

Romans

**Study series as posted at the website
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The unconventional punctuation styles you will see are related to the way these studies were originally intended for the e-mail audience, using plain text to keep file sizes smaller for bulk mailing; creatively 'formatting' with punctuation, for various kinds of emphases, in the absence of formatting the actual type. You may find occasional misspellings, and the more rare cases of a Scripture reference going to a wrong passage; those will be 'typos', not intentional. With this type of POD (Print On Demand) publishing, it seems simplest, and the most prudent use of time, to not completely go through and revamp everything, but to just leave things as they are. Please accept this book, warts and all; but rather, please pay attention to, and receive God's Truth presented herein.

Romans

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Gospel of God - Wrath of God - (Chapter 1)

The "called apostle" Paul's function was to proclaim the Gospel. (vs.1) While there can be many kinds of apostles for whatever ideologies man devises, and Peter led the disciples in the error of selecting Matthias (Acts1), Paul was chosen directly by Jesus Christ. (Acts9:15) As he was the apostle "to the Nations" (Acts28:28,Gal2:8) he writes a treatise to those at Rome. They say "all roads lead to Rome." Rome certainly has become the focal point of the United World Religions, and is its leader. Whatever began at Babel with Nimrod roughly 4500 years ago has culminated in what is today centered at Rome. While Rome claims that "Peter" is their "father" Peter was actually an apostle to the Jews. (Gal2:8) But since Paul is the apostle to the "nations" it is most appropriate that he would have written this book.

The book "to the Romans" is a most comprehensive collection of teachings presenting the Gospel; the need for the Gospel; and once it has been believed and received... how to live. Everything needed for Eternal Life can be found in this book. I wonder if "Rome" has read it...?!

The "Gospel of God."(vs1) The proclamation of the "kingdom of God." (Mt6:33) The "Gospel of Christ" (vs16) is the proclamation "unto salvation." We've considered before, the Gospel Paul preached, summed up in 1Cor 15:3-4. The Gospel "once delivered to the saints" (Jude3) which "you HAVE RECEIVED.." (Gal1:9) and nothing more is needed. That which does not change. (Mal3:6, Heb13:8)

This Gospel was found in the Old Testament. It began in the Garden of Eden at the fall, continued on through Abel, was proclaimed by Enoch and Noah, and spelled out in detail through Abraham, Moses and the prophets.(vs2) One of God's major proofs of Himself was His design to establish it, prophesy it and fulfill it. God's Word is based upon Himself as He says, "the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." (Is45:23) "To whom will you compare Me, and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike?" (46:5) And to proclaim His uniqueness He explains... "declaring the end from the beginning, and from the past things which were not done, saying, My purpose shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure...I have spoken, I will also cause it to come: I have formed; yes, I will do it." (46:9-11) Fulfillment of prophesy is God's "unique" niche. The best Nostradamus and Toronto Blessing revivalists can claim is 70%. God's prophecies are fulfilled 100%. His "success rate" can be 100% because He founded creation. He purposed and promised. He fulfills.

When God "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (Jn3:16) this "Son" came in human form... "seed of David according to the flesh." (vs3) It is necessary to believe that Jesus was "flesh and blood"

(Heb2:14). If a person does not believe this, he cannot experience Eternal Life. (1Jn4:2-3)

Of equal importance is to accept Jesus' "Deity." He was "marked out the Son of God." (vs4) He was revealed "according to the Spirit", when He was baptized by John in the Jordan, to be the "Son of God." (Jn1:30-34) The "Word WAS God." (Jn1:1) He is "..Christ our Lord." (vs3a)

His "resurrection from the dead" (vs4b) was the message proclaimed by the apostles, which the Jews rejected. (Acts4:2) Rome also rejects it by their perpetual sacrifice of the "crucifix" & "eucharist."

It is through Jesus Christ that we "receive grace...to obedience to the faith." (vs5) This grace and faith are a "gift of God". (Eph2:8) We do not accumulate "graces" by works and praying to the Queen of Heaven."Mary" does not save us, because "..there is salvation in no other One; for there is no other name [than "Jesus Christ"] under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts4:12)

And those who are of Faith in Christ are "called ones." (vs6) Having been "known" by Him (2Tm2:19) since "before the foundation of the world" (Eph1:4) He "chose" us who believe. Those being thus "ordained" (appointed) to Eternal Life (Acts13:48) God calls and "draws" to Himself. (Jn6:44)

Jesus proclaimed, "For whoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, the Son of man shall be ashamed of him when He shall come in His own and in His Father's glory, and that of the holy angels." (Lk9:26) Paul proclaims, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith...the just shall live by faith." (vs16-17)

Psychology speaks of "shame." Essentially, they try to persuade people to no longer be "ashamed of" their sin. And in the next breath, they reject God's Word as being the worst form of "abuse" to children so taught. But you see, we MUST BE ashamed of our sin. We must "despise" it and repent. (Job42:6) We must implore God for His mercy upon us (Lk18:13) and look to Jesus Christ for His "salvation." (vs16)

Salvation from WHAT? God's WRATH! (vs18) Just as He promised His gospel through the Scriptures, He also "reveals" His wrath from heaven. What is the focus of His wrath? "Ungodliness and unrighteousness."

UNGODLINESS is a rebellion against "God's existence"; His Essence. While God says, "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex3:14) man says, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Since ancient times we have cleverly devised a scheme of multiplied billions of years based on "uniformitarianism" for us to "evolve" to where we are now. (2Pt3:4) The "Big Bang" and mathematically impossible odds are claimed, in order to deny God's

existence through evolution. However, things of creation "are CLEARLY SEEN, being realized by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, for them to be without excuse." (vs20) God designed the universe SPECIFICALLY "to show" His power.

UNRIGHTEOUSNESS is rebellion against God's "character". His essence is "righteous." (Ezr9:15,Ps7:9,Dan9:14,etc.) How does man rebel against righteousness? Both intellectually and morally.

"Intellectually" man looks to the created beings, instead of God Himself. They worship animals (vs23) trees (Jer10:3-5) the "host of heaven" (Deu4:19) and man, himself. In this latter pursuit they follow Satan's original lie, "you shall be [just like] God" (Gen3:5) The TV show "Touched by an Angel" proclaims "you're just as good as God." Oprah preaches the divinity within each one of us.

And at the religious level, the "scholars" concoct "translations" of Scripture designed to deny God's Truth. They look to their "scholarship" rather than the Holy Spirit. As such, the Word becomes distorted in order to purposely portray a "different God" than the Most High...since the Scriptures ARE part of God's "essence." The "Word was with God, and the Word [WAS] God." (Jn1:1) "You have the WORDS of eternal life." (Jn6:68) "...the words that I speak to you are Spirit and are life." (Jn6:63) In producing these abominations, they are deliberately "SUPPRESS[ING] the truth in unrighteousness" (vs.18 -nkjv) Jesus proclaimed special "woes" to such.. "But woe to you, scribes...! For you shut up the kingdom of Heaven against men. For you neither go in, nor do you allow those entering to go in. (Mt23:13) Scribes were those who hand-copied the texts of the O.T. Scriptures. "Rome" has been a major repository of the sources of the modern perversions. They forbid the reading of Scripture in years past. In more recent years, since the perversions have proliferated, they now allow their subjects to read them.

And so God "gave them up..." (vs24) ..to "Moral Depravity". Sexual perversion abounds. Women have perverted their purpose in God's design. (vs26) "Dishonorable affections.." Alluring female sexuality pretty much governs ALL aspects of entertainment, business, and socialization. Homosexuality has so pervaded society, that, as someone e-mailed me a list recently...there is hardly a western nation that has not passed laws condoning same-sex marriages. There are those who claim to have "gay-ministries" and will provide all sorts of Scripture, out of context, to "support" their views. But I have yet to receive an acknowledgment from any of them that vs.27 speaks "against" such practices. They like to ignore this verse...perhaps hoping it will go away..? "And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another, males with males working out shamefulness..." It is quite obvious to even the least literate, that this is talking about homosexuality. And what is the outcome? "Receiving in themselves the recompense which was

fitting for their error." Aids is not going away anytime soon, until sin is acknowledged, repented of and forsaken!

And vs 29-31 lists many other such and related sins. But you notice the verdict. Not only do people "do" these things, but they fully "enjoy" the fact that others do them, as well. How else can poles show 80% approval for a depraved president. Or thousands of Mariah Carey fans cheering deafeningly as she cavorts about on stage, practically engaging in sexual activity for all to see...while parents hold their small children in their arms to see it all...teaching them, in so doing, that this all is "acceptable."

This list of intellectual and moral depravity is the definition of the object of God's Wrath. (vs18) But it all boils down, in its simplest form, to the fact that the world has rejected God. They distort His essence in order to not have to "deal with" Him. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way.." (Is53:6a) God's standards of holiness and created design they spit at, and with all their might live as opposite to His purpose as they can. They enjoy the fact that they are all in it together...cheering each other along in sin. "..every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Gen6:5)

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer17:9) The depth of wickedness is unfathomable. This is the reason for God's Wrath. But it is also God's mercy which provides "salvation to everyone who believes." (vs16) For those who believe, "God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." (1Th5:9)

Without Excuse - (Chapter 2)

Therefore you are without excuse, O man, everyone who judges; for in what you judge another, you condemn yourself, for you who judge do the same things." (vs.1)

Everybody judges. There are the "christian" legalists who hold to sets of laws and guidelines by which they order their lives. They will point to Scripture passages to support their views, and if someone else does not adhere to the same set of "dos and don'ts" they are considered as "heathens." On the other side of the spectrum are those who claim to have "no" guidelines. "Graeeeessss" is the rule. And yet, while they claim that "anything goes" and there are "no absolutes" because of all of Scripture's supposed "gray areas" they READILY RECOGNIZE the legalist, and "absolutely condemn" them as being "judgmental." Their "love and tolerance" and universal acceptance of all ideas does not extend to the legalist "list maker." While they condemn the legalist for being "judgmental", their very condemnation of the judgmental legalist [IS] an act of "judgmentalism".

Is one better than the other? Some of the staunchest preaching against immorality has been carried on by legalists, who ultimately get discovered and exposed for their own affairs. Those that they call "heathen" do the same, although not so secretly. They both have sinned. Sin is sin. God sees them both.

Paul asks the question; You with all your long list of pieties you claim to adhere to, and expect others to obey; do you think God will judge you any less than that "heathen", when you do the same things he does? (vs3) You must understand, God does not judge "according to sight" (what you've been sneaking around, thinking nobody knows about) but with "righteous judgment" (Jn7:24) because He knows the "truth." (vs2)

The legalist would [like to] call God's "fire" down upon the "heathen" to consume him. The legalist has no mercy on "carnality." "God should judge THEM! THEY are such terrible sinners!" Well...just hold on one moment, there! Who do you think you are? Do you not realize that it is God's "MERCY" ...His "forbearance and long-suffering" which leads to repentance? (vs4) God does not answer to YOU regarding judging THEM. But do you not realize that His mercy which leads to the sinner's (THEIR) repentance, is also the same long-suffering which gives YOU time to repent; but if you don't, you are storing up "wrath for yourself in a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (vs5) unless you soften your heart?

What is the basis for God's judgment? Works. (vs6) If you notice the Great White Throne judgment (Rev20:12) the "dead" are judged and sent into the Lake of Fire "according to their works." They got to that judgment by

not being found in the Book of Life. But the degree of the severity of their judgment is based on their works. For the Believer, his judgment and/or rewards are based on his works, how he "builds" on the foundation of Jesus Christ. (1Cor3:10-15) We all stand before the "judgment seat" of Christ (Rom14:10) to be judged according to what we've done while in these bodies. (2Cor5:10)

Well, "just a minute" someone will say; "are we not saved by grace...NOT of works"?(Eph2:8-9) That's right. But we are save "...[TO] good works" (vs10) James speaks of the works "showing [the] faith". (Jas2:18) How do we know we are looking at a duck? It waddles, swims and quacks. Thus, Paul speaks of "work out your salvation..." (Phil2:12 -nkjv/kjv) Which is why a more correct rendering is "cultivate your salvation." (mkjv)

Working out or cultivating (with care) that which is of value to our hearts. The legalist and heathen are on equal footing in God's sight. The legalist presumes he has an "advantage" because of his pious "list" he lives by. That "list" is his holy grail. Everything is compared to and judged by...that "list." But you see, it is not the "list" ...the "Law" that God judges. But what a person "does." Sinners are judged, whether they be legalists or heathen. (vs9) But "glory, honor and peace" will be accorded to "every man who works good", whether he be the legalist or heathen. (vs10)

Let us, at this point, label them as Paul does as we progress further. Jew and Greek. What we've just been comparing between legalists and heathen is the same as what was between Jew and Greek. The Jews had the Law, the Greeks (gentile/nations) did not. Jews rested upon and relied upon the Law (and Moses), while breaking it at every turn.

God does not look at "heritage" but at each "individual." (vs11) If a person's heritage is Moses and the Law, he is judged from that perspective. If he is a heathen "Greek", God judges him equally...individually.(vs12) You see, there is something greater than the Law which God has endowed each of us with. "CONSCIENCE." (vs15) While there is Moses' law, before Moses ever came along there was already a "law." This law is written "in their hearts." The heathen "by nature" know this law-of-the-heart. They reference it, even though they never heard of Moses. (vs14) By repeated disobedience, most people have "seared" their consciences. (1Ti4:2) When skin is tender and properly moisturized, it has the ability to sense and feel stimuli. Hot, cold, soft, rough. But if the skin becomes calloused, chapped, scabbed from burns or injury; it no longer has its original sensitivity. Same with conscience. When sin is first committed, the battle rages about doing it. But as a person explains it away enough times, and does it repeatedly...pretty soon it becomes "OK" and easier. Eventually, if the person knows Scripture, he has devised some sort of Scriptural explanation for why it is "condoned by God" and thus, he is righteous. To him it's an "explanation", but truth be told, it's an "excuse." (vs15b)

Well, a "day" is coming when "God shall judge the secrets of men..." (vs16)

For the legalist, if his heart is not right, his judgment is more severe. He "boast[s] in the Law" (vs23) but "dishonor[s] God through breaking the Law." As we see, every time another "man of God" is exposed for what he had hoped was a "secret sin" ... "the name of God is blasphemed among the nations because of you.." (vs24) Jesus taught, "And that servant who knew his lord's will and did not...according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he not knowing, and doing things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For to whomever much is given, of him much shall be required. And to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." (Lk12:47-48) You see...in this case the Law actually brings greater judgment. He knew better, and yet disobeyed. For such a one, ".it would have been better for them not to have fully known the way of righteousness, than fully knowing it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. (2Pt2:21)

So, what about the "Law"? We'll discover in later studies that it was set up to be a "standard" ...a "plumb line" to God's holiness. But the Law, itself, does not save. A person, just because he claims to be a "Law-keeper", is not saved; because he breaks it and transgresses. On the other hand, a person not knowing that something called "the Law" exists, but based on his conscience, obeys the Law written in his heart, he is actually a true "Law-keeper." (vs26) A transgressor, by his transgression, becomes a "heathen." But a heathen, by his obedience, becomes a Law-keeper, even though he doesn't know its proper label.

While this obedience or transgression appears to be "outwardly in flesh" (vs28) ...this is what we humanly see; the True Nature is the "inward" one. When God had given the Law and Israel promised, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do.." (Ex19:8,24:3) God responded, "Oh that there were such a heart in them..." (Deu5:29)

But you see, as we began; in the end there is no excuse when we stand for judgment. The true matter is of the heart. The conscience God put within each one of us. This is separate from the Law. "...he is a Jew [Believer] who is one inwardly, ...of the heart; in spirit and not in letter, whose praise is not from men, but from God." (vs29) Because it is Jesus Christ who sees "even to the dividing apart of soul and spirit...and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, but all things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb4:12-13) And He "...will render to each according to his works..." (vs6)

All Under Condemnation - (Chapter 3)

So, if there is no -real- difference between Jew and Gentile, why even have an entity called "Jew"? Is there an 'advantage' to being a Jew? Well, there is. Primarily "because they were entrusted with the oracles of God." (vs2) The Scriptures. All the Old Testament "Law, Prophets and Psalms" (Lk24:44) were penned and safeguarded by Jews. And until Christ came, it was Jewish scribes who meticulously hand-copied the scrolls. Tradition says that, if in copying, even one tiny error was made, they would throw away the whole thing and start over...so that the copy would be "perfect".

Today we have a similar group. They are the 'legalists' we spoke of last month. And more specifically they have become known as "KJV-only". They meticulously hold to things like "inerrancy" and "manuscript origins." They reject anything tainted by Alexandrian heresy. They like to think they are pure from doctrinal adulterations of Rome. It is quite possible that their militance has ensured the availability of Masoretic-Textus Receptus texts to the translators so that good translations are available. They are certainly a storehouse of knowledge regarding the truth, for those who are seeking. And by reading the results of their research and scholarship it is possible to ascertain the truth regarding the origins of the Scripture translations.

We have already concluded that the Jewish 'law' does not save. Many claim affinity for it outwardly, but break it in their heart. (ch2) Nor does being "KJV-only" save. I know of a person who balked at switching from the NIV (perversion) to KJV/NKJV -because-of- what he saw the KJV-only 'people' to be. The ones he saw; Unregenerate, prideful hypocrites. We have noted in other recent writings how many of them don't even preach the essential salvation doctrine of "repentance." So, "if some did not believe, will not their unbelief nullify the faith of God?" (vs3) If they hold forth God's Word, while at the same time disobeying and blaspheming it (2:24), does this render God helpless? Not hardly! "Let God be true, and every man a liar...that [God] might be justified in [His] sayings, and will overcome when [He] is judged." (vs4) Man's sin may try to thwart God's purpose, but it is His -WORD- which triumphs. When it goes out it "shall" accomplish its purpose. It "shall" do the thing it was sent to do (Is55:11) often, "in spite of" the human agent wielding it; BECAUSE -God- is righteous.

When a sinner is viewed next to God's Word, the sinner is seen to be exceedingly sinful, and God is seen to be righteous. So when God pronounces -wrath- (1:18) against unrighteousness, does this make God "bad" for being so "cruel"? (vs5) If He didn't, how else could there be 'consequences'?

