

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

BOOKLET TWENTY-NINE

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

VERSE BY VERSE

(Part one)

This is the first of a series of four booklets that will provide notes for those who have heard our radio programs that teach the letter of Paul to the Romans, verse-by-verse. If you desire or would like to teach this in depth study of Romans, for continuity I recommend that you contact us to receive all four of the booklets in this series of studies.

“Introduction to Romans”

An ancient proverb tells us that if we give a man a fish, we have fed him for a day but if we teach him how to fish, we have fed him for a lifetime. If I spoon-feed you the message of the letter of Paul to the Romans, I may feed you for a day, but if I teach you how to study this inspired letter, the Holy Spirit can feed you for a lifetime. Before we begin an in depth study of Paul’s inspired letter to the Romans, I would therefore like to teach you some principles about how to study the Bible in general and this letter in particular.

There are many different ways to study the Bible. The preliminary approach to serious Bible study is to take a survey course of the sixty-six books of the Bible. If you go to a seminary or Bible College, your introduction to the Bible will probably be a survey of the Old and New Testaments. A formal study of the Bible will usually begin with the telescopic view of the Bible and then follow with a microscopic view, or an analytical study of the individual books of the Bible.

The Mini Bible College begins with a survey of the entire Bible that is designed to give you the big picture and introduce you to the whole Word of God. We then present book studies in the Gospel of John in six booklets, and this letter of Paul to the Romans in four booklets, which teach the Bible one book at a time and verse-by-verse.

My first book study is of the Gospel of John because the objective of the Apostle John is that those who read his Gospel will believe and experience salvation (John 20:30, 31). As I present that first book study, my prayer is that those who join me in that study will experience salvation and come to know and love their Savior.

As I follow that series of studies with a book study of this letter of Paul to the believers in Rome, my prayer is that those who have become believers through their study of John will understand their salvation better and know how to live as saved people. That was the prayer burden of the Apostle Paul when he wrote this magnificent letter.

In this booklet, and in the three booklets to follow, I am presenting some notes for those who listen to our radio programs and those who desire to have, or teach a verse-by-verse study of the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Romans.

The Importance of Word Studies

Jeremiah introduces us to a form of Bible study that is the opposite of a survey of the Bible when he writes: “Your words were found and I

ate them and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.” (Jeremiah 15:16) We might call a study that surveys all sixty-six books of the Bible, “A Bird’s-eye View of the Bible”, while Jeremiah’s version of Bible study could be considered “A Worm’s-eye View of the Bible”. Jeremiah studied the Word of God one word at a time. He actually tells us that he “ate” the Word of God one word at a time and his heart rejoiced when he studied the Word of God that way. Jeremiah’s approach to the Word of God can be especially effective when we study a profound letter like Romans, verse-by-verse.

When we eat we do four things: we bite, chew, swallow, and then digest what we have swallowed. When the question is asked, “How do you eat an elephant?” The answer has to be, “one bite at a time!” How do we study an inspired Book like the Bible, which is really a library of sixty-six books? The answer has to be, “One bite, or one book at a time.”

When we apply the four steps of eating to our study of a book of the Bible like the letter of Paul to the Romans, we must first realize that we cannot eat the entire book in one bite. At times we will take such small bites we will study this profound letter one word at a time. For example, there is a sense in which the entire message of this letter to the Romans can be summarized in the one word, “justified”.

Sometimes we will consider a verse, a cluster of verses, or a chapter. When we “chew” this book we will break a passage down

into smaller pieces that can be swallowed. That is what we will be doing as we overview, outline, analyze and then summarize passages in this inspired letter of the Apostle Paul.

When we bite off and chew a chapter, verse, or word in this letter of Paul, the metaphor of “swallowing” the Word relates to asking and answering this question: “What does it mean?”

After we bite, chew and swallow the Word of God, digesting represents the most important dimension of Bible study: application! It is only when we digest the food we eat that our food gives us energy and sustains life in our bodies. In the same way, it is when we digest the truth we find in the Scripture that the Word of God becomes a spiritual force in our lives.

As you read through the Bible, make the observation that a tremendous value is placed on the critical issue of applying to our lives the truth we find in the inspired Word of God. According to Jesus, the prophets, the apostles and the other authors of the New Testament, it is only when we obey, or apply the truth we find in Scripture that spiritual energy and life is generated and sustained in our lives: “For whatever God says to us is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest dagger, cutting swift and deep into our innermost thoughts and desires, exposing us for what we really are.” (Hebrews 4:12)

That is what the Bible says about itself. The Word of God is a living power and it makes us spiritually alive when we obey it. The Word of God is not merely an academic subject to be studied.

Chapter One

“A General Overview of Paul’s Letter to the Romans”

As we approach the letters of Paul, we should be reminded again of the fact that the books of the Bible are not placed in the Bible in the order in which they were written. Although this is the first letter of Paul we come across in the biblical order, this was not the first letter he wrote to one of his churches. Paul’s letter to the Romans was written late in his ministry - on his third missionary journey while he was briefly visiting Corinth, following his three years of ministry in Ephesus. This letter is written late in his ministry when the Apostle Paul is mature and experienced. It may have been placed as the first of Paul’s letters because it is his masterpiece. Some scholars are convinced that this document is the masterpiece of the entire New Testament.

Most of Paul’s letters relate directly and specifically to the people to whom they are addressed. They address and often confront local problems existing in the churches and cities in which his readers live. However, the content of this letter is a profound, concise, clear and very comprehensive statement of the theology of salvation. This letter is not a simple Gospel tract but a comprehensive theological treatise that is actually a comprehensive and thorough statement of the theology of the New Testament Church.

This letter is beautifully organized and so obviously planned that many scholars believe it was on the heart of the apostle for a long time. He probably received the essence of its content from the risen Christ in the desert of Arabia (See Galatians 1-2:14). However, he may have thought it through during a time like those two long years he spent in prison in Caesarea in Palestine while the Roman government was changing governors (Acts 24:27).

He may have decided to address it to the Romans because of its universal content, and because it would have wide circulation in the capital of the Roman world of his day.

From the very first chapter to the last, there is a theme, or an argument. I do not use that word argument in the sense of a debate. The legal brief, or case presented by a lawyer is referred to as his argument. This entire letter reads like the legal argument of a lawyer who is logically and methodically presenting powerful arguments that will convince a court to believe his evidence. We should read this letter in one sitting and with deep concentration to follow Paul's argument through from the beginning to the end.

As I have suggested, that one word "justified" summarizes and reduces the message of this entire magnificent letter to its essence. Jesus told us in His Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18) that any man who will pray the prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," can go down to his house "justified."

This word, which Jesus used to describe the state of grace of a forgiven sinner, can be paraphrased, "Just-as-if-I-had never

sinned." The word "justified" means that, because of Christ, when a sinner confesses that he is a sinner and asks for God's mercy, he is not only forgiven or pardoned. In the sight of God it is just as if he never sinned at all. In addition to this good news, God declares that sinner to be righteous, or in what we might call "a state of grace".

To further illustrate justification, imagine two prisoners in a maximum-security penitentiary. At the same time both have been convicted of crimes and sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in prison. When they have served twenty years of their sentences, one of them is officially pardoned. He is released from prison. He is a free man, however, he will always have to bear the stigma of his past. He will always be regarded as a man who has been twenty years in prison. This stigma may seriously limit his life and place in society. He may have difficulty finding work or social acceptance for the rest of his life.

Something quite different happens to the other convicted criminal. On his deathbed a man confesses to the crime for which this second prisoner has been convicted and for which he has spent twenty years of his life in prison. When the evidence clearly establishes his innocence, does the government that put him in prison pardon him? How could they pardon him for something he did not do? No, this man must be exonerated, or declared righteous. In other words, he can insist, "I want to be justified", or declared, "just-as-if-I had never committed this crime". He never did commit the

crime for which he has served twenty long years suffering the horrors of prison life.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul is telling us something like that, but with one big difference. Paul is telling us how God can declare a man to be justified who is truly guilty! Our legal systems cannot do that. Only God can do that, and God can only do that because of what Jesus Christ did for us when He died on the cross. This letter of Paul to the Romans tells us how God can declare such a person to be just as innocent and righteous as if they never committed any sins, when in fact they did!

In His parable, Jesus tells us the good news that the miracle of justification can be the experience of anyone who will pray the “sinner’s prayer”. (When a sinner talks to God and confesses that he is a sinner in need of salvation, places his complete trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and believes in the resurrection of God’s only Son from the dead for the complete forgiveness of his sins, we call that the “sinner’s prayer”.) In Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul tells us how God does it. How can a just and holy God take sinners like you and me and declare us righteous? Paul’s letter to the believers in Rome is the inspired, most thorough, logical, systematic and comprehensive answer to that question in the Bible. The message of this masterpiece of Paul is a comprehensive theological treatise that tells us precisely how and what God had to do to declare guilty sinners righteous and what we must do to apply that declaration to our sins.

King David is a great illustration of what it means to be justified. The Old Testament history book of Second Samuel devotes more than ten chapters to tell us all the sordid details of the sin of David (2 Samuel 11-18). But when we read the Chronicles of the Old Testament, where that same period of history is covered from God’s perspective, David’s sin is not even mentioned!

Psalms Fifty-one records the beautiful confession of David’s hideous sin. Psalm Thirty-two records the blessings David experienced because he confessed that sin. When God looked on the confessed sin of David, without denying the awful reality of that sin, when we compare the history books of Samuel with the Chronicles and the Psalms, we realize that from the perspective of God, the sin of David never happened! That is a beautiful Old Testament illustration of the justification to which Paul is devoting this entire letter to the Romans.

