

ROMANS



Day 193

“The Romans Road”

July 12 - Romans 1:1 - 17

Of all the books in the Bible, Romans has had a more dramatic impact on the history of mankind than any other. Romans is the mini-Bible, the Reader's Digest version of all 66 books. It is a crystal-clear explanation of the Gospel of Jesus and what it does for those who embrace it.

My views on God, as well as how He and I relate, have been greatly affected by what I have read and studied in Romans. I hope that this year you will experience the overwhelming grace of God in Christ Jesus and be liberated from the noose of the law and the guilt of sin. If you believe what you are about to read and apply it to your life, you will experience a fresh measure of the Spirit in your daily walk with Jesus. I want that for you with all of my heart. My hope is that I can explain some of the truths there and make them as clear as I can. I welcome feedback and questions. Please don't hesitate to bring anything to my attention. These things are more important than I can emphasize. Let's go!

Romans is the explanation of the good news, first proclaimed by Jesus Himself; completed when he said, "It is finished;" and then heralded by angels and men when the words came, "He is not here, he has risen." This is unparalleled news. A man once crucified is alive and working in the lives of men and women. No wonder Paul said he wasn't ashamed of this message. Jesus had changed his life and could change yours and his and hers and theirs...

And the basis of this change is faith and not works. It is simple, child-like, open-hearts-and-hands-faith that believes in and embraces the love of Christ

for one's soul. This faith makes things right with God to such a degree that God even declares the guilty sinner "Righteous!" Then God's Spirit works in the believer's life on a daily basis so that he can become conformed to the image of Christ. Finally, God will finish His work in us and we shall share eternity with Him in paradise, a place so unlike anything we have seen on earth that human language fails to describe its glories.

Paul's introduction includes a glimpse of the love he felt for those who were already joined to Jesus but who had not gotten acquainted with him yet. Paul was an apostle who had seen the Lord after His resurrection many times. Paul's commitment to the message of the gospel was without comparison. His life had been changed by the good news and he was devoted to bringing the same message to the world. Strangely enough, God had called him to go to the non-Jews mainly. This is odd since all of Paul's background was under Jewish tutelage. But Paul continued to see that God was opening up doors to reach Gentiles, and so he went.

Rome was on his list of places to visit and he was all the more anxious since he had heard of the faith of the believers there.

I have grown to love Paul and his writings. He was tough and he was tender. He was a passionate man who could speak to the crowds, but he also spent time pouring his life into individuals. Anyone who would listen became his audience. He was devoted to proclaiming Christ so that he could reach as many as possible and encourage their growth in Christ-like-

ness. Paul had a deep love for Christ's church and he spent endless hours building her up. In all of his letters you see this same message and concern for church people. He wanted their unity and growth, and he would not tolerate bullying by anyone opposed to true faith in Christ.

The good news was for a lost world. Just how lost, you ask? Well, Paul will spend the next several chapters painting the dark backdrop of sin so that the

brilliant work of Christ will be all the more illuminated. But from the outset of this book, Paul pegs his entire message on faith in Jesus Christ, both for salvation from sin and for a walk with Christ that is not measured by human effort but by daily faith in the living Lord.

God's blessings, by faith,
Pastor Steve



Day 194

"God's Wrath"

July 13 - Romans 1:18-32

Grace To You,
To put it lightly, God frowns on sin. One of the sins listed at the end of the chapter is "God-haters," which is an apt description of a person living under his own ego leadership. It describes the sinner as autonomous, self-sufficient and not in need of God. A great number of people muddle through life with an "I can do this" attitude and just eliminate God from the equation.

Paul is laying out an argument that will culminate in Chapter 3 with the conclusion that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Not one soul is excluded. Then he breaks down different types of sinners. There are the Do-badders, the Do-gooders, and the Religious-doers. Paul makes the case that no matter what group you are in, you will still sin and there will still be consequences for it.

Paul is saying that man has no excuses for his behavior and the condition of his heart. Later, he will say that the law was given so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world might be shown guilty before God. In other words, no one will get away with anything. God sees it all and He knows the motives of the heart.

Paul even says that God's power and divine nature are clearly seen by what He has made. We have already commented on Psalm 19, where it says that the voice of the Lord goes out into all parts of the earth, sounding through the "handiwork" of God that man can see all around him. Man may choose to worship what God made rather than God (and he does) but that is a corruption of what God intended. God wants us to see Him in creation. Look at the solar system—all of the beauty and variety and complexity around you—and you will get a good look at who the Creator is. All of us have admired the work of a famous painter, or author, or architect, or ball player, or hockey player and have readily praised the author of the thing we are admiring.

Now think about it this way: if God didn't make all things, then the only thing that really gets praise is blind chance, accidental forces, or whatever else you want to call it. Have you ever something really remarkable and gone away from it convinced that what you witnessed was a result of an accident? Let's go to the museum of stuff that was created by blind chance. Is that possible? I haven't seen anything like that, have you?

Paul says that God's truth is evident, but man wrestles it to the ground. He doesn't want to submit to the truth, so he denies it and twists it until it looks like the thing he wants it to be. And so, Paul says, sexuality is perverted so that man will believe a lie and follow the desires of his flesh no matter where that may lead him.

Then Paul gives a list of sins that describe the extent of mankind's depravity. How far has man fallen away from God's righteousness? Read Paul's list again, and also his conclusion that not only do people do these things, but they are delighted when others do them too.

Let's make a few applications:

What is it about creation that you admire the most?

Make a scrapbook of the pictures of that thing.

Study it and admire it and give God the glory for

making it.

(I love sea otters, for example).

Let's repent, turn away from, be repulsed by, and leave (not glorify or rejoice in), the sins on Paul's list. Neither let us laugh, pay money to watch, or join in when others glorify the things on that list.

Let's remember that it is faith in Jesus Christ that motivates us to go down the narrow road that leads to life. Many are proceeding down the broad road, but they will be led to the place of destruction. Let's not walk with that company. At the same time let us not look down our noses at those who do go down the wrong road because those who condemn them "do the same things." That is the subject of the next chapter.

God's blessings happen despite sin,
Pastor Steve



Day 195

"So You Think You're So Good"

July 14 - Romans 2: 1-16

Grace To You,
There are usually three ways people think they'll get to heaven on their own merits:

Most people would say that they are good enough. "I'm a good person," I've heard.

Second, people compare themselves to others and assume that God grades on a curve. They couldn't imagine God judging them when there have been so many infamous bad guys that put us on the good side of the curve.

Third, there are those who believe they have fulfilled their religious duty and should therefore be included. They think they have sufficiently kept the rules of their church.

Paul's point in this chapter is that human effort and merit are really no merit at all because no matter

how good or better than others you might think you are, God knows every single thing you have done or not done, as well as, the reasons behind those things. As a matter of fact, he says at the end of this section, "God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ." There is a verse in Hebrews along these same lines: "And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account," (4:13). The fact that God knows the true me can either be very scary or very comforting, depending on how honest I have been with Him.

Remember, Paul is setting up a backdrop for the gospel that cures man's disease of depravity. So he has to be very candid as he speaks of the true nature of man. We would like to think that there are people in the world who are good enough to get to heaven



“The Religious Man”

July 15 - Romans 2:17 - 3:8

on their own merits. But the question is, do we really know them the way God knows them? Can we see into their hearts and understand their motives for doing what they do?

Well, of course not; we have our own issues. It might make us feel self-assured to point the finger at really sinful people and compare ourselves with them. The problem with that is that in my own way I do the same things. That's why the law is like a hammer; it will smash us where we are. We may point out where others have failed and highlight their weaknesses, but the truth is that we do the same things.

Remember what Jesus said about righteousness. He made it clear that you could fail internally even if you didn't follow through and do the crime. For example, hating your fellow man was tantamount to murder. The guy who sincerely hates his neighbor may point the finger at the bank robber who killed two people in the lobby as he was fleeing, but the neighbor-hater is in hot water too, because God will judge his secret motives one day.

No man will be able to stand on his own merits before God's righteous judgment tribunal. As a matter of fact, God says that when a man tries to justify himself on his own merits, it is a slap in His face in regard to all of the kindness He has shown in Jesus. God says, "If you are righteous enough to share my heaven without my help then, you would be equal to Me. You would know as I know. You would be like a god." Of course, this is the very thinking that got the devil in hot water, and is the cause of Eve and Adam's failure in the Garden of Eden.

When Paul says God will give to each person according to what he has done, stating that "those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life..." and to the

others anger, we should not assume that puts me in the category of "I can do it by myself because I'm a good person." That is the very point Paul is trying to counteract. Just a chapter later he will quote Scriptures stating that, "there is none good."

If I could make it into heaven by my own efforts or good deeds or righteousness, what does that say about the work of Christ and His statement on the cross, "It is finished"? It would invalidate the work of Christ. It would be like saying to God, "Thanks anyway, but I think I deserve to enter into your kingdom on my own merits."

People who think like that are very deceived or delusional or religious. Tomorrow we'll cover the religious man's point of view. Oftentimes, a man's religion gives him the hope that he will get into heaven by his own goodness. Oh boy! Paul addresses this false belief at the end of Chapter 2 and into Chapter 3.

So far we see that sinners are under the wrath of God because they deny truth, and today we see that the moral man is under God's wrath because he also rejects truth; the truth that no one is able to duck out of the reality of his sin.

Let the words of Romans sink deeply into your mind and heart. This book is the heart of the gospel. As you read it and reflect on its content you will gain an appreciation of the work of God and how much He did to bring you back to Himself. If you begin lost, you will be thankful that you were found. If you think you are not lost, it will not matter if you are found because you didn't think you were lost in the first place.

Jesus said, "I have come to seek and to save those who are lost."

Rejoice in Jesus Always.