For all things in creation there are consequences. For every action, there is a reaction. You push on a door, either it opens, or you hurt yourself from pushing too hard. If you walk in the direction of the edge of a dock and

refuse the exhortations to turn (repent), you will fall into the water. Was it anybody's 'fault' that the dock had an 'edge' or that the water below existed? Was there something intrinsically 'evil' about the builder of the dock? No. Simply, you walked, refusing to heed the warnings, and got wet.

The righteous declaration is "the soul that sins, it shall die.." (Ez18:4) Statement of fact. To Adam and Eve it was stated, 'don't eat of -that- tree and live; eat of it and die.' (Gen2:17) God lovingly gave them the warning. They did not heed. They died. Statement of fact. If people die because of sin, that is a righteous statement of fact. Not God's 'cruelty'. God is continually warning and pleading, "Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die...? (Ez33:11)

Furthermore, somebody put up signs warning against getting too close to the edge of the dock. He very meticulously made sure all the correct words were printed out and spelled correctly. Was the sign-maker at fault for making sure it was posted? Were those words of warning terribly 'hateful' and 'judgmental' because they seriously encouraged a 'change' in direction? No. But when you got wet, you discovered the "TRUTH" of the warnings of the sign and of those yelling to you to "look out!" They were all proven to be "right". Supposing the sign maker fell into the water and got wet because he neglected to heed the warning of the sign which he so meticulously made and installed, did that change the message of the sign? No. He's 'wet' just like you are.

Is it necessary for hundreds of people to jump off the dock to prove the "righteousness" of the message of the sign? Will it make the sign -more- "right"? Will it make the dock-builder -more- "correct" in his assessment that a person walking over the edge will get wet? Will the people who heeded the sign, and are "dry" and warm, be any -more- dry because 100 people jumped over, rather than just one? No. But those who fell over are -all- "wet". (vs8) ...thoroughly...

Trouble is... -everybody- is in the water, drowning. (vs10) Nobody heeded the sign. Some didn't know about the sign. Others did. But they're -all- there, nonetheless.

Regarding "sin" notice all the characteristics of the sinner. No one seeks for God. (vs11) This is opposite of modern evangelistic techniques that cajoles everybody to "want" God. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, each one to his own way.." (Is53:6) There is nothing good about anyone. (vs12) And what comes out of the heart does so in words and actions of all sort. (vs13-17) And they do not "fear" God. (vs18) You see, God does not call us to "love" Him until we have "feared" Him. Yes, we are to love Him. (Deu6:5) But just as we cannot "believe/receive" Christ until we have "repented" to God (Acts20:21); we cannot "love" God until we have "feared" Him. Repentance and fear go together; as do faith and love.

Now that everybody's -in- the water, that 'sign' up on the dock cannot pull anybody out, can it. The law merely gave "knowledge" of sin, but does not save. (vs20) Now, along comes the dock builder. Even though He built it to keep people dry, and warned them against the water, He sees them in the water and wishes to 'rescue' them.

Since the dock is so 'high' above the water, simply throwing a life preserver down to the people will not do. So, the Builder sent His Son (Jn3:16) to swim around, bringing and offering a preserver to each person. (Mt13:3) The procedure then was that the Son would give a 'signal' to the Father (Mt10:32, Rev3:5) that 'this one' is ready to go to the "Father's house" (Jn14:2) so the Holy Spirit keeps tabs on that 'line' (Eph1:13, 2Co1:22) so that when the Son goes back up, He will then grab all the lines and "receive [them] to [Himself]" (Jn14:3) as He "raises" them up at the "last day". (Jn6:44,54) Until the Son gathers everybody up, that life preserver is a "redemption..freely" (vs24) As long as the person hangs on to the preserver, the fact that he fell in, no longer matters. It is now in the past and forgiven. (vs25) But salvation will not come unless the flounderer "receives" (Jn1:12) the preserver and in "faith" believes what Jesus is telling him about being pulled up later. (vs26)(1Jn3:3)

So... at this point, what is the difference between the sign-maker and the passer-by? They are -both- in the water, wearing life preservers, with a 'line' being held by the Holy Spirit, waiting for salvation...the "redemption of the body" (Rom8:23) There is nothing either of them can -do- to be saved. (vs27) The legalist has no grounds to stand on "KJV-only" does he. He had it, but didn't heed it. He has to "believe" just like the other.

The sign-maker cannot "boast" (vs27) to everybody, "Hey, everybody! See that sign -up-there- that I made? The Dock-builder gave -me- that project to mount it prominently on its post." So!!?? Big deal!! You're still in the water just like everybody else! When the Son comes around offering a preserver, he cannot pretend that he's -not- 'really' in the water (repentance) and tell the Son that he 'doesn't NEED' the preserver, on account of...he made the sign 'up there' on the dock. After all, he was rather "chummy" with the builder Who commissioned the sign, saying, "the Builder and I are 'bosom buddies'." Nope. He's 'wet' and as such his "mouth [is] stopped" and he's under judgment just like the rest of the world. (vs19)

God is the One who justifies and saves. Faith is the agency of that salvation. But notice a difference between the legalist (Jew) and the other (Gentile). The Jew is justified "by" faith. (vs30) This word "by" carries the notion of "out of, from, away from". You see, they have thought they had it all. They think they -already- have faith. But they are just as lost as the rest. They have to be brought -out-from- this past thinking they've had, in order to be humble to repentance of nothingness. They must get rid of their pride and SELF-righteousness. They have supposed that their 'law'

indicated righteousness, not realizing it actually displayed their sin. (vs20) So, they must "come out of her" (Rev18:4) from their past.

On the other hand, the 'other' who has no legalism to boast on has no basis or presumption of what "faith" might be. He is justified "through" faith. "by means of, by reason of." In other words, he is introduced, for the first time, to the concept of faith. He doesn't have to be 'un-taught' the error of self-presumption and partial-truths.

Remember how in ch2 we learned that God judges based on the person's background and knowledge. Well, His process in redeeming the individual is personalized, too. The one must be brought "out of law" (false faith) to come to Christ. The other is "introduced to" Christ. When Paul witnessed to Jews, He "reasoned with them out of the Scriptures." (Acts17:2) When he witnessed to the Greeks, he introduced to them the "unknown God" (Acts17:23) beginning with God the "creator". But the message to both was the same. To the Jew it was "repent" (Acts3:19) and to the Greeks, "repent". (Acts17:30) And God's righteousness is "toward all and upon all those who believe (Jew or Greek). For there is no difference." (vs22)

Is the Law voided because of God's grace (vs24) through faith? (vs28) No. It is established. (vs31) Shown to be truthful and just. An accurate representation of the existing chasm between righteous God and sinful man; and the need for Christ's intervention and redemption. (vs22,24,26b)

Righteousness of Faith - (Chapter 4)

Faith vs Works. Law vs Grace. Circumcision or not (Jew vs Gentile). Where does all this discussion begin? How do we know what's what? How can we be sure? While many of these dichotomies existed since Cain and Abel, a firm 'official' demarcation came into being with Abraham. And more specifically with Moses. The "Jew" came into being, and yet we learned that -being- one has no advantage regarding eternal life. So, if we can sort out what happened with Abraham, perhaps we can get this all figured out...

This chapter is about "faith". The great "faith chapter" (Hebrews 11) speaks of Abraham. He "obeyed" and "went out" (vs8) 'works'. He "lived in the land of promise" (vs9) 'works'. He "offered up Isaac" (vs17) 'works'. And our study here begins with "if Abraham was justified by works, he has a boast; but -not- before God." (Rom4:2) Does Scripture contradict itself? Was Abraham righteous before God, or not? Did he 'work' or 'believe'?

God made some promises to Abraham, and then commands him to be circumcised, along with everybody in his household. (Gen17:11) This 'work' which Abraham performs is a covenant on behalf of God, and - God's- promises to Abraham.

In many ways, circumcision before Christ's death was like the "seal[ing] with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph1:13) after. They are, both, about God's promise of eternal life to come in the future. Something which does not now -yet- exist, but it's as good as though it -did- exist because God promised it (vs17), and seals the matter with circumcision/Holy Spirit. Faith is "being fully persuaded that what God [has] promised, He [is] also able to perform." (vs21)

Is Abraham, thus, 'accepted' by God because of this circumcision? You know; later, the Jews would consider this act to be -the- single most important aspect of their collective identity as God's "chosen ones." Just as many today seek a 'special dose' of the 'spirit', and equate the resulting -demonic- spiritual manifestations with God's Holy Spirit. Both; looking to the -physical-.

What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." (vs3)(Gen15:6) Notice which came first. Abraham -believes- in ch15. Circumcision happens in ch17. The offering of Isaac, in ch22. We see that "faith" came first, before the works. Faith was "reckoned" prior to circumcision.(vs10) This term "reckon" is an accounting term. To "calculate, compute, count, weigh and determine the results." It was 'entered into the ledger' on Abraham's account.

God made promises: "in you shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen12:3) This blessing (which included the message of Salvation due to

the resultant "Seed" -Gal3:6,29) was further proclaimed in the promise of a -son- from his "own bowels shall be your heir". (Gen15:4) This, to a man almost 100 years old, and his wife waaay past child-bearing age. (vs18-20) God made the promise, and -this- is the point where Abraham "believed in the LORD. And He counted it to him for righteousness." (Gen15:2-6) Abraham's account had "salvation" written into it, when he "paid" -nothing-. When there was no -substance- or -visible results- of the promise. Abraham's faith was the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb11:1)

Thus, Abraham is the "father (first in a succession) of all those believing...for righteousness to be imputed to them also." (vs11)

This 'imputation' is to those who are -not- circumcised. Gentiles. Because Abraham's faith was -prior- to circumcision. Thus, salvation is not through Law, but through faith. This also proves it is of "grace". (vs16) Since it was not works, there was no substance yet from Abraham's part; it came -from- God. It was a "gift of God" (Eph2:8) for Abraham having -done- absolutely 'nothing'.

However, people -of- the Law come to God also. David, a -Jewish- king was the man "after [God's] own heart." (1Sam13:14) According to the Law, David should have been stoned to death. He committed adultery. Lied to cover the sin. And when that didn't work, murder. Adultery and murder carried the death penalty. And yet he proclaims, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered....the man to whom the LORD does not charge iniquity.." (Ps32:1-2)(vs7-8) Did such forgiveness come from the Law? No. It came from repentance and confession. "O God...according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me completely from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Against You, You only, have I sinned...Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me...create in me a clean heart, O God...the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.." (Ps51)

David understood God's mercy and grace, and his own utter depravity. He came to God totally 'empti-handed'..'without works'. (vs6) Like the song says, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling."

If a person could keep the Law, then, faith would be nullified (vs14) because the Law is the basis for Wrath. (vs15) While we learned in ch2 that 'conscience' is given to each person, and existed before the Law was given; simple conscience gives no 'teeth' to judgement. If a person was pulled over by the Montana State Patrol for going 100 mph in the day-time, there is no basis for writing a ticket. Montana doesn't have a day-time speed limit. Technically, a person can drive as fast as they wish. The patrol might 'think' the person is going too fast, beyond his capabilities to do so safely. But he cannot issue a citation for "speeding" because there is no law which declares judgement for doing so. The driver's -conscience-

might tell him that he is not safe...and he 'knows better'. As a result of driving too fast, he could have an accident and die. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom6:23) But he will not stand before a judge for "speeding". The driver crosses over into Idaho, continuing along at 100 mph, the patrol pulls him over and he gets a ticket. He stands before the judge, and receives a 'judgment' of, typically, a stiff fine. Idaho -does- have speed laws.

Again, -if- a person could keep the Law, Faith would be void. Can righteousness be attained through the Law? Yes. "All the commandments which I command you this day shall you be careful to do, that you may live.." (Deu8:1) As Jesus affirms, "..do this and you shall live.." (Lk10:28) Trouble is, as David realized, we are "conceived" and born in iniquity. (Ps51) "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked..." (Jer17:9) We are NOT -capable- of keeping the Law. Thus, in many ways, Paul talking about the Law "voiding" Faith is an academic hypothesis. The Law -cannot- be kept by sinful man. Thus, the only thing that -is- possible, is "Faith".

However, many people attempt to keep the Law. They try to 'appease' God out of guilt. They hope that -if- they can somehow accumulate enough good deeds, that the ledger will balance out on the 'plus' side. They see this big "debt" (vs4) that is owing. So they approach God like they do their banker. Try to consolidate all their credit cards, mortgages, car payments, etc. into something that they can pay on the 'installment plan'. Trouble is, they're only making \$10,000 a year, and their 'debt' with God is in the "Billions" of dollars. The ledger doesn't have enough spaces for all the zeros on their 'debt' side.

The only 'person' who can pay such a debt is God, Himself. He did so when Jesus died on the cross. And even though we do not see Him, we believe in His work of "imputation". (vs22-23) Thus, Abraham is lauded for "believing" in the "Seed" that would come from his loins. (Gal3:16) David, in the middle of that lineage, still 1000 years before Christ, "says of the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works." (vs6) Jesus said, "..blessed are they who have not seen and have believed." (Jn20:29)

What does "impute" mean? Same as "reckon" above. Something like a loan contract to buy a car or piano on the installment plan. Initially the papers are drawn up with the "terms" of the contract printed and filled in. Typically, often, the lending institution will provide a payment coupon book. As each payment is made, a coupon goes with it. Now, the "-WORKS- of the Law" (3:20,28) is the faithful payment each month with those coupons. You miss a payment, there is a penalty. Late payment...same thing. But ultimately the loan is paid off. Either for the full term, or early with a lump sum. When the loan is fully paid, the contract is signed and/or stamped, "PAID IN FULL" All this time you've been driving that car, it has technically been the property of the bank. But once you see that "PAID IN FULL"

stamp, the title is now "free and clear". If a third party came along and paid your loan, the contract would be stamped "Paid in Full". The third party paid, and the matter was "imputed" to your account...even though you did not make the payment. Once the 'contract' has been thus stamped, the coupon books have no value. You might gloat in showing off your coupons and how you faithfully paid them along the way; but your book still has unpaid coupons in it. In the end, what 'counts' is that stamp or signature on the contract.

The debt that we could not possibly pay, Jesus paid with His blood. (1Pt1:18-19) That is "grace." (vs4) His blood stamped that contract in the - Book of Life- (Rev20:15) "RIGHTEOUS of GOD in CHRIST." (2Cor5:21) With our names in the Book of Life, what has been 'imputed' to us is "Righteousness". God looks at the 'contract' and sees "Righteous" stamped on there, and allows us into heaven. He cares not about the payment coupons.

Faith believes this as being true. It receives (Jn1:12) the gift. (Eph2:8) Not only did Abraham believe; in him "all families of the earth" (Jew and Gentile) are blessed. Those "believing on Him who has raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses and was raised for our justification." (vs24-25)

Peace with God thru Jesus Christ - (Chapter 5)

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice on the hope of the glory of God." (vs1-2)

What is the one thing that eludes the world? Both globally and individually, people seek for peace. Nations desire peace, but are continually jockeying and positioning themselves, often through war, for some advantage. While the Middle East continually has 'peace talks' some commentators suggest that total peace is not possible in the region, as long as the world is made up the way it is now.

At the individual level people struggle for peace and contentment. People are fearful for the future. They strive to attain riches in the hopes that that will bring peace. But as my ex-wife used to always say, about that "darkness" deep within her; when she left, she did so to serve -her- 'gods'. She left to 'find' that which was "missing" in her life. But without God, she is still lost in that darkness.

"There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." (Is57:21) You see, in the beginning, God created man in His own "image". (Gen1:26) It was meant to be a 'relationship' of fellowship. But something happened to make us "enemies" of God. (vs10) We -BECAME- "without strength" (vs6) and "sinners". (vs8) Mankind did not start out in this condition, but in perfection. (Gen1:31) God called His creation "Very good".

We are told that "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed on all men inasmuch as all sinned." (vs12) We've talked about the "Law" in past studies, and how that 'speeding ticket' could not be written for speeding if there was no speed-law. God's Law came through Moses. But there were -centuries- of time between Adam and Moses when there was no Law. Just like we spoke of the person driving too fast, crashing and being killed, even though he had not broken any 'speeding laws' so, too, "death reigned from Adam to Moses". (vs14) God had promised, "...in the day you eat of [the fruit], you shall surely die" (Gen2:17) In Gen ch3, Adam and Eve ate of it. And death has reigned ever since. It doesn't matter whether or not there was a Law. Death is death. It is separation from the Holy God. It is enmity. The fellowship God had intended at creation, is not possible. It is not that God 'doesn't want' fellowship. It is the 'sin' "...but your iniquities have come between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, from hearing." (Is59:2)

How did we get to this place? Adam sinned, and by 'heredity' the whole world is in sin. "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Ps51:5) Why does it seem that everybody is

'fighting' against God? Sin causes us to be "enemies" with God. We have "offended" God. (vs15,17) We are under "condemnation". (vs18) We are guilty. Deserving of God's "wrath". (vs9,1:18) We are in no position to ask God to "come along-side" and become our "friend" as long as we are in sin. He will not countenance us.

However, let us consider what it is that happens when we have "repented toward God"(Acts20:21) and "received" Jesus Christ (Jn1:12) in "faith". (Rom4) How does Jesus Christ bring about "peace" (vs1) and "reconciliation" (vs10) with God?

