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“Endure hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”
(2 Timothy 2:3)

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No undertaking of this magnitude is successful without a diligent and faithful editing team. Our chief editor, Sharon Curcio has assembled a wonderful team of helpers, starting with Claudia Dideum, who was so integral to the *Notes on the New Testament* project—just as she was with all other Basic Training Bible Ministries projects—until she was called Home into the presence of her Lord. Linda Foote has graciously stepped in to fill Claudia's shoes in formatting and verse checking. Sharon's sister, Lynn Jensen, goes through the text with her, checking for reading ease and clarity, and suggests possible additional cross-references to the text. My sister, Cheryl Watkins, does a final read-through and also does all the mailing out of books to those who request them. Ben Phenicie, who has done many cover designs for us, has once again created a thoughtful, fitting cover for both *Notes on the New Testament, Part One* and *Notes on the New Testament, Part Two*. I would also like to thank Kristin Preston, a busy pastor's wife and mother, for her willingness to help in any way.

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We are so thankful for the contributions of these faithful saints and fellow servants, for their dedication and commitment to this project!

Gene

DEDICATION

*“This will be written for the generation to come,
that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.”*

Psalm 102:18

While it is my hope and prayer that these notes will be helpful to all current students of the Word of God, I send them forth with a special dedication to the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who are yet to come on the scene of world history (Rev. 7:1–8). They will be the heroes of the faith in the coming time of Tribulation following the soon coming Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

To these brothers and sisters of the future, I want you to know you have been thought of, prayed for, and loved—before you even knew your mission. We of the Church Age salute you for the sufferings you will endure and the victories you will win. We bid you to be strong in the Lord, for your victory is sure in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the labor put into these notes by many hands and through many prayers, be a help to you as you boldly proclaim the name of Jesus Christ in a dark and dangerous time!

Before you begin any study of the Word of God, take a few moments to make sure that you are in fellowship with God, filled by means of the Holy Spirit. Comprehension, like everything else in the Christian life, is a gift that can be appropriated only by faith. The Bible clearly lays out three requirements that must be met before we can expect to understand God's Word. All three require nothing from us but faith.

1. *We must be believers in Jesus Christ* (John 3:16).

It is impossible for unbelievers to understand the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus declared to the leading religious leader of His day that apart from spiritual birth, man is blind to the things of God. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... You must be born again"* (John 3:6–7).

2. *We must be filled by means of the Spirit* (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Only the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. As believers, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but when we sin, we break fellowship with God and cease to function in the power of the Spirit. When we confess our sins, God is always faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The moment we confess, we are restored to fellowship and are again under the control of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, able to learn.

3. *We must approach in faith* (Hebrews 11:6).

Only when we approach in humility, with child-like faith, will the Word of God make sense to us (Matt. 18:4; Heb. 11:3). Where we find Scripture at odds with our ideas or our desires, we must submit to the authority of the Word. Intimacy, understanding, and power are reserved for those who are willing to do God's will (John 7:17).

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PREFACE

While I was teaching in Myanmar/Burma in March 2019, some of my long-term, advanced students suggested that I go through the New Testament and provide basic notes, which they could then be able to print as a study Bible. They specifically asked that I focus on issues that are a major area of confusion in the churches where they work. Therefore, the following commentary will focus on these five primary areas:

1. What is the nature of God's grace and how is it received?
2. What is God's plan of salvation and the clear message of the Gospel?
3. What is the Bible's teaching on the security and assurance of the believer?
4. How is the believer to live the Christian life and be effective in witness/service?
5. What does prophecy say about the last days and the order of end-times events?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

These notes are purposely brief in nature. This work is not intended to be a complete commentary. All through the work I have kept in mind those who live in remote areas of our world, who labor to both understand and to teach others the Word of God. They do not have access to Bible school or seminary training. Neither are they able to afford the vast array of books available to pastors and teachers who live in more advanced countries.

I encourage all who utilize these notes to study them with an open Bible. Pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–21) as you study. Read the context of the passage carefully. Look up and compare the references that are provided. Above all, let the Word of God, and not these notes, guide your insight into God's Word. As I always tell my students: "Never take my word for anything; search the Scriptures and prove what is true" (Acts 17:10–12; 1 John 4:1).

Paul's Epistle to the
Romans

INTRODUCTION

Paul's epistle to the Roman church is considered by many to be one of his most difficult works, particularly because of the arguments in chapters 9–11. Other scholars consider this to be the greatest of all his letters. In reality, this book holds the most systematic and complete record of Paul's theology, covering the broadest scope of the doctrines of redemption and eternal salvation proclaimed by the gospel message. When the scope of the whole book is kept in mind as we progress through it, and the broad outline is followed, many of the questions and problems found in those "difficult chapters" (9–11) seem to resolve themselves as a very necessary and essential part of the overall goal of Paul's teaching. We simply cannot present the New Covenant plan of God for the Church without answering the questions which are first brought up in chapter three, "has God forsaken Israel?" and, "If not, what does the future hold for Israel?" These questions are answered clearly and simply in chapters 9–11 if we do not attempt to impose later theological systems upon them. The great over-arching theme of the book is introduced in Romans 1:16–17, being the revelation of the righteousness and justice of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by the universal offer of the gift of eternal life to all who will receive it by faith. May God grant that these notes, imperfect though they may be, help students gain a greater love and appreciation for what many consider "passages too difficult to understand."

Romans Outline A

"The Gospel of God ..." Romans 1:1b

1. The Gospel—good news for the world (Rom. 1:1–17)
2. Condemnation—God's wrath against sin (Rom. 1:18–3:20)
3. Justification—Salvation by grace through faith (Rom. 3:21–5:21)
4. Sanctification—The power and the path of spiritual growth (Rom. 6:1–8:39)
5. Dispensation—The past, present, and future of Israel (Rom. 9:1–11:36)
6. Transformation—being conformed to Christ's likeness (Rom. 12:1–15:13)
7. Conclusion and greetings—Paul's plans and friends (Rom. 15:14–16:27)

Romans Outline B

"For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed..." Romans 1:17

1. God's righteousness in the condemnation of sin (Rom. 1:1–3:20)
2. God's righteousness imputed to believers through salvation (Rom. 3:21–5:21)
3. God's righteousness imparted to believers through sanctification (Rom. 6:1–8:39)
4. God's righteousness in dealing with unbelieving Israel (Romans 9–11)
5. God's righteousness demonstrated in conformity to Christ (Romans 12–16)

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

ROMANS CHAPTER 1

The gospel message offers hope to the whole world. Rejection of the Gospel results in the wrath of God.

The Message and Ministry of the Gospel

Romans 1:1–17

1:1 “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ.” The word “*bondservant*” speaks of one who belongs to another either through purchase or by being born into slavery (Exod. 21:1–6). For Paul, this was a service of love. **“Called ... an apostle.”** The apostles had to be specifically chosen by Jesus Christ (John 15:16). Paul was chosen last of all, to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:11). **“Separated to the gospel of God.”** The apostles were given the task of spreading the gospel message throughout the world (Matt. 28:18–20). This was God’s plan for Paul before he was born (Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15).

1:2 “Which He promised ... in the Holy Scriptures.” The Gospel he preached did not originate with him (Gal. 1:11–12). It was foretold by all the Old Testament prophets (Luke 24:27, 44–45; Gal. 3:8).

1:3 “Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” “*Jesus*” was His human name, “*Christ*” was His title as Messiah/Savior, and “*Lord*” designates His deity. Jesus Christ, in His Person and work, is the central focus of the gospel message. **“Born of the seed of David.”** It was declared in prophecy that the Messiah/Christ would be from the lineage of David (2 Sam. 7:12–13, 17; Isa. 9:6–7; Matt. 1:1; Mark 12:35–37; Rev. 22:16). This human lineage, however, was **“According to the flesh.”** His deity was eternal (John 1:1–4, 14).

1:4 “Declared to be the Son of God ... by the resurrection from the dead.” The resurrection was the undeniable evidence of His deity (Psalm 2:7; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Acts 2:24–36). The **“Spirit of holiness”** refers to the Holy Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead.

1:5 “We have received grace and apostleship.” Paul, here, speaks of the apostolic band, of which he was the last (1 Cor. 15:3–11). **“For obedience to the faith among all nations.”** The gospel message is for all mankind (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:1–6; 1 John 2:2). To be obedient to the Gospel means to have faith in the Gospel (Acts 6:7; Rom. 16:19, 26).

1:6–7 “Among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.” Paul makes it clear that the “*called*” refers to those who respond to the gospel invitation (Matt. 22:2–14). When we hear the gospel message, and receive it by faith, we are then sealed by the Holy Spirit as God’s personal possession (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:13–14) and are designated as **“saints,”** those who are set apart to God. **“Grace to you and peace.”** God’s greeting to all believers begins with the offer of His grace, which, when received, always results in peace (Rom. 5:1–2).

1:8–9 “I thank my God ... for you all ... I make mention of you always in my prayers.” Paul prayed for these Roman believers, not only for their needs, but because **“your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”** Paul did not plant the church in Rome. Perhaps those returning from Pentecost (Acts 2:10) had spread the gospel message on their return to Rome. Their faith was a great witness to the whole world.

1:10 “Making request if ... I may find a way ... to come to you.” Paul not only prayed for the Roman believers, but also for God to permit him to visit them. This was his great desire (Acts 19:21).

1:11–12 “That I may impart ... some spiritual gift ... that I may be encouraged.” Paul recognized that his ministry would be a gift to these believers, just as their ministry would be to him. The Body of Christ is composed by God for mutual benefit (1 Cor. 12:12–27; Eph. 4:11–16).

ROMANS 1:13–17

1:13 *“I often planned to come to you ... that I might have some fruit ... as among the other Gentiles.”* Even though he did not plant this church, as the Apostle to the Gentiles, they were part of his field (Acts 9:15; 21:21; Gal. 1:15–16; 2:7–8; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11).

1:14–15 *“I am debtor ... I am ready to preach the gospel.”* As the slave of Jesus Christ (v. 1), Paul was in debt to all men for whom Christ died—to preach the gospel message to them.

1:16 *“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”* To preach a message of a crucified Savior in the Roman Empire, was a difficult task. But in that simple message is found *“the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”* The one and only requirement is faith in Jesus Christ. The word *“salvation”* simply means “deliverance,” and is actually used three ways in Romans:

1. our initial salvation from the penalty of sin (justification),
2. our ongoing salvation from the power of sin (sanctification), and
3. our ultimate salvation from the presence of sin (glorification).

“For the Jew first and also for the Greek.” Since both the written Word and the Living Word (Jesus Christ) came through the Jewish nation, it was only right that the Gospel should go to them first (Acts 13:46; Rom. 9:1–5).

1:17 *“In it the righteousness of God is revealed.”* The gospel message reveals the righteousness of God in saving believing sinners, and in judging unbelieving sinners (Rom. 3:22–26). The essential righteousness of God, which is the core of His nature, also demands the expression of the justice of God (Psalm 89:14; 97:2), which is His wrath (Rom. 1:18–3:20). *“From faith to faith.”* God’s righteousness is imputed to all who believe (Rom. 4:3, 5, 22–25), and is demonstrated by those believers who *“live by faith.”* From the moment of faith in Christ, and throughout a life of faith, God’s righteousness is revealed. *“The just shall live by faith”* is a quote from Habakkuk 2:4, and appears to be the bottom line of Paul’s theology (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

Summary Principles of the Gospel

In the Summaries that follow, some of the basic principles dealing with the main topic will be given as an additional help to students, and especially for those teaching others.

1. The gospel message was committed to the apostles, to lay the foundation of the Church (vv. 1; 1 Cor. 3: 9–11; Eph. 2:19–21; 2 Tim. 2:19; Heb. 6:1; Rev. 21:14).
2. The gospel message is all about Jesus Christ, beginning with His incarnation as the Seed of David, and ending with His resurrection from the dead (vv. 2–4; Mark 1:1–3; John 1:1–4, 14, 18; 1 Cor. 15:1–4; 2 Cor. 4:3–4; Phil. 2:5–11; 2 Tim. 2:8).
3. The gospel message is for all mankind because Jesus Christ died for all (vv. 5–7; Rom. 5:6–10, 18; 2 Cor. 5:15, 19; 1 John 2:2). The Gospel was foretold to Abraham, that in *“his Seed”* all nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:3b; 22:18; Gal. 3:8, 16).
4. All those who receive the Gospel ought to pray for and minister to one another (vv. 8–13; Rom. 15:30–32; Eph. 1:15–21; 3:14–21; 6:18–20; Phil. 1:3–7; 1 Thess. 5:17, 25; Heb. 13:18–19).
5. Every believer should feel a sense of indebtedness to both live and speak so as to share the Gospel with those who do not know Christ (vv. 14–15; Rom. 8:12–17; 15:27; 2 Cor. 5:14–21; 1 Thess. 1:5–10; see also Luke 17:10).

6. The salvation provided in the gospel message provides the righteousness of Christ to those who believe and leads to righteous living as those believers live by faith (vv. 16–17; Rom. 4:3–8, 23–25; 6:1–5; 8:1–4; 12:1–2; 14:17–19; Gal. 2:20; 1 Tim. 6:11–14; Titus 2:11–14).

The Wrath of God Against Sin

Romans 1:18–32

1:18 *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.”* Because God is righteous, He must judge sin. The gospel message includes the warning of the wrath of God, for only those who know they are lost will see their need of salvation/deliverance from sin. *“Against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.”* This includes everything that falls short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23). *“Who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”* Mankind is condemned because the truth is made known to them and they seek to ignore or deny what is true (John 1:5, 9–11; 3:16–19). The truth of God is revealed to men through creation (v. 20), by their conscience (Rom. 2:14–16), and through Scripture (Rom. 3:21–23; Psalm 19:7–11).

1:19–20 *“What may be known of God is manifest.”* This means that all men have sufficient evidence of God’s existence and nature. This truth is *“manifest in them,”* by their conscience (Eccl. 3:11; Rom. 2:15). It is *“manifest to them,”* by the witness of creation (Rom. 1:20; Psalm 19:1–6). This witness is *“clearly seen”* and *“understood”* so that all mankind is *“without excuse”* (Rom. 2:1). The goodness of God to men is sufficient to bring men to repentance, which leads to faith upon hearing the Gospel (Acts 14:15–17; Rom. 2:4; 10:17–18).

1:21 *“They knew God.”* That is, their conscience and creation witnessed to them of the existence of God. *“They did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful.”* The first response of the soul to an awareness of God is to acknowledge His glory and to be thankful for His many gifts. *“Their foolish hearts were darkened.”* Rejection of the light, however faint it may be, results in the hardening and darkening of the soul (John 3:19; Eph. 4:17–19).

1:22 *“Professing to be wise, they became fools.”* Sinful mankind always declares atheism or false religion as “enlightenment.” They claim to be far more wise than those who simply trust the word of God (2 Cor. 11:3). It is the fool who says, *“There is no God.”* (Psalm 10:4; 14:1; 53:1; Rom. 3:18).

1:23 *“Changed the glory of ... God into an image.”* The very fact that idolatry exists proves that men know there is a God, and that they have rejected Him, in order to worship an image of their own choosing.

1:24 *“Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness.”* We find the phrases, *“God gave them up”* in vv. 24, 26, and *“God gave them over”* in v. 28. This shows an increasing alienation from God to the point that He removes His restraining grace from them—to let them go in the way they have chosen (Acts 7:39–43). This phrase explains how the wrath of God is at work in the lives of men. His wrath releases them to a continuous cycle of self-destruction. God judges men in this life by allowing them to suffer the consequences of their own decisions!

1:25 *“Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie.”* This “lie” began in the garden when Satan told Adam and Eve that they could be as God (Gen. 3:1–5). *“And worshipped ... the creature rather than the Creator.”* Unsaved mankind always seeks to honor the creation (i.e., the issue of “global warming”) and the created things more than the creator *“Who is blessed forever.”* Of His glory, honor, and blessedness, there is no end (1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 24–25)!

1:26–27 *“God gave them up to vile passions.”* Spiritual deception leads to moral darkness, which ends in sexual depravity. Gradually, the conscience is seared as with a branding iron (1 Tim. 4:2), to the point that nothing is forbidden. These verses show us that lesbianism and homosexuality are the inevitable result of rejecting the true God. The only solution for those enslaved by these perversions is to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Otherwise, they will receive, both in time and eternity, *“the penalty of their error which was due.”* In the case

ROMANS 1:28–32

of a believer who has fallen into these sins, repentance, confession, and correction are called for (1 John 1:9; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

1:28 “God gave them over to a debased mind.” This is the penalty suffered in time, which results in a self-destructive lifestyle, devoid of all hope and happiness. The souls of such individuals become like leaky buckets—no matter how much you try to fill them, they always run empty. Like the people of Jeremiah’s day, they forsook the ever-flowing fountain of life to attempt to dig “*broken cisterns, that can hold no water*” (Jer. 2:13).

1:29–31 “Being filled with all unrighteousness.” The words “*filled*,” and “*all*” reveal the desperation of such a soul in their search for love, joy, meaning, and lasting relationships, which they will never find. This is the life of “*greediness*” spoken of by Paul in Ephesians 4:19. It describes a frantic search for happiness, which can never be found. The list of sins mentioned here is one of the most extensive found in Scripture.

1:32 “Knowing the righteous judgment of God.” Although they have hardened their hearts against the grace of God, they cannot escape the powerful reality of God’s certain judgment (Heb. 10:31). Such people live a haunted-existence, pursuing every vice in order to get as much gratification as possible before the judgment of God strikes.

Summary Principles: The Wrath of God

1. The wrath of God is the natural and necessary reaction of God’s righteousness to sin. Both are “*revealed*” together (**vv. 17–18**). God reveals His righteousness to those who believe the Gospel and reveals His wrath to those who reject the Gospel (John 3:16–19, 36).
2. Just as righteousness is fundamental to the nature of God, so is justice (Psalm 89:14; 97:2). Where justice meets with sin, wrath is the result (Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6).
3. The wrath of God is directed toward men who reject the knowledge of Him, which is known through creation and conscience (**vv. 18–20**; Rom. 2:15; 10:16–18; Psalm 19:1–7; Hosea 4:6).
4. Once men reject the Creator (John 1:1–5; Col. 1:16–18), they also begin to pervert the natural creation and fall ever deeper into depravity (**vv. 22–32**).
5. God’s wrath is revealed in the removal of His restraining grace, abandoning men to their pursuit of ungodliness (**vv. 24, 26, 28**, “*God gave them up/over*”).
6. The coming Tribulation Period is referred to as the “time of God’s wrath” (Psalm 2:5, 12; Ezek. 7:19; Zeph. 1:15, 18; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 6:16–17; 11:18; 15:1; 16:1; 19:15).
7. Believers escape the eternal wrath of God by faith in Jesus Christ and are delivered from His wrath in time by faithful obedience (Rom. 5:9; 13:4).
8. All believers will be delivered from the Tribulation Period (the time of wrath) by the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:13–18; 5:8–10).

ROMANS CHAPTER 2

Paul turns from the degenerate sinner to the sophisticated sinner. He is now moving from dealing with sinful Gentiles to the question of sinful Jews. Here, he shows that the wrath of God is also just in judging the moral and the religious man.

The Self-Righteous Man Condemned

Romans 2:1–16

2:1 “*Therefore you are inexcusable.*” The same guilt of the Gentile who disregards the witness to God in nature (Rom. 1:20), applies to those who set aside the truth contained in God’s Word. **“*Whoever you are who judge ... you condemn yourself.*”** Those who judge others show that they know God’s judgment on sin is just (Rom. 1:32). They condemn themselves because all men are sinners (Rom. 3:10, 23; 5:12).

2:2 “*We know that the judgment of God is according to truth.*” Only God has all the facts about our sins. Men who judge others do so from a partial and limited knowledge.

2:3 “*Do you think ... that you will escape the judgment of God?*” Many so-called “good” men think that by judging others, they justify themselves. In reality, by their judging, they increase judgment on themselves (Matt. 7:1–5).

2:4 “*Do you despise the riches of His goodness ... not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*” This is the only time Paul uses “*repentance*” in this sense in Romans. The idea is to change one’s mind regarding judging others and, instead, to turn to God in humility and faith. God gives grace to all men (Matt. 5:45; Acts 10:38; Titus 2:11). The gifts of God are designed to bring us to repentance, humility, and faith (Acts 14:17). To reject the grace of God is the same as to suppress the truth in the unrighteousness of unbelief (Rom. 1:18).

2:5–6 “*You are treasuring up ... wrath in the day of wrath.*” This unbelieving person who judges others is adding to the judgment they will receive when they stand before God at the final judgment (Great White Throne). **“*Who will render to each one according to his deeds.*”** God is absolutely just (Rom. 3:26). He is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11). All who reject Jesus Christ are judged on the basis of their own works, which fall short of God’s righteous standard (Rom. 3:23; Rev. 20:11–14). For those who believe, their works will be judged at the Bema Seat of Christ to determine their eternal rewards (Isa. 3:10; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:10–11; Heb. 6:9–12).

2:7 “*Eternal life to those who ... in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.*” No human being is good in God’s sight (Rom. 3:10–18). No one goes to Heaven because they do good deeds. The “*good*” Paul speaks of here is to “*obey the truth*” (v. 8). This means to obey the gospel message by placing our faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Those who truly seek the things of God (“*glory, honor, immortality,*” and “*eternal life*”) without fail, will be guided by the Spirit of God to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Prov. 8:17; Jer. 29:13; John 6:28–29; Heb. 11:6).

2:8 “*To those who are self-seeking.*” This includes the person who indulges in gross immorality (Rom. 1:18–32), or the self-righteous who indulge in judging others (Rom. 2:1–6; 2 Cor. 10:12). **“*Do not obey the truth.*”** Whether one rejects the witness of creation (Rom. 1:18–21), or conscience (Rom. 2:14–15), or Scripture (Rom. 3:21; 4:3), the result is the same. The heart is darkened, hardened, and blinded (Rom. 2:5; 11:10, 25; Eph. 4:17–19).

2:9 “*Tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil.*” Evil conduct, as illustrated in Romans 1:18–32, brings its own misery. It is impossible to pursue evil without suffering the consequences of our actions. The ultimate form of evil is to reject the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. The result is eternal misery.

ROMANS 2:10–20

2:10 “Glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good.” The “good” in both v. 7 and here refers to those who “Obey the truth” (Rom. 1:5; 2:10) of the Gospel (John 5:29; 6:29). **“To the Jew first and also to the Greek.”** Greater privilege demands greater accountability (Luke 12:48; Rom. 2:16; 9:3–5, 30–33).

2:11 “For there is no partiality with God.” The fairness and justice of God is upheld throughout the Scriptures (Gen. 18:25; Deut. 10:17).

2:12 “Perish without law ... judged by the law.” All unbelievers will suffer eternal condemnation, but the judgment will not be equal. Those who never heard the Law will suffer less than those who had the Law and rejected it. Paul’s point is that the more light that is given, the greater the responsibility before God (see Matt. 11:21–24; Luke 10:14; John 3:19).

2:13 “Not the hearers of the law ... but the doers of the law.” Since no man keeps the whole Law (Rom. 3:10–18; James 2:10–11), we all stand condemned. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ, who kept the whole Law, can we be “justified” (Rom. 3:21–26; 4:5; 8:1–4).

2:14–15 “Gentiles ... are a law unto themselves.” The fact that Gentiles know that murder, lying, stealing, and adultery are wrong, shows that the conscience acts as a “law” to all mankind. **“Their conscience ... bearing witness.”** Conscience is a witness to the existence of right and wrong, which is fully revealed in the Law of God. **“The work of the law ... accusing or ... excusing.”** Any act of judging others, or excusing oneself, shows the work of the Law, in condemning sinful behavior. God will judge every unbeliever based on their own “words” in judging others or excusing themselves (Matt. 12:37).

2:16 “In the day when God will judge.” This refers to the final Day of Judgment (Rev. 20:11–14). **“The secrets of men ... according to my gospel.”** The gospel message concerning Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:3–5) is the ultimate dividing line in the Judgment. All who trust in Christ will be eternally saved. All who reject Him will be eternally lost. Only God can see what is in the secret place of each heart (Jer. 17:10).

Summary Principles: Judging Others

1. Those who judge others condemn themselves (v. 1; Matt. 7:1–5).
2. Only God is able to give true judgment, because He knows all the facts (v. 2; James 4:12).
3. Those who judge others and do the same things, are rejecting God’s grace and increasing their own guilt (vv. 3–6; Rom. 14:4, 10, 12–13; James 2:8–13; 4:11–12).
4. Those who seek truth and obey it by faith will find eternal life. Those who reject the truth will receive eternal condemnation (vv. 7–10; Jer. 29:13; Psalm 27:8; 34:14; Prov. 8:17; Isa. 55:6–7; Zeph. 2:3; John 6:28–29; Acts 17:27; 2 Tim. 4:3–4; 1 Pet. 3:10–12; 4:1–5).
5. God will judge all men according to the light they have and based on the work of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospel (vv. 11–16; Deut. 10:17; Acts 10:34–35, 42–43; 1 Tim. 1:9–11; James 1:22, 25).

God’s Judgment of Unbelieving Jews Romans 2:17–29

2:17–20 “Indeed you are called a Jew.” Paul now brings his focus on the Jewish arrogance and sense of superiority over the Gentiles. The title “Jew” is the shortened form of “Judah,” which means “praise” (Gen. 29:35). Instead of bringing praise to God, the Jews had come to praise themselves. Paul lists several reasons why they saw themselves as being superior to Gentiles. Everything in this list can be seen in the debates

between Jesus and the religious leaders contained in the Gospels. We can summarize their sense of superiority in three points:

1. superiority based on the mere possession of the Law (v. 17),
2. superiority based on having been instructed in the Law (v. 18), and
3. superiority in their ability to guide and teach other men (vv. 19–20).

This is why the message of John the Baptist was so shocking to the Jews. To call them to repent meant that they were sinners—just like the Gentiles. Their whole religious training convinced them that this could not be so.

2:21–23 “You ... who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” Here, Paul strikes a death blow to the arrogance of the religious Jew. He proves them to be, as James also says, “hearers” of the Law, but not “doers” (James 1:22). Those who teach and preach against stealing, adultery, or idolatry but do the same things, only judge themselves (Rom. 2:1–4).

2:24 “For ‘the name of God is blasphemed ... because of you.’” The hypocrisy for which the Jews were famous (Matt. 9:2–3; 23:13–31; 26:63–65) caused even the Gentiles to blaspheme (speak evil of) God. The fact that this charge came from their own Scriptures (Isa. 52:5; Ezek. 5:6; 36:22) made it all the more convincing.

2:25 “Circumcision is ... profitable ... if you keep the law.” The rite of circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:9–13). It was intended to point to the faith by which Abraham was justified (Rom. 4:11), and the circumcised heart of faith (Deut. 10:16–21; 30:6; Jer. 4:3–4; 9:25–26; Rom. 4:9–12). All of the Law is fulfilled when we believe in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:22–25; Rom. 8:1–4).

2:26–27 “If an uncircumcised man keeps ... the law.” Two great examples of this truth are found in the Roman Centurion who came to Jesus (Matt. 8:5–10; Luke 7:1–10), and in the Centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10:24–43). **“If he fulfills the law.”** Those whose sins are forgiven (Acts 10:43) and who are given the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 4:3), have fulfilled the Law through Christ (Rom. 8:1–4).

2:28 “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly.” This is what Paul means when he says in Romans 9:6, “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.” Like the name “Jew,” which means “praise,” the name “Israel,” means “to have power with God” or “a prince of God” (Gen. 32:28), it is not enough to simply bear the name (John 8:44). One must make the name a reality by trusting in Jesus Christ, who is the true praise, power, and Prince of God.

2:29 “He is a Jew who is one inwardly ... whose praise is ... from God.” The religious Jews loved the “praise from men” (Matt. 23:5–7; Luke 11:43; John 12:43). But the only “praise” that matters is that which comes “from God” to those who honor His Son by believing in Him. The Spirit of God performs this inner circumcision by uniting us with Christ and giving us His new life (Rom. 6:3–5; 7:6).

Summary Principles: Jewish Superiority Denied

1. The typical Jewish attitude was one of superiority to all Gentiles, based on their possession and knowledge of the Law (vv. 17–20; Acts 10:28, 11:1–3; 15:1–5; Gal. 2:11–16).
2. However, their conduct revealed their hypocrisy (vv. 21–23; Matt. 7:5; 23:13–33; Luke 12:1; 13:15–16).
3. The Jewish attitude of superiority, combined with their hypocrisy, caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of the God of Israel (v. 24; Isa. 52:4–5; Ezek. 36:22–23).

ROMANS 3:1–5

4. The sign of circumcision, of which the Jews were so proud, was intended to point every Jew to faith in and obedience to God's Word (v. 25; Gen. 17:1–11; Rom. 4:9–12). Without faith and new birth, obedience is impossible (Heb. 11:6).
5. The "*righteous requirements of the law*" (v. 26) are fulfilled only in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; 3:13–14, 24–26).
6. The word "Jew" comes from "Judah," which means "*praise*" (Gen. 29:35). Therefore, the true spiritual Jew, is one who is born again, indwelt by the Spirit, and imputed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ (vv. 28–29; Rom. 4:3–5, 11–12, 16, 23–25).

ROMANS CHAPTER 3

Paul demonstrates that all men are condemned in sin and that only by faith in Jesus Christ are we justified before God.

Three False Teachings Refuted

Romans 3:1–8

3:1 "*What advantage then has the Jew.*" In vv. 1–8, Paul addresses objections Jews would have to his arguments in Romans 2. There are three main questions, which Paul refutes:

1. If all men are condemned, is there no advantage to being a Jew (vv. 1–2)?
2. If Jews rejected Jesus Christ, doesn't this invalidate God's faithfulness (vv. 3–4)?
3. If Jewish failure brings glory to God, isn't it unjust for God to judge them (vv. 5–8)?

We will look at Paul's response to each objection. It is worth noting that these three questions form the basis for Paul's extended treatment on Israel in Romans 9–11.

3:2 "*Much in every way! ... To them were committed the oracles of God.*" The question in v.1 implies that if Jews are not superior to Gentiles, then there is no advantage to being a Jew. Paul says, but rather the Jews had many advantages because they were possessors of the inspired and revealed Word of God (Rom. 9:3–5). They possessed divine revelation that the Gentiles lacked, yet they rejected it. This question is answered extensively in Romans 9.

3:3 "*Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?*" Since God called Israel to be His special possession, doesn't their unbelief show a failure in the promises of God? However, man's unbelief is never the fault of God. In 2 Timothy 2:13, Paul declares, "*If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*" All guilt for unbelief rests on men for failing to respond in humility to God's Word (John 5:39–40, 46; Rom. 10:16–21; Heb. 4:2; 2 Pet. 2:21). Yet God will still fulfill all His promises (Psalm 89:30–37). Romans 10 will deal with this question in greater detail.

3:4 "*Let God be true but every man a liar.*" Paul declares God's faithfulness stands sure in the face of the unfaithfulness of every man. "*That You may be justified ... and may overcome when You are judged.*" Here, Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4, where David confessed his sin with Bathsheba. David takes full responsibility for his own sin and says that God is just in judging him. The last phrase anticipates the final judgment, where men will seek to blame their sins on God. We know that, in the end, "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*" (Phil. 2:10–11).

3:5 "*Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?*" This third question suggests that, since God is glorified by man's sinfulness, it is wrong for God to judge sin. When Paul says, "*I speak as a man,*" he means that this question is based on faulty human reasoning.

3:6 “For then how will God judge the world.” The Jews wanted to argue that they should not be judged, but that God should judge the Gentiles. Paul’s response is that for God to be just, He must judge the entire world by the same standards.

3:7 “Why am I also still judged as a sinner?” This is simply another way of posing the same question from v. 5. The idea is that if God’s truth is magnified and He is glorified by my unbelief, how can I be judged as a sinner? It appears that the questions from vv. 5–7 are presented in anticipation of Paul’s teaching in Romans 11 that because of Jewish rejection of the Gospel, the salvation of the Gentiles would be made possible (Rom. 11:25–32). To this the Jew would respond, “If this is true, how can God judge us for furthering His plan?”

3:8 “Let us do evil that good may come.” Later, in Romans 5:20, Paul says, “*But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.*” So, some would argue, “*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*” (Rom. 6:1). In other words, if God can work all things together for good (Rom. 8:28), why not do evil to demonstrate His power? Though some appear to have accused Paul of this very reasoning, he says, “*Their condemnation is just.*”

Summary Principles: The Jewish Dilemma

1. While many Jews believed in Jesus Christ, the majority rejected the gospel message. This condition caused many Jewish believers to ask, “How then can God fulfill His promises to Israel?”
2. In vv. 1–7, Paul answers three questions that he probably heard often:
 - a. If most of the Jews rejected their Messiah/Christ, what is the advantage of being Jewish (vv. 1–2)? His answer is that the Jews possessed the Word of God, which is a great advantage (Rom. 9:3–5). This question is answered more fully in Romans 9.
 - b. Does the unbelief of a majority in Israel nullify the faithfulness of God (vv. 3–4)? Paul’s answer is that God is always true and faithful, and in the end, He will be shown to be just and fair. This sets the stage for Romans 10.
 - c. How can God judge Israel if their unbelief actually helps fulfill His plan (vv. 5–7)? Since God will use Israel’s rejection to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles, isn’t it unfair for God to judge Israel? In Romans 11, Paul will show that God truly does work all things together for good (Rom. 8:28), but we are still accountable for our decisions: either to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, or to reject Him and suffer judgment.
3. The general belief in first-century Judaism was that when Messiah came, He would set up the kingdom for Israel (Acts 1:6). When Jesus did not do this, believing Jews were confused, and the majority rejected His claims.
4. Paul will explain in Romans 9–11 that Israel has been spiritually blinded for a time, while the Church Age unfolds. After the Church Age and the Tribulation Period, Jesus will return and establish His kingdom (Rom. 11:25–29; 2 Thess. 2:1–12; Rev. 19:11–16).
5. Future history will unfold with the Rapture of the Church (1 Cor. 15:50–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11; Rev. 4:1–2), the seven-year Tribulation Period (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:9–28; Revelation 6–19), and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Earth (Matt. 24:29–35; Rev. 19:11–16). Then Jesus will set up His kingdom on Earth for one thousand years (Rev. 20:1–6).

All Mankind Stands Condemned

Romans 3:9–20

3:9 “Are we better than they?” Are Jewish sinners better than Gentile sinners? Absolutely not. “*They are all under sin.*” This anticipates Paul’s conclusion coming up in v. 23.

ROMANS 3:10–20

3:10 “There is none righteous.” This is the bottom line of Paul’s argument (Psalm 14:1–3; 53:1–3; Eccl. 7:20; Gal. 3:22). All men are under the curse of sin (Rom. 3:23; 5:12; 6:23). The sins in vv. 10–18 fall into three categories:

1. sins of the mind (mental attitude),
2. sins of the tongue (verbal), and
3. outward acts of sin (overt), sins of the body.

3:12 “They have all turned aside.” The “none” in v. 10 is amplified by the “all” here. See the same idea in Isaiah 53:6. **“There is none who does good.”** Paul is speaking here in the sense of absolute good—equal to God. Even the “good deeds” of men are tainted with evil motive such as pride and desire for recognition.

3:13–14 “Their throat is an open tomb ... Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” David speaks of the power of the tongue to deal out death (Psalm 5:9; 140:3), much the same as James does (James 3:1–10).

3:15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood.” In contrast to the second great commandment that we are to love our neighbor (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:31), men are prone to hatred and violence, even to the point of murder (Prov. 1:10–16; Isa. 59:7–8).

3:18 “There is no fear of God.” When the truth is suppressed (Rom. 1:18), the fear of God vanishes. To fear God is the beginning of true wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10).

3:19 “Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law.” The law, parts of which are quoted in vv. 10–18, condemns both Jew and Gentile as sinners. **“That ... all the world may become guilty before God.”** No man can come to faith in Jesus Christ for deliverance from eternal condemnation until he sees that he is condemned. When presenting the Gospel, we often have to begin with the bad news—that all men are sinners before God.

3:20 “By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified.” This was the point Paul had to constantly make clear to his Jewish audience (Acts 13:39; Gal. 2:16; 3:10–13; 1 Tim. 1:9–10).

Summary Principles: All Men Are Condemned

1. Paul is building up to the conclusion that all men stand condemned before God (Rom. 3:23).
2. The list of sins given in vv. 10–18 is perhaps the most extensive in all the Bible. No one can read it and not see their own sins listed. These sins fall into three categories: sins of the mind (thoughts), sins of the tongue, and sins of the body.
3. The purpose of the Law of Moses was to convict men of their sinfulness, to point them to faith in Christ (v. 19; Gal. 2:16; 3:10–14, 21–24).
4. The Law was never designed to bring salvation, as only faith can do that. Abraham, who lived 430 years before the Law was given, is the example of how we are justified (declared righteous) before God (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6).
5. God has placed all men under condemnation so that all men might be saved through faith in Jesus Christ, who died for all (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23; 11:32).

The Way to Righteousness Is through the Cross

Romans 3:21–31

3:21 “The righteousness of God” Paul is not speaking of righteousness as part of God’s character, but the righteousness He freely gives to those who believe, **“being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”** The provision of righteousness for men came through Jesus Christ, as anticipated in the Old Testament (Luke 24:25–27; 44–47).

3:22 “The righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ.” Faith is the acknowledgement of personal helplessness. To trust **“in Jesus Christ”** means I have absolutely nothing to offer for my salvation (Matt. 5:3; Heb. 11:1). Faith gives all the glory to God for what He has done through Christ (Heb. 11:6). **“To all and on all who believe.”** The offer of God’s gift of righteousness is given to all men, for all are sinners. But the gift is applied only upon those who believe (2 Cor. 5:21).

3:23 “For all have sinned.” The reason given for the offer to **“all”** men is that all men are sinners in need of salvation (Gal. 3:22).

3:24 “Being justified freely by His grace.” Paul often emphasizes that to be justified before God is a free gift (Rom. 5:6–10, 15–17; 6:23). Man can offer absolutely nothing to gain it. Only by the humble response of faith can His promise of eternal life be received (John 1:12; 3:36; 5:24). **“Redemption.”** This word means “the full payment of a debt.” Only the death of Christ on the cross could pay the debt that we owe to God (John 19:30; Col. 2:14).

3:25 “A propitiation by His blood.” The word **“propitiation”** pictures the satisfaction of God with the work of His Son (1 John 2:2). The word is a picture of the mercy seat (Heb. 2:17; 9:5) where, in Old Testament times, the blood of the lamb was poured out on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:15–19; 23:26–32). This is a picture of the finished work of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36; 19:30). **“God passed over.”** God was merciful in dealing with men’s sins before the cross, because they all would be paid for by the work of Christ on the cross (Col. 2:14). The cross proved that God is righteous in judging all sin (Acts 14:16; 17:30–31).

3:26 “That He might be just and the justifier.” The judgment of Jesus Christ on behalf of all men proves that God is both **“just”** in judging all who do not believe, and He is just for forgiving and saving all who believe in Him (Luke 7:29–30; Rom. 1:16–17; 2 Cor. 5:21).

3:27 “Where is boasting then? It is excluded.” No man has any basis for boasting, either by what he has done before his salvation, or by whatever he may do afterwards. The only basis for boasting is in Jesus Christ (Jer. 9:23–24; 1 Cor. 1:29–31). **“By the law of faith.”** The very nature of faith leaves no room for boasting (Rom. 4:16; 11:6; Eph. 2:8–9).

3:28 “Man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” This is the foundation of all of Paul’s theology. There is no mixture of works in the free offer of God’s grace, received by faith alone (Rom. 4:3–5; Gal. 2:16).

3:30 “There is one God” This was the foundation of all Jewish theology (Deut. 6:4; James 2:19). **“Who will justify the circumcised ... the uncircumcised through faith.”** The only path of justification, whether for Jew or Gentile, is by faith in Jesus Christ. Many Jews claimed that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were first circumcised (Acts 15:1–11). Paul vigorously opposed this false teaching.

3:31 “Do we then make void the law through faith?” To the Jew it would seem that Paul was declaring the Law of no value. This Paul strongly denies, because the purpose of the Law is to convict men of sin (Rom. 3:19; Gal. 3:10–14, 21–25).

ROMANS 4:1–5

Principles of the Righteousness of God

1. Righteousness is an essential quality of the character or essence of God (Psalm 89:14; 97:2; Ezra 9:15).
2. Because of His essential righteousness, all of God's works are right and just (Judg. 5:11; Neh. 9:33; Isa. 45:21).
3. An essential function of righteousness is the necessity of judging all sin/unrighteousness (Gen. 18:25; Psalm 9:4, 8; 1 Sam. 2:10; Rom. 1:17–18; 2:5; Heb. 10:20).
4. Righteousness is the free gift of God to all who receive Jesus Christ in faith (Rom. 1:17; 3:21–26; 4:3–5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:6).
5. Because the righteousness of Christ has been given to us, we ought to grow in godly conduct that reflects and is worthy of Him (Rom. 12:1–2; Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 4:1; 5:1–2, 8–10; Phil. 1:9–11; Titus 2:11–13; 1 John 2:29).

ROMANS CHAPTER 4

Paul continues his argument that justification comes by faith alone in Christ alone. His goal is to prove this from the Old Testament Scriptures.

Abraham—The Biblical Standard of Justification

Romans 4:1–12

4:1 “According to the flesh.” This phrase would be understood by any Jew to mean, “by his works.” This also would immediately cause them to think of the act of circumcision, which Paul will deal with in vv. 9–12. Paul has introduced the truth that justification comes only by faith (Rom. 3:21–31). Now he uses Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, as his scriptural example that faith, not works, is the key to being justified before God (Gal. 3:6; Eph. 2:8–9).

4:2 “For if Abraham was justified by works.” Paul had no doubt read the book of James (see James 2:21–24), which had been written about ten years earlier. There was no dispute between James and Paul on the subject. James was dealing with Abraham's justification before men, and so wrote of his offering of Isaac, some 20–25 years later (Gen. 22:1–19). Paul is writing of Abraham's justification before God, through faith alone. **“He has something to boast about, but not before God.”** Paul has just shown that faith excludes all boasting (Rom. 3:27).

4:3 “For what does the Scripture say?” Here, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6. **“‘Abraham believed God ... it was accounted to him for righteousness.’”** Long before the coming of the Law, Abraham was justified by faith alone. The word “accounted” is a banking or bookkeeping term that means “to place into someone's account.” If God's righteousness is placed into our eternal account, that means all our sins have also been totally forgiven. Genesis 15:6 is the first occurrence of the word “believed” in the Bible. Acts 7:1–4 and Hebrews 11:8 tell us that Abraham's faith began in Ur of Chaldea (Gen. 12:1–3).

4:4 “Wages are not counted as grace.” The word “grace” (Rom. 1:5; 3:24) speaks of a free gift. When one receives wages for work done, it is not a gift, but rather a debt. No man can put God into his debt by doing good works.

4:5 “Him who does not work.” All works must be excluded if justification is to be a gift. We are “justified freely by His grace” (Rom. 3:24), apart from any work on our part. **“But believes on Him who justifies the**

ungodly.” The inclusion of the word “*ungodly*” again stresses that justification involves two sides: first, the forgiveness of all sins and, second, the placing of God’s own righteousness into our account.

4:6–8 “Just as David also describes.” Paul calls on David as a witness to the point he is making by quoting Psalm 32:1–2. This Psalm records David’s confession after his sin with Bathsheba. David confirms that part of the blessedness of the believer is the forgiveness of all sins—past, present, and future. According to Jewish law, every fact had to be confirmed by “*two or three witnesses*” (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; 2 Cor. 13:1). “*Blessedness*” is used here, in the aftermath of David’s sin, to describe the unchanging status of the believer before God. “*Imputes righteousness ... the LORD shall not impute sin.*” Here, David clearly shows both sides of justification: the non-imputation of sin, and the imputation of righteousness. It is as if sins are erased from our account (Psalm 103:12; Jer. 31:34b; Heb. 10:17), and righteousness is then recorded in their place.

4:9 “Does this blessedness come upon the circumcised only?” Most Jews of Paul’s day assumed God’s blessings could only be given after one was circumcised (Acts 15:1–5). Paul shows, from the Scriptures, that Abraham was uncircumcised when God justified him. The only reasonable conclusion then is that circumcision plays no part whatsoever in our justification (salvation). “*Faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.*” Paul restates this truth from verses 3 and 5 to make his point.

4:11 “He received the sign of circumcision.” This ritual was given to Israel through Abraham to point them to the truth—that we are justified by faith alone. Circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:10–11), just as the Sabbath was the sign of the covenant of the Law of Moses (Exod. 31:13). “*That he might be the father of all those who believe.*” Abraham is the father of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles (Gal. 3:6–9).

4:12 “Who also walk in the steps of the faith.” Paul has already proved that circumcision, without faith, means nothing (Rom. 2:25–29). To “*walk in the steps*” of Abraham means to follow him in believing God. To the Jew, circumcision was meant to be an outward sign of inward faith. In much the same way, Christian baptism is an outward symbol of what has already occurred within (Rom. 6:1–6).

Summary Principles: Justification

1. The meaning of the biblical word “justify/justification” is “to declare righteous.” God is able to declare all who believe in Christ to be righteous because He forgives all their sins, which were paid for at the cross (Col. 2:13–14), and then imputes the righteousness of Christ to them (2 Cor. 5:21).
2. Abraham is the standard given in the Bible for how one is justified. Abraham believed the promise of his future “*Seed*,” who we know as the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was justified by that faith alone (Gen. 12:2–3; 15:1–6; 21:12; 22:18; Gal. 3:16).
3. Abraham was absolutely not justified before God by works (Rom. 4:1–5). When James speaks of Abraham being justified by works (James 2:20–24), he is speaking of being justified before men, proving the genuineness of his faith. The event of offering Isaac was many years after Abraham first became a believer.
4. Not only does God impute (place into our account) the righteousness of Christ, but He also does not impute any of our sins against us, because Christ paid for them all (**vv. 6–8**). All our sins were imputed to Jesus Christ on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21), so that His righteousness could be imputed to those who believe.

God's Grace Is Received by Faith Alone

Romans 4:13–25

4:13 *“The promise ... was not ... through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”* The “promise” referred to here is first stated in Genesis 12:1–3. There are two things included in this promise. First, that Abraham would be heir of the world, as mentioned by Paul in this verse. Second, that all the world would be blessed.

Note: In Genesis 12:2, the word “blessed” is in the *niphal* stem and, in Genesis 22:18, it is in the *hithpael* (reflexive stem), meaning “they shall bless themselves” (*Old Testament Parsing Guide*, Todd Beall and William Banks, pp. 8, 17). This implies the necessity of faith in the recipients. And not just faith alone, but also the righteousness, which is imputed to those who believe.

4:14 *“If those who are of the law are heirs.”* The Jewish teaching was that obedience to the law is essential to eternal inheritance/salvation (Acts 15:1–5). Paul argues that if this were true, faith is nullified and the promise is ineffective (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10–12, 16–18).

4:15 *“The law brings about wrath.”* The reason is that the law shines a bright light on all our sins (Rom. 3:19–20; Gal. 2:16; 3:10). *“No transgression.”* Without the law, sin still exists, but the penalty of the law is not enforced (Rom. 5:13–14). Therefore, those without the law are judged, not by the law, but by their own conscience (John 16:8; Rom. 2:11–16).

4:16 *“It is of faith.”* The word “it” here and in vv. 22–23 speaks of imputed righteousness, resulting in eternal inheritance/salvation. *“That it might be according to grace.”* God’s grace is only compatible with man’s faith. The law is not compatible with grace, and works are not compatible with faith (Rom. 11:6). Only after we are saved by faith, have become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), possess all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9–11), are we enabled to produce “good works” (Eph. 2:8–10; James 1:22, 25; 2:14–24). We must always remember that any good works produced apart from faith and love are worthless and unacceptable to God (Rom. 14:23; 1 Cor. 13:1–3; see Gen. 4:2–7). *“That the promise might be sure to all the seed.”* That is, to those who are in Christ by faith (Gal. 3:16, 29). *“Abraham, who is the father of us all.”* Abraham is the father of those who believe (Rom. 3:22–24; Gal. 3:22, 26, 29).

4:17 *“I have made you a father of many nations.”* This promise was made before Isaac was born (Gen. 17:5). *“God, who gives life to the dead.”* The immediate thought here is the reproductive deadness of Abraham and Sarah (v. 19); only the God who can raise the dead and bring something new into existence could fulfill that promise. And Abraham believed Him.

4:18 *“Who, contrary to hope, in hope believed.”* Abraham saw the human impossibility of having children. Humanly speaking, there was no hope. Yet, he hoped in the God who made the promise, *“So shall your descendants be.”* This is a reference to Genesis 15:5–6.

4:19–20 *“Not being weak in faith ... he did not waver ... through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith.”* These phrases show the main point of Paul’s argument. From the time Abraham initially believed, up to the time of Isaac’s birth, Abraham was growing stronger in faith. This illustrates one of the main ideas of the book of Romans—that we are to go “from faith to faith,” because “the just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17). In Romans, Paul is not just concerned with bringing men to eternal life by faith in Christ, he is also concerned that believers grow in grace and truth so as to live the abundant life (John 10:10).

4:22 *“It was accounted to him for righteousness.”* The reference here to “it” is speaking of Abraham’s faith (v. 3). However, since Abraham’s spiritual growth is mentioned in vv. 17–21, “it” could also refer to his ongoing faith being accounted as a righteous life. In this way, Paul could be speaking both of imputed righteousness (v. 3), and also of imparted righteousness, that is, the empowering and enablement of

the believer to live out the righteousness of Christ. This would refer back to v. 12, “*Who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had.*” If we look at it like this, Paul may be preparing the way for Romans chapters 6 through 8, and the doctrine of sanctification by faith.

4:24 “It shall be imputed to us who believe.” The righteousness of God will “*be imputed to*” all who believe in Jesus Christ. This imputation is permanent and eternal; once given it is never lost or forfeited (Rom. 11:29). All believers fail, but all our sins, past, present, and future, were laid on Him and paid forever at the cross (Col. 2:14). This is what Jesus meant when He said, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). The word translated “*finished*” is a legal term meaning “paid in full!” “***In Him who raised up Jesus.***” The Lord Jesus made it clear that to believe in Him was to believe in the Father, for They are one in essence and Spirit (Deut. 6:4; John 8:19; 10:30; James 2:19).

4:25 “Who was delivered up ... and was raised.” The work of Christ on our behalf was death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1–4). All our sins were paid for on the cross, but without the resurrection, we would have no assurance of the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death (1 Cor. 15:12–22; Col. 2:13–15). Christ did not die just to forgive our sins, but also to give us new life (Rom. 6:4; 7:6; 8:4; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

Summary Principles: The Promise of God

1. God promised Abraham that he would inherit the world before the rite of circumcision, or the Law, were given (Rom. 4:10–11; Gal. 3:17).
2. When a promise is given, one does not need to work for it, or seek to earn it. All that one can do is to trust in the one who gave the promise.
3. To make the promise depend on works is to nullify the promise (v. 14; Gal. 3:18). If God offers eternal life as a free gift (Rom. 6:23) and we say, “Let me pay for it by works,” the promise is now turned into a debt (Rom. 4:4).
4. All of God’s promises in His Word are given freely and can only be received by simple childlike faith (v. 16, Matt. 18:3; John 1:12).
5. Abraham not only believed in God for righteousness (v. 3), but he lived in the faith that God would give him a child (vv. 17–20). This is the idea Paul introduced in Romans 1:17 when he wrote “*from faith to faith.*” Faith is like the tiny “*mustard seed*” that, once planted, grows and grows (Matt. 13:31–32).
6. Abraham’s faith gave him hope, even when things looked hopeless (v. 18). This was because he knew that the One who had promised was faithful (Heb. 11:11, 19).
7. What is true of Abraham can also be true of us—if we “*grow in grace*” and live by faith (vv. 23–25; 2 Pet. 3:18). When we live by faith, we are following in the footsteps of our father Abraham (v. 12).

Summary Principles: The Power of Faith

1. From Romans 3:21 through 4:25, the words “*faith*” and “*believe*” occur at least 25 times. It is clear—God wants us to understand that faith is all that is required of us for salvation.
2. In order for faith at the moment of salvation to be genuine, it cannot be mixed or mingled with works of any kind (vv. 2–4, 9–11, 13; John 6:28–29; Acts 16:31; Titus 3:5).

ROMANS 5:1–5

3. Faith is the only human response that is honoring to the grace of God and available to all mankind (v. 16; Rom. 11:6). This is because faith is an admission of total, spiritual poverty (Matt. 5:3; Heb. 11:6).
4. Any attempt to include works in receiving salvation is an attempt to turn grace into debt (v. 4; Acts 15:1–5; Gal. 2:11–16; 3:10–14).
5. Faith is powerful because it lays hold of the power of God (vv. 17–22; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 1:18, 23–24; 2 Cor. 4:5–7; Eph. 3:20–21; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:3–4).
6. Faith is not stagnant; it does not stand still. Faith grows in grace, truth, and power as we learn and obey God’s Word (vv. 18–22; Eph. 4:11–16; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18).

ROMANS CHAPTER 5

The benefits and blessings of our justification.

Note that Romans 5 is considered by many theologians throughout history to be one of the most critical passages in the Bible to understanding right theology and teaching right doctrine. It is also a “hinge” in the book, as Paul moves from the issue of justification by faith, to the topic of how we are to live the Christian way of life (sanctification). Paul uses the phrase “*much more*” five times (vv. 9, 10, 15, 17, 20) to show that God’s grace not only provides for eternal life but, beyond that, supplies all we need for the “abundant life” (John 10:10; Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:3, 5–8).

Faith Reaps the Blessings of the Cross

Romans 5:1–11

5:1 “*Having been justified by faith.*” At the moment we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are justified—declared righteous by God (2 Cor. 5:21). “***We have peace with God.***” The word “*reconciled/reconciliation*” (vv. 10–11; 2 Cor. 5:18) means that all grounds for guilt, shame, or judgment, have been removed. Where we were formerly the enemies of God, we have now entered into a relationship of “*peace*” (Eph. 2:13–14; 4:18; Col. 1:21). “***Through our Lord Jesus Christ.***” As vv. 6–11 will show, our standing before God is due only to the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

5:2 “*We have access ... into this grace in which we stand.*” Not only do we stand firmly in God’s grace, but by prayer we can enter His very Throne Room (Heb. 4:14–16). “***And rejoice in hope of the glory of God.***” The word “*rejoice*” means “to boast,” and the word “*hope*” means “certain expectation.” Our rejoicing is based on the eternal security of our salvation. We are absolutely certain, having trusted in Jesus Christ, that we will share His glory.

5:3 “*We ... glory in tribulations.*” Those who believe in Christ have the capacity to boast in the midst of afflictions, because we know how God uses them to bring purity and maturity into our lives (Matt. 5:10–12; James 1:2–3, 12; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; 1 Pet. 4:12–14) “***Tribulation produces perseverance.***” When suffering meets faith, the result is that faith endures to the point of victory (Rom. 8:37; 1 Pet. 1:6–9).

5:4 “*Character ... and ... hope.*” Trials met with faith produce in us the proven “*character*” of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:16–18). As we grow, we move from the “*hope*” (assurance) of our security in Christ (v. 2), to the “*hope*” (assurance) of victorious Christian living (Heb. 6:19; 10:22–24; 1 Pet. 3:15). Spiritual maturity gives us the confidence that we can face whatever God allows to come into our lives (Phil. 4:13).

5:5 “*Hope does not disappoint.*” Genuine “*hope*” rests not in false expectations, but in the assurance that our heavenly Father is in control of our lives. “***The love of God has been poured out in our hearts.***” The coming of

the Holy Spirit into our lives (Acts 1:5; Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 12:13), and His fellowship (Phil. 2:1), is a constant reminder of the depth of the love of God (vv. 6–10; Eph. 3:17–19).

5:6 “Without strength ... the ungodly” We had no power to save ourselves, being totally separated from God. **“In due time Christ died.”** The cross of Christ occurred at the precise time in history ordained by God (Gal. 4:4).

5:7 “For a righteous man ... for a good man.” By a “righteous man,” Paul means one who will do what is right but no more. But the “good man” will go beyond what is required to the point of sacrificial service to another. For this kind of man, one might dare to die.

