

This book is a compilation of sermon summaries that were preached from April through December of 2015 at Calvary Baptist Church in Seymour, TX. Each was written and delivered by Russell Roberts. The title of the series is "Romans: The Study of Salvation". The material in this book is intended to be read alongside the cited scripture passages.

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## The Message of Salvation - The Gospel

Originally Preached - 4/26/2015

*Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching **the gospel of God**, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." - Mark 1:14-15*

This morning we begin a new sermon series in the book of Romans. We are going to journey systematically through this entire book, verse by verse, over the next few months. It promises to be an exciting and thought-provoking study, and I hope you will be faithful to come to every single service. Romans is one of the most popular and familiar books of the entire Bible, and it is my prayer that we will be challenged by it and able to apply its teachings anew and afresh in our lives.

Paul is the author of this book. It is actually a letter, or an epistle, which he wrote to the Christians living in Rome. The origins of Christianity in the city of Rome is uncertain, but most scholars tend to believe that the persecution of believers in Jerusalem led to a dispersion through the world. As such, some of these early disciples may have fled to Rome (among many other places) in order to escape the calamity. These Roman Christians met in home-groups throughout the large city and became well established there over time.

Paul wrote this letter from the city of Corinth, most likely during the winter of 56-57 AD. In the years immediately prior to this, he had been traveling through the regions of Asia Minor and Macedonia on his third missionary journey. Throughout the trip, he had been receiving an offering from the Gentile churches that he intended to take back to Jerusalem. However, winter had arrived and Paul decided to tarry in Corinth until the spring before returning to Judah with the money.

The letter to the Romans contains a thorough examination of the doctrine of salvation. Theologians and Bible scholars refer to this as soteriology or "the study of salvation". As such, I have decided to call this series by that name - "Romans: The Study of Salvation". Each of these sermons will focus upon some particular aspect of salvation, and together they will make up a comprehensive teaching on the entire doctrine.

Salvation is the fundamental message of Christianity. We are all sinners in need of a Savior. That said, this series will bring us back to the basics and remind us once again of the essential elements of our faith. These sermons will delve into several indispensable truths of Christianity, in which there is no room for various interpretations. Romans presents Christianity 101, the foundation upon which the rest of our faith resides. So... let's begin by identifying and considering the message of salvation, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### I. THE GOSPEL OF GOD (Romans 1:1-7)

Paul opens his letter to the the Christians in Rome by identifying himself as a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ. He further states that he has been set apart by God of the sake of the gospel. The English word "gospel" originates from the Greek word "euangelion" which means "good news". The gospel is, in its broadest sense, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ which is certainly good news! Spreading this message is the lifework and consuming passion of Paul, and the fundamental theme of this entire letter.

The gospel was not a promise that had recently come into existence. On the contrary, it had been declared by the prophets in ancient Israel and written about in the Old Testament Scriptures. These prophecies of old anticipated the coming Messiah, who in his humanity would be a descendent of King David, and in his deity the Son of God who would rise from the dead as testified by the Holy Spirit. This is a description of the Lord Jesus, who came to deliver His people from their sin and forever secure their great salvation.

In Christ, Paul and his colleagues have received both grace and apostleship. As recipients of grace, they are empowered by God to share the message of salvation. As called apostles, they are compelled to share it as their act of ministry. The word apostle is defined as “one who is sent as a messenger”. Paul and his friends are evangelists who have been chosen by God to carry the gospel specifically to the Gentiles.

Just as Paul has been chosen by God, so too have the recipients of this letter - the saints who are in Rome. As fellow believers in the Lord Jesus, the Roman Christians also share in the magnificent calling of Christ. They are an important part of the family of God, and Paul greets them with his customary salutation “grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

## II. PREACHING THE GOSPEL (Romans 1:8-15)

As is typical of Paul’s letters, the apostle takes a moment at the outset to commend his readers and express his gratitude and prayers for them. This complementary approach demonstrates that he loves them as people, even if the message that is forthcoming might step on their toes. In this letter, Paul applauds the Romans stating that their reputation of steadfast faith has spread throughout the whole world. It causes me to wonder about the reputation of our church’s faith...

Paul goes on to say that he talks about and prays for the church in Rome all the time, and longs to come and visit them. He looks forward to meeting the Roman believers and supposes that the encounter will be mutually beneficial to both he and them. He tells the Romans that he has planned to come for some time, but various circumstances have prevented him from doing so. Yet, he remains determined to someday soon journey to Rome and meet them face-to-face.

I read somewhere in a commentary that Paul was a “pioneer evangelist”. A pioneer is someone who goes places that no one has ever been before. Like the pioneers who gradually settled the unexplored regions of the American west, Paul carried the gospel to people that had never heard it. Because the Christian church had already been firmly established in the city of Rome, Paul had not ever travelled there. His obligation was to people and places where the message of Jesus was scarce or even absent. Still, he longed to one day preach the gospel in Rome nonetheless.

## III. NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL (Romans 1:16-17)

Despite the heavy persecution that was upon Christians by this time, Paul boldly declares that he is not ashamed of the gospel. He is resolved to share the good news of Jesus Christ openly and unapologetically for as long as possible. In some of his other letters, Paul mentions the hardships that he has endured for the sake of his calling, and concludes that his present sufferings are a small price to pay for the work God’s given him.

The depth of his commitment should challenge us to consider the measure of our own... Paul is not ashamed, but are we?

Inherent to the gospel message is the “power of God for salvation”. In the same way that the potential for a tremendous explosion rests inside a tiny atom, so also the unlimited strength of God can be found in the gospel message. But this power is unlocked only when the message is believed - it remains dormant when the gospel is rejected. When any person - whether a Jew or a Greek - hears and accepts the gospel by faith, the righteousness of God is imputed upon them and they are eternally saved and secured by the hand of the Almighty. This salvation is effected solely on the basis of faith alone.

## CONCLUSION

The gospel is the message of salvation. As stated in the introduction, It is at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is the promise of God unto redemption through the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

In the opening paragraphs of his correspondence to the Romans, Paul names salvation as the primary theme of his letter. In the chapters that follow, he will discuss the necessity of salvation (why we need it), the mechanics of salvation (its various parts how they work), the heirs of salvation (who it is intended for), and the practical effects of salvation (how it is manifested in our daily living).

In closing, did you believe the gospel? Have you heard and accepted it by faith? The power of God unto salvation is released in your life only when you place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. If you have never done so before, would you be willing to trust in Him today?

## The Necessity of Salvation - The Unrighteous

Originally Preached - 5/3/2015

*Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. - Isaiah 55:7*

Last Sunday we began a new sermon series in the book of Romans. We explored the opening sentences of Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. In these, he identifies the gospel as "the message of salvation". He goes on to declare that salvation takes place in a person's life when they believe in the gospel.

Having dispensed with the introduction, Paul now launches into the body of his letter. He begins to explain why a person would need salvation in the first place. This thorough explanation - which begins in verse 18 of chapter 1 continues well into chapter 3 - will be the subject of our sermons over the next few weeks.

One of the characteristics of a good salesman is the ability to convince their audience that they need the product being offered. Simply explaining how it works, how much it costs, and what it can do is not enough... the potential buyer has to feel that they can't live without it. Although Paul is not trying to "sell" salvation in a literal sense, he is trying to impress upon his readers its absolute necessity. Once convinced of this, they will likely be more receptive of the extensive teaching about salvation that follows.

We will consider Paul's presentation of "the necessity of salvation" in 4 separate messages. Today we will discuss the condition of the unrighteous. Next week we will study the condition of the self-righteous. The following week we will examine the condition of the unbelieving Jew. And a month from now, we will consider the condemnation of them all.

### I. THE UNRIGHTEOUS CHOOSE TO SUPPRESS THE TRUTH (Romans 1:18-23)

#### A. The Wrath of God Revealed

The "wrath of God" is His vehement anger and indignation, which is "revealed" or poured out upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness. While similar and often used synonymously, these two words actually differ in meaning. Ungodliness focuses upon one's behavior - committing actions that are ungodly (the act of sinning). Unrighteous usually refers to one's state of being - a relationship that is not right with God (the condition of sinfulness). Speaking for myself, even though I am saved (and have been made righteous) I still sin on occasion (act ungodly). Do you see the difference?

All ungodliness incurs God's wrath to some extent. Because of His holiness and just nature, the LORD is infuriated by all sin and will act with vengeance against those who engage in it. But His fullest wrath is reserved for the unrighteous - those who are not in a right relationship with Him. They are the primary subjects of these verses. These are people who have rejected God by "suppressing the truth". They are sinners, and their state of separation from Him makes them the targets of His eternal wrath and fury.

#### B. God is Evident

God has made Himself known to all people, even to the unrighteous. His existence is “evident within us”. This inner inclination is further confirmed by creation, which declares the attributes and nature of our Creator. The reality of God is clearly seen externally and understood internally so that no person is “without excuse”. Unrighteousness is never the result of an ignorance of God, but always the result of a rejection of Him.

Every person has been given enough revelation to know that God exists. It is a fact that is intuitive with us. Although we might not be privy to all of the specifics, a general acknowledgement of God’s presence should lead us to pursue Him to the best of our abilities. As we do so, God will continually reveal more of Himself to us and our faith will be credited as righteousness. But should we chose to deny His existence, we are without excuse and will suffer the wrath of God.

### C. Foolish Hearts are Darkened

While some unrighteous men completely reject the knowledge of God altogether, others pervert it by worshiping the creation rather than the Creator. These people fail to honor and give thanks to the LORD, and instead worship man-made idols which are powerless to save. Such a futile exchange is utter foolishness.

It is instinctive to our humanity to worship someone or something. People have been doing so since the earliest times of civilization. Yet many cultures and peoples have chosen to worship corruptible objects and images rather than the incorruptible God. This misplaced practice is unacceptable. The revelation of God is sufficient for us to understand the difference between truly worshiping Him versus worshiping His handiwork, idols, or even other false gods. Again, it leaves all men without excuse.

## II. THE UNRIGHTEOUS ARE GIVEN OVER TO CARNALITY (Romans 1:24-31)

As a result of their suppression of the truth, the unrighteous have been given over by God to carnality and worldliness. Afterall, to reject God is to chose the world. Therefore the LORD is simply honoring the wishes of the unrighteous when He “gives them over”. This transfer can be better understood as someone being taken into custody. God is releasing the unrighteous into the captivity of sin and immorality.

This wretched condition is manifested in countless ways. The lust of our hearts consumes us, leading to a myriad of impurities. While lust is most often associated with sexual sin, it can refer to any unhealthy and sinful desire. The lust for power, for fortune, or for fame can be just as harmful as that for a beautiful woman or man.

Not only are the unrighteous subject to immoral lusts, but also to degrading and unnatural passions. The practice of homosexuality, which is widely accepted in our day as a legitimate lifestyle, has been around for centuries. And while the debate rages (even within many of our churches) over its morality, there is absolutely no question about its nature. A simple anatomy lesson drives this point home vividly. God did not design men to have sexual relationships with men, nor women with women.

These lusts - whether immoral, unnatural, or both - are indicative of a depraved mind which desires to do things which are not right or proper. The thoughts of the sinful mind lead to all sorts of wickedness and evil. Paul lists several types of sins that are committed by those who are unrighteous - greed, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; gossip, slander, hatred of God, insolence, arrogance, boastfulness, innovation of evil, and disobedience to parents. He further describes them as reprobates who are without understanding and are untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.

These behaviors are most symptomatic of those who have rejected God. They are specific examples of ungodliness, which are all characteristic of unrighteousness. These deeds, whether committed unwittingly by the righteous or wholeheartedly by the unrighteous, lead to penalties or consequences that are manifested in both the present life and the eternal life to come.

### III. THE UNRIGHTEOUS ARE WORTHY OF DEATH (Romans 1:32)

All people "know the ordinance of God" instinctively. The fundamental truth of good and evil is self-evident. You don't have to teach it - even little children understand the basic difference between right and wrong. Therefore, those who make a practice of sinful behavior (the unrighteous) are worthy of death. This is the just and deserved penalty for their rejection of God.

Not only do the unrighteous embrace a lifestyle of sin themselves, but they give their approval to others who do likewise. They celebrate the fallenness and depravity of other nonbelievers, finding comfort in their mutual wretchedness. Their endorsement of such evil things make them even more deserving of death.

### CONCLUSION

The condition of the unrighteous is quite dire. Because they have chosen to suppress the truth of God which is evident within them, the unrighteous have been given over to their own sinful desires. They are worthy of death, and unless they repent and turn to God while there is still time, they will surely receive it.

The Bible teaches that, in our own humanity, there is none righteous - no not one. We are all partakers of a sinful nature that is contrary to and antagonist toward God. This is our default condition, and the very reason that salvation is necessary. Our depraved state makes it impossible to save ourselves. We were all unrighteous before we accepted Christ, and if you've never accepted Him then you are still unrighteous even at this moment.

Captivated by sin, and helpless to escape from it, we are all in need someone to rescue us. We need a Hero... we need a Savior... we need Redeemer.. we need Jesus!

## The Necessity of Salvation - The Self-Righteous

Originally Preached - 5/10/2015

*For by grace you have been saved through faith ; and that **not of yourselves**, it is the gift of God ; **not as a result of works**, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. - Ephesians 2:8-10*

A few weeks ago we began a new series of sermons from the book of Romans called “The Study of Salvation”. In his letter to the Christians at Rome, Paul provides a comprehensive explanation of the doctrine of salvation. The essential truths taught in these chapters help us to better understand and grasp what it really means to be “saved”.

Today’s message is the third in this series. Romans began by identifying the gospel of God as “The Message of Salvation”. From there, it moved into a lengthy discussion of “The Necessity of Salvation”. We will continue with this topic this morning. Whereas last week we talked about the condition of the unrighteous, today we will highlight the condition of the self-righteous and discover that they too are in desperate need of salvation.

The unrighteous were described as those who “suppressed the truth” of God which was “evident within them”. They are the those who completely reject God or worship some other alternative to Him. The Bible use names such as pagans or heathens to identify these people. Today we might call them atheists or agnostics. We learned last week that these unrighteous individuals are “worthy of death”.

But what about the self-righteous? These are people do who acknowledge the existence of God, and seek to earn His favor. The term refers to those who believe that moral living is a means unto salvation. This viewpoint neglects the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, and replaces it with a self-attained redemption.

Because the concept of self-righteousness is based upon doing good works, it requires some standard of measurement. There are several different ways that people measure their own perceived righteousness. We will examine three of them today - comparing your works with others, comparing your works against each other, and comparing your works against the Law.

### I. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS COMPARE THEIR WORKS WITH THOSE OF OTHERS (Romans 2:1-3)

One of the most common tactics of the self-righteous is to compare themselves with others. In so doing, they often judge themselves to be morally superior. Their reasoning is similar to this... “I may not be perfect, but I am certainly more righteous than they are. God will surely accept me because I act a lot better than they do.”

Such thinking is extremely dangerous. First, it tends to create an arrogant attitude. If someone constantly exalts themselves over others, a prideful and haughty heart will soon develop within them. Secondly, it fosters an overly critical and judgmental attitude. When a person constantly looks down upon others they become insolent and hateful toward them.



Ultimately, such comparisons are foolish. God will judge all of those who practice ungodliness. The self-righteous are just as guilty as those they compare themselves to. Even though their specific acts of ungodliness may be different, their sinful condition is the same. The self-righteous are just as guilty as the unrighteous. They will not escape the judgment of God, and are woefully deceived if they think that somehow they will.

One of the most well-known passages of Scripture that illustrate this point is found in Luke 18:9-14. Jesus is addressing a group of self-righteous people as He tells the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The pious Pharisee thanks God that he is not like the tax-collector, while the tax-collector cries out to God for mercy. Jesus concludes that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, while those who humble themselves will be exalted.

## II. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS WEIGH THEIR GOOD AGAINST THEIR BAD (Romans 2:4-11)

A second approach of the self-righteous is to compare their good deeds with their bad deeds. They seek to place all of their behaviors on a fictitious balance scale. They think to themselves, "If my good outweighs my bad, then God will accept me."

The Bible tells us that God is kind, tolerant, and patient - providing each person with an opportunity for repentance. Repentance is the what the LORD desires. To repent is to consciously turn from sinful behaviors and to wholeheartedly seek holiness. A person who is simply trying to do more "good" than "bad" has not truly repented, because a repentant person would strive to do no "bad" at all. Thus, the self-righteous are storing up God's wrath for themselves.

Some have misunderstood the statement that God will judge all people "according to their deeds" to say that He will weigh one's good against their bad. This is simply not so. Further study explains that those who have received salvation will inherit eternal life and be rewarded on the basis of their deeds, but those who have not been saved will receive wrath and indignation and be condemned on the basis of theirs. The guidelines will be the same for all people whether Jew or Gentile. There will be no partiality in the LORD's judgment.

I am reminded of a scene from the movie "Courageous" in which two police officers are conversing at the gun-range. Though the primary thrust of the film pertains to fatherhood, in this scene a young recruit "hopes that his good will outweigh his bad". The older, more mature Christian explains that a Good Judge will render judgment upon the guilty based solely upon the person's crime, not upon their past good deeds.

## III. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS BOAST IN THEIR ADHERENCE TO THE LAW (Romans 2:12-16)

A third variation of self-righteousness is known as "legalism". We will touch on this briefly today, but will expound upon it even more thoroughly next week. This is a person who tries to earn God's favor and attain righteousness by keeping the Law. They think, "I will acquire salvation through strict obedience to God's commands."

In these verses, when Paul refers to the Law he is talking about the Mosaic Law which was given to the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai. Not all people had heard this law, particularly the Gentiles. But whether a person had heard it or not didn't really matter, because either way one would be judged by it or perish without it. Neither outcome would be positive. The message is clear - obedience to the law will not bring about righteousness or result in salvation. On the contrary, our disobedience to it exposes our sinfulness and need for Savior.

One of Jesus' encounters seems to be quite appropriate for this particular topic. The story is of a rich young ruler who approaches Christ and asks what he must do to obtain eternal life. He claims to have kept all the commandments since his childhood, and appears to be a very sincere and obedient young man. Still Jesus tells the man that he is lacking something - his compliance is not enough. With this statement, Jesus reveals that obedience to the Law is not sufficient to obtain salvation. Instead, we must follow Him.

## CONCLUSION

As we read in our focal text at the outset of this message, we are not saved as a result of our works. We might like to believe that our own moral behavior is better than that of others around us (and maybe it is). We might like to think that the amount of good we've done exceeds the amount of bad (and perhaps it does). We might even like to suppose that we've been faithfully obedient to God's commands (and maybe we have for the most part). Yet in all three cases, we have put the focus upon ourselves and what we have done rather than on Christ and what He has done for us.

The self-righteous are "storing up wrath" that God promises to unleash upon them on the day of judgment. Their condition is just as desperate as the unrighteous, for the truth is the self-righteousness is merely a form of unrighteousness. Neither is "right" with God. Thus, they too are lost and in critical need of salvation.

If you have been trying to achieve righteousness through your own efforts, I urge you to realize the futility of your actions. We are saved by placing our faith in Jesus, who then grants us forgiveness of our sins and covers us with His righteousness. It is only His righteousness that can redeem us, never our own self-righteousness.

## The Necessity of Salvation - The Presumptuous

Originally Preached - 5/17/2015

*“But My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices.” - Psalm 81:11-12*

This morning we will continue our emphasis on the necessity of salvation. Thus far we have discovered that those who suppress the truth of God (atheists and nonbelievers), those who pervert the truth of God (pagans and idolaters), and those who self-righteously pursue God are all subjects of His divine wrath. Each of these categories of people are unrighteous in some fashion or another; that is, they are not “right” in their relationship with God and are in need of salvation.

When we began this series of sermons last month, we talked about some of the characteristics of the church in Rome. It is most likely that there were several small gatherings of Christians who met in homes across the city for worship. The entire congregation itself was probably quite diverse, and most certainly consisted of both believing Jews and Gentiles. Recognizing this distinction, in several places throughout his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul specifically addresses and/or appeals to one group or the other. Such is the case today...

In the later half of chapter 2 Paul identifies yet another unrighteous group of people - the presumptuous. These are individuals who presume that they are saved simply because of who they are. At the time this letter was written, many Jews assumed that they were righteous simply because of their Jewish heritage and birth. Believing themselves to be saved already on the basis of their identity, these people saw no urgent need for obedience or submission to the Lordship of Christ.

This same type of faulty thinking still exists today. Though not necessarily Jewish, many supposed Christians believe that they are saved because of their identity. Some presume that because they are members of a certain church, or children of certain parents, or walked an aisle many years ago that they are automatically redeemed. Such assumptions are horribly misplaced.

### I. HEARERS ALONE ARE NOT JUSTIFIED (Romans 2:12-16)

The Jews were the descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were God’s chosen, covenant nation through whom He sought to further reveal Himself to the rest of the world. Through His servant Moses the LORD provided Israel with the Law, that they would have a comprehensive written collection of His standards to study and abide by.

The Gentiles, on the other hand, did not have immediate access to or intimate knowledge of this Law. They were descended from other ancestors, and did not share in the Jewish heritage or religion. Even still, the revelation of God was “evident within them” to the extent that they could understand the difference between right and wrong.

The law of the Gentiles had been ascribed internally, written within them. Whether someone had the law visibly written on tablets or invisibly written on their hearts, both groups would be judged based upon their obedience to the commandments which they'd been given. As we discussed last week, trying to attain salvation through obedience to the law is a form of self-righteousness known as "legalism". It can be a problem for the Jew and the Gentile, because each has some form of the law to follow. In either case, the Bible is clear that perfect adherence to the law is impossible for any person and all are guilty as a result of failure to keep it.

But notice the implication of this passage... the Jews presumed themselves to be justified simply because they had heard the Law. In other words, because they had been chosen by God to be the recipients of His commandments, the Jews reasoned that they themselves must be redeemed. Actual obedience to it was not significant. And as the exclusive possessors of His law, they further concluded that all of the Gentiles must be wicked.

## II. MISREPRESENTING GOD (Romans 2:17-24)

The Jews had taken God's law and kept it largely to themselves. God had intended them to become "guides to the blind", "lights to those in darkness", "correctors of the foolish", and "teachers of the immature". Put another way, the LORD wanted to reveal Himself to the entire world through the nation of Israel so that all people would come to know Him. Unfortunately, with rare exception, the Jews had chosen instead to selfishly hide their light under a bushel.

Paul challenges these presumptuous and stingy Jews with several questions. Why would you speculate that others are guilty and you are not when both of you commit the same sinful acts? How is God fair and just if He condemns some and excuses others for doing the exact same things? Yet the fact that these questions were even posed reveals that many Jews assumed that they were saved not on the basis on what they did per se, but rather on the basis of who they were.

This type of lofty attitude among the Jews led to deep-seated resentment for them among the Gentiles. The ongoing tension between these two groups is obvious throughout the Scriptures. On top of this, because of Israel's contemptuous behavior Gentiles everywhere blasphemed God's name. The people who had been especially chosen to represent the LORD among the nations had become so pious and hypocritical that the nations despised God.

As professing Christians, we share the responsibility of being God's representatives in today's world. How are we doing? Do people praise God's name after seeing and hearing us? Or... do they see us and say, "If that's what it looks like to be a follower of Christ I'd rather pass"?

## III. CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART (Romans 2:25-29)

Circumcision had been practiced by the Jews since the days of Abraham. It was a physical, outward marking that identified his descendents. Yet, this identifier was meaningless and invalid if the circumcised person was

a violator of the law, which all of them were. Thus circumcision was no more consequential to salvation than uncircumcision, a fact that certainly upset some of Paul's Jewish readers.

The Bible explains that a true Jew has had a circumcision of the heart which is performed by the Spirit of God. Their righteousness is not vested in an outward profession of who they claim to be, but rather is vested in an inward change that God himself imparts.

Walking an aisle and saying the sinner's prayer doesn't make you a Christian, anymore than being circumcised in the flesh makes you a Jew. While the prayer is of some importance, a true Christian is one who has had a transformation of the heart. They have been radically changed on the inside, and this reversal becomes increasingly apparent on the outside. It is something that God does within us when we sincerely commit our lives to Him.

## CONCLUSION

Most of us dislike those who think that, because of who they are, the law doesn't apply to them. Many prominent politicians come immediately to mind. They consider themselves to be above the law, and live as if they will never be held accountable for their behavior. While this may sometimes be the case here on earth, no one will escape the righteous judgment of God.

As we close this morning I want to touch on a concept that is widespread throughout Christian circles today. It is an easily embraced theology that pleases our ears and appeals to our senses. It has come to be known as "cheap grace" or "free grace" and is advocated by many of the most well-known preachers of our day.

"Cheap grace" is the idea that once a person receives Christ unto salvation, their thoughts and behaviors no longer matter. Proponents of this way of thinking suppose that born-again Christians can go on sinning just as they had before their salvation, and no real change is expected by God. According to this theology, accepting the grace of God doesn't cost a person much since they can continue living in whatever sinful manner that they choose. Thus, it is a "cheap grace".

While salvation in Jesus Christ may be free, it certainly comes with a price. We must take up our cross daily and follow Him. Those who reckon to have the grace of Jesus as Savior without any submission to Jesus as Lord are grievously mistaken. Their disingenuous treatment of God is equally as vile to Him as the behaviors of the unrighteous. Assuming themselves saved, they are actually just as lost as the most miserable of sinners.

Jesus may love you just as you are, but He will not leave you just as you are. Those who claim to be saved but continually remain unchanged are presuming upon God's grace, just as these Jews were that Paul was addressing in his letter.

## The Necessity of Salvation - The Guilty

Originally Preached - 5/24/2015

*The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God"; They are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice; There is no one who does good. God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there is anyone who understands, who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; **There is no one who does good, not even one.** - Psalm 53:1-3*

This morning's message is the fifth in our series through the book of Romans titled "The Study of Salvation". After identifying the gospel as the message of salvation in his opening statements, the apostle Paul launched into an extended teaching on the necessity of salvation. We have explored this topic for the past month.

Who needs to hear the gospel message and why? The unrighteous, because their state of being is not "right" with God. Their relationship with Him is disconnected or severed. As such, they are subject to God's wrath and judgment; they are in need of the salvation that comes only through the gospel. These include all who suppress the truth, pervert the truth, self-righteously pursue the truth, and presume upon the truth.

In our passage today, Paul presents his final arguments regarding the necessity of salvation for the unrighteous. He does so by asking and answering a series of questions which logically lead him to a final conclusion. So, have we identified all of the types of unrighteous people yet? Let's find out...

### I. IS THERE ANY ADVANTAGE? (Romans 3:1-2)

Over the past couple of weeks we have studied 2 issues that seemed to be prevalent among Jews during the infancy of the New Testament church. The first was self-righteousness, a condition in which Jews sought to earn their own righteousness before God through strict obedience to the Law of Moses. The second was presumptuous thinking, a condition in which the Jews considered themselves to be exempt from obedience to the Law because they were "chosen by God". We learned that both of these approaches are flawed and neither leads to salvation. Thus, the Jew might ask themselves, is there any benefit at all to being Jewish?

Paul answers this question with an emphatic "yes". Of all the people on the earth, God chose Israel and entrusted them with His divine "oracles". This is referring to the LORD's revelation of Himself to the Jewish people. In direct encounters with the patriarchs, through the written law, through messages to the prophets, and in numerous other ways God had spoken specifically to Israel. They benefited from an intimate knowledge of God and a rich history with Him that other nations simply did not possess. Such an advantage should have been evident in the lifestyles of the people, but all too often it was not.