God's blessings are gospel-centered,
Pastor Steve

Dear Friends,
I realize that many of you consider yourself to be religious. People sometimes refer to their experiences in church as a religious awakening or a religious experience. James said that true religion involved helping widows and orphans and bridling the tongue. For some reason I have always equated the word "religion" with a negative twist; to me, it referred to those who were counting on their religious works to gain them eternal life. This was certainly true of many Jews in Jesus' day and in Paul's too. I don't mean to offend anyone, and would like to say that the word can have a positive twist; it's just that I have not used it that way very often. I hope I can make this clearer while we go through the wonderful book of Romans.

As you know, the Jews are an extremely proud people. This is true in almost every area of their lives, but especially in their spiritual heritage. Paul says that they have every reason to be grateful, because God brought His Word to the world through them. Their lineage goes back to the Patriarch Abraham. God had told Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God spoke to Abraham and his sons; to Moses and David and the prophets and the priests. Theirs was a very blessed nation. God was using them to vouchsafe His Word for all mankind. This is a more important trust than words can convey.

Paul's message to the religious man, and in this case the Jew, is: "Don't brag; you break the very law you advocate." Think about what James says about the law in his little letter: "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it," (2:10). Many of the religious Jews had set their minds and wills to keep the law of Moses without fail. They worked and worked and worked to do all that it said. They even went beyond the law and made it harder on themselves, so that they could assure they wouldn't break the least of the commands.

Jesus says of them: "They strain at a gnat and swallow a camel," (Matt. 23:24). In other words, in their effort to be precise in keeping the law, they did well on the minor things while they were violating the majors like love and justice. Why? Because we all break the law, don't we?

Paul goes so far as to say that Judaism is not about nationality or birthright, but whoever is made new on the inside and desires to please God from the heart is really a Jew. Paul says it is not about circumcision and obeying the whole law, because if it were then no one would make it. All men break the law. It is only those who have had a work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts who can claim a relationship with God. "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," (2:29).

Jesus said something like this in the gospel of John: "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in his name, He gave the right to be called children of God, who were born, not of blood not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God," (1:12,13).

But if salvation is not by works, and if God gives forgiveness to undeserving sinners, then how can God judge the world when He forgives even the most vile and irreligious man? Someone might argue that his sins only glorify or highlight God's forgiveness. Why should he be condemned for something that God sees as a good thing?

Paul brings up these hypothetical questions because the good news of forgiveness could lead a person to these wrong conclusions, and some people were drawing them. In the Message it says, "Some people are actually trying to put such words in our mouths, claiming that we go around saying, 'The more evil we do, the more good God does, so let's just do it!' That's pure slander, as I'm sure you'll agree." This subject comes up again in Chapter 6. The bottom line is,

the free gift of God's forgiveness in Christ seems much too easy for the religious man to swallow. He says, "If it's that easy, people will be taking advantage of it; they'll disregard the law and commit all kinds of sins because they know they can be forgiven for them."

The religious law-abiding man appears to have it together. Others don't see much weakness in his character. He works hard at doing the religious activities that he feels will accumulate enough credit to his account in order to buy his way into heaven. He really doesn't need to lean on faith in the work of God, because he has his own portfolio of good works. He believes he does what he does for God and by God. But in his heart of hearts he trusts in his own religious works to shine in the heavens.

Paul thought this way before he encountered Jesus on that hot afternoon trip to Damascus. Listen to what Paul says about this in Philippians:

"Look out for the dogs (Jewish religious leaders), look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh (those who emphasize circumcision). For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason

for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews (a reference to standing out among his people), as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith," (3: 2-9).

I quote extensively because Paul's own story fits like a hand in glove with what he saying in Romans 2 and 3. Mark these verses in Philippians in your Bible and refer back to them. It will illuminate what we are studying in Romans.

God's blessings make you a truly religious person,

Pastor Steve



"Roll Back the Curtain"

July 16 - Romans 3: 9-31

Dear Friends,
When I was a kid we had a central movie theater where it seemed like the whole town always turned out for the newest flick. I remember seeing a movie there called "The Last Man on Earth" that scared the living daylights out of me. That theater had a curtain covering the screen that was thick velvet material, burgundy I think. I can recall how I felt just before the movie was about to begin, and they would slowly draw the curtain back and reveal the giant lion

growling to represent the movie studio that produced the film. It kind of sent shivers up your arms. There was just something about the dark theater that was weird. It had an eerie feel that I still remember.

Well, Romans 1:1-3:20 is like that curtain, but pitch black. It is the blackest backdrop to the unveiling of the most luminescent light imaginable. I have never been to the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, but I'm told that at one point on the tour they turn out the lights and you can't see anything. You supposedly

can't even see your hand if you held it right in front of your eyes. Now that's dark! The first few chapters of Romans are darker still.

An accurate way to view this is to picture a theater of moviegoers who are all blind. Someone can explain to them just how dark the place is and tell them about the curtain, and they may be able to conceptualize what the person is saying, but to them it's only theory. They cannot see anyway. Their world is always dark. The only way the intensity of the darkness would matter to them would be if they gained their sight.

Think about this verse in 2 Corinthians: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God," (4:3,4). But once that veil is removed, the light one sees is so spectacular that to go back to the darkness would be like a freed prisoner going back to his jail cell.

Paul has already made the case that God's wrath, his judgment, hangs over all ungodliness. He puts the "moral" man in his place by showing that no one is good enough because God knows the dirt on everyone. And he has made it clear that the religious man has himself broken the very law he wants everyone else to keep. Then the final blow from Paul's pen, directed by the Spirit, levels all men like the bomb from the Enola Gay leveled Hiroshima in WW2. Paul quotes scripture to affirm the point that is encapsulated in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

The exclamation comes in several phrases; two, in my opinion, are very powerful:

"There is no one righteous," which makes sense all by itself. Then he makes it perfectly clear and concludes that thought with "not even one."

"There is no one who does good." Is that what I'm hearing you say, Paul? And as if he can hear me he repeats, "not even one."

God's Word is clear. All are guilty. Me and you and that sweet little old grandma who doesn't look like she could hurt a fly. "Not one" is Paul's final answer to the question, "Who is good enough to go to heaven?"

So the good news begins with bad news. The

person who thinks he is good enough will have to look past the Bible to find a way. The Bible is clear on this point. This is a Black and White issue. There is no gray zone, no purgatory, no exceptions, no ifs, ands or buts. My sins have been put in the balance and I have been found wanting. Paul says that every mouth is silenced. The guilt of my sin speaks against me, and the law points out that guilt, and I find myself in a world of hurt. I am not good enough, God does not grade on a curve, and my religious good works fall far short of God's perfection. I am in trouble.

In the darkness of all of this, like a sunburst on a cloudy day, God's love and grace pour through the skies, giving me hope. At this point I realize that God has done something for me that I was powerless to do for myself. God provided a way. God gave me something that I didn't deserve.

God gave me righteousness, the gift of righteousness, wrapped up in the scars and welts and blood and pain and agony of Jesus Christ. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. 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. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood," (3:22-25). Wow! Awe! Unbelievable!

GOOD NEWS!

Shout it from the rooftops!

The end of this chapter is so very significant. If you have an ounce of your own righteousness to add to your salvation, then you would also be able to boast about that little part. But because Jesus paid the price and rescued us from the slave market of sin, we can only boast in Him. Paul said in Galatians 6, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," (verse 14).

Lay down all self-righteousness today.

Don't even go there.

Accept the gift of salvation that Jesus extends with nail-pierced hands.

Oh, the wonder of it all, the wonder of it all, just to think that God loves me.

God's blessings are radiant in Christ,
Pastor Steve

**“Too Good To Be True”**

July 17 - Romans 4: 1-15

Friends,
My boss called me over and asked me to sit down because she had some news for me. Boy, did that get my attention. Usually when the boss called me over it wasn't good. I was in the habit of clowning around with the staff and the public, and immediately thought I was going to get a swift reprimand. She proceeded to tell me that I had a very important phone call to take at her desk. What could this be? Was someone in my family in trouble?

Instead, the lady on the other end congratulated me and informed me that I had won third place in a statewide drawing of all employees. I had won a trip for two to a dude ranch in Arizona and all the money I could withdraw out of an ATM machine in five minutes. That sounds better than it was, but it still took my breath away. I could only withdraw \$200 at one time, over and over until the five minutes were up.

Every day until the day when I would go to collect my prize, I went to my ATM and withdrew \$20 at a time, over and over, so that I could get used to the way the machine worked. Let's face it: the pressure was on. All that practice paid off; I ended up winning the most money in the state--\$1,800 in five minutes. That stack of twenties looked sweet to me. It was more money than I had seen in a long time and it came at a time when I needed a new car and some other things. Really, it was a gift that I couldn't believe. Why me? Out of 100,000 entries I was pulled from the drum number three. I just cashed in the dude ranch trip and ended up with a cool \$2,600 in my pocket. Thankful? You bet!

In our last reading we learned about a free gift that was purchased with the life of a perfectly innocent man, the Lord Jesus Christ. How could it be that easy? Can't I bring something to the table? It doesn't seem fair that Jesus would do all of the work and I just receive the benefits of what He has accomplished.

What we find in Romans is that this gift, this good news, is the only rescue from a life of self-serving sin. The result of Christ's work is that He alone will get the honor for doing what He has done. People cannot stand up and take credit for their own part. Only Jesus will get the credit for dying for us and saving our souls.

In Romans 4, Paul illustrates what he has said in Chapter 3 by going to the Old Scriptures and showing that this is how God has always operated. He uses Abraham and David to show that God will only forgive when a sinner reaches out in faith and receives the promises that God has made.

Let's quote Paul: "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," (4:4,5).

