedside, and this is what the dying man said:

“Oh, if only I had taken your advice a few days ago... I would now be ready to die. But it was stubborn and resisted it. If I had yielded then, I believe God would have saved me from my sins, but now, racked with pain almost insupportable and scorched with burning fevers, and on the very verge of an eternal world, I have no hope in the future; all is dark, dark and gloomy.... And I must now make my bed in hell, and bid an eternal farewell to all the means of grace, and all hope of heaven. Lost! Lost. Forever lost!”

And with those words he died. He had waited too long. What about you? Is there any possibility that you have been somehow thinking that if only you tried hard enough, if only you lived good enough, you’d make it to heaven? Or have you been putting off a

decision to receive Him as your Savior and Lord?

You may not have very much time left, and the Bible says, “Today is the day of salvation.”

Seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous person his thoughts, and let them turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on them, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

PLUNGING INTO THE PROMISES

Romans 4:1-8

This week I received a very nice letter from a woman who had been reading *Then Sings My Soul*. She said that almost every morning she wakes up with a song in her heart, and most of the time it's a hymn. During her devotions, she looks up the hymn that has been on her mind. But the other morning, she said, she woke with anxiety. Some doors had opened for her that seemed too big for her. She was asked to be the keynote speaker at a conference, and she was overwhelmed and fearful. The first thought that came to her when she awoke in the morning was, “I can't do this,” and feelings of acute anxiety swept over her. During her morning devotions, the anxiety wouldn't leave. She said that she had been working hard for the last few years to overcome her tendency toward anxiety and to cultivate peace with God. Now all the anxiety seemed to have come rushing back in one morning. But then the words of an old hymn came suddenly to mind: “My faith has found a resting place, not in device or creed. / I trust the Ever-living One—His wounds for me shall plead. / I need no other argument, I need no other plea; / It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.” And she discovered once again that anxiety can not exist in the soul that is resting in simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I know that Hebrews 11:1-40 is called the “Faith Chapter of the Bible,” and I can't argue with that. But I think Romans 4 comes in a very close second, and today in our study through the book of Romans we're coming to this wonderful chapter. So if you have your Bibles, turn back with me to Romans 1, and let's trace the unfolding logic of the Apostle Paul as he writes this book.

He begins with a wonderful prologue or introduction in Romans 1:1-17. Romans 1:16,17-note state the theme and thesis of the book: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

When Paul uses the word “righteousness” here, he is talking about a way for you and me to appear as righteous, holy, sinless people before God so that we will qualify for everlasting life. In other words, he is saying in verse 17—the theme verse of Romans —“In the Gospel a way of being made righteous and qualified for heaven has been revealed to us, and it is by faith from first to last.” We can never be declared righteous in God's sight or qualified for heaven by trying to live a good life, by trying to be righteous through our own efforts, or by trying to build a ladder of righteousness that reaches up to heaven, because we are all imperfect sinners. But in the Gospel God reveals another way in which we can be declared righteous—it is by faith.

So that is the prologue, the introduction, the theme of the book of Romans.

Then we have a long and rather disheartening section of Romans, the first great section of the body of the book itself. It begins with chapter one, verse 18: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...” And he goes on for the rest of chapter 1, all of chapter 2, and much of chapter 3, demonstrating and arguing that no one in all the earth, no one in the totality of human history can ever be declared righteous in God's sight by living a good life, by keeping the law of God, by doing good works. He says in chapters 1b and 2a that the wrath of God is being revealed against the non-Jewish world, the Gentiles, because of their sinfulness. He says in chapters 2b and 3a that the wrath of God is being revealed against the Jewish world because of its sinfulness. He says in Romans 3:9-10, that the wrath of God is being revealed against the entire world, because all have sinned. There is none righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks after God.

And he sums up this great, dismal section of Romans 3:20-note: Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

And then we come to the very heart of Gospel. Romans 3:21-28-note is arguably the very core of the entire Bible. I call it the

“Ground Zero of Scripture.” We looked it last Sunday night with the time that we had. But let’s just read a little of it again:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood.

Now, with that as background, we come to today’s passage. Most commentators begin the next great section of Romans with chapter 4, verse 1. But as I have read and re-read this passage, I’m quite certain it should begin with chapter 3, verse 29. So let’s begin today’s Scripture reading there, and today I want you to notice three great truths that anchor the Christian life. I’m going to call the first one “A Great Fact.” Behind all of the Christian life, there is a great fact. What is it? We are saved by grace through faith.

A Great Fact

Is God a God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through the same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

In other words, everyone—Jew and Gentile—everyone who goes to heaven does so on the basis of the great fact of the Christian life: We are justified by faith. Now, Paul is going to demonstrate this by giving us the greatest example in the Old Testament. There was no one more revered by the Jews than Abraham, their great father and the founder of the Jewish race. Abraham was the first Hebrew. Abraham was called and set apart by God to create a family, a clan, a tribe, a nation from which the Savior of the entire world would come. Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel. He was the most important figure in Jewish history. He was God’s friend, the man who literally walked with God in the book of Genesis. What, then, was the basis of Abraham’s relationship with God? Was it his good life, his excellent morality, his perfect character? No. He was a sinner like everyone else.

Abraham was justified by grace through faith. Look at Romans 4:1-25 (note)

What shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

In other words, some of Paul’s Jewish readers, hearing him articulate this great fact of justification by grace through faith, might have been saying, “Well, this is certainly a new doctrine. This isn’t found in the Old Testament. This is new and novel and suspect.” Paul was saying, “Oh no it’s not. This is the way God has always worked. In every dispensation, in every age, in every era of history there has only been one way to be made right with God. In Old Testament days and in New Testament days, there was never a time when we could get to heaven on the basis of a righteousness of our own. Everyone who has ever made it to heaven or who ever will gets there the same way—through the blood of Jesus. Abraham was justified by grace through faith. He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Now, Paul goes on almost parenthetically to say, “The same is true of the second great Old Testament Jewish leader—David.” The two greatest heroes of the Old Testament and the two most important figures in Jewish history were Abraham and David. When we turn to Matthew 1, the very first word of the New Testament says, “The genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham.” So Paul brings us both men as examples of those who are justified by grace through faith. Look at verses 6ff:

David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

So this is the great fact of the Christian life—we are justified by grace through faith. It is the only way to be declared righteous in God’s sight. It is the only way to have eternal life. Now, having told us about the great faith of the Christian life, Paul goes on to describe the great father of the Christian life. Let me ask you a question. As a Christian, who is your great father? We’d probably say, “God.” He’s our Heavenly Father. Well, of course, that’s true. But the Bible presents this man Abraham as being the father of the Christian faith. Abraham was not only the father of the Jewish nation, he is the father of the Christian faith. That’s what Paul tells us here in the middle of Romans 4.

A Great Father (Ed: Pause a moment and play this great new song -[Good, Good Father](#))

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

Now, I really dislike dealing with the subject of circumcision from the pulpit, but that's because of my Southern sensibilities. In the ancient world, they didn't have any qualms at all about this subject, and neither does the Bible. So I don't have any choice but to mention this. It's right here in the passage. God prescribed the act of male circumcision as the sign and symbol of being a Jew. Why? Well, it's very obvious. There is a sexual connotation to it. It was a matter of procreation. Every generation of Jews produced the next generation of Jews, and the seed of Israel was passed down from one generation to the next through the loins of the fathers, preserving the Messianic line. So circumcision became the sign and symbol of the Jewish race.

But now Paul is making an incisive observation about the story of Abraham in Genesis. He is saying that this act of circumcision had absolutely nothing to do with making Abraham righteous. The sign of circumcision was given in Genesis 17:10-14 as the sign and symbol of the Covenant, but it was earlier, in Genesis 15, in which we see these critical words of the Gospel: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

So before he became the Father of the Jewish Race, he became the father of all who would be saved by grace through faith! Read on—Romans 4:11b:

So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Therefore the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

A Great Faith

So those of us who are Christians have a great fact and a great father. But thirdly, we have a great faith. The last part of Romans 4 is, to me, one of the most powerful passages on the subject of faith to be found anywhere in the Bible. Paul gives us two things here—first a demonstration of faith and then a definition of faith. And I think it is the most tangible, practical demonstration and definition we can find in the Bible. First, the demonstration of faith involves Abraham's trust in the promise that God would give him a child, even though he and his wife grew to old age with the promise apparently unfulfilled. Look at verse 18:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

And as he goes on to describe this, he gives us a profound definition of faith:

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

What is faith? It is being fully persuaded that God has the power to do what He has promised. Now, we are saved by this kind of faith and we are sustained and strengthened by this kind of faith. I've found over and over again that the answer to the worries and the anxieties of life is to get into the Bible and discover those particular promises from God that meet my particular need. And when I find that promise, then I just have to know and to be fully persuaded that God has the power to do what He has promised. Not one of His promises can fail. And I rest in that and wait for the Lord to work.