In the modern American church we have many advantages and luxuries. Almost every person who wants one has a Bible. There are an abundance of Christian churches in every city. Compared to many parts of the world, we can worship God freely and without much persecution. We are truly blessed. But, as it pertains to salvation, we as Americans have no greater claim on righteousness than any other nation or people. All of us are equally guilty before a holy God.

## II. WILL GOD REMAIN FAITHFUL? (Romans 3:3-4)

Though they had been given a special knowledge of God, some of the Jews chose not to believe it. Such disbelief on their part led to the next question, "Would their unfaithfulness to God undo His faithfulness to Israel?" This time Paul answers with an emphatic "no". Even though every person is found to be a liar, even still God remains both faithful and true.

The underlying message is that God's character and nature is not changed by our behavior. Though we might reject, scorn, and "run around on" God, His love for us and devotion to us remains constant. The LORD is good, and His mercies endure forever. Because of this, He graciously offers salvation to us even though we are stubbornly unrighteous.

## III. HOW DOES UNRIGHTEOUSNESS DEMONSTRATE RIGHTEOUSNESS? (Romans 3:5-6)

The purpose of unrighteousness is to demonstrate righteousness. In other words, our human nature (which is completely corrupted and sinful) is intended to illustrate the divine nature of God. That said, one might wonder, "Since people are so unrighteous and yet taught to be a demonstration of God, does this mean that God is unrighteous too?"

To this question Paul answers with a firm "no". Again, he is teaching that God's incorruptible righteousness is not tainted by the fallenness of mankind. God is not like us - He is holy and perfect and pure. So we might refine the question to ask, "How does the unrighteousness of men demonstrate the righteousness of God?"

The answer lies not in a comparison of man to God, but rather in a contrast of man with God. The extent of our depravity creates a hopelessly dark backdrop upon which the glory of the LORD shines brightly. It is not our likeness to Him, but rather our vast difference from Him, that reveals His righteousness and goodness.

## IV. WHY NOT MAKE THE DARKNESS DARKER? (Romans 3:7-8)

The sinful nature of man unveils that glory of God. Into the abject darkness of the human condition the light of God's glory abounds. Thus, some might consider, "If my sin actually serves to make God shine brighter, why am I being condemned?" Others might propose, "Should we continue to practice evil deeds in order to further demonstrate the goodness of God?"

Apparently some were reporting that Paul was teaching such things. Paul flatly denies this and again says "no". Although our imperfection makes a strong and vivid contrast to God's perfection, this is no excuse to go on sinning as a way of promoting God. Even the idea of it seems ludicrous, does it not?

God did not intend for us to demonstrate Him to the world by living in opposition to His nature. While it may have helped to expose our sinfulness, the LORD's true desire is for us to be like Him as much as possible, so that others might see God in us. For this reason, we are being made into the likeness of Christ. Those who dismiss their sinfulness as a way of advancing the grace of God deserve the condemnation that they will receive.

## V. WHAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE? (Romans 3:9-18)

In these verses, Paul extends the scope of the unrighteous to include all people. There is no one who is any better off than another, for “all are under sin”. No person escapes this expanse. As it pertains to salvation, the Jew might ask, “Am I in a better position than the Gentile?” God’s answer is a resounding “No!” The bottom line is clear - all of us are unrighteous and in desperate need of salvation.

Numerous references to various Old Testament passages are given to support the final conclusion - that all people are unrighteous. Each describes the depraved nature of humanity. Each reveals the moral guilt of mankind. Each serves as a reason for the condemnation of all men.

## CONCLUSION

With this Paul concludes his teaching on the “Necessity of Salvation”. He has argued that all men are separated from God by their sin. Every person is unrighteous; they are not right in their relationship with God. In this perilous condition, all people are subject to God’s wrath and eternal condemnation.

Those who have “suppressed the truth” are equally as guilty as those who have perverted it. Those who have tried to self-righteously pursue God are just as guilty as those who have presumed upon His grace. Those who are circumcised are just as guilty as those who are not. Whether Jew or Gentile, pagan or pious, all have sinned and are guilty before God. No one is excused. Their punishment is just and their need for salvation urgent.

In the remainder of this book we will discuss what salvation is, from Whom it can be received, and how it works in our lives. But for now we must simply understand that it is something we all need, and something we cannot attain on our own. We are hopelessly and helplessly lost, and in great want of a Savior.



## The Initial Phase of Salvation - Justification by Faith

Originally Preached - 5/31/2015

*But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:23-26*

This morning's sermon is the sixth in our series through Romans titled "The Study of Salvation". The book began by identifying the unrighteous. After much deliberation, we found that there is no one who is "right" with God. All are sinful and guilty of violating His commands. Consequently, every person is the subject of God's wrath and judgment. Furthermore, all people are in need of salvation in order to escape the justice of God.

Having recognized its paramount importance, we must now learn what salvation is and how it works. While there are many excellent definitions you could use, let's consider salvation to be the means by which a person is delivered from the condemnation of God. Salvation is a process that consists of several different facets, including justification, regeneration, sanctification, and glorification.

In the coming chapters of his letter, the apostle Paul delves into each of these concepts and how they work together in the overall functioning of salvation. He begins his teaching with justification, starting in the middle part of chapter 3 and continuing through the end of chapter 5. Therefore, this will be our topic for the next few weeks. Following the messages on justification, we will move into sanctification and glorification.

### I. JUSTIFICATION COMES APART FROM THE LAW (Romans 3:19-20)

The law of God applies to all of those who are under its jurisdiction. For the Jew, this refers to the written Law of Moses. For the Gentile, it refers to the law that was written upon their hearts. In either case, all people have some knowledge of God's commands and are held accountable accordingly. But as we have discovered in the preceding chapters, all men are guilty of violating these laws.

Because of the fallen nature of humanity, no person is able to perfectly keep God's law. Thus, obedience to it through works can never lead to justification. Such an approach is doomed to failure. The Law was not given to men as a means to attain righteousness. On the contrary, it was given to reveal our inability to do so. Perhaps in realizing our depravity and sinfulness, we will turn to God in repentance and seek salvation in Him.

Thus, it is the Law that teaches us that we are sinners. It presents us with the troubling reality about ourselves - we are desperately wicked. Our unrighteousness separates us from God and results in a great need for salvation.

### II. JUSTIFICATION COMES THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS (Romans 3:21-26)

The righteousness of God has been manifested “apart from the Law”. The Law and the Prophets, which include the writings of the Old Testament, were simply witnesses to it. The righteousness of God is found through faith in Jesus Christ. All who believe in Him are justified “as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

Baptists define justification as “God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer into a relationship of peace and favor with God.” Those who have been justified have been forgiven of their sin and have had the charges that were against them dropped. Thus, their legal standing before God is rectified.

Jesus shed His blood and died on Calvary's cross as a “propitiation” for our sins. In other words, His death appeased God's wrath and averted His harsh judgment. Christ endured the full extent of God's fury toward sin so that those who place their faith in Him would not have to. Although the Father loves the Son beyond measure, He did not withhold His wrath from the Lord Jesus but rather poured it out to the utmost.

Therefore, because Jesus willingly bore the punishment for man's sin, God's sentence against it has now been executed. The ransom has been paid; the penalty enforced. As such, when any person places their “faith in Jesus” unto salvation the LORD fully pardons their guilt. The punishment that Christ received substitutes for that which the repentant sinner deserves. In this manner, the believer is justified or acquitted.

### III. FAITH ESTABLISHES THE LAW (Romans 3:27-31)

Salvation comes wholly through faith in Jesus Christ. All boasting in good works is excluded. Justification is by faith alone, and is available to both Jew and Gentile. God will justify any one who genuinely confesses Christ as their Lord and Savior. Once a person is justified, the hindrance of sin that had separated them from God is removed. The pathway between them is cleared so that their relationship can be completely restored.

Justification leads to reconciliation, which then results in regeneration. Once the debt of sin is cancelled, one's relationship with God is restored. When this connection is established, new birth occurs as the Holy Spirit comes into the life of the new Christian. They are made into a new creation, brought to spiritual life by the almighty hand of God. Such power is evident in the life of a true believer.

In summary, faith is the catalyst of justification. Apart from it no one is justified. Even still, faith does not nullify the Law. The commandments of God are still valuable to and consequential in our lives. As believers, we are not to live our lives lawlessly but rather in submission and obedience to God. Such living provides evidence of the genuineness of our faith. Thus faith serves to establish or undergird the Law, giving believers a richer and more proper understanding of its purpose.

### CONCLUSION

Salvation is a process, not an event. However, like all processes, it must have a starting point. When a person comes under conviction, having realized their sinful condition and need for salvation, and they turn in repentance to God through faith in Jesus Christ the sequence begins.

The first step of salvation is justification, which is absolutely necessary to pave the way for all that will follow. God forgives the sinner and justifies or pardons them, thereby dropping the charges that had been levied against them as a result of their sin. Because the penalty for these sins has already been paid once by the atoning death of Jesus Christ, God is just in not rendering this punishment twice. As a result, the justified believer is no longer separated from God.

As soon as the barrier is removed, at the moment of salvation, God indwells the new Christian with the Holy Spirit. His presence serves to secure the new believer's standing before God and bring about spiritual life where formerly there was only death. This is known as regeneration, or the new birth, and happens instantaneously following justification. Both are the gracious actions of God.

Each of us is a criminal, having broken the law of God. The charges have been filed against us, and we are simply awaiting judgment. When our day in court arrives, we will be found guilty and sentenced to an eternal punishment. However, if before that day, we will place our faith in Christ who has already served our penalty and bore our sin then we will be justified and freed from the looming condemnation.

## The Initial Phase of Salvation - Abraham (Part 1)

Originally Preached - 6/7/2015

***By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance ; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise ; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. - Hebrews 11:8-10***

Last week we were introduced to the concept of justification. Justification refers to the forgiveness of a person's sins and the pardon of their judgment. When an individual accepts Jesus by faith unto salvation, God graciously places their sin and punishment on Christ's account. He further exchanges the righteousness of Jesus for the unrighteousness of the sinner, thereby removing any hindrance between the new believer and God. This glorious transaction is known as justification, the full acquittal of a person based upon the merit of Christ Jesus.

We further learned that justification results in reconciliation, which is the restoration of one's relationship with God. When the barrier of sin is removed, the relationship between man and God is renewed. This reunion leads to regeneration, or new birth, as the Holy Spirit indwells the new believer. The residence of the Spirit within a person produces spiritual life and vibrancy. The old creation becomes a new creation, saved and secured by the mighty hand of the Lord.

All of this takes place when someone places their faith in Christ. But what about those who lived prior to the incarnation of Jesus? Historically the Jews had followed God, and were known the world over as His chosen people. For centuries they expressed faith in the LORD, yet had not seen the promised Messiah. Could they receive salvation having never actually accepted Jesus Christ specifically?

In chapter 4 of Romans, Paul cites Abraham as an example of someone who had a saving faith prior to the atoning work of the cross. He describes how the faith of the Old Testament saints resulted in justification and salvation even before the advent of Christ, just as it does now for those who place their faith in Him.

We will explore this chapter in a 2-part message called "The Faith of Abraham". We will begin today with Part 1 and conclude next Sunday with Part 2. Let's begin...

### I. FAITH CREDITS RIGHTEOUSNESS (Romans 4:1-5)

Paul has already shown in the latter half of chapter 3 that salvation comes as a result of faith alone, completely "apart from works". He now applies this truth to the father of the Jewish nation, the great patriarch Abraham. Even Abraham was not justified by his works, and thus had no reason or basis upon which to boast. He also was saved by faith just as the New Testament Christians were. But how?

Scripture says that Abraham believed or had faith in God, and "it was credited to him as righteousness". Remember that Paul is using the words righteousness and unrighteousness to describe one's condition of being before God, and thus we can understand this phrase to mean that Abraham's faith resulted in his right

standing before the LORD. The conclusion is this that faith alone was responsible for Abraham's justification, not works of the flesh. Again we are reminded, this forgiveness and pardon of sin is the undeserved gift of God.

Have you ever bought something using a credit card? The idea is that you can go ahead and acquire that which you've purchased, although you have not yet paid for it in full. Credit allows you to make payments over time to pay off expensive items that you may not be able to buy outright. The credit card company or bank trusts that you will eventually pay them back (with interest) for purchasing the item for you. This explanation is helpful in understanding what Paul is teaching.

The righteousness of Abraham was "credited" to him, meaning that he acquired it even though it had not yet been paid for. God applied the righteousness of Christ to Abraham, trusting that Jesus would pay for it when the appropriate time came. Jesus' cry from the cross, "It is finished!" actually translates "Paid in full". Jesus paid off the sin debt of those who lived before His coming, along with those living at the time and all who would live in the future. We call this redemption.

## II. FAITH INVITES A BLESSING (Romans 4:6-8)

Though still referring to Abraham, Paul quotes one of the songs of King David - specifically Psalm 32:1. In this verse, David describes three specific actions. The first is forgiveness of sins, the second is covering of sins, and the third is not taking sins into account. Let's take a moment to apply each of these actions to Abraham.

First, God completely forgave his sins. How? By reckoning them to Christ, who bore the sin of all mankind. Second, God did not hold Abraham accountable for his sins. Why? Because Jesus would assume the accountability for them instead. Third, God would cover the sins or "blot them out". How? By imputing or crediting the righteousness of Christ to Abraham. And what do these 3 actions depict? Justification - perfectly described in the Old Testament centuries before Paul even wrote the book of Romans. Thus, the doctrine of justification is not limited to the New Testament alone.

We must recognize that righteousness comes as a blessing of God. It is given to us as an act of His goodness and grace. Salvation is not something that we have earned, that we are entitled to, or that we deserve in any way. It is granted to those who place their faith in Him solely on the basis of Christ's merit. As believers, we should understand that we are recipients of God's blessing and should live accordingly.

## III. FAITH APPLIES TO EVERYONE (Romans 4:9-12)

Spurred by the voice of God, Abram left his homeland and journeyed to Canaan. There the LORD promised him a son through whom the nation of Israel would be established. In Genesis 15:6 Moses writes that Abram wholeheartedly believed that God would make good on His promise, and this belief was credited to Him as righteousness. This preceded the changing of Abram's name to Abraham and the institution of the covenant of circumcision some years later (described Genesis 17). Thus, the righteousness of Abraham was reckoned to him while he was still uncircumcised!

Seeing that Abraham was justified and saved though not circumcised, so also are all Gentiles who place their faith in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Abraham remained saved following his circumcision and thereby demonstrates that the Jew also is saved by faith. Whether Jew or Gentile, circumcised or not, faith is the requirement for salvation - not works. Abraham may be considered the "Father of the Jews", but his testimony of faith applies to all non-Jews as well.

## CONCLUSION

To the Jews there is no person more significant than Abraham. He had been highly regarded for centuries as the patriarch of their nation. It is understandable that, in light of the necessity to receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, some might wonder about those folks like Abraham who never actually knew of Jesus specifically. How could such a person be saved, especially seeing as they died before the atonement for man's sin on the cross? And if Abraham wasn't saved, why would any Jew give credence to this new doctrine?

Paul's answer regarding Abraham's salvation is the same as it is for those who know Jesus personally - by justification through faith. Old Testament Christians may not have known or even heard of the name Jesus, yet they looked forward to a coming Messiah nonetheless. Their faith was much more than a mere acknowledgment of the existence of God, but rather formed the foundation of a relationship that depended on Him. Men like Abraham, Moses, David, and others walked closely with God and trusted Him to deliver them from their sinfulness. Thus, they were saved by faith in the same way that we are today.

It helps to remember that God is timeless. This is a difficult concept for us because all we know is "time". We understand the universe in terms of the clock, yet the work of God transcends time. Eternity does not only extend forward into time but also backwards, applying to all moments past, present, and future. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross covered all sin for all time, including those who lived prior to its happening. From the beginning God foreknew that the Lord would pay the debt of sin at some point, and thus it was just for Him to "credit faith as righteousness" for Abraham and others.

## The Initial Phase of Salvation - Abraham (Part 2)

Originally Preached - 6/14/2015

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." - Genesis 12:1-3*

Last Sunday we began a two-week investigation of Abraham's relationship with God. Scripture is clear that he walked closely with God and enjoyed sweet fellowship with Him. Abraham followed the LORD's leadership and direction, even when it was difficult. He built numerous altars where he worshiped and made sacrifices to God. He was a godly man of the highest moral character.

Yet, despite Abraham's goodness, a potential problem arises. Paul has been arguing that salvation comes through faith alone - specifically in the person of Jesus Christ. So how could someone who lived centuries before the crucifixion and resurrection know to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior? Is such a person saved, and if so on what basis? Was Abraham saved because of his obedience to God (works) or because of his faith? These are the questions we are dealing with in chapter 4 of Romans.

A week ago we studied verses 1-12 and discovered that Abraham's faith was "credited as righteousness". We discovered that God cited Abraham's faith as the reason for their reconciliation. As the result of his faith, Abraham was forgiven of his sin, freed from his accountability to it, and had his sins covered. Abraham was made righteous, just as we are, through the righteousness of Christ imputed upon his life. Abraham may not have known about Jesus per se, but he depended upon God to be his savior nonetheless and his faith was "credited as righteousness". Thus, Abraham was redeemed by the cross though he lived prior to its happening.

Furthermore, Abraham was justified by faith while still uncircumcised. Later in his life, God confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant and initiated the ordinance of circumcision. This was a binding, unconditional promise made by God to Abraham and his descendants for all generations. This morning we will briefly consider the legacy of Abraham in light of this covenant, and how it still applies to us today.

### I. THE PROMISED INHERITANCE (Romans 4:13-15)

God's covenant with Abraham included three main features - a promise of land, a promise of descendants, and a promise of blessing and redemption. The physical land of Palestine itself was given by God to Israel. Its dimensions are specifically spelled out in the Bible and cannot be disputed. But this promise finds ultimate fulfillment in that the descendants of Abraham would be heirs of the entire "world". This refers to the citizenry of the new earth, which will be created for the redeemed following the millennial age.

This promised inheritance will be given to those who have been justified and saved by faith. The law does not

bring about such a glorious inheritance; on the contrary, it brings about God's wrath. Because all have sinned and are guilty under it, the law ultimately results in condemnation. But apart from the law there is no violation, meaning no guilt, and therefore no wrath. The blessed promise of God to become an heir of the "world" applies to those who live by faith; not to those who live by the law.

## II. FATHER OF MANY NATIONS (Romans 4:16-18)

The promises of God that were made to Abraham were extended to his descendants. A strictly literal interpretation would conclude that they only applied to those born of his family tree. In other words, only those who could trace their ancestry back to Abraham would be privy to the conditions of the covenant. This was the viewpoint of most Jews, and still is today. This would restrict the promise to only blood relatives.

However, upon careful consideration of what Paul is saying, the Abrahamic Covenant was made on the basis of faith. It applied to everyone who shared in the faith of Abraham, not merely to those physically born of his line. The descendants of Abraham include all people who demonstrate the same type of dependant faith in God that he did. Thus, all those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior are truly the children of Abraham and are partakers in the covenant.

God promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations, not just Israel. Some of these are descended from him in the flesh, while others are descended from him in faith. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all trace their heritage to Abraham. These three religions represent over half the world's population and clearly making Abraham the father of "many nations". Jews and Muslims are his direct physical descendants having come through his sons Isaac and Ishmael respectively. But Christians are descendants of Abraham also, on the basis of a common faith and salvation.

## III. ABRAHAM'S CREDITED RIGHTEOUSNESS (Romans 4:19-22)

Abraham was almost 100 years old when God told him that he and his barren wife Sarah would have a son. This promised child would be named Isaac and the covenant would continue through him. Paul describes Abraham's body to be "as good as dead" and Sarah's womb to be completely dead - not a very promising description for expecting parents. Yet Abraham believed that God would keep His promise to give him a son. His unwavering faith was credited to him as righteousness.

We talked about faith being credited as righteousness last week, so I am not going to cover it at length again today. But it does bear repeating that Abraham was not saved by works. He was saved by faith, and so are all of those descended from him.

## IV. OUR CREDITED RIGHTEOUSNESS (Romans 4:23-25)



Not only was righteousness credited to Abraham as a result of his faith, but so also is it imputed upon all who believe the God that raised Jesus from the dead. The process of justification is the same, both then and now. Through the crucifixion Jesus forgave our sin and our paid our penalty, and through the resurrection He overcame the grave and covered us with His eternal righteousness . It is a marvelous exchange.

When I was young I developed a bad habit - perhaps you can relate. I found myself constantly using an inappropriate word. For weeks I tried to stop saying it, but just couldn't do it. One afternoon my mom approached me with a suggestion. She told me to exchange the bad word with a good word instead. So from that day forward whenever I was about to say the swear word I consciously chose to say the other word instead. The strategy worked and I was quickly able to break my bad habit. Here's my point...

It was not enough for Christ to simply remove our sin and guilt. He had to replace it with something else, lest we return right back to our old ways. We needed more than to be forgiven yet still unrighteous. We needed to be both forgiven and made righteous, so that our standing before God would remain right. Thus, Jesus exchanged our sin for His righteousness. He not only took away our bad, but He replaced it with His good so that our relationship with God could remain eternally secure.

## CONCLUSION

The initial phase of the salvation process is justification. When a sinner comes under conviction and turns to God, professing their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and asking for forgiveness of their sins, the act of justification takes place. It is a one-time event that occurs at the very instant when a person gives their life to Christ. When people refer to their past salvation experience, they are talking about the moment of their justification.

Paul spent all of chapter 4 explaining that justification comes by faith alone to all believers. Even those who lived prior to the cross, such as Abraham, had their faith credited as righteousness. In the case of Abraham, though he is regarded as the "Father of the Jews" he is also the father of many nations who share his faith in God.

Next week we will delve into the results of justification. What does it accomplish in our lives? How should we as believers respond to it? What actions follow or accompany justification? We will answer these questions and more in our next sermon.

## The Initial Phase of Salvation - Results of Justification

Originally Preached - 6/21/2015

*Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. - 2 Corinthians 5:18-19*

All people are carnal by nature. As such, we all sin against God's commands. Regardless of whether we have them codified in formal documents (such as the Mosaic Law) or simply "written on our hearts" (our conscience), all of us voluntarily choose to do things we know to be wrong. Thus, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". The result is that every person is in desperate need of salvation.

Where can we go or to whom can we turn to find this salvation? The Bible states that "God so loved the world that He sent his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone, and "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." When we turn to Jesus in faith, placing our trust in Him, we are saved by God's grace.

Even those who lived before the cross, such as Abraham, or perhaps have never heard the name of Jesus specifically are still saved by His atoning sacrifice. When these people turn to the Father in faith, realizing their need for salvation and their dependency of God to provide it, He "credits their faith as righteousness" through the work of Jesus Christ nonetheless.

Thus, the divine work of salvation functions in the same way for all people. It is always activated by faith and never by works or any other mechanism. Once applied to a person's life, the salvation process unfolds in a series of sequential and sometimes concurrent steps. The initial phase of the salvation process is justification, which we have been studying for the past few weeks.

Justification consists of at least 3 specific actions. The first of these is forgiveness of sins, which deals with our behaviors. The second is an acquittal or pardon of guilt, which deals with our penalty. The third is a declaration of righteousness, which deals with our condition. We have discussed each of these extensively already.

This morning, as we move in chapter 5, we will consider the results of justification. The message will consist of 4 main points. They are "Peace with God", "Rejoicing in God", "The Love of God", and "Reconciliation with God".

### I. PEACE WITH GOD (Romans 5:1-2a)

When 2 or more nations are at war, there is hostility between them. They are adversarial toward one another. But should these enemies agree to cease fighting and lay down their arms, a peace can be established. This generally necessitates a formal ceremony in which the warring factions come together to establish a treaty. Once agreed upon, this treaty serves as the basis for the peace that follows.

In similar fashion, justification by faith results in peace with God. Our battle against Him is officially ended and a new era begins in our lives. We are no longer enemies of God, but rather friends. Through our faith, we are introduced to God's grace. It is a spiritual treaty of sorts and a marvelous one indeed.

Imagine a dam that is holding back a mighty river of water. The water represents the abundant grace of God. Now picture a person standing on the opposite side of the dam, in a dry and hardened river bed. When we come to the LORD in faith, it is as if He shatters the dam of separation between us. Torrents of His matchless grace flow upon us completely unhindered. What an overwhelming feeling to know the grace of God!

## II. REJOICING IN GOD (Romans 5:2b-5)

To "exult" means to rejoice. Not only does justification lead to peace with God, but it also is a cause for great rejoicing. Paul writes that he and those with him rejoice in the hope of glory. Isn't it a wonderful thing to have hope in God? Such hope is not wishful thinking, but a sure confidence that we are His and safely secured in His hand. Such hope can see us through the storms of life.

It is this type of assuring hope that also allows us to rejoice in our tribulations. These hardships teach us to persevere or to press on even during the darkest of circumstances. As we do so, our character is developed and our witness is proven as we are conformed increasingly into the image of Christ. And the closer we become to Christ, to stronger our hope in Him grows, which serves to strengthen our ability to endure tribulation... and the cycle continues.

We can be certain that our hope in the LORD will not leave us disappointed. Our salvation is secure in Christ Jesus and is sealed by the Holy Spirit. His presence in our lives as believers is the guarantee of our eternal destiny. Truly justification gives us reason to celebrate! It is sad to see so many Christians who seemingly lack the joy of their salvation.

## III. THE LOVE OF GOD (Romans 5:6-9)

Before a person is saved they are both "ungodly" and "helpless". They are at enmity with God, the targets of His wrath and judgment, and are helpless to change their condition by their own merits. It is highly unlikely that anyone would care for such a worthless or contrary person, much less die for them. I mean, let's be honest, most people would be at least hesitant to die for someone who was a good friend.

This is one of the distinguishing factors of God's love for mankind. He sent his Son to die for us while we were still sinners. He didn't wait for humanity to repent before sending Jesus to die on the cross. He didn't wait to see what we'd do before extending His love to us. Rather He loved us unconditionally, even as we continued to despise Him. He made a way for us to be saved, but didn't force it upon us. Jesus died to provide us with an opportunity. Ultimately, love is a choice. Just as God chose us, He allows us to choose Him in return.

It is Christ's sacrificial atonement that makes justification possible, because He bore our sins and paid our penalty. It is horrifying to think that those who die apart from Christ end up paying a debt that has already been paid. By rejecting the love of God that is demonstrated through our Lord Jesus, the unrighteous needlessly face the ferocious wrath of Almighty God.

#### IV. RECONCILIATION WITH GOD (Romans 5:10-11)

Finally, justification by faith leads to reconciliation with God. Reconciliation is "the bringing together of God and man again". It is the restoration of the relationship between the two. What had been characterized by hostility and alienation is now characterized by peace and fellowship. Reconciliation allows us to walk hand in hand with God.

If you are like me, you reconcile your "checkbook" with your bank statement regularly. The goal of this process is to get your records to match those of the bank. The bank statement does not change to accommodate our "checkbook" but rather our "checkbook" must be updated or corrected to match it. In the same way, when we are reconciled to God He brings us into agreement with Him. Our spiritual "checkbooks" are balanced so that we are no longer at odds with one another, but rather are in one accord with Him.

