

A study on the doctrine of...

“JUSTIFICATION” – ROMANS 1-5

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(*This study of Romans 1-5 utilizes the NASB text*)

Introduction

The Book of Romans is not only the most profound book in the Bible, it is the most profound book in existence. It has been appropriately termed the “*Cathedral of the Christian faith.*” Many theologians describe it as the most important document ever written. The book of Romans is the most complete explanation of what the gospel is in the entire Bible – it gives, by far, the clearest and fullest exposition of the doctrines of sin and grace. For the past 2,000 years God has used this book alone to change the lives of millions of people all around the world. Romans is a revolutionary book that will change your life. When Paul wrote this epistle to the church in Rome, there was a large Jewish contingent in the church, Gentile converts from paganism, and both free men as well as slaves. According to the end of the book, there were several congregations meeting in the city. Rome was the most important city in the world in the first century – it had a vast army, and it controlled all of the countries that surrounded the Mediterranean Sea. The rulers of Rome were extremely powerful and wealthy. At the outbreak of Neronian persecutions, Tacitus says that the Christians in Rome were “an immense multitude” – so there was a substantial presence of believers in that city.

The book of Romans furnishes a massive and basic theological framework for Paul’s writings. The theme of the book centers on the *Gospel of Christ* (Rom 1:16,17). Paul is deeply concerned that his readers understand how a sinner may be received as *righteous* by a righteous God; and how a justified sinner should live daily to the glory of God. Most commentators believe verses 16-17 of chapter one offer us a concise summary of the content of this letter; also in these verses is an expression of the essence of the doctrine of the Word of God – “*the righteous shall live by faith.*” Some of the brightest leaders of the Church have traced their new birth to this book. The list of those touched by Romans reads like a “*Spiritual Who’s Who*” —

“Augustine” was one of the greatest leaders and theologians that the church has ever had. He traces his conversion to a few verses in Romans 13. His godly mother, Monica, had been praying for him for decades that he would come to faith in Christ. His Dad wasn't a Christian. In AD 386, he found himself in great despair... he was a teacher in Milan who had given himself to the ways of the world... he was running from God as fast as his feet would take him... he lived with a gal out of wedlock – they had a baby... he got into sexual immorality... he got involved in the philosophies and cults of his day... he drank profusely at times... his life was a mess. One day sitting in the garden of a friend of his, he just began to weep – he'd come to the end of himself... he reflected upon his deplorable living and thought, “*How on earth could anyone accept me?*” While he was sitting there crying, he looked up and right there next to him was an open scroll of Romans. In his own words, he said, “I grabbed it and read the first passage my eyes fell upon!” This is what he read: “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (cf. Rom 13:13-14). Augustine would later write, “In an instant I came to the end of

the sentence and it was as if *the light of faith flooded into my heart*, and all the gloom and darkness of doubt vanished away." In that very moment, the Spirit caused him to be born again.

“Martin Luther” struggled for years to have peace with God – he knew that God was Holy, and he was not. He studied and prayed and tried all sorts of religious practices, denying himself, even inflicting pain on himself... he went into a monastery to try to find God, and he couldn't find Him there. He knew he wasn't good enough and so he tried every form of good works possible. As a last resort he decided he would go to the Holy City itself, Rome, with its hundreds of shrines. There perhaps by visiting the shrines he could avoid thousands of years in Purgatory. When he got to Rome, he was shocked at what he found – Rome was far from being the Holy City. The people themselves said, “If there was a hell hole in the earth, Rome was built over it.” Luther was shocked to find many of the priests and nuns practicing all sorts of perverted lifestyles. Nevertheless, he went ahead and visited all the shrines he could. The last great pilgrimage he embarked upon was one at the Lateran Church, which is famous for its *sacred stairway* – supposedly, it was the very staircase that Jesus stood on when Pilate condemned him to die; they believed it to be supernaturally transported from Jerusalem. Pilgrims from all over the world would come to Rome (they still do to this day), and climb the steps, one at a time on their knees. So Luther got on his knees and he would kiss and pray the rosary at every single step. While doing this he was interrupted as he was praying by a still small voice saying, “*Martin, the just shall live by faith.*” This happened repeatedly, step after step. Finally, Luther stopped his ascent and stood to his feet and felt like a man who had come to his senses. He thought to himself, “*What am I doing trying to make myself right with God with such stupidity? The just shall live by faith!*” It finally made complete sense to him. He ran down those stairs, quickly went back to Germany, where he did a critical study of the book of Romans in the original language – and the Christian world has never been the same since. At that point Luther began to see that the Church of Rome in his day did not jibe with what Paul had taught them in his epistle 1500 years earlier. Night and day Luther pondered Romans until he grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith (cf. Rom 3:20, 28). Thereupon, he writes, “I felt myself reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise; the whole of Scripture took on a completely new meaning; whereas before *‘the righteousness of God’* had filled me with hate [because he had been trying to obey the Law in his own strength], now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love.” At this point the Protestant movement began, and it spread like wildfire throughout all of Europe. The cry of the Reformation was “*The just shall live by faith!*” Thus history and the destiny of the world was changed by the book of Romans. Martin Luther writes, “Romans should not only be known word for word by every Christian... but each one should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul... the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”

