

Chapter One
“Introduction to Living Right”

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

BOOKLET Thirty

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

VERSE BY VERSE

(PART 2)

Romans 5 - 8

This is the second booklet in a series of four that provide notes for those who have heard our radio broadcasts that teach the letter of Paul to the Romans, verse-by-verse. If you do not have the first of these booklets, I encourage you to contact us and we will send you one. If you want to be instructed yourself, or teach this study of Romans to others, for continuity and perspective you will need that first booklet. Although in this series of radio programs I teach Paul’s letter to the Romans verse-by-verse, in my first booklet I summarized the first four chapters of this letter, and in this one I summarize the second four chapters (5 – 8) of this theological masterpiece of Paul.

In the first four chapters of this letter, Paul relates justification to the sinner. He concludes that all of us are sinners, but he follows that bad news with the Good News that God has justified, or declared righteous, all who will believe Him when He reveals what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. The conclusion of his first four chapters is actually found in the opening verse of Chapter Five: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the second four chapters of this letter, Paul relates justification to those who have been declared righteous by their faith in what Jesus Christ did for them on the cross. Sinners who have been declared righteous by God are no longer to live like sinners, but

they are to live right. How do we do that? Was our sin nature removed when we trusted Jesus Christ to be our Savior? Where can we find the dynamic power to live righteous lives, or to live right?

Paul answers those questions in the next four chapters and he begins his answer in the second verse of Chapter Five, when he writes: “Through Whom also we have access, by faith, into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” By faith we are justified through Jesus Christ. And by faith we have access into the grace that makes it possible for us to stand in, for, and with Jesus Christ. When we learn how to do that, then in this sinful world, without being a slave to sin, we can live a life that glorifies God.

In our first study, as summarized in our first booklet, we learned that the Gospel is two facts about Jesus Christ: His death and His resurrection. By faith in the first fact of the Gospel we are justified and reconciled to a state of peace with God. When Paul writes that we have access by faith into grace, he is directing us to place our faith in the second fact of the Gospel, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The word Paul wrote here that is translated as “grace” is the word “charis” in the Greek language. The grace of God is not only the blessing and favor of God we do not deserve, earn, or achieve by our own efforts. The grace of God is the life and power of God at work in us and through us. When grace is working in and through us, the Greek word used is “charisma”.

Amazing Grace

In another wonderful verse about grace from the pen of the Apostle Paul, we read: “God is able to make *all* grace *abound* toward *you*, that *you*, *always* having *all* sufficiency in *all* things, might *abound* unto *every* good work” (italics for emphasis). This is the most emphatic verse in the Bible about the grace God has made available to His people (II Corinthians 9:8).

According to Paul, God is able to make all grace (not a little bit of grace), abound (not stingily given), toward you (not only to Billy Graham, the pastor, and the missionary, but toward you), that you (Paul repeats that for emphasis), always (not just sometimes), having all sufficiency (not just some sufficiency), in all things (not just some things), may abound (not simply do ok), unto every good work (not only some good works).

In summary: *All* grace, *abounding*, *always*, *all* of you, I mean *all* of you, *all* sufficiency, *all* things, *always*, *abounding* in *all* the good works God wants to do through you! The New Testament church turned the world right side up because they believed and experienced the truth Paul was proclaiming in this extraordinary verse about God’s amazing grace.

Is This Grace Available to Believers Today?

I once heard Dr. A. W. Tozer – a great Bible teacher - say, “When you read your New Testament and then look at our churches today, you cannot help but allow the thought that God is guilty of

false advertising in the New Testament.” Since all those superlatives Paul used in the verse I have referenced above are true, how can we explain the pathetic lack of dynamic charisma in our churches today?

I once heard a pastor say, “When the Lord returns, my congregation will be the first to be resurrected, because the New Testament says, ‘The dead in Christ will rise first!’” Another pastor, who was confronting the same lack of spiritual dynamic in his congregation, profiled the spiritual impotence of his people this way: “Ready, get set (in concrete), and never go.”

God told the Apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you.” It seems appropriate, in light of the “spiritual anemia” in many of our churches today, to follow that statement with the question, “True or false?” We must conclude that grace is available to us today, but we are not accessing that grace. Perhaps we do not know how to access the grace of God today. Or, could it be that we do not believe in the grace of God today?

Paul begins the second four chapters of this letter by writing that people who have been declared righteous can live right if they have the faith to access the grace of God. He writes that if they have the faith, and they know how to access the grace of God, they can stand in and for Christ in a sinful world. Then they can rejoice in the hope of living a life that glorifies God. This introduces the theme of the next four chapters, which is essentially all about how sinners, who have been declared righteous by God, are to access the grace of God so they can live right and glorify God.

Rejoice in Your Suffering

He gives us his second insight into the how of accessing the grace of God when he exhorts the believers in Rome - and you and me - to rejoice in our sufferings. Now why would he exhort us to rejoice in tribulation or suffering? And what does rejoicing in our suffering have to do with accessing the grace of God?

Paul wrote that we should rejoice in our suffering because God sometimes uses our suffering to drive us to access the grace described and prescribed in that great verse he wrote to the Corinthians. That grace is available to every authentic disciple of Jesus Christ.

How must our God feel when He sees us struggling to live as we should in this world knowing that He has provided us with a way to access all the grace we need, and we are not accessing that grace? Having written that we can access the grace of God by faith, when for the second time he exhorts us to rejoice, Paul informs us of a second way to access God’s grace. We are to rejoice because His grace equips us to glorify Him by living right, and we are to rejoice when God uses suffering to make us an offer we cannot refuse.

There are levels or degrees of suffering we simply cannot endure without the grace of God. When our suffering drives us beyond the limits of any human resources we can within ourselves, these times of severe testing become God’s opportunity to provide His grace to us. A devout hymn writer expressed that truth this way:

“He gives us more grace when the burden grows greater.
He sends us more strength as the labors increase.
To added affliction He adds His great mercy.
To multiplied sorrow His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance;
When our strength has failed and the day is half done.
When we have exhausted our human resources
Our Father’s full giving has only begun.

His love has no limit.
His grace has no measure.
His power has no boundary known unto men.
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He gives, and He gives and He gives yet again.”

When we experience that grace we should rejoice in the suffering that drove us to make that discovery. In the next three verses, Paul describes this process: “And not only that, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Who was given to us.” (3-5)

In these verses Paul is telling us that the will of God will

never lead us where the grace of God cannot keep us. However, the will of God frequently leads us where only the grace of God can keep us. That truth is often fleshed out in our experiences of suffering. Paul writes that our “suffering produces”. When we cannot endure our suffering and plead with God to give us the measure of grace we must have, a spiritual virtue is produced in us that is translated here as “perseverance”. The Greek word is “hupo-mone”. It is actually two words, which mean, “abide” and “under”.

There are times when we find ourselves in difficult places and when we cry out to the Lord for deliverance, He answers our prayer and delivers us from our difficult places. There are other times, however, when He does not deliver us but gives us the grace to abide under the pressures and stresses of our difficulties.

Paul asked the Philippians to pray that he would be delivered from prison and he was delivered. However, Paul had a problem he described as “a thorn in the flesh”, which I am convinced was a health problem. In the Greek, Paul literally tells the Galatians that his eye problem was so hideous to see, it made them want to spit out, or made them nauseous. When he first entered Galatia, he was forbidden by the Spirit to enter Asia. At that juncture in his missionary journey, he was joined by his beloved physician Luke, who is writing the Book of Acts and changes his pronouns from “they” to “we.” (Galatians 4:15, 6:11; Acts 9:8, 18; 16:6, 10) He asked God three times to deliver him from this illness. God responded by telling Paul that He would not deliver him, but that He

would give him the grace to “abide under” the problem (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Paul knows from personal experience what he is describing and prescribing for these Roman believers.

He writes that it works this way: When God gives us the grace to cope with our problems a quality of perseverance develops in our character that becomes a vital dimension of who and what we are in Christ. They say an orange becomes an orange because it simply stays in place until it is an orange. According to Paul, this special level of perseverance produces character and character produces hope. He then writes that hope does not disappoint. He actually wrote that, “Hope will not be put to flight.” (Romans 5:5) He means that a disciple with this proven character will not leave a difficult place the way John Mark left for home when they were persecuted on his first missionary journey (Acts 15:37-40).

While visiting missionaries on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan in 1977, I learned that one of the most important abilities the leaders of missionary societies seek in missionary candidates is what we might call, “stickability” – the ability to stay where God has placed you. Can you go to a foreign culture, like some of the missionary doctors I met in that difficult culture, and stay for fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five years? Can you live a Christ-like life there in such a way that your life will be a fragrance of Christ, an irrefutable statement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people who are hostile toward Christ and His followers?

Missionary societies are looking for candidates who have that

quality in their character, because they know that to be a fruitful, long-term, cross-cultural, missionary one of the abilities you must have is perseverance. Most missionary work is not a matter of preaching, but the challenge of living Christ in a cross cultural context until the people you desire to reach “see Christ in your mortal flesh,” to use the words of the greatest missionary in the history of the church (2 Corinthians 4:11).

He then describes the experience of a disciple who has been tested and approved by persecution when he writes that “The love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us. This may be another way of describing what Paul describes elsewhere as being filled with (controlled by) the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). This could also be what Jesus was describing in the last of His blessed attitudes when He pronounced a blessing on those who are persecuted for righteousness (Matthew 5:10).

Can you see why Paul would write that we should rejoice in our sufferings because suffering produces? Suffering produces perseverance, character, hope, (“stickability”), or the long suffering patience that will not quit and run from the difficult candlestick on which we have been strategically placed by the risen, living Christ to shine in a dark world. God then fills this kind of disciple with His love, which is the fruit, or evidence of the beautiful reality that the Holy Spirit is controlling the life of a disciple of Jesus.

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die;

yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” (Romans 5: 6-11)

Paul now briefly returns to his emphasis on the first fact of the Gospel when he writes that the love of God is extraordinary because God loved us in and through the death of Christ while we were ungodly, sinners, and the enemies of God. The awesome reality that God loved us (and loves us) through Christ makes it clear that we were and are totally unworthy of the love of God. Our lost condition magnifies and elevates the love of God not our goodness, nor that we deserve our salvation. This is why one of the root meanings of the word “grace” is “unearned favor”.

He now quickly returns to the second fact of the Gospel as he essentially asks the question: “If we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more will we be saved through the life of the risen, living Son of God?” He tells us why sinners like you and me must believe these two Gospel facts when he uses the word “reconciliation”.

The essential consequence of the reconciliation we have with God when we are justified by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is peace with God. For the third time Paul exhorts us to rejoice. He has exhorted us to rejoice because we can live lives that glorify God. We are to rejoice in our sufferings because they force us to access the grace of God. Finally, he exhorts us to rejoice because we have received reconciliation with our God.

Beginning with the twelfth verse, in the second half of this chapter Paul writes what can be one of the most difficult passages in all his writings. I am indebted again to Dr. David Stuart Briscoe for a simple but brilliant summary of this passage, which really is at the heart of the theology of the New Testament Church.