The Book of Romans and the Old Testament Scriptures that illustrate the message of this book might be better understood if we will think of our lives as a cassette tape. Imagine that your entire lifetime is recorded on a cassette tape. When you sin, all your sin is recorded on the tape of your life. When God finds sin on your tape, because of your faith in what Jesus did for you on the cross, He cuts out the sin from your tape. Where the sin starts, He cuts the tape and where it ends, He cuts it again and throws it away. Then He joins the tape together. When God plays the tape of your life at the judgment, if you have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation, and become a follower

of Jesus, there will be no sin on your tape! You will not merely be pardoned or forgiven. There will be no sin at all. As far as God is concerned, your sin never happened! That is what it means to be justified.

Chewing the Letter of Paul to the Romans

As we begin our study of this magnificent letter of Paul, the first thing we should do is break down the sixteen chapters of the letter into four pieces.

- In the first four chapters, Paul relates justification to the sinner.
- In the next four chapters (5-8), he relates justification to the person who has been justified. How does a person who has been declared righteous by God live once they have been declared righteous? Obviously, they live a righteous life. How do they find the spiritual dynamic to live a righteous life? That is the theme of the second group of four chapters in this letter.
- The third division of this letter (9-11) where Paul relates justification to the people of Israel. These are three of the most profound chapters in the Bible on the subject of biblical prophecy. Paul uses Israel in these chapters as the supreme biblical example of what he calls “election,” or God choosing people for salvation.

It is in this third section of this letter that we study that difficult teaching of the Bible, which is also called “predestination.” A paradox in our study of the Bible is something that looks like a contradiction, but with careful study and spiritual discernment, we realize there is no contradiction. There are times when the limits of our humanity force us to accept the reality that in this life at least we will never resolve these apparent contradictions we find in the Bible. We must realize that the ways and thoughts of God are as different from ours as the heavens are high above the earth (Isaiah 55:8, 9) The contradiction is sometimes resolved when we realize that it is not either/or but both/and.

In one of the greatest paradoxical teachings in the Word of God, in these three chapters, Paul also uses Israel as the supreme biblical example of something that is very important to God: the free will of human beings. Our Creator has endowed us with the freedom and the responsibility to make choices. The Jews made the wrong choices when they rejected the Messiah and chose to not be chosen by God for salvation and as a vehicle of salvation for this world. Paul is therefore using Israel in these three chapters as the outstanding biblical example of the freedom and the responsibility God has given us to make choices – right or wrong choices.

- The last four chapters of this letter are extremely practical. In all Paul’s letters we find a clearly defined division between teaching and application. One of his letters nearly divides evenly with approximately three

chapters of teaching and three of application. In this letter, approximately three fourths of the chapters are teaching (1-11), and one fourth is application (12-16).

This letter is the theological masterpiece of this great Apostle and these four application chapters are intensely practical. Paul shows, explains and applies how justified people are to apply the Gospel of justification to themselves, their commitment to God, His will for their lives, to their government, each other, and a lost world which needs to hear the Good News Jesus proclaims.

It is when Paul makes his practical applications in this letter that he does address and confront local problems that were being experienced among the disciples of Jesus in Rome. When he wrote this letter he had never been to Rome. However, there was a saying then that all roads eventually led to Rome. In his many travels, he met many believers who traveled to Rome and became part of the many house churches in Rome. He also met many believers who had been part of those spiritual communities. In this way, Paul was well informed about the problems he addresses in the application chapters of this letter.

The Importance of the Book of Romans

Before we begin our verse-by-verse study of this inspired letter, I must give a few examples of the influence this document has had on the lives of people throughout church history. No book of the

New Testament has impacted church history quite like this letter of Paul to the disciples in Rome.

One of the greatest people you will meet in the church history books is a man named Augustine. He was a great leader of the church in North Africa. Augustine was converted from a dreadful life of sin by reading one verse in the Book of Romans. In answer to the prayers of his devout mother, he heard the voice of a child telling him to get up and read that verse. When he responded by doing what he was told to do, he was miraculously converted! The history of the church was dynamically influenced by the conversion of Augustine that resulted from his reading one verse from this inspired letter of Paul.

As a Catholic Monk in the sixteenth century, a man named Martin Luther was in agony of soul over his personal salvation and his relationship to God. He experienced a divine intervention one morning in his devotions. He was preparing to teach the Scriptures at Wittenberg University in Germany one morning when the seventeenth verse of the first chapter of this letter seemed to leap out at him from the page. "This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life.'" Like Augustine, he was gloriously converted and all Europe was impacted by what we call the Reformation, which was the result of Luther's conversion. That one verse from this letter not only

transformed the life and faith of this Catholic priest, but the entire continent of Europe.

Two centuries later, a man named John Wesley explains that his heart was strangely warmed at a place in England called, “Aldersgate”. Like Augustine and Luther, Wesley was converted. While someone was reading the introduction to Luther’s Commentary on this letter of Paul to the Romans, God miraculously converted John Wesley! What those who write the church history books consider “The Great Awakening” changed the course of English history. Those who write secular and church history believe the conversion of Wesley and the impact of the Great Awakening prevented England from having a revolution like the bloody Revolution that was such a sad part of French history.

The history of North Africa was dynamically influenced because Augustine read a verse from this letter. The history of the continent of Europe was shaped when Martin Luther read one verse from this inspired letter. The history of England was changed when God changed the life of John Wesley while someone was reading the introduction to a commentary on this letter of Paul to the Romans. Every Protestant denomination exists today as a direct result of the influence of this letter we are now about to study, verse-by-verse.

When you consider the countless thousands that have been changed by the dynamic influence of this book, you should begin your study of this book with the prayer that God will change your life while you read and study the letter of Paul to the Romans. Ask the

Holy Spirit to strangely warm your heart while you are studying this book with me.

A Workman in the Word of God

Many people think of this letter of Paul as the difficult letter of this great apostle. The Apostle Paul was “all things to all men.” He will write in the opening verses of this letter that he was obligated to present the Gospel to the wise and the unwise (1:14). He explains to the Corinthians that the Holy Spirit reveals spiritual truth to spiritual people regardless of their education. However, in that context, he explains that he does speak wisdom among those who are mature (1 Corinthians 2:6).

That is what Paul is doing as he writes this letter. You must learn to study if you want to understand what Paul has written in this letter. To understand what I mean, consider these words Paul wrote to Timothy: “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) This verse almost sounds as if Paul, like Jeremiah, is telling Timothy to eat the Word of God - the Word must be rightly divided if Timothy is to be a workman in the Word of God. The key word in this passage is the word “study.”

In my first class in the study of the Greek language, the professor had a plaque mounted on the wall above his desk with these words Paul wrote to Timothy engraved on it. He began his first class in the study of the Greek language by pointing to that plaque

and asking us, “Do you know what that word “study” means in the Greek language? It means, “To exert yourself, to put forth a real effort.”

I am amazed at the people who think they can study hard to learn Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry, Biology, or Science, but they expect to open their Bible and understand a letter like this letter of Paul to the Romans without studying. It is almost as if they believe they can learn the Bible by slipping it under their pillows at night expecting God to put the understanding of the Word into their head while they are sleeping. They do not seem to realize that God does not reveal His Word to us to by some kind of spiritual magic.

We simply must study the Scripture if we expect the Word of God to bless our hearts and become a power in our lives. This is especially true as we begin this in-depth study of Romans. Therefore, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the message of this profound inspired letter of Paul to you and also put forth some real study effort as we approach this book together. Give at least as much mental energy to this study as you would to one of your subjects in school or one of the things you study to prepare yourself for the skills by which you earn a living. If you diligently study these words Paul has written to the believers in Rome, you will understand why some have said it is the one of the most important books in the Bible.

Chapter Two

“Meet the Apostle Paul”

(1:1-16)

“Paul, a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the Gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord, through Whom we have received grace and Apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name: Among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ: To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:1-7)

Paul Tells the Believers in Rome Who He Is

The first word in this letter is “Paul.” In the first century, letters were written on scrolls. When you wrote a letter in those days, you put your name first so those who received your letter would not have to unravel the scroll all the way to the end to see who had written them a letter. In his greeting, Paul wants to tell these people something about who he is, what he is and where he is in his journey of faith. He also tells them why he is who, what and where he is.

However, he primarily writes to them about Who, what, why and where the risen, living Christ is - and then he tells them something of who, what, where and why they are in Christ. As we read this greeting, if we are looking for the personal and devotional application, we will discover truth about who, what and why we are in Christ. All that profound truth is found in the first seven verses of this letter as Paul greets the followers of Christ in Rome.

To focus the personal spiritual identity of Paul, to the Roman believers and our spiritual identity, think with me as we consider these verses more closely. “Paul a bond servant of Jesus Christ.” The word Paul uses for servant is the Greek word “doulos”, which simply means a slave. When Paul wrote this letter, over half the people living in the city of Rome were slaves. Many of the believers in Rome and in the other cities where Paul established New Testament churches were slaves.

In most of our cultures today we do not have slaves and we do not even realize what the life of a slave was really like. When Paul wrote this letter to the believers in the capital of the Roman Empire, everyone in that city knew what a slave was. A slave was a piece of property who was owned by another human being. A slave had no rights. What a slave thought, desired, or what his or her opinions were, was totally irrelevant. A slave had no more rights than an animal.

If you own a horse, that horse has no rights. You do not consider what that horse desires or may want to do on any given day.