5:8 “While we were still sinners, Christ died.” Jesus Christ shows the love of God to be so much greater than any human love, in that Christ died for sinners. Note that Paul uses four terms to describe mankind: “without strength” and “ungodly” (v. 6), “sinners” (v. 8), and “enemies” (v. 10). The vastness of the love of God embraces all of humanity!

5:9 “Much more.” Paul uses this phrase five times (vv. 9, 10, 15, 17, 20), to show that the plan of God goes far beyond simply saving our souls from eternal condemnation. His purpose is for us to utilize His grace to “reign in life” (v. 17), that is, to live a victorious life of faith. **“We shall be saved from wrath.”** The “wrath” that God inflicts on those who rebel against His truth (Rom. 1:18–32) is never intended to be the portion of the believer. It is critical to understand that the word “saved” means simply “to be delivered,” whether from eternal or from temporal, daily, consequences of sin.

5:10 “For if ... we were reconciled.” The death of Christ on the cross made it possible for us to escape the eternal condemnation of sin. **“Much more ... we shall be saved by His life.”** The believer who lives by faith in obedience to God’s Word will be delivered from sin and the wrath that it brings (Eph. 1:7; 1 Thess. 1:10). By the indwelling of the Spirit, we are able to experience the very life of Christ living in and through us (John 14:6, 12–21; Rom. 6:3–4; 8:37; Gal. 2:20).

5:11 “And not only that.” As if eternal salvation and victory in time were not enough blessing, God also gives us the ability to face life and its trials as **“we ... rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** The One who died for the ungodly—who has reconciled us to God—also becomes our daily rejoicing as we live in His power and presence.

Summary Principles: The Blessings of Justification

1. When we are justified by faith, we have **peace with God**, (v. 1; John 14:27; 16:33; Eph. 2:14; 6:15). This peace is not a feeling, but a fact. God the Father accepts us as He does His own beloved Son, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:6). God Himself expresses this peace to us in every greeting of Paul, “*grace to you and peace.*” (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; Phi. 3).
2. We experience this peace as we “*abide in Him*” and permit the Spirit of God to produce His fruit in us (John 15:4–10; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15; James 3:18).
3. Next, we have a **standing in grace** (v. 2a), which is our spiritual home—the grace of God that will never be taken from us (2 Cor. 12:9; Eph. 3:17, 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:1; Titus 2:11; Heb. 4:16).
4. Then we have **hope** (v. 2b), which means the “assurance” of our eternal presence with God in His glory. “*Hope*” is one of the three great spiritual virtues: faith, hope, and love (vv. 1, 3, 5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:4–5; 1 Thess. 1:3, 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:21–22).

ROMANS 5:12–18

5. We can also live in the expectation of **spiritual growth** (vv. 3–4), because we know that God uses our trials to produce in us the character of His Son (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 1:5–7).
6. Finally, we have **the love of God** (v. 5), which the Holy Spirit has brought to us and constantly reminds us of (John 16:8; Rom. 8:35; 15:30; 2 Cor. 5:14; 13:14; Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 3:19; 1 John 4:19).

Death and Slavery through Adam; Life and Victory through Christ

Romans 5:12–21

5:12 *“Through one man sin entered the world.”* The sin of Adam introduced sin into the world (Gen. 3:1–19). *“Death spread to all men, because all sinned.”* Death is the consequence of sin (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). All men are born with Adam’s sinful nature, which is proved by the fact that *“all [men] have sinned”* (Rom. 3:10–18, 23; 1 Cor. 15:21–22).

5:13–14 *“Sin is not imputed when there is no law.”* The Law was given to reveal the sinfulness of mankind (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:10, 21–24; 1 Tim. 1:9–10). Before the Law came, God dealt with men with great longsuffering and patience (Acts 14:16; 17:26–30). However, even without the Law, men are judged by their own conscience (Rom. 2:13–16; 1 Tim. 1:19). *“Death reigned from Adam to Moses.”* Even before the Law, mankind still suffered the curse of death—the result of sin—even though their sins were not in disobedience to a known command, like Adam’s (Gen. 2:17). *“A type of Him who was to come.”* Just as Adam became the head of a fallen race of sinful men, even so Jesus Christ, by His death and resurrection, became the Head of a redeemed race of men.

5:15 *“The free gift is not like the offense.”* In the rest of chapter five, Paul gives a series of contrasts between the effects of Adam’s sin and the work of Christ on the cross. He uses the phrase *“much more”* to show that the work of Christ brought greater blessings than what Adam had lost. *“The grace of God and the gift ... abounded to many.”* The grace of God brought not only the gift of eternal life, but also the power for abundant life through the power of His indwelling Spirit (John 10:10).

5:16 *“From one offense ... from many offenses.”* A further contrast between Adam and Christ is that, by one sin, Adam condemned all men to condemnation before God, but the Lord Jesus, on the cross, paid the debt of the many offenses of mankind (John 1:29; Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21). All sins were laid on Him at the cross (Isa. 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:25), so that by faith, we can be justified before God. Paul’s point is that Jesus did not just pay for the sin of Adam, which brought sin into the world, He died for all the sins of all men throughout all history (1 John 2:2)!

5:17 *“Much more those who receive ... the gift of righteousness ... will reign in life.”* The sin of Adam brought the rule of sin into the world. All mankind became slaves to sin and death. But because of the finished work of Jesus Christ (John 19:30), those who receive the gift of righteousness by faith, can now reign in life. When we live by the power of the Holy Spirit, we allow the Lord to *“rule in the midst of [His] enemies”* through us (Psalm 110:2b).

5:18 *“Judgment came to all men ... even so ... the free gift came to all men.”* Just as the sin of Adam brought condemnation to all men, even so, the work of Christ brought the *“free gift”* of justification and life to all men. The work of Christ on the cross was universal. However, while all men enter into the bondage of Adam by physical birth, one can only enter into the life of Jesus Christ by spiritual birth (John 3:3; 14:6; 1 Cor. 15:22). The free gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23) must be received by faith in Christ (Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Eph. 2:8).

5:19 “*By one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.*” The obedience of Jesus Christ to the will of the Father (Matt. 26:36–42; Mark 14:34–39; Luke 22:41–42; Phil. 2:5–8) brought righteousness to all who believe (Rom. 1:16–17; 3:21–26; 4:3–5).

5:20 “*Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.*” This verse is a summary of the contrast Paul has been making between Adam and Christ. The sin of Adam made all men slaves to sin. The cross of Christ makes all who trust in Him to be “*kings and priests*” (Rev. 5:10; 20:6). However great the disastrous effects of sin, the grace of God is always greater.

5:21 “*Even so grace might reign ... to eternal life.*” Jesus Christ did not die just to save us from the condemnation of Adam, He died to give us His life, which we can experience by the filling of the Holy Spirit here and now (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). By His control, we are enabled to live righteously, so that our lives bring glory to Him throughout all eternity. The thought of “reigning” (vv. 17, 21) through Christ introduces the next major section of Romans (chapters 6–8), dealing with the power of the Spirit and the work of sanctification.

Summary Principles: The Contrast Between Adam and Christ

1. Adam is the head of the old creation, and he brought sin, suffering, and death to all mankind (vv. 12–14; Gen. 2:17). The presence of death, even before the law was given, shows that all those who lived during this time were sinners.
2. Where Adam brought death, the Lord Jesus Christ brought the free gift of eternal life (v. 15).
3. Adam brought judgment by one sin, but Jesus Christ brought justification before God by paying the debt of “*many offenses*”—the sins of the entire human race (v. 16).
4. Where Adam made all men slaves to the rulership of death, the Lord Jesus brought righteousness so that men could reign as kings in this life (v. 17).
5. Just as Adam brought judgment to all, even so, Christ made justification possible for all men (v. 18).
6. Adam made men sinners; Jesus Christ made men righteous (v. 19).
7. The grace of God is always greater than sin: It is greater in power, in provision, and in promise. All who receive the grace of God are empowered to reign as kings to the eternal glory of Jesus Christ (vv. 20–21).

ROMANS CHAPTER 6

Our union with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection provides power over the sin nature and victory over habitual sinning.

The Power of Our Union with Christ

Romans 6:1–11

6:1 “*Shall we continue in sin?*” The truth that God’s grace is greater than sin (Rom. 5:20) might lead an objector to suggest the question here. This is similar to the objection to his teaching mentioned in Romans 3:8, and the one recorded in Romans 6:15. All were likely attacks on Paul’s emphasis on the grace of God.

6:2 “*How shall we who died ... live any longer in it?*” Many believers simply do not understand what occurred when they believed in Christ. The new man (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:9–10) is free from the

ROMANS 6:3–11

reign of the sin nature (Rom. 5:12–14, 17) because we share in the finished work of Christ's victory over sin (John 19:30; Rom. 8:37; Col. 2:14).

6:3 “Do you not know.” Paul often uses this phrase to introduce a truth his readers should know but are ignorant of (Rom. 6:16; 7:1; 10:19; 11:2; 1 Cor. 3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24). **“Baptized into Christ.”** The baptism mentioned here is not water baptism, but rather the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which places us into union with Christ (Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13). Water baptism is an outward, physical confession of this inward spiritual change.

6:4 “Just as Christ was raised ... we also should walk in newness of life.” In vv. 3–5, Paul declares that we share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By His death we are delivered from the penalty of sin. His burial implies separation from the world, and His resurrection guarantees the impartation of His resurrection life to us (Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:11–14; Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7).

6:5 “If we have been united together.” The word “united” speaks of “the ingrafting of two plants together” (Rom. 11:16–18). We have been spiritually grafted into Jesus Christ. **“In the likeness of His resurrection.”** The purpose of God in the crucifixion was not only to deliver us from the power of sin, but also from the practice of sin. It was not just to save us from sin, but also to save us from sinning. This point is restated in vv. 6–8.

6:6 “Knowing this.” The emphasis is again on the importance of knowing the truth of what Christ has done. **“Our old man was crucified with Him.”** Union with Christ means that the old person we were in Adam—a slave to sin—has died (1 Cor. 15:22). **“Might be done away with.”** The word used here (*katargeo*) does not mean the sin nature is eradicated, but rather that it is rendered powerless against the new power of the Spirit (Matt. 12:29; Luke 11:21–22; Gal 2:20). **“That we should no longer be slaves of sin.”** Sin no longer has dominion over us (v. 14), but we are still able to choose to sin (v. 16).

6:8 “If we died ... we believe ... we shall also live with Him.” The goal of the Christian life is that we share in the resurrection life of Christ (Gal. 2:20; 1 Pet. 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 2:11). Paul introduces the phrase “we believe” to show that not only knowledge of the truth, but also faith in God's power, is essential to live in victory. Not only do we believe that we will share eternity living with Christ, but we are enabled to live with Him now in this life, by His indwelling Spirit (John 15:5; Rom. 7:6; 8:4–14).

6:9 “Christ, having been raised ... dies no more.” Once Christ was raised from the dead, death could never threaten Him again. He is victorious over sin, death, and the grave (1 Cor. 15:50–58; Col. 2:13–14).

6:10 “He died to sin once for all.” When Jesus cried out, “It is finished” (John 19:30), His victory over sin was secured forever (Heb. 10:12–14). **“He lives to God.”** The humanity of Christ, raised from the dead, lives forever to the glory of God (Heb. 9:27–28; Luke 20:37–38).

6:11 “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God.” The word “reckon” here is the same word used in Romans 4 of God imputing or accounting righteousness to us (Rom. 4:3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24). Paul's point is that we should learn to view ourselves as God sees us. Three steps have been given up to this point to lead us to victory over sin. We must:

1. **Know** the truth of what God had done in Christ (vv. 3, 6, 9).
2. **Believe** what God has done for us by our union with Christ (v. 8).
3. Consider (**reckon**) ourselves dead to sin and alive to God (v. 11).

In other words, we must act on what we know and believe to be true (Luke 11:28; John 13:17).

Summary Principles: The Meaning of Union with Christ

1. By our union with Jesus Christ, both the penalty of sin and the power of the sin nature over us has been abolished (vv. 1–2; Rom. 8:2; Gal. 2:20).
2. There are three vital areas of our spiritual union with Jesus Christ: We are united with Him in His death, in His burial, and in His resurrection (vv. 3–4; Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:3–4; Gal. 3:27).
3. By our union with Christ's death, the **penalty** of sin is paid in full. By our union with His burial, the **power** of sin is forever broken, and in union with His resurrection, we will be forever removed from the **presence** of sin.
4. The “*baptism*” Paul speaks of here (vv. 3–4) is a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), which occurs at the moment of salvation (Rom. 8:9–11). At the same time, we are placed into union with Christ, God the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence within us, as the seal of our security in Christ (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30).
5. Our ability to “*walk in newness of life*” (v. 4) means to live in the power of His resurrection life (v. 5, Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10). This is possible only as we are filled by His Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and walk (live) by faith in His power (Gal. 5:16; Col. 2:6). This goes back to Paul's statement in Romans 1:17, “*The just shall live by faith.*”
6. The practice of holiness is the result of three decisive steps on the part of the believer:
 - a. We must **know** about our union with Christ (vv. 3, 6, 9). This requires sound teaching.
 - b. We must **reckon** or consider this to be true for us (v. 11). This is the personal application of the truth to our experience by faith.
 - c. We must **present** ourselves to God as “*a living sacrifice*” (v. 13, Rom. 12:1). Here, we have the daily/moment-by-moment decision to live for God and not for self (Luke 9:23).
7. Again, this goes back to what Paul said in his introduction in Romans 1:17, “*For in it [gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’*”

The Practice of Our Union with Christ

Romans 6:12–23

6:12 “*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body.*” Although this body will one day die because of indwelling sin, we are able to deny sin the right to rule in this body. The power to deny our sinful nature is in the indwelling Holy Spirit.

6:13 “*Do not present your members ... but present yourselves to God.*” The word “*present*” is a picture of offering a sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). Each day we are to “*present [ourselves] to God*” as a “*living sacrifice*” to do His will.

6:14 “*Sin shall not have dominion ... you are not under law but under grace.*” All the Law has the power to do is condemn (Rom. 3: 19; 8:1–4; 1 Tim. 1:9–10). Knowing what the law condemns only excites the sin nature to disobey the Law (Rom. 7:7–11).

6:15 “*Shall we sin because we are not under the law?*” Paul was often accused of teaching antinomianism or lawlessness (see note on v. 1). Freedom from the Law is freedom from its condemnation, so that we are enabled to obey its righteous demands (Rom. 8:4). Paul always made it clear that freedom from the Law did not mean freedom to sin, but rather freedom **from** sin to live in the power of the love of Christ (Rom. 13:8–10; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; Gal. 5:13–14). Although pastors who emphasize the grace of God are often

ROMANS 6:16–23

accused or preaching “cheap grace” or “easy believism,” Paul declares that only the teaching of the grace of God has the power to overcome sin in our lives and embrace godliness (Titus 2:11–14).

6:16–17 *“You are that one’s slaves whom you obey.”* The believer can either be a slave of sin, or a slave of God. We must choose each day whom we will serve (Josh. 24:15). *“You obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine.”* The power to live the Christian way of life is found in two sources: the truth of God’s Word (“doctrine” = teaching), and the indwelling Spirit. It is one thing to believe right teaching, but the next step is to act upon it (vv. 8–13, “believe” + “reckon” + “present”). See Luke 11:28; John 13:17; James 2:20.

6:18 *“You became slaves of righteousness.”* Jesus Christ has purchased us through His sacrifice in our place. However, He desires that our service to Him be voluntary through love and gratitude (John 8:30–32; 14:15, 21; 15:9–10; 2 Cor. 5:14–15).

6:19 *“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.”* Paul resorts to human analogies and illustrations in order to overcome the limitations of his readers. As we once lived as slaves to sin, we now are to use the members of our body for “righteousness” and “holiness” (1 Pet. 1:16). The Greek word for “holiness” is the word we get “sanctification” from. This is the main theme of Romans 6–8.

6:20–21 *“You were slaves of sin.”* As an unbeliever, you have no choice but to serve the sin nature. *“What fruit did you have ... of which you are now ashamed?”* We can all look back to thoughts, words, and actions in our unbelieving life that bring nothing but shame. The only fruit that sin brings forth is death (James 1:13–16; Gal. 6:7–8).

6:22 *“Having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”* Where the end of sin is death (v. 21), the end of obedience to God is eternal life. Paul is not saying that our salvation is dependent on our good deeds. What He is suggesting is that obedience to God in this life will bring its own rewards in eternity (1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; 4:6–8).

6:23 *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.”* Here, “eternal life” is not only what we receive when we believe in Jesus Christ, but it is also speaking of the gift of the life of Christ (vv. 4–8), by which we are enabled and empowered to live obedient lives, and for which we will be eternally rewarded (2 Pet. 1:5–11). This is what Jesus spoke of when He talked of laying up “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:20), and what Paul means when he says we should “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:12, 19). The gift of eternal life provides every believer with the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who gives us the gift of His power, to live lives that glorify God.

Summary Principles: The Practice of Holiness

1. It is critical for us to understand the biblical term “holiness.” It means so much more than simply the absence of sin.
 - a. First, holiness is simply the reflection of the character of God, who alone is truly holy (Exod. 15:11; Psalm 22:3; Isa. 6:3). When we speak of godliness, we are referring to the actions of holiness, which reflect the nature of God.
 - b. Holiness then speaks of the “wholeness” and the “wholesome-ness” of God. He is lacking in nothing that is good, without any defect in all that is pure.
2. When we, by faith, claim the resurrection power of Jesus Christ (vv. 11–12; Phil. 3:10), the Spirit of God enables us to live in the reality of His resurrection life (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:14–21).
3. Sin can have no dominion over those who choose to live by grace, through faith (vv. 14–15; Eph. 2:8–10; Col. 2:6; Titus 2:11–14).

4. As new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), we have the power to choose to serve God rather than serving our sinful nature (vv. 16–19; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:20–24; 1 Thess. 4:7).
5. When we choose to live under the dominion of our sinful nature, we put to death the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 20–21; Gal. 5:16–23).
6. In contrast, when we live in obedience to God by the power of His Spirit, we bear the fruits of holiness (John 15:5; 2 Cor. 9:10; Col. 1:10; James 3:17), which will last forever (vv. 22–23; Matt. 6:20; Heb. 10:35–36; 11:26; Rev. 22:12).

ROMANS CHAPTER 7

The law cannot give victory in the spiritual life. To attempt to live by the law dooms us to frustration and failure.

Free from Law—The Marriage Analogy

Romans 7:1–6

7:1 “Do you not know.” Again, Paul uses this phrase as a rebuke to believers for their ignorance of sound teaching (see Rom. 6:3 note). **“The law has dominion ... as long as he lives.”** Since the law was given to magnify sinfulness (Rom. 5:20) and to regulate one’s life on this earth, it has no power once one is dead.

7:2 “The woman ... is bound ... to her husband as long as he lives.” Paul uses marriage as an example of the power of the law. Once a husband dies, she is no longer bound to him, but is free to marry another. So, it is with the law.

7:3 “If her husband dies, she is free from that law.” This is the main point Paul wants us to understand: Death annuls the power of the Law over a person.

7:4 “You ... have become dead to the law through the body of Christ.” Union with Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) has done two things for us:

1. It has set us free from the law and its condemnation (Rom. 8:1–4; Gal. 3:10–14).
2. It has made it possible for us to **“be married to another ... Him who was raised from the dead.”** The point is that one cannot live under the slavery of the law, and at the same time live in the freedom of Christ (Rom. 8:5; Gal. 5:1, 18).

Those who are joined to Christ by faith, and yet seek to live by Law, become estranged from Christ (Rom. 8:6–8; Gal. 5:1–4). **“That we should bear fruit to God.”** The fruit of the life of faith is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

7:5 “In the flesh.” This refers to our life as an unbeliever (Rom. 8:9–11). **“The passions of sins which were aroused by the law.”** The effect of the Law saying, **“Thou shalt not ...,”** only provokes the sinful nature to sin even more (vv. 7–8). The end result is that we **“bear fruit unto death.”** Both our conscience and our actions condemn us to death (John 16:8; Rom. 1:32; 2:14–15; Gal. 3:10; James 2:10–11).

7:6 “We have been delivered from the law.” Our union with Christ, bringing both forgiveness from all sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, renders the **“law”** powerless over us. **“Having died to what we were held by.”** The word translated **“held”** here is the same word translated **“suppress”** in Romans 1:18. It means **“to work actively, to hold down or oppress.”** **“That we should serve in the newness of the Spirit.”** Paul uses the word **“newness”** here and in Romans 6:4, where he speaks of **“newness of life.”** His point is that our experience of the resurrection life (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10) is dependent on our submission to and reliance

ROMANS 7:7–12

on the indwelling Holy Spirit. The spiritual life is a life that is controlled and guided by the Spirit (John 16:8; Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18).

The Law is Holy, But We Are Not Romans 7:7–12

7:7 “Is the law sin?” Since the Law gives power to sin (vv. 5, 8, 11; 1 Cor. 15:56), is the Law also sinful? **“I would not have known sin except through the law.”** The Law defines what is sinful (Rom. 3:10–18; 5:20). Since coveting what someone else has is hidden in the human heart, we would not think it sinful, except for the command, “*you shall not covet.*” (Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21).

7:8 “Sin, taking opportunity by the commandment.” Our sinful nature naturally rebels against God’s prohibitions. This was the nature of Adam’s first sin (Gen. 2:17). **“Apart from the law sin was dead.”** If there is no absolute standard of right and wrong, then sin has nothing to rebel against. Who can be accused of sin if there is no standard defining sin?

7:9 “I was alive once without the law.” This perhaps refers to a time when Paul, as Saul, considered himself a true law-keeper. Like the rich young ruler, he could say, “*All these I have kept from my youth*” (Luke 18:21). It is most interesting that in the context here in Romans 7, Paul specifically identifies coveting (v. 7), which is precisely the issue Jesus used to break the pride of the young ruler (Luke 18:22). It is fascinating to consider whether that young ruler was, in fact, Saul of Tarsus. **“When the commandment came ... I died.”** Failure to keep this one command brought him under the curse of the law—death (Rom. 6:23; Gal. 3:10; James 1:15; 2:10).

Note: Beginning in v. 9, Paul begins to speak of his own personal struggles against sin, using the personal pronoun, “*I*” 28 times from v. 9 to v. 25. He shows that his own experiences match those of all believers in our struggle between indwelling sin and our desire to live righteously.

7:10 “Which was to bring life, I found to bring death.” The commands of God point to God and His holiness, which is life itself. However, as Paul will show us in Romans 8:3, the problem is in our inability to keep the law. As we read in Galatians 3:24–25, in revealing our sinfulness, the law points us to Jesus Christ—the embodiment of the law—who is also our Redeemer and Savior.

7:11 “For sin ... deceived me, and by it killed me.” The unbeliever, confronted by the law, is deceived into thinking they can keep it. We even think if we keep most of it, we will earn eternal life. However, the more one tries, the more one fails. Our deception by our sinful nature only leads us to condemnation and death (Rom. 8:1b; James 1:14–15).

7:12 “Therefore the law is holy ... and just and good.” The law is “*holy*” because it reflects the righteous nature of God. It is “*just*,” because it is perfectly fair, “*For there is no partiality with God*” (Rom. 2:11). And it is good, because by revealing our sinfulness, it can bring us to the grace of God (Psalm 19:7–9; Rom. 5:20–21; Gal. 3:24–25).

Summary Principles: The Believer’s Relationship to the Law

1. Paul explains our present relationship to the law using an analogy to marriage, **vv.1–3**. Marriage was designed by God to be the union of one man and one woman for life (Gen. 2:21–24; 1 Cor. 7:39).
 - a. When a man or a woman died, the other partner was no longer bound by the marriage vow and was free to marry another (**v. 2**).
 - b. The violation of the marriage vow, while the other partner lives, was an act of adultery (**v. 3**; Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18).

2. Our union with Christ, who died to fulfill the Law, has set us free from the Law (v. 4; Gal. 3:13, 23–25). It is not the law that died; rather, we died to the law. Since the law is made for sinners (Rom. 3:19; 1 Tim. 1:9), and we have been declared righteous (Rom. 4:3, 23–25; 2 Cor. 5:21), we have been set free from the law.
3. Having died to the law, we have become united/married to Christ (“in Him” concept), and the fruits of the Spirit in us (Rom. 8:1–4; Gal. 5:22–23) are the “children” of that union (v. 4).
4. In our unbelieving state, we could only produce the works of the flesh—our sinful nature (v. 5). But now we are free from the condemnation of the law and can choose to walk/live in the new life of the Spirit (v. 6; Rom. 6:4; Gal. 5:16).
5. The essence of sin is rebellion against God. When the Law says do not lie, steal, murder, or commit adultery, our sinful nature rebels and desires to do those very things (vv. 7–11; 1 Cor. 15:56).
6. The Law of God is “*holy*” and “*good*” (v. 12; Psalm 19:7–11). But it is impossible for the unsaved person to keep the Law (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 2:16; 3:10–14). As a child of God by faith in Christ, we are indwelt by His Spirit, who enables us to live righteously, by faith (Rom. 1:17; 8:4; 13:8–10; Gal. 5:1, 14, 16, 22–25).

The Law of God, the Law of Sin, and the Law of Grace

Romans 7:13–25

7:13 “So that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.” This simply expands on what Paul said in Romans 3:20 and 5:20. The Law exposes and magnifies the sinfulness of sin. It is not just the sinful action but, even more so, the evil intents of the heart behind the doing. The sinful heart/mind is actively at war with God and His Law (John 16:8; Rom. 8:5–7). When the sin nature is confronted with “*what is good*” in the Law, it sets its goal to violate it, making the sin even worse.

7:14 “The law is spiritual ... I am carnal, sold under sin.” In his own natural self, Paul is a slave to sin. All men are. By his own efforts, there is no way he can overcome his slavery to sin. A slave cannot free himself.

7:15–16 “What I will to do ... what I hate, that I do.” Every believer knows this experience. There is an inner warfare between the desire to do what is right, and the pull of the sin nature to do what is wrong (Gal. 5:17). “*I agree with the law that it is good.*” The very will to do God’s will (John 7:17) shows the presence of the new man—the regenerate nature (2 Cor. 5:17).

7:17 “No longer I ... but sin that dwells in me.” Although the power and dominion of the sin nature is broken at salvation (Rom. 6:6), the sinful nature lives on in our mortal bodies. Because of this, there is a conflict between the old man (unsaved nature) and the new man (the new creature in Christ).

7:18 “In my flesh nothing good dwells.” The physical body, indwelt by the sinful nature, has nothing in it to commend us to God or to overcome sin. “*To will is present ... but how to perform what is good I do not find.*” The re-born/regenerate individual desires to, but cannot accomplish the good revealed in God’s Law.

7:19 “The good that I will to do.” Paul uses the word “*will*” repeatedly (vv. 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21) to speak of the desire of his true, re-born, inner self. This very desire is a proof of the new birth and of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

7:20 “It is no longer I ... but sin that dwells in me.” This is a repetition of what he says in v. 17. If I desire to do good, and yet do what is evil, then “*I*,” the child of God, am not the source of the sin. That source is the sin nature that resides in my flesh.

ROMANS 7:21–25

7:21 “I find then a law, that evil is present with me.” This “law” is a fact of life, much like the laws of nature. The law of gravity is at work whether we desire it to be or not. The sin nature desires to sin, whether we want it to or not. This verse, and this entire passage, is contrary to those who teach sinless perfection in believers. Yet, the Spirit of God indwells us to express the life of Christ, even in these mortal bodies (Rom. 8:11).

7:22 “I delight in the law of God.” This is something only a child of God—a new creature in Christ—could say (Psalm 1:2). Our grief and shame when we sin is evidence of our new nature (Psalm 6:6–7; 32:3–5; 51:1–11).

7:23 “I see another law ... warring against the law of my mind.” The desire of the child of God to obey the Law of God will always be resisted by the sinful nature within. This struggle will continue until we receive our new/resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15:20–23, 50–57; 1 Thess. 4:13–17).

7:24 “O wretched man that I am!” The frustration of the inner struggle makes the believer feel hopeless and miserable. **“Who will deliver me?”** It is only when we come to realize that we cannot deliver ourselves from this conflict that we find the solution. **“This body of death.”** This refers to the sin nature’s dominion over our flesh: *“the body of sin”* (Rom. 6:6), *“mortal body”* (Rom. 6:12), and the *“law in my members”* (v. 23).

7:25 “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Paul discovers, as we all must, that the same Savior who delivered us from the power of sin and death can also deliver us from the practice of sin. How? By simple faith and surrender to Him through His indwelling Spirit. This will be the theme of Romans 8.

Summary Principles: The Inner Struggle and the Failure of Self-discipline

1. Every believer faces the inner struggle spoken of by Paul (**vv. 13–24**). This is because while we have a new nature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), our sinful nature is still in our mortal/physical body. Because the Law magnifies the sinfulness of sin (**v. 13**; Rom. 5:20), we are now all the more aware of our sinfulness.
2. Because of our new nature, we desire to do good. But the sin nature is still drawn to temptation and sin (**vv. 14–16**). This struggle is actually evidence that we have been born again (Gal. 5:17).
3. The new nature, created in the likeness of Jesus Christ (Gen. 1:26; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:24; 1 John 3:1), desires to please God. The old sinful nature rebels against His will (**vv. 17–22**). But we must remember that the power of the sin nature over us has been broken (Rom. 6:6–10). By the power of His Spirit, we are now able to choose not to sin, but rather to serve God (Rom. 6:11–14, 18–23).
4. The key is in the mind (**v. 23**). We must learn to “set our mind on the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5–6). We must daily commit to the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 4:23) through the study of God’s Word (John 14:26; 16:13–14) and, by faith, we must learn to walk by the power of His Spirit (Gal. 5:17; Col. 2:6). The great decision facing every believer after salvation is whether we will develop the *“mind of Christ”*—or not (1 Cor. 2:16; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:5–9).
5. Victory over the power and practice of sin comes through the same One who delivered us from sin’s penalty—the Lord Jesus Christ (**vv. 24–25**). As we trusted in His work on the cross to save us from the penalty of sin, even so, we trust in the working of His indwelling Spirit to produce the life of Christ within us (2 Cor. 3:17–18; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 3:16–20).

ROMANS CHAPTER 8

The secret to living in the victorious life—the resurrection life of Christ—is explained. This chapter ends with a proclamation of victory for every believer in Jesus Christ.

The Liberating Power of the Spirit

Romans 8:1–17

8:1 “No condemnation.” This chapter begins with “*No condemnation*” and ends with “No separation.” The work of the Law is to condemn sinners (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; Gal. 3:10; 1 Tim. 1:9). In Christ, we are no longer under the Law, because all our sins have been paid and forgiven, and we are imputed with the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 1:16–17; 3:21–22; 4:3; 2 Cor. 5:21). **“Who do not walk.”** The potential for every believer, as shown by Paul’s own experience in Romans 7, is to walk either by the power of the flesh (“*carnal*,” Rom. 7:14; 1 Cor. 3:1–3), or to walk by the power of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). Since faith in Christ has delivered us from the **power** of sin, the believer is now to live by dependence on the Holy Spirit, who delivers us from the **practice** of sin.

8:2 “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” The life-giving power of the Spirit belongs only to those who are “*in Christ*.” Our position in Christ by faith avails us of the power of the indwelling Spirit. **“Has made me free.”** Liberation from the Law also sets us free from the power of sin (1 Cor. 15:56–57). We are now able to choose to experience the life of Christ by the power of the indwelling Spirit (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3).

8:3 “The law ... was weak through the flesh.” The Law can condemn sin but has no power to deliver from sin. The Law cannot save us from sin’s penalty; neither can it make us spiritual. **“God ... sending His own Son ... on account of sin.”** Jesus Christ came into this world in human flesh (John 1:14) so that, by His death on the cross, He could judge all sin and set sinners free (Rom. 4:24–25; Gal. 5:1; Phil. 2:5–9; Heb. 10:10–14).

8:4 “The law might be fulfilled in us.” God has made it possible for sinful men to fulfill His righteous demands, not by law-keeping, but by Spirit-filling (Eph. 5:18). When believers walk (live) in submission to the indwelling Spirit, they are not able to sin (Gal. 5:16). **“According to the flesh ... the Spirit.”** The choice between the two faces every believer every day. When Paul said in his introduction that God’s righteousness was revealed in the Gospel (Rom. 1:17), he not only meant imputed righteousness at the moment of our salvation/justification, but also righteousness imparted to us in daily experience. This is why he added, “*The just shall live by faith.*”

8:5 “For those who live ... set their minds.” If in our minds we are focused on not sinning, we will surely sin (Rom. 7:15, 19, 24). Our focus is wrong! Instead, we should be focused on the Word of God and the power of His Spirit, in order to do His will. We cannot set our mind on the Spirit apart from renewing our minds in God’s Word (Rom. 12:1–2; Phil. 2:1–2, 5–9; Heb. 4:11). Failure to feed daily on God’s Word (Jer. 15:16) leads to apathy and indifference to spiritual realities (Heb. 3:7–8, 13, 15; 5:12–14).

8:6 “To be carnally minded is death.” This refers to the mind set on the flesh with all its selfish desires. This “*death*” is not physical death, but rather the death of our experience of the resurrection life of Christ (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:6; James 2:17). **“To be spiritually minded is life and peace.”** When we focus on the things of the Spirit, as revealed in the Word of God, we experience the resurrection life of Christ, and enjoy His peace (John 14:26–27; Rom. 5:1–5; 6:4; 2 Pet. 1:5–8).

8:7 “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” The essence of sinfulness is selfishness. When we live for self, we make ourselves an enemy of the plan and purpose of God for our lives (James 4:4). We cannot live for self and for God at the same time (Matt. 16:23–25). The first demand of discipleship is denial of self (Luke 9:23).

8:8 “Those who are in the flesh.” To be “*in the flesh*” refers to unsaved people (unbelievers). It is a different thing to be “*in the flesh*” (the sphere of existence), as opposed to “**walking** in the flesh” (vv. 4–5, “carnality,”

ROMANS 8:9–16

the disobedient experience of believers). It is impossible for any unbeliever to live a life that is pleasing to God; it is equally impossible for the carnal believer to please God (see 1 Cor. 3:1–15; Heb. 11:6).

8:9 *“You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.”* The “you” here refers to those who are believers, who are “in Christ.” Every believer has the ability to walk according to the Spirit—something no unbeliever is able to do. *“If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”* Since the Spirit of God indwells us from the moment of saving faith (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30; 1 John 3:24; 4:12–13), anyone who does not have the Spirit does not belong to Jesus Christ.

8:10 *“If Christ is in you.”* The presence of Jesus Christ is with us through His Spirit (John 14:13–18). *“The body is dead ... but the Spirit is life.”* Our physical bodies are mortal (dying, subject to death), but the indwelling Spirit brings eternal life to indwell our bodies by the righteousness of Christ. Everything we do in the energy of the flesh will pass away, but all that we do in the power of the Spirit will last forever (“carnality,” 1 Cor. 3:1–15 cf. “abiding,” John 15:1–16). The choice to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) daily is how we lay up treasures in Heaven (Matt. 6:19–21; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; 2 Tim. 4:6–8).

8:11 *“The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus.”* We see that the Holy Spirit is spoken of as “the Spirit of God” (vv. 9, 14), “the Spirit of Christ” (v. 9), and “the Spirit Himself” (v. 16). Father, Son, and Spirit (the Trinity) are one and cannot be separated. Where one is, all are. *“Will also give life to your mortal bodies.”* While it is true that we will all be resurrected with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:50–57; 1 Thess. 4:13–18), Paul is not talking about the future resurrection here. He is speaking of the power of the Spirit to infuse and impart the life of Christ into our mortal/dying bodies here and now (Rom. 6:4; 7:6).

8:12 *“We are debtors.”* Just like the Apostle Paul (Rom. 1:14), we are all debtors to Christ. The gift of our salvation/justification is free (Rom. 6:23), but once we receive it, we have a great debt of gratitude and thanksgiving for all that our Lord has done for us (Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 5:18). We have no obligation to the flesh, but we owe our allegiance and loyalty to Jesus Christ.

8:13 *“You will die ... you will live.”* The decision that faces us each day is whether we will live in the power of the flesh, which is a “dead” experience, or whether we will live by the Spirit—the abundant life of Christ (John 10:10). To live by faith is to share the life of Christ (Rom. 1:17; 5:10; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3–4).

8:14 *“For as many as are led ... these are sons of God.”* Here, Paul uses the word *huios*, which speaks of a mature, adult son. He is making a distinction between those who are “children of God” (v. 16) by faith in Christ, and those who become faithful mature sons by obedience to the Spirit. The Spirit of God will always lead to the Word of God first, in the learning of it, before He can lead us in life, to the doing of it. Paul makes a very similar argument in Galatians 4:1–7.

8:15 *“The spirit of bondage again to fear.”* Bondage to sin and death only produces fear (Heb. 2:14–15). *“The Spirit of adoption.”* At the moment of our faith in Christ, we are adopted into the family of God with all the rights and privileges of an adult son (Gal. 4:5–7; Eph. 1:3–7). *“We cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”* Except here and in Galatians 4:6, these words are found only on the lips of our Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36).

8:16 *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit.”* Paul explains this further in vv. 26–27, by saying that when we pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf before the throne of God (Heb. 4:14–16). This can also refer to the inner conviction and assurance we have that we are indeed children of God. *“Children of God.”* The focus here is on the new birth as opposed to the issue of spiritual maturity (v. 14, “sons”). Believers who fail to attain to spiritual maturity are still children of God, but they will miss many of the blessings and rewards of those who walk by faith, are led by the Spirit, and attain spiritual maturity.

8:17 “If children, then heirs.” Every child of God has a share in eternal inheritance (Acts 26:18; Gal. 3:26–29; 1 Pet. 1:4–5). **“Joint heirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him.”** He is speaking here of those mature “sons of God” (v. 14) who share in Christ’s sufferings (Matt. 5:10–12; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 4:12–14). The point is that all children of God have an inheritance, but those who grow to maturity and serve God faithfully will share in the inheritance of the firstborn (the “double-portion,” Deut. 21:17). **“That we may also be glorified together.”** Our resurrection bodies will reflect the degree of our faithfulness while here on Earth (Dan. 12:3; 1 Cor. 15:41). All believers will shine like the stars, but some stars shine brighter than others!

Summary Principles: Living by the Power of the Spirit

1. There are four commands given to believers regarding life in the Spirit:
 - a. Do not grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30).
 - b. Do not quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19).
 - c. Be filled by means of/with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).
 - d. Walk by means of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25).
2. The promise of additional eternal rewards and inheritance is given to all who live by the power of the Spirit.
3. Those who “walk by faith” (2 Cor. 5:7) and live in the power of the Holy Spirit are promised the highest of eternal rewards, crowns:
 - a. The Imperishable Crown (1 Cor. 9:24–27),
 - b. The Crown of Joy (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19–20),
 - c. The Crown of Life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10),
 - d. The Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6–8), and
 - e. The Crown of Glory (1 Pet. 5:4).
4. Romans 8:17 suggests that, while all who believe in Christ are heirs of God and share His inheritance (Gal. 3:26; 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:4–7), those who enter into Christ’s sufferings (spiritual growth and service) will share in the “double-portion” inheritance of Jesus Christ—the Firstborn. In other words, every believer is an “heir of God,” but only those who “suffer with Him” are “joint heirs with Christ” (see 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 4:13–14).

The Role of Suffering Explained

Romans 8:18–30

8:18 “The sufferings of the present ... the glory which shall be revealed.” Paul begins to explain “the sufferings” and “the glory” mentioned in v. 17. As we saw in Romans 5:1–5, sufferings in this life, when met with faith, have a role to play in both our spiritual growth and our eternal reward. The eternal glory that we gain by facing our sufferings in faith far outweighs whatever we may suffer (2 Cor. 4:17–18). The greater our sufferings here and now, the greater will be our reflected glory of the character of Christ in eternity.

8:19 “Creation ... waits for the revealing of the sons of God.” All of creation, which shares in the curse of sin, will also share in our liberation from that curse. Because of this, in ways we cannot now understand, all of creation is waiting in expectation for “the glory which shall be revealed in us” (v. 18). It is the assurance of this reward that gives us courage and endurance in times of suffering (2 Cor. 4:16–18). The cross must come before the crown!

8:20 “Creation was subjected ... not willingly.” Adam chose to sin and brought the curse on the Earth (Gen. 3:17–19). Nature suffers the effects of the curse, though it was not involved in the sin. Every creature, great and small, suffers innocently, for the sin of Adam. But God is fair because nature will also share in our future glory. In the earthly kingdom of Christ, all of nature will be restored to her former beauty,

ROMANS 8:21–30

if not something even better (Isa. 11:6–9; 65:20–25; Hosea 2:18). The curse of sin on nature was that it would bring forth “*thorns and thistles*” (Gen. 3:18). The crown of thorns placed on Jesus’ head was symbolic that He was redeeming nature from the curse of sin (Matt. 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5).

8:21 “*Creation ... will be delivered ... into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*” This great future liberation is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 50–57. All of natural creation, including the animals, will share in this renewed Earth.

8:22 “*The whole creation groans ... with birth pangs.*” Like the coming birth of a child, the agonies endured look toward a blessed outcome.

8:23 “*We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit.*” The presence of the Holy Spirit is a promise of a more full and greater harvest to come (1 Cor. 15:20). “*The adoption, the redemption of our body.*” Though we were adopted as sons at the moment of our justification/salvation, we do not yet enjoy all the riches and privileges that await us.

8:24 “*For we were saved in this hope.*” It was the promise of deliverance from sin and death through faith in Christ that led us to believe. The word “*hope*,” when used regarding things relating to salvation, never means uncertainty. Rather, it carries the idea of absolute certainty and assurance (Rom. 5:1–5; 12:12; Gal. 5:5; Col. 1:27; Titus 1:2). “*Hope that is seen is not hope.*” Hope looks forward to future fulfillment. Once what we hope for is realized, it is then a reality, and no longer a hope (Heb. 11:1).

8:25 “*We ... wait for it with perseverance.*” The assurance of future resurrection and life in God’s eternal kingdom has a sustaining power while we live through the sufferings of this present life. Hope is one of three great virtues of the Christian life: faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:4–5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:21–22).

8:26 “*The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.*” The sufferings of this life tend to reveal our various weaknesses. These in turn drive us to prayer. It is precisely when we are crying out to God for help that the Holy Spirit joins us, interceding on our behalf before the throne of God’s grace (Heb. 4:14–16). The Spirit joins in our own groanings (v. 23), in ways that cannot be expressed in human words.

8:27 “*He who searches the hearts.*” “*He*,” God the Father, “*searches the heart*” (Jer. 17:10) and comprehends the Spirit’s intercession. “*According to the will of God.*” Praying “*according to the will of God*,” as revealed in His Word, is the key to prayer power (James 5:16b; 1 John 5:14–15). We do not always know His perfect will, but the Spirit does, and God hears the voice of the Spirit.

8:28 “*We know that all things work together for good.*” This is not saying that all that happens is good, rather, it is saying, in the full and final plan of God, everything is working toward His perfect end (Heb. 2:8–10). This “*good*” end will be realized by all “*who love God ... who are the called according to His purpose.*” The love of God calls us into His plan and purpose. We respond in love to that call (1 John 4:19), and it is our love for God that keeps us growing spiritually and serving by faith (2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 John 4:8–11; 5:2–5).

8:29–30 “*For whom He foreknew.*” God knew every believer in eternity past (Psalm 139:16; Jer. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 13:8; 17:8b). “*Predestined.*” God ordained the destiny of all who believe “*to be conformed to the image of His Son.*” This does not say that God predestined who will believe, but that the eternal destiny of all who believe is pre-determined. Every believer will share the likeness of Christ. “*Firstborn*” speaks of Christ’s position of headship in the heavenly family. It is not speaking of Him as a created being. “*He called.*” The outworking of election is illustrated in the parable in Matthew 22:1–14. The invitation goes out to all, but only those who respond are “*the called.*” (v. 28) “*Justified.*” Those who respond in faith are “*justified*” (Rom. 4:3–5, 24–25). “*These he glorified.*” In the mind of God, our future glorification is just as certain as our

past justification. These five words describe the plan of God in bringing us to share Christ's glory: foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified.

Summary Principles: Blessing through Suffering

1. Suffering is an inevitable experience of living in a world fallen and broken by sin (Gen. 3:15–19; Job 5:7; 7:1–10; Eccl. 3:1–8).
2. However, for the child of God, suffering takes on a new and glorious meaning. It can be a path for growth, purification, and eternal reward (Rom. 5:1–5; 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12; James 1:12).
3. All our sufferings are designed to equip us to be more conformed to Christ and more effective in ministry to others (Psalm 119:67, 71; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 1:3–11; 6:4–10).
4. When we look at our sufferings from God's perspective (Col. 3:1–4), we realize that they are temporary and light, when compared to the eternal reward and glory they can bring us, as we face them in faith (2 Cor. 4:16–18).
5. Every child of God who is undergoing affliction should read Romans 8:18–39 over and over again. It is a victory cry for every believer in the face of any sufferings we may face.

No Separation from the Love of God

Romans 8:31–39

8:31 *“What then shall we say?”* The truth of the perfect and timeless plan of God revealed in the previous verses (vv. 28–30) should lead every believer to a victorious mindset. *“If God is for us ...?”* The “if” here, based on these first eight chapters, is the certain conclusion that God is literally “working on our behalf.”

8:32 *“He ... delivered Him up for us.”* On the cross, the Father turned His own Son over to judgment on our behalf—in our place. *“Freely give us all things.”* We are now in possession of “*all spiritual blessings*” (Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:3). Yet future, we will each play a role in sharing the reign of Christ over all things (Rev. 2:26–28; 3:21; 20:6). Our role in eternity will be determined by our faithfulness now (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12).

8:33–34 *“It is God who justifies.”* No one can bring an accusation against one who is justified by God. *“Christ ... makes intercession for us.”* Paul mentions here the death, burial, resurrection, and present “*intercession*” of Jesus Christ at the Father's right hand (Psalm 110:1–2). The work of Christ on our behalf is not done; it is a continuing work of our High Priest (Heb. 5:1–6; 7:22–27; 8:1–2; 10:11–17). Jesus Christ Himself is our defense attorney against all charges (Rom. 8:31; 1 John 2:1–2).

8:35 *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* This question is the dominant thought through the end of the chapter. Neither circumstances (vv. 35–36), nor hostile powers (vv. 38–39), can come between us and our loving Lord. In vv. 35–39, the love of God through Christ is mentioned three times to emphasize the infinite, unchanging love of God for us (Eph. 2:4–7; 3:17–19; 1 Cor. 2:9; 1 John 4:17–19).

8:36 *“For Your sake.”* This quote from Psalm 44:22 reminds us that all sufferings in this life are part of the perfect plan of God (v. 28). They strip us from self-reliance and increase our dependence upon our heavenly Father (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

8:37 *“We are more than conquerors.”* Because we are “in Christ”, every believer is born an overcomer (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4–5). Through our sufferings, we become “super-overcomers.” *“Through Him who loved us.”* It is the love of Christ imparted to us by His Spirit that is the key to victory (Rom. 5:1–5; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; Gal. 5:22–23).

ROMANS 8:38–9:1

8:38 *“I am persuaded.”* Both his learning of the Scriptures and his experiences in life had brought Paul to this firm conviction (2 Tim. 1:12). When Paul spoke of various trials and tribulations, he spoke from experience (2 Cor. 4:7–12; 6:3–10; 11:22–30).

8:39 There is absolutely nothing that is able *“to separate us from the love of God ... in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* If every believer were to learn, believe, and act upon what Paul says in vv. 28–39, the Body of Christ around the world would become an invincible army marching to victory and honor in time, and to glorious, reward in eternity (Eph. 1:15–23; Phil. 2:5–11; 4:11–13; Col. 1:9–18)!

Summary Principles: Christian Invincibility

1. Because we are united with Christ, we share in His victory over sin, Satan, and the world (John 16:33; Col. 2:13–15).
2. His victory becomes ours through faith alone (1 John 4:4; 5:4–5).
3. Our heavenly Father works in and through all our circumstances to bring about the perfect good of His plan for us (Rom. 8:28).
4. Romans 8 begins with *“no condemnation”* (v. 1) and ends with *“no separation”* (vv. 35, 39).
5. The indwelling Spirit guides us (v. 14), and both the Spirit and the Lord Jesus intercede for us (vv. 26, 34).
6. Because of all this, *“We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (v. 37).
7. The key to living the life of an overcomer, is to first recognize our identity in Christ, and then to live according to that identity.

ROMANS CHAPTER 9

In chapters 9–11, Paul returns to questions he raised in Romans 3:1–7 about God’s faithfulness to Israel. In chapter 9, he deals with Israel’s past, in chapter 10, with Israel in the present, and in chapter 11, with Israel’s future.

Paul explains here that Israel’s rejection of her Messiah (Rom. 9:30–33) has resulted in her partial, spiritual blindness as a nation (Rom. 11:25). However, the door of faith and salvation is still open to any Jew who will recognize Jesus Christ as the God-Man—the Messiah and Savior (Rom. 10:8–13). In Israel, we see a grand drama playing out on the stage of human history: of election, of rejection, and of restoration—in effect, the stories of Hosea and Ruth in their prophetic and messianic significance.

It is not by accident that Paul quotes from Hosea, both regarding Israel’s rejection by God, and referring to the inclusion of the Gentiles (Rom. 9:25–26; Hosea 1:10; 2:23). These are the main themes of the books of Hosea and Ruth.

Paul’s Grief over Israel’s Unbelief

Romans 9:1–5

9:1 *“I tell the truth in Christ ... bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit.”* Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He calls both Christ and the Spirit as witnesses of his great sorrow over Israel. It is inescapable that Paul here, as well as in Romans 10:1–4, expresses the very mind of God in regard to unbelieving Israel. This could not be the mind of God if, as Calvinism declares, God had ordained that the

majority of Israel would reject their Messiah. However, the mind of God expressed here is in keeping with the fact that Christ died for all mankind, that all may be saved by faith, and that Israel alone was responsible for her unbelief (Matt. 23:37-39; John 3:16; 4:42; Acts 7:51; 2 Cor. 5:14-21; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 2 Pet. 3:9).

9:2-3 *“I have great sorrow ... I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren.”* So great was Paul’s love for Israel that, like Moses, he would be willing to be judged in their place (Exod. 32:32). This is the ultimate expression of the love of Christ for those who are lost (John 15:13). Paul expresses the desire, though he knows that no such exchange is possible.

9:4-5 *“Who are Israelites ... of whom ... Christ came.”* Paul lists eight privileges that God gave to Israel. Each of these great blessings pointed to Jesus Christ—the fulfillment of all that the privileges foretold. By rejecting Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior, Israel had lost all other privileges, until the time of restoration (Rom. 11:25-29).

1. Israelites: The name “Israel” spoke of one who was a prince of God and who prevailed through faith. This is the sacred name given to Jacob by the Angel of the Lord (Gen. 32:28), who was an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ—what we call a “Theophany,” or a “Christophany.”
2. Adoption: God spoke of the nation of Israel as His son (Exod. 4:22-23; Hosea 11:1). With this sonship came eternal inheritance (Gen. 12:7).
3. The Glory: This refers to the visible Shekinah Glory that led them in the wilderness and shone in the tabernacle (Exod. 14:19-20; 16:7, 10; 24:16-17; 40:34-35).
4. The Covenants: These are, specifically, the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:1-21; 17:9-14), the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:12-14), and the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32). As believing Gentiles, we have entered into these covenants (Eph. 2:11-13, 19-22).
5. The Law: The Law of Moses, beginning with the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17; 31:18).
6. The Service of God: The Temple, the Levitical priesthood and all its functions (Exod. 25-30).
7. The Promises: There are far too many to list, but all focused on the promise of the coming Redeemer (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:15-19; 22:9-18). These promises centered around the Promised Land, the Promised Seed, and the promised blessing of redemption.
8. The Fathers: This refers specifically to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 3:6; Deut. 10:15; Matt. 22:32).

“From whom, according to the flesh, Christ came.” That is, the humanity of Christ came through this chosen lineage, but in His deity, He always existed (John 1:1; Rom. 1:3-4; Phil. 2:6-7; Heb. 1:1-3). *“Who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”* This is an absolute declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ!

Children of Flesh vs. Children of Promise

Romans 9:6-33

9:6 *“But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect.”* Paul refers here to the questions he first brought up in Romans 3:1-6, and especially verse 3 of that chapter. So, early in the book, he was preparing us to face this question, “If men fail to accept the plan or Word of God, then has that plan or Word failed?” *“For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.”* The point is simple: physical birth/generation does not confer spiritual

ROMANS 9:7–15

regeneration (John 3:3, 7; Rom. 2:28–9; Gal. 4:21–31). Remember that *“Israel”* means “one who struggles with God and prevails” (Gen. 32:28). And how did Jacob prevail? He began by wrestling against God, and he prevailed when he began to cling to Him. Victory is found when we surrender in the simplicity of faith (Rom. 9:30–10:4; 2 Cor. 11:3; Heb. 11:6).

9:7 *“In Isaac your seed shall be called.”* Ishmael was born of natural, physical effort. Isaac was born by the promised and miraculous power of God alone. The *“seed”* spoken of here refers to Jesus Christ (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16), who could only come into the world by miraculous, divine power—apart from human effort. This principle is true whether of the coming of Christ into the world, or for the salvation of the individual soul. The great error of the Jews of Jesus’ time was in this: they thought descent from Abraham was sufficient for their salvation (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:33).

9:8 *“Those who are the children of the flesh.”* Paul refers here to those who have only been born physically, by natural generation. *“But the children of promise are counted as the seed.”* Children of promise are those who receive the promise by faith apart from works (Eph. 2:8–9; Gal. 3:7–8, 24–29; 4:28). His point is not that Ishmael could not be saved; rather, it is that the promise of the coming Messiah required the miracle birth of Isaac, just as the entrance of a soul into eternal life requires the miracle of spiritual rebirth (John 3:3).

9:9 *“For this is the word of promise.”* What God promised Abraham, only God could perform (Gen. 18:10–14; Rom. 4:16–25). The point here is not who may be saved and who may not; rather, it is that none may be saved apart from the power of God’s promise and the miracle of His life-giving work.

9:10–11 *“And not only this.”* Since Isaac and Ishmael came from different mothers, Paul uses Jacob and Esau, both from the same father and mother, to demonstrate that God’s Word never fails. *“That the purpose of God according to election might stand.”* Jacob was not chosen as the lineage of the Messiah because of anything he had done (good works), but because of the perfect plan of God. The blessing of God on any man is due not to the man’s merit, but rather to the grace of God. However, God’s grace given to one man does not exclude any other man from receiving his portion of grace if he will receive it by faith alone. *“Not of works but of Him who calls.”* Paul’s point through Romans 9 and 10 is that God’s promises and provisions for man can never be earned or deserved; they can only be received by faith (Eph. 2:8–9).

9:12–13 *“The older shall serve the younger.”* Here, God declared Jacob to have the privilege of the firstborn, even though Esau was born first. Later, Jacob, under the guidance of the Spirit, did the same to Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:14–20). The issue in both cases was not the salvation of the individual, but their prominence in the plan of God. *“Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”* This quote from Malachi 1:1–3, is not a reference to the individual sons, but rather to the nations that came from them. The word *“hated”* is used in the sense of the rejection of the one in preference to the other (Luke 14:26).

Point: Neither Ishmael nor Esau were deprived of the ability to be saved and enter into eternal life. In fact, the Scriptures imply that both of them were believers (Gen. 16:10–14; 21:15–21; 25:8, 17; Heb. 12:14–17; see notes at end of this chapter). The point Paul is making is much greater than the issue of individual salvation. Rather, it is the perfect plan of God in bringing the Savior into the world (vv. 5, 33), that all who believe might be saved through Him.

9:14 *“Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!”* The question of the justice of God was first raised in Romans 3:5–6. The Jew would argue that for God to choose Israel to bring the Messiah into the world, and then to reject Israel due to their unbelief, was unjust of God. Paul has already argued that the gospel message and the way of faith is in perfect harmony with the justice of God (Rom. 3:23–28).

9:15 *“I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”* This verse is misunderstood by many. In the context of the quote (Exod. 32:30–35; 33:15–23), Moses was pleading with God for a blanket atonement for Israel, and a full view of God’s glory to be given to

Moses. Neither request was given to Moses for the simple reason that God gives His grace to those who receive it by faith, and only to their spiritual capacity for it. Like Moses, the Jews of Paul's day were asking for a blanket forgiveness for the nation, but they were seeking it in the way of works and not by faith (Rom. 9:30–33; 10:1–4).