Jesus "died for the ungodly".(vs6) Let us consider the nature of this sacrifice. Jesus did not die for "friends". People that He was "buddies" with. For those 'equal' to Him. As humans, if we are out with friends and/or family, and one is in peril of some situation, a person might risk life and limb to save that person out of a burning building or from a rushing stream. But if a gutter-bum were on the edge of peril, how many people would jump in to save such a person? But this is what Jesus did for us. We were less-than 'bums'. We were "sinners" and yet God loved us so much that He sent His Son (Jn3:16) Who died for us. (vs8)

What does Jesus' death do? It

- 1) saves us from God's wrath (vs9),
- 2) reconciles us to God (vs10), and
- 3) gives us joy. (vs11)

Where we were sinners and under condemnation, we are now "justified". (vs16) Our account has been stamped with "Paid in Full". Notice, again, that this is not something that -we- 'do'. Jesus did it with His death. It was all His efforts, love and grace. It is a "GIFT of righteousness". (vs17,Eph2:8)

While we will go into more detail on this in ch6, we were under the sentence of death, due to the sin of Adam. (vs18) The death of Christ brought about "justification of life". Adam's -life- of 'disobedience' brought about sin unto death, Jesus' -death- in 'obedience' brought about righteousness unto life. (vs19)

So many preach a false gospel of God being 'reconciled to man'. Bringing God down to our level. But when Christ died, he made atonement before God, as our High Priest, by sacrificing Himself "once for all". (Heb9:28) But He did not stay 'dead'. He rose again, and is presently seated at God's "right hand" making intercession for us. (Heb7:25) He is our Advocate. (1Jn2:1) As such, He has brought about reconciliation (vs10), bringing us before the Father, we can come "boldly" before the Father (Heb4:16) because He "-IS- our peace" (Eph2:14) as he "confesses" us (Rev3:5) before the Father. He has broken down the dividing wall of enmity. The Law that would condemn us. He has made us a "new man" (Eph2:15,2Cor5:17), and thus, "peace".

The extent of this reconciliation is demonstrated by the Law, which we could not keep. While Adam brought about death, God introduced the Law in order to show how exceeding sinful man is. (vs20) To show -just- 'how far' that chasm is between righteous, holy God; and rotten, sinful man. And, knowing how far separated we are from God due to sin; in turn, we understand 'how far' God reached to save us. How wide and broad His grace was, which entered our account with "Paid in Full." So that we might understand that to the degree "sin has reigned to death", to such a greater degree "grace [reigns] through righteousness to eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." (vs21)

Many 'christians' (small "c") do not have "joy", because they have not been saved. If we have truly understood the depths of our sin, and the extent of God's grace, the natural outcome and reaction to the transformation is "joy". When we realize -exactly-what- it is that Christ did for us when He died, then our reactions must echo Peter's words about Him, "...whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.." (1Pt1:8) If we have not experienced salvation, there is no -basis- for joy, or love for Christ. As Jesus said of the sinful woman who came to Him, "Therefore I say to you, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, he loves little. (Lk7:47)

However, the Christian's joy is of a different variety than the world's. The world cheers for the new car, vacation trips, and money they may win on game shows. A young man gives his girl a diamond ring or necklace, and seeing the sparkles, she excitedly jumps to him, showering him with kisses, because he gave her jewels. After all, the commercials tell us that "diamonds are forever". But notice for the Christian... "we glory in afflictions..." (vs3)

First of all, there is a 'love' for Christ. As the old song states, "...how can I do less than give Him my best, and live for Him completely..after all He's done for me" The early disciples "[rejoiced] that they were counted worthy to be shamed for His name." (Acts5:41)

There is also a calm growth that occurs as He "disciplines" us (Heb12:5-11) to result in "peaceable fruit of righteousness". Afflictions bring about patience. Patience results in experience. Hope. And when we have been through His training, we have no need to be ashamed. When God deals with us in such a manner, and we have matured, we 'understand' His love for us. He doesn't merely 'save' us and let us wander about any ol' way we please. He nurtures us with His love, and we understand the Holy Spirit which is given to us. (vs4-5)

A little object lesson to illustrate... Years ago my cat got into a scuffle with another cat, who bit him -real-good- in his rear paw. It became infected, and required a vet to clean up the mess and stitch it up. He remained -

indoors- for many months while recuperating. 'Had to be carried up and down the stairs to his food and 'box'. When the wraps came off, there was daily soaking for a period of time. Where he had been used to running and climbing at will, for a period of time he was dependent for 'personal' care and nurturing for everything. This healing time also caused a 'bond' to develop between him and me. During the healing as he began to chew on the stitches, when "no" was said a few times, by the 3rd "no" he would leave the stitches alone. He -understood-. When he was healed and now running loose again, when it was time to come in for the night, he would 'come' when called...rather than being out all night. If I walked down the street to visit a neighbor, he would come looking for me, meowing at me to "come home".

Same thing shepherds would do with wayward sheep. Only, they would - purposely- break a lamb's leg. (That's what the 'crook' was for.) Same thing would happen. As the lamb was -personally- nurtured back to health, a 'bond' would develop between shepherd and sheep, and the sheep would no longer run off and get lost.

The cat (and sheep) would be at 'peace', having been through 'affliction', and been nurtured through it. You see, God's salvation through Jesus Christ does not -merely- rescue us from God's wrath. He saved us by His own blood. He also nurtures us. It's a 'full-service' package-deal. His "grace through faith" (Eph2:8) is not anything we do. It is not of works. (vs9) But He does not stop there. "We are His -WORKMANSHIP-, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."(vs10)

So, just as an obedient child who has experienced a parent's nurturing 'looks forward to' the parent's return after being away, and runs into their arms; in the same way the Believer can come "boldly" (Heb4:16) to the Father as Jesus "confesses" us before Him. (Rev3:5) As we have "hope" (vs4) looking forward to His "glorious appearing" (Tit2:13) we are prepared to meet Him with "clear conscience" (1Tm1:5,19) and unashamed. (vs5)

With such an outlook regarding our Holy Father after He has saved us and nurtured us, there is truly "peace with God."

Living in Newness of Life - (Chapter 6)

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound? Let it not be! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (vs1-2) "Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? Let it not be! (vs15)

There is a grievous error being proclaimed today. It goes something like, "God loves you JUST AS YOU ARE. That's why He saw 'worth' in you and saved you. That's graaeesssss! It doesn't matter what you've been, God doesn't care. And once you're saved, God doesn't care how you live... graaeesssss."

That is NOT what God's 'grace' is about! As we saw last month, His grace saved us when we were worthless sinners. There was nothing desirable in us, and yet He saved us. (5:8) If we truly understand -what- takes place when God justifies us in Christ, we would understand the 'Christian life' better.

When Jesus died for us, -we- died -with- Him. (vs3-4) Before His death Jesus spoke of the 'baptism' that He had to undergo. (Mt20:22) Another label for His crucifixion and death. And so, when we are saved, we are receiving the 'baptism' which Jesus accomplished for us. Dying and being buried. This is not 'water' baptism we are speaking of. This is the REAL THING. The event which the water -merely- outwardly 'symbolizes'. But this event is that which occurs in the heart. (2:29,10:9,Acts8:37)

This event "joins" (vs5) us to Christ. Jesus is the 'head' (Eph5:23), and we join the 'body of Christ'. (Col1:18,2:17) And, no, this is -NOT- 'church membership' to some 'local' body. This is the body of -all- those who "name the name of Christ". (2tm2:19) Part of the larger "family in heaven and earth" who are named in God's name. (Eph3:14-15) This is that 'unity' which Christ accomplished which He prayed about in Jn17, "that they also may be one in Us.."(vs21) the symbolism of "the two..shall be one.." (Eph5:31) as Paul equates the union of Christ and the Church to the marriage bonds of husband and wife.

Just as our 'joy', once saved, is nurtured in 'affliction' (5:3), our 'marriage' in Christ begins with -DEATH-. In order to come to Christ, we DIE. Before we can be "born again" (Jn3:3) the 'seed' which Christ the 'Sower' (Mt13:3) plants must die. (Jn12:24,1Co15:36) Our old self must be "put to death" (Col3:3,5) as we are "crucified with Christ". (vs6,Gal2:20)

And this, right here, separates most modern "invitations, decisions, commitments, etc" as flawed. People want a 'marriage' with flowers, beautiful music, feelings of romance and happiness. They want to take on Jesus, 'add Him' to their lives, for Him to come-along, take their hand, and

romance-WITH-them, as they wish to la-dee-da along their way. -THEIR-way. And their songs of Christ are swoony "love songs".

DEATH !?! Oh, no! That is much too painful and grotesque! It is not 'enlightened'. It does not boost my 'self-esteem'. It means I would have to humble myself and admit that I'm a 'nothing' and worthless. And we can't have that!!

But notice what happens when we join with Christ in His death. Christ was raised from the dead. (vs4,1Cor15:20) "We shall also be [joined] in the likeness of His resurrection." (vs5) John tells us, "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1Jn3:2) "..we shall also live with Him." (vs8) If we do submit to Him in death we are told, after we've 'mourned and wept', "be humbled before the Lord, and He will lift you up." (Jas4:10) If we are, thus, "in Christ, [we] are a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2Cor5:17)

This 'death' and 'resurrection' now makes us "dead to sin" and "alive to God". (vs10-11) Remember from our previous lessons, death came about due to Adam's sin. We were born in sin. But 'now', due to our death with Christ, and our joining Him in newness of life, there is no more death. "..death no longer has dominion..." (vs9)

Thus, the 'natural' outcome of all this is that we are not going to sin. Why would we? Our new natures are not natures 'of death' (and sin). (Next chapter we will see the struggle between the spirit and the flesh.) But, in our transformation, we are to "count yourselves also to be truly dead to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord." (vs11) This word "count" is the same accounting term we considered in (4:9) as "reckon". We may still, temporarily, be in these "bodies of death" (7:24,1Cor15:50-54), but we are to live as those who are "alive to God".

Therefore, we are exhorted, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts." (vs12) This is a command. Because our bodies are yet 'mortal' and full of 'corruption' (1Cor15:53) this is a conscious choice we must make. How do we accomplish this?

YIELDING!

It's a matter of fellowship and headship. "Yield your members..." (vs13) To whom do we hand over the controls to our life? Do we go hang out with the old swinging, partying friends? Or do we give ourselves to the Lord, to do with as He chooses, having said, "what will You have me to do?" (Acts9:6) We cannot have it both ways. Remember, Jesus said, "you cannot serve two masters." (Mt6:24) If you wish to live 'both' lives, you will have -defaulted- to "unrighteousness to sin".

This 'yielding' is a 'slavery'. It is 'bondage'. Whether a person wants to admit it or not, if they wish to control their own life, they are in bondage to

sin. But when a person dies with Christ, dies -to- sin (repents), he becomes a 'slave' (to obey) to righteousness. This obedience is "from the HEART". (vs17) Humanity has a built-in sense of 'belonging'. Belonging to -some- entity or person.

So, a person might object, "isn't God awfully demanding? See? It's just like everybody says. He has all these 'expectations' of us." Well, when we were in sin, certainly, we were 'free' from God. (vs20) But look at the life in sin. Debauchery, lust, hate, anger, etc. All the things that lead to unhappiness and discontent while in this life; and ultimately leads to death. It was these -things- which your God-given conscience indicated to you as you came to Him in repentance.

But you see, the 'bondage' of Christ leads to life. When Jesus invites, He says, "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt11:28) You see, "rest" is the thing God gives to those who yield to Him. When a person comes to Faith in Christ, they "...enter into His rest.." (Heb3:18) One of the characteristics of Eternity with God is "rest from their labors" (Rev14:13) But as long as a person is in sin, he is weighed down.

Thus, Jesus' invitation is "Take my yoke on you.." (Mt11:29) A yoke was a farming instrument to 'connect' the ox or horse to the plow, to do work. But Jesus says, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (vs30) But we must yield to Him. When we do, we understand meekness and humility, as we "learn of" Christ; as we learn to have the mind "in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (Phil2:5) But with this yoke a person finds "rest to your souls."

Yes, it might be "slavery" to God. (vs22) But the fruits are "holiness." We are "free from sin" [and its result ..'death']. The ultimate result is "everlasting life." Furthermore, if you find this to be an impossible situation for you, you didn't really die with Christ. You are not "dead to sin." You were not saved. You were not raised with Him. You are "yet in your sins." (1Cor15:17)

In case you're still struggling with how to proceed with your life, a little reminder: "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God [while His 'slave'] is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (vs23)

But if you have "died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God" (Col3:3) and are looking forward to "be[ing] like Him" when He is revealed and we "see Him as He is" ...then "everyone who has this hope on him [will live a pure life], even as He is pure" (1Jn3:2-3) as we "[live] to God" (vs10)

The Two Laws - Marriage - (Chapter 7)

If we have died and been buried with Christ through baptism, and the matter of living in "righteousness to God" (6:13) is -simply- a matter of considering ourselves as "dead to sin" and of yielding in submission as slaves to God, how come we still sin? If in being raised with Christ to "newness of life" (6:4) where the new birth (Jn3:3) makes us "new creatures" and everything has "become new" (2Cor5:17) why is it such a STRUGGLE to live pure and righteous lives before God?

As Believers we -want- to be obedient to God and His laws, knowing that His commandments are good. But something draws us away to disobey, and we actually -enjoy- doing those things we "hate". Paul says, "For what I desire, that I do not do; but what I hate, that I do." (vs15,19)

For all this "righteousness of God" which we have, there is "sin that dwells in me." (vs17,20-21) How can this be? John wrote, "Everyone who abides in Him does not sin. Everyone who sins has not seen Him nor known Him." (1Jn3:6) And again, "Everyone who has been born of God does not commit sin, because His seed remains in him, and he -cannot- sin, because he has been born of God." (vs9) Paul says there is sin in us. John says, if you sin you're not of God. Who's right? Does the Bible contradict itself? Oh, but then, John had said earlier, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1Jn1:8) Well, there you have it! John can't even decide!

[Ed: For John's perspective on this the reader is directed to the website "Library" where you will find a study series on the complete book of 1John]

Paul speaks of "Law". Remember how we -died- to sin, and -arose- to Christ, to newness of life. Just as we die to sin and whoever is in charge of sin, we also die to Law and its jurisdiction. As long as a person is alive, the law can fine, imprison or execute a person. Once a person is dead, there is nothing further the law can do regarding that person.

The marriage "trust" which the two pledge to each other is, "until death do us part." The only form of RE-marriage God ordained was for widow/ers. Where -death- had taken one of the two. God ordained, "two become one". (Gen2:24) And Jesus confirmed that law, "what God has joined, let not man separate." (Mt19:6) Any other form of remarriage, according to Law, is "adultery". (vs1-3)

Now, we have just a bit of a dichotomy about the Law. On one hand, the Law is God's Law. It is holy, just and good. (vs12,16) God had commanded regarding the keeping of it, "And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live in them. I am the LORD." (Lev18:5)

However, the Law is also the basis for judgment. If there was no speed-limit law, a person cannot receive a citation for going too fast. In similar fashion, although a person's conscience (2:15) may tell him that lying is wrong, he can't be judged for lying unless there is a law that says, "you shall not lie." When God's only stipulation was, "don't eat of -that- tree" - that- tree became the focus for lust. "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, worked in me all kinds of lust." (vs8) You see, without the Law, there are no 'teeth' against sin. There is no understanding of something existing called "sin". This is why -that- tree was called the "Tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen2:9) Without a law or the breaking of the law, there is no understanding of the -concept- of sin. Sin does not 'exist'. (vs8) There is no death, as mankind was "alive" once without the law. (vs9)

But as soon as there was the Law, then sin had things to grab on to. Start churning and manipulating. Things to be 'curious' about and 'investigate'; which is what the serpent 'helped' Eve along with. How many little children would not be drowned if there hadn't been a "law" which said, "don't go near the pool." As soon as the law says, don't go there, the attention is turned towards the pool, and then, curiosity, investigation...and 'splash'...they're -in- the pool. Did that make the parents "bad" because they warned, "don't..."? No, the warning was good. Just like God's law, if it was observed, the child would not drown... they would "live".

Although it is good, the Law focuses the attention on what is bad, and we tend to do what our attention is focused on. Just like they teach in motorcycle safety classes: If you're maneuvering around objects, or riding near a ditch, or such obstacles; if the attention is focused on that telephone pole or ditch, that's where you're going to end up. What you want to do: You notice the object is there, but focus your attention on where you want the motorcycle to go. Which is why Paul writes about "laying aside" all the obstacles to the Christian life and "sin", focusing our attention instead, "looking unto Jesus..." (Heb12:1-2)

Thing is... there are -two- laws. And correspondingly, two "natures". God's Law is "spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." (vs14) We maybe have died and risen with Christ, but "evil is present with me." (vs21) This word "present" indicates that this evil is not "part -of-" me, but it's near-by, 'tagging along'. It is not a part of that "new birth" (Jn3:3) or part of Christ. Which is why John wrote, "his -seed- remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." (1Jn3:9) When we are born in Christ, we have Christ's nature, but there is sin which tags along and follows us around. How does it do so?

"..I am carnal". Still in the "flesh". (vs14) I "delight in the law of God according to the -INWARD- man." (vs22) We are 'tripartite' beings. We are comprised of "spirit, soul and body". (1Th5:23) The "inward man" is the 'spiritual'. -That- part has no problem being obedient to God and His laws. But there is -another- law "in my members, warring against the law of my

mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin being in my members." (vs23) While our spirits are saved, our -bodies- are yet in sin.

In another recent study with the people on the E-list, we considered how when a person comes to Faith in Christ, that Faith did not change certain -physical- situations about the person. If their body had tattoos or scars prior to salvation, the New Birth did not erase those -physical- features. Nor did it change the status of one's -physical- "marriage bed" in terms of divorce and remarriage.

When we were buried and raised with Christ (6:4) that was -spiritual-. But our -bodies- are yet beset with their carnal frailties. The carnal is yet 'tagging along' and -wanting- its way. And so it contrives to get its way by manipulating the mind. (vs23) If a person thinks about it, temptation to sensual lust, for example, begins with the body. One's own hormones, the visual sensation of that which is "desirable", and everything works on the mind, then, to contrive satisfaction... for the -flesh-.

Notice Paul's great cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the -BODY- of this death?" (vs24) In Ch8 he will speak of the "redemption of our body." (vs23) At the resurrection/rapture notice that it is "flesh and blood" which will be "changed". (1Cor15:50-51)

As we exist presently, no matter how wonderful the Believer, we CANNOT get to heaven. We may have come to God in repentance and received Jesus Christ as our sole Savior from sin, but we cannot -yet- go to heaven. Because of these -BODIES-. "...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption." (1Cor15:50) Our salvation is not yet 'complete' for all three parts of our being. Paul says, "Not as though I had -already- attained, either were already perfect..My brothers, I do not count myself to have -TAKEN- possession..." (Phil3:12-13) But we have the "sealing" with the Holy Spirit of -PROMISE-. (Eph1:13) It is our sure "hope".

