

Survey of Romans

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Foreword

The gospel is God's good news to save us. For those who hear it and obey, its power is amazing. Those who do not hear it and respond will remain lost. There is no other way of salvation. Paul's Epistle to the Romans tells us why the gospel works. Romans is not the gospel (though it has summaries of it); that's what the Gospels are. But it explains the gospel's power.

Why this study? This survey expounds the argument of Romans. But why add another study of Romans when there are already "tons" of good, conservative books about it? Because with current doctrinal presuppositions, many of them miss some of the following points:

- The purpose of Romans is not to present the gospel but to explain why it works.
- When Romans does summarize the gospel (in 1:3-4 and 10:9-10), it is different from what is usually preached nowadays.
- Jesus' gospel titles *Christ* and *Son of God* were both acquired as a human being. (This does not question His eternal divinity but pays attention to all the Scriptural evidence.)
- The judgment discussed in Romans 2 is a real one, not hypothetical. In it Jesus will really judge those who "do evil" and those who "do good."
- Only those who "do good" will get eternal life, which is the same as immortality.
- Saving faith includes repentance from sin and submission to the Lord Jesus.
- Believers are not under the law, but only they truly keep it.
- An essential reason believers are secure is that they are really being transformed.
- The certain hope of believers is to take part in (inherit) "the world to come" (Heb. 2:5).

I sometimes quote from the following books, especially from McClain:

John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 9-16*
(Chicago: Moody Press, 1994)

Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1973)

James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960)

Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the 2011 New International Version (NIV). KJV designates the King James Version. NASB designates the New American Standard Bible. All bolding in Bible quotations is added. Also, as authorized by John 1:41, I usually change Jesus' title *Christ* to its equivalent *Messiah*.

The word *gospel* stands for the Greek word meaning "good news." It can refer to (a) the Christian message for the unsaved or (b) one of the four books (Matthew to John) which present that message. In the latter case I will always capitalize it as in the following: "Learn the gospel from the four **Gospels**." The outline adapted from McClain, along with lists of my appendixes and charts, will double as a Table of Contents. Just before the Introduction to Romans are some "Preliminary Facts."

The Epistle of Paul to the Romans
(Adapted from Alva McClain by John Hepp, Jr.)¹

Theme: "The gospel...the power of God"

Text: "The righteous will live by faith"

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Preliminary Facts

Did you read the Foreword? Please do! Our main concern will be to study the text of Romans to ascertain its argument. Before starting that, however, we will consider the following facts that affect the whole book:

- Evidence from Mark that the Gospels—rather than Romans—are designed to preach the gospel.
- The meaning of Jesus' title Messiah (Christ), which is the most common summary of the gospel.
- The purpose and plan of Romans.

The Gospels proclaim the gospel. To say it again, Romans does not set forth the good news. That was done in the first three books (and later supplemented in the fourth). That is the reason they are called “Gospels.” Consider the Gospel of Mark as an example. Strong early tradition says that it was Peter’s gospel preaching. It takes an hour and a half to two hours to read it aloud without interruptions. Do so and hear what Peter preached.² Mark certainly claims to give the gospel, as seen in the following excerpts. In them bolded words all represent the same Greek word (*euangelion*).

- “The beginning of the **good news** about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” (Mark 1:1)
- “After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the **good news** of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the **good news!**’” (Mark 1:14-15)
- Soon after His disciples confessed through Peter, “You are the Messiah” (8:29), He promised that “whoever loses his life for me and for the **gospel** will save it” (8:35). “Save it” refers to the full salvation when the Lord comes again “with great power and glory” to reign (Mark 13:26; cf. 8:38; 9:1).
- “And the **gospel** must first be preached to all nations.” (Mark 13:10)
- “Truly I tell you, wherever the **gospel** is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” (Mark 14:9)
- “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the **gospel** to all creation.’” (Mark 16:15)

Were you looking for a list of facts that define the gospel? It is not so much a list as it is the good news that the Messiah has appeared, bringing near the promised kingdom. That is the gospel as presented in the first three Gospels. Indeed, it can be summarized to the same effect, as was often done in Acts and elsewhere. Please read Acts and see for yourself.³ At least read Acts 10:34-43, which summarizes Peter’s first sermon to the Gentiles. It is like the Gospel of Mark in miniature. The two summaries in Romans 1:3-4 and 10:9-10 have that same meaning. We will soon take a careful look at 1:3-4.

Consider what I have said. Mark claims to present the gospel and says the same things as the sermons in Acts. I know of no one who really tries to prove otherwise. Nevertheless, many

nowadays preach the gospel differently. They consider as essential to it doctrines which Mark and Acts left out. Neither of those books clearly affirms, for example, Jesus' pre-existence or divinity. Neither mentions His virgin birth or the substitutionary nature of His death. Nevertheless, those are the very doctrines some preachers always emphasize. They preach what they consider the gospel but **never preach it as Mark gives it**. That attitude seems misguided if not arrogant.

“Jesus the Messiah.” These are some of the first words of Mark 1:1 in the current NIV. They are immediately followed by “the Son of God,” which we will study later. In this verse NIV 2011 switched from its usual word *Christ* to *Messiah*. It is a change I make in many passages, as authorized by John 1:41. There John explains that the Greek title *Cristos* means the same as Aramaic *Messias*. Furthermore, the clause “Jesus is the Christ (Messiah)” is by far the most common summary of the gospel. If you read Acts, you saw it often. For example, here is Acts 5:42 exactly as NIV now has it:

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house,
they never stopped preaching and proclaiming
the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

The same title is the basis of summaries elsewhere, such as in Paul's last book. “Remember Jesus Christ [Messiah], raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel” (2 Tim. 2:8). It is essential to understand such a key title. I explain it carefully in Appendix A: “Jesus' Title *Christ/Messiah*” (p. 50). In short, *Christ* simply stands for Greek *Cristos*, which means “Anointed One.” *Cristos* is the Greek translation of Aramaic *Messias*, as John 1:41 says, and of Hebrew *Mashiach*. That title was used for kings who ruled in God's Old Testament kingdom. They were anointed with oil to symbolize God's provision of His Holy Spirit. For example, the prophet Samuel anointed Saul to be king (1 Sam. 10:1), and later David (1 Sam. 16:6, 12, 13). Before long, Saul began hunting David to destroy him. On two occasions David could have killed Saul but refused to do it because Saul was “the LORD's anointed” (1 Sam. 24:6; 26:11, 16).

The same title was predicted for the King of the future glorious kingdom (e.g., 1 Sam. 2:10; Dan. 9:25-26). Many years later Jesus was born, a descendant of David as required (Matt. 1:1, 17). He began His ministry after John the Baptist baptized Him, at which time He was anointed with God's Spirit. That was the moment when He became the Lord's long-awaited Anointed One (*Cristos*). You should keep in mind the royal meaning of that title all through Romans and elsewhere.

The purpose and plan of Romans. Romans is no primer for preaching the gospel, which is simpler than Romans. No one has to understand much of Romans to be saved. It does not give the facts to believe—except in summary form—but explains why they are powerful. Not what the gospel is but why it works. The theme could be stated as “The Great Power of the Gospel of God's Grace.” Accordingly, the apostle did not write the book for unbelievers but for believers. When he appeals in Romans to unbelievers, they are not his readers. Instead, it is a literary device.⁴

Furthermore, Paul's design is different from in his other studies. Elsewhere he moves quickly from one doctrine to another. Here he treats formally, with carefully linked reasoning, many aspects of a single subject. Such a study is called a treatise.⁵ He embeds this treatise in his personal letter to the Roman Christians, as seen in Chart A. The personal elements are at the beginning and the end; the treatise is everything in between. This design plus the contents of the letter and the treatise lead to an easy conclusion about the apostle's purpose. He wants the Romans to be the base of his projected ministry in the West of the Roman empire. See especially 15:18-24.

CHART A Romans: A Letter Containing a Doctrinal Treatise		
1:1-17	1 : 1 8 t o 1 5 : 1 3	15:14 to 16:27
Letter Intro- duction	T R E A T I S E Showing Believers How and Why the Gospel Works	Letter Conclu- sion

Steps in studying the text of Romans. As already said, this Epistle does not set forth the gospel. But it summarizes the gospel in the Introduction and assumes it everywhere else. So we will analyze that initial summary, looking carefully at the title *Son of God*. Next we will follow the argument of the book, especially chapters 1-8. Before reading any of my explanations, however, study Chart A above and the outline provided earlier. Using that outline as guide, read all of Romans or at least the first eight chapters.

Paul's Introduction & the Gospel, 1:1-17

In serious writings introductions are quite important. This one has three parts: two "bridges" from Paul to the believers in Rome—and another to his treatise.. Here we will spend time mostly on the first part.

- A. Paul's greeting to the Roman believers, 1:1-7 An official bridge
- B. Paul's persistent plans to see them, 1:8-15 A personal bridge
- C. Paul's transition to his treatise, 1:16-17 A literary bridge

A. Paul's Greeting to the Roman Believers, 1:1-7. This salutation is one long sentence in Greek. As the first bridge, it shows Paul's **official** relationship to the Romans and other such Gentiles as an apostle. Appendix B (p. 52) shows its ABCBA structure. At its center and heart (vv. 3-4) is a highly important summary of the gospel.

Son of God and the gospel summary. Take time now to read Chart B, which prints most of verses 1-4. As you read, you will notice that Paul immediately mentions “the gospel of God” that he preaches (v. 1). Thus, it is both God’s gospel and Paul’s gospel.⁶ It was also “promised beforehand...in the Holy Scriptures” (v. 2). Therefore, no “gospel” that disagrees with the Old Testament can be valid.⁷ Notice that Paul summarizes the gospel as two assertions “regarding his [God’s] Son.”⁸ *Son of God* does not refer to Jesus’ divinity but to His royalty, designating Him as God’s Heir and Ruler. Before we study that title, read Chart B.

CHART B	
The Gospel Summary in Romans 1:1-4 Two Assertions about the “Son of God”	
<i>Introduction to the gospel about the Son (vv. 1-2)</i>	Paul, a servant of Christ [Messiah] Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son
First Assertion about the Son (v. 3)	who as to his earthly life [Greek <i>sarks</i> , literally <i>flesh</i>] was a descendant of David,
Second Assertion about the Son (v. 4)	and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead....
<i>Epitome (v. 4d)</i>	<i>Jesus Christ [Messiah], our Lord.</i>

So what is the gospel? To understand Paul’s two assertions that define it, we must first consider the title *Son of God*. Many wrongly assume that the title affirms divinity, which it rarely (if ever) does. I will give arguments for a different meaning. Some people will pay no attention to arguments or Scriptures that contradict their tradition. In fact, some will conclude that I must be heretical, denying that Jesus is divine. Not so! I firmly believe in His pre-existence and divinity. Before His incarnation He was already “the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...Through him all things were made...” (John 1:1, 3a; cf. Phil. 2:6). He is eternal, divine, and Creator. But those facts do not require that His sonship refer to His divinity. They allow that He could become “the one and only Son” (John 3:16) as a human being.

For more about this subject, see Appendix C: “Jesus’ Title Son of God” (p. 53) and my separate writing “[The Title Son of God](#).”

Most “sons of God” are not divine. As I just said, Jesus is certainly divine but *Son of God* probably does not imply that. The title is rather often used for persons or groups who are not divine. Some examples are (a) angels, in the Hebrew of Job 38:4-7; (b) Adam, in Luke 3:37;

(c) the nation of Israel, in Hosea 11:1; and (d) “he who overcomes,” in Revelation 21:7. Therefore, we cannot assume that the title itself implies divinity. A divine “son of God,” in fact, would not be normal usage. Even in Jesus’ case we must ascertain how the title was used.

Jesus became God’s Son as a human. One Scripture that clearly proves that fact is Hebrews 1:4-5. Verse 4 calls *Son* “the name he has inherited,” meaning He acquired it by inheritance. To prove that He, but not the angels, acquired it, verse 5 quotes Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. Each verse it quotes was a Messianic prediction using God’s own words. I will quote the Hebrews passage, then consider the two Old Testament verses in reverse order.

- 4 So he became as much superior to the angels as **the name he has inherited** is superior to theirs.
- 5 For to which of the angels did God ever say,
“You are my Son;
today **I have become** your Father”? [Ps. 2:7]
Or again,
“**I will be** his Father,
and he **will be** my Son”? [2 Sam. 7:14]

2 Samuel 7:14. This is the second verse quoted to prove that the Son would acquire His title by inheritance. The verse is from the LORD God’s covenant with King David. Remember the context there. David wanted to build the LORD a permanent “house to dwell in” (2 Sam. 7:5). God responded that David was not the one to build that house (vv. 5-7), then gave David various promises (vv. 8-11). Among them: “the LORD himself will establish a house for you.... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (vv. 11, 16). In his prayer of thanksgiving (vv. 18-29), David repeatedly marveled at such “forever” promises.

How would the LORD achieve these eternal promises? Partly by His special relationship to David’s descendants, as indicated by the words quoted in Hebrews. He would become related in that way to David’s son Solomon after David’s death (vv. 12-13): “**I will be** his Father, and he **will be** my Son. **When he does wrong**, I will punish him.... But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul...” (vv. 14-15). Just as the LORD promised, Solomon and later successors became God’s royal sons. They also did wrong and were punished, yet remained God’s sons. Since this covenant was and is eternal, it applied to the future Messiah. He is also David’s descendant and likewise became God’s Son, which is the point in Hebrews 1.

Remember what we are doing. As a basis for understanding the gospel summary in Romans 1:3-4, we are seeing how the title *Son of God* is used elsewhere. Hebrews 1:5 cites two promises that the future King would become God’s Son. We have looked at one of those two verses, 2 Samuel 7:14. Now we will look at the other.

Psalm 2:7. God’s words are cited in this verse by someone identified earlier in the same psalm. He was called the LORD’s “Anointed One” (that is, *Mashiach*=*Messiah*=*Cristos*=*Christ*) in verse

2. And He was called the “King” in verse 6. It is He who speaks in verses 7-8 about His other title, *Son*, and what it means:

I will proclaim the LORD's decree:
He said to me, “**You are my Son;**
today I have become your Father.
Ask me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession. (Ps. 2:7-8)

Like 2 Samuel 7 this passage also pictures a new royal relationship: “today I have become your Father.” And it immediately says that this “Son” gets the right to inherit “the nations...the ends of the earth” from His Father. In short, Jesus' Sonship as man assures that He will rule the world in the coming kingdom.⁹

Equivalent terms. In other words, *Son of God* means nearly the same as *Messiah*. Both titles look at the same office from slightly different points of view. Several verses show their equivalence. For example, the two terms are alternated in Luke 4:41, also in 22:67 and 70. And one term is put in apposition to the other in Matthew 16:16, John 11:27, and John 20:31. Each verse says that Jesus is “**the Messiah, the Son of [the living] God.**” John 1:49 means the same thing: “You are the **Son of God**; you are the **King of Israel.**” So *Son of God* refers to His royalty. Keep that in mind as you go back to Romans.

Meanings of the gospel assertions in Romans 1:3-4. Look again at the English translation in Chart B. Since verse 3 mentions His flesh (Greek) and verse 4 mentions the Spirit of holiness, some think those are two natures in Jesus.¹⁰ But that would not fit verse 4 at all. For one thing, the Greek verb there (*tou horisthentos*) always means “appoint” or “determine” in the New Testament. For example, a parallel statement is that Jesus is “the one whom God **appointed** as judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42).¹¹ So, how did He get “appointed the Son of God in power”? By being raised bodily from the dead. Not what Jesus was by nature or did to Himself—but what God did to Him through God's own Spirit. Thus, the issue in these assertions is not two natures but two levels of honor.

- Verse 3 shows level #1 of honor. It looks at the time when God's Son and Heir first appeared on the scene (Greek *tou genomenou*). That was in His flesh, that is, in relation to other men (Heb. 5:7). He was in the physical line of David, as required by God's promises to that king. That relationship is emphasized in the first verses of the New Testament (Matt. 1:1-17).
- Verse 4 shows level #2 of honor. It looks at the time after God through His Spirit raised Jesus bodily from the dead. In that way God set Him apart not only as His Heir (Son) but as ready to reign. Now “at the right hand of God...he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:12-13). But when the waiting is over and He “comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory” (Matt. 25:31).

In other words, Jesus has both the credentials (level #1) and the power (level #2) to bring the promised kingdom of God.¹² He is the right One to rule, and He is ready to rule. Those two thoughts summarize the gospel. Nothing summarizes it better!¹³

Paul does summarize the summary, however. He epitomizes the same two conclusions in two other titles: “Jesus **Christ**, our **Lord**” (Rom. 1:4d).¹⁴ You read about this first title, *Christ* (Greek *Cristos*) early in this writing and in Appendix A (p. 50). It means that Jesus is the One *anointed* with God’s Spirit to be King of the promised kingdom. The second title, *Lord* (Greek *Kurios*), means He has now become the Master whom all should obey (Rom. 14:6-9; Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:11).¹⁵ So He is “King of Kings and Lord of Lords,” waiting to be “revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels” (Rev. 19:16; 2 Thess. 1:7). All four Gospels agree with these summaries of the gospel in Romans 1. So do the evangelistic sermons in Acts. This is the gospel assumed as basis for the rest of Romans. It points us to the King and to His coming kingdom. See Appendix D: “Some Scriptural Summaries of the Gospel” (p. 57).

“The obedience of faith” (1:5). This is the proper response from those who hear the gospel. The apostle emphasizes this expression by using it here, then again at the end of his letter (16:26). Appendix E (p. 60) considers the following possibilities for its meaning:

- Obedience **to** faith (faith looked at as a command or set of commands)
- Obedience that **consists of** faith
- Obedience that **comes from** faith

Considering the apostle’s arguments elsewhere, especially in chapter 6, the third choice is probably correct. (The NIV makes that choice.) True faith obeys, as our Lord emphasized in His conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:24, 26; cf. Gal. 5:6; James 2:14-26).

Now we will return briefly to the second and third parts (“bridges”) of Paul’s Introduction.

B. Paul’s Persistent Plans to See Them, 1:8-15. Here the apostle shows his long appreciation for and deep interest in the Roman believers. He trusts that his long waiting to see them and minister in person is about over. He will say much more about these plans after he finishes the treatise. Before you read Romans 1:8-15, read two sections in Acts: (1) Acts 18:1-22, which recounts how Paul founded the church in Corinth, then completed his second missionary tour. (2) Acts 20:1-5, which tells about his three-month visit in Corinth near the end of his third tour. That was the winter of A.D. 56-57, at which time he wrote to the Romans. Finally, read Romans 1:8-15 and write down four or five observations. After you finish, look at the samples given here. (Yours may be better.)

- 1:8 The Roman church had a good reputation.
- 1:9-10 After long waiting and praying, Paul hoped to visit them soon.
- 1:11-12 In his visit he expected that he and they would strengthen one another.
- 1:13 To bring glory to God, he had often planned such a visit—but without success.
- 1:14-15 He felt a divine obligation to share the gospel with both Jews and Greeks.

C. Paul's Transition to His Treatise, 1:16-17. In these verses Paul prepares for the treatise by announcing his theme and quoting his text. Paul's theme: "the gospel...is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes...." Paul gives a reason for this power—a reason he will elaborate in his treatise. "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed" in a way that transforms men ("by faith from first to last," 1:16-17a).¹⁶ Finally, he announces his text, a clause from Habakkuk that states the heart of the treatise: "The righteous will live by faith" (Hab. 2:4).

BEGINNING OF THE TREATISE

I. Condemnation, 1:18 to 3:20

The Wrath of God Revealed

Is the world lost?

"The whole world [is] accountable to God"

In this first division of the treatise, Paul shows why the gospel of grace is desperately needed. Because already "the wrath of God is being revealed" (1:18). God's "wrath and anger" will be continued and completed in the coming judgment (2:8). Everybody deserves it. Everyone is condemned: all Gentiles (non-Jews, 1:18-32), all moralists (2:1-16), all Jews (2:17 to 3:8)—the whole world (3:9-20).

A. The Gentiles (1:18-32) "suppress the truth by their wickedness" (v. 18). By the abundant evidence in God's creation, they knew much about Him: "his eternal power and divine nature" (v. 20). But they did not like Him!¹⁷ "Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him" (v. 21). They show their attitude by exchanging (a) "the glory of the immortal God for images" (v. 23), (b) "the truth about God for a lie" (v. 25), and (c) "natural sexual relations for unnatural ones" (vv. 26-27). "Therefore [in wrath] God gave them over...to sexual impurity" (v. 24), "to shameful lusts" (v. 26), and "to a depraved mind" (v. 28).

Verses 29-31 list many wicked things men practice in their supposed freedom, things that they know "deserve death." But not only do they do them; they also "approve of those who practice" the same things (v. 32). Instead of mourning over wickedness (Matt. 5:4), they applaud it. This is the general story of human beings everywhere. Instead of evolving upward, they degenerate downward. Notice the emphasis on homosexuality, which shows the breakdown of the home. Of course, we believers no longer live that way (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In contrast, we reprove such sin—and manage to save some sinners. But we cannot turn the terrible tide, because God Himself decided its course.

B. The Moralists (2:1-16) agree with Paul's dreadful indictment of the Gentile world. A moralist is anyone, Jew or Gentile (vv. 9, 10), who steps forward to "pass judgment on someone else" (vv. 1a, 1b, 3). Now, there is nothing wrong with passing judgment in the sense of evalu-

ating evil. Paul had just done that in chapter 1. We must do the same thing (John 7:24; Matt. 7:16, 20; 1 Cor. 6:2-5). But it is certainly wrong when “you who pass judgment **do the same things**” (Rom. 2:1). Such a judge condemns himself.

On the following matters, see Romans 5:12-21 and my comments there; Appendix F: “Eternal Life for Those Who Do Good?” (p. 61); and my writing “[Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?](#)”

“God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done’” (2:6). Moralists pride themselves in knowing what is right. But such knowledge will not help “when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Messiah, as my gospel declares” (v. 16). Notice that the gospel that Jesus is Messiah includes the fact that He will be the Judge. “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). This passage in Romans 2 discusses that judgment. It is a real judgment with real results.¹⁸ Jesus had predicted it in John 5:29: “those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

The Judge’s main criterion will be truth (Rom. 2:2). He will present reality, the facts of each case. Specifically, this refers to one’s works (vv. 6-10), “according to what they have done” (v. 6). The literary structure is remarkable; see Appendix F (p. 61). In it Paul describes the two classes of people Messiah will distinguish (emphasis added):

- a. “To those who by **persistence in doing good** seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life....glory, honor and peace for everyone who **does good**” (vv. 7, 10).
- b. “But for those...who **reject the truth and follow evil**, there will be wrath and anger.... trouble and distress for every human being who **does evil**...” (vv. 8-9).

The two classes are those who do good and those who do evil. By what standard will they be judged? By God’s law, especially the covenant made at Sinai, which He gave to reveal His righteousness. He gave Israel that law and will judge them by it (vv. 12-13). But those who do not have the law will be judged by the same standard. Why is that fitting? Because they have “the requirements of the law...written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness” (v. 15). And every conscience without exception accuses its owner of falling short. No one can attain God’s standards with human power.

Results of this judgment. Notice again that those who do evil will suffer “wrath and anger” (v. 8). That will be God’s final wrath, spoken of in many passages (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). The Judge “will cast them into the furnace of fire,” where they will be burned up like weeds (Matt. 13:40, 42). He will “destroy both body and soul in hell [Greek *gehenna*]” (Matt. 10:28). Such verses seem to mean that those burned up/destroyed will eventually cease to exist.¹⁹

In contrast are “those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality.” To them He will give “eternal life” (Rom. 2:7). Notice two implications here about eternal life:

- First, eternal life is the same thing as immortality. They “seek immortality;” they get “eternal life.” Men are not naturally immortal; only God is (1 Tim. 6:16). So it must be a gift. In other words, men will not live forever unless God gives them that ability. To some He will finally “give the right to eat from the tree of life” (Rev. 2:7); to others He will not. A corollary is that no one can survive hell fire unless God deliberately keeps him alive.
- Second, in this passage eternal life is not a present possession but future, to be received at the judgment. (In other words, we are not eternal yet.) That is a common teaching in the New Testament, such as in Romans 6:22, 23; Matthew 19:29; 25:46; Titus 1:2; 3:7; and Jude 21. Consider one example. A man asked Jesus what he must “do to **inherit eternal life**” (Mark 10:17). In His comments Jesus equated eternal life to salvation in the promised “kingdom of God” (10:23, 24, 25). Then He promised it to everyone “who has left home or brothers [etc.] for me and the gospel.” Every such person will “receive a hundred times as much in this present age...and **in the age to come, eternal life**” (10:30).

The Apostle John sometimes speaks of the judgment as past and eternal life as already granted. In John 12:31, for example (cf. John 3:18-19), Jesus says, “Now is the time for judgment on this world.” But in 12:48 He acknowledges that judgment is future: “the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.” Similarly, He says in 5:24 that the believer already “has eternal life” (cf. 3:36; 6:47, 54; and 1 John 5:13). But in 5:29 He affirms that “those who have done good **will rise to live**” (see also 12:25). In what sense, then, is eternal life already present? In the sense that by faith in Messiah we already make the future certain and receive the “seal” of it (Eph. 1:13-14). But the present aspect should never cancel in our minds the far larger future aspect.

Finally, what will happen to the principle of judging by truth/works? Will God overlook our deeds? Will Messiah despair of finding persons who persist in doing good? Will all be deemed unworthy of eternal life/immortality? Of course not, because through the gospel God both accepts us and makes us able to do good and pass the test. That will be Paul’s argument starting at Romans 3:21.