How clear can the Scripture be? "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast," (Ephesians 2: 8, 9). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done but by his mercy He saved us..." (Titus 3:5).

But what about what James says: that faith without works is dead and that a man is not justified by faith alone but by works? James is talking about the result of salvation, which is a life of works caused by the new life a person has experienced in Christ. Paul here is talking about not the result, but the means of salvation, which is the finished work of Christ, grasped by faith in Him.

Then Paul goes on to David. He says David wrote about this very thing that we see in Abraham. God declares a person righteous, for Christ's sake, apart from any effort on the part of the sinner. Unbelievable!

Happy is the man whose sin the Lord will not count against him.

And again to highlight this remarkable gift from God, Paul makes it clear that Abraham was declared righteous before God even before He initiated the rite of circumcision. It isn't circumcision that qualifies you, or any other physical act. It is faith and faith alone. Abraham is called the father of all those who believe in Jesus because he is the father of those who believe by grace and receive the grace that accompanies that belief.

The totally depraved of Chapter 1 and the deceived moral man of Chapter 2 may not care what Abraham and David had to say on this topic, but the

religious person sure would have. These two guys are the pillars of the Jewish faith. Interestingly enough, in Judaism today there is no free forgiveness. A person only tries to put himself in good standing by doing good works and following the traditions of their elders. Muslims also trace their heritage back to Abraham, but they do not have provision for the absolution of a person's sins beyond personal piety either.

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift," (2 Corinthians 9: 15).

God's blessings, Oh, their depth, in Christ,
Pastor Steve

**“Jewels In The Gospel Crown”**

July 18 - Romans 4:16 - 5:11

God's Word is so rich. You and I are so rich because we have God's Word. I cannot think of a greater treasure than to possess the very Words of the Creator of the universe. His words give us hope because they are His promises to us. They describe the wonderful work He did on our behalf when we were nowhere to be found.

In this passage Paul is like a jeweler, polishing the beautiful truth that Abraham was saved by faith. Abraham simply believed in God's promises. God had promised him a son in his old age. When Abraham believed this, God then credited righteousness to his account. His relationship with God was based on trust and faith, not performance and evaluation. Abraham was a sinner like all of us; but he, like many of us, believed in the declarations of God.

Do you believe in the declarations of God? When you hear Scripture, do you receive it not as the words of men but as it truly is, the words of God? If so, like Abraham you are justified in the sight of God for Jesus' sake.

Don't you love this verse? "Without weakening

in his faith, 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, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised," (4:19,20). Do your circumstances sometimes weaken your faith because you don't see any way that God can fulfill His promises? Remember, God will keep His Word. What He promises, He fulfills. That is something you can bank on.

Paul paints the grace of the Lord with golden strokes in Chapter 5. He uses some terminology that may be a bit difficult at first, but after an explanation these ideas will come alive with very practical results. The first concept is justification by faith. Justification means to be declared righteous. When you are justified, you receive something that you do not deserve. In this case, the righteousness, the perfection of Christ.

In another letter Paul would write, "and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head

over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross," (Colossians 2: 10-14).

Here Paul spiritualizes the act of circumcision and makes it a picture of the removal of sins. Notice it is something Christ does for us. As a matter of fact, note in these verses all of the things Christ has done for us.

Paul goes on in Romans 5 to emphasize the many benefits of being in Christ. He says that for the believer there is a purpose for suffering. Indirectly he is identifying the believer with Jesus, the ultimate sufferer. Hebrews says that Jesus learned obedience through the things he suffered. Paul says that suffering serves the same purpose for us as well—it builds character. The greater the character you are, the more hope you have.

On top of that, the believer has the Holy Spirit, Who is actively supplying us with God's love. The

work of the Spirit is described throughout Romans. Remember the small nugget in Chapter 2 where Paul talks about true Jews and what true circumcision is? He says that it is all "by the Spirit, not by the written code."

Once again, to reaffirm the fact that it was God who worked out our salvation, Paul emphasizes our condition when Christ died for our sins. We were "sinners," separated from God and enemies of the cross. Paul says that Christ died for the "ungodly." Not for those who had their act together and had a heart for God. No, it was people who were, in essence, raising their fists at God and saying that they would live life the way they wanted to live it.

Notice the jewels that Paul says are ours in Christ: We are justified by His blood (by means of the cross we are declared righteous before God) (5:9).

We are saved from God's wrath, that wrath that is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (1:18; 5:9).

We were saved by His death and we are kept by His life (5:10).

We have received reconciliation, we are now one with God as Jesus is; we were once enemies but now we are friends (5:10,11).

We have ample reason to rejoice in Jesus always. God's blessings are true blessings, indeed,
Pastor Steve

in the heavenly kingdom? If I were to boast about my own works it would only be like throwing dirt on the brilliant work of Christ. God forbid that I would ever do that.

This section under consideration today only emphasizes what has already been said so far. Paul clearly states again that all are sinners and experience the result of sin, which is death. The question is "What are the results of sin?" The answer is "Death and sickness and disease and pain and all forms of turmoil." Death came through one man, Adam (note interestingly enough that Eve is not mentioned). Adam passively disobeyed God and took the fruit from the hand of his wife. She was deceived, but it seems that Adam went into the transgression with his eyes wide open.

So that we won't blame Adam for our own sins, Paul adds at the end of verse 12: "...because all sinned." We were all in Adam when he sinned. I think of it like a cheering section. The whole human race was in the grandstands that day rooting him on. "Go ahead and take it Adam," we all shouted. "Assert your independence! Stand up for what is rightfully yours! Make your opinion heard!"

Someone might say, "That's not fair, I wasn't there, maybe I would have said differently. God can't hold me accountable for what Adam did. I protest!"

And God replies, "You prove every day by your own sins that you are a son or daughter of Adam. You are no different. You are like the man in Chapter 2 who points his finger at others but doesn't consider that he does the same thing in his heart and in his actions."

In Chapter 5 we are also reminded of more benefits because of what Christ has accomplished

for us. Now we reign through Christ. What Adam did is no comparison with what Christ did. Adam unraveled the ball of yarn and Christ not only put it back together, He wove a beautiful tapestry out of it. There is so much more in Christ than we even can imagine. For example, "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," (verse 17).

Let's review:

Chapter 1: God's wrath is revealed against ungodliness

Chapter 2: The "moral man" and "religious man" are under sin

Chapter 3: All have sinned; men are justified freely through the cross

Chapter 4: Abraham and David corroborate justification by faith

Chapter 5: There are many benefits for a forgiven person

Practical review:

Chapter 1: God is aware of all of my sins

Chapter 2: I have no excuses; I must be responsible for my own sins

Chapter 3: I cling to the cross for forgiveness of my personal sins

Chapter 4: I can rely on the Scriptures for spiritual assurance

Chapter 5: I take God's promises and stock them in my daily life

God's blessings cannot be added to,
Pastor Steve



"Through One Man"

July 19 - Romans 5: 12-21

By now I believe many of you, who are sincerely listening to God's Word, have been broken by the great love of God. You are probably in awe of the wonder of God's grace. How could God demonstrate His love in a more sacrificial way? He

couldn't. He loved us to the Nth degree and showed it on the cross. All praise and glory and honor be to His name forever. Wouldn't you, with me, exchange any personal glory so that the name of Jesus may be fully glorified in our life and in the world, and one day

**“I Am Dead”**

July 20 - Romans 6: 1-14

I am not who I once was. If you met Jesus as a child, you are not what you might have become. You and I are different. Our identity now is Jesus Christ. God’s book says so. There are some mysteries in the Bible that I don’t understand; because of my ignorance I am confounded and sometimes confused and frustrated. Some mysteries, however, like the ones at the beginning of this chapter, confound me but leave me in awe and give me joy.

Christianity in its essence is identification with Christ. He died, I died; He lives, I live. Before we dive into this a bit deeper, allow me to make one important point about the first line in this chapter.

Remember that it comes on the heels of the truth that we sinners are freely forgiven in Christ and have been declared righteous by Him. We have learned that this is a gift that comes to the worst of sinners on the basis of grace, a grace broad enough to cover all sins no matter what the background of the sinner. Now someone might argue because of this that it would be God-honoring to go ahead and sin away, since God is so gracious to forgive sins. The more sins, the more God can extend His grace. Paul says, “No way, no how!” He argues that this is faulty thinking because of the change forgiveness works in a person’s life. Remember that Paul dealt with this issue once already, at the beginning of Chapter 3. Obviously, he thought it was important enough to revisit.

Why would Paul even bring up this topic if it wasn’t a common response to the good news of God’s grace? For the gospel is a gospel of grace. Do some people take advantage of the message of free forgiveness and grace? You better believe it. But if they read Paul’s thoughts in Chapter 6 they will be silenced.

I have never once thought that Christ’s blood was something I could take for granted. Could you imagine, after being rescued from some dire condition by a kind soul, you purposely go back to that same

position and put your rescuer in the same position to save you again? That would be stupid, wouldn’t it? I think you would be so thankful for your rescue that you would be very sensitive about putting yourself in harm’s way again. Some people do this anyway, but any clear-thinking person would say they are rude and despicable. We ought to do what is right out of a heart of gratitude. Wouldn’t you say? Typically, people will do anything for someone whom they believe loves them. And when it comes to Jesus, no one loves us like He does. But Paul takes it further than that. Let’s explore.

