

TRIUMPHANT FAITH



**ROMANS: FAITH AND GLORY!
CONQUERING THE PENALTY
AND POWER OF SIN**

As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
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*For in the good news a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written:
“The righteous will live by faith.”*

Romans 1:17

I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Ephesians 3:16,17a

For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

1John 5:4

PREFACE

What lies between the pages of this book originated from a succession of beautiful summer nights, in a city park environment, in a field behind a public apartment complex. It was an occasion where a brother was asked by a number of others to open up his heart on thoughts from Romans regarding Faith, Sovereignty, and Life. We were simply reading through the book of Romans together (loudspeaker and all) in a public setting. The purpose wasn't to "meet together as believers," but rather to publicly proclaim and clarify some foundational truths about the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. That was the nature and purpose of these public gatherings.

In Acts 19 Paul was in Ephesus, and there were some pretty amazing things going on there. It started off with 12 dramatic conversions and the Gift of the Holy Spirit being poured out in a very obvious way. Then it says,

“Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:8-10).

This was not a description of the “gathering of the saints” in Ephesus. Paul was in the synagogues publicly speaking continuously about the Kingdom of God. He was forcefully pushing forth the Word of God on a daily basis in a public way. And although there were followers of Jesus present, it was not a “meeting” of the saints. The synagogue was a public place where Paul argued persuasively about the Kingdom of God. And when there was too much opposition in that place, they went to a different place—the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This was apparently a rented hall where events such as Greek debates

were held. And Paul went there in order to teach publicly. He taught virtually every day in a public way for two years so that everyone in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord. Although the bulk of the people present may have been followers of Jesus, the primary purpose of the meeting was for public teaching. We know from other writings that there were “gatherings of the church in Ephesus,” but that’s not what happened in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. These were meetings for the public.

Solomon’s Colonnade, part of the temple courts better described as a public park, was another place where the apostles testified publicly. It, like the lecture hall of Tyrannus and the synagogues, was a coming-and-going sort of place where Jews and Gentiles who were seekers of God were likely to be. “*The apostles testified with great power and great grace was upon them all.*” Here, Jesus and His Kingdom were proclaimed in a public way. The saints were there, but it wasn’t a “meeting of the church” per se, though the believers certainly met publicly and from house to house in deep relationship with each other on a daily basis. The depth of relationship they shared was such that there were no needy persons among them. All the believers were together and had everything in common, but that wasn’t what was happening in Solomon’s Colonnade.

What Paul was doing was a public proclaiming of Jesus and His Kingdom, like he told Timothy also to do by being devoted to the public reading of the Word. So for clarification’s sake, a “public proclaiming” is what we were doing here, not exactly a “gathering of the church.” It is necessary to make this distinction because so many people have tried to substitute “outreach” oriented meetings for a life of daily devotion to Jesus and His people.

And, for further distinction...Ninety-nine percent of the occasions the Church is together would be best described by 1Cor.14:23-38—normal Church expression of Jesus’ Life in the midst of His People. On some rare occasions, such as what this book was birthed out of, the Saints’ time together might better be described by Acts 20:7, where PAUL “dialogued” until midnight, or Acts 19:8-10 where, again, Paul had some things to say. However, the PRIMARY way a Church under Jesus’ Lordship and Headship should function, day to day, gathering

to gathering, is BEST described in 1 Cor. 14:23-28. “Sermons” by some particular “special guy” or “official pre-assigned leader or teacher or speech-giver” is entirely unBiblical, and disobedient to the Command of Jesus Himself. This is far from that.

If you were to be encircled, enlivened, and endued in daily LIFE, “contending as One Man for the Faith,” “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament,” then the Acts 19 and Acts 20 situations make more sense as unique circumstances, for a Cause. This is not to be confused with a “sermon” or “bible class” or some such thing. As they say... “You just had to be there.” Do read 1 Cor. 14:23-38 as the norm amongst God’s People, anywhere that JESUS is the Living Head—rather than a religious memorial “service”—“about” Him, or “to” Him, or “for” Him. Let’s go to Higher Ground! Although those with prestige, or power, or money to lose LOVE to be “the official” teacher or “preacher” or “pastor”—*it’s NOT God’s Way*. As the Scriptures say, “The child born in the ordinary, logical way (Ishmael) will always rise up to persecute the Child born of the Spirit (Isaac)... it is the same now.”

PART 1



FAITH THAT RINGS OUT!

FAITH! WHAT IS IT?

“I live by Faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

“The righteous will live by Faith.”

“According to your Faith will it be done...”

“If you have Faith as small as a mustard seed...”

“Have Faith in God...”

“We live by Faith and not by sight...”

“Will he find FAITH on the earth?”

To “live by Faith in the Son of God”—THAT is the Christian life! So what is Faith? Faith is what we **BELIEVE!** Faith is *active*. It is to live with every fiber of your being turned fully toward God in every issue of life. It has *nothing* to do with what we know in the intellectual sense and *everything* to do with what we BELIEVE in an ACTIVE sense. ***Faith is to turn to Jesus of Nazareth in everything***—every accomplishment, every failure, every disappointment, and every sin and emptiness that you would ever see in your life. Faith has to do with what we BELIEVE *from the heart* in the midst of stress and strain and difficulty.

Beholding Him, turning to Him, and resting your case in Jesus as the Answer to the Father’s every question and the satisfaction of the

Father's every demand of you—*that* is Faith. Holding up Jesus in every circumstance of life as the Answer and the Solution and the Anchor that holds within the veil.

Faith in Christ is the Power unto Salvation! *It's us believing from the heart the Good News of what God has done to redeem a fallen humanity.* It's what God has done to restore everything that Adam lost—and so much more! But, we've got to believe it in order to access it.

Call on the Name of the Lord and turn your face toward Him. He will hear your heart cry and come swiftly, healing your wounds and changing your life. He will make you a man or woman after His own Heart, and you'll see Him and trust Him and worship Him all your days. That kind of trust and adoration is God's heart for you and is your inheritance in Christ Jesus. Take hold of all that God has in store for you, by this glorious Faith in the Risen Son. Let the work of Jesus Christ and Faith in Him as a Redeemer of men's souls well up within you as a ray of Hope in spite of anything else that would ever happen in your life.

Watch for that word "faith" as we go. It's ***Faith*** that makes us whole—an unwavering trust and dependence on the Father because of the work of His Son on Calvary.

WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE?

Reading through Romans is not some attempt to be a bunch of doctrine heads who have a perfect grasp of Pauline theology. Our desire really and truly is to find God's Heart for our lives and to understand what it has to do with us *personally*. How do His Heart and Word affect how I live at home and what comes out of my mouth? How does it affect my work ethic? How does it affect my ability to look at someone else, whether Jew or Gentile, in a market or in a mall and understand how to view them? What effect does His Word have *on me*? Can I let it touch my heart to change who I am, that God could be further glorified in my short stay here?

All my days I want to be a worshiper! I want to reflect the Glory of God and the vast depth of the riches of the Wisdom of God. I want to reflect His Life and Glory in my daily life, and not just be able to spout things off because I've memorized and processed certain truths. I want to be a *changed person* so that God's Glory can shine through me.

The key that Paul speaks of again and again to the Romans is that all of this Wisdom and Glory and Life and depth of God are, from first to last...**by faith**. Both our justification and our sanctification are *by faith*. Our ability to find God and reflect His Glory in the inner man comes not by striving but by "seeing Him who is invisible." It comes by being able to live a life from first to last that is focused on Jesus as the fulfillment of God's requirements of us, and focused on Him as the potential for all of the Power and Glory of God to be manifest in us.

So, how does that affect my daily life? If I'm a complainer or a whiner... if I slump back in times of difficulty and trial... if I sever relationships rather than pour into them... if I pull away from God and shrink back and forget Him rather than turn my face fully towards Him—*then I'm walking by sight and not by faith*. I'm walking in a way that invites demonic presence into my life, rather than God's Presence and Glory into my life.

If you had to describe what faith is, there are many ways you could do that because faith is a diamond with many facets. But one thing that faith *will always be* is an attitude. Certainly faith has to do with the knowledge of God—no question about that. So now, in view of your knowledge of God, **what is your attitude?** That will be the indicator of whether you really believe God or not. If you really believe God, it will affect your point of view. How you view other people will totally depend on whether your faith for them and for yourself is in Christ, or whether your faith instead is in works—theirs or yours.

Everything in life comes back to this issue of where we place our faith. Where do we place our confidence and trust? How do we decide how we're going to feel about things and how we're going to view other people? It's either "faith from first to last" or there's a curse on your life, as Paul said to the Galatians. As you perceive the world around you—the heavens and earth, the circumstances at work and home, your health, your business dealings and relationships—if you live by anything other than faith, then there's a *curse* on your life. If we won't perceive things through the eyes of faith, other attitudes begin to creep in...bitterness, frustration, anxiety, fear, judgment, criticalness, and laziness. Nothing but corruption begins to fill our lives and hearts.

"*Faith from first to last*," isn't some generic, "Yes, I believe in God," and "Yes, I know the proper doctrines." Forget that junk—we're talking about...**do you really trust Him from the heart?** Do you look at life through the eyes of what happened on Calvary? If so, your faith in Him will affect your attitude. It will change how you view and respond to others. It will determine the kinds of things you whisper in the inner chambers—the remarks you make to your spouse, children or roommate and the behind-the-scenes thoughts you hold in your

heart. How you view people and what you say comes either from faith in Christ, or from worldly, carnal attitudes where you see both men and God after the flesh.

SET APART ONES

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the good news of God—the good news he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:1-4). If those words alone don’t make you just want to sing... **“Jesus Christ our LORD!!”** then there’s an element of unbelief in your heart. That should make your heart just want to burst with—**“YES!”** Confidence, Strength and Power from on high! *That’s the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, dwelling mightily in your heart!* So, I’ll say it again, if those words don’t make your heart just well up, then inside you lies some measure of unbelief. If it’s just, “Oh, that’s a neat way to say that,” or “I’m not sure I followed the train of thought there,” then there’s a lack of awe of God in you, and you need to face God and ask Him to help you.

“Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith” (Romans 1:5).

There is an *obedience* that comes from faith. It’s not simply knowing about something and saying you believe it. There’s an *obedience*. In other words, if we *really* believe God, *it changes what we do*. That doesn’t mean we’re justified by obedience. No, we’re justified only by our faith in Him. We *really believe* He is God. Faith is believing that **God is**, and that He’s a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. And without faith, it’s impossible to please Him. It’s a faith that declares, “You are who You say You are, the I AM. You are Jehovah God, the Provider, and the King of the Galaxies. You are who You

are, and You've called me and chosen me." We believe that God is, and if we diligently seek Him (not being lazy or sloppy), He will be a Rewarder because He's a loving Father. An obedience comes from faith simply because we believe that He is who He is. We're not gods! We're not meant to be little gods who make our own decisions, like whether we're going to believe in God or "go to church." That is not it. It must be a total abandonment of the heart and life and will. "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst..." I humble myself before God, and an obedience wells up out of truly believing that He is who He is.

And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ (come to be the possession of—to belong to Jesus Christ). To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6,7).

"Called to be saints"—set apart ones. Get the religious jargon out of your mind. We're called by God to be set apart, holy, separate. "Come out from among them and be separate," says the Lord. But some say, "Well, I don't think we need to take that so seriously. It got a bunch of people martyred in the first century, and we wouldn't want that to happen again. Let's just eat, drink and be merry. Let's mix it up a little—after all, Jesus was 'a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"

The words "saint" or "chosen" or "elect" all find their root in the expression of God's heart and mind: "set apart for God's purposes." Set apart, pulled away. *Come out from among them and be separate.* If you'll do that then God says, "I'll be a Father to you. I'll show you My love and you'll be My very children. *If you will come out from among them and be separate, rather than clinging to a love of the world and the things of the world, trying to then just add Me on the side... If you'll truly lay your heart and your life down... If you'll do what John did with My Son Jesus by laying your head in My lap... If you'll trust me implicitly at the moment of trial and crisis... If you will come out from among them and not cling to the world, not demand your rights, not push your weight around... If you'll let ME be God instead of you... If you'll belong to My Son by your own free will... Then I will be your God, and you can be My people.*"

AN IMPLICIT TRUST

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world” (Romans 1:8).

When people have faith, it rings out!

We once knew a man from India and the one quality that stood out about him was his faith. He was a man who could see through any circumstance that came upon him, including his own terminal cancer. In spite of a lot of pain and difficulty and personal rejection, he let faith ring out from him, and it expressed itself in every area of his life. There was still joy in his heart, and there was a peace in him. His faith *affected* his attitude.

You can have a lot of other things besides faith. You can have great doctrine or some really cool worship or super talent in some area or another. You can be a real pioneer in some doctrine, or thought process or cultural lifestyle adjustment. But you know what? That’s all chaff. What rings out to the heavens and the earth, and what God commends, and what Gabriel accompanies with a trumpet blast, are ***people who have faith during times of crisis and stress.*** They let God’s hope and God’s promise answer all their questions in Jesus Christ. To people with Faith, He is the “Yes” and “Amen” to every question that could ever be asked and any difficulty that could ever arise. When people have faith, it will be reported throughout the world. It will “ring out throughout Macedonia and Achaia.” When we, like the Thessalonians, turn from idols to serve the living God, it becomes an expression of the obedience of the faith. But it won’t be our obedience that rings out. It will be our *faith!*

“... *Your faith is being reported all over the world.*” That’s pretty impressive considering they didn’t have telephones and jet planes and e-mail at their fingertips. “Hey, did you hear about so-and-so’s faith?” That report went from person to person to person *all over the world*: “Did you hear about so-and-so’s FAITH?” That ought to be reported about *us*! It ought to be reported about you and me. We can do a lot of great things in life, but I somehow feel that if the report around the world was, “***Did you hear about their faith?***” it would be quite a compliment in the heavenly courts.

That doesn’t mean you’ll always be laughing, “Oh, I’m just so filled with joy!” That’s not the issue.* The old stereotype of a Christian bubbling over with joy all the time simply isn’t true. Jesus was a “man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.” Bopping around with some sort of flippant, “joyous” attitude is not what Jesus was about; that’s not Christianity. But I’ll tell you what Jesus was about—an implicit trust of the Father! Everything was filtered through the knowledge that the Father’s Hand is sovereign over all things. Jesus’ attitude was always held in check by His Faith and Trust in the Father. His complete devotion to the Father, and His complete trust of the Father’s devotion to Him, defined His attitude. That’s why Jesus could say, speaking of Himself, “The Father loves the Son.” That’s faith!!

Nothing can interfere with a person’s walk with God or his relationships with brothers and sisters or his sanctification before God if he knows in his heart... *“the Father loves the Son.”* He’s resolved all the open issues within himself and the open issues between he and God by the work of Calvary. Faith is not some impotent doctrine where we uphold a certain “belief system” about who God is. If you don’t remember anything else, remember this: ***faith affects your attitude in everything you do in every circumstance of life.*** Otherwise, you’re walking in unbelief—NOT FAITH!

*You will be filled with a joy far more deeply than the average person is, worshiping constantly. Worship isn’t a “thing” you do with others or a “thing” you do by yourself. Worship is an expression of “GOD, YOU ARE WHO YOU ARE! You are the I AM! I trust You, I’m Yours.” That’s worship! That’s Trust!

“Oh, sure, I believe in God.” *Do you really?*

Let’s see your attitudes when you’re under stress. Let’s see what you do when you’ve been treated unfairly (or so you think), or something isn’t going right on the job. What do you do then? What will you do when a relationship isn’t turning out as you thought it should, or someone treats you in a way you don’t think is proper or right or just or kind? How do you respond? What will you do? Faith is not measured by how many doctrines you can spew off. *Your faith is measured by what you do under stress.* What do you do when life isn’t adding up and it isn’t meeting your expectations? What do you do when your circumstances take you out of your comfort zone and out of your element of understanding? *Is your face towards God with implicit trust?*

Everything will be affected by your faith. Do you have faith? In your work ethic, in every relationship you have—do you have faith? Show me how you get along with your spouse, or your roommate, or your children. Let me see how you function in a work environment when difficulties and injustices arise. Those are the places where the statements of faith in Christ happen.

If nothing else comes from this, let me remind you again that true faith has to do with what you actively believe from the heart in times of stress, strain, confusion and difficulty. That’s true faith according to the Biblical definition of the word—the way that word was used historically as Jesus taught it, and the way Peter, John and Paul again and again elaborated on it and demonstrated the workings of that word. Faith is an *active* word that has nothing to do with what we believe with our minds. ***It has to do with what we BELIEVE in an ACTIVE sense from the heart in the midst of difficulty.***

So please, watch God carefully and totally throw your heart out to Him in every kind of trial and confusion. Let your faith in Him mend every relationship with those who also trust in the Name of the Lord. Let your faith bring a glimmer of Hope at the moment of your darkest failure. Let the Work of Jesus Christ and Faith in Him as a Redeemer of men’s souls well up within you as a ray of Hope in spite of anything else that would ever happen in your life. Faith

in Christ—*that's the Power unto Salvation*. It's the Good News we BELIEVE of what God has done to redeem us. We've got to believe it if we want to access it.

Very few people have ever *believed God* and let it affect their lives and attitudes. Very few people. Yet, that's the kind of Faith God desires from us. Joshua and Caleb were the only ones out of two million people who were willing to believe God and take the Land He promised them (Numbers 13:25-14:10). We're talking about a rare quality. The Israelites did not combine what they knew with faith and they lost their inheritance because of their attitudes. They grumbled and were cut off. The destroying angel wiped them out because of their attitudes—because of unbelief in their hearts (1Cor 10). Joshua and Caleb were the only exceptions to that. When it was time to take the Promised Land, they said, “The battle is the Lord's. This is God's deal here. We're His servants, and with His help He'll give us the land.” The rest of the Israelites, millions of people, thought otherwise.

Let's do something that very few people throughout history have done—*BELIEVE GOD!* Let's be like Joshua and Caleb and exhibit that rare quality of *FAITH!* Few people have ever walked that way, but it IS our inheritance in Christ. And I encourage you to take a hold of it.

Even if you feel like a total failure and you do everything wrong, let it always be said, “But he sure has faith in God. He trusts implicitly in the Blood of Christ and the Power of God to work miracles. Even though many, many times he's failed, this person turns his face towards God every time.” Now that will be reported throughout the earth, I assure you. Simple trust in God is just such a rare thing. But that is God's heart for each of us—for anyone who calls on His name.

EVERYTHING TRACED BACK TO FAITH

“God, whom I serve with my whole heart in proclaiming the good news of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Romans 1:9-12).

Even spiritual gifts are somehow related to faith. *“I want to impart a gift to you...that is, that we could be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.”* Remember how Paul himself, “Looking out, saw the man had faith to be healed”? Somehow, believing God has everything to do with spiritual gifts. Receiving an impartation from God or from someone with a spiritual gift is very related to our ability to walk in faith.

I know of three people who have been prayed for about their health in the last two or three days. Two of those people were utterly, ridiculously healed very quickly from ailments that had them flat on their backs. The other person had to grapple just a little with this issue of having faith to be healed. They wanted to be healed in order to find God somehow. So there was a wrestling over that issue of faith as it related to God’s spiritual healing.

I don’t think there’s anything in life that is not in one way or another traced back to our faith to see God and to find God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the voice of God—the utterance of God. That’s what Christianity is all about—finding God, finding faith and then

forging ahead without doubting. Abraham is known as the Father of our Faith, and we will read again and again that faith is the issue that's at stake. I can't possibly encourage you enough to resolve in your own heart to believe that **God is** and that He's a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. **Resolve in your heart that Jesus Christ is the "Yes" and the "Amen" to all the promises of God.** You've got to resolve that God is able, that He hears you and knows you, and that He will meet you on the ground of *believing Him*. He is who He said He is, so don't let any unbelief linger in your heart.

Paul could impart no spiritual gift, just as Jesus could bring no healing in his hometown, because of the unbelief of the people. If you are skeptical, and you're going to doubt...if you roll your eyes or withdraw your heart and pull back even just a little bit, you will not find the healing of God in your life or the power of God welling up from within you. You will never find your inheritance. If you shrink back, you'll be amongst those who are destroyed, the Hebrews writer said. If you shrink back, you will reap destruction and devastation in your heart in one form or another.

I don't know how to best say this, but I do know that it has to be our faith that rings out, and it has to be *your* faith that apprehends the Heart and the Mind and the Voice of God and stands firm on that in spite of any circumstances or heartache that life *will* bring you. The storms will come. Have it fixed in your heart and mind **exactly who Jesus is** and that His promises are your Anchor and Hope. You will not be among those who "grumble and are destroyed by the destroying angel" as Paul wrote. You'll not be "of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who *believe* and are saved."

PART 2



UNTO DELIVERANCE

FOR THE JEW AND FOR THE GENTILE

THE JEW/GENTILE DILEMMA

“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles” (Romans 1:13).

One of the things to look for as we read through the book of Romans—and this will be very important later on—is this difficult issue that was going on between the Jews and the Gentiles in the Roman Empire. There was all this confusion about what it meant to be a Christian. It was an especially difficult issue in Rome, not only because there was a huge problem with polytheism, but also because there was a strong Jewish contingent in the city and many people were being converted to Christianity. Because of this, confusion and difficulty came in: Do you have to be a Jew first in order to become a Christian? What’s the place of the Jew? Is Christianity an extension of Judaism, or is Christianity something separate from Judaism? How are the two related?

Of course in our culture today, Christianity is totally separate from Judaism, but back then, it wasn’t so clear. In their minds, Christianity was Judaism with all the prophecies about the coming Messiah having been fulfilled. “The Messiah’s come! Hallelujah!” So if I was a Gentile, was I becoming a Jew with a Messiah who had just come? Or is this a totally separate entity? It’s monotheism, but is it two different things—Judaism and Christianity? How do I understand this? So you can see how this was a problem in their era. Even twenty-five years after Pentecost it was still a difficult issue—especially in a foreign

land where Judaism and Christianity coexisted. There was definitely some confusion.

The reason this issue comes into play is because of the very controversial and difficult part of Paul's letter you read later in Romans 9-11. The letter to the Romans can really *only* be understood in light of the Jewish/Gentile dilemma that was going on there in Rome at the time. Those scriptures are about God's sovereign choice as it relates to the Jews and the Gentiles and the fulfilling of His purposes. So as you read "Romans," be watchful as you see Paul back and forth addressing the Jews and then addressing the Gentiles. He's holding out what the gospel is to the Jews as well as what the gospel is to the Gentiles. He's answering the question: What value is there in being a Jew if we are justified by faith? All these different things are going on and Paul is trying to unravel the difficulties for them.

It's not my heart or hope to be overly technical in discussing all this—that's not my intent. But I do want to lay forth something of the counsel of God, so you can have the same thing happen in your heart that happened to Paul when he was discussing these things. In Chapter 11 he was saying, *"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be the glory forever! Amen."* There was an explosion of Paul's heart as he had just been considering the *immense* Wisdom of God. Not only had God chosen a people for Himself, but now He's also grafting in the wild branches of the Gentiles! The prophecies had been there all along about grafting in the Gentiles, but the Jews just didn't see them. Because they hardened their hearts, God cut Israel off, in a sense. Then to the Gentiles Paul says, "Who are you to gripe and complain when He grafts in the natural branches to their own olive tree?" Who are you to gripe with His original intention to form what in Revelation could be referred to as the Two Witnesses? All these things are very important for understanding the Last Days and the part we play in it all.

POWER UNTO DELIVERANCE

Paul makes this statement to his friends in Rome throughout his letter: “Hey guys, the Law was granted to you. You were given a set of do’s and don’ts, folkways and mores from the Most High God. Okay, that’s all well and good. But those things are meant to point you to consider the deep, deep depravity in your own heart and understand that there is no way out except Jesus of Nazareth. You have no hope and no ability to abide by a set of laws and rules to please God. No one can do anything for you, and you’re powerless to do anything for yourself that will free you from this body of death. But praise be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! You can be set free from this body of death! You can be delivered from the law of sin and death and everything satan would ever throw at you. But, it won’t happen by adding more knowledge, more striving, or better this or better that. The solution is a total devotion to and an implicit trust in Jesus of Nazareth in every circumstance of life. And then the power of God unto deliverance will be seen in your lifetime.”

“I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to proclaim the good news also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the good news, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the good news a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Romans 1:14-17). For everyone who puts their full weight on the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus... for everyone who utterly trusts to an extreme, it is the deliverance, for both the Jew and the Gentile.

In the first several chapters of this letter, Paul is wrestling with these questions: Who is the Jew? Who is the Gentile? Who has God justified? He makes it clear again and again that justification comes by an utter belief in the fact that the *Father loves the Son*. And our ability to apprehend that the Father loves us is based entirely on the fact that the Father loves the Son and we've been clothed with Him. This righteousness is totally apart from the law—apart from our ability to believe the “right things” and do the “right things.” Our righteousness in God's sight is based on an utter trust that Jesus is the “Yes” and the “Amen” to all the Promises of God. That's the issue Paul keeps driving at with these people.

In chapter 6, Paul begins to talk not only about the fact that the stain and guilt of sin has been completely removed; he also talks in a radical way about how our lives are to be so completely transformed, as we trust in Him day in and day out. The work and righteousness of Christ not only affect “where you go when you die,” but they **also affect how you live while you are here**. When Paul says “the righteous will live by faith,” that means we can apprehend the Power of God in a supernatural way for bringing us to a place of **changing us utterly into the image and the character of Jesus**. In addition to saving us from death, His power is just as effective for changing our characters and softening our hearts of stone and turning us into the very family likeness of Jesus (Romans 8) and bearing wonderful fruit in our lives to His Glory. That's Good News! God is just as powerful through faith in Christ to change our personalities and our attitudes, as He was to save us from the penalty of sin. Not by our own works, but by believing God's promises. He came to save us from the *power* of sin.

Paul talks about not being ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of deliverance for everyone who believes. He's not just talking about deliverance from death and the penalty of sin (Romans 1-5), he's also talking about **deliverance from the power of sin and the slavery to sin in our hearts, attitudes and relationships**. Understand that God means to deliver us from every form of temptation, every lust, every fear, every issue of pride—even our personality if it separates us from Him and from men. God means to transform us into the very family likeness of Jesus, the full measure of the stature of Jesus Christ

(Romans 8, Ephesians 4). That's a very large and powerful work God means to do!

Maybe you look in the mirror and wonder how in the world you're ever going to be a different person. How can you ever be free from this "body of death"? You desire to do the right thing and still you fall, and then you fall again. Maybe you even stop wanting to do the right thing and start blaming other people for your failures. You're tempted to compare yourself to others rather than to what Jesus taught and who Jesus is. Well, know this: God means to deliver us. If we have "faith to be healed," He will deliver us from every aspect of the power of sin as well as the penalty of sin, which is death.

NO EXCUSE

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:18-20).

Every mortal, every human being, is “without excuse.” Paul uses that exact expression. No one on the face of the earth has any excuse because if you so choose, *you could have faith*. God’s life and presence is clearly revealed to each of us to enough of an extent that **we can believe God**. And if we believe God, there will be an obedience of the faith.

So the power of God is for “all who believe,” the Jew and then the Gentile. But the wrath of God is for all who suppress the truth by wickedness. There’s a correlation here between what we truly believe from the heart and how we act. Wickedness comes out of a heart of unbelief. Paul is about to describe all this terrible darkness that comes from those who refuse to believe God. They suppress the truth about God and don’t want to believe Him. They hold an attitude about it and somehow justify themselves by their own good deeds. If you won’t believe God—if you won’t trust him implicitly and let it affect your attitude—you will incur wrath in your life instead of peace.

Unbelief will bring bad news instead of good news. And if you continue to live in unbelief, God will give you over to a delusion and to the fantasies of your heart. If you want to play God—if you’re

walking in unbelief as proven by your attitudes in the workplace, toward brothers and sisters, towards God as it relates to obedience in your heart and life—if that's the way you want to live, then the wrath of God will come upon you. His wrath is being revealed against those who walk in what Paul describes as unbelief, which expresses itself through disobedience.

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness...” In other words, His wrath is revealed against anything that is “without God.” That's the definition of godlessness. People make *themselves* to be god and therefore God has no effect on how their lives work. His “invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature,” though clearly seen, don't affect their attitudes. It has no effect on what they look at with their eyes, what they ponder in their minds, or how they view and judge other people. If we don't let God affect the way we live, it's godlessness and the wrath of God will be poured out.

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.” When people choose to suppress or push back the truth by their wickedness, it's not because we've failed to express something clearly or have said it in terms they can't understand. Their response to truth doesn't depend on our gimmicks. That's not the deciding factor. The Scripture says that **God** has made truth plain to every man. I have to believe that is true. I don't fully understand how it's true, but I have to believe that another man's faith isn't dependent on my good works, my great knowledge, or my great ability to expound on some teaching. God has made His reality plain to all mankind. *“For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”*

“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him” (Romans 1:21). They didn't have a worshipful attitude, really believing that God was God. They suppressed the truth—pushed it back—and didn't acknowledge Him as God, because like satan, they wanted to be gods. “I want to call my own shots. I want

to entertain myself as I please and think about what I want to think about. I want to live unrestrained and want no government except my own. How I choose to interpret God's government is totally up to me." Well, that makes it *my* government rather than God's, doesn't it? That kind of attitude suppresses the truth and ends up giving us over to wickedness.

THE INSANITY OF SIN

“For although they knew God...” He gave them a fair shot at it, just like He does us, right? *“They neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened”* (Romans 1:21). This terrible insanity of sin begins to set in if we don’t glorify God as God. If we allow attitudes and judgments to sit, if we allow bitterness, laziness, resentment and compromise into our hearts, then insanity sets in. Futile thinking takes over if we don’t glorify Him as God, turn our face to Him, and trust Him implicitly in every circumstance. When we hurt or when we don’t hurt, when we feel slighted or unjustly treated, we need to turn our face to Him so that our faith rings out. If we don’t function that way, an insanity of sin sets in. It’s an inevitable process: futility of thinking, a darkened heart, and darkened understanding. We become justified in our sin.

“Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:22-23). He’s not just talking about stupid idol worship of setting up a stone against a tree and then bowing down to worship it. He’s talking about any man-made object or man-made pursuit filling our hearts. Idol worship is when our affections are toward the created world rather than the Creator.

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts...” (Romans 1:24).

In the sinful desires of our hearts we can refuse to trust God and refuse to turn our face toward Him and resolve all open issues by faith in Christ. We give ourselves to our own hormones and glands and lustful desires, and then we justify our sin by comparing ourselves to others.

“Well, God created this. He made me this way.” When we use the things God has given us for our own satisfaction and self-indulgence, He’ll let our hearts become darkened and our understanding become stuck in a quagmire of confusing issues and doctrines. If we don’t have a simple faith in Christ, continually turning toward Him, He’ll give us over to our own foolishness.

There’s a lot of good news in this letter to the Romans, but something that’s not very good news is what happens in the heart of man when we allow our attitudes to sink us. It is bad news when we tolerate unbelief in our hearts and we form walls against God and other believers. We get into trouble when we don’t see our lives the way God does, and when we don’t see people who truly love Him as washed in the Blood of the Lamb. We begin to form critical thoughts toward ourselves or toward others, and at that point, God gives us over to a delusion.

God does not allow us to stay in the middle, being a Mr. Nice Guy and sorting out life at our own pleasure and discretion. He makes us go one way or the other. By seeking God and the immortality of God, He gives us over to Life. By seeking the flesh, He gives us over to destruction. When we make ourselves to be gods, knowing good and evil, He gives us over to darkened hearts and futile thinking. Though we claim to be “teachers of the law,” we don’t know what we’re talking about or what we so confidently affirm.

This faith in Christ is not an optional extra. There’s no way you can maintain attitude problems and *not* end up in an insanity of sin. It happens automatically. By faith we’re justified and by unbelief we are ultimately condemned. God doesn’t let us sit in the middle. Faith leads to obedience because we believe God. We believe He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. We are thankful to Him. We believe that He is God and He is ever to be praised! We believe Him and so there’s an obedience of the faith. By the same token, there is a disobedience of unbelief that sets in when our thinking becomes clouded—when our hearts become darkened and our flesh begins to run after selfish pursuits. Then we justify our attitudes, our lashing out, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. We begin to justify those things if we don’t walk by faith.

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion” (Romans 1:24-27).

Notice that all this immorality stems from *not believing God*. The Good News is the power of salvation **for all who believe**. And by contrast, the wrath of God is poured out for those who won't believe and who maintain their right to be gods. There's no way to emphasize this enough. Your faith can ring out in every circumstance of life, or your unbelief can bring destruction into your heart.

“Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge or intimacy with God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless” (Romans 1:28-31).

Notice that gossip is right in the middle of the worst wickedness and sin. It's right in there with murder, homosexuality and every kind of wickedness. All these violations—slander, envy, strife, deceit, arrogance and the rest—are lumped in exactly the same package, because all of them are indicators that we don't know God. We don't believe God and we have no fear of God. We're not conscious of God, and it shows up in our attitudes and actions.

All those sins are lumped together because they're all the fruit of making ourselves to be gods. We make ourselves to be gods rather than retaining the knowledge of the true God and loving and worshiping Him, humbling ourselves before God and man. Those acts of sin and evil result when we don't filter everything through belief that God is God, and that His Son died for our sins, and for the sins of everyone

throughout the world who calls on His name. All this evil comes into play, *“gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil...”* Very clever, these people who walk in unbelief. *“They disobey their parents...”* right there with murder and homosexuality is disobedience of parents! *“They are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them”* (Romans 1:29-32). These people approve of those who practice rebellion and lead others into the same senseless sin.

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” (Romans 2:1-4).

We need to let this stuff really soak in. Vast riches are here, so look at each word and turn your face toward God to find what He has for you in these things.

HUMBLE YOURSELVES...

What God is looking for is *repentance that comes from His kindness*. In trust, turning your face towards Him. That's what "repent" means—to turn towards Him. He's looking for people who turn towards Him and see His character. It's not about people who can enunciate the laws of God, memorize scriptures, and then read them on the "sabbath day." God honors people who turn their faces toward Him. Paul is talking to anyone who would attempt to justify themselves by what they know or what they do.

He says to them, *"You are mere men and do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger"* (Romans 2:4-8).

Notice the *"persistence in doing good..."* I think he said this for those who would hold up some sort of stained-glass, "I believe in God, and Jesus conquered everything on Calvary, so I'm free from any need to do anything." Martin Luther wanted to throw the book of James out of the New Testament because he thought it had too much emphasis on works. But James was only saying what Paul says over and over—there's an *obedience* that comes from faith. If you really believe that *God is*, then you'll seek "glory, honor and immortality" by persistence in *doing good*. He will give eternal life to those who really see God for who He is.

*But for those who are self-seeking—which is the opposite of faith in Christ—for those who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress, for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. It doesn't matter what your knowledge base is, whether Jewish or Gentile. What you know about God's character and can proclaim to babes means nothing if you don't **turn your face toward God in faith and let it affect your attitude and how you live your life.** If you don't do that, you'll bring judgment, distress, wrath and anger upon yourself, no matter who you are.*

“There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares” (Romans 2:9-16).

There will be wrath and judgment for all who don't have faith in Christ. *Everyone* is without excuse, because He puts His law in the heart of every man—including those who have no knowledge of His righteous decrees and teachings that are in keeping with the God of Israel. He allows, “thoughts, now accusing, now even defending.” He was and is still actively working in a serious way to create an awareness of Himself in every mortal's life.

“Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know His will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others,

do you not teach yourself? You who proclaim against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.' Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised" (Romans 2:17-25).

A Jewish heritage (or even a Christian heritage) means nothing if you only keep certain parts of the law but don't keep the entirety of the law. You're totally guilty before God and man, and in fact make a mockery of God's will and God's Word before the unsaved.

Paul is being pretty ruthless, wouldn't you say? He is talking to a "hall of fame" of hard-working believers who for the most part had been converted out of Judaism (Romans 16). He's saying, "Whoever you think you are and whatever you think you've accomplished for God, you'd better watch out. If you think you're justified by your knowledge of God's Word and the fact that God entrusted you with His Holy Oracles—the Ten Commandments, the law of Moses—if you take pride in that, then watch out and look into your own heart." Paul shows *no partiality* to the Jews. They think they have some sort of inheritance because of their lineage, because of their knowledge of the Scripture or because of some "spiritual truth." But, Paul shows them no mercy! "Great! You have the law. But do you *keep* the law?"

In the first four chapters, Paul demonstrates that "knowledge of the law" justifies no one—it never has and it never will. Knowledge of God's will, believing some approved set of truths, or hanging out with the right people has *no value* whatsoever to justify you. If you think of yourself as a teacher of infants, a proclaimer of truth, or a healer of nations because you have a knowledge base of God's will or because of some lineage, then you're a fool. If you think that simply having the knowledge of His commands gives you His Power, then you should look carefully in your own heart because you'll see that you have **NO power to do God's will**. No power whatsoever. We're only fooling ourselves if we think that we're justified before God or empowered by Him to keep His commandments simply because we *know* His commands and can enunciate them to others.

Paul is being very ruthless with people he dearly loves. Many were in Christ before he was, and had borne good fruit, even on two continents! Yet he says to them, “I’m not cutting you any slack. If you think for a minute you can be justified simply because you’re not a Gentile and you know a few of God’s principles, then you’re a fool! If you look honestly, you will see depravity and wickedness in *your own heart*, because God does not empower mere knowledge. He doesn’t empower proclaiming knowledge to the Gentiles.”

Paul had just finished telling them, “Yes, it’s true that the Gentiles rejected what has been made plain since the creation of the earth. Man could’ve sought God. And yes, God has given the Gentiles over to depravity and futility of thinking because they didn’t turn to Him as they could have. God made Himself known, and they rejected Him and made themselves god.” He goes on to give that long list of depraved sin. And then (v. 17) Paul turns to these Jewish believers and says, “All right, so you guys know the law. Big deal! I don’t care what you think you know about God or who your ancestors are. I don’t care if you can teach infants all these things, because that’s really not the issue.”

LET HIM DRESS YOU DOWN

“If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God” (Romans 2:26-29).

God is looking for something real in the inner man. He doesn’t judge according to the externals of a person, whether Jew or Gentile, and *that’s* the point Paul is developing. He didn’t like doing it, but he’s raking them over the coals. There have been certain times when I have had to rake someone I dearly love over the coals the way Paul did, and it has broken my heart. But it’s necessary at times to come back to ground zero. It’s very important to come all the way back to the baseline of *“there is no one who is righteous, not even one.”*

Paul found no joy in raking the Corinthians or the Romans or anyone over the coals and laying them bare. He didn’t enjoy taking people he dearly loved and shoving their face in the fact that their unrighteous lives are no better than anybody else’s. But he had to do it because he wanted to take them back to a place where they could find Jesus.*

But you don’t need tolerance from God if you don’t see your own sin. And you don’t need patience from God if you don’t come to grips with your own wickedness. If you’re unwilling to face that because

you have some sort of false doctrine in your head... “Wait a minute. I’m justified by faith. You can’t dress me down, Paul!” Well, here’s the man who wrote the book on faith! And *he dressed them down* because that was the only way they could ever find the true God who would lead them to repentance through His kindness, tolerance and patience. They had based their righteousness on their knowledge and other externals, so they couldn’t see how far away from God they really were. If they couldn’t face that, then they would never really find the true God or have anything to offer anyone else. They thought themselves to be teachers of infants, yet in truth they had nothing to offer anyone.