This is why Christ's -physical- resurrection is so important. His resurrection insures a "living hope" of the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and unfading, reserved in Heaven for you." Which is why the "security" of God's salvation is so precious. This aspect of our salvation is "ready to be revealed in the last time" (1Pt1:3-5) at His "glorious appearing" (Tit2:13) when Believers are raised from the dead and living ones caught up to "meet the Lord in the air" (1Th4:17) at which time "when He shall be revealed, we shall be like Him" ..because we will have been "changed" as the "corruptible [put on] incorruption" (1Cor15:52) ..as we "see Him as He is." (1Jn3:2)

[Ed: Think about how the "wedding garment" might fit here. (Mt22:11-12) Possibly something different than the "robe of righteousness"? (Isa61:10, Rev7:9)]

But for now "...with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." (vs25b)

How do I gain victory over the flesh? "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (vs25a) And -how- is this accomplished? "Oh...just turn it over to the Lord!" ...flutter the eyelids a bit and don a pious expression? Not quite!

Marriage! When we died with Christ, we not only died to sin, but also to the Law which condemned sin. Since we are now "free" from the law and sin, we are "free" to "be married to Another [Christ], even to Him raised from the dead.." (vs4) Thus, Paul exhorts, "stand fast therefore in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and do not again be held [entangled-nkjv] with the yoke of bondage." (Gal5:1)

When a couple is newly married, in a 'healthy' marriage the two do not necessarily seek out each other as to what "laws/rules" the other -requires- of them. The "law" that now exists is the law of 'love'. The -desire- to 'please' the other; to do what the other wants. Just as wives are "subject to" their husbands (Eph5:22,Col3:18), if we love Him [our "Husband"] we will keep His commandments. (Jn14:15)

And so, if our flesh tempts us to lust away after sin, sin now has a new label. "Adultery". "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (Jas4:4) The O.T. prophets spoke much of Israel's "whoredom" against God. In other words, with our "marriage" relationship with Christ, if we are led away into sin, we are being "UNFAITHFUL" to our "Spouse", Jesus Christ.

So, how do we achieve victory over sin? Do we begin to see how the pharisaical approach of "legalism" just doesn't 'cut' it? Is impossible? Legalists judge everything by "law". They look -to- the Law, instead of Christ. They busy themselves with their KJV-derived "appearances" of evil (1Th5:22) in terms of what "looks" good or bad, rather than looking within their own hearts and their relationship with Christ. They forget that the Law was much too cumbersome and impossible to keep. They do not accept the "simplicity that is in Christ" (2Cor11:3), forgetting that He promised, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Mt11:30)

Victory comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. Through our marriage "Pledge of Faith" to Him. "-ABIDING-" in Him (Jn15:4) and bearing "much fruit" (vs5) "to God". (Rom7:4b) If we in this manner continually "put on" the Lord Jesus (Rom13:14) we won't have time for the flesh.

The Spiritual Life - (Chapter 8)

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. But the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." (vs1-2)

Remember that we died with Christ. (6:3) When we died to sin (6:11) we also died to the law which condemned sin. (7:4) We now are under a new law in our "marriage" to Christ (7:4); the "Law of the Spirit of life." (vs2) Since we died to the old law, we are also no longer under its condemnation.

The new life is a "spiritual" life. Yet, we are still in these bodies. But we are given a means by which to bring these bodies in line with the spiritual. The "mind". The flesh is weak, and manifested the weakness of the law. The flesh could not keep the law. By the law was death. Those who mind the things of the flesh do so unto death. (vs5-6) The 'pharisees' who try to live unto God through the Law have a losing battle, because the Law indicates the carnal mind which is enmity against God. When they have their minds on the Law, it is impossible for them to be subject to God. (vs7) The "carnal" mind is similar to the "natural" man who does not receive the things of the Spirit of God..neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1Cor2:14) So, if you try to live according to the flesh, you -cannot- please God. (vs8)

This is why Jesus had to "come in the flesh". (1Jn4:2) In so doing, and dying in the flesh on the cross, He "condemned sin in the flesh". (vs3)

So, the life in Christ is a "walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (vs4) We set our "minds" according to the "things of the Spirit." (vs5) "Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth" as we "seek those things which are above..." (Col3:1-2) The Spiritual life is one of "life and peace." (vs6)

In a proper translation you will notice that "Spirit" in this chapter is capitalized; indicating the -Person- of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised His coming in John16. And in this chapter (ch8) we come down to the crux of the Christian life. The nature of the Believer. How do we live for God successfully? We are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you." (vs9) How do we live successfully pleasing to God? In the Holy Spirit, because He [the Holy Spirit] dwells -in- you.

Of all the verses in the N.T. this verse (Rom8:9) may quite likely be -THE- KEY to living for the Lord. It tells how to live, and defines a "Believer." A True Believer is one, by definition, who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Because, notice, "if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, this one is not of

Him." If you think you're a "Christian", but are also 'waiting' to receive the Spirit, you are not a Christian. At Salvation the Holy Spirit "seals" us with a "promise" (Eph1:13) and indwells us. (1Cor3:16) And so, now that the Spirit indwells us, our living is according to the Spirit, not the flesh.

It is because of the Holy Spirit that our "mortal" bodies can have life. (vs11) Remember: "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1Cor15:53)

Therefore we are no longer "debtors" to the flesh to live fleshly lives. (vs12) Remember how we are slaves, either to sin or to God? (ch6) When we died to the flesh and the Law, we are no longer bound to the flesh to obey it. We have "freedom" NOT to. Now, if we insist on continuing in the flesh we will die. Paul spoke of "deliver [a deliberately sinning one] to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved..." (1Cor5:5) And again, "If anyone defiles the temple [physical body] of God, God shall destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which you are." (1Cor3:17) But the one who "through the Spirit mortifies [kills] the deeds of the body" shall live. (vs13)

We are no longer slaves in the same sense we were "in bondage" to sin, but are "sons of God." (vs14; Gal3:26, Phil2:15) We are no longer "servants" but "friends" of Christ. (Jn15:15) We are no longer slaves who live in little cottages along the periphery of the property, but as "adopted" sons, we can run into the main living quarters and 'jump into His lap' as we cry out "Abba Father!" ...'Daddy, Daddy!' (vs15)

How do we know that we "belong"? Again, the "Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit Who resides within us (vs9) is the One Who confirms to our heart that we belong. (vs16) Now, if that Spirit does not reside, thus indicating that we don't belong, we will not receive that "witness". If He resides and has given you the "witness", you know it. If you "don't know" or are wondering "what it's like" to know the Holy Spirit "bearing witness", then that's a pretty sure sign you do NOT 'belong'.

And be sure that Satan will give you -imitation- 'experiences' which you will "feel" in your emotions. But those are not the Real Thing. One of the best ways to know the Holy Spirit is through God's Word. The Holy Spirit propelled the writers who wrote it down. If that Word comes "alive" to you, you will know the "witness", because it is the same Holy Spirit Who wrote it in the first place. If you experience an emotional 'high' where Scripture is -specifically- Set Aside in order to conjure up these emotions, you -KNOW- that that experience is -NOT- God's Holy Spirit. This witness will not come through the highly-charged emotional meetings where the Rock band is playing, and people are jumping and swaying as they "praise the Lord"...as the "strong wind, earthquake and -fire-" are stirring you up and bowling you over. But it will come in His "still, small voice" (1Kg19:12) as you are in "your room..shutting your door" with your Father "in secret". (Mt6:6) This "witness" is the very ESSENCE of -true- "prayer".

What is the result of living the Spiritual life? Happy-happy, smiles, swoon, jump up-n-down, clapping the hands?? If we are "joint-heirs" with Christ, we will also "SUFFER with Him." But then, we will also be "glorified together." (vs17) Let us never forget that Jesus never promised a garage full of expensive cars, and earthly mansions with gold-plated fixtures; or that we would "FEEL good". We are promised "sufferings" (vs18) Jesus said, "in this world you -shall- have tribulation..." (Jn16:33) If they persecuted Jesus, they will also persecute the Believer. (15:20) Martyrdom is not the only form of persecution. "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall -SAY- all kinds of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for your reward in Heaven is great." (Mt5:11-12) Paul says, "I reckon [it's my opinion] that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed in us." (vs18) Just for one item of comparison: rich people have gold-plated house fixtures, but in Heaven gold is found as -street- composition! ..to be walked [trod] upon.

The sufferings and coming glory apply not only to Believers, but to creation itself. The "whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now" (vs22) because of sin's curse. One of the prophesied characteristics of Christ's coming earthly reign is that earth's violence will cease. No more "thorns" (Is55:13) and predatory animals will be at peace with their former victims. (Is11:6,65:25)

Even these bodies we inhabit will be "redeemed". (vs23) At present we "groan" in these bodies because of the "flesh" which wants us to sin, along with their frailties, illness and mortality. While we currently live in a time when Believers expect the Rapture imminently, those who continue on to physical death do so in "hope". The Hope of the resurrection. (Acts23:6,24:15) But our hope is a "living hope" (1Pt1:3) because of Jesus the "First-fruit". (1Cor15:20) It is called the "blessed hope, and the glorious appearing" of Jesus Christ. (Tit2:13)

How do we 'make it' through these sufferings and frailties? Again, the Spirit. (vs26) We are instructed to "pray" (1Th5:17,Jas5:13a) but the trouble is, we often don't know how to pray. Often, there are no -words- to adequately convey that which is in our hearts. Now, the 'pharisees' again have contrived a whole methodology regarding this, with special formulas and turns of phrase which appear to be "spiritual". And those who are "spiritual" amongst their number 'know' when a fellow-pray-er is praying "spiritually". On the other hand, there are those who claim to receive a special "spiritual language". A "prayer language". They condone themselves in this by distorting Paul's teachings in 1Cor12-14.

But notice Paul's teaching on this matter. We do not even -do- the praying! We don't know -how- to pray "as we ought." Therefore the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us. And these "groanings" are -NOT- uttered. (vs26) And notice Who else is in this prayer "partnership". The One

"searching the hearts." Who is that? The "Word of God" [Jesus Christ] - Who- knows us down to our soul and spirit, our thoughts and intents. (Heb4:12-13) It is Christ Whose present "job" is that of -interceding- for us. (vs34) Not only does Christ -know- us, He also knows the "mind of the Spirit" Who is in us. Between the two of Them, our prayer comes before the Father.

With this kind of "Spiritual" life, nothing goes wrong with our lives. God "chose" us (vs29) and does a "workmanship" in us. (Eph2:10) He does not abandon us. He sees to it that "all things work together for good". (vs28) Yes, there may be sufferings, and we will make wrong choices along the way, but God knows the end from the beginning (Is46:10) He called, justified and glorified us. (vs30) So if He -did- all these things -for- us, how can anything come against us? (vs31) If God went to all the trouble to break up the fellowship of the God-head in order to "crush" Jesus in judgment (Is53:10) to inflict His wrath upon Him for our salvation; surely He is not going to abandon us to failure, but will "freely give us all things." (vs32) God "so loved" that He gave His only begotten Son. (Jn3:16) If the Lord and Creator of the universe went to all this trouble to save us, will He not also guarantee and assure our safe-keeping!

Notice the 'list' of adversities that will try us. (vs35-39) We will have trials and afflictions from earthly things and spiritual forces. But even Satan, himself (principalities-powers) cannot separate us from the "love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (vs39) Who can condemn us before God? It is God, Himself, Who justifies us. (vs33) And we've got the best "litigator" in the business Who "also intercedes for us" (vs34) since He is our "Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1Jn2:1)

The Spiritual life is a win-win situation. The Holy Spirit indwells us. He assures us through His "witness" that we belong. We are "adopted" as "joint-heirs" with Christ. We have the "hope" of the redemption of our bodies out of this flesh. Communion with the Father is jointly with the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. And we are safely kept in His love, and guarded against any force which would try to remove us from our standing with God.

Our only "work" in all this is to be "spiritually minded" (vs6) and allow God to "conform" us "to the image" of Jesus Christ. (vs29) And when "hope" is fulfilled, we anticipate being "like Him" when we "see Him as He is." (1Jn3:2) A person with such a "hope..purifies himself, even as [Christ] is pure." (vs3)

True Israel and Faith - (Chapter 9)

I tell the truth in Christ...that I have great heaviness and continual pain in my heart. For I myself was wishing to be accursed from Christ for my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites..." (~vs1-4)

What a level of love that most of us do not understand! For all the accusations and persecutions the Jews hurled upon Paul, he says here that he would not only give his life, but that if Israel would be saved as a result, he would even give up his salvation for their sake.

How many of us even 'care' about those we know who are in the "church"? The relationship Paul had with Israel is the same as many Believers have with the "church". Paul was a "Jew" of the tribe of Benjamin, had participated in all the Jewish rituals, and was an up-n-coming Pharisee. (Phil3:5) Israel had been given all of God's blessings. Salvation was "of the Jews" (Jn4:22b) The Law came through them. (vs4) They were keepers of the Scriptures. (3:2) Worship of God was required to happen from Jerusalem at the temple. (vs4,Deu16:5-6) And it was through Israel that Christ came "according to flesh" as "humanity". (vs5,1Jn4:2-3)

But he notes, "...not all those of Israel are Israel." (vs6) What does he mean? Is this a bunch of double-talk? Isn't red red? 2 equals 2. Israel is Israel. Right? Well, no. There are two -kinds- of "Israel". Many who confuse the "Church" and "Israel" as being the same misunderstand this. Even Israel misunderstood this.

There is Israel, the physical, genetic descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The physical bodies and souls of the Israeli nation/race. The -people-. And then, there is "Spiritual" Israel. Those who are of the "faith of Abraham". (4:16) Those who are of "promise". (vs8-9)

All of Israel, physically, left Egypt and ate manna in the wilderness. They all heard God's voice from Sinai. They all went through the Red Sea. They all received the Law. They all participated in the rituals of worship to God. And yes, they followed Christ (figuratively). "But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were scattered in the wilderness." (1Cor10:1-5) If you read in the Law, any "foreigner" who wished to worship God had to participate in Jewish ritual and be circumcised. Essentially, a person who believed in and worshiped God was labeled a "Jew". If you wanted to worship God, you followed Jewish ritual. Even in exile, although Daniel called Him the "God in Heaven" (Dan2:28) He became known as the "God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego." (Dan3:29) The Jewish God. And again, the "God of Daniel." (Dan6:26)

Again, it's a difference between the physical and the heart. The -Spiritual- Israel is "not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that outwardly in flesh..." (2:28) This is what the Jews who killed Jesus looked

to. Their fleshly rituals. But God did not call out Abraham and make all the promises just to have a unique, distinct 'race' of people, genetically. God's call was for the purpose of providing "Salvation" to sinful man as a provision because of Adam and Eve's sin at Eden. If it is merely a "racial" question, God made all mankind equally of "one blood". (Acts17:26) But "Israel" was a chosen race (1Pt2:9) for the purpose of providing salvation to the whole world (Jn3:16) through them. (Gen12:3b) The "whole point" in having Israel, at all, was for Salvation. Thus, the true understanding is that "he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart; in spirit and not in letter, whose praise is not from men, but from God." (2:29)

So, we see "...not all those of Israel are Israel." (vs6) In other words, Not all those who are physical descendants of Abraham are Believers in God. You see, while most of Babylon looked at the "God of Israel", Nebuchadnezzar was humbled by God and received "understanding" and then "blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him who lives forever, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom..." (Dan4:34) He became a Believer and said, "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and exalt and honor the King of Heaven.." (vs37) It was no longer "Jew" to him, but a personal Faith in the Most High.

So, Paul looks at those labeled "Israel" with the realization that they were not all "Believers", and says "I have great heaviness and continual pain in my heart.." for them.

Today we have a similar entity. It has the Scriptures, doctrine and worship of God. They make certain claims to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Something called the "Church" comprised of "Christians". Let's adapt Paul's words, 'for not all those of the church are the Church'. Or, in other words, 'not all christians are Christians'.

Over the years I have been blessed to have been in a lot of churches. As a missionary kid on furlough in deputation meetings. Concert tours ministering to many churches. Participating in crusades musically. That's a -lot- of people. But in recent years that "blessing" has become a curse. A heaviness on the heart. As a realization of the true state of the "church" has burdened my heart, I have often spent entire mornings, while working, in mourning, with tears; realizing that those hundreds (or thousands) of people I have known of in some manner, are not the "Church" (capital "C"). Many of them are not only deceived, but as Paul wrote, "For many are walking, of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping, as the enemies of the cross of Christ;" (Phil3:18) The tears come because of the knowledge that their "end is destruction.." (vs19)

Even though God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2Pt3:9) how is the determination made as to "who" is going to be saved? There are some who follow some of the past "great men of God" and declare a grievous error from this chapter. They suppose that God goes 'eeny, meeny, mynee, mo' ... I'm gonna pick you, you, and

you. But the rest of you I'm gonna cast away. And that His "picking" is something the person has "no choice" about. A person who is going to be saved can't help BUT be saved, and the lost has no choice BUT to be doomed. That those thus saved come as a result of "irresistible grace". After all, vs18 says, "He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will, He hardens."

Let's look at what God had to 'work with' for a moment. Even though Noah and family had been saved through the flood, the ensuing world became corrupt again, immediately, because "all the world lies in evil" (1Jn5:19) "Jehovah looked down from Heaven on the sons of men, to see if there were any who understood and sought God. All have gone aside, together they are filthy; there is none who does good, no, not one." (Ps14:2-3) He had, essentially, NOTHING to work with. Just lumps of clay. Worthless. So He 'picked' a particular lump, Abraham. On what basis did He do so? "Foreknowledge" "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.." (8:29) And regarding Israel, He "foreknew" them. (11:2) You see, while all we see is "lumps" of clay, "God looks on the heart". (1Sam16:7) He sees clear into the "dividing apart of soul and spirit" (Heb4:12) He knows all things (Jn2:24,18:4) and the "end from the beginning" (Is46:10)

Did God's 'choosing' of Jacob in the womb hinder Esau? (vs13) No. Esau had no "place for repentance". (Heb12:17) Did God's choosing of Jacob's "seed" condemn Esau's descendants? No. Job was Esau's descendent (Job1:1, Gen36:28, Lam4:21), and was a righteous man before God. (Job1:8,42:7,12)

When God 'chose' Pharaoh (vs17) to show His power, was Pharaoh an "innocent victim" of God's wrath? (vs19) Not hardly! God said, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart" (Ex7:3) But notice that he (Pharaoh) had ALREADY hardened his -own- heart when he retorted, "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey His voice? I know not the Lord..." (Ex5:2) He had already made his choice. So, God took what was already determined, augmented and used it to show forth His glory.