Paul says that we are united to Christ in His death and resurrection. The old us is crucified with Christ, and the new us rose from the grave when Christ came back to life. That’s what baptism is about too. When you go under the water you leave your sins there; they are buried as Christ was buried. Then when you explode up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. And when you do, the Bible says, you are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come, (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Let me talk very practically for a minute. What you believe about the death and resurrection of Jesus will have a bearing on your life. It will. Do you believe you died when Jesus died? Then why are you self-focused so much of the time; guilt-ridden and talking about your failures as if the more you moan, the greater the chance you will feel better about things? The Bible says simply, “Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus,” (Romans 6:11). And “sin shall not be your master because you are not under the law, but under grace,” (6:14). Now give your body to God. Your eyes, ears, mouth, hands, legs, feet, your whole heart and mind; give it all to God. Do not hold back. You have every reason to give yourself to the one who gave you free-forgiveness through His sacrifice.

What Paul is saying here is that our union with

Christ motivates us to be true to Him. Isn’t this the same in marriage? It is our union to our partner that motivates us to be true to our partner. When a couple gives their vows, they make promises about their body parts. They are saying: my body is no one else’s, it is only yours; I give myself to you and you alone. So Paul is saying that because you are now united to Christ, you must be devoted to Christ. Don’t go back

and live like you once did, because that would be adultery; a spiritual mockery.

I hope you are enjoying Romans. There is something in Romans for all of us all of the time. Keep reading and studying this awesome book.

God’s blessings unite us to Christ,
Pastor Steve

**“The New Way Of The Spirit”**

July 21 - Romans 6:15 - 7:6

Some people see joining the church as similar to joining a service club in town. That’s where you pay your dues, do your service, attend the meetings and make the acquaintance of others. You follow the rules of the club and off you go. Well, that is not the way it is with the church. The church is not a club or even an organization for that matter. The church is a body; it is the body of Christ. We are now grafted into Him and experience Him working in our lives. This has many ramifications, some of which Paul alludes to in our reading today.

In our last reading, we discovered that we are no longer slaves of sin because we died to it. Here we read that we are not under law. Law does not govern our life or our conscience any longer. Man usually depends on rules to govern his life. He can then measure how he is doing. If he’s keeping the rules, he feels well, and if he’s breaking the rules he will have a guilty conscience. The problem is that no one knows which rules are “the” rules. One man’s standard is another man’s joke. Then there is the problem of adapting the rules to fit my own likes and dislikes. Man becomes a rule unto himself and there becomes as many standards as there are people. So who makes the rules?

Even moral and religious people struggle with this because they are constantly trying to reach an

unreachable standard. Either they live in guilt, or they set their standard at a level they’re capable of living up to. It becomes a never-ending effort to keep a set of rules. Those on this treadmill will often be very judgmental and hard on others because they have to continually promote their standard to others, in order to convince them that they know what the standard is. That’s why Jesus blew the Scribes and Pharisees out of the water when he raised the bar of righteousness way out of their reach. See the Sermon on the Mount and you’ll see what I mean.

So those in Christ are not under law. As a matter of fact, Paul states in Galatians that the law was like a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, who is the end of the law as far as righteousness is concerned. The law merely showed me where I had blemishes; there was no way it could, in and of itself, make me righteous, because there was no way for me to keep it perfectly. Those who try to live by law only frustrate themselves because of their lack of power to fulfill it.

We who are in Christ are now under an entirely different law. It is the law of the Spirit, and He leads us and empowers us and fulfills the law in us. He is at work in our lives, transforming us into the image of Christ. Look at it this way: in Adam the image of God was smudged, but in Christ that image was renewed.

We have a new life in Christ. I can remember living by rule. It is wearisome and chaotic. I have even tried this with the Christian life, but it doesn't work because it contradicts a life led by the Spirit.

Paul also points out that we have become slaves of God. I love the way he puts it: "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." Think about that truth for a minute. After you were set free from the bondage of sin, you became God's slave. Bad thing or good thing? Good thing! Being God's slaves frees us from the tyranny of sin and law and the traps of this world. We need, now, to see ourselves as God's. Remember that Jesus said, "He who loses his life for me and the gospel, will save it," (Mark 8:35). Slavery to God is absolute freedom. Not freedom to do my thing, but freedom to be all that my Creator made me to be. That is reason to throw a party. Now I am truly free. I am free at last.

In Chapter 7, Paul comes back to his original point by using the illustration of the freedom of a widow to remarry. If her husband is dead she is free. In the same way we died to the law and are therefore truly free because the law has no more hold on us. Now we are dead to law and remarried to Christ, and the result is that we bear fruit to God. This reminds me of John 15, where Jesus said that abiding in Him would result in a fruitful life. Again the idea is that something special happens when we are joined to Christ. It is something the rules of law could never

provide. It is alive and active in us, compared to law, which was all external. The law may have guided us but it could not make us righteous. We needed the Spirit for that. Now we have a new way to live: the way of the Spirit.

And so Paul introduces us again to the work of the Holy Spirit, Who changes the believer internally, making a huge difference in our lives. We'll be taking about His ministry more as we go along, but in the meantime we need to stress that the Christian life is about being wrapped up into Jesus, walking with Jesus, and getting to know Jesus more and more. It is not about how good you are at keeping rules.

How about you? Is your righteousness dependent on rule-keeping?

Do you spend more time worrying about following rules then you do following the Lord?

Are you pretty judgmental of others, tending to measure them by your own set of standards?

Do you often suffer from guilty feelings after you have let yourself down by breaking some of the rules?

If so, then pray about it and see about the new way of the Spirit. He is waiting to lead you down this road of freedom and life. The Romans Road is a wonderful road. Enjoy the ride and you will be set free from the tyranny of rule-keeping.

God's blessings set sin's captives free,
Pastor Steve

the old me; or, another way to put it, the real me and what looks like me but really isn't. I'll try to explain this momentarily, so hang on.

Remember Chapters 1-3? Well how about putting it this way: "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature...but in the sinful nature (I am) a slave to the law of sin" (7: 18, 25). Paul says that this law is at work in the members of his body, so he has to fight to do the right thing. In Galatians, he says that the flesh wars against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, so that we cannot do what we would like to do (5:17). As long as we are in these bodies, the gravity of sin will weigh us down. We will have the "want to" but not the "can do." I can not tell you how often over the years I have tried to deal with the sinful nature in ways that have been unsuccessful. Many times I have convinced myself that I had finally conquered the flesh. Then the next day...

In my early Christian days I had a friend named Donny who shared with me that he felt he had gotten victory over lust. The next time I saw him, he despaired that he'd never know freedom from the tyranny of lustful eyes. You see, that week he had run into a poster of a famous "hot chick" and...that's all she wrote. His mind went bonkers. He couldn't think of anything else and it was downhill from there. Why? Because there was a war in his body which was stronger than the desire to resist the temptation.

We all battle. There is no one who bats a thousand. We are all in a struggle. In Ephesians 6, the famous chapter on spiritual warfare, it says we are in a wrestling match, a contest, a battle; the only ones who win are those who are strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. All others eventually fail. The victors are those closely associated with Jesus, who find in Him the strength for a fight that will end in His victory through His cross.

There is a very intriguing verse in this section of Scripture. It reads: "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," (verses 16,17). What is Paul saying?

First of all, he is trying to show us that the purpose of the law is to point out where I have gone wrong. How would I know where I have blown it, if there was no code to tell me? The law fits that bill.

The law is holy, just and good. The law points its bony finger at me and declares, "Guilty!" I shut my mouth at that point, because if I'm honest I would agree that the law is good and I am sinful.

Second, he is saying that God knows our true intentions. God knew that my friend Donny wanted to do the right thing, and yet he did the very thing he didn't want to do. Donny was merely proving that, indeed, he had nothing to offer in his flesh or sinful nature. But God knows the heart, and if your heart has been changed by the Holy Spirit, the true you, the born-again you, is innocent and holy and righteous. The "inner man" cannot sin. John says this in his little epistle at the end of the New Testament. He cannot sin because he has been born of God. But he does sin, because he is still in a sinful body with members aching to do the very thing the law says not to do. So even though I love the Lord and want to do what He wants me to do, I still sin. To others it looks like I am a sinner. But the truth is that the real me, the inner me, is okay because he has the righteousness of God.

Think about David. David looks like a horrible sinner from the accounts we read about him. And if David had those incidents to do again, he might have handled them differently. But from God's vantage point, He says that David is a man after His heart. How do you explain that unless the real true David is the one who wants to do the right thing despite his struggles and struggles and struggles. Can you relate?

Finally Paul cries out for someone to deliver him from this dilemma. Then who does he say comes to his rescue? He thanks God that the victory is in Christ Jesus: his Lord, his Leader, his boss, his ruler. Jesus is the key to the victory.

If you go to the law you will see, as in a mirror, all of your smudges.

If you go to Jesus you will experience His righteousness and find peace.

It's possible that you're reading this and thinking, "Well then, if it's like this, I'll go ahead and sin all the more because God sees my heart." But if that's your attitude, beware. That is presuming on the grace of God. God knows your motives. He knows if you really want to serve Him and be His disciple, or if you are "kidding." But in the final analysis no one kids God; all things are open before Him.



"How Spiritual Am I?"

July 22 - Romans 7: 7-25

Romans 7 is all about me and you. Some claim that they have graduated out of chapter 7 into chapter 8, and in the process have left chapter 7 behind. Bunk! I believe we, as Christians, live in

chapter 7 every day. Paul says here that the law is not to blame for our problems. The law is simply the catalyst for bringing out the utter depravity of my flesh. Also, there is an emphasis on the new me vs.

Do you love Him?
Then it is no longer you who is sinning. The real you is perfect in Christ.
Do you believe that? It's gospel.
But remember, sin still lives in your members and there will be consequences for your sins. My wife and I were talking today about people who land in the hospital because of poor health choices. What percentage of people do you think are in the hospital despite

good health choices? Really a very small percentage. Most are there because they've failed to do the things they knew they ought to be doing. We still reap what we sow.
The good news is that in Christ there is victory, in this life and ultimately in the life to come. Hallelujah!
God's blessings help us to overcome sin,
Pastor Steve



"Is Romans Eight The Greatest?"