Now Paul is saying the same thing is true for saving faith. We have a particular need, a great worry and anxiety. We're all going to hell. We're all lost. But God has given us a promise. If we confess with our mouth Jesus Christ as Lord and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, we shall be saved.

And so we come to Jesus Christ and we say, “I know that I am powerless to save myself. I admit that I can never get to heaven on the basis of my own works. But I believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again, and I confess Him as my Lord and Savior.” And we are saved, we are declared righteous, we are justified by grace through faith. Look at the way Paul ends the chapter:

This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Last Sunday morning I ended my message by telling of a young man who waited too long to make his decision for Christ. Evangelist Peter Cartwright pleaded with him, and the young man kept putting off the decision. He suddenly fell ill, and on his deathbed, the young man screamed, “It’s too late. I’m lost! I must make my bed in hell! Lost! Forever lost!”

I then closed with the verse that says, “Seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near.”

At the close of the second service, as I gave the invitation, a woman came forward, knelt with me here at the altar, and gave her heart to the Lord Jesus. Two days later, she was shot dead, killed by an ex-boyfriend who pumped her full of bullets as she got out of her car. I prayed with her at the altar Sunday, and yesterday I preached her funeral. I’m so glad she listened to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and made that decision, for it truly was her last opportunity.

You and I don’t know if we’ll ever have another opportunity like this, to confess with our mouths Jesus as Lord and to believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead. And so I’d like to say one more time: Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man His thoughts, and let him turn to the Lord and He will have mercy on Him, and to our God for He will abundantly pardon.

STAYING SOBER IN AN ADDICTIVE SOCIETY

Romans 6

This is going to be a great week for all the so-called “Ditto-heads” in America, because it’s been announced that Rush Limbaugh is returning to his radio broadcast tomorrow. He’s the most listened-to talk show host in America, but he has been sidelined for the last month, in re-hab, battling an addiction to pain killers. He’s just the most recent in a long line of American celebrities who have announced they are battling various addictions.

This week the popular singer Courtney Love was in a Los Angeles courtroom on drug possession charges asking the judge to send her to drug rehabilitation instead of to jail. Her late husband, Kurt Cobain, committed suicide because of his addiction to heroin.

We read in the newspaper this week that country singer Wynonna Judd was charged with driving under the influence after a city police officer stopped her speeding Land Rover not far from Music Row.

As we’re beginning to wrap up our topical messages for this fall on the issues we face as Christians today in America, I’d like to devote a message to the subject of addictive disorders. I’ve heard psychologists say that we are the most addictive prone society in history. The mobility of our population, the break-up of the family, the loss of spiritual roots, the entertainment orientation of our culture—all this sets us up for addictive disorders. And there is a wide variety of addictions that can draw us into bondage.

Alcoholism is one. It’s epidemic in our society. Drug addiction is another. Ditto smoking. The first person whose death I ever witnessed was a man who had spent his entire life smoking. It had given him lung cancer, and his death was a horrible thing to observe. But what I remember most clearly about it was that as soon as he passed away, his son, who had been with us at his bedside, went out and lit a cigarette.

And then there are all kinds of sex addictions and pornographic addictions.

Some suffer from gambling addictions. We’re about to see more and more of that in our state of Tennessee as Rebecca Paul and her dubious friends from Georgia come up here and earn their hundreds of thousands of dollars at our expense. I’ve read that gambling addictions occur more quickly than other addictions. I don’t know if that’s true, but I do know that in states that allow casino gambling, the casinos send buses to the retirement homes and to senior citizen centers on the day after social security checks arrive. They bus these seniors to their dens of iniquity, and wine them and dine them, then they put them in front of their slot machines and rob them of their social security checks. And nobody seems to say a thing about it. I don’t understand it.

We are a nation in the grip of scores of life-altering, self-destructive addictions. For this sermon, I'd like to define an addiction in this way: An addiction is any kind of self-destructive pattern in your life that is difficult to control.

Now, I want to issue a caveat here at the beginning of the message. I am not a psychologist or a trained therapist. That's not my role. I'm a pastor, a Bible student, and a theologian. And I start with a basic biblical premise: All our problems have spiritual roots. Now, if a psychologist or a trained counselor were asked to speak today on this issue, they would take a totally different approach, and they would say some very, very useful things. I'm not disputing the wise advice of a godly counselor. I'm just saying that I'm going to approach this subject like I approach every subject. I like to ask the question: "What does the Bible say about this?" And I think we can find a lot of answers to that question in the book of Romans.

Romans is the Bible's premier theology book. It's the letter that Paul sent to the church at Rome in order to leave with them—the central church of the Roman Empire—a copy of His systematic teachings about justification by faith. But Romans isn't just a theology book. It is enormously practical. It tells us how to live. And it tells us how to deal with addictive disorders. Look at this passage, for example, in chapter 6:

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is one of the best passages in the entire Bible as it relates to our subject today. In summary, we can say that this passage teaches us four things about addictions:

First, addiction is a form of spiritual slavery. Look at verse 16: Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

I have a theory about addictions. I believe that our enemy, that old serpent, Lucifer, the Devil, wants to destroy us. But he is so evil that he gets sadistic pleasure in manipulating us into destroying ourselves. If there is anything he loves more than the destruction of a human life, it is the self-destruction of a human life. And addiction is a form of spiritual slavery in which we destroy ourselves.

That leads to the second truth about addiction in these verses: Addiction brings shame and death. Verse 21 says: What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

Many people in this room know what it's like to live in fear for the life of someone we love who is in the grips of an addiction. How tragic it is when one of our precious loved ones is lost because of a self-destructive addiction. It may be a slow death such as comes from the lung cancer of a smoking addiction; or it might come in the sudden destruction of an alcohol-related car crash. But addiction is a form of spiritual slavery that brings shame and death.

But the third truth about addiction in these verses is a surprising one: The power of addiction is broken by doctrine. Look at verse 17: But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.

The word "form" comes from the Greek word *tupos*, meaning type. It was the idea of something stamped. Have you seen a man take a hammer and a metal rod bearing an insignia on the end and with a mighty blow he stamps the insignia on a metal plate? That's the idea. It has to do with something that is indelibly and indestructibly written or posted or stamped.

The word "doctrine" is the word *didacha*, the Greek word for teaching. So Paul is telling us here that there exists a truth or a teaching that has the power to break the cycle of sin and addiction that makes us destroy ourselves. What is this truth? What is this teaching? It's the truth and the teaching of the book of Romans. We have it summarized for us in the last verse of our passage: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As [Charles Wesley](#) put it:

He breaks the power of cancelled sin
And sets the prisoner free:
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.

[\(And Can It Be\)](#)

I have based my life and my ministry on the proposition that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that He has the power to cleanse and to cure us of the tyranny of Satan and sin.

The fourth truth is this: We must deliberately choose to live in that freedom. That's Paul's primary point in this paragraph. Look at verse 19: I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. In other words, he is saying, "I know you are human beings, and we human beings have trouble grasping divine truth, so I'm using an analogy here and framing this in terms of slaves and masters." I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh: Just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

This is the primary emphasis of chapters 6, 7, and 8 of Romans. Just because we have come to Christ for salvation doesn't mean we're going to experience consistent victory over sin. Paul was concerned that there were Christians who were officially now serving Christ but were, in practical terms, still serving sin. Look at the way he began the chapter: What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live in it any longer?

Romans 6:11-note: Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive for the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace.

In other words, it takes an intentional effort on our parts to live consistently in the victory Christ as provided. We must make up our minds that having received Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are going to live with Him. We must learn to break the addictive patterns and become slaves of righteousness through the power that He provides.

Now, with that as background, what can we tell someone who is wanting to overcome an addiction in life? As I read again through the book of Romans on this issue, I'd like to share with you twelve steps to victory. This is the Romans version of the famous 12-step program.