When God uses a "lump" as a "vessel..to dishonor" (vs21) does He do so with glee, without them having a chance to repent or soften their hearts? No. He "[endures] with much long-suffering". (vs22) His "long-suffering" is because He is "not willing that any should perish". (2Pt3:9) He does not wish to punish sinners. Through the prophet He asks the question, "Do I actually delight in the death of the wicked? says the Lord Jehovah. Is it not that he should turn from his ways and live?" (Ez18:23)

So, we come back to Israel. God chose Abraham and Jacob. The nation of Israel. A national entity through whom to bring "blessing" to the world. (Gen12:3,28:14) Israel, as a nation and label, the 'avenue' to Salvation. But even though God chose them -nationally-, on an -individual- level they were not all "Israel", even though they could trace their blood lineage back

to Abraham. There is "free-will". People who espouse "predestination" without understanding "free-will" need to understand this. God "chose", "elected" and "predestined" Israel, but for the most part they rebelled. God had chosen to create Adam and Eve in perfection, but He also gave them the -ability- to disobey. The ones of Israel who are "not Israel" are thus because of "unbelief". (Heb3:19) They think they are Israel because of the "works of the Law." But they are not "of faith". (vs32)

But God has selected "vessels to honor". In His foreknowledge He "prepared" them "before" so that He could "make known the riches of His glory" (vs23) This was true of Israel where He assured Elijah, "Yet I have left seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal.." (1Kg19:18) The same is true today of the Church. This entity, the "Church", made up of predominantly Gentiles for a time (we'll discuss this at length in ch11), is presently the Body that worships, serves God, and is recipient of His promises. (vs4) But just like with Israel, there is a "remnant [that] shall be saved." (vs27)

The end comes quickly. (vs28) What does it take to be part of that "remnant" group; either Israel or Gentile? Israel with all their Law pursued righteousness, but "did not arrive at...righteousness" (vs31) And yet, the Gentiles who didn't have this legacy of "election" nor a national heritage of righteousness "have taken on righteousness". (vs30) How? By faith. Israel, as an entity did not arrive, because all their striving was "not of faith" (vs32) but relied on the -ritual- of the Law. And when Christ came, they "stumbled" as he told what the Law -really- meant (see the study series in Matthew at the website Library) as He "fulfilled" the Law. (Mt5:17) What He taught did not "fit" their preconceptions. They were "offended" at Him. (vs33, Mt13:57)

To be a "remnant" the ones "believing on Him shall not be put to shame." (vs33) These are the ones of whom He says, "I will call those not My people, My people; and those not beloved, Beloved." (vs25) It was promised that Israel would be like the "sands of the sea" (vs27, Gen13:16) and the "stars of the sky" (Gen15:5) for multitude. But due to unbelief and rebellion, they were scattered into all the nations, and there have been many attempts to annihilate them. And so even nationally, compared to the rest of the world's populations, they are a "remnant" in the land; and presently, still, in unbelief. If it weren't for God's mercy on them, they wouldn't even exist as an entity, but would be like Sodom and Gomorrah. (vs29) But God's promises for Israel's future restoration are sure. They will be called, "sons of the living God." (vs26)

Israel Rejects the Call to Salvation - (Chapter 10)

Brothers, truly my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is for its salvation." (vs1)

First of all, before we get into the meat of this chapter, we should make an observation from this simple statement. When Paul speaks of "Israel" he is not speaking of the "Church". A definition of the Church is the Body of Christ (1Cor12:27), those who are Disciples. (Acts11:26) The Church consists of both Jews -and- Gentiles. (Eph2:12-16) Those that participate in the "faith of Christ". (Phil3:9) Those that are "saved". (Acts16:31) If a person does not fit into this definition, whether Jew or Gentile, they are not saved. They are not part of the Church.

When Paul expresses his desire and prayer regarding Israel, that they be saved; BY DEFINITION, they are not the Church. If they were, they would be "saved" and he would not have made such a statement. And conversely, the Church is not Israel. He is referring to the Israel that is not Israel. (9:6) The genetic descendants who make up Israel, nationally. Those who are yet in "unbelief". (Heb3:19) This is a good thing to keep in mind when confronted by some who apply prophecies and promises meant for Israel, to the Church. They take passages like Gal3:29 "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise", thinking this makes the Church -into- Israel and thus recipients of Israel's benefits; not understanding that Israel that -is- Israel, is so through "promise". (Rom9:8) They become Abraham's "seed" in Faith. (4:3) And in this sense, being more than -merely- Abraham's seed, but Christ's seed (1Jn3:9) through the new birth. God had promised Abraham, "in your Seed [capital "S"] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen22:18, Gal3:16) This Seed was Christ. So, when Paul speaks of "Abraham's seed" in Gal3:29, he is actually speaking of being "in Christ". (2Cor5:17) Being "Israel" of Israel. (Rom9:6) Being a [C]hristian christian.

Israel, just like much of the 'church', has been zealous for God. They work hard to measure up to some standard. The Law. But Paul expresses the same thing we have noted in our Matthew studies, that the law they kept was often of their own contrivances and efforts. When they would ask Jesus about the Law, He would speak of His "fulfilling" the Law (Mt5:17). And yet, when confronted by the Law's specifics, many of them would find themselves as coming up short of its requirements. And on the other hand, they would condemn Jesus for not observing -their- 'idea' of the Sabbath laws. (Jn9:16)

Paul now defines their problem. They didn't take God's Law to heart; but instead set "about to establish their own righteousness". (vs3) If they had truly kept the Law, they would have "lived". (vs5, Lev18:5) But their rebellious hearts did not understand, nor submit to the "Spirit" of God's Law. (Acts7:51, Rom2:29, 2Cor3:6)

And ultimately they rejected Jesus Christ, the "end of the Law for righteousness for everyone who believes." (vs4) Remember Abraham's "Seed". And then, the whole Law was set up to look -ahead- to Christ; beginning with Passover. Christ came as the "[Passover] lamb without blemish and without spot.." (1Pt1:19b) Now, if the Law looked ahead -to- Christ, and Christ has now come; what further need is there for the Law? There isn't. That's why He is the "end of the Law.." We'll come back to this momentarily...

Just another thought about the Law which they misunderstood. They tried to set about to "observe" the Law; but they did not understand the "keeping" of it. Perhaps I'm nit-picking with words, here, but... They were like many legalists today; busy, busy, busy trying to "do" the Law, or "not do" its prohibitions. Missing entirely the "fellowship" aspect of the relationship God desired with them. They were the "pupil of His eye" (Deu32:10,Zec2:8) as He dwelt among them in the pillar of fire and smoke. And then, when the temple was dedicated, His "glory" filled the temple (2Chr7:1) indicating His "presence" among them. When the Law was given, Moses exhorted that the Law was not something meant to be insidious and vicious, or difficult. But it was something to be kept in one's heart. "This commandment..is not hidden from you..but the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you may do it." (Deu30:11-14) Remember how Paul begins Romans when he speaks of the "conscience". (2:15) This conscience is -already- in the heart. The Law merely enumerates into words, what a person already innately knows. So, this is just another explanation of the fact that Israel's problem was a - heart- problem. The 'Law' was merely an excuse and symptom.

So, naturally, if they rejected the Law already in their hearts, they also rejected the "End" of the Law, Jesus Christ.

But now we're talking about the personal 'mechanisms' of being saved. Paul's heart-yearning is that Israel be saved. What he says regarding Israel's salvation is the same 'process' as for anybody; Jew and Gentile, alike. (vs12)

What is this "Word of Faith"? (vs8b) "..with the mouth you confess the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead.." What? "..you shall be saved.." (vs9)

Now, he defines what he has just said. "With the heart one believes unto righteousness." (vs10a) Remember that salvation is "by grace through faith...not of works" (Eph2:8-9) Abraham's 'righteousness' came about when he "believed God". (4:3)

"And with the mouth one confesses unto salvation." (vs10b) Can a person -merely- "believe" and be righteous? Certainly. God knows the heart. But we are also "body and soul" beings. How do -we- know we are saved?

Paul often speaks of the "mind". (Rom12:2,Eph4:23) How does our mind know we are saved if that faith doesn't make it "out" to that which the rest of the person understands? The -mouth- confesses. Proclaims. The mouth is a door to the heart. As Jesus said, "the things which come out of the mouth come from the heart.." (Mt15:18) Best way to tell the heart of a man is to be around when he smashes his thumb real hard with a hammer. What comes out of his mouth? Abraham "believed" God, but he proved and proclaimed it when he put his -only- son on the altar. (Jas2:21)

Anyone, Jew or Greek [Gentile] equally, who calls on Him, who does so "believing on Him shall not be put to shame." (vs11) He will not have to 'hang his head' when he stands before God, awaiting judgment; because there is "no condemnation". (8:1)

Now, we come to the favorite passage that used to be used in missions conferences. (Is it still?) If salvation comes about from "calling on the name of the Lord" (vs13, Joel2:32) they obviously have to 'believe' in Him. To believe in Him they need to "hear" of Him to know Who He is. Obviously, somebody needs to "tell" them. And then, naturally, the ones telling need to "go" to where the unsaved are, in order for them to hear.

There's the ol' favorite song with words, "Bring them in, bring them in..." And most churches use the song to stir people up to bring the unsaved in -to- the church meetings. Is that what this passage says? The ones who reach them are "sent" to "preach the gospel of peace.." (vs15) How many churches expect the unsaved to "come in" to the "church" to -then- "get them saved"?

First of all, until the lost are saved, they don't even -belong- in the assembly! In the O.T. God's direction was quite specific about keeping the profane out of God's presence. And they had the gatekeepers "so that the unclean in any way could not go in." (2Chr23:19) Preachers need to be "sent" to the lost, to bring (take) the gospel -to- them.

Not everyone who hears will be saved. "But they have not all obeyed the gospel." (vs16) Even when Jesus came "to His own [Israel]...His own received Him not." (Jn1:11) He -was- "sent" to Israel who was not Israel, and "though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they did not believe on Him" (Jn12:37) fulfilling the prophecy, "Lord, who has believed our report?" (Jn12:38,Isa53:1) And even today Israel rejects Him, even to the refusal to read that prophecy. Isaiah 53 is a "banned" chapter to orthodox Jews. Not only -did- they reject Him then, they still reject the prophecy that foretold their rejection of Him. 'Don't confuse me with facts, I've got my mind made up!'

What is the -basis- for Faith? Experience? Feelings? Emotions? Invitations? "Faith is of hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (vs17) Do you see why the apostasy LAYS ASIDE God's Word? Why they "tear down the walls" of Doctrine? When they have their "spirit-filled" meetings,

just "praising the Lord", preachers are often heard to say, "We won't have Scripture tonight; we've had the spirit." But you see, if it is not the Word of God, it is NOT Salvation! A person cannot be saved without God's Word. When the Ethiopian asked if he could be baptized, what was he doing? He had been reading the Scriptures. (Acts8) And Philip was sent, joined him and "preached the gospel of Jesus" to him.

The Holy Spirit, who propelled the writers of the Scriptures in the first place (2Pt1:21), is the 'conduit' for God's Word, pointing people to God's Word, Jesus Christ. (Jn16:13-15) If the meeting is all about being "spirit-filled" and being blessed "in the spirit", the attention is being focused on whatever "spirit" is being conjured up with their shamanism. If these "spirit-filled" meetings don't include God's Word or doctrine, then, the spirit in that meeting was NOT God's Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is not to be the focus, Jesus Christ is. We are not exhorted to be "looking to the spirit" but rather, being "filled with the Spirit" (Eph5:18) and "looking unto Jesus..." (Heb12:2)

By the same token, a "christian concert" (whether rock, classical or gospel), if God's Word is not present, does NOT produce converts to Christ. People may become emotionally worked up, and in tears, because of the power of the music. But if the music was not overflowing with God's Word, those people coming forward are -NOT- "being saved"! Period! No ifs, ands, or buts! The 3000 that came to Christ in Acts2 did not attend a concert. They heard PREACHING of God's Word. (This is one reason I'm no longer a "musician"!)

If you forget everything else from this lesson, remember this one verse! Etch it in your mind and heart! Mark it in your Bible and memorize it! "Faith [Salvation] is of hearing, and hearing by the... what? WORD-of-GOD." (vs17)

But Israel rejected. And God attempted to draw them. "All day long I have stretched forth My hands to a disobeying and gainsaying people." (vs21) He sent His 'preachers' (vs15,18) so they would hear, "rising early and sending them". (Jer25:4) God then turned His attention on the Gentiles, those whose only knowledge of God was as the "unknown God" (Acts17:23), and "became known to [them]" (vs20) as Paul was the "apostle to the Gentiles". (11:13, 2Tm1:11) Even when Jesus preached to them, He compared them and said that if His message and miracles had been presented to Sodom or Tyre and Sidon, that -they- (the heathen) would have listened and repented. (Mt11) Trying every which way to 'get through' to Israel. If they won't hear straight-forward preaching, let's try to stir up their "jealousy" (vs19) by showing them how others are hearing and receiving, or would have.

But they "disobeyed" (vs21) and in "anger" (vs19) cried out, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mt27:25) and subsequently went into dispersion like "stubble" in the "winds of the wilderness" (Jer13:24) after

Paul had made a final proclamation against them, "Therefore be it known to you that the salvation of God is sent to the nations [Gentiles], and they will hear." (Acts28:28)

Israel's Fall and Restoration - (Chapter 11)

Did not God put away His people? Let it not be! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." (vs1)

It continually amazes me when I hear the arguments that say things like, "Israel is gone, it's the church now." They look at prophecies written to and about Israel, apply them to the Church, with the argument that since God cast away Israel, all these things now 'must' apply to the Church. That the Church is "spiritual" Israel. So they teach things like the concept that the Church is to be "purified" before the Lord returns. That the Church is to go through God's wrath of what is often called "the Tribulation". That the rapture of the Church occurs at the -end- of the Tribulation.

Paul gives his own credentials as an "Israelite". He could trace his lineage back to Benjamin. People today should simply "open their eyes" and -LOOK-. Look over in the middle-east. There is a -nation- over there called "Israel". These "church" people who say that Israel is "done for" are no better than the Arab peoples who refuse to label Israel on their maps as "Israel". But after years of being scattered like stubble (Jer13:24), they have again been a nation since 1948. And their military prowess has brought back memories of Joshua and David. And their continual strivings to -negotiate- with people who make no secret of their desire to obliterate Israel off the earth are reminiscent of their peace treaty with Gibeon. (Josh9) Obviously, they are still the same people! They still haven't learned! [Ed: This is being written in August. What new treaties may be in effect by the time this is mailed is hard to say.]

The fact that Israel currently is yet in unbelief (Heb3:19) is apparent. The "Israel My Glory" magazine each issue has a section by Zvi, a Christian Jew living in Israel. His column each time testifies to Israel's blindness to the Gospel, God's Word and their Messiah Whom they rejected 2000 years ago, and still do to this day, as Zvi witnesses to them from the Scriptures. The Temple Mount Faithful movement, while they seek to rebuild the temple, and have many preparations already in the works for that to happen, are in unbelief of their Messiah. Even today, they are "ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." (10:3) They are busy doing things "for God" to usher in Messiah's reign. (Just like the "christian" Restorationist movements.) But in their e-mail messages there is nothing about Faith in Christ, their Messiah Who -came-.

The Church is "Abraham's seed...according to the -promise-" (Gal3:29) because they are "Christ's". Jesus Christ Who -is- Abraham's "Seed". (Gen22:18) Israel of Israel. (9:6) Christian christian.

The ones who are purified during God's wrath are the "sons of Levi" (Mal3:3) which is something that is obviously necessary, as God's "woes" were pronounced upon the "shepherds" of Israel. (Jer23:1) Before His crucifixion Jesus pronounced "woe" to the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders. (Mt23:13-39) They even heaped woe upon themselves by crying out, "His blood be on us and on our children". (Mt27:25) So, yes, the "sons of Levi" (Levi, being the religious ruling tribe that was condemned) -need- to be purified. Israel, indeed, -will- go through the time of God's wrath, as only a third of them will survive alive..."refined". (Zech13:8-9)

No, God did not totally obliterate His people "whom He foreknew". (vs2) They were scattered like stubble into the nations. But He has kept them as a distinct people. Just like Elijah didn't think there were any Believers left, God informed him, "I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (vs4,1Kg19:18) Even in Paul's day he said there was a "remnant". Perhaps it is safe to say that even today there is a remnant? By his wording it would seem to be some group other than Jews who are part of the "Church"? Jews (by genetic heritage) who are part of the Church through Faith in Christ are united with Christ, together with Gentiles (Eph2:13-16) and will be part of the Rapture. But there obviously has to be some entity God works with when Israel is purified during His Wrath. I don't understand it, but accept that it is so. The "seven thousand" are labeled as ones who had not "bowed to Baal". But it doesn't necessarily say they were faithfully keeping all the Law. What is God's criteria for those making up this remnant? God knows. This remnant that "shall be saved". (vs26) Perhaps it is people like the "Temple Mount Faithful" who are presently "blind" and have not acknowledged their Messiah, but in their own way, they are earnestly -seeking- God? (Jer50:4) Let's continue...

Who are these "remnant" people? God knows. How are they selected? "Election" (vs7) On what merits? Certainly not their own, because they are still "darkened" from seeing. (vs10) Again, does God go "eeny, meeny, mynee, mo?" Remember, they are His people "whom He foreknew". (vs2) While they are still blind, God reaches down with His "grace". (vs5) Until they are "all" saved (vs26), how many of them are merely "Israel", and how many are to be Israel of Israel? God knows.

Israel's fall: was it permanent? (vs11) "Let it not be!" When Paul wrote this, 1948 hadn't yet come around. We have now seen decades of God's working to bring Israel back. So, it should be obvious that God is not finished with her yet.