“John Calvin” was another Protestant reformer whose life was profoundly changed by the book of Romans. He said this about it: “If a man understands the book of Romans, he has a sure road open for him to the understanding of all Scripture.” That's because the book of Romans is a little Bible in miniature. It is a book of Christian doctrine, and doctrine is very important, because your doctrine will affect the way you live – right doctrine will lead towards right living; wrong doctrine will lead towards wrong living.

“William Tyndale” was the first publisher of the Bible in English, and his life was profoundly affected by the book of Romans. When he finally translated Romans into English in 1534, he wrote this statement in the preface to the book – “I think it is important that every Christian not only know

the book by rote, but that he also continually exercise himself in it as the daily bread of the soul. No man can read it too often, or study it too well; for the more it is studied... the more it is chewed... and the more groundly it is searched, the more precious are those things that are found therein.”

“John Wesley” was a spiritually dead minister in the Church of England. He spent years desperately trying to minister to people without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He had ritual and religion, but not a relationship with God. Then one evening in 1738 he reluctantly attended a little church gathering where his life would forever be changed. Later he wrote of that night: “I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was simply reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans – *“I felt my heart strangely warmed, and trusted in Christ alone for my salvation; an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”* Wesley was used by God to start a revival in the New England colonies of America – the blaze was so great that it's still known today as the *“Great Awakening.”* Hundreds of thousands of people were saved, and the awakening spread to all of Europe. It was a marvelous move of God's Spirit. The power of the book of Romans is not just something that worked 2,000 years ago, it's power is something that still effects lives today. If you are spiritually dry or dead, this book can quicken your spirit and can cause you to come alive by the power of the Holy Spirit. One cannot read the book of Romans without the power of God affecting your life and motivating you to move for God.

Romans includes the most systematic presentation of theology found anywhere in Scripture. Romans is a classic – to the *Unsaved* it offers a clear exposition of their sinful, lost condition and God's righteous plan for saving them. *New believers* learn of their identification with Christ and of victory through the power of the Holy Spirit. And *Mature believers* find never-ending delight in its wide spectrum of Christian truth.

The three main reasons why Paul wrote this letter were these: 1) to give a clear explanation of the gospel; 2) to give practical advice about how Christians should behave toward one another and toward their rulers; and 3) to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians. In many churches, there were serious arguments between Jewish and Gentile Christians – the Jewish Christians said that God had given *His law* in the Bible; therefore it was incumbent upon the Gentiles to obey it as well. But the Gentile Christians said that God had given them *freedom*; so they did not want to obey any Jewish rules or traditions.

How did Christianity first reach Rome? Scripture tells us that a number of Jews from Rome were converted in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:9-11; 2:41), and carried back the good news with them. That was in about AD 30. Historically, the Roman Suetonius wrote that Emperor Claudius ordered the expulsion of “Jews” from Rome in AD 49 because a man named “Chrestus” had caused major trouble in the city – most believe this to be a reference to “Christus” (Greek word for “Christ”); the Jews were strongly opposed at this time to those who were preaching the message of Christ. Paul had never been in Rome when he wrote this letter from Corinth in AD 57, but he knew quite a few of the Christians there, as is seen in chapter 16. Christians in the days of the early church were people on the move, whether as a result of persecution or as heralds of the gospel or in the ordinary course of their work. Paul finally reached Rome in AD 60, as a prisoner for his faith in Jesus Christ. One further historical note: in AD 64 Christians received the blame for the great fire of Rome that Emperor Nero himself may have started. The writer Tacitus spoke about the great numbers of Christians in the city; he called them “enemies of the human family of people.”

In the following study, the “text” that is utilized is that of the NASB – in addition, it is in “**bold**” type to make it distinguishable from the corresponding commentary. When a word in the text itself is put in “*italics*,” that indicates that particular word is “emphatic” in the original language – as such, give *special emphasis* to that word or expression when interpreting the text. Most of the commentary on each verse will follow that verse (or verses) in a different, indented typeset.