July 23 - Romans 8: 1 - 17

Grace To You,
Some might say it is the Sermon on the Mount, but that section is three chapters.
Others may say it is Luke 15, where you find the story of the Prodigal Son.
I Corinthians 15 has a ton of good stuff, especially teaching on the resurrection of Jesus.
The romantics would probably cling to I Corinthians 13.
Many would say Psalm 23 or John 3 because they know those chapters.
I personally think Luke 24 is the number one chapter in the Bible, but that's just my opinion and I've explained the reasons why before.
But when all is said and done, it is probably Romans 8 that gets quoted the most. Romans 8 is a safe haven from the world and the theological battles that happen in some churches. Romans 8 is a place to find assurance and hope, and it is put in such easy-to-understand language that all believers can come here and drink from its refreshing, cool, spiritual waters. Have you drunk there lately? I hope today it becomes a spring of water for you during these dry summer months.
I said earlier that Paul would begin to unveil the

workings of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers. Here is where we begin to see how our relationship to the Holy Spirit benefits us. Paul says that if you have the Holy Spirit, Who Himself is the gift of God, (see Acts 2:38,39), then you know you belong to God and you can partake of all of the graces that flow from that relationship. On the other hand, "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ," (8: 9). In other words, the believer who truly loves God will have the activity of the Spirit in his life.
Chapters 1-3 put all of us in a place of condemnation—deserved condemnation. You know, the verse right after that famous verse about God's love, John 3:16, says, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him." Once you are "in Christ," God finds no grounds to condemn you because His Son took your condemnation. Paul boldly stated in another place: "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him," (2 Corinthians 5:21). When Jesus died on the cross He bore your sins and the guilt associated with them. He took your penalty on His own body. Peter says, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to

God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

Being free from guilt is a load off. It helps me to live with less burdens and more energy, because my conscience is not on my case constantly. And when it gets on me I go right away to God and talk to Him about the sacrifice of my Forgiver, Jesus Christ. His blood cleanses me from all sins once for all. When we get to the book of Hebrews, this point will be made over and over again. The blood of Christ cleanses our conscience from all of the muck and mire that has weighed us down, and gives us freedom to love God and others.

Paul says we are under a new law, the law of the Spirit of life. Under this law I am not bound to the old law of sin and death any longer. The Spirit is busy putting the spotlight on Jesus. He reminds us of what He did for us and what that means for our lives. The Spirit moves us away from the strife of self-righteousness, and moves us to focus on the righteousness of Christ. He fills our minds with thoughts of Christ and in so doing gives us peace and spiritual life.

At this point we have welcomed Jesus into our lives, we have been forgiven of sin, we desire to please the One who gave His life for us, and we begin to despise the works of the flesh when they put their tentacles around us and squeeze. We don't want that life any more; instead, we desire the life of the Spirit.

We are now under a new jurisdiction. The Spirit controls us now, and our new set-free nature loves to submit to His direction

Paul also says a few more things about the Spirit here. He says that we need the Spirit's help to put to

death those strong pulls of the flesh that we talked about in chapter 7. The Spirit will help us to deal with the lusts of the flesh that pull us in the wrong direction. The Spirit will also remind us that we are the children of God. Receiving Him moves us to cry out to God as our "Daddy."

Wow, Paul also says that you are an heir of God, a co-heir with Christ. Your inheritance is God Himself. This also means that you will have to put up with the difficulties associated with being a Christian. Others may mock you and put you down. Some may wonder why you don't go out and have "fun" any more. But you are under new management. And the Manager is busy re-constructing you into His Image by His Spirit in you.

How To:

How do I get more in step with the Spirit? Stay in the Word that He inspired. Peter said, "For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God," (2 Peter 1:21).

Ask God to help you to pray with the Spirit's help. He will help. Remember, "those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."

Ask God to fill you with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18)

Pray by asking the Spirit to guide you.

Walk in the Spirit today.

God's blessings are from the Spirit

Pastor Steve

**“More Than Conquerors”**

July 24 - Romans 8: 18-39

The extent of sin's effect even reaches to the creation. It groans, it aches, it reels; it is experiencing the decay that sin brought into the world. It longs for the day when God will sum up all things. That day will affect everything, all of creation. We will experience the final deliverance, the renewal of a body that was destined to death and decay, and transformation into a glorious body like that of the Lord Jesus. What a day that will be! What rejoicing! What triumph!

And so, we who have the fruits of the Holy Spirit in us because of our association and identification with Jesus, have hope of a better future day when the full effects of sin will be dismantled and God will make all things right.

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit helps us. He is active in our prayers when we go to God in Jesus' name. The Spirit knows what the will of the Father is and He can help us to pray on target, so to speak. We don't always know what we should be praying. We pray one way and then another, and a lot of the time we are just shooting in the dark. But when we rely on the Spirit to help us in prayer, He does. There have been many times at many different prayer meetings when I knew the Spirit was leading us along because of the content of our prayers. I think it may even be better to just go to prayer and let the Spirit lead. Sometimes when we try to figure out our prayers I think we can get in the way. Simply bow and pray and begin to talk to God; you will find a welcome assistance that will sail you along as you pray. "The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will," (8:27).

Now God invites us into His counsel and gives us a glimpse of the heavenly movement. God did this before, in the book of Job. Remember? We were invited into a conversation between God and the devil and then we were told how things work out for good old Job. Sometimes God will allow us a peek into the

somewhat hidden things so that we can appreciate His sovereign rule over all things. Things may seem out of control to us, with our limited perspective, but God has all things in the scope of His council.

He is working in our lives. That truth boggles my mind. The God of all creation is at work in our little lives today? Why? Because He loves us and has a plan for our lives. Paul says that He is working in His children's lives for the good. There are good ends for each and every circumstance in our lives. How He can do that and also work with my will is a mystery, but He does. God is not limited by the will of man. Some may teach that He is, but I personally do not believe it. I think Paul is confident that God is in control of all things. Otherwise, how could he say that all things are working together for good, unless God works in all things? God can take the crummiest of circumstances and work out His good plan in them.

I experience Romans 7, but I also experience Romans 8. Eight does not negate 7. We still will struggle with the old flesh. It will continue to pull us down. But the truths in Romans 8 should give us hope. God is at work in our lives and He is working through all of our circumstances to complete His. How do I know this? Well, look at what follows Romans 8:28. God's foreknowledge, or the placement of His love on our lives, led Him to predestine us to conform to the image of Jesus. Then Paul gives a chain of events that describes the life of a believer:

Those He Predestined, He also called. John 10 says that Jesus knows His sheep and calls them by name.

Those He Called, He justified. Remember that it was the blood of Jesus that is the basis for God to justify us or declare us righteous.

Those He Justified, He glorified. He will bring us safely into His heavenly presence. He started the process and He will finish it. He is the author and finisher

of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

So how do you respond to these great truths?

Obviously, God is for you. And God is gracious. And man cannot thwart the will of God because it is God who has worked and is working in your life. There is no condemnation your way. As a matter of fact, nothing can separate you from Jesus. Nothing, no way, no how. You are a conqueror in Christ. Let me say that again: You are a conqueror in Christ. That is who you are. Man may say differently, but God is true and His

Word is true. Our response will determine how we live today.

I invite you to join me in living victoriously in Jesus today as a conqueror. John says that the victory that overcomes the world is our faith (1 John 5:4). Put your faith in these truths today and you will grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Enjoy!

God's blessings make us conquerors,
Pastor Steve

**“God's Choice...Of Us”**

July 25 - Romans 9: 1-21

Ihope your reading in Romans has been profitable for your spiritual journey so far. We are almost home, but the last trek of the Romans Road will bring us through some winding parts where our conventional thinking about God and His purposes will be challenged.

I think most of us have a mental view of God that we have constructed over the years based on our own circumstances. I like to think of God as a good Father who has my best interest in mind, even as I do for my kids. He tells me He loves me and reminds me over and over that I am His. This is actually what we read in Romans 8, isn't it? Now we can call God our "Daddy" because of what He has done for us through the Son of God, Jesus.

The call for salvation goes out into all the earth. Men see God's work in the created order and the message of salvation goes out from the church everywhere. Later God will judge all men on the basis of what they did in response to the Son. Someone once said that, theoretically, on the door of heaven it says "Whoever wills may come," and once you are on the inside you see that the inside of the door says "Chosen before the foundation of the world." The fact that

God has chosen "His people" is indisputable. Somehow God works in the hearts of people, drawing them into the kingdom of God. If God didn't do this what would happen? Romans 3 says that man would go on in his own way, lost and blind and stumbling to find his way in life. Only by embracing the work of Christ on the Cross can a person find help.

Paul expresses his desire to see his own countrymen saved, but makes it clear that their unbelief does not negate what God is doing in the world. As a matter of fact, it was through Israel that the Christ descended. He came through Abraham's son Isaac and not through Ishmael. Why? Because salvation would come through grace, and through a promise in which men would trust and be saved. Isaac was the son of promise, and so the blessings of God's promise to Abraham would come to those who believe in the promised one, Jesus Christ. It didn't matter if you were Jew or not, salvation would be for those who place their faith in Jesus.

Isaac's wife Rebecca had two boys, twins, but God had already decided that the promise would be fulfilled through Jacob and not Esau. It would be easy to figure out why if we could base God's choice on His

foreknowledge that Esau would be a bad egg and Jacob a good bird. But Paul makes it clear that that isn't the issue at all. "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—" and also, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." If it's not based on works, then it appears unfair that God would choose one over the other. Why couldn't He have chosen both?