1. Realize that without Christ we are all in the same boat. We're all battling bondage to sin. Look at the way Paul puts it in Romans 2:1-note. After listing all kinds of terrible sins, he says to his moral and outwardly upright reader: Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. In other words, all of us are in the same boat; all of us are in bondage to sin; all of us struggle with sinful patterns in our lives. You aren't alone in this. Even the apostle Paul battled sin in his Christian life. Look at the way he described his struggle in Romans 7: For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. In other words, even the great missionary Paul struggled with the sinful patterns that were within him. In another place, he said, "There is no temptation that has taken you but that which is common to man." We may have different weaknesses and different areas of temptation, but we all battle the ever-lurking danger of spiritual bondage and slavery to sin.

2. Admit your problem. Breaking through denial is the first step toward recovery. Romans 3:23-note says: "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God." I think that it's important not only to be willing to admit, "I have a problem here; I need help." It is also important to admit, "My root problem is spiritual in nature. It is a heart in rebellion against God, and I am willing to confess my sins and to deal with them with His help."

3. Claim victory in Christ. Romans 8:37 says: Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Romans 5:17 says that God intends for us to reign in life through one man, Christ Jesus.

4. Soak up God's love. Realize that Jesus is what you're looking for. A lot of addictions may be caused by our efforts to satisfy

something that is lacking in our hearts. Without Christ, our hearts are empty. We try to drown that emptiness in alcohol or some other addiction, but our hearts are made for Christ and nothing else satisfies. Romans 5 says that when we are justified by grace through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and He pours the love of God into our hearts by His Holy Spirit. Romans 8 says that the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God, and if children then heirs. Jesus loves us, and His love can satisfy every lonely and empty spot in your heart, if only you will let Him do it.

5. Exercise self control. God will help you, but you have to really want His help and you have to make up your mind you're going to conquer your addiction, whatever it is. Look at Romans 12:1-2-note: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Look at the last verse of Romans 13:14-note: But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

6. Enlist the help of others. Few can overcome a sinful pattern without the help of a Christian friend or a wise counselor. Look at Romans 15:1-note: We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to education. And down in Ro 15:14-note: "Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another. One translation says, "Competent to counsel one another." Sometimes our best counselors are our closest friends in whom we can confide, who will tell us the truth, who will pray for us and hold us accountable. Lean on such friends.

7. Along those same lines, seek counseling. God has given to the church some who are gifted with the gifts of wisdom and knowledge. They have the ability to help people work through their difficulties and to apply biblical principles to the problems of life.

8. Accept freely God's forgiveness. Anyone who is entangled in sinful or dysfunctional life patterns suffers guilt because of it, and with the guilt comes a loss of self esteem. But look at Romans 4:7-8-note: Blessed (happy, joyful, healed, restored, fulfilled) are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. In restoring our damaged self-esteem, the greatest thing we can ever realize is that God loves us so much that He has made available to us the ultimate sin-remover—the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9. Trust God for His deliverance. You and I can never overcome any sin—not even the smallest one—in the strength of our own power. We have to trust God for His deliverance. God intends for you to be free. He has promised that we can be more than conquerors through Christ who loves us. And we must believe that He has the power to do what He has promised. Look at Romans 4:20-note: He did not waiver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

10. Fill your mind with Scripture. Look at Romans 8:5: For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. I would advise you to go back to Romans 6, and to personally claim some of the verses that are there. Romans 6 is full of powerful verses, like Ro 6:11-note: Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Recently I memorized Ro 6:1-2-note from this chapter: What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? There's a great power in Scripture memory, because it allows the truth and the word of God Himself to penetrate your mind, to sink into your conscious thoughts and into your subconscious mind and into your unconscious moments with its healing strength. We are what we think about. The Bible says: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." So if you can change the way you think, you'll change the way you live and you'll change the kind of person you are. The best way to change the way you think is to begin memorizing the Bible and hiding God's Word inside your heart. I don't think you have a more powerful weapon in this world when it comes to battling addictions than the deliberate, systematic memorization of Scripture. If you wanted to, you could memorize a verse from Romans 6. In fact, if you wanted to and if it was really important to you, you could memorize the whole chapter—which is my goal. In fact, if you made up your mind to do it, you could memorize all of Romans 6, 7, and 8—this entire section having to do with sanctification and with victory over sin—and I don't believe the devil can ever do very much with a person who is full of Romans 6, 7, and 8. The Bible says, "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly." Romans 12 says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. We haven't been doing that, and as a result the vacuum in our hearts and minds has become the home of all of these addictive disorders. You can push them out again through the power of the memorized Word of God.

11. Be an optimist about the future. One day all those who are in Christ will be out of sin's reach. Our best days are yet to be, and Romans 8 says that the sufferings of this present world are not worth comparing with the glories that shall be revealed.

12. Finally, don't give up. Sometimes when we're battling an addictive pattern in our lives, God sees fit to remove it all at once, once and for all. But normally we still struggle with the temptation, and sometimes we fall and we become discouraged and we want to give up. I want to say to you today, "Don't give up." If you're praying for someone for whom you are burdened, don't give up. I want to give you one final verse on this subject from Romans and I'd like for us to close our message to day by reading it together—all of us—aloud. This is the Bible's message for sinners for whom Christ as died. It is Romans 16:20

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

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

OOPS, I DID IT AGAIN

Romans 6:1-14

Years ago I heard a little poem that I still remember. I don't remember where I heard it, and I've never been able to find it since then. But somehow it has stayed in my memory all these years. It's very simple:

More and more of Thee
And less and less of me.
Till there is all of Thee,
And there is none of me.

The writer of that poem wasn't saying that we should lose our identity or cease to exist; but that as we grow in Christ, we should display less and less of the old sinful nature and more and more of the Christ-nature.

Last week I said that the Christian has two natures. We are children of Adam; and when we receive Jesus Christ as Lord, we become sons and daughters of God. We have a human nature and a Christian nature. There is an old self and a new self.

A couple of people pointed out to me—and rightly so—that when we come to Christ our old self, our old nature, the flesh is killed off. It is crucified. We have died to self, and our new identity is in Christ. That's true. But do you remember what the old King James Version said in John 11, when Jesus told them to roll the stone away from the mouth of Lazarus' tomb. They said, Lord, he has been dead four days—by now he stinketh. Well, the old self is dead, but it still stinketh.

Our old self has been crucified with Christ and we are new creatures in Christ, yet we still struggle with the old self. The apostle Paul refers to this many times in his writings. Look at the strange way he puts it in the book of Colossians, for example.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness....

Isn't that interesting? In verse 3 he says that our old self died. But in verse 5, he tells us to put to death our works of our old self. The NIV says: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature."

How can you put to death something that is already dead? In terms of our position, the old self is dead, crucified with Christ. But in terms of our condition, we still struggle with the remnants of sin in our lives. Galatians 5 says that the flesh wars against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. In other words, there is a conflict within us. And we're to walk in the Spirit so that we do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

That's what Romans 6-8 is all about. In our study through the book of Romans, we're coming today to this powerful three-chapter segment having to do with sanctification, with Christian growth, with how the person who has been justified by faith deals with the sin-problem he or she still faces. We don't have time to study these three chapters in great depth, but let's see how they begin in Romans 6:1-14:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we

also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

A Question (Romans 6:1-note)

There are four elements of this passage for us to consider today. The first is a logical question. Paul begins the chapter asking, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"

The word "then" indicates that he is continuing to pursue the thought found at the end of chapter 5. Look at Romans 5:20: "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more."

In other words, when God gave us the Ten Commandments and the Law, He provided a way for us to recognize and define sin. And so sin became more pronounced, more recognized, more defined, more real to us. Sin abounded. But grace has abounded more. The benevolence of God's grace is greater than the malevolence of sin and self. So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But that raises a question. If God's forgiveness is so available, if His grace is so abounding, won't we be more likely to sin? If we have constant, continual, and carte blanche forgiveness over all sin, why not sin freely? For example, if someone tells me I can use my credit card up to a million dollars a month and all my debts will be covered by somebody else, won't I be more tempted to purchase things? If God's grace is so abundant, doesn't that just encourage us to sin all the more? "Oh, I know it's a sin, but it's all right. I'll just confess it and draw on God's unlimited forgiveness."

That's the question Paul wants to address. Since we have been justified by grace through faith, should we go on acting like we did before we were saved? Should we continue in sin, trusting God's grace to keep forgiving and forgiving and forgiving?