Allow God to dress you down from time to time, and allow Him to lift you up simply by faith in His Son alone—nothing more than that. Don’t try to lift yourself up by judging others, or comparing yourself to others, or by what you think you’ve accomplished or what you know. No comparisons and no contrasts. Simply face the living God and drop to your knees as you see how unrighteous you are before Him and how desperate you are for His cleansing. Let Paul dress you down. Let others, if God so leads, bring you to that place where you can justify yourself no longer. Whether Jew or Gentile, there’s only one justification, one claim to fame. If we see that properly and correctly, there will be a deep humility in our hearts pervading everything we say and everything we do. ***There can be no faith and no obedience of the faith if there isn’t a continual brokenness before God day by day by day.***

If you have something to whisper in the inner chambers about someone—grumbling, accusation or judgment—then you’re not going to find God. If you know of sin in someone’s life, then talk with them honestly. There certainly is a place for speaking out against sin. God doesn’t tolerate compromise, and He doesn’t desire

*And there are times for us too, when God will *RAKE US OVER THE COALS* and take us all the way back to the very beginning. You need to understand that ***there’s a time and place for God to dress us down through brothers and sisters so we can find a righteousness apart from the law.*** It’s a righteousness that comes simply by faith in Christ in the inner man, having been led to Him by His kindness, tolerance, and patience.

for the house to be filled with leaven as it is when we just overlook sin. But that doesn't mean we criticize and judge others when we see something that's not right. If someone starts getting pompous and full of themselves and critical of others, then that person isn't recognizing that the only hope he or anyone has is by faith in the Son of God...the Living Son of God. We must see Him for who He is and drop to our face in repentance, and call others to do the same. He won't be found until we face *ourselves* first, then face others with humility and faith.

So allow God to dress you down, to expose your attitudes and your judgments. If we don't come to that point, then we'll never live by faith from first to last. Our faith cannot ring out. See yourself the way a Holy God must surely see us mere mortals. Let that be preparation for your future. Paul felt the need to plow up the ground with people he dearly loved *before* he planted the seed of the Hope of Glory in their hearts. Unless you start from a posture of humility, God has nothing to offer you for your future. Start by letting Him dress you down. If you try to skip over that, you'll never know the inheritance He has for you, and you'll never be a redemptive force—the power of God—in other people's lives either. You have to start by letting Him show you who you really are. Paul did that with his dearly beloved friends, with the hope hidden in his heart that if he wrung them out like this, they would stay with him in order to find true hope... the only hope: a total trust in Jesus of Nazareth and all that He lived and died for.

The people in Rome easily could've found fault with Paul after reading the first part of his letter and just thrown it down. But they didn't do that. That's because it wasn't a "book" Paul wrote, but a personal letter to his friends. Look at Chapter 16 if you doubt that for even a minute. This letter to the Romans is often considered the most difficult book in the New Testament because Paul seems to leap from thing to thing to thing, at times making it difficult to understand the train of thought. Some things even seem like contradictions to us. But please, for the sake of Jesus, truly lay your life before God, just as these men and women must certainly have done when they first received this letter. They must've scratched their heads and asked,

“Who’s he talking to? Does he mean me?!” And we had all better answer that question, “Yes, I guess he does.” Paul is talking to us, too. And you’ll never find the Glories of what Paul says later on in his letter if you’re unwilling to accept the dressing down that he throws in your lap at its start. If you won’t receive it, you’ll never know the Glory of the *Freedom* God has for you in your future.

The Father loves the Son, and that’s all. You’ll never know that until you’re willing to walk in brokenness and humility. Through God’s tolerance, patience, and kindness, we seek immortality by humbling ourselves and by going forward and doing good, rather than hardening our hearts. When our thinking becomes futile, then our hearts become darkened in understanding because we’ve made ourselves to be God. We refuse to thank Him and praise Him in all circumstances—this God who is forever to be praised.

Oh the depth of the wisdom, the riches, the fullness of God! Now ask Him, beg Him, to allow you to apprehend the *immensity* of His heart. Ask Him to help you understand the despair He feels over the darkness of our foolish hearts. And yet there’s Hope He holds out for us, by faith in His Son—true trust and belief—that affects our attitudes in the course of our daily lives. Let Him expand your heart and mind, so that when you look out into humanity or look in the mirror, your eyes see what He sees. Ask Him to let you see the despair that is our inheritance (chapters 1-3) when we put our trust in ***anything other than the Son of God*** as the payment for the *penalty* of sin and the *hope of the future for the power over sin*.

No principles will ever replace the Life of the Risen Son of God. Let Him rip you off. Let Him take everything away from you. Don’t pompously, pridefully and selfishly hold on, but let Him take you down to ground zero. Let Him take you to the place Paul wrote of, where you make yourself nothing so God can truly lift you up from the inside.

Let Him make you a vessel of immortality rather than a foolish, futile-thinking, darkened-in-your-understanding, so-called Christian. Let it be immortality that He brings you toward—true Life that’s really, really Life! Let Him take you to ground zero so He can lift you up.

I'm not talking about introspection. I'm talking about seeing things *exactly* the way they are, so that your hope, your trust and your confidence can be in Christ Jesus alone. You glory in Him rather than anything external. Your security can't be in trying to avoid the "bad things" which make you despair or in boasting in the "good things" which distance you from brothers and sisters. If you allow despair to come in, you'll also let pride come in. If you allow pride to come in, you'll also let despair come in. Neither of them are founded and rooted in the Blood of Calvary and the Power of the Spirit of God and the Power of the Risen Lord seated at the Right Hand of God, interceding for us.

Paul asked those in Rome to 'fess up, and he asks us to do the same. If you won't admit your need, you will never know the power of God for sanctification. You will never know God's power because it can only be apprehended through faith, and faith is seeing God for who He is and seeing ourselves for who we are. If people will start by admitting who they are, God will take them a lot farther more quickly, in a supernatural, powerful, miraculous way, than if they kick and scratch and defend themselves. Our faith will ring out when we come clean with exactly where our starting place is and admit how little we have to offer God, and how much we will always owe Him.

PART 3



FEELING THE NEED FOR MESSIAH

NO OTHER WAY

Jesus said, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom.*” That was the first of what we call the beatitudes, the “be happys.” What does that mean, “poor in spirit”? Aren’t we supposed to be jubilant? How does poverty fit in? Poverty means not having anything! How can we be happy if we’re empty spiritually? Jesus was saying that the starting place, the first of the “be happys” is... “*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*”

In the first part of his letter to his friends in Rome, Paul started dressing them down by saying, “Look, you guys need to recognize that being a Jew doesn’t make you anything. And being a good Gentile doesn’t make you anything either. That’s not what this is all about.” The Good News of Jesus Christ starts with recognizing your poverty—“*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*” We have to start by not believing anything good about ourselves. That’s the starting place. You don’t need a Messiah unless you understand the depth of the poverty in your own heart. If you don’t recognize that you have a *total problem*, then you certainly don’t need a Messiah.

Many would say, “Don’t be so hard on yourself. You need a good self-image.” And so people “come to Christ,” because they want to go to heaven, or they want to be part of a “good church.” They read the Bible, and it seems like becoming a Christian is the “right thing to do”—and better than the alternatives. Or maybe it’s a lifestyle thing that mom and dad taught or they have friends that “go to church” so they “go up the aisle and sign the card” too. Well, I have news for you. ***You will never know the power of God in your life unless you know the depravity of your own heart.*** You *cannot* know the power of God as long as you maintain a prideful, egocentric view of what God can

do for you, and how you can use Him like a genie-in-a-bottle to get a bunch of friends or get your soul saved or this or that. You have to face the emptiness of your own heart. “Blessed are the poor in spirit. *Theirs* is the kingdom.” You have to start with letting God dress you down. There’s no other way. Only when you face the major crisis of seeing your own sin, then and only then can you really understand how much you need God.

“*He who has been forgiven much, loves much,*” Jesus said. Who needs to be forgiven much except those who have faced Jesus of Nazareth and gotten on their face before Him? They’ve wept at His feet, anointed Him with perfume and dried His feet with their hair. Until you’ve had that sort of self-abasement and understanding of **how deeply you need Jesus** and that there’s **no other way**, you’ll not find the power of God in your life. “*Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it abides alone*” (John 12:24). Until you comprehend that, and go to the cross and deny your very self as having any value—until you start there, you don’t need a Messiah.

Maybe you would rather have a genie-in-a-bottle that does good deeds for you, or some sort of lucky rabbit’s foot. Or you want to keep a set of moral laws in order to feel good about yourself. *All* of that is empty and powerless. You’ve got to see what Paul was saying to the Romans, “Do you think you keep the law? Do you think you’re a great person? Do you think there’s good stuff in you and that you do good deeds and you’re a wonderful husband or wife or parent? What do you think about yourself? Do you think you’re better than all the other teens? Hey, I have news for you. **So what?!**” *That* is what Romans chapters 1, 2 and 3 are about. Whoever you *think* you are—apart from Jesus of Nazareth washing you by His Blood—**you have nothing and you are nothing**. If you won’t face that, then you’ll never understand Resurrection Power. I’m not trying to make you paranoid, but I *do* want you to see that in order to have faith—*total dependence*—on Jesus Christ, you have to see your need.

If you’re still hanging on to your pride, or your accomplishments, or your good works, or your good looks...if you’re hanging onto anything, you’re dead! You *will* abide alone. Some people have very little reason to hold on to their old life. Even though they’re miserable

in it, they still tenaciously hold on to it. They have very little reason for pride, and yet they still have pride. The battle with your self-life is a battle that can only be resolved in the unseen realm. It's a war in the unseen—an *inner man issue* and not just a "logical thing to do." This is about satan who has birthed offspring throughout the earth. "*Your father is the devil,*" Jesus said. All of humanity has fallen because of Adam's sin and is now under a curse. Every person so desperately needs to be bought back from that curse! And the very nature of the curse is that we're deceived. Our condition apart from God is a life of futile thinking, a darkened heart, and darkened understanding (Eph. 4:17,18). We've got a BIG problem on our hands! And until we face it and sense the total need we have for the Glorious Good News of Jesus Christ, we will never know His Salvation, His Deliverance or His Power. There will never be Resurrection Life in our bones, "joy inexpressible and full of glory," "the power of an indestructible life," "peace that transcends understanding," and "full of the Holy Ghost and full of wisdom." (1 Pet 1:8, Heb 7:16, Php 4:4-7, Acts 6:3). Our inheritance is all of these things, not just that we will go to heaven when we die.

If we want to know the Good News of Jesus, we have to face the very, very bad news that "going to church" and being a good person won't save us. Doing good deeds and giving things away will not save us. They mean NOTHING to God. "Our righteousness is as filthy rags." Until we face all that, we don't need a Messiah. We think we have a lifestyle that will save us, or one that will make us whole and full. But if you've ever found life that's truly Life—the abundant Life that's full and complete—you've only found it because you've fallen on the Rock and declared Jesus to be the answer for your sin, your selfishness and your foolishness. You won't find it because of a "lifestyle." You will only find true Life because you've become poor in spirit... You've made yourself nothing because it's an accurate assessment of who you are apart from Jesus. Only then will you find "the power of an indestructible life" and "taste the powers of the coming age" (Heb 7:16, 6:5). Then and only then will you find the inheritance that Jesus has left for you. Jesus says, "My peace I leave with you," to those who have consecrated themselves to Him.

But if your seed hasn't died, then you'll abide alone and live in poverty with emptiness in your heart. You'll be ransacked by sin, temptation, misery, bad attitudes and foolishness. You'll lack wisdom because you don't see God, and you don't hear God. And when somebody else does, you'll be jealous or embarrassed, and tempted to rear up with pride and comparison. You'll find yourself full of secret judgments of other people: "Well, *they* did this, and I can't believe *they* said that..." If those attitudes still dominate you, then you have cancer in your heart. You've not yet found the Good News of Jesus Christ and He has not yet set you free as He desires to set you free.

In fact, the more you learn about Christianity and Jesus' teachings, and the more you see the Life of God in the people of God, the more empty and alone you'll be if *you yourself* have not died. You'll be the loneliest person on earth. Seeing the Life, hanging around the Life and hearing about the Life will only make you more miserable and more alone if you haven't faced Jesus with your own sin. You have to see ***your own personal, desperate need for Him***, and have your own desire to fall on the rock and be broken to pieces because you know you have no other hope.

If someone in your life dresses you down the way Paul did his friends, it's so that you can find Jesus and cast your cares on Him, for He cares for you. It is meant to cause you to face Jesus in a way that you wouldn't do, apart from the pain. Paul said the Kingdom is entered with much tribulation. The **only** way to Resurrection Life is through a cross, and a cross is never without *humiliation*, it's never without *rejection*, and it's never without *pain*. You will never find a cross that's *real*, if it's lacking in any of those three things. You need to understand that and face those things.

"Get behind me, satan" was Jesus' rebuke to Peter. How would you handle that correction? Would it repulse you? Would you reject it and say, "Now, wait a minute. Who are you to talk to me like that!?" If that's your attitude, and you're not willing to let Paul or the Life of God in the corporate Life of Jesus put you in a place where you feel the pain, then you'll never really find Resurrection Power. God sovereignly orders these things for our good and for our growth. Whether they come from our roommates, spouses, parents, or even

our children, it is God who sovereignly orders opportunities for us to face our own sinfulness, humble ourselves, and call on His name.

God has made His presence and righteousness known to all of us, without exception (Romans 1). It's equally true that God gives every last one of us multiple opportunities to face the agony of the cross, as He wants to translate us from glory to glory to glory. You'll find a variety of things, and different kinds of crosses that He puts in front of you. I want to encourage you as a friend and a brother, to face those things and as James said, to count those trials as pure joy and learn perseverance. Let your faith be tested as by fire and turn your face towards Him. Let your attitude be refined as you humble yourself before Him. I beg you to do that, because there's nothing anyone can do for you when **God Himself** has sovereignly and supernaturally ordered *humiliation, rejection, and pain* in your life through your circumstances. Things will humiliate you that don't humiliate others, and things will humiliate others that don't you. It's an experience that He custom fits for each of us from glory to glory to glory.

Face heartache with pure joy and humble yourself before the exposing light of God, falling on your face before Him, washing His feet with your tears and drying them with your hair. If you won't do that in humility and grace and go forward, then you will be cutting yourself off and determining your own destiny to abide alone. No amount of good works or knowledge or superficial fellowship (because that's all you'll ever have in this state) will keep you from feeling totally alone, if you've never faced the Gospel of Jesus.

The Good News of Jesus is meant to forgive your sin and to render sin as powerless in your life. He was manifested not only to destroy the penalty of sin, but also to destroy the devil's working in your life. You will never experience freedom from sin unless you find in Jesus the need to be poor in spirit. That's God's heart for you—to be *poor in spirit*. Face Him without any claims of your own righteousness—how well you compare to other people...the fact that you don't do anything too terribly bad...the numerous “good things” that you do and say to others...your “knowledge of the truth”...

You will abide alone unless you face Jesus about the fact that there is nothing good inside of you and that you need Him desperately. Apart from Him, you can do how much? Nothing. *Absolutely nothing.*

GREAT HUMILITY, GREAT BOLDNESS

“I want to come to you so that I can have a harvest among you just as I have had among the other Gentiles.” That holy boldness came by faith in God, by such a relationship with Him that he wasn’t ashamed to say something ridiculous like that! If today somebody said, “I want to have a harvest among you just as I did the saints in Dallas and Wappahanee,” they would be ostracized to an extreme. People would say, “Who do you think you are? You can give us your ‘sermon,’ but don’t give us that kind of thing—that’s arrogance, presumption!” But Paul spoke unashamedly because his relationship with God was so deep, and his ability to hear God’s voice was so loud and clear that it brought a faith and a confidence that allowed him to make ostentatious, bodacious statements like that.

Think of those who have accomplished the most in life for Jesus. If you got underneath their skin and into their head, you’d find out that they are the most humble people on the earth. They may speak boldly, like Moses. He sounded pretty bold sometimes, but God affirmed that he was the most humble man on the earth. If you got down under his skin, you’d realize that he counts himself for nothing and his boldness shouldn’t fool you; there’s deep humility there. There’s great courage and deep humility, a deep crying out to God for the next breath that comes out of his mouth.

That’s God’s intent for you! Not that you would be a worm and all shriveled up, “Oh, I ain’t nobody. I’m just a sinner saved by grace.” That was far from the attitude Paul took in light of his unworthiness. He was greatly courageous and bold in all of his dealings. That’s

because he found all his identity in Jesus alone. Anything else is going to cave in. Anything else is going to fall through and fail. But Jesus never fails. “Let God be true and every man, including myself, be a liar.” There’s confidence in that statement, not pity! “Through Christ I can do all things,” he said. “I am nothing. Anything I’ve ever done and anything I am is dung.” But, “Through Christ *all* things” shows great courage there. “I was the least of the saints. I was worse than the worst of sinners,” he said. “But His grace began to work in me and I began to see my great sin and that I am of no account. His great grace was poured out and I just decided that I was going to work harder than all the rest” (1 Cor. 15:10). Paul didn’t shrink back because of his unworthiness. Instead, he found his worthiness and his righteousness in Jesus and it thrust him forward with great courage and life and zeal and heart. But he never lost his humility in spite of all his boldness.

That’s what God wants to do with you, too—great boldness and courage in the workplace with customers, employers, and employees. He wants to impart the courage that’s in His heart, which is filled with the humility of knowing, “I am nothing, but Jesus is everything. Therefore, I have boldness to speak to you, because you can’t hurt me. You can hurt me if it’s *me* doing it, but you can’t hurt me or reject me if it’s Jesus doing it through me.” Because Jesus already died, I died to the world and the world to me, Paul said. That’s the quality of life that brings us before the Throne of God and before the thrones of men with the courage to say, “I wish that you were like me except for these chains.” Great courage, great boldness, great life and fullness, and yet great humility—that’s God’s Life living through us.

To have that Life, we have to find out what Paul’s trying to tell us in these first three chapters to the Romans. We have to see how entirely and incredibly *un*-worthy we are as human beings and as a fallen race that deserves to die. The wages of sin is *still* death. “...*If you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants...you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who say, ‘Do not steal,’ do you not steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?*” (Romans 2:19-22). He was saying this to the people,

not because they were terrible sinners, but because he wanted them to see the possibilities in their hearts of stealing, lying, cheating, and immorality. Paul is saying, “Can you not find these things in your own heart? Can you not see that these things exist in your own bones?” We’re all worthless. Until you see it and understand that no one does right—not even one—and that even your *righteousness* is filthy rags, you will not find the Life of Jesus welling up inside of you.

And because a lot of people in this world don’t see that, they end up making “claims” about Paul’s meaning in Romans 6 and 8. They “claim” those scriptures, but never really experience them. They say, “I find my identity in Christ. You can’t talk to me about something in my life. I have the imparted Life of Jesus—He possesses me, and I Him. You can’t touch me, I’m fireproof because I have my identity in Christ,” and so on. Yet when you look, you see that their lives are empty and worthless, ransacked with sin, selfishness, worldliness and pride. You ask, “How could sin be so rampant in their lives if they’ve truly found their identity in Christ, like Romans 6 and 8 say?” It’s because they *claim* this imputed righteousness, strength, and sanctification of Jesus, yet they’re powerless! Their lives are carnal and worldly and ridiculous. It’s sickening. They sit under the teaching, but they don’t live the Life.

The problem is that they didn’t start at the beginning of Romans. They never let God strip them of their pride and self-worth. So God couldn’t fill them with *His* worth. He couldn’t fill them with His power because they were still functioning in their own. We’ve got to start at the beginning of Romans to understand the power of Romans 6, 7 and 8. We’ve got to understand how desperately needy we are if we’re going to find the Kingdom of God in force and in power.

I encourage you that when your trials come, faith in Jesus implies a certain attitude. In spite of the pain, the rejection, the unfairness of circumstances, whether imposed by God or man (seemingly man, *really* God), don’t kick against the goads. Don’t balk at those things, but rather turn your face with a smile toward God—“*Though you slay me, yet will I trust you!*” It’s that attitude of Job in the midst of conflict, so that you let your faith be refined as through the fire. It brings perseverance and thick skin. It brings depth of heart and

deep wisdom. The Hebrews writer said, “By now you ought to be teachers, but there is no wisdom in you.” They had no wisdom because they weren’t letting God dress them down, so that He could dress them up.

"GOD, I'M HOPELESS!!"

I'm going to say this one more time because it is essential that you understand this. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom." Only by starting *there* can you ever begin to find the fullness of God's Life inside of you. *And that's why so few people ever find it!* So many people are filled with platitudes and clichés, words, concepts and competition. But they die empty and in poverty, because *they didn't start at the starting place*—being poor in spirit. They never faced the emptiness and lack inside themselves.

The beginning of the Good News is the very, very bad news of who we are and how desperately we need Jesus. I'll just say it in plain English: You can't know who you are in Christ until you know who you are in satan. Until you grapple and deal with it and embrace the truth of who you are in the devil—a fallen member of humanity in a worthless society—you can't have true life. We are altogether worthless. As terrible as that sounds, in view of a Dale Carnegie world that wants to make you feel good about yourself, you still need to face the facts. Would you please do that? ***As an individual, whatever your name is, would you please face how desperately you need Jesus?*** I don't know how else to say it. There is *nothing good that dwells in you!* You need to face that if you are going to be able to go forward and find Resurrection Life. Please face it. Please cry, weep, wail, and lament. If you can't find it in your heart to weep at His feet, then you've not seen the bad news or the Good News just yet, because it ***WILL BRING YOU TO TEARS***. As emotionless as you are, as "big a boy" as you are, as sure of yourself as you are—the fullness of the gospel *will* bring you to tears. If you really see it and you really understand it with your heart, you will weep like you have never

wept before. The goal is not to shed tears, but the objective before each of us is to see the desperate nature of fallen humanity.

The thing that Paul kept saying was, “Look in your own hearts, boys. You’re a thief, too. You’re a homosexual, too. You’re disobedient to your parents, too.” He gives a long list in Chapter 1 of revilers and slanderers and gossips. But the smug Jews say, “Ha! *I’m* not like that. *I’m* not a murderer! *I’m* not a homosexual! Ha, that doesn’t apply to me!” These Jews were living these righteous, Ten Commandment kind of lives just like we are, right? But Paul goes on to say in Chapter 2, “I’m talking to YOU, TOO!” I don’t care if you kept the Ten Commandments or not. I don’t care if you even *taught* the Ten Commandments and all about this righteous God to everyone! Look in your own heart and see that ***you, too, are desperate for God.*** Just like the Gentiles who never heard the Law in the first place, you are as desperate as they are.

Until you face that, you can’t have Jesus, and you can’t have Resurrection Life. Unless the seed falls to the ground and dies, it will abide alone. It doesn’t even matter how much you know about the teachings of all these things. ***You must face your own heart.*** You have to face what comes out of your mouth—the bad attitudes you’ve allowed in your head, the things that you’ve allowed to fester, and the way you’ve judged other people and situations. Maybe you find yourself out of the flow of things with others, and you assume that since you feel empty, everybody else must be empty, too. You feel worthless and spiritless, and so you judge other people as being the same. Everybody else is a doofus, too. “They’re just pretending because that’s all I’m doing.” “They must not have anything either. It must not be real.” That’s the nature of the deception. You’ve got to capture all that stuff and face God and realize that the Blood of Jesus and the Spirit of God are the only things that can deliver you. Otherwise, YOU ARE HOPELESS. You’ve got to let those words come out of your own mouth to God. **“GOD, I’M HOPELESS!!”**

IT'S ABOUT MIRACLES

In view of what has already been said, please be sure to embrace the pain. The Kingdom is entered through much tribulation. That's how you find the Life and Power of God rather than just a bunch of clichés about God...a bunch of cheap fellowship that means nothing and a bunch of barbecues that have no power. The road in to the Glory of God, the real thing that sets captives free and declares the Year of the Lord's favor and gives sight to the blind and heals the lame...is to face the cross. The thing that brings sinners to salvation and many sons to **Glory and Fullness**—is to face the cross. The way to find not only salvation, but also Glory and Fullness, is to deny your very life, to humble yourself before the dressing down of God and lift your heart and your voice and your eyes to heaven—to call on His Name. It is to sit at His feet, totally unworthy of anything. To wash Jesus' feet with your tears and to dry His feet with your hair, making yourself nothing—THAT kind of humility.

Let's pray for each other and ask for miracles for each other. I'm not satisfied with anything less than that, because that's what the Scriptures teach that Christianity is about—it's about miracles. "Behold all things are new"—a transformation takes place, a radical miracle of a changed heart, life, mind, perspective, priority and personality. It's God Himself filling a person—the Creator of the Universe, who fills the heavens and the earth, living inside of a person! *That's* the hope and the promise and the inheritance that He has for each of us. He totally blows away the old, and changes a heart of stone into a heart that's soft. God desires to do that, and it starts by admitting our true state—'fessing up—and letting God dress us down, so that He can fill us up. Letting Him uproot, tear

down, destroy, and overthrow (Jeremiah 1) in order that He might build and plant. That's His heart.

Turn your face toward the Son of God.

Lord Jesus, You are a baptizer—not only with Your Spirit but also with fire. We're grateful that You want to kindle a fire to burn up the chaff. We're genuinely grateful that You are a baptizer with fire. It hurts, but we're grateful. Now, O God, we pray that as You've burnt up the chaff in others, that You would consume the emptiness and the chaff in our own lives. We're 'fessing up, we're admitting these things. We're not counting on our past achievements, our education, our knowledge or any of those things as having any merit. It's all dung in Your sight. We're admitting that.

Father, You promised us in Your Holy Scriptures that in Your Son Jesus You could take a heart and a life that was willing to be emptied before You and do a miraculous transformation—a miracle like the Red Sea and like the dead raised. And we believe that Your Son Jesus is the "Yes" to all Your promises, and we say, "So be it, Amen." We believe You and trust You that if we're honest in what we're saying before You, we know that You desire to do a miracle and WILL do a miracle.

We stand before You united in total trust and belief that You are a Conqueror over the power and the penalty of sin, for us. As the song goes, let Your "wonder working Power" wash us and cleanse us. Burn up the chaff with a baptism of fire and fill our hearts and lives with a baptism of Your Spirit in Your time and way. Show us exactly what needs to happen. We trust You for paths of righteousness and paths of peace and a hope and future for us if we trust completely in the Name of Your Son. For Jesus' Name and for His sake, Amen, so be it.

God, these are all simple seeds. Please remake us. We've got nothing to offer You. There's no work that we can put our hope and trust in. We just flat need You. Help us.

Father, we ask that You would impart Life to us. The words have piled up in abundance over the years, but we're asking You to intervene and touch our hearts and lives. Our faith is in YOU. We know that we need to sow the

seed, and we do. We go to bed, and You bring life out of sawdust, though we know not how. We trust You for that.

We bring Good News to our brothers and sisters by Your Spirit. It's Good News to all of humanity that Jesus Christ frees us from the power and penalty of sin—a power unto deliverance. We ask You for that power to be evident, that our faith would ring out and be heard around the world. There are other things we could be known for—good things and wholesome things—but we want to be known primarily for our faith that rings out.

We want our faith in YOU to be the whole substance of our life. We want to experience the obedience of faith that comes from knowing and walking with You—wanting to be with You and like You in every way. We trust You implicitly for Your Power to work itself out in our lives. We trust You and want our faith to ring out around the world, individually and corporately. Glory to Your Name. We praise You, we honor You and exalt You.

We're humbled by the depth of Your riches, the magnificence of Your Name and by Your plan for fallen humanity. We're humbled by all that You want to do and all that You want to strip from us first, and fill us with, second. Please tear down and uproot, destroy and overthrow in order that You might build and plant. We yield all these things into Your hands and call on You to intervene in our lives. We do love You, as far as our foolish, darkened hearts are able. Please CHANGE US and let our faith ring out. Continue to pray for us that our faith would not fail, and that we'd be able to strengthen our brothers in response to Your goodness to us. Amen.

PART 4



ABRAHAM'S FOOTSTEPS

THE PLAYING FIELD IS LEVEL

“What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew [or a person that knows all about the commandments], or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God” (Romans 3:1,2).

Sure, being a “vessel for God’s Word” has value in that God chooses to use you as an envelope to deliver the message to others. But that’s the *only* value that comes from it if your own heart hasn’t changed. So *what* if you get to be a vessel for God’s Word? That doesn’t mean you keep His commandments! That doesn’t mean His Word has had any real effect on your life from the *inside*. Even if your outward man has kept the law, your inward man could still be wrecked.

“What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true and every man a liar” (Romans 3:3,4a). In other words, God’s Word stands true, regardless of what anybody does with it. “As it is written: ‘So that you may be proved right in your words and prevail in your judging.’ But if our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing His wrath on us? (I’m using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, ‘If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases His glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner? Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—‘Let us do evil that good may result?’ Their condemnation is deserved” (Romans 3:4b-8).

We start playing this game, “Well, God’s righteous, and I’m not righteous. I’m just a ‘sinner saved by grace,’ and so I’ll just go on sinning so that grace may abound. That would just make God look all the better because He’s saved someone as dark and depraved as I am.” If you desire to play that game and want to keep on sinning, it’s clear that you deserve your condemnation!

But that’s not what God wants for us! Through His kindness, tolerance, and patience He’s turning us towards *repentance*—not towards boasting in our sin. The nature of God’s Spirit inside of us is that we *cannot* continue to sin, and if we do, our condemnation is deserved. 1 John 3 is a proof of that, “*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God*” (1 John 3:9). If the Spirit really lives inside of you, if you really did receive the Good News, then you won’t continue to sin. If you can keep on sinning, crucifying Jesus afresh, and even boast in your sin, saying, “Oh, well, just put that on Jesus’ account,” then your condemnation is deserved. You don’t have the Spirit if you are callous like that to your own sin. If it doesn’t just break your heart, then you don’t have the Spirit at all. You *need* the Good News—the Good News that teaches us to say “NO!” to ungodliness, as Paul said to Titus (Titus 2:12).

The proof of God’s grace, His forgiveness, and His love—the proof that His Spirit is inside of us is that we want to say “No” to ungodliness! It’s our desire to turn away from sin, and what we do that’s against God’s righteousness, we hate (Romans 7, Titus 2).

We don’t want to do it. We don’t try to excuse it. Paul is saying that it is the wrong covenant if we try to excuse our sin based on some imputed righteousness. In that case, we don’t have His Spirit at all. (Only when we admit that we *do* have sin does Jesus’ blood continually cleanse us from all sin, 1 John 1.) If our attitude is, “Hey, we haven’t really missed the mark. It’s not *our* problem, it’s Jesus’ problem,” then we have no conscience about our sin. If we dismiss sin based on our theology (or maybe we don’t even have a theology, we just blow it off based on our seared conscience) then there’s a very good chance that we’re not walking in the New Covenant or the forgiveness of sins at all. The Spirit of God teaches us to say “No!” to unrighteousness. It

teaches us to turn away from sin. We feel it in our heart and in our bones. There's something inside of us that says, "No! I don't want to live that way. I'm not a pig. I don't want to live in the pigpen like the prodigal. I'm not a pig—I'm a son. I've got to get myself out of this mud." *That's* the cry of God's Spirit inside of us when we're in sin.

"What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all!" (Romans 3:9a) Do you have that phrase in your vocabulary? "NOT AT ALL." Are you any better than anybody else? Not at all. If you don't have that phrase in your vocabulary, you don't understand the Good News. Are we any better? Not at all.

"We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin" (Romans 3:9b). So, you're a Jew? Well, you had the law, but you never kept it in your heart. You were powerless to keep it. So, you're a Gentile? God made His will known to you, too, even without the law. Jew and Gentile alike, you are both under sin. We've leveled the playing field here, boys! You are *all* the same. Apart from Jesus, you are all the same. Are we any better? Not at all.

"As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes'" (Romans 3:10-18). Are you the exception to that? Do you think you do good or have some sort of merit or worth in yourself? You think you're not so bad? I wouldn't start there if I were you! You will never have Jesus if that is your mentality.

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:19-20).

All the laws of God are in place simply to make us see how much we need Jesus. *That's* the point he is making here. These laws are not here to make us feel good about ourselves. In fact, we're not honest about them if they make us feel good about ourselves! You could think, "We have the law. We keep the commandments. We know what 'church' is. We know what discipleship is. We know what God expects." The truth is that if you *really* knew what all of that was about, it would make you **desperate for Jesus' life**. If you *really* understood and believed it in your heart, you would realize what *deep trouble* you're in. Sure, like the rich young ruler, you think you've kept a few commandments. From "the time of your youth," you've been wonderful, you think. But in your heart do you cling, like the rich young ruler, to one thing (or two or three or four), and refuse to let go? If you've refused to let go, you can't have Jesus, just like the rich young ruler couldn't have Jesus.

You'll never have Jesus if you refuse to let go of your "right" to have opinions about people and things; or if you refuse to let go of your "right" to object violently when someone brings light into your life; or if you refuse to accept authority in your life from whatever source that may come. If you defend and hold on to your rights, then you *can't have Jesus*. The law of God decrees that any of these things makes you unrighteous before Him—just lacking *one* thing is all it takes. Like the rich young ruler, it doesn't have to be thirty-eight things. "*One thing you lack*" is sufficient to make you worthless in God's sight.

If you're honest with what God says and what His requirements are of you—if you look in the mirror candidly for just one second, and judge *yourself* compared to the Word of God, instead of judging others, you will know how *incredibly* needy you are. The **Word of God** is the Standard. And that's what Jesus said will judge YOU on the last day (John 12:48). He said, "I didn't come to judge the world but to save it. My Word will judge you." If you let the Word judge you, you're in a LOT of trouble—a HEAP of trouble! Think about that. If you let the Word judge you, you're in a lot of trouble! The law was given to make us conscious of sin. Unless you read and see that Romans 1, 2 and 3 are talking to *you*, you're not ready for the Good News. You need to be conscious of the sin in your own bones, and see how desperate

you are for deliverance—a deliverance you cannot bring yourself and a life you cannot grant yourself by anything you say or do. It has to come from God—“not of natural descent or human decision or a husband’s will,” but it must be born of God (John 1:13). Until you understand that, you’ll not find the True and Living God—the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You’ll not find His life, and you’ll only find a form of godliness that’s without power (2 Tim. 3:5). You will be miserable. You will abide alone. You’ve got to face who you really are, by yourself. No one can do it for you.

I’m emphasizing all this because I want you to have the Life of God. And you cannot have the Life of God apart from facing Him in the mirror—without pride, without self-justification, without comparison to others, and without any claim of your own good deeds or merit. You can’t have the Life of God until you come clean. There’s no one who does right, not even one. Not me, not you...No one who does good.

Will you please face God some time very soon with this? Will you do that, as an individual? Don’t treat this like some sort of teaching that can be injected into your head. Don’t turn around to others and say, “Oh, yeah, I’ve got that. Yep, I heard that. Romans 1 through 3—I understand that. Hey you, you better let God dress you down!” Please don’t do that! What I’m saying is: YOU face God and acknowledge before Him, with tears in your eyes, *your total, absolute unworthiness* to even breathe a breath of air or know an ounce of peace, let alone go to heaven. “God, I deserve hell. Every fiber of my being is condemning me—I deserve hell. I DESERVE HELL!” Until you’re willing to face that, there’s really not much hope that you will find the Life of Jesus.

That’s why Paul is dressing down his friends and leveling the playing field. He’s saying that religion **won’t** save you. He’s making it clear to the Jews, “Yes, the Gentiles needed religion desperately, like you thought. But look at yourselves! You had religion and it didn’t do you a bit of good.” The playing field is level. No one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing any externals. Rather, through our lack of meeting externals, and our lack of internal life and righteousness, we become conscious of sin (Romans 3:20).

GUILTY AS CHARGED

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Romans 3:21-22).

“But now...” Paul has come to the turning point: “But now, a righteousness from God” apart from anything that we say or do has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. If you’ve read about it in the Old Testament, now is the time to believe it! Righteousness comes through *total* dependence, *total* faith, and *total* trust in Jesus Christ to all who believe—to all who put **their whole hope in Jesus and His righteousness**, in their daily lives as well as for their initial salvation. There is no one who does right, no one who does good. There is no one who is capable of anything. Apart from Him, we can do *nothing*. But now there is a righteousness apart from externals, available through total dependence on Jesus Christ. The Father doesn’t love me—the Father loves the Son! So I’d better hide my life in Him. The Father loves *the Son*.

The Father loves the *Son!* *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not be damned to hell, but have everlasting life.* If we put our full trust in Jesus because the Father loves the Son, then the Father will redeem us. He will buy back those who completely and totally trust the Son of God for any measure of righteousness they ever have had or ever *will* have. That is a key for many of us who have functioned according to the externals and relied on our “knowledge of truth.” We’ve depended on those “things” as our righteousness instead of Jesus alone. But the only peace that God ever grants comes when we trust the Son and hide our lives in Him.

“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22b-24a). “Justified freely”—what does that mean? Does that mean I am innocent? No! It means **the penalty has been paid**. You need to understand the meaning of that in your personal daily walk with God. Justification comes freely by believing in Jesus and it means that justice has been served—somebody needed to die and it should have been you, but Jesus died instead of you. He paid the price for your sin. That doesn’t mean you’re innocent. You are, in fact guilty.

Suppose I went to court for a crime that I *did* commit. I could spend the rest of my life saying, “Not guilty! Not guilty!” But the fact is, I did commit it, and I *am* guilty. Now in order for Jesus to pay the price of eternal death for my sin, it’s imperative that I say, “*Guilty as charged*.” You’ve got to start there. Depraved? *Yes*. Wicked beyond belief? *Yes*. Empty beyond understanding and comprehension? That’s me! Dead in my transgressions and sins? *Yes*. *Guilty as charged*. I will take the accusation at face value and admit my guilt before a Holy and Just God. *Only then* does justification take place, by faith in Jesus. Justification doesn’t mean that we’re innocent. It means that **the price has been paid; justice has been served**. The death sentence has been carried out. “*Guilty as charged. I deserve hell*.” I face God and I say from the heart, “I deserve hell, oh God! I am wicked. I have no holiness. My mouth is an open grave. There is nothing good in me. *Guilty as charged. Send me to hell*.”

Only as we face our sin can we then face our Redeemer. As we fall on our face as a dead man like John did, Jesus puts His hand on our shoulder and says, “I was dead *for* you. Behold, I’m alive *for* you. As the first Adam brought you sin and death, so now *all the more* I bring you Resurrection Life and Power. As he brought you the penalty of sin, all the more I bring you freedom from its death sentence. As he bound you under the slavery of sin until you were wracked with its pain, *still more* I bring you freedom from its bondage. I bring you an abundant life that’s *truly* free. I cause my life to live inside of you, so that you can live in resurrection power—the power of an indestructible life.”

As we face the fact that we've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God, we can then understand justification in Christ. We are justified freely by His grace, by His free gift. We are not innocent, but rather, "Guilty As Charged." We turn to Jesus and humbly let Him wash us and cleanse us and die for us. Why do we need someone to die for us if we're not guilty? Is there still pride in our hearts? Are we not yet poor in spirit? If we don't see ourselves as guilty, we don't need someone to die for us. No death sentence is necessary. If you don't face the curse and face the death sentence, then Jesus fulfilling that death sentence as a free gift is unnecessary. He doesn't offer it to those who won't turn to Him, having faced their own sinfulness. Please, I beg you to let this get through to your heart.

*"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through **faith in his blood**."* He is our atoning sacrifice by faith in His blood—dependence, **totally**, on His blood. *"He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus"* (Romans 3:25-26). **Why** did Jesus have to die? Because death was the **only** thing that could bring about justice. It should've been us—we are the ones who **DESERVE** to die. The death sentence is fully applicable because justice required that someone must die. God didn't overlook our sin, but He instead justified us freely by letting the Lamb of God take away the sins of the world.

"Where, then, is boasting?" Do you get the idea now? Where is the boasting, hot shots? Are we any better? Oh, no! Certainly not! Where now is the boasting, oh wise Christian soldiers? *"It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? (Or doing good "Christian" things?) No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (or externals). Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law"* (Romans 3:27-31).

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him’” (Romans 4:1-8).

*“Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” If we face this dressing down and come to Him poor in spirit, then our sins—because of the life of Jesus and the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus—are never counted against us, *no matter what*. Through thick and thin, through high and low times, our sins are never counted against us if we are really living by faith in Jesus.*

*“Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!” (Romans 4:9,10) Did Abraham’s circumcision—his obedience to God—bring him to righteousness before God? When was he “credited with righteousness”? It was not *after* he received the sign of circumcision, but before. So for the Jewish person with pride, understand this: Abraham’s justification*

wasn't based on his good deeds. His circumcision didn't make him an Israelite and it didn't justify him. He was justified *before* he was circumcised. *“And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of **the righteousness that he had by faith** while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of **all who believe** but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them”* (Romans 4:11).