C. The Jews (2:17 to 3:8), of course, do have the law. In it God revealed His divine standard of behavior. Chosen to receive “in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth” (2:20), the Jew can teach the rest of the world. Also, God gave him physical circumcision to be a sign and seal of righteousness, a reminder to be holy. But the law will not save him because he does not keep it (vv. 17-24). Gentiles who keep the law without having it are better off than disobedient Jews (vv. 25-27). And there is something far more important than circumcision of the flesh. No Jew really deserves that name unless he has “circumcision of the heart” (vv. 28-29).

If transforming faith is required of Jews as much as Gentiles, why is it better to be a Jew? Not because guilty Jews avoid God’s judgment but because they have received His word (3:1-8). Israel’s lack of faith cannot nullify God’s faithfulness but—in contrast—only enhance it. That is

true for us all: our wickedness makes God’s goodness sparkle in contrast.²⁰ But that fact will not allow us or the Jews to escape His judgment.

Notice that the label “Jew” is used often in 2:17 to 3:8. As everywhere else in the New Testament, it refers to **physical** descendants of Abraham. Gentiles may “be regarded as though they were circumcised” (2:26), but it never means that they are Jews. See Appendix I (p. 69).

D. The Whole World (3:9-20), then, is condemned. “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin” (v. 9). Here Paul quotes many Scriptures, mostly from psalms, that show the final state of the world before God. He begins, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God...no one who does good, not even one” (vv. 10-12, quoting from Ps. 14:1-3).²¹ The next quotations picture people issuing the corruption of “open graves” through their throats, tongues, lips, and mouths (vv. 13-14). They are destructive and godless (vv. 15-18).

To reiterate, even God’s law—given to Israel as mankind’s representatives—does not make them good. It embodies the essential elements of knowledge and truth. It instructs Jewish consciences and helps them teach others. But it only sharpens their guilt. It saves no one because no one can keep it. By condemning the Jews, it condemns us all (vv. 19-20). It is important to understand that sad conclusion because it can direct us to a method that is no less righteous but really saves.

II. Salvation, 3:21 to 8:39

The Righteousness of God Revealed

How does God save sinners? By putting them “in Messiah Jesus”

In the previous division of Romans Paul has shown that the whole world is guilty before God. Although God’s law reveals His character and standards (His righteousness), it cannot save but only condemn. Now, however, “**apart from the law** the righteousness of God has been made known” (3:21). This revelation is in the gospel, which offers complete salvation “by His grace” (3:24). That salvation will be Paul’s topic in Division II of the treatise. As before, he will not discuss the content of the gospel, which he summarized in 1:3-4. Instead, he will show its power—how and why it works. He will show that by the gospel God can carry man through all three phases of salvation. It can

- A. make him acceptable (justify him)
- B. make him holy (sanctify him)
- C. give him eternal glory (preserve and glorify him)

Paul deals with justification in 3:21 to 5:21, sanctification in chapters 6-7, and glorification (the goal of sanctification) in chapter 8. In the whole division he answers the question “How does

God save sinners?” In each phase the answer is essentially the same. There is one secret to the gospel’s power: “In Messiah Jesus” (8:1; cf. 6:3-4, 11, 23; 7:4, 25).

A. Justification, 3:21 to 5:21

Declared righteous in Messiah

The apostle will describe this divine method of justifying (3:21-31), illustrate it in Abraham’s case (4:1-25), then show how it can save fully (5:1-11) and can save everyone (5:12-21).

1. This divine method is described, 3:21-31. No merely human religion could have dreamed up God’s marvelous method of salvation through the gospel. Here Paul begins its study by describing how men secure its blessings. Not by observing the law but simply by faith in the Messiah who died and rose again (see vv. 22, 24, 26, 28, 30).²² It doesn’t matter who they are—even if ignorant Gentiles or boastful Jews. All must come as guilty sinners. They will be declared righteous by *grace* (v. 24; 5:15, 20, 21)—that is, God’s favor for those who do not deserve it. Nothing is required—no works nor guarantee of works (not even an understanding of Paul’s explanation in this section).

But how can God accept and save people who are godless and wicked? How indeed, when He—by His own nature—is angry against their sin (1:18)? Simply because Messiah, in obedience to the Father’s own plan, has offered Himself to settle sin’s account (3:24-26). Messiah came and kept the law, yet paid its penalties and made its requirements available to everyone who believes in Him. In this way He did not nullify the law but upheld it (v. 31). In the gospel God is not careless, capricious, or arbitrary, but righteous (vv. 21, 25-26). Finally we see how He could both justify the wicked and at the same time “demonstrate His righteousness.”²³ Messiah’s sacrifice vindicates God because it truly deals with sin. It has power, wherever applied, to atone for all sins—past, present, or future. Thus, as Stifler points out (quoting Godet), that sacrifice not only justifies men but justifies God also.

“For four thousand years the spectacle presented by mankind to the whole moral universe . . . was, so to speak, a continual scandal. . . . Divine righteousness seemed to sleep; one might even have asked if it existed. Men sinned here below and yet they lived. They sinned on and yet reached in safety a hoary old age. Where were the ‘wages of sin’? It was this relative impunity which rendered a solemn manifestation of righteousness necessary. Jesus died for men, but in a much more striking way He died for God.”
(Stifler, *Romans*, pp. 64-65, quoting Godet)

2. Abraham was saved by this method, 4:1-25. Justifying people by faith is not a new method; it did not originate when Messiah came. It has always been in operation. “Father” Abraham himself lived by faith, not by his deeds.

- a. By faith Abraham was justified. “His faith [was] credited as righteousness” (vv. 3-5, quoting Gen. 15:6). Verses 6-8 show that David in Psalm 32 echoed the same truth.

- b. By faith Abraham “received the promise that he would be heir of the world,” a promise valid for his descendants also (vv. 13-17).
- c. By faith Abraham “became the father of many nations...[even though] his body was as good as dead...and...Sarah’s womb was also dead” (vv. 17-21). In becoming a father at that age, he foretasted future resurrection.

a. Justification. Abraham was justified by faith “before he received the sign of circumcision” (vv. 10-12). Consider two things made obvious by this order of events: (a) Righteousness does not come from works, such as using religious symbols. The God-given sign of circumcision was not the cause of righteousness. It (and by analogy, baptism) was merely a “sign” and “seal” of righteousness already attained (v. 11). (b) Abraham was “the father of all who believe” (vv. 11, 16-18), not just of Jews. The gospel welcomes Gentiles as such.

b. Inheritance. Again, consider two points. (a) Abraham—along with all his true descendants—had his future guaranteed by God’s promise. It was a promise rather than a contract. Therefore, it could not be nullified by man breaking God’s law nor be limited by that law to Jews only. (b) “Heir of the world” (v. 13) might seem broader than the promises in Genesis, but is not. In Genesis God repeatedly promised to give Abraham and his offspring “the land of Canaan” (e.g., Gen. 12:6-17; 13:12, 14-17). Hebrews 11:8-16 shows that the promise is still valid.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 13 ... They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.... 16 ...they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Commenting on the story in Genesis, this Hebrews passage is exceedingly clear about what God promised Abraham. It is the same place where Abraham “went” “when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance” (v. 8). It was “the promised land” in which he “made his home” (v. 9a). The same area where “he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise” (v. 9b). The land where he and they “did not receive the things promised” (v. 13). The land they will inherit only when it has God’s “city with foundations” in it (vv. 10, 16b) and it becomes a “heavenly country” (v. 16a). When that happens, inheriting Canaan will mean the same as inheriting the world. Canaan will be the center and capital of God’s coming worldwide kingdom on earth. This is the same as Jesus’ beatitude that quotes Psalm 37:11: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

c. Resurrection. Abraham obtained descendants because he believed that God brings life out of death. That is just like the faith we must have, that God “raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom. 4:23-24).

3. This method can save fully, 5:1-11. If we are justified by faith in Messiah, we are secure. Nothing can do us ultimate harm or take away God’s love. He sees to it that trials help perfect us (vv. 3-5, 8-10). This process of transforming us, called sanctification, is achieved through God’s love and His Holy Spirit. Both are mentioned here for the first time in Romans: “And hope does not put us to shame, because **God’s love** has been poured out into our hearts through **the Holy Spirit**, who has been given to us” (v. 5). Sanctification will be the main topic in chapters 6-8. The Spirit and God’s love will be the keys to chapter 8.

This all began when we were ungodly and helpless—God’s enemies. That is when Messiah died for us. We believed in Him, and He gave us “peace with God.”²⁴ That peace is not a feeling but a fact, not an emotion of contentment but a state of harmony (cf. Eph. 2:14, 17). The King of the universe now accepts us. He also gives us “access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Rom. 5:2a; Eph. 2:18). We are not obliged to wait in His courts but can march boldly up to His “throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22). With such peace and access, “we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2b).²⁵ That is the glory believers seek for (Rom. 2:7) and will surely receive (Rom. 2:10; 8:21, 30; 9:23; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 John 3:1).

“How much more shall we be saved” (5:9). Not only do we have peace and access, “but we also rejoice [boast] in our sufferings” (v. 5:3a). The verb translated “rejoice” in verses 2b and 3a is the same word as “brag” or “boast” in 2:23 (noun form in 3:27). It means to express great confidence.²⁶ How can we boast in sufferings? Paul shows the reason in a “much more” argument, summarized in Chart D. When we were His enemies, He reconciled us through Messiah’s death. Now that we are reconciled—and therefore His friends—He will much more surely save us²⁷ through Messiah’s life. “He always lives to intercede for [us]” (Heb. 7:25; cf. Rom. 8:34). Therefore, at the end of our road we will face no divine wrath (5:9; see 8:1). Instead, we will receive “the glory of God” for which we confidently hope.

CHART D How Much More Shall We Be Saved from God’s Wrath! Romans 5:9-10					
IF			HOW MUCH MORE		
when we were God’s enemies	we were reconciled to Him	through the death of His Son	having been reconciled	shall we be saved	through His life!
(This was our previous condition.)	(This is what Messiah did for us through His death.)		(This is our present condition.)	(This is what Messiah does and will do for us through His life.)	

Not only does He help us in our trials. He sees to it that our trials help us! They produce perseverance, character,²⁸ and greater hope (vv. 3-4). Nothing can bring us lasting harm. God’s love has already “been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (v. 5). All this is certainly cause for godly boasting (vv. 2, 3), not in our own abilities but in God Himself (v. 11)²⁹.

For the next section, see Appendix G: “Interpretive Issues in Romans 5:12” (p. 65). The appendix discusses such issues as (a) What kind of death “entered the world” in Genesis? (b) Will all men live forever? and (c) Whose sin brings death to every person? See also Section 8 of my [“Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?”](#)

Remember that Division I of Romans was Condemnation and its conclusion was that everyone is condemned. Now you are studying Division II, which is Salvation, and finishing its Subdivision A, which is Justification.

4. This method can save everyone, 5:12-21. One last question remains in the consideration of justification. Can Jesus’ obedient death provide eternal life for all who believe, no matter how many or how bad? The answer is yes! Where death reigned before, He will make all believers reign in eternal life. Paul proves this by comparing Adam and Messiah, the two heads of mankind. Adam in Eden committed one act of transgression, whereas Messiah at the cross made a supreme act of obedience. Adam’s act brought sin and death to all in him. Accordingly, Messiah’s act brings justification and life to all in Him. Where death reigned through Adam, grace now reigns through righteousness to eternal life (v. 21).³⁰

In other words, this passage compares the extent of justification by faith (dealt with in this Division II of Romans) to the extent of condemnation (dealt with in Division I). Just as condemnation is universal, so is the power of the gospel. Consider how Paul proves that. His whole argument depends on his premise in verse 12: namely, that (physical) death is the universal effect of Adam’s sin.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

Key terms in 5:12. Paul gives evidence in verses 13-14 to prove the premise of verse 12; then he draws out conclusions from it. To understand his argument, first consider two key words in “**death** came...because all **sinned**.” (a) “Death” means physical death, the only kind Paul refers to in this passage and the only kind mentioned in the Genesis record. Neither Paul nor Genesis means spiritual death, which is not observable and therefore cannot serve as evidence.³¹ (b) “All sinned” does not refer to later individual sins but to their sin *in Adam*.

Paul’s proof, 5:13-14. Remember that Paul’s premise is that death is due to Adam’s sin. In verses 13-14 he proves it in three steps, based on evidence from one period of time.

- a. After Adam all the way to Moses, everyone died (physically, observably).
- b. Yet, during that period they had no law to break and be punished for (as Adam had).
- c. Therefore, they must have died as participants in Adam’s transgression, not for their sins as individuals.

Paul’s conclusion. If we all die because of one man’s sin, we can also live because of one man’s obedience. Messiah’s obedience can be imputed to all, that is, put to our account. The

rest of the Romans 5 passage (vv. 15-21) discusses the relative influence of Adam and Messiah. There are three contrasts (vv. 15-17) and three similarities (vv. 18-21). To see them in tabular form, go to Appendix H (p. 68). In this connection read also 1 Corinthians 15. Like this passage it discusses the two heads of mankind, Adam and Messiah,³² and what we get in them.³³

Three Contrasts in the Influence of Adam & Messiah, 5:15-17. The first contrast (v. 15) is in the **quality** of influence. Adam brought death; whereas Messiah brought God's grace. The second contrast (v. 16) is the **quantity** of influence. The judgment bringing condemnation came after Adam's one sin, whereas the gift bringing justification came after many trespasses. The third contrast (v. 17) is the **certainty** of influence. Adam's trespass caused death to reign, whereas Messiah will cause His followers to reign in eternal life.

Three Similarities in the Influence of Adam & Messiah, 5:18-21. First (v. 18), in each case there was **one act**. Adam's trespass resulted in all being condemned, whereas Messiah's act of righteousness resulted in life for all (in Him). Second (v. 19), there was **one man**. By Adam's disobedience, many were constituted sinners, whereas by Messiah's obedience, many will become righteous. Third (v. 21), each case produced **a reign**. Adam caused sin to reign in death, whereas Messiah will cause grace to reign in eternal life.

Future hope. This passage agrees with others in Romans, that the Christian hope is basically future: "how much more **will those...reign...**" (Rom. 5:17). As pointed out in connection with Romans 2:1-16, however, the Gospel of John gives another side to Christian confidence. In a sense the judgment of the world has already taken place and a believer already "has eternal life." We should rejoice in that past/present aspect, which guarantees the future, but never lose sight of the future aspect itself.

And you? As Paul has stated repeatedly, God's grace comes only to those who have faith in Messiah (1:16-17; 3:22, 28; 4:5, 13; 5:1, 2). Only they "**receive** God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness." Are you one of them? If so, you "will...reign in life through the one man, Jesus Messiah" (5:17). This means, as it always does in the New Testament, that you will rule with the Lord in His coming glorious kingdom.³⁴

Make sure you are one of those who "receive God's abundant provision
of grace and of the gift of righteousness" in Messiah. (Rom. 5:17)

B. Sanctification, 6:1 to 7:25

Made holy in Messiah

Romans 3:21 to 5:21 has showed how the gospel justifies, the first aspect of its power to save. Salvation is by God's grace simply through our faith in His crucified and risen Messiah. Nothing more is required from us—no works nor guarantee of works.³⁵ This method fully revealed God's righteousness, since He Himself dealt with our sin in Messiah's death. Our participation by faith was not novel, since that's how Abraham pleased God. The gospel puts us on a secure path, because it transforms God's enemies into His friends and grants us His Spirit. And it is not

restricted to an elite “godly” few but can save everyone. In fact, the more sin there is, the more grace there is to cover it. So the gospel has power to make all of us right with God.

The gospel secures God’s grace but requires only faith from us. Can that method also make us holy like God? Can it overcome our sin and assure our transformation? Using technical language, can it sanctify us?³⁶ Yes it can. Chapter 6 shows how it does so by answering two questions that arise from that method. The answers reveal that saving faith includes submission. Believing the gospel joins us to the living Messiah and makes us God’s willing slaves. Chapter 7 shows how this all relates to God’s law. Having died and risen again with Messiah, we are no longer obligated to the law. Yet, we keep it. We now “serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (7:6). The rest of chapter 7 shows that we could never have kept God’s law on our own. Chapter 8 brings the discussion to a glorious climax.

1. How the gospel sanctifies us, chapter 6

6:1-14—First question: “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” (v. 1). In other words, Do the facts just presented allow us to keep on living in sin? This first question is based on the facts that grace (a) made no moral demands (3:24, 27-28; 4:4-8; 5:10) and yet (b) triumphs over all sin (5:20-21).³⁷

Answer: No, we cannot, because of our new union with Messiah (6:2-14). When we accepted God’s grace, we were joined to Him in His death and resurrection. This was pictured in baptism, our response to the gospel, Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38. In Him we died to sin (Rom. 6:2-4a, 6-7) in order to live a new life for God (vv. 4b, 5, 8-10). So how can we possibly live in the sin we died to?

No passage is more crucial for understanding the Christian life. As given in this passage, there are three steps that advance our sanctification: (a) knowing how we are now joined to Messiah, (b) counting on our new relation to God, and (c) presenting ourselves to God in that way.

- **Knowing** that we have died and risen in Messiah. We were “baptized into his death” (vv. 3-5). This shows that saving faith involves repentance, just as John the Baptist and Jesus required from the beginning (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Those who come to Messiah must come “poor in spirit,” mourning, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, as in Matthew 5:3-6. Since Messiah Himself had to die (Mark 8:29-32), those who follow Him are also condemned to death in this world (Mark 8:34-37; cf. 9:43-47; 10:23-27). Ritual baptism is the response of genuine faith to that Savior.³⁸ It pictures the fact that one has joined Messiah in death to sin and resurrection to new life.³⁹ This is not something we try to do but something every believer has already done.⁴⁰
- **Counting** ourselves “dead to sin but alive to God in Messiah Jesus” (v. 11). The Greek imperative for “count” is “present” tense, here indicating an ongoing activity. But it does not mean that we kill ourselves daily; this death is **past**, just as His is (v. 9).

If he does not die anymore, do we? Certainly not. Some people say we can, but we died with Him, were buried with Him, raised with Him. “He dieth no more!” So we die no more. That is security! “Death hath no more dominion over Him.” When He went to the cross, He paid the debt of sin in full. And when the debt is paid in full, the creditor has no more power over the debtor. We are in Him, therefore death hath no more dominion over us. (McClain, p. 145)

- **Presenting** ourselves to God as those alive from the dead (v. 13; cf. 12:1). We must live aware that grace has triumphed and that our bodies now belong to God and righteousness (vv. 12-14). This victory under grace is never possible to those under law.

6:15-23—Second question: “What then? Shall we sin [that is, at any time] because we are not under the law but under grace?” (v. 15a). In other words, Does being under grace and not under law encourage our sinning on any particular occasion?

Answer: “By no means!” because we chose a new Master. Our faith means a change of allegiance. Previously we were slaves of sin, but now we have submitted ourselves to be God’s “slaves” (vv. 15b-18).⁴¹ That former slavery to impurity led us to more sin, ending in death. But “slavery” to God now leads to holiness, ending in eternal life (vv. 19-23). Notice that believers are called on *to do what they have already done*. They have already “come to obey from [their] heart” the gospel (v. 17), “have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (v. 18). Yet, they are exhorted to again “offer [the parts of their body] as slaves to righteousness” (v. 19). Apparently, this means to renew their vows to God, a common attitude of true believers. See 8:12-13 and my notes there, also 12:1-2.

2. Why the law cannot sanctify us, chapter 7

7:1-6—Our new “marriage.” Before our conversion we were “married” to the law (vv. 1-3), and our sinful passions bore fruit for death (v. 5). But when we were joined to the dead-but-risen Messiah, we died to the law and “married” Messiah (vv. 3-4). Now we bring forth fruit for God “in the new way of the Spirit” (v. 6).

7:7-25—The law’s incapacity to sanctify. Our failure under God’s law does not mean it is bad. It is perfectly good but quite incapable of changing people. Whether justified or not, no one can really achieve in the flesh (which here means the body in its own strength) what the law requires. Flesh cannot be subject to the law. In three similar cycles (vv. 14-17, 18-20, 21-25; see Chart E), Paul shows the reason for this failure. In one’s body there is a law (a principle and power) of sin that leads to death. As already seen in chapter 6, victory comes only through Messiah (v. 25).⁴²

CHART E				
The Law Cannot Sanctify Me Romans 7:14-25				
	The Fact	Proof of the Fact	Conclusion	Summary
Cycle I 7:14-17	14. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.	15-16. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.	17. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.	<i>There is an evil power within me that keeps me in bondage.</i>
Cycle II 7:18-20	18a. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my [flesh],	18b-19. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.	20. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.	<i>That evil power within me keeps me from doing the good I want to do.</i>
Cycle III 7:21-25	21. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.	22-23. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.	25b. So then I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in [the flesh] a slave to the law of sin.	<i>That evil power within me keeps me enslaved to sin rather than to God’s law.</i>

Paul’s treatise on how and why the gospel works comes to a climax in chapter 8. There Paul ties together the strands of his argument, then praises God for the reassuring package that results.⁴³ Besides the discussion that follows, see my separate document: “Romans 8 Verse by Verse.” It prints and gives comments on each verse, with special attention to connectives.

C. Preservation/Glorification, chapter 8

Made like Messiah

How long will salvation by grace through faith hold good? Forever! As Messiah Jesus said: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish” (John 10:28). This is the same truth Romans 8 emphasizes as it brings to a conclusion the subject of salvation. It shows that nothing can thwart God’s plans for a person who through faith is in Messiah. That person is eternally secure, even if sometimes he feels like a miserable failure.

It is all about God's love. His love provided the gospel, to which we respond in faith. His love will also preserve us (keep us to the end) because it guarantees our final glorification. God achieves that by giving us His own Spirit, thus assuring our victory over sin (Rom. 8:1-11) and our victory over suffering (8:12-30). Considering such victory leads to an exultant hymn praising God for His invincible love (8:31-39).

1. Victory over sin, 8:1-11

This section gives the first reason for our assurance: namely, that God's method of salvation frees us from sin and death and gives us righteousness and life. In spite of sin within us He is now transforming us.

a. There is no condemnation because the Spirit makes us holy, 8:1-4.

Verse 1 proclaims the fact of security: **"Therefore**, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Jesus." "Therefore" shows that it is a conclusion based on God's way of justifying and sanctifying just presented in 3:21 to 7:25.⁴⁴

This fact of security combines two thoughts from earlier in Romans: "no condemnation" and "in Messiah."

- "No condemnation" means no doom—including punishment and loss. This looks back to 5:12-14, 16, 18. In those verses Paul contrasted two conditions and their causes: (a) our former condemnation and its basic cause in Adam and his sin, (b) our justification and its cause in Messiah's act of righteousness.
- "In Messiah" is a key expression found in 8:1, 3, 5, 11, and 23. This reflects 6:3-5, which traced our victory over sin (that is, our sanctification) to union with Messiah.

When we were only in Adam, we were doomed to die in both body and soul (5:12-14). That was our natural condition, and we could not change it. If we attempted to keep God's holy law of commandments (given to Israel), we found the struggle hopeless. The sin that lived in us maintained its mastery and produced death. This was the "law of sin and death" (8:2) that Paul had discovered in 7:14-25 (see especially 7:23). Enslaved to sin, we could not please God.

But by sending His Son to be like us and to deal with (sacrifice Himself for?) our sin (8:3),⁴⁵ God has changed our history. By faith in the Son we are no longer doomed. United with this once-dead-but-now-risen Messiah (6:3-11; 7:4), we have received His Spirit (5:5). Therefore, we can now live in "the new way of the Spirit" (7:6). In 8:2 this new way is called "the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah" (Greek order). This probably means that "the law [principle and power] of the Spirit" IS life in Messiah. Weymouth translates: "for the Spirit's law—life in Christ Jesus...." The same verse 2 contrasts the Spirit's law to "the law of sin and death." That, as I just explained, was the principle and power that kept us enslaved to sin.

But verse 3 uses "law" in yet a third way—for the covenant God made with Israel revealing His standards. "Life in Messiah" sees the Spirit guiding and empowering us to meet those standards. We do not live under that law of commandments (6:14; 7:4; 10:4); yet, we keep it. God arranges that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to

the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:4; cf. 2:26).⁴⁶ We can finally please God; the gospel really works. Using theological terms, justification by grace inevitably leads to sanctification.

b. The Spirit overcomes the body’s evil bent and guarantees its eternal life, 8:5-11.

The process of sanctification takes place in every believer without exception.⁴⁷ (Our cooperation determines its pace.) Verses 5-8 explain that the Spirit produces an attitude, a mindset, that pleases God.⁴⁸ He enables us to conform to God’s standards as seen in His law of commandments, whereas others (“who live according to the flesh”) cannot. The mindset of the indwelling Spirit is toward life and peace (v. 6). The mindset of the flesh—in contrast—is death, that is (or, because), it produces enmity against God, rebellion (v. 7, also 7:14-25). Because of their mindset, fleshly people cannot possibly please God, even when they are considered good or religious.

Verses 9-11 affirm that this presence of Messiah’s Spirit in a believer also guarantees life for the believer’s body (see v. 23). Though “the body is [still] subject to death” due to the sin principle in it, “the Spirit gives life because of righteousness” (v. 10). This Spirit in the believer is the same Spirit of the God who raised Jesus the Messiah from the dead. So He is the pledge that God “will also give life to your mortal bodies” (v. 11). Resurrection in a glorified body is the most basic element in the believer’s “hope of the glory of God” (5:2). His body “is sown [at death] in dishonor, it is raised [at Jesus’ coming] in glory” (1 Cor. 15:43).