When you own a horse that animal exists to serve you. When Paul introduces himself to the Romans and to us by writing, “I am the bond servant of Jesus Christ,” that is precisely what the word “bond servant” means.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that though he was born free, he made the deliberate choice to become the slave of every man he meets. He will serve that man as if he were his slave that he may have the opportunity believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ and experience salvation (Romans 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:19).

Paul was actually born free. He was not a slave. He was a Roman citizen, which was extraordinary for a Jew living under Roman rule. He was born free and could have been very proud of it, but he is telling believers in Rome and Corinth, and he is telling you and me that he has deliberately chosen to become the slave, not only of Jesus Christ, but of all those whose lives intersect his life.

He also tells us that he is an apostle. He literally wrote that he is “a called apostle”. When the apostles appointed a replacement for Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, they appointed Mathias (Acts 1:16-26). It seems obvious to me that the Lord’s replacement for Judas was the Apostle Paul. The replacement appointed by the apostles, Mathias, does not appear again in the New Testament, but Paul writes half the New Testament and takes the Gospel to the whole world of his day.

The word “called” is an important word to Paul. He uses this word to describe the experience of salvation. He wrote to the

Corinthians that when we are saved, we are called to have fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9). He made other references in his letter to the Corinthians that show us that he considered the experience of salvation to be synonymous with when a person is called (1 Corinthians 1:24-31).

Why is Paul called to be an apostle? He writes: “For obedience to the faith” and “for His name.” He says in verse five, “Through Him (meaning Christ) we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.” Paul literally wrote, “for obedient faith.” We have a shallow idea of what faith is today. If you research the Greek word the authors of the New Testament use for “believe” the way we have focused the word “justified”, you will discover that to believe means to make a commitment to follow and to obey.

In the early days of World War Two, When the Japanese invaded the Philippine Islands the principal of a Christian school was leading a chapel service when Japanese soldiers entered his school. A Japanese army officer ordered the principal to tear down the Philippine and Christian flags, spit on them and trample them under his feet. The humble principal was so frightened he could not even speak, but he shook his head from side to side and refused to do what he was being ordered to do. The Japanese officer placed a pistol on the stomach of the principal and shouted his commands a second time. When the terrified Filipino Christian continued to refuse, the soldier shot him in the stomach.

Miraculously the principal survived and after the war when he was liberated from a prison camp, a reporter asked him the question, “What thought ran through your mind that you decided to take a bullet in the stomach rather than desecrate those flags?” The man replied, “It occurred to me that there comes a time in every person’s life when they must show by their actions what they believe. That was my time.”

According to the New Testament, there is not only one time in our lives that we must show what we believe. To be consistent with the essential meaning of the New Testament word for faith, we should always show by our actions what we believe. That is literally what the Greek word for believe means.

Imagine that you are an invalid and your house is on fire. When the fireman comes to rescue you, the only way you can contribute to your salvation would be to lean your weight upon the shoulder of the one who is carrying you out of that burning house. The Greek word for “believe” has that connotation. When we read: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life,” the Greek word that is translated as “believe” means to lean your full weight on Him as one who is helpless and being carried from a burning house (John 3:16). The Apostle John was not thinking of intellectual agreement when he used that word “believe”.

I have a plaque hanging on the wall of my study that reads: “What we really believe, we do. All the rest is just religious talk.”

When the Word became flesh so that we could see God's truth in human flesh, Jesus was also showing us that the Word of God should become flesh in your life and mine. One great soul made the observation that when the Word of God dwells in our flesh today, unfortunately, it often merely becomes more words.

Jesus asked the question, "When the Son of man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) There is very little real faith today because we do not realize that the word "faith" literally means, "A commitment to trust completely that expresses itself in obedience."

Why is Paul who and what he is? His motivation for all of this is found in these words: "for His name." The name of God represents the essence of who and what God is. When we do something "for His name", that means we do it in alignment with all that God is and with what God wills. We also do it as an expression of grateful worship for all that God is, has done, and is doing in our lives and in our world through us and as we walk with Him.

Where is he a called apostle? His answer is "among all nations!" In this letter we will see the missionary heart of the greatest missionary the church of Jesus Christ has ever known. This will be especially true in the fifteenth chapter, where Paul tells these Roman believers that he has strongly desired to visit Rome because he wants them to support him as he reaches Spain with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In this greeting, Paul also tells us who, what, why and where Jesus is. In seven short verses, Paul mentions Jesus twelve times.

Who is Jesus? First of all, he tells us that Jesus is the One Who was promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Paul wants the Romans - and you and me - to know that what he is about to present so thoroughly in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is not something new. The Good News that is expressed by that one word "justified" is not something that was the creation of his extraordinary mind.

He could have written to the Romans, as he did to the Galatians, that he learned much of the truth he is about to present from the risen Christ in the desert of Arabia (Galatians 1-2:13). Since he is addressing the Jew first and then the Gentile Roman mind, he writes that this Gospel of salvation is something that had been prophetically profiled in the Old Testament for thousands of years. Paul is reaching for his Jewish readers by sharing this Old Testament perspective and he wants the Gentile readers to know that this is something God had always planned to do.

If you will study the Old Testament Scriptures, you will discover that they are all about Jesus Christ. If you surveyed the Gospel of Luke with me, you will remember that in the last chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we are told that Jesus opened the Scriptures to the apostles, when He told them something about the Scriptures. Jesus told His apostles that Moses, those who wrote the Psalms and the prophets were all writing about Him.

When Jesus gave the apostles that insight into the Old Testament, we read that, “For the first time, they understood the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:25-27, 44, 45) The apostles understood the Scriptures for the first time in their lives when they understood what Paul is sharing with the Roman believers in this greeting: The Old Testament is really the foundation and historical setting from which the Gospel is understood and proven. He is going to explain this Gospel in an extraordinary, profound, yet simple way in this masterpiece of all his inspired letters. However, before he does he makes the point that the Gospel is rooted in the Old Testament.

Paul also writes that Jesus was “... born of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power.” (3) In these words Paul is declaring that Jesus was a human being. When Paul tells us that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power, he is referring to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and he is declaring that Jesus Christ was more than a human being.

Paul then tells the Romans - and you and me - who we are when he writes: “Among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ: To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.” (7) This great apostle has described himself as a called apostle. We have seen that this word “called” is an important concept to Paul. Now he informs those to whom he is writing that every believer is called. We are called “saints”. This word represents one of Paul’s favorite ways of referring to the followers of Christ. The word is simply an abbreviated way of saying that a person is sanctified.

There is a traditional and a biblical definition of a saint. The traditional definition is that when an extraordinary servant of the Lord has met certain criteria, they are canonized or declared to be a saint. However, that is not the biblical definition of this word. According to the New Testament, every believer is a saint because they are sanctified, or separated unto Christ and from the world.

The emphasis of the Scripture is not that they are separated from sin, although when they are separated unto following Christ they should also separate themselves from sin. The primary emphasis is that those who are saints, or sanctified are separated unto Christ. When the emphasis is primarily upon separation from sin, that teaching of sanctification often leads to a severe form of legalism, or rules about what a believer can and cannot do when they are sanctified.

When our sanctification is coming from the outside/in rather than from the inside/out, we call that “legalism”. Authentic sanctification stems from the glorious reality that a believer is separated unto the risen, living Christ, Who lives in them and He is offended by sin - things that are contrary to His will, which they are doing. When true followers of Christ separate themselves from sin, because they are separated unto Christ, that is biblical sanctification. Authentic, biblical sanctification is based on our personal relationship to Christ rather than rules created by man that regulate our separation from sin.

This word “sanctified” does not imply that sanctified people are without sin. Paul refers to the Corinthian believers as those who are sanctified and he then addresses a long list of sins that existed in the Corinthian Church. That shows us that sanctified people are not sinless people – they are people who are separated unto Christ and to following Christ. When they are totally separated to Christ, they will be totally separated from sin. That is the obvious objective of this teaching in the New Testament. However, as long as we are in these human bodies we will fight the battle of living lives that are separated to Christ and from sin (7:14-8:2).

Paul then continues his salutation with a blessing that is found in some form in all the letters he writes: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:7)

The salutation, or greeting continues through verse sixteen as Paul informs these saints in Rome that he has heard of their faith all over the world. As I have already observed, although he had never been to Rome, in cities all over the Roman Empire he had met people who were from Rome.

In verse nine he writes: “God is my witness, Whom I serve with my spirit (or whole heart) in the Gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.” Today believers sometimes say to each other, “I will pray for you every day”, but how faithfully do they remember to pray? When Paul writes these words, he is not casually or lightly making a superficial

promise. Observe that he writes: “God is my witness (God knows) that without ceasing, always, I remember you in my prayers.”

As you read through the inspired letters of Paul, mark every place he makes this sincere prayer commitment or promise to an individual or group of believers. You will then see that Paul had a very long prayer list and spent many hours in prayer. If we understood the power of prayer, we would also have a long prayer list and spend many hours, every day and night, in prayer and experience answers to prayer like those this beloved apostle regularly experienced.

He writes that he has faithfully prayed for them, has desired to meet them and has actually tried to visit them on several occasions. Each time some obstacle has prevented that visit. His objective for visiting them was that he might impart some spiritual gift to them and that they might also contribute great blessings to his spiritual life (11-12). Paul knew the risen Christ lives in born again disciples and that a great blessing passes between them when they meet each other.