9:16 *“So then it is not of him who will, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”* God's grace is not gained by human will or effort, but by faith alone (John 1:12–13). God is at liberty to bestow His grace freely on whom He will. And all the Scriptures declare to us that He bestows it on all who will believe in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:23–31; 4:22–25; 5:17–18; 10:11–13, 17; 11:5–6, 20, 23; 1 Pet. 5:5–7).

9:17 *“I have raised you up, that I might show My power ... that My name might be declared in all the earth.”* God worked even through the hardness and unbelief of Pharaoh to spread the message of His name and power to save throughout all the earth. Pharaoh repeatedly hardened himself against God (Exod. 5:2; 7:13–14, 22; 8:15, 32; 9:7). Paul has already shown the process of divine hardening in Romans 1:18–32. It is never arbitrary. God deals with each soul according to how it responds to Him (2 Sam. 22:26–28; Psalm 18:25–28).

9:18 *“He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.”* All of Scripture shows us that God has mercy on the humble and hardens the arrogant (1 Pet. 5:5–7; Psalm 147:6; 149:4; Prov. 3:34; Isa. 57:15; Luke 1:53). To separate these verses in Romans from the rest of God's Word is poor workmanship in the task of interpretation.

9:19–20 *“You will say to me then ...”* Here, Paul anticipates an argument from an objector. If God hardens whom He will, how can we blame the man? This argument assumes two great impossibilities: First, that we can comprehend the working of God in all things (Job teaches us this is not true in Job 38–41) and, secondly, that we know the heart of any other man (1 Sam. 16:7). Rather, it is best for us to trust in God to work righteously and justly in all things we cannot understand (Rom. 3:3–4; 11:33–36). *“O man, who are you to reply against God?”* When we look on God's dealings with others and we do not understand them, it is best for us to rest in the faithfulness, righteousness, and justice of God.

9:21 *“Does not the potter have power over the clay?”* This figure of the potter and the clay comes from Isaiah 29:16, 45:9–10, 64:8, and Jeremiah 18:1–12, passages that would have been familiar to the Jews Paul is writing to. If you study these passages, it will become clear that God is not arbitrarily saving some and damning others. God works with men as He finds them, and as they respond to Him. *“One vessel for honor and another for dishonor.”* Consider 2 Timothy 2:20 as to how this is done.

9:22–24 *“What if God, wanting to show His wrath and make His power known.”* Just as surely as God wants to reveal His grace and power to save (His mercy), so also, He desires to reveal His justice and power to judge. Both are expressions of His nature. *“Endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath.”* Paul has already explained what constitutes these “vessels of wrath” (Rom. 1:18–32), as well as His purpose in being longsuffering (Rom. 2:4–6). The very fact that God is longsuffering is designed to bring men to repentance. *“Prepared for destruction.”* Just how they are “prepared for destruction” is shown in Romans 1:18–32; 2:4–6, 2 Thessalonians 1:4b–10, and 1 Peter 2:6–8. It is never good interpretation to divorce any passage of Scripture from the rest of the Bible. *“That He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy ... not of Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.”* This is the real issue Paul is confronting with his readers. The Jewish believers were struggling with both the failure of Israel to believe in Christ, and the fact that the Gentiles, who had not sought for God, were entering into the grace of God through faith (Rom. 9:30–33). Although the nation of Israel is being set aside for the time (Rom. 11:25), neither Jew nor Gentile individually were hindered from coming to Christ in faith.

9:25–26 *“I will call them My people, who were not My people.”* Here, Paul quotes from Hosea 1:10 and 2:23, to show that the plan of God was always to use Israel to bring the Gentiles to saving faith. *“You are not my people ... sons of the Living God.”* The Gentiles, who were considered by most Jews as accursed, have

ROMANS 9:27–33

now—by faith—been grafted into Israel (Eph. 2:4–22; Rom. 11:17–25). The book of Ruth (which shows the Moabitess, Ruth, being brought into the lineage of the Messiah) reveals the same truth prophetically.

9:27–29 “Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel.” These prophecies in Isaiah 1:9 and 10:22–23 demand an answer to the question: “Does prophecy ordain what will happen? Or does it simply declare what will happen?” If it declares what is predestined, then “Who can resist His will?” (v. 19). If instead it simply declares both what God and man will do, then it affirms the distinction between those who seek God through faith versus those who seek Him by works (vv. 30–33). **“The remnant will be saved.”** And this salvation will be by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9), not by works (Rom. 9:32; 10:2–3; Gal. 3:10–14, 24–26; 4:21–31). **“The Lord will make a short work on the earth.”** In the final judgment of the Day of the Lord, the work will be swift and sure (Matt. 24:21–22). **“We would have been as Sodom ... like Gomorrah.”** Had it not been for the longsuffering and mercy of God, Israel would have long ago been destroyed for their constant rebellion against God. God’s mercy is always offered long before His wrath falls!

9:30–32 “What shall we say then?” Paul uses this phrase to introduce his conclusions based on the arguments presented (v. 14, Rom. 6:1). Paul’s conclusion is simple: Those who come to faith attain to God’s righteousness (Rom. 4:3–5, 23–25), and those who seek to attain to righteousness by works will never enter into eternal life. This simple argument can be traced throughout the book (Rom. 1:16–17; 2:4–6, 28–29; 3:23–26, 28–31; 4:1–8, 24–25; 5:17–18, 20–21; 6:23; 8:1–4). Those who conclude from Romans 9 that God predestines some to salvation and others to damnation simply fail to study the chapter in the light of the whole book, or in the light of all Scripture.

9:33 “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone ... and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” This quote from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 is the conclusion of all of Romans 9. God has set Jesus Christ before all the world as the only way of entering into eternal life (John 14:6). All men are free to receive Him by faith, or to reject Him in unbelief. To those who believe in Him, He becomes the foundation stone and cornerstone of life (Psalm 118:22–23; Matt. 16:18; 21:42; 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:6–8).

Summary Principles: The Election of Israel

1. The very fact of Paul’s unceasing grief for Israel (vv. 1–3), so similar to the words of Christ as He wept over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37–39; Luke 13:34–35), is proof that God’s will for Israel was that they should believe in the Messiah and Savior that the nation was called to bring into the world (John 1:11–13).
2. All of the great spiritual advantages that were given to Israel (vv. 4–5) were pictures and object-lessons designed, if grasped and understood by faith, to point to and identify Jesus Christ as that promised Seed and Savior (Gen. 3:15; 12:1–3; 22:18; John 8:56; Gal. 3:16).
3. The simple truth is too many in Israel trusted in being physical descendants of Abraham—children of the flesh—and failed to enter the lineage of faith by spiritual rebirth (vv. 6–13). Note carefully that while the whole nation was a part of the election to special service (Rom. 11:28), only a few went on to enter into the election of grace by faith (Rom. 9:30–33; 11:5–6).
4. The calling of Isaac and of Jacob (vv. 7–13) no more hindered Ishmael and Esau from believing than did the election of Israel as a nation hinder the other nations from entering into the faith. In fact, the implications of Scripture are that both of them were believers.
 - a. Of Ishmael, it is said: Hagar, his mother, knew and believed in the true God (Gen. 16:13–14); God heard the prayers of Ishmael; the Angel of the Lord (Jesus Christ, pre-incarnate) responded to them (Gen. 21:17); God promised to bless and be with him (Gen. 21:18–19); and like his father, Abraham, he was “gathered to his people” when he died—a phrase used for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not for unbelievers (Gen. 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33).

- b. Of Esau, we can say that he demonstrated a gracious and forgiving spirit (Gen. 33:4, 9–10), and that the author of Hebrews uses him as a warning to believers about despising our birthright (Heb. 12:14–17). It seems impossible that an apostle under inspiration of the Holy Spirit would warn believers against following the path of someone who was not also a believer, and who had failed greatly.
5. The election of Israel, as a nation of necessity, excluded all other nations from being in the lineage of the Messiah/Savior but did not exclude anyone from believing in Him. In fact, God's purpose in electing Israel was inclusive, that they might be a light to the nations to believe in the true God and thus enter into the "*election of grace*" (Rom. 11:5–6; 4:16). Similarly, the election of Judah to be the tribe of the King (Gen. 49:8–12) did not exclude the other tribes from claiming Him as their own.
6. The fact that God shows mercy on whom He will and hardens whom He will (vv. 14–18), in no way suggests that this is arbitrary. The whole tenor of the book of Romans up to this point has documented that God hardens those who reject Him (Rom. 1:18–32; 2:1–11; 1 Pet. 5:5b), and that He gives grace to those who come to Him in faith (Rom. 1:5, 16–17; 2:28–29; 3:21–26; 4:1–5; 1 Pet. 5:5b–6).
7. Paul presents the figure of the potter and the clay (vv. 19–23), which his Jewish readers would have been well-familiar with from the Old Testament (Isa. 29:16; 45:9–10; 64:8; Jer. 18:1–10). Anyone who will read those passages in their context, which Paul would expect his Jewish readers to do, would see that God is pleading with Israel to turn to Him in faith so as to become a vessel of honor and not one of dishonor (2 Tim. 2:19–22).
8. Paul urges us to not only rest in the sovereignty of God (vv. 22–24), but also to be assured that His sovereignty is exercised in love and justice (Rom. 9:14, 16 with 3:23–26).
9. The purpose of God for Israel was that through them He might reach the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). Since the majority in Israel turned away from Jesus Christ, God chose to fulfill His purpose through Israel's unbelief (vv. 25–29; 11:11–14). In His matchless wisdom and grace, God will now use the believing Gentiles to provoke Israel, yet future, to come to faith in Christ (Rom. 10:19; 11:11–14).
10. The main focus of Romans 9 is not Israel; it is Jesus Christ whom they brought forth (vv. 5, 33 with Rom. 1:2–4). The election of Israel is Christ-centered, not man-centered. They were only an elect nation because, in the plan of God, they would bring forth Christ, the Elect One (Isa. 42:1). Those who are humble and come to Him by faith become the elect of God. Those who are arrogant reject the Gospel and thus become the non-elect (Rom. 9:30–33; 10:16–21). These are some of the major lessons of this chapter.

ROMANS CHAPTER 10

Romans 9 has dealt with Israel's past. In chapter 10, Paul now moves to the study of Israel's present. In this chapter, he first explains how their devotion to the Law blinded them to the way of faith, but that the door of faith remains open and available. Secondly, he shows that one of the great stumbling blocks to the Jew was their unwillingness to acknowledge the deity of Christ—that He was the God-Man, the only true Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). Finally, he reveals the plan of God to use the Gentile church to provoke Israel to ultimately return to Jesus Christ in faith. The following are the three great stumbling blocks Israel had erected between themselves and the faith.

The Stumbling Block of the Law vs. the Gospel
Romans 10:1–7

10:1 “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel.” If the Calvinists’ view of election, which they base on Romans chapter 9, were correct, this would be a futile and frivolous prayer. Again, Paul echoes Jesus Christ (Matt. 23:37–39; Luke 13:34–35), not only in desiring their salvation (2 Pet. 3:9), but in declaring that that salvation is still possible, if only they would believe in Jesus Christ. **“That they may be saved.”** The salvation Paul prays for includes not only justification by faith (Rom. 4:1–3), but also deliverance from the wrath of God that is closing in on Israel (Matt. 23:31–36; Rom. 2:1–6, 17–24; 9:30–33).

10:2 “They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” There are only two ways in which men can approach God—either in humility or arrogance (Prov. 3:34; 29:23; Isa. 57:15; 1 Pet. 5:5). Humility inevitably leads to faith, while arrogance always leads to wrath (Rom. 2:4–11). Israel chose the path of works, and thus the way of wrath.

10:3 “Being ignorant ... seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” The choice is always self-righteousness vs. God’s righteousness (Isa. 64:6; Phil. 3:9). Israel preferred their own form of works-righteousness instead of God’s faith-righteousness. The phrase *“have not submitted”* indicates the absence of humility and, therefore, of teachability.

10:4 “Christ is the end of the law.” The word *“end”* comes from *telos* and literally means “fulfillment” (Matt. 5:17). Jesus Christ alone fulfilled the Law of Moses, and He offers us that righteousness as a free gift to be received by faith (Rom. 6:23). The whole Law was designed to reveal to us our sin, and then to point us to Jesus Christ as the Savior from that sin (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:19–29). **“To everyone who believes.”** Faith makes eternal life available to all men, for Christ died for all (2 Cor. 5:14–15, 21). Jesus Christ took the initiative (Rom. 5:8) on the cross to take upon Himself the sins of all mankind (1 John 2:2). When we believe in Him, the transaction is completed, in that just as our sins were imputed to Him, so now His righteousness can be imputed to us (Rom. 4:3, 23–25).

10:5–7 “The righteousness which is of the law ... the righteousness of faith.” As stated in v. 3, there are two kinds of righteousness: that of God, which is perfect, and that of man, which can never save. **“The man who does those things shall live.”** In order to find life through the Law, one must keep the whole Law (James 2:10). This approach to righteousness is impossible. However, **“the righteousness of faith”** declares that righteousness is near, in the simplicity of faith (2 Cor. 11:3). Paul quotes Moses from Deuteronomy 30:11–14 to show that, from the very beginning, eternal salvation came not by extreme effort, but rather by faith and the love of God (Deut. 30:15–16, 20), from which obedience comes (John 14:15). **“To bring Christ down from above ... to bring Christ up from the dead.”** The coming of Jesus Christ into the world, and His victory over sin and death, took absolutely no effort on our part. In grace, God does all the work, and by faith, we receive the benefits and blessings of that work.

**The Stumbling Block of the Deity of Christ,
and the Simplicity of Salvation**
Romans 10:8–17

10:8 “The word is near you ... the word of faith which we preach.” The emphasis here is on the Word of God—the message of the Gospel (Deut. 30:14; Rom. 10:17). Faith implies belief in a message. Paul is now going to zero in on the specific part of the Gospel that the Jews found most objectionable: the deity of Jesus Christ (John 10:30).

10:9 “If you confess ... the Lord Jesus.” Misunderstanding of Paul’s point here has given rise to what many refer to as “Lordship salvation.” This is the idea that if you do not claim Jesus as your Lord, as well as Savior, then you are not saved. Again, this position results from not taking the text in its context. Paul is speaking here

to Jews and one part of the gospel message they could not, or would not, accept—the proclamation that Jesus was God in the flesh (John 5:17–18; 10:31–33). It was, in fact, Jesus’ claim of deity for which He was crucified (Matt. 26:63–65). Paul is saying here that Christ is able to save because He is God in the flesh, and this claim is verified by the quote in v. 13 from Joel 2:32, where “*LORD*” is *Jehovah* in the Hebrew, and refers to Jesus Christ. **“Believe ... that God has raised Him from the dead.”** From the beginning of Romans, Paul has stated that the resurrection of Jesus is essential to the gospel message (Rom. 1:4; 4:23–25). Note that “*confess*” in this verse comes before “*believe*,” simply because until the truth of Christ’s deity is acknowledged, one has no foundation for faith.

10:10 “With the heart one believes ... with the mouth confession is made.” While v. 9 looks at the saving work from God’s perspective, this verse sees the work from man’s perspective. God sees the condition of the heart, but man can only hear the confession of the mouth. The natural consequence for those who have believed is to be a witness of that faith to others (Psalm 116:10; 2 Cor. 4:13). However, this outward confession is not so much directed to men as it is to God, when we call on Him for His deliverance (v. 13).

10:11 “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” This quote from Isaiah 28:16 speaks of the Messiah as the foundation and cornerstone of faith (1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:6–8). That it is addressed to “*whoever*,” makes it clear that none are excluded from the offer of eternal life, and that simple, childlike faith is the only requirement (Matt. 18:3–5; Luke 18:16–17; John 3:3).

10:12 “For there is no distinction.” The Jews have no advantage over the Gentiles when it comes to entering into eternal life, “*for there is no partiality with God*” (Rom. 2:11). **“For the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.”** This makes two great truths clear: first, since Christ is Lord over all mankind, all may call upon Him. Second, that the “*confession*” spoken of in vv. 9–10, is directed first to the Lord, and only then to men.

10:13 “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD.” This quote from Joel 2:32 makes the issue of Christ’s deity clear. In the Hebrew, “*LORD*” is *Jehovah*. Yet, this whole passage is speaking of Jesus Christ (v. 9). Paul is urging the Jewish unbeliever to come to the truth of the deity of Christ, and to call upon Him for deliverance. **“Shall be saved.”** Throughout Romans, the idea of “salvation” is not exactly the same as “justification.” It is a much broader concept that includes not only deliverance from eternal condemnation, but also deliverance from the wrath of God in time (Rom. 5:8–10; 8:1). This is especially relevant to unbelieving Jews, since the coming wrath and judgment on the nation, which fell in 70 A.D., was drawing near.

10:14–16 “How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?” Go through the chapter and count how many times the word “*they*” occurs. With the exception of its use in v. 15, where it refers to the preachers, it is speaking about unbelieving Israel. In these verses (vv. 14–16), Paul uses the word “*they*” eight times. As long as they deny that Jesus is LORD (God in the flesh, John 1:14), they will never call upon Him to deliver them. Paul reveals here the process involved in evangelistic work. “*They*” will not call until they believe, and they will not believe until they hear, and they will not hear unless someone preaches, and they will not preach until they are sent. **“How beautiful are the feet.”** It is imperative that the preacher of the Gospel must “*go*” (Matt. 28:19), and his feet carry him (Isa. 52:7). **“The gospel of peace ... glad tidings.”** The Gospel is “good news” because it proclaims to men the way of peace with God, and the resulting joy of the Spirit (Rom. 5:1–5; Gal. 5:22). **“But they have not all obeyed the gospel.”** Here, Paul quotes Isaiah 53:1, **“LORD, who has believed our report?”** where the prophet laments the unbelief of Israel. The idea of faith being obedience to the gospel message is a major theme of Romans (Rom. 1:5; 16:19, 26).

10:17 “So then faith comes by hearing.” God has chosen to reach men through men. He has chosen “*the foolishness of preaching*” (1 Cor. 1:18, 21) and the weakness of the human tongue, to proclaim the message of God’s mighty work of redemption. **“Hearing by the word of God.”** It is never our ideas about God’s plan of salvation that count. It is what He Himself has revealed in His Word that contains the power of salvation (Rom. 1:16–17). The greatest Bible teachers down through the ages have been those who dwell on and expound what the Word of God says. Paul said to Timothy, “*Preach the word*” (2 Tim. 4:2).

The Stumbling Block of the Gentiles

Romans 10:18–21

10:18 “Have they not heard?” Once again, Paul uses “they” to refer to unbelieving Israel. They have indeed heard, for “*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork*” (Psalm 19:1). “*Their words to the ends of the world.*” By quoting from Psalm 19:4, Paul recaptures the truth expressed in Romans 1:18–20, that creation so reveals the Creator that all mankind is without excuse if they do not honor and glorify Him. If such accountability exists simply from creation, then how great is Israel’s guilt, when they were given so much revelation from God as is revealed in vv. 4–5 (Luke 12:48, 2 Pet. 2:21)?

10:19 “Did Israel not know?” One of the obstacles to Jewish reception of the Gospel was its unlimited appeal to and response from the Gentiles. The gospel message placed all mankind on the same level and was thus a blow to the Jew’s sense of superiority. “*I will provoke you to jealousy*” (Deut. 32:21). God would use the foolish and uncultured Gentiles to incite Israel, first to hostile rejection of the Gospel then, in the end, to embrace it (Rom. 11:30–32). So important is this point that Paul repeats it in Romans 11:11 and 14.

10:20–21 “Isaiah is very bold.” The prophet proclaimed seven hundred years before Christ came that He would be received by the Gentiles and rejected by the nation of Israel. “*Those who did not seek Me ... those who did not ask for Me*” (Isa. 65:1). The Gentiles lacked the “*zeal for God*” (v. 2) that Israel possessed, just as they lacked all of Israel’s spiritual privileges (Rom. 9:4–5; Eph. 2:11–12). However, they received the simple, gospel message by faith, whereas Israel rejected it in favor of trying to earn their own righteousness (v. 3). “*All day long I have stretched out my hands*” (Isa. 65:2). This not only speaks of God’s longsuffering throughout Israel’s history, but is also a beautiful picture of Christ dying on the cross for their sinfulness. “*To a disobedient and contrary people*” (Isa. 65:2). These words from the prophet Isaiah, like the rebuke of Jesus Himself (Matt. 23:34–39), reveal the historical hard-heartedness of Israel. They “*despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance*” (Rom. 2:4). As a result, as a nation, they will now face the wrath of God, which they have treasured up in the “*revelation of the righteous judgment of God*” (Rom. 2:5). This judgment, which brought the destruction of the nation in 70 A.D., was drawing near even as Paul wrote the book of Romans.

Summary Principles: A Stumbling Block or a Cornerstone?

1. Paul ended Romans 9 with quotes from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16, which present Messiah as a stumbling stone to Israel. Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22, which referred to Himself as “*The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone.*”
2. In Romans 10, Paul reveals three reasons why Christ was a stumbling block to Israel:
 - a. the simplicity of the gospel of grace,
 - b. Jesus’ claim to be God, and
 - c. the elevation of the Gentiles to equal standing with Israel in regard to entering into eternal life.
3. Both chapters 9 and 10 end by demonstrating that Israel, although the “elect” or “chosen” people of God, became non-elect by rejecting their Messiah, and that the non-elect Gentiles became “elect” by trusting in Christ. This is the “*election of grace*” (Rom. 11:5–6).
4. Because Israel scorned the Gentiles, who eagerly received the gospel message, God foretold that He would use the Gentiles (the Church) to be a provocation to Israel, which would ultimately bring them back to God.
5. Romans 11 now looks at Israel’s future, to show that God will fulfill all His promises to Israel when they return to Him in faith. Contrary to those who believe in what is called “replacement theology,” the idea that the Church has replaced Israel, Paul will now show that God is not through with Israel.

ROMANS CHAPTER 11

In this chapter, Paul reveals God's future plans for Israel, as well as showing the true relationship between the predominantly Gentile church and Israel. From Pentecost (Acts 2) up until the time of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13–18), we are living in the Church Age. During this period of history, the Church is a constant provocation to Israel because we claim their God, their Messiah, and their Scriptures, but have also claimed the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–32; Matt. 26:26–29; 1 Cor. 11:23–26), which they rejected. Yet, the day will come when the eyes of the Jewish nation will be opened (Rev. 7:1–8) and they will see the fulfillment of all of God's kingdom promises to them. We who now believe in Christ should always pray for Israel and that glorious coming day!

Israel's Blindness and the Election of Grace

Romans 11:1–10

11:1–2 “*Has God cast away His people?*” Paul soundly refutes the current teaching known as “Replacement Theology,” which says that the Church has replaced Israel in God's plan. ***“I also am an Israelite.”*** Paul is living proof that a remnant of believing Jews continues the plan of God. ***“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.”*** In ancient times, God chose Israel to be the vehicle of bringing His Word into the world—both the written and the Living (John 1:14; 2 Tim. 3:16). The Messianic kingdom, which God promised to Israel, will yet be fulfilled.

11:3–5 “*I alone am left.*” Paul quotes Elijah, who was ignorant of the remnant of faithful believers in Israel (1 Kings 19:10–18). ***“I have reserved for Myself seven thousand ... a remnant ... the election of grace.”*** In the days of Elijah, the remnant refused to bow to Baal. In Paul's day, the remnant was composed of those who received the grace of God by faith (Rom. 4:3, 16). God will never forsake Israel (1 Sam. 12:22; Jer. 23:3–4; 46:28).

11:6 “*If by grace, then it is no longer of works.*” God's grace can never be earned or deserved. It can only be received by faith (Eph. 2:8–9; Rom. 4:16). The majority in Israel rejected the way of faith in favor of works (Rom. 10:1–4). ***“Otherwise grace is no longer grace.”*** Any attempt to mingle works with grace destroys the very nature of grace. Grace and works are incompatible, except as grace is first received by faith, and then produces “works” as the fruit of the marriage of grace and faith (Eph. 2:10; Col. 2:6–7).

11:7 “*Israel has not obtained what it seeks.*” The works-righteousness they sought they could not obtain (Rom. 10:2–3). ***“The elect have obtained it.”*** Paul, here, distinguishes between the general election of the nation of Israel (Rom. 9:4–5) and the personal election of those who believed (Rom. 9:30–33). The two are not the same. ***“The rest were [hardened] blinded.”*** Those who resisted the Word of God, as Pharaoh did, were hardened (Exod. 5:2; 8:15, 32; 9:12, 34; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8; Rom. 9:17–18). This hardening, which was voluntary on Israel's part, God then enforced on them (Rom. 11:25; see also “*gave them over,*” Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Paul makes it clear that the beginning of their hardening was their own willful unbelief (Rom. 9:30–33; 10:16–21; 11:20, 23).

11:8–10 “*Just as it is written.*” Paul quotes Isaiah and David (Isa. 29:10; Psalm 69:22–23) to show that Israel's rejection of her Messiah was anticipated by the prophets. The process of this hardening has already been explained by Paul in relation to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:18–32). It is always the result of willful and repeated rejection of the light of God (John 3:19; 8:12). ***“Let their table become a snare”*** (Psalm 69:22). These quotes from the Old Testament picture men at a feast who, by overindulgence, have become drowsy and sluggish, and so become enslaved to an enemy. Israel became so proud and complacent due to their privileges (Rom. 9:4–5), that when Messiah came, they blindly ignored Him.

The Relationship of Israel and the Church

Romans 11:11–25

11:11 *“Have they stumbled that they should fall?”* The question here is: Has Israel fallen, never to rise again? Paul absolutely rejects this. *“To provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.”* God in His infinite wisdom will use Israel’s rejection of Jesus Christ to bring Him to the Gentiles. This will, in the future, provoke Israel to return to God in faith (Deut. 32:21; Rom. 10:19).

11:12 *“If their fall is riches for the world.”* Because of the Jews rejection of the Gospel, the Gospel was spread to the nations (Acts 13:46–47; 18:5–6; 28:25–28). *“How much more their fullness.”* The future restoration of Israel in the Tribulation Period will bring in the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ. This is why the Church should never cease to pray for and love Israel for Christ’s sake.

11:13 *“I speak to you Gentiles ... I am an apostle to the Gentiles.”* Paul has been addressing Israel since the beginning of chapter 9. He now addresses the Gentile church, regarding our relationship to Israel. *“I magnify my ministry.”* Since God would use the Church to bring about Israel’s restoration, Paul’s love for Israel then (Rom. 9:1–3; 10:1) could be effective through his ministry to the Gentiles.

11:14 *“If by any means I may provoke to jealousy ... and save some of them.”* Paul knew he could not reach the nation as a whole because of their willful blindness. However, he could demonstrate the love and grace of God through the Church so that some of them would come to faith and be saved. Remember that the word “saved” simply means “delivered,” and contains not only the idea of eternal salvation, but also deliverance from the horrors of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the nation in 70 A.D. (Matt. 24:1–2).

11:15 *“Reconciling of the world ... life from the dead.”* By the failure of Israel to receive her Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Gentile world received the message of reconciliation (Rom. 5:8–11; 2 Cor. 5:17–21). The return of Israel to God in faith would be a national resurrection, that would result in the return of Christ and the inauguration of His kingdom on Earth (Isa. 26:16–19).

11:16–18 *“If the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy.”* The offering of the firstfruits of the harvest sanctified and made holy all the harvest (Lev. 23:10; Num. 15:17–21). *“The root ... the branches.”* The call of Abraham, the “root” of the nation, had sanctified the whole nation to God (Gen. 12:1–3). God will bless those who bless Israel. *“Some of the branches were broken off.”* These refer to unbelieving Jews. *“A wild olive tree.”* Israel is pictured by the prophets as a cultivated olive tree (Jer. 11:16; Hosea 14:6). It is not a normal practice to graft the wild tree into the cultivated one, but rather to do the opposite. Yet here, God works contrary to nature. The Gentile church is grafted into Israel for the benefit of the Church now, and for the benefit of Israel yet future. *“Do not boast against the branches ... the root supports you.”* Rather than focus on the unbelieving “branches” in Israel, the Gentile church should focus on our Abrahamic roots (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6), and on Jesus Christ—the ultimate Root of all eternal life (Rom. 15:12; Rev. 5:5; 22:16).

11:19 *“You will say.”* Paul anticipates the pride of the Gentiles boasting over Israel’s fall. Again, he knew that 70 A.D. was coming. He dreaded it for the sufferings of Israel, as well as for the potential of Gentile boasting.

11:20 *“Because of unbelief ... you stand by faith.”* The whole argument of chapters 9–11 is summarized in these words. The nation of Israel fell due to unbelief, and the Gentile church stood firm “by faith.” Nothing about the act of divine election (Romans 9), nor of Israel’s hardening (Romans 11), was divorced from the issue of receiving or rejecting the gospel message.

11:21 *“He may not spare you either.”* Those Gentile believers who choose to become arrogant will suffer the just consequences of their pride (Prov. 16:18).

11:22 “The goodness and severity of God.” From the beginning of this book, Paul has shown us that both love and justice are part of God’s nature. Grace and judgment are both demonstrations of His perfect character. Those who fall through unbelief will surely suffer His severity. Those who receive His grace by faith will experience His “goodness” (Rom. 2:4). **“Otherwise you also will be cut off.”** The Laodicean church (Rev. 3:14–22) shows that the Church will ultimately end in failure. When the Rapture of the Church occurs (1 Thess. 4:13–18), the Church will be “cut off,” and Israel will then be restored (Rev. 7:1–8).

11:23 “God is able to graft them in again.” The key here is **“if they do not continue in unbelief.”** The ultimate choice before all mankind is always faith or unbelief. When Israel returns to faith in Jesus Christ, they will be “grafted into” the plan of God again.

11:24 “How much more will these ... natural branches, be granted into their own olive tree?” The restoration of Israel will be much more natural than the entrance of the Gentiles into their promises and blessings.

11:25 “This mystery.” The temporary dominance of the Gentiles in the plan of God was not revealed in the Old Testament. Not until God revealed it to the Apostle Paul was this “mystery” known (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:1–7). The term “mystery” is most often used for newly revealed truths that relate to the Church Age (Eph. 1:7–14; Col. 1:26–27). **“[Hardening] Blindness ... has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”** Here, he refers to the final harvest of the Gentile church at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:50–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18).

Israel’s Future Restoration a Tribute to God’s Wisdom

Romans 11:26–36

11:26 “And so all Israel will be saved.” By the end of the Tribulation Period, only those Jews who believe will remain on the Earth. Then the words of Christ will be fulfilled from Matthew 23:39, and Jesus Christ will return to deliver them. **“The Deliverer will come out of Zion”** (Isa. 59:20–21). The return of Christ is pictured in Revelation 19:11–21 and Isaiah 63:1–6.

11:27 “This is My covenant ... when I take away their sins” (Isa. 27:9; 59:21). At Christ’s Second Coming, Israel will finally enter into the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–29; Matt. 26:26–29).

11:28 “Concerning the gospel ... concerning the election.” Though unbelieving Jews were hostile to believing Gentiles, they should still be dealt with in love for the sake of our common father, Abraham (Rom. 4:11–12; Gal. 4:21–31), along with Isaac and Jacob (Rom. 9:7–13; Deut. 7:8; 10:15–16).

11:29 “The gifts ... the calling of God are irrevocable.” God is immutable; He never changes (Heb. 13:8; James 1:17). His promises are sure and certain, and He will fulfill them. However, He will not do it apart from the condition of faith. The “gifts” (Rom. 9:4–5) and the “calling” (Rom. 9:7–13) will ultimately fulfill the purpose of God.

11:30–31 “You were once disobedient ... these also have now been disobedient.” Obedience to God requires believing the gospel message (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). “Disobedience” refers to unbelief. The Jews’ disobedience, by rejecting the Gospel, resulted in mercy to the Gentiles that the Jews might ultimately believe and receive mercy as well. The Gentile church becomes the custodian or caretaker of the gospel message until Israel reclaims it by faith. **“Mercy.”** It should be noted that Paul speaks of “mercy” nine times in this section (Rom. 9:15–18, 23; 11:30–32). It is to these “mercies” that Paul will refer to in Romans 12:1!

11:32 “For God has committed them all ... that He might have mercy on all.” All mankind is condemned as sinners (Rom. 3:10–18; 5:12–21), in order that all might have the chance to receive the gift of eternal life. Condemnation for sin must come before justification through the righteousness of Christ. By declaring all men to be sinners, God includes all men in the sacrifice of Christ for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 2:2).

ROMANS 11:33–36

11:33 *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”* Paul breaks into a song of praise as he considers the infinite wisdom of God. As Job learned (Job 42:1–6), the ways of God are *“unsearchable,”* and His judgments are beyond our capacity to comprehend.

11:34–35 *“For who has known the mind of the Lord?”* Here, he loosely quotes Isaiah 40:13–14; Jeremiah 23:18; and Job 41:11 to show the unsearchable ways of God. While we cannot fathom all the workings of God, we can rest in knowing that He is wise, compassionate, and merciful in all His ways, as He is revealed in Christ (Isa. 61:1–3).

11:36 *“For of Him ... through Him ... to Him.”* This statement is so rich that it could take pages to record all the meaning. God is the source of all good things, and all good things come by His doing. Ultimately, all things that are good and holy (Phil. 4:8) will bring praise and glory to Him forever and ever!

Summary Principles: The Plan of God for Israel

1. God has not *“cast away”* Israel (v. 1)! Rather, by their unbelief, Israel has excluded themselves from the blessings of God’s plan (Rom. 10:18–21).
2. Just as in the time of Elijah, God continued to save the remnant in Israel who trusted in Him (vv. 2–5).
3. The election of Israel as the *“chosen nation”* did not guarantee the salvation of all Jews. That was determined by *“the election of grace”* (vv. 5–6), which was dependent on individual faith (Rom. 4:3, 16, 23–24; 10:11–13, 17).
4. Because of Israel’s rejection of faith in favor of a works-salvation (Rom. 10:3), the majority in the nation had been hardened and blinded in accordance with their own desires (vv. 7–10).
5. However, God in His infinite wisdom will use Israel’s rejection of Jesus Christ to spread the Gospel to the nations (vv. 11–13). This is in keeping with the words of the prophets (Deut. 32:21; Isa. 65:1–2; Hosea 1:10; 2:23).
6. God will then use the witness and ministry of the Gentile church to provoke Israel into returning to Him in faith (vv. 14–15).
7. As members of this Gentile church, we must never forget the debt that we owe to the nation of Israel, and to consider them the source of our spiritual blessings in Christ (vv. 16–22; Rom. 1:16).
8. Ultimately, God will restore Israel to Himself in faith, and all believers will proclaim His wisdom in showing mercy to them and to us (vv. 23–36; Rev. 5:9–14; 7:12; 15:3–4).

ROMANS CHAPTER 12

This chapter begins the final section of the book, which deals with our transformation into the likeness of Christ. Paul details how we should conduct ourselves in the Church of God/Body of Christ, in relationship to human government, and in society. Here, Paul presents service to God in terms of conduct and ministry among men. He defines what Jesus meant when He told His disciples, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me”* (Luke 9:23). The cross represents a right, vertical relationship with God the Father, resulting in a right, horizontal conduct and relationship to those around us. It is the outliving of the two great commands cited by Jesus: *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matt. 22:37–39).

Become a Living Sacrifice to God

Romans 12:1–2

12:1 “By the mercies of God.” The word “mercy” only occurs in Romans 9:15–23, 11:30–32, 12:8, and 15:9. It is in light of the relationship of Israel and the Church in history that we ought to play our part on the stage of history. **“Present your bodies.”** This exhortation takes us back to Romans 6:11–14 and 19–23. The word “present” pictures a priest drawing near to the altar. **“A living sacrifice.”** The first example of this in Scripture, and the first occurrence of the word “worship,” is found in Genesis 22:5 with the offering up of Isaac by Abraham. **“Holy, acceptable.”** That which is dedicated and set apart unto the Lord is holy, and therefore “acceptable” by Him. **“Reasonable service.”** The word translated “service” refers to an act of worship. Our surrender to the plan and purpose of God is “reasonable” in light of His “mercies” demonstrated throughout history—first to Israel, and now to the Church, the Body of Christ.

12:2 “Do not be conformed ... but be transformed.” The choice facing every believer each day is conformity or transformation (1 John 2:15; James 4:4). To conform is to adopt outwardly the form and fashion of this world apart from Jesus Christ. The world seeks to conform us from the outside, changing our conduct, with the result that our attitude and thinking is subdued to that mold. The Spirit of God changes us from the inside out, first changing the thinking, which then brings the conduct into line. **“Renewing of your mind.”** God’s Word brings a new and higher quality of thinking, which results in a new outward expression of living (Eph. 4:20–24). **“That you may prove ... that ... perfect will of God.”** Every believer is to be a living example to the world of the perfection of the will of God. As we experience God’s plan, we find that, both to Him and to us, it is **“Good ... acceptable ... perfect.”**

Become a Loving Servant in the Church

Romans 12:3–13

12:3 “Not to think ... more highly ... but ... soberly.” One of the first effects of a renewed mind is a humble attitude regarding oneself (Phil. 2:3; 1 Pet. 5:5–6). **“A measure of faith.”** We all differ in regard to our level of spiritual growth and faith (v. 6; 1 John 2:15–17; Rom. 14:1–8; Phil. 3:12–15).

12:4 “All the members do not have the same function.” Unless we surrender to the will of God and grow in grace, we will never know His “perfect will” (v. 2) regarding what part we are to play in the Body (1 Cor. 12:4–31). He is speaking here of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1–7; Eph. 4:11–16).

12:5 “Individually members of one another.” God gives a spiritual gift to every believer, for them to contribute to the overall function of ministry within the Church.

12:6 “Gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.” Our exercise of the spiritual gift we have received depends on the measure of grace God has given us, and in the **“proportion [of] our faith.”** God may give grace to one for large public ministry and to another, a more silent and hidden gift (i.e., prayer). Each of us needs to learn and accept the role God intends us to play. Consider the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–29). Note especially Matthew 25:15, **“to each according to his own ability.”** God perfectly matches our calling with our spiritual capability through the enablement of His Spirit (Zec. 4:6).

12:6–8 “Prophecy ... ministry ... exhortation ... he who gives ... leads ... shows mercy.” Gifts fall into two main categories: speaking or serving (1 Pet. 4:10–11). **“Prophecy”** here means foretelling God’s Word, not predicting the future. Ministry simply means to serve in some way. This is only a sampling of various kinds of gifts. The best way to identify one’s gift is to surrender to God, consistently grow spiritually, and serve where you are able. In time, your gift will define itself as the Spirit of God guides and blesses your service.

ROMANS 12:9–21

12:9–10 “Love ... without hypocrisy.” The love of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; 2 Pet. 1:7) leads us to reject evil and embrace all that is good. This is the outward evidence of the inward transformation (vv. 1–2). Three words for love occur in these two verses:

1. **“Love”** is used for the love of God (*agape*). It is unconditional and sacrificial.
2. **“Kindly affectionate”** is the word used for familial affection (*philostorge*).
3. **“Brotherly love”** is the word *philadelphia*, which is a strong love of brethren.

“Giving preference to one another.” This is the outward effect of a right attitude to self as seen in v. 3.

12:11–13 “Not lagging in diligence.” “Diligence” refers to strong spiritual motivation. This is critical to both growth and service in the Christian life (Prov. 4:23; 13:4; Rom. 12:8; 2 Pet. 3:14). **“Fervent ... serving the Lord.”** The word “fervent” means “to be boiling hot.” This is the opposite of the mentality of the “lukewarm” Laodicean church (Rev. 3:15–17). Eight qualities of faithful service are found in these verses, which help to define what “living sacrifice” in v. 1 means. **“Hospitality”** means a “love of strangers,” a willingness to use our resources to bless those outside the circle of our friends and family (Rom. 15:26; Heb. 13:1–2, 16; 1 Pet. 4:9).

Become a Lamp Stand to Society

Romans 12:14–21

12:14 “Bless and do not curse.” Persecution can come both from unbelievers and from other Christians. “*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*” (Prov. 15:1). To bless God and then to curse those made in His image is not consistent with our witness (James 3:9–10). We should desire and pray for God’s blessings on all men.

12:15 “Rejoice ... and weep.” We are to enter into the joys and sorrows of other members of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:25–26; 2 Cor. 11:29).

12:16 “Associate with the humble.” The instructions in this verse echo the teachings of Jesus on humility (Luke 14:8–11). The example of Christ is to be our standard (Phil. 2:5–9).

12:17 “Repay no one evil for evil.” The victory over evil is found in vv. 20–21. We should strive to be peacemakers in the midst of the hatred and evil of this world (Matt. 5:9).

12:18 “If it is possible, as much as depends on you.” We are to seek peaceable relationships to the extent that we are able (Heb. 12:14). There are some who make peace impossible. We are told to avoid such men (Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9–11).

12:19 “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” Only God is in the place of judging or avenging because He alone has all the details in every case (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35). This does not forbid the execution of justice by those entrusted to do it.

12:20 “Feed him ... give him a drink.” These actions show how believers are to leave vengeance in God’s hands. By showing grace to those who persecute or do evil to us, we both seek to win them to Christ, and increase their own guilt if they reject Him, thus we **“Heap coals of fire on his head.”** Either shame will bring them to Christ, or their hatred will result in judgment (Prov. 25:21–22).

12:21 “Overcome evil with good.” This verse is a summary of all the instructions from v. 14 up to this point. It is also a summary of the life of Jesus Christ, which we are to imitate (1 Cor. 4:12; 11:1; 1 Pet. 2:21–24).

Summary Principles: The Sacrificial Life

1. There are several biblical examples of what “*living sacrifice*” looks like in real life (v. 1). We have Abraham offering Isaac (Gen. 22:1–18), Ruth’s commitment to Naomi and to God (Ruth 1:16–17), Hannah’s dedication of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:24–2:11), and Mary’s expensive oil (Mark 14:3–9). Many others could be found, and careful consideration of each will provide wonderful illustrations of this truth.
2. The Christian life is one of growing non-conformity to this world, and greater transformation into the image of Jesus Christ (v. 2; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:17–18; Phil. 3:12–14).
3. Everyone who is a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ has a spiritual gift, which defines the plan of God for our life and service (vv. 3–8; 1 Cor 12:4–31; Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). Three major aspects of God’s will are:
 - a. His operational will. What does God want me to do? Spiritual gifts and ministry largely define this area.
 - b. His geographic will. Where does He want me to serve? This is defined by the leading of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16–18). Consider how the Spirit directed Paul in Acts 16:6–10.
 - c. His motivational will. Why does He want me to do this? The underlying motive is always love and obedience (John 14:15; 2 Cor. 5:14–21).
4. The love of God, produced by the Holy Spirit, is the key to all the exhortations from vv. 9–20. Love that is “*without hypocrisy*” (v. 9) can only dominate our lives as we are filled by the Spirit and producing His fruit (Rom. 5:5; Eph. 3:14–21; 5:18; Gal. 5:16, 22–23).
5. This chapter begins with the command to be “*transformed*” into the likeness of Christ and ends with the command to “*overcome evil with good*” (vv. 2, 21). We must fulfill the first command before we can ever hope to fulfill the second. We grow into the fulfillment of the plan of God as we surrender our life unconditionally to Him (Luke 9:23) and “grow in grace and truth” in a life of discipleship (2 Pet. 1:5–8; 3:18).

ROMANS CHAPTER 13

Paul now expands his instructions about the ideal Christian life by addressing our relationship to rulers. This chapter has been much abused through the ages by those who urge total compliance with evil rulers. But here, Paul is simply expanding on the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, and Luke 20:25, “*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.*” The apostles show us that there are things we do not surrender to any earthly ruler (Acts 4:19; 5:29).

The Christian and Delegated Authorities

Romans 13:1–7

13:1 “Let every soul.” This obligation applies to believer and unbeliever alike; there are no exceptions. **“Be subject.”** The same requirement is found in Titus 3:1 and 1 Peter 2:13. **“Governing authorities.”** This refers to those in higher authority. While governing authorities is implied in vv. 4–7, this includes the idea of submission to all authority delegated by God such as children to parents (Eph. 6:1–3), wives to husbands (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22–24), and church members to pastors (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17). **“Authorities ... are appointed by God.”** God has delegated authority to man at various levels to create order (1 Cor. 14:33–40). All authorities will answer to God for how they use or abuse that authority (Eph. 6:4). The primary purpose in this delegation of authority is to punish evil and to reward good (1 Pet. 2:13–14). Our obedience is a vital part of our witness (John 13:17; 1 Pet. 2:15–17).

ROMANS 13:2–13

13:2 *“Whoever resists ... will bring judgment on themselves.”* This “*judgment*” may come from either earthly rulers, or in the form of God’s wrath (vv. 4–5). This principle does not rule out civil disobedience when rulers make laws contrary to the Word and will of God (Dan. 3:16–18; 6:6–10; Acts 4:19; 5:29).

13:3 *“Rulers are not a terror to good works.”* This is stated as a general rule (1 Pet. 2:13–14). In the case of tyrannical rulers, the believer need not fear, but rather trust in the faithfulness of God. *“Do what is good, and you will have praise.”* Even though earthly rulers may persecute believers, their praise will come—if not from men, then from God (Rom. 2:29b).

13:4 *“For he is God’s minister ... he does not bear the sword in vain ... to execute wrath.”* The “*sword*” refers to the power of civil authority to execute criminals (Acts 25:11). In the execution of criminals, civil authority is but an agent of the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18; 2:3–6).

13:5 *“Because of wrath...for conscience’ sake.”* Believers have a higher motive for obedience than fear. We ought to be motivated rather by the desire to maintain a good conscience before God (1 Pet. 3:21). This separates the obedience of the believer from that of the unbeliever.

13:6 *“Because of this you pay taxes.”* Taxes fall under the domain of that which belongs to Caesar (Matt. 22:17–21). Consider Jesus’ lesson to Peter in Matthew 17:24–27. A believer should pay taxes because he recognizes the civil government as *“God’s ministers,”* however imperfect they may be.

13:7 *“Render ... to all their due.”* Paul uses the same word as Jesus did in Matthew 22:21, which means “to pay back what is owed.” Some authorities are due only taxes, some certain customs, others fear, and others honor. There is no honor in showing honor to those who are dishonorable.

The Law of Love Romans 13:8–14

13:8 *“Owe no one ... love one another.”* We should incur no debt toward others, except the obligation to *“love one another.”* This is especially true regarding fellow believers (John 13:34–35; 15:12–13), however, it includes our neighbor (v. 9b; Matt. 22:39; Lev. 19:18). *“He who loves ... has fulfilled the law.”* Since all the “*law*” is contained in the two great commandments (Matt. 22:37–40), those who act in the love of God fulfill the “*royal law*” (James 2:8).

13:9 *“For the commandments ... are all summed up in this saying.”* Again, Paul is merely repeating the statement of Jesus Christ from Matthew 22:37–40. It must be pointed out that faith only “works through love” (Gal. 5:6b), and that love is produced in the believer by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22; 2 Cor. 5:14–15). The love spoken of here is not sentimental feeling, but the animating power of God working in the transformed believer (Rom. 12:1–2).

13:10 *“Love does no harm to a neighbor.”* The negative commands cited in v. 9 cannot be committed by one who is acting under the power of the love of God (Matt. 7:12).

13:11–12 *“Knowing the time ... to awake out of sleep.”* Because we live in the expectation of the “*blessed hope*” (Titus 2:13), we are to live vigilant lives (1 Cor. 15:34; Eph. 5:14–16; Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 5:4–10). *“Our salvation is nearer ... the day is at hand.”* Believers who live in the expectation of the return of Christ will be rewarded (Phil. 4:5; 2 Tim. 4:6–8; James 5:8; 1 Pet. 4:7; 5:4). *“Let us put on the armor of light.”* The Christian life is a spiritual battle, which must be waged with spiritual weapons (2 Cor. 10:3–6; Eph. 6:10–18).

13:13 *“Let us walk ... as in the day.”* The figure of walking in the light of day is common throughout the Bible (Psalm 56:13; 89:15; Isa. 2:5; 9:2; John 8:12; 12:35–36; 1 John 1:7) and indicates those who are living in obedience to the Word of God.

13:14 “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul often uses the figure of taking off filthy garments and putting on that which is clean (Eph. 4:22–24). We “put off” sin in our lives by confession (Psalm 51:3–9; 1 John 1:9) and correction of wrong conduct. We “put on” Christ as we are led by His Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16, 18) and walk in obedience to His Word (1 John 1:7). This idea links back to Romans 12:1–2 and the idea of being transformed into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

Summary Principles: Victorious Christian Living

1. Starting in chapter 12, Paul begins to develop the practical ways in which we can be “*more than conquerors through Him who loved us*” (Rom. 8:37). What we are spiritually by our position “in Christ,” we ought to become practically in our way of life (Gal. 2:20).
2. Our obedience to delegated authorities (vv. 1–7) is simply a demonstration of the love of Christ (vv. 8–14) in action (cf. 1 Pet. 2:13–24).
3. It is by the living demonstration of the love of Christ that we “*overcome evil with good.*” (Rom. 12:21).
4. The section on submission to delegated authority (vv. 1–7) is a further development by Paul of the words of Christ in Matthew 22:21, “*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.*”
5. The only way we can maintain the balance in our relationship to divine and human authority is if we first are motivated by the love of Christ (Matt. 22:37–39; John 14:15, 21; 2 Cor. 5:14). Only when we love God above all else can we love our neighbor as we should. Only when we are obedient to God first are we then able to render the right obedience to human authorities.
6. The right and true love for God will often require that we disobey earthly authorities (Acts 4:19; 5:29). Biblical civil disobedience is always grounded in the love for God and for His Word above the desire for worldly popularity or personal safety (Daniel 3 and 6).
7. No Christian who desires to be a light shining in this world (Matt. 5:16) can accommodate or ignore political corruption, deception, or tyranny.

ROMANS CHAPTER 14

Paul now moves from the law of love to the law of liberty. Believers are to grant the same freedom to others, to act according to conscience, that we desire for ourselves. The law of liberty applies in all areas where there is no specific command given in Scripture regarding certain activities. There are many areas that fall under the title of “*doubtful things*” (vv. 1, 23); these things should not lead us to despise or judge one another over our differences (vv. 3–4).

The Law of Liberty

Romans 14:1–13

14:1 “Receive one who is weak in the faith.” Those who are “*weak*” lack understanding of the grace of God, our standing in Christ, and our freedom from the Law (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 2:11–21; 3:23–24; Col. 2:16–23; 1 Tim. 4:4–6). Paul defines those who are “*strong*” in faith as those who understand Christian liberty and use it wisely (Gal. 5:1, 13; 1 Cor. 8:9; 9:19–23). The “*strong*” are commanded to “*receive*” those who are “*weak*,” with grace and compassion, into their fellowship (Rom. 15:1). “***Not to disputes over doubtful things.***” It is far better to stand on the certainties of God’s Word than to argue over questionable things.

ROMANS 14:2–11

14:2–3 *“One believes he may eat all things.”* The strong believer realizes that the various food prohibitions of the Law no longer apply (Mark 7:14–19; Col. 2:16; Titus 1:15). *“He who is weak eats only vegetables.”* Many feared to eat meat bought in the marketplace because it was often first sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:1, 4–13). *“Let not him ... despise ... judge ... for God has received him.”* The tendency of the strong—who magnify God’s grace—is to despise, or hold in contempt, the weak. The weak, who are always more legalistic, tend to judge those who are strong. Both need to recognize that we are all received by God on the same basis through faith in Jesus Christ. We ought not reject those whom God has received!

14:4 *“Who are you to judge another’s servant?”* Every believer is a servant of God. He alone is able to pass righteous judgment (James 4:11–12). *“God is able to make him stand.”* The power of God is at work in every believer as they respond in faith to His Word and rely on the indwelling Spirit to strengthen and guide (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16, 18; Eph. 3:14–21). God empowers those who trust in Him, whether they are weak or strong (Jer. 9:23–24).

14:5 *“One person esteems one day above another.”* The two main areas of conflict in the early Church were observance of the Sabbath and eating of meat (Col. 2:16). *“Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.”* Every believer must be free to act according to their own conscience and understanding of Scripture.

14:6 *“To the Lord ... gives God thanks.”* Both the strong and the weak do what they are doing in a desire to please God and give thanks to Him to the degree that they understand His Word and His will. Paul argues for unity rather than division, because:

1. God the Father receives both the weak and the strong by grace through faith, (vv. 1–3; Eph. 2:8–9);
2. The power of God to make us stand is available to each of us as we seek to serve Him—whatever our level of growth (vv. 4–6); and
3. We will all stand before the Lord to be judged by His perfect judgment (vv. 7–12).

14:7–8 *“Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”* Rather than trying to judge or evaluate one another, we should each be concerned to live lives pleasing to our Lord (Col. 3:23).

14:9 *“For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again.”* Jesus Christ has the only right to Lordship of our lives (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:9–13; 2 Cor. 5:14–15). We ought to live to please Him, not men (2 Cor. 5:9; Gal. 1:10).

14:10 *“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”* The life of every believer will be evaluated by the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Therefore, we should leave all judgment and evaluation to Him (1 Cor. 4:5).

14:11 *“Every knee shall bow to Me.”* This quote from Isaiah 45:23 declares that all men will ultimately declare that He is God (Phil. 2:10–11; 1 Pet. 4:5). This final judgment has two distinct parts, however (John 5:25–29):

1. Believers are judged regarding their service, not their salvation. This is the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:10), where faithfulness will be rewarded (1 Cor. 3:14; 9:24–25; 2 Tim. 4:6–8; James 1:12).
2. Unbelievers are then judged at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11–15). Their rejection of Christ is proven by the fact that their names are not written in the Book of Life (Exod. 32:32; Rev. 13:8; 17:8). They are therefore judged on the basis of their works (Rev. 20:12–13), which cannot save them (Gal. 2:16; 3:10–11).

14:12 *“Each of us shall give an account ... to God.”* We should therefore be far more concerned with evaluating our own lives, rather than judging one another (Matt. 12:36; 1 Cor. 11:31).

14:13 *“Resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall.”* We should each be concerned that our life be a source of edification to other believers (Eph. 4:29), and not a cause of either hindrance to growth or of falling into sin for fellow believers (Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 8:9).

Liberty Limited by Love

Romans 14:14–23

14:14 *“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself.”* Here, Paul speaks as a strong believer, declaring that all things are pure to those who use them wisely (Titus 1:15; Acts 10:13–15). Things become “*unclean*” because of their abuse, not their proper use. *“To him it is unclean.”* That is, that his mind and conscience consider it unclean, and for him to use it is wrong (v. 23).

14:15 *“You are no longer walking in love.”* The law of love (Rom. 13:8–10) always limits the law of liberty (Rom. 14:1–13; 1 Cor. 8:1–13). *“Do not destroy.”* What a strong believer may engage in could cause the ruin of the weak believer. Things that may be harmless to the strong believer may lead the weak into ruin (vv. 20, 23; 1 Cor. 10:23).

14:16 *“Do not let your good be spoken of as evil.”* If the strong believer engages in what they know to be “*good*” in the company of the weaker believer, their freedom in Christ will become a cause of slander and accusation.

14:17 *“For the kingdom of God is ... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* The life that is lived in the consciousness of the kingdom of Christ is concerned with eternal, not with temporal things. When we live by the power of the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16), we seek His approval, not our own gratification.

14:18 *“He who serves Christ ... is acceptable to God.”* When our focus is to please God rather than ourselves, our lives will be pleasing to God and beneficial to men (Rom. 12:16–18; 2 Cor. 8:21).

14:19 *“Let us pursue ... peace and ... edify [one] another.”* When we are willing to limit our liberty out of love for weaker believers, we will maintain unity and peace, while at the same time, we will strengthen the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:12; Rom. 15:1; Eph. 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:10–12).

14:20 *“Do not destroy.”* The word “*destroy*” here, and in v. 15, speaks of insisting on our liberty to the spiritual detriment of weaker believers. It must also be pointed out that devotion to legalism can cause the same damage (Gal. 2:11–21). Peter first enjoyed liberty among the Gentile Galatians, but then reverted to Law-observance when the Jews came from Jerusalem. Paul severely rebuked him for his hypocrisy. *“All things indeed are pure.”* Everything has its proper use, but everything can also be abused (Titus 1:15).

14:21 *“It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine.”* Weak believers had scruples with both these activities in the early Church, as they do today. The strong believer is to restrain from these activities when in the presence of weak believers, or those whose spiritual maturity is not known.