Declaration (Romans 6:2-note)

Having asked the question, he then makes a vigorous declaration: "Certainly not! I love how emphatically this verse states it. There's no ambiguity, no hesitation, no amplification. Just--Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

Let's suppose that we have a family living in squalor. They're the poorest of the poor, and they live in a cardboard box in a squatter's village in a smoldering dump outside of a third-world city. They live in absolute filth. They have no plumbing. They have nothing but a few pieces of junk. They have no toys for the children. They are sick and starving. The stench of the place is overpowering.

But suppose a benefactor shows up in their lives, loads them into a car, takes them to a beautiful new cottage in the country, gives them all baths, cleans them up, and provides a lovely new home for them with a kitchen garden, a little playground, a lovely lawn, and arching shade trees. Inside is a bed for every child. Inside is a bathroom with tub and shower. Inside is a pantry filled with food. Inside is a medicine chest packed with medicines and vitamins. He gives them the deed and pays the property taxes for the next twenty years.

What shall we say then? Shall they continue to live in squalor? Shall they return to the dump? Shall they meander back to their old way of life? Certainly not! How shall they who left that kind of life live in it any longer? When we who are Christians are delivered from self and sin, when we find ourselves in Christ, how can we ever want to go back to our old way of life? How can we imagine continuing with our sinful ways? The question is: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" The declaration is: "Certainly not!"

Explanation (Romans 6:3-10-note)

Now, the passage goes on with an explanation. Look at verses 3-10: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

When we received Christ as our Savior, what happened? We entered into His death and resurrection. There is a sense in which we

were crucified with Him and raised with Him. We identify with His death and resurrection. When we are baptized, it is simply the outward, symbolic declaration we make to all the world that we have been buried with Christ in death and raised to walk in newness of life.

Verse 6 goes on to say: Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

So you see the progress of Paul's thinking here. The question: Should we continue sinning now that we are under grace, now that we are Christians? The declaration: Certainly not! The explanation: We have been crucified with Christ and raised with Him to live a new kind of life.

Instruction (Romans 6:11-14)

Now, in the last section of this paragraph, Paul gives us seven wonderful instructions, and here's where I want to spend the rest of our time. If we have died to sin, how can we live victoriously over temptation? Think of a temptation that bothers you. It might be your thought life. It might involve the words you speak. It might be an attitude of heart. It might be some habitual behavior. How can you have victory over these temptations? Paul gives us seven steps here in Romans 6:11-14-note:

First, reckon yourselves dead to sin (Romans 6:11). The word "reckon" means to "consider" or to "regard." It has to do with the mental image we have, with the way we think about something. Paul begins here by telling us we need to change the way we think about sin. We need to reckon or consider or regard ourselves as dead to sin.

Along those lines, I think one of the most powerful tools for overcoming temptation is to memorize this very Scripture, Romans 6:1-2. When temptation stares you in the face there's nothing more powerful than to remind yourself that you have died to sin. You have to reckon yourself dead to that temptation. I've found these two verses to be very powerful in defeating temptation: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

God's Word is our most powerful tool in fighting and overcoming temptation. All temptation begins in our minds, for the mind is the spiritual battleground for the soul. If, therefore, we want to have victory over any sin, it begins by remolding our minds. That means changing the way we think about ourselves and about sin. Reckon yourselves dead to sin.

Second, reckon yourselves alive to Christ (Ro 6:11-note). Our ability to overcome temptation is in direct proportion to our fellowship with Christ. If we are walking with the Lord each day, if we are having our daily quiet time, if we are memorizing Scripture, if we are praying without ceasing, if we are enjoying unbroken fellowship with Christ, if we are abiding in our living Lord, temptation is going to lose much of its power. I've noticed that there are some buildings that are very thick and insulated or filled with electronic devices. As a result, it's hard to receive a call on your cell phone. The radio waves have a difficult time penetrating the walls and the electronic field within the building. Think of that as an illustration. When you're in the center of Christ, it's harder for the devil's radio waves to reach you. They're weakened by His overwhelming power. The closer you are to the Lord, the stronger you'll be over temptation. Reckon yourselves alive to Christ. Live in unbroken fellowship with Him.

Third, do not let sin reign over you (Ro 6:12-note). In other words, make up your mind you're going to overcome that stubborn temptation through the power of Christ. Even if that sin is habitual. Even if it is addictive. There is victory in Jesus Christ; and you have to make up your mind that you're going to be an overcomer. I just finished a wonderful autobiography of the Christian composer John W. Peterson. He wrote such great classics as "It Took a Miracle" and "Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul." In his book, Peterson acknowledged his terrific battle with pride, jealousy, and envy. He had become one of the most popular Christian composers of the 20th century, and he was reveling in the way God was using him. But just at that moment, he began to sense that jealousy was nibbling away at him. He was afraid that newer, younger composers were going to rise up through the ranks and invade his "territory." When he'd be at a meeting and someone would sing something by another popular composer like, say, Ralph Carmichael, it would frustrate and frighten him greatly. But Peterson acknowledged his sin of envy before God and prayed for deliverance. One night at two or three in the morning, he was unable to sleep. He finally came to grips with it, confessing his sin of pride and envy to God, and then he began to pray for those whom he had envied. "Lord, bless Ralph Carmichael. Bless Kurt Kaiser. Bless Otis Skillings—he's been writing some wonderful music. Bless Bill Gaither...." Peterson said that although the temptation hasn't gone away completely, he has achieved a breakthrough in his attitude through prayer. Now "when Satan lights his fires of resentment and jealousy, I can put them out by thanking God for my fellow writers, asking Him to bless them, and taking delight in their success."

Whatever your temptation or sin is, there is victory if you approach it seriously, with determination, and in the power of Jesus Christ. We can have consistent victory over all known sin. So the Bible says, Reckon yourselves dead to sin. Reckon yourselves alive to

Christ. And do not let sin reign over you.

Fourth, do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness. The word “members” here refers to the parts of our bodies. I said earlier that the mind is the battleground for the soul, but every sin manifests itself in a physical way. Perhaps your sin is with your mouth. Maybe you say things you shouldn’t, or maybe you fail to say things you should. Maybe you eat or drink unwisely. Perhaps it’s with your eyes. Perhaps it’s with your fingers. Perhaps it’s where your feet are taking you. Perhaps there are sexual sins in your life. We must refuse to let our bodies be conveyers of sin. This was a great theme of the apostle Paul’s. In his letters, he talked about the body nearly 100 times. He said:

- Romans 8:13-note: For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
- Romans 12:1-note: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.
- 1 Corinthians 6:13: Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.
- 1 Corinthians 6:19: Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.
- 1 Corinthians 9:27-note: I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

We could go on to other verses, but these are enough to see the emphasis of Scripture on this point. Do not present the parts of your body as instruments of unrighteousness.

In my reading this week, I ran across a good example of this. Years ago, in 1971, I read a little book by F. B. Meyer called *The Christ Life for Your Life*. This week I’ve been re-reading it in preparation for this message. In one chapter, Meyer wrote: “I was once staying with another man, a pastor. I had said nothing about smoking—I never do single out sins—I had not alluded to the habit; but one day we were walking along a street that led over a river, and to my surprise as we got to the apex of the bridge he took his tobacco pouch and pipe and threw them over, and said, ‘There, I have settled that.’ Then turning to me, he said: ‘I know, Mr. Meyer, you have said nothing about it; but for the last few months God has been asking me to set a new example to my young men, and said, ‘Why should not I do as I like, and they as they like?’ God was searching me, and I was fighting Him; but it is all settled now, sir, it is all done now.’”

So reckon yourself dead to sin. Reckon yourself alive to Christ. Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, and do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness. But...

Fifth, present yourselves to God. Come to Christ in full surrender. Come and let Him have all there is of you. The famous British army chaplain, Bishop Taylor Smith, put it this way in his personal testimony: “As soon as I awake each morning I rise from bed at once. I dress promptly. I wash myself, shave and comb my hair. Then fully attired, wide-awake and properly groomed, I go quietly to my study. There, before God Almighty and Christ my King, I humbly present myself as a loyal subject to my Sovereign, ready and eager to be of service to Him for the day.”

Sixth present your members as instruments of righteousness. Lord, here is my mouth, my eyes, my ears, my hands, my feet, my brain. I dedicate my body as a living sacrifice to you.