Chapter 1

The Gospel Exalted (1:1-17)

¹ Paul, a bond-servant (*doulos*: “slave” – one purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ) of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle (*apostello*: “one sent with a message”), set apart for the gospel of God, ² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, ⁴ who was declared the Son of God (deity) with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

As an apostle, Paul was a “special emissary” (apostle) of the Savior... commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles (see Acts 9:15; 13:2; Gal 1:1). Just as God had chosen Jeremiah from before his birth to be His spokesperson (cf. Jer 1:5); so God had chosen Paul from before his birth to be His emissary (cf. Gal 1:15). It should be noted, just as Paul was a “slave of Christ,” we are also “slaves of Christ” (purchased with His blood), and are called to be “His witnesses” – we have been set apart to tell the good news wherever we go. Paul here talks about his personal subjection to Jesus Christ – a slavery undertaken “voluntarily” out of love, unlike the forced slavery well known to many in the Roman Empire. He wants his readers to know that the gospel is not a “new idea” – the OT prophets had promised it long ago (cf. Deut 18:15; Is 7:14; Hab 2:4). The gospel is the good news concerning God’s Son, who is a descendant of David (Mt 1:1) – which speaks to His humanity. That He was more than human is revealed in v. 4 – Jesus, the Lord and Christ of God (God’s anointed) speaks of His deity. As such, He was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit – furthermore, the miracles of Christ bore witness to the fact that He is the Son of God; the Jews rightly understood Jesus’ claim of equality with God when He referred to Himself as “God’s Son,” and God as “His Father” – (cf. Jn 5:18; 10:30, 36)

⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all Gentiles for his name’s sake, ⁶ among whom *you also* (emphatic!) are the called of Jesus Christ; ⁷ to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is through Christ that we receive God’s undeserved favor (grace) and salvation. Paul makes it clear that he was “commissioned” (apostleship) to persuade Gentiles to obey God’s command to trust Christ – the goal of this worldwide proclamation of the message of the gospel was to bring glory to Christ. So Paul emphasizes here that it was God who took the initiative in their salvation. Paul addresses his letter to all believers in Rome, and not just to a single church, like most of his other letters – all believers are both “beloved of God” and “saints” – these favored ones are objects of divine love in a special way, and as saints they are “set apart to God” from the world. Paul’s characteristic greeting combines “grace” (*charis* – Greek) and “peace” (*shalom* – the traditional Hebrew greeting). The combination is especially appropriate because Paul’s message tells how believing Jews and Gentiles are now one new man in Christ. The “grace” Paul refers to here is the grace that equips and empowers believers to live for and serve Christ; the “peace” he

speaks of is the “peace of God” that should reign in our hearts – even in the midst of a turbulent society, Paul wanted his believers to know the inner peace of God’s love. These two spiritual qualities come to us directly from God the Father and Lord Jesus.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. 9 For God (emphatic!), whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, 10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you, in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the others’ faith, both yours and mine. (carefully note all of the “emphatic” words in these five verses)

Whenever possible, the apostle began his letters by “expressing appreciation” for whatever was commendable in his readers – here Paul thanks God for the believing community in Rome, that their faith was being proclaimed throughout the whole [Mediterranean] world. Although he was not responsible for their becoming believers, he recognized how strategic the church in Rome was. As such, he “prayed for them continually” – the greatest saints knew they could not do the work of ministry for God or live their lives for Him without praying. Coupled with that, Paul desired to visit them in the not too distant future – according to the will of God. The apostle’s impelling desire was to help them spiritually (through the ministry of the Word) so that they might be further established in the faith. He goes on to explain that there would be “mutual” blessing in his visit – he would be encouraged by their faith, and they by his. Paul was careful not to emphasize himself as the giver – therefore he humbly acknowledged that his life would be enriched by their faith as well. In all edifying, there is spiritual enrichment: “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Prov 27:17) – notice Paul’s humility; he is not above being helped by other saints.

13 And I do not want you to unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am under obligation both to the Greeks and to the barbarians; both to the wise, and to the foolish. 15 Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God us revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.” (I’m only going to remind you of the “emphatic” words a couple more times!)

Paul desired to visit the believing community in Rome and have a fruitful ministry there, just as he had in other places. He felt compelled to share the good news with people of all cultures – “I am a debtor,” he says (vv. 14-15). Paul felt himself a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians – the “Greeks” were those who spoke the Greek language and followed Greek culture, and the “Non-Greeks” were those people whose language sounded like “bar-bar” – hence, they were referred to as “barbarians” – many Greeks thought this was an ugly and strange way to speak. Paul proclaims here that the gospel is both for the both the educated and the uneducated; for both the wise and the foolish. Paul was not ashamed to take God’s good news to the most sophisticated in Rome, because he knew it was the “power of God unto salvation” – regardless of whom it was that he preached to (verse 16). Paul realized many people would be ashamed to follow Christ. Jesus Himself recognized that (cf. Mk 8:38). Paul warned Timothy not be ashamed of it (cf. 2 Tim 1:8). Paul had suffered much for the gospel. The Gentiles though the message of the cross “was foolish” (cf. 1 Cor 1:23). But the message of the gospel is not wrong or stupid. It is a message of which to be proud; a message to honorably proclaim. Ashamed of the gospel? Read the next page!