But when Israel stumbled, it opened the door for "the nations" (mkjv) to receive Salvation. (vs11) Israel rejected Christ. So Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles informed them, "the salvation of God is sent to the nations (Gentiles)..". (Acts28:28)

And so, what of the predominantly "Gentile" Church? Who is it related to? What is its foundation? Has it been grafted in "to Israel"? After all, God called Abraham, and those who are in Faith in Christ are "Abraham's seed". (Gal3:29) When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the fledgling Church was "Jewish".

First of all let's consider -logic- from this passage. If the "branches were broken off" (vs19) and "I [am] grafted in", it should be obvious that the "branches" are Israel. Branches grow from a main tree, which in turn grows out of a root. Those who say the Church is grafted in "to Israel" unwittingly are saying that the Church is grafted in to an entity that is "broken off". Something that is broken off is without life... is dead. But the Church is NOT dead!

Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." (Jn15:5) When Jesus came into Jerusalem Passover Monday, He looked for fruit (Mt21:19) and found none. The fig tree withered up, and He then pronounced woes against the Scribes and Pharisees (Mt23). In similar fashion, the Father, the "Vinedresser" looks for fruit, and prunes away branches not bearing fruit. (Jn15:2) Israel was not bearing fruit, and was pruned from the Vine, Jesus Christ. Ever since their 'birth' in the wilderness, Israel was branched off of Christ. (1Cor10:4) People who say the Church is grafted in to Israel, unwittingly are rejecting the same Christ that Israel rejected; making Israel the "root". Again, like the "sons of Levi" who complained about the "Root" Jesus Christ taking away -their- place and nation. (Jn11:48) But the "foundation" is Jesus Christ. (1Cor3:11)

Gentile Believers, also, should be careful not to be too boastful! In relegating Israel to the garbage heap, they set themselves up in pride. We should never forget that in God's plan of "election" He chose Abraham...and subsequently, Israel. Gentiles were "outcasts" and "foreigners" to God's salvation. (Eph2:12) If Israel, God's "elect", being in the palm of His hand, was rejected due to unbelief and hard hearts; we should beware lest a hard heart cause us to be "cut off". (vs22) If they died "without mercy" we should be careful lest we "[insult] the Spirit of grace". (Heb10:28-29)

In His redemptive plan we are -merely- the "gleanings". (Lev19:9-10,23:22) And yet, He made us into the "glorious Church" (Eph5:27) by His grace. What kind of 'glory' do you suppose Israel will be once they are restored again! (vs15)

But Israel's breaking off was for a purpose. Remember, God is "not willing that any should perish". (2Pt3:9) While He "elected" (vs7) Israel as His special nation (1Pt2:9), He also loved "the world" (Jn3:16) and made provision for the rest of "the nations" to be saved. Since Israel was hoarding it to themselves in unbelief and called the Gentiles "dogs" (Mk7:27-28), their blindness will continue "until the fulness of the nations

has come in." (vs25) God desires to have his "house" filled. He is in the process of "compelling them to come in" (Lk14:23)

Ultimately Israel, "all Israel" will be saved. (vs26) Even though they have been at enmity against the Gospel, rejecting Christ, God is going to perform a work in them. He is going to make a new Covenant with them. He is going to change their hearts, putting His Word in their hearts. (Jer31:31-34) While they have been enemies of the Gospel, they are still His "elect". That is their -title-. "Israel My elect, I -entitle- you." (Is45:4 litv©1999) So, when God sends His angels to "gather His -elect- from the four winds" (Mt24:31) we know Jesus was talking about "Israel"; NOT the Church.

God is going to do this by His "grace" (vs5) as "free gifts" (vs29). And He will do this without any regrets [repentance]. This will be the ultimate display of His "mercy". (vs32) A nation who so blatantly rejected His law and His Son, He will "abundantly pardon". (Is55:7)

But... God! You don't know what You are doing! To receive such scoundrels! "Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who first gave to Him, and it will be repaid to him?" (vs34-35) When a person reads Israel's account throughout the Scriptures, how they were in the palm of God's 'hand', and had every blessing; and then rejected Him soooo royally, even to asking God's curse upon their own descendants, in order to crucify God's Son, their Messiah; and as we see their continued unbelief and pride today; to understand how God is going to "change" them, reach into their hearts and soften them so that "all" Israel is saved... it is unsearchable. People claiming to be "Christians" with hard hearts, themselves, refuse to accept that it will happen. They presume that Israel is "done for". Permanently.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! (vs33) Just a demonstration of His love, grace and mercy! Unbelievers in pride may object to His ways. But "of Him and through Him and to Him are all things; to Him be glory forever! Amen. (vs36)

"They [Israel] shall call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, It is My people; and they shall say, Jehovah is my God." (Zech13:9b)

Living the Faith - (Chapter 12)

"Therefore, brothers, I call on you through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order to prove by you what is the good and pleasing and perfect will of God." (vs1-2)

With this chapter we see a division in the book. Up until this point we have had a meticulous, methodical, comprehensive discourse on Salvation. Chapter One begins by laying the foundation of the world's sin and corruption, defining 'what' sin is, and 'how bad' it is. Even those today who attempt to excuse their "alternate lifestyles", run away from and ignore chapter one. It tells them JUST EXACTLY "what" they are. They will distort other Scriptures to excuse their sin, but when confronted with chapter one, they are left speechless. Their mouths are "stopped". (3:19)

The book continues, describing how mankind is without excuse before God. (ch2) That both Jew and Gentile are guilty. That the Law could not bring about salvation. (ch3) That only Jesus Christ could. That He provides the grace and faith necessary to save. (ch4) It then goes on to describe the life of faith, the relationship with God through Christ, via the Holy Spirit. (ch5-8) And finally, a specific addressing of Israel's situation. (ch9-11)

So far, Romans has been all "theoretical" and "Spiritual". "HOW" one is saved. Now it's time to consider the "so what?" aspect. James speaks of the relationship of Faith manifesting itself into Works. (Jas2:14-26) If ch1 describes in detail the nature of sin being acted out; now that we are saved, we need to know how a proper Christian lives in this world. We understand the struggle between the flesh and the spirit (ch7), and we know the solution is to live "according to Spirit". (8:1) But where does the "rubber meet the pavement" in the day-to-day outworkings?

It begins with our attitude. And here we find something totally opposite from the world's ways. Paul says, "therefore..." Therefore, now that you are saved (chs3-11), "I call on you through the compassions of God..." Other translations say "beseech". If we can look at this like children playing in the school yard, and a group of children are involved in the 'game' they are playing. A child has been in detention (sin), but now has been released (saved), and comes to the edge of the playing field, somewhat tentatively; feeling "good" at being outside, "free" from detention; but not quite sure about joining in with the games. So Paul is calling out, C'mon over here and join in the games. And with the "compassions of God" he calms the child who had until recently been under discipline, Things are all right now. It's OK. Come and join with us and let's play together.

Now, here comes the "mind" which has been "transformed" and "renewed". Remember that he says, "If anyone is in Christ...old things

have passed away; behold, all things have become new!" (2Cor5:17) Isn't this part of the very definition of "repentance"! The "changing of one's mind". Changing directions. Changing outlook and perspective. The new perspective is one of "proving" what is the good, pleasing and perfect will of God. (vs2) Which is in stark contrast to those who "did not think fit to have God in their knowledge". (1:28) Where sinful man, "conformed to this age", takes God's good things and corrupts them, the transformed mind seeks to do the "will of God". (12:2) The corrupt mind does everything for "self"; and perverts its flesh. But the renewed mind presents its "bodies a living sacrifice". (12:1)

What was the nature of a "sacrifice"? The animal was brought before the priest. It was killed. Its blood was shed. Its body was cut up into pieces. And then placed on the altar where it was burned. NO WONDER Jesus spoke of "count the cost" (Lk14:28) regarding following Him. To be a "living sacrifice" is an -ultimate- situation, isn't it. In other words, the Christian life is not for self. It is not "what I want", -my- plans, -my- life, -my- desires. But rather, as Saul/Paul responded to Jesus when he was saved, "Lord, what do You desire me to do?" (Acts9:6)

Right here we see that most of those claiming to be "Christian" today, are not. This is why they rebel at the concept of "repentance". If they truly repented, it would mean their lives have to change. But they don't want that! They want to keep "their" lives, and -add- Jesus into the equation. So they have distorted the Scriptures to teach "faith only" ...and "repentance isn't necessary". But Jesus taught that you "cannot serve two lords". (Mt6:24)

But also notice that the sacrifice is a -living- sacrifice. The Believer does not actually -physically- die and get cut up into pieces. We have died to sin. (6:11) But our living is a -sacrificial- living. Paul speaks of, "Day by day I die..." (1Cor15:31) While he was speaking this in the context of physical resurrection, and of the physical peril he was in from persecution; he lived his life with -others- first; "To all I have become all things, that in any and every way I might save some. (1Cor9:22b) "..esteeming one another to surpass themselves." (Phil2:3b)

And so, this is the first order of business. If we get this down, the rest of the details will naturally follow. "I say to everyone being among you, not to have high thoughts beyond what is right to think. But set your mind to be right-minded, even as God divided a measure of faith to each." (12:3) You see, here we get back to the -basics- upon which the Law was ordered. The "greatest commandment" was to "Love the Lord your God..." (Deu6:5) And if that is in order, the natural outcome will be "love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev19:18)

If each individual has the right mind-set, then the "members" of the "one body" will smoothly function together with each other. (vs5) But the proper mind-set realizes that not everybody has the same function. (vs4) [See

also: 1Cor12] But we function to the fullest in -whatever- is our "gift". Each "different gift" is given "according to the grace" ... "even as God divided a measure of faith to each." (vs6,3) Each member's gift is given by God; just as the "master" gave out the talents before going on the long journey (Mt25:14); He fills out the duty roster as he knows each servant's abilities can fulfill.

If a person is gifted in ministry, he should minister. The one sharing, in simplicity. If you're a leader; lead. As we will see in ch14, we do not look to see "what about this man?" Jesus says, "You follow Me." (Jn21:21-22) Man your post. As though to say with human examples, If you're the pilot, fly the plane; If you're the navigator, don't try to fly the plane...watch your radar scope and charts; If you're the engine mechanic, don't try to load the torpedo tubes. Do that which you are given to do. And DO IT WELL. Even if you're only bringing the pilot his coffee. Do it according to the abilities God gave you. Be diligent; not lazy; fervent. Always remember that, while you may be ministering to people, you are "serving the Lord". (vs11) You may lead a sinner to saving Faith, but you have done so as Christ's "ambassador". (2Cor5:20) The person is not -your- "convert".

Jesus said, "By this all shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love among one another." (Jn13:35) Remember that -love- is a gauge of "being a Christian". If you are a Christian, a natural outcome is "loving" other Christians. If you don't love them, you are not a Christian; you are a "liar". (1Jn4:20) And Paul says, "Let love be without dissimulation" (vs9) In other words, don't hold back with your love. Don't hide it. Let it be seen. "..loving fervently" (vs10)

And there's a whole list of things you can read for yourself in those verses; how to do good, shunning evil. All the different ways and attitudes by which Believers interact, exhort, support, nurture each other. But while we flee the evil, we latch onto and "cleave" to the good. (vs9) We grab the good and don't let go. As one reads these verses of all the various ministries amongst the Body, there is a sense of what one sees watching busy ants, continually on-the-go, swarming; each doing their individual tasks, but also doing it all together. If that dead worm or bug is too big for one, several gather around and get into the act. But they eventually get it into their burrow...working together.

But notice what kind of "love" it is. It does not say, God accepts you "just as you are" along-with-your-sin, being all lovey dovey sweetness; not wanting to "upset" anybody by confronting sin. Fervent love absolutely despises and hates sin. It "hates even the garment having been stained from the flesh." (Jude23b) Remember, our minds are "renewed". If we understand that sin was sending us to hell, anything that reminds us of that life is utterly abhorrent to us! We will "flee" from it (vs9), which is what true repentance naturally leads to; and will seek to "snatch" others from it, as well. (Jude23)

So... what of the world? If you are persecuted, do you talk back? No. "bless, and do not curse." (vs14) Remember, Jesus "gave" Himself to those who crucified Him. (Is50:6) "...having been reviled, did not revile in return; suffering, He did not threaten." Jesus was our "example" of how to "follow His steps" (1Pt2:21-23) We do not "get even" or retaliate. We don't shout back, "God is going to -get- you, you so-n-so!" But we "give place to wrath." (vs19) What does this mean, "give place"? Let's go back to "school" again. Everybody is lining up for the door to open, or at the drinking fountain, lunch line, or...whatever a person lines up for. The bullies come along and push their way ahead in the line, knocking the "sissies" out of their way. "Wrath" is like those bullies. Rather than trying to jostle back and get into a scuffle, the Christian pulls back, clears a space for the bully, motioning with the hand to say, "Here you go. Here's your place...ahead of me." Because, you see, the Lord is like the 'hall monitor' who saw the whole incident. He comes along and says to Mr.Bully, "Into the principal's office, young man!" The retribution to Mr.Bully coming from the principal has meaning to him. He suffers consequences. Where, if you try to tackle the issue yourself...you -both- end up in the principal's office. So, "if one hostile to you hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink; for doing this you will heap coals of fire on his head" ... "and Jehovah shall reward you." (vs20,Pr25:21-22) Let God take care of "getting even". He promises to "repay". (vs19)

If it's possible "be in peace with all men." (vs18) Even if you find yourself in a difficult situation and your unequal yoke wants to leave, Paul wrote, "...God has called us in peace." God hates divorce and the Believer should stay married; but if the unbeliever wants to leave, let them leave and don't stir up strife.

But you see, all this begins with the attitude of the "renewed mind". When that bully comes around, our nature wants to assert "my rights". But as a "living sacrifice" I -determine- to behave differently. My "self-esteem" doesn't matter, compared to "peaceability". If it was a fellow-Believer who wronged me, perhaps unintentionally; love "will cover a multitude of sins" (1Pt4:8) We do not want to "bite and devour one another." (Gal5:15) But rather, be "building up itself (the Body) in love" (Eph4:16)

When we truly have a renewed mind, the opposite of "high thoughts" is "humility". As we are "providing right things before all men" not "returning [evil] for evil" (vs17), we then "do not be overcome by evil, but overcome the evil with good." (vs21)

Living in the World - (Chapter 13)

"Let every soul be subject to higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, but the existing authorities have been ordained by God." (vs1)

God "ordains" atheistic communism? Fascism, emperor-worship and muslim theocracies are "ordinances" of God? When Noah's descendents built Babel, God says, "and now all which they have purposed to do will not be restrained from them." (Gen11:6) He confounds the languages and "scatters them..over the face of all the earth." (vs8) Genesis ch10 tells the origins of all the national entities of the world. And the division of the earth into continents. (Gen10:25,1Ch1:19)

When Paul says "ordained", this means each national entity has been "assigned, appointed" it's domain. "And He made every nation of men of one blood, to live on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons and boundaries of their dwelling, to seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and might find Him.." (Acts17:26-27) You see, when man was all together, "united", they set about to build Babel which became a world-wide system of idolatry. When man was all "one" language, they chose to rebel against God. So He split mankind up into nationalities...for what purpose? To give the opportunity to seek after Him, instead of false gods. While we already know about -individual- choices regarding following God or rejecting Him; there also seems to be a "national" component to God's dealings. There is God's special chosen (elect) nation of Israel. And we know from prophecy how God is going to restore her, infusing her heart with His Laws. But there is also to be a judgment of nations as we see in Matthew 25:31-46. Their judgment is based on their behavior towards Israel. All the nations in their "seasons and boundaries" are also playing out their roles; -as- national entities.

Let us, here, take a couple of paragraphs to digress from 'Romans 13' a moment. This study begins the year 2000. All the past preparations for global unity are going to escalate even faster this year. Unity in world politics and government, and religion. Prophetically we know that the world is in a count-down to the time of God's judgment and wrath, and notice what it is doing. Just like the "days of Noah" (Mt24:37), man is UNITING. When man united after the flood, he went into idolatry, in REBELLION AGAINST God. God separated man IN ORDER THAT he might have opportunity to "seek after God".

Now, after all these millennia, man is uniting again...big time. And the -religious- nature of this unity can be demonstrated by the words of a song a local banking establishment has been using in it's TV ads, "As each day dawns the morning star rises and sings to the universe who we are.." The song then breaks off into a cacophony of adults and children expressing the various kinds of people who make up "who-we-are" and the song then

ends with "...and we are one.." Sun-worship, with the name "morning star". The "Root and Offspring of David" is called the "Morning Star". (Rev22:16) Yes, a good part of this unity is being -called- "christian". The -spirit- of antichrist (1Jn4:3) which is "already in the world".

Do not be deceived. You will feel "tugs" from all quarters to "unite" with this, and "unite" with that. That we can all be "one" humanity. All the -different- religions are "one". All the -diverse- ethnicities are "one". There is no more difference in gender, either, as that is all mixed up and swapped around; hetero, homo, cross-dressing, sex changes... just mix it all up into one hodgepodge... in rebellion against God's order of "male and female". (Gen1:27) Sex is supposed to be between -a- man and -a- woman, the gender God ordained them when He formed them in the womb. (Ps139:16) Do not be deceived: all these pushes for "unity" are -NOT- Godly. Just as in the days of Noah, they are unified REBELLION against God.

OK; now back to Romans 13...

However, within these regional entities, -individual- Believers exist, as part of the definition of "every soul". We live like other humans within these nations. While we know that our "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil3:20) and we are "ambassadors" for Christ (2Cor5:20), we are not to assume some position -above- these God-appointed national entities. Remember in the previous chapter Paul exhorts us not to "have high thoughts beyond what is right to think." (12:3) And so, as "humans" (being in the flesh), we are exhorted to submit to these God-appointed national entities.