The Three “I Am’s” of the Apostle Paul (13-16)

In the second part of this greeting, Paul actually begins his inspired, profound and comprehensive presentation of the Gospel of salvation by relating the words “I am” to the Gospel three times. He writes: “I am a debtor both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the

wise and the foolish.” (14) He is declaring that he is in the debt of every person he meets.

In that culture, there was a stigma associated with debt. To be in debt was also a serious problem because it could lead to debtor’s prison. Debt was not only embarrassing. If a person could not pay their debts, being in debt was a crime for which they were put in prison from which they could never pay their debts. In the context of that culture, Paul is telling his readers that he has made the deliberate choice to make himself the debtor of every human being he meets in the sense that he will serve that person any way he must serve them for the privilege of presenting the Gospel to them.

He then writes: “I am ready to preach the Gospel in Rome.” (15) The word is actually “eager” and Paul explains why he is eager to preach the Gospel in Rome. Paul had proclaimed the Gospel with supernatural results all over the world in decadent, morally corrupt cities like Ephesus, Philippi and Corinth. As a result of his bold proclamation of the Gospel, he had planted strong churches in those cities. He is, therefore, eager to preach the Gospel in Rome also because he is convinced that the Holy Spirit will convert sinners in Rome when they hear the Gospel just as he has seen Him do this miracle in the other pagan sin capitals of the world.

This leads to his third “I am.” Paul proclaims: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (16)

If you have surveyed the New Testament with me, you will remember that by comparing a passage in the Book of Acts with some verses in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, we learn that in the city of Corinth, Paul had an experience that completely changed his philosophy of preaching the Gospel. As he was about to begin preaching the Gospel in the city of Corinth, the Lord appeared to him.

In so many words God told Paul, “Do not be afraid, Paul. I have many people in this city. You simply boldly proclaim the Gospel and you will discover who they are.” (Acts 18:9, 10; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 15:1-4) From that point forward in his evangelistic preaching, he simply proclaimed the two facts about Jesus Christ, which are the Gospel. He also frequently shared what believing those two Gospel facts meant to him when he applied them to his own personal faith and life in Christ. He then trusted the Holy Spirit to move those who heard that Gospel to believe and experience salvation.

As this apostle writes, “I am” three times, he is telling the believers in Rome who he is. He is the slave of Jesus Christ and of every person he meets in this life because he has the magnificent obsession to declare the Gospel and lead to salvation every person he meets in this life. He is eager to preach the Gospel in Rome and he is not ashamed of the Gospel because he has seen how the miraculous grace of God changes lives, when the Gospel is preached and sinners believe that Gospel.

Chapter Three
“The Gospel According to Paul”

(1:17-32)

The last words of Paul’s greeting launch him into the systematic argument of his theological masterpiece. Although in our radio programs we consider these verses in great detail, in this booklet I will merely summarize them. When he declares that he is not ashamed of the Gospel, he follows that claim with the statement that the Gospel reveals two great realities about God: the Gospel reveals a righteousness which is given by God to you and me, and is acquired by faith. The Gospel also reveals the wrath of God upon all who are not righteous (16-18).

As an introduction to this theological masterpiece of Paul I would like to present a summary overview of the first four chapters of Paul’s letter to the Romans I learned from one of my favorite Bible scholars, Dr. David Stuart Briscoe:

“In the first four chapters of this letter Paul tells us what God is: God is righteous. Then he tells us what God wants you and me to be: God wants you and me to be righteous. Next he tells us what God condemns: God condemns all who are not righteous. Then Paul tells us what God knows: God knows that by our own self-efforts we could never in a million years of trying possibly be righteous enough to save ourselves by our good works. These realities about God might be described as the bad news.

“This leads Paul into the Good News - which is the heart and soul of this magnificent letter - when he tells us what God has done. God has come into this world in the Person of His Son and offered the only Sacrifice that can save us from our sins and make it possible for you and me to be declared righteous by God. Paul then tells us what God wants you and me to do: God wants you and me to believe Him when He tells us in his Word what He has done to save us from our sins and declare us righteous.”

This first part of Paul’s comprehensive and profound explanation of the Gospel is summarized in the first verse of the fifth chapter when he writes: “Therefore, being justified (declared righteous) by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When Paul writes that the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel, he adds to that statement the heart of the prophecy of Habakkuk when he writes: “A righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (1:17; Habakkuk 2:4) This is the verse God used to stir the heart of Martin Luther and become the driving force of the Protestant Reformation. There is a sense in which every Protestant denomination owes its existence to this one verse of Scripture.

When Luther read that verse, believers were being taught a salvation that was based on personal works of righteousness. Luther was pursuing that kind of salvation with a marathon of self-righteous works of penance, which included beating himself with a whip, and

penances like climbing stairs on his knees, thinking he was somehow earning his salvation. Can you imagine how these words must have leaped out at him from the page of Scripture that morning: “... A righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” Luther wrote next to verse seventeen in the margin of his Latin Bible, the Latin word, “Sola!” (Alone!) He began to understand that salvation was by faith alone, not by works!

Paul is now into his profound and comprehensive presentation of the Gospel. Having begun with the Good News about the righteousness that is by faith, he then shares the second reality about God that is revealed in the Gospel: the way the wrath of God applies to all who are unrighteous, when he writes: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Paul then moves into his inspired study of the character of God and the character of man, like it was and like it is. In the Book of Genesis we find a very similar study of God and man, as they were and as they truly are. (The word “man” is used in a generic sense in Scripture and does not simply mean the male gender to the exclusion of females.)

Jesus showed us how to interpret passages like these written by Paul and Moses. When they asked Jesus questions about marriage, He said in so many words, “If you want to understand marriage like it is today, you must go back to the beginning and

understand marriage like it was designed by God to be.” (Matthew 19:3-12) Paul is telling us about the fall of the human family like it was, because he wants us to understand the character and the chaos of the human family like it is today.

Observe that beginning in verse eighteen he writes a passage of Scripture that is really not a pleasant passage of Scripture to study. This is not my favorite chapter in the Bible. All Scripture is inspired but not all Scripture is equally inspiring. Although this is not the most inspiring passage in the Bible, it is a profoundly realistic passage of Scripture. It begins by telling us that, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” (1:18)

Observe that the wrath of God addresses two things: the ungodliness of men, and the unrighteousness of men. Scholars with keen insight tell us this relates to the fact that the Ten Commandments were given on two tablets. The first tablet listed four commandments that governed man’s relationship with God. There were six commandments on the second tablet that governed man’s relationship with his fellow man.

These scholars believe that since those first four commandments show the people of God how to be godly, when Paul references the “ungodliness of men,” he is referring to the violation of the first four commandments. In other words, when man violates the first four commandments he is guilty of ungodliness: “Do not worship any other gods besides me. ... Do not make idols of any

kind, whether in the shape of birds or animals or fish. You must never worship or bow down to them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not share your affection with any other god! I do not leave unpunished the sins of those who hate me, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations. But I lavish my love on those who love me and obey my commands, even for a thousand generations. ... Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name. ... Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy... For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; then he rested on the seventh day. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.” (Exodus 20:3-11)

Since the six commandments on the second tablet govern the relationships of God’s people, when Paul references “unrighteousness,” he is addressing the violation of the six commandments that are on the second tablet. When the people of God fail to do what is right in their relationships, they are guilty of unrighteousness: “Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God will give you. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not testify falsely against your neighbor. Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else your neighbor owns.” Exodus 20:12-17)

When Paul writes that the response of God to ungodliness and unrighteousness is the wrath of God, we should ask ourselves, “What do Paul, Moses, the prophets and the other authors of Scripture mean when they make reference to the wrath of God? Many people believe the concept of the wrath of God is only found in the Old Testament, is prehistoric, primitive, and a concept of God that enlightened godly people no longer believe. How long has it been since you have heard a sermon on the wrath of God? Or we might ask, “Have you ever heard a sermon on the wrath of God?”

The Character of Man

Three times in his description of how the character of man fell, Paul will write that God “gave them up” or God “gave them over.” (1:24, 26, 28) This does not mean that God gave up on man. This means God gave them up to what they wanted to do. Each time this happens, you have the charges of God against man, the responses of God to man and the moral consequences permitted by God in man. This passage could be called, “A Study of the Moral Fall of the Human Family.”

The first charge of God against man was and is that “They suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” This is consistent with a definition of sin we learn from Jesus in the Gospel of John. The definition is actually “no light, no sin.”

When Jesus claimed that He was a kind of Light that gave sight to those who knew they were spiritually blind, and revealed

spiritual blindness in those who boasted that they could see, the Pharisees asked Jesus if He was saying that they were spiritually blind? His response was, “If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now you say you see. Therefore, your sin remains.” On another occasion, Jesus said, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they would have no sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin.” (John 9:40, 41; 15:22)

This first charge of God against man, like it was and like it is, describes the way man deliberately suppresses the light, or the truth God tries to reveal to him. Because they are totally committed to their unrighteous life style, they reject the truth about what is morally right when God reveals righteousness to them. According to Paul, the creation of God man can see all around him should make him aware of a Creator, Whom he should worship as God Almighty (Romans 1:18-23).

This is labeled as, “natural revelation” by theologians. There is much disagreement as theologians discuss the possibility of man learning enough about God from a study of His creation to be saved. Paul is not making the claim in this passage that man can be saved by observing nature. However, I believe he is teaching that the first step in the long slide into the depravity of the character of man is the rejection, or the deliberate suppression, of the light God is trying to reveal to him regarding righteous living.