Seventh, remember that sin shall not have dominion over you. Why? Why shall sin not have dominion over us? It isn’t because we have superhuman personalities. Not because we’re able to defeat Satan, sin and self on our own. It’s because Jesus Christ has broken the back of Satan, sin, and self on the cross.

When I was in college, I had a Dean of Men and coach who lived on campus with his family. His child had purchased a snake for a pet, a boa constrictor. It became as domesticated as a boa constrictor can become, and, of course, it was a real conversation item. They were sort of proud of their unusual pet. But one day, Coach Matthews returned home to find the boa constrictor had wrapped itself around his child and was in the process of squeezing the child to death. It was only the grace of God that brought him home at that moment. With a mighty rush of adrenaline and superhuman strength, he managed to extricate the child and destroy that serpent.

Sometimes we think that we can domesticate sin. We think that we can entertain that temptation. But sooner or later, it always turns on us, and we don’t have the power within ourselves to break free. But Jesus Christ enters our lives, and with His superhuman

righteousness He extricates us, destroys that old serpent, and because of Him sin shall not have dominion over us.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin
And sets the prisoner free.
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to Christ. Do not let sin reign over you. Do not present your bodies as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourself to God and present your bodies as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not have dominion over you for you are not under the law but under grace.

More and more of Thee
And less and less of me.
Till there is all of Thee,
And there is none of me.

WHAT'S AHEAD FOR ISRAEL?

Romans 9-11

As we prepare to celebrate Good Friday and Easter here in America, the nation of Israel is preparing to celebrate the Passover, perhaps the oldest holiday (literally, holy day) in human history. It has been observed for over 3500 years by the Jewish nation, and it commemorates that never-to-be-forgotten night when God struck down the firstborn of Egypt but spared the homes of the Israelites which were marked by the blood of the Passover Lamb. "When I see the blood," said the Lord, "I will pass over you." It was a prophetic emblem of the coming Messiah. Today thousands of Jews are preparing to return to Israel to celebrate the Passover. According to news reports, many of the pilgrims are coming from Germany and France, from Europe, but fewer Americans are traveling to Israel this year because of terrorism fears and high airline prices.

I wish I were able to go. There's no nation in the world that fascinates me like Israel. One of the most remarkable events in human history has been the restoration of the State of Israel, which occurred in 1948 after nearly 2000 years of non-existence as a nation. Today we see biblical prophecy being fulfilled before our eyes, and the attention of the whole world is on the Middle East.

I remember visiting Israel for the first time in the mid-1970s, and as we walked across the Temple Mount, I thought to myself, "This is the Powder Keg of world events and the crucible of world history."

Well, today, as we prepare for Passover, Good Friday, and Easter, I want to deal with the question of the Jews. What is the role of the nation of Israel in God's program for the ages and in God's plans for the future? That is the subject of Romans 9, 10, and 11, and it brings us to the next segment of Scripture in our wintertime series of studies from Romans.

The apostle Paul has devoted eight chapters to explaining the theology behind the biblical truth of justification by faith. This sermon series is a survey of Romans, not an in-depth study; but we've at least seen the grand themes of the book—beginning with the utter depravity of humanity. Left to ourselves, we are utterly incapable of establishing a relationship with God or going to heaven. We can not build a ladder to take us to heaven. It is impossible for us. But a righteousness from God apart from law has been revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. This is not a new teaching. It's the way God has always worked. It is Plan A, and there is no Plan B. Justification by grace through faith was what saved Abraham, for the Bible says that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. That was the subject of Romans 5. Romans 5 gave us the benefits of justification. As we saw last week, Romans 6-8 tell us that as long as we're in this world we'll struggle with sin; but we can be more than conquerors through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul ends chapter 8 by saying, "For I am persuaded that neither life nor death nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now Paul has one other thing to explain to us along the lines of the theology of justification. He wants to elucidate how the nation of Israel and the people of the Jews fit into God's overall plan for the ages. He devotes three chapters to this topic, but it seems to me that these chapters are relatively simple and quite helpful. In general we can say that Romans 9 deals with Israel's past rejection of Christ. Romans 10 deals with their present need for Christ. And Romans 11 deals with their future glory with Christ. Let me show you how these ideas work their way out.

Romans 9:1-33 We Should Mourn Israel's Past Rejection of Christ

In Romans 9, Paul tells us we should mourn Israel's past rejection of the Messiah. The chapter begins: I tell you the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

In other words, God chose Abraham and his descendants to become the human channel through whom God would provide redemption to the world. He chose them, gave them His presence and His promises, and through them brought a Redeemer into the world. But in the process, the Jewish people turned from Him. The Bible says about Christ, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." And Paul is grief-stricken over that. Every day he mourns Israel's rejection of their long-awaited Redeemer.

What went wrong? Well, Paul went on to say that the problem wasn't with God. It isn't that God's promises failed. In fact, it's possible to see all this as a part of God's brilliant plan for world history. Let's continue reading with verse 6.

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promises are counted as the seed. For this is the world of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, Jacob I have loved (chosen), but Esau I have hated (rejected).

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Here's what Paul is saying. God wanted to establish a family, a lineage, a channel through whom He would bring into the world a great Redeemer, the God-Man, Jesus Christ. In His sovereignty He chose one man—Abraham. That man had two sons: Isaac and Ishmael. Ishmael was rejected, and Isaac was chosen as the son through whom the seed would come. Isaac had two sons—Jacob and Esau. Esau was rejected, and Jacob was chosen as the son through whom the seed would come.

God, in His sovereignty, established a family tree for the Messiah. The next several verses say, in effect, "Was God unfair in doing this? No. He is God, and He can do whatever He wants." So He chose a certain nation and a certain family, and through them came the Messiah.

But when the Messiah came, He was rejected by the very family God had appointed as His lineage. He was rejected by the very nation chosen by God as His kinsman. Look at verse 30:

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

This is one of the saddest realities in the annals of humanity. God chose a man, raised up a nation, and through this man and this nation, He brought forth His only begotten Son, the Messiah. But He came unto His own and His own received Him not. He was rejected and despised, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our eyes from him. Oh, the sorrow! Oh, the tragic irony! We should be deeply burdened for God's people, the Jews—Israel.

Romans 10:1-21 We Should Evangelize Because of Israel's Current Need for Christ

Moving on to chapter 10, we see the natural outcome of such a burden. We're to evangelize the Jews because of Israel's current need for Christ. Look at the way he begins: Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

What does Israel need to do? Well, what do any of us need to do if we're going to establish a relationship with God? What is the greatest need for any person in the world today? Look at verse 9ff: If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

We need to evangelize the Jewish people. Look at Ro 10:14-note: How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

While this is true for all the nations of the world, the specific context is that of Jewish evangelism. Paul says that is why I am stopping at every synagogue I come to and sharing the Messiah with them.

Now, this is a controversial subject today. We live in such a post-modern, pluralistic society that it is considered impolite to try to evangelize anyone. By seeking to evangelize another person, we are implying that our faith is superior to someone else's faith. We're implying that we have a corner on the truth. We're implying that our religion is better. The world screams about that. They ask: How can you be so arrogant and intolerant? Don't you know it isn't politically correct? Don't you know that it's offensive? Don't you know it is arrogant and unacceptable?

Recently Jewish leaders in consultation with the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops forged a document on this subject. It contained this sentence: "Targeting Jews for conversion to Christianity is no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church."

A group of leading mainline church leaders known as the Scholars' Group, made up primarily of leaders from Lutheran, Methodist, and Episcopalian denominations, put out a similar document called "A Sacred Obligation Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People." It said in part: "In view of our conviction that Jews are in an eternal covenant with God, we renounce missionary efforts directed at converted Jews."

That is more-or-less what they said to Simon Peter after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, as he stood before the Jewish ruling counsel. His reply rings out through history, and it's all the answer I need: We should obey God rather than man. Whether it is right or not, you be the judge; but we cannot help but speak of the things we have seen and heard. There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved!"

One of the interesting developments of the last several years have been the number of Jews coming to Christ and converting as Messianic Jews. Messianic Jewish congregations are flourishing around the world.