14:22 *“Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God.”* The strong believer who is convinced of his liberty in Christ (v. 14; Gal. 5:1) is free to indulge in those things in private. He is free to enjoy that liberty in which there is no self-condemnation.

14:23 *“He who doubts is condemned if he eats.”* If the eating of meat or drinking of wine troubles one’s conscience, then it is an act of sin against one’s own conscience to do those things. *“Whatever is not from faith*

ROMANS 15:1–5

is sin.” In order to “*walk by faith*” (2 Cor. 5:7), we must live by our understanding of God’s Word. If we violate our own conscience by doing things we believe to be wrong, we are not acting in faith, and anything not of faith can only be sin (James 4:17).

Summary Principles: Christian Liberty

1. When Paul speaks of Christian liberty, he is speaking of liberty from slavery to the law, as well as slavery to sin (Gal.5:1, 13).
2. The liberty of the individual believer should always be tempered by his love for weaker fellow believers (Rom.15:1; 1 Cor. 8:8–13; 9:19–23).
3. The Spirit of God is the author of our liberty, with the goal that we might be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (2Cor. 3:17–18; Rom. 12:1–2).
4. When we live in the true liberty of Christ, we reflect His life and His kingdom (Rom. 14:17–18; 2 Cor. 8:9).

ROMANS CHAPTER 15

In chapter 15, Paul gives instruction on how liberty is limited by love in practical ways. He expresses his confidence that the Roman church will be obedient to his instruction and explains his plans to visit Rome on his way to Spain. As we have seen in our study of Acts, God had different plans regarding how Paul would visit Rome.

The Duty of the Strong to the Weak

Romans 15:1–6

15:1 “*We then who are strong.*” Paul includes himself in this group. As an apostle, he surpassed them all in strength. As a brother, he is an example of humility and reconciliation. It is the duty of the “*strong*” to care for the weak. The ancient ideal of this was the care of the shepherd for the flock—an ideal realized in Jesus Christ (Psalm 23:1; 77:20; 78:52; Isa. 40:10–11; John 10:11). Our motive must be sacrificial service (Rom. 12:1–2), not self-gratification (Gal. 6:1–2). “*Bear with*” is the same word used of Jesus bearing His cross (John 19:17).

15:2 “*His neighbor for his good, leading to edification.*” Our conduct should be guided by a genuine desire for our neighbor’s spiritual well-being (1 Cor. 10:23–24, 31–33). The life and ministry of Paul is an example and reflects the ministry of Christ (1 Cor. 4:9–16; 9:19–23).

15:3 “*For even Christ did not please Himself.*” Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of selfless service to His fellow men (Phil. 2:5–9). The quote in this verse, from Psalm 69:9, is a reminder that all throughout His life, He endured scorn, contempt, and shame on our behalf; and at the cross He bore all our sins (Isa. 53:4–6; 2 Cor. 5:21).

15:4 “*Whatever things were written before.*” All of the Old Testament Scriptures are designed for our instruction and benefit. To us, this also includes all New Testament Scriptures (1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). “*Patience ... comfort ... hope.*” By persistence in Bible study, we gain comfort in time and build hope for eternity. The word “*hope*” speaks of the assurance that comes with spiritual growth and maturity that we will not be ashamed when we stand before the Lord (Rom. 14:10–11; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 1 John 2:28–29).

15:5 “*Now may the God of patience ... grant you.*” This is Paul’s prayer for the saints in Rome. “*Be like-minded ... according to Christ Jesus.*” The humanity of the Lord Jesus, which is emphasized by putting “*Christ*” first in the sentence, should be the standard of our interaction (v. 7; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:32; Col. 1:18).

15:6 *“That you may ... glorify.”* The more we are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18), the more the Father is glorified through Him (John 17:9–23).

The Duty of the Jew to the Gentile

Romans 15:7–13

15:7 *“Receive one another.”* This applies both to the strong and weak, as well as to Jew and Gentile, as the following verses show. The word “*receive*” goes back to the beginning of this section in Romans 14:1 and is the main thought throughout. *“As Christ also received us.”* Jesus Christ receives all those who will receive Him as Savior (John 1:11–12). He welcomes us into His fellowship, but the goal of this welcome is always that we might be “*sanctified*” through that fellowship (John 17:17–19; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 5:26; 1 Thess. 4:3).

15:8–12 *“Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision.”* The incarnation of Jesus Christ in human flesh came through the Jewish nation (Matt. 1:1–17; Rom. 9:4–5). The purpose of God in this was two-fold:

1. *“To confirm the promises made to the fathers.”* This includes all the Old Testament promises to Israel, and again proves that God is not finished with them (Romans 11).
2. *“That the Gentiles might glorify God.”* When Jesus “*came to His own*” (John 1:11), this refers to Israel. But He came to them that they might open the door of faith to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11–12, 29–31).

Paul quotes a string of Old Testament prophecies to show that this was all included in the plan of God (2 Sam. 22:50; Psalm 18:49; Deut. 32:43; Psalm 117:1; Isa. 11:1, 10). When the Rabbis used a series of passages to prove a point, it was called “a string of pearls.” These prophetic passages look forward to the universal rejoicing that will prevail during the millennial reign of Christ. *“A root of Jesse.”* This is His Messianic title, as both the source and the descendant of the Davidic line (Rev. 22:16).

15:13 *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.”* Our God is the source of “*hope*,” “*joy*, and *peace*,” as long as we continue to trust in Him (Rom. 5:1–5; 12:12; 14:17). This is another prayer, like vv. 5–6.

Paul Exults in His Ministry

Romans 15:14–21

15:14 *“I ... am confident concerning you, my brethren.”* Through his contacts in Rome, Paul knows that these believers are well instructed and capable in ministry. His confidence is in three areas (1 Cor. 1:4–8; 8:1; 2 Pet. 1:12; 3:17–18):

1. Their motives are good.
2. They have full knowledge of the Word.
3. They are capable of ministering to one another.

15:15 *“I have written more boldly ... because of the grace given to me by God.”* He is not trying to intrude into the ministry of others (vv. 20–21), but rather is fulfilling his apostolic ministry (2 Cor. 10:12–16).

15:16 *“That I might be a minister of Jesus Christ.”* This letter is an expression of Paul’s apostleship to the Gentiles. He summarizes his ministry as (Gal. 2:7–9):

1. Focus: to the Gentiles,
2. Content: concerning the gospel message, and
3. Purpose: with the goal that Gentile believers may be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 15:17–33

15:17–18 *“I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus.”* What God had accomplished through Paul in his missionary journeys was an evidence of divine power. *“To make the Gentiles obedient.”* This obedience consists initially of faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:5), and then in continued growth and service (Rom. 16:19; 26; 1 Thess. 1:5–8).

15:19 *“In mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.”* One of the evidences of those who were true apostles was their ability to work mighty miracles (Acts 19:11; 2 Cor. 12:12). *“From Jerusalem ... to Illyricum.”* Ancient Illyricum is southern Europe today. At this point, Paul was planning to go to Spain (vv. 24, 28).

15:20–21 *“I have made it my aim.”* Paul saw his ministry as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 52:15. He sought to go where others had not gone with the Gospel (2 Cor. 10:13–16). This may explain his great desire to reach Spain (ancient Tarshish), since it was considered to be the end of the Gentile world, and Isaiah spoke of believers coming from there to worship the Lord in the kingdom (Isa. 60:9; 66:19).

Paul’s Plans to Visit Rome

Romans 15:22–33

15:22 *“For this reason.”* Paul’s busy ministry had kept him from visiting Rome (Rom. 1:8–13).

15:23 *“No longer having a place in these parts.”* This was due either to his finished work, or the Jewish opposition to his work. *“Having a great desire ... to come to you.”* He had been planning his visit for some time (Acts 19:21) and God confirmed his plan (Acts 23:11), but not in the way he supposed it would be.

15:24 *“Whenever I journey to Spain.”* This was Paul’s ultimate goal. On that journey, he hoped to visit Rome, both to enjoy their fellowship (Rom. 1:9–14) and to receive support for his missionary journey.

15:25–27 *“Now I am going to Jerusalem.”* The purpose of this visit was to bring the offerings from churches like the Thessalonians, the Philippians, and the Corinthians to the poor in the Jerusalem church (1 Cor. 9:11; 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8:1–5; 9:1–9). *“Partakers of their spiritual things.”* The Gentile churches were blessed by what began at the church in Jerusalem (Rom. 11:17).

15:28 *“When I ... have sealed to them this fruit.”* The word “sealed” is the same word used for the sealing of the Holy Spirit on the believer (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13–14; 2 Cor. 1:22). It suggests three things: 1) ownership, 2) security, and 3) safe delivery to the final destination. The “fruit” of the Gentile offerings was seen to belong to the saints in Jerusalem; it would be kept secure and ultimately delivered to them.

15:29 *“I know ... I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”* All this proved true, but little did Paul realize how that blessing would come to pass (read Acts 21–28)!

15:30–32 *“Now I beg you, brethren ... that you strive together with me in [your] prayers.”* Paul never forgot the intensity of the spiritual war in which he fought (2 Cor. 10:3–6; Eph. 6:10–20). He knew our greatest weapon is that of effective prayer. *“That I may be delivered from those in Judea.”* He knew the danger he was walking into, and perhaps sensed what eventually occurred. In his prayer requests he is specific:

1. for deliverance from his enemies,
2. that his service will be acceptable, and
3. that he might be blessed to visit them and be refreshed by them.

15:33 *“Now the God of peace be with you all.”* It is interesting, in all his epistles, how Paul mixes his instructions with prayer requests for them (Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–21; Phil. 1:9–11; Col. 1:9–14; 1 Thess. 2:13, etc.). In spite of all troubles and trials, God is able to give us inner peace and stability (Rom. 5:1–5).

Summary Principles: The Duties of the Strong

There are at least five duties of the strong believer given in this chapter:

1. *“To bear with the scruples of the weak” (v. 1)* means that we do not treat them with scorn, nor do we impose our liberties on them so as to cause them to stumble.
2. We are to seek the best way to help edify them and build their spiritual strength (vv. 2–3). If Jesus Christ was willing to bear our sins, we ought to be willing to bear with those who are weak.
3. We are to receive them into our fellowship as Jesus Christ has received us (vv. 5–7); we are not to exclude them from our company or avoid association with them.
4. We are to imitate Jesus Christ by becoming a servant to others, resulting in praise and glory to God (vv. 8–12).
5. We are to learn to use our knowledge of God’s Word to *“admonish”* and encourage those who are weaker in the faith (v. 14).

ROMANS CHAPTER 16

The Apostle Paul concludes this great epistle by sending greetings and giving credit to many who were a support and blessing in his ministry. It is the mark of truly great leaders that they recognize their influence and impact is due to many who are unknown and uncelebrated.

Greetings to Many Helpers

Romans 16:1–16

16:1–2 *“I commend to you Phoebe.”* Phoebe probably carried this epistle to Rome. What confidence Paul had in her, to commit to her care such a great treasure! She is described in three phrases: *“our sister,”* that is, a fellow believer, *“a servant,”* though the same word is translated “deacon” (here, it simply refers to one who served in the church), and *“a helper,”* in that she supported Paul and many others in their ministries. She was apparently a wealthy businesswoman from Cenchrea (the seaport seven miles from Corinth) who had business interests in Rome.

16:3–5 *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila.”* This amazing couple worked with Paul in Corinth and in Ephesus (Acts 18:1–3, 18, 26; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19). *“Who risked their own necks.”* This was possibly in the great riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:23–40). *“The church that is in their house.”* These greetings of Paul are addressed to various house-churches in Rome, and those members who were known to Paul. Twenty-four individuals are mentioned by name.

16:6 *“Mary ... labored much for us.”* The word used here speaks of “labor to the point of exhaustion.” She, along with others (v. 12), had worked hard for the Lord.

16:7 *“Greet Andronicus and Junia.”* This couple had been *“fellow prisoners”* with Paul and were *“of note among the apostles.”* Some have taken this to mean that they were apostles, however, the language simply means that they were held in high regard by the apostolic band. That they were *“in Christ”* before Paul suggests they were saved at Pentecost or under the ministry of Stephen.

16:8–10 *“Greet.”* The repetition of this term suggests Paul’s personal interest and honor to each of these believers. The names in these verses were common slave names in the Roman empire.

16:12 *“Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord.”* These were quite likely twin sisters; their names mean “dainty” and “delicate.”

ROMANS 16:13–27

16:13 *“Greet Rufus ... and his mother and mine.”* This is widely believed to be Rufus, the son of Simon, who carried the cross of Jesus (Mark 15:21). Why does Mark mention him by name? Remember that Mark wrote his Gospel for the Romans.

16:16 *“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”* It was common to greet others with a “kiss” on the cheek (1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). Remember that Judas used a kiss to identify Jesus for the authorities (Matt. 26:48; Mark 14:44; Luke 22:47–48).

A Call for Unity and Closing Benediction

Romans 16:17–27

16:17 *“Who cause divisions ... contrary to the doctrine which you learned.”* God’s Word always promotes unity among believers (John 17:20–23; Eph. 4:3–6). Those who create division (2 John 9–11) are to be shunned (1 Cor. 5:9–13; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; Titus 3:10).

16:18 *“For those ... do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Rather than serving the Lord, these people serve *“their own belly,”* meaning their own gratification and desires (Phil. 3:18–19; Col. 2:4; 2 Pet. 2:1–3).

16:19 *“Your obedience has become known to all.”* Like the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:5–10), the faith of the Roman believers had been reported far and wide (Rom. 1:8). The word *“obedience”* here carries the sense of faith in the Gospel introduced in Romans 1:5 (also see v. 26). It is always obedience in faith that results in the obedience of action (Col. 1:3–8). *“Be wise ... and simple.”* True wisdom seeks Truth and has no interest in the knowledge of evil (Matt. 10:16).

16:20 *“The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet.”* This figure is first introduced in Genesis 3:15. While all believers look forward to the ultimate fulfillment of this in Christ’s Second Coming, it is also true that our obedience defeats Satan on a daily basis (John 16:33; Rom. 8:37; 1 John 5:4–5).

16:21–24 *“Timothy”* was Paul’s beloved companion and co-worker; *“Tertius”* was the secretary who wrote the letter at Paul’s dictation. *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”* Paul’s final prayer for all the Roman believers is that they live in the security and power of God’s grace. The idea of the matchless grace of God suggests the benediction that follows.

16:25–27 *“Now to Him who is able to establish you.”* This idea of spiritual stability is found at the beginning of Romans (Rom. 1:11), and here at the end. It suggests spiritual growth and maturity. God uses three mediums to build us up into maturity:

1. the preaching of the Gospel,
2. the revelation of the mystery, that is, God’s plan for the Church Age (Eph. 1:9; 3:1–13; Col. 1:24–29), and
3. the commandment of God for obedience to the faith.

In other words, God has commanded all men to believe (Acts 17:30–31; 1 Tim. 2:3–6; 2 Pet. 3:9). *“Made known to all nations.”* Paul never lost sight of the universal need for the gospel message (Rom. 1:5; Col. 1:6)!

Summary Principles: The Unity of the Body

1. The spiritual unity of the Body of Christ is based on the perfect work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on our behalf (Rom. 1:1–4; 8:1–4; 15:15–17; Eph. 4:4–6).

2. This is a summary of Paul's praise to the Father (Eph. 1:3–6), the Son (Eph. 1:7–12), and the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14) in the book of Ephesians. Note the repeated phrase, *"To the praise of His glory."*
3. The Body of Christ, made up of all who believe in Him, is a spiritual unity made up of many diverse members (Rom. 12:1–8; 1 Cor. 12:12–18). We each have a different gift and role to play, but all contribute to the health of the Body of Christ.
4. One of the chief signs of carnality or worldliness among believers is when we cause divisions and destroy our spiritual unity in Christ (Rom. 8:5–8; 14:1–23; 1 Cor. 1:10–12; 3:1–4).
5. The maintenance of this unity ought to be of utmost importance to every believer (Rom. 15:1–7, 13–14; Eph. 4:1–3). Only when we maintain spiritual unity are we walking worthy of our calling!

CONCLUSION

The book of Romans is the greatest of Paul's epistles in its doctrinal and theological scope. However, the central theme—the righteousness of God provided through the gospel message (Rom. 1:16–17)—is foundational to every verse and doctrine expounded by Paul. This reminds us that the work of Jesus Christ on the cross is not only the central event in all of human history, but that it is also the foundation of all true revelation from God. Those who build their theological framework and their lives around the uniqueness of the Person of Jesus Christ, and the completeness of His work through crucifixion and resurrection, will certainly build their *"house"* on the solid Rock (Matt. 7:24–25). It is my deepest hope and prayer that these notes will contribute to that end, and that the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified through them.

Paul's Epistle to the
Galatians

INTRODUCTION

Paul had first preached the Gospel to the Galatians on his first missionary journey with Barnabas, in the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:13–14:31). These cities were the scene of some of Paul’s greatest persecution, and on his second missionary journey, he met Timothy in Lystra (Acts 16:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:10–12). The Gauls, also called Galatai, or Keltoi (Celts), migrated, according to some out of France, but others claim out of central Asia, into what we know as Galatia. This area is located in modern Turkey. They later moved northwest into what is today Britain, Ireland, and Scotland.

The letter to the Galatians is the most aggressive and combative of all of Paul’s epistles. This is because Paul was under a three-pronged attack from the Judaizers: His apostleship, his gospel message, and his conduct were all being challenged. Paul responds like the fighter he was—he counter-attacked.

In this epistle, Paul responds to the heresy of the Judaizers who challenged:

1. His ministry (Apostle to the Gentiles—Gal. 1:1; 2:7),
2. His message (the gospel of the grace of God—Gal. 1:6–9; 2:14–16; 3:1–9, 11, 22–26; 5:1, 13), and
3. His method (they accused him of being a “men-pleaser,” Gal. 1:10; see 1 Cor. 9:19–23).

In the minds of these zealots, no one could be saved apart from becoming a proselyte to Judaism through circumcision, and total dedication to the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1–5).

Paul’s shift from “The gospel of the kingdom” to the “gospel of the grace of God” shook the religious world of his day because they did not yet understand the Doctrine of the Mystery, or the great dispensational shift from the Age of Israel to the Church Age.

This letter was probably written from Antioch shortly after Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13–14). The same Judaizers who had come to Antioch and disputed with Paul (Acts 15:1–5), had followed him and sought to pervert his message in Galatia. The Galatian letter has many similarities in its emphasis with the epistle to the Romans.

Three Descriptions of the Galatians’ Defection

The phrase “*turning away*” in Galatians 1:6 speaks of a gradual and continual moving away from the truth of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, apart from works.

1. It was a defection from Christ, the Living Truth, to a lie (1:1–9).
2. It was a defection from the Spirit of God back to the Law (3:1–9). This was essentially a rejection of the New Covenant in favor of the Old Covenant:
 - a. Rejection of new wine in favor of the old,
 - b. Attempt to put new wine in old wineskins, and
 - c. Desire to perpetuate what God had abrogated (Heb. 7:18, 22; 8:6–7, 13; 9:15; 10:9).
3. It was a defection from freedom in Christ to spiritual slavery (5:1–6).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

GALATIANS CHAPTER 1

Paul rebukes the Galatian believers for their defection from the true Gospel (justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, apart from works) to a non-gospel, which sought to mix faith and works as the means of salvation. He uses the history of his own conversion and his independence from the other apostles to show that his apostleship and message were received directly from God, apart from any human interference.

Paul's Greeting: The Essence of the Epistle

Galatians 1:1–5

In these first five verses, Paul sets forth his primary objectives in writing the letter:

1. To establish his apostolic authority, which came not from men but from God,
2. To show he did not stand alone, but had the support of many brethren,
3. To declare that only through the grace of God alone could one find peace, and
4. To clarify for them the essence of the Gospel, in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the only hope of eternal salvation.

1:1 “Paul, an apostle.” The term “*apostle*” originated in the Greek navy, and spoke of what we would call the Admiral—one in charge of a fleet. The root words *apo/stello* refer to “one sent with a commission from highest authority.” **“Not from men nor through man.”** Paul’s apostleship was derived neither from the source of human authority, nor through a human agency, such as a modern ordination board. **“But through Jesus Christ and God the Father.”** Jesus Christ was the agency (Acts 9:1–6), and God the Father was the ultimate source (Gal. 1:15–16; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1). **“Who raised Him from the dead.”** The same power that raised Jesus from the dead was at work in and through Paul’s apostleship (Eph. 3:7, 20).

1:2 “And all the brethren who are with me.” Paul will stress to them that he had the support, not only of many other noted believers, but of the apostles themselves (Gal. 2:6–10). **“To the churches of Galatia.”** This letter is unique in that it was sent, not to a single church, but to a group of churches in the province of Galatia. While it is argued that the letter to the Ephesians was also a circular letter, it is not addressed as such.

1:3 “Grace to you and peace.” While it is true that “*grace*” (*charis*) was the greeting used by the Greeks, and that “*peace*” (*shalom*) was the greeting of the Hebrews, Paul’s usage is more than just a blending of the two. It is the essence of his gospel message. Apart from receiving the unmerited and infinite grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, there can be no peace in the soul of man (Isa. 57:19, 21; Rom. 5:1; 8:6; Acts 10:34–36, 43; Eph. 2:8–9). **“From God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This greeting expresses the desire of both the Father and the Son for these Galatian believers. The same source and agency of grace and peace to these Galatians was the authority behind the apostleship of Paul.

1:4 “Who gave Himself for our sins.” This phrase stresses both the voluntary, self-offering of our Lord, and also its substitutionary nature. He willingly went to the cross for the purpose of bearing the total penalty of our sins (John 10:18; 1 Cor. 15:1–4; 2 Cor. 5:19–21; Heb. 2:9–11). **“That He might deliver us from this present evil age.”** Not only is eternal salvation in view (Col. 1:13), but also present deliverance, which we call sanctification (1 Thess. 1:5–10; 4:3–4; 5:23; Titus 2:14). The Bible speaks of salvation in three phases: justification (initial), sanctification (gradual), and glorification (ultimate). **“According to the will of our God and Father.”** This is the outworking of the eternal plan of God in our lives (John 3:16; Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7).

1:5 “To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Ultimately, all praise and glory go through Jesus Christ, the Agent of our salvation, to the Father, who is the Author of our salvation. Each member of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit, receives praise and glory for the part they play in our salvation. Note that Ephesians 1:3–6 directs praise to the Father; Ephesians 1:7–12 directs praise and glory to Jesus Christ; and Ephesians 1:13–14 is directed to the praise and glory of the Spirit.

GALATIANS 1:6–7

Summary Principles

1. Much of our confusion regarding the Galatian heresy stems from our failure to understand the term “Gospel” as it was understood by the first apostles, and then by the Apostle Paul.
2. The word “gospel” simply means “good news” or “glad tidings.” There are various kinds of good news throughout the Bible. For example, in Matthew, the gospel being proclaimed was “*the gospel of the kingdom*,” meaning in essence that the King had come, and the kingdom was at hand (Matt. 3:1–2; Mark 1:14–15). This was a message specifically to Israel (Matt. 10:5–7) and was based on the covenant God made with Moses. It was never intended as a message for the Gentiles.
3. When the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah/Christ, the message then went out to the Gentiles as the “*gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24; 28:23–31). The “*kingdom*” promised to the Jews was an earthly kingdom. The gospel to the Gentiles also speaks of a kingdom, but it is a heavenly one (1 Cor. 15:24, 50; Col. 1:13; 2 Tim. 4:18).
4. This transition of focus from the nation of Israel to the nations of the Gentiles marks also a transition of dispensations, from the Age of Israel to the Church Age. This age lasts from Pentecost (Acts 2) to the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13–18).
5. Because Paul was uniquely chosen to be the Apostle of the Gentiles, God also gave to him the revelation of the “*mystery*,” that is the nature of this age and the doctrines that pertain to it (Rom. 11:25; 16:25–26; 1 Cor. 2:7–13; Eph. 1:7–10; 3:2–9; 6:19; Col. 1:25–27). The word “*mystery*” signifies that nothing about this present Church Age, or the unique teachings or privileges belonging to it, was ever revealed to the saints in the Old Testament.
6. Such things as the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), His permanent indwelling (John 14:16–18; Col. 1:26–27), and our exalted position in Christ (Col. 3:1–4), were completely unknown to Old Testament saints. This is clear from what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:9–10, that prior to his Spirit-inspired writings “no eye had seen, nor had any ear heard them, nor had they ever entered into any mind of prophet or sage. But these glorious truths have now been revealed to us through His Holy Spirit.”
7. Once we understand these points, it is easy to see how difficult it would have been for even believing Jews to transition from the rites and rituals of Judaism to the freedom of grace and truth that we Gentiles enjoy in Christ (Gal. 5:1, 13).

Paul’s Amazement at the Galatians’ Defection

Galatians 1:6–10

1:6 “I marvel that you are turning away so soon.” It was not just their defection from the true Gospel that amazed Paul, but how quickly it came about. “***Turning away ... from Him who called you.***” The word used for “*turning away*” was used of a soldier who deserted his post, or who fled in the face of the enemy. Their desertion was 1) from Jesus Christ their Savior, 2) defection from His grace to the law, and 3) a departure from the true Gospel. “***To a different gospel.***” The word *heteron* speaks of a “*gospel*” that is totally different in nature than the true Gospel Paul preached.

1:7 “Which is not another.” In other words, it is not a gospel (“good news”) at all. “***But there are some who trouble you and ... pervert the gospel of Christ.***” The work of the false teachers was to distort the true Gospel, resulting in a troubling and disturbance of the faith of the Galatians. To add any work of any kind to the Gospel is to destroy the Gospel (Rom. 4:3–5; Gal. 3:1–3, 10–11; Eph. 2:8–9).

1:8–9 *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven.”* Whether the apostles, or even *“an angel from Heaven,”* were to pervert the Gospel, they would be judged by God. *“Let him be accursed.”* This does not refer to eternal condemnation (John 3:19; Rom. 8:1), since Paul includes himself and the apostles. Those who pervert the Gospel, even though believers, will be judged by God in this life. Note that those who started this heresy were believing Jews (Acts 15:1–5). *“Any other gospel ... than what you received.”* Since these Galatians had *“received”* Paul’s gospel, they had eternal life, even if they followed false teaching (John 1:11–12; 1 Cor. 15:1–2; Eph. 1:13–14). It is possible for believers to be deceived by false teaching. They do not lose their salvation, but they will certainly lose eternal rewards (Heb. 6:9–12; 10:35–36; 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 John 8).

1:10 *“Do I now persuade men, or God?”* The false teachers accused Paul of preaching an easy salvation, to seek the favor of men. Possibly, they used his willingness to ignore non-essential issues as evidence of this charge (1 Cor. 9:19–23). *“If I still pleased men, I would not be the bondservant of Christ.”* Prior to his salvation on the Damascus Road, Paul had sought the approval of man (Gal. 1:13–14; Phil. 3:4–6). Once he became a servant of Jesus Christ, he suffered greatly for his stand on the free and full salvation of God, received by simple childlike faith alone (Matt. 18:3).

Paul’s Gospel Came Directly from Jesus Christ

Galatians 1:11–17

1:11–12 *“The gospel ... preached by me is not according to man.”* In vv. 11 and 12, Paul makes it clear that his gospel message: 1) is not of human origin, 2) that he did not receive it from any man, and 3) at no time since his conversion was he taught this Gospel. *“It came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Paul received his message directly by a revelation/vision from the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ revealed Himself to Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1–9), He also revealed the essence of the gospel message.

1:13–14 *“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism.”* Paul uses his own salvation experience to demonstrate both the authority of the Gospel, and its power to transform lives. *“I persecuted the church ... I advanced in Judaism.”* The more he persecuted the Church, the faster he rose in status among the Jews. *“Being more exceedingly zealous.”* Among the Pharisees, zeal for God is counted as one of the highest virtues. However, zeal without true knowledge has no value (Rom. 10:1–4; Phil. 3:6).

1:15–17 *“But when it pleased God.”* Paul sees his conversion coming at God’s perfect timing. It is worth noting the points made in Paul’s personal testimony:

1. It came at God’s perfect time;
2. It fulfilled the purpose God had for Paul from birth (Jer. 1:5);
3. It was God’s grace that initiated his salvation;
4. Jesus Christ was not just revealed **to** Paul, but **in** him, the work of the Holy Spirit in removing the blinding power of Satan (Psalm 146:8; Isa. 35:5; 42:7; Luke 4:18; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:18–20); and
5. Paul did not go to Jerusalem, or confer with other apostles, but spent three years in Arabia, under the instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“And returned ... to Damascus.” In Acts 9:20–22, we find Paul preaching the Gospel, given to him by Christ in Damascus, long before he met any of the other apostles.

Paul’s Independence from the Other Apostles

Galatians 1:18–24

1:18–19 *“Then after three years I went up ... to see Peter.”* Paul received no new insight from Peter, as is made clear in Galatians 2:6. More than likely, Peter was confronted with the truths of Paul’s gospel. *“James,*

GALATIANS 1:20–2:1

the Lord's brother." Though not one of the original twelve, James was held in high regard, and is linked here with the apostles (1 Cor. 9:5). This first Jerusalem visit is recorded in Acts 9:26–28.

1:20 "Before God, I do not lie." This statement, calling God as his witness, declares his truthfulness in the events he is relating (Rom. 9:1–3).

1:21–22 "I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia." Due to Paul's bold preaching while in Jerusalem, the Jews sought to kill him, so the disciples sent him home to Tarsus (Acts 9:29–31). So, very early on, the Lord's prophecy about the sufferings he would endure was coming true (Acts 9:15–16). **"I was unknown ... to the churches of Judea."** Other than a brief time with Peter, James, and Barnabas (Acts 9:27), Paul was unknown to the Jewish believers in Israel.

1:23–24 "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith." What joy and relief it must have given to the believers in Judea to know that the fierce persecutor of the faith was now preaching it! Paul apparently began a ministry out of Tarsus, and later went with Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:19–26). **"They glorified God in me."** Neither the churches of Judea, nor later the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:7–9), contradicted the gospel Paul was preaching. His point is that though he was independent of all others, he was not in conflict with them.

A Summary of Paul's Apostleship and Gospel Message

1. His authority as the Apostle to the Gentiles came directly from God (Gal. 1:1; Acts 9:15–16).
2. The message that he preached was also given to him directly by Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11–12).
3. His conversion from a zealous Pharisee who persecuted believers, to the gracious apostle and missionary of Christ, confirmed his message (Gal. 1:13–16).
4. He sought neither the approval nor the input of the other apostles regarding his apostleship or his message (Gal. 1:17–19).
5. His message was accepted and confirmed by the churches of Judea (Gal. 1:22–24), later by the apostles (Gal. 2:6–9), and specifically by the experience and vision of Peter in Acts 10–11, which Peter reaffirmed in Acts 15:7–11.
6. Therefore, anyone preaching any message other than salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone was preaching a false gospel (Gal. 1:6–9), and would be judged by God for doing so.

GALATIANS CHAPTER 2

Paul continues to demonstrate that his ministry and message were independent from the other apostles, being given directly from God. In vv. 1–10, he speaks of his visit to Jerusalem, at which time the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church—Peter, James, and John—affirmed his message of salvation by grace through faith alone, apart from circumcision or law-keeping. Then, in vv. 11–21, he shows that he was willing to rebuke Peter publicly in Antioch, because of his compromise with the Judaizers. No grounds existed for anyone to question Paul's authority, message, or ministry.

Paul's Authority and Independence Maintained

Galatians 2:1–10

2:1 "After fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem." Scholars differ on whether this was the famine-relief visit of Acts 11:27–30, or the Jerusalem council meeting of Acts 15:1–29. I am inclined to believe it was the visit of Acts 15 for three reasons:

1. In Acts 11, Paul was still seen as subordinate to Barnabas (note the order of their names in Acts 11:30; 13:1–2, 7).
2. It was not until the first missionary journey that Paul took the lead over Barnabas (Acts 13:9–10, 13).
3. When Paul rebuked Peter in Galatians 2:14–21, he implied that Peter was rebuilding a theological position that had previously been destroyed (Gal. 2:16–18). This would refer to the lesson Peter learned in his vision and experience in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:10–43), which he defended against the charges of the legalists in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1–18), and which he referred to the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:6–11).

Note that Peter's words in Acts 15:11 are very similar to Paul's rebuke in Galatians 2:16. (See summary following v. 10). If we add the three years of Galatians 1:18 to these, we are now in the seventeenth year of Paul's Christian life.

2:2 “*And I went up by revelation.*” The Lord Jesus Christ revealed to him the need to go and face the heresy that taught eternal salvation came by faith plus works. Some suggest that this was the revelation of the coming famine by the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:28) that resulted in the famine-relief mission. However, Paul's vision was specifically related to his defense of the Gospel. **“*Privately to those who were of reputation.*”** Paul first met privately with James, Peter, and John (see v. 9). **“*Lest by any means I ... had run, in vain.*”** Paul did not doubt his message. His concern was that they may have been influenced by the legalistic party. If the original apostles had been influenced by this perversion of the Gospel, Paul's labor among the Gentiles would be undermined (Phil. 2:16).

2:3 “*Not even Titus ... was compelled to be circumcised.*” Titus was proof that salvation came by faith alone, apart from the Law. Paul did have Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3), because of his Jewish heritage (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5), and to give him credibility among the Jews. The issue was not salvation, but the removal of a possible hindrance in his ministry to Jews (1 Cor. 9:19–23).

2:4 “*Because of false brethren secretly brought in.*” This probably refers to the Judaizers who tried to infiltrate the Antioch church (Acts 15:1–5). Paul identified these heretics as 1) working in secret/stealth, 2) spies sent to undermine liberty, and 3) whose ultimate goal was to enforce spiritual bondage on the church. Tragically, there are many such people seeking to undermine the message of grace in our churches today.

2:5 “*To whom we did not yield submission even for an hour.*” This figure of speech is like our saying, “we did not tolerate it for a minute.” **“*That the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*”** Paul was fighting for the pure truth of the Gospel, but he was also fighting for the Galatian believers, who had now defected from that message!

2:6 “*But from those who seemed to be something ... added nothing to me.*” When Paul says, **“*whatever they were,*”** he is referring to the fact that Peter, James, and John had known Jesus and were eyewitnesses of His miracles and messages. His point is that they had no great theological truth to offer that he was unaware of. **“*God shows personal favoritism to no man.*”** Paul did not feel inferior to them in any way, as he sought only to please God and not men (Gal. 1:10).

2:7 “*The gospel for the uncircumcised ... the gospel for the circumcised.*” The gospel message was the same. The fields of service were all that differed. Paul was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15–16; 22:21).

2:8 “*For He who worked effectively in Peter ... also worked effectively in me.*” This is a reference to the Holy Spirit. The word “*worked*” is *energeo*, from which we get “energy/energize.” Only the Holy Spirit can make the gospel message effective in reaching the mind and heart of those who hear it (John 16:8; Gal. 3:5).

GALATIANS 2:9–11

2:9 “Who seemed to be pillars.” Paul acknowledged their standing and authority in the Jerusalem church, but he was not inferior to them. He was focused, not on human “pillars,” but on Christ the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). **“Grace that had been given to me.”** Paul was an apostle by the calling of Jesus Christ, just as they were. **“The right hand of fellowship,”** a handshake of mutual respect and agreement (Acts 13:3, “laid hands on”).

2:10 “That we should remember the poor.” This most likely referred to the poor church in Jerusalem, which Paul often sent support to (Acts 11:27–30; Rom. 15:25–27; 2 Cor. 8:1–15; 9:1–15).

Summary: The Conversion and Spiritual Growth of Paul

1. God’s plan for Paul to be an apostle existed in the mind of God from eternity past. At Paul’s birth, that plan became operative as God worked in his life. However, like every believer, Paul received his spiritual gift at the moment of his salvation (Gal. 1:15–16) These gifts are given for the purpose of service (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7).
2. But, like all of us, Paul had to grow into the maturity (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18) to exercise his gift.
3. From the moment of faith in Christ, Paul was recognized as a **brother** (Acts 9:15–17) and a member of the family of God.
4. Immediately, he became a **witness/evangelist**, proclaiming Jesus Christ to others (Acts 9:20–22).
5. As he continued in growth and dedication, he was recognized as a **disciple**, one dedicated to learning and following Jesus Christ (Acts 9:26–28).
6. After some time, Barnabas found him in Tarsus, and took him to Antioch, where he became a **teacher** (Acts 9:22; 11: 25–26).
7. As the ministry in Antioch grew, Paul (Saul) came to be known among those called **prophets** and **teachers** (Acts 13:1), of which he was the last and least.
8. Then, with Barnabas, Paul (Saul) was sent out as a **missionary** from the church at Antioch (Acts 13:2). Note that Saul (Paul) is mentioned second to Barnabas, signifying a subordinate position.
9. Not until the crisis in Cyprus when Elymas the sorcerer opposed them did Saul/Paul take the lead and rise to full power and authority (Acts 13:1–12).
10. Immediately, the mission party was under the leadership and authority of Paul the **apostle** (Acts 13:13). Remember that the term “apostle” was used in the ancient world of one commissioned with full authority, like an admiral of a fleet of ships. From this point on Paul exercised the full office and authority of an apostle.

Paul Rebukes Peter for His Compromise

Galatians 2:11–21

2:11 “I withstood him to his face.” The word *anistemi* is used in Ephesians 6:13 for taking a stand against the wiles of the devil. It was at the Antioch church where Paul was called to his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1–3). It was the Spirit of God that elevated Paul to the position of authority over the mission team (Acts 13:9–13). Peter’s hypocrisy (see below) demanded confrontation, or the gospel of grace would be compromised. **“He was to be blamed.”** The word “*blamed*” literally means “against knowledge.” Peter sinned against his own conscience in what he did in Antioch.

2:12 *“Before certain men came from James.”* James was considered the leader of the Jerusalem church. Later, James would convince Paul himself into something of a compromise, which resulted in his imprisonment (Acts 21:18–33). *“He would eat with the Gentiles.”* Peter had learned from God, not Paul, that there was to be no distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers (Acts 10:1–35). Peter had even faced accusations for this act and had successfully defended such actions previously (Acts 11:1–18). This meal probably involved the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:42–46; 1 Cor. 11:20–33). *“He withdrew ... fearing those who were of the circumcision.”* Peter compromised under legalistic peer pressure.

2:13 *“The rest of the Jews ... played the hypocrite ... even Barnabas.”* Paul twice refers to hypocrisy, one of the worst religious sins (Matt. 23:13–29). Paul stood alone in defending the Gospel of the grace of God.

2:14 *“They were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel.”* Paul shows here that our conduct, as well as our message, conveys what we truly believe. The conduct of Peter and the others conveyed the message that Jews who were circumcised and kept the law were spiritually superior to the Gentiles. *“I said to Peter before them all.”* This was a public rebuke for a public sin. In confronting Peter, he was rebuking them all. *“If you ... live in the manner of the Gentiles ... why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”* Paul put a spotlight on Peter’s hypocrisy. Peter had violated what God had taught him (Acts 10:28, 34–35), he had violated his own conscience and conviction (Acts 11:16–17), and he had violated the truth of the Gospel (Gal. 2:14). This was a serious breach and Paul boldly confronted it.

2:15 *“We who are Jews ... and not sinners of the Gentiles.”* This is a bit of sarcasm by Paul. Jews commonly referred to Gentiles as *“sinners.”* Paul is not saying that the Jews are not sinners (Rom. 3:23; 4:3), but that they, having the Old Testament, ought to know that salvation is not of works, but by faith (Gen. 15:6).

2:16 *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law.”* As Paul stresses repeatedly, the Old Testament example is Abraham, who was justified by faith (Rom. 4:3–5; Gal. 3:6–11). *“Even we have believed in Christ.”* Paul, Peter, James, and Barnabas had all been saved by grace through faith in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8–9). Three times in this verse, Paul speaks of being justified by faith, and three times he declares that no one is justified by the works of the Law. *“Justified”* is a term that means to be declared righteous by God through faith. It includes the idea of the righteousness of Jesus Christ being imputed by God to the believer (Rom. 4:3, 5, 11; 2 Cor. 5:21).

2:17–18 *“Is Christ therefore a minister of sin?”* Paul is saying to Peter, “If you turned from the law, under which you were cursed (Gal. 3:10), to trust in Jesus Christ, and now turn from grace back to the law, are you suggesting that Christ led you into sin?” Instead, Paul says, *“If I build again those things ... I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”* He is laying the fault fully at Peter’s feet. Peter, by his hypocritical actions, had made himself a transgressor.

2:19 *“For I ... died to the law that I might live to God.”* The Law of Moses can only condemn, it cannot save (Rom. 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:9). The purpose of the Law was to convict us that we are sinners, so as to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:22–26). Once we have trusted in Him, we are no longer under the Law (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 4:4–7).

2:20 *“I have been crucified with Christ.”* By the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:3–6; 1 Cor. 12:13), we share in the finished work of Christ (John 19:30). *“Christ lives in me ... I live by faith.”* Once we are saved by faith, it is the duty of the believer to live by faith (Rom. 1:17; 8:12; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38; 11:6). *“The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* The debt of the believer is not one of compulsion, but rather of love and gratitude (2 Cor. 5:14–15).

2:21 *“I do not set aside the grace of God.”* The word Paul uses for *“set aside,”* was used in the ancient world for the cancellation of a debt. It meant “to cancel out what was due.” It can also mean “to reject.” By their actions, Peter and the others had cancelled out God’s grace in favor of legalism. By His coming, Jesus Christ had cancelled the work of the Law in those who believe (Rom. 3:20–31; Gal. 3:24–25). *“If righteousness*

GALATIANS 3:1–5

comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” The message Peter and the others were implying by their actions was that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was not sufficient for eternal salvation.

GALATIANS CHAPTER 3

Chapters 3 and 4 are one unit, in which Paul argues the case for grace versus law, and faith versus works. I have adapted Dr. Warren W. Wiersbe’s outline for these chapters. In chapter 3, Paul demonstrates the dangers and destructiveness of legalism. He begins by showing that it is a deception of the devil and is contrary to the gospel of grace. He goes on to show that it is contrary to the Abrahamic Covenant, as well as to the Law of Moses. He concludes this chapter by showing that the purpose of the Law was to bring us to Christ in faith. Having achieved this goal, the Law no longer has dominion over us.

Argument from Experience Galatians 3:1–5

3:1 *“Foolish”* means “unthinking, without wisdom.” These Galatians became fools, due to accepting false teaching. *“Bewitched”* means to be “under the spell of an evil spirit.” The ancients called this the “evil eye,” which came from envy. Consider that the persecution of Joseph, Jesus, and Paul all came from envy (Matt. 27:18; Acts 7:9; 13:45; 17:5). The false teachers envied the Galatian believers for their freedom in Christ and sought to bring them into bondage (Gal. 2:4). *“Not obey the truth.”* All obedience to “*the truth*” begins with faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). The Thessalonians show the right response to the truth (1 Thess. 1:5–10; 2:13). Spiritual deception by false teaching results in disobedience to the truth of the Gospel (1 Thess. 2:4–5, 13–14; Gal. 2:5, 14) and denial of the truth they had first received. *“Clearly portrayed”* means publicly proclaimed. It was used of a public notice.

3:2 *“Did you receive the Spirit?”* Here, Paul appeals to their own experience of faith. They did nothing to receive the Spirit of God but believe. Compare this to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:43–45; 11:15–17). *“By the hearing of faith?”* This is how all believers receive eternal life and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:13).

3:3 *“Are you so foolish?”* Paul will now define their foolishness. *“Having begun ... are you now made perfect.”* The words used here speak of the beginning and the ending of a sacrifice. *“Spirit ... flesh”* shows the contrast between a work of God and the work of man. Is it logical to go from the power of God to the energy of the flesh? *“Made perfect”* speaks of attaining spiritual maturity.

3:4 *“Have you suffered ... in vain.”* Some of Paul’s greatest suffering was in Galatia, and many of those believers had shared that suffering (Acts 13:45–51; 14:4–19; 2 Tim. 3:10–11).

3:5 *“He who supplies the Spirit.”* God the Father sends His Spirit to indwell all who believe (Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13–14). The word “*supplies*” was used of the provision wealthy citizens would make for public entertainment, or for supporting a war effort, or of the lavish provision a husband would make for his beloved wife. It carries the idea of abundant supply, without restraint. *“Works miracles among you.”* This would refer primarily to miracles worked among them by the Apostle Paul (Acts 14:3, 8–11). *“Works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”* No honest believer could claim that God’s mighty deeds were dependent on their works or efforts. All faith comes by hearing and receiving the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

Summary: Spiritual contrasts (vv. 1–5)

1. Truth vs. error (v. 1).
2. Grace vs. law (v. 2).

3. Spirit vs. flesh (v. 3).
4. Faith vs. works (v. 5).

Argument from Scripture Galatians 3:6–14

3:6 “Abraham ‘believed God.’” Here, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, which he also uses in Romans 4:3. **“It [faith] was accounted to him for righteousness.”** Abraham is the standard in the Bible for how all who believe are declared righteous before God. It is always by faith, never by works (Rom. 4:3–5; Eph. 2:8–9)

3:7 “Those ... of faith are sons of Abraham.” The true “Seed” of Abraham is Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16), and those who believe in Him (Matt. 3:9; John 8:39; Rom. 2:28–29; 9:6–8; Gal. 3:26). This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (John 3:3, 7).

3:8 “And the Scripture, foreseeing.” Here, Paul speaks of the prophetic nature of the Word of God as an expression of the omniscience, or all-knowing nature of God. **“Justify the [nations] Gentiles by faith.”** God’s plan from the beginning was to offer salvation to all mankind on the basis of faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:16; Matt. 28:19). **“In you all the nations shall be blessed.”** This “good news” was given repeatedly to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18).

3:9 “Those who are of faith.” This refers to all who believe in Jesus Christ. **“Are blessed with believing Abraham.”** This is why Paul calls Abraham “The father of all those who believe” (Rom. 4:11), and “the father of us all” (Rom. 4:16). God’s blessings of eternal life and inheritance in His kingdom belong to all who receive Jesus Christ by faith.

3:10 “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things ... to do them.” This is a quote from Deuteronomy 27:26. The Law declares all sinners to be under a curse. Paul’s point here is the same as that of James (James 2:10). All who want to be justified by the Law must keep the whole Law. If you fail in one point, you are condemned as a sinner (Rom. 3:23; 1 Tim. 1:9–10). Since all men fall short of perfect obedience to the Law (Rom. 3:10–18, 23), our only hope of eternal salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1–11; 6:23). There are three things the law cannot do:

1. it cannot save,
2. it cannot make one spiritual, and
3. it cannot bring us to spiritual maturity.

3:11 “No one is justified by the law in the sight of God.” This is the same point Paul made to Peter in Galatians 2:16. **“The just shall live by faith.”** The way of salvation is declared in Habakkuk 2:4 (Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38). It is by faith, and faith alone!

3:12 “The law is not of faith.” God did not give the Law to be believed in, but to be obeyed, which no man but Christ ever did. **“The man who does them shall live by them.”** This quote from Leviticus 18:5 shows that salvation could only come by the Law if one keeps the whole Law (Lev. 18:5; Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 20:11). The purpose of the Law was never to save us, but to show us that all are sinners in need of a Savior (Gal. 3:24).

3:13 “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.” This He did by bearing “the curse” in our place (2 Cor. 5:21). **“Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”** This quote from Deuteronomy 21:23 anticipates Christ, as our substitute, hanging on the cross in place of all sinful mankind. Redemption was illustrated at the first Passover by the slaying of the lamb, and the placing of its blood on the doorposts (Exod. 12:3–7). Then the lamb was eaten, as a symbol of faith, just as we do with the Lord’s Table (Matt. 26:26–28; John 6:54–56; 1 Cor. 11:23–26).

GALATIANS 3:14–18

3:14 “The blessing of Abraham.” The “*blessing of Abraham*” is to be declared righteous before God, and to have an eternal inheritance in His kingdom (Heb. 11:8–10; 1 Pet. 1:4–5). “***The promise of the Spirit through faith.***” All who believe in Jesus Christ receive the gift of the indwelling of the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13–14).

Summary: Abraham the Example

1. Abraham is Paul’s favorite example from the Old Testament of God’s way of salvation by simple faith alone (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6).
2. Another of Paul’s favorite Old Testament passages is quoted in v. 11, “*The just shall live by faith*” (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38).
3. In Hebrews, the author (I believe it to be Paul), declares that “*without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Heb. 11:6).
4. He then uses Abraham as one of the great Old Testament examples of a believer who lived by faith (Heb. 11:8–19).
5. Like all of us, Abraham had to grow in his faith. He is a great example to each of us as to how we should live (Rom. 4:16–25).

Argument from Human Law

Galatians 3:15–18

3:15 “Brethren.” Despite their deception and defection from faith, Paul knows these are true believers. “***In the manner of men.***” That is, according to even normal human custom, covenants should not be tampered with or violated. “***No one annuls or adds to it.***” Once a legal covenant has been made, no one can alter it.

3:16 “To Abraham and his Seed.” Paul stresses that the word used in the Old Testament passages is singular (Heb. 11:17–18). “***To your Seed, who is Christ.***” The promise to Abraham would be confirmed in Jesus Christ—not the nation of Israel.

3:17 “The law ... four hundred and thirty years later.” This refers to the time Israel was in Egypt (Exod. 12:40–41). “***Cannot annul the covenant.***” The covenant of the Law, given through Moses, cannot make the Abrahamic Covenant void. “***That was confirmed before by God in Christ.***” All the promises of God to Abraham were dependent on the coming redemption through the Lord Jesus (Rom. 4:13).

3:18 “The inheritance ... God gave it to Abraham by promise.” Paul’s point is that you cannot mix Law and promise. Law demands work, promise can only be received by faith. “***The inheritance***” belongs to all who are children of God, and this inheritance involves sonship, life, and eternal possessions (Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 3:26, 29).

Summary: Inheritance

1. All who believe in Jesus Christ are heirs of His promises and are kept secure by His grace (John 10:28; 1 Pet. 1:4–5).
2. But while all believers share in the inheritance of children, those who are faithful will receive extra rewards and inheritance. Note that in Romans 8:16–17, all children are heirs, but only if “*we suffer with Him*” are we “*joint heirs with Christ.*” We do this by entrusting ourselves to Him in all our sufferings (James 1:2–4, 12; 1 Pet. 2:21–23; 4:19).

3. The greater our growth and faithfulness, the greater will be our eternal reward in Heaven (Matt. 6:20–21; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27).
4. The greatest rewards are spoken of as “crowns” and are given to those who are “faithful to the end” (2 Tim. 4:6–8; James 1:12; Rev. 2:10).
5. Each of us should live so as to be unashamed at the coming of our Lord (1 John 2:28–29; 2 Cor. 5:10).
6. When we fail, as all of us do, the grace of God provides us a way of cleansing through confession and correction, so that we can continue to aim for the prize of His approval and reward (Phil. 3:12–14; 2 Tim. 2:20–21; 1 John. 1:9; 3:1–3).
7. Keeping our eyes on the prize of eternal reward will help us to stay strong in faith and make wise decisions in life (Heb. 11:24–26).

Law and Faith Reconciled in Christ

Galatians 3:19–29

3:19 *“What purpose then does the law serve?”* This is a logical question if the Law was never intended to save us. *“It was added because of transgressions.”* The role of the Law is to magnify the sinfulness of sin (Rom. 5:20; 1 Tim. 1:9–10), *“till the Seed should come.”* The Law was only in force to Israel, until the coming of Christ. It was never given to the Gentiles (Rom. 2:14; Acts 15:24). *“Appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.”* Unlike God’s promises to Abraham, the Law came through angels to Moses (Acts 7:37–38; Heb. 2:2). The work of the Law then was to reveal sin, and point to the Savior.

3:20 *“Now a mediator does not mediate for one only.”* Moses was the mediator of a conditional covenant between God and Israel. The condition of the covenant was obedience in all things (Exod. 19:3–8), to which all Israel agreed. *“But God is one.”* Not only is this a fundamental truth to the Jewish people (Deut. 6:4; James 2:19), but it is also a critical point in Paul’s argument. When God made the promise to Abraham, there was no mediator. The covenant was unconditional, made within the Godhead. When God said, *“I will,”* with no conditions, it was a covenant with Himself (Gen. 12:1–3; 17:2–8). This puts the Abrahamic Covenant on a much higher plane than the covenant of the Law. Note: In v. 17, Paul said it was *“confirmed before by God in Christ,”* thus, under the New Covenant, Jesus Christ becomes the Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:13–15; 12:22–24). Jesus is the Mediator that Job cried out for in Job 9:32–33, and the Redeemer He longed for in Job 19:25–27!

3:21 *“Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not!”* Paul anticipates anyone taking a false conclusion from his arguments. *“If ... a law ... could have given life.”* If any possible way for salvation could have come through a law, God would have given such a law. It would have saved Jesus Christ from the cross. There was simply no other way for our sins to be forgiven and for us to receive the gift of eternal life (Heb. 9:22; 10:1–7). The Law of Moses is not contrary to grace, but it is not grace! Paul clearly shows us in Romans 8:1–4 that the weakness of the Law is our own sinful nature. We cannot measure up to the holiness of the Law!

3:22 *“The Scripture has confined all under sin.”* Because the Law shows all men to be sinners (Rom. 3:10–18, 23; 5:12; 6:23). *“The promise by faith in Jesus Christ”* is offered to all men. Because all are sinners, all may be saved by grace (Rom. 4:16; 5:12, 18; 11:32).

3:23–24 *“We were kept under guard by the law ... the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ.”* Here, Paul shows two roles of the Law: one was to restrain the sinful passions of men; the other was to guide and point men to faith in Jesus. *“Before faith came.”* No one comes to faith until they realize they are a helpless and

GALATIANS 3:25–29

condemned sinner. The work of the Law was to make that point clear. Men need to hear the bad news, that all are sinners, before they will receive the good news, that Jesus Christ saves sinners (1 Tim. 1:15)!

3:25 “We are no longer under a tutor.” Believers living in the Church Age are free from the Law for two reasons. First, because we are under the New Covenant—under a new High Priest (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–28; Matt. 26:26–29; Heb. 7:12, 18, 22; 8:13; 10:9). Secondly, because we are now under the law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:1–4; 13:8–10; Gal. 5:18).

3:26 “Through faith in Jesus Christ.” This is the key thought and basis of all of Paul’s theology. *“Sons of God.”* Only by faith are we born into the family of God (John 1:12–13; Gal. 4:7).

3:27 “Baptized into Christ.” This is not speaking of water baptism, for if it were, then we are not saved by faith alone (vv. 2, 5, 6, 8, 11, 14, 22, 24, 26). The baptism spoken of here is the one that actually unites us with Christ—the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:3–5), which occurs at the moment we believe. *“Have put on Christ.”* We are clothed in His righteousness (Rev. 7:14).

3:28 “You are all one in Christ.” God makes no distinctions between those who trust in Christ—all have the same salvation, the same spiritual provisions, and the same spiritual opportunities. God’s plan for each of us is the same—to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). However, we are all gifted for different tasks. (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–31).

3:29 Since Jesus Christ is the promised “Seed,” *“if you are Christ’s,”* then you are also *“Abraham’s seed.”* This means that all who believe are *“heirs according to the promise.”* What an amazing thing to consider, that we share in God’s promise to Abraham! Therefore, we should also be looking for that city, *“Whose builder and maker is God”* (Heb. 11:10).

Summary: Law and Grace Reconciled

1. It is evident that the Law is not grace, and grace is not the Law (Rom. 4:14–16; 11:6; Gal. 3:12).
2. The Law declares all to be sinners (Rom. 3:10–18, 23; 5:12; Gal. 3:10; 1 Tim. 1:9–10), but grace declares all who believe to be righteous (Rom. 4:3; 5:8–9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:6, 11).
3. And yet, Paul declares that the Law is not contrary to the grace and promises of God (Gal. 3:21; Rom. 7:7, 12, 14, 22). It actually acts as a subordinate co-worker, to point men to Christ (Gal. 3:23–24).
4. Once the work of the Law is done, convicting us of sin and pointing us to Christ, we are no longer under the Law (Rom. 6:14; 7:4–6; Gal. 3:25–26).
5. Jesus Christ reconciles Law and grace by His life and His cross. In His life, He fulfilled the Law perfectly. On the cross, He paid the penalty for all the sins of mankind (1 John 2:2). Thus, the Law is satisfied both in its demand for righteousness and in its demand for judgment for sin. Now, Jesus Christ is able to offer His own righteousness to every sinner on the basis of faith alone (2 Cor. 5:21). Why is faith so important? *“He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true”* (John 3:33). To believe in Christ is to declare God alone to be true and, therefore, the only One to be trusted. How great is the grace of God!