Living sinless lives, or keeping the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses with its sacrificial system, never justified anyone. It is **our faith** that always has and always will justify us, whether we are circumcised or uncircumcised; in the law or apart from the law; good deeds or no good deeds. I'll even go so far as to say...holiness or no holiness. It's our *faith* that makes us true Israelites.

“And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (Romans 4:12). To follow in the footsteps of our father Abraham is to believe on the One whom the Father has sent! He's the **only** hope for deliverance from the *penalty* of sin and our only hope for freedom from the *power* of sin. You must grasp that! You have to grab greedily onto that fact if you're ever going to understand God's forgiveness, and learn to “love much, because you've been forgiven much.” If you're ever going to find Resurrection Power, you must understand the rotting death that's in your heart. You have to understand the utter wickedness of carnal power—the power of the mind, the power of persuasive ability, the power of hard work and willpower, the power of genius, and the power of charm and good looks. None of that junk will ever justify us before God or bring us to a place of bearing fruit to the Father's glory. Do you believe that? You've got to believe it. If you want to find the same freeing power and life and justification of our father Abraham, then you have to walk in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham. Only then will we become friends of God.

“It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world (wow! The heir of the world!), but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all” (Romans 4:13-16).

Being “heir of the world” comes by faith—by *totally* believing God and His Word and His Son. Reigning in life comes by believing God about our own *unrighteousness* and about the *total worthiness* of the Son of God as our only hope. And not only is He our hope, but He is the fulfillment of God's every requirement, and our only reason for confidence. Because of that, we're not just squeaking by, but *boasting* in the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ. These things are guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring. And who are Abraham's offspring but those who have Abraham's faith!

“As it is written: ‘I have made you a father of many nations.’ He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed...” (Romans 4:17). Notice this FAITH of Abraham! It is this *attitude* in the face of disappointment or in the face of a barren womb. It's this attitude in the face of failure with children or relationships or business dealings. It's having this *attitude* of faith again and again and again, in the face of despair and rejection and sin in your life—*sin that you've fully acknowledged*. You've said, “I am guilty, oh God. I resented that person when they brought me Your Word. I rejected it because I was pompous. I was haughty and I lashed back and accused. I did not humble myself before You. *Guilty as charged*, God. I deserve death.”

Not only do we face the facts of our sin and turn to God, humbling ourselves and casting ourselves before Him as guilty, but we also go on to face Jesus as the *only* fulfillment of all righteousness. In spite of failure after failure after failure, we keep coming back to Him. In spite of defeat, rejection, despair, disappointment, and discouragement, we still face God. We turn our whole heart toward Him and receive His Word that He calls things that are not as though they are. With that kind of faith and heart towards God, we trust God for the forgiveness of sin and for the redemption of a fallen and failed life.

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith. . .” (Romans 4:18-19a).

We too can *believe*, just like Abraham, against all hope, without weakening in our faith. With courage and humility, we have a despair of our own sin but a deep confidence of our hope in Jesus. We face God, confident of the fact that He’s written His Heart and His Overcoming Life into our genetic code. He’s become our life and so we’ve hidden our life in Him. Without weakening in our faith, we face the fact that our body is as good as dead. We face the facts. We cannot do anything worthwhile. That’s the way it is, and it’s okay. We don’t argue about it.

He faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God” (Romans 4:19-20). In spite of his failures, in spite of his stupidity, in spite of his weakness, in spite of the death in his inner man, he was *strengthened* in his faith and gave glory to God! He was a worshiper, like Job. “Though you slay me, yet will I trust you.” In spite of everything, He was a worshiper! He didn’t have an attitude problem or hold a grudge. He didn’t judge and complain about his circumstances. He didn’t complain to God, or to others or to himself. Instead, he gave glory to God and he worshipped God. He was strengthened in the inner man because he turned his face toward God and called on the Name of the Lord. He had that kind of heart! He wasn’t dealing horizontally, only looking at the seen world. He was “conscious of God” as Peter said. He wasn’t dealing with the junk of circumstances, religion, good deeds, and comparisons. Rather, he had a smile and a twinkle in his eye, and a heart toward God, and he saw the majestic cloud. He saw all of creation crying out to the Glory of God! He saw even the stones along the road bursting into praise! His heart was conscious of the God who created the heavens and the earth.

So then, what do I have to say about my “little ol’ circumstances”? They just aren’t so bad, *are they?* Abraham was “*fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised*” (Romans 4:21). Without

wavering, fully persuaded, giving glory to God! *Fully persuaded*. He didn't waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was *strengthened* in his faith, giving glory to God. Ask me any ol' time how this is going to turn out, this terrrrrible thing that is happening to me. I'm not going to shrink back as one destroyed! I'm *fully persuaded*—in spite of all the evidence, in spite of all the history that would prove how bad this is going to be. Fully persuaded. That's the faith of Abraham—faith that justifies us freely, in spite of our failures and our circumstances. Fully persuaded, that God has the power to do what He has promised!

“This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’ The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:22-25). AND for our consecration. In other words, Jesus not only removes the penalty of sin, but He completely obliterates the power of sin in our lives.

STRENGTHEN YOUR BROTHERS

Satan desires to sift all of us as wheat. He desires to thresh us and shake us and kill us. But Jesus says, “*I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not. And when you’ve turned, strengthen your brothers.*” These words are from the Throne of God. Satan desires to sift each of you as wheat—brutal words! Yet the Son of God, seated at the Right Hand of God, who lives to intercede, says, “*But I have prayed for you that your faith would not fail.*” And when you come through this, view this not as for yourself, but for the sake of others. When the sifting is over, “**strengthen your brothers.**” Love them as I have loved them. When you’ve been sifted, thrashed and beaten every which way, and the winds have blown and scattered you to the four corners of the earth...when you’re converted, strengthen your brothers. I’ve prayed for you, that your faith would not fail.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “We have the mind of Christ. We’re spiritual, but you’re carnal.” The quality of the Corinthians’ lives didn’t demonstrate that they had the mind of Christ and that they lived by the Spirit of God. They were carnal and foolish. They couldn’t even understand a lot of what he was saying. As he put it, “I have to give you milk; you are babies.” When he wrote to the Galatians, he said the same thing: “I’m crucified with Christ, yet I no longer live, I live by faith in the Son of God.” He went on to say, “I’m in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, too.” He wasn’t saying *they* had been crucified with Christ, he said *he* had. “I’m dead to the world and the world to me. You have that same inheritance, and I’m in the pains of childbirth until you live in it, until your life demonstrates it.”

You may need to take a hard look in the mirror, and be on your face and on your knees before the full meaning of this actually has any bearing on your life. “I’ve been crucified with Christ, I no longer live. I live by faith in the Son of God.” Paul could say these words about himself, but he wanted to see Christ formed in them, too, because that was their rightful inheritance. They weren’t meant to remain babies, tossed to and fro by every wind, but to righteously live in faith and strength and life, fully persuaded, giving glory to God in every circumstance. It wasn’t their current experience, but it was their inheritance.

So whether you’re experiencing it this instant or not, let your heart just well up from within, “God, help me to know what it means to be crucified in Christ and to no longer live. I’m sick of me! I want You to live in me.” Cry out to Him, and live by the power of the faith of the Son of God—a resurrected, full, free, abundant life. “I came to give you life—in ABUNDANCE!” That’s Jesus’ heart cry for the sheep in His fold.

Satan desires to sift you as wheat, but Jesus said, “I have prayed for you.” Jesus says to you right now, “I am praying that your faith would not fail, and that when you are converted, you will strengthen your brothers.” Do you know why Paul worked so hard, harder than all the rest? He was free to do that because faith and grace were so real to him. That’s not justification by works. That’s not doing good deeds in order to earn something before God. Working harder than all the rest comes from finally seeing and letting God work His power and His faith and His grace through us. As James said, a person who doesn’t work hard or have a demonstration of life and grace, whose life isn’t marked by an evident power of the Spirit in serving the brothers—that person hasn’t experienced true faith. It’s not justification by works, it’s joining ourselves to the works of service that God created in advance for us to do. Before He created time, He had a part for each of us to play in His symphony. Being able to play our part is all wrapped up in the fact that we are saved by grace *and* faith—and none of this from ourselves. It all crescendos into a symphony of God’s work being done on planet earth.

“I’ve prayed for you that your faith fail not. And when you are finally converted to true faith, strengthen your brothers.” Settle for nothing less than the faith we’ve been talking about. Be fully persuaded and give glory to God with NO attitudes and NO judgments, facing God, humbling ourselves without pride, with nothing to protect or defend. When you’ve finally faced God that way, and your faith has not failed in the midst of turmoil, crisis, or disappointment, or even your own sin—when you are converted, ***turn and strengthen your brothers.***

Take some time and pray for people in a real way. Pray for your brothers and sisters and your children and people all over the city and all over the world who wear His name. Pray that their faith would ring out throughout the world. Pray for those who *claim* to be God’s people—that they would have true faith in the Son of God. Pray that their life would demonstrate the power of Christ living through them—not just their words, not just their doctrine, but their *life* would be a demonstration of God’s power. If their life doesn’t reflect God, then they’re *not* living in grace or in faith. I don’t care what their doctrine says—they’ve not found Jesus. Because if they had, then the result would be that they would be bearing ***much fruit*** to the Father’s glory. Abiding in Him will always result in bearing fruit—filling and multiplying the world with the Life of God. So please pray for your brothers right now?

When He returns to earth, **WILL HE FIND FAITH?** Pray passionately that He would find faith. Consecrate yourself for your brothers and sisters throughout the world.

LET YOUR HEART REST

Take a minute and let your heart rest. Maybe your mind is driving toward this thing or that, but just ask God to let your heart rest before Him. Turn your face towards Him and ponder some of what you remember (or some of what you don't remember 😊). Lift your heart toward Him. The reason David was a man after God's own heart was that he took the time to look up into the clouds and find God. So let your heart stop racing, and let these seeds settle in. Just ask Him to touch you and help you.

Don't space out, don't zone out, and don't just consider externals. Don't think about what other people around you are doing, or how you feel about this person or that person. Maybe you had a contention with the way something was said. Don't get bogged down in what you understand or what you don't understand. Don't let your mind and your heart and your flesh race. All of those things will kill you. Contemplate God in a spirit of peace and beg Him to touch your heart and your life. Turn toward God, seated high and lifted up, the train of His robe filling the temple, the angels singing glory to God in the highest. Join them. Let your heart rest before the person of the Godhead right now, the God of Israel. Face Him. Take a moment to do that, please.

God, give us insight into these things. There is no way, apart from Your grace, that we can comprehend the magnitude, the depth of the riches of Your awesome glory and wisdom. We cannot capture this apart from Your help and the power of Your Spirit speaking to us. Jesus, You promised in Your covenant that You would send Your Spirit to the world to convince us of righteousness and judgment to come, of Your condemnation of sin and yet Your power of delivering righteousness to those who will fully trust in

You and You alone. Not one whit more, not one inch more, nothing added to the fact that You alone have overcome Satan and the power of sin and death. “Death, where is your victory? Where is your sting?” Through the resurrection, You demonstrated the power of sin and darkness and death being overcome. We believe in You as our only hope. We believe in You as the only reason the Father loves us. The Father loves the Son, and we’ve hidden our lives in You.

Father, open our minds. We repent of the darkened understanding and the futile thinking...the junk. The “one thing we lack,” we lay that into Your hands freely, because only You can deliver us from the power of death. Only You can allow the seed to no longer abide alone in our hearts and lives. Only You can make us free.

Father, let our faith ring out. Nothing else has any value in comparison to that. We want to be fully persuaded, giving glory to God in every personal circumstance of life. Help us to completely receive the dressing down that You bring through Paul or any of Your other servants. We want to do this with true humility, without complaint or argument. When Peter heard the words, “Get behind me, Satan!” he could have been bitter. He could have rejected Jesus. There were a lot of reasons he could have walked away, and yet he knew that the words of Life came from the mouth of Jesus. We want to have that same heart, Father.

We want to reign in life, not because we claim “reigning in life” as some doctrine, but because we’ve owned up to the darkness in our hearts and claimed YOU as the only hope. And now that we’ve found that only You can bring hope, we want to be the kind of people that, without wavering, give glory to You, fully persuaded that You are a God who keeps Your promises. You take even our darkened hearts, our futile thinking, our sin and weakness, our stupidity, our emptiness and loneliness—and “You call things that are not as though they are.” You want to give us the very life of Your Son—not just His salvation, but His very life. And God, we are fully persuaded that You want to keep Your promise. We want to be the kind of people that walk by faith, giving glory to You in spite of the competition that Satan offers us for faith.

Father, redeem Your people. Bring Your people to a full salvation, a great salvation, a great deliverance, not simply a belief system with a few good

deeds and a neat way to live, but a resurrection life in every home! With each look in the mirror, we'll see, "Not I, but Christ who lives in me. I no longer live by faith in myself, but by faith in the Son of God, because I have died. I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, and I not only survive, but I live mightily by faith in the Son of God!" God, make that a true statement in every single life! Let all boasting, except in Christ, be totally excluded.

God, we give You glory as a Keeper of Promises, as Maker of the heavens and earth, and Re-maker of a new creation. That is our hope for everyone who will ever hear or read these words. God, we give You glory as a Re-maker as well as a Maker. We ask these things in the Name of Jesus Christ, the conquering King, the One who is coming quickly for the people who have truly called on His Name. He's the One who will tread out the winepress of the wrath of God Almighty for those who play religion and don't humble themselves before You. We welcome Your coming. Come, Lord Jesus! Please open our eyes to all these truths. Amen.

PART 5



ACCESS TO THE FATHER

WE NOW STAND

The Scriptures teach that if we love the world, we're enemies of God, and that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. You've got to know that there's a virtual war going on between fallen man and the Living God. There's this war, yet a way has been made to have peace with the Living God.

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Romans 5:1-2a).

When we access Jesus and the Father's Grace by faith, we have peace with Him. There's a Grace in which we now stand, and we can face the Creator and go *boldly* before His Throne of Grace. That's God's call for each of us, to be able to *stand* in that grace. And it's ours if we approach God, through and only through, a total belief in what Jesus has accomplished. It's through **totally believing** that He purchased our sin and bought back the right for us to stand at peace before God, enabling us to have the same relationship with the Father that Adam and Eve had before they sinned. When Adam fell, the right to fellowship with God was taken away. We were totally cut off from any hope of relationship with Him. But then, not only did He redeem and buy us back...but **how much more** did Jesus restore our ability to have a relationship with God! It's now possible to have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“...*Through our Lord Jesus Christ...*” That's not just some phrase that's strewn throughout the New Testament for no reason. It has to actually be our posture before God when we pray—in “Jesus' Name, Amen.” Just saying those words at the end of a prayer means nothing. When

we pray, our hearts have to be “God, you have no reason to listen to me because I’m dead in my transgressions and sins...ah, but **JESUS!!** Father, You *will* listen to me. Because of Jesus, I come boldly before You.” And so we “name drop” a little bit because the Father loves the Son, and we know that if we ask anything “in His name,” it will be done. The nature of praying “in Jesus’ Name” is essentially lining up our hearts with this issue of God’s grace, this free gift that can only be received as we trust totally in Jesus, relying solely on the fact that *the Father loves the Son*. There has to be those between-the-lines words in our hearts whenever we use that phrase, “In Jesus’ Name, Amen.” In our heart, we have to be saying, “Father, I ask you to hear what I’m saying because You hear the prayers of Your Son, and I’m hiding my life in Him. I’m not praying this for my own sake. It’s for Jesus’ sake I pray this—this isn’t a self-centered prayer.” With that kind of heart, the words “in Jesus’ Name” take on a whole new meaning...it’s not just a trite phrase or some “magic words” that we use.

We live by faith, approaching Him in every area of our lives, every minute, with faith in the Son—“the Father loves the Son.” We **live** by faith; that’s God’s call. And that faith is a posture of heart, affecting the attitude we take in the way we speak and how we make decisions, and how we respond in times of failure and success, crisis and difficulty. “The just shall live by faith.” “This is the victory that overcomes the world, *even our faith*.” And so we live that way all the time. In other words, through Jesus we have peace with God—*through the Lord Jesus Christ*. We come to the Father *through Him*. “No one comes to the Father but by Me,” Jesus said. “I am the way, I am the **only** way to the Father.” The Father is the destination, and we come *through* the Lord Jesus Christ. We come to the Father in peace through the Lord Jesus Christ, reasoning with the Father not on our own merit, on any front, but reasoning with the Father on the merit of the Son of God. *That’s* living by faith—trusting in Jesus’ worth, not our own. That’s not a “doctrine”—it’s the way we live our lives! That’s what Paul meant when he said, “through our Lord Jesus Christ”—“I no longer live, I live by faith in the Son of God.”

We’ve gained access by faith into this unmerited favor in which we now stand. We’ve seen that a part of faith is recognizing our own sin.

Another part of faith is recognizing the power and the immutable, imponderable, nature of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and what that means—*access to the Father*. This access brings confidence, peace, hope and a sense of fulfillment that allows us to go into our relationship with the Father and relationships with each other with peace and with courage. We now *STAND*.

LONGING TO SUFFER?

“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:2b-5).

We’ve talked a lot about pain, and I just want to reemphasize the point that this ability to walk in fullness cannot happen **except through a cross**. Jesus said, “Unless you take up your cross and come after Me, you cannot be My disciple.” And the cross always implies several things: rejection, humiliation, pain and a death to our plans and our identity—all are defined in the cross. If you’re not “taking up” those things, then it’s not a real cross, and it’s not real Christianity.

But “taking up your cross” doesn’t mean you’ll be gritting your teeth about it. We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that certain godly, Christ-like qualities are produced in us *through the sufferings*. Suffering produces thick skin, so I can’t be easily hurt. It’s not that I’m proud, or because I think people are of no account, and so I don’t care what they say. Or I have this attitude of, “I have *my* identity in Christ, therefore I’m fire-proof and I don’t need people,” or because “*I’m* not a man-pleaser.” That’s not Christianity. Christianity is perseverance that says, “I will find a way to resolve this difficulty... I will not curl up in a ball and give up.” We trust in God, turn our face toward Him, and find peace with the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. There’s no arrogance or presumption in that at all. It’s not, “I’m untouchable and I don’t care.” Rather, it’s through suffering that we find perseverance, thick skin, and character. Perseverance brings character, and character brings hope. And at the end of every

dark, dark tunnel is the light of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus of Nazareth. *That's* what suffering brings to us.

Paul could say, “*I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead*” (Phil. 3:10). He desired to share in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings because he knew what suffering produces. He didn’t try to avoid pain or accuse others who might be the source of it in some indirect way. Paul knew that pain and heartache are *always* from God. God is sovereign and He never lets us be tempted beyond what we can bear. So we have no reason to point a finger at any one, any time. Although satan means pain and difficulties for our harm, the Father orders them for our good. We can face our sufferings and failures and the issues that bring us heartache with an attitude that says, “I know this will bring perseverance, and perseverance will bring character, and character, hope. So, bring it on! I want to share in the fellowship of His sufferings. I don’t mind because I’m too shallow the way I am. I want to be a deeper person and have more of God’s wisdom. I want to bear more of His fruit. I don’t care, so bring on the suffering! I AM TOO SHALLOW!! I know I need character and perseverance. I need to be filled with hope and praise, without wavering, giving glory to God! I know I *need* these things, so let me share in the fellowship of Your sufferings, Jesus. *If I can be conformed to the likeness of Your death, then somehow I can be conformed to the likeness of Your Resurrection Life and Power.*”

That is why we’re willing to pay the price to go through the pain and turn our face toward God in the midst of it. We know that pain will bring perseverance and endurance. It will bring the ability to run the race when the race isn’t as easy as we thought it would be. Instead of looking over our shoulder to see who might be catching us, and being fearful about losing the race, we look forward with a full hope and strength—all the way to the finish line. *That's* the character God wants to develop in each of us through every circumstance that comes our way. So don’t reject the pain and difficulties. Don’t push away from suffering...**embrace** it. In fact, go further than embrace it...**desire** it. Long to share in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings,

in order to be conformed to His death: a lamb led to the slaughter, silent before His shearers. Don't grab after your rights or identity, and don't lash out or defend yourself. Desire that God would purify you through the things He brings your way. If that's your heart cry, then He will hear your prayer and He'll bring perseverance and character. He will bring Hope into our lives. But if we won't go through this process of dying to our self-life, that's a hope we'll be without.

Pursue being conformed to the likeness of His death, so that you can be raised in the power of His Resurrection Life and character and fruitfulness. Pursue it just like you pursue worship...because you know the Father desires worshipers! We also know the Father desires us to share in fullness of His Life...so we *pursue* sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings. We don't want to be shallow, fruitless people any longer, and the suffering is necessary to make us whole and to make us like Him. It's necessary in order to make **real men and women** out of us. We need these things in our lives to keep us awake, if nothing else! It's so easy to fall asleep when everything is going well and falling properly in place. Without the challenges and trials and stress, we get lackadaisical and fall asleep. We don't even know it's happening to us, but it does.

Stay with it when hard times come, and don't kick at the goads. It's *hard* to kick against the goads! A goad, you'll remember, is a sharp stick that shepherds use to get sheep to go in the right direction. While Paul was serving the God of Israel with all his heart, but doing it totally wrong, Jesus was goading, pricking and poking him with a sharp stick, trying to get him to go in the right direction. He was kicking back, and Jesus said, "It's hard for you to kick against the goads, Saul."

And God is that way with us too. If we'd just stop kicking at the goad, we could start learning the direction God wants us to go. We can respond to that sharp pain with the understanding that He is teaching us and leading us. He's leading us to still waters and green pastures and preparing a table for us in the presence of our enemies. That little sharp pain you get from time to time is really okay. It's for your own good. Even 25 years after he became an apostle, Paul himself was still wrestling to understand these things. He was fighting with

God over some suffering—a goad in the side, a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12). Three times he asked God to remove it...the pain, the rejection, and the opposition. God said, “I’m not going to remove it. My grace is sufficient for you. You need, because of the surpassing great revelation that I am giving you, this pain in order to keep you humble.” And Paul’s response was to take delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions and in difficulties.

God is a Good Father and He works with us throughout our lives, and so we endure hardship as discipline (Heb. 12:7). We endure the pain and the difficult things of life with joy in our hearts (as the scriptures teach), because we know GOD is involved. It’s not by chance and it’s not someone “out there” trying to hurt us, and so we believe some lie that “It’s just not fair.” It is God Himself trying to bring us to a place of fullness and character, and since that’s where you need and want to be, you need to receive these things.

David was a great example of this. You’ll remember that after he became king, his son Absalom began undermining him for a long period of time. He was saying to the people, “Ah, David is just too hard. Come follow after me and I’ll give you an easy road. I’ll give you a pleasant kind of wisdom that doesn’t cost you anything.” Eventually, this smooth-talking son overthrew David and took the Kingdom away from him. So David left town in humiliation and shame with a rag on his head (2 Sam. 15, 16). After David had fled the city, this hideous, ugly man named Shimei was harassing him and throwing stones, saying, “Curses on you, David! You are worthless. You’re a man of blood. You’re just getting what you deserve.” David’s men said, “Let’s go kill this guy. He ain’t nothing; we can handle him.” But David said, “Leave him alone. Perhaps God is allowing this to happen for my good, to deepen my character. Maybe this is just what I need right now.” It was *more important* to David that he become like God than to have his cause vindicated. He didn’t need people to think the perfect thing about him if it would shortchange him from growing into the image of God. And that’s why David, a man after God’s own heart, was willing to embrace the humiliation and was willing to endure the rejection and pain.

I want to encourage you to face every painful issue that would ever come up in your life, **with faith**. And as we've already discussed, there *will be* pain and storms! But face them with faith. Face them with an eye toward the heavens, knowing that God is in control and that nothing escapes God's notice. Just or unjust, everything is really from the Hand of God. He desires to bring us into His image, and that's not going to happen apart from these tests. We need to have our faith refined as by fire in order to grow in perseverance, in character and in hope. Every issue that brings pain is meant to work these things into our lives and hearts and ultimately bring about fruitfulness and wisdom.

Please learn the fine art of walking in faith when things don't go the way you think they should. Turn your face toward God. Don't inwardly feel sorry for yourself, or outwardly justify yourself, and lash out, or get even. Turn to God every time you're tempted to turn inward or outward, and resolve it. I'm not telling you to eliminate the problems, but rather to find God, and trust in Him. Turn your face toward Him and allow Him to change your heart and make you like Jesus. "He left us an example that we should follow in His steps" (1Pet 2:21). That example was that He was like "a lamb led to the slaughter, silent before His shearers," not retaliating. Like Jesus, we will not vindicate our own cause, but instead we will turn to the Father who judges justly, not worrying about our reputation or defending our position. If we do that, we will find that by those stripes, God brings healing. If we willingly suffer and go forward with faith, we can trust that this is how God brings perseverance, character and hope into our hearts. Trust Him for those things. Work it out gently and kindly, thinking of others as better than yourself, without defending or vindicating.

If we will approach pain that way, God will bring healing into our hearts and make us into the image of His Son. Those who are willing to humble themselves in the midst of difficult times will emerge into the forefront in fruitfulness, fullness and wisdom. God will allow the Holy Spirit to come into our life and make us into true men and women of God.

YOU PUT THIS LOVE IN MY HEART!

“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5).

Maybe you think to yourself, “I’m not a very loving person. I’m callous to others’ needs. I think about myself when I’m in a group of people. I don’t think about them or about Jesus. I’m self-conscious. I don’t seem to connect with others or care about them.” Those are signs that there’s a lack of love in your heart.

How do you get this love? How do you find the emergence of love being poured out into your heart by the Holy Spirit whom He’s already given us? Well, the answer to that question is to *live* by faith in the midst of circumstances and to let your faith be refined as by fire. Turn your face toward God, and as perseverance grows, as character grows, as hope grows, this hope will not disappoint. Because what emerges out of that is a deep love you could never accomplish on your own, no matter how lofty your goals or how determined you were to have love in your heart rather than some sort of severity (whether based in truth or selfishness). When we walk by faith, in hope and confidence, with everything coming through Jesus, it allows the Holy Spirit to pour out love into our hearts in a *spectacular* way. He changes our very character—the very nature of who we are—so that we become loving people.

Having true love in your heart requires that you willingly go down this road of pain, faith, perseverance, character, and hope. As all of these things are wrought into your life, a river of love begins to flow

into your heart by the Holy Ghost, and you begin to care more about other people than about yourself. You notice other people more than yourself. You think about other people more than yourself. God's goal through all of these things emerging together is that you would *love like He loves*. As your character is being refined, your heart is filled with hope. And this hope then does not disappoint because the love of God is poured out in a spectacular way in your life.

If you're not following the sequence of all of these things, just start with this very simple measure: *When faced with crisis, turn your face toward God*. If you just do that one simple thing, then all of these other things will begin to take place in your life automatically. You've got God's promise on that and you can trust Him. "This hope will not disappoint."

How can we be sure that "this hope will not disappoint"? How can we have such confidence in the fact that He's not only going to purchase our sins, but He's also going to redeem us into full, Christ-like men and women? How can we be sure that we won't just be "survivors" who die and go to heaven? We **can** be men and women that are very much like Jesus in our daily dealings—in our thought patterns, in our attitudes, in our actions, in our hearts, in our wisdom, and in our love. We can have such confidence because of the nature of the covenant God has made with us through Jesus.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die" (Rom. 5:6,7). For a "good man," somebody that's a real hero in everybody's sight, someone might be willing to die. Somebody might die for a Nobel Peace prizewinner, or the President of the United States. For someone who is esteemed in the world's eyes, someone might actually be willing to die. But would anyone be willing to die for a righteous man, one who lives a holy life and exposes sin because he's stood in the presence of God? Except for believers, no one would die for a man like that. In fact, in an unbelieving generation, a person like that will be crucified! He wouldn't be anybody's hero.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!” (Rom. 5:8,9). There is not a doubt that God’s wrath is what we deserve as sinners. But how much more, because of the Blood of Christ, are we free from the wrath of God. It’s not that we’re innocent. In fact, we are guilty, but the price has been paid! Paul says it over and over again that there ought to be tremendous confidence in our lives. We’re not escaping by the skin of our teeth! If we are well deserving of wrath, **how much more, because of the blood of Jesus**, are we deserving of liberty?! If you’ve really trusted in the name of Jesus, hidden your life in Him, and been clothed with Christ—however much you deserved wrath, *how much more so* because of His Blood do you deserve freedom! That’s the nature of the Covenant. If Jesus Himself died for you, don’t ever question the fullness of the purchasing Power of His Blood. Don’t ever diminish the nature and the quality of the Life of the Son of God by questioning whether you are just getting through by the skin of your teeth. This isn’t a covenant where Jesus says, “Okay, okay, I guess I’ll let you in.” The nature of the covenant is: “COME! Blessed, chosen one of my Father, come into the full measure of the Glory that has been set apart for you before the ages were ever created. All of this was intended for you before life began. **Come in.**” And you say, “Who? Me?” He says, “Yes, you.” *How much more so* because of the Blood of Jesus! He is calling each of us to accept the glorious fullness of the purchase of our lives back from the dead. This isn’t just about “survival”, but great glorious **victory**. This is all part of faith, to receive the victory and the confidence found in Christ and to believe it with *all of your heart*. Allow Him to wash you and cleanse you, and then accept the full meaning of that with confidence because of the nature of the purchase price, which was Jesus Christ.

COMPLETE FREEDOM

“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (Rom. 5:9-11). The war is over and the treaty is a done deal! There’s reconciliation—peace and embracing on what was once the battlefield. How much more, how much more! Can you comprehend the *fullness* of what Jesus did, who He was, and the price He paid? All these things could so easily become clichés. But when you consider the magnificence, and *really* comprehend the fullness of what it means that the blameless Son of God has died instead of you—when you really comprehend that—*how much more then* if you are saved. What a **Great Salvation** this becomes for you! What an awesome deliverance this is! Ask God to help you comprehend the fullness of what it means now to your life, *because* these things are so. How much more, **how much more**.

And what about the depth of your depravity—Yes! You need to understand that. But now also understand the total awesomeness of *complete freedom*. Absolute, total annihilation of the penalty of sin in your life. Death, where is your victory? Where is your sting!? If we have apprehended the fullness of Jesus, there’s *nothing* left of condemnation and the sting of death. Free from wrath and alive to Christ—if we’re really living by faith in the Son of God, then all of these things become very real in our lives. How much more! There is absolutely no fear in that.

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men (including you and me), because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world” (Romans 5:12-13a). Just as faith came into the world before circumcision, so also sin came into the world *before* the law was given. Before the Law of Moses came in, sin came in. There was a rejection of God, a desire to be gods in ourselves, knowing good and evil—making our own decisions, calling our own shots and justifying ourselves. All of that rebellion against God came long before the law. Paul is saying here that the law is not really what condemned you. Sin came into the world long before the law ever did.

But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!” (Rom. 5:13b-15). Exclamation point! Adam lived a death-life when he sold his birthright and chose to be a “god”—making his own decisions, living his own life, having his own wisdom, determining what he thought was right and wrong. As soon as Adam became that mini-god to himself, death came into the world. He lived a life of death, separated from God.

Now if death comes to us in the same way, by living like mini-gods, how much more does LIFE come in by submitting to the one true God through the Blood of Jesus Christ? *How much more*, does life come in? Have you felt the penalty of death in your own bones and how well deserved it is (Rom. 1, 2 and 3)? Then surely, if you see Jesus high and lifted up—the Lamb of God slain before the foundations of the earth—if you can see what that means, how much more will you *live* in life? When you see that one man’s trespass brought sin and sin brought death, *how much more* does Jesus of Nazareth dying for our sin bring life that’s truly life! Paul is beginning to speak of Resurrection Life, Resurrection Victory, a Celebration of Indestructible Life! The Power of God in the Life of Jesus Christ, imparted to us as we live by

faith. Please consider the measure of the fullness of what God intends by these things.

“Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:16,17). If you are not reigning in life—living in the fullness of God’s Life in conquering sin, conquering fatigue and despair, in conquering confusion and shallowness of relationship—if there’s a lack of wisdom and fruitfulness in your life, it is because you don’t believe God yet. Every issue of eternal life flows from this thing called **faith**—from believing God. Fully, *fully* believing God as the vindication from all of your enemies, as the justification for all of your sin, as the consecration for all of your future. You live *by faith* in the Son of God, by the life of God flowing out of you now.

If you are not living in the fullness of God’s Life, it’s because you’re still living a “demigod” kind of life: making yourself to be a god, knowing good and evil, determining who’s right and who’s wrong, deciding what you like and what you don’t like, where you’re going to go and where you’re not going to go, what you’re going to do and what you’re not going to do. You’ve dubbed yourself to be a god, rather than living by faith in the Son of God, which requires dying to the world and the world to you, dying to your self-life and denying your very self. If you’re missing the power of reigning in life, it’s because you’re not yet living by faith in the Son of God. You’re still living by faith in yourself—your own knowledge, your own good deeds, your generosity, your accomplishments. Your faith is in your carnal appearance or carnal relationships or in the oh-so-common problem of comparing yourself to others.

TO LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD—*that’s* the Christian life. After coming to Him on the basis of faith and beginning in the Spirit, don’t start trying to obtain your goal by mere human effort (Gal. 3:3). Live by faith in the Son of God. **Live** with every fiber of your being turned toward Him in every issue of life. In every accomplishment

that you'd ever have, in every failure or sin that would ever creep its way into your life, in every disappointment in relationship, in every emptiness that you see in your heart—turn toward Jesus of Nazareth. Turn your face fully toward Him and ask Him to fill your heart. Trust Him—believe Him—that He is able to complete that which He began in you (Phil. 1:6).

HE BRINGS EVERYTHING TO THE TABLE

“The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20-21). If you don’t believe that you have nothing to offer, just take a real hard look at what God requires of you. The law was added to make you conscious of sin (Romans 3). The law was added that the trespass might increase, that you might see just how utterly empty you are. If you don’t believe that, then you don’t know the requirements of God very well! God brought His law and His Righteousness to the earth to make you realize how *incredibly desperate* you are for Him. But don’t stop there, because “where sin increased, grace increases all the more!” Just as sin reigned in death, now grace reigns through righteousness to bring Eternal Life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Are you just too hard a case? You’ve failed soooo many times, and there’s nothing in you to work with, and you’ve proven it time and time again, right? If that’s how you think, then you are not believing God. He’s not concerned about how many times you’ve failed, or with how much you bring to the table. That is not what this is all about. If you **think** you bring something to the table, you’re dead already. It’s about recognizing that you bring nothing to the table *at all*, yet trusting Him that He brings *everything* to the table. The reason so few people ever get a hold of this and Live in Fullness is that they **think** they bring something to the table. That’s the dilemma.

If you think you have something to offer in the whole situation, then there's no hope for you...you're dead! You will never find the fullness of Christ. If I finally *do* recognize that I bring nothing to the table, but I don't really believe that He brings *everything* to the table, then I'll *still* live in poverty! He brings a total feast to the table—you'll not grow hungry! That feast is mine. I *celebrate* His feast. His enemies are my enemies. His assets, my assets. If I don't really believe He's made covenant with me through the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He loves me simply because "the Father loves the Son" and that my life is hidden in Him...if I don't believe and celebrate that without wavering—**fully persuaded, giving glory to God**—then I will continue to walk in emptiness and poverty. And that's not His desire for me.*

Believe that you have nothing to offer; that's good. Now go on to believe that He has *everything to offer* and all that He has is *yours!* It is grace. It's unmerited favor. It's free for the asking. And it's not just a free lunch—it's a free banquet! Yours for the asking, just because you trust Him and believe Him. You simply believe Him. Your trust is wholly in Him.

*So what does all this mean in a practical way in our lives? Paul goes on to talk about how sin—the practice of sin—is overcome by this Covenant that we have with Jesus (Chapter 6). Jesus brought a covenant just as Adam brought one. Through Adam, you are an utter failure—sinful, depraved and empty. Whether you recognize it or not, you're worthless. Your mouth is an open grave. Just as that is *sooo* extremely true, "how much more" true it is that you can have **Life in Him through faith in Jesus**. It's by fully trusting in Him as the only reconciliation you need with the Father, and as the only thing that will bring access and relationship with the Father. If you believe that Jesus can bring you that "how much more" kind of life, then you will, in fact, reign in life.

NOT WEAK, WIMPY SURVIVORS

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!” Certainly not! What a hideous thought! “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom. 6:1-4).

However glorious Jesus’ Resurrection was, that’s ***exactly how glorious the Father wants your life to be!*** Can you picture in your mind just how glorious Jesus’ Resurrection was? Picture the angel meeting Mary and Peter and John, and the Glory as the stone shook and rolled back, and the guards running away in fear. Envision the gloriousness of the Resurrected Jesus with His face shining like the noonday sun! *That’s* God’s intent for *your* life—the whole deal.

Quit thinking about how shallow and utterly sinful you are. Those things are true, but by faith in Jesus—by ***fully trusting in Him*** and His Name, His Blood and His Spirit—what a glorious resurrection He brings about in your life! Just as Jesus was buried, so also we are buried with Him in baptism. As we are identified with Him in His death, *how much more* shall we also be identified with Him in the likeness of His Resurrection. The Glory of the Father shining forth in your life just like it shined forth through the Resurrection of Jesus. *That’s* God’s intent! Behold, all things are new! Not weak, wimpy survivors—but lives ***exploding*** with the evidence of the Glory of God.

So we face the poverty of our heart and the depth of our sin without pride and without claiming anything. We come to the table with nothing, knowing we have nothing to offer—we're altogether worthless, the scripture says. If we will face those facts, then we'll find ourselves coming to Jesus and humbling ourselves before Him. He'll then impart His Resurrection Life that's the "how much more" kind of life. Born of the race of Adam through an ordinary peasant girl named Mary, Jesus demonstrated for us the Glory of that Resurrection Life—how to live in the power of the fellowship of the Glory of God. That's what God desires for us, but we have to have faith for it—we have *to believe* that.

If instead of looking at our own pitiful sin and weakness and shallowness, we will ***believe what God says***, then with ever-increasing glory, from one degree of glory to another to another to another, we too will experience Resurrection Life. Our faces will shine like an angel, like Stephen's did, speaking wisdom that men can't stand against. Our hands will do things that mere men's hands can't do. Our eyes will see things that mere men's eyes can't see. Our mouths will say things that mere men's mouths could never say. Our hearts will feel things that mere men's hearts could never feel. And our feet will go places that mere men's feet could never go. (Remember how Philip was transported from one place to another without walking or riding!) We can walk on water like Peter did—a mere man—simply by keeping our eyes on Jesus, believing His Word, "Come to Me." These things are for the human race that is no longer under the curse of Adam, but is now living by faith in the "how much more" kind of Resurrection Life. We are no longer subject to the law of gravity. Peter and Philip proved that! We are not subject to the normal laws of nature, as Paul proved with his handkerchief that brought healing to people. If we will truly live by faith, we can live in a "how much more" kind of Resurrection Life—from one degree of glory to another!

Don't get the idea this is going to change overnight. Day by day, our faith is tested by sorrow and pain and rejection, and then we *grow* in perseverance and we *grow* in character and we *grow* in hope, and the Love of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We grow from one degree of glory to another. You don't just snap

your fingers and say, “Okay, I believe.” It doesn’t happen that way. **It’s GOD bringing Resurrection into our lives from one day to another, from hope to hope, from glory to glory, and from faith to faith!** That’s how this letter to the Romans begins—from faith to faith to faith! From glory to glory to glory—it’s a *process* as He’s making us into the image of the Son, and as we’re becoming a habitation of God by the Spirit. Even as we speak these words, satan is curling up in pain, because you are receiving the word of your rightful inheritance and the vision of what God intends for *your* personal life.