Just this week I read about astronomer David Block, who was professor of Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at a major university in Johannesburg, South Africa. Growing up in an Orthodox Jewish home in South Africa, he was an active practicing Jew. When he enrolled in the university, he became friendly with a professor named Dr. Lewis Hurst, and the professor agreed to give the young student private lessons in astronomy. Week after week, they discussed the cosmos, and David Block began asking his mentor certain philosophical questions: Why are we here? What's the meaning of such insignificant life on such a tiny planet in such an immense universe? One day Dr. Lewis said, "David, there is an answer to all your questions." He went on to say, "I know that you come from an Orthodox Jewish family, but would you be willing to meet with a dear friend of mine (who was a Christian minister)?" David Block consented, and in his meeting, the Christian minister turned to Romans 9 and read from our text where Paul says that Y'shua (Jesus) is a stumbling block to the Jewish people but that those who believe in Him will never be put to shame. As the young astronomy student continued to study it all began to make sense. He began to realize how remarkably Y'shua-Jesus had fulfilled the messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures, and day David Block gave his life to Christ and found His Messiah. He went on to become one of South Africa's leading scientists and astronomers. There is a steady stream of Jewish conversions to Christ, and I think we'll see more and more as the age draws to a close.

Perhaps you have the same need. It doesn't matter what your race or background or ethnicity—everyone in the world needs the forgiveness and eternal life that Y'shua-Jesus offers, and if you will confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 11:1-36 We Should Anticipate Israel's Future Glory in Christ

So we should mourn Israel's past rejection of Christ, and we should evangelize because of Israel's current need for Christ. But now I want to briefly touch on Romans 11 which tells us we should anticipate Israel's future glory in Christ. Look at verse 1: I say then,

has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. He goes on to give us two truths about this. First, there is a remnant of Jewish believers in our own day, that steady stream of converts who are the [firstfruits](#) of the great coming harvest of evangelism that will occur among the Jewish people. Verse 5 says: Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

The second truth is seen later in the passage. Let's skip down to Ro 11:25-note: For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

In other words, there is coming a day in which God will bring the nation of Israel en masse to Himself. When will that be? It is pictured for us vividly and prophetically in one place in the Bible, in the book of Zechariah, chapters 12 through 14. At the climax of the Great Tribulation period, when the armies of the antichrist are surrounding Jerusalem and the Battle of Armageddon is about to be joined, and the Jewish nation is facing ultimate annihilation, look at what will happen:

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.

Do you realize this was written about 520 B.C.? Five centuries before Messiah came? It is all predicted here in advance.

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for them as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn... In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. "It shall be in that day," says the Lord of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered..."

And look at Romans 14:3-note: Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights on the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west...

Do you realize that Jesus ascended back to heaven from the Mount of Olives while the disciples watched with astounded, upturned faces? And do you realize that two angels appeared to those disciples telling them that this same Jesus would so return in like manner.

In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west...

It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to the Lord—neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light. And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—"The Lord is one," and His name one.

Jesus Messiah shall usher in His millennial reign and for a thousand years all the great promises made to Israel will be fulfilled on this earth. And so, Paul says, all Israel shall be saved.

So God wants us to grieve over Israel's past rejection of the Messiah. That's the point of Romans 9. He wants us to evangelize Israel and the world during this present season of opportunity. That's the subject of Romans 10. And He wants us to anticipate the future as he gives it to us in chapter 10. Do you have a burden, not only for the lost of Israel but a world-burden and a world-vision for the lost and dying everywhere? Are you doing what you can to reach others? And is your face turned upward in glorious anticipation of the future? If so, there's something about all that which leads to praise. Notice how the passage ends. Paul closes this section and the entire first portion of his book of Romans with a great doxological burst of praise and worship:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen!

EXTREME MAKEOVER

Romans 13:1-14

The veteran missionary, Dan Cronk, once gave me an odd sort of compliment. “Rob,” he said, “you’re not particularly handsome, but your face has character.” Well, some of us have a tough time of it, but we all want to improve our face and our appearance. The newest fad is “makeovers.” There’s a popular television show called “Extreme Makeover” that, well, takes things to the extreme in helping people develop a new exterior. The problem, of course, is that no matter how much money you pay for your makeover, you’re still the same person on the inside. And it’s the inside that counts. The message of the Bible is that God wants to give you and me an interior makeover; and in doing so, He makes us truly pleasant, handsome, beautiful, and influential people.

We might say that the book of Romans is the manual. I’d like to take one last opportunity in this series of messages to give you a brief, comprehensive survey of Romans. Here it is. After the prologue or introduction of the book in Romans 1:1-17, we have this outline I’ve developed based on the word ROMANS:

- R **Ruin** (Romans 1:17 – 3:20) – The utter sinfulness of humanity
- O **Offer** (Romans 3:21-31) – God’s offer of justification by grace
- M **Model** (Romans 4:1-25) – Abraham as a model for saving faith
- A **Access** (Romans 5:1-11) – The benefits of justification
- N **New Adam** (Romans 5:12-21) – We are children of two “Adams”
- S **Struggle w/ Sin** (Romans 6-8) Struggle, sanctification, and victory

Chapters 9-11 then deal with the role of Israel in the overall plan of God for redeeming the world. And then, the theology of the book of Romans is complete, and Paul ends with an exuberant word of praise: Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Now, the Apostle Paul could have ended the book of Romans right there, and we would have been very happy with its contents. It would have explained to us in a systematic and Spirit-inspired way how God had determined to redeem the human race and give hope to you and me. But it would have been an incomplete book from God’s perspective, because doctrine and theology is never an end in itself.

Let me give you an illustration. My father owned and operated an apple orchard on the Tennessee/North Carolina border. One of his most popular variety of apples at that time was the Virginia Beauty. Suppose he had planted a whole row of Virginia Beauties, but after carefully tending and cultivating them, they had never produced a single apple. The trees may have been beautiful in themselves, but if they are supposed to produce bushels of apples, they’re useless if they don’t do it. The purpose of an apple tree is to produce fruit. And the purpose of good doctrine and theology is to produce happy and holy lives.

Good theology produces good living. Right thinking produces right living. Wrong thinking produces wrong living. Bad theology sooner or later corrupts the morals, but good theology leads to a happy and a holy life.

So having given us good theology in Romans 1-11, Paul devotes the rest of the book to the implications of that theology in terms of our daily lives. In other words, Romans 1-11 tells us what we should believe, and Romans 12-16 tell us how we should live based on that teaching. And it’s all about relationships.

Romans 12:1-2 tells us that if we accept the truth of justification, we should offer ourselves without delay as living sacrifices to the God who has given Himself to save us: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The next several verses tell us how we should relate to ourselves. For I say, through the grace given me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought....

The next several verses tell us how we should relate to our brothers and sisters in the family of God. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another....

The next several verses tell us how we should relate to the people we have trouble getting along with: Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men....

Listen To Your Leaders

Now, today, on our study through Romans we are coming to chapter 13 and it is just a continuation of this theme. The Lord is going to tell us in this chapter how we should get along with the government and with our neighbors, and He is going to tell us why. So with all of this as a backdrop, let's look at what Paul says about the Christian and the government in Romans 13:1-7.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

The remarkable thing about this passage is that Paul wasn't talking about the American federal government, or our state government, or our local government here in Nashville, as frustrating as some of those entities can be. He was addressing Christians in the imperial city of Rome in the first century. And he told them here that they should be good citizens and respect their leaders and obey the laws and pay their taxes for two reasons.

First, to stay out of trouble. And second, because God built an authority structure into all the universe, He ordained the concept of human government, and without human government we have nothing left but a state of anarchy. Therefore when we are submissive to the governing authorities, we are respecting the authority and the order of things which God put into play at the creation.

Now, Paul does not deal here with one vexing problem. What happens when the government orders us to do something that violates our biblical responsibilities as Christians? What if the government, for example, would pass a law forbidding us from preaching or from sharing the Gospel? Then we have another biblical principle to follow. It's found in Acts 5:29 when Peter said, "We must obey God rather than man." Some of my greatest heroes in Christian history have languished in prison for preaching the Gospel. John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. The great Chinese Christian Watchman Nee. In fact, right now all round the world there are Christians suffering in prison for their faith. We have the right and the responsibility to engage in civil disobedience when our rights as Christians are violated by the law.

The emphasis in Romans 13, however, is that we must go just as far as humanly possible in avoiding such a conflict. We should be subject to our governing authorities, we should pay our taxes, and we should obey the laws of our land because God has instituted a principle of authority in this world and we're thankful for it.