2. Victory over suffering, 8:12-30

The second reason for a believer’s security is that God’s method of salvation gives victory over suffering. It carries the believer through all troubles to a predestined glory. This section deals fully with the theme of suffering and glory that was touched in 5:1-11.

a. God’s children will receive eternal life and inheritance, 8:12-17.

Two choices, 8:12-13. This subsection begins by reviewing—as two opposite unavoidable obligations—the truth just presented in verses 1-11. “We have an obligation” that depends on whether we have chosen the gospel or not.

- 8:13a. If we have not chosen the gospel, we will live according to the flesh. That leads to death. (This sums up verses 5-8, also 6:16, 21, 23.)
- 8:13b. If we have chosen the gospel, however, we will live by the Spirit. That leads to life. (This sums up verses 2-4, also 6:16-18, 22.)⁴⁹

Every true believer, of course, has made the second choice—and should never forget it (as we saw in chapter 6). He has chosen the Spirit and consequently will receive life. Study these alternatives in Chart F.

CHART F Opposite Obligations, Romans 8:12-13 (quoting NASB)			
“So then, brethren, we are under obligation			
	Obligation	Result	Comments
<i>NOT THIS</i>	12b-13a NOT to the flesh, to live according to it—for if you live according to the flesh,	you will die.	<i>This sums up verses 5-8 (also 6:16, 21, 23). It describes “those who are according to the flesh” (v. 5a) and “cannot please God” (v. 8) because they have not chosen the gospel.</i>
<i>BUT THIS</i>	13b BUT if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body,	you will live.”	<i>This sums up verses 2-4, (also 6:16-18, 22). It describes “those who are according to the Spirit” (v. 5b) because they have chosen the gospel.</i>

What should one think who made a profession of faith but now lives “according to the flesh”? No Scriptures are designed to give that person assurance. Even Romans 8:1 does not promise every professor “no condemnation.” Rather, it is those who are truly “in Messiah” as evidenced by the life described in verses 2-4 (cf. 1 John 3:6-10, 14-15). As we saw in Romans 2:6-10 and John 5:28-29, “those who **have done good** will rise to live.” Many Scriptures say the same thing in many ways. The gospel really works; the Spirit really transforms us. See my notes for these verses,⁵⁰ also for 5:1-10.

Why we will live, 8:14-17. Those in the Spirit will truly live because the Spirit now in us transmits to us the life of God’s sons and heirs. He witnesses within us that God is now our Father. Our own spirit joyfully concurs. Our biggest fear is gone. We know that God accepted us for adoption and actually made us to be born into His family. We are therefore His heirs—along with Messiah Himself.⁵¹ Since we suffer with Messiah now, we will inherit glory with Him when He does.

Do all true believers suffer, and therefore qualify for glory? Certainly yes—to varying degrees. John 15:18-21 is one of the passages that show it to be inevitable: “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Earlier He had said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10-11; cf. Phil. 1:29).⁵² The godly suffer because their Master suffered. Therefore, “if indeed we share in his sufferings” (Rom. 8:17) in effect means “assuming that in reality we are Christians.”⁵³

b. All creation will take part in the coming glory of God's sons, 8:18-30.

Our present suffering with Messiah is not worth comparing to our future glory with Him (v. 18; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Pet. 1:4-5). That glory will be “revealed in regard to us,” which is the probable meaning of the Greek in verse 18. That implies that it will involve more than us; it will affect all the material creation (that is, all of nature; vv. 19-21). When we believers get revealed for what we are (v. 19; Col. 3:4; 1 John 3:1-2), creation will share that glory.

Like us, creation now suffers from a condition that was not original (8:20, 22) and that will be relieved (v. 21). As a result of man's fall (Gen. 3), creation “was subjected to futility” (v. 20, NASB), that is, made “to attain to no good end permanently” (Stifler). Perhaps that is why cold winds moan and earthquakes shake. “All the voices of nature are in the minor key.” All things sigh before God, as Bonar sang:

Come and make all things new;
Build up this ruined earth;
Restore our faded paradise,
Creation's second birth.⁵⁴

Creation's moaning will be answered; glorious relief will come. Jesus called that relief “the rebirth” (Matt. 19:28, Greek). Peter called it “times of refreshing...from the Lord” when God will “restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:19-21). You can read some of those prophecies involving nature in Isaiah 11:6-9 and 35:1-10. When will God lift this curse and creation cease its groaning? At the same time that He makes our own groaning cease.

We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (Rom. 8:22-25)

Thus, creation and believers are side by side, both groaning and waiting for their full redemption. Everything that was lost in the fall will be recovered at “our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.” That clearly refers to the resurrection. Only then (not at death) will we receive our inheritance in the eternal kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50-56). It was “in this hope we were saved” (Rom. 8:24).

Our “blessed hope.” This hope in coming redemption is implicit in our confession of Jesus as Messiah. It is our present confidence about the future He will bring⁵⁵—an essential aspect of our faith (see also Heb. 11:1, 3; 2 Cor. 4:18). The future realization of that hope is called by the same name: “We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Messiah” (Titus 2:13). It is the same confidence as in Hebrews 9:28: “He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (cf. 1 Peter 1:5). That completed salvation will include His own kingdom and our participation in it in glorified bodies.⁵⁶

Divine purpose in suffering, 8:26-30. Despite this firm hope of unbelievable glory, we must now patiently suffer as our Lord did. We are too ignorant even to know what to ask for in prayer (v. 26). Not so the divine Spirit within us. He knows both us and God, and makes intercession in perfect agreement with God’s purposes and plans. His pleas cannot be put into human words; yet God understands Him (v. 27). God responds to those prayers and uses all our experiences to make us like His Son (vv. 28-29a). When done, He will have created a whole family of heirs with the same qualities (v. 29b). That was His plan from the beginning (Gen. 1:26). He chose us and planned that future for us before we ever existed. When we arrived, He called us to Himself and accepted us in Messiah. Finally, in His own mind, He has already made us like Messiah (Rom. 8:29-30; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). God does all these things for everyone He calls. We do not have to be aware of them (see Chart G) but only respond when called. Look at them one by one.

CHART G What God Has Done for “Those Whom God Has Chosen” (“those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”) Romans 8:28-30				
<i>BEFORE THEY EXISTED</i>		<i>AT THEIR CONVERSION</i>		
Foreknew them	Predestined them	Called them (the step they “experience”)	Justified them	Glorified them
chose them	planned to make them like Messiah	invited them so that they responded	declared them righteous	assured their final destiny

1. Foreknew. This verb⁵⁷ is of great importance in understanding God’s sovereignty. It does not mean to see beforehand who would believe. Instead, it is based on a special meaning for the Hebrew word for *know* and its Greek equivalent—namely, to have intimate relations with someone. Here are some examples of that meaning in both Testaments: “Adam **made love to** [lit., knew] his wife Eve” (Gen. 4:1). “The Lord **watches over** the way of the righteous” (Ps. 1:6). “You only **have I chosen** of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). “I never **knew** you” (Matt. 7:23). *Foreknow* or foreknowledge adds the idea of having this knowledge in advance, as it does here in Romans 8:29, also in 11:2.

God did not wait to see which people would respond to the gospel. In every case He ordained people to eternal life before they believed (Acts 13:48),⁵⁸ then enabled them to believe (Eph. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:9). In themselves they were incapable of believing, did not seek God (Rom. 3:11), and could not be subject to His law (Rom. 8:7). In fact, they were dead in sins (Eph. 2:1, 5).

2. Predestined. Those God foreknew He predestined to become like Messiah. Though Messiah was the first to attain glory, He will not remain alone. He will be the “firstborn” (the greatest, 8:29) among many sons of God.⁵⁹

3. Called. Those God predestined He also called (8:28, 30). In the Epistles this always means an “efficacious” call, one that results in obedience (see Rom. 1:6; 9:11; and the note).⁶⁰ This passage makes it obvious which people God called in this sense. He called only those He had already predestined—and all of that group! He did not call everyone in general, then predestine those who believed. Notice that of the five steps, calling is the only one now obvious to our experience. We are not aware of the others except through God’s Word.

4-5. Justified and Glorified. Those God called He justified (declared them to be righteous). He did this on the basis of Messiah’s sacrifice for them, as explained in Romans 3:21 to 5:21. All of those same people He glorified, the end of the sanctification process dealt with in Romans 6-8.

In none of these steps does God lose anyone. Once God has selected someone for His grace, He will fulfill His purpose for him. In each case the divine Sculptor has chosen a rough slab of marble from which to make a beautiful figure. The marble must undergo much chipping before the image is complete—but the Sculptor will not allow it to be ruined. In His mind the process is as good as done; in the slab He already sees one like Messiah.

In this chapter the apostle has given two main reasons why those in Messiah are eternally secure. Both reasons depend on God’s gift to us of His Holy Spirit. The first reason is that through the Spirit He gives us victory over sin (vv. 1-11), freeing us from its control and making us righteous. The second reason is that He gives us victory over our inevitable suffering (vv. 12-30). As His children, He has destined us to inherit unbelievable glory along with Messiah Himself. In sufferings His Spirit cooperates with God’s purposes to make us like Messiah. Based on these victories, we can sing an exultant hymn.

3. Victory hymn, 8:31-39

This hymn poses and answers four questions (quoted from the New KJV):

- If God is for us, who can be against us? (v. 31)
- Who shall bring a charge against [that is, successfully accuse] God’s elect? (v. 33)
- Who is he who condemns? (v. 34)
- Who shall separate us from the love of Messiah? (v. 35)

In each case the answer amounts to “No one!” God already gave His Son for us and freed us from guilt. His Son, the King and Judge, gave us His own Spirit and constantly intercedes for us. Who in all creation is powerful enough to separate us from such amazing love?

This subdivision, Salvation, ends (8:39c) with the same name and titles as in the summary at the beginning (1:4). They remind us that the content and power of the gospel reside in one Person:

Messiah Jesus our Lord.

III. Vindication, Chapters 9-11

The Wisdom of God Revealed

**Why has Israel (the Jew) been set aside?
“So that [God] may have mercy on them all” (11:32)**

Why did the apostle write this section? To vindicate God, that is, show how right He is in view of Jewish unbelief.⁶¹ Read again the question asked and answered here. It has to do with the Jews. These chapters seem to interrupt the flow of Paul’s treatise. Without them chapter 8 would lead smoothly into chapter 12. The marvelous victory hymn ending chapter 8 has capped the study of God’s mercy to us in salvation. It is on the basis of that mercy (“in view of God’s mercy”) that Paul starts the exhortations in 12:1. They urge believers to be transformed in all aspects of life. So why does he first pause to address the problem of Israel’s unbelief? The reason is that the problem can make some doubt God’s wisdom and gospel—but its answer can bring rejoicing. In these chapters I will lean heavily on Alva McClain’s book on Romans.

It was known everywhere that most of Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah and violently opposed His witnesses (see 1 Thess. 2:14-16). The same attitude continues until the present. Judaism considers it impossible that they could have rejected the true Messiah. How could they, since God has highly favored them by making Israel His chosen nation? Here is how McClain poses the problem of chapters 9-11:

The whole Old Testament was simply packed with promises that God had made to this Jewish nation. They were Messianic promises, promises which went with the Christ, the Messiah. Now notice the paradoxical situation. If the Jewish nation will not accept Jesus as Messiah, then the unbelieving Jew would say that there are two possible conclusions to be drawn. Either the gospel that Paul is preaching is not true, or else, if it is true, then the promises of God to Israel have failed, because the Messiah and blessing to Israel were connected inseparably. The Jew would say in essence that, either Jesus Christ is not the true Messiah or the Word of God has proven false.

Paul’s treatment of this problem is daring! He admits the fact that the Jew as a nation has rejected the gospel, and yet he takes his stand firmly and declares that the nation still has a place in the economy of God. There is nothing in all the Word of God, in logic itself, that can exceed the movement of thought constituting the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of Romans. (McClain, *Romans*, p. 173)

All four Gospels, especially John, show why this problem exists. The gospel message recorded there, the same as Paul’s gospel, was unacceptable to Jews. It was directly opposed to Jewish thinking about themselves and about righteousness. When “we preach Messiah crucified, [it is] a stumbling block to Jews” (1 Cor. 1:23). Because of that result, Paul’s opponents might make one of the two claims McClain mentions. Either (a) Paul’s gospel must be mistaken or (b) God’s

promises to Israel have failed. Paul answers these objections in chapters 9-11. As in most of the book, he teaches believers, not unbelievers. He shows us God's ways in history, His wisdom and sovereignty as related to the story and gospel of salvation.

Survey of chapters 9-11. We will follow the apostle's line of argument in these chapters. First, however, let us see how McClain sketches them (bolding added).

The ninth chapter admits to the fact that the Jewish nation has not received [that is, accepted] the gospel, but it also declares that the Word of God has not failed. Why? Because some Jews have believed, and these Jews, says Paul, are a part of that elect remnant that the Old Testament tells about. So the conclusion is that there is always a continuing line of believers, in whom the promises of God are being fulfilled.

The tenth chapter carries the argument further and lays the blame on Israel. The apostle says that if Israel, as a nation, has been set aside, it is through no fault of God. The reason that God has rejected Israel is because Israel rejected the gospel.

Then in the eleventh chapter, the apostle tells that although the nation of Israel has been set aside, and although that rejection of them as a nation has been richly deserved (because they rejected the gospel), the rejection of Israel as a nation is not final. It is temporary only, and through all that (through the election and through the rejection) God is working out a mighty, loving, and gracious purpose. For by the rejection of Israel as a nation, salvation has been brought first of all to the Gentiles. And if Israel's rejection has resulted in the enrichment of the world, how much more blessing will come someday when God receives Israel back in the place where it once was. (McClain, *Romans*, p. 174)

A. Divine Sovereignty, chapter 9

Election

1. The problem presented, 9:1-5

Paul expresses his deep sorrow for his people Israel, who have many honors from God but have rejected the gospel.⁶² Paul's concern was not feigned (vv. 1-2). He showed it by preaching the gospel to the Jewish religious community wherever he went (see Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1-2; 19:8). He continued doing so even though in most places the Jews tried—and often succeeded—to do him harm.

Romans 9:4-5 lists several of Israel's honors, each of which would merit study using cross references. The first one, "the adoption as sons" (v. 4) refers to God's choice of the nation as a whole. On the eve of bringing Israel out of Egypt, He told Pharaoh through Moses, "Israel is my firstborn son... Let my son go" (Exod. 4:22-23).⁶³ Centuries later, after a long history of Israel's rebellion, He still claimed them. "Hear this word, people of Israel, the word the LORD has spoken against you—against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt: '**You only have I chosen** [Heb. known] of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins'" (Amos 3:1-2; see also Hosea 11:1-11).

Also in this list of Israel's honors are "the promises" of a glorious future (Rom. 9:4). John the Baptist's godly father Zechariah restated some of those promises in Luke 1. They included "salvation from our enemies...to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days" (Luke 1:71-75). But Jesus (in His first coming) did not bring Israel that aspect of salvation. Instead, He predicted the ruin that came a few years after Paul wrote: Israel would be scattered and their glorious temple destroyed. Should we conclude that Zechariah was mistaken—simply a naïve and misguided zealot? Certainly not; for he "was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied" (Luke 1:67). And what he prophesied was not novel but reflected God's promises through earlier prophets (Isa. 11:10-16 and many others). Why then, were such prophecies not fulfilled? Paul will explain.

The last honor listed for Israel is the greatest: Messiah Himself is a Jew (Rom. 9:5)! NIV's preferred reading closes the paragraph with a unique benediction of Messiah as "God."⁶⁴

2. The explanation offered, 9:6-13

What happened to Israel and their promises? Has God's word failed? Paul explains why the answer is no. First, because it promised nothing based only on lineal descent from Abraham. Though God chose Abraham's descendants, He never intended to include all of them. For example, He chose Isaac, the child of promise, but not Abraham's other children. In the next generation He chose Jacob but not his older twin Esau. In doing this, He disregarded both custom and the boys' future deeds. God's reasons are in Himself; He elects and calls according to His own purpose (v. 11; 8:28). In other words, He is sovereign. Some interpreters assume that He chooses because He foresees some as having faith and/or good works. This passage specifically denies that human notion. God made His choice known "before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that **God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls...**" (vv. 11b-12a).

The twins had not "done anything good," not even believed in God. Thus, not even man's faith is the basis of God's choice (election). Of course, an elected person will get faith—which will show that he was elected (see Heb. 11:17-18; cf. 20-21). Faith confirms election. But faith is not its cause. When God chooses to save some, He makes no conditions (requirements) at all. Attempting to avoid this teaching, some deny that God elects individuals. They note that God's words to Rebekah refer to entire nations:

Two nations are in your womb,
and **two peoples** from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than **the other**,
and the older will serve the younger. (Gen. 25:23)

It is clear that God's election did affect more than the twin brothers. It determined the course of history for the whole nations descended from each of them. In fact, their names often represent those nations, as in the passage Paul quotes (in Rom. 9:13) from Malachi. Yet, it was *also* true that they were individuals—and were elected or not elected as such (vv. 11-12).⁶⁵

3. The objections answered, 9:14-24

Paul has shown that God elects sovereignly, that is, He chooses to show mercy to only a few—and those undeserving. Men object to this. They believe that a God who would do this would be unjust (vv. 14-18).⁶⁶ Paul's answer to this objection first implies that without God's mercy all would be condemned. That was true for the whole nation of Israel at Sinai, when God spoke the words quoted in verse 15. Under Moses' leadership God had brought Israel out of Egypt to His holy mountain. But even as He was making His covenant with them, they became idolatrous. They all deserved to die. Yet, those God chose would live (v. 15), not because of "man's desire or effort" but because of "God's mercy" (v. 16).

The case of Pharaoh was also one of mercy for Israel. On purpose God exalted a man to become Pharaoh, then hardened him. This afforded God the opportunity to do ten great plagues while giving Pharaoh what he deserved. The whole world, especially the elect, saw God's power and His mercy (vv. 17-18).⁶⁷

This prompts a second objection to God's sovereignty (vv. 19-24): If man cannot successfully resist God, how can he be blamed? This objection assumes that man somehow has a right to God's mercy. Instead, God has full rights over His creation, like the potter over the clay. Remember that we are all corrupted clay. Yet, this Potter shows His glory in two ways: (a) He patiently puts up with vessels prepared for destruction;⁶⁸ (b) He makes some of the clay—both Jews and Gentiles—into noble pottery.

4. The present situation predicted in Scriptures, 9:25-29

Unless our teachings agree with Scripture, they are useless if not dangerous. Paul now shows that earlier Scriptures had foretold Jewish unbelief and the salvation of Gentiles. He begins by quoting (in vv. 25 and 26) two passages from Hosea originally about Israel. They say that those who were not God's people would later become His people. The words are equally true about Gentiles and are so applied here (see 1 Peter 2:10). Next, Paul quotes (in vv. 27-29) other passages, basically from Isaiah, only about Israel. They state that the LORD's judgments on Israel would leave only a small remnant to be saved. This contradicted a common Jewish belief in New Testament times that all the circumcised were safe.

5. The conclusion drawn, 9:30-33

These verses sum up the situation just discussed for unbelieving Israel and believing Gentiles. They also serve as basis for the discussion in chapter 10. They make two points: (a) that Gentiles have obtained righteousness by faith though they did not seek it, whereas (b) Jews did not obtain righteousness although they pursued a law of righteousness. The reason: they did not seek it by faith but by their own works. This fact again fulfills the old saying (Isa. 28:16) that Israel stumbles over God's stone in Zion—which in this case was Messiah Himself!

B. Human Responsibility, chapter 10

Rejection

In chapter 9 Paul has shown that God's choice is based on His sovereignty, not on our personal characteristics or works. Nevertheless, as chapter 10 will show, God is not to blame when He must reject some. It is they who are to blame, who will not believe.

Accordingly, Israel is to blame for its current condition. They have heard the gospel and thus had opportunity to achieve righteousness. Yet, they have not believed the message. This chapter drips with earlier Scriptures that foresaw the gospel and the Jewish unbelief.

1. Israel has failed to attain salvation, 10:1-4.

Israel's failure is due to ignorance of God. As already seen (in 9:1-3), Paul's constant concern and prayer was for Jews to be saved.⁶⁹ Paul had been just like most other Jews. Therefore, he could testify that they worked for God but did not really know Him. If they had known Him, they would have submitted to His righteousness in Messiah (10:1-3). Verse 3 sums up the chapter:

Since they did not know the righteousness of God
and sought to establish their own,
they did not submit to God's righteousness.

They refused Messiah, who attained the goals of the law (v. 4).⁷⁰ Instead of the reality, they kept on pursuing the shadow of the reality!

2. The gospel is within the reach of all, 10:5-10.

Righteousness is unattainable by the law, because the law's standard is absolute obedience (v. 5; see Gal. 3:10-12 and James 2:10-11). In contrast, righteousness by faith is easily available. It requires no search for Messiah, in heaven or in the grave (vv. 6-7). The message offering it is "near you...in your mouth and in your heart" (v. 8). Its two key elements are stated in verse 9: (a) "Jesus is Lord" (that is, Master) and (b) "God raised him from the dead." This summary of the gospel means the same as the one in 1:3-4. Peter said it on the day of Pentecost, too: "God has made this Jesus...both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36). The title *Lord* simply emphasizes His authority as Messiah. In Greek it is the usual word for a "master" over slaves, as in Ephesians 6:9 (twice). In Romans 14:9 it means that, too: "For this very reason, Messiah died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord [Master] of both the dead and the living."⁷¹

3. The gospel has been offered to all, 10:11-15.

Whether Jews or Gentiles, all can find salvation by believing the gospel. These verses emphasize the process through which the gospel has been offered. See the following chart (Chart H). Notice that the way to get faith is to truly hear God's message. "Everyone" of any race who thus hears and "calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (vv. 12-13).⁷²

Did Israel have the opportunity to hear and believe this saving message? Certainly they did—as this passage implies and verse 18 strongly affirms. Paul later said to the Colossians, “the gospel that you heard...has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven” (Col. 1:23).

CHART H The “Word of Faith”: Evangelism & Missions Romans 10:8-17 <i>“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Messiah”</i>					
God	The Preacher	The Sinner			God
sends the preacher	preaches the message	hears the message	believes the message	calls on the Lord	saves the one who calls on Him
<i>The message: “Jesus is Lord...God raised him from the dead”(vv. 8b-9)</i>					

4. As foreseen in Scriptures, the gospel has not been obeyed by all, 10:16-21.

All four Gospels show that Israel rejected the good news that began with the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus (Mark 1:1; Matt. 11:12-13).⁷³ Here in Romans 10 Paul quotes Old Testament predictions that the message would be accepted by others but not by Israel. All these predictions were written centuries before Messiah came. The first one here (v. 16, from Isa. 53:1a) was from the last and greatest “song” about the Lord’s Suffering Servant (Isa. 52:13 to 53:12). Though the Servant’s first coming was far in the future, the song in Isaiah refers to it as past. In the song the future remnant reports on the Servant’s suffering and rejection as facts: “Who **has believed** our message?...He **grew up**....He **had** no beauty....He **was despised and rejected**.... He **was pierced** for our transgressions....” This song clearly predicts facts that Judaism still denies: (1) that the Messiah must suffer, (2) that by suffering He would bear their sins, (3) that His people would reject Him. It is obvious that the “message” was preached to those who rejected it.

How widely was the good news spread? Paul compares its extent to the worldwide witness of the heavens (v. 18 from Ps. 19:4). Then he continues his Scriptural evidence, going way back to Moses’ time (v. 19, quoting Deut. 32:21). Even then God predicted that He would incite Israel’s envy and anger by blessing Gentiles over them. Gentiles would respond and obtain God’s blessing although—in contrast to Israel—they were “not a nation” and had “no understanding.” Much later, God again described these believing Gentiles through Isaiah (65:1, quoted in v. 20): “I was found by those who did not seek me” and was revealed “to those who did not ask for me.” Such predictions showed that Gentiles would understand and accept what they had not been prepared for, whereas God’s people Israel had been prepared. In contrast, “all day long” (perhaps during the whole law-period; see Matt. 23:37) God would invite Israel in vain (Isa. 65:2, quoted

in v. 21). This was precisely the situation Jesus described in Luke 14:15-24 and Matthew 22:1-10.⁷⁴

C. Merciful Purpose, chapter 11

Reception

Many commentators have noted the three parts of chapter 11:

1. Israel's rejection is not total but partial (vv. 1-10).
There is still an elected remnant.
2. Israel's rejection is not final but temporary (vv. 11-24).
That rejection has opened the door of salvation to Gentiles.
3. Israel's final salvation is surely coming, as predicted (vv. 25-32).

Several more Old Testament Scriptures are quoted in this chapter. The way they are used illustrates two important rules of interpretation: (a) Scripture means what it says. Although it may use figures of speech and have various applications, its basic meaning is the normal one. (b) "Israel" means Israel and not the church. There is more about these matters in Appendix I: (p. 69), also in my much more detailed study "[Will God Eternally Bless Ethnic Israel?: A Critique of 'Replacement Theology.'](#)"

1. There is a present election, 11:1-10.

The nation of Israel cannot cease to exist, because God has eternal plans for it.⁷⁵ "God did not reject [that is, push away] his people, whom he foreknew" (v. 2). His foreknowledge of Israel was His decision to have a special relationship with them. (See my comments on 8:26-30.) On that basis, as you saw in Romans 9, God made Israel eternal promises. Those promises were not abrogated by that nation's many rebellions, which were anticipated and punished, as noted in Romans 10. Even after such disasters, prophets often assured Israel of restoration. For example, when God was dissolving His kingdom over Israel, Jeremiah wrote: "This is what the LORD says: As I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised them" (Jer. 32:42).