Face your sin and your fears, claiming nothing for yourself. Face the sorrow, the pain, the rejection and heartache, and then truly turn your heart towards Jesus and believe in the One that the Father sent. **“This is the work of God—to believe on the One the Father sent.”** If you will do that, then you will overcome the world. You’ll blow this world away by the power of God living through you. And it won’t be *you* doing it, because you’ve died and you don’t live any longer! Now you live by faith in the Son of God. Now by your faith, you can overcome the world (1Jn. 5:4). You’ll do it by believing that God meant what He said. Believe Him! He “calls things that are not as though they are” (Rom. 4:17). If He says you’re a spiritual person, you may not feel that way, but don’t argue with God about it. He “calls things that are not as though they are.”

Just as He created the heavens and the earth, and said, “Let there be light,” He also works His creative power *in you*. How does this happen? The same way that God created light. He spoke His Word “Let there be light”...and it came to be. If you will behold Him, then He will translate you into His image from one degree of glory to another, by the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). As we *behold* Him! His Word was spoken and the result was the Glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. If we will believe and hear the creative Word of God and put our full hope and trust on that, He will change us from glory to glory, and from FAITH TO FAITH!

Behold Him and turn toward Him and rest your case in Jesus as the answer to the Father’s every question, and the satisfaction of the Father’s every demand of you! Hold up Jesus in every circumstance of life as the answer, the solution, and the anchor that holds within the

veil. Ohhh, if we will **hold Jesus up!** *Live* by faith in Him. We don't just *come* to Him by faith, we *live* by faith in the Son of God. Then God causes us, from one degree of glory to another, to reign in life by the same Power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1 and Rom. 5, 6).

FREE FROM SIN

*“If we have been united with Him in His death”—having seen how utterly dark and sinful our hearts are apart from Him (Romans 1, 2 and 3)—we will certainly be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self **was** crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with—rendered powerless.”*

Do you want to read it for yourself in black and white? Not just the penalty of sin, but the body of sin—the continual outworkings of sin—has been killed! It’s annihilated, rendered powerless! Freedom from the penalty **and the power** of sin! *That’s* God’s desire and our inheritance! The body of sin is crucified and in the grave, and we are raised to a new resurrection life, *“that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin”* (Rom. 6:6b, 7).

Wouldn’t you agree that a corpse is free from sin? A corpse isn’t going to be easily tempted. If we will die to sin and face God, face our sinfulness and die to any self-righteousness or self-worth, and instead **find all of our worth in the fact that the Father loves the Son... then the Power of Life will work in us instead of the body of sin and the power of death working in us.** We can reign in life. If you’re a shy person, you can live in courage, freedom, peace and love, caring more about others than yourself. If you’re a fearful person, you can live in confidence—not a boastful, arrogant confidence, but a peaceful confidence, trusting God. If you’re racked with any kind of sin you can name, God can bring peace. I’m not talking about “muscle flexing.” That’s not the nature of an overcoming life. God brings peace and security that makes those things unnecessary.

God wants to bring in you a *freedom* from sin because if you've been crucified with Christ, then the death that Christ died is also *your* death. God desires it and wants it for you! Understand and believe that this isn't about your willpower any longer; it's about *His* willpower. It's not about what you can do for God, it's about what **Jesus** did for God! If you will believe that, day after day, in circumstance after circumstance, then you will find the Power of God and the Resurrection Life working inside of you. Your personality and attitudes will change—they won't be the same. The sins that ransacked you day after day will no longer touch you. "*The prince of this world has come, but he has nothing in me.*" That's Jesus' life that He desires to bring into you with ever-increasing glory. That's your inheritance. It goes way beyond just being saved; it goes into being "filled to the full measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4). That's His desire for you.

"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God" (Rom. 6:8-10). If death no longer has mastery over Him, it doesn't have to have mastery over you either. He died for you because of the sin that would enslave you. And if you will get on the cross with Him, and believe that He died not only to free you from the penalty of sin, but also from the power of sin, then sin does not have dominion over you. It no longer holds you as its slave. You don't have to be the same person tomorrow that you have been for the last 5, 10, 25, or 45 years. Sin does not have dominion over you. Why? Because **Jesus conquered sin for you**. Jesus overcame the power of sin for you. You don't have to live in it any longer. Sin does not have to control you and make you a slave any longer, because Jesus cut the chains and swung the cell door open. You don't have to rot in your cell any longer. He swung the door wide open. He paid the price. Now will you walk out? By faith you walk out because you believe that Jesus has cut the shackles of sin and rendered sin powerless in your life. You **believe** that. You believe it regardless of your personal history and you believe it with all of your heart. "Sin does not have dominion over me!"

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body [because it doesn’t have to!] so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life” (Rom. 6:11-13a). Do not offer the parts of your body to sin! Sin does not have to control you any longer; it can’t take you anymore. In order for sin to have control now, you have to *offer* yourself to sin. Sin can’t come from the inside and own you anymore. Instead it comes from the outside, and you have to willingly embrace it. The nature of the Freedom of the Spirit of God and what Jesus did when He died on Calvary was that He totally abolished the power of sin and broke the shackles of Satan forever. Satan was rendered completely powerless because of the crucifixion of Jesus (Col. 2). So when the temptations come up, we *believe* that, and then the power of sin is broken in us and sin no longer controls us from the inside. Sin comes from the outside and if we end up being controlled by it, it’s because we’ve *offered* the parts of our body to sin. We have to desire it. We have to want to do it, because sin *can’t* control us. It has no more dominion over us. That’s the nature of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It’s not just “I’ve got a mansion over the hilltop.” It’s “I live in the life of the power of God *now*. I live by faith in the Son of God.”

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). Now that’s a statement of faith!

“But I don’t *feel* dead to sin.” If you don’t “feel” dead to sin, is that any reason to not consider yourself dead to sin? Didn’t Jesus die and rise again? Isn’t He seated at God’s right hand? The body of sin, the fullness of the power of sin was *crucified* with Jesus on the cross. He died to sin, and because we were crucified with Him, we died to sin too. Therefore, sin has no dominion over us! “Reckon yourself dead to sin.” It’s done. It’s settled. It’s an issue that has been *resolved*. The Son of God died to your sin. Because He died to your sin, you no longer need to live in it.

Do you *really* understand what Paul is trying to say here? Take shyness for example. A shy person doesn’t need to repent of being shy; they need to repent of not believing God! Because God says, “You’re not

shy.” So whether it’s lust, pride, selfishness, bad temper or impatience that you struggle with, if you *really* understand what Paul is trying to say here, you know it’s not those “things” that you need to repent of. You need to repent of your unbelief! You couldn’t walk in those sins if you *really believed* that all of your sins were crucified with Jesus. Your belief would be manifested in your life in a way that those sins couldn’t hold you captive any longer.

By the power of the Spirit and the resurrected Christ, **sin has no dominion over you!** The shackles are broken! *Believing* that sin has no dominion over you is what *allows* sin to have no dominion over you. You must understand, appreciate and *fully believe* that the things that have held you captive have been crucified with Jesus. If you really believe, from the heart, that the power of sin was broken by Jesus’ death on the cross, then when temptations come up, they will flee. They can’t hold you. But do not reckon from the standpoint of your own willpower, or from the standpoint of your own history, be it good or bad. Reckon yourself dead to sin from the standpoint of *Jesus’ victory over sin and death*, and THEN sin can have no dominion over you. There is no power whatsoever in any sin that has ever been held up to the cross. The power in sin *only* keeps us captive when we try to contain it with our own willpower, our own righteousness or our own good deeds. When we compare and contrast, living in this horizontal world, sin continues to have dominion over us.

But when we shove it in Satan’s face *because of what Jesus has done* and reckon ourselves dead to sin, then the power of sin is broken! The power of sin is only an “imaginary” power if we are reasoning through faith in Christ rather than through our own willpower, or striving to do good deeds or striving to live a holy life. Sin has no power over those who will *live* by faith and who believe that what God says is true. “*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires*” (Romans 6:9-12).

“Don’t let sin reign in your mortal body” ...because you don’t HAVE to! It’s not *necessary*! God always gives you a way out. You’re “never

tempted beyond what you can bear.” For those who “live by faith rather than by sight,” who live by the crucified Lord, rather than by their own justification, sin comes from the *outside*. But if you try to justify yourself by doing good deeds, “keeping the law,” and even by obeying the commands of Jesus, then the power of sin will continue to reign. If you present yourself to God based on the “good things” you do, and the “bad things” you think you don’t do, you can be sure that the power of sin will continue to reign. We *only* have power over sin insofar as we live before God with an attitude that says, “I know I have no power, but while we were still *sinners*, You died for all of us, the ungodly. Now, because of *Your* death, the power and penalty of sin is forever gone from my life.” THAT’S how we must reason with God. What *Jesus* has done is the issue, not what we have done.

If we reckon ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus—if that’s how we *live*, then, “though the prince of this world has come, he has nothing in me.” Why? Because he has nothing in Jesus! That’s the *only* identity we have. That’s the *only* reasoning power we have before God *or* man. ***We boast only in Jesus Christ and Him crucified—raised from the dead, seated at the right hand of God, and coming back for the people who have hidden their lives in Him,*** rather than in some “good thing” they’re doing for Him.

Can you understand why so many people live in poverty and powerlessness in their lives? It’s because they don’t live in what we’re talking about! They’re always reasoning with God and with one another and with themselves from the vantage point of what they do and what they don’t do and by what they’ve accomplished or haven’t accomplished. Then they end up being either prideful or pessimistic. They are always reasoning on the basis of themselves, rather than ***reasoning before the unseen realm and all of mankind on the basis of what Jesus has done and is doing and has yet to do!***

Please hide your life in Him. *Totally* saturate your thought patterns, transforming your minds by the renewing of His Word, His promises, His future, His life, His death, and His resurrection. Always reason only from this vantage point: “The Father loves the Son—so I’m okay.” We reason from that vantage point *only*, and yeah, the prince

of this world has come, but he has nothing in me because he has nothing in *Jesus*.

FULLY PERSUADED

So, what are you going to do the next time a difficulty arises in your life, a challenge, a failure, or some kind of stress or pain? What are you going to do? Will you follow in the footsteps of the father of your faith, and be a son of Abraham? Maybe there's been a lot on you lately. Maybe things have been hard for you, and people are dealing with sin in your life. Perhaps you've had failure in this circumstance or that, or maybe you've felt lonely. Whatever's going on, could someone say of you, "I sure have noticed something about you: you're a son of Abraham. You haven't wavered a bit. You're fully persuaded that God is able to keep His promises. You give glory to God in the midst of difficulty and contradiction. You're a son of Abraham. I want to thank you for that." Is that what someone's going to say to you the next time you face something difficult? "You're a daughter of Abraham, I can see it in your eyes." Without wavering, fully persuaded, giving glory to God. "You have a heart full of joy and praise. You're a son of Abraham."

By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, by faith in Jesus Christ, and the power that was worked in Him that raised Him from the dead—that's who you are. And that's who you're becoming from one degree of glory to another, growing in perseverance, growing in character, growing in the image and the likeness of Jesus Christ. The love of God is being shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, day by day by day, from one degree of glory to another, by the same power of the Word that said, "Let there be light." Let the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shine in *your* heart until the day He comes back to retrieve you and take you home. Amen.

If you've been taking all this to heart, there's no doubt that God has raked you over the coals. We just need to understand how totally "bad off" we are before we can understand how "good off" we are by the Power of God in Christ Jesus. That's why Paul in this letter to the Romans wrote chapters 1, 2 and 3 before he wrote chapter 8. Paul said you can't take any pride in being a Jew or a good Gentile. Good deeds can't do anything for you. Being a nice person won't earn you anything in God's sight either. He ripped all of that away from us, leaving us empty.

But God in Christ Jesus makes you *more than conquerors*. You could never win before. You were no "conqueror." You couldn't beat your way out of a wet paper bag! You were *nothing*. But Jesus of Nazareth has made you *more* than a conqueror. Receive the depths of your sin so you can receive the Glory that is in Christ Jesus, living *only* by faith in the Son of God with no faith left in yourself. Turn to God, and ask Him about all these things. Let this stuff really sink in and work on you. Know exactly who you are apart from Jesus and exactly what happens when you have true faith in Him. Let Him live through you because of His death and His Resurrection.

The message Paul has come to in Romans 6 is that God is definitely **more** than able to complete what He began. And He wants to do so much more than just forgive our sins, "escaping as through the flames." He wants to make our lives more than we could ever dream of, more than we could ever ask or imagine! He's totally able to do that and desires to give you a life that's full and free and reflects His Glory, filled with the same Spirit and Power that raised Jesus from the dead. But most people don't experience that because they don't believe God. They don't believe Him and embrace Him, and stand on His Word without wavering, in spite of all the evidence. It's no wonder they never see the fulfillment of it! They don't experience it because they don't *live by faith*.

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the voice, or the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). And right after that it says, "What about Israel, didn't they hear?" Of course they did, but they didn't combine what they heard with faith. They didn't believe and didn't obey. They didn't put what they heard into practice. All day long God held out His

hands to an “obstinate and disobedient people,” and they wouldn’t receive Him.

God is holding out His hands with the exact same call for us in our lifetime. If *we* would receive God and simply believe what He said, there would be no need to die in poverty. He desires with all His heart to change us into the family likeness of His Son. He wants to grow us up into the “full measure of the stature of Jesus Christ,” from the rising to the setting of the sun—all the way around the clock. He’s *more than able* to change us! No longer do we need to be ransacked by sin and slung around by our emotions, fears, selfishness, pride and lust. No longer do we need to be slaves to the growling of our stomachs and the fatigue of our bodies. He doesn’t want us to be subject to the circumstances of life or the opinions of those who hate God and oppose His Work. If we will simply believe Him and *act* like we believe Him, He will set us free from all that! He wants to free us from the penalty of sin *and* the power of sin.

Beg God to help you grasp these things and apply them, not just with your mind at this moment, but day-to-day, when the circumstances of life smack you in the face. *That’s* what Christianity is, in short. You might go to heaven without understanding these things, but you can’t LIVE in the Life and Power of God in this present age without understanding them—it’s impossible! You won’t experience the abundance of God’s grace, the power and authority of His Heart, His righteousness and His love with sacrificial life and liberty in the Spirit, without comprehending and *applying* these things in the circumstances of life. You can “go to heaven,” but you’ll never manifest the Life of Jesus—the *fullness of the Life of Jesus*—apart from what we’re talking about.

FOLLOW ME AS I FOLLOW CHRIST?

What was it that empowered Paul's life of fullness and freedom in the Spirit? He *lived by faith in the Son of God!* It's the same for every person like Paul who has ever lived. It's the only way to find the Life and Power of God, where sin no longer has mastery over us. Paul could say, "You follow me as I follow Christ." Can YOU say that right now? Can you look at a group of people and say, "Hey guys, do what I do, and you'll be fine. Think the thoughts I think, say the things I say, have the attitudes I do under pressure. Walk the way I do in my daily relationship with God and man, and you'll be just fine. Follow me, as I follow Christ." Can you say that? If you can't, then you're not truly living by faith the way Paul was. He could say all that with such confidence and a clear conscience because he didn't live any more—"I died to the world and the world to me. I don't need the world, and the world doesn't need me." Sin can't master that kind of life, a life that's hidden in Christ. He wasn't saying he was without temptation—"Who among you is tempted that *I* don't inwardly burn?" (2 Cor. 11:29) He was saying, "The prince of this world has come, but he has nothing in me, because he has nothing in *Jesus*, and I am living in Him. I'm not afraid."

He said to the Thessalonians, "You know when I was with you how holy and righteous and blameless I was." He said, "You've seen my life, I've opened it up on every front—day and night from house to house. You've seen with your own eyes how holy and righteous and blameless I've been." Paul could say that with a clear conscience, without boasting or bragging. And the Holy Spirit confirmed it was true in his life by recording it in the Scriptures. Can you speak that

boldly with a clear conscience? (Some might, but their confidence comes from a seared conscience. They don't see how ridiculously far off their lives really are—they *say* it, but it's not true.)

Jesus' life imparted to a believer frees you to speak like Paul, without boasting, without bragging, without a guilty conscience. If you can't say the same things, from the heart, with a clear conscience, don't be condemned about it, but know that you have an inheritance that you haven't tapped yet. It doesn't matter what your name is or how long you've been a Christian. *You* have an inheritance! And it doesn't come by knowledge or by willpower. It's by *faith* in the Son of God, and it's accessible for *all who believe*, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. There is a power, a dynamite, a "Good News" that can set your life free from the bondage of selfishness, pride, lust, fear, laziness—whatever your "thing" happens to be. This is your inheritance!

You **do not** have to be a slave to sin any longer! *This is real*. This isn't just poetry or story time. This is *real*. It's for you, whoever you are. No matter how many times you've failed in the past, if you will simply, *simply*, live by faith in the Son of God, you will not be a slave to sin. Whatever your personality type—A, B, C, D, it doesn't make any difference—you can be **Type J: Jesus**. On the authority of the Word of God that said, "Let the light shine out of darkness," I say to you: HE DESIRES FOR YOU THE FULL MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF JESUS CHRIST. Everything that Jesus was while He was here in the flesh is accessible to you as an individual, *right now*—the whole measure of the fullness of Jesus Christ, from Glory to Glory to Glory!

So, why the delay in getting from one degree of glory to another? It's simply because we don't yet comprehend the fullness of His majesty, grace and power; we don't see the depth of His love and commitment to us. God's desire for us is to grow in this faith, and as we learn more and more about His trustworthiness, we cast more and more of ourselves on Him, level after level. It's all accessible now, it's just that we've not seen enough of it yet! And if we did, it would consume us as it would've for those who took over the Promised Land (Deut. 7:22). We would explode if we had any idea how Great and Awesome, Loving and Generous and Faithful God is. He is so

incredibly full and wonderful, that if we could comprehend it, we would be like Enoch—POOF!! (Gen. 5:24).

And the more we believe and hold out what Jesus has done, the more we will see the manifest power of God in our lives. Like Peter, a mere human, who walked on water . . . and like Paul, you can say, “You know how holy and righteous and blameless I was. Come on, follow me as I follow Christ.” The ability to speak that way with a clear conscience, confirmed by God in the Holy Spirit, is based on ***our willingness to believe what Jesus has done and is doing***. Nothing more. “This is the work of God, to *believe* on the One whom He sent.” “The spirit of prophecy is a testimony of Jesus.” Let that testimony reign in your heart. Let it well up in every attitude and every word that comes out of your mouth.

WILL HE FIND FAITH?

Ohhhh, how we want Jesus to find faith when He returns! The kind of faith that believes His Word is true and holds onto it. The next time you're tempted to be snappy with somebody, prideful, boastful, selfish, or impatient, fearful, lazy, gluttonous...*I beseech you in the name of Jesus to reckon yourself dead to sin.* Is this an act of willpower? * No, it is simply saying, "I understand and comprehend what Jesus did on the cross. He made a public spectacle of satan, humiliating him before the hosts of Heaven and the people of the earth. He knocked out satan's teeth, and now he has nothing but gums to bite with. He drove satan right into a place of powerlessness, rendering him harmless." We reckon and declare that these things are true! "What Jesus has done is the issue, not what I have done, or what I am capable of overcoming—that's what we now say to you, oh hosts of heaven and peoples of the Earth." What Jesus has done is the issue and we hold that up in satan's face in times of trial and temptation and discouragement and failure.*

*Just in case you still believe willpower has some value, the Bible says that when we try to reach God through a willpower mentality, trying to fulfill His expectations by keeping some sort of standard (even a standard He has set), it actually **gives power** to sin. "**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law**" (1 Cor. 15:56)—ponder that! Living by "law" or by anything other than His continuous Word and a relationship with Him actually gives power to sin. So when we cut off living that way, it takes away sin's power. If we'll quit living by willpower—reasoning with ourselves, comparing ourselves to others, striving to do good deeds—if we'll stop doing all of that and live by faith instead...sin will be rendered powerless.

Let your mind be transformed and renewed by the Promise and Person of God in the face of Jesus Christ, high and lifted up, Holy, Holy, Holy. “He’s my Security, He’s my Hope, my Fortress, my High Tower, my Rock, my Door, my Way, my Truth, my Life, my Good Shepherd.” He’s the Light of the world—Jesus of Nazareth. Glory to His Name!! Let it reign in your heart. Let it fill your heart and mind, saturating you in every circumstance, and like Nathanael, you too will see the Glory of God. You too will see angels ascending and descending to the Throne of God and the footstool of God. As you believe the promises that are “Yes” and “Amen” in Jesus Christ, you’ll see things like that—incredible things! Don’t let sin reign in your mortal bodies. Sin no longer has mastery over you! Why? Real simple answer. JESUS.

As you read Paul’s words, let them soak into your heart. Let them fill your mind and heart and have utter control over any future thoughts as it relates to your sin and temptations, trials, discouragements, failures and opportunities. Soak it in...let these words *totally saturate* your heart and mind and control your reactions to every circumstance of life.

“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

“I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:8-23).

Holy Father, grant your people faith. Open the eyes of our hearts to see and comprehend the riches that are in Christ Jesus Your Son, the fullness of all that He is and all that He *could be* for those who will simply believe. Father, please open our eyes. No more words, we just beg You to open our eyes.

PART 6



THE LAW SATISFIED

JUSTICE IS SERVED

The very *nature* of Jesus' death on the cross automatically brings about an assumption on our part that the power of sin has been *totally* crushed. We no longer need to be slaves to sin! We can still "offer" the parts of our bodies as instruments of wickedness, but it's not *necessary*. And the way we can comprehend and fulfill the righteousness of God in our lives in a visible way (that Peter said even the pagans would see and praise God for) is to *live by faith*—to reckon ourselves dead to sin. To understand, appreciate and *believe* what Jesus has accomplished.

The nature of Calvary and God sending His Son into the world wasn't so we would have a bunch of little bedtime stories to tell our children! Truly, something was *legally accomplished* when Jesus died, though He was innocent. *Something LEGAL was accomplished at that point in time and is therefore permanently settled.* A legal issue was resolved. According to God's justice (a word Paul uses several times in chapter 3), something legal *needed* to happen. In God's heavenly court, because of His righteousness, the wages of sin is *death*... the death penalty must be imposed on those who violate His Holiness.

Those who reject Him as God by choosing what their flesh wants rather than what the Creator of the Galaxies wants (!!!!)—deserve to die. Paul made that crystal clear in the earliest chapters to the Romans. *You deserve death.* Whether Jew or Gentile, law or no law, the same is true for everyone—we *all* deserve death. Justice says: you must die because you've made yourself a god, just like Adam did. You've made yourself a god, whether carelessly or intentionally, just as soon as you said...."God, I know better. I'm going to have it *my way*. I deserve to have this attitude. I deserve to have this judgment. I deserve to

act on this fleshly impulse. I have a right to my opinion and I have a right to speak my mind.” As soon as any of that enters our hearts, we violate the entirety of the law, James said. “Oh, it was just a little white lie...” Tell that to Ananias and Sapphira! They twisted the truth only the tiniest bit to accommodate their situation, and they were struck DEAD for it (Acts 5). *“The wages of sin is death.”*

God is desperate to make us understand that there are no “little white lies.” There is no *tiny* sin. The entirety of the law is violated when the slightest jot or tittle is violated. Why? Because as soon as we “bend” anything to accommodate our flesh, we have made ourselves gods, knowing good and evil. We cannot eat from the Tree of Life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil at the same time. We’re shut off from the Tree of Life if we choose to be our own gods... “God is not God, I’m going to make myself a little god. I’m going to have it *my way*. I can say or do what I want because this isn’t faaaaiir! I have a right to be disrespectful to my parent. I have a right to this selfish attitude.” And God says, “No! The wages of sin is death. You deserve the death penalty.”

Well... justice is served ***In the Person of Jesus Christ***. He was without sin His entire lifetime—He never once bent anything. He didn’t manipulate or water down a single thing that the Father wanted for His life, His heart, His eyes, His attitude, or His tone of voice. Never ONCE did He mumble, complain or lash out at others (and even his brothers and sisters harassed Him from the time He was young, the gospel of Mark says). He never once responded out of anything other than a soft heart toward God.*

*Having a soft heart might mean violence at times and making whips and turning over tables, but it was zeal for the Father’s House that consumed Him, not a selfish anger. It wasn’t about His business, it was about His Father’s business. He was angry about what God was angry about, and that’s the distinction. Be angry, but don’t sin. (Eph. 4:26).

The blameless Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, came into the world to satisfy justice—*so we wouldn't have to die. Death* for sin... Even the tiniest white lie or raised eyebrow calls for death. That cold shoulder, edgy tone of voice, rolling of the eyes, the slightest shrinking back in times of stress or pain, withholding our hearts because of fear or selfishness—all those things instantly violate the entirety of God's law just as much as anything Hitler or anyone else has ever done.

“Are *you* any better?”

“No way!” Paul said.

When we make ourselves gods by choosing something *other* than the current will of the Father—by an action we take, or a decision, or a thought we tolerate or in how we carry ourselves—we violate the whole law and we deserve death. PERIOD.

So out of God's justice *and* out of His mercy, Jesus died. Those are two separate things. God's *justice* said somebody had to die. God's *mercy* said He would let his precious Son, who loved His Father desperately and obeyed Him implicitly, be the One to die—the One God loved with all His heart because of His obedience and devotion. In spite of the love affair that Jesus and the Father had always shared, the Father allowed His Son to die in order to fulfill justice. Imponderable thought!! Incredible!!! It goes beyond anything we could *ever* comprehend, but it's true. That's exactly what happened. Justice was served because out of mercy, someone died who didn't deserve to. He died for your sake and mine, when what we *did deserve* was the entirety of every punishment God could ever conjure up for us. Wow!

LIMITATIONS?? HA!!

The fact that Jesus died for us doesn't just mean we don't have to die. It ALSO means that the curse that came on Adam when he sinned and was cut off from the Tree of Life—*has been reversed!* All that Adam had in the Father, in the garden, can be restored—from one degree of glory to another to another to another. It happens as we shed self-life, and continue to grow in fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. We let Him make His home in us and we abide deeply in His Word. We continue now, by the power of the Holy Spirit living within, to “keep His commands and decrees”... We turn our face toward Him and let His Spirit melt our heart, and we shed the dead and meaningless cocoon of the old life. The fleshly life is just scraped off like a snake's second skin as we continue to let the Life of God well up, well up, well up from within—the deposit that guarantees our inheritance.

So justice is served in that the penalty of sin is totally demolished and permanently fulfilled—we have faith in Jesus to *be that* for us. *Not only that*, but we **also believe** that the very Life that Jesus had with the Father and that Adam had with the Father prior to sin coming into the world, can be restored to us with ever-increasing measure from one degree of glory to another. Fellowship with God and eating from the Tree of Life—that's *also* what Paul is talking about in chapter 6! This magnificent, unbelievable thing is happening... not only is justice being served, but even more than that, history is being turned back and turned back—and now, “*how much more?*” If sin came through the one man Adam... how much *more* does Resurrection Life come through the one man, Jesus Christ, for all who believe? “Christ dwells in your hearts through faith,” through believing (Eph. 3:17). “This is the victory that overcomes the world... **even our faith!**” (1 John 5)

Believe that what God said is true...the same God who said, “Let there be light. Let light shine out of darkness.” By BELIEVING His Word, a miracle as magnificent as light shining out of total chaos that was hovering in darkness—all the lights of the heavens and the earth coming into existence out of nothing—a miracle *just that large* is happening inside of us. We are “*becoming* a habitation of God by the Spirit.” We are “*being* transformed by the renewing of our minds.” We’re not just being saved, but we’re being drawn into the “family likeness of Jesus” (Romans 8), to the “full measure of the stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4). You have to **believe that** in order to secure it for your life.

“*Reckon yourselves dead to sin.*” Why? Because Jesus died! He overcame the power of sin and death and He rose and is seated at the Right Hand of the Father. Just shatter everything that’s held you back—all your feelings about your past and all your supposed weaknesses. Let Jesus not only be the standard of the measure for salvation, but let His Life be the only ceiling you ever put on yourself. Are you with me? **Jesus must be your only ceiling**, if you want to secure not just a salvation, but **a Life in Him**—an abundant life that “transcends understanding,” “the power of an indestructible life” in the inner man. That Life is ours to secure and live out in a real way! Truly *being* the Bride of Christ that’s an equal yoke for Jesus. We don’t want to be a pitiful, “also-ran” thing that barely survives until He comes back—holding down a little turf with some kind of theory about Jesus’ return. That would be “positional” truth alone, as opposed to **deep FAITH in the Work of God** that transforms our very personal lives.

Unless you believe, you’ll not find the Glory of God in this lifetime. You **MUST** believe that the *only ceiling* in your life is the Person, Character and Fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ. Nothing else is acceptable to you—aim for perfection! Nothing else is tolerable in your life, or in anyone else’s. You love others too much to let them settle for less than the Standard of the Life of Jesus Christ.

YOU GET WHAT YOU BELIEVE!

Why did Jesus come? Was it only for atonement? Was it *only* so we could be forgiven of our sins? If *that* was the case, He could have taken care of that in a number of ways, and with a lot less pain and trouble! He even could've taken care of it as a child if He wanted to. He obviously had something *more* that He was after.

He spent three and a half years, as a man, with temptations just like ours, so he could demonstrate ***what Life could be like***. He showed us the Power of the Resurrection Life of a man in total fellowship with the Father. Born of a human mother, He was *a man* with weaknesses just like ours (Hebrews 2-5). He became a man like us, to show us how we can be like the Father in our character, in our walk, and in our fellowship. Our life with the Father can be ***just like His***, where we're no longer limited to the seeing of the eye and the hearing of the ear. You have to believe this, *from the heart!*

To believe any less is to call God a liar, to call three and a half years of Jesus' life a farce, and to deny what the Scriptures say, again and again. God wants to manifest His Life in practice and reality again in His Body, in His People, in observable, touchable, tangible reality. Reality where hands can touch and eyes can see and ears can hear the very Life of God on planet earth. But why would He do that for people who are calling Him a liar all the time??? We fail and then we wrongly *assume* that's the limit of where we can be. We're calling God a liar! We look in the mirror and see certain character flaws, and *assume*, "That's just who I am and it's all I'll ever be, but God bless everybody else. I know they can do it! Rah, rah, rah! But as for me,

I'm just a sinner saved by grace, gettin' along the best I can. Please save my soul on the last day, oh God." That sort of pathetic attitude will cut you off from the riches of the inheritance that are in Christ—the full stature of Jesus that God intends *for you personally*.

If you call God a liar and accept any ceiling lower than the person of Jesus Christ in fellowship with His Father, then you will get EXACTLY what you believe. With weaknesses just like ours, Jesus lived out God's will in His heart and life in flesh and blood, and if you accept a lower standard for yourself, personally, *you will get exactly what you believe*. That's the nature of faith. You get what you believe. Whatever you're willing to settle for in your heart is what you get. That's the *only* reason some people surpass others in this lifetime, in spiritual maturity. Some *seem* to surpass others, but it's only flesh and it doesn't hold up. Others genuinely do surpass all their peers. Paul described some as, "You that are spiritual, restore such a one..." And to others he said, "I can't call you spiritual, you are mere babes..." But it's not because of some foreordained purpose of God that one person will always be weak and another person will be strong. That's not the way it is. We are limited *only* by how much we believe God. No question about it! We are not limited by our talents, our willpower, our looks, or our eloquence. ***We are only limited by how much we believe God, and that's all.*** That is really Good News! *It means the only limitations I have are God's power and my willingness to believe what He said.*

God said, "Let the light shine out of darkness."

And you say, "That's right, I can believe that. That's easy."

Oh *really?* Don't be so sure! If you had been there in that *very* dark world back at the beginning of time, you might have had a hard time with that one! "Let the light shine out of—Hey! What is light, anyway? I don't even know what light is. I don't know if I believe that or not. Maybe those words mean something else. Let's cross-reference and study it out in the Greek. I've never seen light or experienced it so I'm not sure it *could* mean that because I don't know what *that* is." And so we second guess and rationalize ourselves into a hole.

God spoke it... “Let the light shine out of darkness,” and—BOOM—there was light! If you can believe *that*, then in the face of Jesus Christ you can also believe that He can transform your character “from one degree of glory to another”! As you behold Him, He can transform you into the “*full measure of the stature of Christ.*” **You, personally, are only limited by how much you believe God and how much you’re willing to submit your heart to Him in total trust that what He said is true.** And so now it isn’t willpower, it isn’t talent and it isn’t eloquence—it’s nothing but **believing God.**

“But it *has* to be more than that!”

That’s *exactly* the kind of thinking that gets people into trouble! It makes some in the periphery of Christendom imagine they’re saved because they “go to church.” And others, though saved, barely “escape as through the flames” because they built with wood, hay and stubble. They limit what God could have done in their lives by not abiding in Him—by not being saturated in His life, totally trusting His character and believing His will and His heart for them. Any limitations on your life are *only* limitations of your faith—your willingness to believe God. He desires the WHOLE thing for you. All you have to do is believe Him with all of your heart and keep asking Him about it. Keep talking to Him, keep beholding Him.

“*Reckon yourself dead to sin, but alive to God...don’t offer the parts of your bodies as instruments of wickedness.*” You don’t have to do that anymore!! That’s what Paul’s getting at in chapter 6. Jesus not only brings freedom from the penalty of sin, but He also **restores fellowship with the Father!** He brings power over sin and death, not just in the age to come, but *in this present age.*

You’re not a slave anymore, so sin does NOT have to control you. Your tongue doesn’t have to run wild, your attitudes don’t have to fire off at every inconvenience. Those things don’t have to happen anymore. And if it does, then turn to God... “God, it just happened again, but I believe You that it didn’t *have* to happen. Show me the way out. You promised a way out, so I know I had one. What was it? God, give me the grace to take that way out next time. Right now, I humble myself before You. I’m sorry for what I’ve done and I’ll

apologize to the people I've hurt and together in faith, we'll believe God for the future." We trust Him *together*—it's a together thing! "I will build my *church* and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." *Together* as His Bride, we believe for each other, that all the laws of sin and death have been overcome in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, the Lamb!! Slain before the foundations of the world. Raised in Glory. Seated at the Right Hand of God. Coming again!! It's been *completely* satisfied and fulfilled. There's no ceiling now for the Bride of Christ and how she can appear when Jesus comes back for her—the Bride that "has made herself ready." And *this* is our readiness—our FAITH! "When I return, will I find faith on the earth?" Well, He's not coming back for a Bride if He doesn't! He WILL find faith. It's a challenge! It's hard. But God wants to transform us and teach us and bring us the gift of faith—the measure of faith God has given to each of us (Romans 12). God is totally involved in bringing His people not only to salvation, *but into Glory*. That's His business and He desires it with all of His heart. We have to be soft and yielded and hungry for it... but glory to God, He's going to do it! He shall do it.

YOU MUST DIE

“Do you not know brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God” (Romans 7:1-4).

If you don't read carefully, you might get the idea that Paul jumps from Romans 6 into a totally different subject in chapter 7. You might think he's now talking about marriage, death and remarriage. But keep in mind that there were no chapter breaks in his letter with little numbers between each of the sentences. In the depth of his heart, Paul is still speaking of the same thing he was in chapter 6—“dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus!” Remember, Paul was talking to Christian men with a Jewish heritage, who were familiar with “the Law.” So in chapter 7, he uses an illustration he knew they could understand—the “law” of marriage.

He's saying that it's just like what happened with the body of sin in your life and Jesus! You “...*died* to the law through the body of Christ, that you might *belong to another*, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.” In the context of the marriage analogy that Paul is giving, this little expression, “that we might *bear fruit* to God,” is speaking of “having babies.”

Are you willing to die to the law? Are you willing to quit striving to please God by the things you do in order to somehow justify yourself before Him? If you try to live that way, you're under a curse. There's no hope for you as long as you're trying to reach God through your own good works, your striving, your willpower, your own personal holiness, and all your self-sacrifice—you, you, you—the innumerable good deeds you do for so many people. Do you know what Paul says about all that? He says, “SO WHAT?!” No one ever reached God that way and no one ever will.

If you're an honest person and know what God requires of you, for every one “good thing” you've done, you *know* there are ten things you've been an utter failure in. Paul's saying that as long as you try to approach God through willpower and striving, there's *no way* you can marry Jesus. It's impossible! You can't have Jesus if you're so intent on trying to please God through striving. The only thing you'll accomplish is making yourself and everyone around you miserable with all this back and forth, back and forth, try-real-hard kind of stuff that happens with millions of people that “know the law.” As long as you try to approach God on that basis, you will be miserable and impotent...and you'll NEVER find Jesus.

You've got to be DEAD to trying to please God through any means other than Jesus. You need to be dead to believing anything about yourself other than what **God thinks about you**, whether too much or too little. You need to be dead to all your ties to religion, self-justification, striving and all your fear about how *baaaad* you are. You're not any worse than God says you are, and you're not any better than God says you are either. If you think you're something, you're “dead even while you live.” On the other hand, if you think you're a terrible, tragic mess, but you're not able to turn to Jesus and find Him in spite of that, then that unbelief in your life will result in tragedy for you. Because if you don't believe that “the light will shine out of darkness,” then you'll get exactly what you ask for—darkness your whole life.

Believe what God says, that all who come to Him **through FAITH in His Son** will never be put to shame. “The work of God is to *believe* on the one whom He sent.” If you'll believe that with all your heart,

then you'll find the working out of the power of God in *Resurrection Living* in this present age. That's God's promise for each of us—the stature of Christ in ever-increasing measure from one degree of glory to another.

“You died to the law through the body of Christ,” Paul said. In 1 Corinthians 15 he says, *“The power of sin is the law.”* Understanding all the “right things to do” is actually what empowers sin. That is not our salvation! The law is what makes us conscious of sin, and being conscious of sin is what makes us aware of our poverty. And when we're aware of our poverty, *“happy are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom.”* We start at ground zero with no claims of our own. None. Not even a thought of being anything great or special... not comparing ourselves to others or to what we used to be. None of that stuff. We know how altogether worthless we are. We understand and *fully* believe from the heart *with every fiber of our being* that we are deep, deep, deep in sin (Rom. 3:12). And believing how true that is...we *also* believe that “the Lamb of God came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.” We believe with all our hearts, “The Father loves the Son” and because I'm clothed with Him, the Father loves me! No questions asked. That in itself is what allows God not only to save our souls, but also to change us into the image and the likeness and the personality of Jesus.

THE NEW WAY OF THE SPIRIT

“You also died to the law through the body of Christ that you might belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.” Ohhhhh! We can belong now to Another! No longer must we remain married to ourselves—to our self-life, our self-love, our self-justification, our good deeds and our comparisons to others. We’ve been married to this wretched self-life since Adam left the Garden under duress. But if we die to all that, then according to the law, we’re free to marry Another—but not a minute before! That’s the point Paul’s making. You cannot marry Jesus until you’ve died to the first. You can’t have both. You can’t have Jesus, and belong to Him and “bear fruit unto God” (bringing many sons to glory from the very womb of God, as you are in union with Him) and at the same time be under all this wrestling and unbelief. It cannot happen because the two are incompatible. Paul is saying, “Hey guys, this is an example you should be able to relate to.” The law clearly says, **you cannot marry another until the first one DIES**. There’s no hope if you’re going to live by any self-justification or striving. If you really want to belong to Another and bear fruit unto God—have godly offspring for God—then you have to die to the unbelief and self-justification in your life.

“For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (Rom. 7:5,6). NOW, we live our lives by the new way of the Spirit—the same way Jesus did. He didn’t live by the

written code, and He confused a lot of people because of it. Gathering grain on the Sabbath. Healing on the Sabbath. What was He doing? He didn't even wash His hands before meals! All these things about the Lord of the Sabbath that constantly confused those who tried to live by the written code. But Jesus was above all those things...He was the *fulfillment*. It wasn't that He disobeyed the law, not at all! It was that He encompassed it so fully that their finite minds couldn't comprehend it.