The Four Conquerors

According to my favorite Bible teacher, in this passage Paul is telling us about four conquerors. Each of these conquerors enters this world. They abound in this world until they reign or conquer. The first conqueror could be called “King Sin”. Paul does not give us a treatise on how sin entered, or enters our world or our lives. He simply acknowledges the harsh reality that sin and evil are here, and are very much present in our personal lives.

The origin of evil is a problem the theologians and philosophers have discussed for thousands of years. Those who are believers cannot explain how, or where evil came from if everything God created was good. The Bible is realistic enough to acknowledge

the reality of the existence of these powers, which are the enemies of God and all that is good, but does not clearly tell us why, or how God permitted them to be here.

The closest we come to an explanation is in the parable Jesus taught about wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30). Good seed is planted but this planted crop is sabotaged, probably at night, when someone who does not wish this farmer well plants tares or weeds that look exactly like wheat. When both grow together, it is impossible to tell one from the other. The question is asked and answered: “Did you not plant good seed in your field? Where did these tares come from?” The answer is: “An enemy has done this.”

I remind you again that like Moses in the Book of Genesis, Paul is not only telling it like it was. He is primarily presenting these four conquerors as they are today. Hold on to the flow of his argument - that he is teaching sinners who have been declared righteous how they can access the grace of God, by faith, and then live right in a sinful and decadent world.

He tells us that King Sin enters our world and our lives. His intention is to flourish in our lives and our world until he conquers and reigns over us. One great old pastor taught me, “You cannot co-exist with sin any more than you can co-exist with malignant cancer!” Every devout follower of Christ needs to know that sin is a conqueror. When sin entered this world or enters our lives, its intention was and still is to grow and flourish until it conquers and reigns over us.

The second conqueror Paul presents in this context is “King Death”. He will end the next chapter with the conclusion that sin pays us wages and the wages paid by sin is always death. When he uses the metaphor of death, he is including literal death but he means more than that. He is applying the label of death to all the negative consequences of sin in our world and in our lives. When King Sin enters our lives, he will always be accompanied and followed by King Death.

The ancient and inspired author of the Psalms declares that we must all eat the labor of our hands (Psalm 128:2). The poet tells us: “Soon or late, every man must sit down to a banquet of consequences.” Jesus strongly emphasized this same undeniable reality that every choice we make leads to consequences (Matthew 7:13-27). In this profound passage Paul is teaching the same truth when he declares that King Death always follows King Sin.

These first two conquerors could be labeled as the bad news. The third and fourth conquerors are the good news. The third Conqueror is King Jesus. The Gospel presented by Paul in this letter is that Jesus entered this world. He abounded in this world until He conquered sin, evil and Satan. One day Jesus will reign over His kingdom, which will have no end.

Jesus Christ is the greatest Conqueror this world has ever known. For two millennia He has been conquering the lives of people around the world. One day it will be known that He has conquered and reigned over people of every nation, ethnic origin,

race and color in this world. (Matthew 24:14, Revelation 5:9) According to the last Book of the Bible, one day Jesus will literally conquer as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Remember, the systematic argument Paul is presenting is that it is possible to access the grace of God that will give us the spiritual dynamic to live right, as people who have been declared righteous ought to live. The most dynamic truth in the New Testament is the Good News, that the same Jesus Who entered this world to save us from our sins - since He been raised from the dead - as the living Christ can enter your life today.

When Jesus entered this world and when He enters our lives today, He wants to abound until He reigns in your life and mine (Romans 5:17). He declared that He came that we might have life and that we might have life more abundantly (John 10:10). This should raise some questions in your heart and mine: Have I been justified by faith in Jesus Christ? Am I still conquered regularly by King Sin, and his “twin” King Death? Am I continuously eating a ‘banquet of consequences’ that shows me and those who know me that I still being defeated by these two Kings?”

If you are still being continually defeated by sin and its consequences, then you are ready to hear the Good News (Gospel) about the fourth conqueror in this great statement with which Paul opens his treatise about how to live right. The fourth conqueror is “King You”. Having told us about these other three conquerors, Paul writes: “For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the

one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:17)

There is so very much more truth in this profound passage that I will not have the space to exposit here. The important truth to gain from this great passage is that it is possible for us to enter into Christ, abound in Christ, reign in Christ and be victorious over sin and death.

The beautiful metaphor of these four conquerors begins this second section of four chapters, which are all about how we can conquer these two Kings of Sin and Death, enter into life in union with Christ and reign in life through our relationship with Him. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight will develop this teaching in a profound and comprehensive way. He will conclude in Chapter Eight by proclaiming that we can be super conquerors in and through Him Who loved us! (37)

He concludes this teaching of the four conquerors by relating the sin of Adam, through which we were all made sinners, to the work of Christ, through which all who believe are made righteous.

“Therefore, as through one man’s offense (Adam) judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act (Jesus) the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” (18, 19)

The sin of Adam resulted in judgment and the condemnation of death, while the righteous act of Jesus Christ resulted in the free gift of justification and life for those who are the children of Abraham, because they have the faith to believe God when He tells them what He has done for them in Christ.

Paul then summarizes his teaching to this point by writing, that when the Law of God entered the world through Moses, since the function of the Law always was and is to make us aware of our sin, in that sense the Law caused the offense to abound. However, the Good News was and is that when sin abounded, grace abounded even more: “Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign, through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (20, 21)

The reign of sin led and leads to death, but the reign of grace led and leads to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul will develop this truth more in Chapter Six, and he will conclude the teaching he begins here at the end of the sixth chapter with these words: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” (23)

Chapter Two

“Two Kinds of Slaves”

(6:1-23)

How do people live, who have been declared righteous by faith in what Jesus Christ has done for them? How should we expect people who have been declared righteous to live? Where do they find the dynamic to live that way? That is the theme of the fifth, through the first part of the eighth chapter of this theological masterpiece.

Perspective on Chapter Six

As we approach this chapter, there is one verse that should be placed alongside the metaphors Paul uses here: “I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.” (19) There is also a truth that focuses the theme of the chapter and the entire chapter should be studied in the context of this truth: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body ... for sin shall not have dominion over you.” (12, 14)

Relate the first verses of this chapter to the last thoughts of Paul in the fifth chapter. Since he finished the previous chapter writing that where sin abounded grace abounded so much more, he begins the sixth chapter with a question he imagines his readers might want to ask him: “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” His answer is, “Of course not!” He then begins using

metaphors, which illustrate his emphatic answer to that question.

His first metaphor is that of baptism. This illustration of Paul is interpreted in two ways. Those who believe immersion is the correct form of water baptism, believe Paul is speaking here of the baptism Jesus commanded in His Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Paul writes in another letter that we are all baptized into Christ when we believe the Gospel (1 Corinthians 12:13). Many believe Paul is writing of our baptism into Christ in these verses. As is often the case, the answer is that it is not either/or, but both/and.

When we are justified by faith, although this is a mystery we do not fully understand, we are baptized into Christ. We are baptized into His death and His resurrection. As Paul told us in the fifth chapter, there is a very real sense in which we are all “in Adam”. We were in Adam when the first human being sinned. By that one man, and our identification with and in him, we all sinned. As long as we are only expressing our Adam nature, or our flesh, we are all guilty sinners who must be justified by faith.

That is what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus we are condemned already and that is why we must believe in Him (John 3:18). When that miracle happens to us, we are now in Christ, baptized into His death and His resurrection. As we were in Adam, we are now in Christ. That is why Jesus is called the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Water baptism, as commanded by Jesus, is merely a shadow of this deeper spiritual baptism. When we obey the Great

Commission of Jesus and are baptized, we are professing our faith in Jesus in the way Jesus commanded us to publicly profess our faith in Him.

But water baptism represents a deeper reality. Dead people do not sin. Paul knows we are not dead and that we still sin. He is merely using this as an illustration. If we were dead we would not sin. Where sin is concerned, even though we are not dead, we should act toward sin as if we were dead.

Water baptism by immersion beautifully parallels and illustrates what the apostle writes in this chapter. He identifies the one being baptized with the two basic facts of the Gospel: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we go down into the water, we are making our own, personal and public profession of faith in the death of Jesus for our salvation.

Our water baptism makes a deeper profession of faith in the death and resurrection of our Savior in a beautiful way. When we go down into the water, we are professing the commitment that we are dying to our old life of sin. When we come up out of the water, we are professing a commitment to live a new life in relationship with the risen, living Christ and the abundant life made possible by that relationship.

As Paul moves from the metaphor of baptism into the metaphor of the death and resurrection of Christ, and then challenges us to apply our identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus to our sin and our right living, remember the verse, which is the key

to understanding this chapter: “I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.” (19) This statement essentially means: “I am using human illustrations to help you understand spiritual truths I am teaching you.”

Jesus Christ was the greatest Teacher this world has ever known and He was the absolute Master of the use of parables and metaphors. Paul obviously learned that approach to teaching from the risen Christ, Who taught Paul in the Arabian desert, according to what Paul wrote to the Galatians (Galatians 1-2:10). This key verse to the metaphors of this chapter, is simply making the statement that Paul is following in the footsteps of the greatest Teacher this world has ever known by graphically and clearly illustrating his teaching.

There are some other words in this chapter that are keys to the way we should interpret and apply these illustrations of Paul to our struggle with sin. See verse five, where Paul writes that we are to be in the likeness of His death and resurrection. And in verse eleven, where he writes: “So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus.” The Greek word Paul used here, which is translated as “consider,” is given suggested alternate readings by scholars, which essentially read: “In the same way consider yourselves as dead to the appeal and power of sin, but alive to God through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This is very important for you and me as we study this chapter. Paul is not literally telling us that we are dead. A dead person does not sin and a dead person is never tempted to sin. If we

were dead, sin would be no problem to us whatsoever. Our problem is that we are not dead to sin. Paul is teaching that we should respond to sin and the temptations to sin as we would if we were dead.

A pedestrian who had been drinking too much was the first person to arrive at the scene of an automobile accident. A man who had been injured in the accident was rolling on the side of the road and saying, “Call me an ambulance! Call me an ambulance!” The drunk pedestrian responded: “So, you are an ambulance!” When we confront the temptations to sin, Paul is challenging you and me to say to ourselves, “Call me a dead person!”

Like many others, when I was converted, I will never forget how those who were my sinner friends were sad when I announced I would no longer join with them in that old life style. When I told one of them I had decided to study for the ministry, he told me he was grieving because it was almost as if I had died. He lamented: “And you had a good personality!”

When I enrolled in a Christian University to study the Bible, I was blessed and encouraged in one of my first Bible courses by something Paul wrote to the Galatians at the conclusion of his letter to them. He made the declaration that because of the cross of Jesus Christ the world was crucified to him and he was crucified to the world. In other words, the cross made this world a dead thing to him and made him seem like a dead person to those who knew him in this world (Galatians 6:14).

One of the primary truths Paul is emphasizing here is a truth he emphasized in the second chapter. That truth is that we should never have a religious ceremony without the reality that is represented by that ceremony. Our baptism is to our profession of faith what circumcision was to the Jew. We must never, never reduce our ceremonial profession of faith through baptism to an empty religious trapping which has no real meaning in the reality of our faith in and experience of our living in the power of our risen Christ.