The rebellion/punishment/restoration pattern continued. Just before His passion Jesus had a mighty struggle with the leaders of Israel (Matt. 21:23), ending in this awful sentence: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matt. 21:43). Does this mean that Jesus hereby took away from ethnic Israel any distinctive future in God's plan? Some commentators confidently affirm that it does. Consequently, they (apparently all amillennialists, at least) consider misguided the question the apostles asked the Lord a few weeks later: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). But the apostles were not misguided or naive. The risen Lord had just "appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). He had "opened their mind so they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). But thus taught and enlightened, they still thought a time was coming for Israel to get back the kingdom. The Lord answered them, not denying their premise but only the possibility of their know-

ing when. “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority” (Acts 1:7).⁷⁶ Romans 11 still doesn’t say when but strongly confirms that rebellious Israel will be restored.

God chose Israel knowing full well how unfaithful she would be. In order to fulfill His plans and promises for her, He could not let her melt away. Though scattered all over the world, the Jews some day had to be constituted again into a nation. And indeed they were—in 1947-1948.⁷⁷ So Matthew 21:43 did not mean that Israel will not get the kingdom back. In fact, it is possible that the “people who will produce its fruit” are a *future generation* of that same nation. In [my study of the kingdom in all the Gospels](#), however, I suggest the following:

This probably means the church, which is called a people/nation in Romans 10:19 and 1 Peter 2:9. But Paul’s discussion of Gentiles’ being grafted onto Israel’s “olive tree” (Romans 11) shows that God’s promises to that nation continue. George N.H. Peters discusses all this in great detail.⁷⁸

Something else showed Israel’s perpetuity in God’s grace: He has always preserved a godly remnant of them (Rom. 11:2-7a). Paul himself was one example of that remnant (v. 1)—one of God’s “elect” ones “by grace,” not “by works” (vv. 5-7).⁷⁹ God had shown this grace for Israel even in deep dark days of apostasy. To Elijah He had said, “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (vv. 2-4). There was still an elect remnant in Paul’s day. Only they obtained “what the people of Israel sought so earnestly” (v. 7), probably meaning righteousness (see 10:3). God hardened the rest of them in their unbelief, as He said He would (vv. 7b-10).⁸⁰

2. There will be a future reception, 11:11-24.

We must not whitewash the fact that Israel stumbled as predicted. “Their transgression” (vv. 11, 12) probably includes their rejection both of Messiah and His witnesses. God’s purpose for that stumble, however, was not for Israel to fall. Rather, it was for “reconciliation of the world” (v. 15). The Book of Acts repeatedly notes two direct results God designed and obtained from Israel’s transgression:

- By crucifying Messiah, Israel provided in His death the **basis** of reconciliation (see Acts 2:23; 3:13-18; 13:27-29).⁸¹
- By rejecting Messiah’s witnesses, Israel affected the **means** of reconciliation. Preaching the message was rechanneled to the Gentiles (v. 11b; Acts 13:46-47; 28:28). Gentile conversion, however, will eventually lead back to Jewish conversion (vv. 11c-12). That ultimate Jewish “full inclusion” will be “much greater riches” for the world (vv. 12c, 15b).

Now study Chart I. Follow verse numbers as you read (the parts of 12c are reversed).

CHART I How God’s Partial Rejection of Israel Shows His Wisdom Romans 11:11-15			
At the Present		In the Future	
Israel	The World	Israel	The World
11a Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression →	11b salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.		
12a But if their transgression means → 12b and their loss means→	riches for the world riches for the Gentiles→	will their full inclusion bring!	12c how much greater riches
15a If their rejection brought →	reconciliation to the world →	15b What will their acceptance be→	but life from the dead?

As usual, God had anticipated this great turn in evangelism—and that Gentile conversion would result in Jewish conversion. It was implied by His prediction (recorded in Deut. 32:21 and quoted in Rom. 10:19) about Jewish envy. Their envy for God’s many blessings on believing Gentiles prepares Israel for conversion. Paul kept this in mind in his mission to Gentiles. He wanted to incite such envy to bring about more Jewish conversions (11:13-14). He knew that the greatest blessing is yet to come. At the present God, by partially rejecting Israel, has opened the door for Gentiles to be reconciled to Himself. But in the future when He again accepts Israel, He will produce “life from the dead” (v. 15).

Israel must be restored because it is “holy” as connected to its holy past. “If **the part of the dough offered as firstfruits** is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if **the root** is holy, so are the branches” (v. 16). The bolded words refer to Israel’s forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), as confirmed in verse 28 (“the patriarchs”). They are called “holy.” That term, as usual, does not specifically mean saved but separated to God, in the place of His blessing.⁸² Since the patriarchs were separated to God, so was the nation as a whole.

This leads to the memorable illustration of **the olive tree** (vv. 17-24). As just seen, that tree does not picture saved people but people in the place of blessing.⁸³ At one time only Israel was in that place; they were the natural branches. But now, with some of those branches broken out, the tree includes Gentiles grafted there from a wild tree. (The illustration in Ephesians 2:11-22 is similar.) Only by faith can anyone stay there. Because of their unbelief, God in sternness broke out the natural branches. In kindness He grafted in the wild branches. But they can remain only by faith. When Israel is converted, “how much more readily” will He graft those natural branches back “into their own olive tree!”

3. There will be a final salvation of Israel, 11:25-32.

Here Paul sums up what his teaching in chapters 9-11 has implied:

Israel has experienced a hardening in part
until the full number of the Gentiles has come in,
and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is
written... (11:25-26a)

First, he says that this hardening of Israel is partial, not of the whole nation. Second, the hardening will cease when “the full number of the Gentiles has come in.” What might that mean? Here are three interpretations that have been suggested. Might it mean

- That no more Gentiles will be converted after that? No, as probably all literal interpreters agree. Even dispensationalists admit that great numbers of Gentiles will be converted during the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:9-17) and the millennium (Zech. 8:20-23).
- That the church will be complete before Israel gets saved? No, because there is no good reason or clear evidence to exclude converted Israel or any other saved people from the church. The church (*ekklesia*) is Messiah’s “body” and kingdom community (which I explain in various writings).⁸⁴ It is constituted through His baptizing believers in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13), which is specifically promised to Israel (Matt. 3:5, 11).⁸⁵
- That the age of favoring Gentiles over Israel will be completed? The figure of the olive tree favors this meaning or something similar.

Third, what does Paul mean that “in this way all Israel will be saved”? (a) “All Israel” must refer to the nation as a whole, not to every individual. (b) “In this way” refers to the procedure or means of saving them. Does that look to the previous verses, the conversion of the Gentiles and Jewish envy? Or, to the conclusion of the time period? Or, to the quotation that follows—“the deliverer” and God’s “covenant with them when I take away their sins”? It may be any or all of these. The precise occasion when Israel will be converted is made explicit in Zechariah 12:10 (cf. 13:1). It will be at Messiah’s Second Coming, when “they will look on me, the one they have pierced.”

Verses 28-32 show how we saved Gentiles should regard Jews. Jews have made themselves our enemies in their opposition to the gospel (v. 28a). But they are still unalterably God’s chosen people (vv. 28b-29). Neither we nor they were good. But we were saved out of our disobedience as a result of their own disobedience. When they realize their condition, they will find mercy because of the mercy shown to us:

[Gentiles] who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of [Jewish] disobedience, so [Jews] too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to [Gentiles]. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (vv. 30-32)

Paul looks back and looks up. Don't miss the point of Romans 11. In it the apostle has used powerful Scriptural arguments to assure us that ethnic Israel is still God's chosen people and has a future as such. As pointed out earlier, it agrees perfectly that the Lord will "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). McClain explains the importance of the end of chapter 11 in Paul's argument.

Paul has been like an Alpine mountain climber. Now he has reached the peak, and he does just what anyone else would do—he turns around and looks back to see how far he has come, to know the path by which he has wound around to reach this height!

The person who has mastered the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans knows more about the philosophy of history than all the wisest historians that the world has ever seen. There is a philosophy of history here that is unmatched! It makes the historians of the earth appear like children playing with their toys. In these eleven chapters, Paul shows us the original human race. The race is split into two segments: Jew and Gentile. Then came the promises. But the Jew failed to receive the promises by crucifying the Messiah, resulting in the expansion of the promises to all. Then the two segments of the race come together again, God having mercy upon all. (McClain, *Romans*, pp. 203-204)

The doxology in verses 33-36 exults in God's wisdom in this whole procedure! Absolutely no one could have imagined it (vv. 33-34). No particle of it came from us; it all came from Him (v. 35). In fact, everything is **from** Him as the origin. Everything is **through** Him as the sustainer. Everything is **for** Him as the goal (v. 36a). It will all be for His glory (v. 36b; see 1 Chron. 16:23-24, 28-29; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; 3:21). This doxology "climaxes the doctrinal section of the epistle and focuses on the supreme purpose of everything God does—to glorify Himself." (MacArthur, p. 124⁸⁶). Is your life also dedicated to His glory?

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"
"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"
For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen. (11:33-36)

IV. Exhortation, 12:1 to 15:13

The Will of God Revealed

How should a saved man (believer) walk? “Be transformed” (12:2)

In Paul’s treatise we have reached the last division, which consists of three sections of exhortation:

- A. In Relation to God, Self, and Others, chapter 12
- B. In Relation to the Government and Other Citizens, chapter 13
- C. In Relations between Strong and Weak Brethren, 14:1 to 15:13

In this division Paul shows how we should respond to God’s mercies given through the gospel. He answers the question “How should a saved man (a believer) walk?” The answer can be summed up in a command from 12:2: “Be transformed.” The motive to everything in the process is love.

Because the commands in these three sections are given in the spirit of personal pleas, we call them exhortations. Like much of the doctrine in earlier chapters, they are not directed to unbelievers. Such people are quite incapable of responding with the proper motivation. Believers, however, will receive divine grace as they seek to trust and obey. As you study, do not treat these commands merely as theory to analyze. Instead, determine to obey them. As a practical measure, choose at least three commands in each section and write down **how** you will obey each one.

A. In Relation to God, Self, and Others, chapter 12

1. The basic command: consecration to God, 12:1-2

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to **offer your bodies** as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 **Do not conform** to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed** by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Basis of this command. The words “therefore...in view of God’s mercy [Greek *mercies* or *compassions*]” base this command on God’s love shown to us through the gospel. In spite of our sin and rebellion, He has provided us a new life through His Son’s sacrifice. Solely because we believe in the Son, He makes us acceptable (justifies us) and holy (sanctifies us). Having transformed us into His children, He guarantees our complete victory over sin and over suffering.⁸⁷ We can take no credit; He chose us and called us. For those of us who are Gentiles, the mercy is even greater: we have been grafted into the Jewish tree of blessing. Jewish failure led to our

success. Yet, God will fulfill His promises to Israel. He will cleanse and save that nation when Messiah finally comes to rule.

Parts of this command. In the first part of the command, we are exhorted to “offer [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.” This is the same exhortation as in 6:13b (which see). “Offer” seems to refer to an action accomplished over our entire Christian life and often brought to mind. What we offer are our bodies, because they embrace everything we are. They are living sacrifices in contrast to animals slain in the temple. By means of the gospel they have already become holy (separated) and pleasing to God.

This act of “worship” is “true and proper [Greek *logikon*].” This is one of several possible translations of the Greek adjective. (a) “Spiritual” would describe a level of worship in which the Spirit controls (see 1 Cor. 15:44, 46). (b) “Rational” would describe the activity of a reasoning human rather than an animal. (c) “True and proper” (logical), as here, would describe a rational conclusion from what God has done.

The next part of the command uses two Greek “present tense” imperatives, which describe a process: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” “Conform” refers to a merely outward appearance; “be transformed,” to a revelation of one’s inner essence (Matt. 17:3; 2 Cor. 3:18). That transformation will proceed as our “mind” is renewed to agree with “the mind of the Lord” (11:34). The same process is described in Ephesians 4:21-24 and Colossians 3:9-16.⁸⁸ It involves our letting “the message of Messiah dwell among [us] richly” (Col. 3:16). The parallel in Ephesian (5:18b-20), shows how His Word has such an effect: “Be filled with the Spirit.” The Spirit uses the Word to transform us.

Result of obeying this command. By cooperating with divine grace, we will “test and approve what God’s will is.” As an assayer tests an ore, we will experience and approve God’s will. That will is not limited to vocational guidance but includes all He wants us to be and do. Far from frightening, His will is good (pure and lasting), pleasing (to us and to Him), and perfect (lacking nothing).

Write down this command, with its parts, as the first one you will obey in this section (chapter 12). In fact, write out these two verses and keep reading them until they are memorized.

2. In regard to ourselves, humility, 12:3-8

Considering yourself as better than other believers is wrong. But so is badmouthing yourself; it is false humility. Instead, you should “think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you” (v. 3). “Faith” here refers to your ability to exercise one of the spiritual gifts listed.⁸⁹ None of us has all the gifts; we need the ministry of other gifted people. But none of us is useless either; we all have gifts. True humility will respect God’s judgment in giving you a gift, will seek to determine what it is, and will exercise it heartily in building up the body of Messiah.

3. In regard to others, love, 12:9-21

This subsection deals with our relations in the church (vv. 9-16) but outside the church as well (vv. 17-21). As we play our part in both circles, we play in the key of sincere love (v. 9). Several of the exhortations here—including the command to love—perfectly reflect our Lord’s teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Most of them are not hard to understand but require divine grace to perform. Write down at least two commands from verses 3-21 that you will seek to obey—and how you will do so.

You may need help on verse 20, quoted from Proverbs 25:21-22a. The last part has been interpreted in many ways:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, **you will heap burning coals on his head.**”

One misguided interpretation is that goodness to an enemy will get revenge by making him feel awful. Instead, this verse agrees with “do not take revenge,” emphasized in the preceding verse. This “enemy” is not a combatant but an angry neighbor. Giving him food and drink shows him unexpected love just as heaping burning coals would. In that culture home fires were kept burning by live coals. Someone could run out of such coals and ask to be resupplied in the container he would carry on his head. It would show love to heap up a lot of coals for him from one’s own supply. The object of this action is expressed in the last verse (v. 21): “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

B. In Relation to the Government and Other Citizens, chapter 13

The basic command: submission, 13:1. In this second section of exhortations the basic command is that every believer must “be subject to the governing authorities” (v. 1). Submission involves (a) recognition that such authorities have rights over us and (b) corresponding conduct, such as, paying taxes and showing respect (v. 7).

In the early church both Jews and Gentiles could give reasons not to submit to government:

- (a) Authorities were often perverse; think of Caiaphas, Pilate, and—as Paul wrote—the Emperor Nero.
- (b) Jews, throughout their long history, had long resented non-Jewish authorities.
- (c) Both Jewish and Gentile disciples now rightly believed “that there is another king, one called Jesus” (Acts 17:7). Furthermore, (d) Jesus had promised that “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Some might interpret this to include freedom from government control.

Yet, in spite of growing opposition and persecution from rulers, early Christians learned to submit. They learned it from the Lord Jesus and from the apostles. (a) The Lord had given a basic reason for submitting: “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Mark 12:17). Also, by paying the temple tax (Matt. 17:24-27), He had set an example of complying so as not to offend. He had even submitted to unjust arrest. (b) Two leading apostles wrote important passages on this subject, in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:13-17.

The Bible often teaches that God Himself has established government. Verse 1 here says so twice; succeeding verses repeat it. He has appointed those who govern—not just the institution itself but the individuals in charge, the “rulers...the one in authority” (v. 3).⁹⁰

Why has God appointed rulers? Romans 13 gives the answer. He has done so in order to promote what is good and punish what is bad (vv. 3-4).⁹¹ The negative purpose (punishing) parallels an exhortation just given: “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the **wrath of God**” (12:19). Revenge is not our job but God’s. Accordingly, His wrath will be poured out when the wicked are punished at Messiah’s coming to rule (see 2 Thess. 1:7-9). But meanwhile, He has given human government that same purpose now. He has established it to “bear the sword” as “God’s servants, agents of **wrath** to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (13:4).⁹² It should be obvious that the sword implies capital punishment as well as all levels of minor punishment. God ordained human government with such power when Noah’s family began the new world after the flood (Gen. 9). The divine covenant made back then—and never rescinded—emphasized the requirement to take the murderer’s life. The government also uses the sword to protect us from evildoers (1 Pet. 2:13-14), which sometimes requires even war.

Reasons to submit. To repeat, it is God who ordains human government to promote good and punish evil. Thus, there are two main reasons why we should “submit to the authorities.” The first reason is literally “because of **wrath**” (v. 5, NASB), which means “because of possible punishment” (NIV). The second reason is “as a matter of conscience” (v. 5c). That means, because of our relation to God, whom the person in authority represents (vv. 2a, 4b, 6). To submit to the ruler is to submit to God.

Two other reasons for submission are given in the rest of this chapter 13. The first is love (vv. 8-10), and the second is Jesus’ soon coming (vv. 11-14). Those reasons affect our relationship to all citizens of the state, not just rulers.

The debt of love, 13:8-10. “Owe nothing to anyone” (13:8, NASB). That literal Greek probably means “Let no debt remain outstanding,” as translated by the NIV. If so, the command does not forbid all debts but debts we cannot pay.⁹³ There is only one debt we should always owe: that of love. Verses 8-10 twice say that by genuine love we fulfill the law.⁹⁴ As seen before, we fulfill it without being under it. We “are **not under law**, but under grace” (6:14). We “**died to the law**...that [we] might belong to another...in order that we might bear fruit for God...we have been **released from the law** so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (7:4, 6). We have a deep thirst for righteousness and are pleased that Jesus did not

come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...but to fulfill them...Anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:17-20)

In the new covenant God writes these laws of His on our hearts (Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 3:3-6, 18). He pours “out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom. 5:5). Our resulting transformation gives us assurance (Romans 8:1-4).

The Lord’s coming, 13:11-14. Everything we do should be in view of His soon coming to rule. When He comes, He will bring our full salvation (v. 11) and the night will be replaced by the day (vv. 12-13).⁹⁵ The Epistles exhort us to live as children of that coming light rather than of the present darkness (for example, 1 Thess. 5:4-9). We do not belong to this “dominion of darkness” in which we live, but to the coming “kingdom of the Son he loves” (Col. 1:12-14). To live properly as children of the light, we should “clothe [our]selves with the Lord Jesus Messiah” (Rom. 13:14). That means to adopt His ways.⁹⁶

Don’t miss what this implies about the kingdom of God. We acknowledge King Jesus; we belong to His kingdom; and we live by its standards. **But it hasn’t come yet.** We are still subject to this world’s “governing authorities.”

But how should we act toward government if authorities do not fulfill their divine purposes? What if they subvert justice and reward evildoers? Must we still obey them? Scriptural precepts and examples would say yes—unless obeying authorities would make us disobey God (Acts 4:17-20). Should we strive to replace bad rulers? Surely we should if the government provides legitimate means to do so. But if there are no such means, it is doubtful that we may use violence. We should speak out for justice, but no scripture seems to authorize rebellion.⁹⁷

If you have not already done so, pick out at least three commands in this section (chapter 13) that you will seek to obey. Write down **how** you will obey each of them. Then do the same thing in the last section of the treatise, which follows.

C. In Relations between Strong & Weak Brethren, 14:1 to 15:13

The basic command: maintain a spirit of unity, accepting one another (15:5-7). This rule embraces the other rules in this section (see below), which closes Paul’s treatise on the power of the gospel. In it Paul’s concern is for the church to be united in love in order to accomplish its mission. Before reading my comments, read the text with the following divisions (MacArthur, pp. 271ff.):

1. Receive one another with understanding (14:1-12).
2. Build up one another without offending (14:13-23).
3. Please one another as Christ did (15:1-6).
4. Rejoice with one another in God’s plan of redemption (15:7-13).

Apparently the apostle knew of no major problems in the Roman church like those he had addressed in 1 Corinthians. Yet, there were bound to be different opinions about “disputable matters,” matters not clearly settled by Scripture.⁹⁸ Arguments about holy days or unclean foods

have caused quite as much division as have differences over doctrine. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 8 is closely parallel to this passage.

The people Paul addresses as holding these opinions, he calls “weak” and “strong.” Both groups are believers, accepted by the Lord and in agreement about basic teachings. They all agree, for example, to avoid the sins listed in Romans 13:13. But the weak also consider some things sins that the strong do not—such as, to eat certain foods or fail to observe certain days (14:2, 3, 5). For such opinions they can give no clear apostolic teaching. Yet, they lack faith to cast off these scruples; in this way they are weak. The strong do not have unscriptural scruples. They have better understanding of the freedom the gospel has brought us.

1. Three basic rules, 14:1-3. Paul classes himself among the strong (15:1). Yet, in this passage full of exhortations, he gives none about diet or days, only about love.⁹⁹ He begins with three basic rules, the first one general:

- Accept one another but do not quarrel about disputable matters (14:1; 15:7).
- The strong must not look down on (have contempt for) the weak (14:3a).
- The weak must not condemn the strong (14:3b).

2. Reasons for the rules, 14:4-12. The main reason is that both strong and weak are servants of Messiah and must answer (in judgment) to Him, not to one another.¹⁰⁰ No servant has the right to hurt the relationship of another servant to his master. Each servant must have good reasons, then act accordingly (vv. 5b, 22). It is sinful for him to act against his conscience (vv. 14, 23).

An example is the matter of observing days. One servant “considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day [sacred]” (14:5, adding “sacred” rather than “alike,” as NIV does). The first servant is weak. He probably thinks that we are still under the law of the Sabbath (Saturday) and maybe that Sunday has taken its place.¹⁰¹ However, the strong believer disagrees that some days are more sacred than others. He can cite Galatians 4:9-10, that “observing special days and months” is “turning back to those weak and miserable forces [that is, elementary religious principles].” He knows that meeting on a particular day does not make it “more sacred than another.”

3. Build one another up, 14:13-23. A strong believer like Paul knows that no food “is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean” (v. 14). In other words, a believer is free to eat any food unless he considers it unclean. But the strong believer has a more important consideration than his own freedom—namely, his Christian brother’s wellbeing. I must not exercise my liberty if doing so will hurt my weak brother (vv. 15, 19-21). He is far more important than food. If by my actions I encourage him to violate his own conscience, I “destroy” him (v. 15) rather than build him up (v. 19).

What we eat and drink is quite unimportant in comparison to eternal things (2 Cor. 4:18). We should live as those who will participate forever in Messiah’s coming kingdom—“His servants will serve him....And they will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:3, 5). And that “kingdom of

God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). Those are the things we should avidly pursue (v. 19), as Paul reiterates in 15:13 (cf. Matt. 6:33). Some misunderstand the use of the present tense in “the kingdom of God is...” They wrongly assume that this verse defines the kingdom as a present spiritual reality. Instead, it states the essence of the coming kingdom already well-known from the prophecies. See Appendix J: “The Kingdom in Romans 14:17” (p. 73).

4. Please one another and spread the gospel, 15:1-13. Paul brings his treatise to a climax on the missionary theme. He reminds us that our ministry is the same as Messiah’s, whose motive was to fulfill God’s missionary plan. Our goal, like His, should be to please our neighbor rather than ourselves (vv. 1-3), and thereby extend the circle of those who praise God. We should “have the same attitude of mind toward each other” (v. 5), not in regard to food and drink but in regard to love. Thus, “with one mind and one voice” we will glorify God and bring praise to Him (vv. 6-7). That praise to God will come from beyond our close friends; the circle of worshipers will keep growing. In other words, accepting one another as Messiah accepted us (v. 7a) will keep on extending the gospel. Messiah gave the example. He ministered to His own people; He was “a servant of the Jews...so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed” (v. 8). Yet, His objective was bigger than reaching Jews—namely, “that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (v. 9a).

Verses 9-13 illustrate that plan from every part of the Old Testament and close the treatise with a benediction. Each quotation mentions the Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations.¹⁰² Messiah’s ministry, which we continue, will produce converts “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). All those nations will praise and obey God along with redeemed Israel. The final reference in the treatise affirms that He “will arise to rule over the nations” (Rom. 15:12). Thus, the treatise concludes as its two previous sections did (at chapters 8 and 11). The grand goal, the great climax of salvation, will be our Lord’s coming eternal kingdom.

Are you also one of God’s “workers for the [coming] kingdom” (Col. 4:11)?

Are you also concerned to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19)?

END OF THE TREATISE

Conclusion, 15:14 to 16:27

Paul's concluding remarks give a marvelous sample of how the gospel is extended. He first resumes telling of his own ministry and plans (15:14-33), then expresses many personal greetings (ch. 16). As usual in the New Testament Epistles, (a) this author is a missionary (b) writing to a church or churches or individuals won by missionaries, (c) in the interest of more missionary outreach. Read the first part of his conclusion, answering the questions I propose. After answering all of them, check your answers by those provided.

A. Paul's Ministry and Plans, 15:14-33

Questions

1. In verses 14-16 Paul says, "I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again." What final purpose will this help him attain?
2. In verses 17-22 what rule does Paul follow for where he ministers, and how far has it taken him?
3. In verses 23-24 Paul says, "there is no more place for me to work in these regions." What plans does he have that involve Rome?
4. In verses 25-29 why does he plan to go to Jerusalem first?
5. In verses 30-33 what two specific prayer requests does he make?

Answers

1. Help Gentiles become an offering acceptable to God.
2. His rule is to preach the gospel where Messiah is not known, which has taken him as far as Illyricum (Dalmatia).
3. He plans to go to Rome and enjoy them, then have them help him go on to Spain.
4. To make sure the Christian Jews in Jerusalem receive the contribution for the poor from the Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
5. "Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there."