Love Your Neighbors

Now, the middle part of chapter 13 tells us to love our neighbors.

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

When we come to Christ, we should grow to be more pleasant people. It should have an effect on our personalities. We should begin thinking more about other people and less about ourselves. Roland Hill used to say that he would not believe a man to be a true Christian if his wife, his children, the servants, and even the dog and cat, were not the better for it.

From time to time, I've told some of my college-era stories about being in the home of Billy and Ruth Graham. I had the rare and wonderful opportunity of spending weekends in their home in Montreat, North Carolina. On my first visit there, I was sort of a pitiful young man, still trying to get established in my Christian life. Sometime during the weekend, I think it was Sunday afternoon, I walked by the den and Ruth had just sat down for the first time all weekend. She had been a beehive of activity, and there was an old movie on television and I knew that she rarely watched television, but she had sat down for a few moments to watch the old movie, *Gigi*. I suppose I didn't know any better, but I was full of questions about the Christian life and this was the first time I had

seen Ruth alone. So I sauntered into the den and when she looked up, I said, "Ruth, can I talk to you for a few minutes." Instantly the television was off and I had her total attention. And the answers she gave me and the words she said have stayed with me all these years. But the older I get, the thing that impressed me was how quickly she dropped her own interests to attend to my needs.

A few moments of relaxation instantly dropped in order to attend to my needs. I've never forgotten that. And sometimes I'm ashamed that I'm not as charitable with those who interrupt me as she was at my interruption. The essence of love is putting the needs of another person—maybe your husband or wife—before your own. And that is the fulfillment of the law.

Live Out Your Faith

Chapter 13 ends with one last word about how we should let ourselves be viewed by the society around us. We must wear our armor. We must put on the armor of light and wear the Lord Jesus Christ as it were, for time is short. Look at verses 11-14:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

The key phrase here is "put on." Paul says it twice. In verse 12, he tells us to put on the armor of light, and in verse 14 he tells us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.

This is one of Paul's favorite object lessons. Listen to these verses:

- For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ—Galatians 3:27
- Put on the new man which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness – Ephesians 4:24
- Put on the whole armor of God – Ephesians 6:11
- Put off the old man with his deeds and... put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him - Colossians 3:9-10
- Put on tender mercies – Colossians 3:12
- Put on love, which is the bond of perfection – Colossians 3:14
- Put on the breastplate of faith and love – 1 Thessalonians 5:8

And there are many other similar verses in the Bible. We might say that the Scripture gives us our daily wardrobe. But what does it mean to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." This is not referring to the act of being saved, because Paul was writing this as a commandment to people who were already Christians. This was written to the church at Rome, and these people had already decided to follow Christ. So how, in our Christian lives, do we put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh?

Well, think of it as getting dressed in the morning and ready for the day. When I wake up in the morning, I stagger into the shower and let the warm water run over me and awaken me and cleanse me. I look in the mirror and see if I need additional grooming. I decide what I'm going to wear for the day, and I make a conscious decision to get into those clothes so that when people see me all day long they will see the shirt and pants I've selected to wear. And then, when I'm ready, I leave my room to start the day.

Well, we should do something akin to that in a spiritual sense. There's no better way to start the day than to consciously decide to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We step into the shower of confession and make sure we're sprinkled with His blood. We look into the mirror of His Word as James tells us to do, and we make sure we're presentable. We spend time in our devotional exercises and get inside the Lord Jesus just as we'd get inside our pants or shirt. And when we emerge from our room, we want people to see us dressed up in Jesus Christ.

I shared something with my Wednesday night Bible study group that I'd like to share with you also. Many years ago when I gave my life to the Lord in full surrender, I was given a little book by Dr. Stephen Olford on having a daily quiet time. I read it and it was a great help to me. Dr. Olford, a powerful British preacher, is still alive though somewhat frail and elderly. I met with him last week and I asked him about his own personal quiet time. His eyes sparkled and he came to life. It was so inspirational to me that I'd like to quote a little of what he said:

"I have a very, very simple procedure. I read from Genesis to Revelation. When I reach Revelation I go back to Genesis. Even though I have read it over the years—over and over and over again—never a morning with God that He does not reveal something new to me. I read the passage three times: First time generally, second time expositionally, third time personally. I let the Lord speak to me, showing me in His Word a promise to keep, a prayer to echo, a command to obey, a sin to confess, etc. I personalize it entirely and write in that form. And then I like to take what I have written and loosely turn that into prayer so that my prayers are not mechanical. It is not a Chinese wheel I can just put on and watch TV while it plays. It is a prayer that comes right out of my quiet

time before I go into thanksgiving, intercessions, etc.”

I asked him if he kept a prayer list, and he said: “Yes. My prayer list is a very interesting one. Monday-Missions. Tuesdays-Thanksgiving. Wednesday-Workers, staff, etc. Thursday-Tasks. Friday-Family. Saturday-Saints (so much of Paul’s praying was for the saints). And Sunday-Sinners. On the list of sinners for this present period of my life, one of them is a famous golfing figure that I’m praying for earnestly, because I believe if he were converted it would turn the youth world upside down. Anyway, I do have a prayer list, and under those headings. Now, it isn’t the length of time I spend in my quiet time, though I usually take an hour, but there is a carry-over of the activity of prayer, the attitude of prayer, that marks the rest of the day. I never pick up a telephone without a prayer. I never dictate a letter to my secretary without a prayer. I never let anybody into my study or out of my study without a prayer, and as my beloved workers know, any time we get together we say, ‘Let’s pray.’ And so, prayer is literally praying without ceasing. At the drop of a hat... and so I feel I live in that of perpetual prayer.”

It seems to me that that is what it means to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.

So I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

PLAN B

Romans 15:14-23

Have you ever had a time in your life when God did not answer your deepest and most earnest prayers? You wanted or needed something so badly—perhaps healing for yourself or another person, perhaps a relationship, perhaps a job—and you were convinced this thing that you wanted represented God’s will for your life. And so you prayed with earnestness and intensity. And just the exact opposite occurred. You got a bad report from the doctor. The relationship ended. The job went to someone else. And it left you confused. Why did God not answer my prayers?

Well, today I’m going to show you something from the Scripture that may help answer that question. I’m going to be rather professorial about it and give you a good bit of background so we can really understand the context of our story so as to glean all we can about its lesson. Let me review for you again the great missionary career of the apostle Paul. He and Barnabas were set apart as missionaries in Acts 13:

The two of them launched out on a missionary tour, traveling to the island of Cyprus and over into Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Paul’s second missionary journey took him further west, all the way to Greece. His third missionary journey covered much of the same territory as his second one with added stops along the way.

Now, during Paul’s first and second missionary trips, he had one purpose and one purpose only—to preach the Gospel and plant churches. But this third missionary journey had several purposes. He still wanted to preach the Gospel and plant churches, of course. But he also wanted to visit and encourage the churches he had previously planted. And he wanted to take up a large offering.

At this time there was a huge tension in the church between Jewish believers and Gentile believers. The Jewish believers felt that Christianity really belonged to them, that it was a fulfillment of Judaism. They had a sense of ownership over it and a healthy pride and zeal for it. But now, especially under Paul’s ministry, the Gospel had gone to the Gentiles. Non-Jewish people were taking over the church, and they were not respecting or keeping the Jewish forms of worship. A lot of tension had developed.

The apostle Paul became convinced that if he could take up a large financial offering from the Gentile churches in Greece and distribute it to the poor Jewish Christians in Judea who were suffering from famine and drought, it would go a long way toward healing the breach. So he put an enormous effort into raising this money. We read about it several times in the New Testament. It was one of the Bible’s great stewardship campaigns.

Now, in Acts 20, carrying a large amount of money, he was headed to Jerusalem to distribute it. He was planning to end his third missionary tour in Jerusalem, distribute his money, and then launch out on a fourth missionary tour. This time he envisioned going further west than he had ever gone before. He wanted to go past Greece, all the way to Italy, visiting the church in Rome, and then

go as far westward as possible, to the Roman province of Spain. So on his way to Jerusalem, he stopped in the city of Corinth where he spent three months resting and planning his next moves. He stayed in the spacious villa of his friend Gaius, and there he wrote the book of Romans. He had two purposes in writing this book.