A second charge of God against man was and is that when God reveals Himself to man, man does not glorify Him as God and

give Him the place in his life God deserves. This is another place in the Scripture where we meet the concept of God first. If God is anything to us, then He is everything to us, because until God is everything to us, He is not really anything to us. The refusal of man to put God first is a second step toward depravity, according to Paul.

A third charge of God against man was and is that mankind is not thankful. This really magnifies the sin of ingratitude. Paul then chronicles a long list of sins that present his study of the fall of the character of man, as it was and as it is today, all over this world. In Second Timothy chapter 3 Paul writes to the young pastor that ingratitude is a sign that we are in the last days. (1-5)

As these moral consequences develop in man we read: “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.” We then read that these moral consequences are simply described as every kind of wickedness: “They become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.” (Romans 1:28-32)

The Character of God

When the Bible speaks of the wrath of God, it is not describing an emotion we experience as human beings. The word “wrath” in Hebrew is a very interesting word. It means, “to cross over”. The word means that the essence of the character and nature of God is love. But love is not the only attribute of God. His character is a whole spectrum of attributes. One of the attributes of God is holiness, or what we might describe as perfect justice. The character of God is the essence of the definition of what is right, just, or fair. Now if He is just, that means He has to do something about ungodliness and unrighteousness.

As a World Cup football fan, what would you think of an official who penalized one side and then when the other side committed the same foul more flagrantly, he simply winked, smiled, said, “Well, boys will be boys,” and did not call the penalty?

Think of God as an Absolute Referee, Who is absolutely, perfectly fair and just. With a character that is the essence of perfect justice, He simply cannot wink at the ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. He must always respond to sin by charging it as a penalty. His character demands that He respond to sin that way. That is why Paul writes here: “The wrath of God is against such things.”

Now this does not mean that God watches ungodliness and unrighteousness and then finally gets angry and loses His temper. It means that consistent with His righteous, holy, just character, when

wrath is demanded because the ungodliness and unrighteousness of man has reached a certain point, He “crosses over” in His character from love to wrath.

Once He crosses over He completely annihilates the unrighteous and the ungodly, as in the example of the flood and what the prophets like Joel and the Apostle Peter present as the great and terrible Day of the Lord (Joel 2:11, 31; 2 Peter 3:10). Then the wrath of God can be defined as “The annihilating reaction of perfect justice toward injustice.” Another definition can be “The annihilating reaction of perfect love toward that which is threatening His love objects.”

The love of an earthly father can be converted to wrath. A little seven-year-old girl was raped and murdered. The gentle, loving father of that little girl was in the police station when they brought in the man who had committed those terrible wrongs to his precious daughter. It took every policeman in that station to hold that father and prevent him from trying to annihilate the man who had destroyed his love object.

Although this helps us to understand the wrath of God, it is not an accurate metaphor of the character of God, because that father lost control and was filled with rage. As I have observed, God does not ever lose control when He “crosses over” from love to wrath.

In the second chapter of this letter, Paul writes of a future wrath of God that will be expressed in judgment. In the thirteenth chapter he describes a present wrath of God that is expressed through

the duly authorized peace officer against those who are breaking the laws of God. Three times Paul describes this officer, who expresses the wrath of God on the law-breaker, as “The minister of God.”

In the decade of the ‘40s, many nations joined together to destroy Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party, which was determined to kill every Jew on earth. If Hitler had not been destroyed there may not be a Jew alive today. During that decade, many devout believers who fought in that war, believed they were an expression of the wrath of God toward an evil power that was systematically killing ten million people in its death camps. Their biblical rationale for fighting in a just war was that they were part of a collective peace officer, expressing the wrath of God toward an evil power that was threatening not only Jews, but also millions of other people who were labeled as sub-human by the Nazis.

Chapter Four

“The Judgment of God”

(2:1-29)

When Paul finally reached Rome on his missionary journeys, after a hazardous journey by sea, he was imprisoned but was well treated by his Roman captors. He was permitted to have visitors and the first visitors he asked to see were the Jewish leaders in the city of

Rome. He reasoned with them from the Scriptures about things concerning Jesus, and concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 28:17-31).

When he writes the second chapter of this letter to the Romans, it is as if he is still addressing those Jews who were his first visitors when he arrived in city of Rome. In this booklet I will give a brief summary of this profile of a future judgment of God presented in this chapter by Paul.

In the first chapter he profiled a present judgment of God, which comes in the form of a present expression of the wrath of God toward the ungodly, unrighteous character and actions of man. In this second chapter, he predicts a future judgment of God, which will reveal a future expression of the wrath of God against the ungodly and unrighteous character of man.

The response of a Holy God to the sinful character of man must always ultimately result in judgment. This has always been true. In Scripture observe how God ultimately judges the sinful character of man. In the Book of Genesis we read of the judgment of God on Sodom and Gomorrah and the judgment of the terrible flood in the day of Noah (Genesis 19:24-29; 6-9).

The author of the Book of Hebrews declared: “As it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment ...” (Hebrews 9:27) In this second chapter Paul gives us a realistic summary of that appointment with death and judgment we must all keep with God. Paul agrees with the author of the Book of Hebrews.

There will be a judgment of God in the future after we keep our appointment with death.

The Scripture consistently teaches that a future judgment simply must be. Solomon as a great thinker reasoned his way to the conclusion that the only way we can resolve the hard reality of the injustices we see in our lifetimes is to come to this conclusion: there must be a judgment. (Ecclesiastes 3:16-17, 12:13-14) According to Paul, and many other authors of New and Old Testament Scriptures, a future judgment is an absolute certainty and there will be such a judgment.

Paul writes that this judgment of God will be according to truth (Romans 2:2). In this chapter, remember that he is addressing the Jew first and then the Greek or Gentile and by application, of course, he is addressing you and me. We all have the tendency to judge others, especially our fellow believer. But Paul cuts through that pattern of horizontal judging and states clearly that the judgment of God to come will be based on the truth of what God knows about each of us. While he is making that point clear, he adds the fact that the judgment of God is inescapable for every human being (3).

He then teaches that the judgment of God will be accumulative. According to Paul, we are treasuring up the judgments of God on our sins, which will be faced and accounted for in judgment. In this context, he teaches that God forbears or tolerates our many sins because He is long suffering and it is His design that His goodness toward us should lead us to repentance (4, 5).

Peter teaches this very same truth in his second letter, adding the thought that God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance and salvation (2 Peter 3:9). These two great leaders of the New Testament Church agree that the judgment of God is according to truth, inescapable and accumulative.

Paul next writes that the judgment of God will be a righteous judgment (5). When we are judged, the issue will not be what we professed but how well we performed as we lived our lives. The judgment of God will be according to what we have done and what we have not done for God and Christ (6). He teaches this same truth about judgment in his letters to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 5:10).

In this context, He agrees with his Lord and Savior that performance is far more important than profession. Jesus consistently declared the value that it is how we perform, rather than what we profess that matters to God. (Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:46) When Jesus dramatically cleansed the Temple, He responded to the demand of the religious authorities to see credentials with a parable, which demonstrated His authority for such severe action: “A certain man had two sons. He ordered them both to go work in his vineyard. The first son refused but later repented (thought again), and did go work in his father’s vineyard. The second son said he would but he also repented and never did work in his father’s vineyard. Which one of these two sons actually did the will of his father?” (Matthew 21:28-31)

The hard reality taught by this parable is that each of these two sons professed one thing and their performance contradicted their profession. What they professed, therefore, had very little meaning. It was their performance that really mattered. Jesus was actually teaching that His only credentials, humanly speaking, were His miracles, or His performance. He was also teaching that His performance stated that He was in the vineyard of the Father and the performance of those with whom He was speaking were not, even though they professed to be.

Although the central message of this Roman letter is that we are not justified by our good works but by the finished work of Christ on the cross for us, in this chapter Paul does agree with Jesus and James: Good works do validate the faith by which God declares us to be righteous (James 2:21-24).

Consistent with that teaching, Paul writes that the judgment of God will be impartial (11). The Jews Paul is addressing throughout this chapter believed they had no need of salvation because they were born Jews. He now supplements and complements the teaching above that we will be judged by our deeds rather than our profession of faith, by stating emphatically that being a Jew by profession will not suffice when we meet God as our Judge.

By personal application, this teaching should be related to those who believe they are saved because they were born into a Christian family, have godly parents and were baptized as a child. This should also be related to the nice people, who have been and are

living a moral life and have more integrity than many who profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ. If you fall into that category, as Paul addresses the Jew, realize that he is addressing you if you are trusting in your godly heritage or your moral integrity for salvation.

This is followed by a great teaching in which Paul challenges those who are Jews by accident of birth to be by performance all that a Jew claims to be by profession. The Jews were proud of the miracle that God had given His Law to them and they were the people chosen by God to teach His law to others. They considered Gentiles to be “dogs” because compared to a Jew, a Gentile had as much spiritual life or awareness as a dog. They considered those who did not know the Law of God to be “babies” while they were spiritual “fathers”. Other people were in darkness while they were the guides for the spiritually blind.

However, Paul ruthlessly challenges them to perform what they profess. As teachers of the Law of God, do they obey that Law themselves? He cites several of the Ten Commandments. While they teach others that they should not steal, do they steal? He specifically asked if they rob temples?

Because they were so intense regarding their obsession to forsake idol worship after the captivity, they had no guilt whatsoever regarding their practice of stealing idols from pagan temples. Since these idols were often made of gold, silver and precious jewels, they often sold them for large sums of money. They rationalized that since God hates idols, this practice was not really stealing.