Certainly, God does not 'approve' of communism's atheism. The muslim countries that seek to push Israel into the Mediterranean will be judged by God, as prophesied. China, which persecutes Believers, is not honoring to God. But those things are not concerns to the Believer. We are not to be high-n-mighty and retort, "Hmph! They don't fear God! So I'm not going to obey their laws!" No! When the regime says, "pay taxes", the Believer pays taxes. Remember how Jesus sent Peter to "go fishing" for the tax money. (Mt17:27)

These entities are set up for "order" on the earth. When man does whatever is "right in his own eyes" (Jdg21:25) without a king (or some ruling entity), the whole earth becomes full of "violence" (Gen6:11). Just think what would happen if there were no laws or order regarding traffic; people would drive any ol' way they like (more than they already do), and there would be multiplied times -more- accidents than there already are. And what happens when people don't follow the rules? The person who doesn't seem to know it's his "turn" to go at that intersection, sits there...and others knowing it's his turn sit, waiting for him to follow the rules and "take-his-turn"...and so traffic gets held up, and drivers get irritated.

Thus, God has given these atheistic, humanistic governments "authority". If you went through that stop sign and the policeman pulls you over, he is God's authority to reprimand you. When the ticket says to appear before the judge, you had better keep the appointment, otherwise you will experience the ruler's "terror". (vs3) 'Ever notice on the freeway when a patrol car is there, you see a lot of brake lights. He might be driving under the speed limit, but guilty consciences cause people to not 'dare' to pass him; so they will bunch up -behind- him. Now, a person with a clear conscience, being used to regularly obeying the traffic laws, will have no problem to continue at the speed limit, and yes, -pass- the officer. He's not "afraid" of the law, because he habitually keeps it. He goes on around, and the officer does not pull him over. He is obeying the law. He drives along in peace.

Now, in keeping with what we learned in ch2, even though these regimes are atheistic/humanistic, they -do- maintain many of God's laws. Remember how God's Law is written in the heart of every person from birth. It is called "conscience". (2:14-15) So, even Russia and China have laws against murder, adultery, stealing, etc. (vs9) As Believers, it should not be difficult at all to keep clear of the law. To avoid having to appear before a judge for wrong-doing. Moral laws a nation enforces are God's laws already. Civil laws govern the smooth operation of a society. And even in that, we still come back to the basic law Jesus quoted, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev19:18) Only thing, a Believer who is living righteously finds this easier to do, because he is already living with the "renewed mind".(12:2) His outlook is to not think "highly" of himself.(12:16) He is already looking out for others first; by virtue of the fact that he is a Christian. He is not going to perpetrate "road rage" because he is already of a mind-bent to "give place to wrath" (12:19) as he even "yields to the lowly." (12:16) A person of such a mind will not be in "trouble" with the law, will he. A Believer will not steal because "love does not work evil to the neighbor". (13:10) The very essence of a Believer, thus, is a person who is a "law-abiding citizen".

"Also this, knowing the time, that it is now the hour for you to be aroused from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed." (vs11)

Well, I thought we are SAVED, and that's it. God saved me, keeps me, satisfied me; and now I'm "eternally secure"! Hmph!! What's Paul talking about, that our salvation is "near[ER]"? Either you have it, or you don't. Right? A couple years ago somebody unsubscribed with a rather snide note, reacting to a comment I had made, something to the effect of Salvation being a "process".

You see, as long as we are still in these bodies of "corruption" (1Cor15:50-54) we cannot get to heaven. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God". When we come to God in repentance and receive Jesus' work of salvation on our behalf, from which "nothing" will "separate" us (Rom8:35-39), what we have is a "promise". When we "believed" we "were sealed

with the Holy Spirit of promise". (Eph1:13) And so we now have the "hope of eternal life" because of His "[saving] us through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit". (Tit3:7,5) We are "heirs" and "joint heirs with Christ". (Rom8:17) But we have not yet received our inheritance. We are "on our way" to heaven, but we are not yet there. Thus, Paul's yearning was expressed, "also we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly expecting adoption, the redemption of our body." (Rom8:23)

So, Paul says, "Also this, knowing the time... Jesus had said, "when you see all these things, know that it is near at the doors." (Mt24:33) All the indications of the time of God's judgment. As the world is busy uniting against God, the Believer is exhorted to "be aroused from sleep". Remember Jesus' story of the 10 virgins who were sleeping, and then the midnight cry came and it was time to go into the wedding feast. (Mt25)

What is the exhortation for being ready? To get busy and "win more souls"? No. "Cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the weapons of light." (vs12) Behave like "children of light". (vs13, Eph5:8) No, it is not sufficient to come to God "just as you are" retaining all your sin and evil ways! We are to behave "becomingly" not carousing, getting drunk, and being promiscuous. As we have the "hope" of being "like Jesus", our response is to "purify [ourselves]". (1Jn3:3) After all, this coming "salvation" we await is the occasion where we meet Jesus Christ, as we see Him just as He is, and our corruption changes into incorruption as we become "like Him". Jesus is pure. How can we break His heart by living in the world's debauchery, all the while knowing that His return to "receive us" (Jn14:3) to be with Himself is -SO- IMMINENT!

How do we accomplish this, to be ready? "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not make forethought of the flesh, for its lusts." (vs14) This expression "put on" is like putting on a coat. Being clothed. Yes, in our spirits Christ is "in" us (Col1:27), and we are "in Christ" (2Cor5:17), the Holy Spirit residing in us. (Rom8:9) These are our "spiritual" relationship with Christ. But -physically- being in the world yet, living under the world's authority, living exemplary lives as law-abiding people; we live these lives in the flesh. How do we live pure lives? Well, there's the old expression, "The clothes make the man." If our -renewed- minds are engrossed in nothing but Jesus Christ, and thus, figuratively, we have "put Him on" like we do a coat, the world will not see us. They will see Jesus. Of the early disciples it was noticed that "they were with Jesus." (Acts 4:13) Jesus was 'clothing' them in word and deed.

Thus, we do not engage in the things of the world, because our minds are not on the world. They are on the "things above, not the things on the earth." (Col3:2) We don't make plans (provision -nkjv/kjv) for sin, nor do we dabble "near" the world's enticements. And we -certainly- don't go bringing them into our worship assemblies! "Let us walk [live] becomingly." Amen!

Judging or Building Up? - (Chapter 14)

"And receive the one who is weak in the faith, not to judgments of your thoughts. One indeed believes to eat all things, but being weak, another one eats vegetables. The one eating, do not despise the one not eating. And the one not eating, do not judge the one eating, for God received him." (vs1-3)

What is Paul teaching? Vegetarianism? In 1Cor10:23-33 we get a better picture. Just as we read in the O.T. how Israel would bring the "firstfruits" of their harvests before the Lord, the pagans would also worship their idols by offering various food items. Once it had been "blessed" by the idol, it would join the rest of the meat at the market. Somebody coming along to buy "meat" would not be able to tell which cuts had been before the idol, and which had not. So Paul says, "Eat everything being sold in a meat market, examining nothing because of conscience, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness of it." (1Cor10:25-26) Idols, as physical objects, are nothing. Wood is wood. Gold is gold. Meat is meat. There is nothing to fear from an idol; they can do neither good nor bad. (Jer10:5) Good or bad is "not in them". They are inanimate objects.

A Christian does not need to fear fetishes. Yes, there is a whole system of imparting spirits into objects and creatures. We know such things are possible and real, as Jesus sent the demons into the herd of pigs. (Mk5:13) And it is believed that the Rock music industry performs impartations of spirits to their tapes and CDs. People have their amulets and crystals, thinking them to possess special "powers" on their behalf. But if a person is a True Believer in Jesus Christ, these things do not have authority over the Christian, who is not worshiping satan. Jesus said, "I have given you the authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and on all the power of the Enemy, and nothing shall hurt you, not at all" (Lk10:19) So, eating of meat will not hurt you, even if that cut was offered to an idol.

However, there are some people, just having come out of idolatry, whose physical minds cannot distinguish the fact that the meat is OK. They were - Sooo- steeped in idolatry, offering their cuts of meat to the idols, "clapping their hands" in worship, (Is2:6); they are so 'programmed' in their mind, that when they see "meat" they see "idol". And when they see "idol", all the memories of those thoughts they had as they used to worship, come flooding into their being. They are not able to eat meat without these memories. Just like, a person who gets bit by a dog, is afraid of -any- dogs for a time. A person who had an accident at an intersection, is afraid of approaching intersections. After I "lost it" making a left turn on my first motorcycle (years ago) when the tire hit the oil spot, I was timid of left turns for several years. This is how we are as frail, corruptible human beings.

Paul says to "receive" the one who is "weak". Don't judge him as being, somehow, -less- of a Christian because he has this weakness. And on the other hand, the one who has this hang-up should not judge, as being "worldly", the one who does eat. God has received both. The one who is "weak" needs a little more "tender care". (1Cor12:23-26) If you cut your finger real bad, it takes time to heal. It might require stitches. Once the stitches come out, and the bandage is off, it is still 'tender' for a long time while all the 'deep' flesh heals fully. You do not scoff at the finger and say "silly finger, you fool..why can't you be like the other fingers!" No, you "favor" it. Nor does the finger scold the other fingers for doing their normal activities. In fact, the healthy fingers take up some of the slack where the sore one isn't yet able to give 100% to the activities the 'hand' wishes to do.

The discussion is "judging". (vs4) And something else often called, "gray areas". We are not talking about Scripturally-specific Doctrines, such as Salvation, Justification, Faith, Rapture, etc. Things that are generally lumped into the word "Gospel". In those things, a "differing viewpoint" is anathematized by Paul, "let him be accursed". (Gal1:8-9) But in a lot of things, there are gray areas. And Paul says, "who are you judging another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. But he will stand, for God is able to make him stand."

The example of "meat" has already been given. What about "days"? There are those who believe that "Saturday" is the day to collectively worship. The "7th day" of the week. Now, some of those who feel this way, typically, also have other doctrinal problems. But, is it wrong to worship on Saturday, and view Saturday as "the Lord's Day"? The Law did say, "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." (Ex20:8) Those who observe Sunday do so because of Jesus' Resurrection on the "first of the week". (Mk16:9) And there are N.T. examples of Christians meeting on Sunday. (Acts20:7, 1Cor16:2) Who is right? Those who observe Saturday judge those observing Sunday, as not keeping God's Law. In studying Scripture, a case could be made for both views. Paul says, "Let each one be fully assured in his own mind." (vs5)

Whichever day you have chosen, some hold the O.T. Law principles, and do NOTHING on that day, except worship, eat, sleep. They will not mow their lawns, play games, work at any job. Others will do -everything- the same. "One indeed judges a day above another day; and another one judges every day alike.." Again, "Let each one be fully assured in his own mind."

For the Believer, truly obeying the Lord, whatever they do in these matters, they worship God. The one eating meat "gives thanks to God" for his meat. The vegetarian "gives thanks to God" for his salad. While there is One God, and One Faith (Eph4:5), God has created us as "diverse" creatures. (1Cor12:6a, Rom12:4) God did not make us all "clones" one of another. He made us all to be "different". When mankind strove to -unite- at Babel,

and be all the same, and rebel against God together, He scattered them across the face of the earth. -Different- languages, -different- races, -different- cultures. The current globalists should understand this. This is -true- "unity in diversity". The UNITY is due to Faith and Doctrine (1Cor1:10); and from these we dare not depart. DIVERSITY is in the Uniqueness with which God has gifted each -individual- person. When there is true Unity-in-Faith, then there is also true Acceptance of one another's diversity.

The problem with the world and current religious pushes for "unity" is that they are trying to get everybody to "get along" through "diversity-in-faith". They've got it backward!

But the Believer is the Lord's. The reason Believers "get along" is because, as a result of that "renewed mind" (ch12), "no one of us lives to himself and no one dies to himself." (vs8) If we each "esteem others to surpass ourselves" (Phil2:3), then, we will not be judging our brother. (vs10) Anybody who sets himself up to be a 'judge' is not a 'doer'. (Jas4:11)

"For all shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ." (vs10b) If we are busy judging another, we are not 'doing'. If we are not doing, what happens when we give account of OURSELVES before Christ? (vs12) We have NOTHING. If we judge, we become like "Suzy" who chimes up after prayer, "Johnny had his eyes open during prayer!" Well, Suzy... how would -you- know such a thing? ...unless, of course, -your- eyes were open, too. Perhaps Johnny is able to pray 'better' with his eyes open? Do you know what was in his heart? Was he praying in his heart? Does the Bible say that you must have your eyes "closed" for prayer? Johnny might have actually been 'praying' during the prayer, but Suzy was busy judging Johnny...not praying!

So, the criteria is actually this: "not to put a stumbling-block or an offense toward a brother." (vs13b)

Remember, "meat" is OK. "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing by itself is common; except to the one deeming anything to be common, it is common." (vs14) "Common" was another Jewish expression for "unclean". Something to be avoided and not touched. If they touched something "common", they would ritually cleanse themselves.

So, if the weak brother comes to visit, do you serve him meat? He is going to feel "awkward" isn't he. "But if your brother is grieved because of your food, you no longer walk according to love. Do not by your food destroy that one for whom Christ died." (vs15) Meat might be perfectly OK for you, but don't militantly insist on forcing your "knowledge" onto him, and thus, turn your 'good' thing into 'evil'. Your "knowledge puffs up (pride), but love builds up." (1Cor8:1b)

Let's look at another example. Since Paul exhorted Timothy to "use a little wine.." (1Tim5:23) we know that wine is not intrinsically bad. After all, the wine Jesus made was of high quality. (Jn2:10) [And no, it wasn't watered-down "grape juice"! It was "wine".] Perhaps you have wine with your meals. It has been said by the medical community that wine has benefits. If a person has digestive problems, wine certainly helps. But the "weak brother" comes to visit. His life in sin included "being a drunk". The Lord has saved him from his addiction, and he has been sober since he was saved. But physically, psychologically, he needs to stay away from anything with alcohol, because he knows that it is wrong to "be drunk with wine". (Eph5:18) For him, even the smell of anything alcoholic dredges up the past. The host, practicing Christian Love, will forego the family's usual practice of having wine with the meal. And certainly won't ask him "what kind would you like?"

Do you need to stop drinking wine 'totally' because he knows you do it, and he doesn't, and for 'him' it is offensive? Well, remember Paul's exhortation to the "weak" one not to judge the one who does. (vs3) They certainly don't need to give it up when they are by themselves. "Do you have faith? [that it's OK?] Have it to yourself before God." (vs22a) But, in love, they will also refrain when he comes to visit, so as not to parade it before him; as though to say, "We can, but you can't!" And, if you do have digestive problems, you're not going to die because you missed it that one meal.

Again, it's a matter of that "renewed mind". (ch12) If we are "living sacrifices" (12:1), we will think of the needs and benefits of the needy brother rather than merely our own desires. In keeping with the words "marriage is honorable in all [things], and the bed undefiled" (Heb13:4) a wife might undress herself in seductive attire for her husband; and that's a "good" thing. But it would not be a thing "for building up one another" (vs19) if she presented herself provocatively to others. That which was "good" with her husband would "be spoken evil of" in front of others. (vs16)

Here we go... "conscience". How do we know how to be toward other Believers in "gray" matters? Sensitivity to God. That which a person does, it is a life of faith. After all, that verse that is often misapplied (as to its meaning) says, "the just shall live by faith". (Rom1:17, Heb10:38) A person who has been justified, and is, thus, "just" ...lives by faith. This is possible because of the relationship between the Believer and our Three-Person God.

Paul could say, "I in all good conscience have conducted myself toward God to this day." (Acts23:1) And again, "the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and faith not pretended" (1Tm1:5) Notice two things there. The Pure Heart, and Faith NOT Pretended. Pretend "christians" and carnal ones will practise certain questionable things, claiming to be doing them "in faith". They parade their "right" to live the way they do with bravado. But their hearts are not pure.

They have also likely twisted some Scriptures to make it appear that God condones some of their activities. But they will intone, "who are you to judge another's servant?!"

But they are pretending. They are "condemned, because it is not of [pure] faith; and whatever is not of faith is sin." (vs23) Their [kind of] faith is sin.

We need to order our lives so that we are "serving Christ in these things.. [being] pleasing to God.." things which will then also be "approved by men." Thus, Paul exhorts, "So then let us pursue the things of peace, and the things for building up one another." (vs18-19)

Ministering to Believers - (Chapter 15)

"But we, the strong ones, ought to bear the weaknesses of those not strong, and not to please ourselves. For let each one of us please his neighbor for good, to building up. For also Christ did not please Himself, but even as it has been written, "The curses of those cursing You fell on Me." (vs1-3)

In another letter Paul writes, "Brothers, if a man is taken in some fault, you, the spiritual ones, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, that you not also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal6:1-2)

Due to the nature of the current apostasy, we often address many issues related to false prophets, pretend "christians", "leaven in the lump", etc. Frequently, as a result, e-mails come in from those who ARE false prophets and pretend "christians", chiding me for whacking away at "fellow-christians" or "judging brothers". Accusations that we should be "building up" our "brothers" rather than tearing them down with venomous hateful rhetoric.

Let us again, briefly, have clear understanding. There is a distinction. There are two categories of people; "saved" and "unsaved". There are MANY MORE unsaved (Mt7:13), and VERY FEW (Mt7:14) true Believers. When John exhorts, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God.." (1Jn4:1) he is not talking about the Mormons, Catholics, Masons, or any of the spiritist "heathen" beliefs from the "jungle". If a person knows even a little bit about these things, they are -OBVIOUSLY- not of God, when compared with Scripture. They are not even close! But where things are "believable" if one is not careful is WITHIN that which is called "christian". Not everything that is called "christian" is "Christian". (Rom9:6b) "Not all those of Israel are Israel." Paul warns that "out of you yourselves will rise up men speaking perverted things". (Acts20:30) This is COMING FROM OUT OF the entity originating as the True Church of Jesus Christ. These, he calls "grievous wolves". (vs29) They are NOT Christian christians. But they LOOK LIKE Christians, because, as ministers of satan, they "appear as ministers of righteousness". (2Cor11:13-15) Thus, when we speak of -these-, we DO NOT "bid them God speed" (2Jn11 -kjb), but rather "expose/reprove" their "works of darkness" (Eph5:11) and them for being the ministers of satan that they are. They are -NOT- "brothers".

But for those who ARE Believers, but are weak, we "make a distinction" as we "pity" them. (Jude22) The weak Brother, we "bear" their weaknesses. We bear one another's burdens.

What are some of the reasons a Brother is weak? In ch14 we considered the "memories" of one's past life in sin or idolatry, where some aspect of

the past, while not necessarily being evil in itself, because of the context of the past, the person stumbles.