God doesn't want us to be bound by what we *think* He wants, and by our perceptions of this law and that law. "Doing this makes God happy," and "Doing that makes God sad." That's *pathetic*. We don't have to live that way any longer! When Jesus saw His dearly loved brothers gathering grain on the Sabbath, He didn't panic because He looked at His Father. The Pharisees looked at the law and said, "Aha! You're breaking the law. You're harvesting on the Sabbath!" But **Jesus looked at His Father**. He served God in the *new* way by fellowshiping with His Father, and therefore He could comprehend the written code in a way that the Pharisees couldn't. The Pharisees were relying on their minds and perceptions of the covenant of the written code. They were limited to that because they didn't go *through* the written code to the Father who *wrote* the code in order to comprehend His heart and mind. So Jesus reminded them, "There was a time when David did things that you all would consider unlawful, and God smiled! Remember when he and his men went into the house of God and ate the consecrated bread that only the priests were allowed to eat? Do you remember that?" And the Pharisees were left scratching their heads. "What's going on here? Yeah, I remember that, but I never thought about it that way." He just fried their minds, because they were approaching God on the basis of some finite thought pattern about scriptures and law.

God wants us to come to Him the same way His Son Jesus did. He wants us to eat from the Tree of Life rather than from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And so now, by living out of that fellowship with God, we can serve in the new way of the Spirit, rather than the old way of the written code. It's not that we cast away the jots and tittles of the law, but we fulfill the law out of fellowship

with God. Hebrews 10 says the written code, the law, is a *shadow* of God, but it's not the *reality* of God. It's not that the written code misrepresents God; it's simply a shadow. You need to understand that about the Scriptures, though it doesn't at all minimize them. As Jesus said, "You diligently study the Scriptures, because you think that by them you possess eternal life...yet you refuse to *come to me*" of whom the Scriptures speak (John 5:39-40). The Scriptures are meant to take us from the shadow to the reality!

You see the same thing in Colossians. Paul talks about how men had tried in the past to approach God on the basis of externals. They were always trying to do the right things and avoid the wrong things through the law, the festivals, the Sabbaths. Now, these were things that God had clearly written about and even commanded, but Paul says, "It's bigger than that. Go *through* the shadow and find the reality that's in Christ Jesus" (Col. 2). And as you find God and fellowship with Him, and *as you love, you will fulfill the law*. "The written code, with its regulations" won't kill you anymore. You won't find the flesh rising up against you when you're in love with the Father. The law in itself is meant to make us conscious of sin and in Galatians it's called a "tutor." It's a schoolmaster that drives us to Christ as we realize our inability to obey even the little bit of what we do understand about God's requirements of us. It's all meant to drive us to "the new and living way." It's the way Adam had with the Father until he made himself a god, indulging his flesh "by the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life."

We come to Him in *a new and living way!* That's God's heart! Then His power is released into our hearts so we can reckon ourselves dead to sin. No longer in bondage, no longer slaves of wickedness with the members of our body. Instead we can now be *willing* bondservants of God, from the heart, because we're in love with Him. The whole nature of the New Covenant is so radically different! It's not just that some new laws and new traditions were added. No! The whole thing is radically different in that ***we can now approach the Father the same way Jesus did*** because we are now IN the Son. How else can we approach the Father? "Our life is hidden with Christ in God"—how else are we going to approach the Father? If you live in the

old way, you can't belong to the New Man. You can't belong to the Second Adam as long as you're living under the curse of the first Adam, approaching God through your head, through your deeds, and through your judgments.

THE LAW IS NOT THE PROBLEM

“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died” (Rom. 7:7-9).

Did you ever notice that if you approach God in some way other than by faith, the more you know the more miserable you are? It’s true! “I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came—when I came to understand what God required of me—death reigned in my mortal body.” Paul describes in great detail the torture of what it’s like to “know” what God wants, and at the same time try to attain it by our minds, our willpower, by self-justification, or by comparing ourselves to others. It’s *miserable* to live that way, rather than living in the Spirit, in total humiliation before God, submitting ourselves to His Spirit and marrying Jesus.

He says, “I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death” (Rom. 7:10,11). In other words, I thought I could reach God by keeping His laws. “Aha! Now I know God’s will, I will simply do it, and live.” But I was deceived by that. I found that my flesh is weaker than I ever imagined. My ability to reach God is far less than I’d ever dreamed. I thought I just needed to know a little more and do a little

more and everything would be okay. But it was nothing like that! It deceived me and brought death to me. The more I knew about what God required of me, the more I realized how impoverished I was.

The law was given to make us “conscious of sin” (Rom. 3:20)...not to justify ourselves before God! The law came to make us realize how *incredibly* weak our flesh is and to put a spotlight on sin. It came to make us see how pitiful we are in ourselves so that we might finally fall on the Rock. Then He can bless us by turning us from our wickedness (Acts 3:26). He longs to lead us toward repentance by His kindness—not by our self-will or our self-righteousness, but out of His *kindness*. He graciously leads us with cords of love into His heart and will, and into an amazing love affair with Him. Everything else just drifts away, not by our self-will but just by humbly loving Him. We saturate ourselves with His love and His perfect love casts out our fear. His love casts out our appetite for trying to find some other way to satisfy ourselves, other than Him (which only heaps condemnation on our hearts anyway).

We were designed by God to find satisfaction only in Him. And we *all* have to learn that the hard way. Being created in His image is a tremendous blessing, but in a sense, it's also a tremendous curse! Since we were created in His image, we have this impulse to think we can somehow, some way, justify ourselves. We justify ourselves with, “I'm better than they are,” or “At least I'm better than I used to be.” Or we're ignorant enough about God's will that we think we've fulfilled it to some tolerable extent—we think we're justified! So God deceived us. He had to show us how *far off* we really were and how *totally* helpless and hopeless we are—“Apart from Me you can do *nothing*.” The sooner we fully comprehend that, the sooner we'll find His Life flowing through us. As long as you hold on to the other, you can't have Jesus—that's the first part of Romans 7. If you continue to strive, to justify yourself, to compare, to judge, to stick out your chest and walk in all that stuff, then you can't have Him. Paul said, “You know enough about the Law of Moses that you ought to know that.” You **CANNOT** have the new and living way as long as you hold tenaciously to the old way.

“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). Don’t fault the law—the law is RIGHT! So don’t think, “What’s the big deal? I don’t have to keep these commands because I’m in the *New* covenant.” If you think that way, you’re missing the boat. You need to believe exactly how true and righteous God’s requirements are, and how *incredibly right* He is in saying that you deserve death. Every last thing He ever said *must* be fulfilled by you. You need to understand that! And don’t soft sell and rationalize with, “I don’t have to do that, it’s not important.” Or, “Well, I’m better than I used to be. And I’m better than John or Fred or Sally.” As long as you rationalize God’s will for your life—His holiness, righteousness and blamelessness—and say, “Well, I don’t have to do that,” you will never find the power of God in your life. ***His commandments are holy, righteous, and true and we must keep them.*** There’s no question about that. Otherwise, we shall surely die!

Violating even the slightest commandment makes us guilty of violating the ENTIRE law. The instant we tell a white lie or don’t tell the whole truth when someone asks us a question, or when we have an attitude at work toward our boss, we’re just as guilty as Hitler or The Boston Strangler. In fact, we’re *worse* than they are, in the sense that we probably know more! Paul said, “Don’t get the wrong idea about the law when I say that it makes me conscious of sin and makes sin well up in my heart and accuses me all the more. Don’t get the wrong idea that the problem is with the law. God’s law is ***right***. The problem is with ***you!***” And you’ll never find God as long as you continue to approach Him on your own merit. It can’t be done.

UTTERLY SINFUL... UTTERLY MISERABLE

“Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful” (Rom. 7:13).

We’ve got to see our utter sinfulness. “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom.” If you can snap at your spouse, your child, your roommate or a co-worker and not feel **utterly sinful**, you are self-deceived because you don’t understand God’s righteousness. If you can walk away from that without a conscience about it, then you don’t understand what God requires of you!

“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it” (Rom. 7:14-20). Grab on to what Paul’s saying here... “As long as I live in this old relationship of trying to approach God by the good things I do, I’m always going to be a slave.”

Some people say that Paul must have been writing about the time *before* he became a Christian, because he’s saying he sins all the time. Otherwise he wouldn’t be able to say to the Thessalonians,

“See how holy and righteous and blameless I was when I was in your midst.” He would be contradicting himself, right? How can he be sinning all the time and be “blameless” at the same time? He must be talking about *before* he was a Christian. Others say, “Well, Paul was a sinner just like the rest of us, so why should we care about being holy when here’s this great man of God sinning like crazy, by his own testimony? Even Paul sinned, so it’s okay if I sin too.” If you take either one of those lines, you’re missing the whole point! Paul is describing ***the nature of trying to live by the law***. If we try to justify ourselves, we will live in this *terrible* slavery of being made consciously aware of how utterly sinful we are, failing again and again, and being utterly miserable.

If you’re experiencing a life that’s obviously against God’s will—in your attitudes and priorities, the way you spend your time and money, the way you treat other people, and the lack of testimony of God in the workplace—if you’re just a Joe-blow-do-what-you-want kind of person, conforming to the patterns of the world, then you don’t understand the Righteousness of God and you’re selling short the Holiness of Jesus. In fact, the Scriptures say you’re “trampling underfoot the Blood of Christ.” That’s a very serious accusation that God holds against you. “*If you deliberately continue to sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, then no sacrifice for sins is left. All that remains is judgment and a raging fire that consumes the enemies of God*” (Heb. 10:26,27). That’s how *serious* it is if you deliberately continue to sin.

In fact, if you can continue to sin without conscience, there’s very little chance you’re a Christian. The nature of the Spirit given to us is that He makes us aware of sin and righteousness and judgment to come. He teaches our conscience the ways of Jesus and testifies about the holiness and life of Jesus. So if you have no conscience again and again and again about things that are totally unlike Jesus’ character, there is a very high probability that you’ve never been born a second time. The letter of 1 John was written around 95 A.D. to the second and third generation Christians with many tests so they could see if they were really believers—born a second time from the very womb of God, and not just living on their parent’s faith. One of those tests

of the seed of God truly living inside of you, was that you *cannot* deliberately continue to sin, because the Son of God was manifest to destroy the devil's works (1 John 3:8,9). If it's no big deal to you to live in sin, on and on and on...if you can continue to live in sin without a conscience and without power over sin, you're not even a believer, says John.

So...back to what Paul is talking about in Romans 7... He's *not* talking about an unbeliever with no conscience for sin. He's talking about a man who DOES have a conscience about sin. "What I do I *hate*." He despises it! What he wants to do, he can't do. What he doesn't want to do, he keeps falling into. Paul isn't describing an unbeliever who's without the Spirit. He's talking about a believer, but one who is *not living by faith*. Paul's describing a man who's living by self-justification and by flesh, and who's "trying to attain his goal by mere human effort." "After beginning in the Spirit," this man is now trying to justify himself and trying to accomplish God's purposes by the flesh rather than by the new and living way of the Spirit. He's approaching God like Adam would, through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—"This is good. This is evil." It's approaching God in some way *other* than faith in the Son of God. True faith means you're dying to the world and the world to you, with no regard for externals, or the fear of man or fear of failure. Faith is living your life **totally in Christ**. It's believing that the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" is able to make the Glory of God shine in *your* life with ever-increasing measure, through the face of Jesus Christ as you behold Him. God's heart for you is to transform you into the image of His Son from one degree of glory to another. That's His desire! That's His manifest purpose. It's His *whole heart and purpose* for planet earth, that the sons of God would be manifest (Romans 8)—a race of people who will **believe on the One whom He sent**. And they'd believe Him not only for salvation, but also for the demolishing of the strongholds of sin in their lives and the lives of their brothers and sisters. *That* is God's will for *you*.

SATURATE YOUR LIFE IN THE SON

If you're exhibiting all these symptoms...miser—pain—anguish—then there's a problem! Don't settle for it! What you want to do, you can't do, and what you shouldn't do, you do. If there's all this agony and failure, on and on and on...Paul says the real issue is this: you haven't died to your first love, which is to justify yourself. As long as you're still living in the flesh, you can't marry Jesus. You can't live by the new and living way, the Second Adam's way of life that He had with the Father. *"The prince of this world has come, but he has nothing in me."* You can't live that way as long as you try to justify yourself outside of total, saturated faith in the Son of God. *Total, saturated faith in Jesus*, nothing more—*that's* the power of God unto deliverance. It's the Good News of Jesus Christ that we believe from the heart. The First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega, the *everything of God*, the whole alphabet of God is in Jesus! "The spirit of prophecy is a testimony of Jesus." Jesus, high and lifted up! "The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." *Totally* saturated in Him, believing in Him for every breath of air. "Apart from Him you can do nothing." "If you'll abide in Me and let My word abide in you, you'll bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be supernatural to the world like I was." There's no other way! *That's* God's heart for each of us!

After "beginning in the Spirit," you can then go on to live in misery if you want to, living by "mere human effort" by your flesh and by the law. You can still be "saved"... but what GOD wants, as Paul said... "I'm in the pains of childbirth **until Christ is formed in you**"—THAT'S God's heart for you! The Anointed One of God can be formed in you to the "full measure of the stature and fullness

of Christ.” If you see the “symptoms” of perpetual failure in your life, then you’re not yet living by faith in the Son of God who loves you and gave Himself for you. You’re still living in another world. After “beginning in the Spirit”—believing God for salvation that you couldn’t attain yourself—now somehow you believe in yourself for sanctification. Somehow, someway, if you trace the roots back, either your conscience is seared because you don’t care what God thinks (in which case you’re in serious trouble), or you care deeply, but fail again and again. What you do you *hate* utterly. You hate that raised eyebrow, that rolling of the eyes, those pursed lips, that cold shoulder you give your spouse or roommate, or the lack of openness you have with others, and the judgment you feel as you scowl at someone because of the way they dress. *If you’re truly born a second time, you’ll hate that stuff.* What you do, you’ll *hate*. You cannot continue to live like that without a conscience.

The sheep know the Shepherd’s voice, but the goats don’t. So if someone speaks to you about sin in your life, you’ll find conviction in your heart about it, because the Spirit of God comes with deep conviction. Like Paul said, “we know you’re one of His, because the Gospel came to you *not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction*” (1Thess. 1:5). Paul knew there was something real going on because the Word of God and the Spirit of God came, and there was *deep* conviction. Remember the Corinthians’ response to a simple letter from a brother named Paul, who they didn’t even trust very much... “What indignation, what alarm, what desire to make every issue right.” (2 Cor. 7) That’s the kind of heart we need to have.

So Paul has been lifting up this glorious truth of beginning in faith by the Spirit, and also *walking* in faith by the Spirit. It’s JESUS who fulfills the requirements of God for salvation. And it’s JESUS who provides *everything* that pertains to life and godliness. “*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desire*” (2 Peter 1:3-4). Great and precious

promises! Promises that allow us to be partakers of the divine nature so we don't have to be nearsighted, blind and unfruitful. God can now well up from within as we believe Him *by faith* to not only fulfill the requirements of God to justify us and free us from the death penalty... but also to bring us to Himself in the stature of Christ, with the personality and character and fullness of Jesus. That's God's heart and will for you and it's accessible by *believing* Him (the God who said, "Let the light shine out of darkness!"), and by beholding the person of Jesus and trusting Him completely for that transformation.

That is *really* good news to me! It's a whole lot better than having to "be somebody," and "know" things and accomplish 10,000 things and avoid 10,000 others! I can saturate my heart and life with the Son of God. He will transform me from one degree of glory to another as I behold Him and trust Him, and lay down my appetites and no longer "offer the parts of my body as instruments of wickedness." I offer myself to Him and call on the Name of the Lord, trusting Him and believing in Him with all my heart to transform me and change me. He's able to create the galaxies so I believe **He's able to change my heart**. No matter what has ever happened, or what anyone has ever said to me, no matter how bad I've ever felt about myself or how others have felt about me...I believe He can change my heart.

I start by acknowledging that His ways are right and true. I look at Romans 1 through 3 and say, "Apart from Him I can do nothing. It's true! We've altogether become worthless. There's nothing good in me...*nothing* good dwells in me. I acknowledge that. There's no pride in my heart. I empty myself of pride." And then I believe in Him as my only hope. I believe in Him for justification, and then believe in Him for character, growth and fullness. That's the Good News that sustains us and draws us across a lifetime, that Jesus demonstrated for us in His 33 years, and that He desires for us and wants to fulfill in us. "*When I return, will I find faith on earth?*"

THE SON DELIGHTS THE FATHER

*“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!** So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin” (Romans 7:21-25).*

Paul is aching with it... “Ohhhh, this is just *terrible!* Is there any answer for all this terrible pain I feel? Is there *any* answer? I am willing to acknowledge how pitiful my life is. I freely admit with no pride how many times I’ve failed. I acknowledge it. God is righteous and His decrees are TRUE and GOOD. He is Holy. I am pitiful. I acknowledge it all and make no defense for myself! I make no comparisons to others or to myself. I’m an utter, utter failure. Is there ANY hope for me!?!?”

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1-8:4).

Can you see how all this is blossoming? Paul's saying, "You need to understand that the righteous requirements of the law *can be fulfilled* in your mortal bodies, in your era, in the span of life God has given you." If you live by the power of the Spirit, rather than by the power of the law in the members of your body—***you can live in the kind of life God intended for you, that Jesus lived!!*** If you live by the Spirit, in fellowship and friendship with God, you won't say anything you don't hear the Father saying or do anything you don't see the Father doing, ***because you trust nothing in yourself.*** It won't be because you're so "spiritual," but because you're so UNspiritual. You'll have no choice but to face Him, and draw every word that you speak and every ounce of life *from His heart*. As the war rages in your flesh, you'll become more and more convinced. From one degree of glory to another to another to another you'll become more convinced that the law of sin and death is actually put aside *IF* you will simply live by His Spirit in fellowship with Him. Then and **ONLY** then can the righteous requirements of the law be fulfilled in our current lifetime in a way that satisfies the Father. It won't be because of us. Only the Son living through us can ever satisfy the Father.

So we abandon trying to sacrifice anything "for Him," or accomplish or do any good thing "for Him," or justify ourselves in any way. We stop trying to maintain our reputation or compare ourselves to others. A dead man doesn't think about all those things! And until you're dead, you can't find the power of God. ***You're going to have a war raging inside of you until you're DEAD to approaching the Father on any basis other than through JESUS, as a way of life.*** "I've been crucified with Christ; I no longer live. Yet I *do* live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." If that doesn't describe you, you're under a curse, as Paul said earlier. And this is the curse: Either your conscience is seared and you don't know God's will so you miss Him entirely; or you *know* the law, but you can't *keep* the law. Your conscience has been enlightened by God's requirements, which are holy and true. You can't find fault with the law or the holiness of God, so you're desperate to fulfill the law. But you find you just can't, and you become more and more guilty. And then finally, somewhere in the middle of all that struggle...once in a rare moment amongst a whole generation of people...someone decides they want to believe

Jesus, and lay down their life for Him and quit striving. They decide to find Him and *only* Him for their only justification and their only sanctification—with their whole heart and soul, and their whole mind and strength.

God wants not just a rare few, but a whole tribe of people like that! He wants a *whole race* born of the Second Adam—not just the “first Adam” trying to please the “Second Adam.” A race of people born from the very womb of God, living in the genetic life of Jesus, in the same way He lived—by the Spirit, in *the new and living way*.

*“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be **fully met in us**, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires” (Rom. 8:1-5a).* Notice the tie between your mind and the Spirit of God. If you live according to the sinful nature, your mind and thoughts will be set on and consumed by what the earthly nature desires—justification, retaliation, judgment, bitterness, lust, fear of man, pride. Your mind will be *set* on these things. If the sinful nature is reigning in your mortal body, your mind is *fixed* on earthly issues.

“But those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” I’m not living for myself because I don’t live any longer. I live for what the Spirit desires. “Zeal for the Father’s House consumes me.” I don’t run after what pleases myself, my flesh and my glands—the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life. I don’t *want* that anymore because I know it creates a raging war in me. I want to set my mind on what the Spirit desires—fellowship with the Godhead, the same as Jesus had.

“The mind of sinful man is death...” If you don’t believe that, then your conscience is totally seared. You’ve got to *feel* that “working in your members” (Rom. 7:23). Like Paul said, “The mind of sinful man

is *death*. Ycch!! Oh wretched man that I am!” You are out of touch with God if it doesn’t drive you nuts when you live by the flesh and the sinful nature and try to justify yourself through externals—comparing yourself to others, or to how you used to be or to what you “think” you understand of the Word of God or some other sort of external thing.

MARKS OF THE SPIRIT LIVING WITHIN

“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). Here’s a mark of a man living by the Spirit: He senses life and peace in his heart and mind, and the acts of the sinful nature will be put to death. He’ll be blameless, righteous and holy in God’s sight. He’ll live in fellowship with God and lay down his life for his brothers in very obvious ways, like Jesus did. You say you love God? John said that your brothers can tell you whether you do or not. Because you don’t love God if your brothers don’t know how *desperately* you love them! How can you love a God you haven’t seen if you won’t love the measure of God that’s been granted to your brothers? John said, “You’re a liar and the truth is not in you” (1 John 4:20). “The life and the mind that’s controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”

“The sinful mind is hostile to God” (Rom. 8:7). There’s enmity there... “Don’t bind me. Don’t make me do that. You’re a hard God. You’re a harsh master, reaping where you haven’t sown. You’re trying to take all my rights away from me. You’re trying to squeeze me in and make me do this or that. It’s just not fair. You did this for somebody else but you won’t do it for me.” “You made me this way!” the clay says to the Potter. God isn’t very amused by that kind of attitude.

*“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, **nor can it do so**” (Rom. 8:7).* As hard as we might try, we have no power within us, living by externals, to obey God. It *can’t* happen! There’s a hostility and a resentment toward God, His people, and His Word. We don’t want any part of Him. We kick and push and resist and resent. “Those

controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). You cannot please God when you give your heart and mind over to the sinful nature and if you approach Him on the basis of externals.

*“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Rom. 8:9). It’s a conditional statement—an “if-then” statement. If the Spirit of God lives in you, then you won’t be living by the sinful nature. He gives the Holy Spirit as the deposit, or the down payment that guarantees that the House and the Inheritance are ours. And the Holy Spirit living inside looks a certain way. When the Creator—God Himself—lives inside of you, there are certain “marks,” John said and Jesus taught, and Paul is teaching here. There will be life reigning in you (Romans 5)! There will be power living inside of you. There’ll be life and peace in you, and the righteous requirements of the law will be fulfilled in you, with ever-increasing glory. The stature of Christ and fellowship with the Godhead will continue to well up, and well up, in a supernatural way, as you believe on the One whom He sent. These are marks of the Spirit of Christ living in you, if in fact He does live in you.**

“But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Rom. 8:10,11). You can have LIFE in your mortal body!! That’s God’s promise, if you live by His Spirit. As surely as God raised Jesus from

*If Jesus doesn’t live in you...you’re not one of His yet. This is a call to those of you who are wrestling with all this. Maybe this isn’t where you are. Maybe you’re not wrestling or driving toward these things, or you don’t desire the things of God and aren’t desperate to find God. Maybe it’s, “I just don’t care, I don’t have any conscience for it. It doesn’t matter to me. It’s not that big a deal.” If that’s the case for you—you don’t hunger and thirst for righteousness, and you don’t long for it as a newborn baby longs for milk, as Peter said. For you, it’s not a matter of needing to learn how to live by the Spirit rather than by the flesh and the law. What you need is to get on your face and ask God to deliver you from the penalty of sin. That’s got to be the starting place before these other things apply.

the dead, so also YOU can have Resurrection Life living in you that is *not* under the law of sin and death, and that is *not* pushed around by the flesh. When your mind is controlled by the Spirit, life and peace will flow out of you, through you and into you. **Your whole world will be filled with Jesus**, rather than contention, striving, fear, comparison and judgment. In your mortal bodies, God means to fulfill *in you* the law of the Spirit of God, which is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost!

PART 7



TRUE SONSHIP

OUR HEARTS CRY, “DADDY, DADDY!”

*“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Rom. 8:12, 13). **There is a direct correlation between living by the Spirit and destroying the misdeeds of the body.** Don’t think you can have one without the other. There’s a very direct correlation. If you’ll live by the Spirit, the misdeeds of the body *will be* vanquished in your heart and life. But if they are not being destroyed in your life with ever-increasing glory, then you’re not living by the Spirit yet. You’re not believing the Good News of Jesus from the heart. You’re living by sight rather than by faith.*

God is calling us to *live* in Him, to totally believe His Word and to totally trust Him for the reconciliation between us and Him, between you and Him. We believe Him that the enmity can be resolved, and even beyond that, that we can become ***like the very Son of God in our mortal bodies.***

*“...Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). TRUE SONSHIP. That family relationship with God that we all desperately long for, comes from living in the Spirit rather than living by externals. Only then can we experience the sonship that God intends for us. “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Rom. 8:15). The Spirit of God cries out in our hearts, “Daddy, Daddy!” With *that* kind of heart and spirit, we draw closer and closer to Him and the acts of the sinful nature just fall away as*

we fall more and more in love with Him. As we're restored and as we return to our First Love, the acts of the sinful nature have no hold on us! That's the New Covenant. He changes our hearts and causes us to keep His commands and decrees. If you haven't found that to be true, it's because you're not living in the good or "the fat of the land." You're not living in the inheritance God has given you. And the reason you're not is because you're still living according to externals, rather than living totally saturated in the person of Jesus as fulfilling every requirement of the Father, in you.

"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16,17a). We're not just babies, but heirs of all the riches of God. Not just "saved" into the family, but heirs of all the riches that Jesus experienced. "Ohhhhhh, the depth of the riches!" It's all ours! All the great and precious promises are ours in Christ Jesus as we're "partakers of the divine nature" and as we "add to our faith" (2 Pet. 1:4-8).

"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Rom. 8:17). Sharing in His sufferings means more than keeping a good attitude when "bad things" happen to you. Certainly, part of "sharing in His sufferings" means that you live in faith in spite of bad things that happen to you...you don't react, or resent, or lash out. You live by faith in the Son of God. You can't be prodded or provoked because, after all, *you're a dead man!* We live by faith in the Son of God. *We* no longer live. That is God's heart for us that we share in the fellowship of His sufferings through the difficult things of life. But there is MORE...

We're *also* meant to share in the kind of suffering that Peter described—facing sin in the inner man and struggling with death to sin (the sinful desires which war against our souls). We face that struggle with hope in our hearts—fully persuaded that God is able to keep His promises. There's that pain you feel of wanting to do something and not being able to. There's anguish inside when you honestly want to overcome sin, but fall short. Like walking up to the refrigerator, desperate to not be a slave to food, and then failing.

Embrace that kind of suffering too. ***Be willing to suffer with Him through the process of becoming heirs***—not just family members, but *heirs*. Be willing to suffer with Him, as you continue to “believe in the One whom He sent.” Just like “all of creation groans as it waits for the sons of God to be manifest...we also groan.” This process of suffering is something we need to accept, not resent. We’ve got to *receive* the suffering. “*Even though Jesus was a Son, He learned obedience by the things He suffered.*” We need to EMBRACE the fellowship of the suffering of Jesus, not just in the injustices of life, but in the warring in our own members. And in spite of the warring, in spite of the failure, we *believe* the One whom the Father sent.

We trust that the God who said, “Let the light shine out of darkness”... can ALSO mold us into the character and image of Jesus. He will do it and I believe it with all my heart. ***If I believe it and combine His Word with faith, then like the Hebrews writer said, I’ll see the manifest glory of God in my own heart and life, regardless of my personality or history.*** I’ll see it in my relationships, and in the fruit I bear in the world. Amen?? Share in the fellowship of the suffering of the inner man, whether imposed from without or imposed from within. *Share* in that fellowship, in that suffering. Beg God in the midst of the storm, in the midst of the trial. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. “Made perfect...*being* made holy,” as we cry out to God, washed in the Blood of the Lamb, presenting ourselves boldly before His throne of grace. We make all our requests boldly to God because of the Blood of Jesus and the character of Jesus and the promises of God—the promises that will be fulfilled in *your* personal life, *if you will believe*. If you’ll believe and share in the fellowship of His sufferings in the midst of the war, He will change you from glory to glory to glory.

Can you believe that?? Will you believe?? Can you believe the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness”? Can you believe the sun could shine in the black of night, in an instant, right where you are? Can you believe that? I can believe that!! That doesn’t bother me *at all!* If He can do the things in my heart that He’s already done, then making the sun to shine in the dark is small! And the flip side is true too. If He can hang the stars in the sky, then what He has to do in

me is also small! There's no question in my mind about that. There are definitely times when I war and wrestle with unbelief. But when I get right back to the basics, I know that since God gave His only Son, "how much more all things?" I come back to the Good News of Jesus Christ, and I say, "I have to believe.... I **must** believe You have an interest in me. And Father, You are able, and You love me. It's obvious, so I believe."

Please keep pouring over these things in your heart. Beg God, the Person, to show you and teach you these things. Beg Him to manifest them in you, and to give you utterance so you can speak them and impart them to the people around you. Keep begging God, who is a Person, to manifest Himself out of His love, in all the things we've been talking about.

Father, I'd like to speak to You on behalf of everyone reading this. I really hope that it can be on behalf of everyone reading this. Father, we do believe You. If You'd give Your only Son, how much more all things? We believe that You're able and that You desire it for us. In the midst of the warring, the struggling, the failure, the pain and the suffering, we receive all of that as the groaning that's in keeping with the miracle You're doing in our lives. We believe You in spite of our failure, and our own flesh, and in spite of our personalities and histories. We believe You're the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" and that You made the Glory of God shine in the face of Jesus, and raised Him from the dead by the everlasting Covenant of Blood. We believe that since Your Spirit took the chaos of the universe and transformed it into order, You can do the same thing in our own hearts and minds and lives. We believe you, Oh God.

Please!!! Come into our lives in a spectacular way. Change us not for our own sake, but for Your Glory. And we will give You every last bit of the glory in our lives, we promise. You deserve it all, and we'll take none for ourselves because we know that You are jealous, and share Your Glory with no man. We believe that You want to bring us to the end of ourselves so that we know we have nothing but You...and as a result You will live in us with ever-increasing measure. We're desperate for more—not for our own sake, but so Jesus would not be blasphemed among the nations any longer. We want Him to receive the Bride He deserves—that He's waited too long for already. Lord, come quickly! We know that's conditional on us

*being ready. We trust You to ready us, to help us, to change our hearts and minds, to transform us by the renewing of our minds. We believe that Your Word is true and Your character is faithful and that You **are** love, so we have nothing to fear. God, we give You glory. You are a great and marvelous and awesome God, and we lift our hearts to You as a God who will keep His promises to us. Amen.*

THE NATURE OF SONSHIP

The nature of sonship and the nature of being co-heirs with Christ is that it's something that happens *in the spiritual realm*. Sonship is not something you can claim based on a bunch of words, or something you once did or said. It's not based on having the "right belief system" about Jesus or anything like that. True sonship, true inheritance in Christ, is something that can only be sensed in the Spirit. "*The Spirit testifies with our spirit, 'Abba, Father.'*" There's a sonship, a "co-heirs together with Christ." "What counts is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, what counts is a new creation."

If we will live by the Spirit of God and draw on Him in fellowship, then we can have fellowship in a SPECTACULAR way, one with another. That's the basis on which we live our lives. It's not about circumcision or uncircumcision, what counts is a new creation (Gal 6:15). That's what we're looking for in one another—Spiritual Life. We're looking for life with a capital "L". That's the basis of fellowship—not what they say or what they do or what they know, but *is there Life?* Do I see Jesus in this person? I've got to know, because I can only fellowship with Him. I don't care what a person tells me, it's only Jesus I can fellowship with. Can you see that? Can you see how important it is?

If we accept a substitute—an alternative basis of fellowship and Life—we'll sell Jesus short. We'll also cheat those that we're extending our heart and fellowship to. *If we build a false fellowship based on externals, we rob each other of any craving or hunger to find the real thing.* If everyone thinks I'm great and keeps puffing me up when I'm not doing so great in my own relationship with God, then I'll find myself in a battle. I won't tend to be as honest with God as I need to be in order to find the real thing in my life. Someone's feeding

me cotton candy, so I'm not hungry when dinnertime comes. I'm eating candy all the time—people puffing me up with a fellowship that's not based on spiritual discernment. So when it's time to eat the real meal, I pass. I'm not interested because I have no appetite for it.

But what if I'm starved of everything but real meat and real bread from Heaven? What if nobody gives me even a morsel of cotton candy and won't settle for anything but Bread from Heaven—real drink and real food for me? What if I'm given *nothing to satisfy me* until the real thing is there? Maybe *then* there's hope that I will find Jesus and that something will be transformed in me beyond just intellectual or social change. Maybe *then* there will be something supernatural...a child born, “not of natural descent, not of human decision, not of a husband's will, not by peer pressure, but born of God.”

Only settle for real meat, real drink, real food—REAL bread from Heaven. Those can only come as long as we're not feeding each other candy in the meantime. Does that sound harsh? It is harsh. Does that sound difficult to live out on both sides of that relationship? Is it difficult to receive someone who won't give me a morsel? Yes, it is difficult to be in that situation when nobody seems to give me the time of day. I feel cheated; I feel slighted. But if we'll be faithful and have soft hearts, the end result will be something **very SUPERNatural** rather than natural. You have to have eyes to see and a hope in your heart. Press on and persevere, like the man who came to his friend at midnight. He said, “I have to have bread, I have to have bread.” He could've pulled up weeds in the garden and eaten those I suppose, but he was going after something real. He stayed after it and he persevered. If we'll have that kind of heart with God and with one another, God will hear our cry.

Jesus promised that it would require perseverance to find the real thing, but that He would hear because He loves to give good gifts to those who cry out to Him. It will require perseverance to find the real thing, and if you're not up for that, you'll lose. He taught us to ask and keep on asking—to pursue. “I will be found by those who search for me with all their heart.” He puts us in situations where anything less than all of our heart is not acceptable to Him. ***He will not meet us on any terms other than ALL of our hearts.***

That's why that wonderful man named the rich young ruler lost everything. As great a guy as he was, he wasn't willing to give up that "one thing he lacked." So Jesus would not fellowship with him, and thank God that He wouldn't. If the young ruler had come to Jesus on the basis of something less than a *whole heart*, there would've been nothing real. He would've been deceived and deluded into thinking that he truly belonged to Jesus. Just by "hanging out with Jesus," he would've thought he was truly part of Him. But hanging around Jesus means nothing. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus says, "Then you will say, 'But you taught in our streets, you ate at our table.' But He will reply, 'Depart from me, I never knew you'" (Luke 13:26-27). From their perception, they hung out with Him and said the right words—"Lord, Lord." But hanging out with Jesus does not make us a part of Him.

BE GRATEFUL

So, receive the fact that God, out of His graciousness, His kindness and His mercy, will *not* give us a placebo. He wants us to have the REAL thing and He won't give us a placebo to satisfy us! Instead, He'll make us miserable and make us stand at the door and knock and knock until our hearts are truly right. Then He will come and give us abundantly from the feast He has prepared for us from the beginning of time! Thank Him and don't resent the fact that He withholds from you in certain ways and certain times. He wants the real thing for you...the *whole thing* and nothing half way! He doesn't want us to see men "walking as trees"—He wants us to see clearly as ones who have been wholly and totally healed!! That's His gift to us. He will not answer the door until our hearts are right. Thank Him for that. Don't resent or hold that against other people. Don't hold that against God, but be grateful—He LOVES us!

And, on the other side of that same coin, please do not extend superficial, foolish fellowship that isn't based on spiritual discernment. Do not build your relationships, giving away your humor and affections and the secrets of your heart, apart from spiritual discernment. You might be feeding someone a placebo when they really aren't plugged into God. If they've not really lost their life in order to find Him, you might be giving them a false Messiah. If you give them false fellowship, they'll never be hungry enough to crave the real thing, and they'll not let the seed fall to the ground and die. They'll keep getting back up again and again, and then even blame others, "Well, you're my real friend, and they're not." You can create wars and strivings and actually keep people from God by fellowshipping on a basis other than in the Spirit.

Exercise caution rather than superficial assumptions that end up robbing people of finding the true Christ. I know it's hard to receive that from others. It's hard and painful to live that way. But as Paul said, "If we are indeed willing to share in His sufferings, we will also share in His glory." ***There is no way to describe or apprehend Glory, without also understanding the sufferings that Jesus had.***

We must learn the pain that He felt when He had to say, "Who are my mothers, my brothers and my sisters?" To those seated in the circle around Him, he said, "These are. Those that do the will of God." It must have caused great pain in His heart to say that about His own mother. But she wasn't ready yet. She had come to take possession of Him because "he had lost his mind" it says in the Gospel of Mark. She wasn't ready yet. "A sword will pierce your own heart too, Mary," as Simeon had said to her. "You're not going to come off easy in this thing. He will be a scandal and a stumbling stone for you, too." Nobody escapes the stumbling stone. Nobody escapes suffering in the inner man if they want to find the Power of the Spirit of God in a real way. We must share in the fellowship of His Sufferings, that we might also experience His Glory.

So, as we evaluate ourselves and the world we live in, it's important that we judge a righteous judgment, which is never based on externals. We must never *condemn* a person based on externals and never *receive* a person based on externals either. Those are judgments we are not free to make. We're not free to receive someone just because they say or do or believe the "right things," or because they claim to be something. We're not free to receive *anyone* other than on the basis of the Spirit...the Spirit testifying together with all of our spirits, "Abba" sonship.

Some people are apt to say, "Who am I to judge?" and they go ahead and receive anyone who claims they ought to be received. "You need to receive me, because I believe the right thing, and I say and do the right things. You can't condemn me, because there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ." And you say, "Well, okay. Even though my spirit says that something is seriously wrong, you do seem to say and do and believe the right things. I guess I have no choice. I better judge not, lest I be judged." So based on externals alone, we judge

people as innocent. But we don't have that right! ***Only the Spirit of God has the right and freedom to testify "Abba," and to join hearts together in the Spirit.*** Only the Spirit brings us together in the family of God in a spirit of sonship.

By the same token we're not free to *condemn* anyone based on their externals...such as the way they act, their personality, their appearance or even the mistakes they make. In that case, who would ever receive David as the namesake of Jesus—"Son of David"? Who would ever receive David as a man to admire—as a man after God's own heart? Based on externals, we wouldn't—He made some serious mistakes! We'd put him on the back burner somewhere, but we certainly wouldn't desire to be like him or make him our role model. Yet God exalted him above all of His people. The same was true about Abraham. On what basis is he exalted above all other men on earth? On what basis? Look at the things he did and said and the decisions he made! He did stupid, sinful things! But God is looking for something ***inside of a man***, and it's very important that we learn to look for the same thing. We don't judge based on externals—not for the good, nor for the bad.

God is calling us to live in spiritual discernment. Romans speaks of the fact that in order to live in the Glory of Jesus' Life, it is mandatory that our minds be controlled by the Spirit. We must live in this testimony of the Spirit, testifying with our spirit, "Abba." As we look at each other, we must look for that "co-heir in Christ" testimony, that glory testimony, that sons of God testimony, that mutual "Abba" testimony.

In the Spirit is the **ONLY** basis by which we can judge. If you've not learned how to judge in the Spirit, you'll be impotent in your walk with God. You'll not be able to touch the things Jesus wants to touch. You'll gloss right over them and be naive in circumstance after circumstance. You'll judge in a negative way those who don't "do the right things" or who have personalities you don't like, or who make mistakes, like David and Abraham. You'll reject them, based on externals. Then you'll judge in a positive way those people who are smooth talking and say the right things, and whose "testimony" is squeaky-clean. Nothing you see in their life seems to be a problem, so you receive them based on externals. But God doesn't judge a man

based on the externals...*He looks at the heart.* David was judged after the heart.