Ashamed of the Gospel?

On the "Temple to Apollo" in Greece, an inscription summed up the wisdom of that day – "Know Thyself."

Those two words embodied the deeply held conviction that "the chief study of mankind is man;" that our wisdom consists in the accuracy and depth of self-knowledge. On one level Christianity has no quarrel with that analysis, so long as it corresponds with a personal knowledge of God, and our intrinsic need for salvation. What Christianity does deny is that we can know ourselves apart from God – though it is true that we can know much about man, we cannot know man as he is in himself apart from God's revelation. That is why Reinhold Niebuhr says, "Man has always been his own most vexing problem." Nothing explains the "nature of man" except the truths of Christianity.

According to the book of Genesis, God placed man in the Garden of Eden to be His vice regents on earth. He gave them maximum freedom, authority, and dominion over all the earth (Gen 1:28). There were no apparent restrictions on how they were to do it, except one – they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). The fruit was a tangible symbol of the fact that the man and woman were God's creatures – they were not God – they were responsible to Him – "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:16-17). A contradiction of the veracity of God's Word is the issue in Satan's temptation of Eve – "you shall not die" (Gen 3:4-5). Here, then, is the first revelation of sin's nature and of what is basically wrong with mankind: 1) Sin is unfaithfulness – it is to doubt God's goodness and truthfulness, leading inevitably to an act of outright rejection; 2) Sin is apostasy – it is rebellion against that sublime nature & destiny God made for man; and 3) Sin is pride – in the woman's case, it was the conviction that she knew what was better for herself and her husband than God; this was the original sin of Satan (Isa 14:14). As such, man is faithless, rebellious, and full of pride. So sin is everything within our being that is contrary to the expressed will of God (cf. Rom 3:20; 4:15; 7:7; Jam 4:12, 17). The sinfulness of sin lies in the fact that it is always "against God," whatever the sin may be (cf. Ps 51:4).

The questions arise, "How bad is man? How bad is sin?" Some believe man is only "slightly flawed," that he is just "sick" – observers differ over how sick he is: acutely, gravely, critically, or mortally. The Bible says man is "dead" (Eph 2:1), that he is "totally flawed." Furthermore, the tragedy of human existence is overwhelmingly visible to anyone who will honestly view the mounting starvation, suffering, hatred, selfishness, and indifference on our planet. The fall affected every part of man – his spirit died, for his fellowship with God was broken. . . his soul began to die, for he began to lie and cheat and kill. . . his body eventually died, for God had said, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). So man is now alienated from God, and unable to find his way back to God without the work of God's Spirit (Jn 6:44) – John Stott says our alienation from God is "the most dreadful of all sin's consequences." The result of man's alienation is expanded upon by the apostle Paul in Romans 3:10-12 -- 1) "No one is righteous, not one;" that is the essence of the moral side of every man. 2) "No one understands;" sin has also polluted our intellect and our spiritual understanding. 3) "No one seeks for God;" this is the area of our will – we have no desire to come to God; instead we make gods of our own making, in the hope that they will fill the spiritual vacuum in our lives. As Luther says, "We are wholly given over to sin" – we are enslaved to sin (Rom 6:6, 17, 20); therefore, the only proper thing for us to do is to humbly acknowledge our sin, and call upon the eternal God for mercy.

What does "sin" really look like in the heart of man? According to Scripture, man is totally corrupt, and has placed his own interests above all other interests; hence, man is fully "self-centered." His entire life is oriented toward himself – man loves himself; as such, God commands him to "love others!" (Mt 22:39). The sum of all the commandments is "love" – thus sin in its nature is egotistical and selfish; self is put in the place of God (cf. Rom 15:3; 1 Cor 13:5; 2 Tim 3:1-2; 2 Th 2:3-4); by the way, "self love" is one of the signs of the last days (cf. 2 Tim 3:2). Ultimately, men have their own self-interests at stake in everything they do; in some way, their intent is always to satisfy and gratify themselves. Paul writes, "Don't merely look out after your own personal interests, but also look after the interests of others" (Phil 2:4) – why does Paul say this? Because we "naturally" have a self-focus in life, and we need to be reminded to focus on others. Since our number one concern is "us," everything we do in life is to make us feel good and gain the approval of others; it is natural (that's flesh) to want others to "like us," so we behave in ways that elicit favorable responses from others. When people don't like us, or respond negatively toward us, we become jealous or angry – because our own "self interests" have been impinged. By the way, every human being operates this way; even the so-called "lovelies" among us – some just exhibit a more disciplined behavior than others – the fact is by "nature" we are all sinful and self-centered.