Paul anticipates this objection and answers it. "What then shall we say? Is God unjust?" Paul answers his own question: "Not at all!" Then as he delves into this he says later, "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'" If God chooses one and leaves the other in his sins, how can that be fair? This would have been the perfect place for Paul to talk about free will and how it depends on the choice of men, but he doesn't, does he? His answers point back to God's choice. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy...But who are you, O man, to talk back to God...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?"

I would encourage you to go back and re-read Romans 8 and 9 and let the Bible speak for itself. Paul may be speaking to you when he anticipates your objection: "Who are you?" That is the lesson in Job as well. "Who are you, Job?" "Do you understand the mysteries of God? Do you know the ways of the Almighty?" In the end, Job's response was remorse that he had judged God's good judgment.

Do you love God? Do you enjoy His words? Is your heart willing to be obedient to Him? Do you work for the unity of the church and use your spiritual gift(s) in the church? Then you are chosen by God. You can thank God for His choice of you, and you can urge others to come to Christ so that they too can enjoy the benefits of being a child of God.

"By grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast," (Ephesians 2:8,9)

God's blessings are according to God's choice,
Pastor Steve



"Even Us"

July 26 - Romans 9:22 - 10: 4

Yesterday we learned that God decided to choose us on the basis of His mercy and not on anything that impressed Him in us. When he looked into our hearts all He saw was egotism. We were set on doing our own will until God came along and had a tremendous amount of grace upon us. Remember that in Romans 8 we saw God's progression in dealing with us: Predestined - Called - Justified - Glorified. We, who are the objects of His mercy, were called to Christ so that we might show the riches of His mercy for His own glory.

What would be God's motivation to send His one and only Son to give His life for sinners? Paul gives us a direct answer to this in Ephesians 1: "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him, In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intentions of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved," (verses 4-6). Sounds a lot like Romans, doesn't it? Paul taught with continuity. He exalted the grace of God in

all of his writings. The Holy Spirit was guiding him as he penned the words of Scripture.

Who are those who get mercy? The deserving? No, mercy means not getting what you deserve. You deserve judgment, as Paul has been explaining all along the Romans Road, but God is willing to give mercy to sinners. "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," (5:8). Jesus died for us when we were on the other side. We were in darkness, separated from God, and spiritually dead. Then, because God loves us, we read in Ephesians again: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (2: 4,5).

Then Paul goes on to give the words of the prophets who had declared that God would have a people consisting of Jews and Gentiles. He also points out that unless God had stepped in and shown mercy, the human race would have looked like Sodom and Gomorrah, where no one was saved except for just a few fortunate ones.

The Romans Road is a highway of faith in Jesus Christ. He is a stumbling block to those who would like to come to God in any other way. If you exclude Him, you will be excluded. Jesus is the end of the law to those who put their trust in Him, because God's way

of righteousness is through Jesus and not through human effort. Consider the arrogance of anyone who would think they could add to the perfect work of Christ.

Those who have the Spirit, those in Christ, have had the blood of the Son applied to them. They are now recipients of the righteousness of Christ. This righteousness is from God, for us, and clears us from all wrongdoing that has isolated us from God in the past.

Look at it this way: "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord,'" (I Corinthians 1:30,31).

Also, you have reason to celebrate. If you have faith in Jesus, you can rejoice that He has done all of what we are talking about for you. He took a sinful person and exchanged His own righteousness so that you could freely come to a holy God. Rejoice!

Third, no matter how often you think on the mercy and grace and love and blood of Jesus, you will always be able to go deeper than you have before. The depth of His grace is unfathomable. Just when you think you have it down, it will surprise you all over again. Jesus loves you in an incomprehensible way.

God's blessings are ordained by God,
Pastor Steve



"Jesus Is Lord"

July 27 - Romans 10: 5 - 11: 10

A few days ago we skipped over a very important verse that is reiterated here in this section. "Theirs (the Jews) are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen," (9:5). Who is the Christ? He is none other than God. In Hebrews it says,

"But of the Son He says, 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom,'" (1:8). Is there any doubt as to the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ?

It is faith in Him that saves, and Paul lays this out here in Romans 10. True faith originates in the heart.



You have to believe from the heart that Jesus Christ is alive, and confess (or speak with your mouth) that He is Lord. I'll never forget how, the night I accepted the Lord, my girlfriend bought a "Jesus is Lord" bumper sticker and slapped it right on the back of my little VW Beetle. For some reason that small act helped to change my identity. I was no longer the lord of my life; there was a new boss. I was now under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Look at what Paul lists as the benefits of coming to Christ. He says that you will not be ashamed or disappointed. I have found that to be true. Second, he says that Jesus richly blesses all who call on Him. I have found that to be the case as well. The connection I have with my spiritual family far outweighs any other relationship I have experienced. There is a bond that goes way beyond the natural relationships that form between people with whom you have things in common. To know people who love you simply because you are friends and you have the Lord in common is a very pleasurable experience. We have the same Lord. He is a good Lord, a benevolent King, a friend who sticks closer than a brother. In what ways has Jesus blessed your life?

For the rest of this chapter and into chapter 11 Paul wants to make it clear that anyone can call on the Name of the Lord and be rescued from sin. God's people are Jews and Gentiles alike, and they come from every continent on the globe. They are a remnant, a people chosen by grace. Grace is defined as undeserved favor. That's why Paul makes such a big deal about God's choice not being in correlation with a person's works. If God gave grace based on a man's works, then no one would be saved.

"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. What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did, the others were hardened..." (verses 5-7).

Grace is God's "loving kindness," a word used

frequently in the Old Testament, which is the New Testament equivalent of grace. God Foreknows - Predestines - Chooses - Justifies - Glorifies. His elect are the beneficiaries of His inheritance, and what the "graced ones" find out is that God has placed His love on them and given them grace, grace to be saved by faith (Ephesians 2: 8,9).

Let's look at a couple of other verses that will parallel what we have been saying. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice..." (1 Peter 1: 3-6); and "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things (the qualities he had just talked about like faith and moral excellence and knowledge, etc.), you will never stumble," (2 Peter 1:10).

A growing Christian is always reminding himself about the importance of Christ. He stays in the Word and is reminded of the grace and mercy of God. Because of this, he has few doubts about his own place in God's kingdom. He hears the Spirit telling him that he is a child of God and loved dearly by God.

Is Jesus the Leader of your life today?

Have you committed the day to Him?

Let's pray: "Lord, be the leader of our lives today. Make your ways clear to us so that we can go your way. We do not want to call our own shots. We have tried that, Jesus, and have only found it to be a detour from your good purposes for our lives. Show me today, Lord Jesus, what it would mean for me to be under your control absolutely. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

God's blessings teach the grace of God,
Pastor Steve

"Mercy Upon All"

July 28 - Romans 11:11-32

"He came to His own but His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them he gave the right to be called the sons of God, even to those who believed in His name," (John 1: 12).

God's chosen people, the Jews, started well but ended poorly. They began by faith, like Abraham, and ended with trying to justify themselves by works. I see this trend in the church and sometimes in my own life too. We are saved by grace, and yet from time to time we attempt to feel good about ourselves by our works.

This works in reverse as well. We can overly emphasize our failures and forget the blood of Jesus. Instead of coming to the Lord and confessing our sins, we try to make up for them by balancing the scales with a better day tomorrow. God's remedy is 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

How about you? Are you trusting in the grace of God from day to day? Are you overly concerned about impressing others, justifying your actions, or comparing yourself with others? Remember, Paul said earlier that where the Jews fell short was in attempting to establish their own path for righteousness apart from Christ.

Despite all of the light that they had received over the years, they went about things not according to God's way but to their own.

The fall of the Jews meant that the message of the gospel would go to the Gentiles. Paul, as we have said before, was the apostle to the Gentiles even though he was a Jew. He reminds us all in this section that when it comes to our salvation and the fall of the Jews, our attitude should not be arrogant, but humble. It was through their heritage that our blessings have come. And now Paul's hope is that they will be moved

to Christ through these blessings. He says that God is able to graft them back into the tree (a picture of the elect ones mentioned in chapters 8 and following).

The crux of the matter is belief and faith in God. Those who persist in unbelief, whether Jew or Greek, must come to Christ for salvation. He is the Deliverer who rescues His people. Eventually all Israel will be saved. Does this mean all Jews will one day be saved? Remember who the true Jews are. Paul made this clear in earlier chapters, saying that a true Jew is one who is a Jew inwardly, with a heart that has been heart circumcised. One day all Israel will be saved, because all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, will be saved, and these believers are the "true Israel." Do you buy that? Think about it in the context of what Paul has already told us about true Judaism. All will come to God the same way—through faith in Jesus. There will be no national salvation because of your bloodline; we must all come by faith as Paul has taught throughout the book. Can you imagine him emphasizing faith all along, and then suddenly teaching that a particular nation will be saved? On what basis would that fit with the rest of his theology?

The main point here is that God shows mercy to Jew and Gentile alike. He has sent a Deliverer who earned salvation for any man who calls on His Name. "Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," (Romans 10:13). What a privilege to tell someone about the great love of God through Christ.

With whom would you like to share your faith in Christ? Take a moment to pray for that person, and for God to open up an opportunity for you to share your personal story of salvation through Christ.

Rejoice in Jesus Always.

God's blessings make the gospel powerful in our lives,

Pastor Steve

**“True Worship”**

July 29 - Romans 11:33 - 12:21

Hello Friends,
We were made to worship God. All of Creation was made to worship God. Isaiah 55:11,12 says, “So shall My word be which goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. For you will go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”

Worship is a universal desire. We were made to worship. But remember, as Paul pointed out in Chapter 1, that often man distorts worship; and instead of making God the object of his worship, he worships things and images.