I want to encourage you, like Paul is testifying to the Romans, that the nature of spiritual victory and the nature of spiritual fellowship are in the Spirit. They are not to be found based on common socio-economic strata, personality, age, common interests, or even common belief systems, per se. None of those issues are the basis on which we might have fellowship one with another, and be co-heirs together in Christ. We have to see way past the externals and “judge nothing according to the flesh,” as Paul said. We must only discern in the spiritual realm. Those with the mind of Christ can discern all things (1 Cor. 2). Those without the mind of Christ are fleshly babies that live in carnality, and as Paul went on to say, “I can’t speak of you as spiritual.” *The ability to fellowship properly has to be based on spiritual discernment, not on external discernment.* Choosing to give your heart away, or the refusal to give your heart away—both must be based on spiritual discernment, not on the externals.

I’m calling you to a higher plane of existence! Don’t decide where you’re going, and what you’re doing, and who to have dinner with just based on externals. The intent is that *we would all grow up in the Spirit and learn how to judge a righteous judgment.* The intent is to learn how to discern all things and to live in the Spirit...to fellowship only with what Jesus is fellowshiping with, and to withdraw from things that Jesus has withdrawn from because they have grieved His Holy Spirit. You don’t even have to see or know a person extensively, or spend huge blocks of time with them, to be able to discern these things. If you live in the Spirit, you’ll be able to discern these matters just as Jesus did.

This is about LIVING a Victorious Life! It’s about overcoming sin in your own life and discerning properly in the Spirit those things that testify “Abba” and sonship. Co-heirs together in Christ because of a revelation that flesh and blood cannot reveal—that’s the basis on which the Church is built. It has to be SUPER-natural! *“Upon this rock I will build my church against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.”* If it’s not based on a revelation that only the Father can give, then the gates of hell prevail. We’ll make bad decision after bad decision.

We will exclude what He's receiving, and we will receive what He's excluding—in our own life as well as in other people's lives. Without revelation we will be miserable in ourselves, constantly living in Romans 7 failure. We will always be failing in Romans 7, and won't have true fellowship one with another, because we'll constantly be making decisions after the flesh. We'll never be able to fulfill the requirements of God in our mortal body **as He promised we could if we lived by the Spirit.**

LIVE BY THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP

SO, Live in the SPIRIT!! It's a call to live in the Spirit so you can find victory over sin, temptation, trial and suffering within yourself, and also to find true fellowship one with another. We must live only by the revelation that comes from the Father, because it's ***only on that rock that Jesus builds His Church*** and against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. The only way to beat satan down and win the victory over him personally and corporately is to put to death the misdeeds of the body ***by the Spirit***. To live by that Spirit of sonship that testifies together—co-heirs, co-heirs! We must live by Revelation that the Father gives and not by externals.

Leaning on your own understanding or on others' understanding is a lack of spiritual life and a quenching of God's Spirit. Not turning to Him will leave you continuously impotent, perpetually making mistakes in life, and missing thing after thing. You'll see warning sign after warning sign in a person's life, but you'll not act on any of them because you think somebody else surely would've said something if it was really a problem. "Well, they've been around a lot, and if there was a problem somebody surely would've said something, so it must be okay." "They were probably just joking." Meanwhile, all those warning signs combined together end up resulting in someone's death that could've been stopped! If someone had been willing to throw their body down in front of the roaring freight train, it could've been stopped before it was too late. We've got to live by the Spirit.

The testimony of God's heart is the Gospel of Jesus. And the Gospel of Jesus and the Kingdom involves ***the Power of the Spirit of God living***

within. Paul went so far as to say that if you don't have the Spirit of Christ and you're not living by the Spirit of Christ, you're none of His! It's just that clear in Paul's heart—we've got to live by the Life of the Spirit of God! If we live by the flesh, we will die. But if we will live by the Spirit—the Spirit of sonship—we will surely live.

“The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” If you live by the Spirit, you'll not find yourself making 10,000 mistakes...always back and forth, back and forth, wondering what people think and wondering how you're going to fail next. Can you relate to that? Have you ever felt that? “What do people think? How will I ever do this right? Well, I've failed before; I'll probably fail again. If I do that, then what will they think?” It's always this “they” thing. That web of thoughts doesn't happen when you live by the Spirit of Life. The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. That doesn't mean life is without its mistakes! But it will be 99% less filled with foolish mistakes if we abide in Him and do nothing apart from Him, as He called us to do.

The gates of hell will not prevail if we live by the Rock of Revelation that the Father has given us. And that's what Paul goes on to say is the secret of this whole deal. Do you want to put to death the misdeeds of the body? Then don't live by a bunch of externals...live by the Spirit. Let your mind be controlled by the Spirit of Life. Find the testimony of life within yourself and the Spirit of God testifying with your spirit, “Abba!” With that kind of life, you will find fellowship one with another and fellowship with the Godhead. You'll find a freedom that is just unbelievable compared to the Romans 7 kind of life that most people perpetually live in. This is your inheritance—co-heirs with Christ. *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs.”* We're not just talking about being born into His family. We're talking about **inheriting the riches of Jesus** in this life and in the life to come, eternal life. If children, also heirs!

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17). If you wonder what he means by “heirs”...**glory** is the issue! Jesus is bringing many **sons to glory**

(Hebrews 2:10). God's intent for us is to have *abundant* life, a *full* life, *reigning* in life, the power of an indestructible life, peace that transcends understanding, tasting the powers of the coming age (John 10:10, Rom. 5:17, Heb. 7:16, Phil 4:7, Heb 6:5). This is what we are heirs to—filled with Glory! Not just sons, but also *heirs*.

EXPRESS THE RISEN JESUS

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us...” (Romans 8:18). It doesn’t say, “revealed *to us*,” but “revealed **in us**.” Do you know the difference between those two things? The difference between glory that is revealed *to us*, versus glory that’s revealed **in us**? God’s intent is to reveal His Glory **IN** you. Do you believe that? You have to believe that—it’s His promise to you. You will never experience the reality of His Glory in you in this present age to any measure at all, unless you believe that. Look to God and say, “God reveal your Glory in me!” Don’t think, “Oh well, I’m too modest. I’m too humble to ask for **that** to happen.” No! It’s His desire and it’s to the praise of His Glory that He reveal His Glory in us, not just to us. Don’t settle for, “When we die and go to heaven we’ll see His Glory. The streets are paved with gold and there’s a mansion...” That is not what He’s talking about. He’s talking about revealing His Glory *in us*. It’s not just revealed to us, where “Oh, I see it now.” No! We *are* it now! We **ARE** it now. ***That is His objective for your life—to have His Glory revealed IN you!!*** You need to believe that.

And the more you believe and have a heart for that, the more of an expectation you will have for... “this hope that will not disappoint.” You will have the Love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost. ***That’s GLORY***, if you want to define terms. I’ll just plant that as a seed. If you really want to know the experience of His Glory, you have to believe that it’s His full intention to draw you up and reveal His Glory **in you** and through you in the full measure of the stature of the Son of God. It’s His intent that you would be able

to put to death the misdeeds of the body by the Spirit. The Spirit of God testifying with your spirit, “Abba! Abba!” And experiencing that on a continual basis, not just in some rare times of ecstasy while you’re listening to a praise tape. We’re talking about the Life of God welling up from within. “Rivers of living water, flowing from the inner man,” Jesus said. Rivers gushing forth from your inner man! For who? To those who BELIEVE! (John 7). This is not to the spiritual heroes or to the people who say things real well. This is for the people, the simple saints, who truly believe His Word is True. Rivers of living water will flow out to water the gardens of God, and bring forth Life out of the desert of humanity. That’s God’s heart for you who believe...if you believe.

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Romans 8:19-30).

All of creation—all the heavens and the earth, all the stars hanging in the sky, all the trees and grass and wildflowers, all the rivers, waterfalls, lakes and bubbling brooks and all the thunderclouds—all of them are working towards one end. They’re all crying out in eager

expectation for **you** to have the manifest glory of God burst from within! All of creation waits with a drum roll...for **you** to express the Risen Jesus!

God's intent is that you, as a person, as an individual, by name, would express in your life the ***Glory of God in an unprecedented and unhindered way***. God's intent is that your life would declare His Glory to the angels, and the principalities and powers, and all the spiritual forces of darkness in the underworld. God's intent is to take "mere men" like us—flesh and blood, created "a little lower than the angels"—and draw us up into Himself and make an equal-yoke-Bride for the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. It's a miracle, but God is preparing and making us "a habitation of God by the Spirit." He's working these things in all who believe, for all who have a revelation of these things from the Father.

Look to God and cry out to Him that His Glory would be manifested in His children. We must believe that's what God is doing—that all of creation is waiting in eager expectation. Only with that kind of heart and mindset, will God manifest these things. Cry out that we'd believe Him in spite of our own weaknesses, our frailties, the disappointments in life, our heartaches, rejection and fear. From "one degree of glory to another" to another, God will express His Glory. When we see Him face to face it will be fully completed, but what a tremendous amount that can happen between now and then, for those who will Believe.

It's certainly true that there's a victory that overcomes death and lets us "go to heaven." But there's a victory NOW that ***overcomes the world and lets us overcome the power of the enemy—even our faith***. Believe what God said is true—"without wavering, fully persuaded, giving glory to God!" That's the kind of heart. Those with the faith of Abraham are sons of Abraham and experience the promise of Isaac... Laughter out of a barren womb. Do you understand you have a barren womb? Do you understand that you're dead? That your body is as good as dead? Good. That's Romans 1, 2 and 3. That's exactly right. Your body is as good as dead, so *you* can't do it. You can only express the Glory of God if you'll let the seed fall to the ground and die. Deny your very self, take up your cross and follow Him...

not striving for recognition, not striving for accomplishment, not striving to justify yourself. Recognize completely that your body is as good as dead and that *you cannot do it*. Apart from Him you can do nothing. With that heart and that mindset, God can “create” out of nothing. So claim nothing for yourselves. “Call things that are not, as though they are.” Make yourself nothing, taking on the form of a slave because that’s all you’re worth...and then God highly exalts. God lifts us up as we make ourselves nothing. This is the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). We’ve seen the beginning of what God is doing...we’ve tasted the first fruits of the Spirit, and we’re crying out, not just for firstfruits, but for the entire harvest! We don’t want to just “taste the powers of the coming age,” we want the WHOLE meal! We don’t want just a little bit on the tip of our tongue—we want the **whole thing!** And we believe God is doing that—in spite of our decay and our weakness, and in spite of the fact that our body is as good as dead.

The Spirit is praying—He’s crying out—with our spirit in the inner man. *“The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will” (Romans 8:26,27).* So what is God’s will? What is the Spirit praying for?? What is this “groaning in the Spirit” that goes way beyond words? What’s it all about? Well, verse 28... *“in all things God works for the good.”*

In most Bibles, there’s a title heading between verses 27 and 28. But in the text that *God* wrote, there are no titles. There’s no break in the flow of thought in Paul’s original letter. So what does the Spirit intercede for? What’s He after? **He’s working “everything together for the good” and the Spirit is interceding for you by name.** He’s praying for you by name and He’s crying out way past being able to express it with words. “God, make everything work together for this one end. This child loves You and he wants to serve You. He wants to do things for Your purposes and not his own. This daughter

loves You and wants to serve Your purposes and not her own. Work everything towards the end of making them into the family likeness of Jesus” (v. 29). The Spirit of God is groaning, even fighting, for you. The Spirit is interceding at the Throne of God *for you by name* in order to draw you up into His Life and Likeness. If you love Him and you desire to serve His Purposes and not your own, then He’ll work everything toward the end of making you just like the Son of God.

We can have such hope, and that “hope will *not* disappoint.” Though we’ve not seen the full expression of it yet, “that hope will not disappoint.” We receive that hope because in God’s heart, the work has already been done in us. He’s freely justified you and He’s also freely glorified you. Yet we haven’t believed what He’s spoken, and that’s what has held us back. He *has* glorified you. You **NEED** to believe that. You need to understand that you’re not just flesh and blood. Your personality and the things you believe and think about... you’re not limited to *any* of that junk. ***The full Godhead has come to make His home in you!*** (John 14:23; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 3:16). If you began in faith, and if you now continue *to believe*, rather than trying to “attain your goal by mere human effort,” then He will bring forth in you the manifestation of the Glory that is in Christ Jesus. Not just the sonship, but also ***co-heir with Christ***. He wants to manifest not only the salvation of Jesus, but also the full measure of His Glory and His Riches in you.

Jesus was saved, wouldn’t you agree? But is that the end of the story, just that Jesus was saved? No! Nor should it be the end for you. The fact that we’re saved is wonderful and it’s something none of us deserve. How could we even ask for *that* as a starting place? But God promised it, so we believe it. For those who believe on the Name of the Son, God brings a salvation. That’s marvelous, but there’s more! There’s a salvation that is a full salvation, a **full** deliverance that involves every aspect of your life, every molecule of your body, every wavelength in your brain, every neuron that fires in your head. God wants to change every word that comes out of your mouth. Every hair on your head is numbered and ***the whole picture is meant to bring you into the full measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ***. *That’s* your inheritance! Not just saved with Him, but co-heir!

“Not just a Son,” He said, which is enough, “but a co-heir with Christ in all the fullness of His riches.” That’s His desire for you, and it will happen in your lifetime. This “hope will not disappoint,” if you will only believe.

This doesn’t speak of independence in any way. Jesus was the fullness of Deity and yet submitted to the Father with no independence whatsoever. So also, our experience of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit living inside of us makes us all the more mutually dependent on one another, not independent of God or of one another. We will always “have need” of “one another” saith the Lord.

“When I return to the earth, will I find faith? Will I find people that believe Me!? If I find people who believe Me, then I’ll find people who manifest My Life in such a very real and observable way that even the Gentiles will see it, as Peter said.” Even the pagans will recognize the Supernatural Life of Christ and they’ll want to hang on to your cloak. “Take us to your Jesus!!” That’s God’s heart for you—that’s your inheritance.

IF GOD BE FOR US...

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). Jesus didn’t come just to save us, He came to be the genetic Firstborn. He came to be the first fruit of a family that has a serious family likeness to the Father. As the song goes, “She’s Got Her Father’s Eyes.” That’s God’s heart for us, that we’d have a striking family resemblance with the Son of God and with the Father.

*“What, then, shall we say in response to this? **If God is for us, who can be against us?**” (Romans 8:31)* Can you see the confidence that would build in a person if they understood that the Creator of the Universe is *for* us?!

I can remember a time when I was 11 years old or so, waiting at a bus stop to go to school. A particular boy there took serious pleasure in coming after me and picking on me and I have no idea why he did that. He was about three years older than I was and seemed twice as big! One day, three good friends of mine got tired of watching him pick on me. They had a lot more guts than I did, so while he was bad-mouthing me, these three guys just ran at him from all directions, climbed on his back and wrestled him to the ground. There weren’t any punches thrown or any blood, but the fact is that from that day forward I had a confidence that I didn’t have anything to fear at the bus stop anymore. I used to get sick to my stomach every day when I went to the bus stop. I knew this bully wanted to ride and mock and threaten me. But after those boys defended me that day, I never had that problem again. I knew that “those who were for me were more than those who were against me,” and he knew that too! If he could’ve intimidated me, he would have! But he couldn’t intimidate

me anymore, because the numbers had changed. I know it's a shallow example, but something special happened inside of me that day that changed my whole life.

It's the same thing that happened to us when God bought us into His Family. Something very Real happened in me when I first saw that "He who is for me is greater than he who is against me." "*If God be for me, who can be against me?*" Something CHANGED in me in a very serious way when I found that the Blood of Jesus was my claim to righteousness. The Blood of Jesus was my claim to the Father's Love—not something I had done or accomplished or something I hadn't done. The *only* basis, the *only* claim, the *ONLY* thing that would allow me to come boldly before the Throne of Grace was the Blood of Jesus, and that was a settled issue. That can't ever change. It's already happened. You can't change history. You're not able to change what you ate for lunch yesterday. You can second-guess it all day long, but it's already happened and you can't do anything to change it.

The same is true for Calvary...***nothing can change what Jesus did on the cross.*** It cannot be undone. On a Sunday 2000 years ago, in a country that you can get to in just a few hours, *something really happened.* There's an actual place where the Son of God, the blameless Lamb of God, took away the sins of the world. Because I believe that, and *ONLY* because I believe that, are my sins taken away. ***I have nothing whatsoever to fear, because "if God is for me, who can be against me?"***

That doesn't mean I don't have a lot of work to do and I don't need to suffer some. It doesn't mean I won't be convicted and have challenges and failures at times in my life. But the root issues, the fundamentals of the whole deal are permanently settled, because I believe I have no access to the Father except by the Blood of Christ.

And the flip side of that is true too: Because of the Blood of Christ, I cannot be refused by the Father. Do you understand both of those things? I have *no access* to the Father except by the Blood of Christ. I see myself for who I am. I must see myself for who I am and that I have no righteousness of my own (Rom. 1-3). I can have no access whatsoever based on any merit or any good thing that I do. Now

flip the coin over... I also *cannot be refused by the Father because I come in the Name of the Son.*

That doesn't mean His grace is an excuse to sin. As Paul said, "Some slanderously report that I'm saying we should go on sinning so that grace may abound. What a horrid thought, a hideous idea! It's because of His Grace that I learn to say 'No!' to ungodliness. Because He first loved me, I love Him and I've softened my heart. Today if you hear His voice, harden not your heart."

God has changed us and put the deposit of His Spirit in us—the first fruit of the Spirit—the deposit that guarantees our inheritance. When I first believed Him (and this won't be true for those who have not believed), because I *did* believe Him utterly for salvation from my wretchedness by His Blood and Grace... because I believe that, He put His Spirit in me, just as He Promised for "all who believe." And from that day forward I could hear the Shepherd's voice. I wasn't competing intellectually and striving to understand. I wasn't fighting in the intellectual realm to grab a hold of an idea and apply it properly. Everything wasn't dependent on whether I understood or acted properly—that junk just didn't matter anymore.

When we first believe, He puts His Spirit in us, and then we are able to hear the Spirit's Voice. We begin to listen and then it grows with ever-increasing clarity, just like a mother's voice does for a baby. At first a baby doesn't understand its mother's voice. But in time the baby learns to hear the voice of his mother. As a toddler he can hear her voice, even above the noise in a crowded place. "Johnny! Johnny!" His ears perk, and he runs toward her. Out of a thousand voices barely discernible to anyone else, the little one knows the mother's voice. That's the nature and substance of the Spirit of God that has been deposited in our inner man. Paul is simply saying, "Learn to live this way. Learn to hear the Spirit's Voice. Put to death the misdeeds of the body—not by your willpower, not by your self righteousness, not by comparing yourself to other people, or to yourself, not by the guilt and shame you've imposed on yourself—but by the Spirit of Sonship, by the Spirit of Abba, and by the Spirit of your relationship with the Father."

The Spirit will groan inside of you with groans too deep to be uttered. He will groan in your heart and your spirit. When you're missing Him you'll feel that groaning. You'll feel those "pains of childbirth" inside of you. "Arrrghhh!" And you'll know, "Hey, this isn't the Spirit of life and peace. This isn't grace and truth living inside of me. I must be missing Him, I'm not hearing His Voice. There's something else churning and testifying inside of me. The Spirit's interceding for me with groans too deep to be uttered. I must be missing Him." So He graciously turns our hearts and spirits back towards Him, to cry out to Him, to call on the Name of the Lord, to no longer be hardened in our hearts. We find Him in the midst of the storm, and He gives us peace.

"The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." ***"If God be for us, who can be against us?"*** We come *boldly* by the Blood of Christ before the Throne of Grace. Do you see how God is working everything together? If we will love Him and make His purposes *first* in our life... if we will seek first His Kingdom and His Righteousness, then He will bring us into a Family relationship and provision that is far better than what the sparrows and the lilies of the field have! If He cares for them, how much more, us? God desires to make us sons. And if sons, then "co-heirs with Christ," with all the Glory and the Riches that He lavishly poured out on His Son, Jesus. That's His inheritance for us.

Very few people get anywhere near this stuff. To be honest, most people miss it altogether. But it's not because it's not in God's heart! They miss it because they don't believe God. They don't combine His Word with faith and walk in it simply because God said so. In spite of whatever else that's crying out around us for attention and affection, we cannot let that kind of unbelief into our hearts.

UNBELIEVABLE!

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:31,32) If He would let His only precious Son die for us, how can we think that He would rob us of the riches of the Inheritance He wants to give us? Why do we think God is going to cheat us and make it hard for us? Why do we feel like we have to die in poverty and weakness, sin and despair, frustration and guilt? Why would we have that picture of God when **He graciously gave us His own Son to die for us?** “If His Son, how much more *all things?*” Paul is saying, “Anything else is easy compared to that! If you won’t believe the other things I’ve said, at least look at it realistically. God gave His precious, beloved Son to die. He was scourged, mocked, spit at, hated, rejected, beaten, and thrashed beyond human recognition. Then He was unjustly executed with criminals in a most humiliating way. He allowed all that to happen in His sight, carefully watching every detail. He allowed all that to happen to Him, so that it wouldn’t have to happen to you.”

Now if He loved you that much, why do you doubt that He’s going to make you whole? Let me say it another way: **how dare we doubt** that He’s going to manifest His Glory in us. He’s not going to leave us weak and impotent, without testimony, without Life within, without victory over sin, without True Fellowship! How can we even think for a second and accuse God that He’s going to leave us like infants—mentally and spiritually retarded infants? Impotent, weak testimony-less infants? He gave His only Son for us! How much more all things!?

How much more can we expect? We can expect the Glory of Jesus to live in the inner man, rivers of alive water gushing from the inner man—for all who believe! We can expect that because He gave His only Son. We have every right and confidence to expect awesome things to flow forth out of our individual lives. Unbelievable wisdom and testimony of righteousness and faith. Unbelievable giftedness to change the world around us, and to bring peace in our homes and in our hearts. *Unbelievable* things. How much more *all* things! If His only Son, how much more *all* things? The rest of this stuff is easy compared to that.

*“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom **God** has chosen? It is **God** who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying...” (Romans 8:32-9:1)* Paul is convinced that we are more than conquerors. If you’re as convinced as he is, you’ll begin to manifest some of the fruit that he did in your own inner man, in your own home and in the world around you.

Do you want to be like Paul in your testimony and beyond? Well, as wonderful and fruitful in God’s sight as Paul was, he’s not the limit of what God can do in any of us. Paul would shriek at the thought! He would say, “Man, your goal is way too low.” It’s *Jesus* we need to be looking at, fixing our eyes on *Him*, the Author and the Perfecter of our faith—of our FAITH!*

*Do you recall when Job’s riches were restored to him and multiplied many times over what he’d ever lost? Do you recall when that was? When he prayed for his friends, God restored his life to him. Make the application, okay?

Holy Father, by Your Spirit and by the Blood of the Eternal Covenant that You've made with Christ Jesus Your Son, the blameless Lamb of God, we ask that You would not just teach these truths to Your people, but that You would impart them to Your people. We know we depend on You. We sow the seed, certainly. We go to bed, and we know not how, but You give increase and Life to Your words. We ask that You would bring light into our hearts, but we know it's the Life of the Son of God that gives light to mankind. Father, please turn on the light of Your Glory that You made to shine in the face of Jesus Christ. Let it shine into our hearts as we behold Him.

Jesus, we want to fix our eyes on You. We know You are the Author and the Perfecter of our faith. By Your Holy Spirit You are groaning right now with groans too deep to be uttered. You are interceding before the Father of Lights on our behalf. You are crying out for each of us by name, that we would be manifested in full glory—not just in sonship, but also as co-heirs. That You would not only bring to us a salvation, but a full salvation—a whole new life in Christ Jesus. That You would bring this forth out of the earth, out of the decay of the earth, out of barren wombs, out of bodies that we acknowledge to You are as good as dead.

Our God, in the hundreds of thousands of people all over the earth right now who call on Your name with a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. . . in those who truly call out to you, Father, spring forth out of Your Spirit, beyond firstfruits into harvest. Father, it's time now. It's time that Your people rise up and manifest not just Your salvation but also Your Glory. You want to bring many sons into glory, into the family likeness of Your Son, Jesus.

And, Father, all we can really speak of is what You've given us right here, right now. But we cry out for what You've given Your Son—the inheritance You've given Your Son all over the earth right now—that You would find faith when You return. We ask that Your Word would reign, and that as people fix their eyes on You and behold Your Son, You would make Your full Glory shine out of their hearts just as you made it shine out of the heart of Your Son, Jesus.

Father, let the pagans and the nations rage and mock, and let the demons in hell scream out in objection, but let Your sons be manifested. We groan, Your Spirit groans, creation groans. Father, let it rise up within the hearts of

man, by Your grace and Your goodness, not our deeds. We believe You. Just as You made the light shine out of darkness, You can make Your glory shine forth out of our faces, just like with Stephen, whose face shone like that of an angel, like the noonday sun. You let him see Your Son standing at Your right hand. Father, open our eyes too, to see Your Son standing. Open our eyes, like Elisha's servant, to see that those who are for us are more than those who are against us. God, please open our eyes.

All we can do is say the words, planting the seeds. But God, we beg You in the Name of Jesus Your Son, by Your tender mercies, by His Spirit and His blood...we beg You, by the covenant You made with Him, and by the fact that You love the Son...we ask on His behalf that You would manifest Your life in everyone who is in the hearing of these seeds. We ask that You would bring life out of seed, and glory out of death. We believe You without wavering, fully persuaded that You're able to keep Your promises.

God, please do miracles in the hearts of those who truly desire to believe You for the manifestation of Your life. God, we know that only You can do this, but we do believe that the God who created the heavens and the earth can change us and magnify His Son in us. So, Father, please do this right now for everyone who calls on Your name with a good heart, a pure conscience, and a sincere faith toward You. You promised that those who cry out to You and who turn their faces toward You would not be put to shame. Father, in the name of Jesus, humiliate satan as You manifest Your children as co-heirs. Thank You for a hope that's beyond hope and a hope that is reality for those who believe. Thank You so much for that. Amen.

PART 8



THE WORSHIPER CAN SEE IT

WORSHIPERS FIRST

Before we go on to consider what Paul has to say in the upcoming chapters, we first have to consider an important backdrop. *If we want to understand the vastness of God, the magnitude of His Glory, and comprehend what Romans 9, 10 and 11 even mean, it's very important that we are worshipers.* If you are really going to find GOD in these chapters—and not just parse and conjugate, and divide and slice it all up and create some doctrine out of it—you have to be a worshiper. Otherwise, you'll not understand it. Sure, you might be able to “quote scripture” and cross reference it to death all day long, but you will never comprehend God's heart about it unless you are a worshiper FIRST. So, let's be worshipers as we face the God of heaven and earth and consider His thought and His mind in these chapters. If you can enjoy who God is, first and foremost, then you'll see the magnificent scope of His heart and His mind in Romans 9 and following. That's why in chapter 11 Paul just bursts into song about the unsearchable riches of Christ: How *vast* is His glory and the magnitude of His heart and His life! “Oh! the depth of the riches of God!” “From Him and through Him and to Him all things!”

So, take a minute sometime very soon, and go outside and look around...

Look around...look up...Enjoy God and His incredible vastness! See the awesome and infinite scope of His Love, His heart, His magnitude. Take the time...be like David who raised his hands into the Glory of God. He stood among his flocks of sheep and reached out his hands for Abba, Father. That wasn't “hyper-spiritual.” He was *experiencing God's Love* in the testimony of creation itself—God's eternal power and divine nature (Romans 1). “All of creation groans...” as Paul said

in Romans 8. “The stones themselves along the road could just burst into praise!” Jesus said.

If we are ever going to be a people of faith, we have to get past all the ceilings that man has created—not just the ones in our hearts, but also the physical ceilings of the abodes we live in and the places we work. We have to see right through the ceilings—right through the infrastructure of man, into the heavens, as David did.

Take the time and have the humility and the vision to look out with the eyes of your heart, past the ceilings that men have built. We’ve built a world full of physical barriers between us and the heavens and earth God has created and all of His marvelous handiwork. Look past those ceilings, as well as the ceilings of your own previous experiences, your own fears and failures. Look beyond what people have always told you or beat you down with, or even the junk you’ve said to yourself.

Be willing to be fool enough at times to lift up your eyes and absorb the world around you. I don’t mean some weirdo pantheism where God is “in the tree” and “in the bush” and “in the waterfall.” You know I don’t mean for you to do something that would draw your attention away from the Person of God. I’m just saying that ***all the things of creation are meant to be panes of glass through which we SEE GOD.*** They are not something we would focus on, in and of themselves. “Oh, God’s in this, and God’s in that.” Rather, we ***see God*** through creation’s “panes of glass.” Let your eyes see past the panes of glass and into the very heart and mind of God. Explore that possibility, okay? Let your heart be open and look toward the heavens and find God. Find HIM in the little cotton balls of clouds, in the majesty of a sunset, and in the crash of the ocean waves.

Again, I am fully aware of the idolatry that takes place when people fix their gaze on “things” and find the wrong kind of pleasure in created things. This isn’t about worshiping nature and creation. We may not always have the privilege of beautiful scenery anyway. We need to be just as able to see God’s heart and experience His love in a damp, dark prison cell with sweaty, concrete walls and rats and grime and the excrement of man and beast! We need to be able to find God

in that, just as easily. Paul and Silas worshiped God in their prison cells...and the doors swung open.

So, have a worshipful heart, where the eyes of your heart see past the limitations of what your physical eyes can see. Find *GOD*. Be worshipers who worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. And, even if your IQ was 46, *if* you were a worshiper, then you could understand Romans 9, 10 and 11. The rudiments would be very clear and precious to your heart. This is not a mind game Paul is launching into. This is a testimony of the vastness of God's glory and the magnitude of His mind, and it ought to **humble us**, not make us proud. If we really comprehend what Paul has said here, it ought to humble us in the basest way before God and man—not make us proud, or make us judgmental or defiant. It should build no walls between believers. In fact, if we truly understood it, it would humble us to the point that there would be no remaining walls of hostility, no judgments, and no proud statements of, "I understand this, and you don't." Or, "I know something you don't know about God's sovereignty."

The truth is, you don't understand *anything* about God's sovereignty as expressed in Romans 9 through 11 if it makes you proud and makes you build walls. That is NOT what this is about! Paul wrote those things because there *were already walls* between Jew and Gentile, and he was bound and determined to rip them out by the roots, as he displayed God in His magnitude and vastness and stripped away their pride. And yet people today have used these exact same scriptures to judge one another and build walls. They look down their noses at others, "Well, I know God's sovereignty better than you do. So there." That was exactly the opposite of Paul's intention. Do you see that? Let's be worshipers first and foremost, as we face the God of heaven and earth and consider His mind and heart in these chapters that Paul wrote. Okay?

SING, O BARREN WOMAN

Yesterday afternoon, I felt very inclined to go back and read Isaiah 53-56 as a backdrop to comprehending the majesty of God and knowing Him as a Husband who has chosen us and bought us and loved us. Then today, I checked my phone messages and one was time-tagged from yesterday afternoon. A brother had been reading Isaiah 54 with some other brothers, and he wondered if it might be appropriate to read that in conjunction with what we've been looking at in Romans.

This is so important because you've got to comprehend, as best as you are able, the magnitude of God's heart and the vastness and the fullness of God's plan and the way in which He deals with us—this miniscule creature called man. You've got to see the vastness if you want to move forward in the book of Romans with understanding and a heart of humility and wisdom. You'll recognize Chapter 53 as being a discussion of the Messiah:

“Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1)

In other words, “What I'm about to say is almost incomprehensible—unfathomable!” This Messiah that is coming, the Creator of the universe will humble Himself and become like a man. Not only will He become like a man, but He will be **a man that will be rejected by men**. He won't be a hero amongst men, but rather He'll be despised and rejected and crucified by men. It would even appear as though the Father, God Himself, had rejected Him. “A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.” Who would believe such a thing? Who would believe such a message about a Messiah that's supposed to come on

a white horse with shining armor and set us free from the Roman Empire and from all of our woes and pain and agony? Who would believe that He Himself would come with His own woes and pain and agony? That He would even be crucified in weakness, as Paul said, but raised in Power and Glory? Who would believe such a message?

“He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:2-4).

Now he begins to speak of what we find in Romans 1, 2 and 3...

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...” (Isaiah 53: 5-6). There is no one who does good, no one who does right...not even one. Our mouths are as open graves (Rom. 3).

“...And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

“Yet it was the Lord’s will—delight or pleasure—to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the

great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:6-12).

“Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; **burst into song, shout for joy**, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,’ says the Lord” (Isaiah 54:1). This is about the descendants of Abraham, through Sarah—the descendents that came from a barren womb. In Galatians 4 Paul quotes those same verses in regard to the rest of Jesus’ offspring and their triumph over the power of sin and the grave. This quote now refers **to us!**

God will raise up a nation born from a barren womb—born of “the promise of Abraham,” not born of the physical lineage of Abraham. As we will see in Romans 9, physical lineage is not the issue. It’s about those who are born of the **faith** of Abraham and therefore born of the **promise** of Abraham. The One who would be Abraham’s seed has been born—Jesus Christ! The man who would be born of a woman and who would crush the serpent’s head has been born. “Sing, O barren woman! Your descendants will be as numerous as the sands of the seashore. Even though you are barren now and your body is as good as dead, your descendants will be more than that of a fruitful woman. If you will **sing and express the faith of Abraham in your heart**, O barren woman, God will bring forth the fruit of supernatural life from your loins, from your barren womb.” God Himself will do this miracle!! Laughter will come forth out of death; Isaac will be birthed out of Sarah and Abraham’s total inability to birth anything.

“Enlarge the place of your tent...” (Isaiah 54:2). Go ahead and make plenty of room for all the children you’re going to have! In spite of your barrenness and in spite of your inability to live a “sin-free life,” and in spite of your inability to testify about Jesus in the workplace, and your inability to have any decent relationships...**Live in faith** and “Sing, O barren woman!” Cry out to God and sing out of the joy in your heart for the miracle that God has promised. Go ahead and “enlarge the place of your tent” and add on to your house, because God will bring forth fruit from your barren womb, from your body, which is as good as dead. “Give glory to God, being fully persuaded.”

That kind of heart will **bring forth the promise of Abraham**. The seed of Abraham, the Messiah, will be birthed in your heart in a spectacular way and live His life through you, making His descendants through you more numerous than the sands on the seashore.

“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.

“Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected,’ says your God.

“For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,’ says the LORD your Redeemer.

“To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,’ says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

“O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children’s peace. In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you.

“See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to work havoc; no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me,’ declares the LORD.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, **listen to me**, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 54:2-17; 55:1-2).

Lord God, we ask you to open our hearts to comprehend Your majesty. We know that faith is believing that You are “I AM” and that You are the great God who covers the heavens and the earth with Your Splendor and Glory and Majesty. Faith is believing You are a Great Victor. You’ve conquered Your foes with one word from Your mouth, with one breath from Your lungs. You’ve destroyed every enemy of the Cross of Jesus, and every enemy of ours. No weapon formed against us shall ever prosper. Our God, You’ll bring us into desolate cities, to possess them and to conquer all the enemies You’ve laid out before us. And You will soon crush satan under our feet, as You promised at the end of this letter to the Romans that we’ve been reading.

Our God, please help us be worshipers of You. Not because we know how to sing songs, and we’ve trained ourselves to be upbeat and we know a lot of choruses or any such thing. Help us be worshipers because we can see that You’re a God who IS, and that You’re a rewarder of those that diligently seek You. Father, grant us that kind of Faith. Without that, it’s impossible to please You. God, open our eyes to see who You are. If we can see Your magnitude, Your Glory and Your Power, and if we can see that You have plans to prosper us and not to harm us, we’ll be worshipers. Please, by Your Word, open the eyes of our hearts. We will then comprehend a little bit more of Your plan for the nations of the earth and peoples great and small of every tribe and tongue, who will stand before You.

Please open our hearts to comprehend these things! We can't even speak of them with an intelligible tongue or think about them with an intelligible thought, apart from You. These things are too great for us, and we acknowledge that before You. We ask You to please help us so our faith would increase, and so our testimony would live and our lives would change to Your Glory as we believe Your promises without doubting. The fig trees and even the mountains are cast into the sea by a relationship with You and by the word that comes forth from Your Word, "Be cast into the sea."

God, help us to see these things. We know that it's Faith—**believing that You Are who You Are**, and You've done what You've done, and You're going to do what You're going to do. It's that kind of faith that throws mountains into the sea. We do believe You, but help our unbelief. Amen.

WHO ARE ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN?

“I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—”

Paul wants to make a point here and he wants to see to it that we believe him. “I’m **not** lying, this is the **truth**, my conscience confirms it. You’ve got to believe me...”

“...I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen” (Romans 9:1-5).

Up to this point, Paul has been speaking heavily about what life is like in the Spirit of God—a life of faith. But now he steps back to a theme he presented a little bit earlier in this letter, about this battle between the Jews and the Gentiles.

He’s saying to these Jews, “God is my witness—I have nothing against the Jews. That’s my ancestry, too! That’s Jesus’ very own ancestry! Believe me that I’ve not been opening up this way of Glory, this way of fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost because I have a heart to reject the Jewish heritage. That’s not my attitude. With God as my witness, and with my conscience and the Holy Spirit bearing it out: I have no ax to grind with the Jewish people. Theirs

is a *glorious* history. Theirs are the patriarchs, the temple worship, the sacrificial system—all this awesome magnitude and wisdom of God. Yes, Moses went through the Red Sea with God’s people, and there are all these wonderful things God has done throughout history. They are wonderful beyond belief! They are for our learning, in order to expand our hearts, so we can comprehend the mysteries of God and the power of God, and the magnitude and awesomeness of God. These things are not small!”

“*It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel*” (Rom. 9:6). Paul is **redefining what Israel is**. He redefines it for the sake of the truths he talks about from the very beginning of this letter. “You Jews better cut the Gentiles a break! Many prophecies say that the Gentiles will be welcomed into the Kingdom of God. Read your own “Bible”—it’s in there. The government that will be on the Messiah’s shoulders will reach even into Galilee of the Gentiles. God will welcome the Gentiles; an extension of mercy will be granted, even to the Gentiles. It was foretold through all the prophets. You guys just better not be so proud about your heritage because you never kept the law anyway! Yes, you were given a rich heritage, but you never obeyed God. You didn’t live up to what God foresaw *could* be your inheritance.”

Remember that it wasn’t the first *covenant* that failed; it was our *sinful nature* that failed. The Hebrews writer makes that clear and so does Paul in Romans 7. God did not let us down. There wasn’t a problem with the law—the problem was us! It was our sinful nature that created this problem that made the first covenant obsolete and fading away (Heb. 8:13). God’s Word hasn’t failed a bit. The testimony of God and the Covenant He made with His people did not fail. That’s not been the problem. The real problem is that **we’ve not defined Israel properly**. Not all of Israel is Israel. And neither have all of the physical descendants of Abraham, the historical lineage of Israel, been entirely cut off. That hasn’t fallen apart either.

“*For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children*” (Romans 9:6,7a). You are not necessarily Abraham’s child simply because you are his physical descendant. Is that very clear? You are not a son of Abraham simply

because you came out of a physical lineage. That was not what God meant, back when He spoke of Abraham's offspring.

*“On the contrary, **‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’**”*

It's not the natural children who are God's children, but ***it's the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.*** He's explaining why the Gentiles are let in. It isn't just a random thing God decided to do. There was a Wisdom in it that was far greater than anyone had ever comprehended. God made this mystery clear to Paul (Ephesians 3), and because of that call on his life to make these mysteries known (to be the apostle to the Gentiles), Paul expands on what the Jews always knew—*the promises were for the descendants of Abraham.*

But the Jews were so narrow and limited in their understanding. Paul said, “I'm not asking you to reject the law from Mt. Sinai, temple worship and the sacrificial system as not being from God. No, they are all well and good. But there's an issue here that you must understand. The magnitude of God's wisdom far supersedes a mere physical plot of ground and a lineage based on passing on physical seed. The scope of God's wisdom goes far beyond that.” The Gentiles have been permitted into the Kingdom of God ***because the lineage is through Isaac, the child born of the promise.*** He was not a child born of sperm, but a child born of the promise. The child born in the logical way (Gal. 4) will always persecute the child born of the Spirit.