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Obviously, as Christians, we experienced a “radical transformation” within us! We were “saved from something,” and we were “saved to something.” According to Scripture, we have been “saved from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2); sin is no longer our master, and eternal death is no longer our destiny. This proposition will become very clear as you continue in this study. The Bible also tells us we have been “saved unto eternal life” – we have been “made alive in Christ,” therefore we will live and reign with Him forever! (Jn 3:16; 10:10; Rom 6:4, 11, 23; 8:9; Eph 1:5; 1 Jn 5:13). If you are a child of God, you are a new creation! (cf. Jn 3:3; Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). Your sins are forgiven – forever! (Rom 6:23; 8:2-3; Jn 5:24; Eph 4:32); though your sins were as “scarlet,” they have been “white” as snow! (cf. Is 1:18). You have been made righteous with the righteousness of Christ; the very DNA of Christ Himself has been given to you! (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:20-21). You are now indwelted by the Holy Spirit, that you might walk in newness of life – we were all meant to live in intimacy with Christ on the day of creation! We have now been re-created! (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 16:13; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 6:19-20). By the way, though you stumble and mess up over & over & over again – we all do! – and though you are faithless, God will never abandon you, or give up on you, because You are now “His possession!” (Jn 6:37, 39; 10:11, 14; 1 Cor 6:20; Tit 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18-19; 2:9), and has promised to see the transforming work in your life through to the end! (Ps 138:8; Rom 8:28-31; Phil 1:6; 2:12-13; 1 Th 5:24; 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 13:5; Jam 3:2). Now, if the foregoing is indeed the case, that He bought you in the slave-market of sin and made you His own, how can you possibly be ashamed of the redemptive work of Christ? Study the “cross” if you’ve lost focus. If for some reason you are disappointed or discouraged in your faith, or are seemingly too weak to stand for Christ in your area of influence, you have taken your eyes off of Christ – and are once again preoccupied with “yourself.” If that is the case, it is only natural that the destiny and concerns of others are not significant issues to you. The remedy for your problem? Stop focusing on yourself! and get your focus back on Christ! (Heb 12:2; 1 Jn 3:3). This is a very common problem for believers. The fight of faith must be intentionally fought. There is no such thing as “spiritual cruise-control” in the Christian life! Either you are progressing! or regressing! Embrace the spiritual disciplines with renewed vigor!

The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel – it tells of His righteous demands, that sin is punishable by death; yet God’s love provided what His righteousness demanded! Since His righteous demands were fully satisfied at the cross, God can righteously save all who place their trust in the work of Christ. God’s righteousness is imputed on the basis of faith – not works; it cannot be earned. That the righteousness of God is revealed “from faith to faith,” means that faith is not only the beginning of the salvation process, but it is also the goal as well – faith is necessary through the whole of life. We are not only “made alive” by faith in the cross of Christ, we are to “live” by faith (cf. Hab 2:4; Jn 1:4; 10:10; Gal 3:11; Eph 2:1-5; Heb 10:38).

Unbelief and Its Consequences (1:18-32)

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man, and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

People suppress the “truth” about God, that He is a loving Creator and deserves their worship and praise – this is the result of turning one’s back on godliness and righteousness. Sinful humanity can mentally perceive the revealed truth of God, but they have chosen to suppress it (vv. 19-20). God’s anger is revealed

against sin and the suppression of the truth, so He gives them over to uncleanness (v. 24), to vile affections (v. 26), and to a reprobate mind (v. 28). God's invisible attributes such as His eternal power, His Godhead, His wisdom, and His mighty provision, are clearly seen by contemplating His awesome works of creation. Nature reveals God as great and good – its gentle rains and rich soils provide humans with all varieties of delicious food; nature speaks so eloquently of its Creator that men are without excuse (cf. Ps 19:1-14; Acts 15:15-17; 17:24-29). Men would rather worship the created rather than the Creator; they are not interested in glorifying the God who made everything, they are only interested in selfishly enjoying the stuff He made; they exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox (an animal that eats grass); the Israelites had worshipped a gold calf – that's why Scripture calls him a "fool" (cf. Ex 32:1-4; Ps 10:4; 14:1; 53:1; 106:20). "Light rejected is light denied." We worship idols when good things are elevated to ultimate things; we serve and worship that which holds the "ultimate position" in our lives. Tertullian defined idolatry as "loving something more than God." John Calvin said, "The human heart is an idol factory."