The capacity of a human being - especially a religious human being - to justify sinful behavior is almost infinite. Paul concludes this condemnation of the Jews with the declaration that the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the way their performance was making a perversion of their profession. Applying this to our lives, if you are trusting in your godly heritage, which could really be the profession of your parent's faith, may I ask you, is your performance a perversion of your profession of faith?

He teaches that the judgment of God will be by the Law for those who have been given the Law of God (12-15). He agrees with prophets like Amos, who taught that greater spiritual privilege and advantage means greater spiritual responsibility and accountability before God (Amos 5:21-27). As Jews they were very proud of the miracle that they had been given the Law of God. Paul makes the point emphatically that the judgment of God will be by the Law of God for those who have been given the Law of God.

He adds the observation that the judgment of God will be by Jesus Christ. This agrees with the claim of Jesus that the Father has committed the responsibility for all judgment to His Son (John 5:22). While some try to discredit Paul by saying he contradicts the teaching of Jesus, the truth is that Paul consistently parallels and affirms the teaching of Jesus. There are times when he supplements the teaching of his Lord as he is given revelation like his teaching regarding marriage and what we call the rapture of the church, which

will be part of the return of Jesus (1 Corinthians 7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

However, when he addresses a subject on which Jesus taught, he is always in alignment with Jesus. A good example of this is the chapter he addressed to the Corinthians in answer to their questions regarding marriage (1 Corinthians 7).

He then writes of being an inward and an outward Jew. Since circumcision was the outward profession of the inward reality of being a Jew, he addresses the problem that many Jews had the rite of circumcision without the inward reality professed by circumcision. He then prescribes what he calls, "circumcision of the heart".

Circumcision was really a profession of sanctification, or of being separated to God and to living a holy life. When Paul exhorted these Jews to be circumcised in their hearts, he was exhorting them to be separated to God and holy living in their hearts, where their wills, decisions, and the motives reside, which drive their decisions.

He brings this dimension of his teaching about judgment to a close with a focus on what it means to validate the profession of being a Jew with an authentic performance that demonstrates before God and man what it really means to be a Jew.

In this context, Paul expresses a principle he must have learned from the risen Christ. He certainly did not learn this principle as a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He also expressed this principle in his second letter to the Corinthians in which he labeled this principle "the spirit of the law" as compared to "the letter of the

law”. (2 Corinthians 3:6) We might say that in this chapter, Paul is describing the spirit of what it means to be an authentic Jew.

There is a specific personal application for the believers in Rome who were not Jews, and for you and me. Baptism is the outward profession of the inward reality that we believe the Gospel and we are identified with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. Baptism as prescribed by Jesus in His Great Commission, is a public announcement of a private decision.

When a man and woman decide privately to be married, their wedding ceremony is a public announcement of that decision they have already made privately. When we trust Jesus Christ to be our Savior and decide to surrender our heart to Him to be our Lord, that is a private decision. Our baptism is the public announcement of that private, personal decision. However, just as these Jews had the rite of circumcision without the reality that symbol of profession represented, it is possible for us to have the rite of baptism today without the reality it must represent.

Paul emphasizes the hard reality that the judgment of God will hold us accountable for the inward, heart reality of what we profess outwardly. He begins this theme of being an authentic Jew by teaching that the judgment of God will address the secrets (motives) of the hearts of those who are being judged (2:16). This apostle wrote to the Corinthians that it is only when God exposes the secret motives behind all our performance that we will receive praise or otherwise at the judgment (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).

David and Jeremiah combine to inform and challenge us regarding the motives of our hearts. Jeremiah declares that our hearts are desperately wicked and above all things, deceitful. He then asks the question, “Who can know the (secrets or motives of) the heart?” He answers his own question by informing us that only God knows the heart (Jeremiah 17:9, 10).

David then shows extraordinary discernment and wisdom when he asks God to show him the thoughts that should not be in his mind and the motives that should not be in his heart so he can confess and forsake them, because he wants to walk in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23, 24).

In this chapter, Paul is writing on the future judgment of God with which we will be confronted when the secrets (motives) of our hearts will be revealed as we face the judgment of God. The personal application to this dimension of judgment to come is that we should learn from Paul, Jeremiah and David to consider the motives of our hearts now, and not wait until they are revealed to us at the judgment. Then, like David we should confess, repent and turn away from those thoughts and motives that should not be in our hearts and minds, because we want to walk in the way everlasting.

The practical and devotional applications in this chapter also relate to that subject of profession and performance. As we consider the reality that we must die and after that be judged, are we trusting in the fact that we members of a particular church or denomination? Are we trusting in our moral integrity, or in our self-righteous works?

Millions believe that if there is a judgment, they will be safe because they have been a good person and have never hurt anybody. Are you one of those people? Are we doing the same thing the Jews were doing to whom Paul addressed this second chapter?

Paul has told us in this chapter what we should not be trusting for our salvation. As he continues to present his theological masterpiece, we will learn precisely what we should be trusting for our salvation as we move toward the absolute certainty of death and judgment.

Chapter Five

“Justified By Faith”

Having addressed and challenged the Jew in the second chapter, Paul begins the third chapter by asking if there is any advantage at all to being a Jew? He then answers his own question by profiling the advantages of being a Jew. The first advantage he presents is that God gave His Law, or His Word to the Jew.

All Men Are Under Law

According to Paul, even though the Jews have not obeyed the Word of God, their disobedience simply demonstrates the truth proclaimed by the Law of God - that we are sinners. He expresses

that truth by writing: “Let God be true and every man a liar.” (4) As he pointed out in the second chapter, the conscience of the Gentile shows that God has planted His Law even in the hearts of those who are not Jewish (2:15). He then proceeds to declare that all men, whether Jew or Gentile, are under the Law of God.

One of the functions of the Law of God is to reveal the hard reality that we are all sinners. James uses the eloquent metaphor that the Word of God is like a mirror that we should look into every day because it will reveal our imperfections (James 1:23, 24). The fact that the Jews, who were given the Word of God did not obey the Word of God, in no way invalidates the Word but simply confirms the purpose of the Word, which is to convict all men of the undeniable reality that they are sinners.

Paul then declares that all men are under what he will later label as the law of sin (7:23). He quotes the Old Testament to support his declaration that we are all sinners (Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3). Since the sin of man demonstrates and validates the truth of the Word of God, Paul rebukes those who say he teaches we should sin that good may come, meaning that we verify the Word of God when we sin. Of course, he emphatically denies that accusation.

According to Paul, the purpose of the Law of God never was to save us. The purpose of the Law of God was and is to reveal sin and to show us we need salvation and a Savior. None of us can live up to the perfect standard set by God. In that sense, we do not break the Law of God; the Law of God brakes us.

The chaplain of a large prison was permitted to address the convicted criminals who were about to enter prison. Near the gates of the prison there were two huge stone walls with the Ten Commandments and some of the laws of the State these prisoners had broken written on them. Before the chaplain spoke to the prisoners, he approached one of them, who had read some of the laws of his state and was carefully reading the Ten Commandments. He asked the prisoner, “Which of these commandments did you break son?” The prisoner responded, “I did not break these commandments, sir. They broke me!”

In this third chapter, Paul writes that we will never be justified in the sight of God by not doing wrong, or by the good deeds we do while obeying the Law of God. God did not give us His Law for that purpose. God gave us His law to reveal sin. According to Paul, the purpose of the Law of God is that “Every mouth may be shut and that all the people in this world may become guilty sinners before God.” (19) Has the Word of God shut your mouth yet, or are you still talking, trusting in your self-righteousness and making excuses for your spiritual and moral failures?

All the inspired thoughts Paul has written in this profound theological masterpiece to this point are like a beautiful setting for this jewel, which is one of the most important passages in all the writings of Paul: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on

all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (3:21-26)

In this passage, which is the heart and soul of this theological statement of Paul regarding justification, he gives us the Good News before he states the bad news. The Good News proclaimed by this letter is that there is a righteousness that has been revealed by God, which is not simply a matter of obeying the Law of God. This righteousness is a righteousness that is acquired by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works of righteousness on the part of man. This righteousness can be received by all who trust in the work of Jesus Christ on His cross for salvation.

He is now repeating for emphasis the same truth he declared in verse seventeen of Chapter One, where he told us there is a righteousness revealed in the Gospel he is obligated, eager and not ashamed to preach in Rome (1:16, 17). Remember that he wrote in those verses that this righteousness is acquired by faith alone and not by works on the part of the one who is trusting God to declare them righteous.

All Men Are Under Sin

Paul follows this good news with bad news when he concludes: “For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” The languages in which the Bible was written originally have several words that are translated by the word, “sin”. These words sometimes relate to an arrow that misses a target, the concept of stepping outside a boundary, or of breaking a rule.

When he writes that all have sinned, the word Paul uses for sin is a word that describes an arrow falling short, or failing to reach the target. Consistent with what he has already written, Paul is writing that we are all sinners because we fall short of the standards God has set for us all in His inspired Word.

In the Bible, the standard set by God is that every thought, word and deed of the people of God should bring glory to their God. When we fall short of that standard, we are sinners. This is simply another way of saying that we are to keep the Great Commandment, which is to love God with all our mind, all our strength and all of our heart, all day long, every day that we live (1 Corinthians 10:31; Matthew 22:35-40; Deuteronomy 6:5).

This is my favorite metaphor for the concept of sin in Scripture. Over many decades as a pastor, I have encountered two kinds of people who need to hear this biblical definition of sin. There are those who say they are offended when I preach and teach that they are sinners. They believe sinners rob banks, commit

adultery or murder. Since they do not do these terrible things, they are shocked when I tell them they are a sinner.