Just as Jesus was born of the Spirit, so also Isaac was born of the Spirit (Gal. 4). Just as the Holy Spirit came upon the peasant girl Mary and birthed a Messiah, so also Isaac, the first in a long line of sons that came forth from Abraham, was born of the Spirit. He was ***born of the promise believed.*** The child born of the promise and the child born of the Spirit are one and the same. Abraham ***believed,*** and it was “credited to him as righteousness,”—therefore he received descendants as numerous as the sands of the seashore and the stars in the sky. Abraham birthed a son—not of physical lineage, but a child out of a barren womb, born of the Spirit of God. How was this child born of the Spirit of God?? ***A man believed a promise from God, and***

the Holy Spirit joined with that faith and that promise and birthed offspring. Abraham birthed a son in the Spirit (Gal. 4), just as surely as Mary birthed a son of the Spirit. “Be it done according to your Word.” Mary’s heart and her attitude were to believe the promise of God, and therefore it was so. That’s why there’s creative power—nothing of our own power, but GOD’S creative power.

He is free to do miracles in our lives when we believe the promise!! When we believe, when we have FAITH—miracles happen! That’s why we’re discussing this again and again and again. You need to BELIEVE GOD if you want to see miracles in your life. A child born in the Spirit and a child born of the promise are the same thing. The Spirit of God joins with our faith that believes the promise of God... and babies are born. Miracles happen out of barren wombs.

“Sing! O barren woman. Sing! O desolate woman.” Sing, woman that’s without a child. Believe God’s promises and you will see miracles happen in your life and through your life. There is no other way—that’s the economy of God. That’s the basis on which we approach God and on which He works through us. That is the whole economy of God—“Calling things that are not as though they are.” That is the Power of God worked through His Holy Spirit—simple creatures that believe His promise in spite of every physical-world evidence to the contrary. “*God promised. Therefore I believe.*” That kind of heart allows the Spirit of God to bring forth babies—to bring forth miracles out of barren wombs. To “cast into the sea” mountains that can’t be moved in any other way! No dirt-moving equipment ever created by man could ever move a mountain *the way God’s promise and our faith in His promise* could move it in an instant and cast it into the sea. As believers of Jesus, that Truth must be the “air that we breathe.” That’s how Jesus lived every day of His Life. That’s how He walked on water, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, healed the lepers, and walked through walls without falling through the floor. That’s how He forgave sins and *still* forgives sins. He believed the Father’s promises, therefore it was so.

Grab hold and comprehend every promise of God. Sort and sift and diligently search the Scriptures to find out what His promises are (1 Pet 1). Find Jesus in the middle of *every promise that God ever*

made. “Draw near to God that He would draw near to you.” Believe that promise, and in so doing creative life springs forth. The child of the promise and the child of the Spirit are one. The Spirit of God birthing life out of nothing comes from believing God’s promises. The nature of Israel is not as banal and simple and physical as we thought. Paul’s saying, “Expand your hearts to understand that Isaac is not just the child of Abraham and Sarah. Isaac is the **child of a promise that’s been believed**—the power of His Spirit bringing forth life out of a believed promise.”

Do you understand? Do you understand how that applies to you in your daily life? How do you expect the miracles you need so desperately in your life to happen? It’s by “*calling things that are not as though they are.*” Like...“Sin shall not be your master.” Do you believe that promise? If you truly believe that promise from the heart, then the child *will* be born of the Spirit. It will happen, based on the promise of God: “Sin shall not be your master.” Say it to yourself! Say it to every temptation that hits you in the nose. Say it to every failure and to whatever has happened in the past. “**Sin shall not be my master. Based on the power of the Word of God, and the life of the living God, I believe the promise of God.**” Therefore the Spirit of God can birth reality out of a barren womb.

“I know my body is as good as dead. I understand that! I know that I cannot overcome temptation and be a spiritual man. I know I cannot have wisdom. I understand all of that.” But it’s okay because “*Abraham, though his body was as good as dead, believed God—he was fully persuaded and gave glory to God, knowing that God had power to do what He promised.*” And therefore, Life was brought out of death. Beauty was brought out of ashes and fullness out of emptiness.

“*Whoever believes...Rivers of living water will flow from within...*” This promise is for all who believe (John 7). Rivers of living water, now, for all who believe.

“*This is the work of God: to believe on the one He has sent.*” This is what allows the work of God to be accomplished—“*to believe on the one whom He sent.*”

“He has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them, we can become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1). Partakers of the Divine Nature. The Spirit of God births divine life out of those who will dare to believe the promises of God. Therefore there’s a spiritual lineage.

Paul is saying.... “Temple worship? I love God’s wisdom in temple worship! I love the shadow of the sacrificial lamb and the Passover Feast, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Pentecost that we have celebrated. I love the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. Don’t get me wrong! I love God’s wisdom in all of those things. But let’s see past that—let’s see *through* those things. Those are all shadows of the reality that is found only in the Body—the *soma* of Christ” (Col. 1, 2).

What I’m saying is this: God is calling us to be worshipers—calling us to expand our hearts to see the vast domain of His Wisdom and to comprehend His Understanding. He wants us to see that in all of these things—*“the just shall live by faith.”* All of the power and the Life of God. All of the partaking of the Spirit of God. The ability to cry “Abba!” and the Spirit of God testifying with our spirit. Everything “working together for the good” that we would become like the Son of God—Glorified! Not just sanctified, not just justified, but glorified. ***That’s God’s Heart for all of us, for those who will live by faith.*** Rivers of living water for all who will believe the promise of God. Descendants of Abraham—not by physical lineage, but by the fact that Isaac was born of a promise ***that was believed.*** And so also the descendants of Abraham, Israel, are those who believe the promise of God—and the Person of the Son of God is their whole heart. Everything they weigh and measure, all of their potential and the way they view themselves... ***everything*** is wrapped up in this one focus: Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Beholding Him and being transformed by the Lord who is the Spirit. Transformed from glory to glory to glory as He makes the Glory of God shine forth out of the face of Jesus Christ.

As surely as “Let the light shine out of darkness,” so also the creative power of God changes us from glory to glory to glory. This is Christianity! This is what it’s all about. It’s exciting that God has

created this whole realm of existence that is just unthinkable to the natural man and the carnal mind. To the carnal it's foolishness (Col. 2). "I don't understand. That's foolishness. It's stupid and doesn't make any sense. It's a fairy tale." And unbelief will then become the last nail in the coffin of a mocker.

But for us, God has called us to believe on the One whom He sent and to believe the words that testify of the Son of God. And to believe the Life of God that's manifested through those who believe. Can you see it a little bit? Or a lot?

WORSHIPERS CAN SEE IT

*“It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the **promise** who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (Romans 9:6-8).*

All the walls between Jews and Gentiles are being torn right down. ***Because the basis on which we approach God as His chosen people is now based on believing the promise of God.*** The Jew and Gentile wall is being ripped down right before their eyes. Paul started off talking to them about this Jew and Gentile dilemma, and then he went on to display the GLORY of living in a Jesus kind of LIFE—“putting to death the misdeeds of the body by the Spirit” as the covenant is fulfilled. Then Paul went on to say that it’s by faith that we are justified freely, whether Jew or Gentile. The gospel is a dynamite unto salvation for all who believe—first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Paul brings forth all of this power, life and exhilaration of reigning in life and what it means to be a child of God—not just a son, but also a co-heir with Christ and with one another. “Once not a people, now a people.” He brings all these riches to the forefront and then he says, “Let’s talk again about this Jew and Gentile dilemma.” You can see now how ridiculous it is to divide between Jew and Gentile based on external lineage—because it’s never been about that. That has never been God’s heart. Maybe there were “types and shadows” for a time because of the hardness of men’s hearts, but it was not so from the beginning. God had a heart that went way beyond that. Worshipers can see it, but not everyone can.

“For this was how the promise was stated: ‘At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.’ Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’” (Romans 9:9-13). Be worshipers with humility here—you will need that, to understand this next part. Paul is contrasting the Jews and the Gentiles and he’s saying, “Open your eyes and comprehend: **God will do what God will do**. The things by which we would limit Him *do not* limit the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—this Glorious, Awesome God that fills the heavens and the earth with His Glory. Forget all the menial, secondary, superficial things you’ve ever limited God by. Forget all that!” Paul goes on to give examples of how God’s awesome decree supersedes all the walls that we would build. Notice that he is speaking about election, about salvation, about the broad scope of saving the Jewish people versus saving the Gentile people. That has been his theme all the way through this letter, so now he’s saying, “Let me show you just how vast God’s wisdom is.”

Paul goes through several examples that the Jews were already fully aware of. “You guys know the story of Jacob and Esau, and you already understand that Jacob was chosen in a way that doesn’t make sense to the carnal mind. But, you have a big problem with the fact that the Gentiles are being brought in. You don’t like it that all of Israel is not Israel because not all of Israel believes. And you’ve got a problem with the fact that all the Gentiles are not simply Gentiles because some *did* believe and became sons of Abraham. If you guys don’t believe all that, then read your Bibles, because God did many other amazing things just like that!”

Paul used Jacob and Esau as an example for them. The older would serve the younger. That’s not very traditional, is it? That’s not the way we normally expect God to act. It’s not according to a “rational” pattern of behavior on God’s part. But Paul says, “So what?” Isn’t it true that the Messiah came from Jacob? Isn’t it true that God chose something that was totally illogical? In His sovereign purposes He *chose* Jacob rather than Esau. Will you let God do that? Is it okay

with you that He made a choice like that? Of course it is. So it must be okay that He would also bring in whom He would bring in—the Gentiles—and He would reject those whom He would reject. It's not by physical lineage that you are justified. It's certainly not by keeping the law, because you could never do it anyway. Let God make His own choices! And **He's chosen that we would be justified by faith**. That is the nature of this letter. We are justified by faith. He's chosen that as THE way to be sons of Abraham. "You better get that straight," he said, "after all, you already know that he chose Jacob rather than Esau."

"What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!" (Rom. 9:14). Is God unjust because he chose Jacob rather than Esau? Or is He unjust because He chose the Gentiles to be part of the kingdom of God? Is it unjust of God that not all of Israel is even Israel—because they didn't believe that the Messiah had come and receive Him to themselves? Is God unjust? Not at all. For he says to Moses, *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion"* (Romans 9:15).

He's opening their hearts and minds, and turning them into worshipers. Like Job, "Oh!! I repent in sackcloth and ashes. I thought I knew you, God, but oh!! What a fool I was! I know nothing—absolutely nothing." Be worshipers, from the heart. Paul says, "Let me show you some more 'contradictions' and examples that will just blow your mind about God's wisdom. Let me show you some reasons why you better be soft and humble—humble enough to understand and bow your knee that God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. If He wants to bring in the Gentiles, that's His business! If He wants to reject those that reject the Messiah, even though they are of the physical lineage of Abraham, that's His business. YOU, be worshipers. Understand, like Job did. **Open your heart and your arms to God and let Him be God.** Oh, the depth of the Riches, the Wisdom, the Glory of God!" No wonder Paul burst into such awe of God.

"Open your eyes," He said. "This is so vast, so great, so amazing!" Be humble before God. Understand that He does things the way He wants to do them. Don't get yourself boxed in with all these logical, "rational" thoughts in your head. You're a total fool if you approach

God on a rational basis. He's never been rational, as we've understood rational in the past.

"It does not depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Romans 9:16).

These things aren't based on anything external. We can't "accomplish" something by our own effort or desire. God is bigger than all of that. *"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:17,18).* God is working through this pagan, Pharaoh. "I raised you up for this very purpose..."

So God is saying through Paul, "Do you understand My wisdom, that I am going to accomplish My purpose any way I please? I'm going to do it the way I please and you can't stop Me. You have nothing to say about it. Don't forget about Job! You have *nothing* to say about it. I will do it My own way and I will use the vessels that I choose. I will ordain My purposes the way I ordain them. I will bring the Messiah through Jacob and not Esau. I will bring deliverance through Pharaoh, and I will harden whom I will harden. You better be humble and be a worshiper, or you'll miss Me. You will have dividing walls of hostility and judgments that are based on carnal reasoning. **You will miss Me if you're not a worshiper.** Open your heart to comprehend My vastness and the way I do My business, the way I bring salvation and the way I call My people. You better open your hearts to comprehend Me."

"One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?' But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?"' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" (Romans 9:19-21).

"If I want to choose Jacob the deceiver, rather than Esau the firstborn, do you have an argument with Me about that? Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth, O little man? **WHY do you think YOU have a right to question the way I do My business??** Is it a

problem with you that I birthed a Messiah out of Bathsheba's womb? Is it okay with you that Rahab the harlot was a great-grandmother of Jesus? Is that all right with you? Do you have the right to say to the potter, "Why did you make me this way? Why did you choose to do things the way you did?"

"What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?" (Romans 9:22-24). You got that? "Not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles." Stop this foolish, prejudicial stuff—open your hearts! God will choose however He wants to choose, because it's His business. He's chosen to justify people, freely by faith. He chose to bring in the eleventh hour worker, not just those who worked hard all day. That's **His business**. Be a worshiper, not a judge of God. Please...be a worshiper. Receive what He receives—and let Him make the decisions. Stop being gods that think you know good from evil, and think you have it all figured out with your flip charts and answers for every hard question. Stop being that way! **Be worshipers**.

He's driving us down into a place of humble worship before Him to receive what He receives, by the Spirit, and not by external judgments. That's Romans chapter 8, right? It's about having spiritual discernment—living in the Spirit of Abba. Let the Spirit of God testify with our spirit and intercede. Make your judgments based on a "mind controlled by the Spirit," not based on carnal reasoning, your knowledge, your IQ, your accumulated experiences or any of that nonsense. Let God rip all that away from you, because that's not how He does business. The sooner you understand that, the more you'll learn to walk in the Spirit and make proper judgments. "Not by the seeing of the eye, not by the hearing of the ear..." "Not by might, not by power, but by the Spirit of God." "We have the mind of Christ," Paul said, as we've emptied ourselves and made ourselves nothing so that God can bring us up into the depth of His riches.

Who knows the mind of God except the Spirit of God? And we have that Spirit! But the carnal mind understands *nothing*—it's foolishness

to him. But those with the Spirit of God—living by the Spirit—discern all things. He’s bringing us to level ground and to humility as worshipers of the Great God of Israel and the God of the Gentiles of Galilee. ***He’s bringing us to a place of humility to receive by the Spirit rather than by the mind.*** Not by our experiences, not by the empty traditions handed down by our forefathers, and not by what we were taught in “Bible school.” We receive as worshipers, approaching Him one day at a time. Not by eating from the tree or reading from the book of the knowledge of good and evil, but rather being humble servants of God, fellowshiping and walking with Him through the garden day by day. That’s why Chapters 8 and 9 are connected. Chapter 9 is not a “new book.” It’s an extension of Chapter 8, flowing right on through from living in the Spirit of God to comprehending in humility these things that Paul is talking about.

THE OPPOSITE OF FAITH...IS PRIDE

“The just shall live by faith...” That’s the scripture in Romans 1 that just sent Martin Luther reeling and totally changed his life and marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. For a very long time, Roman Catholicism was the only “Christianity” people knew about, at least in a public way. Many building blocks led to the Reformation, but Luther is credited with being one of the primary people God used to bust the whole thing open. He said, “Let’s take a look at what *God* said. We don’t have to settle for what our forefathers told us. We can look at what *God* said and live for *that!*” And so Romans 1:17 was a truth that awakened him to a whole different way of looking at Christianity. *“The righteous—the just—shall live by FAITH.”* It was shocking to him and radically changed him when God opened his eyes.

That’s been the theme of so much of what we’ve talked about in Romans. This isn’t about being a Jew or being a Gentile or about good works or about the law. It’s about living by FAITH: *believing* that God is who He said He is! It’s about totally renouncing everything we have and everything we are and clinging to the fact that God’s Word is true. “Let God be true and every man a liar.” He can be trusted. We can believe everything He said in spite of our experience. Abraham had that attitude of living by faith—and thus became the father, not only of the Messiah, but ultimately of us (who are *in* the Messiah). Even before obedience—before circumcision, Abraham believed God, and “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

That's the same thing Paul is trying to say to these "Jewish" Christians. Forget your background. Forget Jew, forget Gentile, forget all the things you think you've done for God and all the things you think you know about God. Granted, there is value in being a Jew—much in every way (Rom. 3:1,2). It has value because it ushered in an understanding about God that others didn't have—much in every way. But, the more you understand about God, the more you realize you don't have a hope or a prayer apart from **Faith in JESUS**. Only by being clothed in His Righteousness do we have any hope whatsoever.

We're justified freely by the gift of God, by faith—period. We are "saved by grace, through faith—and that not of ourselves, lest any man boast" (Eph. 2:8). "*The just shall live by faith.*" That's the theme of Romans. Our justification before God is based solely on what we believe God feels about the Son of God—Jesus of Nazareth. Being identified with the Son, hiding our lives in Him—that's the pleasure the Father finds in us and nowhere else. It's not in anything we say or do, but simply that we put our whole hope in the Son.

So if you look back to where that quotation in Romans 1:17 comes from (those little quote marks means it was quoted from someone), you'll find it in Habakkuk 2 in the Old Testament. "*Then the Lord replied: 'Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith—indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.'*"

Notice the contrast, because you won't necessarily pick up on it in Romans 1 unless you picture Romans 1, 2 and 3 together. Paul only quotes half of the sentence from Habakkuk, in Romans 1. The other half of the sentence talks about a man who is "*puffed up, his desires are not upright...indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.*"

The opposite of “the righteous who live by faith”...is **PRIDE**. It’s just essential to see that. In order for us to grab hold of and really apprehend in the inner man this revelation that “runs” and that “awaits an appointed time”, it’s essential to see that the other half of that sentence is ***pride and arrogance***. The opposite of faith is drawing men after ourselves, taking people captive, being greedy and arrogant, never at rest, always busy, always conniving, always controlling and reaching. That sort of life is the exact opposite of “the righteous shall live by faith.”

In order to live a life of faith, it’s mandatory that we’re not running after things, not controlling, not striving, not trying to gather people after ourselves. When you consider the *whole* sentence in the context of Habakkuk 2, a humble attitude of heart is mandatory in order to receive the free gift of God. Haughtiness, pride, arrogance—these things are enemies of faith. If that describes you, then there’s absolutely no chance you’ll ever comprehend or experience in the inner man the “reigning in life” that God promises. You won’t have “the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5). You’ll never comprehend or experience that as long as you’re living in the other half of that sentence—never at rest, always striving, desiring to be somebody, desiring to impress people and control situations. ***The enemy of faith is pride***—being haughty, controlling, greedy and never at rest. That sort of thing is the enemy and the exact opposite of “***the righteous will live by faith.***”

You cannot live by faith in the Spirit of God and in the Promise of God and in the birthing of Isaac, Laughter...if you’re full of pride. The miracle out of a barren womb can never happen to a man or woman with pride. He’s stripping us of all that, as He shows us His magnitude. He’s not just trying to rebuke us into the ground, He’s showing us His ***great and awesome magnitude!*** Any fool, then, can see the necessity of humility. We can’t figure all these things out with our brains. Why Jacob instead of Esau? Why was Pharaoh used as a vessel of God, a chosen one of God? Why Nebuchadnezzar?

Why did Jesus allow that particular man to be born blind so that 20, 30, or 40 years later, Jesus could heal him in front of the Pharisees? Why did He allow him to be born blind so he would grow up with

his friends all making fun of him? And he would never be able to play kickball with his buddies in the narrow winding streets of Jerusalem? Why did he have to be blind and sit inside and listen to the children play? Why did he have to go through decades of misery? Jesus said it was for this one cause: “*That the Glory of God might be revealed in your presence.*”

“But why? Oh, *why* God?”

He’s saying, “Open your fist. Don’t make a fist at Me...open your hand. I will have mercy on whom I’ll have mercy. I’ll display My Glory as I see fit. I understand the purposes that I have. I understand the flow of humanity before My Throne, and I comprehend the mysteries of time, age, the nations and all the natural disasters. I understand the rise to power of Adolph Hitler, and you don’t. Where were *you* when I laid the foundations of the earth? What do *you* know??” That’s what Paul’s trying to get across in Romans 9. The **only** way to walk in the Spirit is to live in the humility of letting God be God and not being little gods ourselves, trying to know good and evil. Do you know that people make flip charts out of this stuff? They judge and get all divided up—all based on the *very thing that was meant to make us humble!* It’s the very thing that’s meant to drive us, like Job, into the ground saying, “I know nothing. I thought I knew You, oh God. But I know nothing! I have to know You as a person, don’t I? I can’t just know *about* You, and have anything other than death.”

You can birth Ishmael out of knowing stuff *about* God, but you can’t birth Isaac out of that! You can have the child born in the *ordinary* way that rises up and persecutes the child born of the Spirit. You can have Ishmael, based on your logic, your reasoning and your pride, but you can’t have Isaac—the child that comes out of a barren womb. You’ll not see the miracles of God in your own heart or through your heart into other lives. You’ll not see unless you walk in the humility of belief in God, which is fellowship with Him, which is utter humility (Rom. 1, 2 and 3). You’ll not find the power of God flowing through you—the rivers that water the gardens of humanity. You will not find it, and you will die in poverty, prideful and just as sure of yourself as you can be. You’ll judge others, always looking down your nose at them and walking out of fellowship, and having nothing even close to

“a hundred fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, lands, and possessions, and in the life to come, eternal life.” You’ll not have Zoë life, *free life!* You’ll never know any of that as long as you approach the whole world through your mind, your judgments and your assessments.

Paul is saying, “Drop to your face in humility. See **who GOD is!** See the **vastness** of His riches that extend way beyond your understanding! **Humble yourself** before Him and then you will have Him. He will give Himself to you and show Himself to you, if you will approach Him on that basis.”

Paul goes on with more examples...

*“What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: ‘I will call them “my people” who are **not** my people; and I will call her “my loved one” who is not my loved one,’ and, ‘It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” they will be called “**sons** of the living God.”’ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.’ It is just as Isaiah said previously: ‘Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.’*

*“What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it **not by faith** but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the ‘stumbling stone.’ As it is written: ‘See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame’” (Romans 9:23-33).*

The basis on which we come to God is purely, simply and solely by believing in the One whom He sent. Period. Whether Jew or Gentile, it makes no difference. He said it again and again and again! If He wants to do business that way, that’s *HIS CHOICE*. He will do business how He pleases to do business. “So what shall we say then?” The

Gentiles are received, but the Israelites are rejected? Well, why not? If that is God's choice, that He would only receive those who come by faith, and not those who try to come to God by doing good deeds or by keeping the law or some set of rules, then so be it. If God has chosen to reject those who try to come to Him by their own righteous acts, rather than by God's love and believing in the Son of God who was slain before the foundations of the earth... If God has chosen it to be that way, then so be it. Amen. Leave it alone. That's **God's** choice.

WAKE UP AND SMELL THE COFFEE

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge” (Romans 10:1,2). He said, “Good, I’m glad you are zealous!” So was Saul when he went around killing Christians, right? But he was kicking against the goads the whole time! In the Spirit, Jesus was saying, “Whoa, whoa, Saul. Stop it.” But Saul kept fighting with the Spirit. His mind was ruling his choices based on what he thought was right, according to what he had been told and what his mind comprehended about the Law of Moses. He was just pushing and pushing, according to his mind. In the Spirit, Jesus said, “It’s hard for you to kick against the goads, isn’t it Saul?” In the Spirit, Jesus was trying to teach him and was poking him with a pointed stick, but he wasn’t listening in the Spirit. He was listening with his mind, and you can’t approach God that way. You are going to make mistakes. No matter how much zeal you have, you’re going to make big mistakes if you approach God on the basis of the flesh and the human mind, rather than on the basis of the Spirit. It’s back to Chapter 8, isn’t it? “The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” The mind that’s controlled by the externals is death.

*“Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for **everyone** who believes” (Romans 10:3,4).* That is the theme of Romans 9 (even though we’re technically in Chapter 10 now, according to the way men have put in little numbers): “*Christ is the end of the law, so that there may be righteousness **for everyone who believes.***” **That** is Israel.

“Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’ But the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or “Who will descend into the deep?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart...’”

The word is **near** you! It’s in your mouth! It’s in your heart! “...that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ (**Jesus** is master, **Jesus** is the boss of all! If you proclaim that with your mouth) and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved, (O Israel). For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone proclaiming to them? And how can they proclaim unless they are sent by God? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’

“But not all the Israelites accepted the good news.” And that’s the basis on which Israel will be received or condemned. “Not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’” (Romans 10:5-16).

Remember Isaiah 53:1: “Who will believe this message?” “This is craziness. This isn’t fair, God. I had You all figured out! I had an equation written out that defined who Your people are and who they aren’t. How can You mess with all that, God?”

And God said, “I’ve *always* been messing with that! Remember Jacob and Esau? Remember Pharaoh? I’ve *always* been messing with that. This isn’t anything new. I’m **God**, remember?”

“For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (through the Rhema of Christ, through the **utterance** of the Godhead, through the current Word of God). But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: ‘Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.’ Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, ‘I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.’ And Isaiah boldly says, ‘I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.’ But concerning Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people’” (Romans 10:16-21).

Do you want to know why Israel failed? It was because they were disobedient and obstinate. Do you want to know why the Gentiles found the Messiah? Not because they’d done a bunch of good deeds, that’s for sure. It was because **God chose to reveal Himself to them and they believed the message**. They were justified because they **believed** the message of the Messiah, whereas Israel was hardened in their hearts. They didn’t hear His voice and they didn’t believe Him. “He came to his own, but his own received him not.” They made their choice because they had a better idea of what the Messiah was supposed to be.

Remember Isaiah 53? “Who will believe our report?” “We don’t want a Messiah like that. We don’t want a Messiah that rides on a borrowed donkey, and he doesn’t bring us physical riches and he doesn’t deliver us from the Roman Empire and the oppression. We don’t want a Messiah like that!” “Who will believe our report?” He came in a stable, in an animal trough, to an unwed mother. **That** is the nature of God coming to man and it is not very glorious. “He had no beauty or majesty that we are drawn to Him.” People don’t like that message.

The Israelites were people who had come to understand that the kingdom of God was coming and their hope was in a Messiah that would come through the golden gate on a white horse. He would blow away all their enemies and bring them peace on earth. But *this* Messiah... He had “no beauty or majesty, that we would be drawn to him.” They didn’t want to receive this kind of Messiah!

The Gentiles, on the other hand, didn't have a problem with that. They didn't have this long history of accumulating baggage about how they thought God would do His business. So when He brought the Good News to them of the forgiveness of sins, they received it! "The common people heard him gladly," whether Jew or Gentile. He's the stone *the builders* rejected. The people who had something to lose, and who couldn't control Him the way they wanted to, and the people who couldn't use Him for their own advancement—*those* were the people who rejected the Messiah. But the people who had nothing to lose except their sins—those people gladly heard and received Him!

It's the same way today. Who will believe the report of all these things we've been speaking of? Who will believe these things? Only those with nothing to lose. If you have an agenda, or you want to control God for your own advancement, then *"the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone."* You will reject the Messiah and the deliverance that He brings if you have an agenda. If you are a "builder" that wants to accomplish something and you want to use God for your own end—if there is pride in your heart—then you won't receive Him in humility. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom and the kingdom." If you won't receive Him on *that* basis, then you will not know God. Be a worshiper—humble before Him with all your flesh and all your desire to do God some big favor in your lifetime (like Abraham did with Hagar) ripped out. If you won't approach Him in humility and simplicity, you will never find that worshipful heart and the miracles that are brought forth by the Spirit of God.

"Who will believe our report?" The Gentiles had nothing to lose but their sins. A lot of the builders and the people with the heritage had it all figured out and they had to swallow their pride. So God brought forth a nation that would make them envious. God extended His hand to the Gentiles, which enraged the Jews. They hated that idea.

Remember when Peter first went to the Gentiles, to Cornelius and his household? Even Peter, a fisherman who really had very little to lose, had this *big* problem. "Surely not, Lord." He was fighting God! He calls Him "Lord" but he doesn't want to believe it! He had been so caught up in the teachings of his day about what the Messiah was

going to be like, what His kingdom was going to be like, and what all the laws meant (he had it all figured out)...and **Jesus was continually scandalizing him**. “Well, Jesus, this isn’t the Passover feast. This isn’t how you do it. This isn’t the Sabbath Day—this isn’t how you’re supposed to do it. These aren’t the ceremonial washings the way we’ve always been taught.” People are *always* offended that God is God. They always have to have a handle on it, to have it figured out, and Peter was no different. Jesus ripped all that away from him and He continues to do that with us, too.

After Jesus was raised to the right hand of God, by the Spirit He lowered the sheet with the unclean animals. Peter said, “I know You are Lord. I saw You raised from the dead. But surely not, Lord. I don’t want to believe You.” Something inside of him just didn’t want to accept the way God was doing business and that He was bringing in the Gentiles. And then when Peter did finally show up at Cornelius’ house after an angelic visitation and a couple of miracles along the way, he said, “I shouldn’t even be in your house. You realize I’m a Jew and this will make me unclean if I come into your house. You realize that, don’t you?” He has this prejudice built up in his heart because of all the baggage. The Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household, and Peter said, “How can we refuse water baptism to those that received the Holy Spirit as we did? God has made Himself clear. How can we argue?”

When the other apostles heard that Peter baptized some Gentiles, they said, “What is the deal, Peter? What are you thinking?” And he said, “What could I do? I remembered that Jesus said He would baptize with the Spirit, as John baptized with water. I saw Jesus baptize them. If Jesus baptized them, who am I to fight against Jesus? I couldn’t do it anymore. I understand why you guys are upset with me. But what would *you do* if you saw what I saw?” God is God, and slowly but surely, Peter is learning that. **God is GOD**. That’s what Rom. 9, 10 and 11 are about. God is saying, “I’m God. I’ll do it the way I want to do it. Wake up and smell the coffee, boys! I’m going to do it my way.”

HE OFFERS HIS HAND

The Gentiles received. And as a whole, the Jews didn't. "Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, 'I will make you envious by those who are not a nation...'" (Romans 10:19). God provokes Israel out of envy and jealousy to rethink this whole thing. The last of the last days will bring forth a change in this whole scenario that we're talking about right now.

"And Isaiah boldly says, 'I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.' But concerning Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people'" (Romans 10:20-21). God says, "You had my law, and I offered you my hand, but you wouldn't take it! You thought you could reach Me by all the things you knew and did. If you were honest about it, you know you failed miserably at it. But I extended My hand to you, and you wouldn't take it."

It's the same today. He extends His hand, but a disobedient, obstinate and prideful people want to reach Him in some other way, like they did with the Tower of Babel. They want to build with man-made bricks and build a tower to reach heaven in a predictable, orderly way. They want to reach God in some other way than by the stones God has quarried. They failed miserably then, and they fail now. God confuses them. They fight with one another and are divided amongst the nations and the denominations. "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." "I offered you my hand—Myself—and you still wanted to approach Me with your head."

Can we make a pact together to be worshipers of a great and an awesome God that does business the way He pleases? That He can

receive David and call him a man after His own heart? We've read that story so many times that we forget! David was *not* a man that we would receive. But there was something about him that God *did* receive. And God's people somehow understood enough that they still loved him and wanted him to be their king.

There was something in the Spirit that made David special. It's the same Something that made Jesus special...to an extreme. Jesus lived it out a lot more fully, obviously, but it's the same Something that made Abraham special to God's heart. It's the same special quality that ties all those guys together: David, Abraham, Jacob the deceiver, Moses the rock striker. It's the same special quality that tied Rahab the harlot and Bathsheba and all these other people into God's heart. "I will do business My own way," God said, "and you better line your hearts and minds up with My spirit so that you will judge a righteous judgment. Not by the seeing of the eyes or the hearing of the ears, but by My Spirit." It's based on the fellowship in the Spirit that we've talked about so extensively. Approaching one another based on spiritual life, Zoë life, not on the basis of our minds. *"The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."*

God wants us to approach Him as worshipers, as He extends His hand to us. He wants us to take His hand and be lovers of Him, rather than trying to write down all the jots and tittles of His brain so we can make an equation in order to reach Him like those that made the tower of Babylon.

If you could only catch just the tiniest glimpse of God's magnitude, His awesomeness, and the vastness of His knowledge and wisdom and mercy and compassion—just the smallest glimpse of that and you would be forever changed and humbled before God.

Let's really make a pact before God that we are going to be worshipers and find Him as He extends His hand, and let Him find us not as a disobedient, obstinate, prideful and a selfish people, but as a people like Abraham, like Isaac, like Jacob, like David, like Moses, like Enoch. Lovers of the Father, fellowshiping with Him in the cool of the garden. That's Christianity. Let's approach Him that way together. Let's walk hand in hand, all of us together hand in hand in the garden.

Approaching Him not through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but through the tree of **Life**. Okay?

Father, I fully recognize there isn't a word that's been said that can have any meaning apart from those that receive these words by faith and reach out for Your hand that You would give increase. I understand there are many kinds of soil, and a good and an honest heart hears, and receives and perseveres, that You might produce fruit in him. I ask, Father, that You have mercy on us that we would all, right now, be able to turn the eyes of our heart toward You and extend our hand toward Your hand. You're extending it to us, that You might touch us and baptize us in Your Spirit by the laying on of Your hand. Please make these things comprehensible. Lord, increase our faith and let us see—not with the seeing of the eyes or the hearing of the ears, but by Your Glory, by Your Voice. Faith comes by Your utterance. It's the gospel that loosens up our heart and dynamites our foolish pride, and it's Your Spirit that brings life out of death and light out of darkness and beauty out of ashes. God, do that miracle in each of us. Make us worshipers. God, please help us.

In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to all who believe, let a miracle be done in your heart right now. *To all who believe.*

Remember what we said before... When were Job's fortunes restored? When did the Hand of God extend and do miracles in Job's life out of the ash heap? When he prayed for his friends.

Why was Jesus given a Name above every name? Seated at the right hand of God? Why was He raised from the dead by the power of the Father? Because He gave His life for His friends.

Apply it. Between you and God. Apply it. No matter who you are. Apply it!

WHO REALLY FOUND WHO?

Instead of being a point of worship, Romans 9, 10 and 11 are notorious for creating division. And that division or controversy, in simplest terms, centers around a thing called Calvinism. It's a doctrine based primarily on Romans 9 in particular.

It's a doctrine that goes something like this: God has determined, in advance, who will be saved and who won't be saved. He hardens our heart or softens our heart and gives us salvation or doesn't give us salvation in a discretionary way that's totally His option. *Nothing* we do can change the outcome. God is God, and we are not, and dead people can't bring life to themselves. Dead people can't even recognize life. Dead people can't hear anything and can't see anything. It clearly says in Ephesians, "We were dead in our transgressions and sins." How then, can a dead person find God? They can't. So the reasoning in Calvinism is that everything must therefore come from God and we play no part in it at all. We are depraved—there's nothing good in us based on Romans 3. Therefore, there is nothing good enough in us to find God in any way or even desire to find God. It's all a dead-end and God, in His own discretionary way, chooses those who will be able to see Him and everyone else is simply unable to see Him. It's a choice that He makes, totally apart from any part that we could play. It's freely grace, "lest any man boast," so that it's not by our own works, and man has nothing at all to say or do about it. So, if we happen to have any capacity to see or understand anything, then we give all the gratitude to God. That, in a nutshell, is Calvinism.

Now, there's a point at which some of that is certainly true. We should never think, for even the slightest instant, that we have any merit or good thing inside us that was able to find God. "I found the Lord." Well, bless your little ol' heart, you deserve a pat on the back, now don't you? You "found" God. And where was He when you found Him? How did you do this "finding God"? What inside of you was able to "find God"? Did you write a formula for Him and somehow make Him come live inside of you? How did you get the God that created the universe to fit inside of you?! How did you do that?

So, certainly the fact that *every good thing is in God* is worth reveling in. Our capacity to see Him, know Him, understand Him or "find Him"—all of that capacity lies in God's heart, and mind and Spirit. We surely can't conjure these things up in ourselves! We're not "little gods" that make decisions about following a "big God." It's not like that! So there was something very true in what Calvin taught about God's infinite capacity to love entirely unlovable creatures, and to draw them to Himself before they had ever done anything good or bad. They deserved nothing, and were dead in their transgressions and sins, but in spite of that, "While they were yet sinners" He died for them and called them. No one can say, "Jesus is Lord" except by the Spirit. No one can find or have the Father unless the Son chooses to reveal Him.

Many of these things that this man from Switzerland had to say about life in the Spirit of Christ are true. There were certain things, however, that were inappropriate, and if you followed Calvin and the fruit of his labors, you would find major holes in his life and in the philosophy of life that he taught to others. Jesus said, "Wisdom is proved right by her children." If you want to know about the wisdom of something, check the babies. See if they are deformed, or spiritually retarded and backwards and whether there is chaos and things not pleasing to God. The fruit of the Spirit will be evident: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control, gentleness, and faithfulness. That will be the fruit when the mark of God is on something.

When Barnabas showed up at Antioch, he saw the Spirit of God and "the evidence of the grace of God" (Acts 11). He didn't have to check their theology! The grace of God was evident because the Life of God

was there. There was something that God was very pleased with. Romans 8 is a testimony to the fact that God confirms those things that are His, by His Spirit. He doesn't confirm through our heads, and He doesn't ask our permission, and He doesn't ask for a checklist of correct doctrines. He confirms His heart, His mind, His will and His Spirit in the spirit. "The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." "Wisdom is proved right by her children." You know a man's walk with God by the fruit that he bears, not simply by the things he says or how airtight his reasoning is. Life is the issue—we look for Life first. The "life became the light of men."

"He came to His own and His own received Him not." Why is that? Because men reasoned through their own minds to find a doctrine that would properly describe the Messiah they expected. They thought He would be a certain, specific way, but they missed entirely, half the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah! They didn't apply them to the situation, so they blew it—they botched it up. They crucified the Son of Glory because they did not hear "the voice of the prophets" which was read every Sabbath Day. They heard the *words* of the prophets, but they didn't hear "*the voice* of the prophets" which was read every Sabbath Day. (The King James Version rendering of that particular passage.) And so they crucified Him. Can you follow that? They read the scriptures diligently, thinking that by them they would have eternal life, and yet they refused to come *to Jesus* to find life (John 5:39). They missed the Life because they were pursuing the Light by searching the "facts" and "truths." They missed the reality. They missed it entirely and even crucified the Reality of God, the Heart of God, the Eternal Life. They murdered Him. In spite of their best attempts to quantify the Word of God, they missed Him.

So as we said earlier, Romans 9 was never meant to be a new place to build a "dividing wall of hostility" over one's particular belief about God's sovereignty. ***It's a place of worship, not a place of division.*** It's a place to expand our hearts before God and His infinite wisdom, His grace, His mercy and His kindness. It's a place to humble ourselves into the fact that we cannot comprehend the vastness of His wisdom. We cannot take His words that are written down in ink and somehow

create an equation that adds up to God. “I figured it out, and therefore I know.”

Remember from Romans 1 and Habakkuk 2 that ***the opposite of faith is pride***, and that is the thing that will draw us away from God quicker than any other single issue. “God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.” Now, where is *that* in a Calvinistic theology? If you limit it simply to jots and tittles and proof texts, where does that come in to play? “God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble”—we *do* play a part in this whole deal. Our job before God is to maintain humility before Him, to worship, and to not choose to deliberately forget that God created the heavens and the earth (Romans 1). We must deliberately choose to not worship the created thing rather than the Creator “who is ever to be praised.” We can choose to seek immortality rather than ignore His kindness and His patience, which turn us towards repentance.

Why was it that He turned away from Israel? It was because He held out His hands all day long and they chose to be disobedient and obstinate. ***God wants us to find in Him a Person to be worshiped and adored.*** We’re humbled before Him, recognizing His supreme place in anything that we would ever know or think of. We gladly recognize the place that He has in any ability we would have to reason or draw near to Him. It all comes out of His supply, His grace and His kindness. He wants to make worshipers out of us, not prideful contenders with each other over some specific doctrine or idea.