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Three times this passage says, "God gave man up" (vv. 24, 26, 28). God gave man up to uncleanness, vile affections, and a reprobate mind – so God's wrath was directed against man's entire personality. In response to the evil lusts of their hearts, God abandoned them to heterosexual uncleanness – adultery, fornication, lewdness, prostitution, harlotry, etc. Life became for them a round of sex orgies in which to dishonor their bodies among themselves. To repeat, this abandonment by God was because they first abandoned the truth about Him for the lie of idolatry – an idolater worships the image of a creature, and thus dishonors the Creator, who alone is worthy of honor and glory. For this same reason God gave people up to erotic activity with members of their own sex – women became lesbians, and men became sodomites; turning away from the marriage relationship ordained by God, they burned with lust for other men and practiced homosexuality. Christians must be careful not to accept the world's moral judgment, that homosexuality is simply an alternative lifestyle; instead, they must be guided by God's Word. In the OT this sin was punishable by death (Lev 18:29; 20:13; also Gen 19:4-25); the NT says those who practice this behavior are worthy of death (Rom 1:32). While society tends to rationalize certain sins, God judges all sin. The gospel offers pardon and forgiveness to homosexuals, as it does to all sinners who repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Though some individuals may be more inclined toward homosexuality than others, still this behavior is looked upon as sin. It should be noted that sin does not consist in the inclination toward it, but in the yielding to and practicing it. The Holy Spirit gives the power to resist the temptation and to have lasting victory (1 Cor 10:13; also cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11).

28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Because of men's refusal to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind; and in so doing they commit a catalog of others forms of wickedness. These verses contain one of the most extensive lists of sins in all of Scripture – the list shows the exhaustive sweep of human moral depravity, and the rebellious nature of men's hearts. Verse 28 verse gives deep insight into why "evolution" has such an enormous appeal to natural man. The reason lies not in their intellects but in their wills – they do not want to retain God in their knowledge. It is not that the evidence for evolution is so overwhelming that they are compelled to accept it – because it is not – rather, it is because they want some explanation for origins that will eliminate God completely. They know that if there is a God, then they are morally responsible to Him. The dark list of sins in these verses characterizes man in his alienation from God – notice that this person is "full" (v. 29) of these sins, not just an occasional dabbler in them. Those who abuse/pervert sex (vv. 24-27), and who practice the other sins listed (vv. 29-31) have an innate knowledge not only that these things are wrong, but also that they themselves are deserving of death. Yet this does not deter them from indulging in these forms of ungodliness; instead, they actually unite with others in promoting them. Paul provides us with lists of wrong social behavior in other books (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21). Here in Romans 1, however, he gives several examples of how people destroy relations with each other – this happens when people are jealous of other people, and when they murder, fight, cheat and hate other people.

Chapter 2

The impartiality of God (2:1-16)

¹ Therefore you are *without excuse*, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the *same things*. ² And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. ³ And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you think lightly of the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

Paul now demonstrates that those who "self-righteously judge others" are also inexcusable. Those who look down their noses at the heathen, because they consider themselves more civilized and educated, are just as guilty because their sins, though more sophisticated perhaps, are still sin. By nature, fallen man can see faults in others more readily than in himself (cf. Mt 7:1-5). By condemning someone else when you also are with sin is to leave you without excuse. The sins of cultured people are essentially the same as those of the heathen. Remember, "sins of thought are also grievous" (cf. Mt 5:28). What the smug moralist needs is a lesson on the judgment of God. Paul goes on to say that ***judgment will be*** — (1) according to truth (vv. 1-5); (2) according to works (vv. 6-11); and (3) according to the light one has of the Law (vv. 12-16).

- A. **According to truth** (vv. 1-5) – Judgment is not based on incomplete, inaccurate, or circumstantial evidence; rather, it is based on the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. As stated above, judgment is inescapable for those who condemn others for the very sins they practice themselves. Having the capacity to judge others does not absolve them of guilt – the fact is, it actually increases their own condemnation. God's judgment is sometimes delayed because He is kindly disposed to sinners, though not to their sins – His forbearance and longsuffering toward us are aimed at leading us to repentance (cf. 2 Pet 3:9). This verse also shows that He extends kindness to believers so they might repent, or change the way they think – God is tolerant, patient and kind toward them so they will

change their mind about sin. The essence of “repentance” is having a change of mind which produces a change of attitude, and a corresponding change of action.” By the way, it is more than mere mental agreement that you have sinned – it also involves the conscience as well; as *John Newton* wrote: “My conscience felt and owned my guilt.” In verse 5, Paul pictures hardened and unrepentant sinners storing up judgment for themselves, as though they were building up a large estate – what a shock they will experience in the day when God’s wrath is finally revealed at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15). In that day all judgment will be accepted as that which is absolutely righteous.