Renewed fellowship with God opens the doors of communication and intimacy with Him in ways that are unknown and unavailable to the lost sinner. Reconciliation allows us to have a daily walk with the LORD, an ongoing relationship that can develop and mature over time. How disheartening it is to see Christians discount or neglect the relationship with God that reconciliation has made possible for them!

#### CONCLUSION

The results of justification include peace with God, rejoicing in God, and reconciliation with God. Because we have been justified, we can now walk with the LORD as friends in a harmonious and amicable relationship. We have not only become heirs of eternal life with Jesus in heaven someday, but also recipients of an abundant life with Him on earth today! As His faithful followers, we can experience the grace of God every single day of our lives. Doesn't this truth make you want to rejoice? It should.

Next Sunday we will conclude our teaching on justification as we consider its origin or source. We are going to study how sin infected the human race, and how death spread to all mankind as a result. Then we will learn how righteousness intervened to make salvation possible for all who would believe. It promises to be a great message and I hope you will be here to hear it.

## The Initial Phase of Salvation - Origin of Justification

Originally Preached - 6/28/2015

*Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." - Genesis 2:15-17*

"Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God." It is initiated by our faith, carried out by God's grace, and results in a reconciliation with God.

Justification accomplishes at least 3 things as detailed in Scripture. First, God forgives the justified person of their sin (this deals with conduct). Second, God pardons the justified person of their penalty (this deals with consequence). Third, God imputes the righteousness of Christ to the justified person (this deals with condition). Justification solves the problem of sin, death, and unrighteousness.

This morning we will study Paul's closing comments regarding justification. We will discover how it came into being through the gracious act of one Man, namely Jesus Christ. At the same time, we will also see how sin infected all of humanity through the disobedience of one man, namely Adam.

A brief look back over this series so far reveals 3 distinct areas of teaching. The first was about the message of salvation (1 sermon), the second was about the necessity of salvation (4 sermons), and the third is about the initial phase of salvation - justification (5 sermons, including today's). The passage today ties these all together with a neat bow. The sin of Adam necessitates salvation, while the sacrificial atonement of Christ makes it possible through justification.

### I. ALL MANKIND IS INFECTED BY SIN (Romans 5:12-14)

Prior to the Fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, mankind had never sinned. Adam was righteous, meaning that he was in a right relationship with God. He walked with the LORD intimately and harmoniously. Since Adam had not yet eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil he did not even know what "wrong" was, and thus had no understanding of moral law. This ignorance - perhaps better understood as innocence - kept sin from being imputed against him.

The only restriction that Adam had was not to eat from a certain tree, because God had expressly told him not to. We don't know how long Adam lived in the Garden prior to disobeying this single command, perhaps a long time. Nevertheless, eventually Adam broke the one rule that he was given. He had no idea what would ensue as a result of his misconduct. The tragic ramifications were beyond his ability to grasp.

When thinking about the Fall we tend to fixate on the specific act - Adam eating the forbidden fruit. But let's take a moment to consider what happened to Adam's spiritual condition. When he ate, Adam immediately became aware of the difference between good and evil. In other words, he became conscious of morality -

aka, “the law” - and realized that he had broken it. His spiritual condition changed from one of innocence to one of guilt, from righteousness to unrighteousness.

This corrupted nature has been passed from one generation to the next since, so that all people born of Adam (everyone) are carnal, worldly, and unrighteous. We are inclined to sin from the moment of our conception and invariably choose to do so given the opportunity. Our sin leads to death, which refers to eternal separation from God in hell. While we are ultimately held accountable for our own personal sins, certainly the transgression of Adam has affected all of humanity by infecting it with a sinful nature which we inherit from him.

Even before the Law was formally given to Moses, spiritual death reigned in Adam’s descendants because they had an inherent law written on their hearts. It was derived from the knowledge of good and evil and they knowingly violated it. Their disobedience was slightly different than Adam’s because he broke a verbally expressed command directly spoken by God while they broke a silent command from God which they instinctively knew to be true. Either way, both were guilty.

Adam was a righteous man who sinned, and as a result became unrighteous. All who come after him are born unrighteous men, and sin consistent with their corrupted nature. Since all of us sin, death has spread to everyone.

## II. COMPARING THE SIN OF ADAM AND THE GIFT OF GOD (Romans 5:15-19)

Paul makes 5 statements of comparison between the effects of Adam’s sin and the impact of Jesus’ sacrifice on mankind. These contrasts clearly describe the differences between the two acts. Adam is referred to in these verses as the “one” (lowercase) while Jesus is called the “One” (uppercase).

(v 15) The sin of one led to the death of many. The gift of One leads to abounding grace for many. In Christ there is grace, but apart from Him there is none.

(v 16) The sin of one led to the condemnation of many. The sin of many led to justification through One. In Christ there is justification, but apart from Him condemnation.

(v 17) The sin of one allowed death to reign over many. The gracious gift of One allows life to reign over those who receive it. In Christ there is life, but apart from Him is death.

(v 18) The sin of one led to the condemnation of all. The righteousness of One led to the justification of all. This verse repeats and thereby emphasizes the truth stated in verse 16. In Christ there is justification, but apart from Him condemnation.

(v 19) The disobedience of one led many to be made sinners. The obedience of One led to many being made righteous. In Christ we are righteous, but apart from Him we are sinners (unrighteous).

## III. HIS GRACE ABOUND (Romans 5:20-21)

The advent of the Mosaic Law did not increase the severity or consequence of people's sins, but rather raised our awareness of them. It was not intended to establish more types of sin, but to be used as a means of greater recognition of sin. As we become increasingly conscious of our sin, we understand the encompassing extent of God's grace that triumphs over it.

The abundant grace of God as demonstrated through our Lord Jesus Christ has completely enveloped and crushed the scourge of sin and death. The tragedy that befell mankind through the sin of one has been reversed through the gracious gift of Another. Jesus is the source of our justification. Where our sin increased, His grace abounded all the more!

## CONCLUSION

As we wrap-up this portion of Paul's letter to the Romans regarding justification, I want to remind us all of some of his major points. These are important truths for us to remember as we continue through this study of salvation.

- Justification is the first step in the salvation process.
- Justification comes through faith alone; not of works or by any other means.
- Justification through faith applies to everyone in the same way, even those who lived before Jesus' coming.
- Justification involves the forgiveness of sins (the charges are dropped).
- Justification involves the pardon of penalty (the sentence is dismissed).
- Justification involves a declaration of righteousness (the nature is changed).
- Justification is a one-time event that occurs at the moment when a person places their faith in Christ.
- Justification deals with one's spiritual nature and standing before God.
- Justification results in reconciliation with God - a restored and ongoing relationship.
- Justification was made possible through the work of Jesus Christ.

One Sunday morning, at the age of nine, in the back of a small church in Conroe, TX, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and was justified in God's eyes. But that was only the beginning of my salvation... Today I am 43 years old and am continually being saved every single day as my salvation unfolds. Starting next week we will begin exploring the second step of the salvation process - sanctification.

## The Ongoing Phase of Salvation - Regeneration

Originally Preached - 7/5/2015

*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But **God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. - Ephesians 2:1-7*

Ultimately our eternal destiny will be determined by how God sees us. As our divine Judge, it is Jesus who will make the decision as to whether we gain entrance into Heaven or not. While many may claim to know Christ, the more pressing issue is whether or not He knows them. This is what justification is all about - making us righteous in God's eyes so that we can be saved.

But even after God forgives, pardons, and declares us righteous in His sight, we still continue to live in these bodies of flesh. Although our spiritual nature is justified, our defiled human nature remains. While the LORD sees us as His righteous children, we see ourselves, others, and even Him from the perspective of our own brokenness. Within our very beings the flesh wages war with the spirit, producing an ongoing inner conflict that is present within all true Christians.

Gradually over the course of a believer's life, the spirit should be gaining greater control over the flesh. Increasingly, our human nature should be disciplined and submitted to the spiritual. As this happens, our behaviors will be progressively cultivated and perfected. This process of growing into the image of Christ is known as sanctification.

Baptists define sanctification as "the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life."

This definition neatly summarizes the Bible's teaching on sanctification, which we will examine in more detail (in chapters 6 through 8) over the next few weeks. It states that sanctification begins with regeneration, and so this is where we will start. What exactly is regeneration and what all does it entail? Let's see what Paul has to say in today's passage....

### I. DEAD TO SIN (Romans 6:1-4)

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed



away; behold, new things have come.” When we begin analyzing this statement, we can see that the “old things pass away” before the “new things come”. This is exactly what this passage in Romans is addressing.

Today we commonly use the phrase “passed away” as a softer substitute for the word “died”. We will say things like, “I was so sorry to hear that your cousin passed away last week.” Like us, when Paul says that old things must pass away he means that they must die. The first thing that must die is our subjection to the reign of sin over our flesh.

When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we die to sin. Notice that it is not sin that has died, but rather it is we that have died. Anyone who has been a follower of Christ for anytime at all can attest to the fact that sin is still a very present reality in their lives. Sin and the temptation to sin has not passed away, but rather it is us who have died to it and been made into new creations.

Death to sin is pictured through the ordinance of baptism by immersion. When new Christians are baptized, they are first plunged underneath the water. This submersion symbolizes their death to sin and the subsequent burial. Immersion, just as practiced in the New Testament, is the proper method of baptism because it correctly demonstrates the reality of regeneration.

## II. FREED FROM SIN (Romans 6:5-7)

Having died to sin, we are no longer subject to its authority over us. The tyrannical reign of sin no longer has jurisdiction in our lives. It is though we were citizens living in the kingdom of sin, but something happened to us and we died. Now deceased, the rule of the kingdom of sin no longer has application to us but rather only to those still living under its dominion. Our death to sin has, in effect, set us free from its lethal control.

The Bible speaks often about the liberation of Christians from the reign of sin. Jesus, speaking on this topic in John 8:36, says that “if the Son makes you free, you are free indeed.” In Galatians 5:1 Paul writes that “it was for freedom that Christ has set us free.” Free from what? The authority of sin ruling over us. In Christ we find this glorious emancipation.

There is only one method for attaining this freedom from sin. We cannot escape from it, we cannot negotiate with it, nor can we successfully overthrow it - we must die to it. This past week my son watched the old movie “Escape from Alcatraz” with Clint Eastwood. It is held by many that no one ever successfully escaped from this infamous prison known as the Rock. Whether they did or did not I don’t know, but one thing I am certain of - no one escapes the kingdom of sin alive. The only way to be freed from its clutches is to die to it.

## III. ALIVE TO GOD (Romans 6:8-11)

In our minds, death seems to be so final. We think of it as the end. But in Christ, death is the necessary prerequisite to life. After the “old things have passed away” it is time for the “new things to come”. Put another way, after we die to sin we are then made alive to God. We are raised from the dead, in a similar fashion to the resurrection of Jesus. This too is pictured through the ordinance of baptism as we are lifted up and out of the water.

Jesus died once to sin, and forever triumphed over its rule and reign. He will never die to it again, as sin no longer has mastery over Him or those who trust in Him. Therefore, when we die to sin our regeneration occurs only once. We are made alive to God - a new creation in Christ Jesus. We are born again, this time into the kingdom of God; and as citizens of it we are entitled to all the privileges and rights that He affords to us.

Have you ever seen a movie or read a book about a person who went to sleep in one place and woke up somewhere else? While we don't go to sleep, still this analogy can be helpful in understanding what happens in regeneration. In the recent Movie "Captain America", the hero goes to sleep (is frozen actually I have been told) in 1941 and wakes up in 2011 - some 70 years later. The changes he encounters are overwhelming. So too is the enormous contrast from the old kingdom of sin to the new kingdom of God.

## CONCLUSION

As regenerate believers, we are no longer subject to the reign of sin over us. But... as they say, "old habits die hard". While it may no longer have absolute control over us, sin still has a persistent lingering effect. Our flesh remains inclined to sin, despite the fact that we have been made spiritually alive to God. The difference is that when born again Christians choose to sin they do so voluntarily as citizens of a heavenly kingdom, not because they are trapped under sin's dominion. Simply put, Christians sin because they want to - not because they have no alternative.

Paul challenges us to consider ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. He exhorts us to think of things in this way, and to view ourselves in light of this truth. And as citizens of God's kingdom, we should aspire to put off our old ways and live in the flesh according to the LORD's commands. When we continue to voluntarily submit to the rule of sin, even though we have been freed from it, we give place for Satan to exert influence over our lives.

Sanctification is a process that begins with regeneration. A repentant person dies to sin, is freed from its control, and then is reborn alive to God. But this new life of freedom from sin's reign does not imply an absence of sin's presence or influence. We must exercise the strength to resist it in the flesh, as aided by the power of the Holy Spirit living within us. Strengthening personal resistance to the allurements of sin and increased submission to the Lordship of Christ form the basis of sanctification.

## The Ongoing Phase of Salvation - Submission

Originally Preached - 7/12/2015

*Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it **you may grow in respect to salvation**, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. - 1 Peter 2:13*

So far in our series through Romans we have explored 4 broad topics. The first was called "The Message of Salvation". Does anyone remember what the message of salvation is? It is the gospel. The second was called "The Necessity of Salvation". Can anyone tell me why we need to be saved? "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The third was called "The First Phase of Salvation". Does anyone recall what the first phase of salvation is? It is justification. Last Sunday we began with the fourth topic "The Ongoing Phase of Salvation". Do you know what it is? That's right - sanctification.

Baptists define sanctification as "the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life." Last week we talked about regeneration as the launching point of sanctification, whereby we die to sin, are freed from it, and made alive to God. Regenerate persons are "new creations" in Christ, having been born again spiritually through Him.

But a person is both body and spirit. Though a person is made alive spiritually with Christ at the moment of salvation, their flesh remains defiled. Thus, a progression is initiated in which their bodies begin a journey which leads them from their present fallen condition toward Christ-likeness. This is the experience of sanctification, and it requires a daily commitment to the LORD.

Today we will continue our study of sanctification as we consider three practices which we will help us move toward spiritual maturity - our presentation to God, our service to God, and our receiving from God.

### I. PRESENT YOURSELVES WELL (Romans 6:12-14)

"Therefore" because you have been regenerated, or born again do not allow sin to reign over your flesh. Don't continue to obey its wicked lusts which allure you. Do not keep submitting your body as an instrument of immoral and ungodly purposes. You have died to sin, been freed from its absolute sway, and are now made alive with Christ - so act like it! Present yourself to God as one who is alive, and your body of flesh as an agent of righteousness.

Have you ever had to present yourself to someone? Perhaps it was for a job interview, or maybe you were going to meet your newlyweds parents for the first time. When Janice and I were dating while in college years ago, I still remember driving to her house in Oklahoma one night to pick her up; she was already there, though I can't recall why. Anyway, this was going to be my first encounter with her parents so I put on a suit because I wanted to make a good impression. I made the three hour drive, arriving there well after dark, all

dressed up. Ridiculous right? Well, maybe not as much as you think - that was 22 years ago and we are still together.

Back then I wanted to present myself well to Janice's folks. I wonder, how well do we present ourselves to God? Do we even think about it? When we come into the presence of the LORD each day, do we approach Him in the drab garments of our old sinful selves or do we come adorned in the righteousness of Christ Jesus? Don't let sin be the master over your body, but rather let grace reign over it.

## II. BE ENSLAVED TO GOD (Romans 6:15-19)

This passage is speaking of a person who presents themselves to someone as a slave - in other words, they sell themselves into slavery. We have a very specific view of slavery based upon American history, but Biblical slavery as referred to here was more like indentured servitude. Jews would intentionally sell themselves into the ownership of a master as a means to pay off a debt that was owed.

We are servants of the one we choose to obey - either of sin or of righteousness. Jesus taught that no one can serve two masters. "He will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other." The conclusion is this we can't ride the fence. If we are truly slaves of righteousness then we will be devoted in our obedience to God. The Lordship of Christ over our lives will be apparent, and though we may stumble at times, it will be clear that He is our master.

Imagine for a moment being so indebted to your master that there is no chance you will ever be able to repay them. Thus, it appears that you will be their slave forever. But then, a Redeemer appears and pays the enormous debt for you, effectively freeing you from the previous master and purchasing you for himself. Then, amazingly, this new master forgives the debt he has taken upon himself and asks that you serve him out of love rather than obligation. Why would anyone abandon his new gracious master and return to the oppression of the first one?

Paul thanks God that the Roman Christians have become slaves of righteousness. He encourages them to continually present themselves to the LORD as such, which results in sanctification. Likewise, as we steadily submit to Him over time we too will become more fully sanctified. Increasingly we will look different from the world, and more obviously set apart for the purposes of God.

## III. CHOOSE BENEFICIAL COMPENSATION (Romans 6:20-23)

The behaviors we committed while still slaves to sin offered no real benefit. While our sinfulness may have resulted in some temporary gratification, ultimately its outcome was only death. While we were still in sin, the compensation we received for our work was not a means of gain but rather a vehicle of destruction.

Now we are enslaved to God and have derived our benefit. It is profitable to us in at least 2 ways. First, it results in sanctification as God molds us more closely into the image of His Son. Secondly, it affords us eternal life with Him in heaven. What greater benefit could we receive?

Over the years, I have used Romans 6:23 as my “go-to verse” for sharing the gospel message. So have countless others, as it clearly presents the choice that confronts all of us. We will either choose sin and receive the death that accompanies it, or we will turn to God through Jesus Christ and receive the gift of eternal life. It’s one or the other... there is no other alternative.

## CONCLUSION

The process of sanctification presents us with three questions that we must answer again and again every day. How do we want to present ourselves to God? Which master are we going to serve? What benefit do we wish to receive? The problem is that many of us go through life never consciously asking ourselves these questions, never submitting to God, never renewing our efforts to be obedient to Him...

The process of justification, which Paul addressed in the preceding chapters, pictures Jesus as our Savior. He forgives us of the sinful crimes that we’ve committed, pardons us from the sentence of death that we’ve received, and expunges our record by declaring us righteous in Christ Jesus.

The process of sanctification, which we are discussing now, pictures Jesus as Lord. Just as He reigns over us spiritually, He also should rule over our flesh. We must present our bodies to Him in obedience to His righteous commands. We must allow Him to be the master of our lives.

You see, salvation involves both justification and sanctification. That said, those who have had a genuine salvation experience will accept Jesus as both Savior and Lord. This is the Biblical model of Christianity - a person who has truly experienced the life-changing grace of God will walk with Him throughout their lives.

Jesus is not exclusively a master to be pleased, nor is He exclusively a savior to be praised. Rather, He is both of these. It is as though we were drowning in the sea of sin, and Jesus threw us a life ring. Once we grabbed hold of it we were immediately saved, floating securely even though still in the midst of the raging sea. Now He is pulling us toward the boat, and with each heave we draw closer and closer to Him. One day, He will lift us up out of the water and onto the boat, where we will ever be with Him - our Lord and Savior.

## The Ongoing Phase of Salvation - Married to Christ

Originally Preached - 7/19/2015

*In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." - Mark 10:10-12*

Over the past two weeks we have been exploring the concept of sanctification. Paul describes it as a lifelong process that begins at the moment a person accepts Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. At the instant of their salvation, the new believer is regenerated or "born again" spiritually. This means that they die to sin, are freed from its control, and are made alive to God having been resurrected with Christ.

The newly sanctified person is no longer a citizen of the kingdom of sin and is released from its harsh reign over their lives. Yet the influence and allure of sin continues to appeal to the believer's old human or fleshly nature, even though their spirit has been made new. This creates a fierce conflict within the Christian, as the spirit continually duals with the body. Sanctification refers to the growth and maturity of saved people who increasingly submit to the godly desires of their regenerate spirit rather than the lusts of the flesh.

It is challenging to live in obedience to the spirit while overcoming the constant temptations to these carnal bodies. Paul describes this supernatural struggle as a type of slavery - either we will live as slaves to God or as slaves to sin. He challenges us to consciously choose the LORD everyday by presenting ourselves well to Him, by obeying His commands, and by joyfully receiving the gift(s) He offers.

In the opening verses of chapter 7 we are given a second analogy to help us better understand the true nature of sanctification. While last week we pictured sanctification as slavery, this morning we will view it in terms of marriage. Some of you might be thinking that your marriage feels like slavery at times, but I can assure you that they are not the same thing... (that was my lame attempt at a joke)

Often we as Christians think of the phrase "the bride of Christ" in a collective sense as it refers to the entire Church. This is certainly true, and is probably the most common usage of the phrase in scripture. But in this passage Paul pictures himself and all believers individually as brides of Christ, stating that each of us is married to Him personally.

The outline of today's message has 4 major points - the Jewish law regarding marriage, our spiritual marriage to Christ, the nature and purpose of the law, and the cause of death. So with that, let's delve into Paul's depiction of sanctification as a marriage...

### I. THE JEWISH LAW REGARDING MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (Romans 7:1-3)

In this section of Paul's text, he is specifically addressing those who "know the law" - aka, Jewish believers. As Jews, these new Christians had grown up with and been taught to be zealous followers of the Old Testament Law. Their strict obedience to it was believed by many to be the means of salvation, and thus the concept of grace through faith was new and challenging to them.

While a man could divorce his wife for numerous reasons, the wife was bound to her husband in most cases. She could not divorce him or leave him as long as he was living. The only way a woman could be set free from a marriage was if the husband died. At the point of his death and thereafter, the marriage relationship was officially dissolved and the woman was free from its obligations.

If a woman left her husband and married another man, while the original husband was still alive, she was considered an adulteress under the law. Marriage was considered to be a lifelong institution in the eyes of God, and thus could only end at the time of death. To marry another person, even if allowed by the civil government, was an act of adultery. However, if her first husband was deceased the woman would then be morally free to marry again.

## II. MARRIED TO CHRIST (Romans 7:4-6)

Like a wife who is bound to her husband, so too were we constrained to the Law. There was no means of escape from its jurisdiction over us so long as we were living. Yet when we died to it, at the point of our regeneration, we were released or divorced from it. As such, having been born again, we are now free to marry or be “joined to” another - namely Jesus Christ.

Our first marriage - when we were “in the flesh” - was characterized by sinful passions that ravished our bodies and bore the fruit of death. But our second marriage - as those now joined to Jesus - is characterized by righteousness and newness of spirit which produce the fruit of life. We are no longer under the oppression of the Law but are now under grace.

## III. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE LAW (Romans 7:7-12)

In chapter 3 Paul dealt with the purpose and nature of the Law as it dealt with justification. He taught that we are justified by God when we place our faith in Jesus Christ, not by our works under the Law. In today's verses, Paul addresses this topic again as it relates to sanctification. We learn that our sanctification is the result of God's grace upon us, and is not attained by our obedience to the Law. In both instances - justification and sanctification - the Law is not the driving factor. So what then is the value of the Law?

The Law formally imparts to us the knowledge of sin. As we have discovered earlier in this book, the purpose of the Law is primarily to expose our own sinfulness and to help us realize our need for salvation. The Law was intended for our good, but sin took the opportunity through it to destroy us. By studying it we learn how to live in holiness before God, how to serve Him, and how to love each other. But we also know the guilt and shame that comes as a consequence of breaking it. Thus, while the Law is ultimately meant for our benefit it also provides sin with an occasion to abound.

Verse 9 is particularly difficult to understand, as it must be reconciled with Paul's teaching elsewhere. He seems to indicate that he was once spiritually alive and apart from the Law, but earlier in this letter he taught that the law (of the conscience) is inherent within us and that all are guilty of violating it even at a very early age. In other words, if we are born into this world subject to the law how could there be a time prior to our

salvation when we are free of its rule? In order for this to make sense, we can interpret Paul to be speaking about his own personal awareness of the law. There was a time in his earlier life that he naively considered himself to be alive to God, but as he studied the Law he became aware that this was not the case. Indeed, the Law revealed that he had been dead in his sins all along...

#### IV. THE CAUSE OF DEATH (Romans 7:13)

The primary purpose of an autopsy is to determine the cause of death. In this verse, Paul rules out the Law - which was intended for our good - as the cause of our spiritual death. It is actually sin, our own disobedience to God's law, that kills us. The law or commandment simply reveals this to be the case.

In America today there is a raging debate about gun laws. Many people claim that guns cause hundreds of deaths each year and that people would be safer if the possession of firearms was illegal. I flatly disagree. My position (which is shared by many others) is that if law abiding citizens were prevented from having guns they would be helpless to defend themselves from criminals who would access them illegally anyway. This would lead to increased deaths and violence. It would promote a culture of fear and helplessness. In my mind this issue boils down to a single question... do guns kill people or do people kill people? The answer is quite obvious.

In the case of the law and sin, it is not the law that kills people. Rather it is sin that kills people. Sin uses the law as a means to commit this murderous crime, but the law was never meant to be used as a weapon to destroy us. Rather it was supposed to assist us, just as guns were originally invented for the good of mankind.

#### CONCLUSION

From the moment of our salvation until the day we physically die, we are being made into the image of Christ. With each passing day, the LORD is molding us and making us into the likeness of His Son through the process of sanctification. We can submit to the spiritual transformation by living our lives in submission to Him or we can resist it through our own stubborn sinfulness.

Like any marriage relationship, there will be good days and bad days. But as redeemed believers, we have died to our old marriage to the Law and have been remarried to Christ. This new relationship is free from the rule of sin over us, and instead is founded upon the grace of God toward us. So even a "bad" day with Jesus is much better than many "good" ones without Him... It is His grace that continually sanctifies us and sets us apart for His glory.



## The Ongoing Phase of Salvation - Conflict of 2 Natures

Originally Preached - 8/2/2015

*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. Galatians 5:16-17*

For the past month we have been learning about the experience of sanctification. It is the second phase in the salvation process following justification. A justified person is forgiven of their sin, pardoned of its penalty, and declared righteous through the work of Jesus Christ. They are legally acquitted in the eyes of God. A sanctified person is set apart for the purposes of God and enabled to grow and mature in Christ throughout the entirety of their lives. Sanctification allows me to become what justification has already declared me to be!

We have discovered that sanctification begins with regeneration, which is a supernatural occurrence in which a person spiritually dies to sin, is freed from it, and is reborn alive to God. The regenerate person embarks on a journey in which his spiritual nature battles his flesh for dominion over his life. Paul first described this experience in terms of a slave complying with either one master or the other, then as a marriage relationship in which the bride submits to either her former husband or her current one.

In the text we will study today, Paul briefly turns his attention away from theology and instead reflects upon his own life. In other words, he takes that which he has been teaching and describing about sanctification and applies it to his own personal experience. Paul openly and honestly describes the struggle that rages within himself.

Paul candidly describes the conflict between his two natures, and in so doing presents himself as a model to help us better understand the conflict within ourselves. It takes a tremendous amount of courage to divulge uncomfortable and ugly truths about oneself like Paul does in this passage. Perhaps this is why I appreciate his testimony in these verses so much...

### I. DOING WHAT I DON'T WANT TO DO (Romans 7:14-20)

The Law is spiritual in nature. It appeals to our spirits through which it seeks to guide us in obedience to the LORD. However, as human beings we also have a fleshly nature which is enslaved to sin. As such, a conflict exists within all born-again Christians that pits our spiritual nature against our flesh (carnal nature).