Let this perspective guide you as you interpret and apply the profound, inspired metaphors Paul uses throughout this chapter.

A Summary of What Paul Teaches in Chapter Six

The first truth Paul teaches in this chapter is illustrated by the metaphor of baptism. That truth is that we are to relate our going down into the water to the death and burial of Jesus, and leave our old life of sin in the water. We are to relate our rising out of the water to the resurrection of Jesus, and to the entirely new life we are to live that is free from sin (1-4).

This truth was actually introduced in the second verse of the fifth chapter where he wrote that we have access by faith into the grace that makes it possible for us to stand for Christ in this world, and live a life that glorifies God.

In the next seven verses (5-11), he reinforces this teaching by presenting a truth he often teaches in his letters: “Likewise you also,

reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (11) I call this truth, “The Gospel in Reverse.” Simply stated, the Gospel is, “Christ died that you might live.” The Gospel in reverse is simply, “Now it is your turn; you die (to your sinful desires and selfish ambitions), that Christ might live.”

Paul taught that same truth to the Galatians as his own experience in Christ: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

The following three verses are introduced with that important word, “therefore” as he writes:

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” (12-14)

Paul uses the word “therefore” to help us trace his inspired logic; he is obviously connecting these three verses with what he wrote about the Gospel in reverse. If we are to die to sin that Christ might live through us, but we are continuing in sin, Christ cannot live through us. That is unthinkable to this apostle. When we were under law we did not have the grace to live above sin. Since grace and truth came through Christ (John 1:17), we simply must not continue

to be under the dominion of sin because we now have the grace to live as we should.

He then comes to the heart of this chapter as he introduces the metaphor of slavery: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.” (6:15-19)

As I observed in my commentary on the greeting with which Paul begins this letter, when Paul wrote this letter half the people in Rome were slaves. To those like Paul who were born free, the very idea of being a slave was a horrible thought. The truth he dynamically and dramatically profiles by using this metaphor is that you are the slave of whoever or whatever you serve. If you are controlled by sin, you are the slave of sin.

If you have trusted Jesus Christ for your salvation and you have chosen to call Him your Lord, to then be the slave of sin is a

denial of your faith in Christ! (Luke 6:46) You should be the slave of Jesus Christ and His slave alone, which will make you free from the power of sin and death. That is why Paul introduces himself in his letters as the bond slave of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1).

“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (20-23)

In the last four verses of Chapter Six, he returns to that undeniable reality of consequences. Paul challenges them to think about that “banquet of consequences” that always resulted from their yielding the members of their bodies to be the slaves of sin. He reasons that when they served sin they were unable to serve righteousness. However, he challenges them to think of the fruit, or the consequences of the sins of which they are now ashamed. He labels those consequences as “death”.

In contrast to this death, he exhorts them to realize that the fruit or consequences of serving righteousness will lead to holiness and the eternal quality of life which Jesus Christ promises to bring to everyone who will trust Him as Savior, crown Him as their Lord and live out the Gospel in reverse – die to self and live for Christ.

Paul summarizes his profound teaching with that concluding verse in which he writes that sin always pays the same wages. Even in a world where inflation and markets fluctuate the value of the wages we receive and the wealth we accumulate, sin always pays the same wages. The bad news is “The wages of sin is death.” But the Good News is “The free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Chapter Three

“The Four Spiritual Laws of Paul”

(7:1 - 8:13)

When Paul writes this seventh chapter, he relates the challenge of conquering sin to himself and shares with us his own private journal of how he lost and won his battles with sin. As he begins this personal testimony of his own struggles with sanctification, he writes my favorite, and what is the favorite part of this letter for millions.

By way of introduction to this section of the letter, observe the emphasis of the apostle on the concept of law. Beginning in this chapter and continuing through the seventeenth verse of the eighth chapter, Paul presents “four spiritual laws”. As people who have been declared righteous, if we sincerely desire to live right, we

simply must understand these four spiritual laws we read in this spiritual journal Paul shares with us.

As you read the seventh and eighth chapters of this letter, carefully observe what Paul teaches about:

The Law of God,

The Law of Sin and Death,

The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ, and

The Law of the Mindset or Way of Thinking.

After presenting all those metaphors in the sixth chapter, Paul begins the seventh chapter with yet another metaphor: “Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband, is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

“Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another - to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to

what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” (1-6)

Spiritual Law Number One: The Law of God

Paul is now building on what he has written in this inspired, logical and comprehensive presentation of justification by faith. He has written that we all are under sin, because we all are under the Law of God, which shuts our mouths and shows us all that we are sinners.

Make the observation that before Paul shares the metaphor with which he begins this chapter, he admits that he knows he is writing to those who know the Law of God. This means that, as we saw in the second chapter, throughout this letter he is addressing the Jew. He is still thinking of those Jews with whom he met when he first arrived in Rome (Acts 28:17-29). When we read the first verses of the ninth chapter of this letter, we will understand why this apostle is always thinking of the Jew first, and then the Greek, when he writes, preaches, or teaches.

He now addresses people who are like he was when he was Saul of Tarsus. As a Pharisee of the Pharisees, Saul of Tarsus had dedicated every fiber of his being to keeping the Law of God. Pharisees like Saul of Tarsus get bad press in the Gospels. However, we should realize there was much that was good about the Pharisee. For example, they were formed to preserve the orthodoxy of the Jewish faith. They were the Jewish fundamentalists of the New

Testament period of Hebrew history. Pharisees as zealous as Saul of Tarsus memorized the - the Law of Moses, or the first five books of the Old Testament. Most Christians today have never even read the entire first five books of the Bible.

They were incredibly righteous people. Their righteousness was a legalistic, letter-of-the-law kind of self-righteousness that was opposed and confronted by Jesus and this apostle. They zealously obeyed the Law of God because they believed their salvation depended upon it. However, they were very self-righteous people and many of them were very good people.

As you read the four Gospels, observe the love and patience of Jesus as He reaches out to Pharisees like Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and those with whom He is locked in dialog, even though that dialog becomes hostile. The greatest example of the love of Jesus for Pharisees is the conversion of this apostle on the road to Damascus. When the risen Christ chose the greatest missionary the church has never known, He chose the Pharisee of the Pharisees.

In a biographical passage, which he wrote to the Philippians, he shared with them that he considered his commitment to keeping the Law as garbage, because as a Pharisee, he believed keeping the Law would bring him salvation. As he wrote to the Church in Philippi, Paul denounced that commitment forcefully. Yet he had great compassion for those self-righteous Jews who were zealous in their love for the Law of God. In this letter to the Romans, he is now addressing those who have that same level of commitment to keeping

the Law of God.

What is their relationship to the Law of God once they realize they cannot be justified by keeping that Law? The answer to that question is found in the metaphor with which Paul begins this chapter.

When David profiled the blessed man in his Psalms, he wrote that the blessed man delights in, or loves the Law of God (Psalm 1:2). The longest Psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible, was obviously written by someone like Ezra who had a great love for the Law of God (Psalm 119).

When devout Jews who loved the Law of God realized the Law could not save them, they grieved like a widower who had lost his life companion. Paul therefore presents this inspired and brilliant metaphor, which reminds them that when a man loses his spouse, he is free to marry again. Now that they have lost their “spouse” (the Law), they are free to be “married” to another. Paul writes that if they believe what he is presenting, they are now to be “married” to their risen, living Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Personal Application

What is the personal and devotional application for those in Rome and those reading this letter today? In principle, this teaching applies to anyone who has always trusted someone or something for salvation, which they learn from their study of this theological masterpiece, will not and cannot save them.

There is an illustration in the Gospel of John that profiles such people. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, there was a great multitude of weak, sick and crippled people lying in the porches around the Pool of Bethesda. These people believed in a superstition. They believed that when the water rippled, the first one to get into the water would be healed. Jesus healed a man there because he had lost all hope of getting into that Pool. In my commentary on that story (in booklet #24), I compare the pathetic multitude, gathered around that superstition, to all those who are looking for salvation, or trusting anyone or anything but Jesus Christ for salvation.

Peter tells us there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) If you are trusting in anyone or anything but Jesus Christ for your salvation, you are looking to a “Pool of Bethesda” for salvation, and this metaphor with which Paul begins the seventh chapter of this letter applies to you.

When you believe what Paul has written in the first six chapters of this letter, what will you do without that which has been like a spouse to you? The answer is that you should consider that which cannot save you to be like a dead spouse, and you are to be married to another, even the risen, living Jesus Christ.

Another personal application is to realize that as Paul addresses the devout Jew throughout this letter, he is addressing all the nice, or good people who are trusting in their goodness for

salvation. There are many people in this world who believe salvation is based on our doing the best they can and living their lives without hurting anybody. If you are one of those who are trusting personal integrity, goodness, or self-righteousness for your salvation, then this metaphor applies to you.

In my commentary on the third and fourth chapters of this letter, I raised questions you must answer, like this question: “How can you know when you have done enough good?” And this question: “If you can save yourself, why did Jesus have to die on the cross?” Apply the thoughts Paul addresses to the Jews in this letter to yourself if you are one of those nice, moral people of integrity who believe that goodness is enough.

Jesus spoke in love toward a young man, who was very good and moral. We call him, “The Rich Young Ruler”. We read that looking at him and loving him, Jesus told him his moral integrity was not enough (Mark 10:21).

In the next five verses (7:8-12), Paul makes an important change in his writing style. He has been addressing those to whom he is writing using words like “you” and “my brothers”. Now he begins to relate what he is writing to himself and his own experience with the Law of God and his battle with sin.

Spiritual Law Number Two: The Law of Sin

Paul repeats for emphasis a truth he has already made clear: the purpose of the Law never was salvation, but to make us aware of

our sin and our need for salvation. According to Paul, the Law is like God’s straight edge, which He places next to our crooked lives and Paul would agree with James that the Law or Word of God is like a mirror in which we see our imperfections (James 1:23, 24).

Paul also writes that the law is like a harsh schoolmaster, which brings us to Christ. (Galatians 3:24) Paul again establishes the purpose and the value of the Law of God when he writes: “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.” (Romans 7:7-11)

He then comes to the conclusion that there is really nothing wrong with the Law of God. His problem and the problem we all have, is not with the Law of God. Our problem is with ourselves.

The prophet Jeremiah agreed with Paul when he essentially preached that if we want to know what and where the problem is, we should look in a mirror. Jeremiah consistently preached the impending judgment of God through the coming Babylonian Captivity. One paraphrase of the passage referenced above describes Jeremiah preaching: “When one of the people or priests asks you,

‘Well, Jeremiah, what is the sad news from the Lord today? You shall reply, ‘You are the sad news!’” (Jeremiah 23:33)

Paul writes his version of that sermon preached by Jeremiah: “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.” (12, 13)

Paul parallels Jesus in proclaiming that the Law of God is good if we interpret and apply that Law in alignment with the purposes of God for giving us His Law (Matthew 5:17-20). Jesus fulfilled the Law by passing the Law of God through the prism of the love of God before He applied the Law of God to the lives of the people of God. Paul did the same thing and called it “The Spirit of the Law.” (2 Corinthians 3:6) He is now focusing one of the purposes for which God gave us His Law - the Law of God reveals the Law of Sin.