Their problem is with their definition of sin. When they understand God’s definition of sin - the concept that we are sinners because we fall short of the standards God has set for His people - they will realize that they are a sinner even though they do not do those things they associate with sinners. They are a sinner because they fall short of doing what they were created to do: glorify God in every thought, word and deed all day long, every day they live.

The other person who needs this definition is the person who believes they have experienced what they consider to be “sanctification.” To them, sanctification means that they never sin, nor will they ever sin again because they have had an experience called “sanctification” (1 John 1:8-10). They have a problem because of their definition of sanctification. As I have already observed in my commentary on the greeting with which Paul begins this letter, Paul calls the Corinthians “sanctified” and then he labels a long litany of sins in their church. This teaches us that being sanctified does not mean sinless perfection.

They also have a problem because of their definition of sin. They need to realize that sin is falling short of the standard God and Jesus set when they taught that we should be perfect (Matthew 5:48; Genesis 17:1). If this person claims that they no longer sin, nor will they sin again, they probably also define sin as stealing, committing adultery, murder or worse. When they accept the definition of sin

Paul presents in this passage, they will realize that to claim they do not sin is to claim they are perfect.

When Jesus fulfilled the Law of God by teaching the spirit of those laws of Moses on that mountaintop in Galilee, He raised the Law of God so high that the Law of God breaks every one of us, and shuts our mouth, except to pray the sinner's prayer and plead for the mercy of God (Matthew 5:17-48). The Good News is that when we do, Jesus tells us we can go to our homes, justified, - declared righteous by God (Luke 18:10-14).

All Men Can Be Justified by Faith

Paul quickly returns to the Good News, which is the thrust and purpose of this inspired statement of the theology of the New Testament Church. When we study these first four chapters carefully we realize that Paul is presenting a plan of God by which sinners can be declared by God to be just-as-if-they had never sinned.

God is the Author of this plan. This is obvious in all that Paul writes in these first four chapters. In the eighth chapter Paul states bluntly that, "It is God Who justifies." (8:33) The sacrifice of Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God is the foundation of this plan (3:25; 4:25). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the guarantee that the One Who died on that cross was the Lamb of God Who died for the sins of the world (4:25).

Faith is the principle by which we apply the miracle of justification to our own personal sins (3:28, 30). Faith is such an important dimension of our justification that Paul devotes most of the fourth chapter of this letter to the example of Abraham – the Father of Faith. When God wants to communicate a great idea, He wraps that concept in a person. God considers faith an important concept. Therefore, God devotes a dozen chapters in the Book of Genesis to tell us the story of Abraham because he is a walking definition of faith.

In the New Testament, when the inspired authors want to tell us about faith, before they have written two sentences, they nearly always write the name Abraham. This Old Testament character is mentioned in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament character.

The grace of God is the source of our being declared righteous by God (3:24). The glorious truth that the grace of God is the source of our justification is also illustrated by the life of Abraham. When we read that Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness, Paul explains that this word means that the righteousness was given and not earned or in any way merited by Abraham.

Later, in the ninth chapter, Paul will use Jacob as an example of grace. Grace is the work of God in us and for us, without us, or without any help from us. The mercy of God withholds from us what we deserve, while the grace of God lavishes on us salvation and all

kinds of blessings we do not deserve, or in any way achieve by our own self-efforts. Paul writes here that we will not find the source of our salvation in any works or worth of our own, but simply in the grace of God.

Works are the evidence that validate true faith (2:6-10). According to James, the faith that saves us always works (James 2:14-26). Someone has said: “Faith alone can save, but the faith that saves is never alone.” We are saved by a faith that is always accompanied and validated by good works. Although the thrust of this letter is that we are justified by faith and not by works, observe the emphasis in this letter, and in all the inspired letters of Paul, on the important place of works in the faith journey of a believer (2:6-10).

According to Paul sinners are never saved by good works however, we are saved for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). There is a very strong emphasis in all the writings of Paul that we are not saved nor can we maintain our salvation by good works. This is also the thrust and the theme of this letter and his letter to the Galatians.

In Summary

God is the Author of a plan whereby He can declare sinners to be just as righteous as if they had never sinned. The cross of Jesus Christ is the basis of this plan. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the guarantee that Jesus was God’s only begotten Son when He suffered and died on the cross to redeem us. The grace of God is the source

of God’s plan to sacrifice His Son for our salvation. Faith is the principle by which we personally apply this miraculous plan of justification to our sins and our salvation. Works do not save us, but they are the validation of the authentic faith that does save us.

After Paul presents the heart of this plan in the third chapter, he asks a question: “Where is boasting?” He is still addressing an imaginary Jew who is proud of the fact that God has given him the Law and that he is keeping that law. As a proud Pharisee, Paul himself was once guilty of this kind of self-righteous pride (Philippians 3:4-9).

Like Jesus, much of Paul’s teaching here is directed to the religious leaders of the Jewish people. His answer to his own question is that when we understand this plan of God for declaring us righteous, there is absolutely no place for boasting. That is why this apostle writes to the Galatians: “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 6:14)

As a former Rabbi he concludes this third chapter asking and answering questions again: “Is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of the Gentiles also?” He concludes that what he labels as “The Law of Faith” is the plan of God for justifying you and me, Jews, Gentiles and every person on earth.

His concluding thought is that justification by faith does not make void the Law of God. The Law of faith by which God justifies Jew and Gentile, establishes the Law of God. His concluding statements about the Law are an echo of the words of his Lord, Who

told us on that mountaintop in Galilee that He had not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill the essence of what the Law and the Prophets teach us (Matthew 5:17).

Chapter Six

“The Walking Definition of Faith”

When God wants to convey a great idea, He packages that idea in the life of a person. As I have already observed, in the first book of the Bible, God wants us to understand the concept of faith. Therefore, he introduces us to this remarkable man named Abraham. When we meet him, his name is Abram, which means, “Father of many sons.” However, he is seventy-five years old and he does not have any sons. Imagine this old man introducing himself as “Father of many sons.” People would probably say, “How many sons do you have old man?”

Then imagine him explaining that he had no sons at all, but if you could number the stars in the sky, or the grains of sand on the beaches of this world, then you would have an idea of what his descendants would number one day. If they asked him how he knew that would be, he would have replied, “God told me!”

Stretch your imagination even further and think of those people seeing him again a few years later and asking him, “Abram, do you have any sons yet?” He would reply, “Since I saw you last, God has changed my name from Abram to Abraham, which means, Father of nations of sons!” When they would respond, “Well, you must have had a son then.” He would again reply, “No, as a matter of fact I have not. But ...” then he would repeat the promises of God about the stars and the sand and his nations of descendants.

The miracle is that every Jew, every Arab who is a Muslim, and every Christian in this world considers Abraham to be their father. Do you see why the authors of the Scriptures mention the name Abraham when they are trying to teach us about faith?

In my survey of the Book of Genesis, I write that in the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis, God records the beginning of the universe, the earth, man, woman, marriage, family, sin, conflict, judgment, languages and the ancient nations God considers important enough to mention. The other thirty-eight chapters of Genesis record three character studies because God knows that people are interested in people and we learn important concepts when He packages those concepts in the lives of human beings.

Faith is the important concept God packages in the life of Abraham. As we read the book of Romans this masterpiece of Paul, which is all about justification by faith, we can see why God would prioritize so much space in Scripture to tell us about the man who shows us what faith is all about. Faith is man finding and trusting

God and God finding man. If you will consult my survey of the Book of Genesis, you will find that I trace what we learn about faith as we read about how God finds Abraham and Abraham finds the God Who is seeking and finding him.

As the Apostle Paul finds his walking definition of faith in Abraham, he focuses one of the most dramatic appearances of God to this man when he was nearly one hundred years old. God has just changed his name and repeated again His promise about the descendants of Abraham being like the stars and the sand. On the occasion of this appearance of God to Abraham, God showed Abraham, in a graphic and dynamic way, that his God was in covenant with him.

Law enforcement did not exist where Abraham walked out most of his journey of faith. In those days, the survival of a wealthy man like Abraham depended on his being in covenant, or having a treaty with other men with wealth and power similar to his. The only protection a man like Abraham had against bandits or enemies was to be in a covenant relationship with another man who could quickly bring the forces of those he employed to fight a common enemy.

When they entered into such a covenant, they had an elaborate ceremony, which was made official by a covenant walk and a seal of the covenant they were pledging to each other. The ceremony began with them standing opposite one another with a sacrificed animal between them. The covenant walk took place when each of them individually walked through the sacrifice, moved in a

circle in one direction, then passed through the sacrifice again and moved in a circle in the opposite direction. The pattern of their covenant walk was like the figure eight.

While they were doing the covenant walk, a sword was heating in a fire nearby. They sealed their covenant when they applied the red-hot sword to the inside of their wrists. This obviously burned a scar they would bear for life. The custom of waving can be traced to this ancient covenant seal. When potential enemies saw a covenant scar, they knew such a person was in covenant with someone of power equal to or greater than his own. If they attacked him, they must also fight the one who was in a covenant relationship with him.

All the appearances of God to Abraham, where God promised Abraham that his descendants would be so numerous, were a covenant God was making with Abraham. In the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, God repeats the covenant promise to Abraham and then commands him to prepare a sacrifice. He then puts Abraham into a deep sleep.