GALATIANS CHAPTER 4

As in the last chapter, Paul offers three arguments, designed to free the deceived Galatians from their bondage to Jewish, legal slavery. I will continue to use an adapted outline from Dr. Warren Wiersbe.

A Dispensational Argument

Galatians 4:1–11

4:1 *“The heir ... does not differ ... from a slave.”* In Jewish custom, a minor, *“though he is master of all,”* did not assume his rightful place until he had gone through the training of tutors. This tutelage had been supplied to Israel under the guardianship of the Law of Moses (Gal. 3:23–24). But now the Age of the Law had passed, and the time had come to assume full manhood.

4:2 *“Until the time appointed by the father.”* God the Father had now determined that it was time for the Age of the Law to pass, and for mankind to enter into the full inheritance found only by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26–28).

4:3 *“Even so we ... were in bondage under the elements of the world.”* Though only the Jews were in bondage to the Law, Gentiles also held to their rules and the rituals designed to make them acceptable to whatever god or gods they worshipped (Col. 2:8). The time had now come for both to be set free from these chains and to find full freedom in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 12:2; Gal. 5:1).

4:4 *“The fullness of time”* refers to God’s perfect timing to bring the Savior into the world. *“Born of a woman.”* Jesus was the fulfillment of the age-old promise of the “Seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14). *“Born under the law.”* Jesus came into the world as a Jewish man, subject to the Law of Moses, which He alone could keep to the full measure of obedience.

4:5 *“To redeem those who were under the law.”* Since the Law condemns all who are sinners (Rom. 3:23; 1 Tim. 1:8–10), Jesus came to redeem mankind from being under its condemnation. He alone could pay the price/penalty for the sins of the world, because He was the *“Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29). *“That we might receive the adoption as sons.”* All those who believe in Jesus Christ are adopted into the family of God, having all the rights and privileges of adult sons (Rom. 8:15–17; Eph. 1:5).

4:6 *“Because you are sons,”* that is, by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26). *“God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son.”* The coming of the Spirit of God to indwell every believer is proof that we are now under the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–28; Matt. 26:26–29; John 14:16–18; Heb. 10:9; 14–17). *“Abba, Father!”* Jesus used this very cry when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36).

4:7 *“If a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”* Every child of God has an eternal inheritance from God (1 Pet. 1:4–5). We can never lose this inheritance, but we can add to it by faithful living and service to God (Matt. 6:19–21; 2 Tim. 4:6–8; James 1:12).

4:8 *“When you did not know God.”* What was true of the Jews, being under the Law, was also true of Gentiles, who served pagan gods and idols (Rom. 1:22–23; Eph. 2:11–12). They were slaves to rules, rituals, and religious regulations.

4:9 *“After you have known God ... are known by God.”* Not until we come to know God through faith in Jesus does He know us as His children. *“How ... you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements ... to be in bondage?”* Having entered into the privilege of adult sons of God, they now want to return to the bondage from which Jesus Christ has freed them. By turning back to the Law, they were going back into slavery. Because the Law was unable to save, it had been set aside by the Spirit (Rom. 8:1–4; Heb. 7:18; 8:13; 10:8–10).

GALATIANS 4:10–20

4:10 *“You observe days ... months ... seasons ... years.”* They had begun to observe the Jewish calendar of feasts and festivals (Col. 2:16), things which were only a shadow of Christ’s coming (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1).

4:11 *“I am afraid ... lest I have labored ... in vain.”* He is not afraid regarding their salvation, which was secure in Christ (Gal. 3:26, 29; 4:28, 31). His fear is that they are throwing away great eternal reward (Matt. 5:12; 6:19–20; Luke 6:35; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; Col. 2:18; Rev. 22:12). Paul not only wanted them to be eternally saved, but also to live faithful lives.

Paul’s Personal Argument Galatians 4:12–20

4:12 *“Brethren, I urge you to become like me.”* Paul’s use of the word *“brethren”* shows that he has no doubts about their standing in Christ. He urges them to become imitators of his life of faith (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1). *“For I became like you.”* He had left behind his life as a Pharisee in order to pursue a life of faith in Christ (Phil. 3:7–14). When he came to them, he adapted himself to their customs and culture (1 Cor. 9:19–23). *“You have not injured me at all.”* The harm done by their defection to the Law was not an injury to Paul, but to their own spiritual lives.

4:13 *“Because of physical infirmity.”* Some illness or injury, not recorded in Acts, kept him from traveling on, so he stayed, and preached the Gospel to the Galatians.

4:14 *“My trial ... you did not despise.”* Though Paul preached to them in illness, yet they received him with kindness. *“As an angel of God ... as Christ Jesus.”* Their reception of him was enthusiastic and full of honor and respect.

4:15 *“If possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.”* This statement, along with Paul’s large handwriting (Gal. 6:11), has led many to suggest that Paul’s *“thorn in the flesh”* (2 Cor 12:7–8) was failing eyesight. However, it was common among Greeks to use this figure of speech as if saying, “You would give up anything for me.”

4:16 *“Have I ... become your enemy?”* The love they showed at first for Paul had now turned to hostility. *“Because I tell you the truth?”* The truth not only sets us free (John 8:32), but it can also make people angry. This is because the truth cannot compromise with what is untrue or evil.

4:17 *“They zealously court you.”* False teachers will use flattery and deception to win followers. Here, they are seeking to *“exclude”* or separate these Galatians from Paul, so that they will *“be zealous”* to follow these teachers of the law.

4:18 *“It is good to be zealous in a good thing.”* When it comes to the truth of God’s Word, the problem is never zeal, but rather zeal without knowledge (Rom. 10:1–4). We Christians should be zealous to serve Jesus Christ in every way (Titus 2:14)!

4:19 *“My little children.”* Paul grieves over them like a father or mother would their wayward children. *“I labor in birth ... until Christ is formed in you.”* Though he had brought them to faith in Christ, now he was suffering birth-pang like pain, to see them grow up to spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness.

4:20 *“I have doubts about you.”* Again, these doubts were not about their salvation, which he is sure of (Gal. 3:26, 29; 4:6). His doubts are whether they are standing firm in the grace of God or have been totally led astray by the false teachers. In Galatians 5:1–9, he details some of the spiritual damage that can result from false teaching; but he will also express his confidence that their faith will prevail (Gal. 5:10).

An Allegorical Argument
Galatians 4:21–31

4:21 *“You who desire to be under the law.”* He is speaking to those who would willingly surrender Christian freedom (Gal. 5:1, 13) for slavery to the Law. *“Do you not hear the law?”* Paul is referring here, not to the Law of Moses, but to the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament, written by Moses. The story he refers to is in Genesis chapters 16–17 and 21.

4:22–23 *“Bondwoman ... freewoman.”* These references are to Hagar and Sarah. *“According to the flesh ... through promise.”* That is, Ishmael came by human works, but Isaac was a miracle birth according to the promise and power of God (Gen. 17:15–21; 21:1–12; Rom. 4:16–21; Heb. 11:11).

4:24–25 *“Which things are symbolic.”* The word Paul uses here is *allegoreo*, from which we get “allegory.” Paul was a trained rabbi and knew the various uses of allegorical interpretation. Some disregarded the importance of the historical account, claiming that it was only a “parable” to be interpreted (the Alexandrian method). This gave rise to endless, fanciful, and unbiblical interpretations. Paul is taking the story as historically true and is using it to illustrate a spiritual truth. This method of interpretation was used in Antioch and was faithful to Scripture. *“Two covenants ... Mount Sinai ... Jerusalem.”* Paul is contrasting the covenant of the Law, given at Mount Sinai, and the Abrahamic Covenant, which is fulfilled in the New Covenant, given by the Lord Jesus Christ (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–28; Matt. 26:26–29; Heb. 7:22; 8:6, 13; 10:9; 14–17). Paul is simply saying that Hagar illustrates those under the Law, because she was a slave, and Ishmael was the result of a work of the flesh (human effort). Sarah, however, illustrates the Abrahamic Covenant, which is based on God’s promise, fulfilled by His power.

4:26 The reference to *“Jerusalem above”* looks forward to the city Abraham waited for—the New Jerusalem (Heb. 11:9–10; Rev. 21:1–7).

4:27 *“Rejoice, O barren.”* This quote from Isaiah 54:1 anticipates the joys of those who, like Sarah (Heb. 11:11) trust in the faithfulness of God. We should note that Isaiah 54 follows the amazing chapter of Isaiah 53, where Isaiah describes the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the basis of our faith and rejoicing.

4:28 *“Now we, brethren ... are children of promise.”* The miraculous birth of Isaac is a picture of the supernatural, “new birth,” called “regeneration,” in those who believe in Christ (John 3:3, 7; Titus 3:5). When we believe in the promise of eternal life through Christ, we become children of that promise (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Rom. 3:24–26; 9:6–8; 1 John 3:1–2).

4:29 *“He who was born according to the flesh.”* This refers to Ishmael, who was born not only by natural means, but in an attempt by human effort to aid in the fulfillment of the plan of God (Genesis 16). *“Persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit.”* This incident occurred in Genesis 21:8–12, when Ishmael mocked/scorned Isaac. This illustration should not be used to argue that Hagar and Ishmael were unbelievers, as both appear to have come to faith (Gen. 16:7–14; 21:15–21). Instead, Paul is using historical events as a parable to illustrate spiritual truths.

4:30 *“What does the Scripture say?”* The words of Sarah to Abraham, in Genesis 21:10, were affirmed by God as the right course of action for Abraham to take. The phrase *“shall not be heir”* introduces the idea of eternal inheritance (see Gal. 3:18; 4:1, 7), which Paul will develop further in chapters 5–6.

4:31 *“So then, brethren.”* Paul now reaches the conclusion of all of his arguments in chapters 3–4, that those who seek to be justified by works are *“children of the bondwoman,”* and, therefore, are slaves, while those who receive justification before God on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ are children *“of the free.”* This introduces the subject of spiritual freedom developed in Galatians 5:1, 13.

GALATIANS 5:1–2

Six Arguments Against Works-Salvation

Again, these points are based on an adaptation from the outline of these chapters by Warren W. Wiersbe.

1. The argument from experience (Gal. 3:1–5). The Galatians came to Christ by simple faith and received the indwelling Holy Spirit. Not only could the Law not save them, but also, it could not bring them to spiritual maturity.
2. The argument from Scripture (Gal. 3:4–14). As in Romans 4:3–5, Paul uses Abraham as the example for justification by faith alone.
3. The argument from human law (Gal. 3:15–29). Once a covenant or legal agreement is made, it cannot be undone or amended by a later covenant. Therefore, the covenant of the Law (works) cannot annul God's covenant with Abraham (faith). In Galatians 3:19–29, Paul reconciles the purpose of the Law in its role leading to faith in Jesus Christ.
4. The dispensational argument (Gal. 4:1–11). Building on the role of the Law as guardian and tutor (Gal. 3:23–29), Paul uses the custom of child-training in the ancient world, before the son could fully enter into his rights of inheritance. The world before Christ came was like a minor under the care of a guardian. After the coming of Christ, anyone who will believe can enter into the sonship and inheritance of God.
5. The personal/compassionate argument (Gal. 4:12–20). Paul pleads with them here, as a father to his child, to remember the sense of blessing they had when he first came to them. How could they forsake their spiritual father in favor of the legalists and false teachers who were influencing them?
6. The allegorical argument (Gal. 4:21–31). The contrast in the manner of birth between Isaac and Ishmael, and the position of Sarah as a free woman, versus Hagar as a slave woman, provides a parable of the contrast between human works and simple faith as the way to find approval from God.

GALATIANS CHAPTER 5

This chapter begins the practical section, which closes the book. Paul always teaches that what we know and believe should affect our life and conduct. The keys to this section are freedom/liberty (5:1, 13), walking in the Spirit (5:16), being led by the Spirit (5:18), and the fruit of the Spirit (5:22–23).

Freedom versus Bondage

Galatians 5:1–15

5:1 “Stand fast ... in the liberty ... Christ has made us free.” The finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross has liberated all who believe from any system of works or merit (Rom. 4:1–4). All works and fruit of the Spirit are the product of faith, and the result of freedom from sin (Gal. 2:20; 5:22–23; Eph. 4:1; 5:1–2, 8). For a believer to turn back to the Law as a way of life is to submit to **“a yoke of bondage.”**

5:2 “Christ will profit you nothing.” From the moment any believer chooses to live by Law/works, all spiritual assets are neutralized. This is because works are contrary to faith, Law is contrary to grace, and the flesh is contrary to the Spirit. The believer who chooses the path of legalism forfeits spiritual power and illumination from God's Word (Eph. 4:17–19; Col. 2:8, 16, 18; Heb. 3:12–19).

5:3 “He is a debtor to keep the whole law.” One cannot pick and choose which parts of the Law to uphold. Either you keep the whole Law, or you stand condemned as a transgressor of the Law (Acts 15:1, 5; Rom. 2:25; James 2:10–11). As believers, we are under the “royal law,” which is the “law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:8, 12).

5:4 “You have become estranged from Christ ... you have fallen from grace.” These statements in no way speak of a Christian losing salvation/eternal life. Rather, he is speaking of loss of abiding/fellowship with Christ (John 15:4–5, 7; 1 John 1:7). Turning from grace to Law brings loss of joy, peace, and power in the Christian life (Heb. 5:12–14; 12:12–15).

5:5 “We through the Spirit.” For the believer living in the Church Age, reliance on the indwelling Holy Spirit is the key to the spiritual life. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and makes it alive in our lives (Gal. 2:20; 4:19). I take the “hope of righteousness” to include not only the future righteous reign of Jesus Christ on this earth in His kingdom, but also our desire to live a righteous life (Rom. 5:1–5; 8:4–11; Col. 1:27).

5:6 “In Christ Jesus.” Only those who have trusted in Jesus Christ are “in Christ.” **“Faith working through love.”** Our faith in Christ makes us a recipient of the love of God (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9–11, 19). This love creates in us a love for those around us (John 13:34–35; 2 Cor 5:14–15; Gal. 5:22–23; 1 John 3:16–19).

5:7 “You ran well.” They began their Christian lives by faith, but now they had stumbled over the obstacle of the Law. **“Who hindered you from obeying the truth?”** Those false teachers who were promoting Law-keeping were at fault for side-tracking them from the truth of the Gospel. See Hebrews 12:1–3.

5:8 “This persuasion ... not ... from Him who calls you.” The teachings of these Judaizers/legalists were not from God. Ultimately, their teachings were of the devil in an attempt to keep them from powerful witness and service to God, which would result in great eternal reward (Matt. 6:19–21; 2 Tim. 4:6–8).

5:9 “A little leaven.” Here, leaven is a symbol for the permeating and spreading power of evil. What may seem like a small and harmless departure from the truth of God’s Word will, in time, corrupt a life or a church.

5:10 “I have confidence in you, in the Lord.” Paul’s confidence is not in the Galatians (Gal. 4:19–20), but in the power of God, by His Spirit, to deliver them from deceptive, false teaching. **“He ... shall bear his judgment.”** God would bring judgment on the false teacher, both now in time, and in the future judgment (Matt. 7:15–23).

5:11 “Then the offense of the cross has ceased.” Someone apparently accused Paul of still teaching the necessity of circumcision. But if Paul still taught that circumcision was essential to salvation, as he had once thought, he would not suffer persecution. The message of the cross, which teaches the all-sufficiency of God’s grace for sinners, is offensive to those who love the Law and works (Luke 18:13 cf. 2 Cor. 3:5). The message of salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8) is an offense to the pride and arrogance of man.

5:12 “I could wish ... would even cut themselves off!” If the false teachers are so fond of physical circumcision, why not go all the way and castrate themselves? This practice was actually used by the pagan religions of Paul’s day, as a sign of total dedication.

5:13 “You, brethren, have been called to liberty.” It is evident that there is no doubt in Paul’s mind that these Galatians were believers. Their struggle was not over the way of salvation, but rather how one is to be spiritual. They thought that having begun by faith, they should now reach maturity by works (Gal. 3:3). The “liberty” Paul speaks of refers to the power of the indwelling Spirit to bear fruit in our lives (vv. 22–23), not by our efforts, but by our faith. **“Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.”** Christian liberty is not freedom to sin, but freedom from sin (1 Cor. 8:9; 1 Pet. 2:16). **“Through love serve one another.”** The true way to reflect Jesus Christ in our lives is to imitate His love and servant attitude (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27; John 13:3–5, 13–15; 1 Cor. 9:19; 11:1; Phil. 2:7).

GALATIANS 5:14–23

5:14 *“All the law is fulfilled in one word.”* To love God above all and to love our neighbor as ourselves, fulfills all the Law (Matt. 7:12; 22:37–40; Rom. 13:9–10). This is *“the law of Christ”* (Gal. 6:2), *“the law of liberty”* (James 1:25; 2:12), and *“the royal law”* (James 2:8). Following the way of grace produces humility and a servant-mentality. Meanwhile, following the way of Law-keeping produces arrogance, bitterness, and division.

5:15 *“If you bite and devour one another.”* The end result of legalism is competition and self-promotion. Those who seek to keep the Law exalt themselves, while they judge others (Luke 18:9–14). *“Beware lest you be consumed by one another!”* Once legalism takes hold in a church, division and conflict will spread until the whole church is destroyed!

The Victory of the Holy Spirit over the Flesh

Galatians 5:16–26

5:16 *“Walk in the Spirit.”* To *“walk in the Spirit”* means to live by faith and dependence on the Spirit to do what He came to do. He is our Helper (John 14:16), our Teacher (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:10), our support in witnessing (John 15:26–27), the source of power for a new life (Rom. 7:6; 8:4) and our aid in prayer (Rom. 8:26–27). He gives us spiritual gifts for service (1 Cor. 12:4–11) and bears spiritual fruit in our lives (Gal. 5:22–23). He is always at work to transform us into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:17–18). *“You shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”* It is not possible to be under the control of the Holy Spirit and the old sinful nature at the same time. As believers, we must choose to live by faith, under the filling and control of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 5:18), or to choose to be carnal, and live as unsaved men (1 Cor. 3:1–3; Heb. 5:13). I will give a summary of walking in the Spirit at the end of this chapter.

5:17 *“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit.”* Every believer experiences this inner conflict between the sinful nature and the new nature, indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:14–25). *“These are contrary to one another.”* There can be no peace between the sin nature and the Holy Spirit, and each strives for dominance in the life of the believer. *“You do not do the things that you wish.”* Paul makes this very point in Romans 7:19–23. The only solution is when the believer chooses to submit to the reign of the Spirit within. Since the Holy Spirit is the *“Spirit of truth”* (John 4:24; 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), He leads us to study God’s Word and enables us to apply it in our lives.

5:18 *“If you are led by the Spirit.”* As stated above, the Spirit leads us into the Word of God as our guide for what we believe and how we ought to live. By faith, we rely on the Spirit to empower us to live faithful lives. *“You are not under the law.”* The purpose of the Law is to condemn (Gal. 3:10; 1 Tim. 1:9–10). Jesus Christ came not to condemn, but to justify and purify (John 3:17–19; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21).

5:19–21 *“Now the works of the flesh are evident.”* They are *“evident,”* both because they violate the law of God and of conscience (Rom. 2:14–15; 3:10–18), and because they are blatantly flaunted by this world. *“Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* Believers who live in these sins will lose eternal rewards (1 Cor. 3:11–15; Rev. 3:11). God intervenes in the life of a sinning believer with discipline, which will either correct them, or in extreme cases, remove them by premature death (Prov. 3:1–2; Heb. 12:3–11; Acts 5:1–10; 1 John 5:16–17). The unsaved world demonstrates, by the lifestyle mentioned here, that they are not *“Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”* (Gal. 3:29). See Note on Galatians 6:8.

5:22–23 *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love.”* All the “works of the flesh” violate the law of love (Matt. 22:37–40; Rom. 13:9–10; Gal. 5:6, 13–14). Here, Paul contrasts “works” with *“fruit.”* In John 15:1–5, John explains that fruit is a **result** of the *“branch,”* “abiding” *“in the vine.”* The Spirit Himself produces the *“fruit”* as a result of a living/vital relationship to Jesus Christ—who is the Seed (Gen. 3:15), the Root (Rev. 22:16), and the Vine (John 15:1). In this passage, the other eight qualities are expressions of love in the character and conduct of the growing believer. Paul also defines love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. These qualities are all a picture of the perfect character of the Lord Jesus Christ in His earthly life. *“Against such there is no law.”* Although earthly powers

will persecute believers who reflect these qualities, no human law can overrule the law of God, which is “*the law of Christ*” (Gal. 6:2).

5:24 “And those who are Christ’s.” This refers to every believer in Jesus Christ. **“Have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”** In a very real sense, every child of God has been united with Christ in His crucifixion, which was God’s judgment on all sin (Rom. 6:3–6). The choice facing every believer each day is whether we will choose to live by faith, in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20). The next two verses make it clear that this is a decision we must make (Phil. 3:10).

5:25–26 “If we live in the Spirit.” This statement is true of everyone who has trusted in Jesus Christ. We share in the resurrection life of Christ because of the work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). **“Let us also walk in the Spirit.”** The first statement speaks of our **position** in Christ. The second is an exhortation regarding our **practice**. The daily challenge of every believer is whether or not we will live up to our true identity in Christ. The means of accomplishing this is given in Romans 8:4–7. We must learn to have a spiritual mindset—a daily discipline of spiritual focus and thinking. **“Let us not become conceited ... provoking ... envying one another.”** Paul would not include this warning if it were not possible for Christians to fall into these sins. In v. 25, we have the exhortation to spiritual living. In v. 26 we have a prohibition against self-centered, carnal living.

Summary: Walking in the Spirit

The idea of walking in the Spirit is simply a way of saying that we are to live by faith. The following examples and illustrations will clarify what a spiritual walk or lifestyle should look like, and what it should not include.

1. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). The context (**vv. 25–26**) shows that sin in the life of a believer is a cause of grief to the Spirit of God.
2. Do not quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). Again, the preceding context (**vv. 11–18**) gives a list of things the Spirit wants to produce in our lives. If we resist, or are indifferent and apathetic to spiritual growth, the Spirit is quenched and will be unable to produce Christ-likeness in us.
3. Walk in or by means of the Spirit (**vv. 16, 25**). This is simply to live by faith, sensitive to the leading of the Spirit (**v. 18**; Rom. 8:14;).
4. Be filled with, or by means of, the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). This simply implies that we should be in the habit of daily submission to the Spirit of God, allowing Him control over our lives. It is the life of obedient fellowship (1 John 1:7). When we fail, sin should be confessed to God (1 John 1:9), and correction made in our attitude and life, so that fellowship is restored (Heb. 10:19–25; 12:12–15; James 1:21–25).
5. Believers need to be attentive (sensitive to the “*still small voice*,” 1 Kings 19:11–13) and obedient to the leading of the Spirit (**v. 18**; Psalm 5:8; 25:5; Rom. 8:14).
6. The believer who walks in the Spirit will produce good works, according to the Word and will of God (Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14).
7. The spiritual walk will be worthy of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:1–6) in that it will promote unity among fellow believers.
8. The spiritual walk will reflect the love of Christ to others (Eph. 5:1–2).
9. The believer who walks in the Spirit will reflect the light of the Word of God in their life (Matt. 5:16; John 8:12; Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 5:8–10).

GALATIANS 6:1–6

10. The one who walks in the Spirit will walk in wisdom, knowing and doing the will of God (Eph. 5:15–17). All of the above qualities are what it means to be “*filled with the Spirit*” (Eph. 5:18).

GALATIANS CHAPTER 6

Paul concludes this epistle with practical counsel on restoring a fellow believer from sin, the law of sowing and reaping, and a final warning against the Judaizers, who seek to impose circumcision and law-observance on the Galatian believers. Every principle in this chapter is an expression of the “law of love” (John 13:34–35; Rom. 13:8–10; 15:27).

Restoration from Sin and Burden Bearing

Galatians 6:1–5

6:1 “*If a man is overtaken in any trespass.*” The word “*overtaken*” means to “come upon unexpectedly.” If a fellow believer is discovered in some sin, each of us has a duty (provided we are “*spiritual*”) to restore them to obedience and fellowship. This would include bringing rebuke from God’s Word (1 Tim. 5:19–20; 2 Tim. 3:16–17), confession of the sinning person to God (1 John 1:9), and support in overcoming that specific temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). “*You who are spiritual.*” This refers to obedient and maturing believers (1 Cor. 3:1–3; Heb. 5:12–14). “*In a spirit of gentleness.*” This is an evidence of true spirituality (Gal. 5:22–23), and is the opposite of a judgmental spirit. “*Considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*” The danger here may be of falling into the same sin we seek to rescue another from, or the temptation to judge and feel superior to the fallen brother.

6:2 “*Bear ... and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” Just as Christ bore our sins at the cross (1 Pet. 2:24), so we ought to bear the weaknesses and faults of others (Rom. 15:1). The “*law of Christ*” is the law of love and service (John 13:12–15, 34–35; 15:12). There are two burdens in this passage: those of others (v. 1), and that of our own calling (vv. 4–5).

6:3 “*For if anyone thinks himself to be something.*” This confirms that the temptation Paul warns of in v. 1 is that of pride—thinking we are superior to one who has fallen. “*When he is nothing.*” Paul includes himself and all of us, as being nothing without Christ (2 Cor. 12:11; see John 15:5). “*He deceives himself.*” We certainly will not fool others, who can easily see our faults and failures.

6:4 “*Let each one examine his own work.*” The word “*examine*” means to “put to the test for purity, to prove through testing.” We will only give an account of our own lives and service to God (Rom. 14:10–12; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 10:12–18). “*He will have [cause for] rejoicing in himself alone.*” The joy of serving our Lord well is a blessing in time and will be a cause of reward in eternity (2 Tim. 4:6–8).

6:5 “*Each one shall bear his own load.*” The word “*load*” is the concept of “portion.” In Paul’s day, it referred to the pack of the Roman soldier. Each of us has a work of service allotted to us by God (Matt. 25:15; Mark 13:34). For this task, we receive a spiritual gift to enable us to do the work (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). Each of us will give an answer to the Lord for how well or poorly we have served (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

Galatians 6:6–10

6:6 “*Let him ... share in all good things.*” Most commentators only emphasize financial support in this passage. But here, Paul says, “*all good things.*” Certainly, this would include the student sharing of their finances or possessions with those who teach (Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 9:9–11; 1 Tim. 5:17–18), as well as providing lodging and food (Phi. v. 22; 3 John 5–8). But, as a pastor of 50 years, I would say there are many things more important to share than just money. The first would be consistent prayer support. Sharing spiritual victories that

result from the teaching of God's Word is also a great encouragement to the teacher. Another would be to bring an unbelieving friend into the assembly to hear the Gospel, or a new convert who needs to grow in grace.

6:7 “God is not mocked.” The idea here is that, though we may deceive ourselves, God cannot be fooled. **“Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”** The fundamental law of agriculture is that what you plant is what grows. This applies both to sowing spiritual seeds of faith and service, and also to disobedience and sin. While we rejoice in the full and free forgiveness of God through Christ, that does not remove the cost and consequences of sin (2 Sam. 12:7–23; Judg. 16:13–31).

6:8 “He who sows to his flesh ... to the Spirit.” Paul is simply confirming that we choose whether to sow in our lives selfishly (Gal. 5:19–21) or spiritually (Gal. 5:22–23). One brings corruption, discipline from God (Heb. 12:3–11), and sorrowful consequences; the other results in blessing in this life and reward in eternity. **“Reap everlasting life.”** Paul is addressing believers here. The issue is not the gift of eternal life, which we receive when we believe in Jesus Christ. Rather, he is speaking again concerning eternal inheritance (Gal. 3:18, 29). While all believers have an inheritance from God, which cannot be diminished (1 Pet. 1:4–5), greater inheritance, including reigning with Christ, can be won or lost (Rom. 8:16–17; 2 Tim. 2:11–13).

6:9 “Let us not grow weary ... in due season we shall reap.” The harvest will occur at the Bema/Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11–15; 15:58; 2 Cor. 5:10). All service done in faith and obedience to God's Word will be remembered and rewarded by God. If we live in the light of Jesus' return, we will be motivated to serve and not lose heart (2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; James 5:7–9; Rev. 22:12). Good works do not save us (Rom. 4:3–5; Eph. 2:8–9; Gal. 2:16), nor do they produce spiritual growth/sanctification (Gal. 3:1–3). Instead, they come from the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) and give life and animation to our faith (James 2:14–26).

6:10 “Therefore ... let us do good to all.” In this way, we reflect our Lord and Savior in the way He lived and served (Acts 10:38). **“Especially ... the household of faith.”** Special care should be given to treating our fellow believers with grace, compassion, and love. It is a shame and disgrace when believers treat their unbelieving friends better than they treat other believers!

Boast in Nothing but the Cross of Christ

Galatians 6:11–18

6:11 “See with what large letters.” Some scholars believe Paul suffered with poor eyesight from the blinding light of Jesus' appearance to him on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3–9). Paul typically signed his epistles after they were written by a scribe (2 Thess. 3:17).

6:12 “Desire to make a good showing in the flesh.” There will always be people who pretend to be spiritual, not to please God, but to impress others. Some of the Galatians had followed the teachings of the Judaizers, being circumcised and seeking to keep the Law (Acts 15:1–5) so as to please the false teachers. **“That they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.”** From the beginning of the Church Age, those who follow the path of grace and faith have been persecuted by those who want to make Christianity just another religion, with rules, regulations, and taboos.

6:13 “Not even those ... keep the law.” The Judaizers promoted law-keeping as a requirement for salvation but did not keep it themselves (Rom. 3:10–18; James 2:10–11). **“That they may boast [glory] in your flesh.”** The false teachers would look on everyone they deceived as a validation of their teaching and ministry and boast in the number of their followers.

6:14 “Except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul gloried in the fact that he was united with Christ in His crucifixion. Paul exulted in the fact that Jesus loved him and sacrificed Himself for him (Gal. 2:20), as He did for us all (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 2:2).

GALATIANS 6:15–18

6:15 “In Christ Jesus ... a new creation.” Those who believe in Jesus Christ are “*a new creation*” (2 Cor. 5:17). Our new life in Christ is not a matter of religious observances or rituals, but of genuine spiritual life and purpose (1 Cor. 7:17–24).

6:16 “Walk according to this rule.” New birth, regeneration (Titus 3:5), is the rule and standard by which believers are to live. We are to live by the power of the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). **“Peace and mercy ... upon the Israel of God.”** Paul makes it clear that the Church does not replace Israel in God’s plan (Rom. 11:11–31). Here, he refers to believing Jews as the true Israel (Rom. 2:28–29; 9:27–28). The Church and Israel have separate roles to play in the plan of God.

6:17 “Let no one trouble me.” Paul wants the troublemakers in Galatia to cease their evil work. **“I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”** The scars of his many sufferings (2 Cor. 11:23–33) were the true evidence of his obedience and loyalty to Jesus Christ. His many persecutions had branded him as a slave of Christ (1 Cor. 7:22).

6:18 “Brethren.” Throughout the epistle, Paul had never doubted that these truly were believers in Christ. His only concern was that they were being deceived and their spiritual lives hindered. **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”** The true motivator of the Christian life is always the matchless grace of God—not the Law. Paul was not only the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15–16; 22:21; 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 3:7–8), and the most effective of all the apostles (1 Cor. 15:9–10), he was above all the apostle of the grace of God! This epistle ends on the keynote of his life—the grace of God.

Summary: Five Great Lessons from this Chapter

1. Each of us has a duty to restore a fallen brother to fellowship and obedience (**v.1**).
2. We all must be willing to bear with the faults of others, even as we strive to faithfully carry the burden of our own gift and service to God (**vv. 2–5**).
3. The law of sowing and reaping is especially relevant in relation to the pastor and members of his congregation, (**vv. 6–8**). Those being fed spiritual truths have a duty to support the physical and material needs of the pastor and his family (1 Cor. 9:11, 14; 1 Tim. 5:17–18).
4. We need to remember that what we faithfully sow in this life will bring a harvest of eternal reward in the next life (**vv. 9–11**). This truth can motivate us to be steadfast and faithful in our service to the Lord.
5. Paul’s closing warnings (**vv. 12–18**) should remind us all that Christians live not by the Law, but by grace (Rom. 6:14).

CONCLUSION

Galatians is Paul’s proclamation on Christian freedom. We could almost imagine that he uses the defection of the Galatian believers from the faith as an opportunity to write a treatise on Jesus’ words in John 8:31–32 and 36, “*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free ... Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.’*” In the book of Galatians, we learn that once we are united with Jesus Christ by faith, we are truly free. We are free from the Law and its condemnation because we are free from all sin. Jesus Christ—the great Liberator—has paid our debt, and made us righteous in the sight of God the Father. Galatians teaches us that every child of God can boldly say, in the famous words of Martin Luther King Jr., “*Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, I am free at last!*”

Paul's Epistle to the
Ephesians

INTRODUCTION

The epistle to the Ephesians has been both a blessing and a “mystery” to many Bible students and scholars through the ages. Some have called it “the Queen of the Epistles,” and others “the Alps of the Epistles.” Coleridge said that Ephesians was “the divinest composition of man,” according to the scholar, William Barclay (*The Letter to the Ephesians: The Daily Study Bible Series*). Yet, the thoughts and sentence structure of the epistle have confounded many. In the Greek, passages like Ephesians 1:3–14, 15–23; 2:1–9; and 3:1–7 are all one long sentence.

It appears that this epistle was an extended development of Colossians, just as Romans is to Galatians. Barclay points out that there are more than 55 verses in the two letters that are exactly the same in the original Greek. Additionally, we find at least seventy words in Ephesians that are not in any other letter that Paul wrote. Paul’s inspired thought soars into realms found nowhere else in Scripture.

Paul wrote this epistle while he was in prison in Rome. He mentions his imprisonment in Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; and 6:20. The words, “*in Ephesus*” from Ephesians 1:1 are not found in early manuscripts. Some have suggested it may be “*the epistle from Laodicea*” mentioned in Colossians 4:16. Most likely it was a circular epistle to all the churches of Asia Minor.

Ephesus was an important city in the ancient world. It was a Roman capital, a wealthy center of the merchant trade, and was home to the Temple of Diana, considered one of the “seven wonders of the world” at the time (Dr. Warren Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*).

Where Colossians emphasizes Jesus Christ, resurrected, and seated in Heaven, as the Head of His body—the Church (Col. 1:18), in Ephesians Paul stresses the Church as His body on Earth (Eph. 1:22–23; 3:6–7). In this letter, Paul places great emphasis on the “*mystery*,” that is, the previously unrevealed plan of God for this present Church Age (Eph. 1:9–10; 3:1–11). The epistle is built around two prayers of Paul for the church: first, that we would receive enlightenment concerning our “riches in Christ” (Eph. 1:15–23), and second, that we would receive enablement from His Holy Spirit to live in the power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:14–21). Also, there are two main sections of the book: In chapters 1–3, Paul explains the position and the power we have “*in Christ*” by faith. Then, in chapters 4–6, he teaches us the practice, and the worthy walk (Eph. 4:1) that should reflect our position.

Bible expositor, G. Campbell Morgan, presents an interesting theory that the book of Ephesians is “*the last exposition of the words of Jesus Christ at Caesarea Philippi, ‘Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it ... I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom’*” (Matt. 16:18–19 KJV). He goes on to say, “*Paul was the steward of the mystery of the Church. In this letter, then, we have the last exposition of the meaning of Christ*” (G. Campbell Morgan, *Concise Survey of the Bible*, p. 476). In this sense, chapters 1–3 deal with the building of the Church; Ephesians 4:1–6:9 have to do with the “keys to the kingdom” in the sense of Christian conduct, and Ephesians 6:10 to the end has to do with the warfare by which the powers of hell are defeated.

One last note in relation to the outline of the book: It has long been noted that Paul builds the epistle around three postures of the Christian. First, we are “**seated**” with Christ (Eph. 2:6), which relates to our position in Christ (chapters 1–3). Second, we are to “**walk worthy**” (Eph. 4:1), which relates to Christian conduct (Eph. 4:1–6:9). Finally, we are to “**stand firm**” against the forces of Satan (Eph. 6:11, 13–14), which concludes the book. Many books and studies on Ephesians have followed the “Sit, walk, stand” theme.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 1

This first chapter is in two main sections. First, Paul introduces ideas he will develop further in the epistle, such as our rich blessings in Christ, resulting from the combined work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in effecting our eternal salvation (Eph. 1:1–14). Secondly, he prays for the illumination of the Holy Spirit to give us an understanding of the things he is writing (Eph. 1:15–23).

The Doctrine of Positional Truth (Chapters 1–3)

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul writes about “positional truth”—our standing and acceptance before God due to being united with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Paul will deal with this in detail in Ephesians chapter two. Paul sets forth this truth every time he uses the phrase “in Christ” or “in Him.” The repetition of these phrases in his writings demonstrates just how important this concept was to his thinking and life.

The Blessings of our Union with Christ

Ephesians 1:1–14

In this section Paul identifies the work of God the Father (vv. 1–6), God the Son (vv. 7–12), and God the Holy Spirit (vv. 13–14), in bringing us into His blessings. Like stanzas in a song, each section ends with the praise of His glory.

Our Blessings from the Father (vv. 1–6)

1:1 “Paul, an apostle ... by the will of God.” Both Paul’s commission as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15–16), and his authority (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10) were not of his own choice, but of God’s call and purpose for him. **“To the saints ... and faithful in Christ Jesus.”** All who believe in Jesus Christ are saints, “set apart” to God by the Holy Spirit (vv. 13–14). The word “*faithful*” speaks of those who are believers “*in Christ Jesus*.” We are “*saints*” because we are those who believe in Him. The plural masculine word *pistoi* (“faithful”) indicates that they are “saints” because they are “believers” in Christ Jesus (compare 2 Cor. 6:15; Gal. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:6). Paul is not making a distinction here between “*spiritual*” versus “*carnal*” believers (1 Cor. 3:1–2; Heb. 5:12–14). Otherwise, who would the warnings against carnality in Ephesians 4:17–19; 25–32; 5:3–7, 15–18 be addressed to?

1:2 “Grace to you and peace.” Paul’s typical greeting (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:3; Phil. 1:2) combines both Hebrew and Greek greetings. It also presents a fundamental spiritual truth: only by receiving God’s grace through faith can we enter into His peace (Rom. 5:1; Col. 3:15). **“From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** This greeting and provision of grace and peace come directly from God to every believer in Christ Jesus.

1:3 “Blessed ... the God and Father.” To “bless” God means to praise, honor, and glorify Him for what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. **“Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.”** Every believer is in possession of every possible blessing bought by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. **“In the heavenly places in Christ.”** The storehouse of heavenly blessings is available to all who are in Christ Jesus by faith. We who believe are already seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1–4). These spiritual blessings, which will be identified throughout the epistle, are our heavenly birthright.

1:4 “He chose us in Him.” It should be noted that “*us*” is plural, not singular. In eternity past, God chose to bless those “*in Him*,” that is, all Church Age believers, with “*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*” (v. 3). **“That we should be holy and without blame before Him.”** This is the standing of every believer before God. Due to the work of Christ, all our sins have been blotted out, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been imputed to us (2 Cor. 5:17–21).

EPHESIANS 1:5–10

1:5 “In love having predestined us.” Note that I take the “in love,” ending v. 4, as relating to His work of predestination. Predestination is not used here in the sense of being pre-determined to believe, but in the sense that all who believe in this present Church Age are to comprise the **“adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself.”** In eternity past, God determined in advance that all who believe in Jesus Christ would receive the privilege of “adoption” into His family (the Church), and this was done **“according to the good pleasure of His will.”** In other words, *“It pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell”* (Col. 1:19), and through Christ, *“the Father ... has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light”* (Col. 1:12). The point is that God the Father is pleased to shower upon us, His children, positions of great privilege and power.

1:6 “To the praise of the glory of His grace.” God is to be blessed and praised for all that He has done for us through His grace (v. 3). **“He has made us accepted in the Beloved.”** We are acceptable to a holy and just God because we are in Christ, who is *“the Beloved.”* In other words, we are as acceptable to God as Jesus Christ is! When He sees us, He sees His own beloved Son in us. This again shows that the address, *“to the saints and faithful brethren”* (v. 1), is inclusive of all who believe in Jesus Christ, because we are all holy and acceptable in His sight, through Christ Jesus.

The Father’s Blessings Summarized

1. He has showered us with every possible spiritual blessing (v. 3).
2. *“He chose us”* (the Church), before time began, to be *“in Christ,”* and therefore, *“holy and without blame”* (v. 4).
3. He pre-determined that all who believe in Christ during the Church Age (from Pentecost to the Rapture of the Church), would be adopted into His family (vv. 4–5; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5–7). This gives each and every member of the Church of Jesus Christ a unique standing, with surpassing privileges that no believer of other ages possessed. Paul’s extended prayer (Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–19) is that we might know and utilize these great privileges and possessions.
4. He made us acceptable to Himself through Jesus Christ (v. 6).

Our Blessings from the Son (vv. 7–12)

1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood.” On the cross, Jesus Christ paid the debt of all our sins (1Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 2:14; 1 John 2:2). By trusting in His saving work, we have **“the forgiveness of sins.”** Our complete and total forgiveness is but one of a multitude of *“spiritual blessings”* (v. 3) that comprise the **“riches of His grace.”** Note that *“riches”* is a key concept in this book (Eph. 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16).

1:8 “He made to abound.” The word means “to overflow,” like the cup in David’s Psalm 23:5. We will never, in this life, be able to comprehend or contain all that God has done for us. He will be revealing these things to us throughout all eternity (Eph. 2:7). **“In all wisdom and prudence.”** Only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:17–19) can we hope to grasp the greatness of God’s grace to us in Christ!

1:9–10 “Having made known to us the mystery ... that in the dispensation of the fullness of times.” Here, Paul introduces the doctrine of the mystery of the Church Age. He will develop it more fully in Ephesians 3:1–12. Paul is revealing what Jesus meant when He said, *“On this rock I will build My church”* (Matt. 16:18). At the time, the disciples did not understand what He was talking about. Now, because of Paul’s revelation of the mystery, we do. In short, it refers to new revelation never before given to men but now revealed to members of His Church. This *“dispensation”* refers to this present Church Age, and to the doctrines that relate to Church Age believers. **“He might gather together in one all things in Christ.”** The truth that God would create a new body of believers, composed of both Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:11–22), was never before known.

1:11 *“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance.”* Every child of God, by faith in Christ, shares in an eternal inheritance (Gal. 3:29; 1 Pet. 1:4–5). This eternal inheritance was *“predestined”* or pre-determined by God to fulfill His perfect plan for human history, and to display His infinite wisdom (Rom. 11:33–36; Eph. 3:10–11).

1:12 *“That.”* This little word is crucial because Paul is about to define what he means about God’s *“purpose”* and *“the counsel of His will”* in v. 11. *“That we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”* Those early believers were the beginning of God’s plan for the Church working out in history, which would, in eternity, result in His praise and glory forever and ever.

The Son’s Blessings Summarized

1. By His blood (the cross) we have redemption—sin’s penalty paid in full (v. 7a).
2. We also have full and total forgiveness of sins (v. 7b).
3. Through Christ’s provisions we have the revelation of “the mystery,” God’s plan for the Church (vv. 8–10).
4. By faith in Christ, we enter into an eternal inheritance (v. 11).
5. Finally, the Church in eternity will be a cause for glorifying God forever (v. 12; Rev. 5:8–14).

Our Blessings from the Holy Spirit (vv. 13–14)

1:13 *“In Him you also trusted.”* The recipients of the letter are included in the praise of v. 12. *“After you heard ... having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”* This is the order of the promise of eternal salvation. First, *“the gospel of your salvation”* must be heard. *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom. 10:17). Then, when anyone believes the gospel message (Rom. 1:3–4, 16–17; 1 Cor. 15:3–4), they are instantly sealed by the Holy Spirit for eternal life (1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 4:30).

1:14 *“Who is the guarantee of our inheritance.”* Every believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit, and that seal guarantees our entrance into eternal life and an eternal inheritance. The indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:16–18; Rom. 8:9–11) is God’s “down-payment” on His *“purchased possession,”* the Body and the Bride of Christ. All of these wonderful provisions are intended *“to the praise of His glory.”* We owe eternal praise to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for all the rich blessings that are ours in Christ.

The Spirit’s Blessings Summarized

1. Although not strictly stated, it is the Holy Spirit who motivates the preaching of the Gospel, and convicts sinners of its truth (John 15:26–27; 16:7–13).
2. The Holy Spirit seals every believer for eternal life. This is the basis of the security of our salvation (v. 13).
3. The Spirit is our guarantee that we will enter into eternal life (v. 14).

Paul's Prayer for Enlightenment
Ephesians 1:15–23

Paul's prayer is actually in two parts in this epistle. In Ephesians 1:15–23, we have the first part of the prayer. Here, he prays for the Holy Spirit to give us illumination and understanding regarding God's amazing plan. Then, in Ephesians 3:14–21, he prays that the Holy Spirit will empower us to live Christ-centered lives.

1:15 “After I heard of your faith.” This statement tells us that Paul is writing, not just to the Ephesians, but to many believers he had never met (Col. 1:3–4, 7–8; 2:1–2). **“And your love for all the saints.”** Here is the sure sign of new life in Christ (John 13:34–35; 1 John 3:14; 4:7–8, 11–12).

1:16 “Do not cease to give thanks ... making mention of you in my prayers.” Love for fellow believers compels us to both give thanks and to pray for their needs (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 1:4–5; James 5:16).

1:17 “The spirit of wisdom and revelation.” The Word of God is supernatural wisdom and can only be understood by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13). **“In the knowledge of Him.”** The focal point of all revelation—the Word of God—is the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:15–19; Heb. 1:1–4).

1:18 “Your understanding being enlightened.” This illumination requires a desire to know, believe, and obey on our part (John 7:17; 14:21; Heb. 5:12–14). **“The hope of His calling ... the riches of the glory of His inheritance.”** The word “*hope*” in the Bible speaks of confident assurance of future possession. It leads us to an eager expectation of our ultimate eternal possessions. The language here actually speaks of the household of the saints as Jesus' inheritance. He considers us His eternal treasure!

1:19–20 “The exceeding greatness of His power toward us.” God demonstrates His power by saving us, by sanctifying and purifying us, and by using us as partners in His great plan (2 Cor. 4:1, 5–7; 5:14–21; Col. 1:11–14). **“The working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ.”** The greatest demonstration of divine power is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul's point is that the power of Jesus' resurrection life is available to every believer (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:10). **“And seated Him at His right hand.”** This was the fulfillment of prophecies such as Psalm 2:6 and 110:1. However, Paul wants every believer to understand that we are seated there with Him (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1–4). We have His authority and power to live supernatural lives in the power of the Spirit (Titus 2:11–14).

1:21–23 “Far above all principality and power and might and dominion.” These terms are used for angelic powers and authorities, both holy and fallen (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 1:5–14). **“He put all things under His feet.”** Jesus Christ reigns in total authority (Matt. 28:18). **“Gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body.”** This is an astounding statement. All that the Father has given the resurrected Son is for the benefit and blessing of His body—the Church—the family of God. Not only this, but Paul says that the Body of Christ, made up of every believer in Him, is **“the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”**

Summary: The Mystery of God's Will

1. In this chapter, Paul tells us that God had a master plan before the world began.
2. This plan is called a “mystery” because it was not revealed to the prophets of the Old Testament.
3. This plan was put into effect by the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. His resurrection power makes it possible.
4. The focus of the plan was to create a new spiritual creation (2 Cor. 5:17), made up of every believer in Jesus Christ—His body.

5. To these newly created people He gave His Spirit to indwell them, His completed Word to guide them, and His mission to share in (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).
6. Paul prays that we will comprehend this great plan, that we will lay hold of the hope of our calling, and utilize the power that is made available to us through His Spirit to accomplish His will.

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, Paul continues to expound on the outworking of God’s amazing plan to produce the masterpiece of His plan, “*His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus*” (Eph. 2:10), made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers, who become one body in Christ Jesus. Where chapter one focused on our possessions in Christ, this chapter looks at our position in Christ.

The Blessings of Our Position in Christ Ephesians 2:1–10

Throughout chapter 2, Paul is developing what he means in Ephesians 1:23 by “*His body*.” He is speaking of the family of God, newly formed, made up of both Jew and Gentile, both reconciled to God and to each other.

What We Were without Christ (v. 1–3)

2:1 “*And you ... were dead.*” The words, “*He made alive,*” are in italics because they have been brought up from v. 5. In vv. 1–3, Paul lists five characteristics of those who are without Christ. The first is that we are spiritually dead in Adam (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22), and therefore live “*in trespasses and sins.*” All mankind without Christ is enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:19–21).

2:2 “*In which you once walked.*” The second spiritual characteristic of those without Christ is that they can only live “*according to the course of this world.*” The way of this world is sin, corruption, and death—followed by eternal condemnation (John 3:19; 1 John 2:15–17). The third quality of the lost is that they live “*according to the prince of the power of the air.*” This of course refers to Satan, who seized dominion of this world when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:9). Satan rules by “*the power of darkness*” (Col. 1:13), and only Jesus Christ can deliver someone from his domain. Fourth, the lost are identified as “*sons of disobedience*” due to the power and impact of Satan’s spiritual influence.

2:3 “*Among whom also we ... were by nature children of wrath.*” Here, Paul switches from “you” (meaning Gentile believers) to “we,” referring to Jewish believers. Jewish unbelievers, with all their devotion to the law, were just as lost as Gentiles and shared in all five of the conditions mentioned here. All who are without Jesus Christ live their lives under the wrath of God (John 3:18, 36).

Summary: Five Spiritual Characteristics of the Unsaved

1. They are spiritually dead in the realm of sin.
2. They live life on a course to eternal destruction.
3. They are unconsciously slaves under the rule of Satan.
4. They are under the influence of the spirit of rebellion against God.
5. They are by their fallen nature children of Adam, condemned to wrath.

What We Become by Faith in Christ (vv. 4–10)

2:4 “But God.” This phrase introduces a great contrast between the lost and the saved. Compare it with the phrase in v. 13, “*But now in Christ Jesus.*” **“Rich in mercy, because of His great love.”** God’s mercy to sinners is due to “*His great love*” for sinners (John 3:16; Matt. 11:19). His mercy moved Him to send Christ as a mediator for sinful men (Isa. 53:10–12; 1 Tim. 2:5–6; Luke 5:24; Rom. 2:4).

2:5–6 “Made us alive together with Christ.” Those who trust in Jesus Christ share His resurrection life (Rom. 5:8–10, 17; 6:5, 23). **“(By grace you have been saved)”**. This parenthesis, which will be repeated in v. 8, is designed to define “salvation” in terms of three things God does for those who believe in Christ:

1. He makes them alive (v. 5).
2. He raises them up with Christ (v. 6).
3. He causes them to sit with Christ in the heavenly realm (v. 6).

Our union with Christ is complete, both regarding His past work on the cross, which brings forgiveness, and regarding His present session at God’s right hand (Psalm 110:1–2; Heb. 12:2), which provides spiritual power. Therefore, His mercy removes our condemnation, while His grace provides us with justification and power.

2:7 “That in the ages to come.” That is, through all the endless “ages” of His eternal kingdom. **“He might show the exceeding riches of His grace.”** Like a trophy of world history, the Church will shine throughout all eternity as evidence of **“His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”**

2:8 “For by grace you have been saved.” This is a summary of vv. 4–7. Flowing from the love of God, His mercy removed our condemnation from us, and His grace provided for our justification by adding the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our account before God. **“Through faith.”** Faith is a declaration of helpless and undeserving dependence upon the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Faith is the total absence of works (Rom. 4:4–5). It is the confession that we have nothing to offer but trust in our victorious Savior. **“That not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”** Many try to make this refer to faith, but the grammar of Greek will not allow this. The “that” here refers back to the working of God in vv. 5–6. Scripture constantly affirms that the “gift” is eternal life (John 4:10; Rom. 6:23). Three times in chapter three, Paul speaks of grace as a gift that has been given to him (Eph. 3:2, 7–8). John 1:12 and 3:15 make it clear that all men have the power to believe if they will receive the truth.

2:9 “Not of works.” No human effort or work is included in the act of faith (Rom. 4:4–5). Sinful man contributes absolutely nothing to God’s gift of eternal life. **“Lest anyone should boast.”** If any part of our salvation was due to any work on our part, we could take credit for it. As it is, by grace through faith, we can only boast in the grace of our Lord (Jer. 9:24; 1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17).

2:10 “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.” Every believer is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The Church, the Body of Christ, is God’s masterpiece. We are created **“for good works, which God prepared beforehand.”** God has a plan for each and every believer. This includes our prayer life (1 Thess. 5:17–18; Heb. 13:15), our witness to the lost (Matt. 28:18–20; John 15:26–27; Acts 1:8), and our ministry through our spiritual gift (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–11; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). In the plan of God, every believer is to be a priest to God (1 Pet. 2:9), an ambassador to the lost (2 Cor. 5:18–20), and a minister to fellow believers (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Pet. 4:10–11).

Summary: What We Become in Christ by Grace through Faith

1. We are made spiritually and eternally alive.
2. We share in His resurrection life.

3. We are seated with Him in victory and power.
4. We are His masterpiece in time and His trophy in eternity.
5. We are a new creation designed for good works that He planned for each of us.

The Blessings of One Body in Christ Ephesians 2:11–22

In vv. 1–10, Paul has clarified what God has done for each believer as an individual. Now, in vv. 11–22, he shows how God is building the Church corporately into a spiritual temple, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He is expounding on Jesus' statement, "*on this rock I will build My church*" (Matt. 16:18).

The Gentiles without Christ (vv. 11–12)

2:11–12 "*Remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh.*" That is, in unbelief, they were "*called Uncircumcision*," a term of contempt by the Jews. "*Without Christ.*" Apart from faith in Christ, there was no way Gentiles could enter into the blessings of God anticipated by the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1–3) and later covenants (Rom. 9:4–5). "*Aliens from the commonwealth ... strangers from the covenants of promise.*" All of the Old Testament "*covenants*" looked forward to fulfillment in the coming Messiah. "*Having no hope and without God in the world.*" This is the desolate condition of every soul without Jesus Christ.

By Faith both Jew and Gentile are One in Christ (vv. 13–16)

2:13 "*But now.*" Again, this goes with the "*but God*" statement in v. 4. By faith in Christ, the Gentiles, who were "*afar off*" (v. 17), have been "*brought [made] near by the blood of the cross.*" Paul is speaking here of the work of reconciliation, by which former enemies are made into friends and family (Rom. 5:6–11).

2:14 "*He Himself is our peace.*" In Christ, both Jew and Gentile find common ground and standing before God. "*Has broken down the middle wall of division.*" In the Temple, a wall separated Gentile proselytes from Jewish worshippers. The penalty for a Gentile that trespassed that wall was death (Acts 21:28–29).

2:15 "*Having abolished in His flesh the enmity ... the law of commandments.*" By fulfilling all the Law of Moses for every believer (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 10:4), Jesus Christ removed the basis for the distinction between Jew and Gentile. "*To create in Himself one new man ... making peace.*" The central truth of the "mystery" Paul has been expounding is that God has created an entirely new, spiritual company, called the Church—the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:15).

2:16 "*That He might reconcile them both to God.*" Both Jew and Gentile, apart from Jesus Christ, are separated from God. All mankind are by nature enemies of God (Rom. 5:10). However, further enmity between Jew and Gentile was created by the Jewish misconception that their unique calling made them superior to Gentiles (Rom. 2:1–6, 11–29). "*Putting to death the enmity.*" By His finished work on the cross, Jesus Christ has removed the "*enmity*" of sinners toward God, and of Jew toward Gentile—but only for those who are in Christ.

The Body of Christ is the Temple of the Spirit (vv. 17–22)

2:17 "*He came and preached peace.*" As the one and only Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:3–6), the Lord Jesus came with a message from God to men, of reconciliation and peace through faith. "*You who were afar off ... those who were near.*" By the covenants and the promises, the Jews had been brought near, while the Gentiles, apart from Old Testament revelation, were far off.