Paul states that he doesn't understand why he continues to do the things he doesn't want to do. He doesn't want to act in sinful disobedience to God, yet it just keeps happening. Paul is not questioning the theological reasons why he continues to sin. Rather he is questioning his own personal choices that continually lead him to sin.

Earlier in this chapter Paul explained that the Law was good, and here he affirms it again. The fact that we do not want to sin reveals that we are in agreement with the Law and that our intent is to abide by it. Our desire

to live in obedience to God's commands reflects the condition of our hearts, even though our actions may not always meet the LORD's standard.

It is not the spiritual nature of the redeemed man that leads a person to sin. Rather it is the fleshly nature. As "new creations" in Christ we have died to sin and been freed from it. In this sense, as spiritual beings we no longer sin. Yet the old body of flesh remains with its lustful, carnal nature. Therefore, as earthly physical beings we continue to sin.

Those who have received salvation through Jesus Christ are indwelt by the Spirit of God. Even still, Paul declares that nothing good dwells within his flesh. While the Holy Spirit may wield some godly influence over the flesh, still the flesh remains basically wicked and corrupt by nature. Though the spirit may will obedience, the flesh continues to act in disobedience. Harnessing our fleshly desires and bringing them under the control of the spirit is an arduous task.

Again Paul repeats this sentiment. If it is our will to live in obedience to God, when we sin we are actually acting in defiance to our own desires. We, like Paul, are doing the very things we don't want to do. If we see ourselves as God sees us - from a spiritual perspective - then it is not us that are sinning. But if we look at our lives from the viewpoint of the flesh, then it is us who are sinning.

We have all heard the excuse that, "The Devil made me do it." Perhaps some of us have even said it ourselves. It is an attempt to shift the blame for our sin off of ourselves and onto someone else. Yet the Bible is clear that we are responsible for our own behaviors. In light of this truth, we must understand that Paul is not trying to shift the blame for his sinful actions. He is simply saying that his spiritual nature is not the one acting sinfully; rather it is his old, carnal flesh.

## II. THE PRINCIPLE OF EVIL (Romans 7:21-23)

All of us have principles that we live by. They are guidelines that help us to live moral and ethical lives. We want to be known as men and women of principle. In verse 21 Paul concedes that there is a principle of evil present in his life. Though he wants to do good, this evil principle seeks to override his godly spirit and direct his flesh to sin.

Paul identifies his spiritual nature as "the law of God in the inner man" and his carnal nature as "the law of sin in the members of my body". These two are waging war against one another both seeking to exercise control over the "law of my mind". Thus we see three distinct "laws" or aspects of redeemed person - the spirit (which is of God), the flesh (which is sinful), and the mind or soul (which is neutral and influenced by both the spirit and flesh).

Paul admits that in his life, far too often, the lusts of the flesh prevail over the desires of the spirit. He expresses that at times he feels like a prisoner to sin, bound in its horrifying chains. This sentiment is not exclusive to Paul alone. I'm sure we have all felt this way at times - I know that I have.

## III. OUR WRETCHED CONDITION (Romans 7:24-25)

Paul concludes that he is a wretched man. The word wretched means, “In a deplorable state of distress or misfortune: miserable”. Paul is not discounting his salvation or the many blessings of God in his life. He is not claiming that he has no value and that life is not worth living. Rather, he is commenting specifically on the misery that is caused him due to the sinful condition of his flesh.

Paul then asks and answers an important question. He states that God, working through Jesus Christ, will one day set him free from his “body of death”. In that day, the fleshly nature will be changed into one characterized by righteousness. The old, corrupted body will be done away with once and for all. We will address this in more detail in a few weeks when we discuss glorification.

On the one hand our minds lead us to serve God, but on the other hand they succumb to the alluring of sin. But there is coming a day when our flesh will be permanently defeated, and we will be free to serve God unencumbered by its nagging presence in our lives. When this happens, the wretched condition that Paul describes in this passage will be vanquished forever!

## CONCLUSION

I’d be willing to guess that we can all relate to Paul’s personal struggle between the flesh and the spirit. Everyone of us face this same conflict on a daily basis. And if we are honest, like Paul was in this passage, I think we would all admit that the sinful desires of our flesh often win out over the godly desires of our spirit. This is why praying for forgiveness and renewed fellowship with God continues to be important even after a person is saved.

The process of sanctification boils down the battle between our dual natures. If we are to truly grow and mature in Christ, we must learn to submit our minds and bodies to the will of the spirit and not to the lusts of the flesh. As we discipline our flesh to live under the guidance our spirit, we become increasingly like Jesus.

Wouldn’t it be nice if our spirit had an ally in its contest against the flesh? Wouldn’t it be great if there was someone to come alongside our spirit and strengthen it to be victorious over our own carnal nature? Next Sunday we will discover that there is someone living within us who can help us overcome the flesh - the Holy Spirit.

## The Ongoing Phase of Salvation - The Holy Spirit

Originally Preached - 8/9/2015

*Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you ; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. - Ezekiel 36:26-27*

This morning Paul will conclude his teaching on sanctification. Thus far we have learned that it is the second step in the salvation process, following justification (step one) and preceding glorification (step three). Sanctification begins with the act of regeneration, which sets up a lifelong conflict between the believer's new righteous spiritual nature and their old fleshly carnal nature.

Sanctification is defined by Southern Baptists as follows: "Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity **through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him**. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life."

Over the past few weeks we have highlighted various aspects of this definition, emphasizing that sanctification is an ongoing experience that begins at the moment we are born again and continues until the day we die. It is the process of spiritual growth and maturity in Christ. We are sanctified as an act of God's grace as He sets us apart from the world for His own purposes.

The one component of sanctification we have left to discuss is the role of the Holy Spirit in the process. It is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within a saved person that enables them to overcome the lusts of the flesh and to live in obedience to the commands of God. The activity of Holy Spirit is critical to Christian growth and development. How can we hope to become more like Christ if we neglect the leading of the Holy Spirit within us?

Today's sermon has 4 major points - The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit, The Leading of the Holy Spirit, The Influence of the Holy Spirit, and Our Obligation to the Holy Spirit. We will examine these verses in a different order than they were written, simply for the purposes of clarity.

### I. THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Romans 8:9-11)

Although a redeemed person still retains a body of flesh they are not to be considered "in the flesh" but rather "in the Spirit". This is because the Holy Spirit lives inside them. God sees saved people through the lens of Christ's righteousness which is affirmed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The presence of the Holy Spirit within a person is the evidence that that individual belongs to God. If the Holy Spirit is absent, that person does not belong to the LORD. There are many ways that the Holy Spirit makes himself known within the life of a person, and these proofs should be visible to some degree in all Christians.

Notice in these verses that there is a clear distinction between the Spirit of God (which is capitalized) and the human spirit (which is not capitalized). We must understand the spirit of a man is not the same thing as the Holy Spirit. When a person comes to Christ, they are made spiritually alive through regeneration and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. These are two separate and distinct, yet simultaneous, actions.

## II. THE LEADING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Romans 8:14-16)

The Holy Spirit plays several different roles in the life of a Christian. Scripture says that He helps us when we pray and that He secures our salvation, among many other things. Of chief concern in these verses is the Spirit's leadership in our lives. Those who allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit are called the sons of God.

The human spirit of a saved person has been made alive to God and will recognize Him as Father. Only the spiritual nature of a man is able to see and know God. The spirit of a regenerate person will instinctively seek guidance from the Holy Spirit.

The Christian has not received a spirit of slavery to sin, but rather a spirit which is forever free from the fear wrought by sin. The Holy Spirit is in agreement with our human spirit, both testifying that we are indeed children of God if we have been born again. The Holy Spirit enters into the believer's life in order to lead them and assist them in the process of Christian maturity and to assure them of their own salvation.

## III. THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Romans 8:5-8)

The Holy Spirit appeals to our human spirit, which in turn appeals to our hearts & minds (our souls). The Holy Spirit not only provides us with direction so that we can walk in obedience to God, but also provides us with the power to do so. When we set our minds on the leadings of the Spirit of God, we discover a purpose-filled life and an overwhelming peace.

On the other hand, if we allow the demonic influence of Satan to dictate our thoughts while ignoring the voice of the Holy Spirit, we will find only death and destruction. The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God and cannot subject itself to His law. It is impossible for a carnally minded person to please God.

The amount of influence that the Holy Spirit exercises over a person is not the same thing as the extent of His presence within a person. A child of God is indwelt by the entirety of Holy Spirit at the point of their salvation. Over the course of their lives they will never get more of the Holy Spirit, or somehow end up with less of Him. But even though the Holy Spirit is fully present within them, a Christian still has the choice to follow or reject Him. This is what we actually see fluctuating within the life of God's children - not the Spirit's presence but rather His influence over our stubborn minds.

## IV. OUR OBLIGATION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (Romans 8:1-4,12-13)

Paul actually begins this chapter with the conclusion that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." He then explains that he arrived at that conclusion because the Spirit of Christ sets us free from

the law of sin and death. The Old Testament written Law appealed to a man's spirit, but it was ultimately too weak to empower them to overcome the sinfulness of the flesh. Therefore God sent His son Jesus to die for the sins of mankind so that the requirement of the law would be filled, thereby freeing humanity to live according to the Spirit.

Because of the great sacrifice that He made on our behalf, all Christians owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to of Lord Jesus and to the Holy Spirit of God who was upon Him. In this passage Paul emphasizes our obligation to the Holy Spirit because He is, in part, responsible for our salvation and eternal livelihood.

We should not serve God merely out of a sense of obligation or duty. We should be motivated by a genuine love for Him and a deep gratitude for all that He has done for us. That said, we would be foolish to forget that we do owe Him a debt that we ourselves can never repay and therefore do have an obligation to serve Him with all of our being.

## CONCLUSION

Last Sunday I said, "Sanctification allows us to become what justification already declared us to be." It affords us with the opportunity to enjoy the journey rather than be immediately transported to the destination. But if we are to become more like Christ, it will happen only as we allow the Holy Spirit to take the lead over our lives.

The Holy Spirit can be compared to the West-Texas wind. Where I grew up in the Permian Basin the wind was always blowing. In a similar way the Holy Spirit is always stirring. The question is, "How are we going to set the sails of our life?" If we discount the breeze of the Holy Spirit, we might set our course in another direction and be controlled by the lusts of the flesh. But if we turn our sails to catch the Spirit wind, not only will He direct our course and lead our spirits, but will also propel us forward with greater power and efficiency. This is what it truly means to be "filled with the Holy Spirit".

Christian growth and maturity require the activity of the Holy Spirit. His working in our lives is paramount in the ongoing process of sanctification. As our spirits submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit within us, and then exercise control over the fleshly nature that still lingers, we are increasingly sanctified and set apart for purposes of God.

## The Final Phase of Salvation - Glorification

Originally Preached - 8/16/2015

*Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. - 1 Corinthians 15:50-53*

Salvation is a process that begins when a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It consists of 3 major steps or phases. The first is justification, which occurs at the moment of repentance. The second is sanctification, which begins with regeneration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the moment of repentance, but then continues throughout the believer's entire life. The final step is glorification, which will be the topic of our sermon today.

Southern Baptists define glorification as "the culmination of salvation and the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed." Glorification involves the redemption of our fleshly bodies, thereby completing the salvation experience. We will abide in our glorified bodies with Christ for all eternity.

As we have already studied, when we as Christians are first saved our spiritual nature is declared righteous and made alive to God. However our old carnal bodies remain and the sinful desires of the flesh linger. Therefore, the spirit (which is alive) and the flesh (which is still dead) war against one another for dominion over a person's mind. But when glorification takes place, the wicked body of flesh will be done away with and replaced with a new spiritual body that is incorruptible and righteous.

Of the 3 phases of salvation - justification, sanctification, and glorification - we know the least about glorification. This can be attributed to the fact that we have not yet experienced it and therefore have a limited knowledge and understanding of how it works. Still, despite our lack of information, there are still some important details about glorification provided in scripture.

This morning we will discuss the glorification of our bodies, the glorification of the natural creation, our anticipation of the coming glorification, and the triumph of glorification over our present sufferings.

### I. THE GLORIFICATION OF OUR BODIES (Romans 8:11,17)

In the early portion of this chapter Paul was emphasizing the role that the Holy Spirit plays in sanctification. It is the leading of the Holy Spirit that enables us to grow and mature in Christ. But now the focus shifts to the Holy Spirit's work as it applies to glorification. Those who have accepted salvation through Jesus Christ will have life given to their mortal bodies "through His Spirit who dwells in you". In this final phase of salvation a person's body of flesh will be made alive to God and hostilities between it and the spiritual nature will forever cease.

As God's children we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Our inheritance is far more magnificent than what we can imagine. The beauty and splendor of heaven is beyond description, and the promise of God's continual blessings to be lavished upon us leaves me in awe. In addition to these promises, one of the most wonderful things we will receive as heirs of God is a glorified body.

Our glorified bodies will be imperishable, honorable, and powerful. They will no longer be natural bodies driven by the lusts of the flesh, but rather spiritual bodies which are fully in tune with the Holy Spirit. They will not hurt, ache, or ever become sick. They will not age, weaken, become feeble, or ever die. Likewise, they will not be shamed by or inflicted with sin. Our glorified bodies will be physical to the touch, yet not limited in some of the ways that our current bodies are. For example, we can enjoy the pleasure of eating yet we will never hunger or thirst. Our glorified bodies will appear similar to our present bodies, but without any flaw. While there is much we simply don't know about our glorified bodies, we can say with certainty that they will perfectly suited for our eternal dwelling place in heaven.

## II. THE GLORIFICATION OF THE NATURAL CREATION (Romans 8:19-22)

Although it is not alive per se, Paul personifies the creation as "waiting eagerly" for the day when God's people will be glorified. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, the Lord cursed not only their bodies but also the entire creation. Plants, animals, the environment - all of the earth itself was subjected to corruption as a result of the sin of man. But there is coming a day when this curse will be lifted and the natural creation of God will be restored to its original glory. When this occurs the glorified creation of God will serve as the eternal home of the glorified people of God.

In the final chapters of Revelation we read about a "new heaven and new earth". This is referring to the glorified heaven and earth that will be established in the last days. Just as we lack many details regarding the glorification of our bodies, we also don't know as much as we'd like to about the "new heaven and new earth." What we can say for sure is that God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) will be immediately present there, most likely reigning from the New Jerusalem, and we as His redeemed believers will be dwelling with Him.

The Bible describes the "new earth", which most understand to be the glorified earth, as a place with no more sadness, sorrow, or tears. There will be no pain, anguish, or death. We can imagine an incorruptible earth that is free of natural disasters, harsh weather or temperature, pollution, and any other imperfections. It will be the ideal location to live with Christ forever.

## III. EAGERLY AWAITING THE GLORIFICATION (Romans 8:23-25)

Just as creation longs for the "revealing of the sons of God", so also we are eager for "the redemption of our bodies". This is a part of the great hope that we have as Christians, that one day we will receive a glorified body which is completely free from the effects of sin and death. Anticipating this wonderful event, Paul perseveres through the daily struggles of this present life.

Many theologians have made suggestions as to when the glorification of our bodies will occur. Perhaps the most widely accepted view is that glorification will occur when the rapture of the church takes place. The



bodies of the “dead in Christ” will be resurrected from their graves and rise to meet Jesus in the air. There they will be reunited with their spirits and instantaneously glorified into new spiritual bodies. Likewise, those who are alive at the time of the rapture will ascend into the air and their corrupted bodies will be glorified also.

Other theories exist regarding the exact timing of the glorification, which is associated with a trumpet blast. Rather than disputing over these unknown details, we should instead take comfort in knowing that it will occur at the precise point God chooses and it will be the final phase in the salvation process. Following the glorification of our bodies, our redemption will be fully complete - both spiritually and materially.

#### IV. GLORIFICATION TRIUMPHS OVER PRESENT SUFFERINGS (Romans 8:18)

As he reflects upon the wonders of glorification Paul comes to a marvelous conclusion. The sorrows, pains, griefs, and other sufferings of this life are not even worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed to us some day. We will someday receive imperishable bodies and live in a new heaven and new earth. The glory we will experience when this happens defies our wildest imagination. The struggles we carry in this life pale in comparison to the blessings we will receive in the next.

#### CONCLUSION

What a wonderful thought to know that we will someday be given glorified bodies. The effects of sin will be vanquished forever more and we will live with Christ in our new bodies, in the new heaven and the new earth, for all of eternity. Satan and all of his influence will be utterly cast out and we will stand in the holy presence of God Almighty. It is then that we will experience the fullness of our salvation.

With these verses, Paul concludes the portion of Romans dealing with the mechanics of salvation. He has taught us that as believers we have been justified, we are being sanctified, and we will be glorified. To phrase it another way - we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. Salvation is not an event, but rather a process. Have you given your life to Christ and begun to experience salvation? If you haven't, how about getting started today?

## The Triumph of Salvation - Victory in Christ

Originally Preached - 8/23/2015

*I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. - Isaiah 61:10*

We are just over halfway through our study of Romans. As you may recall, this sermon series is titled "The Study of Salvation". Paul has been writing and teaching specifically about the doctrine of salvation, which serves as the theme for this entire letter. Salvation in Jesus Christ is the fundamental doctrine of Christianity. The book of Romans contains the most thorough and systematic explanation of salvation found in the entire Bible.

Southern Baptists describe salvation as follows - "Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord."

Paul has spent the first half of this epistle to the Romans meticulously explaining the mechanics of the salvation process. He began by describing a person's unrighteous condition before being saved. Then he moved on to the events that take place when a lost person accepts Jesus as their Savior. First they are justified (and reconciled to God) at the moment of their repentance, second they begin to be sanctified (starting with regeneration) for the remainder of their lives, and third they will be glorified at some point in the future when they receive new imperishable bodies.

Having reached the midpoint of his letter, and having just completed his comments on how the process works, Paul takes a few paragraphs to celebrate the wonders of salvation. As he does so, he introduces some words such as "the elect", "foreknew", "predestined", and "called". These are concepts that will be elaborated on in the coming chapters. But for right now, we will limit our discussion to the content covered in the closing verses of this chapter.

### I. THE INTERCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Romans 8:26-27)

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, which was attributed to the Holy Spirit, will someday also raise our physical bodies from the dead. This same Spirit is working within us presently and helping us in our current state of "weakness". We are weak because our salvation is not yet fully complete. As a result, the Holy Spirit serves as our divine Helper as we walk through this earthly life.

As carnal human beings, we are rarely in perfect alignment with the will of God. Our own selfish desires and lusts continually affect how we think and what we value. Our ways tend to take precedent over His. As such, we often pray amiss, asking for things that are inconsistent with God's will or plan for our lives. Such prayers are misguided and ineffective.

One of the greatest functions of the Holy Spirit is His intercession on our behalf. The Spirit knows what the will of the Father is - for both are persons of the triune Godhead. As such, the Holy Spirit always prays for us in a manner consistent with the will of God. In addition, the Spirit's prayers are not casual or matter-of-fact; rather they are deep groanings offered for us. Even when we as born-again believers don't know what or how to pray, the Holy Spirit constantly pleads on our behalf before God the Father.

## II. THE PROVIDENCE OF ALMIGHTY GOD (Romans 8:28-30)

I've heard pastors say, "Not everything that happens to a Christian is good, but everything works together for our good." It is a wonderful sentiment, but how can such a statement be true? It seems that the foolish decisions we make or the difficult circumstances of life often have a negative effect that leads us further from God. In some cases, people never recover or turn back to God. So how can we say with certainty that "all things work together for good"?

The answer is found when we determine the people that this verse is referring to. The concept that "all things are working together for good" is limited to those who have been saved or "called according to His purpose". Those who have placed their faith in Christ will be completely redeemed and spend eternity with the LORD in heaven. This is the destiny of all Christians, and thus regardless of the many bumps along the way, ultimately goodness awaits at the end of life's journey. Each challenge brings us one moment closer to this glorious end.

This principle gives us great encouragement and hope for the future, but it can also have application in the present. We must learn to "look for the silver lining" in every dark cloud that overshadows our life. We should approach life from the perspective that in every difficult or harrowing experience there is some reason behind it or lesson that can be learned from it that will somehow benefit us. We must make the best of bad situations.

This passage introduces an interesting sequence of events beginning with God's foreknowledge, followed by predestination, and ending with His call. Notice that these actually precede justification and glorification. This will be the topic of several upcoming sermons starting next week.

## III. THE ALLEGIANCE OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST (Romans 8:31-34)

Having a capable ally on your side makes all the difference. As a boy, we used to "pick teams" before playing a game. Whenever I was a team captain, I always chose players that I thought were most likely to help us win. I wanted the best teammates I could get in order to guarantee my success. In like fashion, there is no greater companion in this life than God. Believers are reconciled with Him and are therefore able to overcome any challenges they might face.

If God was willing to give His own Son for us, we can be certain that He will freely give us all other good things as well. If God has justified us and dropped all charges against us, we can be certain that no one else can ever condemn us. Jesus Christ died for us, was raised from the dead, and is now seated at God's right hand interceding (along with the Holy Spirit) on our behalf. He is for us... not against us. So whatever you are facing, remember that God is in your corner.

In verse 33 we find the phrase “God’s elect”. Like some of the concepts mentioned previously, Paul will dig into the doctrine of election more fully in the coming chapters. For the moment let’s simply rest in the fact that since God is for us, none can successfully stand against us.

#### IV. THE INSEPARABLE LOVE OF CHRIST (Romans 8:35-39)

When you were young did you ever suffer from “separation anxiety”? Separation anxiety disorder (SAD) is a psychological condition in which an individual experiences excessive anxiety regarding separation from home or from people to whom the individual has a strong emotional attachment. It is most common among children when their mothers are absent, or pets when their owners are gone. I must admit, even as an adult I begin to get a bit uneasy when I am separated from my family too long...

But this is a worry that we need not ever experience as a Christian. Scripture is abundantly clear on this point - there is absolutely nothing that can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. His love for us is unquenchable, unshakable, and unrelenting. Now matter how far we may wander from the LORD’s fold or despite the numerous missteps we might take along the way, as His children nothing will ever extinguish or diminish God’s all-encompassing love for us.

#### CONCLUSION

Salvation triumphs over sin and the grave. In Jesus Christ we have won the decisive victory over the Devil. The Holy Spirit who lives within us is continuously interceding on our behalf in accordance with God’s will. The Father is providentially directing our every step working all things together for our benefit. He is our ever-present and powerful God... an ally than none can withstand. The love of Christ envelopes us so strongly that nothing can separate us from it. Considering these amazing truths, what could be more wonderful than salvation? Brethren, I’ve racked my brain all week and I can’t think of anything that even comes close...

## The Audience of Salvation - Children of the Promise

Originally Preached - 8/30/2015

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. - Galatians 3:26-29*

Up to this point in his letter to the Romans, Paul has been focused upon what happens in a person's life when they, by faith, call upon the name of the Lord unto salvation. But beginning in the latter parts of chapter 8 he makes the transition to another important topic - the fact that God called out to us well before we ever called out to Him. The shift highlights things that have been in place since the beginning of creation.

Paul lays out a sequence of events that allows us to better understand the whole plan of redemption (Romans 8:29-30). First, God has complete foreknowledge of all people who will freely choose to accept Christ. Second, He has predestined that those who choose salvation will be made into the image of His Son. Third, He has called out to those He foreknew with the message of the gospel so that they could accept Jesus for themselves. Notice that all of these acts of God actually precede the work of justification, sanctification, and glorification which we have been discussing.

God is not confined to time or space - as a matter of fact He created both of them. His knowledge is unlimited and includes all things past, present, and future. He is completely omniscient and knows in advance who will accept Christ and who will not. However, His knowledge of what a person will choose does not take away their prerogative to choose. For example, if I was to offer my pet Mandi either a freshly grilled steak or a bowl of dry dog food I am certain she'd choose the steak. In this scenario, I know what she'd choose even though I didn't make the choice for her. In like fashion, God's foreknowledge of our decisions does not override or interfere with our free will.

The Bible repeatedly states that God sent Christ to die for all people, so that all might receive eternal life; but it also reveals that He knew that most would refuse to accept it. So while His call unto salvation extends to all people, only some will hear and respond to it. I believe it is a mistake to believe that God's call is somehow limited to only those that He foreknew would receive it; rather His call is universal and includes both those He foreknew would embrace Him and those He foreknew wouldn't.

You have heard it said that "Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship." Consider this... for a relationship to work both parties have to make the choice to be devoted to one another. Yes it is true that God first chose us, but in order to make the relationship complete we must also choose Him in return. The raging theological debate between whether God chooses us or we chose God has led to widespread confusion; in fact, both are true according to Scripture. We must choose each other - He goes us first, and it is then up to us to respond.

Salvation is offered freely to everyone who is called (I believe this is all people), but is applied only to those who have accepted it. Scripture often refers to these people - the redeemed children of God - as "the elect".

As a result of their decision to follow Christ, God chose (or elected) to make salvation effectual in their life. The doctrine of election is demonstrated in the Bible through the nation of Israel.

#### I. THE FOOLISH CHOICE OF ISRAEL (Romans 9:1-5)

Israel collectively was God's chosen nation through whom He sought to reveal Himself to the rest of the world. They had been "adopted as sons", were partakers of God's covenants, had been given the Law and the temple, were the recipients of God's numerous blessings, and even were the human ancestors of Jesus. Yet despite their special chosen status, the Jews as a group did not recognize Jesus to be God's Son. As a whole, the nation of Israel had rejected Jesus Christ by refusing to accept Him as the Messiah. What's more, they lobbied relentlessly for His execution by the Romans.

It is important to note that the word "chosen" as it applies to Israel refers specifically to the fact that God selected them as an entire nation to be the instrument through which He'd reveal Himself to the world. "Chosen" when used in this context does not mean that every individual Jew was saved, but rather that the entire group was being used by God in a special way to bring about His divine purposes.

Paul, who was himself a Jew, expresses his great sorrow and grief that the nation of Israel - his own people - could have been so blind as to reject their promised Savior. He states that he wishes that he could be "separated from Christ for the sake of his brethren" - that is, take their place - which indicates that the nation of Israel had been separated from God in some sense for their rejection of Christ. While individual Jews could certainly still accept Jesus and receive the gift of salvation (Paul himself for example), as a whole the nation had forsaken the Lord and instead chosen judgment.

#### II. THE GRACIOUS CHOICE OF GOD (Romans 9:6-13)

Despite the Jews' refusal to accept Christ, still God's plan of redemption through Him had not and would not fail. For salvation had never been solely limited to "the children of the flesh" but rather had always pertained to "the children of the promise". This fact is demonstrated in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Though Abraham had 2 sons, God chose Isaac as the promised son. A generation later Isaac fathered twins by Rebekah, and God chose Jacob through whom to establish His people. From this we learn that our standing before God is not a result of our human lineage, but rather the result of God's sovereign choice (His promise).

Should verse 13 be understood to mean that God "hated" Esau and that he was never afforded an opportunity to be saved? Does it imply that some people are rejected by God from the outset and can never come to know Christ personally? If so, then Paul is declaring that God restricts some people from having any choice in their own eternal destiny. Such an interpretation is inconsistent with the broader teachings of Scripture and therefore cannot be accurate. A proper understanding of this verse would conclude that God despised the descendants of Esau as a whole (the nation of Edom) though some might have accepted Him individually, in contrast to His affection for the descendants of Jacob as a whole (the nation of Israel) though many might have rejected Him individually.