B. Personal Greetings, chapter 16

This last chapter has an unusual feature. The apostle greets by name many of the believers to whom he writes (vv. 3-15).¹⁰³ Notice how he uses the expressions "in Messiah [Jesus]" or "in the Lord"—certainly "the tie that binds" believers together all over the world. Read this chapter, listing any further information about Paul's present circumstances or plans. You will find it mostly before and after the greetings. For example, list what verse 1 says about Phoebe. She was "a deacon [or servant, Greek *diakonon*] of the church in Cenchreae," a port for the city of Corinth.¹⁰⁴ Apparently Phoebe carries the epistle to Rome. There is more information about Paul's circumstances in verses 17-19, 21, 22, and 23. After you list such data, I challenge you to a great learning experience. Organize all the information you have seen and write your own account of the historical circumstances for this epistle. Include what you saw in chapters 1, 2, 15, 16 and Acts, such as the following:

- Paul is writing to the church in the imperial capital, Rome. He has never visited that city or church but has longed to do so (15:22, 23b). Apparently the Roman church sprang up from believers who moved there (16:3-15).
- Paul has been hindered from going to Rome by the great amount of apostolic work to do in the East. Now he has finished planting the gospel “all the way around to Illyricum” (Dalmatia, 15:19-20, 23).
- He is in Corinth during his third missionary tour (16:1, 23) and writes from there. He established the Corinthian church on his second tour (Acts 18), communicated with it often (for example, 1 Cor. and 2 Cor.), and returned there to spend three winter months (Acts 20:3).
- He plans to end his third tour by going from Corinth to Jerusalem (15:25). He and some colleagues are taking a substantial gift to help the poor saints in Jerusalem. The gift is from the Gentile churches in the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. He hopes it will strengthen the unity of the worldwide church (15:26-28a; cf. 2 Cor. 9:12-14). Though important, this trip will be dangerous (15:30-31); Jewish enemies want to kill him (15:31a). So He requests prayer for success.
- After ministering to the saints in Jerusalem, he plans to minister in Rome and Spain. He seems confident that he will visit the church in Rome, and then—with their help—plant the gospel in Spain (15:24, 28-29, 32).
- He sends the epistle by Phoebe, “a deacon [or servant] of the church in Cenchreae” (16:1), a port for Corinth. He highly recommends her and asks the Roman believers to help her as needed.
- He sends greetings by name to a long list of believers in Rome whom he knows personally (16:3-15).
- He warns them of troublemakers and false teachers sure to come (16:17-19).
- He sends greetings from several key people in Corinth (16:21-24). Tertius was the amanuensis who wrote the words of the epistle as Paul dictated them (v. 22).
- Acts tells us how he did reach Jerusalem. He was spared from death by becoming a prisoner in Jerusalem and Caesarea, and was taken as a prisoner to Rome. So, as requested, he got to Rome “in the full measure of the blessing of Messiah” (15:29; Acts 28:14-31).

Paul closes the letter by reminding the Romans of the greatness of the gospel. In its fullness it is a great “mystery,” once hidden but now revealed (16:25-27). Its object is that “all the Gentiles” [or nations, Greek *ethnoi*] might believe and obey its Architect (v. 26b).

All the glory should be, and will be, to Him!

Appendix A: Jesus' Title *Christ/Messiah*

The Greek title *Cristos* (written *Christ* in English) is Jesus' most common and basic title. The word literally means "anointed" and as a title refers to the king. John 1:41 (quoted below) shows that it is valid to translate it *Messiah*, which NIV 2011 occasionally does. In all the following samples but John 1:41, it does so.

- The introduction to Matthew. "This is the genealogy of Jesus the **Messiah** the son of David, the son of Abraham...fourteen [generations] from the exile to the **Messiah**." (Matt. 1:1, 17)
- Jesus' birth. "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the **Messiah**, the Lord." (Luke 2:11)
- After Jesus' baptism, the first disciple's witness. "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ)." (John 1:41)
Here "Messiah" represents Aramaic *Messias*, not Greek *Cristos*, which follows.
- The Great Confession. "'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'God's **Messiah**.'" (Luke 9:20)
- Jesus' trial. "The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the **Messiah**, the Son of God.' 'You have said so,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (Matt. 26:63-64)
- Preaching the gospel. "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the **Messiah**." (Acts 5:42)

Summarizes the gospel. The New Testament has *Cristos* as Jesus' title in the first verse (quoted above) and very often. Also, "Jesus is the Christ (Messiah)" is the core of the message in the Gospels and the most common summary of the gospel in Acts. Therefore, we should not neglect it in our own study and witnessing.

Used in both Testaments for Anointed (One). The English word *Christ* hides a message that has to be explained. In itself the English word means nothing. As already mentioned, it does not translate anything but simply gives an English form of Jesus' title *Cristos*. In Greek versions *Cristos* appears often in both Testaments and tightly links them together. Why did I not realize that fact even after years of reading in Greek? Partly because English versions do nothing to show it. In the Old Testament they correctly translate (as "Anointed [One]") the Hebrew word it stands for (*Mashiach*). But in the New Testament they completely hide the connection, because they say *Christ* in English instead of translating. I still remember the thrill when I first discovered that connection reading the Old Testament Greek (the *Septuagint*) version. There was *Cristos* in Psalm 2:2, for example!

A title for the king. Although *Christ* in itself means nothing, the Greek word it represents is majestic. That word *Cristos*, as already stated, translates the **Hebrew** word *Mashiach* and means

Appendix A: Jesus' Title Christ/Messiah

“Anointed,” or, as a substantive, “Anointed One.” Each king over God’s kingdom was anointed, in his inauguration, with oil symbolizing the Holy Spirit. That made him *ha-Mashiac*, which in Greek is *ho Cristos*. For example, David used it of King Saul in 1 Samuel 26:11, 16 (cf. 16:6, 12, 13). The future prophesied Ruler would have the fullness of the Holy Spirit as described in Isaiah 11:1-2. Therefore, He would have the same title (as, for example, in Ps. 2:2).

Aramaic and John 1:41. Many Jews in New Testament times spoke mostly the different language of Aramaic. In that language the title equivalent to *Mashiac/Cristos* was *Messias* (written *Messiah* in English). That was the form of the title they knew best. And that was the first testimony any of Jesus’ prospective apostles gave about Him. I will again quote John 1:41. In it Andrew attested that Jesus is that long-awaited Ruler. After giving Andrew’s exact word in Aramaic, *Messias* (here written as *Messiah*), the verse adds the Greek equivalent, *Cristos* (here written *Christ*). In other words, the NIV does not translate either form of the title but writes each one in an English form.

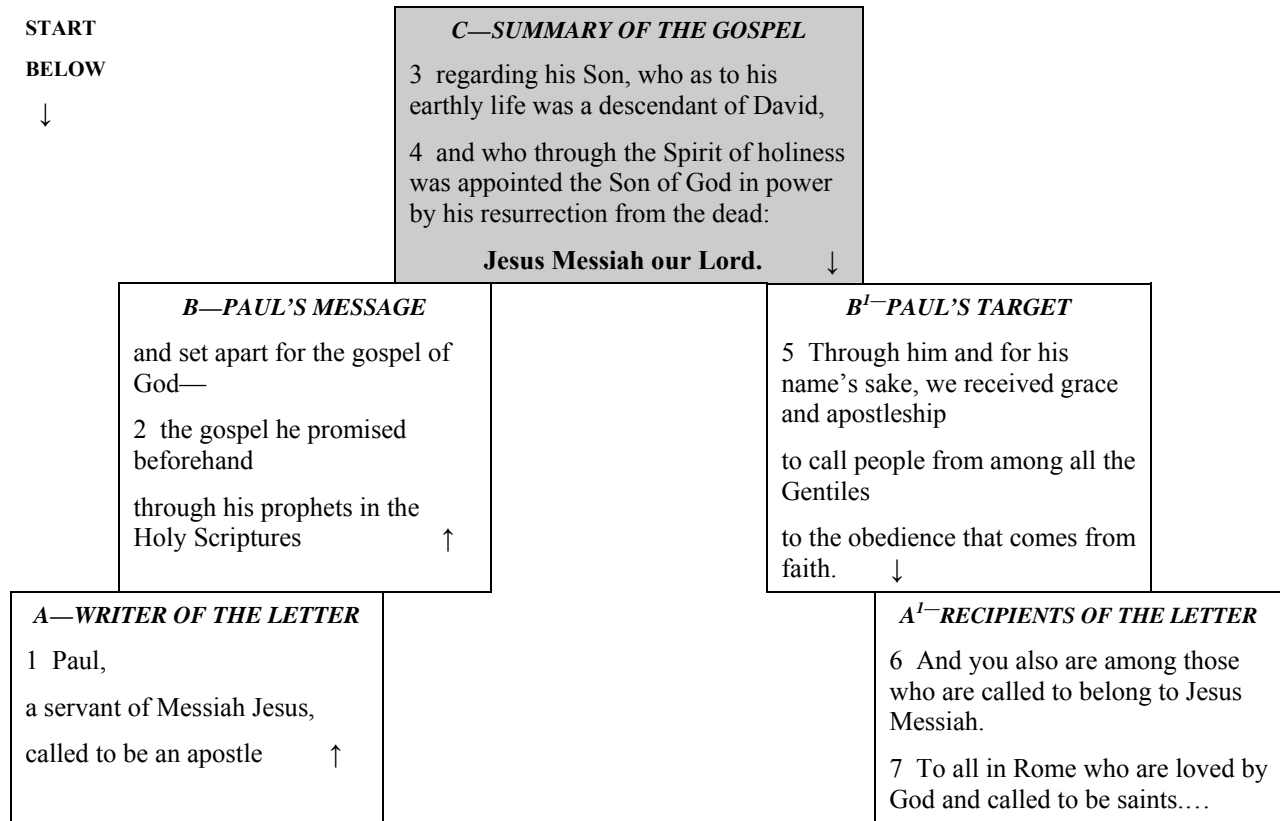
The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the **Messiah**” (that is, the **Christ**).

Switching to Messiah. You have just seen that John 1:41 uses the Greek and Aramaic forms of this title. Like the Hebrew form, they both mean “Anointed One.” In the Old Testament they all referred to Israel’s historic kings but especially to the Promised One, as in this verse. In English this royal meaning is better suggested by using *Messiah* than *Christ*. NIV 2011 sometimes makes that change, as illustrated earlier. Since this title means that He will rule, it also directs attention to God’s many promises of His coming kingdom. Since “Jesus is the Messiah” is the main summary of the gospel, the gospel implies God’s plans for the future.

Son of God. Study my explanation of *Son of God* to understand that the two titles are virtually equivalent.

Appendix B: Romans 1:1-7 Structure

Romans is not designed to preach the gospel to unbelievers but explain its power to believers (1:16). It is summarized, however, as part of Paul’s salutation, which states his official relationship to the Roman Christians. Read the salutation as printed below clockwise (from NIV 2011) starting at the lower left. Notice that the first part, labeled A, corresponds to the last part, labeled A¹. The second part, labeled B, corresponds to the next-to-last part, labeled B¹. The central and most important part (labeled C), which summarizes the gospel, stands alone. As authorized by John 1:41, Jesus’ royal title *Christ* is consistently changed to *Messiah*.



The gospel is preached in the Gospels and throughout Acts. It is often summarized as, for example, in Acts 5:42; 9:22; 17:2-3; 18:5; 20:21; 24:24; 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 23; 2:2; 15:1-11; 2 Timothy 2:8; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 2:3-5; 1 Peter 1:3, 19-21. Those sermons and summaries are like Paul’s summaries in Romans 1:3-4 and 10:8-10. They say that Jesus is the living (and therefore coming) Messiah, not that He is divine or was pre-existent (though He is and was). Rarely do they mention the reason for His death. The main issue is that He is the royal Ruler of the kingdom to come, with all the authority that implies.

Appendix C: Jesus' Title *Son of God*

In this study the word Son is treated as though it were Son of God if that is what it implies. On my website is [a longer study](#) by the same name.

Before you use this study, read what I say about Jesus' much more common title, Christ. Yet another title but not dealt with here, is the one Jesus most often used for Himself, Son of Man. Rarely employed by anyone else (but see Acts 7:56), it seemed to designate Him as man's representative.

The title *Son of God* is used for Jesus on some important occasions. Here are three samples from Matthew and one from John.

- Jesus' baptism. "This is my **Son**, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:17)
- The Great Confession. "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, **the Son of the living God.**'" (Matt. 16:16)
- Jesus' trial. "The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, **the Son of God.**' 'You have said so,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (Matt. 26:63-64)
- Preaching the gospel. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only **Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."¹⁰⁵ (John 3:16)

A human title, though Jesus is also divine. The One called *Son of God* in the verses just quoted had existed forever before He became a man. He was the eternal Word, both God and with God. Everything was made through Him. Most Bible students nowadays assume that He also had that title before He became a man. They suppose that it asserts His divinity and implies His pre-existence. But it rarely if ever has that meaning. We must see how it is used in order to know what it means.

Other "sons of God." The same title was used for others besides Jesus, and none of them was divine. In the following examples of that usage, I have bolded their identities.

- When God "laid the earth's foundation...all the **angels** [Hebrew says *sons of God*] shouted for joy." (Job 38:4, 7)
- "**Adam**, the son of God." (Luke 3:37)
- "When **Israel** was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." (Hosea 11:1)
- "**He who overcomes** will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son." (Rev. 21:7; cf. Luke 20:36)

In these examples angels, Adam, the nation of Israel, and every true believer (every overcomer) are called God's sons. In no case does the label refer to them as divine, which they are not. But Jesus is divine. Does the title therefore mean something quite different in His case?

Appendix C: Jesus' Title Son of God

Usage of *Son of God* for Jesus. We will see Scriptural evidence that Jesus acquired this title as a man. So even though His Sonship is unique in some aspects, it is still His relation to the Father as a human being. Take note of four kinds of New Testament books in which the title is used or implied about Him. As noted before, the word *Son* alone, which is common, will also count if it clearly implies *of God*.

- In the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Jesus sometimes used this title for Himself. Others also called Him that, such as the Father, demons, and men. The title indicated His special relationship with God but nowhere with certainty implied pre-existence or divinity. Luke 1:35, for example, shows that it belonged to Him after His birth, not before. Luke 4:41 uses it, then substitutes the title *Messiah* for it, showing that those titles are equivalent. Luke 22:67 and 70 do the same thing.
- In the Gospel of John, *Son of God* occurs much more often. Jesus reveals that His sonship is unique, is related to the Father's sending Him on a mission (believers are similarly sent, John 20:21), and so forth. But even in John the title is sometimes, if not always, equivalent to *Messiah*. That is how it was used, for example, by John the Baptist (John 1:32-34), Nathanael (1:49), Peter (6:69), Martha (11:27), and in the purpose statement (20:31).
- In the apostolic preaching recorded in Acts, the title *Son of God* was rarely used. There are many summaries of sermons there, but only one use of that title, in Acts 9:20. There it is equivalent to *Messiah* (9:22). Also, in 13:33 God calls the king "my Son" in a quotation from Psalm 2. Its KJV use in Acts 7:37 is invalid, since it occurs only in some Greek manuscripts centuries after Christ.
- In many Epistles *Son of God* is used even less frequently than in Acts. It does not appear at all in ten books: Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, James, 1 Peter, 3 John, and Jude. It is used most often in Hebrews (13 times) and 1 John (23 times). In the remaining ten books it is used 19 times, including only once in Revelation. In the Epistles seldom if ever can it be shown to be a pre-incarnate title. The contrary is true. For example, as the basis of Paul's gospel summary in Romans 1:2-4, it is related only to Jesus' birth and resurrection. The same thing is true in Hebrews 1:4-5 (see below).

Evidence that Jesus acquired this title as a man. "Son of God" was a new "name" for Jesus. Hebrews 1:4-5 calls it that, then proves it by quoting Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 as fulfilled in Him. Read the Hebrews passage as it quotes the two prophetic verses.

- 4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.
- 5 For to which of the angels did God ever say,
"You are my Son;
today I have become your Father"? [Ps. 2:7]

Or again,

"I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son"? [2 Sam. 7:14]

Appendix C: Jesus' Title Son of God

In the composition of Hebrews, 1:4 has two functions: (a) It concludes the majestic prologue describing the Son through whom “God...has spoken.” (b) It also prepares to show how the Son is “as much superior to the angels as **the name he has inherited** is superior to theirs.” The Greek for “has inherited” (*kekleronomeken*) means He acquired it by inheritance; He did not have it previously.¹⁰⁶ But God had promised it to Him long before, as seen twice in the next verse. We will consider in reverse order the two verses quoted in Hebrews 1:5.

2 Samuel 7:14. This promise by God to King David was clearly not limited to Jesus in its original context. It embraced each of David’s descendants who would be heir to David’s throne, starting with Solomon (notice bolded words):

“**I will be** his Father, and he **will be** my Son. **When he does wrong**, I will punish him.... But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul.... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” (2 Sam. 7:14-16)

Did you notice that God twice used the future tense (“will be”) about this sonship? In this way God indicated that it would be, for David’s descendant, a new relationship. And when that new “Son” did wrong, as Solomon did, God would punish him. But God would not end the relationship—as He had done in Saul’s case—but maintain it. Thus, David’s house, kingdom, and throne would be eternal. Accordingly, later prophets spoke of Messiah ruling from “David’s throne...forever” (Isa. 9:7; cf. Luke 1:32-33).

Psalms 2:7. This psalm is often rightly called an “enthronement psalm.” Its language, and that of Isaiah 42:1, was purposefully like that used in Ancient Near East coronation texts. God Himself repeated such language at Jesus’ baptism.¹⁰⁷ Two key Persons in Psalm 2 are introduced in verse 2 as the LORD and the LORD’s “Anointed One.” Read my separate explanation of the latter title. (In Hebrew it is *Mashiac* [Aramaic *Messias*], translated *Cristos* in Greek, which is represented as *Christ* in English.) The same person is called the “King” in verse 6. It is He who speaks in verses 7-9, saying that the LORD has made Him *Son*. Immediately He refers to what He will inherit as Son.

⁷ I will proclaim the LORD’s decree:

He said to me, “**You are my Son;**
today I have become your Father.”

⁸ Ask me,

and I will make **the nations your inheritance,**
the ends of the earth your possession.

⁹ **You will break them** with a rod of iron

[or, **rule them with an iron scepter**];

you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” (Ps. 2:7-9)

It is evident that as *Son* He is God’s Heir. Jesus showed the same equivalence in His parable at Luke 20:13-14. He was the son of whom the owner of the vineyard said, “I will send my son,

Appendix C: Jesus' Title Son of God

whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’ But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’”

Don’t forget why Hebrews 1:4-5 quotes Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7. To prove that Jesus obtained a better title than the angels: *Son of God*, the Heir of David’s kingdom, that is, the whole world.

***Son of God* equivalent to *Messiah*.** As you just saw in Psalm 2, both these titles belong to the same King. They look at the same office from slightly different points of view. For that reason they are sometimes alternated, as in Luke 4:41 and 22:67, 70. Or one is put in apposition to the other, as in Matthew 16:16 and John 11:27; 20:31, all of which say, “You are the Messiah, the Son of [the living] God.” Matthew 16:16 is only one report of the Great Confession. In it Simon Peter used both terms together. How do we know that the second term is in apposition to the first, meaning basically the same? Because of parallel reports of the same confession. Mark 8:29 and Luke 9:20 record only the first term, “Messiah.” (John 6:69 says “the Holy One of God.”) Neither of them says “Son of God.” If the terms meant something very different, that would also mean that Mark and Luke left out something essential!

Here are four conclusions about the title *Son of God* in Jesus’ case:

- In view of its non-use in Acts and many Epistles, the title was not essential to evangelism nor initial instruction. (A different title, *Messiah*, was used much more often.)
- It refers to what Jesus became (“today I have become your Father”), not to what He already was. This fact assures that it does not mean His deity, as many assume. But we should determine what it does mean.
- Psalm 2 shows that it is a royal title and implies that He will inherit God’s new world to come. From the Father He will receive “the nations” and “the ends of the earth,” that is, the kingdom of David (2 Sam. 7; Isa. 9:6-7). By the same principle, our own sonship also implies heirship (Rom. 8:17).
- *Son of God* for Him means substantially the same as *Messiah*, the One anointed to rule. That is equivalent to Nathanael’s saying “You are the **Son of God**; you are the **King of Israel**” (John 1:49).

Keep in mind this royal meaning for *Son of God* as you study the New Testament. Applying it to a passage like Romans 1:3-4 makes us aware that the gospel primarily centers on Jesus’ kingship. But although the title does not denote divinity, it can easily be harmonized with that fact. For example, consider Matthew 22:41-46. Jesus showed the Jews that their belief in a purely human Messiah did not fit all the Scriptures. For Messiah’s forefather David called his future descendant “Lord.” In that case, Jesus asked, “how can he be [David’s] son?” The most likely answer seems to be that He is also more than human. So those who believe in Him as Messiah will soon admit His divinity.

Appendix D: Some Scriptural Summaries of the Gospel

The following quotations are from NIV 2011, with Christ changed to Messiah. The validity of some items depends on the fact that Messiah is a meaningful title for the King. Included are some of the shorter summaries of the gospel and clear references to it.

In Acts

2:36 (Peter's conclusion at Pentecost) "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

5:42 "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped preaching and proclaiming the good news that **Jesus is the Messiah.**"

9:22 "Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that **Jesus is the Messiah.**" (This means the same as the summary in James 2:1—and similar summaries—"believers in our **glorious Lord Jesus Messiah.**")

10:42-43 (Peter's conclusion at the "Gentile Pentecost") "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

17:2-3 "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and...reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the **Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,'** he said."

18:5 "Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that **Jesus was the Messiah.**"

20:21 Paul reminded "the elders of the church" in Ephesus that "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must **turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.**"

24:24 "Felix came with his wife Drusilla...He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about **faith in Messiah Jesus.**" (See also 8:12; 18:5, 28; 28:23, 31.)

In Romans

1:1-4 God's "Son, who as to his earthly life was **a descendant of David,** and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his **resurrection from the dead: Jesus Messiah our Lord.**"

Note: Romans 1:16-17 introduces the main theme of the treatise (why the gospel is God's power for salvation) but does not summarize the gospel. Likewise, 3:21-26 does not give the gospel's content but emphasizes that, unlike law, it works by faith. That subject is developed in the next chapters. Romans 2:16 says that the gospel includes judgment by Messiah.

Appendix D: Some Scriptural Summaries of the Gospel

6:3-4 Implies what was preached: “All of us who were baptized into **Messiah Jesus** were baptized into **his death**...in order that, just as **Messiah was raised from the dead**...we too may live a new life.”

10:8-10 “the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

16:25-26 “Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about **Jesus Messiah**...”

In 1 Corinthians

1:17-18, 23 “The **cross of Messiah**...the message of **the cross**...we preach **Messiah crucified**.”

2:2 “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except **Jesus Messiah and him crucified**.” (Cf. 8:11, “weak brother...for whom Messiah died.” 10:16 and 11:26, the Lord’s Supper is participation in Messiah’s blood and body. Believers are waiting for Jesus’ kingdom, which they will inherit, 6:9-10, and in it judge the world, including angels, 6:2-3.)

3:11 “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is **Jesus Messiah**.”

8:6 “There is but **one God, the Father**...and there is but **one Lord, Jesus Messiah**...”

12:3 “No one can say, ‘**Jesus is Lord**,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

15:1-11 “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you...By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you...what I received I passed on to you: ...that **Messiah died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, that he **was buried**, that he **was raised** on the third day...and that he **appeared** to Cephas...to me also...this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.”

Note. According to Acts 18:5, the message (gospel) first preached at Corinth was simpler and shorter: “**Jesus is Messiah**.” The two versions can be harmonized by simply emphasizing the fact from the longer version that **it was “Messiah”** who died and rose. To judge from the sermons in Acts, the reason for His death was never given in the original message. Therefore, it was not essential to know that doctrine to be saved. Yet, it was a corollary important to 1 Corinthians 15 (see v. 17). Even more important for that chapter was the fact of His resurrection, as proof of our own resurrection. See verses 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, and 23.

In Galatians

3:9 “Scripture...announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘**All nations will be blessed through you**.’”

Appendix D: Some Scriptural Summaries of the Gospel

In 2 Timothy

2:8 “Remember **Jesus Messiah, raised from the dead, descended from David.** This is my gospel.”

In Titus

2:13-14 “We wait for the blessed hope—the **appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Messiah, who gave himself for us** to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

In Hebrews

2:3-5 “This salvation, which was **first announced by the Lord...the world to come,** about which we are speaking.”

In 1 Peter

1:3 “Father of our Lord Jesus Messiah...has given us new birth into a living hope through the **resurrection of Jesus Messiah** from the dead.”

1:17-21 “redeemed...with the precious **blood of Messiah...chosen...revealed...raised...from the dead and glorified**” (also 2:21, 24, 25; 3:15, 18, 21-22; etc.)

In 1 John

1:3 “We proclaim to you **what we have seen and heard** [as recorded in the Gospels, vv. 1-2], so that you also may have fellowship with us.”