In Romans we have been in some pretty deep water. We have seen the sovereignty of God in ways that maybe some have never considered before. We have been a bit confused by the statements of God’s election and choice of His people. We, like Paul’s hypothetical man, have said, “How can that be?” or, “that doesn’t seem fair.” We, like Paul’s first century readers, have wondered how suffering fits into God’s plan, because it doesn’t seem to fit our ideas about a loving God. Paul does not pussyfoot around with any of the difficult issues. He lays them out and serves them up on a plate for us to eat and digest. So by this point in the book you may have a bit of indigestion. Roloids, anyone? Paul’s response is a doxology that magnifies the wisdom and autonomy of God.

He cries out: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unreachable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” In other words, good luck figuring God out; He is incomprehensible and we cannot understand the kind of mind He has or make the judgments that He makes.

Paul goes on, “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?” Who has the

final word? God. Who knows what’s best for everyone? God. Who sees all and knows all? God. Who can understand what goes on in His mind? No one.

Then: “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” God is debtor to no man. He doesn’t need a thing. He is self-sufficient. How do we know this? “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.”

Remember the story of the small child who asks his father for two bucks and then goes to the store to buy a present for his daddy? The child, with delight, buys a gift with “his money” and brings the present to his dad. The money was from him and through him and to him. The child was only able to use what his dad had given him, for a delightful reason. This is the way it is with everything we have. All that we have is from God without exception. Someone may protest, “Wait a minute, I earned it, I did the work!” Where did you get the health and the strength and the brain-power and the energy to earn it? “... from Him...are all things.”

In view of all of this, what should I do? Give myself to God. If I do, He will have mercy. If I do, I worship. God wants me in worship. My gift back to God is me. God made me and He wants me and He will forgive me of my sins so that I can get to know Him.

In light of this, I see a theme in the previous chapter and this one. The idea is HUMILITY. In chapter 11 humility meant not judging the Jews or moving them out of the scope of God’s forgiveness, because God was able to bring them back in. In chapter 12, it is humility in the way we treat one another and our enemies. Look at 12:3, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.” And verse 16: “Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” Do you see what I mean?

Then the other subjects here in this chapter,

which is very practical indeed, come into focus so that we can see the Christian life through the lens of the great things God has done for us in Jesus.

For example: When you live humbly:

You will know the will of God and want to do it, 12:2.

You will find your place in the Body of Christ, 12:4-8.

You will care about and love others from the heart, 12: 9-13.

You will love your enemies by overcoming evil with good, 12: 14-21.

All of this goes out the window, though, when I live in a proud way. When I put myself in the God po-

sition, there are problems. The opposite of the good things Paul lists will happen. I become worried about my own will and not God’s; I focus on myself and not the church; I make sure people are giving me strokes, but am not thinking how I can reach them and love them; and by no means would I consider loving my enemies.

My mind must be renewed. I must soak up and think about the things of God. His ways are beyond finding out, but when I accept His way as The Way, I am then ready to let Him lead my life and work in me.

God’s blessings are realized through humility,
Pastor Steve

**“Love Does No Harm”**

July 30 - Romans 13: 1-14

I feel sorriest for those who have inadvertently injured others. We’re talking about a person who didn’t mean to hurt someone, but it happened anyway. Maybe this person made a mistake and did something she will regret for the rest of her life. Years ago I visited a young man who had been shot at close range with a shotgun. He had 20 hours of surgery and months and months of rehab. The other boy, who shot him, didn’t mean to. He was just showing him his father’s gun. What started out so innocently changed the other boy’s life.

Those who want to show kindness toward others just cringe at stories like this, because they realize that they too could accidentally injure someone.

One of the words we have already heard in the same breath with God is the word kindness. God is kind. He has demonstrated His kindness through Jesus by offering Him as a sacrifice for our sins.

Think about it. God wants to do things for us out of the goodness of His heart. Remember 8:32: “He

that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things.” God’s kindness is so remarkable. He is kind to you and me; kinder than anyone we have ever known in our lives.

Kindness is just one of the practical qualities Paul commends to us in this chapter. Let’s take a look at a few other ideas.

Submission to authority: Paul says that God is in control of government. He uses government to shape us into trusting people, he disciplines us through the authorities, and being a good citizen helps us learn responsibility. Think about how unbelievable this statement must have seemed in the light of the government of that time. Rome is considered by most historians to be the most ruthless of ancient governments. What Caesar said was binding. He was sole ruler and would often resort to barbaric practices to have his way. Nero lit his garden at night with the flaming bodies of church members. Caesar Hadri-

an had all Scripture burned. These rulers were no friends to the Christian cause, and yet Paul says that we are to submit. From the Biblical perspective, God is behind the scenes working through even the most anti-Christian rulers.

Paul tells us, very practically, to be responsible citizens. I believe that for us in America this includes voting. We are to give honor to those in government even when we do not agree with their views or actions. Why? Because God will work it out. God has a plan and in some way He will even use the most God-denying leader to accomplish His will.

Debt: Paul tells us to not be in debt because debt quenches love. If you are in debt, then you are a slave to the lender. He says not to do that because it will drain you of the kind of love believers need to show to all men.

Love: Paul winds up the chapter with a theme that pervades all of his writings. That theme is love. If you have love, you fulfill the law. You will not want to harm your neighbor if you are a loving person. A loving person could not even imagine hurting someone accidentally, let alone on purpose.

When you love others, you sum up all of the commands of the law. If you love God, you will not

make idols of things or people to put before Him. You will not commit adultery because of the damage that would do to families. You would not murder because that is not a very loving thing to do. Love does not steal from or take advantage of his neighbor, but wishes the best for those he meets. The loving person does not covet, because he is thinking how to give rather than to get. It's hard to covet when you are focused on meeting the needs of others. Love fulfills the law.

So how do I love and give up bad habits at the same time? How do I let go of my wayward ways? Sex and vodka and hatred are hard to release if you have been into them for most of your life. Paul simply says, "...clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Put on Jesus. Pray to Him. Read His words. Tell Him that you will obey His word and then do it. Believe the declarations God has made in His Word. Thank God for what He has done in your life. Keep on praying.

Will you bow your head right now and connect with God?

God's blessings are kind,
Pastor Steve

I was getting ahead in life. If it wasn't about me then it wasn't worth pursuing. I thought the moral and religious guys were weird. They seemed to me to be wasting life on their own scruples. How boring! Now when I see adults acting the way I did in high school, I tend to think that it's time for them to grow up. I don't mean to say that having fun is a bad thing, but when a person neglects responsibility to focus on partying, it just makes me shake my head...at myself.

The difference Jesus makes in any person's life, no matter which camp they started out in, is a stark one. The Jesus person has moved residences. He has moved out of Me-ville into Jesus. Remember back in Chapter 6, about how closely identified the apostle says we are joined with Jesus? And in chapter 12 we saw that we were part of His body. You can't get much more connected than that. We are members of Jesus. We are all necessary. No one can look at another member and say that he or she is not needed. We all are.

Jesus' example and teachings show us that life is about serving God and others. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many," (Matthew 20:28). Now our focus is to be like Jesus and not to be corrupt (Romans 1) or self-righteous (Romans 2) or religiously justified (Romans 2 and 3). We are in Jesus and to be like Him is our new passion. We are no longer on the ladder to the top. We are holding the ladder for others.

So here in chapter 14, Paul makes some applications for us on how to treat fellow believers who may be different from us. Are others in the church different than you? You've noticed that, haven't you? We are all so different, and sometimes that makes it hard for us to get along. But now that we are in Jesus, we have ample motivation to learn to love the way Jesus loves. Don't you want to love the way He loves? I think you'd say that was God's will for you. Any objections?

In Paul's day people had opinions about the food they ate and what days were more important than others. This was especially true for those from a Jewish background. Certain foods were off limits and certain days were more holy than others. Some of the folks who grew up following these rules became followers of Jesus. Remember that the entire early church was made up of Jews only, until God showed Peter that the message was for Gentiles too. So the church became a mixture of

people from very different backgrounds.

I see this same problem in my own home. My wife grew up in the church. She had good values and a focus on the Bible. I grew up with the attitude "Live and let live, you do your thing and I'll do mine." Can you see how these backgrounds might affect our marriage and the way we raised our kids? It has. We have needed to learn to compromise on many things. Guess who the kids go to when they want their way? I have learned to say, "Have you asked your mom?"

Paul says, that for Christ's sake, you must be sensitive to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Don't flaunt your liberties before someone who would be tempted to violate his own conscience by doing what you do. He is convinced in his mind at the present time that it would be wrong for him to do what you do. So he sees you doing it, and his faith is weakened because he is toying with violating his own conscience. Look at what Paul says, "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."

For example, the issue of the best day to worship was one of the sticking points. The apostle says to not make a big deal out of it. Let the person who thinks one day is more important than another go ahead and make that day special. Don't look down on him. On the other hand, if you treat every day the same, don't make yourself out to be someone super spiritual. God has called us to peace.

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men." In other words, live under and by the law of love and you won't go wrong. Think about others before you indulge your own liberties. If you do this, you will be helping the weaker brother who struggles in his conscience with many things. Maybe if he sees your love for him, that you respect where he is, then his faith will grow and he too will see that Christ is all in all and that issues like these are not all that important.

Is there someone in your life who is driving you crazy right now because he is just so different? Let's apply this lesson to him, and you too will experience righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Love in Christ,

God's blessings help us to accept others unlike us,
Pastor Steve



"The Kingdom Of God"

July 31 - Romans 14: 1-18

Good Day/Good God,
The outright sinner, described by Paul in Chapter 1, could care less about pleasing God or loving others. The moral man, from Chapter 2, thinks he is the standard by which everyone else should be judged. Therefore, he is usually pretty critical of others. He wonders why people don't live life like him. The religious man, from the second half of Chapter 2 and part of 3, sees those who do not

conform to his religious rules as simply wrong. To him, it is do as I do, or else! He masks his talk with a lot of religious jargon and heavenly language, making others feel condemned for their nonconformity.