True Confessions of A Pharisee

Paul now begins the most transparent, honest and helpful passage of Scripture on the subject of sanctification, or the victory over sin that has ever been written. Every believer struggles with this “King Sin” who wants to rule our lives until “King Death” destroys our lives. These verses clearly and practically show us how Paul applies the biblical teaching about sanctification to his life.

He is now summarizing and is at the very heart and soul of the teaching he began when he wrote that second verse of the fifth chapter: “Through Whom (meaning Christ) also, we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Remember, that is where the apostle began to tell the Roman believers - and you and me - how we can access the grace we need to live the way people who have been declared righteous should be expected to live.

Paul followed that opening verse with his exhortations to rejoice in everything that makes the grace of God accessible to us by faith, even the sufferings that force us to access the grace of God. That was followed by the metaphor of the four conquerors: King Sin, King Death, King Jesus and King you and me, when the Holy Spirit of God has come to control our lives and make us more the victorious. Then in the sixth chapter he used the metaphors of baptism, death, resurrection and slavery to convince us that sin should never control the life of a believer who has been declared righteous by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul now continues his systematic teaching on this theme with the teaching of his four spiritual laws. He vividly illustrates those laws with this transparent confession, in which he shares his personal struggle. Then he shares the keys to his victory, which can be ours too, as he determined that sin would not reign in his life. This theme can be found through verse thirteen of the eighth chapter and continues to the end of the eighth chapter, and it could even be

said to extend to the end of the eleventh chapter of this theological masterpiece.

As you read this transparent and honest biographical passage - which reads like an entry from the spiritual diary of the apostle - look for the four spiritual laws Paul profiles here. Also, remember that you are reading the spiritual journal of a man who loved the Law of God and probably tried harder than any man who ever lived to keep that Law.

“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

“Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.

“Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!” So

then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” (7:14-25)

The opening statement of Paul regarding his struggle to overcome sin relates to what he has learned about himself. He writes: “I am carnal, sold under sin.” This word “carnal” is a translation of the Greek word for “flesh”. He continues by telling us that in himself - that is in his flesh - there dwells no good thing.

Paul uses this word “flesh” frequently in his writings. It is therefore important for us to understand what he means when he uses this word. A famous Greek scholar and professor of Bible at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland believed the accurate definition of this word as Paul uses it should be: “Human nature, unaided by God.”

When the apostle concludes that no good thing dwells in his flesh, he means that nothing good dwells in his human nature when his human nature is unaided by God. We should add that those who live in the flesh, or their human nature without help from God, embrace and live by the values and philosophy of human nature that has no access to grace and the truth revealed and mandated in the Word of God.

This definition has very important practical applications for any believer who wants to live right because they have been justified by faith. When Paul looks into his own heart, he is honest and transparent about what he sees in his human nature. He not only finds nothing good. discovers a law, that when he desires to do what

is good, evil is present with him.

In other words, when he looked into his human nature, he discovered the Law of Sin. Paul agreed with what the Law of God told him to do and believed the Law of God was good. In fact, he loved the Law of God. He may have told himself, as an incredibly disciplined Pharisee that keeping the Law of God was simply a matter of will power. However, he is now telling us that because of this Law of Sin, he discovered that when he determined to obey the Law of God, he finally decided that the problem with his will power was that his will was consistently out of power.

He also concluded that the Law of Sin was at war with what he calls “The Law of His Mind”. He is bearing witness that his battle with sin was not won in the arena of his will power, or his great intellectual powers. After his desperate confession that he is a wretched man, he cries out for deliverance. He then declares that the battle with sin is a spiritual warfare and cannot be won by looking within. According to Paul, he and we will find nothing by looking within that will empower us to win our battles with sin. Our battles with sin will only be won when God adds a spiritual dimension to our human natures. This means that when we are justified by faith, the Law of Sin is not removed from our flesh.

As he moves into the next chapter, he will declare the very good news that when we are justified by faith, something spiritual, supernatural, and miraculous is added to our flesh. However, even after the miracle is added, we must still cope with the harsh reality of

the Law of Sin, which continues to be present with us as long as we live in these human bodies. When the risen, living Christ lives in our hearts through the miracle of the Holy Spirit, we will then discover, that He who is in us is greater than the one who drives the power of sin – the devil - and we will find our victory in Christ.

Romans Chapter Eight: The Victory!

Two More Spiritual Laws of Paul

As we move from the seventh to the eighth chapter of this letter, I remind you that when Paul wrote this letter it was not divided into chapters and verses. Very often, chapter divisions occur in the middle of a profound statement and that is the case here where Paul is writing and the chapter division interrupts the inspired logic of what he is teaching.

Observe the presence of that important word “therefore” as you begin reading the eighth chapter of this masterpiece. When you consider what it is there for, realize that this word connects what Paul is about to teach in the eighth chapter, with what he has been teaching. Obviously, the teaching he is going to present in the eighth chapter will continue what he presented in the metaphors with which he began the seventh chapter, through the transparent, honest way he let us see into the spiritual diary of his own personal struggles with sin which followed those metaphors, and especially the last words he was writing when he began this eighth chapter.

Also, look for the third and fourth spiritual laws as Paul

permits us to read more of his spiritual diary: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors - not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will

die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (8:1-13)

Spiritual Law Number Three:

The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus

There are three important truths in the opening sentence of this eighth chapter. Going all the way back to what Paul began teaching in the seventeenth verse of the first chapter, this “therefore” introduces the conclusion that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and do not walk according to their human nature, unaided by God, but according to the Spirit. Jesus and Paul taught that those who do not believe are condemned because they do not believe (John 3:18). They also both teach that faith - in the finished work of the Son of God for their personal salvation - removes their eternal condemnation.

Paul will also show later in this chapter that the living, risen Christ does not condemn us when we fail or fall short of the standard of glorifying God in every thought, word and deed. He is our perfect heavenly Father, and we are told, that like any good Father, He pities His children and remembers that we are merely dust (Psalm 103:14).

Can you imagine an earthly father teaching his child to walk, scolding, or even punishing his child when he stumbles and falls while learning to walk? Jesus made this same comparison when He taught that if we know how to give good things to our children, we should realize our heavenly Father certainly will give us the Holy

Spirit and a relationship with our God when we will ask Him (Luke 11:11-13). Such a Father will not condemn us when we fail.

Paul teaches a second important truth when he agrees with James that, “faith works” and “faith walks”. (James 2:14-26) Faith alone can save but the faith that saves is never alone. Those who are not condemned because they are justified by faith validate their faith by demonstrating that they are not walking according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. There is a difference between walking according to the flesh and being in the flesh. Walking according to the flesh is a choice that spiritual people make. Being in the flesh is the condition of the unspiritual or natural man without a relationship with God, who cannot even understand spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2:14).

A third truth Paul teaches in this opening sentence is found in these two words he uses nearly two hundred times in the New Testament. One of Paul’s favorite ways of describing justified sinners who have discovered this third spiritual law is to say that they are “in Christ”. By this designation he means that they are in Christ as a branch is in, or related to the vine, from which that branch derives the life that makes it possible for that branch to be fruitful (John 15:1-16).

Paul then introduces his third spiritual law when he writes: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” When he tells us what this third law can do, he returns to his second law and this time he adds two words to

that law. He calls it “The Law of Sin and Death”. This connects the four spiritual laws of Paul to the four conquerors he introduced in the fifth chapter. Remember, King Sin and King Death? The consequences of death always follow sin.

Just as the first two conquerors were the bad news and the third and fourth conquerors were the good news, the first two spiritual laws are the bad news and the third and fourth laws are the good news. The good news about this third law is that it sets us free from the law of sin and death. Picture a large commercial airplane roaring down a runway until it gains great speed and then lifts off the runway rising like an elevator while 375 passengers and many tons of luggage and equipment go soaring to an altitude of ten thousand meters.

On one occasion, I was preaching a sermon on this third spiritual law and I used this illustration. I confessed that I had no idea how the large jet airliners, in which I had traveled many times, could rise into the sky. A devout professor of physics who heard my sermon, later patiently explained to me how that happens.

His explanation was that while the huge airliner is roaring down the runway, its speed and the thrust of its engines make it possible for the law of aerodynamics to overcome the law of gravity. When the law of aerodynamics overcomes the law of gravity, the plane lifts into the sky and soars at 10 thousand meters for thousands of kilometers until it reaches its destination.

Now think of that second spiritual law, The Law of Sin and

Death, as a law of “spiritual gravity”, which holds us down and will not let us soar spiritually. When Paul introduces his third spiritual law, he is writing that the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus is like a law of “spiritual aerodynamics”, which lifts us up and soars us over the power and consequences of the Law of Sin and Death.

The good news of this third spiritual law has been part of the New Testament since it was written. Should we not then expect all justified believers to be soaring over the power and consequences of sin? What actually is the experience of many of the sinners who have been justified by faith and attend our churches?

Based on the observations of one who has been a pastor for nearly five decades, I am convinced that the honest and candid answer to that question is that too many of us, too much of the time, are like huge jet airliners sitting on the runways of life, with engines that are capable of overcoming the law of spiritual gravity, roaring for twenty, thirty, forty, or for the rest of our lives, without ever lifting off those runways! Why are we not soaring over all that is represented by The Law of Sin and Death with its very expensive price tags?

Spiritual Law Number Four:

The Law of the “Mind set” or Way of Thinking

We simply do not know how to implement the grace of God - or this third spiritual law if we do not understand the fourth spiritual law of this great apostle. Look for this fourth spiritual law as you

read these verses again: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (5-8)

The concept of a mindset, or way of thinking, is very important to athletes and to athletic teams. Very often the best team does not win a World Cup Championship or Olympic Gold Metals. The team or the individual athlete with the best mindset often wins.

Diplomats, who have awesome challenges of avoiding war by convincing world powers that peace is better than war, must set their minds before they enter into their challenging negotiations. Sales people, doctors who perform life and death surgical procedures, and people in every profession, trade, job and walk of life must have a proper mind set to be successful.

Surely something as practical as a mind set would have no place in our victory over sin – or would it? In the passage quoted above, as he tells us about a fourth spiritual law, which is a critical part of our victory over the power of sin, five times Paul refers to the set of the mind!

Has the Law of God revealed the Law of Sin in your life? Have you discovered the miraculous good news of the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus? Are you soaring over the power of sin?

Are you overcoming “spiritual gravity” with “spiritual aerodynamics”? Or are you racing your spiritual “jet engines” on the runways of life without ever taking off spiritually? If your answer to that question is “yes”, you desperately need this fourth spiritual law of the Apostle Paul: The Law of the Mind Set.

According to Paul, when we have the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus available to us because the risen, living Christ lives in us, we have an option: we can choose to live and walk according to the flesh (our human nature unaided by God), or we can choose to live and walk in submission to the control of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-23).