6 who will render to every man according to his deeds: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.

B. According to works (vv. 6-11) – A man may boast of family heritage, national origin or great personal goodness, but come judgment day he will be judged by “his own conduct,” and not by any of these other things. His works will be the determining factor. By the way, both the Old Testament and the New Testament record the fact that God judges human actions (cf. Ps 62:12; Jer 17:10; Mt 16:27; Rev 20:12). It should also be pointed out that “this passage in Romans” in no way teaches salvation by works – that would contradict the consistent testimony of the rest of Scripture. The fact is there are about 150 passages in the NT that condition salvation solely on faith or believing. In order to understand the essence of “good works” in this passage, we must understand that good works do not begin until a person has been “born again.” So, if unbelievers are judged by their deeds, they will have nothing of value to present as evidence – all their supposed righteousness will be seen as filthy rags (cf. Is 64:6; Rom 3:10-12), and their condemning sin will be that they have not believed on Jesus as Lord (cf. Jn 3:18) – because therein is righteousness (cf. Rom 5:1; Gal 2:16). Beyond that, their works will determine the degree of their punishment (Lk 12:47-48). On the other hand, God will bestow on believers eternal life – because their lives will be characterized by persistently doing good (the verb here is in the “present tense” – believers habitually practice righteousness, and unbelievers habitually practice unrighteousness; believers “keep on seeking,” and unbelievers “keep on rejecting or disobeying”). Each one who does evil (present tense) will receive trouble and distress; whereas each one who does good (present tense) will have glory and honor and peace. God will award eternal life to all who manifest this evidence of a conversion experience – which is all believers. Those who have chosen to obey unrighteousness as their master, their lives will evidence the fact that they were never saved. Let us not forget, that no one can do good works, as far as God is concerned, unless he has first placed his faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. The expression “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” shows that judgment will be according to the amount of “light” received – the Jews, as God’s chosen people, will be first in responsibility – it has nothing to do with “favoritism,” as verse 11 states: “There is no partiality with God.” Therefore the expression must indicate the historical order in which the gospel went out, as in Rom 1:16 – it was proclaimed first to the Jews, and the first believers were Jews (cf. Acts 1:8; also cf. 1 Pet 4:17). This aspect of God’s judgment will be developed further in verses 12-16. In human courts of law, preference is often shown to the good-looking, the wealthy, and the influential – it is not so with God. He is absolutely impartial.

12 For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; 13 for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law will be justified. 14 For when the Gentiles who do not have the

law, do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law *to themselves*,¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their *conscience* bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately *accusing* or else *defending* them,¹⁶ on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

- C. According to the light one has of the Law (vv. 12-16) – God’s impartiality in judgment is also seen in the fact that He will deal with people in accordance with measure of light they received. Two classes of people are in view – those who do not have the Law (the Gentiles), and those who are under the Law (the Jews). This includes everyone except those who are in the Church (cf. 1 Cor 10:32). Those who have *“sinned without the Law”* will perish without the Law – they will be judged according to whatever revelation the Lord gave them, and failing to live up to that revelation they will perish. Those who have *“sinned under the Law”* will be judged by the Law, and if they have not obeyed it they too will perish. The Law demands total obedience. No one is accounted righteous simply because he knows what the Law says – to be justified by the Law requires total compliance. Since all men are sinners, it is impossible for them to do this (cf. Mt 19:26; Acts 13:39; Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16, 21; 3:11). It was never God’s intention that anyone be saved by the Law – the Law was given to reveal man’s sinfulness, and lead him to Christ (cf. Gal 3:19-24). Paul goes on to say that although the Law was not given to the Gentiles, yet they have an innate knowledge of right and wrong; they know instinctively that it is wrong to lie, steal, murder, and commit adultery – therefore, the Gentiles are a law unto themselves; they form their own code of right and wrong behavior from their moral instincts. Gentiles show that the requirements of the Law are written on their hearts – this is confirmed by their consciences, the faculty within human beings that evaluates their actions, that either accuses or excuses them of sin. By the way, it is not the Law itself that is written on their hearts (as it is in believers – cf. Heb 8:10; 10:16), but the requirements or the works of the Law (verse 15). Paul concludes this section by stating that judgment will not only take into account the people’s public sins, but also the secret sins of the heart (cf. 1 Cor 4:5; Heb 4:12; Ps 139:1-3). The Agent of divine judgment is Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 25:31-33; Jn 5:22, 27; Acts 17:30-31) – it is good news that Jesus is the Judge, because He knows what it is like to be a man. So in this entire section (Rom 2:1-16), God is seen as the Creator-Sovereign of the universe conducting the moral government of His human creatures. The emphasis on the justice of God’s judgment leads to the conclusion that “no one” on his own can be declared righteous by God.