These points of view are each humanistic. They are man-centered and focused on performance and evaluation. In my early days I would have identified most with our friends in Chapter 1. The more I could dive into self-absorbed behavior, the more I thought

**“Accept One Another”**

August 1 - Romans 14:19 - 15:13

(Please allow me to do something a bit different today. I thought I'd try to write to you after the same spirit Paul is writing this section. Let me give it a try.)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Sometimes it is so difficult to put up with the idiosyncrasies of our friends with whom we worship at church. We tend to look around and find the flaws of others in order to justify our own lack of spiritual vitality. When we are close to Christ it is so much easier to put up with the foibles of others. That's what I have been trying to say so far. I want you to have a close relationship with Jesus and then carry that over into your relationships with others.

Do you have some strong opinions about the way things ought to be in the church? That's great, but be careful how you share your thoughts, because you could bowl over others who do not understand your thinking. God wants us to live peacefully together so that we can reflect the love of the Savior. Remember that He suffered to the point of death, not so that he could correct our sometimes faulty or weak thinking, but so that He could give us the gift of forgiveness.

What I'd really like for you to do is get into the Word and find in it the strength to love as Christ loves you. If you do, you will find special grace to be able to put up with all kinds of incongruities among your friends. You will then have the energy to reach out to a friend you struggle with instead of criticizing him. What does criticism accomplish? Not much.

If you are still concerned about him, go to him and try to talk sensibly with him about the things you believe in. But be careful to do it in love. Remember, love is the fulfillment of God's law. Keep that in mind. Let God's word be your encouragement. Don't let the Scriptures gather dust on your shelf--read the Bible, think about it, follow it, and you will find that it is a life-map, giving you the direction you need to love as Christ loves.

Remember that Jesus was able to accept sinners and bring them along. He put up with a lot of junk so that He could show his love. Let's do the same. You know how it feels when someone accepts you unconditionally, don't you? How does that make you feel? Pretty good, huh? Well, accept others as you would like to be accepted. This includes those who are from a different religious or ethnic background. It may be difficult because you do not have a natural affinity for them, but because of Jesus you can love them now with a new kind of love, the love of Jesus. You can do it. Commit it to God and He will help you.

Don't forget that it is the Holy Spirit living in you that will enable you to do things you never dreamed you could do. Once you experience His joy and peace, you will be out there in the world full of hope and enthusiasm for doing the will of God. Enjoy!

I love you in Jesus.

God's blessings enable us to love as Jesus loves,
Pastor Paul (really Steve)

**“You Are Able”**

August 2 - Romans 15: 14-33

What is your opinion of counselors and counseling? Your answer probably depends on whether or not you have been helped by a counselor. We live in a “hurry-up” world, a place with little time for deep conversation. And yet I think from time to time we need someone, like a counselor, to truly listen to us. If we do not regularly bring out the things in our minds and hearts they tend to sit in us, getting stale and rank, until they make us sick, emotionally. There is a proverb that says the heart of man is like a deep well and the wise man is able to bring out the deeper things.

Wouldn't you agree that we live in an impatient world? By that I mean that we tend to want what we want immediately. This way often results in frustration. Have you been around people who are more and more frustrated? Remember back in Romans 5, where we saw that our sufferings are meant to accomplish things in us? Things like patience, proven character, hope, and a new relationship with the Holy Spirit, which brings us into the love of God. How are you doing in the area of patience? I know that I struggle with wanting things to come together today. I get so disappointed with myself because I don't have my act together yet in the same old areas. I feel like Charlie Brown who could never get it together and was always being picked on by his nemesis, Lucy. “Good grief, Charlie Brown!”

One common problem in counseling is impatience. People come to counseling with unrealistic expectations or doubts about whether it will work or not. The real question is not whether counseling will work, but whether you will work in counseling. Problems are not solved overnight, nor are they the product of a smart counselor. People must be willing to recognize that their problems did not come about yesterday and they will not be resolved by tomorrow. Most people are unwilling to face that music. When

there are problems, a popular approach to dealing with them is to isolate oneself from them. And in doing so, the person usually isolates himself from God and his spouse and his friends, as well.

Paul's attitude toward counseling involves all of us. Come to think of it, this approach dovetails what we have already been reading in Romans. We are the Body of Christ. We are individual members of something that is alive and life-producing and spiritually invigorating. Therefore, Paul says, “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another” (15:14). Paul says that the church is to counsel itself. What does this mean in practical terms?

Number one, I need to be an active part of the church's life. I cannot afford to isolate myself from my brothers and sisters in Christ. I need them and they need me. We are joined because of our identification with Jesus. If we are not functioning well in the Body, the Body will be disabled. Do you know local churches that are disabled? It happens all of the time. I wonder how it makes the Lord feel. Not very well, I reckon.

Second, I need to be a growing believer. To be “full of goodness and complete in knowledge” I must be vitally joined with the Holy Spirit, Who is good, and I must grow in my understanding of the Word of God so that I will be able to show someone from the Word what God's will is for them. Are you growing? Then according to Paul, God will use you in the church to counsel others. Christian fellowship creates this and gives it opportunity. It is in the context of developing relationships that we are able to admonish someone toward the Lord's will. When a close friend is wandering from God, I want to be right there encouraging them to get back on track. It is much harder with people you do not know, isn't it?

Third, we need to step out in faith and ask the

tough questions sometimes. Paul's word for "instruct" is a Greek word that means to "admonish, warn, correct." He is saying that each of us has the God-ordained task of encouraging our Christian friends who are straying from the truth to get back on the Romans Road. Maybe they have forgotten and need some reminding. Maybe they have succumbed to immorality. Whatever has happened, God wants to use all of us to pull them back.

Here's a small collage of verses along these same lines from other apostles. "My brethren, if any among you stray from the truth, and one turns him back, let

him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins," (James 5: 19,20). "And have mercy on some who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh," (Jude 22,23). "And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men," (Paul in I Thessalonians 5:14).

God's blessings often follow admonishment,
Pastor Steve



"Good and Evil and Satan"

August 3 - Romans 16: 1-27

The kindness and love of God has drawn us to Jesus Christ. We now have a new life in Him. God's kindness changes the way we see others. The church becomes our family and the way we treat our family is with God's kindness. I think you can sum up Romans like this: God was kind to us/we are to be kind to one another. We need God and we need one another. God made us that way; no man is an island, so it's time to learn to get along.

Who are the people that encourage you in your faith in Jesus? We all need a group of people in our lives with whom we can laugh and cry and pray and... you name it. Paul ends this gospel book with a list of people who have had an impact on his life and the advancement of God's Word. They are not only men but a pretty good group of women. Paul acknowledges all of those who have been a help to him in the spread of the gospel. The message of God's kindness was Paul's passion, and the people who partnered with him were the ones he loved. Do you love the gospel? If so, you would have been one of Paul's favorites.

I love this verse: "Greet Apelles, tested and ap-

proved in the Lord," and "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me too."

This is our last day in Romans. It has been a good road. I am always revitalized in my faith after reading it again. The last chapter of a book is always important. It is meant to bring to a conclusion the many truths we have been reading. Let's look at it with the rest of the book in mind and bring to a conclusion the Romans Road.

The list of names is more than a list of names. It represents the life of the Holy Spirit through people. It is about the church meeting in homes, and about working hard for the Lord, and about simply being in the Lord, and about helping one another in the gospel work. It's the life of the church. It is the result of the gospel working in the lives of people. First, to change them, and then to send them out into the world to reach others.

The "brothers" are to greet one another warmly. "Greet one another with a holy kiss." I guess that would be with warm affection, innocently, not in lust-

ful passion but in brotherly love.

How important is the message of the gospel? Paul says that you are to mark out those who cause divisions and teach another gospel. Those who oppose the gospel oppose Christ and are to be avoided. In Galatians Paul says that any who preach another gospel are to be accursed. Why is this? To distort the gospel is to throw mud in God's face. It misrepresents God. How would you feel if someone came up to you and said he knew your father, but when he began to describe him you were flabbergasted because his view was nothing close to the person you know. You would be angry. He would be dishonoring your father by representing him incorrectly.

Then Paul says some very important things. He commends the Roman believers and then says to them "I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil." What should we major on? What should we minor on? Major on the good and minor on the evil. I think the message for us is, "Don't get caught up in the loose morals of the times." Spend the majority of your time studying and knowing the real, the pure, the genuine, and then you will be able to call a spade a spade. Paul said in Philippians 4:8 "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

The reason some cannot tell the true from the fake is that they do not spend enough time examining the genuine. There is a lot of fool's gold out there. Some people naively walk into traps by not evaluating what they are getting themselves into. Many well-intentioned folks have bought a bill of goods because they have not eaten from God's tree. Jesus said that

as the branches remain in the vine, so you abide in Me (John 15). Jesus says that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).

Another interesting quote from Paul here is the one about Jesus soon putting the devil under their feet. I'm not sure exactly what Paul meant here except for the fact that he was confident that through Jesus they would have whatever spiritual victory they needed. A common New Testament theme is that the devil has been defeated through the cross and that eventually God would wrap all things up in Jesus, which would mean a final dispelling of the evil one.

Let's finish Romans by reading Paul's benediction (Let's read it out loud):

"Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."

My friends, I hope that Romans has made an impression on your heart and mind. This book is one to go back to over and over. Martin Luther believed that every Christian should memorize every line of it. Whatever your commitment level is to Romans, I hope you find yourself on the Romans Road for life.

God's blessings,
Pastor Steve