It is true that God chose a particular line of Abraham's family tree through which He established the nation of Israel. Such a choice was in line with His sovereign plan for revealing Himself to the world. But never did He, nor does He, completely prevent or restrict a person from ever having the opportunity to be saved. Though Esau and Ishmael might not have been players in God's grand design for the advent of the Jewish nation, nevertheless surely God loved them and desired for them to be redeemed.

### III. THE HARDENED HEART OF PHARAOH (Romans 9:14-18)

After 400 years of captivity to the Egyptians, God raised up 2 people who would confront one another over the future of the Jewish people. Moses boldly spoke before Pharaoh demanding that he let God's people go. Yet Pharaoh was obstinate, stubbornly refusing to allow the release of God's children even after several terrible plagues. God had preordained that this particular man would rise to power at this appointed time, and when it occurred the LORD repeatedly hardened his heart in order to demonstrate His great power throughout the earth.

We see in this story how God chose to use certain individuals in very specific ways to bring about His divine plan. One might conclude that because God hardened Pharaoh's heart he was never given a chance to choose anything other than wickedness and sinfulness. According to this line of thinking, God denied Pharaoh of any hope of righteousness. But again this goes beyond what the verse actually says... the text never rules out that Pharaoh had a chance to repent of His hardheartedness. The passage does not say that God took Pharaoh's choice away, but rather that He used his stubbornness to orchestrate His will and accomplish His purposes.

### CONCLUSION

God chose the nation of Israel as his special people through which to proclaim Himself to all of humanity. Generally speaking, Israel as a whole rejected Jesus Christ and in so doing rejected God the Father as well. This serves to show us on a large scale that even when God chooses someone, they are still responsible for choosing Him in return. If they fail to do so, the two-way relationship is incomplete and consequences ensue.

God chose to use Pharaoh as a vehicle through whom He could display His power and glory to the nations. In the process, God hardened Pharaoh's heart. But this hardening did not necessarily preclude Pharaoh from repentance. Even a hardhearted person can break under conviction.

Some churches believe in the idea of limited atonement which supposes that only those whom God has chosen can be saved. Thus, the atonement offered in Christ is limited in its application to only certain people. Other churches believe in the idea of general atonement which supposes that salvation is offered freely to all people. Based upon what I have taught in this sermon, it is not hard to tell which way I lean... Historically the Southern Baptist denomination has accepted both viewpoints to be Scripturally possible and have remained intentionally neutral on the subject.

As your pastor, I personally believe that a person cannot be saved unless God has first chosen them. But I also believe that a person isn't saved until they chose God through faith in Jesus Christ. It must work both ways. Furthermore, I believe that God creates all people with a free-will to choose for themselves whether or not

they will accept Jesus, and that this choice is not made for them by God or anyone else. That said, a person can't come to God on their own volition - they must be drawn by the Holy Spirit for their conversion to be genuine..

Whatever you chose to believe theologically about this issue, practically speaking there is no real choice. Even if you surmise that some people have been chosen by God for salvation while others haven't, there is still no surefire way for us as non-omniscient humans to know who is who. Therefore, from a practical standpoint, we must assume that everyone is a candidate for salvation, needs to hear the gospel, and experience the love of Christ. To assume otherwise would erode our zeal for the Great Commission and undermine our calling to minister to the lost.



## The Audience of Salvation - Vessels of Mercy

Originally Preached - 9/6/2015

*“But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord GOD, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?” - Ezekiel 18:21-23*

In the first half of Romans 9 Paul begins to speak specifically about the audience of salvation - those people for whom salvation is offered. He teaches that the children of God are those who are related to the promised Son - not merely by the fleshly descent of Isaac, but referring instead to the spiritual kinship of His son Jesus Christ. As children of the promise, we have been both chosen by God and have ourselves chosen God.

God chose the nation of Israel as a whole to be His anointed people. He did not choose them based upon any merit that they had. He did not choose them because He foreknew that they'd embrace Him in return - as a matter of fact, history proves that they didn't. He chose them solely based upon His own sovereign will. In response to God's gracious choice of them, Israel by-and-large rejected Him.

As individuals, God has chosen each of us as candidates for salvation. His will is that none should perish, but that all might choose eternal life. This is why He sent His only begotten Son Jesus to die on the cross, in order that all people would have a path to redemption. As is the case for Israel, His choice to love us and make salvation available to us is not based upon our merit, nor is it limited to those He foreknows will receive it. His gracious choice extends to everyone, but it does not negate our responsibility to choose Him in return. We must both (God and man) choose each other.

God's hand is at work in the temporal, earthly realm in which we live as well as in the unseen, spiritual realm which surrounds us. In the visible realm, God's sovereignly orchestrates the events of history causing some nations to rise and others to fall. He ordains that some individuals will rise to prominence while others remain shrouded in obscurity. He shows mercy to those whom He desires, and even hardens the heart of those whom He desires. This is done for the purpose of revealing his glory to the world.

But in the invisible realm, which is eternal, God's desire is for all people to be saved. While he may hate the sinful actions of nations collectively and of people particularly, He still loves the individual person themselves. Such a position is consistent with what the Bible teaches about the character and nature of God. We often say to one another, “Hate the sin, but love the sinner.” The reason we express this sentiment is because it describes the character of God, which we should imitate.

Even if the bitter wrath of God befalls a person in this present life (even for no apparent reason), it is contradictory to the prevailing teaching of Scripture to believe that such a person is completely hopeless and utterly unable to be saved. God can and on occasion does break through to even the most hard-hearted and wicked people (even though He may have hardened their heart in the first place). His curse might be upon the present activities of a person's life, but His affection for their soul remains steadfast.

## I. THE POTTER IS SOVEREIGN OVER THE CLAY (Romans 9:19-21)

Have you ever wondered why your life seems so difficult? Have you ever shaken your fist at the sky and yelled at God? Have you asked, “Why did you make me like this?” Have you believed in your heart that God is not always fair? Have you laid awake at crying because God “hated” you? If we are honest, most of us have had at least one if not several of these experiences, myself included.

God is the potter and we are the clay. He is the Creator and we are His creation. He possesses absolute sovereignty and full discretion as to how He will shape our lives. If He chooses to make some of our lives more “honorable” than others, so be it. Such is His right as the potter. We are not in a position to question His authority. Nor is He under any obligation to answer us when we do. This is demonstrated quite vividly in the story of Job. Such is the harsh reality that we must all come to grips with.

Far too many people wander through life angry with themselves, angry with others, but mostly angry with God. Such anger will get you nowhere. God will exercise His authority over us whether we receive it willingly or not. Thus, we’d be much better off if we’d simply learn to submit to God’s control, regardless of our never-ending opinions, and stop questioning His decisions. If nothing else, our attitudes would improve as our anger subsided...

There is a popular saying that we often repeat around our house - “It is what it is.” Have you heard that or said it yourself? I will concede that we can change and work to improve most of the things we face in this life, so this saying is not always very accurate. However, there are some things that are beyond our control - things only God can change. In these cases, we must realize that we are only the clay, that He is the Potter, and that our complaining and worrying is a colossal waste of time and energy...

## II. VESSELS OF MERCY AND VESSELS OF WRATH (Romans 9:22-23)

Following his illustration of the potter and the clay, Paul asks a thought provoking question - what if God patiently endures “vessels of wrath” in order to display His glory to “vessels of mercy”? With this query he presents us with two contrasting types of vessels, and upon a casual reading we are left once again with the troubling possibility that God creates some of His creations for destruction. But is this really the case?

The “vessels of wrath” are prepared for destruction, while the “vessels of mercy” are prepared for glory. But who is actually making these preparations? Notice that when speaking about the “vessels of mercy” the text definitely says that He (God) prepared them, but when but when speaking about the “vessels of wrath” it does not directly state that God prepared them. Rather, it simply says they were “prepared for destruction” without definitively attributing the action to anyone. The Lord is certainly “enduring” these vessels, but the passive voice of the verb “prepared” in this sentence is inconclusive as to whether God was the one who actually prepared them or not.

Many scholars interpret the tense of the word used here (katartizo in the original Greek) to mean that these vessels are actually preparing themselves for destruction. They are willfully resisting the mercy of God, and

though He certainly can and does use them to “demonstrate His wrath and make His power known” in this present world, still He patiently endures their continued ungodliness. Why would He do such a gracious and undeserved thing as that? I suggest that He endures because, despite their waywardness, God deeply loves these “vessels of destruction” and longs to see them come to repentance.

### III. WHO ARE THE VESSELS OF MERCY (Romans 9:24-33)

The “vessels of mercy which God has prepared beforehand for glory” are identified more clearly in the final verses of this chapter. Paul cites several Old Testament passages to support his identification of them. He quotes both Hosea and Isaiah as he teaches that these vessels include both Jews and Gentiles. Not only are both included at the time of Paul’s writing to the Romans, but they always have been since “beforehand” (v23)!

We have talked a lot about the fact that God is Lord of both the Jews and the Gentiles. This has been a repeated theme in this book, and is prominent in most of Paul’s letters. Since we have discussed it several times in this series, we will just briefly reemphasize it today...

As a whole, the Jews unsuccessfully pursued God via the law while the Gentiles found Him through faith. Thus, the “vessels of mercy” are those who have placed their faith in God through the person of Jesus Christ regardless of whether they are Jew or Greek. They chose to follow Him.

### CONCLUSION

There is a large segment of Christianity who believe that God sovereignly chooses those who will and will not be saved, and that people can do nothing to change His predetermination. Romans 9 is often used by those who ascribe to this viewpoint as justification of their theology. When you read this chapter by itself, apart from the context of the rest of Scripture, it certainly would appear this way.

On this we can agree... God alone is responsible for our salvation. It was His design, we can only receive it as He offers, and it is His power that accomplishes and secures it. We are wholly unable in our own fallen and corrupt nature to attain salvation on our own. God must draw us to Himself, through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, and supernaturally present us with an opportunity to receive redemption. We might, by our own choosing, place ourselves in situations that are more conducive to moments of conviction, but ultimately God chooses when and how often these moments will come.

Sadly, there are thousands of people in our churches today who believe they are saved but are not. This is because they approached God on their own terms, but not while under Holy Spirit conviction. Their “perceived new-birth experience” may have been emotional, but emotion does not equate to the stirring of the Spirit. Some of them came to God because they wanted to fit in, it seemed like the right thing to do, someone pressured them into it, or for a host of other humanistic reasons. But apart from the genuine conviction of God, true salvation is impossible.

In closing, it is Scripturally accurate to say that God chooses His children - but it is also incomplete. In order to be saved, we must also choose Him. Paul will emphasize this aspect of election more in the coming chapter so that we have a balanced presentation of both perspectives. God directs the events of this present world as He chooses, having predetermined to ultimately accomplish His own purposes, but upon consideration of the entirety of Scripture I don't believe He predestines the eternal fate of individuals without allowing them a choice in the matter.

## The Audience of Salvation - Whoever Calls on the Lord

Originally Preached - 9/13/2015

*' AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS , ' God says, ' THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND ; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY , AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS , AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS ; EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN , I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT and they shall prophesy. ' AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW , BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE . ' THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD , BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME . ' **AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED .** ' - Acts 2:17-21*

For the past 2 weeks we have emphasized the fact that God is sovereign. He has complete and absolute authority over and control of His creation. He allows and sometimes causes some to rise and others to fall. He showers blessings upon some and withholds them from others. God exercises His sovereign will as He sees fit upon nations and individuals, and thereby directs the course of history toward its predetermined end. In addition, He alone calls His people to salvation and apart from His intervention into our depraved, sinful lives no one could ever be saved.

Some have taken the doctrine of God's sovereignty so far as to believe that God predestines those who will be saved and those who will not. According to this type of theology, God has from the very beginning already elected or chosen all of His children. During their earthly lives He grants them faith, so that they can recognize Him while all others can't. He extends to them irresistible grace which cannot be rejected or denied, thereby ensuring their salvation. Thus, His elect are saved solely based upon God's prerogative, while the rest are lost and condemned. While embraced by many, I believe this particular interpretation of Scripture is faulty.

Those who believe that a person's eternal destiny in either heaven or hell is predetermined by God and cannot be changed misunderstand the Biblical meaning of predestination. Such a rigid belief completely undermines the doctrine of free-will, which is also clearly and thoroughly taught throughout Scripture. In order to reconcile these seemingly contradictory teachings so that both can be accepted, one must understand that predestination does not refer directly to a person's choice to accept or reject Christ, but rather to the result of their choice. In other words, that which is predestined is the outcome that will take place as a consequence of a person's decision - not the person's actual decision itself.

Paul has written extensively about God's sovereignty over our earthly lives and the fact that He chooses us as candidates for salvation. In chapter 10 he turns the spotlight upon humanity - what must we do in response? These verses affirm that people do have a choice as to whether or not to accept Christ. It is important to realize that our freedom to make this decision in no way dilutes God's sovereign authority over us.

### I. CHRIST IS THE END OF THE LAW (Romans 10:1-4)

In the previous chapter, Paul began by expressing his sorrow that the Jewish people as a whole had rejected the Messiah. Here he adds that his heart's desire and earnest prayer is for their salvation. He applauds their

zeal or passion for God, acknowledging that many are devoted and diligent in their commitment to Him. Yet, he points out that they lack the knowledge of how true salvation works.

The Jews (as a whole) do not know recognize their need of God's righteousness. Of course they believe that God is righteous, but they do not understand that it is His righteousness that they need in order to be saved. Instead, they seek to establish their own righteousness through strict obedience to the Mosaic Law. Such efforts to attain self-righteousness are futile, as no person can perfectly adhere to the Law. Scripture teaches that violation of just one command brings about the same level of guilt of breaking them all. Thus, salvation through works is impossible.

Christ is the end of the law. This should not be interpreted to mean that with the advent of Jesus the law is no longer useful. The commandments of God are not like something that ends and can be forgotten or discarded. Rather we should understand this verse to mean that at the end of the law's road, we find Christ. In other words, the law is a pathway that leads us to Jesus - where the law ends, Christ begins. When we arrive at this destination, the road that guided us there does not cease to exist does it? Absolutely not! It still serves as a guide, but is not itself the goal.

## II. THE WORD OF FAITH (Romans 10:5-8)

Earlier in this series we discussed justification, the first step in the salvation process. Justification includes God's forgiveness of our sins, His pardon of our penalty, and His making us righteous by imputing the righteousness of Christ upon us. The person who receives salvation by faith is justified and is therefore covered with the perfect righteousness of Jesus, while the one who seeks salvation through the law is not justified and remains uncovered in their own flawed self-righteousness. This is an important distinction to make and to understand.

As one having been saved by faith, Paul poses a couple of questions to his self-righteous kinsmen (the Jews). He asks if any of them can, by their own might, ascend to heaven and bring Jesus down. He follows up with a similar challenge requesting any of them, by their own power, to descend into the abyss and bring Jesus up. With these questions he is trying to demonstrate that no one can successfully go and find Jesus in their own strength. Salvation in Christ can never be founded or achieved on the basis of human effort or works.

The inaccessibility of Christ through works should not make us upset. It is not as if He is in some far, distant place or hidden in some remote location. On the contrary, the word of God is very near to us - "in our hearts and in our mouths". It is not the location of Christ that is the chief concern here, but rather the means by which we approach Him. We must hear and receive the "word of faith" which Paul (and others with him) are preaching, namely that salvation comes solely on the basis of faith and not of works.

## III. CONFESS AND BELIEVE (Romans 10:9-13)

In the previous set of verses Paul stated that the "word of faith was near - in our hearts and mouths". Now he will explain what we must do with them (our hearts and mouths) in order to actually receive the word which

is near to us. It is important to remember that “the word” is often used in reference to Jesus Christ. That said, it is Jesus who is near to us. This passage is teaching us what we must do in order to receive salvation in Him.

First, a person must confess (with their mouth) that Jesus is Lord. The title “Lord” is significant because it indicates that we must accept Jesus as the lord or master over our lives. If someone expects to receive Christ as Savior only, but not as Lord, their salvation will be counterfeit - not genuine. Second, a person must believe (in their hearts) that God has raised Him from the dead. Again, the words matter. It is not enough to just believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, but we must also believe that He actually rose from the grave and lives eternally. The resurrection proves that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.

When a person acts in faith both confessing and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, God graciously responds by granting them salvation and making them righteous. As you may recall from earlier in this series, righteousness refers to a “right standing” with God. Those who accept Christ are reconciled to God; they enter into an eternal, saving relationship with Him and have the promise of eternal life in heaven.

The invitation to receive salvation through confession and belief in Jesus is available to all - both Jew and Greek (Gentile). There is no distinction or variation in the manner in which these 2 people groups are saved. The grace of God to save sinners is always initiated on the basis of faith, regardless of who you are - never on works or by any other means. In addition to this, salvation is not limited to certain persons or groups, but is available to “whoever calls upon the name of the Lord”.

## CONCLUSION

As we have been discussing, in order for a person to choose God he must first be chosen by Him. This simply means that God must afford the person with an opportunity to overcome their abject spiritual blindness in order to recognize Him. These brief glimpses of God’s true glory can be few and far between. They are moments of Holy Spirit conviction. Only God can cause these moments to occur. When they do, it is an instance of God calling out to the chosen individual. Only under these circumstances can a person be genuinely saved.

Seeing that salvation is extended to all, it stands to reason that God must be calling out to all people generally and to individuals on occasions of His choosing. That said, God has not chosen only certain humans to be saved but rather He has chosen all of humanity to be candidates for salvation. I understand Scripture to teach that all people have at least one moment of conviction (and often many more) over the course of their lives in which they have the chance to receive salvation by faith. Because of this, no one can rightly stand before God and accuse Him of being unjust by not granting them an opportunity to be saved. Everyone has an opportunity to place their faith in God by confessing and believing in Jesus Christ at some point. But we must not go so far as to believe that someone can come to God whenever they feel like it; this cavalier, any-time access to God is unscriptural.

The faith we show as humans simply allows the application God's saving grace. It is God’s grace alone that affects salvation. He forgives us of our sin; He pardons us of our condemnation; He makes us righteous by imputing the righteousness of Christ upon us; He reconciles us to Himself thereby restoring our relationship;

He makes us into a new creation through spiritual rebirth; He sets us apart for His purposes and fosters our growth; He secures our salvation by the power of His hand; and someday He will give us incorruptible heavenly bodies. God alone is wholly responsible for all of this. Our faith does not entitle us to lay any claim on salvation. It is entirely a gift that we are offered - all we can do is either accept it or reject it.



## The Audience of Salvation - Those Who Have Believed

Originally Preached - 9/20/2015

*Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters. - Proverbs 25:13*

My family and I recently attended a play at the nearby community theater. It was a rendition of the the Disney classic "Mary Poppins" - one of my all-time favorites. It was the show's closing weekend so the auditorium was packed with people who had come to enjoy the musical performance before it was too late. The presentation was marvelous and the audience was clearly delighted by the play. It was a wonderful experience.

I have lumped chapters 9-11 of Romans together and have titled their related messages the "Audience of Salvation". Like a play is presented to an audience, so also God presents salvation to an audience. His audience is mankind. Salvation is not revealed to any other of God's creations - not to angels, not to animals, nor to anyone else. God chose His audience (humanity) beforehand, and offers salvation exclusively to them.

Unlike a play, which is intended simply to entertain those who watch, God's presentation of salvation demands a response. It is much more than a performance, and we are called to be more than mere spectators. Those who hear the message of salvation must respond to it individually by faith in order for it to become effectual in their lives. Salvation is made possible by Holy Spirit conviction, and received through confession and belief in Jesus Christ (as we discussed last week).

5 months ago we began this series with a sermon titled "The Message of Salvation". We saw how Paul opened this letter by proclaiming that he was "not ashamed of the gospel" because it is the "power of God unto salvation" for all who believe it. This gospel is a message that everyone needs to hear - a play that everyone needs to see. The eternal destinies of people are at stake. So, how does God go about spreading this all-important message? This morning we will seek to find the answer.

### I. SENDING AND PREACHING (Romans 10:14-15)

God is able to reveal Himself to people in various ways, but His most widely utilized method is through the proclamation of the gospel by preachers. These "preachers" include anyone who rightly proclaims the message of salvation as taught in the Bible, regardless of their formal vocation. While some do this fulltime, all of us can and should be preachers in the sense that we should share the gospel with others. God's primary approach for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ is by commissioning Christians to go and tell it to lost people.

The process is straightforward. Jesus established the church with the purpose of evangelizing the entire world. God's calling of all people to Himself through the redemptive work of His Son Jesus Christ is the church's paramount message. Thus, the church serves as the primary channel through which this message is communicated. It begins as the church sends people - missionaries, evangelists, preachers, teachers, and others - to proclaim the gospel to the unsaved masses.

The church conducts various ceremonies which are intended to either commission, ordain, or otherwise anoint someone for Christian service. These should never replace or supplant the genuine calling of God upon a person's life. Rather, they should serve as an affirmation and a formal endorsement of God's calling upon a person. The church's sending of a preacher provides credibility to the truthfulness of their message and the authenticity of their personal testimony. While I do believe that there are some who have been called of God and have gone out independently sharing their message, in general I advise caution when listening to and subscribing to the teachings of preachers who have never been commissioned and/or ordained by the church.

Simply put, God uses saved people to reach lost people. When a sinner becomes saved, they are immediately called to reach others who are still lost... and this cycle continues perpetually, from one generation to the next. Therefore, preachers serve a critical role in the revelation of God to this lost world. For this reason, Paul commends them by citing the words of Isaiah - "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

## II. HEARING AND BELIEVING (Romans 10:16-17)

Having been called of God and sent by the church, preachers are charged to carry the invitation of Jesus Christ to the whole world. Some will hear this message, while others will tune it out or ignore it altogether. Of those who do hear it, some will fall under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and truly believe. Those who do will then call out to God in repentance and accept salvation by placing their faith in Jesus. Thus, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the proclaimed word of Christ.

Sadly, millions who hear the gospel message will not believe it; they will not "heed the good news". Paul again quotes the writing of Isaiah when he asks, "Who has believed our report?" When we consider this statement in context we might rephrase it like this, "Has anyone believed what we've been saying? If so, then who?" The question indicates that many have heard the message of God but few have actually taken it seriously. It expresses any preacher's nagging frustration - namely, that most people, even after hearing it proclaimed, tend to reject the declared word of God.

Some Christians and churches allow the majority's rejection of Jesus Christ to dampen their passion for evangelism. It can be very difficult to endure when so many are averse to the gospel message. Yet, there are those out there who will believe it when they hear it. Therefore we must not become silent in our preaching, because even if thousands say "no" to Jesus just one "yes" makes it all worthwhile.

## III. HAVE THEY HEARD? (Romans 10:18-21)

Some Jews openly questioned the faith of the believing Gentiles. They wondered from where or from whom the Gentiles had heard the message of salvation. If they had not heard it preached, how could they possibly believe it? Paul refers to a psalm of King David which speaks about creation itself declaring the glory of God. This is his way of reminding his Jewish readers that God can and does reveal Himself in numerous ways, and can make Himself known to people even without sending a human messenger.

Paul cites Moses who wrote in Deuteronomy that “a nation without understanding” would anger the Jews. This nation of people he is referring to are the Gentiles, to whom God would make Himself known even after the Jews refused to do so. It is shameful that the Jewish people were so hateful to and skeptical of the Gentile believers, when they should have been a cause for great joy! Even today there are examples of unfounded jealousy and anger among Christians who doubt the sincerity of one another.

Finally Paul returns to the prophecy of Isaiah to further emphasize his point that God had indeed made Himself known to the Gentiles, allowing them also to be saved. They had found God by faith, despite the fact that they weren’t specifically looking for Him at the time. Perhaps you can remember an instance when you found something that you’d lost even though you weren’t actively searching for it. Ironically, God’s chosen nation of Israel had rejected Him and continued to live in obstinance and disobedience.

## CONCLUSION

God makes Himself known to people in numerous ways. Some involve human messengers, while others do not. God speaks through nature and creation, through circumstances, through internal thoughts and impressions, through angels, through the stirring voice of the Holy Spirit, through the private reading of His written word, and so on. He reveals Himself in whatever manner He sees fit. But the primary means by which He communicates His message of salvation to the world is through preachers - those people who unashamedly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

God’s strategy is to send out believers that will reach to this lost world for Jesus. This is His game plan. As imperfect as we are, God chooses to use people as the primary instrument through which He seeks to impact the world. To be honest, I have often wondered why He would take this approach to evangelism when He could accomplish this task by Himself much more effectively. Perhaps our involvement in the spreading the gospel is intended to allow us to actually experience Christ’s compassion and love for other people, and thereby to grow us in His likeness. Perhaps it is not just about reaching more people for Jesus, but also about making those who have been saved more like Jesus...

In the previous verses we learned that God has chosen to offer salvation to all people, and that we as individuals must choose to accept it by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. In a similar fashion, God has also chosen to use Christians as a means to spread the gospel to others. Again, we must choose for ourselves whether or not to be obedient to this purposeful calling.

There are people in your sphere of influence today who are more likely to listen to you than to anyone else. Will you tell them about Jesus? As an ordained minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I recognize and affirm the call of God upon your life (as it is upon mine) and this morning am formally commissioning each of you who are believers to go tell your neighbors, your family, and your friends the message of salvation. “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

## The Audience of Salvation - A Jewish Remnant

Originally Preached - 9/27/2015

*In those days and at that time,' declares the LORD, 'search will be made for the iniquity of Israel, but there will be none; and for the sins of Judah, but they will not be found; for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.'* - Jeremiah 50:20

In the years following the death of Christ, news of the gospel quickly spread across the known world. Despite monumental efforts to stop it, the expansion of Christianity could not be deterred. Bewildered Jews were shocked, and in many cases appalled, by the rapid advancement of God's word among the Gentiles. The acceptance of these new believers as siblings into the family of God was completely new and somewhat unsettling to many in Israel. The majority of Jews flatly refused to embrace Gentile Christians.

How was this new message reaching the Gentiles? How does it continue to spread today? Paul explained the sequential process as follows... God sends preachers, generally through the commissioning of His church, into all the world. These preachers proclaim the gospel message in the presence of a hearing audience. Of those who hear, some will believe the message and call upon the name of the Lord. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord (including Gentiles) shall be saved!

As the gospel progressed from nation to nation the Gentiles were experiencing a great increase in the number of believers. Meanwhile the Jews had, for the most part, missed the Messiah altogether. They had rejected His claim to be the Son of God, had conspired to put Him to death, and had sought to suppress the reality of His resurrection. In the face of such stubbornness, you might think that God would have washed His hands of the Jews once and for all - such an act certainly seems justified. But amazingly He didn't do that. Instead, He continued to reach out to this ornery, stiff-necked people. Aren't you glad He remains faithful even to those who act unfaithfully?

The truth is that among the masses of non-believing Jews, there were some individual Jews who had placed their faith in Christ and were truly saved. These redeemed people were few in number when compared to the entire nation, but they existed nonetheless. This small remnant of believing Jews included many who had been dispersed throughout the world and were the people through whom God would preserve His covenant promises to Israel. They are the topic of today's sermon.