EPHESIANS 2:18–3:5

2:18 *“Through Him [by faith in Jesus Christ] we both have access [both Jew and Gentile believers] by one Spirit [the indwelling Spirit] to the Father.”* In this brief sentence, Paul shows 1) that each member of the Godhead (Son, Spirit, and Father) is involved in our salvation, and 2) that all who believe in Christ have free and full access to the throne of grace (1 Cor. 12:13; Heb. 4:14–16).

2:19 *“Fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”* As believers, our citizenship is in Heaven (Phil. 3:20). In eternity, we will inhabit the New Jerusalem with all the saints (Heb. 11:10). All believers of all ages will make up this household, and yet the Church will remain unique as the Body and Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25–27, 32).

2:20–22 The Church here is described as a temple (1 Pet. 2:5). *“Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”* That is, this temple is built by the work of evangelism and the Word of God. *“Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”* This figure for Christ shows that the whole building is fashioned around Him (Psalm 118:22–23; Matt. 21:42; 1 Pet. 2:4–8). *“Grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”* Unlike the Jewish temple, which was destroyed in 70 A.D., this spiritual temple continues to grow through 1) the work of evangelism and missions, and 2) the spiritual growth of each individual believer. *“You are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.”* God does not dwell in earthly temples made by man, but He indwells His own temple, which is the Church (Acts 7:48–50; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19–20).

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 3

In chapter three, Paul concludes his explanation of the mystery of this present Church Age, and of the unique revelation and spiritual provisions for those who live between Pentecost and the Rapture of the Church.

The Mystery of Christ Revealed

Ephesians 3:1–13

The Message of the Mystery (vv. 1–6)

3:1–2 *“For this reason.”* This phrase is repeated in v. 14, where Paul begins his prayer for the recipients of the letter, and for us, based on the unique provisions made for those living in this present Church Age. *“Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.”* Paul sees his imprisonment as a part of God’s plan for reaching the Gentiles with the Gospel, fulfilling his expression of hope in Romans 15:29–33. God often fulfills our hopes and desires in ways we could not anticipate, and do not desire. Yet His plan is always perfect, and Paul had the spiritual maturity to see this and be thankful for it. If not for his arrest and imprisonment we would not have the prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). *“The dispensation of the grace of God.”* The word translated “dispensation” can refer to “the law of the household,” and speaks of the duties of the Steward (the chief servant in the house) of the house in carrying out the wishes of the master of the household. *“Which was given to me.”* God ordained Paul as the “Apostle to the Gentiles” (Acts 9:15–16; 22:21; 26:16–18). Therefore, as the steward of the household of Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:6; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19), Paul was given the task of revealing the “mystery,” the plan of God for Church Age believers, through his thirteen epistles (or fourteen, as I believe, including Hebrews—based on the passage in 2 Pet. 3:15–16).

3:3–4 *“By revelation He made known to me the mystery.”* This has been Paul’s topic since vv. 1:9–10, where he had *“briefly written already.”* Paul’s *“knowledge in the mystery of Christ”* is unfolded more fully in Ephesians than any other epistle, but is also mentioned in Romans 11:25; 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 15:51; Colossians 1:26–27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; and 1 Timothy 3:9, 16. Only by correctly interpreting and understanding all these passages can we gain a full picture of just how unique the Church Age is in all of human history.

3:5 *“Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men.”* No prophets of the Old Testament knew or wrote about the Church Age. The doctrines and provisions of the Church Age were not revealed until Paul,

the Apostle to the Gentiles, received a divine revelation about them. ***“Revealed to His holy apostles and prophets.”*** The Church Age was first hinted at to the original apostles by Jesus (Matt. 16:17–19; John 16:13–14). However, the full understanding and recording of it were left to Paul.

3:6 *“That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body.”* The union of Jew and Gentile into one new body was a truth unknown in the Old Testament (Eph. 2:14–3:7). That Gentiles could be saved was never in question (Isa. 11:10; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 60:3; 61:9; Mal. 1:11). The great truth of the mystery is that the Gentiles would be grafted into Israel, in a way that would ultimately bring Israel back to God (Rom. 11:11–25).

The Ministry of the Mystery (vv. 7–13)

3:7 *“I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God.”* Paul is referring here to his spiritual gift as an apostle. Like all spiritual gifts, it was not given because of any merit on Paul’s part. ***“Given to me by the effective working of His power.”*** Only the Holy Spirit is able to make spiritual gifts effective in those gifted for various areas of service (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–18, 27–31; Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Pet. 4:10–11).

3:8 *“To me ... less than the least of all the saints.”* Note Paul’s self-evaluation in 1 Corinthians 15:9; 2 Corinthians 12:11; and 1 Timothy 1:15. ***“The unsearchable riches of Christ.”*** What Paul means here is that, apart from the revelation given by God, no man could ever discover the treasures we have in Christ (Rom. 11:33–36; 1 Cor. 2:12–13).

3:9 *“The fellowship of the mystery.”* This again refers to the union of Jew and Gentile in one spiritual body (Eph. 2:11–22). ***“Which ... has been hidden in God.”*** Not until the coming of Jesus Christ into the world could this *“mystery”* be revealed (Heb. 1:1–4). Jesus Christ is both Creator and Redeemer of all creation (John 4:42; Col. 1:12–19).

3:10 *“That now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church.”* This new creation of the Body of Christ is also a new revelation to the angelic realm. ***“Principalities and powers in the heavenly places.”*** Though this would include all angelic beings (1 Pet. 1:12), Paul uses this phrase, especially for the fallen angelic realm (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 6:12). Satan’s fallen realm is made to realize the infinite wisdom of God through His formation of the Church, made up of all members of the human race. It will be the Church that will judge fallen angels (1 Cor. 6:2–3).

3:11 *“According to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* The eternal salvation of all who believe in Jesus Christ was God’s plan before the world began (Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 13:8; 17:8).

3:12 *“In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.”* Note the repetition of the thought *“In whom ... in Him.”* This phrase is a summary of all that we have because of our spiritual position before God in Christ (Eph. 1:6; 2:4–6; Col. 3:1–4; Heb. 4:14–16; 10:19–25). While we may fail in our practice of the faith, our position before God never changes!

3:13 *“Therefore ... do not lose heart.”* For mature believers who understand the mystery of our spiritual union with Christ and with each other, there is never a reason to lose heart (Rom. 8:28–39). ***“My tribulations for you, which is your glory.”*** Paul knew his sufferings were all designed by God to enrich the Church. If we believe that Romans 8:28–39 is true, we know that nothing can happen to us that God will not use for His glory and the furtherance of His perfect plan.

Paul's Prayer for Enablement
Ephesians 3:14–21

Previously, Paul prayed for **enlightenment** for all believers to understand what he is revealing about God's perfect plan for the Church (Eph. 1:15–23). Now he breaks into a prayer for **enablement**—strength from the Holy Spirit for each of us to comprehend and to live in His power. This prepares the way for chapters 4–6, which deal with living out the Christian way of life.

3:14 “For this reason.” This is the repeated phrase (resumes) from v. 1. **“I bow my knees to the Father.”** Take note that Paul mentions the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in vv. 14–16. Each member of the Godhead is involved in strengthening us.

3:15 “From whom the whole family ... is named.” The “family” here refers to the family of faith, both those alive on Earth and those who are already in Heaven. The idea of the family—father, mother, and child—is closely related to the three members of the divine family. It is worth looking at Psalm 128—a family Psalm.

3:16 “That He would grant you.” That is, “to give you” by His grace. God's grace comes to us through the channel of His Word, and by the inner working of His Spirit. **“According to the riches of His glory.”** Our spiritual wealth in Christ is one of the main themes of Ephesians (Eph. 1:3, 7, 18; 2:7; 3:8; see also Col. 1:27). **“To be strengthened with might.”** Paul uses two words for strength: the first refers to inherent ability to do things, the second speaks of authority or dominion. **“By His Spirit in the inner man.”** Here, the “inner man” speaks of the newly created spirit of the believer (2 Cor. 5:17), or the “new man” (John 3:6; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The term “new man” is also used by Paul collectively for the Body of Christ (Eph. 2:14–16).

3:17 “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” The word “dwell” means to “be at home” in us. Christ already indwells every believer through His Spirit (John 14:16–18; Rom. 8:9–11; Eph. 2:22). This is the idea of abiding in Christ, that He might abide in us for fellowship and power (John 15:4–5, 7–10; 1 John 1:7). Jesus Christ is at home in hearts by prayer and obedience to His Word (John 14:21, 23; 15:7; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:23). **“Being rooted and grounded in love.”** These figures come from both the agricultural and the construction world. They speak of attaining an advanced stage of spiritual growth and maturity, making it possible to experience the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

3:18 “Able to comprehend with all the saints.” All believers are capable of comprehending spiritual truth by learning God's Word in the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). **“Width and length and depth and height.”** The four dimensions given here speak of the complete scope of Christ's love.

3:19 “To know the love of Christ.” Every believer experiences the initial effect of the “love of Christ” when we believe in Him and receive the gift of eternal life (Eph. 2:4–6). **“Which passes knowledge.”** Paul is speaking here of more mature knowledge. Since the love of Christ is infinite, we will never cease to increase in greater knowledge of it (Eph. 2:7). **“That you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”** Because “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16), the more we learn, understand, and experience Him, the more we are filled with His love (John 1:16–19; Col. 2:6, 9–10).

3:20 “Now to Him who is able.” This spiritual growth and stability is not our doing. It is the work of God within us as we grow in grace and truth (2 Pet. 3:18). **“To do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.”** As we continue steadfastly in spiritual growth, we can experience ways in which God surpasses all our expectations. **“According to the power that works in us.”** This is the power of the indwelling Spirit combined with the power of God's Word as we learn it (Rom. 16:25–27; 1 Cor. 2:9–10; Col. 1:28–29).

3:21 “To Him be glory in the church.” God the Father is glorified through His work in the Church (vv. 10–12). **“By Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen”** Here, we see that ultimately all

glory goes to the Father, through the work of Jesus Christ, and that glory will last throughout all the ages of eternity (Eph. 2:7).

The Duty of Practical Christian Living (Chapters 4–6)

In chapters 1–3, Paul revealed the doctrinal side of the “*mystery*” of God’s plan (positional truth). The spiritual riches we have in Christ are set forth. He will now address the practical side of how this plan should work out in our lives.

From 4:1 to 6:9, Paul deals with the walk of faith, which is how we are to invest our spiritual wealth into this fallen world. Then, in 6:10–20, he instructs us in the warfare of the believer—how we can live victoriously on this earth.

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 4

This chapter explains how we are to “*walk worthy*” of the Lord. Paul uses the metaphor of walking to illustrate our lifestyle. We walk worthy by maintaining unity (vv. 1–6), growing in maturity and service (vv. 7–16), and in the sanctification of the Holy Spirit (vv. 17–32).

Walking in Unity

Ephesians 4:1–6

4:1 “*The prisoner of the Lord.*” Paul is paying a price for his faith and service. He wants to remind us that “*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tim. 3:12). “***Walk worthy.***” The Greek word used here means “to balance the scale, to have equal weight.” Our practice should reflect our position (chapters 1–3). “***The calling***” refers to our identity in Christ, our spiritual vocation. We are to be “*salt*” and “*light*” in this world (Matt. 5:13–16).

4:2 “*Lowliness and gentleness.*” In the Greek language, these are the very words Jesus used to describe Himself (Matt. 11: 29). They speak of the humility of mind and “*gentleness*”—restraint in dealing with others (Phil. 2:3). “***Longsuffering, bearing with.***” Again, these words speak of attitude first, of patient endurance while bearing the burdens of others (Rom. 15:1–3, 15–21). The “*love*” mentioned here is not natural, but rather supernatural. This is an expression of the “*fruit of the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:22–23; Col. 3:12–16).

4:3 “*Endeavoring to keep.*” This means “to work hard, to be diligent so as to safeguard something of great value.” “***The unity of the Spirit***” is that spiritual unity resulting from our union with Christ described in vv. 4–6. Christ cannot be divided (1 Cor. 1:13). “***The bond of peace.***” The word “*bond*” is from the same root word used in v. 1 for “*prisoner.*” Just as Paul was bound by Rome, we are all bound together in Christ. These bonds are to be maintained in “*peace.*” There can only be peace in the Body of Christ when there is a unity born out of mutual humility and forbearance. The chief focus of Jesus’ high priestly prayer was for unity (John 17).

4:4–6 In these verses, Paul sets forth the seven pillars of spiritual unity. These are not things we produce, but what the Spirit of God has secured for us all by the new birth. “***One body***” speaks of the Body of Christ, made up of all who believe in Him (1 Cor. 12:12–27). “***One Spirit***” is the Holy Spirit who indwells each of us (John 14:16–17; Rom. 8:9–11). “***One hope***” is the hope of eternal life. When the Bible uses “*hope*” in this way, it means “confidence, assurance, certainty” (1 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 1:18; Titus 2:13). “***One Lord***” speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 13:13; 14:6). “***One faith***” is the shared belief of all who are trusting in Jesus Christ alone for eternal life. He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). “***One baptism***” is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that unites us with Christ (Eph. 1:13–14; 1 Cor. 12:13). “***One God and Father of all***” means that by faith in Christ we enter into the family of God (Mal. 2:10; Gal. 3:26–29). “***Above all ... through all ... in you all***” describes the omnipresence and omnipotence of God. He is all-powerful and ever-present.

Walking in Growth, Maturity, and Service

Ephesians 4:7–16

4:7 “To each one of us grace was given.” This refers to the “*grace*” by which each believer is given both a spiritual gift and the enablement/power to develop and use it (Zech. 4:6; 1 Cor. 12:7, 11). “*According to the measure of Christ’s gift.*” No two believers, even having the same gift, will have the same measure of power or effect. Consider the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30). Spiritual gifts are not natural talents, but abilities received at the moment of salvation (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–14:40; 1 Pet. 4:10–11).

4:8 “When He ascended.” This refers to the ascension of Jesus Christ following the resurrection (Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:9–11). “*He led captivity captive.*” At that time, Jesus took the souls of all Old Testament believers from Paradise (Abraham’s Bosom) into Heaven with Him (Luke 16:19–31; 23:43). “*And gave gifts to men.*” Note that in Psalm 68:18, which Paul refers to here, it says, “*You have received gifts among men.*” Paul is quoting from the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament. Where the Hebrew version sees Christ receiving these gifts for men, the Greek version looks at His giving them to men. The Holy Spirit, who inspired both David and Paul, thus gives us a full picture of how spiritual gifts are provided for the Church. These gifts are a part of the spoils of His victory, which He shares with men (Isa. 53:12; Psalm 110:1–3).

4:9 “He ... first descended into the lower parts of the earth.” After His death on the cross, the Lord Jesus went into Sheol/Hades, which had two parts: one called “Torments,” and the other called “Paradise/Abraham’s Bosom” (Luke 16:22–26). He released the saints from Paradise and took them with Him into Heaven. Paul tells us that Paradise is now in the presence of God (2 Cor. 12:1–4).

4:10 “He who descended is also the One who ascended.” Jesus spoke of this to Nicodemus (John 3:12–15). Christ came down from Heaven to go to the cross for us, then He ascended back to Heaven to serve as our High Priest (Rom. 8:31–39; Hebrews chapters 5, 7–8, 10). “*That He might fill all things.*” This idea of filling indicates full supply and control, as in the filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; see also Col. 1:19; 2:9–10).

4:11. “He Himself gave.” This stresses that Christ and no other has done this. “*Apostles ... prophets ... evangelists ... pastors and teachers.*” These are the primary communication gifts for the instruction and edification of the Church. Prior to the completion of the written New Testament Scriptures, apostles and prophets received divine revelation. Now that the written Word is complete, there is no new revelation from God. Evangelists are gifted to win men to faith in Christ. Their strength is in a powerful presentation of the gospel message. I take “*pastors and teachers*” to refer to the same gift. You will note that the same construction is used in Acts 13:1 as “*prophets and teachers,*” where both titles refer to the same five men.

4:12 “For the equipping of the saints.” The purpose of communication and teaching gifts is to bring the members of the Church to spiritual maturity (Heb. 5:14–6:1; 2 Pet. 3:18). “*For the work of ministry.*” Each member of the Body of Christ has a ministry to fulfill (2 Cor. 5:18–20). This can not be achieved without spiritual growth and maturity. “*For the edifying of the body of Christ.*” Spiritual gifts are not for personal gain, but for the strengthening of fellow believers (1 Cor. 14:12, 19).

4:13 “Till we all come to the unity of the faith.” There are three forms of “*unity*” spoken of in this chapter. First, there is our spiritual unity in Christ (vv. 4–6). Jesus Christ has already secured this unity. Second, there is “*unity of the faith*” (v. 13). This is speaking about spiritual maturity in our understanding of God’s Word and comes only through growth. Finally, there is functional or operational unity (vv. 15–16), which is the Body of Christ building itself up as each member ministers their gift effectively. Paul illustrates this process by three terms: “*knowledge of the Son of God*” refers to the learning of sound doctrine; “*a perfect man*” simply means spiritual maturity; and “*the stature of the fullness of Christ,*” which is a picture of a body able to perform as it is intended to do.

4:14 *“No longer be children.”* The word used here means little babies. *“Tossed ... and carried”* pictures instability and insecurity in the face of false teachings. *“Every wind of doctrine”* speaks of teachings that change like the wind. False teachers rely on *“trickery ... cunning craftiness”* and like a prowling beast they *“[lie in wait for] deceitful plotting.”* Spiritual maturity in the Word of God gives discernment (1 Cor. 11:3; Heb. 5:14) to spot and avoid false teachers and their destructive teachings. Immature believers are easily led astray by false teachers.

4:15 *“Speaking the truth in love.”* The teaching of God’s Word, in the love of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), is set in contrast to false teachers who are motivated by greed and malice to promote their destructive lies. *“May grow up ... into Him.”* Jesus Christ is both the goal and the standard for all spiritual growth. As the Head, He is the Authority and Guide for the Body (Heb. 12:2).

4:16 *“From whom”* again emphasizes that all spiritual growth comes from Jesus Christ as the source and supply. *“Joined and knit together”* is another picture of unity. *“By what every joint supplies”* seems to picture the provision of the teaching gifts. Using the supply from those in teaching positions, individual believers engage in *“effective working ... [doing their] share”* of ministry, resulting in the edifying, or building up, of the Body *“in love.”* Every time Paul uses *“love”* he is reminding us that the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23; 1 Cor. 13:4–8) is essential.

Walking in Sanctification

Ephesians 4:17–32

This section sets forth the contrast between the carnality of immature believers and the spirituality of those who are growing in grace and truth. Sanctification refers to separation from the world as we “grow in grace and truth” (2 Pet. 3:18).

4:17–19 It is best to see this section as a unit, setting forth seven characteristics of the Gentiles that believers ought to avoid. It is a warning to the carnal believer, who continues to live and act like unsaved men (1 Cor. 3:1–3). It is amazing that there is a faction within Christianity that denies that a true believer can be carnal. The weight of Paul’s warnings in all his epistles demolishes this idea. Paul warns that we *“should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk.”* What a waste this warning is if such a thing is impossible for believers! The *“futility of their mind”* refers to the vacuum of the soul not founded on Christ. Without the illumination that comes from the light of the truth, the *“understanding [becomes] darkened.”* This process also occurs in the soul of a believer who rejects sound biblical teaching. That even believers may become *“alienated from the life of God”* is proved by Paul in Galatians 5:1–4. When believers *“grieve the Holy Spirit”* (v. 30), His work in their lives is hindered. *“Because of... ignorance.”* This refers to ignorance of the Word of God. *“Because of the blindness [hardening] of their heart.”* That the hardening of the heart is a danger to believers is seen in many passages (Mark 6:52; 8:17; 16:14; Heb. 3:8, 12–13, 15; 4:7). *“Being past feeling”* speaks of spiritual insensitivity to the Word, and the ways, of God. *“Have given themselves over”* actually means to betray oneself. If a believer turns from the path of growing up in Christ, even his end result is *“lewdness [licentiousness] ... uncleanness ... with greediness.”* This refers to the insatiable pursuit of self-gratification of an empty soul (Jer. 2:13). Either we will live for Jesus Christ, or we will live for self-satisfaction. Paul gives us examples of believers whose lives ended in this way (1 Tim. 1:19–20; 2 Tim. 4:10). None of this means the loss of salvation, but rather it reveals that backsliding or reversionism is a danger to those who do not go on to maturity (Heb. 5:11–14; 6:1). This gradual spiritual decline in the life of the carnal believer is described also in the five warning sections of the book of Hebrews (Heb. 2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:26–39; 12:25–29).

4:20 *“You have not so learned Christ.”* The worldview of the believer is to be shaped by Jesus Christ (John 6:45). We who believe are called by Jesus to *“learn from Me”* (Matt. 11:29). We learn from Him through His Word. The word translated *“learn”* is from the same root word as that translated *“disciple”* in other passages. A disciple is both a learner and follower.

EPHESIANS 4:21–30

4:21 *“If indeed you have heard Him.”* This could be translated, “[Since] ... *you have heard Him*” (Eph. 1:13–14). Paul had no doubt about their salvation. *“And ... been taught ... as the truth is in Jesus.”* Paul will now review what he had previously taught these Ephesians during his stay with them (Acts 19:1, 8–10; 20:17–31).

4:22–24 These verses show the opposite of the downward spiral of vv. 17–19. The upward path of growth is followed as we *“put off ... your former conduct.”* This sinful conduct (vv. 17–19) is the fruit of *“the old man,”* referring to the domination of the sinful nature (Rom. 6:11–14). *“Which grows corrupt”* shows that not only can the sin nature not improve, but it also actually progresses from bad to worse. *“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”* This renewal can come only by submitting to the Spirit of God and learning His Word (Rom. 12:1–2). *“Put on the new man.”* The phrases *“put off ... put on”* picture the removal of a soiled and dirty garment, and the putting on of clean clothing. When we daily confess our sins (1 Cor. 11:27–31; 1 John 1:9), we receive cleansing and restoration to fellowship so that we can *“walk in the light as He is in the light”* (1 John 1:7). *“Created ... in true righteousness and holiness.”* The “new creature” of Christ within the believer (2 Cor. 5:17) reflects the nature of Jesus Christ. The new man is *“holy and without blemish”* (Eph. 5:26–27).

4:25 In vv. 25–32, Paul shows us how to put off the old ways and put on the character and conduct of Christ. *“Putting away lying ... ‘speak truth.’”* (Zech. 8:16) Believers learn, within the protection of the local church, how we are to conduct ourselves in the world. Both the teaching of God’s Word and the interaction with *“members of one another,”* our fellow believers, we learn—like children in a family—how we are to conduct ourselves.

4:26 *“Be angry ... do not sin.”* Only godly anger against sin can prevent us from engaging in it (Psalm 4:4; 37:8). *“Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”* This can have two meanings: If your anger is righteous indignation against sin, then deal with the sin and be done with it. But if others provoke your anger, do not allow it to fester. Anger prolonged leads to the poison of bitterness (Heb. 12:15; 1 Pet. 2:1–3).

4:27 *“Nor give place to the devil.”* Unrestrained anger in the soul gives the devil a base of operations to work all manner of evil against us.

4:28 *“Let him who stole steal no longer.”* The best way to “put off” sin and “put on” righteousness is to replace sin with what is good. One who was a thief can *“labor, working with his hands ... that he may ... give him who has need.”* Victory over sin is not gained when we just stop sinning. It is gained when we replace sin with spiritual conduct, trusting the Spirit of God to enable us in right conduct (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). Here, instead of robbing others, the former thief becomes a source of help to others.

4:29 As in the example above, the believer replaces *“corrupt word [communication]”* with a conversation that is *“good for necessary edification.”* The goal of our conversation should shift from what is destructive to that which builds others up. If we seek to exalt ourselves, we will be divisive. If we magnify Jesus Christ, we will bring harmony. *“That it may impart grace to the hearers”* indicates a conversation that is full of God’s Word and points to the Lord Jesus Christ. Good conversation builds relationships, where evil communication destroys them (Prov. 16:27–30; James 3:1–12).

4:30 *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”* The Spirit of God is grieved by sins in our life, whether they are sins of the mind, of the tongue, or of the body. Rather, we are to submit to the filling and enabling of the Spirit in our lives (Eph. 5:18, 22–23). *“By whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”* The sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21–22; Eph. 1:13–14) secures the eternal salvation of every believer. No good that we try to do can secure our salvation, and no sin we commit can threaten it. It is forever secured by the seal of the regenerating and indwelling Spirit.

4:31–32 *“Let all bitterness ... be put away ... and be kind ... tenderhearted.”* With these words, Paul summarizes the thought begun in vv. 22–24 with the words *“put off ... put on.”* The departure from sinful conduct must be balanced by Christ-like living. *“Forgiving ... even as God in Christ also forgave you.”* All conflict and division within the Body of Christ would be resolved if we would treat others as God has treated us. He has done this for Christ’s sake, based on His sacrifice. We ought to show our love for Him by treating others in the light of the cross of Christ (Matt. 6:12–15).

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 5

Paul exhorts us to become imitators of God in our Christian walk. This is possible only by being filled by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Walking in Love Ephesians 5:1–7

There are six commands in this section, beginning with the command to become imitators of God.

5:1 *“Therefore”* links the following commands to the theme begun in v. 4:1 of *“walking worthy of the [our] calling.”* *“Be imitators of God.”* We do this by imitating Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 John 3:16–18) as He is revealed in the Gospel accounts. *“As dear children”* could be translated “as beloved children.” Children in a loving family always have a desire to imitate their parents.

5:2 *“Walk in love”* is the chief way to imitate God, because *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8, 16; 5:1). Paul says of the Spirit-filled believer, *“the love of Christ compels us”* (2 Cor. 5:14). The fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22), but this is divine love, not capable of being produced by man. *“As Christ also has loved us.”* The sacrificial life and death of Jesus are the standards we are to use as a measure of Christ-conformity (Luke 22:27; John 13:13–15, 34; Rom. 8:29; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 John 2:6). *“For a sweet-smelling aroma.”* The self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf was an acceptable sacrifice to God (Lev. 1:7–9; 2:9), just as our lives are to be (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 2:14–15; Phil. 4:18).

5:3 *“Let it not even be named ... as is fitting for saints.”* The word *“saint”* means “a set-apart one, one who is set apart to God.” From the moment we believe in Jesus Christ, we are *“called to be saints”* (1 Cor. 1:2). The words “to be” are not in the original text. God calls us *“saints,”* because we are “set apart” to Him in Christ. Here, Paul exhorts that our positional sanctification in Christ (1 Cor. 6:11) now must become active sanctification/separation (1 Thess. 4:3–7; 5:23). By using both the outward sin of *“fornication [sexual immorality]”* and the inward sin of *“covetousness,”* Paul reminds us that all active sins begin in the mind/heart (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 12:34; Luke 6:45; Rom. 14:23b).

5:4 *“Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting ... but rather giving of thanks.”* Having dealt with sins of the mind and of the body in v. 3, Paul now deals with sins of the tongue (James 3:1–12). The believers’ speech ought to be filled with grace and truth so as to lead nonbelievers to Christ and to edify those who are children of God (Prov. 10:21; Col. 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:15).

5:5 *“For this you know ... has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”* This verse has caused many Christians struggling with sin to doubt their salvation. It must be pointed out that every believer is a *“new creation”* (2 Cor. 5:17), and is no longer counted among those who are lost, but is now a saint (1 Cor. 6:9–11). Sin in the believer’s life is disciplined as in a father/child relationship (1 Cor. 11:31–32; Heb. 12:3–11). Jesus Christ paid for all our sins: past, present, and future. Unbelievers have no inheritance in God’s eternal kingdom (Gal. 19–21), but every believer has a secure and assured inheritance (Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 3:26–29; 1 Pet. 1:3–5).

EPHESIANS 5:6–15

5:6 “The wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience.” The “*sons of disobedience*” represent unbelievers (Eph. 2:2). However, when believers live like unbelievers, they share the same consequences of those sins (2 Sam. 12:7–15; 1 Cor. 3:3; Heb. 10:29–31; 12:3–11, 25–29).

5:7 “Therefore do not be partakers with them.” This verse makes it clear that Paul is talking about unsaved people, and he does not want believers to become “*partakers*” in their sins, as well as partakers in the judgment of those sins. By exercising self-judgment, which includes not only confession but correction, the believer can avoid partaking in that judgment (1 Cor. 11:28, 31). In addition, God judges His own people first (Deut. 32:36; Heb. 10:26–31; 1 Pet. 4:17). This also includes the Judgment Seat of Christ, where every believer will be judged regarding faithful service, and receive or lose rewards accordingly (Rom. 14:10–12; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 3:11).

Walking in the Light Ephesians 5:8–14

5:8 “For you were once darkness.” At the moment we believe in Jesus, we are transported into the kingdom of Christ (John 3:19; Col. 1:12–13; 2:13–15). Now we “*are light in the Lord*” (Matt. 5:14–16). Therefore, we are to “*walk in the light*” of God’s Word (Psa. 119:105, 130; Isa. 2:5; John 8:12; 12:35–36; 1 John 1:7).

5:9–10 “The fruit of the Spirit.” The indwelling Spirit reproduces the character of Christ in us (Rom. 5:3–5; 8:29; Gal. 5:22–23). “*Goodness, righteousness, and truth.*” These qualities define what Paul means by “*light*” in vv. 8 and 14. “*Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.*” Obedience in our lives is what pleases God and proves the perfection of His will (John 14:21; Rom. 12:1–2; 1 Thess. 4:3).

5:11 “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.” There is no common ground between light and darkness (2 Cor. 6:14–18). “*Fellowship*” involves participating with unbelievers and in the sinful activities mentioned in vv. 3–5. The unsaved world is under the control of the powers of darkness (Eph. 6:12). As children of light, our task is to “*expose them.*” The word “*expose*” can also mean “to reprove or rebuke.”

5:12 “Things which are done by them in secret” should not even be topics of our conversation. What men try to hide in secret, God will expose and judge (Luke 8:17; 1 Cor. 4:5).

5:13 “But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light.” Light reveals the true nature of things. When the “*light*” of God’s Word shines on the activities of unsaved men, the evil motives behind them are revealed. While sin seeks to conceal, the light exposes. Be the light! Living in the light gives us freedom from fear and shame (Gen. 2:25; 3:7–10 cf. 1 John 1:7).

5:14 “Awake ... arise from the dead.” Paul imitates the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 26:19; 60:1) in calling the people of God to awaken to the light of God’s Word and come out of the “*sleep*” of carnality (Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 3:3; 1 John 1:6). Christians are not to “*sleep*” (1 Thess. 5:4–7), like the disciples in the Garden (Matt. 26:40, 43, 45), but to be alert and active. It should be pointed out here, in regard to the reference in 1 Thessalonians 5:4–7, that a different Greek word is used for “*sleep*” than in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. In the earlier passage, “*sleep*” speaks of the rest of the believers’ body in the grave. In the second passage, the word used is a negative term used for those who are unaware or unconscious of what is going on around them.

Walking in Wisdom Ephesians 5:15–21

5:15 “Walk circumspectly.” These words mean to “exercise caution and vigilance” in daily life. “*Not as fools but as wise.*” Wisdom walks with caution and good judgment. The whole book of Proverbs is about the contrast between the wise man and the fool (Prov. 14:15–16).

5:16 “Redeeming the time.” Every moment that we live in the Spirit and by faith is an investment in eternity. **“The days are evil.”** The light of a faithful believer’s life may win others out of the grip of Satan (Col. 4:5). Time is our most precious possession. Every moment passes and will never come again. We should use every minute for eternity!

5:17 “Understand what the will of the Lord is.” True wisdom is not the accumulation of knowledge. It is to simply know and do the “will” of the heavenly Father. Wisdom seeks to know the will of God, by Bible study and prayer, and to obey His will moment by moment.

5:18 “And do not be drunk ... but be filled with the Spirit.” Where drunkenness dulls the senses and diminishes ability, the filling of the Spirit quickens our senses and empowers our actions. Drunkenness is “being under the influence” of alcohol, with the parallel “being under the Spirit’s influence.” The first step to being filled is to empty ourselves of self-will (Luke 9:23), then to be filled with the Word of God (Col. 3:16). Sin breaks our fellowship with God, and therefore must be confessed and cleansed (1 John 1:9), so that we may again walk in the light of His Word (1 John 1:7; 2:6). Another description of the filling of the Spirit is to abide in Christ (John 15:1–10).

5:19 “Speaking to one another ... giving thanks ... to God the Father.” Evidence of the Spirit-filled life includes inner joy, the desire to edify others, and gratitude to God in all things (1 Thess. 5:16–20).

Walking in Relation to Others

Ephesians 5:21–6:9

5:21 “Submitting to one another.” This is an expression of Christian humility (Phil. 2:1–8). **“In the fear of God.”** Our reverence for God ought to be evident in our love for fellow believers.

5:22 “Wives, submit to your own husbands.” Just as Christ submits to the Father (1 Cor. 11:1–3) so wives should submit to their husbands. Submission is not subjugation. Submission in all areas of life demonstrates the recognition that God has established both authority and order in life. **“As to the Lord.”** A wife can recognize that this is her God-given role in life (Col. 3:18, 23).

5:23 “For the husband is head ... as also Christ is head ... and He is the Savior of the body.” Headship means authority for leadership, protection, and provision. Jesus Christ is Head of the Church, and in that role, He sacrificed Himself for us (Phil. 2:5–9). So, husbands are to show their headship, not just in leadership, but in self-sacrifice.

5:24 “Just as the church is subject ... so let wives be.” Marriage is to be a living picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church. All marriage problems result first from failure in our relationship to Christ. The refusal of the husband to submit to the Lord (1 Cor. 11:3), or of the wife to her husband, or of children to their parents, all results in a breakdown of the divine order. Without authority, there is only anarchy and chaos.

5:25 “Husbands, love ... as Christ also loved the church.” The husband is to imitate the love of Christ, which is self-denying and sacrificial (Luke 9:23; Col. 3:19; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:21; 3:7, 18; 4:1).

5:26 “That He might sanctify ... with the washing of water by the word.” God’s Word is the instrument by which the sacrifice of Christ is made effective in us (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 4:12–13). Even so, Christian husbands ought to be the Word-bearer, in both tongue and deed, to their wives and families. Their authority is not to rule over, so much as to lead in spiritual growth (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:5–7; 3:18).

5:27 “That He might present [the church] to Himself.” Jesus Christ purifies and blesses the Church, as a gift to Himself. So, the husband ought to bless and edify the wife as a gift to himself. The man who carefully tends the garden of his home and family is the rich recipient of his labors.

EPHESIANS 5:28–6:4

5:28 “So husbands ought to love.” Before a husband can love his wife *“as Christ loves the Church,”* he must first learn to love her as his own body. Just as he protects, cares for, and nourishes his own body, so he ought to do toward his wife. **“He who loves his wife loves himself.”** This is because in marriage, husband and wife become *“one flesh”* (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5–6). Just as one who takes care of his body reaps the rewards of good health, so the husband who loves his wife will be richly rewarded with God’s blessings on his marriage and home. A joyful and loving home is worth more than all the world’s wealth!

5:29 “Nourishes and cherishes.” Just as we protect, feed, and care for the body, so we should do in marriage. The word *“nourishes”* is used again in v. 6:4, translated *“nurture”* or *“training,”* and speaks of tender care in training. The word *“cherishes”* is used in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 to picture the loving care of *“a nursing mother.”*

5:30 “For we are members of His body.” Our spiritual union with Christ through faith explains and illustrates His care for us. On Earth, the Church is the Body of Christ, being prepared for our eternal role as the Bride of Christ (Rev. 21:1–2, 9–10). **“Of His flesh and ... bones.”** Paul uses this term instead of *“flesh and blood”* because *“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”* (1 Cor. 15:50). The resurrection body of Christ is made up of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39).

5:31 “For this reason ... the two shall become one flesh.” This quote from Genesis 2:24 (see v. 28) reveals that physical union is a picture of our spiritual union with Christ. Many say there will be no marriage in Heaven, based on Matthew 22:30. However, actually, Heaven is an eternal marriage between Christ and His Bride—the Church.

5:32 “This is a great mystery.” Remember from Ephesians 3:1–7 that *“mystery”* means a spiritual truth never before revealed. Nowhere in the Old Testament is the union of Christ and the Church anticipated. In Scripture, *“mystery”* is new truth revealed in and through Christ. **“I speak concerning Christ and the church.”** The marriage union is not the mystery, but rather how it portrays the union of *“Christ and the Church.”*

5:33 “Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife.” Note here the exclusiveness of marriage, found in the words *“each one ... in particular ... his own.”* Just as the first great commandment leads to a fuller understanding of the second (Matt. 22:37–40), so it works in marriage. The more we learn to receive the love of God, and to love our Lord, the more we can love wives, children, and others. All spiritual love is produced by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:22–23)

EPHESIANS CHAPTER 6

This chapter division really comes at a bad place, interrupting the flow of Paul’s thought. We resume with his instruction on how we are to relate to others as an expression of our faith.

Walking in Relation to Others (Continued)

Ephesians 6:1–9

6:1–3 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord.” All children are to obey their parents because God has given authority to parents over their children. However, children are not bound to obey parents who command them to do sinful things. The same is true of citizens to rulers (Rom. 13:1–8), and of wives to husbands (Eph. 5:22). These commands come down from the seventh commandment (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). **“That it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”** Obedience to parents is obedience to God, and both may lead toward blessing and a long life (Deut. 5:16; 32:47; 1 King 3:14; Prov. 10:27).

6:4 “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath.” We provoke our children when we tell them to do one thing, while we do another (hypocrisy). It is also a provocation if we constantly point out their failures, but never commend their achievements. This is discouraging to children (Col. 3:21). **“Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”** The word *“training”* means to *“nurture and to nourish”* (1 Thess. 2:7).

“Admonition” means to “verbally instruct” them. If we bring them up in the admonition of the Lord, they will see His grace and mercy revealed within the truth of His Word.

6:5–6 “*Servants, be obedient.*” God has placed authority over every area of life. There is no one, no matter how high their social or political or military position, who is not under some kind of authority. Overall earthly authority is the authority of God Himself. Servants should obey their earthly masters, as good servants of Jesus Christ. **“*With fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart.*”** The word *“sincerity”* means “simplicity and single-mindedness.” The Greek word *haplotes*, means “single- hearted devotion,” translated *“simplicity”* in the KJV (Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 1:12; 11:3) *“Fear and trembling”* speak not only of a genuine desire to please one’s master (or boss), but to be able to give a good account to the Lord of their service. **“*Doing the will of God from the heart.*”** The desire to please God affects every believer, no matter their station in life (Eph. 5:17; Col. 3:22–23). Knowing that God is always watching, we ought to serve—as a slave or employee—so as to please God and do His will.

6:7 “*With goodwill doing service, as to the Lord.*” Everything we do should be an offering that is acceptable to the Lord (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 10:5). The love of God and the desire to please Him should affect both how we exercise legitimate authority and how we obey those in authority over us (see the first great commandment in Matt. 22:37–38; 2 Cor. 5:14).

6:8 “*Whatever good one does, he will receive the same from the Lord.*” God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11; 10:12). No matter what our station in life is, our lives will be evaluated, and our good works rewarded, if we offer our lives as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1–2; 14:10–12; 1 Cor. 3:10–15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23–25).

6:9 “*Masters, do the same things to them.*” Those in positions of power and authority ought to keep in mind that we all will stand before the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Bema Seat) (2 Cor 5:10) to give an account of how we live (Matt. 12:36). The second great commandment (Matt. 22:39) applies in all areas of life (Rom. 13:8–10).

If we truly learn to become imitators of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1), our lives will be marked by grace, truth, and love (John 1:14; Rom. 8:29; 1 John 2:5–6; 4:17).

The Warfare of the Believer

Ephesians 6:10–20

6:10 “*Be strong in the Lord.*” This command literally means to receive strength from God. The provision of God’s strength is available to every believer. This power comes from understanding our position in Christ (Neh. 8:10; Eph. 1:13–14; 2:4–8). We receive it by learning His Word (Eph. 1:17–23) and by relying on His Spirit (Eph. 3:14–21). **“*In the power of His might.*”** Before we can be strong, we must understand our own weaknesses (1 Cor. 1:26–31; 2 Cor. 12:9–10). We can only be strong by faith as we rely on His power (1 John 4:4; 5:4).

6:11 “*Put on the whole armor of God.*” Paul outlines this *“armor”* in vv. 14–18. We are to *“put on”* the full armor, just as we are to *“put on the new man”* (Eph. 4:24; see Rom. 13:11–14). **“*That you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*”** Only the armor of faith enables us to withstand the lies, schemes, and strategies of the devil (2 Cor. 6:7; 1 Pet. 5:8).

6:12 “*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.*” The spiritual battle involves spiritual enemies and requires spiritual armor and weapons. The word *“wrestle”* speaks of hand-to-hand combat. **“*Principalities ... power ... rulers ... spiritual hosts of wickedness.*”** This list shows that Satan has a hierarchy of fallen angels that are well organized and formidable (Rom. 8:38; Rev. 12:7). We fight not against men, but against a hierarchy of demonic powers under Satan’s control.

EPHESIANS 6:13–19

6:13 “Take up the full armor of God.” We must choose daily to put on our spiritual armor. We should face each day like a soldier going into battle. **“That you may be able to withstand in the evil day.”** This can be any time of temptation, discouragement, or other attacks. Paul assures us here that we can “withstand” and “stand” in these times.

Note: There is a logical progression of postures in the book of Ephesians. First, we must learn what it means to be **seated** with Christ (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1–4). Then, by spiritual growth, we learn to **walk** by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 4:1–3; 5:2, 8; Col. 2:6; 2 Pet. 3:9). Finally, we grow to maturity (Heb. 5:14; Jude 3), where we are able to **stand** against the devil and his forces. We must not only follow this progression, but also the order of “putting on the armor.”

While we tend to focus our attention on the various items of armor (belt, breastplate, sandals, etc.) it is far more beneficial for us to focus on the spiritual provisions (truth, righteousness, Gospel, faith, salvation, Word of God, prayer). These are God’s perfect and complete armor for us to win victory in the spiritual life.

6:14 “Stand therefore.” We always win when we “stand” firm in the victory of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:31–39). **“Having girded your waist with truth.”** The “belt of truth” speaks of consistent Bible study. The heavy, leather belt was the first thing a Roman soldier put on, as everything else connected to it. **“The breastplate of righteousness.”** The “breastplate of righteousness” is the righteousness of Christ given to all who believe (Isa. 11:5; 59:17; Rom. 4:3, 5; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). We are to live out that righteousness by faith (Phil. 2:12–13; 3:9).

6:15 “Having shod your feet.” The heavy, Roman combat sandal made progress possible and gave stability in combat, like our modern combat boots. **“The preparation of the gospel of peace.”** When we study God’s Word and live in obedience to it, we will be prepared to testify to the truth of the gospel message (1 Pet. 3:15). The “gospel sandals” pictured here remind us that discipleship involves “going” (Matt. 28:18–20). God’s kingdom advances by proclaiming peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14–17).

6:16 “Above all, taking the shield of faith.” The “shield of faith” speaks of the ability to counter Satan’s attacks with the Word of God, just as Jesus did (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–12). **“The fiery darts of the wicked one.”** The “fiery darts” seem to refer to especially painful attacks of the enemy. Only faith can overcome the devil’s attacks of doubt, fear, and shame (Rom. 8:31–39; 1 John 5:4–5; Rev. 12:11).

6:17 “The helmet of salvation.” Just as the Roman soldier’s helmet protected his head, so our assurance of eternal salvation protects our soul (1 Thess. 5:8). Those who wrongly fear that they can lose their salvation are easy prey for the enemy. **“The sword of the Spirit ... the word of God.”** Because the Romans tended to be small men, between 5 feet 3 inches and 5 feet 8 inches tall, they developed the Roman short sword, called a *machaira*. It traditionally measured the length of the arm from elbow to fingertip. It was easily handled and effective for both defense and offense (Jude 3). The “sword” is familiarity with and the ability to apply the “Word of God” (Heb. 4:12).

6:18 “Praying always.” Prayer is to the believer what communication is to a soldier on the battlefield. We pray **“in the Spirit”** only when we are “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Prayer should be a moment-by-moment conversation with God (1 Thess. 5:17–18). Paul tells us our prayer life should be 1) constant, 2) vigilant, 3) persistent, and 4) inclusive of others (Matt. 9:38; Luke 22:40; 1 Tim. 2:1–8; Heb. 4:16; 10:19). It is by an effective prayer life that the Christian soldier is enabled to use his armor and weapons.

6:19 “And for me ... to make known the mystery of the gospel.” Paul requests their prayers, knowing that though he is an apostle, he is dependent on their prayer support. He requests that they pray for his boldness and clarity in making the “mystery” (Eph. 1:9–14; 3:1–12) of newly revealed truth clear to those to whom he preaches.

6:20 *“I am an ambassador in chains.”* Though he is a prisoner *“in chains,”* Paul is still an *“ambassador”* of Christ. Each of us shares in this ministry, whatever our position in life may be (2 Cor. 5:18–21). Conditions or changing situations do not change our calling as *“ambassadors for Christ.”* *“That ... I may speak boldly.”* Twice (vv. 19–20), Paul stresses the importance of boldness in presenting the Gospel. A reluctant or hesitant witness will not be very effective!

Final Instructions and Farewell

Ephesians 6:21–24

6:21 *“But that you also may know my affairs.”* Paul is sending Tychicus as a messenger to them. (Acts 20:4; Col. 4:7). He was a trusted companion and faithful servant of God (Num. 12:7; 1 Cor. 4:2; Heb. 3:2–5).

6:22 *“Whom I have sent to you ... that he may comfort your hearts.”* Tychicus would inform them of Paul’s situation and bring comfort from the Word of God to them (Col. 4:7–8).

6:23–24 *“From God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul ends the letter as he began it (Eph. 1:2), with a message sent to them from the heavenly “Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is the expressed desire of our Father that we enjoy His *“peace ... and love”* through His *“grace”* which is received through *“faith.”* A special word of *“grace”* is given to those who *“love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”* How we choose to respond to the teaching of this epistle will determine whether we are included in this faithful group. The word *“Amen”* is a word of affirmation (“I believe it”), or of approval (“Let it be so”). It is the desire of the Apostle Paul, as he closes this letter, that all who read it should be among those who genuinely love and serve the Lord Jesus. May we be among them. Amen!

CONCLUSION

What a treasure the book of Ephesians is! In it, Paul reaches the greatest heights of doctrinal insights regarding both our position in Christ, and the riches of grace we have in Him. But Paul does not leave us here with only an expanded understanding of God’s gracious provisions in Christ. He goes on to show the practical use of these spiritual riches in a life that is constantly growing and bearing fruit so as to be a blessing to those around us. This little epistle, carefully studied and confidently applied, will have a transforming effect on all who diligently apply themselves to understanding and living out its precepts.

What treasures are ours because of the sacrifice and victory of our glorious Savior!

Paul's Epistle to the
Philippians

INTRODUCTION

No church of the early Christian era was more in tune with the theology and spirit of the Apostle Paul than were the Philippians. His letter to them is unlike any other. It is a letter to friends and brothers in a “*fellowship in the gospel*” (Phil. 1:5, 7) that was shared by no other church. No other epistle, with the exception of Philemon, reveals the heart of the Apostle as does this one.

Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, founded the city of Philippi in 368 B.C. It was a strategic site, which commanded the road from Europe to Asia. The city was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12), settled by veteran Roman soldiers. As a colony of Rome, its inhabitants were given Roman citizenship, spoke Latin, and observed Roman customs (Acts 16:20–21). Paul reminds these Philippian believers that they now hold a “new citizenship from Heaven” (Phil. 3:20).

The story of Paul’s first visit to Philippi is recorded in Acts 16, one of the key chapters of the book. After receiving the call from Macedonia (Acts 16:9–10), Paul and his company traveled to Philippi. It was at this point that Luke joined Paul’s team, as is evident from the “*we*” and “*us*” found in Acts 16:10. The story of his first visit is critical to the gospel message for two reasons. First, the key figures in the chapter are Lydia (a wealthy merchant woman), a demon-possessed slave girl, and a Roman soldier and citizen, who was the jailer. Lydia was from the Asian city of Thyatira (Acts 16:14); the demon-possessed slave girl was a Greek; and the jailer was, of course, a Roman. The whole of the world was represented in these three and, in Paul, the Jew, who brought to them the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The second reason this story is so vital is because of the jailer’s question, “*What must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30), and Paul’s answer, a model of the simplicity of the Gospel, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*” (Acts 16:31). Those who seek to add anything to this simple statement of Paul are guilty of betraying the message of the great Apostle (Gal. 1:6–9).

Although the book is filled with the theme of rejoicing, we ought not fail to see that it is set against a background of persecution and suffering. Paul is writing from a Roman prison (house arrest, Acts 28:16, 30), in chains for his ministry (Phil. 1:7, 13). He is writing to a church that, from the beginning, shared in his persecution (Phil. 1:27–30). Not only this, but also no other church was so dedicated to supporting Paul in his missionary journeys (Phil. 4:14–16; 2 Cor. 11:9). In this letter, the themes of thanksgiving (Phil. 1:3–8), suffering (Phil. 1:7, 12, 16, 29–30), warning (Phil. 3:2–3, 18–19), and rejoicing are combined (Phil. 1:4, 25; 2:17–18; 4:4).

In the book of Philippians, we have a snapshot of the turbulence and challenges of the ancient Roman world, and of a valiant and victorious assembly of early believers who opened the door of Europe to the gospel message (Acts 16:8–10; 2 Cor. 2:12–14). Most of us in the western world who have believed are indebted to these courageous, first-century believers.

Philippians Outline

1. Chapter One—the Single Mind (v. 27)
2. Chapter Two—the Sacrificial Mind (v. 5)
3. Chapter Three—the Sanctified Mind (v. 15)
4. Chapter Four—the Steadfast Mind (vv. 1–2)

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 1

In this chapter, Paul reveals to us the confidence and boldness of the mind of a true servant of Christ. He shows us that stability and balance in life comes from seeing our life in light of the perfect plan of God, and a willingness to submit to His perfect will.

The Provisions of Grace and the Progress of Faith Philippians 1:1–11

1:1–2 “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ.” Paul did not need to cite his apostleship to these believers, as he often did in beginning his letters (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1, etc.). Instead, he writes to them as a servant—a “bond-slave,” or willing servant of Jesus Christ. **“To all the saints in Christ Jesus.”** All those who are “*In Christ*” by faith have been “set apart to God” forever and are seen by God as “holy” (1 Cor. 3:17; Col. 1:22; Heb. 3:1). **“Bishops and deacons.”** The word “*bishop*” means “overseer,” and is equivalent to “pastor” and “elder,” the three titles being used for the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1–4). The deacons are to be helpers and servants in the church—not the authorities (Acts 6:1–6). **“Grace ... and peace.”** This greeting is both a summary of the plan of God, and a greeting from the Father and the Son. All those who receive the grace of God in Christ have a standing of peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

1:3–5 “I thank my God ... in every prayer ... with joy ... for your fellowship.” These phrases are almost a summary of the whole epistle. Paul was constantly thanking God with great joy for the fellowship of this staunch band of faithful supporters. The word “*fellowship*” speaks of their participation in his ministry, both in sufferings (Phil. 1:27–30), and in their support (2 Cor. 8:1–5; Phil. 4:14–18).

1:6–7 “He who has begun a good work ... will complete it.” Paul’s confidence is in the working of God to complete their growth, maturity, and service. This confidence includes the fact that “*you all are partakers with me of grace.*” They willingly and voluntarily joined with Paul in receiving and experiencing God’s grace. It was due to their eager response to the Word of God that Paul was able to say, “*I have you in my heart.*” He held them in his heart due to their dedication to his ministry.

1:8 “God is my witness.” Paul declares a solemn oath assuring them of his love. “*I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.*” God loves all men (John 3:16), and commands us to love all men (Matt. 22:37–40). We can only love others when we first love God (1 John 4:19). However, there is a special bond of love shared by those who actively participate (fellowship) in the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–21; 1 John 1:7; 3:11, 14, 16–19; 4:16–19).

1:9 “That your love may abound.” The word “*abound*” (*perisseuo*) means to “overflow, to continue to increase.” Paul desires that they will not cease to grow in grace and truth. **“In knowledge and ... discernment.”** Our love for God and for others increases as we gain greater insight into His Word. This love is not sentimental but is discerning. This involves insight, perception, and skillful application of God’s word to daily life. We do not throw our pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6).

1:10 “That you may approve.” The word “*approve*” is *dokimazo* and means “to prove after testing.” Elsewhere, Paul instructs us to “*Test all things; hold fast what is good*” (1 Thess. 5:21). **“Till the day of Christ.”** This is his second reference to the day of the Rapture of the Church (v. 6; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). We who believe are to live our lives in the Blessed Hope of His return (Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28–3:3).

1:11 “Filled with the fruits of righteousness.” The service we render to Jesus Christ by faith, in the power of His Spirit, will bring glory and praise to God when we stand in His presence. These fruits of the Spirit (Phil. 4:8–9; Gal. 5:22–23) are the result of the righteousness given to us from Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22; 4:3, 5, 11, 22–25; Col. 1:6, 9–11).

Summary Principles: The Disciplines of Grace

*“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, **teaching us** that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” Titus 2:11–14*

1. The above text makes it clear that those who respond to the Gospel message are to continue in its teaching, resulting in transformed lives.
2. The grace of God is freely received, but it carries with it life-changing power.
3. Spiritual maturity comes only to those who enter into the exercise and the disciplines of God’s grace (Heb. 5:12–14).
4. In these opening verses of Philippians, we see the seven disciplines of God’s grace:
 - a. Thanksgiving (v. 3) with “joy” (v. 4).
 - b. Prayer for one another (v. 4).
 - c. “Fellowship,” communion in the things of God (v. 5; Acts 2:42).
 - d. Joint participation in the ministry (v. 7).
 - e. Love for fellow believers (vv. 8–9).
 - f. “Discernment” and obedience (vv. 9–10).
 - g. Fruitfulness in “righteousness”/divine good from the Spirit (v. 11).
5. To be a disciple means to be disciplined according to the teachings of God’s Word.

The Overruling Providence of God

Philippians 1:12–18

1:12 “But I want you to know ... for the furtherance of the gospel.” Paul is writing from his Roman imprisonment, probably under house arrest at this time (Acts 28:16, 30–31). He sees, in the events that unfolded from Acts 21–28, the hand of God at work. The word “*furtherance*” is a Roman military word, *prokope/prokopto*. It literally means “to cut ahead,” and was used both for an advance scout, out ahead of the main force, and also for the advance of an army. Rather than being a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel, his adverse circumstances had furthered its spread, even into the palace guard (v. 13). Nothing that happens takes God by surprise, and His sovereign providence works all things “*together for good, to those who love*” and serve Him (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28).

1:13 “The whole palace guard.” This was called “The Praetorian Guard,” originally made up of 10,000 elite, highly trained Roman veterans. These warriors of Rome were chained to Paul in shifts. They heard his explanation of the work of Christ to many visitors (Acts 28:30–31), they observed the scars of his sufferings (Gal. 6:17), and many were won to faith in Jesus Christ. “***My chains are in Christ.***” Paul was not a justly accused criminal, but a wrongly persecuted servant of Christ (Acts 25:1–12).

1:14 “Most of the brethren ... speak the word without fear.” The effect of Paul’s gallant defense of the Gospel message produced courage in many believers to be more bold in their witness for Christ.

1:15 “Some ... from envy and strife, and some ... from good will.” There will always be those who seek to promote themselves as ministers through the misfortune or afflictions of a fellow pastor-teacher. While a spirit

of competition is the furthest thing from the spirit of Jesus, it is always present and on display in our churches (2 Cor. 10:12).

1:16–17 *“The former preach Christ from selfish ambition ... the latter out of love.”* Even believing ministers can fall to the temptation for self-advancement. However, at the Bema Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11–15), they will see the foolishness of their efforts, as they are burned as straw. ***Knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.*** The word “*appointed*” is from *keimai*, which can mean “to recline, to stay where one is placed,” but can also convey the idea of “to be set forth publicly.” Paul saw his circumstances from divine viewpoint, that is, from God’s point of view. God had orchestrated his circumstances so that he might defend the gospel message and ministry before the throne of Caesar. This would have an effect throughout the entire Roman Empire.

1:18 *“Whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached.”* Paul knew nothing of jealousy in his ministry. Even when others ridiculed him (2 Cor. 10:7–11) and sought to exalt themselves above him (2 Cor. 10:12–18), his desire was for the message of Christ to be proclaimed. Even those who did so with wrong motives, God could still use the message to reach others for the faith.