When God wakes him from this sleep, Abraham sees a torch moving above the sacrifice he has prepared which is following the figure eight pattern of a covenant walk. Through this awesome metaphor, God is saying to Abraham, "I am in covenant with you!" It is then that we read the verse Paul quotes from the account of this experience: "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6, 22, Romans 4:3)

The story of this man as it is recorded in Genesis covers about twenty-five years of his life. We need to remember that God wants us to read that entire story and then realize that the whole story is recorded to show and tell us the definition of one word: faith.

Paul is only focusing one verse from this remarkable story, which proclaims, that when Abraham saw the supernatural torch moving through that sacrifice, he believed God! He did not believe in God. He believed God. His God was telling him something and he believed God who was communicating with him. When God saw that Abraham believed Him, He made the declaration that He was accounting the belief of Abraham, to Abraham for righteousness.

The Primary Application

The primary application Paul is making about the faith of Abraham in this chapter is, when God saw that Abraham believed Him, God declared Abraham to be righteous. As he makes this application, the Apostle Paul is illustrating and applying the truth of the first four chapters of his letter. He has told us in these chapters what God has done in and through Christ and what God wants you and me to do about it. God wants us to believe Him when He tells us what He has done through Jesus Christ.

Paul is using the life and faith of Abraham to show us what it means to believe God when we hear what God has done for us through Jesus. Essentially, Paul is telling us that God looked on Abraham, smiled and said, “I have told this old man something and

he believes Me. I like that! I am going to declare him righteous because I told him something and he believes Me.”

This letter is all about justification, which is the miracle of God declaring sinners to be righteous. Paul is making an application to his teaching of justification by faith by presenting this example of the faith of Abraham. That application is that when we hear the Good News that God will declare us to be righteous simply because we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we must believe God even as Abraham believed God and God gave him the gift of righteousness.

Paul goes on to write that when we do that, we are experiencing and expressing the same kind of faith Abraham had when he believed God and God declared him to be righteous. Anyone who believes as Abraham believed is one of the children of Abraham. When we believe the Gospel of justification Paul is proclaiming in this letter, we become “spiritual Jews”.

He continues to address the Jews who are like the Saul of Tarsus he once was when he makes the observation that God declared Abraham righteous before he was circumcised: “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.” (11, 12)

Circumcision was the seal of the covenant between God and Abraham. However, just as baptism does not save us but is the seal of our faith covenant of salvation with God, Paul emphasizes the point that circumcision did not earn the righteousness of Abraham for him, or for any of his descendants.

He makes this same point when he explains the meaning of the word that tells us this righteousness was “accounted” to Abraham. According to Paul, the word does not mean the righteousness was earned or deserved like wages for an honest day of work. It means precisely the opposite. This righteousness was a gift, freely bestowed on Abraham because he believed God.

Paul then makes the connection between God’s covenant promises to Abraham, regarding his descendants being as the stars and sand, and the glorious reality that all those who believe the Gospel of justification by faith are the children of Abraham. The fact that Abraham was promised that he would be the father of many nations when he was not circumcised means that he did not earn his righteousness through circumcision. Paul believes the promise was also made to Abraham then because it pictured the reality that he was to be the father of the uncircumcised, or Gentiles who believe God when God tells them what He has done for them through Christ.

He writes this same truth to the Galatians (Galatians 3:6-9). Essentially, Paul means that the same God Who gave faith to Abraham gives the gift of faith to those who believe the Gospel (Ephesians 2:8,9; Philippians 1:29). He may also mean, that just as

the Jews were chosen by God to be the stewards of His Messiah and His Word, He has chosen those of us who believe today to be the stewards of His written Word and the Living Word, the risen, Living Jesus Christ (John 15:16; Ephesians 1:4).

The conclusion of this inspired and logical presentation of how God declares sinners like you and me to be righteous, which we have considered in these first four chapters is actually found in the first verse of the fifth chapter when Paul writes: “Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This reminds us of the principle of Bible study that we should not let chapter divisions interrupt our train of thought or the inspired logic of a writer like the Apostle Paul. Someone has said that when we are reading the writings of the Apostle Paul, every time he uses the word “therefore”, we must stop and see what it is there for. This word introduces a conclusion or an important step in the logic of the truth he is teaching. Chapter Five begins with that word and should cause us to look back at the last thing he wrote before he wrote the word “therefore”.

The argument or teaching of this masterpiece of Paul’s actually began in the sixteenth verse of the first chapter where he declared that he was not ashamed of the Gospel. He then wrote that seventeenth verse that started a theological revolution in the heart of Martin Luther that led to the Protestant theological reformation of Europe and the entire world.

When he began this theological treatise about justification, he not only declared that two things are revealed in the Gospel he is not ashamed of but eager to preach in Rome: the righteousness of God and the wrath of God toward all unrighteousness. He also wrote that this righteousness is “from faith to faith” before he quoted the great sermon of Habakkuk: “The just shall live by faith!” (Romans 1:17; Habakkuk 2:4)

He was declaring bluntly and in a very concise way the theological statement he developed in depth in these first four chapters: that this righteousness, which is revealed in the Gospel, is a righteousness that is acquired and experienced, by faith. He literally writes: “from faith which leads to more faith.” As I have already observed, He will write in his other letters that this faith is given to us by God (Ephesians 2:8,9; Philippians 1:29). Paul learned from Jesus that faith is a gift from God (Matthew 13:11-17).

Remember that it was the truth of righteousness by faith in this verse that spoke so dynamically to the heart of Martin Luther, because he had been trying, and the church had been teaching that it was possible and necessary to earn salvation by good works. We need to hold this righteousness by faith truth in perspective all the way through these first four chapters.

We have seen that he presents a comprehensive plan whereby God declares sinners to be righteous. That plan involves the cross of Christ, His resurrection, the grace of God, faith and even the good works, which validate authentic faith. However, observe that like an

inspired lawyer presenting his case before a court of law, he seals his presentation in the fourth chapter with the example of Abraham. That is his way of reinforcing the closing thoughts of the third chapter – that the righteousness revealed in the Gospel is acquired by faith and not by works.

The last point Paul makes in this justification by faith presentation is expressed in those opening words of Chapter Five: “Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The second verse in that fifth chapter introduces the next four chapters of this magnificent masterpiece. I will reserve my commentary on that verse for my next booklet.

Personal Application

At the beginning of this booklet, in my approach to and overview of this letter of Paul to the Romans, I challenged you to pray that God will speak to you while you are studying this book of the New Testament with me. As He has spoken to people like Luther, Augustine, Wesley and so many others through this profound letter of Paul, may I ask if God has revealed to you personally this glorious truth that you cannot possibly add anything to what Jesus finished on the cross for your salvation? Has God made you know what He is, what He condemns, what He knows, what He has done and what He wants you to do?

God is righteous. God condemns unrighteousness. God knows that you could never in a million years of doing good works

be righteous enough to save yourself. That is why God sent His only begotten Son to a cross to die for you. When He tells you through Paul in this inspired letter what He has done, God wants you to believe Him.

When He told Abraham something, Abraham believed Him. God, therefore, declared Abraham to be righteous. In these first four chapters of this letter of Paul, God is telling you something. God is telling you that your faith in the death of Jesus Christ - Who offered up Himself on the cross for you as the Lamb of God - is the only basis on which He can declare you to be righteous. Do you believe what God is telling you?

As I conclude this booklet, I invite you to use your imagination and compare salvation by being a good person, to our ability to swim the entire Ocean, from the coast of America, all the way to Europe. Immoral people would not even get off the beach and into the surf. People with average integrity would get off the beach and perhaps many meters from the shore into the ocean. Extremely moral and good people, like Gandhi, would be like extremely good swimmers who might actually swim for a few kilometers. However, they would drown from exhaustion while they were still a very long way from Europe.

Paul wrote to the Galatians, that if we could be justified by our own good works that would mean Jesus died on His cross for nothing. (Galatians 2:20, 21) When Jesus sweat as it were great drops of blood, He prayed, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass

from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:39) He was essentially asking His Father, that if there was any other way to accomplish the salvation of the world without sending Him to the cross, to please accomplish salvation that way.

The Father in effect answered that there was no other way and He sent His Son to die on the cross. Is it not then unthinkable that we would say to God that He should not have sent His Son to the cross because we could have saved ourselves by our good works?

Anyone who believes in salvation by works must answer at least three questions: How do you know when you have done enough good works to be saved? How can you ever be sure of your salvation, and if you could save yourself by your good works, why did Jesus die on the cross?

As Abraham believed what he was told by God and was given the righteousness that is by faith, do you believe God will declare you righteous if you believe what God has told you in these first four chapters of this letter of Paul to the Romans? On the authority of these inspired words Paul wrote to the "First Church of Rome", God has told you that He will declare you righteous if you will believe what He is telling you. Are you ready to believe God and be justified, by faith?

If so, I invite you to pray – talk to God, as I did years ago. "Loving heavenly Father, I confess that I am a sinner and I trust Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be my Savior. I place my complete trust in His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead for the forgiveness

of every one of my sins. I now forsake and turn away from all my sins. I want to reconcile my divorce from You. Right here and right now, I declare by faith that Jesus Christ is my Lord and my Savior, and I surrender my life, unconditionally, to His control and direction. Bring my life into perfect alignment with that great design You have always willed for my life. Help me as I follow Your Son, Jesus Christ, to rely on His power and authority and to live to exalt Him, and for Your glory. Thank You for providing this great and eternal salvation for me. Amen.”

If you have prayed this prayer, I invite you to write us and let us know and then become involved in a local church that believes and teaches the Word of God.

If you have already believed God and are a follower of Christ, I challenge you to be like Paul and share the Good News with everyone that they can also be declared righteous and enjoy eternal peace with God.