There are those who are yet "babies" in the Lord, and are still on "milk" (Heb5:13,1Pt2:2). They are still "growing up" in their knowledge of the Lord. (Eph4:15) And so the "whole body" joins in to help nurture those weak and immature parts. (vs16) The feet walk over to the table, the hands pick up the food, the mouth chews. If the feet get the body to the table, but the hands refuse to pick up the food, the mouth goes empty, and the -whole- Body suffers.

There are some who stumble and fall. Cuts, bruises, broken bones. And various disobediences that 'children' are often guilty of. Sometimes the parent comes into the act and gives a whuppin'. Cuts are treated with tenderness. Broken bones are confined within a cast until healed. If it's a sore 'bottom', the legs settle the person into the chair... 'gently'.

In Christ, Believers are all of One Body. We "mind the same thing among one another according to Christ Jesus." (vs5) We are of "one faith" and "one judgment (doctrine)." (Eph4:5,1Cor1:10) We are all growing from the same Vine, Jesus Christ. (Jn15) And "with one accord" we "glorify" God. (vs6)

Therefore we also "receive one another". (vs7) Fellowship. If we are walking "in the light" as Christ is, "we have fellowship with one another.." (1Jn1:7) Recall how when we are dealing with false prophets and pretend christians, we are NOT TO "receive him into the house". (2Jn10) Yes, it is proper to not allow JW "missionaries" in the house when they come to your door. But True Believers, we receive.

This includes the "love" Jesus spoke of. God is glorified when Believers love one another. This is because this love is a testimony to the world. The world knows we are Believers because of this love for the brethren. (Jn13:34-35) The world does not know this love. It hates and fights. So, when it sees Christians in love with each other, they see something wonderful and beautiful. "Behold! How good and how pleasant is the living of brothers, even in unity." (Ps133:1)

In the early Church, this oneness, unity and joy resulted in everyone pooling all their resources. (Acts4:32) Nobody was in -physical- need as they all cared for each other, fellowshiping from house to house (Acts2:46,5:42,20:20) both in physical eating, and in exhortation in the Word of God. And notice sandwiched in the middle there: All their possession were "common" (4:32) and "neither was anyone needy" (4:34) we see, "And with great power the apostles gave testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all." (4:33) When the -Body- was functioning as a whole, made up of self-less individuals contributing to the whole, the Word of God spread. People

were saved, and it says, "And the Lord added to the church those being saved from day to day." (2:47)

If we suggest that -we- are NOT "soul-winners", some people get rather irate. They will quote the odd passage where someBODY is "saving" a sinner, e.g. 1Cor7:16, somewhat out-of-context. They will say that the Lord "great commissioned" us to "MAKE disciples" (Mt28:19 -nkjv), and that since Acts records "thousands" coming to the Lord, we also should be concerned about "how many" -WE- WIN for the Lord. But notice again just -WHO- is doing the work. The -LORD- added to the Church. What was the Church doing? Functioning as they were supposed to: proclaiming, exhorting, nurturing, fellowshiping, loving. And as the unsaved saw this "living spiritual organism" growing and bearing spiritual fruit, the Lord is the One Who caused to "increase". (1Cor3:6)

Let us never forget this, and boast our position. We are merely the "branches". (Jn15:5) Branches -merely- "abide" in the Vine, Jesus Christ. And notice that the "Vinedresser" is the "Father". (Jn15:1)

As the branches are interlaced, as the Body lovingly cares for its various parts, the early Church brought together all their wealth. But obviously that only lasted for a brief time until they were scattered when persecution arose. (Acts8:1)

It seems as though they did things a bit differently in those days. He speaks of coming to them (at Rome) on his way to Spain, with the idea that they would provide for Him to go on further into Spain. (vs24) It doesn't seem to be the case that they would have "deputation" meetings with the "home churches" to raise their support first, and -then- go. They would go, being helped along the way as they went from church to church. To the Corinthians he speaks of how he didn't receive financial support from them, but from various churches in Asia Minor. (2Cor11:7-9) Now, Corinth, of all places, was most able to support him, being in the wealthiest region in the world at that time. But Corinth was "carnal", and hoarding their wealth to themselves.

Jesus spoke of the worker being "worthy of his hire". (Lk10:7) Go into a city, the Lord will provide support for sustenance. Paul teaches, "So also the Lord ordained those announcing the gospel to live from the gospel." (1Cor9:14) As he reviews the fact that he was sent to the gentiles, he is expressing how the churches in Macedonia and Achaia were sending "gifts to the poor of the saints in Jerusalem." (vs26) These churches felt indebted to those in Jerusalem, sacrificing to stay in Jerusalem where politics and economy were making it really tough to survive. "If 'they' are sacrificing, being the sending agency, so that 'we' can hear the Gospel and be saved, we owe it to them to help them out in their 'financial' need."

As Paul sends a "note of thanks" to Philippi for their giving he speaks of his own situation, how he knew how to survive on much, or on little. The

other day (written in November) I happened past the TBN channel and Benny Hinn was speaking of financial prosperity, teaching from scripture-out-of-context how God "intends" for us to be wealthy. Well, notice that Paul says, "Not that I speak as to need, for I have learned to be content in whatever state I am. But I know to be humbled, and I know to abound;" (Phil4:11-12) Many people are not happy unless they have lots of money and many possessions. But Paul had learned "contentment" as he says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." (1Tm6:6) It is not a sin to be wealthy. But if you suddenly became poor, would you be just as happy in the Lord?

A friend who used to be well-enough-to-do, became a Christian. Is now in the Lord's work as a pastor, and often barely scrapes by making ends meet. But he would be in no other place than in the Lord's work. While I run my own business, business is slow. Things are "tight", and statistically the government would consider me to be at the "poverty level". But, if business wasn't so slow, I wouldn't always have the necessary time to write these lessons, and communicate with people's needs via e-mail. If you were to ask me, "If you could do ANYTHING, or be ANYWHERE - else-...what/where would that be?" know what my answer is? RIGHT WHERE I AM!

Yes, sometimes I worry. So does my friend. We are also 'human'. And we remind each other of Paul's other words to those he was thanking for their gifts, "But I have all things and more than enough...And my God will fill your every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Phil4:18a,19)

But notice what Paul actually -asks- for. We don't see Paul asking anybody for money. Corinth he chides for their carnality, and lays a little "shame" on them by telling them how others give. But he never asks. Among other things, years ago when I sought the Lord's will as to what He would have me do in service, one reason I never pursued working under a mission board was because of the stipulation they all have for "fund raising". Going around to churches, presenting one's -self-, with the goal to get people to pledge to support financially. (I even hate having to ask customers for money!) But how many of these "ministries" do you see spending valuable time begging for money. Some even being so brazen as to "promise" the givers that their "seed money" will guarantee God's blessings upon them to where they can't contain it all.

The thing Paul -asks- for is "prayer". "Strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf.." (vs30) To what end? So that I will have enough money to pay the bills...? "...that I be delivered from the disobedient ones in Judea, and that my ministry...may be acceptable to the saints.." (vs31) The same warnings he always gave out to others about the "wolves" and, as we call them, "pretend-christians"; he was concerned about regarding himself. Even though he was so used by God, as was authenticated by the "power of miraculous signs and wonders" (vs19)

(since he was an "apostle"), he did not view his "successes" in ministry to be a guarantee against slipping. Even though he penned most of the N.T. epistles, he was always checking up on himself to make sure he was doing right before God. He never considered his ministry to be a "slam dunk". He was always striving, "[controlling] himself in all things... lest proclaiming to others I myself might be rejected." (1Cor9:25-27)

Paul was the ultimate "apostle" and "minister"... "to the saints". (Col1:1-2, 2Cor9:1) For all his earnestness, when he met with the churches his desire was "that I may come to you in joy through the will of God, and that I may be refreshed with you." (vs32)

Here ends the main part of the book of Romans. Ch16 is a kind of "epilogue" or "P.S." So, his closing salutation, "And the God of peace be with all of you. Amen" (vs33)

P.S. -Beware False Prophets - (Chapter 16)

Greet the saints. Receive them into your house. Fellowship with them. The greeting of society, the kiss, let it be holy. (vs16) If you hug, let it be holy. And a whole list of -names- is given. Individuals. Groups associated with those individuals. Believers. And if we remember that in Acts they went "house-to-house" in fellowship, partaking bread and exhortation; notice that a "church" [assembly, gathered for meetings] existed at Priscilla and Aquila's -house-. (vs5) While the Jewish missionaries would always seek out synagogues, first, when coming to a new place, and thus fulfilling Jesus' command starting "in Jerusalem" to Jews (Acts1:8); when they spread out to people of the "end of the earth" (Gentiles), we never hear of 'building programs'.

"For you are a temple of the living God, even as God said, "I will" dwell in them and "walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (2Cor6:16) Years ago when my father was still alive, he and a couple of his siblings met for a reunion, and my wife and I were invited to visit. At one point I happened to be sitting next my uncle's wife, and she said, "We got a new church since you were there last..." (Years earlier I had sung one of my concerts there.) Not thinking what she meant, but knowing what I understood the word "church" to mean, I responded back asking something like, "Oh, what church are you fellowshiping with now?" And a couple words from her, it was then obvious she meant that her church had built a new -building-.

The church is not the "building". St.Peter's is a building. The Mormon temple is a building. The Dome of the Rock mosque is a building. Hollywood depicts the "quaint" concept of the "little Baptist church down the road" as a building. In various places there are little tiny buildings, barely big enough for 2 people to sit... "wayside chapels" or "prayer chapels". Buildings. And sadly, for most (nominal) "christians", when they hear the word "church" they think of that -building- they go to. They -go-to-church. They -have- church. Church -starts-. Church -ends-. Churches are -places- to be married and buried. [Ed: that last sentence spawns a witticism in my mind, from which I will refrain at the moment!]

"..that He might present it to Himself as the glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such things, but that it be holy and without blemish." (Eph5:27) The Church is the worldwide group, collectively, of Believers. PEOPLE. Those that Jesus has redeemed with His Own blood when He loved her and gave Himself for her. (Rev1:5, Eph5:25) The Church is that living, breathing, mutually caring "Body" in/of Christ. (Rom12:5)

Paul speaks of "not having spot or wrinkle". Jude speaks of "hating even the garment having been stained from the flesh." (vs23) John speaks of the "purity" which results from the one anticipating Christ's return at which

time we become "like" Him. (1Jn3:2-3) Jude's vigilance is expressed as, "snatching them out of the fire."

Jesus warns, "See that not any leads you astray. For many will come in My name..." (Mt24:4-5) "If anyone says to you, Behold, here is the Christ! Or, Here! Do not believe. For false christs and false prophets will rise up. And they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I tell you beforehand." (Mt24:23-25)

Peter exhorts us -how- we should be careful. "Be sensible, watch, because your adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion seeking someone he may devour; whom firmly resist in the faith.." (1Pt5:8-9)

But, while the devil may be likened to a "roaring lion" in his -mission-, he doesn't appear to us that way in his -methodology-. His workers are "deceitful workers transforming themselves into apostles of Christ." (2Cor11:13) Satan didn't appear to Eve as a grotesque dragon with pitch fork. He came as the most beautiful creature in the garden. If Satan can "marvelously transform himself into an angel of light...it is not a great thing (no big deal) if also his ministers transform themselves as ministers of righteousness.." (vs14-15)

As we say repeatedly, if Satan came through the "obvious" avenues of heathenism, occult, witchcraft...he would not win many. Satan comes -through- the church. His methods appear to be "christian". That's why it's called "deception". It -looks- like the real thing, but is not. Notice that Paul says they transform themselves into "apostles of Christ".

Dear Believer: Are your eyes open? What is the current push? "Apostles" are rising up all over. And they operate in the realm of "signs and wonders". Notice that Paul names their -label-, and Christ gave their -methods-. What did Jesus say their goal is? IF POSSIBLE... to deceive the elect. While, in a most prophetically/historically stringent sense "elect" refers to Israel, in a broader sense in other passages it also refers to Believers. Who is satan after? The world? Not hardly! He's already GOT them! But the ones he doesn't have are the Faithful. And he would certainly like to have them, too.

And for you who still believe that "Eternal Security" (Rom8:33-39) is the same thing as "Once save-Always saved", think again. If there were no possibility for a Believer to "draw back" (Heb10:38-39), why would there be so many warnings about being deceived?

But notice that Paul warned "Because of this watch, remembering that I did not cease admonishing each one with tears night and day for three years." (Acts20:31) Notice, "WITH TEARS"! He says, "because of this". What is "this" that he is referring to?

Near the end of his missionary journeys, Paul gathered the Asia Minor church leaders...and after all those years of ministry, his primary message on that occasion was "warning" against the "wolves" (Act20:29) He says "take heed to yourselves and to the flock". (vs28) "Take heed" means to be vigilant, be on the lookout, stand guard, be careful, be alert. And as he is speaking to the leaders he warns them to watch out, not only for themselves...but also "to the flock".

There are some today who rebel against the concept of -a- "leader" in an assembly. But notice Paul says that "the Holy Spirit placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased through His own blood." (vs28) Notice that these are not people the church "voted" for through their democratic process. It was the Holy Spirit who give the authority. And notice the nature of the flock. They are -precious- because Christ "purchased" each one of them with His own blood when He died on the cross as our Passover Lamb. Since they are under His blood, when God goes out in Judgment, He 'passes over' them and does not judge them. [Ed: again; 'pre-trib' Rapture] And so, the overseer's duty is an awesome one.

And Paul tells -where- the deception will come from. "Grievous wolves will come IN AMONG.." the assembly. (vs29) How do these wolves get in there? Well, sadly, in most cases in recent years, they have been "invited" in by the Believers. The excuse given is that they want to "win souls". But when these people make a "profession" it is false. They then get into leadership. In other cases, they are invited to assist in worship, even though they have never made a profession of Faith. Leaven. The "unholy". And of course, people in leadership tend to be "heard". When this happens, what do wolves beget? Sheep? No. More wolves. "...and out of you yourselves will rise up men speaking perverted things.." (vs30)

Now, also notice... he says "out of you yourselves.." He was speaking to supposed "Believers". Those whom he had, in many cases, personally appointed as leaders. How could this be? We have two scenarios: Some would be "drawing back" (Heb10:38-39) and would not be "[continuing] in the Faith" (Col1:23). And others would manifest themselves to HAVING BEEN unbelievers all along, and their departure would be proof that "but they left so that it might be revealed that they all are not of us." (1Jn2:19)

And so Paul ends Romans with more warnings. Notice -how- the wolves operate. They "make divisions and causes of stumbling contrary to the doctrine which you learned.." (vs17) In ch14 we considered the "stumbling" caused to a fellow-believer in the "gray areas". This is one thing we have seen over the past decades. The World has been brought into the assembly; from their not-so-'gray' Rock music, to nearly-naked women performing on stage, sensuously/provocatively gyrating as the world does; and the list is endless. These kinds of things have caused -many- to stumble and to be led away from Truth.

And once the senses were titillated with the flesh, of course the Bible had to "support" what they were doing. So they twisted the Scriptures (2Pt3:16) "to their own destruction", and the destruction of those following them.

And most recently they are totally -abandoning- Doctrine! They are busy "uniting" everybody (like Babel) with the methodology of "tearing down walls" (of Doctrine). They are taking God's Word and throwing it out the window. The new "apostles" do not proclaim from God's Word. When I've read prophetic utterances, whenever somebody sends me one, I have yet to see -any- Scripture in them. And what little 'hints' there are, are out of context and misquoted. Their "dreams" are not from God... "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I did not send them and I have not commanded them, nor did I speak to them. They prophesy to you a false vision, and a worthless divination, and the deceit of their heart." (Jer14:14) ...but from themselves. Just like their master, "by smooth speaking and flattering they deceive the hearts of those [of simple understanding]" (vs18)

PLEASE NOTE THIS WELL! These who -claim- to be "uniting" everybody are actually the ones -CAUSING- the "divisions". What "division" is this? Dividing people AWAY FROM God's Word. Away from God's Doctrine. Doctrine is what brings "unity" to Believers. (1Cor1:10) So when they throw God's Doctrine out the window, they are dividing God's people. According to John ch17, which they all love to recite, the unity among Believers happens when Believers are "one" with God. (Jn17:21,23) When they ravenously rip and yank Believers away from God by seeking to destroy God's Word with their perversions which they call the "Bible", and further, by totally ignoring doctrine, they also cause divisions amongst Believers. DO NOT BE DECEIVED!

What is the Believer to do regarding them? Engage in 'dialogue' with a view to come to 'concensus' over the "broad doctrines we can agree on"? Agree on what are the "essential" doctrines, and agree-to-disagree on the "nonessentials"? Paul says, "..TURN AWAY FROM THEM". (vs17b) Do NOT become "united" with them. Do NOT work together in "joint" evangelistic campaigns. When they are "wolves" their evangelism does not produce "sheep". It produces more wolves.

In conjunction with his firmness, notice Paul's tenderness. As though to say, 'Now be careful... there's a good chap!' He says, "...your obedience reached to all..." (vs19) Everybody has heard of your faithfulness and obedience to God's Word. And he says, "I rejoice over you." This is wonderful..

But we daresn't let our guard down. While you're doing well, and you have a good testimony, don't be complacent. "But I desire you to be truly wise as to good, but simple toward evil." There are many so-called "discernment ministries" who concentrate on everything evil. They send out every bit of scrap of perversion of God's Word they can to their mailing lists. Some jump up and down with glee when they find yet another

instance of rottenness. But Paul says, "be simple toward evil". Don't spend all your time with it. When bankers train to recognize counterfeit money, they don't spend a lot of time looking at counterfeits...but on the Real Thing. That way, when the counterfeit comes along, they know it does not match the real thing.

In the same way, we as Believers should be engrossing ourselves in God's Word. Getting to "know Him [Jesus Christ] and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, having been conformed to His death." (Phil3:10)

It is "the God of peace" Who will "bruise satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." (vs20) The mysteries from eternal times is "made plain..by prophetic Scriptures". All we need to know is found in the Scriptures. (2Tim3:14-17) It results in "obedience of faith" for all people. (vs26)

"..to the only wise God" and "Jesus Christ...be the glory forever." (vs27)

Amen!