First, he wanted to leave a written, authorized, definitive record of the theology of justification by faith. And second, he wanted to prepare the church at Rome for his visit. So with all this as background, look at what Paul says as he begins to wrap up his book of Romans. Our Scripture reading is from Romans 15:14-23-note:

Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

Here Paul was reviewing his previous three missionary trips, saying that they took him from Jerusalem as far west as Illyricum, which is western Greece. Do you see how close he was to Italy? How close he had come to Rome? He had gone as far as western Greece, just across the Adriatic Sea from Rome. That isn't very far. I once took a ship across the Adriatic from Rome to Greece, and it was just an overnight trip. So why had Paul thusfar avoided Italy and Rome? He goes on to explain. The next verse, verse 20, is very important because it reveals Paul's missionary strategy:

And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand." For this reason, I also have been much hindered from coming to you.

In other words, the Christian message had already penetrated Italy and there was already a church established in the city of Rome. Paul was a church planter, and he had little interest in going where churches were already thriving. He wanted to go to the unreached peoples. And so he had never targeted Rome in his missionary endeavors. But now, as he was wrapping up his third trip and as he sat and prayed and rested and strategized in the villa of Gaius in Corinth, he mapped out his intentions. He would proceed on to Jerusalem, distribute his offering, and then head straight to the city of Rome so that he could use it as a launching pad for his missionary campaign into Spain. Read on in Romans 15:23ff-note:

But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.

But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is to also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.

Now, I want you to notice the next verse—Romans 15:29. Listen to how confident Paul was in what he was determining to be God's will for his future plans:

But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

So he has a prayer request:

Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

The apostle Paul was earnestly praying and planning that God would bless his cherished plans—to go to Jerusalem, to protect and preserve him from the dangers that he might face there, to allow him then to go on to Rome and from there on to Spain to open up a new field of labor in the Lord's work. That was his plan. That was his prayer. And that was his prayer request.

But that is not what happened. I'd like to show you what really happened to Paul in the book of Acts 21:1-40 Leaving Corinth, he

traveled through Asia Minor back to Judea and on into Jerusalem.

Acts 21:15: And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem...

Acts 21:17ff: And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. And when he greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord...

But while the Christians were thrilled to see Paul, the Jewish zealots in Jerusalem were not. His presence caused a riot in the temple, and look at verse 30: And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.

And so Paul was arrested and it would be many a day before he would again see freedom. To make a long story short, he was held in Jerusalem, then transferred to the city of [Caesarea \(Roman theater at Caesarea\)](#) where he was imprisoned for over two years, then taken as a prisoner aboard a ship heading for Rome. That ship was destroyed in a typhoon, though the passengers and crew managed to escape death. And when Paul finally made it to Rome, it was as a prisoner in chains to be placed on trial before the emperor.

And that's the way the book of Acts ends—with Paul having made it to Rome as a prisoner in chains guarded by Roman soldiers. He had told the Romans, I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. But his carefully laid plans, earnestly prayed for, had fallen apart. And he came to Rome in chains and imprisoned.

What was Paul's attitude? Was he disappointed with God? Was he angry? Was he confused? Did he question how he could so completely miss the will of God in his own prayerful planning process?

Probably. I don't think Paul was particularly happy with being seized and beaten and arrested and imprisoned. I think he was bitterly confused and disappointed at first. But I want to show you another verse. As Paul was sitting in that prison cell in Jerusalem—the first of many he would see in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome—look at what happened. Acts 23:11 says: But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

There are three important things to notice in that verse.

First, God stands by us in times of unanswered prayer. It says, The Lord stood by him. The Lord Jesus Christ came down to stand beside him in that prison cell. When we face unanswered prayer and when our hopes and dreams are dashed, the Lord Himself comes down to stand with us.

Second, He commands us to be of good cheer in the face of unanswered prayer. Don't be discouraged. Don't give in to disappointment. Don't despair. Change your mental attitude and start rejoicing. Count it all joy. Trust God anyway and rejoice. This disappointment is His appointment. Our "Plan B's" are often God's "Plan A's."

Third, God knows exactly what He is doing in times of unanswered prayer. As you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome. The Lord hasn't really failed to answer our prayers. He has simply—substituted.

Sometimes when I order roses or plants from a nursery catalog, there will be a little box on the order blank saying, "If we are out of the item you want, may we substitute one of equal or greater value?" I always say, "No," because I don't think the boys in the warehouse know what's best for my garden. But with the Lord, we should always say, "Yes! Yes, Lord! You may substitute. You may grant an alternative answer of equal or greater value. I trust you with substitutions."

And that's why after Paul arrived in Rome he wrote a letter to the Philippians and he said, "But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

In other words, Paul was able to evangelize the Imperial Guard, the upper echelons of the government of the mighty Roman Empire, and his example had inspired and motivated hundreds of Christians to jump in and take his place in preaching the Gospel. It had all worked out for good.

Let me give you some examples. There's an old clipping from the devotional magazine *Our Daily Bread* that illustrates this in a practical way. During World War II, a man in Sussex, England, sent some money to an organization known as the Scripture Gift Mission. He enclosed a letter saying that he longed to give more, but the harvest on his farm had been very disappointing because of lack of water. He was also fearful because German bombs were being dropped in the area and his family and farm were at risk. He was praying that no German bombs would fall on his land. Doesn't that seem like a sensible prayer? Lord, protect our family. We're trusting You for safety. Protect our farm and our possessions."

So the man sent in a small contribution to the Scripture Gift Mission and with the enclosed note, he asked the workers of Scripture Gift Mission to pray that no bombs would fall on his land. Mr. Ashley Baker wrote back from the Mission and said that while he didn't feel led to pray that exact prayer, he had prayed that God's will for their lives in this matter would prevail. Shortly after, a huge German missile crashed down on the man's farm. None of his family or livestock were harmed, but the bombshell went so far into the ground that it liberated a submerged stream. The spring continued to flow and yielded enough water to irrigate the man's farm as well as neighboring farms. The next year, due to a bountiful harvest, the man was able to send a large offering to the Mission.

I want to end with four powerful quotations about this.

The first is from [Augustine's Confessions](#).

We could almost say that Augustine's *Confessions* is the first autobiography ever written. It was the great church father of the 4th century, Aurelius Augustine, writing out his life's story. He tells about his wild and dangerous and ungodly youth. For many years, he ran from the Lord. For many years, he was a brilliant, immoral pagan young man. But his mother Monica prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed for him. They lived in North Africa, and one day Augustine determined that he was going to leave and move to Italy to teach. Monica was very distraught. She prayed earnestly that he would not go to Italy, and yet he went. And it was there that Augustine found the Lord as His Savior under the preaching of Bishop Ambrose of Milan.

Here is what Augustine later wrote about his mother's prayers.

Listen to this sentence carefully. It is written in the form of a prayer: "But You, taking Your own secret counsel and noting the real point of her desire, did not grant her what she was then asking in order to grant to her the thing that she had always been asking."

The second quote is one by [Ruth Bell Graham](#), who once wrote something very similar in her book on prodigals:

"How often has God said no to my earnest prayers that He might answer my deepest longings, give me something more, something better."

The third quote is from one of my favorite preachers, the late [Vance Havner](#) who wrote:

"God wants us to trust him, no matter what He does. There is a heavenly carelessness that leaves it all with Jesus and doesn't become upset when He does things contrary to what we expected."

The final quote is a obscure and unknown poem by the great hymnist [Fanny Crosby](#), who wrote such great hymns as "Blessed Assurance." She wrote so many thousands of poems and hymns that many of them have been nearly lost. A few years ago, Dr. Don Hustad gave me a book he had compiled called *Fanny Crosby Speaks Again*. He had uncovered a number of unpublished Fanny Crosby poems. And among them was this one:

God does not give me all I ask,
Nor answer as I pray;
But, O, my cup is brimming o'er
With blessings day by day.
How oft the joy I thought withheld
Delights my longing eyes,
And so I thank Him from my heart,
For what His love denies.

How tenderly He leadeth me
When earthly hopes are dim;

And when I falter by the way,
He bids me lean on Him.
He lifts my soul above the clouds
Where friendship never dies;
And so I thank Him from my heart
For what His love denies.

We reach a new plateau in our Christian faith and discover a new aspect of God's omnipotence on our behalf when we learn to trust Him with unanswered prayer and to thank Him for what His love denies. For in such times He stands with us. He tells us to be of good cheer. And He reminds us that He is still in control and that He knows exactly what He is doing.

And so we say: Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done.