Somewhere in the magnitude of His wisdom, God has put us in a place where our “understanding” of something that He has said will be severely limited by the finite nature of our minds. We’ll have an inability to comprehend His heart and His mind...and that’s okay. If we could all learn the lesson Job learned, then all of these matters would be just fine with us. We don’t have to understand them all, but we can be just fine with whomever God has chosen us to be. We can be fine with whatever part He, by His grace and kindness, has allowed us to play. And that’s a key issue. Whatever part we could ever play is something that He’s *allowed* us to play, not something that we have earned or deserved.

EVERY MAN RESPONSIBLE

I want to read a few scriptures to you just to rattle the cage a little bit about this idea that God has predetermined in advance exactly how things are supposed to be, and that nothing can be thwarted in any way, shape, or form and that there is no part whatsoever that we play. The Romans letter doesn't teach, nor do any other of God's writings, that man is inconsequential in the whole equation. God created us in His own image, and ***He has drawn us into a place of responsibility.*** In fact, the very nature of what He's doing here is that He's preparing us to deal in the unseen world, just as His Son Jesus did! Has He rendered us totally as puppets, with no ability whatsoever to see, to know, to understand, or to be able to partake in His work because we are just "preprogrammed"? Are you destined to automatically do whatever He says and that's the end of the story, because anything more than that would be our own works? If so, then it totally violates the whole purpose of us even being here! He is teaching those of us who are "created a little lower than the angels" to participate in the Work in the unseen realm. He is training us to be an equal yoke for His Son. We are becoming "a habitation of God by the Spirit." He is drawing us into *a place of responsibility in the unseen world.* Most certainly it is by His grace—we have absolutely no merit, no rights, no ability, and yet He grants us certain privileges and abilities that then become our choice to walk in, because He's granted us that choice. You need to understand that.

Here's something God said to Paul, as Paul recounts this story in Acts 26.

"On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I

saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

“So, then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

God makes this absolute statement to Paul: “I have appeared to you and now I’m sending you, and this is what you’re going to do. You are going to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light. You are going to turn them from the power of satan to God, so they may receive forgiveness of sins in a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. I’m sending you, and you are going to turn them from their sins.”

Paul’s response to that was, “Now, Oh King Agrippa, **I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.**” What does that imply? That implies that God *did* have a very distinct plan for Saul’s life. No mistake about it. It was no accident that Paul did what he did in the life that he had. “But now, Oh King Agrippa, *I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven; I proclaimed they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.*” He was not disobedient to God because he went forward with the message that God sent him with. God had a specific plan for his life. Unmistakably. Paul did not “earn” that and he didn’t choose that. When Paul was in his mother’s womb, God foreknew the plan He had for Paul’s life. However, Paul

could've chosen differently and was capable of being disobedient to the vision from heaven.

So also as God plans marvelous things for our lives, He's marked out a way for us. He's cleared a way for spectacular things that are beyond our comprehension! Spectacular things, for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2). However, we can choose to be disobedient to the vision from heaven. We can grieve the Spirit—no question about that. Remember when Jesus said, "I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, *but you would not.*" His full desire and whole heart was to gather them as a hen gathers her chicks. That was God's will, but they "would not." They chose not to obey.

Is it not God's expressed will, that everyone come to a repentance and a knowledge of the truth? God's specified will, through his servant Peter, was that everyone repent (2 Peter 3:9)—that all men repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. Peter specifically said that. And in Acts, it says that in times past God winked at ignorance, but now "He commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Then why is the road narrow and "few will be those that find it?" How do you *explain* that? There is certainly no capacity in man except that which God grants him. But if God has granted the capacity for a man to repent and He commands all men everywhere to repent, why is the road narrow and "few will be those that find it?" God's expressed will is that all men repent. He's commanding "all men everywhere to repent." Why would He do that if He's already foreordained that all men everywhere *cannot* repent? It's impossible.

It doesn't make any sense, except for the fact that God is participating in the cleansing, the regeneration, the sanctification and the glorification of a people who have CHOSEN by His grace to serve Him. The opportunity is opened up in a way that we don't deserve. Grace is provision for us, but grace is not mandate. Grace is opportunity, but grace is not "we have no choice in the matter." "Grace" is that apart from man's ability, man's will or man's knowledge accumulation, ***God has provided an opportunity that they could know Him if they choose to do so.***

By His grace, He has granted the opportunity to man and has made everyone without excuse. “Men are without excuse.” They deliberately forgot God because it was their intent to worship the created thing rather than the Creator (Romans 1). They *chose* to do that. Then came the sovereign issue: “Therefore He gave them over to their depravity.” As they chose sin, as they chose to believe the lie, as they chose to crave the flesh. . . at that point, God then gave them over to a delusion. God Himself can send a “powerful delusion” (2 Thess. 2:11), when people deliberately “refuse to love the truth.”

Marvel at these things but don’t create a doctrine around them. Certainly it’s to be said that God desires an equal yoke for the Son and this is all a training ground. By His grace and provision, He has foreordained that those created “a little lower than the angels” would be able to search Him out because He has opened the door for them. He’s equipped them and made provision for them, and then allowed them to make that choice—to be obedient or disobedient to “the vision from heaven.”

JUST HUSH!

Look at Abraham...

He's pleading for Sodom, and... *"Then the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will **surely** become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.'* (That sounds like a very sovereign statement, doesn't it?) *"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him"* (Genesis 18:17-18).

Do you see the connection? God foreordained this awesome, unbelievable plan for a very unworthy man. Abraham was totally undeserving, yet God swung open the door for him...**if** he would raise his children in a righteous and just way in obedience to God, **then** "the Lord would bring about for Abraham what He has promised him." "I'll surely do this for Abraham"... but that "if-then" statement was involved in the whole thing.

And David...

"Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, 'God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars.' And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

"When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, 'Bring the ephod.' David said, 'O Lord, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and

destroy the town on account of me. Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, God of Israel, tell your servant.'

"And the Lord said, 'He will.'

"Again David asked, 'Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?'

"And the Lord said, 'They will.'

"So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there" (1 Sam. 23:7-13).

Now God *clearly* said, "Saul will come" and they will hand David over.

"Will he come, Lord?"

"He will."

Two verses later, Saul heard that David left and Saul didn't go! He DIDN'T GO! God just makes worshipers out of us with stuff like that, doesn't He? There's something so *very* vast and marvelous about God! If you try to use your mind and "eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" with these scriptures, you would say that since God said Saul is going there, that it is a definite done deal. It's done, Saul will go. God said it would happen, so it will. Those are God's words—period. Will he come? He will. It's settled forever. Nothing can change that. And then two verses later, boom! Saul didn't go!! You have to be worshipers! I'm *asking* you to be worshipers. God is so *much bigger* than a Calvinistic or an Armenian doctrine. God is *much* larger than that. It's so vitally important that we are worshipers in all of these things.

And Elisha...

“Open the east window,’ he said, and he opened it. ‘Shoot!’ Elisha said, and he shot. ‘The Lord’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram!’ Elisha declared. ‘You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.’

“Then he said, ‘Take the arrows,’ and the king took them. Elisha told him, ‘Strike the ground.’ He struck it three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him and said, ‘You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times’” (2 Kings 13:17-20).

The man of God said, “This is great—it’s awesome! You will completely destroy your enemy. NOW—beat those arrows on the ground.” So, the king beat it three times. Did God say how many times to beat it? No. So the king didn’t disobey, right? Not exactly...

Somehow, *he didn’t have a heart for the battle of God*, and he didn’t listen to the Spirit. He just didn’t have a heart for it. So Elisha said, “Forget what I just said a minute ago. I just finished declaring to you in the Name of the Lord that you will completely destroy your enemy. But now I tell you, you will only defeat it three times. Sorry about that. You didn’t beat the arrow enough times.”

Once again, the issue is clear that these things from God’s heart show that God is *very* vast. It’s not that God is tricking us, but He’s vast and as He sees our hearts and our minds and as He comprehends what’s happening inside of us, *He responds to that*. He “sets us up.” Not everything is just so cut and dry as we would like it to be. It’s not like that. You won’t be able to find a formula for God and put Him in a box: “This is the way it always is.”

This passage in Romans 9 brings up so much controversy...

“Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’

“What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: ‘I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

One of you will say to me: ‘Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?’ But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? ‘Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?”’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?’ (Rom 9:10-21)

People take examples from these scriptures that are supposed to “prove” that God sovereignly chooses in advance, exactly who’s going to be saved and who’s not going to be saved. It’s all decided in advance, independent of any man’s involvement in the process.

In verse 12, *“The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”* It’s so controversial for people. It goes on to talk about the fact that the lump of clay doesn’t have the right to cry out against the potter, *“Why did you make me like this?”*

And in verse 17 it talks about Pharaoh. *“I raised you up for this very purpose that I might display my power in you...”* And *“Who resists his will?”*

From those examples, people conclude that God sovereignly predetermines, apart from anyone’s involvement, who will and will not be saved. (That thought right there defies probably a hundred scriptures.) Romans 9 is not about salvation—*that* is the point, and you need to know that. Esau was rejected and Jacob chosen not as one would “be saved” and one would “go to hell.” Their salvation is not what this was about. This had to do with God’s eternal purposes to bring forth a Messiah and to bring forth a race of people.

Same with the Pharaoh and God hardening his heart—it is *not* about Pharaoh’s salvation. It’s not just, “God hardened his heart, and

therefore he went to hell, and that is God's choice. He can harden hearts and make them go to hell, or he can soften hearts and make them go to heaven." You need to understand—this is not about Pharaoh's salvation. This is about God's purposes in setting Israel free from captivity.

The context of this whole thing in Romans 9 has to do with the Jews and the Gentiles and God sovereignly choosing His People in any way that He pleases—apart from any lump of clay's objection to it all. God's heart as He's bringing these things out is, "I am God. I will bring forth my purposes any way I choose." He is not talking about individual salvation in this passage. That is not the context or the subject. He's not saying, "I will choose who is going to be saved and who is not." The book of Romans is not about that! It's about this: *that all who believe, as many as call upon the Name of the Lord, shall be saved.*

All of us are on level ground before God. He's opened a common door to each of us, and entrance is not based on your heritage. Who among you decided to be born a Gentile or decided to be born a Jew? That was *God's choice*, right? He levels the ground and says that it has nothing to do with anything that happened before you were born. God has sovereignly chosen to bring forth His purposes in the way that He's chosen—*to open the door to everyone*—to all that would call on the Name of the Lord. Change your heart so you can extend the hand of God to others without a lot of clutter in your head. He wants simple children.

My reason for saying all of these things is not to convince you of a particular point of view, so you can go argue about it—definitely not. My position is to have God's position, which is to level the ground. My desire is simply to say: Do not approach anything with a preconceived idea of exactly the way God does His business. Don't you approach Him that way! His desire is that we would soften our hearts, eat from the Tree of Life, watch for Life, be worshipers of the Life of God in Christ Jesus and be soft before Him. Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "It's good to do this, it's evil to do that, and I can prove it." That is not God's way.

We are not qualified to make judgments about what God's Sovereignty even means! Make the personal application of Romans 1, 2 and 3, okay? That's His desire for us. Only **God** can define His sovereignty. You just hush! Be still and know that He is God. *HUSH!* Quit the debates and the fussing. Humble yourself before Him, and let Him do His business, and "today if you hear His voice, harden not your heart." He's extended His hand to a disobedient and obstinate people—US. "Today if you hear His voice"—you decide—"harden not your heart." Soften your heart before God so you can hear Him. If you get your head filled with competitiveness and clutter...if you get your mind and heart filled with the vanity of the world and the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye, the boastful pride of life... if you separate yourself from God, then you will grieve His Holy Spirit. Don't you call what's good "evil," and cut yourself off from the Life of God.

He wants to extend mercy, so don't you limit Him in any way, shape or form! (That's what he's saying throughout this letter.) Don't you stop Him for a second from the way He wants to extend mercy. That's His job and His decision. If He wants to extend mercy to the eleventh hour worker... *HUSH*. He's God. Be still, and know that He is God. That is Romans 9, 10, and 11. It's His business, so soften your heart. "Today if you hear His voice" you soften your heart. Don't be so quick to judge others and categorize and make your flip charts. Soften your heart before Him and be a worshiper. He's your friend and your Father—He loves you!! He will teach you His ways. If you will incline your ear towards Him, *He will teach you His ways*.

GOD CHOSE TO HAVE A PEOPLE

“I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew...” (Romans 11:1-2a).

God chose to have a People before time began. He decided in advance that He would have a People, and He would teach them His ways. He would lead them to build a temple and an ark and He would give them animal sacrifice, the Law of Moses and the whole Levitical system. These were written down for our learning—they were done in advance for us, “on whom the apex or the fulfillment of the ages has come,” Paul said (1 Cor. 10). In His mind and His heart He saw the whole picture from beginning to end before there even was any picture! While the Spirit was still hovering over the chaos of the earth, God Himself foresaw the whole picture of how humanity would play itself out. He chose to have His “people, Israel” that would be the foreshadowing of the Life that would be in His Son. Before time began, God ordered all these circumstances. That is not to say He specifically decided in advance that I would “go to hell” or I would “go to heaven” apart from His beckoning. Today I’ve heard His voice and softened my heart and I’ve not been disobedient to the vision from heaven. Do you see the difference?

“God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don’t you know what the scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ‘Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me’? And what was God’s answer to him? ‘I have reserved for myself 7,000 who have not

bowed the knee to Baal.’ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace” (Romans 11:2-6). God has chosen to keep the door open and continues to extend Himself, His hand and His heart. “What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did—the chosen ones, did. The others were hardened, as it is written: God gave them a spirit of stupor.”

We are going to talk now about this ultimate plan of God: He chose a people Israel, as a shadow of the reality that’s in Christ. And now, He is allowing a span of time to go by in which the Gentiles will receive the Messiah, but the Jews will not. And then God will ultimately, out of envy, offer the opportunity again to the Jews in a spectacular way. Again, ***we are talking about people groups, not specific individuals.*** “What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see, and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.’ And David says: ‘May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever’”(Romans 11:7-10).

I read these things, and I just have to emphasize again the spirit of worship that God is drawing us into. You know those times when something inside of you catches just the slightest glimpse of His face on any given day or hour? Or those moments in time when you find that desire inside, to just look to heaven and worship? You *SING* to this awesome God that you cannot see with your naked eye! Or what about when you’re able, by faith, to overcome temptation in your life, and be a victor in that area? Or those moments when you find just a tiny bit of conviction in your heart for sin and you can look someone in the eye, and humble yourself and say, “I’m sorry.” ***Let every one of those examples remind you to be still and know that He is God.*** Let them remind you to be a worshiper of Him. Because you know the war inside of yourself, just to say “I’m sorry” to a person. Simple words, yet almost impossible to say, right? “I—was—wrong.” Three words. Inside your bones you know you ought to say, “I’m sorry....” but you can think of fourteen reasons why you shouldn’t have to. “It’s *their* problem, and after all they hurt me.” Or, “That circumstance

was just too hard for me..." Or, "I have a hormone problem." "I didn't get much sleep." "It's all your fault because you gave me these children..." Whatever the excuse happens to be, you know the war that rages inside, between you and those simple words, "I—was—wrong." Only by His Grace can we even *apologize*—so THANK Him for that!

Every time you have the chance to worship, to smile inside, to experience peace, to have the capacity to say "I am sorry, I was wrong"...Every time you have the ability to overcome the slightest temptation, thank God and be a worshiper. "You are saved by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves, lest any man boast." We have to look to God in heaven and be worshipers. Do you want to know what faith is? Faith is not something that you conjure up in your mind. ***Faith is looking at God and understanding His capacity and His love and simply believing that HE IS GOD.*** Faith is believing "that God is, and that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him." God is God, and God loves. So as we see these small workings in our lives, and the larger ones too, and we turn our eyes towards God, we thank Him and worship Him—*that* is faith. God is calling us to be worshipers—faith-filled worshipers with a vision of God's Promises and a vision for His capacity to fulfill those promises. We see His love, and therefore His desire to fulfill those promises.

And so, here we are, 6,000 years later, after this long line of people, beginning with Adam and Eve—and who of us asked to be here? Who decided "who" you would be? Why aren't you in a bed somewhere as a quadriplegic? Why don't you have an IQ of 27, like a virtual vegetable? Or blind, or with a fatal disease right now? What merit do you have that has kept you alive all these years? In all the frailty of humanity...why is it that you still exist on this planet? Do you understand how totally puny our mortal flesh is, and how many thousands of ways we could die in any given day? The fact that you've existed, all these days, all these months, all these years and even decades.... do you understand how you've even managed to make it through to this moment in time to read these words? That you are even able to turn your face towards God, to soften your heart, to hear His voice and "to harden not your heart"? The capacity that

God has placed within you and the angelic protection around you, and the Word of His grace He's spoken into your life to surround you, to turn you towards Him—all these things are *marvels* to me! ***They must be MARVELS to all of us, to make us worshipers of Him.***

HIS MAGNIFICENT PLAN

So again, don't get bogged down in some narrow doctrinal view. God is God. "*Be still and know that I am God,*" is the heart cry. Look at the vast lineage of humanity and how He has worked all these incredibly intricate details. Look at what He placed in the ark, for example—the staff of Moses that had budded and the tablets of stone and the hidden manna. ALL of it has extremely unbelievable, deep, rich meaning. The Hebrews writer couldn't even go into it all, because he didn't have the time to tell about it! But it is *unbelievable!* The ark represented Jesus—HE was the ark. "He came and He tabernacled among us." You see the tablets of stone and the miracles and the authority of God and the rod that budded, and the hidden manna, the bread of life—all of them are hidden in Jesus' heart. We could go on for years discussing what the Hebrews writer didn't even give us a hint about! He only made a passing reference to it and said, "Sorry, I can't tell you any more about it." All of this stuff happening for ages and generations and all of it for our learning so that we could explore the Heart and the Mind and the Personality and the Magnificence of God.

So here we have Israel and the Gentiles, and the Jewish people in Rome are saying, "I'm frustrated with this. Why not circumcision? Why did you give us this law? What about temple worship anyway? What's the deal here, God? What's the meaning of all these things?" And He strips away the Jews' right to their own righteousness. "You never kept the law anyway, guys!"

To the Gentiles, He's about to say, "Okay, I received you—big deal. Does that make you some kind of heroes because I received you and I blinded the minds of the Jews for a season? Does that make you heroes or was it I who did all of that?" You see, God's sovereign plan

is that two witnesses would testify in the last days—TWO witnesses, side by side. He wants to raise up the Jews, and raise up the Gentiles, and cause them to walk side by side, declaring the Glory of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. This is the marvel that Paul is talking about in Chapters 9, 10 and 11.

“Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. Do you see that God has a Plan in all these things? He sees way past just the obvious and the superficial. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!” (Romans 11:11-12) He says, “I’m talking to you, Gentiles. Don’t be so selfish and so prideful about what I’ve done for you. If their fall has made you great, oh Gentiles—just think of what their fullness will mean for you! Don’t be so jealous.” If Israel’s fullness is worked out in creation and God’s wisdom is brought to bear through the original people that He had chosen, **how much more does that mean fullness for all of us!** This is not something we should resent, any more than the Jews have any right to resent.

“I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my service in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. Notice that: “And save some of them.” For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.” (Romans 11:13-18) **“Who do you think you are?”** ... Like Paul said to the Corinthians. “What do you have that you did not receive? Your boasting is not good. What do you have that God didn’t give you?” **WHO** do you think you are? **See God! Look at Him, Worship Him, Humble yourself before Him.** There is **NOTHING** you have ever offered to Jesus. The root did not find Life in the branches, but the branches found Life in the Root.

“You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.’” The Jewish people were cut off from the inheritance, so I could be grafted into the vine, which is Jesus.” *“Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid”* (Romans 11:19-20). It’s only by faith that you stand. It’s only because you chose to believe the Messiah and they chose not to believe the Messiah. Their conception of Him was wrong, and their hearts were hard. They chose to desire a fleshly Messiah rather than a Spiritual One. They didn’t want a kingdom that “was not of this world,” the way Jesus said His Kingdom was. They wanted a different kind of Messiah. But even a pagan king knew that this was the King of the Jews! He put those words right on His cross and said, “I’ve written what I have written.” Now there’s sovereignty for you! GOD chose for that sign to say exactly what it said: “KING OF THE JEWS.” Does that mean Pilate was saved because he ordered that to be written? No, but because of God’s sovereign purpose, Pilate said, “I have written what I have written. Leave it alone. I don’t know why I wrote it—I just wrote it.” God chooses the vessels to accomplish His purposes in order that He might work all these things out. GOD was the one who drove the Messiah as a baby off into Egypt, right? I just want you to see on a much larger scale that these things were prophecies to be fulfilled. And God intends that His vast Wisdom would be made known to Jews and Gentiles through the fulfillment of all of these sovereignly foretold issues. God has a Plan here that goes way past just the obvious and superficial.

“For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either” (Romans 11:21). If you live in unbelief, you will suffer the same fate they did. God did not graft you in “off the cuff,” off the top of His head, apart from your choice to believe Him. If He is capable of cutting off those who walk in unbelief that have a Jewish heritage, He certainly can do it to us too.

“Consider therefore the kindness and the sternness of God.” **Be worshippers!**

“Consider—think about—the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in

unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (Romans 11:22-23). “IF they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in...” It’s all BY FAITH—that’s the issue throughout this book. They believe in the Son of God for the forgiveness of sins, their justification before God, their sanctification before God and their value before the Father. They don’t rely on externals, but they believe God and the Son whom He sent. Those He will justify freely, by His Grace, by the Provision He’s poured out.

“After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!” (Romans 11:24) “For if they do not persist in unbelief, they WILL be grafted in.” Stop being arrogant, Gentiles!

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers...” (Romans 11:25a) Paul even says “this is a mystery.” He says, “I don’t want you to be ignorant of it, but it still must be labeled a mystery.” These are just phenomenal things that not even the other apostles write much about. Think about it—Jesus Himself didn’t even talk much about this stuff. You can see little hints here and there, through the prophets, the other apostles, and a hint here and there through James and Mark, and maybe Luke. But these are glorious mysteries that truthfully, if anyone on the face of the earth had a real handle on them beside Paul, they didn’t let on! Certainly we know that Jesus taught these things to Paul—some of it in Arabia probably, and some through revelation as time went on. Probably a large extent of it was revealed as Paul had his pen in his hand. That’s often the way God works. “Do not consider what to say or how to say it, in order that my Father might speak through you” rather than you speaking through your own prejudices, biases and finite mind (Matt. 10:20).

These are glorious mysteries that very few people, if any—other than Jesus—could comprehend during that era. Paul is talking to some unbelievably rich and fruitful saints (see the list in Romans 16), yet even to them, he considered these things to be mysteries. ***What magnificent statements of the omnipotence and the Glorious Thought and Sovereignty of God!*** He wants to prepare a People and then cut them off from the natural olive tree. Then He grafts in the unnatural,

wild branches and lets those take nourishment from the root and come to life and after that, He will regraft in the natural branches. He will graft those back in who are from Jewish lineage that do not persist in unbelief. These are *marvelous* things. *“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”* Unbelievable! How could God DO that? What does that mean? How do we understand this stuff?

INHERITANCE— IT'S ALL ISAAC'S

“And so all Israel will be saved...” (Romans 11:26a). What is all Israel? Take a look at Romans 9: “It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: ‘At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son’” (Romans 9: 6-9). Therefore, he goes on to say, it’s by faith that we become sons of Abraham.

So... “Israel has experienced a hardening in part... and so all of Israel—as defined in Chapter 9—will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’

“As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs...” (Romans 11:28).

As far as God’s intent and overall purposes throughout history, they are loved **on account of the patriarchs**—much in every way. What value does it have to be a descendant of a Patriarch? Much, in every way! God looks at what’s been entrusted to the Patriarchs and His deep love and promises for them and He views that in a special way. Remember Ishmael? He was the son of a Patriarch and God loved him. But He couldn’t bring Ishmael an inheritance. Remember, “Get

the slave woman and her child out of my house.” The child who will receive the inheritance is the one who came into the family according to the promise, by the Spirit. Born from the womb of the Spirit, and the promise and faith, without wavering—that is the child that shall receive the inheritance...but God also loved Ishmael. Because of the Patriarch, Abraham, God promised to protect Ishmael in the wilderness with his mother, and to make a great nation out of them as well. Not in the same way, but He did love them and He did meet them. It’s one of the mysteries in God’s heart. Why did He do that? It doesn’t make any sense that He would tell the slave woman and her child to get out of the house and then say, “I love Ishmael, I love Hagar. I can’t give them any inheritance, but I sure do love them and I’m going to protect them and make a great nation out of them.” These are the mysteries of God.

Does God love the religious organizations of our day? Yes, and no. Because of the Patriarchs, He loves them. Because God is God, He has a love for those who even have roots in true Christianity (though generations and even centuries removed in most cases from anything even reminiscent of the Spirit of Christ alive in His People, such as in Acts 2-4). “Get the slave woman and her child (the baby born half of My Plan, and half of worldly wisdom) OUT of My House—there is no true Inheritance for them” and then provision in the wilderness... this is our God. His sovereign will says that only that which is birthed out of the Spirit of God, not out of the flesh of men, can receive the inheritance. Because of His sovereign justice, and the purity of His heart, He cannot give them an inheritance—but that doesn’t mean He doesn’t love them. Figure that out! He loves Ishmael, but He will not bless Ishmael and bring an inheritance in the same way He does those that live by the Spirit rather than by the ambitions, the doctrines and the traditions of men.

These are marvelous things, and it’s very important that we not have an attitude like Jonah’s. He sat up underneath the fig tree that God Himself had provided, in order to give him shade and Jonah cursed the fig tree when the worm ate it. God sent a worm, which ate the little shade that God had created, and Jonah had a pity party for himself. God said, “I am trying to teach you a lesson here. You shouldn’t have

anything to say about that vine that brought you shade, or about that worm that ate the shady vine. These are not your matters. It's not your concern. I told you to go to Nineveh and proclaim Good News to them and a repentance that would bring refreshing and a blessing to them. I told you to do that, and it's none of your business why. There are 120,000 people that don't know their right hand from their left and their animals are dumb, too. I love them, and that's My business, not yours. Why are you up here judging them? This is *My business*. Open your eyes to My sovereignty and My glory, Jonah."

Later on, God destroyed Nineveh! Look it up—it's gone. He wiped it out. Who can figure it out? God wants us to marvel at these things, to find His Grace and His Goodness, and to apprehend something of His Mind. "Who knows the mind of God except the Spirit of God," and "we have that Spirit" and "we worship Him in Spirit and in truth." We worship Him in His own Spirit in order to apprehend something of His Mind—eating from the tree of Life, not the tree of knowledge.

"For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you" (Romans 11:29-31). He's saying, "I provoked them. I've allowed a hardening in part in order that they might find out how utterly worthless they are. They felt pretty good about themselves when they were busy doing the temple worship, keeping the Sabbath Holy, and keeping all the other things I commanded." But now that it's all fallen apart—the ark is gone, the temple is gone, the animal sacrifice is gone—in their own hearts they find they're not able to keep the laws of Moses. It's all just a vast disarray. All of a sudden, hey—they might actually need a Messiah! God said, "Their own disobedience is now provoking them to see what you Gentiles knew all along – that you're worthless and there's no hope for you. The Jews didn't believe that, because they were propped up with all these things—the law, the temple, the Sabbath. Now that it's all been ripped out, and the fullness of the Gentiles has come in—now, the Jews realize out of envy, out of seeing their own hearts, how *tremendously needy they are* for the same Messiah that the Gentiles needed. So now, they're not so pompous anymore."

This picture I'm talking about has not, in large measure, yet come to pass. If you want to see something that foretells the end of the end in a clear way, this regrafting of the Jews *will* be happening just as surely as the Bride will have made herself ready—the church will become what God intends it to be “without spot or wrinkle or blemish.” The world is waiting on these things and creation is groaning for them, and God said they must take place before His return. So don't expect Jesus to come bursting through those clouds any minute now. Jesus said that we can comprehend the times and seasons—and as far as we can see, Jesus is not coming through those clouds any minute now. The Jews have not come in and the Bride is nowhere near ready.

There are other issues here, too, like the Two Witnesses. It is very apparent that the things about the Two Witnesses that are mentioned in Revelation have not yet come to pass in fullness because the timing is waiting on the Jews. This transition needs to take place where the Jewish people realize their vast need—their tremendous need for the Messiah that they'd always waited for and then murdered on Calvary.

I have to say this, that even amongst Jewish believers, there is a tremendous arrogance. They really want to hold themselves up as being “the cream of the crop.” There is still a pompousness, “Well, I found the Messiah and all these Gentile Christians—they're all second class citizens.” They wouldn't necessarily say that, but you sure get that impression by the way they carry themselves, speak of themselves, and carry on the traditions of men. They still hold onto the traditions of men and Jewish traditions the Bible calls “obsolete,” and make null and void the Word of God. It gives them some kind of identity. It is just proof that many of the things we're talking about have not yet come to pass.

Amongst the Jewish believers, you just don't see the humility that speaks of people who are truly finding a revelation of the Messiah, and truly falling on their faces before a sovereign, omnipotent, glorious, majestic God and His beloved Son Jesus Christ. It's not the humility that rips away any claim to anything except just simply faith in His Name as our only calling card. That's the only lineage that has any value whatsoever. Everything else, as Paul said, is dung. The ultimate Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, the favorite son, a Pharisee

of Pharisees, beyond all of his peers said... “Eh—dung.” That was the word he chose. It doesn’t mean *anything*. The best Jew that ever lived, as far as we know, except Jesus, counted all of that external stuff as having no value compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing in an intimate way the Son of God as a friend. **That’s** what it’s all about, and that’s what God is stripping away from both Jew and Gentile throughout this letter. Lifting them to a knowledge of the sovereign, glorious, awesomeness of God—humbling them just as He did Job. He is saying to both Jew and Gentile, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? *“For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”*”

Paul’s been saying, “Let God be God!” The basis on which we come to God is purely, simply and solely by believing in the One whom He sent. Period. Whether Jew or Gentile, it makes no difference. He said it again and again and again. If He wants to do business that way, that’s HIS CHOICE. That’s what Romans 9, 10 and 11 are about. He will do business how He pleases to do business. “So what shall we say then?” The Gentiles are received, but the Israelites are rejected? Well, why not? If that’s God’s choice, that He would only receive those who come by faith, and not those who try to come to God by doing good deeds or by keeping the law or some set of rules, then so be it. If God has chosen to reject those who try to come to Him by their own righteous acts, rather than by God’s love and believing in the Son of God that was slain before the foundations of the earth... If God has chosen it to be that way, then so be it! Amen. Leave it alone. That’s God’s choice.

Open your hearts and be a worshiper, not a judge of God! Please...be a worshiper. Receive what He receives—let Him make the decisions. Stop being gods that think you know good from evil, and think you have it all figured out with your flip charts and answers for every hard question. Stop being that way! Be worshipers. Drop to your face in humility. See who GOD is! See the vastness of His riches that extend way beyond your understanding. Humble yourself before Him and then you will have Him.

*Oh, the depths of the riches
Of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments, and
His paths beyond tracing out!
Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
Who has ever given to God,
That God should repay him?
For from him and through him and
To him are all things.
To him be the glory forever!
Amen.*

LIVING SACRIFICES

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”

At the end of chapter 11, there’s this incredible vastness of God’s Wisdom and Glory and Greatness that Paul’s talking about. And then, into what we call Chapter 12, it begins with the thought that’s very familiar to us, “...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...” But on what basis do we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice? On what basis? The beginning of that sentence is essential if we expect to understand what this thing called “commitment” is. We try to hammer it into ourselves, “We’ve gotta be committed to Jesus, and we gotta offer our bodies as living sacrifices; we have to stop conforming to the patterns of this world and be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can know the good, perfect and pleasing will of God.” That’s all true, but remember the phrase that began that thought: “**In view of God’s mercy**, offer your bodies as living sacrifices.” Be worshipers. If you are worshipers and can see just a little glimpse of God’s Greatness and His Glory and His Mercy towards us, it’s really not a big problem to offer your body as a living sacrifice. It’s not a problem to stop pursuing worldly pursuits and sniffing the smells of Egypt like dogs do. It’s not so hard to turn away from sin when you understand the mercy of God. In view of God’s mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices...and that will be a fragrant, acceptable act of worship before God.

YOU DESERVE WORSHIPERS

Our God, Your Name is to be blessed and praised and magnified throughout all generations, and yet, we've let You down—our generation has let You down. Maybe other generations have as well. But we look You in the face right now, bowing our heads before You and say, “We've let You down...we've not been worshipers, as You've desired.” You've asked very little of us. You've simply sought worshipers and called us to be worshipers.

You've given us everything that pertains to life and godliness. You've built a wall around the vineyard. You've dug the winepresses, and You've planted the choicest vines, as Your servant Isaiah was told. And yet in spite of all that, we've let the thorns and thistles grow in our hearts. We haven't glorified You as God. Too many times, we've worshiped the created things—our own glands and possessions and our own intellects. We've worshiped such *stupid* things. We've deliberately ignored the fact that You are God and we have chosen to worship the created thing, rather than the Creator who is ever to be praised.

Our God, in shame, as representatives of the human race, as well as of our own households and our own personhood—our own selves—we bow before You. We're creatures that are simply lumps of clay, who You've caused this seed of Life to live within—this germ of personality, of soul, of spirit, of mind, the vitality of Life that came straight from Your heart, that we have no ability to comprehend. No scientist has ever been able to define “life.” These things are purely and clearly from You, and yet somehow we've made ourselves to be

“gods” again and again and again—in the way we’ve judged ideas and distanced ourselves from people rather than washing their feet. In the way we’ve cut ourselves off from Your Holy Spirit and seared our own consciences to Your voice, Your life, Your love and to Your liberty. Our God, we repent like Job in sackcloth and ashes.

You deserve worshipers. “From You and through You and to You are all things now and forever, age without end.” You’re worthy to be praised! HOLY, HOLY, HOLY are You! Your riches and wisdom are *deep*—far beyond tracing out. We’ve complained when we’ve hurt. We’ve complained when we’ve been slighted, or when injustices supposedly have happened to us. What is injustice, oh God? We deserve HELL! What is injustice? Why does a lump of clay complain? We have no right! Why do we do this?? We repent, as representatives of all of humanity, this puny race of people – lumps of clay that inhabit the earth. We repent before You. You’re a Great and a Wonderful and an Awesome God.

You’ve extended mercy to all generations, as You’ve made Yourself clear. Your testimony to the hearts of every human being has been clear. Even in creation itself, You’ve made Yourself abundantly clear that every man would be without excuse. And yet we’ve turned away from You. We’re altogether worthless and You’ve continued to love us anyway. Father, thank You for the provision You’ve extended to an unworthy population, to an unworthy race of people. Surely the deer in the field and the groundhogs and the kitty cats are far more worthy than we are. And yet You’ve loved us and given us a piece of Your very own Life and Spirit. You’ve given us an opportunity—though we’re created a little lower than the angels—to participate with You in the unseen world, in this life and in the life to come.

Glory to Your Name, Oh God! We have no words, but surely in view of Your vast mercy, we can offer our bodies as living sacrifices. We can reckon ourselves dead to sin. We can say to You and to the host of unseen forces as well as to one another, and to Your enemies, “Sin shall no longer be our master.” You deserve our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength. “Hear, O Israel.” We want to love You with everything within us, “In view of Your mercy.” It’s our worship of You that calls us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. We do worship

You right now. We're grateful that You've given us the opportunity to do that. We want to stop grieving Your Spirit, and we want to hear Your voice and harden not our hearts...maybe for the first time ever. Thank You for Your provision in Your Son, Jesus. And thank You for leaving Your Spirit until the work on earth is done. ***Great and Most Holy and Magnificent—Worthy of Praise and Love and Honor is Your Name.*** Amen.

AFTERWORD

ONLY GOD CAN MAKE THIS REAL IN YOU!

In many ways, I am very, very grateful to God that man is not capable of “giving” you anything that will change your life. And I am certainly far, far, far, from being capable of that. Paul said, “I am so glad that I didn’t have wise or persuasive words, and that I could never say it ‘just right’ so that you would have what I have.” He said, “I know I cannot give you what I have, just with human communication.” The tongues of men and of angels cannot give you what Paul had, what Peter had, what John had, what any other mortal has. Words alone can’t do that—it’s only seed. Only God can give the increase. Paul said, “I’m very glad that I didn’t have persuasive speech, because now it’s between you and God.”

I have absolutely no desire to be dramatic, but I am very frustrated. I didn’t intentionally use any elevated speech in order to inspire or motivate you. I just said what came to my heart in my inner man. And after doing everything that I can to try to express the limited measure of what I see and feel and experience... I am frustrated out of my socks, knowing good and well that there was nothing whatsoever I could really impart to you and give to you that you could actually have. “Okay, I have it now.” *It’s not like that.* It’s between you and God—that you would find Him, that you would choose to be a worshiper, and you would allow these seeds to dwell in your heart. That the seeds wouldn’t take shallow root, and spring up quickly with great joy, but fail to withstand the heat of the sun coming up with the trials, the pain and the suffering that are yet to come in your life.

The kingdom is entered with much tribulation. If you really want to find the vast storehouse of the riches of Jesus Christ in your own heart,

then you need to be like Paul and be willing to carry about in your body the sentence of death, that also the aroma of life might shine forth through your heart and life. It's not for you, so that you would notice and experience great and awesome things that make you feel good about yourself. Jesus already said it wouldn't be like that. The Messiah doesn't come to us in order that we would flex our muscles. He came so that when we are weak, He can be strong through us—in spite of our pain, and in spite of the things that buffet our body on a daily basis, and the messenger from satan that torments us. God allows those things to happen in our hearts so that the surpassing great revelation from Jesus can flow without us becoming conceited.

Welcome the testing of your faith, so that you might grow in perseverance. Welcome it, so that you might grow in character, and grow in your own revelation—something that flesh and blood can never reveal to you. *It's between you and God*, is all I'm trying to say. I understand fully that I cannot give you anything. All I can do is hopefully plant a seed in your heart, that you will go out and find God with.

I do understand there's a part that we play – “the treasure in earthen vessels.” “Faith *does* come by hearing, and hearing by the voice of God.” “And how can one hear unless someone's sent to them?” Like the Ethiopian eunuch said, “How can I understand these things unless someone explains it to me?” I understand that you and I will both play a part in other people's lives. We do plant the seeds, but it also has to be fully recognized that there is no quality of speech that can permanently and supernaturally change a person's life. Supernatural life and change is between every man and God. It's for a man, that he would hear the Word, that he would retain the Word and persevere in it, and that he would seek and keep on seeking, ask and keep on asking, knock and keep on knocking. “*I will be found by those that search for me with all their heart.*” God tells the man who cares.

Be a follower of the Nazarene. Hang on His every word. With the slightest opportunity you have to hear Him—as the birds are chirping, as the thunder and lightening rumbles in the distance, as the conversation happens within earshot, in your living room, in settings like this one—in any environment whatsoever, listen for Him.

Listen, long for, lean into, and incline your ear to the Shepherd's voice. "Hear it, retain it, and persevere in it." Cry out to God that He would take these little specks of dirt in your finite mind called seeds, and create supernatural life within you as you choose to believe Him! Live by FAITH and not by sight. Cry out to Him for understanding, as you search for wisdom like you would for gold and silver. If you incline your heart and your ear towards Him, He will miraculously, as you believe His Word, create supernatural life within you. Not necessarily so that you would notice it entirely—this is not for your benefit! It's for His Glory, for His Testimony. Cry out to Him and for one another that the testimony of the Nazarene, the Master Teacher from Galilee, the Son of God, would shine forth like the stars in the universe, and make a Great Name for Jesus. Not a name for us, not for you, not for me...but for Jesus! Cry out to God for SUPERNatural Life. "Rivers of living water gushing from the inner man" because you believe His Word regardless of circumstances.

Amen means, "so be it." Amen.

AND THE ANGELS CELEBRATE!