### I. A REMNANT WILL BE SPARED (Romans 11:1-5)

In the final verse of chapter 10 we read of Israel's disobedience and obstinance toward God's outstretched hand. Though they were the chosen nation of God, set apart to be the recipients of His specific revelation, by-and-large the Jews had rejected the LORD by chasing after idols and committing numerous other sins. Despite their adulterous behavior, Paul opens chapter 11 by assuring His readers that God has remained faithful to Israel, who are referred to as a "people He foreknew".

Paul cites an Old Testament story found in 1 Kings 19 which illustrates his point. The great prophet Elijah has fled for safety from the murderous hand of Jezebel and is hiding in a wilderness cave. There he laments that

all of the God-fearing prophets have been killed and that he alone is left. Perhaps you have felt this way before... that you were the only one who was standing up for the LORD or for what is right. In this moment, Elijah felt completely alone and worried openly that the children of Israel had been rejected by the LORD.

God corrected Elijah's mistaken assumption by informing him that He had protected and preserved 7,000 men who had not bowed their knee to Baal, which is to say they had not succumb to the pressure of worshipping a false god. Like Elijah, these men had remained faithful in the face of severe persecution. God shielded this remnant of the Jews in order to preserve His people and perpetuate His covenant with them. Now centuries later, even as Paul writes to the Roman Christians, he assures them that while the nation of Israel may have despised Jesus and sought to destroy His followers, again the LORD was protecting and preserving a believing remnant of the Jews.

## II. A REMNANT WILL BELIEVE (Romans 11:6-10)

God graciously chose the people of Israel to be His covenant people. This choice was not made on the basis of their own good works. As a matter of fact, nothing that the Jews did or could do merited their selection. God's choice to reveal Himself to the world through Israel was made solely on the basis of His own sovereign will. He chose them collectively, or nationally, as it relates to the declaration of Himself. He did not choose them individually, or as distinct persons, as it relates to their own personal salvation. Through Israel God sought to make Himself known to all nations and people.

But most of the Jews rejected Him and were "hardened". They became callous, hateful, and wicked. They grew increasingly hostile toward God and His people. As a result of their continual disregard for the LORD, He gave them a spirit of stupor having eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear. He gave them over to their own devices, allowing them to heap judgment upon themselves. But those who accepted God's gracious choice by responding to Him in faith through Jesus Christ obtained the salvation for which all were seeking.

According to recent statistics there are approximately 14 million Jews currently living on earth, and of these 350,000 are Messianic - meaning that they accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah. This percentage is only 2.5%, which is a relatively small number. When we narrow the focus to include just the Holy Land, there are around 6 millions Jews living in Israel itself. Of these, only 20,000 or so accept Jesus as the Messiah. This percentage is less than half of one percent, a tiny fraction of the whole. These statistics reveal that, just as in the days of Elijah and as in the days of Paul, even now God has kept and is keeping for Himself a small remnant of believing Jews.

## III. INCREASING THE SIZE OF THE REMNANT (Romans 11:11-16)

Though the majority of Jews had stumbled, they had not yet fallen down there was still reason for hope. The gospel was spreading well beyond Israel and many Gentiles were now being saved. Some of the Jews who had previously been averse to the message of Christ were now becoming jealous of these new believers. Their rejection of Jesus had led to a broad dispersion of His message to the rest of the world - kind of a silver lining on a dark cloud.

Paul states that he considered himself to be primarily an apostle of the Gentiles - an evangelist who carried the message of salvation to new places and to new people, in part because he was not welcomed by the Jews in Israel. Even still, he was himself a Jew and desired for more of his Jewish brethren to be saved. As he preached to the Gentiles and many came to faith, his hope was that more of his fellow Jews will become curious or perhaps envious and seek Christ also. Though jealousy is certainly not the best approach to motivate someone to come to Jesus, if it works then so be. Anything that leads someone to salvation can't be all bad...

The first people to accept salvation by faith were Jewish - namely Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They represent the root from which the Gentile branches grew. They represent the first piece of dough, from which the lump was taken. Paul emphasized that salvation continued to be offered to the Jews, and that if some of were saved and the size of the believing remnant increased as a result of his Gentile-focused ministry it would be icing on the cake... a wonderful magnification of his efforts.

## CONCLUSION

As Gentile Christians, many of us might wonder what the Jewish remnant has to do with us. Afterall, we are not Jewish and therefore will not be a part of this group. What benefit then, if any, do we derive from learning about them? Is there an underlying lesson that we can learn from God's purposeful preservation of this remnant of believing Jews? There are 2 truths I would like to point out as it relates to Israel and the remnant.

The first truth is that God's word never fails. He had established a covenant with Israel though the patriarch Abraham. This covenant was intended to last forever. In order for God to honor this promise, it was and continues to be necessary that He preserve a remnant of Jews through whom it can be fulfilled. Thus, the perpetual existence of a Jewish remnant sustains the covenant. It proves that God's gracious choice of the Jews was not a mistake nor did His plan fail as a result of their disobedience. God doesn't make mistakes, but He can fix those of us that do...

The second truth is that individuals are held accountable for their acceptance or rejection of God. The LORD chose the entire nation of Israel in accordance with His own sovereign will, yet not all of them would become recipients of His covenant promises. Rather, only a small remnant who submitted to Him through saving faith would receive these blessings. In a similar fashion, God has sovereignly chosen all of humanity to be recipients of the gospel message. Jesus died on the cross to secure the forgiveness of all sinners. Yet only those who respond in faith by choosing Jesus Christ will be saved. Thus, the remnant is to Israel what the redeemed are to the mankind. They are a subset of the God's chosen whole, distinguished by their dependant faith in their Chooser.

Just as Paul sought to increase the number of Jewish believers by making them jealous of their Gentile counterparts, I would ask any and all non-Christians to consider what they are missing out on. Those of us who have accepted salvation through Jesus Christ have the promise of eternal life someday and the presence of an abundant life today. Lost person, wouldn't you like to have these blessings too? If so, don't be jealous that we have something you don't... instead receive the gift of salvation for yourself and join us as a part of God's redeemed remnant!



## The Audience of Salvation - The Gentile Branches

Originally Preached - 10/4/2015

*"and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations ; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until **the times of the Gentiles** are fulfilled." - Luke 21:24*

In almost all of his letters, including this one to the Christians in Rome, Paul begins with teaching and then turns to practical application. This morning we will conclude the theological content of this book and next week we'll begin learning the practical implications of salvation as it applies to our daily lives.

Beginning in Genesis chapter 12 and continuing through the entire Old Testament we read the history Israel. While other nations and peoples are mentioned in relation to them, the major focus is always upon the children of Jacob. As His specially chosen nation, the story of God during these centuries is told through the Jews. However, as we will discover in our message today, there came a point in time when this arrangement was altered by God and temporarily changed.

We call this belief system dispensational theology. It refers to God's practice of revealing Himself to or through certain people, groups, or nations for distinctly unique periods of time (or dispensations). Prior to the Fall of man, God dwelt in the immediate presence of Adam and Eve and revealed Himself directly to them. After they sinned and were cast out of the garden, God made himself known to humanity through individual consciousness. Years later He established the nation of Israel, made a covenant with them, and selected them to be the primary channel of His communication with the world. In the New Testament age (which we are in now) God's primary messenger is the Christian church. Following His second coming and during the Millennium His attention will return to Israel. Though the precise manner of God's revelation changes over time, the fact that He continually makes Himself known remains constant.

For the past few chapters Paul has been emphasizing that God's promises to Israel have not failed, and that despite their widespread rejection of the Messiah He would preserve and protect and believing remnant of faithful Jews. But what about the Gentiles? What was God's intentions toward them as it related to salvation? How did the actions of the Jews impact His revelation to the Gentiles? These are some of the questions that Paul deals with in the later half of Romans chapter 11.

### I. BRANCHES ARE GRAFTED IN (Romans 11:17-24)

Olives were a vital crop during the days of the New Testament. As such, olive trees were planted and cultivated by farmers on a large scale. While olive trees also grew naturally in the wild, those which were tended to domestically produced a greater and more dependable yield. Using this as an analogy, Paul describes the difference between Jews and Gentiles by comparing them to branches of the olive tree.

He calls the Gentile believers "wild olive branches" and states that they have been grafted into the tree and thereby have become partakers of the rich root. The root referred to here was characterized back in verse 16 as being holy. Thus, the Gentiles who have been grafted into the tree have attained the holiness that comes forth from the root. Paul sternly warns these wild Gentile branches not to be arrogant toward the natural



Jewish branches who were broken off the holy tree in order that they might be grafted in. He cautions them to fear God, and reminds them that if the LORD was unwilling to spare the Jewish branches because of their unbelief, He could also chose not to spare the Gentile branches for their conceited attitudes.

In this passage Paul presents his readers with the kindness and severity of God. To those branches who fell or were broken off, God displays severity. But to those who are grafted in, God displays His kindness. Seeing that God is able to graft a wild olive branch (Gentile) into a cultivated olive tree, He can certainly take natural branches (Jews) and graft them into the tree again. Thus, even though the Jews as a whole were cut off there is still hope for individual Jewish believers to be reconnected to the holy tree of God through faith in Christ.

## II. A PARTIAL HARDENING (Romans 11:25-27)

As a result of their continued disbelief in God and willful disobedience to His commands, God caused a partial hardening to occur upon Israel. The hardening was partial in that it did not preclude all Jews from realizing salvation through faith in Christ. Though the vast majority would reject Him, a remnant of Jewish believers would accept Jesus as the Messiah and would be genuinely saved (this was our topic last Sunday). The hardening was also partial in that it will not persist permanently. Rather, at some future point in time a "softening" will occur and a repentant Israel will again turn to God, be forgiven of their sins, and be saved. God's covenant with Jacob has not ceased - it has simply been put on hold for a while.

The partial hardening of Israel will continue until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. We refer to this time period as "The Age of the Gentiles" or "The Church Age". From the time of Abraham until the Day of Pentecost - around 2,000 years - the Jews served as the primary representatives of God. Some might argue that their allotted time temporarily ceased with the fall of Israel to Babylon. Either way, after they rejected their promised Messiah, God established a new representative to herald His message - the church of Jesus Christ. Today we as Christian members of the body of Christ, some Jewish but mostly Gentile, are the primary carriers of God's banner. This will continue until the second coming of Christ, after which Israel will be restored to its original status among the nations.

## III. MERCY SHOWN TO ALL (Romans 11:28-32)

Generally speaking, the Jews sought to prevent the spreading of the gospel among the Gentiles. They harshly persecuted many Gentile believers. Not surprisingly, the Gentiles widely regarded the Jews as enemies. But upon the realization that Christianity had been birthed out of Judaism, and that Israel was still God's chosen nation despite its partial hardening, Paul challenged the Gentiles to love the Jews from the standpoint of God's choice.

For the centuries preceding the life of Paul God's mercy had been bestowed especially upon the Jews, while the Gentiles remained largely ignorant of His laws and therefore acted disobediently. However, when the Jews rejected Christ the LORD transferred His mercy to the faithful Gentiles leaving Israel to walk in disobedience. Having always enjoyed the mercy of God, perhaps the Jews would realize their error by observing God's gracious treatment of the Gentiles. If they did and chose to repent, the Jews would again

regain the mercy of God they'd lost and be joined with the Gentiles, so that all disobedience would be shut up and mercy would be shown to all.

#### IV. GLORY TO GOD FOREVER (Romans 11:33-36)

These verses serve as the conclusion of the doctrinal portion of Paul's letter. He has been teaching about the characteristics of and phases in the plan of salvation. He has spoken about election, predestination, God's calling, justification, regeneration, sanctification, and glorification among other things. In light of these amazing truths, Paul praises the LORD for His incredible wisdom and knowledge. God's ways defy human understanding. He is able to accomplish His will apart from any human assistance. To Him belongs all glory forevermore!

#### CONCLUSION

In chapters 9 through 11 of Romans we have taken an in-depth look at the audience of salvation. The doctrine of election teaches that before the He created the world God chose to offer salvation to humanity solely on the basis of His sovereign good pleasure. In other words, people were designated by God beforehand to be the audience of the gospel. He determined in the very beginning to send His son Jesus Christ in order to make this redemption possible. The LORD predestined all people who choose salvation through faith in Christ to be conformed into His image, to be made into the sons of God, and to be eternally saved. Furthermore, He predestined all those who reject salvation through faith in Christ to be condemned, to be cast into hell-fire, and to be eternally separated from God.

Intellectually speaking, God knows all things. He is fully omniscient. He knows every fact and every detail about all of His creation. But relationally speaking, God only knows those individuals who are members of His family. He does not know, in a personal saving way, any of those who are unsaved. We should understand God's foreknowledge in this manner - it is not about knowing information mentally, but rather about knowing people relationally. God foreknew those of us who would be redeemed, and implemented His divine plan accordingly to ensure these relationships would endure.

All people have a God-given free will and must personally accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in order to be saved. Genuine salvation experiences are only made possible through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit as He draws individuals to Jesus. Thus, God alone is wholly responsible for making salvation possible and making it available to individual persons. The sinner's only role is to either accept or reject God's offer of forgiveness. This is solely an expression of faith, and should in no way be considered a work of man. Those who accept the gift of salvation are known in the Bible as the "elect".

We have referred to the elect by several different names in our sermon titles over the past few weeks. These have included "Children of the Promise", "Vessels of Mercy", "Those Who Call Upon the Name of the Lord", "Those Who Have Believed His Report", "A Remnant of Believing Jews", and "The Gentile Branches". Each of these names uniquely describes some aspect or category of God's elect. The elect are those who have been both chosen by God and have chosen to place their faith in Him.

In closing, God the Father formulated the plan of salvation in the beginning well before anyone was actually saved. Jesus executed the plan through His death and resurrection thereby making salvation available to all sinners. The Holy Spirit effects the plan by applying salvation to individual believers who receive Christ through faith. In this way, God accomplishes the salvation of all who come to Him in repentance.

## The Application of Salvation - Saved to Serve

Originally Preached - 10/11/2015

*So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation** with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. - Philippians 2:12-13*

The greatest gift that a person can receive is salvation. The fact is that all people are sinners and have fallen short of the glory of God. Every person is unrighteous apart from Christ - they are not in a right relationship with God. It is for this reason that Jesus came to make redemption and forgiveness available to the world. Turning from sin and accepting salvation by placing one's faith in Him is the most important decision that anyone can ever make. If you have never done that, I urge you to do it today.

Like the believers in Rome to whom Paul wrote centuries ago, most of us to whom I am now speaking are already saved. And just as I praise the LORD for my own salvation, I also praise Him for your salvation, and the fact that He has adopted us as Christians into His family. There is no better feeling on earth than to know that you are saved, bought and secured by the blood of Jesus, and heaven bound!

In Luke 17:11-19 we find an interesting story that happened during the ministry of Jesus Christ. One day as He was traveling to Jerusalem the Lord encountered 10 lepers. They cried out for to Him for mercy. Jesus told them all to go show themselves to the priest, and that they'd be healed as they went. Sure enough, along the way all 10 lepers were cleansed from their disease. While all of them must have been truly amazed and thankful for the miracle that Christ had performed in their life, only one returned to express his gratitude by worshiping and praising the Lord.

In a sense, we are all like these lepers. All of us were at one time covered by the tender and painful sores of our own sin. Yet, when we came to Jesus in faith, He forgave us of our festering sin and washed us white as snow. I would venture to say that almost every person who has ever been truly born again is genuinely thankful for their salvation. But the question is, how do we express this gratitude? Do we celebrate the gift while neglecting to acknowledge the Giver? How can we live our lives in appreciation to God for the salvation that He has given to us through His Son?

### I. PRESENT YOUR BODY (Romans 12:1)

Up to this point, Paul has been thoroughly exploring the doctrinal truths of salvation. Chapter 12 begins with the word "Therefore" which refers back to what he has been teaching. We can rightly understand this transition to mean, "Because you have been saved..." As Christians, we have already experienced and still are experiencing the spiritual wonders of salvation. Because we have been saved, we now are under obligation to live accordingly.

The first admonition we are given is to "present our bodies" as a "living and holy sacrifice" to the God. In the Old Testament times, the Jews offered sacrifices to God for several different reasons. While many of these offerings involved the slaying of animals in order to secure the forgiveness of sin, the grain offering was given

purely as an act of worship and acknowledgement of God's provision. It was often presented after the burnt offering. The sacrifice that Paul is describing in this verse is like that of the grain offering. Jesus, the unblemished Lamb of God, has already laid down His life as the sacrifice that secured our forgiveness of sin. Now we should present ourselves to Him as a living and holy sacrifice in appreciation and praise for the salvation He has granted us.

The offering of our bodies must be "acceptable" to God. One of the things that angers the LORD and makes Him most disgusted is the presentation of unacceptable or defiled offerings. The Jews were not supposed to bring second-rate animals or grains to the priests in order to be sacrificed. Instead, they were to give of their very best. Therefore, we should strive to keep our bodies as clean, pure, and wholesome as possible. While all of us will have seasons of sickness and weakness in our lives, we should never inflict these conditions upon ourselves through reckless living.

The presenting of your body to God requires your physical presence. It doesn't get more basic than this - the first step in authentic Christian living is simply to show up. Whether it be for church services, for ministry opportunities, or for a host of other activities that God is calling you to - your attendance is of utmost importance. Simply by coming you are presenting your body to the LORD as an act of service. While there are certainly some legitimate excuses for being gone at times, for the most part persistently absentee and in-active Christians are useless to Kingdom of God and to His church.

## II. RENEW YOUR MIND (Romans 12:2)

If we intend to truly serve the LORD, we must go an additional step beyond just presenting our bodies. We must also renew our minds. In other words, we must be both physically available and mentally engaged for Christian service. The actions of our hands and feet are determined by the thoughts in our heads, and therefore if we seek to do the work of Christ we must also share in the mind of Christ.

Such thinking requires a radical transformation from our natural conformity to this world. We all tend to conform to the prevailing norms of our society and culture. Sadly, these are deeply marred by sin and corruption. The things that we see and hear have a profound effect on how we think. It is imperative that we guard our hearts and minds from things that will enslave our thinking to worldliness. Instead we must discover and embrace the attitude of Jesus Christ, and submit our personal ambitions to perfect His will.

If we are to renew our minds, we must continually fill them with the words and truths of God. Such a renewal takes extreme discipline, as we commit ourselves to the frequent and intentional study of Scripture. We must replace the corrupt lusts of the world with the pure and righteous thoughts of God. By immersing ourselves in His word through listen to it, reading it, studying it, meditating on it, memorizing it, and so on, we can transform our minds slowly over time and begin to take on a godly perspective.

## III. CHECK YOUR EGO (Romans 12:3-5)

Because we have received such a great salvation, we should aspire to serve God both physically and mentally. As we do so, we are increasingly molded into the image of Christ through the process of sanctification. What a

wonderful journey! Nevertheless, as we mature in the faith and in our dedication to service we must be careful to avoid the pride that often creeps in.

As we grow closer to God, it can be tempting to point the finger at others who we perceive to be farther away from Him than we are. Our thoughts can become haughty and arrogant, and we become "puffed up" with inflated egos. Christian service should never be considered as a way to score points with God or to earn His approval. While the work we do in His name certainly pleases Him, it does not make us more worthy of His affection or more valuable than anyone else. Such lofty thinking impairs sound judgment and is a recipe for disaster!

Paul uses an analogy to demonstrate that while we are all one body in Christ, each member has been given a different function. God allots to each one of us a measure of faith in accordance to and appropriate for our particular function. Thus, every ministry and every minister is uniquely different. All too often, we begin to make inappropriate comparisons between ourselves and others in an attempt to measure our success. These types of thoughts can lead to either pride or discouragement, both of which can severely damage your service to God.

#### IV. EXERCISE YOUR GIFT(S) (Romans 12:6-8)

Not only has God given you a unique ministry, but He has also gifted you in a certain way that enables you to accomplish that ministry. God has equipped you to do the work which He has called you to do. He has provided you with the necessary spiritual ability to live out your calling in life. It is up to us all to discover what our gift(s) is/are and to use them for the furtherance of His kingdom.

There are numerous spiritual gifts listed in various places throughout the New Testament, but in this passage Paul names these seven - prophecy (preaching), service, teaching, exhorting (encouraging/motivating), giving, leading, and mercy (caring). Perhaps you possess one or more of the traits. May I ask - how are you using your gifts to the glory of God?

If your desire is to become stronger and healthier physically, you must exercise strenuously and frequently. Occasional and/or non-challenging workouts are not much use. In the same way, if you want to become stronger and healthier in Christ, you must exercise your gifts to the utmost. Spiritual laziness and idleness will never take you to the places where God wants you to be.

#### CONCLUSION

You are saved to serve. As a born-again Christian, you have been employed by the King of Kings and are now at His service. And beloved, there are many things that He desires for you to do. It is time to roll up your sleeves and get to work for Jesus!

You can begin by surrendering your body to His service. This means that you will take care of yourself and allow God to use you for His purposes. Secondly, you can work to renew your mind by showering it constantly in the Word of God so that you begin to see the world through the eyes of Christ. Next, you can check your

ego and take on a humble and contrite spirit. Such an attitude will contribute to your ability to serve God effectively. Finally, you can discover and exercise the spiritual gifts and talents that God has expressly given you.

You are saved to serve. God wants to use you to accomplish His will and way.

You are saved to serve. Embrace His calling and give Him your very best.

You are saved to serve. By doing your part, the entire body of Christ benefits.

You are saved to serve. This is the very essence of abundant life.

## The Application of Salvation: 22 Characteristics

Originally Preached - 10/18/2015

*By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. - 1 John 2:5-6*

I like to use lists. They help to remind me of everything I need to get done. Before I go to bed at night or early in the morning I will sometimes scribble out a list of things to do for the day. Some time ago my wife inspired me to make little checkboxes beside each item on my list so that I can check them off as they are completed. I find this approach to be surprisingly gratifying. At the end of the day, as I look back over the marked off items, I feel a great sense of accomplishment. The list can be a great tool for success.

This morning we are going to read through a list of directives that, if followed, will enable us to show many different Christian characteristics. The list includes 22 instructions that can assist us in living a godly lifestyle. These are not items to be checked off, but are instead descriptors of a person who is living out their salvation. By practicing the qualities included in this list each and every day, years from now we will be able to look back with a great sense of accomplishment knowing that we lived as the Lord desired us to.

### 1 Let love be without hypocrisy. (Romans 12:9a)

Hypocrisy is defined as "The practice of professing beliefs, feelings, or virtues that one does not hold or possess." It means to say one thing while doing another. As it relates to love, we should never say that we love something or someone when we are unwilling to show it by our actions. Claiming to love God (or others) while living a life that demonstrates exactly the opposite is completely disgraceful. Scripture is clear that if you truly love the Lord you will keep His commandments. (John 14:15)

### 2 Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. (Romans 12:9b)

Abhor means "To regard with horror or loathing; to detest". There is a big difference between avoiding doing evil things and abhorring them. Far too many professing Christians still love the sinful ways of this world. Sin doesn't horrify us, or even make us angry. Instead, if we are honest with ourselves, most of us still kind of like it. What we should be doing is clinging to that which is wholesome, pure, and righteous. Our grasp on the "good" should be one of utmost desperation, as we realize that letting go of it will likely bring about ruinous consequences upon our lives.

### 3 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; (Romans 12:10a)

Devotion is defined as "Ardent, often selfless affection and dedication, as to a person or principle". A person who is devoted to another is fervently committed to them. Devotion includes the ideas of loyalty and faithfulness toward each other. Christians are to exhibit the type of brotherly love that remains strong and steadfast even in the midst of hardship and conflict. We the family of God and should be dedicated one to another as spiritual siblings. The world already hates us and wants to tear us apart - why should we help them by doing these same things to ourselves and each other?

### 4 give preference to one another in honor; (Romans 12:10b)



Scripture tells us to regard one another as "more important than ourselves". (Phil. 2:3) This is not a command to neglect ourselves or to face life with low self-esteem. Such self-hatred is not pleasing to God or beneficial to His purposes. Rather, only by first knowing our own great value to God we are then truly liberated to extend honor to others. We need to acknowledge and respect one another, giving credit where it is due. This requires us to embrace an attitude of humility.

#### 5 not lagging behind in diligence, (Romans 12:11a)

Diligence means "A steady, persistent, or untiring effort; assiduity". While devotion refers primarily to our thoughts and emotions, the word diligence is more related to our actions. As believers, we are to be diligent in our works for the Lord. Paul urges us not to become weary of doing good, knowing that in due time we will reap of the harvest. (Gal. 6:9) The army of God is marching on, and we must keep up without lagging behind. Those who straggle behind are most susceptible to the enemy...

#### 6 fervent in spirit, (Romans 12:11b)

The greatest commandment given in the Bible is to love the LORD with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. (Mark 12:30) We have already covered devotion to God in our hearts and minds, and diligence to His calling with all our strength. All that remains in Jesus' command is to love God with all our soul, which can be understood to mean our spirit. While the two words are different from one another, their similarities are such that Biblical writers often use them interchangeably. We are advised to be zealous and passionate in spirit - to align our spiritual desires and will to that of the Holy Spirit.

#### 7 serving the Lord; (Romans 12:11c)

The first half of this chapter teaches us that we are "saved to serve". As born-again believers, we are to present our bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice; we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds; we are to check our egos by not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought; and we are to exercise of spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ. These are the hallmarks of Christian service, as we discussed thoroughly last week.

#### 8 rejoicing in hope, (Romans 12:12a)

To rejoice means to express joy. Rejoicing is the act of showing delight or ecstatic happiness. We can rejoice in all things because of the great hope we have in Christ. Personally, I am convinced that one of the greatest deterrents to the church today is the overall lack of joy within it. Scripture reveals that the joy of the Lord is our strength. (Neh. 8:10) If we aspire to serve the Lord with all of our strength as discussed previously, we must first learn to rejoice in Him. There is nothing more exhausting than to labor for that which brings you no sense of pleasure.

#### 9 persevering in tribulation, (Romans 12:12b)

Perseverance means "To persist in or remain constant to a purpose, idea, or task in the face of obstacles or discouragement". Those who persevere refuse to quit or give up even while enduring incredible difficulties and challenges. In the midst of our hardships and bitter tribulation, we are told to press forward and never to lose hope. Scripture says that even when we are walking through the darkest valleys, the LORD is with us and there is no cause for fear. Therefore, we must continue to advance the cause of Christ and endure even through the most troubling of circumstances.

10 devoted to prayer, (Romans 12:12c)

Like the absence of joy which was mentioned previously, there is also a profound lack of prayer in the modern church and among individual Christians. Prayer is more than simply a channel of communication with God. It also provides the means to involve Him more deeply in our lives and the lives of others. The Bible is abundantly clear that the LORD is willing and able to do miraculous things that are beyond our human abilities. His only desire is that we ask. When we neglect God through our failure to pray, we are left to face the problems of this world largely on our own.

11 contributing to the needs of the saints, (Romans 12:13a)

We are to give generously in order to help other Christians. While it is true that we should reach out to the poor and the lost, let us not forget that there are fellow believers who are also in need. Scripture indicates that the church must minister to its own members. There are those among us in need of help and provision, whether it be financially or in some other way. By providing for one another, the body of Christ remains healthy and is then able to demonstrate Him to the entire world.

12 practicing hospitality. (Romans 12:13b)

Hospitality is defined as the "Cordial and generous reception of or disposition toward guests". Paul was quite familiar with this, as he was often a guest in the homes and churches to which he traveled. Providing food and lodging for traveling missionaries and evangelists was more common back then, yet even today we should be as hospitable as possible. When we have visitors in our churches or homes we should greet them lovingly and make them feel welcome.