Summary Principles: The Providence of God

1. The idea of providence is that because God is able to see ahead, He is able to provide in advance (Gen. 22:14).
2. Paul took confidence in knowing that God worked through his circumstances to further His purpose for Paul in proclaiming the Gospel message in Rome (**v. 12**).
3. It was with that same confidence in the plan of God that Joseph was able to forgive and sustain his brothers in Egypt (Gen. 50:20).
4. The same providence can be seen in the story of Ruth (Ruth 2:1–13), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:11, 20–28), and Esther (Esth. 4:14), and so many other Old Testament examples.
5. God is always faithful to work in our lives for the furtherance of His plan (1 Thess. 5:23–24). However, we must cooperate in faith and submission/obedience, for He will not force His plan on us.
6. When the disciplines of grace (**vv. 1–11**) combine with the providence of God (**vv. 12–18**), the result is confidence and boldness in facing the future (**vv. 22–26**).

Uncertain Future, Certain Outcome

Philippians 1:19–26

1:19 *“I know”* is a statement of absolute certainty in Paul’s mind, not about what will happen, but of the final outcome. *“My deliverance”* does not mean salvation, which Paul already has. It means that God will accomplish what is best for Paul, whether that means death, or future ministry (vv. 21–26). ***“Through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”*** Paul sees his own dedication to God’s plan, the prayers of the Philippians, and the provision of the Holy Spirit, all working together to fulfill the will of God in his life (Rom. 8:28; Phil. 1:6; 4:6–7).

1:20 *“Earnest expectation and hope.”* These words express both anticipation and assurance. Paul’s desire was *“that in nothing I shall be ashamed,”* and his confidence was that *“with all boldness ... Christ will be magnified”* in his life, *“whether by life or by death.”* What happened mattered little to Paul, so long as the goal

PHILIPPIANS 1:21–26

of his life—to magnify Jesus Christ—would be fulfilled. It is a wise believer who realizes that our focus should not be on **what** may happen, but **why** God has permitted it.

1:21 “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.” This is truly one of Paul’s greatest sayings. From his perspective, it would be far better to go home to be with the Lord (v. 23). However, from God’s point of view, it was better for him to remain for the further instruction and growth of many believers (vv. 24–25). Paul does not pretend to know what the future holds beyond the certainty that God would fulfill His will.

1:22 “If I live on ... this will mean fruit from my labor.” Should God grant him further life, he would use it to bear more fruit, both for God’s glory, and for his own eternal reward (2 Tim. 4:6–8). Paul could not choose between the two, because only God knew the span of his life (Psalm 90:12) and the work he was called to do.

1:23 “I am hard pressed ... having the desire to depart and be with Christ.” The word “depart” was used in the military for breaking camp. It reminds us of the last words of Gen. Robert E. Lee, “*strike the tent!*” To be with the Lord was far better than to be in prison for Paul. But what was best was whatever the Lord chose for him.

1:24 “To remain ... is more needful for you.” In vv. 23–24, Paul shows three contrasting states or conditions. The first is “to depart” from this earth. The second is, “to be with” the Lord. And finally, “to remain,” for the sake of the Philippians and other believers to whom he ministered. As always, that which benefits others dominates in his mind, for he was a sacrificial offering to God (Rom. 12:1–2; Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6), and a servant to men.

1:25 “Being confident of this ... I shall remain.” As Paul evaluated possibilities and priorities, he concluded that God would continue his ministry. This would result in the blessing of “*progress and joy of faith*” for these believers, who loved him greatly. The word “progress” is, again, *prokope*, the same word translated as “*furtherance*” in v. 12, speaking of an advancing army. In a sense, we could say Paul was the advance scout who blazed the trail, which now the army of the Philippian believers will follow.

1:26 “Rejoicing ... by my coming to you again.” Knowing the love they had for him, Paul anticipates their great joy upon his return visit, by the will of God.

Summary Principles: Confidence in God, Courage in Life

1. No one but God knows the future. It is enough for the mature believer to entrust their future into the hands of God (Eccl. 8:7–8).
2. It is far better to die boldly, than to live in cowardice and shame.
3. When our priority is to honor Jesus Christ, we can be carefree about whether we live or die. This boldness is based on the certainty that to be with Christ is better for us.
4. To be willing to die for Christ, one must first be willing to live for Him, which is much harder (Romans 12:1).
5. In all our plans and desires, one thing should dominate: What will make me most useful to my Master (2 Tim. 2:20–22)?
6. We should develop the ability to rejoice, both in living our lives for Christ (vv. 25–26), and in dying for Him (Phil. 2:17).

Passing on the Guidon

Philippians 1:27–30

Note: In military history, the guidon was the banner or flag that represented the empire or nation, or company to which it was attached. It was a great honor to be designated as the “guide” to carry the banner and, in battle, all troops were to rally to it, hence the saying, “Follow the colors!” Paul is the “guide,” and he is rallying the Philippian believers to the banner of the cross of Christ (Psalm 60:4). If the “guide” were to fall in battle, the nearest man was to raise the guidon and carry it onward.

1:27 “Only let your conduct be worthy.” The word “worthy” is *axios* and pictures a set of scales balancing out. Our conduct should balance with our message, **“the gospel of Christ.”** Paul says the same thing to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:1). **“That you stand fast.”** This was a word that pictured the motto of the elite Roman soldiers, “Stand firm!” (*stete*, Eph. 6:14). These soldiers would not retreat in the face of the enemy. **“Striving together for the faith.”** The word *sunathleo* pictures an athletic team striving together for victory, or a band of soldiers who will not break ranks. They are united for the cause of the faith.

1:28 “And not ... terrified.” The word “terrified” is *pturo*, a very strong word used of a horse that panicked uncontrollably in battle. They were not giving in to fear during their persecutions. This fearlessness has characterized men and women of faith throughout the ages (Psalm 34:7; 91:1; Heb. 11:32–38). **“Which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.”** Their bold and courageous stand in the face of persecutions was a warning to their enemies of their coming judgment from God, and an evidence to the world of the assurance of their ultimate salvation. This courage comes from a mature understanding of our standing in Christ (Rom. 8:31–39; Eph. 1:13–23; 2:4–10; Col. 3:1–4).

1:29 “To you it has been granted.” Their persecutions were, in fact, a gift of God’s grace (*charizomai*) and would gain eternal reward for those who were faithful (Matt. 5:10–12; 2 Tim. 2:12; 4:6–8). **“Not only to believe ... but also to suffer for His sake.”** God gives the gift of eternal life to all who believe in Him (John 3:16; Acts 16:31). He also gives sufferings and afflictions to those who choose to faithfully follow Christ (Luke 9:23; John 15:18–19; Rom. 5:3–5; 2 Tim. 3:12).

1:30 “Having the same conflict.” These Philippian believers were on the same battlefield as Paul, sharing the fatigue and afflictions of the spiritual war. The word “conflict” is *agona*, from which we get “agony.” It was often used of those who fought as gladiators in the Roman arena.

Summary Principles: Standing Firm in the Battle

1. This section reads like a commander preparing his troops for battle.
2. First, they are reminded of the just and holy cause for which they fight (v. 27). It is their duty to conduct themselves in such a way as to bring honor and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. They are to “stand fast,” that is to keep the battle line firm and unyielding. Every believer, like every good soldier, depends on the man to his right and to his left, to “hold the line” (v. 27a).
4. It is not enough simply to hold the line, they must “strive together” in united effort for the faith they profess, to be honored among them and to be made known to the world (v. 27b).
5. They are not to be like a horse that panics in the crash of the battle but, by their courage and calm assurance, to send a message of doom to their enemies, and of the absolute assurance of ultimate victory to their fellow soldiers (v. 28).

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–8

6. By looking at their persecutions as a gift from God, with the promise of great reward, they will ensure that all the above exhortations will be fulfilled (v. 29).
7. They will know that they are imitating Paul just as he was imitating Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), and that should Paul fall in battle (Phil. 2:14–18), there would be many to lift up and carry on the banner of Jesus Christ (v. 30).

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 2

Paul now sets before us the ultimate example of Jesus Christ in His humility and victory. He also provides two living examples of spiritual warriors in Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:19–30).

The Humility, Victory, and Exaltation of Christ Philippians 2:1–11

2:1–2 *“If there is any consolation in Christ.”* To Paul, all true and lasting comfort or consolation found its source in Jesus Christ—whatever its immediate source or channel might be. To him, God is *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”* (2 Cor. 1:3). He is the Father who, through the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, *“comforts us in all our tribulation”* (2 Cor. 1:4). Here, Paul is imprisoned, the Philippians are persecuted, and he greatly desires that they all might have this priceless comfort. How is that comfort to come to us, if not through the members of Christ’s Body? Thus, he urges them to *“love ... fellowship ... affection ... mercy.”* All of these sources and elements of comfort are the result of *“being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord.”* Only by literally being “of one soul,” with care and compassion for one another, could this love of Christ bring comfort to each and every one of them. How different the Church would be, if each member saw their chief role as being an avenue of the love and comfort of Christ to all of the other members (2 Cor. 5:14)!

2:3–4 Such a happy condition in the Church abolishes *“selfish ambition or conceit,”* which are at the root of all division and strife (James 4:1). Rather, in *“lowliness of mind,”* each one ought to *“esteem others better than himself.”* The degree of selfish arrogance that exists in its members, or the depth of genuine humility, determines the condition and spiritual health—or lack of it—in any church. *“Look out ... for the interests of others.”* Humility was scorned in the ancient world, until Christ and His followers elevated it next to love in highest value (Matt. 11:29; 1 Cor. 13:13; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:5). It is to Jesus’ supreme example that Paul now turns.

2:5 *“Let this mind be in you.”* The word for “mind” is *phroneo* and refers to one’s mental attitude. It is a key word in this epistle (Phil. 1:27; 2:2–3, 5; 3:15, 16, 19; 4:2, 7). The *“mind of Christ”* (1 Cor. 2:16b), or the attitude that directed His life, is revealed to us in the written Word of God. To adopt His way of thinking is to be *“conformed to His image”* (Rom. 8:29; 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

2:6–7 *“Being in the form of God ... taking the form of a bondservant.”* Jesus Christ’s humble attitude was demonstrated in His incarnation. This verse speaks of His eternal existence as the second member of the Godhead. Yet, He *“did not consider it robbery”* or, rather, something to cling to for Himself—to be equal with God. Remember that it was this claim of equality with God that first lit the fires of hatred in the Pharisees (John 5:17–18; 10:30–33). *“Made Himself of no reputation.”* This literally means “He emptied Himself.” It means to divest or relinquish all the honor, power, and glory inherent in the Godhead, so as to enter into the estate of true humanity *“In the likeness of men.”* It does not mean He ceased to possess those attributes, but He voluntarily set them aside. As a man, He relied on the power of the Holy Spirit, as we are to do. In this way, the eternal Son of God became a slave to the Father and to the human race (Isa. 42:1–4; 61:1–3).

2:8 *“Being found ... He humbled Himself.”* By His incarnation, Jesus was identified as true Man (perfect humanity) and humbled Himself even further; He *“became obedient to ... the death of the cross.”* Paul seems

to identify three stages of Jesus' self-humiliation: From the glories of Heaven, He became a man. As if this was not enough, He submitted to the death experienced by all men because of the fall of Adam (2 Cor. 5:21). Not only this, but He also willingly accepted the most horrible form of death—that of one crucified as a criminal (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13).

2:9–11 “Therefore.” As a result of His three-fold humiliation, God the Father has given Him, in His resurrected humanity, a three-fold glorification. First, He has **“exalted Him”** above all other men and angels (Psalm 110:1; Heb. 1:4–14). Second, He has **“given Him the name which is above every name.”** This **“name”** includes not only the name given to Moses, **“I Am”** (Exod. 3:14), which was the name of the God of Israel, but it also includes **“Immanuel”** (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), meaning **“God with us,”** as well as **“the Lord of hosts”** (Isa. 47:4; 48:2; James 5:4). He now holds these exalted titles as the resurrected God-Man. Third, to Him **“every knee should bow,”** and **“every tongue ... confess”** His Lordship, **“to the glory of God the Father.”** This great confession will not only involve **“those on the earth,”** meaning all mankind, but also **“those under the earth,”** which will include all fallen angels (Isa. 45:23; Col. 2:15; Jude 6).

Summary Principles: The Sacrificial Life

1. The life of discipleship is a life of self-sacrifice and surrender to the perfect plan of God (Luke 9:23; Rom. 12:1–2).
2. The Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate example we should seek to imitate (Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:5–9). Just as He humbled Himself to become our Savior, so we ought to be willing to humble ourselves to be of service to those around us (Mark 10:45).
3. Paul is also an example of what it means to live a sacrificial life (Phil. 3:7–14).
4. However, the sacrificial life is not a life of sorrow and loss but, rather, is the only path to joy and fulfillment (Heb. 12:2; Phil. 2:17–18).
5. This is because true blessing, joy, and meaning in life come not from gaining what we want, but by giving what others need (Acts 20:34–35).
6. When we seek to give to others instead of gaining for ourselves, we become imitators of Christ Jesus and enter into His joy (Matt. 25:21, 23; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1–2).

Working Out What God Has Worked In

Philippians 2:12–18

2:12 “Work out your own salvation.” Paul does not say to work for salvation, but to work out in life what God has already worked within us by regeneration (v. 13; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Titus 3:5). The grace of God offers eternal salvation as a free gift, which is received by simple child-like faith (Matt. 18:1–3). Once we enter eternal life, God's grace works in us, by His indwelling Spirit, to teach us His Word and to guide us in obedience to what we learn (Titus 2:11–14). **“With fear and trembling.”** True reverence for God produces in us a genuine fear of offending Him and incurring His discipline in our lives (John 16:8; Heb. 12:3–11), resulting in the loss of eternal reward (Heb. 4:1–3, 11, 14–16; 12:12–17).

2:13 “For it is God who works in you.” This is the purpose of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer. He has come as our **“Helper”** (John 14:16–18; Rom. 8:9–17), to work from within **“both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”** Anyone who claims to be a believer but has no sense of the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8) to grow in grace and to do God's will, might well question if they have been born again. His work is to reproduce the mind of Christ in each and every believer (vv. 5–9).

PHILIPPIANS 2:14–19

2:14 “Do all things without ... disputing.” There were conflicts within the church in Philippi (Phil. 4:2), which needed spiritual correction (Phil. 2:1–4).

2:15 “That you may become blameless.” This instruction specifically has to do with the witness of the Church to the observing world. Division and strife in the Church is directly contrary to our union with Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:3–6). **“A crooked and perverse generation.”** Paul describes this fallen world under the dominion of Satan as being both twisted and contrary to Truth. Yet, they will seize on inconsistencies in the lives of believers as an excuse for rejecting Christ. **“You shine as lights in the world.”** Mature and obedient believers are lights in a dark world (Matt. 5:14–16; John 8:12), showing the way to God, by reflecting the love and character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2:16 “Holding fast the word of life.” This can also be translated “holding forth,” in the sense of offering the Word of God to a dark world as the door to escape from the kingdom of darkness (John 3:19; Col. 1:13). **“I may rejoice in the day of Christ.”** When Paul stands before the Bema/Judgment Seat of Christ, he wants to rejoice at their shared reward (Col. 1:28–29; 2 John 1:8). Paul uses the words **“run”** and **“labored”** to emphasize the intensity of his missionary efforts.

2:17 “If I am being poured out.” In the ancient world, wine was often poured out over a sacrificial offering. **“On the sacrifice and service of your faith.”** In great humility, Paul sees his labors as the smaller part, which contributes to the greater sacrifice of the Philippians. If he should be martyred by Rome, it would be for their sake—a cause for which he would rejoice.

2:18 “You also ... rejoice with me.” Paul truly believed what he said in Philippians 1:21, and encouraged these believers—should he be put to death—to rejoice at his good fortune in being at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1–8).

Summary Principles: The Ingredients of Spiritual Growth

1. Spiritual growth begins with obedience to the Word of God (v. 12a).
2. Obedience begins in the heart but works out into the life (v. 12b).
3. We obey God because we have love and reverence for Him, and a healthy fear of His displeasure and discipline (v. 12c; Heb. 12:3–11).
4. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who works the will of God in us (v. 13; James 4:5–10).
5. The greatest light the Church can shine into this dark world is unity and harmony among members of the Body of Christ (vv. 14–15; John 13:34–35).
6. The focal point for all spiritual growth is always the Word of God (v. 16). It must be studied accurately, faithfully, and consistently.
7. The true minister of God’s Word would count his death to be a great prize if he could know that his evangelism and teaching would live on in his students (vv. 16–18).

The Example of Timothy Philippians 2:19–24

2:19 “I trust ... to send Timothy to you shortly.” Timothy, as a young disciple, was with Paul when he first came to Philippi (Acts 16:1–12). The Philippian believers knew Timothy and held him in high regard. It would be Timothy’s task to evaluate the condition of the church and report back to Paul. Timothy’s name means “one who honors God.”

2:20 “For I have no one like-minded.” Paul’s regard for and praise of Timothy in his epistles surpasses his praise for any of his other co-workers (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thess. 3:1–2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2).

2:21 “For all seek their own.” This statement of the selfish motives of many in the ministry is exemplified in those referred to in Philippians 1:15–16 and 2 Timothy 4:10.

2:22 “You know his proven character.” Timothy’s reputation was great from the beginning (Acts 16:1–2). **“As a son ... he served with me in the gospel.”** The analogy of a father and son speaks not only of great affection, but of likeness of character. Timothy was a reflection of Paul and, therefore, of the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:5–9). The indication of Scripture is that Timothy’s father was not a believer (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5).

2:23 “I hope to send him ... as soon as I see how it goes with me.” Here, he explains the reason for his delay in sending Timothy (v. 19). He wants to wait until his case is heard. If the outcome is favorable, he may accompany Timothy. In the meantime, Timothy was a great comfort to and servant of the apostle.

2:24 “I trust in the Lord.” This phrase begins and ends Paul’s words about Timothy (vv. 19, 24). In all that he did, Paul sought to follow the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ as a faithful servant. **“I myself shall also come shortly.”** Paul expresses the same confidence to Philemon (Phi. 22). Many scholars believe that Paul was released from imprisonment for a time, then was rearrested and executed.

The Example of Epaphroditus

Philippians 2:25–30

2:25 “Epaphroditus.” Some suggest this may be the same man as “Epaphras” (Col. 1:7; 4:12), though Epaphras lived in Colossae, and Epaphroditus in Philippi—cities about 300 miles apart. However, both are mentioned with Paul in Rome. His name means “a very charming man.” **“My brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need.”** Paul heaps praise on this man with five descriptive titles. These titles seem to picture the ancient courier who ran great distances to deliver important messages. A courier had to be loyal, dedicated to his calling, able to defend himself along the way, and willing to risk every danger to deliver his message (Phil. 4:18).

2:26–27 “He was ... distressed because you heard that he was sick.” It says a great deal about this man that he was more concerned for those worried about his welfare than for himself. **He was sick almost unto death.** His illness had nearly cost him his life. **“But God had mercy on him ... on me also.”** Paul was apparently unable to heal Epaphroditus, but God had shown mercy, showing the power of prayer.

2:28 “You may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.” God works through adverse circumstances to bring comfort to many, as His good plan unfolds (Rom. 8:28). Paul is imprisoned, facing possible death, yet his greatest concerns are for his friends.

2:29 “Receive him ... and hold such men in high esteem.” Men like Epaphroditus were rare, and to be considered of great value in the church. How we need men like him today!

2:30 In this verse, Paul summarizes the motive of Epaphroditus, **“for the work of Christ,”** the price he was willing to pay, **“he came close to death,”** his self-sacrificial attitude, **“not regarding his life,”** and his dedication to the task set before him by the Philippian church, **“to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.”** As Paul was now under house arrest in his own rented home (Acts 28:16, 30), he needed offerings from the churches to pay his expenses (Phil. 4:14–18). The phrase **“not regarding his life”** uses a word that spoke of an ancient clan of gamblers, who would risk their life on a roll of the dice. Later it was used of a gladiator in the arena and, finally, about two centuries later, it was claimed by Christians who chose to stay in plague-struck cities, so as to care for the sick and bury the dying.

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 3

Paul now records his own experience of coming to the “*mind of Christ*” (Phil. 2:5), and how it had transformed his life. This chapter lays out both the attitudes and the actions that can carry any believer from the new birth all the way to winning the crown at the Bema/Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Transformation of a Pharisee into a Beloved Apostle

Philippians 3:1–14

3:1 “*Finally ... rejoice in the Lord.*” The word “*finally*” could be translated “from now on.” For the Christian, joy is possible under any and all circumstances, if we adopt the mind of Christ (John 16:22, 33; Rom. 5:1–5). **“*To write the same things.*”** Paul recognized the necessity of repetition in his teaching, and that we should never tire of hearing a truth over and over again.

3:2 “*Beware ... beware.*” The term “*dogs*” was one of the worst terms of contempt in the ancient world. It is used here and in 2 Peter 2:22 and Revelation 22:15 for hardened unbelievers. His mention of “*the mutilation*” shows that he is specifically referring to the Jewish legalists who sought to impose circumcision on Christian Gentiles.

3:3 “*For we are the circumcision.*” That is, the true spiritual circumcision (Rom. 2:28–29; Col. 2:11–13). **“*Worship God in the Spirit.*”** The Church-Age believer has entered into full spiritual reality, which the rituals of Judaism all pointed to (Heb. 10:1–4, 12–14). **“*Rejoice in Jesus Christ.*”** Our basis for joy is the finished work of Christ (John 19:30; Col. 1:12–14; 2:9–10). We put no faith in good works for salvation (Eph. 2:8–9).

3:4 “*Though I also might have confidence ... If anyone else thinks he may ... I more so.*” Paul is anticipating those among the legalists who might want to parade their works before these Philippian believers. He offers himself as one who could surpass any of his challengers in training, status, and sufferings—but his point is **all this is still not enough to gain eternal life!**

3:5–6 Here, Paul sets forth the kind of claims his enemies used to exalt themselves. Paul surpassed them all, being of pure Israelite lineage, from the “*tribe of Benjamin*” and thus, a descendant of Rachel, not Leah (Gen. 35:18). **“*A Pharisee ... blameless.*”** Paul does not mean he was sinless, but that no one could find fault in him. His claims surpassed those of his rivals (2 Cor. 10:10–16; 11:22–30). The “*righteousness ... in the law*” could not save. Only by receiving the righteousness of Christ by faith can one enter eternal life (Rom. 4:3, 5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:10–14).

3:7 “*Gain to me ... loss for Christ.*” This is the great decisive moment in Paul’s life, which would have occurred shortly after his Damascus revelation (Acts 9:1–9). This is the fundamental decision of discipleship (Matt. 13:44; Luke 9:23; 14:26–33). Christ demands and deserves to be first place in all things (Col. 1:18). What Paul had considered to be assets in his unbelieving life, he now recognizes as liabilities. The religious practices of the unsaved are the greatest hindrance to their coming to Jesus Christ in faith (Matt. 19:24).

3:8 “*Indeed I also count all things loss.*” This includes not only what he had attained (v. 7), but all the wealth and prestige the world could ever offer. **“*The excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.*”** Here, Paul moves on from his original change of thinking (repentance) and includes his continued growth in spiritual understanding as a disciple and apostle. **“*I ... count them as rubbish.*”** The word translated “*rubbish*” (*skubalon*) is not found anywhere else in the New Testament and refers to that which is totally disgusting and repulsive (Isa. 64:6), such as human excrement. His point is simple: nothing in this world is worth what he had found through justification by faith in Jesus Christ, and what he continued to learn as he grew in grace (2 Pet. 3:18).

3:9 “*And be found in Him.*” At the moment one exercises faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit places us into eternal union with Him, imputing His righteousness to us (Rom. 6:3–5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:2–9; Eph. 1:13–14). **“*Through faith in Christ.*”** The true gospel message is always “faith alone in Christ alone!”

3:10 *“That I may know Him.”* When we believe in Jesus Christ, we are trusting in the message about Him—what He has done for us on the cross. Spiritual growth comes by moving on to knowing Him personally. *“And the power of His resurrection.”* The desire expressed here is to experience His resurrection life in our daily walk. *“The fellowship of His sufferings.”* In taking up our cross (Luke 9:23), we commit to the willingness to suffer for His sake (2 Tim. 3:12) and, in our own small way, we become *“conformed to His death.”* By His death, Jesus Christ conquered sin and death (Col. 2:13–14). By living in the power of the Holy Spirit, we also share in that victory (Rom. 6:6–14).

3:11 *“If ... I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”* Here, Paul uses a word for “resurrection” not found anywhere else in Scripture. It literally means “out-resurrection,” Paul does not doubt either his salvation or his future resurrection. What he desires, and hopes to attain, is both the living experience of the resurrection life of Christ here and now, in his imprisonment and possible martyrdom (Phil. 1:21–23; 2:16–17), and his final approval and reward before the throne of Jesus Christ at the Bema/Judgment Seat (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; 2 Cor. 5:9–10). This final victory had not yet been attained (v.12), because Paul realized that failure on his part was still possible. Every believer must realize that as long as we are in this life, God’s grace and power are available to us. But we must never cease to strive to our utmost to claim them by faith (Heb. 6:11–12), lest we should *“become weary and discouraged”* (Heb. 12:3) and fail to “run our race” to the finish (Heb. 12:1). The possibilities of either victory or failure exist for each of us until this life is over.

3:12 *“Already attained ... already perfected.”* These phrases show that Paul is thinking about the future completion of his life in faith and victory. He is still in the race, and he is still running to win (1 Cor. 9:24–27). As long as we live, there is more to learn and more to apply of the power of the life of Christ in us. *“That I may lay hold ... for which Christ Jesus ... laid hold of me.”* Jesus had a plan for Saul of Tarsus when He met him on the Damascus Road. That plan is not complete since Paul is still alive. Paul’s desire, in simple terms, is to fulfill the plan of God for his life. This same desire should be the driving force in every believer’s life. Each and every believer has been *“called according to His purpose”* (Rom. 8:28b). The motivating force of our lives ought to be to lay hold of and to finish the plan of God for us. This demands continual spiritual growth in God’s Word and faithful service according to His will. Every believer needs to be reminded that God has a plan for his or her life (Gal. 6:9; Eph. 2:10). That plan involves growing in conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:18) and faithful service in the area of your gifting (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7), resulting in the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11–16).

3:13 *“Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.”* Here is the key to success in the Christian life. Past failures or successes must be forgotten, in order to strive for victory in whatever time remains to us. The words *“reaching forward”* are from the athletic arena, where the runner, nearing the end of the race, leans forward in the final sprint.

3:14 *“I press toward the goal.”* Paul has his eyes focused on the finish line of his life. *“For the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* This shows that the whole section here (v. 7–14) is speaking about striving for faithful service that will result in eternal reward. God is keeping a record of believers who are faithful (Mal. 3:16–17). Paul desires his life and name to be in that book (*“remembrance”*). So should we!

Summary Principles: The Path to Spiritual Greatness

1. We should rejoice in the repetition of Bible teaching (v. 1). Without truths being repeated over and over we do not grasp their deeper meanings.
2. The great danger to our spiritual growth always comes in the form of false teaching (v. 2). False teachers always claim that salvation *“by grace through faith”* (Eph. 2:8) is not enough. They then add some form of work as being necessary for eternal life (Acts 15:1–5; Gal. 2:16–21; 3:1–3, 10–14).

PHILIPPIANS 3:15–19

3. Paul offers himself as an example to those who think that works can gain eternal life (vv. 4–6). He surpassed them all in good works, yet these accomplishments did nothing in bringing him forgiveness or righteousness.
4. The great moment of repentance and faith came when Paul realized that all his achievements counted as nothing compared to the righteousness and life offered to him by faith in Jesus Christ (v. 7).
5. As a new believer, Paul began the life of a disciple, setting aside the things of this world, so as to know Jesus Christ in a real and personal way (v. 8).
6. Paul's great desire was to not only enter into eternal life, but to live in such a way as to share the power, the fellowship, and the sufferings of his Savior (vv. 9–10).
7. The goal of Paul's life was to experience the resurrection life of Christ here and now, and to gain the greatest possible reward in eternity (v. 11; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:6–8).
8. As long as we are in this life, there is more to learn, more grace to experience, and more service we can render (vv. 12–14). We need to forget the past and to look forward to what lies ahead, and to live in order to win the prize of eternal reward (Heb. 11:26; Matt. 5:10–12; James 1:12; 1 John 2:28–3:3).

The Mind-Set (Attitude) of Spiritual Maturity

Philippians 3:15–21

3:15 *“As many as are mature, have this mind.”* The immediate goal of every believer, according to the plan and will of God, is to grow up into spiritual maturity (Matt. 5:48; Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 5:12–6:1; 2 Pet. 3:18). The word translated here as “mature” (*teleios*) is unfortunately often translated “perfect,” which gives the wrong idea of being sinless. Those who are mature, Paul says, should have the same attitude as he has expressed (vv. 7–14), to continue to grow in grace, wisdom, and power, until life on Earth ends. If you are still breathing, there is more for you to learn and do, and greater sanctification/purification is required (1 Thess. 5:23).

3:16 *“Let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.”* No matter what level of spiritual growth one has attained, whether child, young man, or father (1 John 2:12–14), all should continue to strive for greater Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). Those who are mature ought not to expect young believers to live up to the standards of the mature. We all need freedom to grow and need to show grace and patience with others as they grow up into Christlikeness.

3:17 *“Brethren, join in following my example ... as ... a pattern.”* Paul was able to point to himself as an example of the genuine Christian life, as well as other mature co-workers. Every believer should associate with those who are more advanced in their Christian life and learn to emulate their example. The phrase, *“note those who so walk,”* uses the word *skopeo*, which means “to examine closely,” or “scope-out.” We should all diligently seek and find examples to follow, both of those living now and from historical examples (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Titus 2:7–8).

3:18–19 *“For many walk ... the enemies of the cross of Christ.”* Paul has mentioned before those with impure motives and false teachers (Phil. 1:15–16; 3:2). There will always be imposters, deceivers, and hirelings—even among the body of Christ. Some he mentions by name (2 Tim. 2:17–18). By their erroneous teachings and conduct, they are the enemies of the truth and righteousness for which Christ died. *“Whose god is their belly.”* They live only for what gratifies their own carnal appetites and is pleasing to them in the moment (1 Tim. 5:3–6; 2 Tim. 3:1–9). Their self-centered lifestyle will ultimately destroy them, for “we reap what we sow” (Gal. 6:7–8).

3:20 “Our citizenship is in heaven ... we ... wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” One of our greatest aids to continued spiritual growth and service is to live in the expectation of our Lord’s return (Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28–3:3). Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony and possessed the privileges that accompanied that status. We are a colony of Heaven, planted in this fallen world, to be a light in the darkness (Matt. 5:14–16; Phil. 2:15; Col. 3:1–4). We are ambassadors of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–21).

3:21 “Who will transform ... conformed to His glorious body.” When Jesus Christ returns for His bride, every believer will be glorified in a moment of time (1 Cor. 15:50–58). We will receive a body like His resurrection body. This will accompany His dominion and rule over all things (Psalm 110:1; Heb. 2:5–8). We are to live our lives now in anticipation of our glorious future.

Summary Principles: The Mind of Maturity

1. Those who are mature in Christ will have the same attitude as that expressed by Paul (**v. 15**). Whatever lack we may have in our understanding, if we are striving to excel, God will reveal those things to us.
2. Whatever our level of spiritual growth, we ought to follow in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul (**v. 16**; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Tim. 2:10–17).
3. We must always be on the alert for those who, by their false teachings, make themselves into enemies of Christ (**vv. 17–19**; Matt. 7:15–20; Acts 15:1–5; Gal. 1:6–9; Col. 2:4, 8, 16, 18; 1 Tim. 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:1–9; 2 Pet. 2:1–3). Sometimes these false teachers are believers who have wandered away from the truth, for personal gain (Phil. 1:15–16; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17–18).
4. Believers should always remember that we are citizens of Heaven, and that we are to live by the precepts of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, as we await His return to take us home (**v. 20**; John 14:6).
5. When He comes, all who believe in Him will be transformed into the likeness of His resurrection body (**v. 21**; Job 19:25–27; Psalm 17:15; 1 Cor. 15:50–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 1 John 3:1–3). If we live our lives in light of these truths, we will not fail!

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 4

Paul concludes this epistle with a plea for unity, a call to prayer and obedience, and an expression of gratitude for their continued support. This chapter is filled with great lessons for those who are faithful and mature to avoid complacency and to strive for even greater excellence in thought, word, and deed.

A Call for Stability, Unity, and Tranquility

Philippians 4:1–9

4:1 “My joy and crown.” The crown of joy is an eternal reward given for effective evangelism and training of others (1 Thess. 2:19). Because of their faithfulness and loyalty, Paul had a bond with these believers above all others, and they would share in eternal reward together. **“Stand fast in the Lord.”** This command is repeated from Philippians 1:27. The word used here is a military term that pictures holding the line in the face of enemy attack (Eph. 6:13–14).

4:2–3 “I implore Euodia and ... Syntyche.” These ladies’ names are interesting. The first means “prosperous way,” the second means “good fortune.” They were good workers in the church, who had an apparent falling out with each other. This is the third time Paul has called for unity of mind (Phil. 2:2; 3:16). **“True companion”** is likely the pastor of the church. **“Whose names are in the Book of Life.”** The names of all who believe in Jesus are recorded in this book (Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15).

PHILIPPIANS 4:4–16

4:4 “Rejoice ... rejoice!” This is probably the most famous verse of this epistle. Remember, Paul is a prisoner in Rome facing possible execution (Phil. 1:21–26). His confidence in the perfect plan of God is not shaken by his circumstances (v. 11).

4:5 “The Lord is at hand.” This can refer either to His presence with us at all times (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5–6), or to His soon return (1 Thess. 4:13–18; Titus 2:13). The word *“gentleness”* speaks of patience, forbearance, and being *“temperate”* with others by exercising self-control (1 Cor. 9:25; Gal. 5:23; Titus 1:8).

4:6–7 “Be anxious for nothing.” Victory over worry and anxiety comes through praying for everything. If we entrust everything that concerns us into the hands of a loving and protecting Father, *“the peace of God ... will guard”* our souls (Gen. 50:20; Psalm 27:1; John 14:27; Rom. 8:28). The word translated *“guard”* means “to see and provide in advance,” exactly the idea seen in the experience of Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22:8, 13–14). Our God is *“The God of peace”* (v. 9).

4:8 “Finally.” As in Philippians 3:1, this can mean “from now on,” or “for the duration.” *“Meditate on these things.”* Our life is the product of our mind-set (Rom. 8:5–8).

4:9 “You learned and received and heard and saw in me.” Paul had been both teacher and the example of what he taught. *“The God of peace will be with you.”* It is one thing to be a child of God and secure for all eternity; it is another to live in the daily fellowship of the heavenly Father. This should be the goal of every believer (John 14:21–23; 15:4–8; 1 John 1:7).

Self-Sufficiency through Christ-Dependency

Philippians 4:10–23

4:10 “But I rejoiced ... your care for me has flourished.” Paul expresses both gratitude for their support and his awareness that they had not forgotten him, even though they could not send financial aid until Epaphroditus was able to travel to Rome (Phil. 2:25).

4:11 “I have learned ... to be content.” The word *“content”* (*autarkes*) has the meaning of being “self-sufficient, self-reliant, and independent of outward circumstances.” Paul’s total trust and reliance upon the Lord Jesus set him free from living life “under the circumstances.” He lived life from the heavenly perspective (Col. 3:1–4).

4:12 “I know how ... to be full and to be hungry.” Paul had the “know-how” because he took seriously what he learned of Christ and practiced it daily. While hunger, cold, and exposure could make him uncomfortable (2 Cor. 4:7–13; 6:9–10; 11:24–28), it could not dampen his joy in Christ. He had graduated from the school of affliction with high honors!

4:13 “I can do all things through Christ.” How many Christians quote this as if it were a promise to claim instead of a stature to grow up to? For Paul, it is a statement of fact, based on years of proving it to be true. What he taught them about the power of God, he practiced (Phil. 2:12–13). It is certain that God has a plan for every believer for sanctification and service (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Pet. 1:5–7). If we are growing and obedient to His plan, no other power can hinder its fulfillment in us. *“Christ who strengthens me.”* Again, total dependence upon the Lord brings independence from conditions and circumstances.

4:14 “You have done well.” He commends them for their care for him, so as not to seem indifferent to their gift. *“You shared in my distress.”* His affliction was real, and their gift would help in his time of need (Phil. 1:7).

4:15–16 “When I departed from Macedonia ... in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.” Paul recites three previous times they had supported him as evidence of his gratitude. While he was in Corinth there was another time they sent support (2 Cor. 11:8–10).

4:17 “I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.” Regarding financial support, Paul shows that his greater concern was for the eternal reward being laid up to their account (Matt. 10:41; Mark 9:41).

4:18 “I have all and abound. I am full.” Their gift had provided for all his needs. *“Well pleasing to God.”* Paul always saw his own life, as well as that of his converts, in its relationship to God. Their gift blessed him but, above that, it had been a sacrifice and offering to God (Eph. 5:2).

4:19 “My God shall supply all your need.” Just as God supplied Paul’s needs through the gift of the Philippian church, so He would also meet their needs in return (2 Cor. 9:8–11). Sometimes, believers “have not because they ask not” (James 1:5; 4:2). But many times, believers have not because they give not (Luke 6:38). God’s ability to provide is never limited (Eph. 3:20; 1 Cor. 2:9), but our disobedience and/or lack of faith hinders our ability to receive and use His gifts wisely. *“According to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”* Through our faith and union with Jesus Christ, we have been given access to all the riches of Heaven (Eph. 1:3, 7, 18; 2 Cor. 1:3; Col. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:3). God does not waste His gifts but gives them in proportion to our willingness to learn and apply His Word to our lives. If we reject His Word—the greatest treasure we possess—we have no capacity to rightly use many of His other gifts!

4:20 “To our God and Father be glory forever.” This verse is a summary of all the rejoicing found in this epistle. All praise and glory and honor belong to our gracious heavenly Father (Rom. 16:25–27; Jude 24–25).

4:21 “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.” Two things stand out in this sentence. First, we are saints because of our union with Christ. We have been “set apart” to God for all eternity. One is not a “saint” because they do good deeds. Second, each and every member of Christ’s Body is beloved of God, and there should be a unity and harmony in the Body as a result of divine love for one another (Eph. 4:1–6).

4:22 “Especially those who are of Caesar’s household.” Paul’s witness and ministry in Rome had won many to Christ in the household of Caesar (Phil. 1:12–13). These probably included some Roman soldiers who guarded him, as well as slaves and even members of the family of Caesar.

4:23 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” If we possess and live in the sphere of His grace, all will be well in the end. His grace is sufficient for us all (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

Paul, an Example of Spiritual Growth

1. The Apostle Paul had to go through the stages of spiritual growth just like we do. In the early record of his Christian life, he is recorded first as a **believer** (“brother,” Acts 9:17), then as an evangelist/**witness** (Acts 9:20–22); he then is identified as a **disciple** (Acts 9:26–27), then as **the least of the teachers** in Antioch (Acts 13:1). When he went out as a **missionary**, it was Barnabas who was in charge (Acts 13:2), and not until he grew fully into his gift do we see the mighty **apostle** emerge (Acts 13:9–12).
2. In this section of Philippians, Paul gives us three stages in his own spiritual development:
 - a. **Learning (v. 11).** The word translated “learned” is from *manthano*, which is the root word for “disciple.” A disciple is a student, a learner—one who is devoted to master the knowledge and service of Christ.
 - b. **“Know how” (v. 12).** When we say that someone has “know-how” regarding something, we mean that they are skilled in that area. The result of consistent learning is the development of skill in applying what we have learned to life. Paul gained this skill, being able to abound or be abased, by long and continuous practice. He could stay in a nice inn and eat a fine meal or sleep in a crevice of rock to escape the wind and rain. In either case, he was thankful to God.

- c. Confidence/courage (v. 13). “*I can do all things through Christ.*” How many Christians quote this verse, then fall apart when things don’t go well for them? This is a verse only for the mature (Heb. 5:14), who have proved themselves over and over in the spiritual fight. This is not self-confidence. Paul’s confidence is in “*Christ who strengthens me.*”
3. He also commends the Philippian believers for their growth and service (v. 14). The book begins (Phil. 1:3–7) and ends (Phil. 4:14–20) with his acknowledgement of their generous participation in his missionary labors. True spiritual growth will always result in fruitful service to others (Rom. 7:4; Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 5:8–10; Col. 1:3–6).
4. Paul assures them that their service is not in vain, for it will result in eternal reward (vv. 17–18; Matt. 6:4, 6, 18, 20; Heb. 10:35; 11:26; Rev. 22:12). The highest form of eternal reward is the crown, of which there are five:
 - a. The Imperishable Crown (1 Cor. 9:24–27). This crown is given to those who exercise self-discipline so as to serve Christ better (1 Cor. 9:19–23).
 - b. The Crown of Joy (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19). This crown is given to those who are faithful to win others to faith in Jesus Christ.
 - c. The Crown of Life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10). This crown goes to those who faithfully endure sufferings as a way of life.
 - d. The Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6–8). This crown is given to those who live their lives in light of the return of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13–14).
 - e. The Crown of Glory (1 Pet. 5:1–4). This is often called the pastor’s crown, given to faithful shepherds of God’s flock. It appears that Peter was looking forward to receiving this one, for keeping Jesus’ charge (John 21:15–19).
5. The assurance given in v. 19 should be viewed in the context. God is faithful to His children, whether we are faithful or not. However, we do reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7–9). Disobedient believers will receive divine discipline (Heb. 12:3–11), and that discipline intensifies as long as their rebellion continues. There are four stages of discipline seen in Scripture:
 - a. Rebuke or reproof (Heb. 12:5b; 2 Tim. 3:16). This is verbal correction from the teaching of God’s Word, or from fellow believers.
 - b. Chastening (Heb. 12:5a, 6a). This word means “child-training,” and speaks of the application of the rod (Prov. 13:24; 22:15).
 - c. Scourging (Heb. 12:6b). This is a severe beating (Heb. 10:31). Scourging was done with a whip, producing deep cuts.
 - d. Death (1 John 5:16; Acts 5:1–11). In cases of persistent and destructive behavior by a believer, God may call them home to Heaven early, so as to spare others from their destructive ways (Judg. 16:28–31).
6. The book of Philippians is a joy-filled book but, in the background, are Paul’s sufferings under Roman imprisonment, and the afflictions of these Philippian believers. Triumphant living is joyful living (Neh. 8:10; Heb. 12:2), because it is Christ-centered in thought, word, and deed, and is a blessing to those around. Let us all strive to be such a believer!

Application: Promises Based on Premises

There are a number of promises given to the Philippians that Christians love to quote. Probably, the two most often claimed are Philippians 4:13, *“I can do all things through Christ,”* and Philippians 4:19, *“And my God shall supply all your need.”* The problem is that, when put to the fiery test, most Christians fail to *“do all things through Christ,”* and many find themselves short of the supply of critical needs.

How do we square this lack of spiritual reality that God’s Word seems to promise with the reality we see daily? The answer is really quite simple. The failure lies, as usual, in a failure to understand Scripture in its context.

A brief survey of promises shows us that promises in the Bible usually come with conditions. Many love to quote, *“And we know that all things work together for good ...”* (Rom. 8:28), without finishing the verse, *“to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* The promise is based on a premise of spiritual dedication on the part of the believer. Jesus said, *“If you love Me, keep My commandments”* (John 14:15). Can we casually assume that the promise of Romans 8:28 can then be applied to a disobedient believer?

Certainly, there are some promises in Scripture that are unconditional, based solely on the faithfulness of God. *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* is an example (Heb. 13:5b). But this is a promise about what God will do, not about what we can do.

Certainly, the promises cited above can be said to be **potentially** true of every believer. We all share in the same provisions and potential through God’s Word and by His indwelling Spirit. But, when we read promises in the Bible, we would do well to consider the context. Consider these promises made to the Philippians, with the contextual background:

1. Philippians 1:6, *“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”* Why is Paul confident here? Because of their consistent joint participation with him (vv. 5, 7).
2. Philippians 1:21, *“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* Many believers claim this, without real merit. Paul had proved this to be true (vv. 12–14), and anticipated that he would, by the grace of God, continue to be “unashamed” (v. 20) due to continued *“boldness.”*
3. Philippians 4:13, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* While this is certainly potential for every believer, most who claim it have no clue of its reality in life. Paul came to this by a process (vv. 10–12) of experience, learning, and proven capabilities over the course of many years.
4. Philippians 4:19, *“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”* Certainly, God is able to do this for every believer. However, it is not true of many (2 Thess. 3:11–12; Eph. 4:28; Luke 15:11–17).

CONCLUSION

In this epistle, Paul sets forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of both attitude and conduct for every believer. Not until we fully absorb the mind of Christ, through the diligent study and digestion of His Word, can we hope to actually experience the victorious life of Christ (“humility and obedience,” Phil. 2:5–8). The potential is there for every believer. Few attain the practical reality.

May each of us be challenged to pursue the prize of knowing Jesus Christ
as Paul sought to know Him!

Paul's Epistle to the
Colossians

INTRODUCTION

The town of Colosse, about one hundred miles east of Ephesus, was a small and insignificant place at the time of this its writing. Yet, it was significant—especially to Paul—because of the Christian church there, and because of the heresies that threatened the truth of the gospel message. These consisted of a mixture of mysticism, Jewish legalism, angel worship, and Gnosticism (chapter 2). These teachings were the result of the false teachers Paul had warned the elders of Ephesus about in Acts 20:28–30. The church was apparently founded by Epaphras (1:7; 4:12), probably after his own conversion during Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19). This letter is one of the prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). Epaphras likely carried the letter from Rome in the company of Onesimus (Phi. 10; Col. 4:9), the runaway slave of Philemon.

The Epistles of Colossians and Ephesians are like two sides of a coin. While Colossians exalts Christ as the Head of the Church, Ephesians is more focused on the Church as the Body, and Bride, of Christ. We can also find contrasts between the two. The Ephesian letter assumes a steadfastness in the recipients, while Colossians warns of the dangers of departing from sound doctrine and being led away by empty philosophy. It has been pointed out that many of the words and verses found in one epistle are also found in the other. Because of this, it is worthwhile to study them together as compliments of each other.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 1

In this first chapter, Paul expounds on the greatness of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us. We speak of both the Person and the work of the Savior. His work is effective on our behalf because of who He is. Paul ties the finished work of Christ to those who believe, showing the spiritual benefits of our salvation in our new position “in Christ,” and the power available to us “in the Spirit.”

Paul's Greeting and the Promise of the Gospel

Colossians 1:1–2

1:1 “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” The title “*apostle*” was used in the ancient world for one sent forth with delegated authority. Paul was a personal messenger and representative of Christ. “*By the will of God.*” Apostles did not choose their calling, but were called by God (John 15:16). “*Timothy our brother.*” Timothy was a fellow-minister, but not an apostle (Acts 16:1–3; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2).

1:2 “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ.” Paul defines the position of all believers in Christ as those set apart to God through faith. Our spiritual position, or standing before God, is defined as holy and believing. “*In Colosse.*” Our exalted position “*in Christ*” equips us for effective service in our geographic location. “*Grace to you and peace.*” “*Grace*” refers to all the spiritual provisions we receive the moment we trust in Christ (Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:2), and we find peace as we learn of them and utilize them in our lives. “*From God ... and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Since vv. 3–8 is one sentence in the Greek, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (v. 8) are all included in our spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3, 5, 13).

The Power of the Gospel

Colossians 1:3–5

1:3 “We give thanks to God.” Paul mentions his prayers for them, and details the contents of his prayers in vv. 9–14. Paul often reminds his readers that he prays for them (Eph. 1:15–21; 3:14–21; Phil. 1:3–11; 1 Thess. 1:2–4). “*Praying always.*” Prayer for our fellow believers is a duty for us, and a source of supply for them.

1:4–5 “Since we heard of your faith ... and of your love ... because of the hope.” Here, we find the great triad of Christian virtues (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10–12; 1 Pet. 1:21–22). It is the hope/assurance of eternal life that draws forth our faith, which then produces love (Gal. 5:6b, 22; 2 Pet. 1:5–7). “*Laid up for you in heaven.*” This is part of the spiritual treasure reserved for us (Matt. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:3–5). “*The word of the truth ... the gospel.*” The Gospel is “good news” because it is the message of truth from God. It includes not only the offer of our initial salvation, but also instruction for righteous living (1 Thess. 1:3–10; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

The Progress of the Gospel

Colossians 1:6–8

1:6 “In all the world ... is bringing forth fruit.” The ultimate goal of evangelism is to take the good news to the ends of the Earth (Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2 Tim. 4:5). This is not only to bring new believers to Christ (justification), but also for their spiritual growth and service (sanctification, Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 5:9; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 12:11). “*The day you heard and knew the grace of God.*” For every believer there is a day when the Gospel first makes sense, under the conviction and illumination of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8; Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:13–14). It is then that we know “*the grace of God*” in our own experience (2 Tim. 1:12).

1:7 “As you also learned from Epaphras.” The word “*learned*” here is the root word for disciple. Discipleship is a process of learning, first intellectually, and then experientially (Phil. 3:11–13; 2 Pet. 1:2–11). Epaphras was to Paul a “*dear fellow servant.*” The word means “a bond-slave” or “a willing servant.” Epaphras is probably the shortened version of the Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25 and 4:18. “*A faithful minister of Christ.*” This is the highest acclaim any believer can attain (Matt. 24:45–46; 25:21, 23; 1 Cor. 4:2).

COLOSSIANS 1:8–9

1:8 “Your love in the Spirit.” The love produced by the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:22–23) is the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–15; 2 Pet. 1:7). It is produced in our lives when we “walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18).

Summary Principles:

The Work of the Gospel

1. By faith in the gospel message, we enter into the family of God. We are still in the world, but not of the world (**vv. 1–2**; John 17:14–17).
2. The word “*saints*” (**v. 2**) means “set apart/sanctified” to God. The sanctification process is growth from the inside outward (John 17:17, 19; Phil. 2:12; 1 Thess. 5:23).
3. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all working to “conform us to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ” (**vv. 3, 8**; Rom. 8:29; 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:3–14).
4. The gospel message is first heard, then believed, then learned (**vv. 6–7**; Rom. 10:17; Titus 2:10–14). It gives hope/assurance of eternal life.
5. The Gospel bears spiritual fruit in our lives as we grow in grace and truth (Eph. 4:15; Gal. 5:22–23; 2 Pet. 3:18). This fruit consists of increasing faith, hope, and love (Rom. 5:1–5; 1 Cor. 13:13).
6. The **promise** of the Gospel is “*Grace ... and Peace*” (**vv. 1–2**). The **power** of the Gospel is found in “*faith ... love ... hope*” (**vv. 3–5**). The **progress** of the Gospel is both in its universal scope, “*in all the world*” (**v. 6**), and in personal growth, “*bringing forth fruit ... you heard ... knew ... learned*” (**vv. 6–8**).

The Nature of the Gospel

1. It is “good news for all mankind.”
2. It is the expression of ultimate truth regarding God and man.
3. It is universal and unlimited in scope.
4. It keeps on bearing fruit in the lives of believers.
5. It reveals God’s grace, which results in peace to those who receive it.
6. It is a message that requires messengers to transmit it.
7. It brings the hope/assurance of eternal life and inheritance.

Paul Prays for Transformed Lives

Colossians 1:9–14

1:9 “For this reason we ... do not cease to pray ... and to ask.” Because of what Epaphras had reported to Paul, he prays for the Colossians’ continued growth/sanctification. Prayer involves both thanksgiving and requests. “**Filled with the knowledge of His will.**” These believers were lacking in critical areas of doctrine, which made them vulnerable to the false teachings mentioned in Colossians 2. A full knowledge of God’s will

comes to those who desire to do His will (John 7:17). *“Filled” (pleroma)* is the same word used for the “filling” of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). That the filling of the Spirit is inseparable from being filled with God’s Word is shown by comparing Ephesians 5:18–19 with Colossians 3:16. **“In all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”** It is not enough for us to simply have an intellectual knowledge of God’s Word; that knowledge must be illuminated by the indwelling Spirit, resulting in an understanding of how to relate it to daily life. The Gnostics who were seeking to infiltrate the church claimed to have special knowledge into the “mysteries” of life. Paul declares that only the wisdom that comes from understanding the Word of God is capable of guiding us in our experience (James 1:5).

1:10 “That you may walk worthy of the Lord.” The goal of spiritual growth and insight is a life conformed to Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:3–5; 8:29; 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The word *“worthy”* is *axios* and pictures a set of scales or balances in which our life reflects the character of God (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:1). **“Fully pleasing ... fruitful ... increasing in the knowledge of God.”** The fact that one is walking *“worthy”* does not mean that they are perfect (Eph. 4:1). Obedience to what we know can only increase as we continue to study God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 1:5–8; 3:18).

1:11 “Strengthened ... according to His glorious power.” Strength comes from exercise. The *“might”* of the Holy Spirit gives strength to those who obey, and the result is that the resurrection power of Christ is displayed in our lives (Rom. 1:4; 6:4–5; Phil. 3:10). **“For all patience ... longsuffering ... joy.”** Progress in the path of spiritual growth demands persistence/endurance, sustained by the joy set before us of a productive life and resulting eternal rewards (Neh. 8:10b; Acts 20:24; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27; 2 Tim. 4:6–8; Heb. 12:1–2).

1:12 “Giving thanks to the Father.” Effective prayer is offered to the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the power of the Spirit (John 14:13; 16:23; Eph. 6:18). We must also learn to pray according to the will of God, as it is revealed in His Word (1 John 5:14–15). **“Who has qualified us.”** By forgiving our sins and imputing us with the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), the heavenly Father has made us worthy of receiving an eternal inheritance (Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 4:4–7; Eph. 1:11; 2:4–8; 1 Pet. 1:4–5). **“Partakers of the inheritance.”** Those who are sanctified—set apart to God in Christ—are *“children of light”* (Eph. 5:8–9; 1 Thess. 5:5) and will share a glorious inheritance. While the basic inheritance of the child of God cannot be diminished (1 Pet. 1:4–5), it can be enhanced by faithful service in this life (Matt. 5:12; 6:20; Heb. 10:35–36). When the Bible speaks of losing our reward (1 Cor. 3:15; Col. 2:18), it is not talking about losing our inheritance as a child of God. Rather, it is the loss of some reward we might have gained but failed to achieve through apathy or indifference.

1:13 “He has delivered us.” The heavenly Father rescued us from the dominion of darkness through the work of His Son on the cross. **“And conveyed [transferred] us.”** In the moment we believe in Jesus Christ, this liberation and transfer takes place. We are rescued out of Satan’s kingdom and *“conveyed”* into the kingdom of the beloved Son of God (Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 1:5).

1:14 “In whom we have redemption.” Jesus Christ redeemed us—paid the price for us—to be delivered from the curse of the law upon the sinfulness of mankind (Gal. 3:13). **“Through His blood.”** This redemption came at the cost of giving up His own life (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18–19; Rev. 5:9). **“The forgiveness of sins.”** While the work of Christ accomplished so much more than forgiveness, this is the beginning of the redemptive work. To this is added the imputation of Christ’s righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21) and all the spiritual riches that come with it (Eph. 1:3, 7, 18; 2:7; 3:8; 2 Pet. 1:3).

Summary Principles: The Elements of Spiritual Growth

1. Spiritual growth demands that we study God’s Word until our souls are saturated with it (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18).
2. To this study we must add an obedient attitude, that the indwelling Spirit may give us insight, wisdom, and understanding (John 7:17; Eph. 1:17–18).

COLOSSIANS 1:15

3. The life-long goal is that our lives are pleasing to God and productive in good works (Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; Heb. 11:6).
4. As long as we are on this earth, we need to continue onward and upward in our spiritual growth (Phil. 3:7–15).
5. Only with consistent and persistent growth can we realize our full potential in experiencing the resurrection life of Christ (John 14:21, 23; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10).
6. Our lives are transformed into the image of Christ by these seven things.
 - a. We are “*filled with the knowledge of His will*” (v. 9).
 - b. We “*walk worthy of the Lord ... pleasing Him*” (v. 10).
 - c. We are spiritually “*fruitful in every good work*” (v. 10).
 - d. We are “*strengthened with all might*” by His Spirit (v. 11).
 - e. We endure trials in “*patience ... longsuffering ... with joy*” (v. 11).
 - f. We are constantly “*giving thanks to the Father*” for what He has done (v. 12).
 - g. We remember that He has “*qualified us ... delivered us ... conveyed [transferred] us*” into Christ’s kingdom by “*redemption through His blood*” (vv. 12–14).