Paul writes later of not being in the flesh but in the Spirit, and adds this warning: If the Spirit does not dwell in us we are not His and do not belong to God. This is not the same teaching as living according to the flesh, walking in the flesh, or setting the mind on the flesh.

Paul divides the entire human family into two groups: spiritual people and unspiritual people. The person, who is still in the flesh, is the unspiritual person or the natural man Paul profiles when he writes to the Corinthians. According to Paul, this natural man cannot possibly understand spiritual concepts; they are foolishness to him because only spiritual people can understand spiritual truth (I Corinthians 2:9-16).

When this apostle writes of living according to the flesh, he means something very different from what he is teaching when he

uses the expression, “in the flesh”. Paul is declaring here that those spiritual people, who choose to live according to the flesh, set their minds on the flesh as a matter of deliberate choice, and those spiritual people who choose to live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the Spirit as an act of deliberate choice.

Paul declares that even spiritual people, who have made a commitment to be Christ followers, cannot please God when they are living according to the flesh. He adds that those who are spiritual will also discover that when we set our minds on the flesh, we will find that sin always pays its wages. Those wages are that banquet of negative consequences he describes as “death”. (Romans 6:23; 8:2) By death Paul does not mean literal death or eternal death, but death in the sense of separation from God, and separation from the quality of life that results from knowing God (John 17:3).

Spiritual people have an option unspiritual people do not have. To set the mind on the Spirit leads to spiritual life - what Jesus described as, “life more abundantly”. (John 10:10) The Apostle John summarized this truth when he wrote: “This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life.” (I John 5:11, 12)

Jesus taught that if our mind is single, or healthy, our whole body will be filled with light but if our mind is not single, our whole body will be filled with darkness. According to Jesus, the difference between a life filled with light (happiness), and a life filled with

darkness (unhappiness), is the way we see things, (Matthew 6:22, 23). Jesus was issuing a somber warning against what we might call “spiritual schizophrenia”, or “spiritual double vision”. James 1:8 tells us that a man that is double minded is unstable, hesitating, dubious, unreliable and uncertain in everything he thinks, feels and decides. Paul is issuing that same warning in the sixth, seventh and eighth chapters of this letter to the Romans.

Jesus, Paul, other apostles and the prophets labeled this unhealthy spiritual mindset in many eloquent ways. The prophet Elijah challenged the people of God in his day: “How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him!” (I Kings 18:21)

The Apostle John recorded an open letter from the risen, living Christ to the church at Ephesus. He was receiving the last book of the New Testament - by inspiration - from the risen Christ, while imprisoned for his faith on the Isle of Patmos. That message was essentially: “I would rather you would be hot, but if you are not going to be hot, then go ahead and be cold. Whatever you do, do not be lukewarm. That makes Me sick in My stomach and to want to vomit you out of My mouth.” (Revelation 3:15, 16)

James, who along with Peter and Paul was one of the great leaders of the first generation of the New Testament Church, instructed believers to ask God for wisdom when they reached the place where they simply did not know what to do. As a vital part of that exhortation, James challenged them - and us - to be unwavering

in our faith when we ask God for wisdom. We are not to be like a wave of the sea, first driven this way and then that way. He labels the problem focused by Jesus, Paul, Elijah and John when he writes: “He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways!”

Personal Application

I once heard a secular psychology professor call this problem, “logic-tight compartments”. He told us to think of our minds as a circle. Within that circle we have a thought, which is a positive thought, like I have faith and I am therefore not worried about anything. Then we have another thought, which is in direct conflict with our first thought. When these two thoughts come into conflict in our minds, they cause stomach ulcers, high blood pressure and other physical symptoms, which face us with the undeniable reality that we are worried - in fact we are running scared!

To live with these conflicting thoughts, we build an imaginary wall down the middle of our minds and isolate these thoughts into two logic-tight compartments. While we are worrying, we do not permit ourselves to think about the fact that we have faith. We tell ourselves - and everybody else - that we are not worrying about anything because we have faith.

When we affirm our faith and tell ourselves that we are not worried about anything, we do not permit the thought that we have physical symptoms, which make it impossible for us to deny our worry. Our mind could then be represented by a circle with plus

signs and minus signs, separated and isolated from one another by a line – that imaginary wall in our mind - that is drawn down the middle of that circle.

The professor then taught that every thought we have passes into our subconscious memory banks and creates a reservoir of conflict, which eventually causes physical symptoms, which is our sub-conscious mind sending a message to our conscious mind that we had better resolve these conflicts.

He then challenged those who were training to become counselors to carefully remove that imaginary wall that was dividing and isolating the conflicting thoughts of those they counseled. He warned them that religious people need this more than others because many have very high and unrealistic standards of integrity, which they are unable to live out in their everyday lives. He concluded his lecture with the declaration that those who teach these moral absolutes are making people mentally sick!

Jesus taught that the Word of God is truth and that we should read the Word of God looking for truth. Furthermore, we should make the commitment that when we find truth in the Word of God, we will apply that truth to our personal lives (John 17:17; 7:17; 13:17). This insight of our Lord has shaped my entire approach to the Word of God. I have discovered - and you will also discover - that this is the way to prove that the Word of God is the inspired Word of God.

Jesus also taught that His Word is like wine that has not yet

fermented. He warned that if the wine of His teaching is poured into an old and brittle wineskin, as that wine ferments, it expands and puts pressure on the wineskin. If the wineskin does not yield to the pressure of the fermenting wine, the wineskin will explode and be destroyed. This will also mean that the wine will be lost and wasted (Luke 5:37, 38).

Jesus was warning those who heard His teaching that if they did not receive His Word with the commitment to apply and obey the truth He was teaching, His Word would destroy their minds. I shared that parable of Jesus with the psychology professor. His response was, “Do you tell the people in your churches what Jesus taught in that parable?” I assured him that we most certainly do. For nearly five decades I have shared that parable of Jesus, not only with my congregations, but also with several psychiatrists and psychologists who believe that those of us who teach the Word of God are making people sick.

While discovering and obeying the truth discovered in God’s Word since 1949, I have concluded that the Bible is all absolutely true. However, there is revealed truth and there is discovered truth. When counselors, judges, doctors and others who see hundreds of people in their work, discover truth in the lives of those they encounter in their work, they will discover that the Bible already said what they have discovered, and the Bible said it better. We can say the Bible is true because the Bible is inspired. We can also say the Bible is inspired because truth we find in the Bible is so very true.

Summary and Personal Application

I share this example from psychology with you to put in perspective this teaching of Jesus, Paul and others we find in the Bible. As you read this letter of Paul to the Romans, think of your life as if it were a circle. Imagine this circle that represents your life filled with only plus signs. That would represent what Jesus was teaching when He taught that we should have a single mind if we are to have a body or life filled with light or happiness. That circle would also represent the objective of what Paul is teaching by these four spiritual laws.

Now imagine that circle has both plus and minus signs with a line drawn down the middle of the circle dividing the plus signs from the minus signs. The plus signs symbolize the Law of God, or the Word of God. In other words, the plus signs represent what you believe are the inspired standards for right living, based on the teaching of the Word of God. Then realize that the minus signs symbolize your behavior, which is not measuring up to what the plus signs represent and demand from you.

The divided circle represents the honest confession of Paul - this Pharisee of the Pharisees - in the seventh chapter of this letter. The divided mind, or spiritual double vision, is the profile of what the apostle calls himself: "a wretched man."

Psychosomatic illness is illness in the body (Greek soma) when the cause of the illness is in the mind, or the soul (Greek

psyche). One of the typical and prevalent causes of psychosomatic illness is guilt. One of the most common causes of guilt for believers is having a standard of what we know to be right living (the Law of God), in conflict with our daily living, when the way we are living does not measure up to God's standard for living right.

One of the most holy men who ever lived was the man who was described by Almighty God as "A man after My own heart who will do all My will." (I Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) This man showed us more than any other man, with the exception of Moses, what worship is and how we should worship. However God's Word tells us the whole truth: he sinned grievously! He committed adultery, betrayal, murder and for one whole year he tried to cover up these awful sins. That had to be the unhappiest year of David's life.

Consider these words written by David, which vividly describe how the awful guilt he experienced affected him physically, emotionally and spiritually. I am quoting them from a popular paraphrase of the Bible: "What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record.

"There was a time when I would not admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. All day and all night your hand was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself,

‘I will confess them to the Lord.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone!” (Psalm 32:3-5)

These words of David parallel the candid words of Paul. They give us an Old Testament example to place alongside the confession of Paul. The honest confessions of these two godly men serve us as an awesome example. Paul calls himself “a wretched man!”

Now imagine a circle with only minus signs in the circle. This would represent the life of a person who has never had any light, or any teaching at all from the Law or Word of God. These would be the people Jesus described as those who have had no light and therefore have no knowledge of sin (John 9:40, 41; 15:22). According to Jesus, sin is the rejection of or failure to live up to the light we have received.

Verses in the early chapters of this letter challenge us to ask if there really is such a person (1:20). However, if there were such a person, they would have no sin, they would have no guilt, and they would have no ulcers, migraine headaches or colitis.

As you read the sixth chapter of Romans, think of that person with a single but sinful mindset as represented by the circle with only minus signs. This person would not be immoral because they have no standards for morality. Today some call this “amoral” by which they mean there is no such thing as moral absolutes or an absolute standard of what is right and what is wrong. Obviously, those who

believe in the Law of God believe in moral absolutes, or an absolute standard of what is right and what is wrong.

As he writes the sixth chapter of this letter, the strong emphasis of Paul is that those of us who have been justified by faith, have access to grace, and believe in the Word of God, should never, never be pictured by this circle with only minus signs. In other words, sin should absolutely not have dominion over us!

As you read this honest confession of Paul, think of that circle with both minus and plus signs, separated by a line drawn down the middle of the circle. There was a popular song when I was a teenager that proclaimed: “Latch on to the affirmative; eliminate the negative; accentuate the positive and do not mess with Mr. In-between!” The Paul we meet in the seventh chapter is the “Mister In Between” profiled above by that ridiculous song. What is far more important is that this, “Mr. In-between” is emphatically profiled by Jesus, David, Elijah, John, James, and Paul at the conclusion of his confession as the “wretched man”. (Romans 7:24)

When you read the eighth chapter of this letter, picture a circle with only plus signs. That circle would represent the single mind and the life filled with light and happiness taught by Jesus. It would be the application and obedience sought by David, the apostles and prophets. A circle filled with plus signs would also represent the application of the third spiritual law profiled by Paul, which gives the justified sinner the dynamic to obey the Law of God and overcome the Law of Sin and Death.

The Law of the Mindset is simply the deliberate choice we have to implement the third spiritual law of the Apostle Paul. Unlike the psychologist who has no dynamic to offer those who would remove the wall that makes them double minded and wretched, Paul offers the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, which can overcome the Law of Sin and Death.