13 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (Romans 12:14)

To bless someone means to ask the LORD's favor upon them, while to curse someone means to appeal to God for their misfortune. We are encouraged to bless others - even those who persecute us. Jesus modeled this behavior by praying for those who were crucifying Him. Even when confronting His enemies, the Lord's desire was always for their well-being and that they would come to repentance. Wishing ill on others has a way of poisoning our own minds.

14 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15)

We should learn to share in the emotional experiences of others. When they are joyful, we should celebrate with them. When they are in mourning, we should grieve with them. This command carries with it the idea of compassion. We should not only hurt for people, but actually hurt with them. By putting ourselves in their shoes, we can begin to share in the feelings that they are having. Such empathy will allow us to better understand and join in the emotional expressions of those around us.

15 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. (Romans 12:16a)

We should ascribe equal value to all people. No one is more worthy of affection in God's eyes than any other. As Christians, we would do well to adopt this same perspective. Because all are equally precious to God, we should not be ashamed to associate with those that the world views as lowly. Jesus closely identified with the outcasts of society and spent a good deal of time with those whom the culture had rejected. This attitude

does not exclude us from spending time with the wealthy (they need Jesus too), but it reminds us not to neglect the downtrodden and forgotten.

16 Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Romans 12:16b)

One of the great characteristics of true wisdom is its ability to remain silent. Often the wisest people are those who are the most quiet and thoughtful. They are usually slow to speak and quick to listen. (James 1:19) A wise person rarely "toots his or her own horn" or calls attention to themselves. Such boasting is most often the behavior of a fool. While we should certainly pursue godly wisdom, we should never consider ourselves as having attained it all. A wise person is keenly aware of their own personal folly.

17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. (Romans 12:17a)

It is human nature for us to mistreat those who mistreat us. When other people act badly toward us, we are inclined to pay them back in-kind. However, we are instructed in this verse to never respond to evil with evil. When someone sins against us we are not justified in sinning against them. The old saying that "Two wrongs don't make a right" is absolutely true. When we are treated unjustly or unfairly the proper response is forgiveness, not retribution.

18 Respect what is right in the sight of all men. (Romans 12:17b)

We must publicly and visibly "respect that which is right" so that others will see us doing so. In other words, we must live our Christian lives openly and in the light of day. We are called to work out our salvation before people, so that they can see for themselves the presence of God within us. People look at us should be able to tell that we are believers. Our love to and service for the LORD should not be a secret that we try to keep hidden. At the same time, it should not be a reason to gloat either.

19 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. (Romans 12:18)

It is possible for us to be at peace with others, even when they refuse to be at peace with us. This means that we avoid engaging in or participating in the fight. When they attack us maliciously, we respond peacefully. This doesn't necessarily mean that we back down, but rather that we don't automatically turn to violence. Peace requires discipline and self-control, and is a sign of great strength. As this verse concedes, peace is not always possible; but if we must fight, it should be done for a just cause and only as a last resort.

20 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. (Romans 12:19)

This concept is closely related to that of retribution, which we discussed earlier. Vengeance is retaliation against someone who has harmed us. We desire to personally punish them for what they've done. As such, we become instruments of wrath. Yet the LORD teaches us that He alone is the judge, jury, and executioner. When we intervene, no room is left for God to carry out His vengeance. Scripture assures us that God will pour out His wrath on sinners, and it will be far worse than any revenge we could ever get.

21 "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." (Romans 12:20)

Doing good to your enemies is closely connected to blessing those who persecute you, as we studied already. One nuance that is added in this verse is the concept that such service actually "heaps burning coals on his

head". This does not mean that our acts of kindness will amplify their coming punishment. On the contrary, by adding burning coals to the fire a person becomes increasingly purified by the heat. Showing love to our enemies is one of the best ways to diffuse their anger and change their attitudes about us.

22 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

Overcoming evil is akin to persevering in tribulation. The notable difference between the two is that we are to actually triumph over evil. We are to do more than merely survive - we are to thrive! This verse presents us with the image of being on offense, actively confronting and defeating that which is evil. Unfortunately, many Christians take a defensive perspective. But God does not call us to protect that church; instead, he calls us to overcome the world in Jesus' name!

## CONCLUSION

Many different behaviors and attitudes are displayed in the life of an authentic Christian. This morning we have considered 22 such statements written by Paul in the latter half of Romans 12. For those of us who desire to live as Jesus would have us to, it seems prudent to examine these characteristics and to apply them to our lives. As the redeemed children of God who are being conformed into the Lord's image, we should think and act like Him more every single day.

## The Application of Salvation - Be a Good Citizen

Originally Preached - 10/25/2015

*Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. - Matthew 10:28*

As redeemed Christians who have been saved and continue to experience the wonders of salvation, we are called to live in a certain manner. Last week Paul challenged us to display several characteristics that are indicative of a godly life. Before that, he urged us to diligently serve God as laborers in His kingdom. This morning we will consider a third behavior that we as God's children are to practice - we should strive to be good citizens.

Before we delve into the text, let me preface this sermon by saying that the opening verses of Romans 13 have been misused over the centuries to convince Christians that submission to the government is always the correct course. In the late 1930's for example, virtually every German preacher taught their congregations to obey the atrocious decrees of the Nazi government as an act of allegiance to God. Hitler, along many other ruthless dictators, have greatly benefited from an improper interpretation of this text. Unfortunately, millions have died at the hands of these infamous leaders. Absolute and unquestioned submission to any human government is completely unbiblical and ignores the preponderance of what is taught in Scripture.

As Americans, we should understand this truth better than most. Our forefathers were British citizens who were appalled by the behaviors of their own government. They tried for years to resolve these differences through peaceful compromise. Finally, having failed to reach any meaningful agreement, and being increasingly persecuted and mistreated by the royal crown, the colonists revolted.

In the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson wrote that it is the "right" and the "duty" of the people to "throw off" a tyrannical and abusive government. This historic document was signed by fifty-six of our nation's founders, many of whom were professing Christians. These devout men understood that blind submission to a corrupt and sinful government is not the will of God. While we should seek to be good citizens to the extent possible, certain occasions may arise in which we must resist the evil dictates of human authority in exchange for the timeless truths of God.

Generally speaking, the children of God should exhibit exceptional citizenship. We should be obedient to the higher authorities that govern us. Our dedication to country should be unmatched by others in society. If and when our leaders begin to stray from doing good, we show seek to restore them through the example of our Christian character.

### I. THERE IS NO AUTHORITY EXCEPT FROM GOD (Romans 13:1-2)

**There is no authority except that which is from God.** The LORD is sovereign in that He alone exercises supreme, complete, and permanent authority over all things. Any other individual or entity that holds some level of authority derives it solely from God. The LORD sets up or establishes civil governments as a means

through which He implements His authority. As Christians, we are to live in submission to these civil authorities, recognizing that the source of their power is ultimately God Almighty.

A person who resists the legitimate authority of the government opposes the ordinance of God. Such disobedience will bring about condemnation, both from the governing authorities and from the LORD Himself. People who violate the laws of their state and/or nation should expect to be punished as a just consequence of their misconduct. This is the primary function of civil government - to serve as an agent which seeks to rightly enforce the moral laws and principles of God.

Because all authority is from God, and none other exists apart from Him, then we must understand that no person or entity possesses any authority of their own merit. Therefore, no one has the natural right to rule over or control anyone else, unless so ordained by God Himself. The only valid, legitimate, and binding authority is that which comes from the LORD. Thus, laws or dictates that are not from God as indicated by their clear violation of His word are unfounded and carry no real authority at all.

There are numerous examples of men and women in Scripture who resisted the illegitimate control of the civil powers, some even to the point of their own martyrdom. We must understand that our call to live in submission to governing authorities is not a blanket command to comply with or defer to everything that they say or do. We should strive to be good citizens, but if the statutes and laws of our government are not of God then they carry no authority. We must first remain obedient to the LORD even if it violates the laws or decrees of the state.

## II. THE PROPER FUNCTION OF GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:3-4)

When a government is acting in accordance with its God-given purpose, it protects and secures the rights and well-being of its citizens. In these instances, those who are in power become a source of comfort to law-abiding citizens and a source of fear to criminals. By practicing that which is good, as specified by the morally upright laws of the land, any person is free to live without fear of or intimidation from their government. In some cases, they might even receive praise or accolades for their fine display of citizenship. This is to be the behavior of a born again Christian.

If, however, a person chooses to do that which is evil and disobeys the just authority of the government then they should expect to receive punishment. God intentionally grants civil magistrates with the power and means to inflict consequences upon law-breakers. In this manner the state serves as a minister of God through which He executes His wrath upon transgressors.

There is a profound difference between that which is legal and that which is right, just as there is between that which is illegal and that which is wrong. Right and wrong carry far more weight than legal and illegal. Godly authority legitimizes that which is good and penalizes that which is evil - ungodly authority does the opposite. When civil governance legalizes that which is sinful, or it makes it illegal to practice that which is right, then it is functioning outside its established purpose. Such is the nature of corruption.

Notice in this text that Paul describes the government as one acting in a just and right manner, as ordained and established by God. Therefore it is completely logical and appropriate that we should submit to it. However, Paul never provides a counter example of an unethical and ungodly government, nor does he tell us what to do under those circumstances. The command to submit assumes that the governmental authorities being submitted to are functioning as God intended.

### III. HONOR AND SUPPORT THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:5-7)

As Christians, we should live in subjection to our civil government because it has the power to punish us if we don't - but even more so because it is the right thing to do. God has established governing authorities to rule over us for our benefit. Those who work as public officials are servants of God who have devoted themselves to this cause. Therefore, we should pay our taxes and customs unreluctantly as a means of supporting our governing authorities.

Supporting the activities of the government by paying taxes is by no means an endorsement of everything that they do with the money. I have met many people who refuse to pay taxes because they believe that by doing so they become partly responsible for the government's corruption. While there are many examples of government spending that I wholeheartedly disagree with and would like to see ended immediately, I refute the notion that I am responsible for the actions of another person or entity. Scripture teaches that each person is held individually accountable for their own deeds. Therefore, we should pay our taxes in obedience to the LORD's command. If the government misuses the money, they will be judged accordingly for their own actions.

Jesus said that we should render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and render unto God the things which are God's. With this statement, the Lord revealed that we are under obligation to both the civil government and to the living God. We are to respect and support our governing authorities, but our ultimate allegiance must always be to the LORD. The honor that we show to our government is undergirded by our reverence for and obedience to Him. Because we fear God and understand His reasons for placing human authorities over us, we can then voluntarily honor the king. (1 Peter 2:17)

### CONCLUSION

God established government and granted it with authority to rule. While we may disagree with some of the activities of the government, we should always respect the institution as an instrument through which God works to accomplish His will. The absence of all government is inconsistent with Scripture, while the existence of a large and intrusive one is dangerous to freedom. America's founders realized this and sought to create a limited government - restricted in both size and power. When the civil government functions as God designed it to, submission to it is not an issue.

Unfortunately, many Christians have taken this command too far. When churches revere the American flag more than the Christian flag there is a problem. When Christians seem to cherish Memorial Day services or Independence Day services more than Easter services something is wrong. Many so-called evangelicals today seem to worship the state more than they do Jesus Christ. Don't get me wrong... I deeply love my country and

am truly appreciative of all the men and women who have served and are serving to defend it. I am a proud American who believes that this is the greatest nation on the earth. But if I am ever forced to choose between either my country or my God, it will be no contest. I am and will always be a Christian first, and an American in distant second.

Some might misconstrue this sermon to be a call for revolution. It isn't. I fully agree with and echo the words of Paul which encourage us all to be good citizens. We should respect and pray for our civil leaders knowing that God has granted them certain authority over us. They aren't perfect and will certainly make mistakes, just as we do. Still we must realize that the burden of leadership can be difficult to carry at times, and those who do so need our support. Ultimately we must remember that God's intent for the government is to make our lives better, not worse. We only have grounds to dissent if the governing authorities are in clear violation of God's commands.



## The Application of Salvation: Love as in the Light

Originally Preached - 11/1/2015

*The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. - 1 John 2:9-11*

Romans is the one of the most often quoted and highly read books in the entire Bible. While it touches on several topics, the primary theme of the letter is salvation. As we have studied through this great work over the course of the past year, we've explored the doctrine of salvation in depth. We have covered a lot of material so far, and still have a few more chapters to go. I thought it might be fun to begin our message today with a pop quiz that briefly reviews some of the important concepts we've already covered in this series.

What is the message of salvation? *The Gospel*

What groups of people are in need salvation? *The unrighteous, the self-righteous, the presumptuous, and the guilty - all people*

How does a person receive salvation? *Through faith in Jesus Christ*

What are the steps in the salvation process? *Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification*

What happens during justification? *God forgives a person of their sins and guilt, pardons their penalty, and declares them to be righteous.*

What is sanctification? *A lifelong process, beginning with regeneration, in which a person increasingly grows and is molded by God into the image of Christ.*

What are the components of regeneration? *Death to sin, freedom from sin, and life to God*

What is glorification? *The exchange of the believer's present earthly body for an incorruptible heavenly body in which they will live eternally with Christ.*

What activities has God done to make salvation possible? *Election, Predestination, and Calling*

How does God desire for His children to live out their salvation? *Through service to Him and other people, by displaying Christ-like characteristics, by being good citizens and respecting legitimate authority, etc.*

So how did you do on the quiz? I hope you remembered many of the answers that we've learned over past several months. This morning we will continue to discover what God's expectations are for believers. After a person gets saved, how are they supposed to live? What are some practical ways for Christians to demonstrate their salvation to others? Today we will talk about "Loving as in the Light".

## I. LOVE ONE ANOTHER (Romans 13:8-10)

In a recent 2011 book titled "Three Felonies a Day", author Harvey Silvergate explains that the average U.S. citizen unknowingly violates federal law on multiple occasions each day. There are laws and regulations that target almost every detail of our lives - including the minutest things. Many of these are written so vaguely or broadly that almost any behavior could be construed as criminal. Knowing and obeying all of these laws is all but impossible for any person, no matter how well-intentioned they might be.

In the Old Testament, there are over 600 laws or commandments. They apply to many different areas of life. Some are focused on moral behavior, others on ceremonial practices, and still others on civil issues. For the average person among us, just remembering this many laws is a stretch. Beyond retaining a mental awareness of them, continuously keeping them all without making a single error is impossible. Scripture clearly teaches that all people have broken the commandments of God. It further states that even one violation renders a person guilty of all. Therefore, every person is a sinner and is subject to God's justice.

Jesus stated that He came to fulfill the law. While on earth He perfectly kept every commandment, revealing God's true intent for them rather than simply their letter. By living a sinless life Jesus did something that none of us could ever do. As a guiltless and unblemished sacrifice, Jesus' death was acceptable to God in order to accomplish the salvation of mankind. When we accept Him as our Lord and Savior, God forgives our disobedience and guilt. He replaces our unrighteousness with Christ's righteousness, which frees us from the requirements of the law and liberates to live in the wonders of grace.

Therefore, rather than trying to remember and uphold hundreds of different commandments, we are instructed in this text to follow just one - to love our neighbor as ourselves. After all, if we truly love one another we won't sleep with their spouse, we won't kill them, we won't steal from them, nor will we covet their possessions. Love does not harm others, but rather seeks for their good. Like Jesus, we too can fulfill the law by loving one another as ourselves. Obviously our fulfillment is not to the same extent as His was, yet by loving others we can reveal the true nature of God to this generation and point them to Christ.

Many religions emphasize to their followers what they can't do. Don't do this, don't do that... No one likes to be told what not to do. But pure, simple New Testament Christianity is more focused upon what we should be doing. We should strive to love one another - both friends and enemies alike, whether deserved or undeserved - all for the glory of God. There is simply no better or more accurate way to display the reality of God to the world than by loving our neighbors as ourselves.

## II. LIVE AS IN THE LIGHT (Romans 13:11-14)

In these verses Paul depicts the current age as one of abject spiritual darkness. We are living in a world shrouded by the blackness of night. The lack of visibility prevents us from truly seeing ourselves as the LORD sees us. We perceive ourselves to be much cleaner and more holy than we truly are. The veil of darkness misleads us into thinking that we can practice sin and disobedience without anyone else finding out - including God. It even prevents people from seeing or perceiving many clear evidences of God in this life. Even

for the most sincere seekers, the darkness can cause us to stumble and run into obstacles that obstruct our path. The fact is that most of us are spiritually asleep, blissfully unaware of or unconcerned about the sinful activities that are rampant during the gloomy night.

But we are warned that the day is drawing near. This era of spiritual darkness will soon end, and the dawn of a new day will soon begin. When the sun rises and the light of God begins to shine, that which has been concealed by the blackness up until now will be clearly seen. The wicked deeds that have taken place in secrecy during the lengthy night will be finally be exposed. The wretched condition of our own sinful lives will be revealed. Nothing will be hidden - the truth will be made evident to all.

Though this new day has yet to arrive, we as Christians are advised to awake from our sleep and to live as if the light has already come. Even now God can see through the spiritual darkness of this present world. The light of the coming day will reveal to us what God already sees and knows. Our sinful behaviors might be hidden from each other, but the LORD is well aware of them all. We are foolish to believe otherwise. Nothing is hidden from Him. As such, we need to put away our fleshly lusts and instead put on the armor of light. This covering will allow us to shine the light of Christ even in the midst of this long, dark night.

Though our eternal salvation is made secured by God's grace through our faith in Christ, the Bible does teach that will we each stand before the Lord and give an account of our works. It is on this basis that we will be rewarded for the things we've done in this present life. Knowingly this, it seems prudent that we should strive for godliness and righteousness. We should consider our thoughts and deeds to be on public display before everyone, because someday they will be. It boils down to this... either we can repent of our sins and live as in the light right now, or we can continue to practice the deeds of darkness and be exposed as sinners later. But know this... if we wait until the morning light to seek salvation, it will be too late.

## CONCLUSION

Love is like the switch that turns on the light. It is like a flame that glows in the darkness. In order to live in the light, we must love one another. Apart from love, we will continually grope in the darkness. The Bible teaches that God is love. Therefore, if love produces the light and God is love, then we can conclude He is the source of the light. This is why Jesus preached that He was the "Light of the World." As the redeemed children of God, we have been saved so that we might love others and by so doing live as in the light.

## The Application of Salvation - Acceptance & Respect

Originally Preached - 11/15/2015

*"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. - Matthew 23:23*

As those who have experienced salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, we should live our lives differently than the world. Starting back in chapter 12 Paul began listing some practical ways in which we should live out our salvation. We should strive to serve others. We should put on or display several different godly characteristics. We should submit to legitimate authority, realizing that God alone is sovereign. Furthermore, we should love one another and live as children of the light. In this week's message we will add yet another item to this growing list of behaviors.

The opening verse of chapter 14 sets forth two related concepts - acceptance and judgment. Throughout the remainder of the passage, Paul seamlessly weaves these two issues together. For the sake of our discussion, we will seek to isolate them from one another. In so doing, we will study the verses in a different order than they are actually written. Hopefully this will allow us to focus on each topic individually, while not ignoring the critical relationship between them. Though we will rearrange the verses, we will be careful not to change the overall meaning of this passage. In this week's sermon we will focus upon the first of these issues - accepting the one who is weak in the faith, and next week we will consider judging the opinions of others.

### I. ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER'S DIFFERENCES (Romans 14:1-3, 5a, 6)

The church is admonished to "accept the one who is weak in the faith". Notice that while the person being referred to here may have a weak faith, they still are a person of some faith. Thus this passage does not apply to the faithful accepting or consenting to the ungodliness of the unfaithful. Furthermore, the "weakness" of the faith cited here does not necessarily refer to that of a newer or more immature Christian. While that may be the true in some instances, the thrust of the verse is that we as believers we should accept one another's differences so long as they do not violate or contradict the clearly revealed commandments of God. The key is acceptance of one another's differences.

Paul cites a few examples that were prominent in the days of the Roman church. As you might recall from earlier in this series, the makeup of this congregation was split between Jewish and Gentile believers who had received salvation in Jesus Christ. Because of their heritage, many of the Jewish converts still sought to uphold the dietary restrictions in the Law which specified what was clean to eat and what wasn't. Some chose to eat vegetables only, in accordance with their desire to be obedient. On the contrary, the Gentile Christians had no such background and felt it permissible to eat whatever they wanted. Providing a second example, Paul explains that some held certain days or times in particular esteem while others did not. The customary Holy Days of the Jews did not carry the same significance among the Gentiles.

The disparity on issues could have been a source of friction between the members of the Roman church. Yet the Scripture teaches that God has accepted those who were adherents of both viewpoints. It further states

that those who "observe the day", "those who eat", and even "those who do not eat" all do so for the Lord. In other words, their heart was intent on worshiping God through their actions. In the realm of these lesser religious issues, we should accept one another as brethren even when our practices differ. Again, this acceptance is limited to the less weighty issues that should not preclude Christian fellowship.

## II. HOLD ON TO YOUR CONVICTIONS (Romans 14:5b, 14, 22-23)

Having shared a few examples highlighting differences between the various groups that made up the Roman church, Paul takes a moment to share his own personal convictions regarding the Jewish dietary restrictions. He writes that he is fully convinced that nothing is unclean in itself. Despite his Jewish background and training, he takes the position that all foods are acceptable for eating and that the distinction between that which is clean and unclean under the Law is no longer valid. His stance is based upon the teaching of Jesus who said, *"Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man."* (Mark 7:14)

Paul is arguing that each person should have and hold onto their own personal convictions about these less pertinent issues. Sometimes these develop and may possibly even change over time. The fact is that everyone has an opinion - and that's okay so long as that opinion is intended to glorify the Lord. Those who are convinced that certain foods remain unclean should follow their convictions and not eat them. The person who stands firm and remains faithful to his beliefs will be happy because he has followed his heart. The one who wavers and doubts if what he is doing is really right commits sin, because he acts apart from faith. Let me clarify this point with an example. If a person eats of that which he still regards as possibly unclean he commits sin - not because the food is unclean (which it isn't), but rather because he eats it with lingering doubt. He is unsure of himself, and therefore is unstable in his ways.

## III. RESPECT THE PRACTICES OF OTHER BELIEVERS (Romans 14:20-21, 15)

The simple truth is that some things should take precedent over others. The greatest commandments are to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Demonstrating this type of selfless love is the supreme work of God, and it should not be undermined by lesser issues such as what we eat. There is way too much work to be done for us to spend all of our time fussing over petty and inconsequential differences.

While we are encouraged to have our own personal convictions, these do not give us license to offend one another. If we are in the company of someone who believes that eating certain foods is sinful, then we should respect that position and not eat of them in their presence. Nor should we seek to compel them to eat (or to do anything that violates their conscience). When we insist on our convictions over or in contrast to those of our brethren we can and often do cause hardship and hurt. In such cases, we are no longer walking according to love. It is almost always better to walk in love than to demand that things be done exclusively our way.

Biblically speaking, just because we can do something doesn't necessarily mean that we should. In like manner, just because we don't have to do something doesn't necessarily mean that we shouldn't. Sometimes it is not our specific behavior that is sinful, but rather the effects of that behavior. Regardless of what the

particular action or inaction in question is, we should never intentionally do anything that would cause our brother to stumble. Instead, we should respect the practices of other Christians. Paul not only taught this principle, but also practiced it - as we see in the circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:3) and in his vow of purity (Acts 21:23-26). He didn't believe that either of these was necessary, but did both for the sake of his fellow believers.

#### IV. PURSUE HIGHER THINGS (Romans 14:16-19)

Our personal convictions are a good thing. They provide a moral compass that helps direct us and keep us grounded. However, if we seek to impose them on others they can become a source of contention that will be spoken of as evil. Remember, we are not talking about compromising on issues of right and wrong. We are not dealing with Christians versus non-Christians. The scope of this passage is limited to differences among fellow believers regarding non-foundational concepts or doctrines. We must move beyond these insignificant arguments and press on to higher ground.

The kingdom of God is not simply "eating and drinking", but is "righteousness, peace, and joy". Our service to God should emphasize these more lofty pursuits, and should not become entangled by lesser things. Such service is both acceptable to God and approved by men. We are charged to pursue peace and the edification of one another. This is done, in part, through mutual acceptance and respect. There is far too much infighting within the modern church over the non-essentials. We are called to pursue higher things.

#### CONCLUSION

Let me close by emphasizing that I am not advocating an "anything is okay as long as you follow your heart" type philosophy. Some things are clearly sinful, and no amount of human reasoning will make them otherwise. What I am saying is that we as Christians should accept one another's spiritual differences and respect one another's heartfelt convictions. Together these will contribute to an atmosphere of unity within the church. It is perfectly acceptable to have distinct views on certain topics (so long as they are based upon a sincere understanding of God's word). But when we begin using our opinions as weapons against each other, to tear one another down or to destroy the work of God, we have gone too far... we must learn to agree to disagree on the lesser things.

So what are these lesser things? Perhaps the better question is... what are the higher things? Doctrinally speaking, I would state that salvation is exclusively accomplished by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other way to be saved, and there is absolutely no room for a variation of opinion on this issue. It is a foundational truth. There are several other such truths that are essential to Christianity which I will not list here. These are the higher things. Still there remain many questions with unclear answers and many doctrinal positions that allow some latitude to move one way or the other.

Certainly love is the highest virtue and must always take precedent. Love is shown as we seek to live in peace with each other, as we display and spread His joy, as we practice justice and righteousness, as we show mercy to those around us, and as we remain ever faithful to God and His will for our lives. These are among the

weightier issues that our LORD desires. Lesser things, while still important, should never trump these greater virtues. If we allow them to, acceptance and respect among believers will crumble.

As your pastor, I have specific and clearly defined convictions (based on the Bible) regarding a host of what I would categorize as lesser issues. These include topics such as social drinking, smoking, dancing, tattoos, magic, playing cards, and church raffles among countless others. Though they may be "lesser" in doctrinal weight, these issues still retain importance. While my personal views and practices in some of these areas may differ from those of my brethren, they are not sufficient grounds to forsake the higher things. We shouldn't allow the little things to prevent us from achieving the big ones.

## The Application of Salvation - Passing Judgment

Originally Preached- 11/22/2015

*Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? - James 4:11-12*

This morning we will conclude chapter 14 of the book of Romans with a message that is closely related to the one we heard last week. That sermon was titled "Acceptance and Respect". In it we learned that fellow Christians should accept one another's differences while holding on to their own convictions, and that they should respect each other's opinions on less consequential issues while together pursuing higher things. By accepting and respecting one another, believers are better able to work harmoniously and effectively as the body of Christ.

Today we are going to look at the remaining verses in this chapter. Remember that we have not been reading these verses in the exact order in which Paul wrote them. We've not changed their meaning, but rather rearranged them for the sake of clarification. That said, the verses that are left deal with the topic of passing judgment on one another. When we fail to accept and respect our brethren, invariably it will lead to judgmental attitudes and behaviors.

Jesus himself sternly warned us not to judge one another. Such behavior is not characteristic of the one who follows Christ. In this sermon we will consider several reasons why passing judgment on others is inappropriate in the sight of God.