Summary Principles: The Ingredients of Effective Prayer

1. Effective prayer begins with thanksgiving for what God has already done for us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:18).
2. This thanksgiving should not only consider what we have been given in Christ, but also for all that is yet to come in eternity.
3. Note these great words: “*qualified ... delivered ... conveyed.*” These are all in the past tense and speak of works that are finished (John 19:30). To these we can add, “*we have redemption ... the forgiveness of sins.*” These are all present possessions of every child of God.
4. The child of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, is transferred from:
 - a. darkness to light,
 - b. slavery to freedom,
 - c. judgment to forgiveness,
 - d. the power of Satan to the power of God, and
 - e. damnation in hell to glory in Heaven.
5. Our gratitude is greatly strengthened when we consider the cost of all these blessings, “*through His blood*” (v. 14). This simple term includes much more than just the physical sufferings of Christ, great as they were. His spiritual agony in the garden and on the cross shows that the penalty for our sins exceeds our ability to fully comprehend, as Isaiah 53 shows.
6. As if all this was not enough, we also have the expectation of eternal residence in “*the kingdom of the Son of His love*” (v. 13). We cannot begin to fully comprehend what awaits us in the ages to come (1 Cor. 2:9; Eph. 2:7).

The Declaration of the Deity of Christ

Colossians 1:15–23

1:15 “He is the image of the invisible God.” The word “*image*” is *eikon*, which means both “the manifestation” (speaking of the incarnation), and “representation” (speaking of visible expression) of the true God—which is

only seen in Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 14:8–11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:1–3). ***“The firstborn.”*** This phrase speaks of Christ as the rightful owner of creation. It is a messianic title (Psalm 89:27). In His perfect humanity, Jesus reveals both what God is like, and what man was intended to be. In Old Testament times, the firstborn was the ruler, priest, and heir of the family. In Genesis 49, we see that Reuben, due to his sin, lost the rights of the firstborn. Judah became the tribe of the ruler; Levi became the tribe of the priest; and Joseph became the tribe of double-portion inheritance.

1:16 *“By Him all things were created.”* The Bible is very clear that creation is a work of God (Gen. 1:1, 27; Deut. 4:32; Isa. 40:25–26; 41:20; Mal. 2:10; Rom. 1:18–20). This includes all things visible and invisible, including the human and angelic realms. Paul is refuting the Gnostic heresy that claimed spirit was good and matter was evil, therefore, God could not have created material things. ***“Created through Him and for Him.”*** Jesus Christ is both the Source of all that is, and the One for whom all things were made. He is the Heir of all creation (Heb. 1:2).

1:17 *“He is before ... in Him all things consist.”* Jesus Christ eternally existed with the Father and the Spirit. He is *“before”* all things—both in time and in preeminence. He is also the Sustainer of the Universe—the One who holds *“all things”* together (Heb. 1:3).

1:18 *“Head of ... the church.”* He is the Author and Ruler of the new creation (Eph. 1:20–23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 3:14). ***“The firstborn from the dead.”*** As in v. 15, *“firstborn”* suggests ownership and inheritance. Jesus Christ is the first to be resurrected. All previous people who were raised from the dead, such as Lazarus (John 11:43–44), had to die again. Jesus Christ is Lord over all who are resurrected through faith in Him. ***“Preeminence.”*** The highest position of glory, honor, and power.

1:19 *“In Him all the fullness should dwell.”* This *“fullness”* is the fullness of the Godhead (John 1:16; Col. 2:9). Jesus Christ is undiminished Deity and perfect humanity united in one person (Phil. 2:5–9). Only in this way could He be a true Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

1:20 *“To reconcile all things to Himself.”* Reconciliation is the work by which all things are brought into a right relationship with God (Rom. 5:10–11). This does not mean that all are automatically saved, but that the cross provides a basis for the restoration of all of fallen creation with God (Rom. 8:18–23; 2 Cor. 5:18–21). ***“Things on earth or things in heaven.”*** Ultimately, both the heavenly realm and the earthly realm will be reconciled to God. For fallen angels and men who reject Christ, this reconciliation will require that they bear the judgment they have freely chosen. ***“Having made peace through the blood of His cross.”*** The cost of this reconciliation was the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ on behalf of fallen creation. Christ died not just for sinful men, but to reconcile a fallen universe to Himself. The goal of reconciliation is to make peace between alienated parties (Rom. 5:1).

1:21 *“And you ... He has reconciled.”* Paul applies the victory of Christ to these Colossian believers. The idea in this verse is amplified in Romans 5:6–10. Jesus Christ died to reconcile those who were enemies both in hostile attitude and in rebellious conduct.

1:22 *“In the body of His flesh.”* Paul stresses the physical body of Jesus to refute the Gnostic heresy. In Colosse, there were two branches of Gnostic thought about Jesus:

1. The Docetic branch (from *dokeo*, “to seem or appear”) claimed that Jesus was a spirit who only appeared to be human—He was really only a phantom.
2. The Cerinthian branch (followers of Cerinthus) said that He was only a man, and that the “Christ-Spirit” came upon Him at His baptism.

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To deny either the deity or the humanity of Christ is to present “another Jesus” and a “different gospel” (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:8–9). “**Holy, and blameless, and above reproach.**” This is what it means to be a “saint” (Col. 1:2). This is the standing of every believer in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:8–9; Eph. 1:4; 5:26–27).

1:23 “If indeed you continue in the faith.” The warning here is that they must be wary of being led astray from the gospel they had heard and believed. It is not so much conduct Paul is concerned with at this point, but loyalty to the truth of the gospel message. “**Not moved away from the hope of the gospel.**” If the false teachers should lead them astray, they would lose—not their standing in Christ, but the hope, the assurance, and the confidence they had in trusting the Lord Jesus Christ.

Summary Principles: The Nature of the Lord Jesus Christ

1. When we use the common Biblical phrase, “The Lord Jesus Christ,” we are describing the unique nature of Jesus Christ. He is the God-Man.
2. The term “Lord” refers to His deity. This can be easily seen in Romans 10:9–13, where the word “*Lord*” is linked in v.13 to the quote from Joel 2:32. In the Hebrew, that word is *Jehovah*.
3. The name “Jesus” speaks of His humanity. It is His human name from the Hebrew *Yeshua*, which means, “The salvation of Jehovah.” He is the one and only Savior.
4. The title “Christ” means “The Anointed One,” and speaks of Him as the promised Messiah—prophet, priest, and king (Deut. 18:15; 2 Sam. 7:14; Psalm 2:6–7; 110:1–7).
5. This is why Jesus is called “*the only begotten of the Father*” and “*the only begotten Son*” (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). He is the unique One in all of human history. Theologically, this blend of the divine and human natures into one is called the “hypostatic union.” The Greek word *hypostasis* speaks of a distinct and independent nature, and the union indicates two natures in one person.
6. It is because of His unique nature that Jesus is able to be our Savior and the Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). A mediator must be one who is equal to both parties, and only the God-Man could reconcile men to God.
7. Job described the work of a mediator in Job 9:32–33 as one “*who may lay his hand on us both*,” meaning God and him. He later anticipated the work of Christ as Redeemer in Job 19:25–27 as One who was always living, but who would stand on the Earth in the last days.
8. Many passages speak of this unique nature of Jesus Christ (John 1:1–4, 14, 18; Phil. 2:5–9; Heb. 10:5–7). In this passage (Colossians 1:15–23) we see that Jesus Christ is:
 - a. The visible “*image of the invisible God*” (v. 15a),
 - b. The “*firstborn [ruler and heir] over all creation*” (v. 15b),
 - c. The creator of all that is (v. 16),
 - d. The Author and Sustainer of all that is (v. 17),
 - e. The “Head” of His body, “*the church*” (v. 18a),
 - f. The “*firstborn [first resurrected] from the dead*” (v. 18b), and
 - g. The One who holds first place (“*preeminence*”) in all things (v. 18c).

The Prize Worth Suffering For
Colossians 1:24–29

1:24 “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you.” Jesus Christ warned that those who followed Him would suffer persecution—a message echoed by the apostles (Matt. 5:10–12; Luke 14:26–27; John 15:18–19; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12–14). The sufferings of Christ on the cross were all sufficient for our salvation. However, for the message of the Gospel to spread throughout the world, all who serve Christ will share in His “sufferings.” **“For the sake of His body ... the church.”** The Church began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and continues to be built. Each of us has a part to play in bringing members into this Body, in which Christ dwells.

1:25 “Of which I became a minister ... the stewardship from God.” Paul was called by God to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:7–8). The word “stewardship” speaks of a servant entrusted with the administration of the household (Luke 16:1–3; 1 Cor. 4:1–2; 9:17). Paul was chosen by God to reveal, new, previously unrevealed, truths essential for our growth and service to the household of the Church (Eph. 3:1–12).

1:26 “The mystery which has been hidden.” The doctrines related to the Church Age, such as our position “in Christ” and the role of the Holy Spirit in the church, were never before revealed in the Old Testament. This “mystery” was specifically that the Gentiles would stand on equal, spiritual footing with the Jews (Rom. 11:11–21; Eph. 2:11–18).

1:27 “The glory of this mystery among the Gentiles.” Although the Jews looked forward to the promise of the New Covenant, when the Spirit would indwell every believer (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–28; Zec. 4:6), they never imagined that the Gentiles would be included in this promise. **“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”** The fact that Jesus Christ indwells every believer by His Holy Spirit, gives each of us the assurance that we will share His glory in eternity (John 14:15–18; Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 12:13).

1:28 “Him we preach ... that we may present every man perfect in Christ.” While every believer will be ultimately conformed to the perfect image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18), the word “perfect” here is speaking of spiritual maturity. There will be a distinction made at the Judgment Seat of Christ between those who were faithful to grow and serve, and those who did not (1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Pet. 1:5–11).

1:29 “I also labor, striving.” The word “labor” means “to work to exhaustion,” and the word “striving” means “to agonize” and was used of the struggle of athletes in the arena.

Summary Principles: The Prize Paul Suffered For

1. Paul rejoiced that his sufferings furthered the cause of Christ in the lives of these Colossian believers. It was the prize of sharing in the mission of Jesus Christ that made his sufferings worthwhile (**v. 23**).
2. In the ancient world, the steward was a trusted slave who was put in charge of the administration of the household (Gen. 15:2; Matt. 20:8; Luke 12:42). As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was entrusted to administer God’s riches to the household of faith—the Church (**v. 25**).
3. These riches are found in the new revelations given to Paul concerning the unique privileges and position of Church Age believers (**v. 26**; Eph. 1:3, 7, 9–14; 3:1–7; Col. 3:1–4). This is the “new wine” Jesus spoke of in Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:22, and Luke 5:37.
4. This new revelation was that the Gentiles would be included in the Body of Christ—a new spiritual creation, indwelt by the Holy Spirit (**v. 27**). This was the fulfillment of the promised New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–27; Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25).

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5. Paul's message was for "*every man*," that true wisdom and holiness could be found only by faith in Jesus Christ (v. 28; 1 Cor. 1:30).
6. To achieve this goal and win this prize, Paul labored in the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 29; Phil. 3:7-14).

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 2

Paul now addresses the problems being faced by these Colossian believers. They were being challenged by many false teachings, which detracted from their faith and growth in Christ. He will express his desire for the church (vv. 1-7), the danger facing the church (vv. 8-19), and the deliverance that comes from knowing the truth (vv. 20-23).

Paul's Desire for the Colossians

Colossians 2:1-7

2:1 "Great conflict" describes the spiritual warfare Paul was engaged in on behalf of the Colossians, as well as the believers "*in Laodicea*." These people had never met Paul or heard his teaching. Spiritual growth in this world always comes at the price of spiritual warfare from Satan's forces (Acts 16:16-30; Rom. 13:12-14; 2 Cor. 10:3-6; Eph. 6:10-18; Phil. 1:27-30; 2 Tim. 2:3-5).

2:2 "Being knit together in love." The "*love*" of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) is the bond that holds the Body of Christ together (Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 3:12-14). The love of Christ is the power that translates faith into works (2 Cor. 5:14-21; Gal. 5:6). "***The mystery of God***" refers to new revelation for Church Age believers, never before given to man (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 1:9-12; 3:1-12). This "*mystery*" reveals the truth that Christ dwells in us, and that we are spiritually dwelling in Him (Eph. 1:17-22; 2:4-10; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). "***Both of the Father and of Christ***." Here, Jesus is identified as God along with the Father.

2:3 "In whom are hidden." In Colossians 1:26, we are told this mystery (new teaching) was hidden from previous generations. That is because it was hidden in Christ and could not be revealed until He came and finished the work of redemption. "***Treasures of wisdom and knowledge***." The true wealth of the believer is found in the truths now revealed about our union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:18).

2:4 "Lest anyone should deceive you." The great danger to every believer is false teaching, which always robs us of assurance and power (2 Pet. 2:1-3, 18-22).

2:5 "Good order ... steadfastness of your faith in Christ." Paul uses military language here for a solid line of soldiers who do not give way to an enemy attack. We can never permit false teaching to enter into our churches or our minds. In vv. 2-5, Paul lists five blessings obtained by those who study, learn, and apply the doctrines of the mystery:

1. Understanding the mystery gives **encouragement** to believers.
2. Knowledge of the mystery **unites** believers together in love.
3. The certainty and conviction that comes from a full understanding of Church Age doctrines is the greatest **riches** that God can give to us.
4. The cornerstone teaching of the mystery is that **Christ is God** in the flesh, and that "in Him" all the treasures of God are hidden.
5. Those who learn and apply the truths of the mystery will **escape** from false doctrines and false teachers.

2:6 "As you ... received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." The simplicity of faith is the key, both to our initial salvation, and to our continued spiritual growth (2 Cor. 11:3). Faith lays hold of the power of Christ's

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redemption, and also of His resurrection power for living (Rom. 6:4; 12:1–3; Eph. 1:19; 3:19–21). Just as we are saved by faith, so we are to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 2:8–9).

2:7 “Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith.” Three words are used here of a building which has a solid foundation and cannot be shaken (1 Cor. 3:11; Matt. 7:24–25; Heb. 12:28). We are never to cease building up and fortifying the sanctuary of our soul and spirit.

Summary Principles:

1. The Christian way of life is likened to the Olympic Games, or to a spiritual battle (v. 1). Paul is engaged in a “great struggle” (*agon* = agony) on their behalf.
2. This struggle is for a spiritual unity and cohesion among the churches in Colosse and Laodicea. This unity is based on a clear and mature understanding of the “*mystery*” belonging to God, both Father and Son (v. 2; Eph. 1:9–12; 3:1–12). This is called “*the unity of the faith*” (Eph. 4:13). The linking of “*the Father and of Christ*” to “*God*” is a clear declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9).
3. This “mystery” consists of spiritual treasures of wisdom which are “*hidden*” or kept safe and secure in Jesus Christ (v. 3; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Eph. 1:3, 18–19; 3:8).
4. These newly revealed truths, which concern the Church Age, are the key to the avoidance of false doctrines and maintaining unbroken ranks in the Church against false teachers (vv. 4–5; Matt. 7:15–20; Gal. 1:6–10; Eph. 4:11–16; 2 Cor. 11:4; 2 Pet. 2:1–3).
5. Paul summarizes his point thus far by a simple formula: Just as we received Jesus Christ, and with Him eternal life, so we should continue to walk (“live life,” Col. 1:9–11). How did we receive Christ? By grace through faith (Eph. 2:8) in response to hearing the truth (Rom. 10:17). Both eternal life and abundant life are received in the same way: We hear the truth, we receive it by faith, and its power begins to work within us (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:13–14; Col. 1:6).

The Mystery: A Summary

1. The term “mystery” refers to new truths unique to the Church Age, which were not revealed until Christ came and accomplished the work of redemption on the cross.
2. These spiritual treasures of wisdom relate to a “*new creation*” (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:13–22; 3:5–6) made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers, and of a new dispensation of history, which we call the Church Age (Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25). In these last two passages, the words “*dispensation*” and “*stewardship*” (often translated, “administration”) both come from *oikonomia*, which refers to the rule of a distinct household, or the law by which the household is to be ruled.
3. With the finished work of Christ on the cross, and His ascension into Heaven, a new age began at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Again, we refer to this as the Church Age, which will continue until the Rapture of the Church, prior to the Tribulation Period (1 Thess. 4:13–18; 5:1–11).
4. During this time, God has created an entirely new spiritual family, made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers, collectively called “the Church” or “the Body of Christ,” or “the Bride of Christ.”

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5. The uniqueness of this company is based on our union with and position “*in Christ*,” a position including privileges and possessions no believer of any other age could claim. We refer to this theologically as “positional truth.”
6. In simple terms, positional truth declares that all believers who live in this age are united with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5; Rom. 6:3–5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21). Because of this, we share in His death, burial, resurrection life, and present session at the Father’s right hand (Col. 3:1–4).
7. To summarize, the “mystery” refers to new revelation from God, which was kept for a new spiritual family (the Church), to be the source of power in a new age or dispensation (the Church Age).

Church Age Truths Not Known in the Old Testament

1. The baptism of the Holy Spirit (see references under point 6 above).
2. The permanent indwelling of each Church Age believer by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 14:16–18, 21–23; Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19–20).
3. Our complete spiritual union with Jesus in all that He has done (life, death, burial, resurrection), and is now doing, seated at the Father’s right hand in reigning power (Psalm 110:1–2; John 17:11–19; Rom. 8:31–37; Col. 3:1–4).
4. The creation of the Church—the Body of Christ (Matt. 16:18; 2 Cor. 5:17).
5. The provision of all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3; 3:8–9; 2 Pet. 1:3).
6. The provision of spiritual gifts for all believers (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10–11).
7. The anointing of every believer as a priest of God, making us ambassadors and ministers of Christ (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Phi. 13; Heb. 6:10; 1 Pet. 4:10).

The Dangers Facing the Colossians

Colossians 2:8–23

The Danger of Empty Philosophy (vv. 8–10)

2:8 “*Cheat you*” literally means “to take you hostage.” **“*Philosophy ... empty deceit ... tradition of men.*”** These all speak, not of the proper study of philosophy, but of any system of thought that robs Jesus Christ of His place of preeminence (Col. 1:18–19; 2:9–10). Paul himself was well instructed in the works of various philosophers, and quoted them when they were right (Acts 17:28–29; 1 Cor. 15:32–33; Titus 1:12–13). **“*Not according to Christ.*”** This is the truth by which all others must be judged (John 14:6).

2:9 “*In Him dwells.*” The word “*dwells*” speaks of permanent residence. **“*The fullness of the Godhead bodily.*”** In the incarnation of Christ, we see God in human flesh (John 1:1, 14). The word for “*Godhead*” is *Theotes* and can only refer to the total essence of God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one in essence, but are each unique in personality. This verse, like v. 19, is a bold declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ (John 10:30).

2:10 “*Complete in Him.*” Nothing can be added to the redemption we have in Christ (1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Col. 1:12–14, 21–22; 2:12–14). **“*The head of all principality and power.*”** Jesus Christ is victorious over all

angelic powers (v. 15) and has set us free from the dominion of Satan (Col. 1:13; 2:15). The word “*complete*” is the same word translated “*fullness*” in v. 9. Just as Christ has the fullness of the Godhead in Him, so we have His fullness in us. There is nothing of Him that is withheld from us.

The Danger of Jewish Legalism (vv. 11–17)

2:11 “*In Him you were ... circumcised.*” Many Jewish believers were still confused about circumcision, thinking it was essential for salvation (Acts 15:1–5). Paul shows that circumcision was only a physical ritual, looking forward to the true separation from sinful flesh that could be found only in Christ (Rom. 2:28–29; Phil. 3:3). For a believer in Christ to turn to physical circumcision as an add-on to faith was, in reality, to reject the all-sufficiency of Christ (Gal. 5:1–6). “*Without hands*” refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in baptizing and sealing us in our union with Christ, thus freeing us from the power of sin (Rom. 6:4–6; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21–22; Eph. 1:13–14).

2:12 “*Buried with Him in baptism ... raised with Him through faith.*” This refers to the baptism of the Spirit. Water baptism is a public ritual, which testifies to what the Holy Spirit has already done by faith, uniting us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The ritual of water baptism is a visible witness to the invisible reality of what the Holy Spirit accomplished at the moment of our salvation. “*Faith in the working of God.*” The work of saving the soul is accomplished by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 2:4–8).

2:13 “*And you, being dead ... He has made alive.*” The unbeliever is spiritually dead—separated from God. But at the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, God gives the resurrection life of Christ to the believer (John 3:3; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:1–8). “*Having forgiven you all trespasses.*” Not only are we forgiven all sins, (past, present, and future), but the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself is credited to our account before God (Rom. 4:3; 2 Cor. 5:21).

2:14 “*Having wiped out ... having nailed it to the cross.*” Every requirement of the Law of Moses, which condemned us, has been removed by the cross of Christ (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:10–13; James 2:10–11). The purpose of the Law was never to save us, but to reveal our sinfulness so as to bring us to faith in Jesus (Rom. 7:7; Gal. 3:22–29).

2:15 “*Having disarmed principalities ... triumphing over them in it.*” By the work of the cross, our Lord broke the power of Satan’s realm. The power of sin is death (1 Cor. 15:56–57; Heb. 2:14–15), and Jesus, by His death on the cross, claimed the keys of death and hell (Rev. 1:18). He alone holds the power to deliver the believer from hell, or to lock the unbeliever there forever (John 5:21–27).

2:16 “*So let no one judge you.*” In the early church, many sought to cling to Jewish rites and regulations, assuming that it somehow added to their holiness. Those who love rules and regulations always seek to judge those who rest in their completeness in Christ (vv. 9–10; Romans 14).

2:17 “*Which are a shadow ... but the substance is of Christ.*” All Old Testament rituals and regulations pointed forward to spiritual realities in Christ. Now that we have the reality, why should we return to the ritual? If we hold to Jesus Christ, the body that cast the shadow, why would we turn from Him to the shadow? (Heb. 8:4–6; 9:11–15; 10:1, 11–18).

The Danger of Mysticism (vv. 18–19)

2:18 “*Let no one cheat you of your reward.*” In the Greek athletic games, if you broke the rules, but still came in first, the judge would take the prize away from you and give it to the next finisher. The warning here anticipates the danger of seeking so-called higher knowledge, which distracts from Christ. In the end, at the Bema (judgment) Seat of Christ, it would cost eternal reward. “*Taking delight in false humility ... vainly puffed up.*” The false teachers assumed a superficial show of being humble, which goes hand-in-hand with

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arrogance of mind. They sought to lead others in pursuing mystic practices either of worshipping angelic beings, or of trying to imitate angelic worship (Isa. 6:1–3).

2:19 “Not holding fast to the Head.” Any teaching or practice that leads away from the firm foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11) is dangerous to the soul. **“From whom all the body ... grows with the increase which is from God.”** From Jesus Christ, *“the Head,”* all the **“joints and ligaments,”** which represent the spiritual gifts and ministries of individual believers, are nourished, and matured (Eph. 4:11–16). All true and faithful teaching begins and ends with the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30).

The Danger of Taboos and Regulations (vv. 20–23)

2:20 “Therefore, if you died with Christ.” The little word *“if”* here expresses a certainty in the case of every believer (Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:12; 3:1–3), and could be translated “Therefore, **since** you have died with Christ.” **“From the basic principles of the world.”** Worldly *“principles”* are concerned with life in this *“world,”* but we are new creatures in Christ—citizens of a heavenly kingdom (Col. 1:13; 3:1–4; Phil. 3:20). **“Why ... do you subject yourselves to regulations.”** This could refer either to Jewish rules and regulations, or any other legalistic practices. This very thing has been a plague in the Church throughout her history. There always seems to be an idea that the more one gives up, the more spiritual he or she is (1 Tim. 4:3). This is worldly wisdom and seeks to add our “sacrifice” to the work of Christ (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 2:5).

2:21 “Do not touch ... taste ... handle.” Worldly religion is always negative. It stresses what not to do but has no positive instruction for godly living. True spirituality is joyful and profitable for self and others (2 Cor. 7:4; Gal. 5:22–23; Col. 1:11; Heb. 10:34). The Gospel of Luke especially emphasizes our Lord’s joyful gathering with the common people in feasting and fellowship (Luke 5:29).

2:22 “Which all concern things which perish with the using.” This is precisely Jesus’ point in His instruction in Mark 7:14–23. **“The ... doctrines of men.”** Men tend to build doctrines on tradition instead of the revealed Word of God (Matt. 15:1–6; Mark 7:13; 1 Pet. 1:18).

2:23 “These things ... have an appearance ... but are of no value.” It is much easier to appear spiritual, by outward observances, than to be truly spiritual within. The Pharisees were masters at this practice (Matt. 6:1–2, 5, 16). **“Self-imposed religion ... and neglect of the body”** are practiced by every false religion and, too often, also in Christian circles. These practices do absolutely nothing to curb **“the indulgence of the flesh.”** Rather, they tend to feed the need for recognition among men, and the selfish gratification it brings.

Summary Principles:

The Three Dangers of False Teaching/Teachers

1. False teachers take you captive (v. 8).
2. They hold you under constant judgment (v. 16).
3. They rob you of eternal reward (v. 18).

Five Additions of the Heretics

To add anything to the finished work of Christ is to subtract from its validity and power.

1. Empty philosophy (v. 8),
2. Jewish circumcision (v. 11),

3. Jewish law observance (v. 16),
4. Worship of Angels (v. 18), and
5. Rigorous asceticism/legalism (vv. 20–21).

Paul's Doctrinal Counterattack

1. The deity of Jesus Christ is the central issue (v. 9; cf. Col. 1:19).
2. Our standing “in Christ” is unassailable (positional truth, imputed righteousness) (v. 10).
3. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit unites us in Christ’s victory (vv. 11–12).
4. Spiritual regeneration and forgiveness remove all judgment (v. 13; Eph. 1:7; 2:4; Col. 1:14).
5. The curse of the law is removed in Christ (v. 14; Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:13).
6. In Christ we have victory over all fallen angelic powers (v. 15; cf. v. 10b).

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 3

Paul now begins to work out the practical effects of our position in Christ. The knowledge of what it means to be “in Christ,” and of all that union with Christ implies, has practical implications for our daily lives. As he says in Philippians 2:12–13, what God has worked in us spiritually should then be worked out by us. In other words, our practice ought to reflect our position, and our standing in Christ should lead to effective service for Him. If Christ is to have preeminence in all things (Col. 1:18), He must have preeminence in our lives.

Working Out What God Has Worked in Us

Colossians 3:1–11

3:1 “If then you were raised with Christ.” The only condition of the “if” in this phrase is the reality of having been saved by faith in Christ. For the believer, the “if” here could be translated “since you were raised.” There is no room for doubt for those who have believed (Rom. 6:3–5; Eph. 2:1, 4–6; Col. 2:12–13). **“Seek those things ... where Christ is.”** The victory of Christ is to be reflected in our thinking and in our lives (Eph. 1:15–23; 4:1–6; Phil. 2:5–13; 3:13–14). **“Sitting at the right hand of God.”** This is the place of victory and power (Psalm 110:1; Phil. 2:9–11; Heb. 1:13; 10:12–13).

3:2 “Set your mind on things above.” This command requires a faith-response on the part of the believer. The present tense indicates the need for persistent, mental effort in keeping our mind fixed on spiritual realities of heavenly value. **“Not on things on the earth.”** Worldliness begins in the mind, when we forget our heavenly calling (Eph. 4:1) and think only of this life and its concerns.

3:3 “Your life is hidden with Christ.” Just as all the treasures of Heaven are hidden in Him (Gen. 15:1; Col. 2:3), even so, we are counted as a treasure of God—kept safe in Him.

3:4 “When Christ ... appears.” At Christ’s return for His Church, we who believe will be transformed to reflect His glory (John 14:6; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:13; 1 John 3:2–3). The degree to which we reflect His glory will be determined by the devotion and faithfulness of our lives here on Earth (Dan. 12:3; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27; Phil. 3:12–14; 2 Pet. 1:5–11).

COLOSSIANS 3:5–11

3:5 “Put to death your members.” We overcome sin by the daily offering up of our life as a “*living sacrifice*” to God (Luke 9:23; Rom. 12:1–2), in a firm reliance on the Spirit of God to live out the life of Christ through us (Gal. 2:20; 5:16; Eph. 5:18; Phil. 3:7–11). The Christian life can only be lived by faith/trusting in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:17; Col. 2:6), not by trying in our own strength. In the ancient world, as today, sexual sins and perversions of every kind, along with graft, bribery, fraud and double-dealing for gain were rampant (Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 4:17–19).

3:6 “The wrath of God ... sons of disobedience.” God reveals His wrath in this life through the harmful effects of willful sin (Rom. 1:18–32). In the future, His wrath will be poured out eternally on those who reject Jesus Christ (Rev. 6:16–17; 20:11–15). The “*sons of disobedience*” refers to the unsaved world (Eph. 2:2; 5:6).

3:7 “You yourselves once walked.” This is a reference to their lives prior to coming to faith in Jesus Christ. “*When you lived in them.*” The perfect tense is used here to summarize their past life in unbelief and sin.

3:8 “But now ... put off all these.” The “*now*” refers to their new life in Christ. The outward effect of a spiritual mind-set (v. 2; Rom. 8:13; Gal. 2:20) is a transformed life (Rom. 12:2). The word for “*put off*” speaks of the removal of a filthy garment. The same idea is found in vv. 9–10, where the clean garment of the new nature in Christ replaces the dirty garment (Rom. 13:12–14). “*Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language.*” Like filthy rags, these attitudes and actions are to be set aside (Eph. 4:22–24; 29–31; Gal. 5:19–21).

3:9–10 “You have put off ... and put on.” Again, Paul uses the language of changing clothing (2 Cor. 5:17). “*The old man.*” This refers to the life dominated by the sin nature, whose power over the believer is now broken (Rom. 6:6). “*Renewed in knowledge.*” The consistent instruction of the Word of God transforms our thinking (Rom. 12:2).

3:11 “Christ is all and in all.” All human and earthly distinctions of race, culture, and social status are removed in Christ. All who believe in Him have equal standing and equal provisions (Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27–28; Eph. 1:22–23). From the most barbaric (Scythian) to the most cultured (Greek and Jew), all who believe are equally precious in Christ.

Summary Principles: The Practice of Our Position

1. Our spiritual union with Christ is so complete that we sit with Him at the right hand of the Father (v. 1). This unity will be fulfilled physically, yet future (John 17:20–26).
2. Keeping the mind fixed on Christ and heavenly realities is central to living the Christian life (vv. 2–3; Rom. 12:1–2; Heb. 10:19–25).
3. We are to live in the expectation of the coming of the Lord Jesus and our transformation into His image (v. 4; Rom. 8:29; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28–3:3).
4. It takes a conscious decision to turn away from the sinful practices, which are common to this world, and for which the wrath of God will fall on the unbelieving (vv. 5–6; Rom. 1:18–32; Eph. 2:2–3; 5:3–6). We must choose to trust in and submit to the Spirit of God to live a Christ-like life (Rom. 8:4–11).
5. Paul uses the figure of removing a filthy garment and putting on a clean one to picture the decision process by which we consciously choose to obey the Word of God and honor Jesus Christ (vv. 8–11; John 14:21; Eph. 4:20–24).

The Transformed Life
Colossians 3:12–25

3:12 “The elect of God, holy and beloved.” The word “*elect*” means “called” and refers to all who respond to the gospel invitation (Matt. 22:1–14). Each and every believer is both holy and beloved by the Father. “*Put on*” is again the garment analogy and emphasizes that our conduct should reflect our standing in Christ. “*Tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.*” These all reflect the character and the conduct of our Lord Jesus Christ in dealing with sinful men and women.

3:13 “Bearing with ... and forgiving.” None of us will attain perfection in this life, and each of us needs to be patient and forgiving, just as we need others to bear with our faults and failures. “*One another*” comes from a word that means “others of the same kind.” This is conduct toward brothers and sisters in Christ, though it would apply to the unsaved as well. “*Even as Christ forgave.*” We are to forgive as we have been forgiven (Matt. 18:21–35; Mark 11:25–26; Eph. 4:32).

3:14 “But above all these things put on love.” Here is the ultimate garment, which is the love of Christ Himself (Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 13:13; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 Pet. 4:8). “*Which is the bond of perfection.*” It is the love of Christ that binds believers to one another, in spite of character defects or doctrinal differences (Eph. 4:2–3; 1 John 3:14).

3:15 “Let the peace of God rule.” We have peace with God because of our salvation (John 14:27; Rom. 5:1). Only by obedience to His commands will that peace rule in our lives (Rom. 8:6; Phil. 4:7; James 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:11). “*And be thankful.*” Gratitude is the natural result of submission and obedience to God (1 Thess. 5:18).

3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” Spiritual growth and spiritual conduct are the direct result of the constant saturation of the soul with the Word of God. The parallel between this verse and Ephesians 5:18–19 makes it clear that being filled with God’s Word is essential to being filled by His Spirit. Abiding in Christ demands His Word abiding in us (John 15:4, 7). “*In all wisdom*” refers not only to our eagerness to receive God’s Word, but also to its application in “*teaching and admonishing one another.*” In the early church, the goal of singing was not just an expression of worship, but the content of the songs was intended for instruction in biblical truths. How far many of the popular “worship” songs today have fallen from this goal, in seeking an emotional response to music and words with little content!

3:17 “Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Our thoughts, words, and deeds should uphold the reputation of our Lord. “*Giving thanks to God the Father.*” Again, gratitude is the only fitting response to all God has done for us through Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:7–8; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2).

3:18–19 “Wives, submit ... husbands, love your wives.” These commands parallel those in Ephesians 5:22–25. No marriage can succeed where the wife is rebellious to her husband, or he is bitter toward her. Mutual love and forgiveness make for a blessed and happy marriage.

3:20–21 “Children, obey ... Fathers, do not provoke.” As an extension of marriage, Paul includes instruction for the family. Obedience in the children is fostered by the loving guidance of the father, and unnecessary provocation hinders this goal (Eph. 6:1–4).

3:22 “Bondservants, obey ... not with eyeservice.” Slavery was common in the ancient world, even among Christians (Phi. 9–16). These same commands would apply to the boss and worker relationship. “*In sincerity of heart, fearing God.*” Ultimately, our lives will be evaluated by how our faith and union with Christ affects our conduct (Rom. 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Remember that, along with this letter, Paul was sending Onesimus, the runaway slave, back to his master (Col. 4:9; Phi. 10–18).

COLOSSIANS 3:23–4:4

3:23 “Whatever you do ... as to the Lord and not to men.” This restates what he said in v. 17 (Eph. 6:7–8). For the believer, the only proper motivation in life, is to please our Savior (2 Cor. 5:14; 2 Tim. 2:1–4).

3:24 “The reward of the inheritance.” Not only does every believer share in the inheritance of the heavenly Father (1 Pet. 1:4–5), but we are exhorted to live and serve in such a way that we gain additional, eternal reward from God (Matt. 5:46; 6:4, 6, 18–20; 1 Cor. 3:14; Col. 2:18; Heb. 10:35; 11:26).

3:25 “He who does wrong will be repaid.” This can come in the form of divine discipline and loss of blessing in this life, and loss of reward in eternity (1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:14; Heb. 12:3–11). **“There is no partiality.”** God deals with each of us in accordance with His grace and truth. He will show no slight nor favoritism to any believer (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6).

Summary Principles: The Transformed Life

1. We “*put on*” the character of Christ when we submit to the filling and leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit (**vv. 12–13**; Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16).
2. The motivating power of the Spirit is the love of Christ, which brings peace to the heart (**vv. 14–15**; Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:14–15).
3. Only when God’s Word has the place of priority in our lives are we able to be a witness and minister to others in the things of Christ (**vv. 16–17**; 2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 4:12–13).
4. God works to transform us from the inside out. Before our actions can be changed, we need a renewed mind by His Word (Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 4:23; 5:26). As God’s Word works out in us, every relationship takes on the nature of a ministry (Prov. 27:17; **vv. 18–22**; 2 Cor. 5:17–21).
5. We are not only to live in the expectation of Christ’s return (Titus 2:13), but also in the knowledge that every act of faithful obedience and service will be rewarded in eternity (**vv. 23–25**; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27; 2 Cor. 5:9–10).

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 4

Paul gives some final exhortations to faithful conduct, requests their prayers for him, and sends personal greetings to those in Colosse and Laodicea.

Closing Commands and Prayer Requests

Colossians 4:1–6

4:1 “Masters ... you also have a Master in heaven.” This verse concludes the instructions, which began in Colossians 3:18, regarding various relationships. Certainly, this challenge, to be “*just and fair*,” would have bolstered his instructions to Philemon to receive back Onesimus as a beloved brother, rather than just a runaway slave. The Christian slave was to serve his master as he would serve Christ, and the master was to treat the slave as Christ dealt with him. It was teaching like this that changed the practice of slavery in the Roman empire. The idea of a “pierced ear slave” from Exodus 21:6, symbolized one who was set free, yet willingly stayed in the service of the master.

4:2–4 “Continue earnestly in prayer.” Paul urges dedication and persistence in prayer. The word “*vigilant*” means “to stay awake” and reminds us of how the disciples fell asleep at the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:32) and again in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:40). Prayer should always include “*thanksgiving*,” as well as prayer for others (1 Thess. 5:18). Paul does not ask for prayer that his prison door might be opened, but “*that God would open to us a door for the word*.” Paul kept his spiritual priorities straight.

Even the great apostle felt the need for prayer *“to speak the mystery of Christ ... as I ought to speak.”* How we need to pray for one another!

4:5 *“Walk in wisdom ... redeeming the time.”* Every believer is to be an ambassador of Christ and minister of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–21). Opportunities for witness come and go quickly. To redeem each opportunity requires that we have the currency of wisdom from God’s Word, as well as being awake and alert to every open door (Matt. 10:16; Eph. 5:14–16).

4:6 *“Grace, seasoned with salt.”* Just as salt adds flavor and helps to preserve, so our speech to others should make the gospel message palatable and lasting. *“How you ought to answer each one.”* Believers need to see each person as an individual. No two people need the same approach or answer. The grace of God should dominate our witness, giving it a charm and beauty that draws a response of faith.

Personal Greetings Colossians 4:7–15

4:7–8 *“Tychicus ... beloved brother ... faithful minister ... fellow servant.”* With these three descriptive phrases, Paul identifies one of his longtime co-workers (Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21–22; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12). How priceless it is to find those who remain faithful and loyal through the years! Tychicus is sent as a messenger to bear news from Paul and to evaluate how the Colossians are bearing up under the assault of false doctrines (Col. 2:4–23).

4:9 *“Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother.”* Paul seeks to prepare this church to receive back a probable thief and runaway slave (Phi. 10–18), not grudgingly, but as a newly won brother in the faith. Onesimus would carry the letter to Philemon.

4:10 *“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner.”* Aristarchus had been with Paul through many trials (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2). He may have voluntarily become a prisoner in order to serve Paul. *“With Mark ... if he comes to you, welcome him.”* Paul does not want Mark’s earlier failure to cause any resentment in this church (Acts 13:5–13; 15:36–40). John Mark is an example of one who failed but who recovered and became known as a faithful and valued servant of Christ (Phi. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13).

4:11 *“Jesus who is called Justus.”* Of this man we know nothing, but his name change suggests that he would not care to be called “Jesus,” out of reverence for his Lord and Savior.

4:12–13 *“Epaphras ... a bondservant of Christ.”* Epaphras was apparently the pastor of the church in Colosse (Col. 1:7), who had travelled to Rome to inform Paul of the false teachings threatening the church. He is identified as a tireless and zealous prayer warrior; not only that, but he prayed specifically *“that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”* It is a great thing not only to pray, but to pray with specific requests relating to those you pray for. *“Laodicea, and ... Hierapolis.”* Epaphras had possibly come from Ephesus with the gospel message he learned from Paul and had done the evangelistic work in these towns.

4:14 *“Luke the beloved physician and Demas.”* Luke joined Paul in Troas in Acts 16:10, where he writes, *“immediately we sought to go to Macedonia.”* He remained with Paul to the end (2 Tim. 4:11). Demas is a study in failure, as he began as a fellow-worker of Paul (Phi. 24) and is mentioned here with no commendation. Finally, in 2 Timothy 4:10, he leaves the story having forsaken Paul, due to his love for the world.

4:15 *“Nymphas and the church that is in his house.”* The house church in Laodicea met in this man’s home. The early church was a small gathering of believers from the same community, meeting in someone’s home. This contributed to a more close-knit assembly than what we know today.

Final Instructions

Colossians 4:16–18

4:16 “This epistle ... the epistle from Laodicea.” There are many theories about the letter mentioned here from Laodicea. The most likely possibility is that this refers to the letter we call *Ephesians*, which was sent out as a circular letter to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:11). Some suggest that it was the first epistle to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:27).

4:17 “Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord.” This man was apparently the pastor of the church in Laodicea. Paul’s sharp challenge suggests he was not taking his charge seriously. Perhaps this contributed to the condition of the church at the time when John wrote to them (Rev. 3:14–22). In Philemon v. 2, he is called “*our fellow soldier*,” and Paul challenges him not to lose his zeal for ministry.

4:18 “This salutation by my own hand—Paul.” Paul had many secretaries who would write epistles at his dictation (Rom. 16:22). However, he validated these by personally signing his name (1 Cor. 16:21; 2 Thess. 3:17), so that no false teacher could claim to be writing as if he were Paul (2 Thess. 2:1–2). **“Remember my chains.”** Paul writes this not as a plea for sympathy, but to remind them to pray for him (vv. 3–4), and because his sufferings were evidence of his devotion to Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 11:22–33; Gal. 6:17). **“Grace be with you. Amen.”** Paul’s great desire was always that each and every believer live in and be blessed by the matchless grace of God.

Summary Principles: Elements of Victory in the Early Church

1. The first practice of the early church was prayer (Acts 1:13–14; 1 Thess. 5:17).
2. Two priorities in prayer are often stressed: thanksgiving to God and prayer for the needs of others (2 Cor. 1:11; 13:7; Phil. 1:9, 19; 4:6; Col. 2:7; 1 Thess. 5:25; Phi. 22; Heb. 13:18).
3. Along with prayer, there must be action (obedience, Luke 11:28; John 13:17), both in our conduct and our speech, with the aim of bringing others to saving faith in the Lord (vv. 4–6; 1 Cor. 15:34; 2 Cor. 5:14–21; Eph. 4:14–17).
4. The record of faithful co-workers in Christ (vv. 7–15) reminds us that the Church is a body, having many members, and all must do their part (1 Cor. 12:4–7, 12–14). Every believer is gifted to serve and play a part in the ministry of the Church (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7). The word “fellowship” is often used without realizing that its true meaning is “joint participation” in the work.
5. The careful reading and exposition of God’s Word is always the foundation of all life and work in the kingdom of God (v. 16; Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16–17; 4:2; Heb. 4:12–13). Where these elements are given priority, the Church will be strong and effective.

CONCLUSION

The little book of Colossians is vital and relevant to us today, particularly in its warnings against the deceptions of human philosophy and worldly wisdom (chapter 2). In no other passage of Scripture do we see the Lord Jesus Christ exalted to a higher degree than in chapter 1:15–19. As indicated earlier in the introduction, there are many parallels between Colossians and Ephesians. They are called “sister epistles.” However, Colossians focuses on the role of Christ as Head of the Church, while the Ephesian letter emphasizes the Church as the Body of Christ. These two epistles complement one another, and great benefit is gained by studying them together.

Paul's Epistle to
Philemon

INTRODUCTION

The little personal letter that we know as Philemon is one of the great prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). Even though he was in a Roman prison (Acts 28:16, 30–31), Paul continued to be more than a conqueror (Rom. 8:37) over the circumstances which put an end to his missionary travels.

The four epistles, which he wrote to the churches from prison, are the most elegant and sublime of all his letters. Here, in the little drama of Philemon, we see the great truths of the other three epistles brought to light and life in the rough and tumble Roman world. The runaway slave, Onesimus, led to faith in Christ by Paul, is sent back to his master, Philemon. How or why Onesimus fled, we are not told. And how in the bustling capitol city of Rome he came into contact with Paul in prison, is not explained. In this letter, we are told what matters. Paul is a picture of Christ, who came *“to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10). Onesimus is a picture of every sinner: willful, guilty, and in need of the grace and forgiveness of God. Philemon is the picture of Christian virtue—a man of faith, love, and generosity to others. He was terribly wronged and rightfully able to inflict vengeance, yet Paul, knowing his true character, urges him to forgive and receive back his runaway slave as a beloved brother in Christ.

All the great doctrines of Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians come into play in this little story. There are lessons in this letter for every husband, every wife, every child. There are also spiritual standards set for every local church, in dealing with sin and shame, and their consequences. There are also sure guidelines that are profitable for every problem that plagues society, reminding us that the solution to all social ills is the message of the Gospel, and the life-transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO PHILEMON

Paul's Greeting Philemon 1–3

v. 1 “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” Paul reveals here that if we live in fellowship and obedience to Jesus Christ, no evil can touch us but by divine permission. He sees that somehow God has designed his imprisonment for the greater fulfillment of His plan. It is by surrender to the will of God that His purpose is revealed (Rom. 12:1–2). Much of that plan is revealed in the prison epistles, and in the events of this little epistle. Paul mentions his prison circumstance five times (vv. 1, 9, 13, 22, 23). **“To Philemon.”** He is the one who Paul calls a **“beloved ... fellow laborer.”** There was a strong bond of love and respect between these two. Philemon apparently lived in either Colossae or Laodicea, which were near each other.

v. 2 “To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.” No doubt Apphia is the wife of Philemon; and Archippus, is most likely their son and the pastor of the church that met in their house (Col. 4:17). The only other time Paul uses the term **“fellow-soldier”** is of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25. He may be the **“Epaphras”** mentioned in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12. It is interesting that while Paul is writing to Philemon on a personal matter, he includes his family and the church in this letter. The defection of Onesimus had affected them all, and all would need to heed Paul's instructions in receiving him back.

v. 3 “Grace to you and peace.” This is Paul's typical greeting, combining the Greek greeting, **“Grace”** (*Charis*) with the Hebrew greeting, **“Peace”** (*Shalom/Eirene*). The order is important, and by this greeting, Paul does three things:

1. He establishes that unless grace is received, there can be no peace.
2. He brings both the Hebrew and the Greek Scriptures together into one.
3. Whereas Paul's gospel was always **“for the Jew first and also for the Greek”** (Rom. 1:16), in this salutation, he places the Gentile greeting first.

“From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Though this greeting comes through Paul, it is directly from God. It expresses His will and plan for all who come to Him by faith.

Philemon: A Man of Christian Virtue Philemon 4–7

v. 4 “I thank my God ... in my prayers.” As Paul reveals the content of his prayers, we are given insight into the kind of man Philemon was.

v. 5 “Love and faith” were qualities that marked Philemon as a mature and fruitful believer (Gal. 5:22–23; see 1 Cor. 13:4–8a). Genuine faith works through love (Gal. 5:6), by the power of the Spirit (Zech. 4:6; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). **“Toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.”** We serve our Lord by serving His people (Mark 10:45; 1 John 3:10, 16, 23).

v. 6 “That the sharing of your faith.” The word **“sharing”** here means **“fellowship,”** in the sense of active participation. **“May become effective.”** Paul prays that he will become even more effective in his faith and love. He may even be preparing Philemon for his request on behalf of Onesimus. **“Every good thing which is in you in Christ.”** By the study of God's Word, we learn who we are in Christ (Eph. 2:4–7). By facing tests and trials, we come to realize who Christ is in us (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–21; Col. 1:27–28). God was at work in the life of Philemon (Phil. 2:13).

v. 7 “We have great joy and consolation in your love.” Paul, Timothy, and his prison team were greatly encouraged to hear of Philemon's ministry to other believers. **“The hearts of the saints have been refreshed**

PHILEMON 8–14

by you.” The word “*refreshed*” means to “give rest, comfort, relaxation.” It carries the idea of the lifting of burdens, and replacing them with comfort. There is a great ministry that each believer can fulfill in this area (v. 20, Rom. 15:32; 1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 7:13; 2 Tim. 1:16).

What stands out about Philemon in these few verses is the picture of a mature and faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. He had a loving, faithful, and effective family.
2. He opened his home to the church. Obviously, a prosperous man, he would have welcomed the poor, the crippled, and the outcasts into his home.
3. His life and conduct were marked by faith, love, and service to others.
4. His reputation was such that Paul, in prison in Rome, heard reports of his faithfulness and effectiveness.
5. He was no doubt blessed by God because he was such a blessing to others.

Onesimus: The Sinner/Slave Now a Brother in Christ Philemon 8–16

v. 8–9 “I might be very bold in Christ to command you.” Paul was an apostle, and his command would have the weight of Christ’s command. **“Yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you.”** Paul desires that Philemon respond voluntarily, by love and not by demand (2 Cor. 5:14). Coerced obedience does not rise to the level of obedience by loving surrender. **“As Paul, the aged ... a prisoner of Jesus Christ.”** Paul has endured years of abuse and sufferings (2 Cor. 4:7–15; 6:4–10; 11:23–33; 2 Tim. 3:11).

v. 10 “I appeal ... for my son Onesimus.” Somehow this runaway slave had come into contact with Paul in Rome, and Paul led him to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. **“Whom I have begotten while in my chains.”** Paul expresses the same love and concern for Onesimus that he often expressed for his faithful son Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; 2:1).

v. 11 “Who once was unprofitable ... but now is profitable to you and to me.” Paul is making a play on words here. “Onesimus” in Greek means “profitable” or “useful.” Though he once failed to live up to his name, now he is “*profitable*” both in name and in his new nature (1 Cor. 6:9–11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1–7).

v. 12 “I am sending him back.” It must be understood that according to Roman law, a slave was the property of his master. There were an estimated 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire. Paul’s actions here do not imply that he condoned slavery. In fact, Christianity effectively put an end to slavery, but did so not by revolt, which would have been disastrous in the early church, making them open to charges of treason against Rome. Rather, Paul’s solution was for masters to treat slaves as Christ treated them, and for slaves to serve their masters as they did Christ (1 Cor. 7:21–24; Eph. 6:5–9; Col. 3:22–4:1; 1 Tim. 6:1–2; Titus 2:9–10). **“You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart.”** Paul’s love for Onesimus could not help but affect Philemon, who loved Paul. The phrase “sending back” was used in the Roman court of law for a case that was referred for legal decision. It is worth considering that when this letter was handed to Philemon, Onesimus, who accompanied Tychicus back to Colossae, was probably standing nearby (Col. 4:7–9).

v. 13–14 “Whom I wished to keep with me ... But without your consent I wanted to do nothing.” Notice how Paul puts the higher desire, to seek Philemon’s consent, over his own personal desire. **“That on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains.”** Onesimus could have been a great helper to Paul in prison. Remember that Paul was under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30–31). Onesimus could have acted as a messenger, could have gone out to buy supplies, and in many ways, could have been a comfort and help to Paul. Yet, Paul takes the sacrificial way—as was right in the Lord. **“That your good deed might not be by compulsion ... but voluntary.”** Later in v. 21, when Paul says that he believes Philemon will do even more than he asks, I am inclined to believe that Philemon gave Onesimus his freedom and sent him back to Paul.

v. 15 *“Perhaps he departed ... for this purpose.”* Here, Paul is looking at the hand of providence—God working behind the scenes to accomplish His will. The word *“departed”* means to “escape by flight,” and the passive voice of the verb indicates God as the active agent of his escape. *“That you might receive him forever.”* The eternal salvation of Onesimus is of inestimable value, both to Paul and to Philemon.

v. 16 *“More than a slave—a beloved brother.”* The new birth transforms every human relationship. *“Especially to me but how much more to you.”* In the miracle of regeneration, Paul has now gained a new son in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4), and Philemon had gained a new brother. The unity of the Body of Christ is based on the equal standing of every believer in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:1–6; 6:8; Col. 3:10–11).

Paul: A Reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ

Philemon 17–22

In this section, we see one of the greatest examples of the great foundational doctrines of the Christian faith made practical in daily life. Paul requests that Philemon receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul himself. Thus, Jesus Christ represents us before the Father as *“accepted in the beloved”* (Eph. 1:6). At the same time, Paul offered to pay any debt Onesimus had incurred. This is a picture of our Lord voluntarily paying our debt of sin on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21).

v. 17 *“Receive him as you would me.”* Since Paul later (v. 22) requests that a guest room be prepared for him, is it possible that Onesimus would be placed in that room? In the Upper Room Jesus prays to the Father for each of us to be received as one with Christ (John 17:21).

v. 18 *“But if he ... owes anything, put that on my account.”* This is a picture of Jesus Christ taking our debt upon Himself. God the Father imputed our sins to Christ on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21), so that we might receive His own righteousness (Rom. 4:3, 5). This type of written debt is called *“the handwriting against us”* (Col. 2:14). It meant a written bill of debt that must be paid.

v. 19 *“I, Paul, am writing with my own hand.”* Paul is not using a secretary to write because he wants Philemon to know his own hand is signing the debt for Onesimus. *“I will repay.”* How amazing it is that Paul, a poor missionary, offers to pay the debt of Onesimus to his wealthy owner! *“You owe me even your own self besides.”* Paul had led Philemon to faith in Christ, and reminds him that he also is indebted to Paul for bringing him to eternal life.

v. 20 *“Let me have joy from you in the Lord.”* This is another phrase used in the ancient business world, “Let me gain some profit from you.” *“Refresh my heart in the Lord.”* According to Paul, one of the great ministries we all can engage in, is the ministry of refreshment (v. 7; Rom. 15:32; 1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 7:13; 2 Tim. 1:16).

v. 21 *“Having confidence ... that you will do even more than I say.”* This verse suggests that besides forgiving and receiving Onesimus back, Philemon might go beyond and give him his freedom. Fifty years later, Ignatius, on his way to martyrdom in Rome, writes a letter to the bishop of Ephesus, whose name was Onesimus. And he commends that pastor for being “profitable to Christ.” Who knows what secrets of history may one day be revealed to us?

v. 22 *“Meanwhile, prepare a guest room for me.”* Perhaps this is a guest room that Onesimus would keep ready for Paul’s coming? *“I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.”* The word *“granted”* means “to be given by grace.” Paul anticipates that his release may be near, due to the prayers of God’s people. Again, as in v. 15, Paul sees God as the invisible mover in the events of men.

Farewell Greetings
Philemon 23–25

The Apostle Paul never saw himself as a “one man show.” He was but a member of the Body, and he always recognized those who were his co-workers (Romans 16).

v. 23 “*Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus.*” Epaphras was a minister and messenger of the Colossian church (Col. 1:7; 4:12), possibly the very one that met in the home of Philemon. It may be that Archippus (v.2) took over the ministry when Epaphras was imprisoned.

v. 24 “*Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.*” Here, we see that Paul and Mark are now reconciled (Acts 13:13, called “*John*” here; 15:36–41; 2 Tim. 4:11). Tragically, Demas will later desert Paul out of love for the world (2 Tim. 4:10). Each of us is writing a story with our lives by the choices we make every day. Let us strive to have a good ending to our story.

v. 25 “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*” The letter begins and ends with the offer and provision of the grace of God (Heb. 4:16). It is always available to us, but we must receive it by faith in Jesus (God’s Word—John 1:14) and through His Spirit (Col. 2:6). The grace of the Living Word is conveyed to us through His written Word. His Grace is always sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:9–10) if we will only rely on it. The spirit that is full of grace and truth is invincible!

CONCLUSION

This little epistle is a summary of how all the doctrines in the other prison epistles should be put into practice in the events of daily life. Paul illustrates the character and love of Christ, first, by leading Onesimus to faith in Christ and sending him back to face the consequences of his actions. Secondly, he exhorts Philemon to receive him as a brother and forgive his betrayal of both theft and flight.

By obeying the instructions of the Apostle Paul, both Onesimus and Philemon will demonstrate how the Word of God conveys to us both the “grace and truth” that is the fullness of the character of Christ (John 1:14).

In the example of the lives of these three, as well as the others mentioned (vv. 2, 23–24), we are enabled to see the practical outworking of God’s Word in matters of daily life. Whether we are a minister of the Gospel, like Paul, or a wealthy and influential Christian (Philemon), or a poor sinner who has just come to faith in Christ (Onesimus), we are called to “*proclaim the praises of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Pet. 2:9).