Read these verses again and as you do, make the observation that he reinforces and emphasizes the absolute reality that without the dynamic of the Spirit of God, we not only cannot win our battle with sin. If we do not have the Holy Spirit, we do not even belong to Christ and to God. However if we belong to Christ we have the Spirit, and we have the promise that He will give life to our mortal bodies:

“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Romans 8:9-11)

He summarizes what he has written about his four spiritual laws in these verses: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors - not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (12, 13)

Personal Application: Where Are You?

What I have illustrated by the metaphors of these circles is the essential message of the sixth, seventh, and the first thirteen verses of the eighth chapter of this magnificent theological masterpiece. In which of these circles do you meet yourself? Do you meet yourself in the circle that represents the truth Paul teaches in the sixth chapter? Do you have no plus signs at all in your mindset? If that is where you are, you need to hear, understand and believe the Gospel Paul clearly proclaimed in Rome and so beautifully, systematically and in such a comprehensive way presents in this masterpiece of all his letters.

Do you meet yourself in that circle with both plus and minus signs? Then you need to move to the circle that has only plus signs. In other words, if you do not want to be a “wretched man”, you must meet yourself and the solution to your wretched condition by moving experientially from the seventh to the eighth chapter of this inspired letter.

Chapter Four
“More Than Conquerors”

(8:14-39)

As you read the rest of this eighth chapter, observe the declaration of Paul that God is not in everyone. God is only in those who, by faith, have been justified, and by faith have found their personal access into His grace. God is not with everyone. God is only with those who obey Him. He is not for everyone. He is only for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. Paul will conclude, however, that if God is in us, with us and for us, no power on earth, under the earth, above the earth, in the past, present, or future will be able to separate us from the love of God - and from what He wills to do in us, with us, for us, and through us.

The last twenty-five verses of the eighth chapter of Romans are considered one of the greatest and most sublime passages of Scripture in the entire Bible. This passage of Scripture compares to other Scriptures the way the highest mountain peak in the world compares to the other mountains in this world.

What I have labeled as, “The Four Spiritual Laws of Paul” have now been presented by this apostle. However, the theme he began in the fifth chapter, regarding how sinners who have been declared righteous can live right, will continue in these last verses of the eighth chapter until he declares that we can be more than conquerors through Christ. The truth Paul will now present, which

makes this an extraordinary passage of Scripture, is that we can all be super conquerors because God is the Source, the Power behind, and the purpose for our spiritual conquests.

Remember that after writing in the second verse of the fifth chapter that we have access by faith into grace, he presented the metaphor of the four conquerors, which showed us how to reign in life through grace and in Christ (5:17). The theme of defeating sin and its consequences has continued through the sixth, seventh, and the first thirteen verses of the eighth chapter. Paul has boldly, eloquently, and in a profound way proclaimed the same message he declared through his metaphor of the four conquerors by presenting his metaphor of these four spiritual laws.

However, another great theme is introduced in the glorious high point of this inspired presentation of the spiritual conquest of the believer. That theme is the Divine intervention of a sovereign conquering God, Who will win the battle in us, through us, with us and for us. Before he introduces that magnificent theme, he challenges the spiritual identity of those to whom he was writing: “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Romans 8:9-11)

The spiritual identity questions Paul raises here are questions like: “Are you in the flesh or in the Spirit?” To Paul, there are only two possibilities. You are either a spiritual person, because the Holy Spirit lives in you, or you are a natural, or unspiritual person because the Holy Spirit does not live in you. If the Spirit does not live in you, you are not spiritual and all he is writing does not apply to you. However, if the Spirit of God does live in you, He Who raised up Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal body. This does not mean in the life to come because he referred to our body as a mortal, or a dying body. The concept of mortality means that we are only here for a period of time. When we go to a funeral we “get in touch with our mortality” because we realize that we are going to die some day.

This spiritual identity question is followed by another question when he essentially asks, “Are you a son of God?” He combines these two issues of personal spiritual identity and being a son when he writes: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” (14-17)

A popular teaching is that God is the Father of all human beings and we are therefore all human beings are brothers and sisters.

The Gospel of John makes the clear statement that those who believe in and receive Christ are given the power to become the sons of God. The word for power in those verses is actually the Greek word for authority.

John is teaching that when Jesus came into this world, when people responded to Him properly, or with faith, they were born again and given the authority to consider and call themselves the sons of God (John 1:12, 13). If all mankind were already sons of God, it would then make the life and death of Jesus Christ unnecessary.

When the Scripture uses masculine “sons” this does not mean males to the exclusion of females. The term is generic and it includes all people regardless of their gender. That is what Paul meant when he wrote that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28). We are all one in Christ.

Paul profiles degrees of relationship when he writes to the Philippians about an old man who brought love gifts from their church to him in prison (Philippians 2:25-30). He describes the old man as his brother, his fellow worker, fellow soldier, their messenger and the one who ministered to him in his time of need. By brother, Paul meant that he was a believer who had been given the authority to call himself a “son of God”. Fellow soldier meant that he had with Paul risked his life for Christ and the Gospel. The other titles have obvious meanings.

Paul clearly and dogmatically states that only those in whom the Spirit lives belong to Christ. He then connects that personal spiritual identity and being a “son of God” when he writes: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” We belong to Christ when the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and when we are led by the Holy Spirit we are the sons of God, according to Paul.

This is followed by a fascinating teaching, which parallels a similar truth he wrote to the Galatians. He essentially writes in both these inspired letters that when the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God, we cry, “Abba, Father.” (Galatians 4:6) The word “Abba” is the word for “father” in the Arabic language. This is obviously referring to a subjective, intimate and personal spiritual experience.

I once asked a mentor, who was coaching me when I was a very young pastor, “How do you give assurance of salvation to a professing believer who lacks that assurance?” I had my notebook and my pen was poised and ready to write. His answer was: “You cannot give assurance of salvation to anybody. That is a ministry of the Holy Spirit.” He explained that we can share verses and we can look for affirming evidences of faith and salvation. We can even ask certain questions and offer many kinds of support, encouragement, and affirmation when those evidences are there. But, in the final analysis, only the Holy Spirit can bear witness with their spirits and give them the assurance that they are the sons of God.

To follow the next thought of Paul, it is necessary to understand something about the Roman culture of that day. Roman custom was for a father to consider his sons as children until they were fourteen years old. When they reached that age, in a court of law, he legally adopted them as sons and declared them to be heirs to everything he desired them to inherit of his estate.

That is the metaphor Paul is using here when he writes that we are children, because we are born into the family of God through our spiritual new birth. However, through our access into the grace of God we become more: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” (Romans 8:16, 17) We inherit with Jesus Christ, Who is the beloved Son of God, everything He inherits from His Father. This has an enormous plus side, but there is also a cost involved. Remember, we are identified with Christ in His death and His resurrection.

He now begins his inspired song of praise of conquest and victory when he relates the death and resurrection identification with Christ, he taught in the sixth chapter, to our suffering for Christ in this world. He proclaims that if we suffer with Christ, we will also be glorified together with Him in the life to come:

“But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.” (17, 19)

Paul is now doing two new things in his profound presentation of the spiritual victory of a justified sinner over sin. First, he relates spiritual victory and growth to suffering. Then he writes the most inspiring and majestic dimension of this teaching when he moves his teaching about the spiritual conquests of a believer into the eternal state. Before I focus what Paul writes about the ultimate spiritual growth and conquest in the next dimension, it is very important that you consider with me what he writes about the way suffering relates to our spiritual growth and conquests in this life.

Many are falsely teaching that God never wants His people to suffer, be sick, poor, or even have any hardships. This is simply not what the Bible teaches and Paul wants us to understand this truth. Have you been a believer long enough to realize that spiritual growth and victory over sin can be related to suffering? According to Jesus, when we are like a branch that is fruitful because we are properly joined to Him as the Vine, the Father prunes, or cuts back that branch we are, so that we may be more fruitful (John 15:2). In this context, much of our suffering can be seen as a cutback rather than a setback and hindrance to our lives.

The Apostle Paul is a great example of this kind of suffering. It was his frequent imprisonments that gave him the time to produce five of his most important letters. He could have been fruitful during those many months preaching and teaching; yet God desired more fruit and Paul spent that time in prison. Now for over two thousand

years his inspired letters, which were written in prison, have brought salvation and blessing to many millions of people.

Consider this passage written by Paul, which gives us insight into his own personal experience of suffering. I have quoted this passage from a well-known paraphrase that helps us to grasp the harsh reality of Paul's personal suffering:

“I have worked harder and been put in jail more often than anyone I know. I have been whipped times without number and faced death again and again and again. Five different times the Jews gave me their terrible thirty-nine lashes. Three times I have been beaten with rods. (This form of punishment was a Roman custom that was similar to the practice known as “canning” in places like Singapore today. These rods were worse than a whip because they bruised the muscle tissue and could even break bones.) “On one occasion, I was stoned by a mob and left for dead (Acts 14). Three times I was shipwrecked; once I was in the open sea all night and the whole next day. (Acts 27,28) I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food; I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.” (2 Corinthians 11:23-27)

Can you see why Paul would relate spiritual growth and conquest to suffering? Since suffering is one of the many tools God uses as He makes us His new creations, has God used, or are you allowing Him to use suffering now to grow you spiritually? Can you

also record your experiences of this principle in your own spiritual journal of faith? Be very sure that you do not waste your sorrows!

Paul writes in another one of his inspired letters that we are all the workmanship of God. When a builder I knew had completed a beautiful home, he would take those who were looking for a homebuilder to the home he had completed. He would say to those prospective homebuilders, “By the grace of God, this is my workmanship.” According to Paul, God wants to point to each of us, and say, “This is My workmanship!” (Ephesians 2:10)

While couples he had married were away on their honeymoon, a pastor I knew would go to their apartment or home. He would place a sign on their front door which read, “Caution: God at work!” He wanted to remind those couples that they needed to be patient with each other and realize that God was at work in their lives. That sign should be placed over the life of every believer who has been justified by faith.

This is not only true in this life but there is a sense in which the workmanship of God will not be complete until we are made perfect in eternity through our own literal death and resurrection. (Philippians 1:6)

I once heard about a minister in New York City who was depressed. He was so depressed he was not able to write his sermon. He decided to take a walk. As he was walking around New York City, so depressed he was almost in a daze, he came upon a construction site. The construction site was a great cathedral in New

York City. Major renovations were underway that were to preserve the beauty and the longevity of the great cathedral.

The depressed pastor stood there in his daze of depression, staring blankly at the workers. Several minutes passed before he realized he was watching a stonemason work on a huge stone that was in the shape of a very large cross. After some time passed, the gifted stonemason became aware of the minister standing there staring at him. When their eyes met, the minister asked, “What are you doing?” The stonemason pointed to an opening in the steeple of the cathedral, high above them. The opening was also in the shape of a cross. He asked the pastor, “Do you see that opening way up there?” Then as the talented craftsman pointed to the huge stone cross he was sculpting, he said to the minister, “I’m shaping it down here, so it will fit up there!”

As the pastor walked away from that construction site, he said, “Thank you, Lord. That is exactly what I needed to hear!” He realized that many of the problems and pressures, which had led to his depression, were God’s way of shaping him down here, so he would fit up there.