### I. YOU ARE NOT HIS MASTER (Romans 14:1,4)

Paul opens chapter 14 by urging Christians to accept the one who is weaker in the faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. The instructions given in this chapter are intended to help the faithful relate to one another. Therefore, we should understand this verse to mean that, as it pertains to lesser things such as eating or drinking (which we discussed last week), we should not condemn another Christian for doing what they sincerely believe to be right in accordance with their convictions. If their actions are not morally sinful or in violation of God's commands, we should withhold judgment.

The question is raised in verse 4, "Who are you to judge the servant of another?" This is a great question to ask and answer for ourselves. Only the master possesses the proper authority to judge or evaluate the performance of his servant. Because we are not spiritual masters of one another, we are not in a rightful position to cast judgment. Each servant will either stand or fall before his own master, not before another who is not his master. Notice that this verse goes on to say that all of those who have been saved will stand - for the Lord will make them stand. Therefore, even those fellow believers with whom you disagree on certain issues will be judged as righteous based upon their saving faith in Jesus Christ. Do we really want to condemn those with whom we will spend eternity?



It is important to understand that these verses do not specifically apply to the relationship between the redeemed children of God and the lost world. While we are to love all people in the name of Jesus, we cannot accept or respect the sinful teachings and practices of the wicked. We must stand up against the evil ways of our culture. This will require us at times to pass judgment on particular behaviors, but not upon people themselves. We cannot blindly compromise the truths of God's Word for fear of being called judgmental. However, even in these instances, our actions should always be redemptive in nature and seasoned with compassion and love for one another.

## II. YOU DON'T KNOW HIS MOTIVES (Romans 14:7-9)

In these verses Paul is referring to himself and others like him who are fully motivated by the Lord. He says that such a person does not live for himself. Rather, everything they do is for God. Where they go, how they work, where they spend their money, who they associate with, everything - their entire life is dedicated to and lived for the Lord. If their committed service leads them to be martyred for the cause of Christ, then they will gladly die for the Lord as well. Whether they live or die, not matter what it is they do, it is all for the Lord. He is their driving motivation.

Sometimes we cast judgment upon one another's actions without knowing the true motivation behind them. In the example Paul gives, the Jewish Christians were not eating certain things because they desired to be obedient to God. The issue was not so much about what they were doing, but rather why they were doing it. During the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry, Mary Magdalene took some costly perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet (John 12:1-8). Judas condemned her for doing so, stating that she could have sold the perfume and used the proceeds to help the poor. Though he truly didn't care for the poor, there is no doubt that doing what he suggested would have been a noble pursuit. Still, Jesus defended Mary's decision because He saw that her heart was in the right place. Mary anointed Jesus with perfume because she deeply loved Him. From a practical standpoint some might think her actions were wasteful, but from a spiritual standpoint her motivations were pure and acceptable.

We should not judge a fellow Christian's opinions or practices regarding lesser issues because we don't always know their true motivation. Many of the decisions we make are not necessarily between right and wrong, but rather they are about style or personal preferences. If someone has arrived at a certain position because of a heartfelt conviction to serve God, who are we to judge them? Would we like it if our fellow believers constantly questioned the sincerity of our devotion to the Lord? Probably not...

## III. YOU'LL BE JUDGED IN LIKE MEASURE (Romans 14:10-12)

Scripture teaches that one day all of us will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. At this time each person individually will have to answer for all of their deeds while here on the earth. The Lord will listen to our defense and render His judgment accordingly. How strictly will He judge us? Will He do so harshly or with mercy? Is there anything we can do to affect His temperament during this coming judgment? Can we request leniency somehow?

During the Sermon on the Mount, the Jesus stated that we will be judged in the same manner or to the same degree that we judge each other (Matt. 7:1-2). If we have demonstrated an overly-critical attitude toward our brethren, He will utilize this same heightened level of scrutiny when judging us. If, on the other hand, we have been generally accepting and respectful of others, the Lord will be more tolerant toward us. The measure by which we judge others will have direct bearing on how we ourselves are judged.

Every time we cast judgment upon another person we unwittingly increase the intensity of our own judgment. We should always be mindful of this fact... by condemning others we are, in fact, condemning ourselves. Again, it is important to remember that we are not talking about be silent or permissive toward sin. This passage pertains specifically to judging the opinions or practices of others on non-essential items. If we desire to receive mercy, we must be careful to give it.

#### IV. YOU MIGHT CAUSE HIM TO MISSTEP (Romans 14:13)

When we judge another person, we place a stumbling block in their pathway. A stumbling block is something which causes a person to err or to stray from the truth. Casting a stumbling block in one's way is quite the opposite of being our brother's keeper. How are we showing love for one another by hindering their relationship with the LORD?

Jesus frequently rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for placing stumbling blocks in their way of the people. Their behaviors discouraged others from believing in or following Christ. They worked furiously to misrepresent Him to the masses and to obscure the message that He that He taught. All too often, the judgmental attitudes of Christians today have this same effect. When we callously chastise our brethren, they are frequently left with a soured opinion about us, the church, and even God himself. They are more prone to misstep or stumble in their Christian walk due to the judgmental behavior we've leveled upon them.

Jesus said, "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!" (Matt. 18:1) The word "woe" as used in this quotation is somewhat synonymous with "cursed". To restate Jesus' declaration in another way, "Cursed is the man who brings about or causes a stumbling block in the life of another." Those who lead others to sin, who encourage them to do so, or who prevent them from following God's direction for their lives by placing stumbling blocks in their way are acting in violation God's will.

#### CONCLUSION

The Bible does not teach that judgments should never be made. Hundreds of times every day we have to make judgments of various types. Scripture gives us guidelines and direction as to how to make these choices. A person who exercises godly wisdom is adapt at making decisions and determinations that will honor and glorify God. There is a profound distinction between godly discernment and judgment.

When we practice sound judgment, we are able to chose between that which is right or wrong - we are able to think biblically. It has to do with the decisions we make. We are not judging others when we determine and even declare that their behaviors are unbiblical. Judgment comes if we proclaim them to be of less value and

unworthy of God's mercy and forgiveness. Judgment is a condemnation of the person rather than their practices. Who are we to judge one another?

## The Application of Salvation - Self-Denial

Originally Preached - 11/29/2015

*And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, **he must deny himself**, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. - Luke 9:23*

In our study of salvation through Romans we have learned many things. Paul has taught us how God, from the very beginning, foreknew us and predestined us to become recipients of the gospel call. He has explained that because all have sinned salvation is necessary for everyone. He has described the various components of the salvation process which include justification and reconciliation, regeneration and sanctification, and finally glorification. Perhaps most importantly, Paul has taught how a person can receive salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. If a sinner will repent of their sins, asking Christ to forgive them, and then will commit their lives to Him as Lord and Savior they will be saved.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul has also described how Christians should behave. The effects of salvation are not limited to our eternal lives in heaven, but rather should have practical application to our present lives on earth. Those who have accepted Jesus and been born-again should live in a manner that reflects their salvation and differentiates them from the world. Paul has named several characteristics that should be exemplified in the lives of believers. They should serve others, display a Christ-like attitude, submit to legitimate authority, demonstrate love for one another, shine as light in the darkness, accept and respect each other, and resist passing judgment.

In the first half of chapter 15 Paul concludes the teaching portion of his letter. His formal and systematic instruction on the theology and practical effects of salvation comes to an end. We have meticulously studied this material over the past several months. Following today's message only 2 sermons remain in this series, and both have to do with Paul's benedictory remarks to the Romans.

This morning we will examine one last trait that should be visible in the lives of God's children - self-denial. Even after a person receives salvation and the forgiveness of their sins, their carnal nature with all of its lust and desires remains. Christians therefore must learn to resist the sinful impulses of the flesh in order to walk as Jesus' disciples.

### I. DENY YOURSELF ON BEHALF OF OTHERS (Romans 15:1-4)

In the previous chapter Paul introduced the idea of the "stronger" helping the "weaker". He was not trying to demean or ridicule those who he described as weaker, but rather he was simply trying to distinguish the differences between these two groups. He echoes this comparison again in the opening verse of chapter 15 by encouraging the strong to bear the burden of those who are weak. A willingness to carry the load of another who is unable requires a person to practice self-denial.

Jesus is the ultimate example of someone who denied themselves in order to please others. He forsook His own will and ambition in order to accomplish the plans of His Father. In so doing, He willingly bore the sinful reproaches that had been committed against God upon Himself at Calvary. Paul cites the words of David in

Psalm 69:9 stating that these Old Testament verses were written to foretell the coming work of Christ, that we might persevere with encouragement and hope.

Notice that we are called to bear the weaknesses of "those without strength" - not those who are strong enough to carry their own load. In our zeal to help and serve others who are in need, we must be careful not to become enablers of those who could otherwise help themselves. As we seek to show compassion for those in despair, we must be wary of taking on the problems of others who are able to confront them but simply don't want to. The self-denial which we read about in Scripture calls us to bear the burdens of those who are weak and unable, not the burdens of those who are lazy or indifferent. We don't need to carry any more weight than we are called to.

## II. BE OF THE SAME MIND WITH ONE ANOTHER (Romans 15:5-6)

This same God who gives perseverance and encouragement to His followers also grants them to be of the same mind. Paul encourages the Christian believers in Rome to share a single-mindedness. In many of his letters, Paul urges his readers to be of "one mind" or of the "same mind" or of "like mind" with each other. He wrote to the Philippian church, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..." (Phil.1:27)

Being of the same mind does not mean that we are to think the same on all issues. If that were the case, there would be no need to accept and respect one another's differences because everyone would think the same thing. Thus, Paul is not arguing that we should have uniformity of thought. Rather, he is urging us to lay aside our differences in order to focus on a single and common purpose that is greater than our various individual desires. Again, this like-mindedness of purpose will require some level of personal self-denial.

This single-mindedness is "according to Christ Jesus". Elsewhere Paul writes that we are to have the mind of Christ. Therefore, the common purpose that should bind all believers together in one mind is none other than that of Christ Himself. So what was the Lord's purpose for coming and dying on the cross as the means of atonement for humanity's sin? He came to save the lost, desiring that none would perish but that all would receive eternal life. Therefore, we must embrace the Great Commission and be of one mind, striving to reach any and all unsaved people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## III. ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER (Romans 15:7-12)

As we have stated frequently during this series, the church at Rome consisted of a large contingent of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Though they were united by their faith in Jesus Christ, significant differences remained in their religious customs and practices. Many of the Jews were hesitant to accept the Gentile believers in the church unless they were willing to embrace the Jewish laws and traditions. Knowing this, Paul cites several Old Testament passages that indicate that it had always been God's plan to accept the Gentiles into His family.

Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 117:1, and Isaiah 11:10 are all listed as evidence that God's name was to be praised among the Gentile nations and that He was the LORD of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. On this basis, Paul again urges the Roman congregation to accept one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. He further states that Jesus became a servant to the Jews ("the circumcision") to confirm the promises made by God to their fathers and a servant to the Gentiles in order to extend the mercy of God. Jesus freely and lovingly accepts both, and so should we.

While we don't have a large faction of Jews and Gentiles worshiping together in the modern Christian church, nevertheless we still have differences of opinion regarding various religious customs, practices, and traditions. Accepting one another will demand, once again, that we deny ourselves at times for the edification of us all. This should not be interpreted to mean that we are willing to compromise the truths of God or to overlook sin, but rather that we are willing to put aside our personal preferences on occasion for the good of the body.

#### IV. ABOUND IN HOPE (Romans 15:13)

Paul closes the teaching portion of his letter with a brief prayer sentence. He asks God to fill his readers with joy and peace, so that they will abound in hope. This will be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. The word abound is defined, "to be present in large numbers or in great quantity; to be copiously supplied". Paul's prayer is not simply that the Romans will have hope in Christ, but that they will overflow with an abundance of hope.

The hope that is discussed here goes well beyond the future expectation of heaven. It is a hope that should shape our present realities as we endure hardships and persecutions. In every circumstance, no matter how difficult or extreme, Christians have the hope that God will see them through. In every dark night there is hope for a new and brighter day in Christ Jesus. Such hope gives us strength to endure heavy affliction for the cause of Christ. Such was the case for the Roman Christians.

When I look into the eyes of people today, it seems that many have lost hope. The economic decline has hit many people very hard. The joblessness and poverty is wide-spread. On the news, we see reports of terrorism and violence running rampant. People are being tortured and killed by the hundreds. Christian persecution is greater now than it's ever been, and it continues to increase - even here in America. Even still, just as in the first century, we are encouraged to abound in hope.

#### CONCLUSION

While teaching His followers, Jesus closely connected the concepts of denying oneself and taking up one's cross. As He made His way to Golgotha to be crucified, the Lord carried His own cross. The cross represented His accomplishment of God's purpose for His life, to make salvation available to all people. It serves as a robust picture exhorting us to carry this burden for the lost every single day. In other words, we are not told to deny ourselves for the sake of self-deprivation or to earn God's favor. Rather, we are to do so for the cause of Christ in order to reach this lost world.

Some of the things we should deny ourselves of include our own selfish ambitions, our desires for fame and fortune, our own personal interests which conflict with God's plan for our lives, our lusts and passions for sinful things, and our inclination to live for ourselves rather than for God. We must purposely submit our will to His, and at times our opinions to those of others. We must learn to say "No" to ourselves and "Yes" to Him.

## The Messengers of Salvation - The Apostle Paul

Originally Preached - 12/6/2015

*But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' - Acts 26:16-18*

Last week we finished studying the main body of Paul's letter to the Romans. This Sunday and next we will look at his concluding remarks. The content of the final 2 messages in this preaching series will be more informative than instructional. As he draws his letter to a close, Paul describes his future plans to visit Rome and records several specific and individual greetings. In most of his letters Paul's benediction is relatively brief, but in Romans it is quite lengthy. Typically these matter-of-fact type passages are not used as sermon material, but we will cover them nevertheless as we wrap up our comprehensive study through Romans.

We are going to call this last section of our series "The Messengers of Salvation". If you can recall, the first sermon in this series was called "The Message of Salvation". Paul opened this book by identifying the gospel as the greatest message that needed to be heard. He stated that it inherently carried the power of God unto salvation for all who believed it - both Jew and Greek. Now, as he is concluding this book, Paul names himself and several other Christians - any and all of which have been called by God to be messengers of the gospel.

The Apostle Paul was born in Tarsus, which is along the southern coast of present-day Turkey. He was the son of Jewish parents, yet because of their prominence his family was afforded Roman citizenship - status that was uncommon for most Jews living in the Roman Empire. As a youth, Paul was sent to Jerusalem where he was trained by the Gamaliel, the most prominent and respected teacher of his day, to become a Jewish rabbi. As Christianity began to spread in Judea following the resurrection of Jesus, the young man Paul regarded it as a great threat to Judaism. Zealous to stop its increase, Paul became a severe persecutor of Christians. He was even present for the stoning of Stephen, the first of many Christian martyrs. However, when he encountered the Lord on the Damascus Road, Paul surrendered his life to Christ and became the greatest missionary who has ever lived.

This morning we will spend some time considering the life of Paul as it was around the time when he wrote this letter to the churches in Rome. We will review his past work, preview his future plans, and discover his present request of the Roman believers.

### I. PAUL'S PAST WORK - Romans 15:14-21

Having dispensed with the main body of his letter, Paul begins his closing remarks with a compliment. He states that he is convinced that the Roman Christians are full of goodness and that they are capable of admonishing (or cautioning) one another to prevent themselves from sinning. Despite this confidence, Paul thought it necessary to strongly emphasize certain points in his letter. Perhaps his most pressing concern was the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile believers who made up the congregation. Numerous times



throughout the book of Romans Paul spoke about the need for these two groups to look beyond their differences and upon their unity in Christ. He was fearful that their division might hinder the development and health of the church.

Paul was not one to brag on himself, yet he was eager to boast about all that Christ had accomplished through him. Paul was an evangelist and church planter who intentionally carried the gospel to Gentile regions where the people had never heard it before. From his home church in Antioch, Paul traveled westward throughout Asia-Minor and eventually crossed over into Macedonia and Greece spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. Along the way he helped to establish numerous churches and, as a result, Christianity began to take root among the Gentiles in both Asia and Europe. Paul was a pioneer of sorts, blazing the trail to new places and preaching to new audiences, careful not to "build on another man's foundation".

Believe it or not, there are still large segments of the population even today that have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. According to statistics compiled by the Joshua Project, 29% of the people on earth still remain unreached by the gospel. This is the equivalent of 2.11 billion people. Despite modern advancements, there are still preventative factors that limit the spread of Christianity in certain countries and places around the globe. Repressive governmental policies, religious extremism, and unchecked violence in many locations have kept missionaries from making any impact. Though the hardships were different in his day, these are the types of places where Paul travelled and suffered for the cause of Christ.

## II. PAUL'S FUTURE PLANS - Romans 15:22-29

In these verses Paul speaks of his upcoming travels and plans. In order to understand them properly we'll need to back up just a bit. Following his first missionary journey through Asia Minor, the church leaders held a meeting in Jerusalem to discuss several pressing issues. Paul and a few of his companions were in attendance. Apparently some time during this meeting, Paul was encouraged to collect an offering from the various Gentile churches that he had established. The monies were to be used to aid the poverty stricken Jewish Christians who resided in Jerusalem. Happy to do this, he readily accepted the challenge. On his second missionary journey, Paul announced to the churches his intentions to take up an offering upon his return. Then on his third missionary journey, he actually collected that which had been given since his previous visit.

Near the end of this third trip, Paul waited in Corinth during the winter of 56-57 AD for warm weather to return. It was during this season that he wrote the letter to the Romans. In this passage, Paul states that he intends to carry the offering he has gathered from the churches in "Macedonia and Achaia" to Jerusalem and present it to the saints there. Following this, Paul plans to begin a brand new initiative. In keeping with his desire to reach new places, his next destination will be Spain. Seeing that Rome is on the way, Paul plans to stop and visit the Christians there as he passes through. This will be Paul's first meeting with the Romans and he looks forward to it with high expectations.

Although Paul's main task was to spread the gospel in new places, he also spent a great deal of time and energy on this missions offering. He saw it as a material way for the Gentile churches to return the spiritual blessing that had been extended to them through the Jews. He took this collection very seriously. Each year Southern Baptist churches take up several missions offerings. They are targeted to assist state missions, home

missions, and international missions. Like Paul, we should consider these opportunities to be much more than simply religious donations or fundraisers. By giving to these causes, we demonstrate the love of Christ and become an integral part of reaching the lost and helping those in need.

### III. PAUL'S PRESENT REQUEST - Romans 15:30-33

Paul requests that the believers in Rome pray with him and for him as he returns to Jerusalem. He is aware of some who are "disobedient" in Judea and fears that his arrival there may not be as welcoming as one might expect. The irony is that Paul is returning with a sizable monetary gift intended to help the Jerusalem church, and yet he worries that he may need to be rescued from the Jews while there. Despite his reservations and covered by the prayer of many, we read in Acts 21 that Paul finally made his way back to Jerusalem and delivered the "Collection for the Saints" just as he'd planned. Unfortunately, some of the devout Jews in the city turned against Paul and he was arrested.

After being held in custody for over 2 years, Paul cited his Roman citizenship and appealed his case to Caesar. He was put on a ship and sent to Rome in order to stand trial. This was not the way he'd planned to get there, but the providential hand of God brought him to Rome nevertheless. Though under house arrest, Paul was allowed visitors during his first imprisonment in Rome. He continued to preach, teach, write, and serve the churches to the extent that he was able. He likely met many of the people to whom this letter had been written.

The Bible does not tell us whether or not Paul ever made it to Spain. There are a handful of extra-biblical writings that suggest that he did. Following his first confinement in Rome, some religious historians believe that Paul travelled on to Spain just as he had planned. If he did make it there, most certainly he preached the gospel to unreached people and worked to plant churches. According to local tradition and custom, the apostle Paul established the Christian church in Tarragona, Spain sometime around 65 AD. While this can't be confirmed with absolute certainty, it is a fascinating possibility to consider.

### CONCLUSION

Paul was arrested and held briefly in Rome for a second time before being executed by the highly unstable Emperor Nero in or around 67 AD. During his lifetime, Paul relentlessly sought to spread the gospel as a messenger of salvation. As we consider his ministry and the numerous sufferings he endured, we are challenged to evaluate our own personal testimonies. God has called each of his children to be messengers of salvation... how are we doing?

Paul was quick to boast about all that Jesus had done in his life. Do we do the same? He was never content with the status quo. There was always another project on the horizon - a new place to go, a new people to tell. What is God calling you to do next? Finally, Paul was constantly asking others to pray for and with him. He believed in the sustaining power of prayer. Do you need prayer today? Ask someone to pray with you...

## TSOS: The Messengers of Salvation - All Christians

Originally Preached - 12/13/2015

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. - 2 Corinthians 5:20*

This morning we will conclude our study through Romans with the thirty-second and final message of this series. In this book, the Apostle Paul systematically taught the doctrine of salvation. He laid out the universal need for salvation and explained how any person could receive it through faith in Jesus Christ. He walked through the various phases of salvation, and even explained the works of God beforehand that made it possible. Paul went on to describe how people who have been saved should live their lives in light of their salvation. He declared that the gospel is the message of salvation and that Christians everywhere are its messengers.

In the last chapter of Romans, Paul expressed greetings and love to the brethren. Like last week, the message today is pretty straightforward. All of the verses are direct and simple to understand. Still, there are a few new things that we can learn and some old truths that we will reinforce as we study this final chapter together.

### I. WELCOME THE ENVOY (Romans 16:1-2)

As has been stated previously in this series, the Apostle Paul wrote the letter of Romans while wintering in the city of Corinth. He gave it to a woman named Phoebe and she delivered it on his behalf. Phoebe was a servant or deaconess at the church in Cenchrea, a port city about 7 miles southeast of Corinth. It is widely believed that the church there met in her house. She was highly regarded for helping other people, including Paul himself, who traveled via ship through this port on occasion. Paul obviously had a great deal of trust in Phoebe, seeing that he chose her to be the emissary of this epistle to the Romans. He urged them to welcome her with warmth and hospitality, and to provide for whatever she might need upon her arrival.

### II. GREETINGS TO THOSE IN ROME (Romans 16:3-16)

Despite having never been to Rome personally, Paul knew many of the members of the Roman church from previous experience. He greeted several of them by name in this portion of his letter. It is fascinating to consider the broad range of differences between these individuals and how they came together to form the church. Rome was the capital city of the empire, and it attracted all sorts of people from various places and for different reasons.

Priscilla and Aquila were a missionary couple who lived, worked, and travelled with the Apostle Paul. They were from Rome originally, but had been expelled from the city along with all Jews by the Emperor Claudius in around 49 AD. Paul met them while they lived in Corinth and stayed with them for 18 months. They travelled with him to Ephesus and stayed there after he left. While in Ephesus they were responsible for mentoring Apollos, who was another one of the early Christian evangelists. When Claudius died in 54 AD, the

Jewish expulsion was ended and Priscilla and Aquilla returned to Rome sometime thereafter where they hosted the Christian church in their house.

Epaenetus was the first Christian convert from Asia, and therefore held a special place in Paul's heart. A friend of Paul, he may have accompanied Priscilla and Aquilla when they returned from Ephesus, which is in Asia, to Rome.

Nothing is known about the Mary mentioned in this passage other than her tireless labor on behalf of Christ. Andronicus and Junias were a male/female pair who were probably Jewish and well known and respected among the apostles. The exact nature of their relationship is unknown - they may have been a married couple, siblings, friends, etc. The identities of Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, and Apelles are unknown as all of these are common slave names found in the imperial household of Rome. Aristobulus could refer to the grandson of Herod the Great, while Herodian was likely a Jew.

Narcissus may have been a wealthy freedman of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. Tryphaena and Tryphosa were probably sisters, and may have been twins based upon the similarity of their names. Based upon her name, Persis is believed to have been a woman of Persian descent who may have been brought to Rome as a slave. Some scholars believe that Rufus is the grown-up son of Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21), who carried the cross for Jesus Christ. Nothing is known about the remaining people listed in Paul's greeting - Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas.

### III. A FINAL WARNING (Romans 16:17-20)

In the midst of his greetings, Paul paused to give a final warning to the Roman Christians. He urged them to be watchful and wary of those who would cause dissension among the congregation by teaching things that were contrary to what they had already learned. He characterized these types of men as slaves to their own appetites eager to deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. False teachers were actively working to undermine the purity of the gospel by adding to it or perverting it in some way, and Paul wanted to ensure that the Roman church would not be led astray. He did not question their obedience, but cautioned them in hopes that they would remain "innocent in what is evil". Paul encouraged the Romans to be hopeful because God would soon crush Satan under their feet.

### IV. GREETINGS FROM THOSE IN CORINTH (Romans 16:21-24)

Paul was not alone while he lodged in Corinth. He and his companions were most certainly speaking in and working with the church there during his stay in the city. Therefore, when he wrote this letter to the Christians in Rome he included greetings from some of the people who were with him at the time.

Timothy was a young disciple whom Paul mentored to become his protege. He was from Lystra, and began traveling with Paul during his second missionary journey. Timothy had been well-grounded in the faith by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. After joining Paul's missionary team, he travelled to Galatia, Macedonia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and numerous other locations. During these years Timothy became a trusted friend and coworker to Paul. He may have assisted in the writing of some of Paul's letters. While Paul

was in prison, Timothy served as his representative to the churches. Even after Paul's death, Timothy continued preaching in Ephesus where tradition holds that he was eventually martyred for his faith.

Lucius may have been one of the founders of Paul's home church in Antioch (Acts 13:1) or he may have been the evangelist Luke who was one of Paul's disciples and who wrote the third gospel along with the book of Acts. Jason is believed to be the same man who had been jailed for allowing Paul, Timothy, and Silas to stay at his house while in Thessalonica (Acts 17:59). Sosipater is probably the same person as Sopater of Berea (Acts 20:4).

Tertius was Paul's amanuensis who wrote this letter as Paul dictated it aloud. This was Paul's common practice. Gaius was the host of the church in Corinth where Paul was residing. He is believed to have been baptized by Paul (1 Corinthians 1:14). Erastus was the city treasurer in Corinth. Archeologists have actually discovered a paved stone in the ancient ruins of this area bearing his name and the title "Commissioner of Public Works". Nothing significant is known about the man named Quartus.

#### V. PAUL'S CLOSING EXALTATION (Romans 16:25-27)

In the final words of his letter Paul stated that God was able to establish the Roman church according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The message of salvation by faith in Jesus is the bedrock upon which the Christian church stands. The truths regarding salvation which Paul taught about extensively in this book serve as foundational doctrine upon which Christianity is built. In Christ, the mystery of salvation has been revealed and God has been made known to all nations leading many to the "obedience of faith".

#### CONCLUSION

There were those in Corinth with Paul who sent their greetings. There were those in Rome who received these greetings when they arrived. There was the one who carried the letter between them. All of these people, regardless of their particular station, were in some way messengers of the gospel. Some were evangelists who travelled as missionaries from one place to the next. Others were leaders or laity in their respective local churches. All were Christians - men and women who had been born again through faith in Jesus Christ. All had been called to tell others the good news of salvation.

Like them, we as Christians today continue to be the messengers of salvation. This generation needs to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed with the same passion and clarity as Paul shared it with the Romans. We must be unashamed of and undeterred in our quest to spread the good news. So while our study of salvation may have come to an end, the challenge to share it with this lost world has only begun...