Appendix E: The Obedience of Faith in Romans 1:5

The whole phrase in Romans 1:5 and 16:26 is *eis hupakoēn pisteos, to [the] obedience of faith*. (“Faith” is in the genitive case.) Consider three possible meanings:

1. Obedience **to** faith (faith looked at as a command or set of commands). Arguments for this meaning can include the use of similar phrases with equivalent Greek syntax elsewhere. For example, 1 Peter 1:22 speaks of “obeying the truth,” and 2 Corinthians 10:5, of “obedience to Christ.” Yet other passages use the verb *obey* (rather than the noun *obedience*), followed by the dative (rather than the genitive). For example, Romans 10:16 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8 speak of obeying the gospel. Acts 6:7 says that “a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”

However, opposed to this meaning in Romans is the fact that Paul does not elsewhere speak of *faith* as though it were a command to be obeyed.

2. Obedience **that consists of** faith. Romans 4:4-5 seems to favor this meaning. It emphasizes justification by faith rather than by works: “to the one who **does not work but trusts** God who justifies the ungodly, their **faith** is credited as righteousness.” This might be the meaning of obedience in Acts 5:32b: “the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who **obey** him.” Since the Holy Spirit comes to every believer from the first moment of faith (Romans 8:9), not after he has good works, “obey” here may equal “believe.”

However, Romans 1:5 looks at the whole of salvation; 4:4-5 only its beginning. The man justified by faith alone will inevitably begin giving evidence of his new life. In that sense “You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Saving faith produces works; a new creature is transformed. So prefer the next meaning.

3. Obedience **that comes from** faith. This is the translation that NIV chooses in Romans 1:5 (and paraphrases in 16:26) and probably the correct meaning. It reflects the same truth as Galatians 5:6: “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” The obedience true of every believer involves more than passive faith. For this reason Jesus warned that the wise man both “hears these words of mine and **puts them into practice**” (Matt. 7:24). This point is assumed in several passages in Romans, such as the following.

Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Rom. 6:16-18; see 15-23).

This “slavery” is not optional. Every believer’s obedience has made him a slave to righteousness and to God (6:22). The result is a godly life, as described in 8:3-4.

Appendix F: Eternal Life for Those Who “Do Good”?

Romans 2:2-16 gives four principles by which God will judge the world:

- a. by truth (the abstract principle), vv. 2-5
- b. by deeds (the concrete principle—referring to actual examples), vv. 6-10
- c. without respect of persons, vv. 11-15
- d. by means of Messiah, v. 16

In Romans 2 the most attention is given to the second principle. Verses 6-10 state it in a remarkable structure explained by Stifler, adapting from John Forbes.¹⁰⁸ There are “four triplets, balanced against one another” and including repetitions and reversals of order. These triplets speak about people who do good deeds and people who do evil deeds—and what they will get in judgment. In each and every triplet, the three lines deal with the character, the pursuits, and the appropriate awards of the good or the bad. Sometimes the order of those lines is reversed. Such statement and restatement emphasize what is taught: In the judgment God will give eternal life to those who do good and condemn those who do evil.

Now read and study Chart C, which quotes everything in Romans 2:6-11 plus other verses. First, notice how it is constructed. The main caption (“God’s Righteous...,” row 1) uses words from Romans 2:2, 3, and 5. The four column captions (“THOSE WHO...,” row 2) are from Jesus’ promise in John 5:28-29. Romans 2:6 (“God will...,” from NIV 1984) is right under the main caption. Verses 7-11 (“To those who...,” from NIV 2011) are in rows 3-5. Read those verses in order, going where the arrows direct you (left to right, then down, then right to left, then down).

CHART C God’s Righteous Judgment Based on Truth, Romans 2:6-11			
6 God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” (NIV, 1984)			
THOSE WHO HAVE DONE GOOD	TO LIVE	THOSE WHO HAVE DONE EVIL	TO BE CONDEMNED
7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, →	he will give eternal life. →	8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, →	there will be wrath and anger. ↓
for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ↓	10 but [<i>there will be</i>] glory, honor and peace ←	for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ←	9 There will be trouble and distress ←
11 For God does not show favoritism.			

Appendix F: Eternal Life for Those Who “Do Good”?

Did you notice that Paul himself begins (in v. 6) with a quotation that states his main point? He quotes Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12, which are similar to many other Scriptures. Our object just now is to consider the first category of those Messiah will judge according to their works: “those who have done good.” That label (row 2) comes directly from the passage in John:

...a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—**those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.** (John 5:28-29)

Romans 2 strongly reaffirms this promise by Jesus. Let us extract what Romans says about the judgment of “those who have done good.”

God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” (NIV 1984)
To those who by **persistence in doing good** seek glory, honor and immortality,
he will give eternal life....
glory, honor and peace for everyone who **does good:**
first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (NIV 2011)

Can anybody deny that both John and Romans promise eternal life to those who do good? How do they do good? Paul immediately tells how.

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who **obey the law** who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, **do by nature things required by the law....**) (2:13-14)

If those who are not circumcised **keep the law’s requirements...**The one who is not circumcised physically and yet **obeys the law....** (2:26-27)

According to this, some people—even some “Gentiles who do not have the law”—do good by obeying the law. They are the ones who “persist in doing good” and will be given eternal life. But how can we reconcile such statements to the purpose and conclusions of this section of Romans (1:18 to 3:20)?

- a. This section is designed to prove not that some are all right but that all are condemned.
- b. The conclusion claims that “there is no one who does good, not even one” (3:12). And the law’s function was to show that. It was not given in order to save some but so that “every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God” (3:19).
- c. It is mankind’s incapacity to do good which calls for the doctrine of salvation by faith in the next section.

In other words, we have a dilemma; the apostle seem to contradict himself. (a) Since he denies that anyone does good (3:12), it would seem that good people do not exist. Yet, (b) he repeatedly refers to good people in chapter 2 (so does John 5). Furthermore, the principle of judgment according to deeds could never result in eternal life if there will be no good people.

Appendix F: Eternal Life for Those Who “Do Good”?

Some avoid this dilemma by denying that the “good” people of Romans 2 actually exist. They are hypothetical people, not real ones. That view implies that even the picture Romans 2 draws of the judgment is hypothetical. But the view is weak since there is no hint in Romans 2 that such people do not exist or that the judgment will only condemn. In fact, many other Scriptures (e. g., Job 1:1, 8, 22; 2:3; Acts 10:35) speak of good people. And many other passages say about the judgment in summary what Romans 2 says in detail.

Another solution to the dilemma admits that there will be “good” people in the judgment—but **not good enough** to get eternal life. This view assumes that the standard must be perfection (cf. Gal. 3:10). But Romans 2 alleges “persistence,” not “perfection.” And by criticizing the moralist for not repenting (vv. 4-5), it implies that the “good” people had sinned but then repented.

Here are two other solutions from well-known commentators (with emphasis added). Each of them believes that Romans 2:6-10 describes real good people who really receive eternal life in the real judgment. Each of these commentators solves the dilemma by the way he defines “doing good” (“well doing” in KJV). The first one defines it only as faith. The second one includes also deeds that result from faith.

What is welldoing in this age? **Welldoing in this age is believing** on the name of the Son of God. “What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” (McClain, *Romans*, p. 76, quoting John 6:28-29, ASV)

[The apostle] is not speaking here of faith’s beginning, but of its completion; not of justification, but of judgment. **The deeds that gain a reward clearly imply faith** [resident] in him who does them. For in the opposite side of the parallel indignation and wrath are said to come to those who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; that is, this sad award comes to them as a result of their unbelief. (Stifler, *Romans*, pp. 40-41)

Will every person justified by faith also practice good deeds? Of course; “the people of God... keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). That is the glory of the gospel and the covenant of the Spirit—to make us good. By these God not only declares us righteous; He also transforms us (“We shall be like him,” 1 John 3:2; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). In theological terms, *imputation* inevitably leads to *sanctification*. That is an essential teaching of Romans 1-8.

Let us return to John 5, quoted in Chart C. In it Jesus pictured the same judgment event as Romans 2, and the same two groups. The event: “the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). The two groups: those “in their graves [who] will hear his voice and come out—**those who have done good** will rise to live, and **those who have done evil** will rise to be condemned” (5:28-29). In his excellent commentary on John, Leon Morris comments on these verses (emphasis added):¹⁰⁹

This does not mean that salvation is on the basis of good works, for this very Gospel makes it plain over and over again that men enter eternal life when they believe on Jesus Christ. But **the lives they live form the test of the faith they profess**. This is the uni-

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form testimony of Scripture. Salvation is by grace and it is received through faith. Judgment is based on men’s works.

Morris also quotes John Calvin regarding the same verses:

“He **marks out believers by their good works**, just as elsewhere He says that a tree is known by its fruit... The Papists’ inference from these passages, that eternal life repays the merits of works, may be refuted without any difficulty. For Christ is not here treating of the cause of salvation, but only distinguishing the elect from the reprobate by their own mark.”

Appendix G: Interpretive Issues in Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned— (Romans 5:12, NIV)

Where is the thought of this verse completed? The word “therefore” indicates that verse 12 begins a conclusion to this whole section on justification. The conclusion itself begins with a “just as” (Greek *hōsper*) statement occupying the rest of the verse: “**just as** sin entered...and death...and...death...because...” Although this statement is complex, it gives only one side of a comparison. Normally, it would be completed by a “so also” (Greek *houtōs*) statement, as in 5:19, 21; 6:4, 19. However, the apostle does not immediately give the other side of the comparison. Instead, he pauses in verses 13-14 to prove the first statement. After that, he presents both sides of the comparison in negative terms (vv. 15-17) and finally in positive terms (vv. 18-21). In other words, he uses the whole passage to complete the comparison. It is not unusual for Paul to introduce a thought then wait to complete it. For example, he starts to mention his prayer in Ephesians 3:1 but does not give it until 3:14-19.

What kind of death “entered the world” and “came to all men”? Physical death? Spiritual death? Or both physical and spiritual? Death rules human beings in both aspects: We all die physically and, before salvation, are all “dead in...transgressions and sins” (Eph. 2:1-2). To determine what death is meant in Romans 5:12, we should look at the original account in Genesis to which it refers. Genesis 2-3 tells about that first sin and its result. And it is clear that the death there is physical—no evidence that it is spiritual. Notice three indications.

- Before Adam sinned, the LORD warned him of physical death. “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for **when** you eat from it you will certainly die” (Gen. 2:17). There was nothing in the context about spiritual life—but lots about the physical life God had just given and the tree of life to maintain it (2:9). Some argue from the literal Hebrew words in the warning: “**in the day** you eat.” If Adam died that day, they think, it must have been spiritually. But that Hebrew idiom means “when,” not a single day. The same idiom is used in 2:4b for the whole **period** of creation—and here in 2:17 for a new period of Adam’s life that would lead to certain death.
- Even more clearly the LORD’s curse after Adam sinned meant physical death. It focused on man’s body. “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground...to dust you will return” (Gen. 3:19).
- The LORD’s further action after the curse also clearly pointed to physical death. “The LORD God banished him from the Garden” because “the man...must not be allowed to...take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Gen. 3:22-24).

Clearly, then, man was sentenced to die physically, from the time when Adam ate of the forbidden fruit. Of course, it is possible that spiritual death began at the same time. Yet, the evidence in Genesis, and consequently in Romans 5:12, does not justify separating it from physical death.

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Does “death came to all men” refer to extinction? Or will they all nevertheless live forever? Twice we read that “death reigned” over all in Adam (Rom. 5:14, 17). At the least this means that we humans cannot live forever as we are; we are mortal. But will we all live in some other condition? Only if God grants it. He “alone is immortal” (1 Tim. 6:16); only He by nature will continue forever. But He will grant immortality to some. “Our Savior, Messiah Jesus...has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). Believers in Messiah know that they will become immortal when Messiah comes to reign (1 Cor. 15:22-25). At that time “the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). It is then that “the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with **immortality**” (said twice in vv. 53-54). That will be the ultimate victory over death (vv. 54-57). It is then that “to those who by persistence in doing good **seek** glory, honor and **immortality**, he will give **eternal life**” (Rom. 2:7).

So God will grant immortality/eternal life to believers. But what about unbelievers, who do not seek immortality from God and will not get eternal life? Will they nevertheless live forever? Many teachers think so. Based on certain New Testament texts (especially Matt. 25:46; Luke 16:23-24; and Rev. 14:9-11), they teach that God will keep all unbelievers alive forever in hell. Obviously, this issue is too big and complicated to study here. It bears on the character of God, the constitution of men, and the meaning of punishment and salvation. (See my [“Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?”](#)) It should be studied beginning in Genesis, when God made man. For example:

- “Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a **living being**” (Gen. 2:7). Certainly God’s method of creating man is intended to show how special man is. But does it in some way imply that he is immortal? His becoming a “living being” does not; the same term in Hebrew is used for water creatures (1:20) and land creatures (1:24).
- According to Genesis 2-3, Adam had to eat from the tree of life to live forever. Doesn’t that imply what is often called “conditional immortality,” that he would perish if he did not eat from that tree?

Whose sin brings death to every person? “Death came to all men, **because all sinned**” (Rom. 5:12). Does this refer to each man’s personal sin?¹¹⁰ Does God wait to sentence each one to death only after he sins personally? That interpretation would invalidate the argument of the whole passage, which compares the consequences of the single acts of Adam and Messiah. In regard to Adam, the passage repeatedly says this or its equivalent: “the many died **by the trespass of the one man**” (v. 15; see vv. 16, 17, 18, 19). Therefore, it seems that “all sinned” in verse 12 must refer to what they did **in Adam** (corporate sin).

The next two verses (vv. 13-14) verify this interpretation. Beginning with the word “for,” they introduce evidence for the statement in verse 12. Notice what they say about death as a penalty in the period of time between Adam and Moses.

Appendix G: Interpretive Issues in Romans 5:12

To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. (5:13-14)

Under a system of justice there is no penalty for sin unless it breaks a law. Thus, there would be no death unless sinners broke divine laws/commands. Why, then, was that penalty enforced on everybody before the law was given, since most of them had received no commands from God? **Not for their personal sins but for Adam's**—who did break a divine command. God did not have to wait for each of them—nor for us—to sin personally. We all participated in Adam's sin and in its penalty. (Even infants and extremely retarded people die though they cannot be held accountable for personal sins.) Reread the same thoughts as expressed by Stifler:

But now the fact is that death reigned, had sovereign, undisputed sway, during all the no-law period from Adam to Moses. In all this long period death came to those who had “not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression”; that is, they had not broken any formal command. Many more irresponsible babies died in the Flood than men. If, then, death is the penalty of some law broken, and these had none, it follows they broke that first law: they sinned in Adam. And the statement “for that all have sinned” means this. The unwritten law noticed in 2:14 cannot be the cause of death, for babes have not even that. All sinned when Adam violated the Word of God. (Stifler, p. 97)

If this principle seems at all unfair, just remember that it also allows us all to be saved through the sacrifice of one Man!

Appendix H: Influence of Adam & Messiah in Romans 5:15-21

Most of the text in the tables below directly quotes Roman 5:15-19, 21 from NIV 2011. "Christ" has been changed to "Messiah," as authorized by John 1:41. A few words have been emphasized to show contrasts and similarities. See also 1 Corinthians 15.

CHART J Three Contrasts in the Influence of Adam & Messiah Romans 5:15-17		
Kind of Contrast <i>(titles adapted from McClain)</i>	Adam <i>"the first man Adam...the earthly man" (1 Cor. 15:45-49)</i>	Messiah <i>"the last Adam...the man from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:45-49)</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">1. Quality of Influence v. 15</p> <p>The gift is not like the trespass.</p>	<p>For if the <u>many died</u> by the trespass of the one man,</p>	<p>how much more did <u>God's grace and the gift</u> that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Messiah, <u>overflow to the many!</u></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2. Quantity of Influence v. 16</p> <p>Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin.</p>	<p>The judgment <u>followed one sin</u> and brought condemnation,</p>	<p>but the gift <u>followed many trespasses</u> and brought justification.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3. Certainty of Influence v. 17</p>	<p>For if, by the trespass of the one man, <u>death reigned</u> through that one man,</p>	<p>how much more <u>will</u> those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness <u>reign in life</u> through the one man, Jesus Messiah.</p>

CHART K Three Similarities in the Influence of Adam & Messiah Romans 5:18-21		
Kind of Similarity <i>(titles by McClain)</i>	Adam <i>"the first man Adam...the earthly man" (1 Cor. 15:45-49)</i>	Messiah <i>"the last Adam...the man from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:45-49)</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">1. One Act v. 18</p>	<p>Consequently, just as the <u>result of one trespass</u> was condemnation <u>for all</u> men,</p>	<p>so also the <u>result of one act of righteousness</u> was justification that brings life <u>for all</u> men.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2. One Man v. 19</p>	<p>For just as through the disobedience of <u>the one man the many</u> were made sinners,</p>	<p>so also through the obedience of <u>the one man the many</u> will be made righteous.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3. Universal Reign v. 21</p>	<p>just as <u>sin reigned</u> in death,</p>	<p>so also <u>grace might reign</u> through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Messiah our Lord</p>

Appendix I: God Will Fulfill His Promises to Ethnic Israel

In the following I will quote from the more literal NIV 1984 instead of 2011. Some of this is adapted from my much more detailed study "[Will God Eternally Bless Ethnic Israel?: A Critique of 'Replacement Theology.'](#)" RT is amillennial, denying a literal millennium and a special future for ethnic Israel. It generally changes the obvious meanings of the promises to Israel and applies them to the church without national Israel.

Many Old Testament prophecies emphasize that God will eternally bless ethnic Israel in spite of rebellion. One example is **Ezekiel 37**, which narrates the prophet's vision of dry bones brought back to life by God's breath. God calls these bones "the whole house of Israel...my people" (37:11, 12). He had identified them in His first words of Ezekiel's first vision. There He called them "the sons of Israel...a rebellious people who have...transgressed against Me to this very day" (2:3). He had proceeded to have Ezekiel preach against this rebellious "house of Israel" (3:1, 4, 5, 7). During Ezekiel's ministry most of the survivors in Israel had been killed or had followed him into the Babylonian Captivity.

But now in chapter 37 God pictured a huge change for His people, this "whole house of Israel" (37:11). He brings these rebels out of their graves and back "into the land of Israel" (vv. 12-14), "their own land" (v. 22). That, He continues, is "the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where [their] fathers lived...They will live there forever" (v. 25). "They will never again be two nations" but one (vv. 15-22).

And they will be godly. "They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God" (v. 23). They will enjoy the LORD's "covenant of peace...an everlasting covenant" (v. 25a) and His "sanctuary among them forever" (vv. 26b-28). They "will follow my laws," He promised, "and be careful to keep my decrees" (v. 24b). The LORD's "servant David will be king over them...their prince forever" (vv. 22-25b). "Then the nations will know," He concluded, "that I the LORD make Israel holy" (v. 28).

Years later, God brought a small remnant back to the Holy Land with Zerubbabel, a descendant of David. But most of the Ezekiel 37 prophecy did not take place. Zerubbabel did not become king; God did not return to them in glory; they did not keep God's laws or convince the nations. However, God does what He says—and will some day fulfill *all* these promises to *the same rebellious nation*.

Replacement Theology (RT) agrees that the first part of the chapter applies to ethnic Israel. God revived them in their captivity and restored some of them to their land. It agrees that the other promises were not fulfilled at that time—but alleges that they are now being fulfilled in "Christ and his church." It teaches that Christ has begun to rule from heaven—a rule to be perfected at His Second Coming. But the beneficiaries of God's blessings are not "the whole house

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of Israel” Ezekiel described. That nation, still rebellious, is not in the alleged kingdom. But the present church is there without Israel.

How does RT justify changing the meaning? By its interpretation of certain New Testament passages that it considers more accurate than others. Read some conclusions (with numbers deleted) by Bruce Waltke and note words I have bolded.

- **The primitive church**, lacking the teachings of Jesus and the illumination of the Spirit, **mistakenly thought** along with all of Jewry that the glories of Messiah Jesus would also be fulfilled literally in the land of Canaan.
- The Synoptic Gospels’ predictions...make a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies regarding Messiah’s glory impossible.
- Christ inaugurated his everlasting reign at his resurrection from the dead and his ascension into heaven.
- **Apart from the primitive church**, the rest of the New Testament represents the glorified Christ as ruling the nations....
- Upon reflection the church realizes that the Old Testament promises regarding the Land typify Jesus Christ and the life of saints in Christ.¹¹¹

I consider all these conclusions incorrect and/or misleading. Perhaps the most significant is the claim, common nowadays, that Jesus is already reigning from heaven.¹¹² Instead, Hebrews 10:13 says that there “he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool” (cf. 1 Cor. 4:8). But even if He were already reigning, we would not be justified in transferring Israel’s promises to another group.

Jeremiah 31:27-37 is another prophecy closely related to Ezekiel 37. In it God made promises to “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (vv. 27, 31; see also 13:11). These were the two components of “the **whole** house of Israel” referred to in Ezekiel 37:11; 39:25; and 45:6. Most prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel deal with that nation God had ruled over. The first component of that nation, “the house of Israel,” had gone into captivity years before Jeremiah was born. During Jeremiah’s ministry the second component, “the house of Judah,” was going into captivity.

Their God had “watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to bring disaster” (Jer. 31:28a). But just as surely He would “watch over them to build and to plant” (v. 28b). He would “make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (v. 30). This would be better than the covenant made with their fathers (vv. 31-33), because it would be written in their hearts. It would be possible to make the new covenant because He would forgive their sin, such as that described throughout the book (vv. 34-35). Accordingly, God concluded:

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**“If the heavens above can be measured,
And the foundations of the earth be searched out below,
Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel
For all that they have done,”** declares the Lord. (v. 37)

Those who accept RT come to a different conclusion. God has indeed cast off “the offspring of Israel” and made the new covenant with the church instead of them. The present church is “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). The Promised Land is now the entire renewed earth (Rom. 4:13)—or Christ Himself.¹¹³

The current condition is not final. When Judaism continued to persecute, the early church quickly and widely adopted some of the RT arguments. For example, since the new covenant is now in operation (1Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3; Heb. 8:6-13), many decided that we are the new Israel. The old Israel is accursed both by the law and by Jesus. The present church inherits much that Israel was promised, and is described with language that was used of Israel.

But the present application of Jeremiah 31 does not cancel its obvious meaning. The covenant is big enough for us and for Israel, too. It reaches all the universe, including “heavenly things themselves” (Heb. 9:23; cf. 8:5; 9:12). Furthermore, Israel’s fall and Gentile blessing was all foreseen. So was Israel’s final restoration (which will be as part of the *ekklesia*). The only secret was the inclusion of Gentiles as equals! Neither the Gospels nor the Epistles really contradict the obvious meanings of Old Testament prophecies. Reconsider how Romans 9-11 corroborates those meanings.

Romans 9-11. From the beginning of this section the apostle identifies his concern as ethnic Israel (9:1-5). He calls them “my brothers, those of my own race” (9:3). Near the end he is talking about the same rebellious people: “Because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles... But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!” (11:11-12). When he finally concludes that “all Israel will be saved” (11:26), he still cannot mean the church. He immediately identifies Israel as “enemies on your account” (11:28).

Has there been any evidence in Romans that there are Gentiles in true Israel? RT thinks there is in 2:28-29.

²⁸ A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.

But these verses say nothing about Gentiles! They simply affirm that unregenerate Jews do not deserve their noble name. (*Judah* may be derived from the Hebrew word for *praise*.) Nevertheless, Paul calls them by that name. In the very next verses (3:1-3) he speaks of “Jews” who “did not have faith.” Using a similar pattern in chapter 9, he warns that “not all who are descended

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from Israel are Israel” (9:6). Yet, later in the chapter “Israel” still includes the whole nation, of which “only the remnant will be saved” (9:27-28). Excluding some from the true Israel does not add Gentiles to Israel. Neither does the fact that God called Gentiles. He (a) “called [them], not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles”; and (b) labeled Gentiles as “my people” and “sons of the living God” (vv. 24-26). Paul later illustrates this new arrangement as Gentiles now participating in the “olive tree” of Israel’s blessings (11:17-21; see Eph. 2:12-22). But participating there does not make them Israel nor change God’s promises to that nation. If it did, it would affect New Testament usage of the term. Although the Greek word for *Israel* is used there sixty-seven times and the word for *Israelite* nine times, not one clearly includes Gentiles.¹¹⁴

So, returning to Romans 11, Paul still means ethnic Israel when he speaks there of God’s **rebellious** people. As a Jew, Paul himself is part of their present “remnant chosen by grace” (11:5-6). God will not “reject his people, whom he foreknew [chose]” (v. 2). Their rejection is only partial (vv. 4, 5, 25) and temporary (v. 25). Their rejection has turned evangelism toward the Gentiles (vv. 11, 15), but their “fullness” will bring “greater riches” than ever (v. 12). Ethnic Israel is still rebellious but has “irrevocable” gifts and call (v. 29).

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. (11:28-29)

Through His prophets God often predicted the rebellions and the ultimate restoration of ethnic Israel. He elected them, which He will never rescind. He made them promises, which He will fulfill. (In my Romans Survey, see especially the discussion and notes on 11:1-10.)

Appendix J: The Kingdom in Romans 14:17

*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking,
but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

Among the many references in the New Testament to God’s kingdom, this verse is unusual. It is often wrongly assumed to mean that the kingdom has begun and is wholly spiritual.