As Paul relates suffering to spiritual growth and conquest over sin in the life of a believer, he is making the point that God is fiercely committed to shaping us as His sons and daughters and making us His messengers here and now. He is also shaping us for the eternal state when we will experience our complete redemption and total victory over sin. Consider this paraphrase of these two

verses where Paul relates suffering to our present and future spiritual growth: “In my opinion whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has in store for us. The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.” (Romans 8:18, 19)

Life in two dimensions:

Have you ever watched a dragonfly in flight, using its magnificent double wings to fly from one flower to another? Sometimes it hovers like a helicopter, still and suspended in space. The dragonfly can actually hover in flight like that all day long. These amazing creatures are an absolute marvel of aerodynamics with their two sets of wings that can keep them perpetually flying.

The dragonfly actually spends the first one to four years of its existence at the bottom of a body of water. If like a scientist, you were to perform a cross section cut on the underwater dragonfly during the first years of its life, you would discover that this underwater creature is equipped with two respiratory systems. The underwater dragonfly has a respiratory system that enables it to inhale water through its long narrow body and derive oxygen from the water, as many underwater creatures do. You would also discover that this fascinating creature has a second respiratory system that will one day equip it to breathe air when it enters into its second dimension of life.

When the underwater, first existence of the dragonfly has

been fulfilled, it rises to the surface of the water, climbs up on the land, dries its wings in the sun, spreads those two magnificent sets of wings and gloriously begins the second dimension of its existence. The dragonfly is obviously designed by God to live out its existence in two dimensions.

We have that in common with the dragonfly. According to Paul, we, also, were designed by God to exist in two dimensions. God issues us an earthly body to live out our life here on earth, and God is going to issue us a heavenly body that will equip us to live forever in the second, eternal dimension of our providentially planned existence in heaven.

Figuratively speaking, if we were to perform a “cross section” on a born again believer, we would discover that the born again believer, like the dragonfly, is equipped with two life systems. Every authentic follower of Christ is equipped with an earthly body, or life system, that enables the believer to live out the first dimension of his or her life. We would also discover that every true believer is equipped with what Paul calls “the new creation”, or “the new man”, or “the inward man”. According to Paul, this miracle work of new creation by the Holy Spirit, like the dragonfly’s second respiratory system, pre-figures the spiritual body God is going to give all believers, which will equip them to live eternally in heaven.

The dragonfly is an aeronautical wonder in its second dimension of life. When believers are supernaturally resurrected, when God gives you and me spiritual bodies that will equip us for

our second and eternal dimension of life, imagine what we will be like!

Near the end of the New Testament, in the First Epistle of John, this aged leader in the New Testament Church, the Apostle John, reflects upon who and what we are as believers, and who and what we are going to be. He tells us that what we shall be has not yet been revealed, but it is going to be marvelous beyond anything we can imagine, because in heaven, we will be exactly like the risen, living Christ is now (I John 3: 1, 2)!

Paul is writing in such a beautiful way that the whole world is on tiptoe, anxiously awaiting, to see this glorious miracle of what we shall be. I have been told that growing old is not for cowards. As you experience aging, or as you observe that process in those you know and love, never forget that the body is only the “earth suit” of a believer. God issues us a body so we can live our lives here on earth. God is going to issue every follower of Christ a spiritual body, which will equip us to live in heaven, when as the sons of God we come into their own.

These two verses, which relate our growth and conquest to suffering and to the eternal state are followed by some profound verses which tell us some fascinating truths about this world God has created and sustains. The sons of God are not the only creation of God that needs the continuous creative work of the Creator: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be

delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.” (Romans 8:20-22)

To interpret these three verses, we must understand the fall of the human family, as it is described in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, and in the first chapter of this letter Paul is writing to the Romans. When man sins, everything he touches is impacted by his sin. We see the results of human sin on the environment in so very many ways today. Human greed pollutes our waters, the air we breathe and the food we eat.

According to the creation account, the creation was dynamically influenced by the fall of man. These verses are simply saying that when the redemption of man is complete, there will be a final and complete redemption of this world. When we are redeemed, we become new creations. Paul has taught us in this letter that our old man is to die that our new life might begin. Scripture teaches that, one day God will create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will reign (2 Peter 3:13).

Paul is telling us here in the eighth chapter of Romans that the present creation is groaning and yearning for that new creation. “Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it

with perseverance.” (Romans 8:20-25)

Now Paul returns to the subject of our final and complete redemption. He writes that we are saved by this hope of the redemption of our bodies. He means that there is a sense in which we will never be fully and finally redeemed until we are resurrected into the eternal state. Godly people die and we often wonder why they were not physically healed.

The answer is at least partially found in these verses. Just as their redemption will not be full and complete until they are ushered into eternity, their complete healing will also not be complete until they are resurrected into heaven. When God gives them that spiritual body that will equip them to live in heaven, their healing and their redemption will be complete.

Pray Anyway!

“Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (26, 27)

Observe the emphasis in the verses I have quoted which Paul wrote to the Corinthians, and in verses twenty-three through twenty-five of this eighth chapter of Romans, on the fact that our bodies and the creation groan with the yearning desire to experience this full and

final redemption. Paul follows this with a passage that has brought comfort to millions of believers for nearly two thousand years. He writes that God hears our groaning and ministers to our weakness in a beautiful way.

Any believer who is instructed in the spiritual discipline of prayer knows that we are to pray in alignment and agreement with the will of God. However, our problem is that we often do not know what the will of God is when we come before the Lord and present our petitions to Him. Some of us therefore do not come before Him in prayer and present these petitions to God.

The instruction of this apostle is that we should pray anyway. The inspired and profound explanation for this counsel is that the Holy Spirit knows the will of God regarding every petition we present to God in our prayers. When we pray anyway, or even if we ask for something that is not His will for ourselves, or for those for whom we are praying, the Holy Spirit will make intercession for us according to the will of God! In plain and simple language, this means that when we ask for the wrong thing, if our hearts are right before God, the Holy Spirit will intercede for us and God will give us that which is His will for ourselves or those for whom we are praying.

I thank God for this promise and that He has not answered some of my prayers. Now that I am more mature, have grown in my walk in Christ, and can look back and see how God has worked in my life, I can say, “Thank you Holy Spirit for interceding for me

when I asked for the wrong things.”

In the Old Testament, there are several examples of godly men who prayed that they might die. Moses, Elijah, Job and Jonah reached a point of depression and despair where they asked God to kill them. Even these very great men of God were so exhausted, physically, mentally, emotionally and even spiritually that they asked God for the wrong thing. Since their hearts were right before God, their loving heavenly Father did not answer their prayer and did not kill them.

He gave Moses seventy men to help shoulder the burdens that had reduced him to depression and despair. For nearly forty years, Moses had been leading the children of Israel while they circled a terrible wilderness desert that could have been crossed in eleven days. He was tired, and he was tired of being tired. In our American culture we call that “burn out”. (Numbers 11:10-17)

The beauty of the truth Paul is teaching in this prescription for prayer is that we should not let the fact that we do not know the will of God keep us from our prayers. We should pray anyway, because the Holy Spirit will intercede for us and God will give us the right thing and that which is in alignment with His will.

The prophet Elijah neglected something I like to call, “Temple maintenance”. Paul teaches that our body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Since our physical, spiritual, mental and emotional lives are packaged together, when the physical dimension of our life is neglected, physical exhaustion involves mental, emotional and

even spiritual exhaustion. When Elijah asks God to kill him, God puts Elijah to sleep, wakes him long enough to feed him then puts him to sleep again. We read that this great prophet, who had wanted to die, is totally restored and in the strength of that food and rest he traveled for forty days! When he asked God for the wrong thing, God gave him the right thing. (I Kings 19:1-8)

If you read the discourses of Job carefully, you will see that the suffering of Job brought him to the place where he also prayed the prayer prayed by Moses and Elijah. (Job 3:11, 10:18) The prophet Jonah joined these other three men and also prayed that prayer (Jonah 4). God did not kill Job or Jonah. When they prayed that prayer, God gave them the essence of the two books that are named for them. These four examples teach us that even very godly people can reach a point at which they lose their perspective and ask God for the wrong thing. These four men are examples of what Paul is teaching in this extraordinary and profound prescription for prayer.

These two verses (Romans 8:26, 27) are the setting for the verse that follows them, which has given comfort and inspiration to millions of Christian disciples ever since it was written. This wonderful verse may also be the most misunderstood and misapplied verse in the inspired writings of this Apostle: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (28)

The verse begins with a marvelous promise that all things work together for good. Paul uses these two words “all things”

frequently but never lightly or casually. Believers and unbelievers have stared at those two words while they were suffering from tragedies like those caused by war, or other expressions of raw evil. These tragic events often seem to be explained only by random chaos, or the hard reality that they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. They stare at this verse and they ask, “All things Paul? Even this horrible tragedy?”

Consider this paraphrase/translation of the verse which is very close to the original language and intent of Paul when he wrote these words: “Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good.” (28) I want to make two basic observations about this verse. My first observation is that the promise with which the verse begins is a very conditional promise. Two important conditions or prerequisites must be met before this promise applies to the lives and problems people are experiencing:

- 1) They must love God.
- 2) They must be called according to His plan.

Precisely what does it mean to love God? The Apostle John informs us that it is not easy to love God. He challenges us with a question: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (I John 4:20) According to Paul, we show that we love God by being called according to the plan of God. When the priority of every fiber of our being is to be

called according to the plan of God, like Moses, Elijah, Job and Jonah, we are meeting the conditions and prerequisites that make it possible for us to apply this verse to our lives and our problems, no matter how tragic and senseless they may appear to be.

When I have preached that all things work together for good, I have had unbelievers and believers, who have experienced tragic events, get right close to my face and challenge my sermon. The awesome, bitter, hard reality is that if the entire orientation of their lives has always been unspiritual, secular, selfish and geared to the going values of their secular world, they cannot even begin to apply this verse to their lives and their tragic problems.

My second observation is that when it is understood, this verse is not calling good everything that happens even in the life of a devout follower of Christ. There may be absolutely nothing good about what has happened to us. Jesus was intensely realistic and so is this beloved apostle.

Jesus taught that in this world we will have tribulation (John 16:33), and by example and teaching, this apostle and his Lord make it very clear that we often suffer because the evil one hates Christ and those who are His. The promise of this verse is that if we qualify, our God can take everything that happens to us, even when there is nothing good about our tragic problems, and He can fit them into a pattern for good.

This raises another question. Whose good is being referenced here - our good, or God’s good? Well, that question is answered in

the conditions or prerequisites on which this promise is based. If we love God and our passion is to be called according to His plan, the only good that interests us is God's good. Every time we face tragic problems, our immediate response should be: "How can this tragedy fit into a pattern for the good and the glory of God?"

The Psalmist prescribed a similar question when we are suffering. He wrote: "If the foundations are destroyed what shall the righteous do?" Based on the study of Hebrew scholars, a literal translation of the Hebrew words written by this ancient hymn writer is: "When the foundations of our lives are breaking up, what is the Righteous One doing?" (Psalm 11:3)

Before we can apply the wonderful promise that all things work together for good, we simply must understand and apply these prerequisite conditions. We will never really understand or appreciate this verse until we do.