CHART L The Essence of the Coming Kingdom Romans 14:17		
Text	Meaning	Common Misunderstanding
<i>“For the kingdom of God is</i>	This introduces the essence of the worldwide kingdom that God has promised in the Scriptures and in which Jesus the Messiah will rule.	that the kingdom has already started
<i>not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righ- teousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”</i>	The promised kingdom’s essence is not material but spiritual. [In this “absolute for relative” statement, “not” means “not primarily.”]	that the kingdom is only spiritual in nature

1. The character of the coming kingdom. Since the promised kingdom will be God’s kingdom and eternal, its essence has to be spiritual. By no means, however, will it lack the material and political elements that were often predicted for it. As for politics, many prophecies agree with the following:

- “The LORD will be king over the whole earth” and “survivors from all the nations...will go up year after year to worship the King...and to celebrate....” (Zech. 14:9, 16)
- “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations....” (Rom. 15:12, quoting Isaiah 11:10)

As for eating and drinking, here are two samples:

- “The LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.” (Isa. 25:6)
- The Lord Jesus promised that “many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom....” (Matt. 8:11; see also Luke 22:29-30)

Romans 14:17 is not meant to deny such prophecies but to emphasize the kingdom’s spiritual essence. Although the verse makes an absolute statement (“is not”), it should be interpreted with

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a relative meaning (“is not primarily”). This is a figure of speech which I explain when commenting on Romans 14:17 in my [“First and Second Thessalonians Study Guide”](#):

Does its apparent denial of material aspects (“the kingdom...is not eating and drinking”) define a strictly spiritual kingdom? No, because that **absolute** statement can and should be interpreted as **relative** (“the kingdom...is not primarily”).

This use of “absolute for relative” is a common figure of speech in the Bible. For example, Exodus 16:2 says that “the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.” How then could Moses respond “You **are not grumbling against us**, but against the LORD” (v. 8)? Only if his absolute statement (bolded) clearly had a relative meaning (“are not primarily grumbling against us”). See other examples in Deuteronomy 5:2-3; Philipians 2:4; and 1 John 3:18.

2. The futurity of the kingdom. Believers belong to the kingdom simply because we belong to the King and His coming triumph (Matt. 25:31, 34). Speaking of that kingdom in the present tense, however, (“the kingdom **is**”) does not prove that it has begun. It is not unusual and not confusing to speak in the present tense of something important yet future. For example, in Luke 20:35-36 the future resurrection is described with five present-tense verbs: “**marry...are given in marriage...can no longer die...are...are....**” In Greek all five verbs are in the present tense though they refer to the future. Likewise, Romans 2:2 speaks of the future judgment in the present tense: “God’s judgment...**is** based on truth.”

However, most references to the kingdom either use future tense or logically refer to the future. Following, for example, are all the references to the kingdom by name in Luke 19-24 (all from NASB):

- “He went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: ‘A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.’” (Luke 19:11-12)
- “He was made king, however, and returned home.” (Luke 19:15)
- “When you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.” (Luke 21:31)
- “I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 22:16)
- “I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” (Luke 22:18)
- Joseph “was waiting for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 23:51)

There is no way that this kingdom Jesus promised has actually begun. The Corinthians acted as though it had. “You have begun to reign—and that without us!” Paul ironically told them. “How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!” (1 Cor. 4:8).

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Instead, Paul taught new disciples that they “must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). In that kingdom we will receive our inheritance.

- “Come...take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” (Matt. 25:34)
- “Wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. 6:9-10; see also Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5)
- “Has not God chosen those who are poor...to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised...?” (James 2:5)
- “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests...and they will reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:10)
- At the seventh trumpet in his vision, John heard loud voices anticipating the conclusion: “You have...begun to reign...The time has come...for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people....” (Rev. 11:15-18)

The goal for us believers (as you saw in Acts 14:22) is to enter that kingdom and share that glory.

- “Live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” (1 Thess. 2:12)
- “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us...The creation itself will be liberated...We wait eagerly for...the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom. 8:18-25; a liberated creation clearly implies an earthly kingdom.)
- “The Lord will rescue me...and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.” (2 Tim. 4:18; “heavenly” referring to its character, not its location)

Therefore, the coming of the kingdom is the object of our prayers: “This, then, is how you should pray:...your kingdom come....” (Matt. 6:9-10)

In view of the coming kingdom, no sacrifice or suffering is too great:

- “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he...in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” (Matt. 13:44)
- “We boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring...You will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.” (2 Thess. 1:4-5)

In conclusion, Romans 14:17 looks at the Romans as heirs of the coming kingdom and obligated to live by its standards. As Paul said previously, believers should live “as in the day” (13:13) although the day has not yet arrived (13:12).

For further consideration of this subject, see my writings at www.kingdominbible.com.

Notes

¹ This outline is adapted from Alva J. McClain, whose masterful lectures on Romans were transcribed into his book on Romans (see my Foreword). Many years ago much of McClain's thinking became my own; much of that got modified. So it is hard to know when to give McClain credit or when to claim responsibility.

² For more evidence that Mark represents Peter's preaching, see my writing "[The Four Gospels: The Kingdom Offered & Postponed](#)." It has appendixes about Peter's sermons in Acts 2 and 10. Like my other studies referenced in this paper, that one is available at www.kingdominbible.com.

³ I have written up my own study of the "[Evangelistic Sermons in Acts](#)." In it I carefully survey all the many preaching summaries in that book.

⁴ As evidence that in Romans Paul appeals to unbelievers as a literary device, see his references to Jews. In 2:1, 3-5, and 17-29 he addresses Jews in the second person ("you" and "your"). Being a Jew himself, he sometimes refers to them in the first person ("our," "my," and "we," as in 3:5, 7, 9). Most often, however, he speaks of Jews in the third person ("they," "their," and "them" in 3:1-3 and often in chapters 9-11). The latter is from the standpoint of the Gentiles to whom he writes. The addressees are Roman believers—see 1:7. They are Gentiles—see 11:13, 17-24, 30; and 15:16.

⁵ A treatise is "a formal, systematic article or book on some subject, esp. a discussion of facts, evidence, or principles and the conclusions based on these" (*New World Dictionary*).

⁶ 1:1. It is God's gospel (1:1; 15:16). Only He could have designed it or made it a reality. "But we preach Messiah crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Messiah the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 1:23-24).

It is also Paul's gospel, to which he has been consecrated (Rom. 1:1) and which he constantly preaches. For this reason he actually calls it "my gospel" (2:16; 16:25), a fact he greatly emphasizes in Galatians (see Gal. 1:8, 11, 12).

⁷ 1:1-2. The same Greek verb for "preach good news" (*euangelidzo*) is used in both Testaments (e.g., Isa. 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 61:1-3; Luke 4:18; Rom. 1:15).

⁸ 1:1-2. "Christ Himself *is* the good news. Apart from Jesus Christ there is no good news. If somebody should ask, 'What is the gospel?', we ought to answer, 'The gospel is not *what*, it is *who!*' The gospel is the Lord Jesus Christ, in His blessed person and in His mighty work. To lose Jesus is to lose the gospel." (McClain, *Romans*, p. 54)

⁹ Psalm 2:7, like the same promise in 2 Samuel 7:14, referred to every king over God's Old Testament kingdom. Considering the worldwide extent of the promise, however, its final fulfillment can only be in Jesus.

¹⁰ In Romans 1:3 NIV now has "with respect to the **flesh**." But in 1984 it had "as to his **human nature**," which can wrongly imply a contrast between Messiah's human and divine natures. Such a contrast is not made in Romans or the gospel. NIV has changed its similar mistranslations of *sarks* elsewhere. For example, it previously had "sinful nature" in 1 Corinthians 5:5, which did not fit, but now has "flesh." And there it adds this footnote: "In contexts like this, the Greek word for *flesh* (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit."

¹¹ 1:4. The Greek verbal phrase in Romans 1:4 is *tou horisthentos*. In its 1984 version NIV translated the verb there as "declared" but in Acts 10:42 as "appointed." In 2011 NIV changed to "appointed" in Romans 1:4 also. The NET Bible says the following about this verb:

The Greek term *horidzo* is used eight times in the New Testament, and it always has the meaning "to determine, appoint." Paul is not saying that Jesus was appointed the "Son of God by the resurrection" but "**Son-of-God-in-power** by the resurrection," hence the hyphenation. He was born in weakness in human flesh (*with respect to the flesh*, v. 3) and he was raised with power." (p. 519, bolding added)

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¹² 1:3-4. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. studied the same two clauses of Romans 1:3-4 in “The Jesus That Paul Preached” (*Bibliotheca Sacra* 128, April 1971). He arrived at the same conclusion I do (p. 133):

The clauses, then, move from Messiahship to Lordship, the resurrection being the point of division between the state of humiliation and weakness and the state of exaltation and power. The Son is both David's Son and David's Lord, and Paul and Peter agree that God has made the same Jesus “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

The final words of verse four, “Jesus Christ our Lord” (in the AV they follow “concerning His Son” in verse three), effectively summarize the points of the interpretation. The Son is, first, “Jesus Christ,” the historical messianic figure who shall fulfill the covenant promises to Israel. He is, second, “our Lord,” the exalted sovereign, who is judge over all. Thus, the historical and the official, the humiliation and the exaltation unite in a thrilling affirmation of His supreme glory. Sonship, Messiahship, Lordship,—such is the content of the gospel Paul preached.

¹³ Of course, the gospel would not be “good news” unless it could help us. But it is the only message that can! We must truly turn from our sins to Jesus as God's chosen Ruler—and wait for Him to return. Believers in Him receive forgiveness now and will share in His eternal kingdom.

¹⁴ 1:4. All Greek manuscripts conclude Romans 1:4 with the words “Jesus Messiah our Lord.” The KJV transfers those words to right after “his Son” in verse 3. The result is not clarification but loss of emphasis.

¹⁵ “Jesus is Lord (*Kurios*).” Here *Kurios* has its most common meaning, Master (e.g., Eph. 6:4, 9; Rom. 14:6-9). This confession says enough to summarize the gospel (see Phil. 2:9-11; cf. Acts 2:36). It is the only title used in Romans 10:9, the other summary of the gospel in this book.

¹⁶ Romans 1:17 in the NIV says that the righteousness revealed in the gospel is “by faith from first to last.” The Greek phrase describing this operation is *ek pisteos eis pistin* (the same noun twice, after two different prepositions). There is no doubt that *ek pisteos* means “by faith” (see v. 17b). But *eis pistin* (literally “to faith”) has had many explanations. NIV (“from first to last”) sees it as adding more faith to the previous faith. Another common explanation of the whole phrase is “based on faith and to those with faith.”

¹⁷ 1:20. The wonders of God's creation give abundant evidence that its Creator is personal, wise, and powerful. But men consistently attribute that glory to gods they dream up. If unsophisticated, they deify created elements, such as, trees and rocks. If sophisticated, they call their gods “Mother Nature” or “Natural Selection.”

¹⁸ 2:5-16. Some Bible students are greatly perplexed at this Romans 2 description of the judgment. It does not fit their theology. Some deny that believers will really be judged, at least with unbelievers. Some even deny that anyone can “do good,” though Paul here affirms that they can. As a result, some pronounce this passage hypothetical (assumed but not real). But there is no hint in the passage that it is hypothetical.

¹⁹ Matthew 13:40, 42 and 10:28. Such passages picture human beings after judgment as “burned up like weeds” and having both body and soul destroyed. Such suffering is eternal in its consequences (Matt. 25:46) but does not continue for ever. Other pictures, such as, “many blows” and “few blows” (Luke 12:47, 48) similarly point to extinction. In fact, only one or two highly figurative passages picture such suffering as non-ending. See my writing “[Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?](#)”

²⁰ 3:1-8. “**My falsehood enhances God's truthfulness** and so increases his glory” (v. 7). This is not a misrepresentation of Paul's teaching but sober fact. It restates the words of verse 4: “Let **God be true** and **every man a liar**. As it is written...[in Ps. 51:4].” The imaginary speaker in verse 7 did not twist that fact but came to the wrong conclusions at the end of verse 7 and in verse 8.

²¹ 3:10-12. “There is no one righteous, not even one...no one who does good.” Since the Bible speaks of exceptions, such as, Noah, Abraham, Job, and others, those must be due to God's grace.

²² 3:25 seems to say that faith is in Messiah's blood: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, **through faith in his blood.**” (According to 5:8-9, “his blood” means His death.) However, many summaries of the gospel show that saving faith is in Messiah Himself, not in His blood. For example, “If you confess with your

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mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). We can harmonize Romans 3:25 with the other statements by simply adding a comma after the word “faith”: “**sacrifice of atonement, through faith, in his blood.**” Then Paul is not saying “faith in his blood” but “sacrifice of atonement in his blood.” The English Standard Version clarifies it as follows: “whom God put forward as a **propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.**”

²³ 3:24-26. “He did this to demonstrate his righteousness...he did it to demonstrate his righteousness.” Messiah’s sacrifice **vindicates** God both for His present and His past actions.

- As to the present, that sacrifice shows how God can be both “just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (v. 26). In other words, He is right in justifying people who come with no good works but only faith. Why is He right? Because He did not overlook their sins but dealt with them in the sacrifice.
- As to the past, it shows how He could leave “the sins committed beforehand unpunished” (v. 25). In other words, He was right in not punishing sinners as the standards in the law require. Why? Because they would be punished in the same sacrifice.

²⁴ 5:1. “**We have** peace with God.” The bolded words represent the Greek indicative form *echomen*. Most of the earliest Greek manuscripts have a different, subjunctive, form: *echōmen* with a long *ō*. That form is a kind of command, meaning “let us have.” Both forms “were pronounced alike in ancient Greek” (NET Bible, p. 527). NET Bible goes on to explain why the indicative form, rather than the imperative, is likely the original here. It better fits the argument of Romans, since the readers already have peace with God (v. 10). Romans is giving facts in the first chapters, with practically no imperatives until chapter 6.

²⁵ 5:2. “the hope of the glory of God.” This “hope” refers to our confident expectation. The “glory” we will have includes becoming like Messiah, God’s Son (2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:3).

²⁶ 5:2, 3. The word here translated “rejoice” is *kauchaomai*. Some other passages where it clearly means “boast” are 2 Corinthians 10:8, 13, 16; and Galatians 6:13, 14. It is not the usual word for “rejoice” (*chairo*), which is used in Romans 12:12, 15; 16:19; Philippians 1:18; 4:10, et al. Notice that we can boast not just in the midst of suffering but in the sufferings themselves.

²⁷ 5:9, 10. “How much more **shall we be saved.**” This clearly refers to the future aspect of salvation, which is by far the greatest (see also 13:11 and the note on 5:21). As we are seeing in Romans, salvation is past, present, and future. Though oversimplified, the following often-repeated statement is helpful:

- In the past, we were saved from the penalty of sin.
- In the present, we are being saved from the power of sin.
- In the future, we will be saved from the presence of sin.

²⁸ 5:3-4. “Character” translates the Greek word *dokimon*, which is either (a) evidence or proof of genuineness, or (b) proven or evident worth, value. We hardly give proof of the value God produces in us without going through testing. See how the same word is used about Timothy in Philippians 2:22.

²⁹ 5:1-10. Eternal security is based on God’s non-failing love for those He elects. Should a single act of our “faith” make us certain we are elected? That is how some interpret Jesus’ promise “but whoever drinks the water I give them **will never thirst.**” (John 4:14a). One drink that satisfies forever!? True, but only if the second part of the verse results, “the water that I will give him **will become in him a fountain** of water springing up to eternal life” (4:14b). Unless a fountain results, we cannot be sure. Therefore, we must not neglect such warnings as Hebrews 3:6b: “And we are his house, **if indeed we hold firmly** to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.” Or, “We have come to share in Christ, **if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.**” (Heb. 3:14; cf. 6:11-12; 10:35-39). A genuine, saving faith is not momentary, but endures and results in evidence (Matt. 10:22; James 2:14-26, 1 John 1:5-7; 2:3-6).

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³⁰ 5:21. This last verse sums up the passage in three contrasts to the first verse:

Romans 5:12	one man [Adam]	sin	death
Romans 5:21	Jesus Messiah our Lord	righteousness	eternal life

³¹ 5:12-21. Widespread confusion about the biblical meaning of death obscures the interpretation of this whole passage. Assuming that all men are innately immortal (cannot cease to exist), many redefine physical death as the separation of spirit from body and consider it quite unrelated to spiritual death. Such distinctions cannot be supported in Genesis or Romans 5.

³² Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15 both discuss the two heads of mankind. The latter calls them both “Adam.” In the original creation “the first man Adam became a living being” (15:45). He received a mortal life, as did all of us in him. But the same verse calls Messiah “the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.” He will give life to all in Him. “For as in Adam all die, so in Messiah all will be made alive” (v. 22). When He gives us that life, we will be like Him: “Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven” (v. 49). When will we get that life and become like “the last Adam”? When He comes again and raises our bodies imperishable (vv. 22-23 and especially 50-55). The whole chapter (1 Cor. 15) was written to expound this hope at the center of Christianity. Without it the gospel would be vain (v. 2).

³³ 5:14. “Adam, who was a pattern [figure or type] of the one to come.” Stifler comments:

Adam is a figure of Christ in just this respect: that as his one sin brought death to all, even when there was no personal sin, so Christ’s one act of obedience brings unfailing righteousness to those who are in Him, even when they have no personal righteousness. Hence the argument of verses 13 and 14 to show that death must be traced to Adam’s sole act and not to the sin of his posterity—one side of the parallel. (Stifler, *Romans*, p. 97)

³⁴ 5:17. “**will...reign** in life.” The same verb is used for the future rule of believers in 1 Corinthians 4:8; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5. This promise is also stated in other ways: “They will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5), be “heir[s] of the world” (Rom. 4:13), as participants with Messiah (Heb. 1:9; 3:14) in His kingdom when He comes (Matt. 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21). In fact, God created us to have that dominion (Gen. 1:26-28), which Psalm 8 sketches and Hebrews 1-2 calls “salvation” (1:14; 2:3) and “glory” in “the world to come” (2:5-10).

³⁵ Saving faith involves no deeds whatsoever. “And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace” (Rom. 11:6). That does not mean, however, that saving faith is indifferent to sin or holiness. The other side of effective faith is “repentance from acts that lead to death” (Heb. 6:1). That verse lists repentance first in what it calls “the elementary teachings about Christ” and “the foundation.” (It lists “faith in God” next.) Accordingly, our Lord warned twice on one occasion, “unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:3, 5). Peter and Paul both echoed the same requirement. For example, Peter at Pentecost: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). And Paul in a summary statement: “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21; cf. 1 Thess. 1:9). No one can do that without wanting to forsake sin and obey Jesus, the attitude that permeates Romans 6-8.

³⁶ Holiness and sanctification are the same thing and, in Greek, the same word. This word appears for the first times in Romans at 6:19 and 6:22.

³⁷ 6:1. McClain quotes Romans 5:20, then comments:

No matter how great the sin was, grace was greater than the sin. The worst sinner in the world can find grace sufficient. That is Paul’s conclusion to the section on justification, that wherever sin appeared, grace came to the rescue in an even greater measure and covered it. “Grace did much more abound.”

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It superabounded! Someone will say, “then if that is the case, it does not matter how much we sin. If our sin, no matter how great it is, only causes us to see that the grace of God is greater than our sin, let us go on and sin in order that we may see more of the grace of God.” (McClain, *Romans*, p. 141)

³⁸ 6:3-5. Stifler comments on Paul’s speaking of ritual baptism:

But must it not be said now that Paul has abandoned his theme, salvation by faith, in substituting the word “baptism”? Why did he not say, “All we who believed into Christ,” a common phrase in the New Testament (10:14; Gal. 2:16), “believed into his death”? The difficulty arises from the modern wrong conception of the New Testament meaning of the word “baptism,” that it is a mere rite, an act to be done, at the best, because one believes in Christ. The New Testament writers never separate it from the faith which it embodies and expresses. It is the fixed sign for faith, just as any appropriate order of letters in a word is the sign of an idea. The sign stands for the thing and is constantly used for the thing. Hence Paul can say that Christ was “put on” in baptism (Gal. 3:27), and Peter does not hesitate to declare that “baptism doth also now save us” (1 Pet. 3:21)...To refuse to be baptized is to reject God, and the opposite is to accept Him (Luke 7:29, 30). Every one of these passages—and there are more like them—would teach salvation by a rite, salvation by water, but that the word for baptism is used as a symbol of faith. Faith so far is not one thing and baptism another; they are the same thing. The faith that accepted Christ in Paul’s day was the faith that showed its acceptance in baptism. The water without the preceding faith was nothing. The faith without the water could not be allowed. Believers were baptized into Christ or they were not considered to be in Him. (Stifler, *Romans*, p. 107)

³⁹ 6:3-5. “baptized **into his death** [Greek *eis* plus accusative].” F. Godet explains in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956 reprint), 238-243. He notes that the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19 uses the same verb and Greek *eis* plus accusative. It means “baptize **in relation to**...the new revelation of God expressed in the name of...” Accordingly, in Romans 6:3 Godet prefers “baptized **in relation to his death**.” Baptism, he says, does not picture death but burial as an external proof that we already died before being baptized. By faith we “died...through the body of Messiah” (7:4), not through the water of baptism. Thus, baptism portrays our burial as those already dead in Him. It also portrays (what the apostle is emphasizing in these verses) that we were “raised from the dead” with Him “in order that...we too may live a new life” (6:4). Godet restates it, “We were buried by baptism only *with the intention* of rising again.” He sees the same purpose in verse 5: “we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” This refers not to our final glorification but to our current sanctification. The perspective is the same as in Galatians 2:20.

⁴⁰ 6:6. “Our old self was crucified with him.” Galatians 5:24 has a similar meaning: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Colossians 3:9-10 (and Ephesian 4:20-24, when interpreted correctly) refers to the same **past action**. The two following comments by McClain are based on the KJV of Romans 6:6: “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

It stirs up our pride for us to try to *do something* by “crucifying the flesh of the old man.” *But Christ has already gotten the victory!* The “old man” means the old self, what we were in Adam. That “old man” was crucified with Christ at the cross, and the task is finished in the mind of God. (See also Gal 2:20). (McClain, *Romans*, p. 144, emphasis his)

“The body of sin”—what is that? It is the body we have, in which sin finds an instrument: the tongue, the hands, the mind. Sin does not find its source in the body. Sin finds its source in the will, but uses the body as an instrument. Because we were crucified with Christ the body of sin is actually powerless in our lives. (McClain, p. 144)

⁴¹ 6:19. Paul points out that slavery is an inadequate human figure of speech. In fact, our “slavery” to God is the greatest liberty possible (John 8:32).

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⁴² 7:7-25. This section in chapter 7 reflects the impotency of mankind that we saw in the section on condemnation. Even the godliest of men—those who try the hardest—realize that they fall far short. We cannot reach God’s standards on our own.

⁴³ Chapter 8. With its many rich facets, Romans 8 has earned several titles. One of them, used for emphasis in the outline given earlier, is “Glorification,” the final stage of sanctification. Another title, which reflects the purpose of giving assurance, is “Preservation.” I will use both those terms.

⁴⁴ 8:1. The word translated “now” in Romans 8:1 does not imply that there may be condemnation later. Instead, it strengthens the idea in “therefore.” The New English Bible says it well: “The conclusion of the matter is this: there is no condemnation.”

⁴⁵ 8:3b. “God...sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh...” F. L. Godet makes perceptive comments, as usual, in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 299-300. One is a simplified translation. (a) “Sinful flesh” does not mean that flesh is innately sinful or forces us to sin. Rather, due to our perverted wills it is the occasion of habitual sin. (b) The purpose of God sending His Son is just “for sin” rather than “to be a sin offering.” Although the latter is a legitimate special meaning in the Old Testament and Hebrews 10:6-18, the simpler meaning is in view here. (c) “Condemned sin” does not mean “abolished” or “expiated” it (Rom. 3). Instead, by living in the flesh but constantly denying entrance to sin, Jesus “declared it evil and unworthy of existing in humanity.” This He did by His holy life, not His death.

⁴⁶ 8:4c. “who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” The King James Version and many late manuscripts have this same clause in Romans 8:1. Most textual critics believe it was not there originally. But if it was, it probably meant the same as in 8:4, that there is no condemnation for those in Messiah because the Spirit has truly given them a new life.

⁴⁷ 8:5-11. Shows how the process of sanctification works. Jesus referred to this process when He said, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). No true believer walks in darkness, as 1 John ratifies: “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...” (1 John 1:6-7b). “Fellowship” (Greek *koinonia*) is not mere comradery but, as seen in 1 John 1:1-3, saving participation in God’s life. Walking in the light does not perfect us instantly. We confess our sins as the light reveals them (1:9). In the process (sanctification) “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1:7c).

⁴⁸ 8:5-7. The word translated “mind” in these verses includes mind, affections, and will.

⁴⁹ 8:12-13. The interpretation I propose sees the verses as contrasting believers and non-believers (not two kinds of believers). The “you” who “live according to the flesh” and “die” as a result, are the same unsaved people so described in verse 5. Such people cannot live according to the Spirit until they are reborn. All Christians, however, made that choice and can continue to make it. They “live in accordance with the Spirit” and not “according to the flesh” (v. 5). They “are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit” (v. 9). Therefore, they “by the Spirit...put to death the misdeeds of the body” (v. 13). The pace of their sanctification will vary; some are more obedient than others. But God will eventually accomplish in all of them what He intended when He “condemned sin in the flesh” (v. 3) and enabled them to “not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (v. 4). To some extent they are all “led by the Spirit of God” (v. 14).

⁵⁰ Saving faith obeys—producing “good fruit” as evidence (Matt. 7:16-20) as it puts our Lord’s words into practice (Matt. 7:24-27). In fact, “faith without deeds is useless” (James 2:20). It also persists—“He who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22b; cf. John 8:31-32; 1 John 2:24-25). Hebrews gives that warning in several forms: see 2:1-3; 3:6, 14; 6:11-12; 10:35-36. (Read my comments in [Hebrews Self-Study](#).)

⁵¹ 8:17. “If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Messiah.” The next verses in this passage briefly sketch the believer’s inheritance, calling it “glory” (v. 18), “freedom of glory” (Greek, v. 21), “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (v. 23), and our “hope” (vv. 24-25). The same future inheri-

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tance is in view in the conclusion to Paul's great doxology in Ephesians 1:3-14 (and in Acts 20:32). Most of that inheritance is still future; in the Spirit we have only the beginnings of it ("the firstfruits," Rom. 8:23).

⁵² 8:14-17. From the "trustworthy" hymn of 2 Timothy 2:11-12, Paul cites a similar statement: that all true believers will endure through trials and will reign with Messiah. Most Christians in the world understand what it is to suffer for righteousness' sake. Such suffering comes partly from external causes and partly from internal concerns. The degree of suffering depends a lot on the degree of difference between Christians and their culture. When the salt loses its savor, there is little reaction and little influence.

⁵³ 8:17. "heirs of God and co-heirs with Messiah, if indeed [Greek *eiper*] we share in his sufferings." Some interpreters deny that the two phrases, "heirs of God" and "co-heirs with Messiah," both describe all believers. Not all believers, they say, share in Messiah's sufferings; so not all will inherit glory with Him. They argue (a) that Greek *men...de* linking the two phrases often **contrasts** items, and (b) that "if indeed" expresses doubt and is true only of some believers. But *men...de* often links items that are not different but related (e.g., Matt. 13:8, 23; 21:35; 22:5; 25:15). And *eiper* often introduces a condition that must be a fact, as it does just a few verses earlier (Rom. 8:9).

⁵⁴ Stifler, *Romans*, pp. 144-145.

⁵⁵ 8:22-25. This same discussion about our present confidence regarding the future was anticipated in Romans 5:1-11. That passage referred to such things as the gift of God's Spirit and our "hope of the glory of God."

⁵⁶ 8:18, 21, 24. Our hope of future glory. There are many more references identifying this as the coming kingdom. For example, James 2:5, reflecting Matthew 5:3, speaks of "the poor [who are] rich in faith and...inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him." In Matthew 25:31 the Lord promises to come sit on "His throne in heavenly glory." Then, as King, He will invite those blessed by His Father to "take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you..." (v. 34). He equates that with "eternal life" (v. 46). Hebrews 2:5-10 declares that Jesus' suffering was designed to prepare many "sons" for the "glory" of "the world to come." Hebrews 12:25-28 shows that the believer's confidence is in receiving, after God shakes all other things, "a kingdom that cannot be shaken." The Lamb is worthy, says Revelation 5:9-10, because He died to redeem people from all nations to be "a kingdom and priests" who "will reign on the earth" (cf. Rev. 22:5).

⁵⁷ 8:29. It does not say that God "foreknew" their faith but them. The Greek verb is *proegno*, from *proginosko*. *Ginosko* does normally refer to intellectual perception—but in that sense God knows everyone and everything. Here He chose certain people whom He predestined, called, etc.

⁵⁸ 8:29. "those God foreknew." These are the same people referred to in Acts 13:48: "All who were appointed for eternal life believed."

⁵⁹ 8:29. "firstborn." See Psalm 89:27, where God made David "firstborn" (the greatest) though he was youngest in his family.

⁶⁰ 8:30. "Those he called, he also justified." Here, as elsewhere in the Epistles, God's "call" is efficacious. See, for example, Romans 1:6; 9:11; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 24; 2 Thessalonians 2:13b-14; 2 Timothy 1:9; Jude 1. First Corinthians 1:24 says, "to those whom God **has called**, both Jews and Greeks, Messiah the power of God and the wisdom of God." 2 Thessalonians 2:13b-14 says, "God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He **called** you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Messiah."

There is also a general call sometimes referred to in the Gospels. For example, Matthew 22:14: "For many are **invited** [called], but few are chosen."

⁶¹ Romans 9-11 has often been called a "theodicy," which seeks "to vindicate divine justice in allowing evil to exist." (Webster's New World Dictionary: Third College Edition)

⁶² 9:1-5. "the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption...." These verses resume and conclude the consideration of Israel's advantages begun in the first part of chapter 3. The Greek term for *Israel* is used in the New Tes-

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tament sixty-seven times, and for *Israelite* nine times. They are always used of people who are physical descendants of Abraham; not one clearly includes Gentiles. (However, see near the end of Appendix I.) Although it is popular nowadays to say that the church is the new Israel, there is no substantial evidence for that notion. Even the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16 refers to converted Jews.

⁶³ 9:4. “the adoption as sons.” God’s choice of Israel is the foundation for many Old Testament passages. Before his death Moses repeatedly reminded Israel of this great privilege. For example:

The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not...choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers... (Deut. 7:6-8)

⁶⁴ 9:5. “Messiah, **who is** God over all, **forever praised! Amen.**” The Greek for the bolded words is equivalent (mostly identical) to the benediction of God the Father in 1:25. With a change in punctuation of the Greek—but the same words—this benediction in 9:5 would probably refer to the Father also. In that sense NIV gives two alternate readings in the margin: “Messiah, who is over all. God be forever praised!” or “Messiah. God who is over all be forever praised!” These readings would agree with the fact that Paul rarely calls Messiah “God” (but see Titus 2:13 and compare Phil. 2:6). However, if the preferred NIV punctuation is valid, this benediction would attribute divine glory to Messiah. If so, for what reason did Paul change his usual procedure? Perhaps to emphasize the favor shown to Israel and the serious nature of their rebellion.

⁶⁵ 9:11-12. John Piper points out that Paul in Romans 9-11 answers a problem presented in 9:1-5. The problem is not only national but individual, why so many of Paul’s race are not being saved. God’s choice of Jacob rather than his twin brother Esau (9:10-13) is part of that answer. (Piper, “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism”)

Piper also considers another passage teaching God’s unconditional election of individuals: Ephesians 1:3-6. It says that God “**chose** us in him [Messiah] before the creation of the world.” The Greek word for “chose” is the verb form for the noun translated “election” in Romans 9:11 and 11:7. It always mean to pick out of a group, as in Luke 6:13; 14:7; John 13:18; 15:16, 19. And though Ephesians 1:4 says that God chose us in Messiah, it neither says nor means that He chose Messiah instead of us, as some interpret it.

⁶⁶ 9:14. “Is God unjust?” It seems that critics who object to sovereign choice want a God who conforms to their standards rather than the real God. MacArthur (*Romans 9-16*; p. 27) comments:

The power of salvation is entirely from God’s grace, and the primary purpose of salvation is to give Him glory. Self-centered man rebels at such a notion, and even many Christians vainly try to explain away the clear truth that God is God and that, by definition, whatever He does can be nothing but just and righteousness. He needs no justification for anything He does—including calling some men to salvation and not calling others. He has always acted thus.

⁶⁷ 9:17. “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” This is quoted from Exodus 9:16. “Raised up” does not mean created but exalted to prominence, as in Numbers 24:19; Habakkuk 1:6; and Zechariah 11:16. The resulting worldwide glory to God is mentioned in Joshua 2:9-11; 9:9; et al., and is still obvious today.

⁶⁸ 9:22. “objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction.” MacArthur says that this

is surely one of the most tragic identifications of unbelievers in all of Scripture...speaking of ungodly and unrepentant *human vessels*, all of whom will feel the ultimate **wrath** of God, for which they have been **prepared for destruction** by their own rejection of Him. As already noted, it is not that God *makes men sinful* but that He leaves them *in their sin* unless they repent of it and turn to His Son for deliverance. (MacArthur, p. 40, emphasis his)

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McClain (p. 182) agrees it is wrong to say “that God has the right to take the clay and make one man a sinner and another a righteous man... God makes no man a sinner. Remember that God takes the clay as He finds it, and the ‘clay’ here is man who is already a sinner.”

⁶⁹ 10:1. “prayer to God...that they may be saved.” It is often questioned what good it does to pray for people’s salvation if God has already elected them or not. The same question can be asked about preaching. Though we can never explain such mysteries, it is clear that our prayers and preaching are means He uses. He does not save people without our cooperation.

⁷⁰ 10:4. “Messiah is the **culmination** of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” The word translated “culmination” (*telos*) is often translated “end,” as in KJV. Here it could mean either goal or conclusion. If it means goal, then Messiah—and those in Him—achieves all that the law seeks. If it means conclusion, the law is superseded. Both are true, though goal may be the emphasis, as McClain explains:

You may never hear another sermon, but in that verse [4] you will have learned all you need to know to be saved—that Christ is the end when it comes to righteousness. To illustrate it: there is an old road that is called the Santa Fe Trail, that runs out to Los Angeles. If you want to get to Los Angeles you take that road. But suppose you want to go there, and you could just be lifted up, transported, and set right down in Los Angeles. Would you, after you got there, say, “I must go back and come over this Santa Fe Trail”? You are already there; Los Angeles is the end. (McClain, p. 188)

⁷¹ 10:9. The New Testament refers to Jesus as “Lord” (*Kurios*) about 700 times. Acts does so 92 times, compared to only ten times as “Savior.” *The Lord* is also used in both Testaments as a substitute for God’s name *Yahweh*. Only rarely, however, is there even a possibility of its being used in that sense for Jesus. Take, for example, the conclusion to the sermon at Pentecost: “God **has made** this Jesus...both **Lord** and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). It is evident that Jesus could be **made** Master but not Yahweh. Philippians 2:9-11 also calls *Lord* Jesus’ new name.

⁷² 10:11. “will never be put to shame.” This promise quotes the same words as 9:33b (from the Greek version of Isa. 28:16; cf. 49:23; 45:17). In effect, it means the same as “will be saved” (10:13).

⁷³ 10:16. “Not all the Israelites accepted the good news.” The Gospel that goes deepest into the reasons for this is John. John gives practically no information about Jesus’ Jewish trial just before His crucifixion (see chapters 18-19). Instead, chapters 1-12 constitute His trial before His nation, with the issues summarized in chapter 12 (see especially vv. 37-43). Israel saw lots of evidence that Jesus is Messiah, but rejected Him. “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (1:11). See my [survey of John’s Gospel](#).

⁷⁴ 10:16-21. Scriptures predicting Gentile belief and Jewish unbelief. “Where Israel was groping and failing to find the Messiah, those who sought Him not clearly discerned Him. How can Israel be excused for ignorance of a worldwide Gospel, when even the heathen discovered it?” (Stifler, p. 182)

⁷⁵ Romans 11. Israel is eternal. Prophets often describe it under the most durable analogies. For example: “He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night... ‘Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,’ declares the Lord, ‘will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.’” (Jer. 31:35-36)

⁷⁶ It is wearisome to hear otherwise sober teachers criticize the apostles’ question in Acts 1:6. Somehow such interpreters consider themselves more knowing than Jesus’ closest disciples just instructed and enlightened.

⁷⁷ A fascinating change has happened to amillennial interpretation, which I will illustrate from Waltke. Various times he rehearses the sins of Israel, culminating in their crucifying Messiah. For example, on p. 329: “With that rejection [by Israel], there is no one else to send. In other words, the end has come for national Israel. As the prophets and his Son have foretold, *I AM* forsakes them as a nation and chooses instead to form a new Israel.” (See why we call it “Replacement Theology”?) Yet, two pages later, commenting on Romans 11:26, Waltke adds this note:

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Before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1947, most Christians held to the doctrine of supersession (i.e., the church replaced or superseded Israel). Since then, many Christian theologians have supported the notion that ethnic Israel still has a role to play in salvation history. Exegesis confirms what Blaising calls “the new consensus”....

⁷⁸ The church is Messiah’s kingdom assembly. In 1 Peter 2:9 words are applied to the church from Exodus 19, when Israel originally became God’s kingdom. George Peters deals with the issues of the transfer of the kingdom in Propositions 59 to 65 of his *Theocratic Kingdom* (1:386-418). His summary of Proposition 59 is “This Kingdom of God, offered to the Jewish nation, lest the purpose of God fail, is to be given to others who are adopted.” Peters emphasizes that the “new” elect ones are “engrafted” on Israel’s tree (Romans 11). Therefore, they continue the previous election without canceling Israel’s unique promises.

⁷⁹ 11:5-7. “remnant **chosen** by grace....the **elect**.” The bolded words represent the same Greek word in two grammatical cases: *eklogen* and *ekloge*. NASB is more successful in showing that they are the same: “remnant according to God’s gracious **choice**....**those who were chosen**.”

⁸⁰ 11:9. “May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution.” God’s greatest provision for their life and sustenance (“their table”) was Messiah Himself. Yet, Messiah became their downfall. “When the Lord Jesus Christ came as their Messiah, He really was bringing all the benefits of a banquet. He was their table, and their table became a stumbling block to them.... They lost everything back there—their Messiah, their kingdom, their land, all the millennial blessing that God had promised them—lost them all, and their loss was the benefit of the Gentile world.” (McClain, p. 199)

⁸¹ 11:15. “their rejection is the reconciliation of the world.” McClain (p. 200) comments, “Where did the reconciliation of the world take place? At the cross.... They rejected their Messiah; they took Him to the cross and there He reconciled the world.”

⁸² 11:16. “holy...holy...holy.” This Greek adjective is *hagios*. It and other words built on the same Greek root usually refer to God or to saved people. It is the word translated “saints” in the greetings of epistles (e.g., Rom. 1:7; Eph. 1:1). In the section of Romans regarding *sanctification*, the key word is *hagiasmos* (6:19, 22). The basic meaning of this root, however, is “separated [to God],” which need not mean saved. For example, children with one believing parent are not “unclean” but “holy [*hagia*],” that is, dedicated to God (1 Cor. 7:14). Similarly, Hebrews 10:29 uses the verb *hagiadzo* to describe people near to God but unsaved. (Hebrews 10:10 and 14 use the same verb for the saved.) In Romans 11:16 both “root” and “branches” are holy in this sense of separated or dedicated.

⁸³ 11:17-24. The olive tree. “What is this olive tree? It represents the place of favor or privilege. Abraham is the root.... It does not save anyone to be in this olive tree.... Of course, the whole church is here too—all the professing members of the church—because all the Gentiles are here. Some are really believers and some are not. Those that are not will be broken off.” (McClain, pp. 201-202)

⁸⁴ I discuss the meaning of the church in many writings. For its first use in the NT, see lesson 8 in my [Matthew Self-Study Guide](#). For much more detail, see “[Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?](#)”

⁸⁵ You will look in vain for any indication in Romans that the church gets completed (or snatched away) without Israel. Neither the olive tree nor the grafted branches in chapter 11 represent the church.

⁸⁶ 11:33-36. “To him be the glory forever!” On pages 124-126 MacArthur has a beautiful study of God’s glory as revealed in Scripture.

⁸⁷ Complete victory over sin and over suffering. Romans 8 has not claimed that either victory is complete this side of final glorification. To use language from 1 John 1, now “we walk in the light” and “have fellowship [saving participation] with him.” But we still cannot “claim to be without sin.” Instead, “we confess our sins” and He continues “to purify us from all unrighteousness.” It is a process in which we cooperate.

⁸⁸ 12:2. “Be transformed.” Since we are exhorted to let this happen, is it optional? From one perspective, no; under the New Covenant it is certain to happen. 2 Corinthians 3 emphasizes the fact that in this covenant God writes His laws in our hearts. Colossians 3:9-10 says that this change has already begun: “You have taken off your

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old self...and have put on the new self.” (The parallel passage, Eph. 4:22-24, should be translated accordingly.) Yet, it is a process, often lengthy, with which we must cooperate.

⁸⁹ 12:6-8. “We have different gifts.” The seven gifts listed here may be comprehensive (include all gifts). That of “prophesying” (v. 6) seems to have served a special purpose when the New Testament was not yet complete. There are other lists of gifts, with related exhortations, in 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Peter 4.

⁹⁰ 13:3-4. “rulers...the one in authority.” God does not merely establish the institution of government but the individuals who are in charge. See also “king” and “governors” in 1 Peter 2:13, 14 (cf. 1 Tim. 2:2; Dan. 2:21, 37-38; 4:25, 32; 5:18-19). Not every government is based on a constitution or has free elections; but all have “authorities...established by God” (13:1). Therefore, Bible history rightly says that even godless rulers like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar were elevated to their positions by God. For the same reason David, though anointed himself, refused to harm “the LORD’s anointed one,” Saul, who kept trying to kill him.

⁹¹ 13:4. “God’s servant for your good.” Psalm 146:7-9 spells out what is good.

⁹² 13:1-7. “Wrath” is repeated here from 12:19. Some other words repeated from 12:17-21 are “evil,” “good,” and forms of “revenge.” “Love” precedes that section (12:9) and follows this one (13:8).

Although present rulers are God’s “agents of wrath” (13:4) to execute “the wrath of God” (12:19), they do so incompletely. God, of course, cannot allow wickedness to remain unpunished; He will purge it from His coming kingdom. “When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire...He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel...They will be punished with everlasting destruction...” (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Doing away with wicked rebels will help Him “bring justice to the nations” (Isa. 42:1, also vv. 3, 4).

⁹³ 13:8. “Owe nothing to anyone” (NASB). Does this mean no debts at all? Some think so. They reason from the facts (a) that a borrower easily becomes the lender’s slave (Prov. 22:7) but (b) that we are not to enslave ourselves (1 Cor. 7:23). However, God in the law did not forbid debts. He legislated about them but allowed them. See also the Lord’s approval of banking in Luke 19:22-23. Therefore, other interpreters limit this restriction in Romans to depreciating items. Others limit it to items too big for one’s budget. Certainly a life without debts is much easier and more efficient.

⁹⁴ 13:9. “The commandments...are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” In contrast, Muslim commentators are said to sum up Allah’s commandments in 75,000 rules—though with exceptions. There is truth in saying, “Love God totally, then do as you please.”

⁹⁵ 13:12. “the day is almost here.” “The day” is a common title for the coming kingdom of our Lord (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:8; Heb. 10:25). He warned us that He would not come immediately to rule but after certain things took place (Matt. 24:32-34). Therefore, His coming and His kingdom were not near when the church first began (Acts 2). However, those preliminary things began taking place. By the time Paul and others wrote their epistles, they considered the Lord’s coming near (see also James 5:8; 1 Peter 1:5; 4:7, 17).

⁹⁶ 13:11-14. Live godly in view of the Lord’s soon coming. The three exhortations in this paragraph might be called: Wake up (vv. 11-12), Shape up (v. 13), and Dress up (v. 14).

⁹⁷ Romans 13. Overthrow bad government? This question has many aspects. Dietrich Bonhoeffer decided that a Christian should help destroy Hitler because Hitler destroyed millions. At least one mission agency considered the Soviet Union to be no government at all because of its cruelty and opposition to the gospel. Liberation Theology considers sin to be inherent in structures (particularly capitalism) and revolution to be essential. (Of course, every structure should count on man’s depravity.) Each view must be judged in the light of Scripture.

⁹⁸ 14:1. “quarreling [Greek *diakriseis*] over disputable matters.” This translation is preferable to “passing judgment.” See Louw & Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, I:439. “Disputable matters” probably refers to “opinions” (NASB) about debatable areas of conduct not clearly addressed in the Bible. In this passage Paul deals only with matters of food and observance of days. Examples of other such matters in modern churches are dress for worship services, music, and Bible translations.

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⁹⁹ 14:1 to 15:13. There are no rules here about diet or days. In other contexts these matters involve other problems. Note two examples: (a) In the Corinthian church some still considered that eating food sacrificed to idols was itself idolatry (1 Cor. 8:7; cf. Acts 15:19-20, 28-29). In the Roman church there was no such dispute. (b) In Antioch food affected the gospel. God had revealed to Peter that all foods are clean, thus freeing him to preach to Gentiles (Acts 10). But in Antioch he violated that truth, withdrawing from Gentiles because of what they ate. In this way he compromised the doctrine of justification by faith (Gal. 2:12-21). Colossians 2:16 addresses the same issue with Judaizers in Colosse.

¹⁰⁰ 14:10-12 “God’s judgment seat.” Many Greek manuscripts say “judgment seat of Messiah,” as in 2 Corinthians 5:10. In either case the Judge will be the Lord Jesus (John 5:22; Acts 10:42). Many commentators believe that there will be several judgments. If so, they are not distinguished here or in the Scriptural passage Paul uses as proof (Isa. 45:23)—or in Romans 2 (see Appendix F, p. 61). Here Paul builds on the thought that “none of us lives for ourselves alone and none of us dies for ourselves alone” (14:7). That does not mean that our actions affect other people (though they do) but that our Lord will call us to account.

¹⁰¹ 14:5. “considers one day more sacred than another.” Entire denominations believe that Christians are still under the law, at least the Ten Commandments. If so, what Sabbath are they obligated to keep? Most often they say Sunday, because Messiah rose on that day, and the church at Troas met on that day (Acts 20:6-7).

¹⁰² 15:9-12. “The Gentiles.” Both in Hebrew and Greek the words translated “Gentiles” mean “nations.” Nearly always their existence as separate political units is part of the concept. (This affects the interpretation of Matthew 28:19.) Though a nation itself, Israel is generally considered separate from the nations.

Paul’s quotations in these verses come from every part of the Hebrew Old Testament. Verse 9 quotes from “The Prophets” (2 Sam. 22:50, the same as Ps. 18:49). Verse 10 quotes from “The Law” (Deut. 32:43). Verses 11 and 12 quote from “The Writings” (Ps. 117:1 and Isa. 11:10).

¹⁰³ 16:3-16. Paul rarely named those to whom he sent greetings in his epistles. Possibly in the case of Rome it was to show them the strong foundation he already had for approval and ministry there.

¹⁰⁴ 16:1. “Phoebe... a *diakonon* of the church.” Was she a deaconess? The Greek word is often used in a general sense (for all believers) as well as the title of an office (Phil. 1:1b). It is quite possible that it is the latter here. But we must remember that deacons were not set apart to oversee the church (as elders were). Rather, they were to serve in whatever function the church wished.

¹⁰⁵ “One and only” (used in John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18) is Greek *monogenes*. It is sometimes translated “only begotten” because the *genes* part is similar to the Greek word *gennao*, beget or give birth. But the two words are probably not related (*gennao* has double *n*; *genes* does not). *Monogenes* is used elsewhere about uniqueness (Heb. 11:17), not about being begotten.

¹⁰⁶ Hebrews 1:4. “the name he has inherited.” The Greek verb for “has inherited” is used eighteen times in the New Testament. It always means to come into possession of something not possessed before. For examples, see 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Hebrews 1:14; 6:12; and 12:17.

¹⁰⁷ Luke 3:22 records God’s words from heaven when Jesus was baptized: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” These words are from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Furthermore, they are like those in Near Eastern coronation texts when the god **adopted the new king as his son**. In the Pyramid texts, for example, we read “This is my son, my firstborn” and “This is my beloved with whom I have been satisfied.”

¹⁰⁸ Stifler, *Romans*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1971), 322.

¹¹⁰ Several times the New Testament lists personal sins, then says that “those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21; 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5). In fact, Ephesians 5:6 adds that “because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.” Without denying that fact, Romans 5 traces God’s wrath further back, to its original cause.

Notes

¹¹¹ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 584-585.

¹¹² In a section previous to the one just cited (pp. 570-571), Waltke begins to discuss changes he thinks he sees in Acts compared to Luke.

The primitive church expected Jesus Messiah to rule from David's throne in Jerusalem and reestablish Israel's glory and in that way to be a light to the nations. However, the Spirit-enlightened and Spirit-empowered church came to understand that Messiah Jesus rules the world from David's throne in heaven in a universal kingdom without national boundaries.

Waltke proceeds to allege "Jewish Misunderstandings of the Primitive Church." Among the misled he includes "Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary and Simeon." But in Acts, he affirms, "the primitive church's Jewish expectations for the kingdom are reshaped." To begin, "on the Mount of Olives, the disciples still think like the primitive church." But starting in Acts 2, "Luke explicitly redefines crucial terms regarding the kingdom of God." My opinion is that Waltke's proofs of such changes are mostly feeble.

¹¹³ RT considers even the "144,000 [sealed] **from all the tribes of Israel**" (Rev. 7:2-8) another description of the church rather than Israel. This seems unreasonable. The ethnic makeup of this group is strongly contrasted to the other group described in the same chapter. For this first group, seen on earth, the names of the tribes are listed separately (vv. 2-8). The other group, coming from earth, are a "great multitude...**from every nation**" (vv. 9-17). If the church is still on earth, they can both belong to it. But it seems quite strange to equate them!

¹¹⁴ Although the term *Israel* never includes Gentiles, it could have in one way by inference. Carefully follow some logic in Galatians 3 and Isaiah. First, God has channeled all worldwide blessings through Abraham (Gal. 3:7-9, 14). Second, the heir to those promises is Abraham's "seed" (v. 16a). As a collective noun, *seed* is singular in form but usually refers to many. Here it does refer to "one person, who is Messiah" (v. 16b). So "the Seed to whom the promise referred" is Messiah (v. 19). But third, that one "seed" also embraces many—namely, all who by faith are in Him. We "are all one in Messiah Jesus...Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (vv. 28-29).

Now consider why our being united to Messiah might have justified calling us "Israel." It is because the LORD once called Messiah Himself "Israel." He did so in one of the "Servant Songs," in Isaiah 49:3. As "Servant" He will fulfill God's promises and "bring justice to the nations" (Isa. 42:1, 3, 4; cf. Matt. 12:17-21). As "Israel" He embodies that nation's purpose. Even then, however, *He is distinguished from the nation*. "You are my **servant, Israel**...to bring Jacob back to him and **gather Israel** to himself" (Isa. 49:3, 5). So *the true Israel does not replace ethnic Israel* but brings it back to God. And although we are in the true Israel, we are never called "Israel." Not in Galatians 3 nor anywhere else.