The Providence of God

Paul follows these three great prayer perspective and prescription verses with one of the most majestic and sublime words that have ever been written in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Remember that he is still addressing the theme he began in the second verse of the fifth chapter. How can sinners who have been declared righteous by God live righteous lives? The four conquerors and the four spiritual laws have been his answer. He now gives us his greatest, strongest, most convincing, inspiring and eloquent

answer to that question, which concludes that we can be more than merely conquerors – we can be super conquerors!

The essence of this highest peak in the sublime and inspiring writings of this apostle is that our conquest is not a matter of who or what we are. Spiritual conquest is not a matter of what we can or cannot do. Our victory has nothing to do with what we want. Spiritual conquest is sourced and finds its dynamic in Who and what God is, in what He can do and in what He wants. He is the Source of our conquest. He is the Power behind our victory now and in the world to come. His glory is the purpose for everything that is happening to us - sinners who are being declared righteous and empowered to live right.

When he concludes the entire teaching section of this masterpiece, he will use those two words "all things" again. He will simply write that, "All things are of Him, through Him and for Him, to Him be the glory forever!" (Romans 11:36) It is reading ahead, but if you will read the last four verses of the eleventh chapter before you read this passage we are now about to consider, that will give you a perspective which will help you understand this passage which is the mountaintop of all the inspirational writings of this author of half the New Testament.

He begins by explaining that when God decided to send His Son into our world that He might declare and make us sinners righteous, for God to apply that miracle to you and me required three miracles only He could perform. He also informs us that after we

have been justified, there is a future dimension to our right living that also involves a miracle only He can make possible.

He writes: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified these He also glorified.” (29, 30)

The first miracle of the Providence of God in our justification by faith is that God foreknew those He would declare righteous. This is simply a statement about one of the attributes of God. When we apply foreknowledge to God we call it, “omniscience”. Since the prefix “omni” means “all” this simply means that God knows everything. He knows everything past, present and future. God is never ever surprised by anything that happens. When the human family fell in Adam, God was not surprised. He did not have to revert to a “Plan B”. The redemption of fallen man always was the plan of God.

The fact that He knew who would be justified does not mean that He violated the free will of those who were declared righteous. The fact that God predestined those He foreknew does not mean He chose this one for heaven and that one for Hell. When we get to the ninth chapter, we will study the concept of election, which raises those issues. Here the teaching is simply that God has predestined justified sinners to be conformed to the image of His Son.

When those who have been declared righteous live right, how

are they to know what living right looks like? That is one of the many purposes for which God sent His beloved Son into this world. God predestined, or pre-determined that His Son would be the first of many who would be so like Him, they would be like His brothers. That is why we read that He is not ashamed to call them His brothers (Hebrews 2:11).

A third miracle that must come from God that we might be conformed to the image of His Son is that those He foreknew and predestined, He also called. I have already observed that this is one of Paul’s favorite words for describing the followers of Christ who are experiencing salvation. Being justified by faith and finding access to grace by faith is more than merely an intellectual proposition. It is a “calling” to have a relationship with the risen, living Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9). God wants us to know His Son and then become like Him.

These three miracles provide the context for the central and primary message of this letter: those He foreknew, predestined and called, He justified. Paul then goes beyond this life and prophesies a present and a future dimension of this great miracle. Those He justified, He also glorified. This is profiling those great miracles Paul described so beautifully for the Corinthians when the God Who gave us an earthly body to live this life will give us a spiritual, or heavenly body to live in heaven.

However, this verse also shows us that the experience of being glorified begins when we are justified by faith and access the

grace of God. When the grace of God changes our lives and we become new creatures, our inner man pre-figures that glorified state we will experience for all eternity.

Questions and Answers

Paul now raises seven questions that have very exciting answers: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (31-37)

The first question raised by Paul challenges us to respond to his glorious declarations: What do we have to say about all this? That seems to be the essence of the first question. The second question shows us what Paul thinks. If God is calling us to experience these five miracles, and our redemption, our final and

complete redemption, depends on Him rather than us, then who can be against us?

The third question introduces an important concept in the great high point to this magnificent section of this letter. If a loving God so loved us that He gave his Son for us, will He not also freely give us everything we need to follow His Son, our Savior and Lord? Paul has reasoned before that if we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son, will we not much more be saved by the life of a risen, living Son? (5:10)

Consider his fourth question in the context of the judgment of which he wrote in the second chapter. Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? God certainly will not do that because God is the One Who is declaring us sinners to be righteous. He has bankrupted heaven and sacrificed His Son to justify us. He certainly will not condemn us.

His fifth question asks, “Who is he who condemns?” Two thoughts are implied here: Jesus Christ is designated as the One to Whom God has committed all judgment (John 5:22). He is therefore qualified to condemn us, but He stated that He did not come to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17). Since He has paid the price of our redemption He will not condemn us. Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God making intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

A second implied thought here relates to a function of the evil one. We are told that the Devil is the accuser of the brethren and that

he accuses them day and night. When he is destroyed as the accuser, the Kingdom of God will flourish with great power (Revelation 12:10, 11).

One of my favorite scholars, with whom I served as a very young intern assistant pastor, paraphrased the word, “justified”, which means “declared righteous”, to mean “declared worth”. People struggle and experience untold agony trying to earn some self worth by achievement and good works. The message of this theological masterpiece of the Bible is that God is offering this world of sinners declared worth that does not depend on their positive or negative performance.

Paul is also writing here that when God declares worth for sinners who have very little self worth, the evil one is right there declaring the opposite truth - “You have no worth.” This may be an application rather than an interpretation, but think of this verse the next time you feel condemned, or as if someone is telling you that you have no worth. Remember to resist the accuser as you remember and affirm the Good News that God himself has declared your worth. The Holy Spirit will then bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God and you do have worth.

Your worth is secure because it is not based on your ability to succeed, and never fail. This declared worth, like the unconditional love of Christ is not won by a positive performance or lost by a negative performance. That is what God’s grace means and the

mercy of God means there is forgiveness when you do fail. It is God Who justifies.

His sixth question and his answer to that question should be a tremendous comfort and consolation to all of us. “Who or what can possibly separate us from the love of Christ?” His seventh question presents a list of those things that we believe can separate us of the love of our risen, living Lord Jesus Christ. The comfort and consolation come when Paul informs us that none of these things can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Life is difficult! Jesus and the apostle are intensely realistic about the tribulation and suffering involved in following a Christ Who is hated by this world (John 16:33; Acts 14:6-22). Paul mentions many of the awesome challenges that have been and are being faced today by the disciples of Jesus Christ. The list includes tribulation caused by persecution, even to the point of death by the sword. His amazing answer is that we are super conquerors in all these things because the truth is, that nothing can separate us from the love of God!

The Shepherd Psalm of David tells us that the mercy, or unconditional love of Christ actually pursues us all the days of our lives, and be with us in the eternal state, forever! (Psalm 23:6) That may be what the apostle has in mind when he answers his seventh and final question: “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be

able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (38, 39)

This is the great summary declaration of Paul as he brings to a glorious high point one of the most sublime passages in the New Testament, which he began in the second verse of the fifth chapter. He has spelled out in detail how an ungodly sinner, who was an enemy of God, can not only be declared worth something, but can access the grace that will make it possible for him or her to live a life that glorifies God.

The ultimate key to the conquest of the sinner who has been declared righteous by faith is the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The key to the victory does not come from us but from God and in Christ. That is the basis of the strong assurance of this apostle.

There is really nothing new in this great concluding statement of Paul. It is merely a summary conclusion of all that he has been teaching. Paul announces that he is persuaded that death will not separate us from the love of Christ. He wrote to the Corinthians that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). He declared to the Philippians that to live is Christ and to die is gain and that he would rather die and be with Christ (Philippians 1:20-23). Death would therefore not separate him, or us, from the love of Christ.

He is also persuaded that nothing in this life can separate us from the love of Christ. Paul was absolutely fearless in the face of

death because he believed that to live was Christ and to die was gain. Devout disciples of Jesus Christ, who really believe in the eternal values of the Gospel, should not fear death.

However, some believers fear life more than they fear death. When we have Paul’s philosophy of death, we will not fear death because to die is gain. We also need to realize that we do not need to fear life either if we have his philosophy of life - that to live is Christ. According to Paul, there is nothing about death and there is nothing in this life that can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

Paul was convinced and teaches that there is a spiritual dimension of life where angels, and what he designated as principalities and powers, impact our lives positively and negatively. He wrote to the Ephesians: “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly (spiritual) places.” (Ephesians 6:12) He is fully persuaded that none of these spiritual forces can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

There is absolutely nothing in our present circumstances and there will be nothing in our future lives that will be able to separate us from this love. He then mentions height and depth. This is a reference to the teaching of Paul that Jesus ascended into the heights and descended into the depths where He led the captives free and gave gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8-10).

The theme and emphasis of his letter to the Ephesians challenges us to live in the heavenly, or spiritual heights where we can possess all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Another practical and devotional application would be the heights and depths we all experience in our lives. The promise then is that there is no personal height or depth that can separate us from the love of Christ.

His last declaration is that “no other created thing” can bring about this separation. The original words imply that he means “no other creation.” In the twenty-first century, we hear speculation regarding life on other planets. Nearly one hundred years ago, a great Bible scholar was asked, “If there is life on Mars, how could they be saved?” He responded, “If there is life on Mars, then they have a Bible which begins, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and Mars.’ That Bible would then tell them about the love and salvation of God for those whom live on Mars!”

Paul may be declaring that if there is a creation somewhere in this universe of which he knows nothing, even that creation could not separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Personal Application

We are worthless sinners with declared worth because of the life and death of the Son of God. And we have access to the grace that makes it possible for us to live right and glorify the God Who has declared us to have worth. Four conquerors show justified sinners how we can reign in life. Four spiritual laws show us how to

soar over the law of sin and its terrible consequences. Then this majestic declaration of the Divine intervention of God, Who has foreknowledge, pre-determines, calls, justifies and glorifies worthless sinners to be more than conquerors in this life and the next!

Paul writes that he is fully persuaded that this litany of miracles is absolutely true! Are you persuaded? Are you justified by faith, or are you still trying to save yourself by keeping the Law that was meant to break you, shut your mouth, and move you to confess that you need a Savior and cannot save yourself?

Are you persuaded that the God Who is the Source of this miracle will also be the Power behind this miracle and finish the work He started when He declared you to be righteous? Then believe what you have read in the first eight chapters of this theological masterpiece. Respond to the call of God. Be justified by faith. Be glorified in this life and in the life to come!

Dear reader, this is only the second booklet in our study of the Book of Romans. If you have not read the first one, I encourage you to write and request it and be sure also to request Booklet 31, where we will continue this marvelous study. Also, when you write I would like to know if you have come to faith yet. If you have been justified by faith and you are finding the grace to live right, I would like to know how God has used these studies of His Word in your life.