The Jew is Condemned by the Law (2:17-29)

¹⁷ But if you bear the name “Jew,” and rely upon the Law, and boast in God,¹⁸ and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,²⁰ a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,²¹ you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal?²² You who say that you should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?²³ You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?²⁴ For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” just as it is written.²⁵ For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.²⁶ If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?²⁷ And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?²⁸ For he is not

a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not in the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Paul next addresses the destiny of the Jew to whom the "Law" was given – Is he lost? The answer of course is, "Yes, he is also lost." No doubt many Jews during the time of the early church felt they were immune from God's judgment – they gloried in God of Israel and simply rested on the Law, which was never designed to give rest, but to awaken the conscience to a sense of sinfulness. He knew God's will... he approved the moral values of the Law... he prided himself on being a guide to the morally and spiritually blind, a light to those who were in the darkness of ignorance... he felt qualified to correct the foolish or untaught and to teach the immature, because the Law gave him an outline of knowledge and of the truth. But these things in which the Jew boasted had never changed his life – it was simply a pride of race, religion and knowledge without any corresponding moral transformation. He taught others but did not take the lessons to heart himself – it was a case of "Do as I say, not as I do." He gloried in the possession of the Law, but dishonored the God who gave it by breaking its sacred precepts. This combination of high talk and low walk caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of God. It was true of Isaiah's day (cf. Is 52:5), and it is still true today. The believer must ask himself this question: "If I am the only view someone has of Jesus Christ, what do they see of Him in me?" (cf. 2 Cor 3:2-3).

In addition to the Law, the Jew prided himself on the rite of "Circumcision" – It was instituted by God as a sign of His covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen 17:9-14), and expressed the separation of a people to God from the world. After awhile the Jewish people so prided themselves on being circumcised, that they contemptuously called the Gentiles "the uncircumcision." Paul here links circumcision with the Law of Moses and point out that it was only valid as a "sign" when it was combined with a life of obedience. God is not satisfied with external ceremonies (like some churches today) unless they are accompanied by inward holiness. So a circumcised Jew who disobeys the Law might just as well be uncircumcised. Thus, if a Gentile obeys the requirements of the Law (though he is not under the Law) his uncircumcision is more acceptable to God than the circumcision of a Jewish transgressor (verse 26). In such a case, the Gentile's heart is circumcised, and that is what counts. The superior behavior of the Gentile condemns the Jew, who does not live the circumcised life (even though he has the Law). In God's reckoning, a true Jew is not a circumcised descendant of Abraham, but one whose heart is sincere and pure (Ps 34:18; 51:17). So true circumcision is a matter of the "heart" (cf. Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4).

Chapter 3

All the World Guilty (3:1-20)

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written: "That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, and mightest prevail when Thou are judged." ⁵ But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms). ⁶ May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? ⁸ And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come?" Their condemnation is just.

So what then is the advantage of being a “Jew,” and what profit is there in “Circumcision”? The Jews had a number of special privileges as God’s chosen people – the most important is that they were entrusted with the *“oracles of God.”* The OT Scriptures were given to the Jewish people to write and to preserve – but their response was an appalling lack of faith. The question that is then raised is this — *“Does the unbelief of some cause god to break His word?”* Paul responds, “Absolutely not!” (verse 4). That answer then raises this question in the mind of the Jew — “If our unrighteousness serves to accentuate the righteousness of God, can we conclude that God’s wrath is unjust?” (verse 5). Again Paul says, “Absolutely not!” If that were the case, that God were unfair in judging unfaithful Jews, then He would be barred from judging the world – and He is going to judge the world (cf. Rom 2:5). Since sin seemingly benefits God, how could He turn around and judge sinners for their sin? (verse 7). Some opponents to the gospel were then saying, “Let us then do evil that good may result!” (verse 8) – furthermore, if faith in Christ alone can save you, then you may as well go out and live in sin; since God’s grace superabounds over man’s sin, then the more you sin, the more His grace abounds, so why not just go out and sin to the max?” This is a common argument by non-believers against Christianity. Paul responds thus: “All I can say is that the condemnation of people who talk like that is well-deserved” (verse 8). Paul goes on to answer these objections in more detail in chapter six.

9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10 as it is written (these nine verses are direct quotations from the OT),

There is none righteous, not even one;

11 There is none who understands, There is none that seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless;

There is none who does good, there is not even one.

13 Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they keep deceiving,

The poison of asps is under their lips;

14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness;

15 Their feet are swift to shed blood,

16 Destruction and misery are in their paths:

17 And the path of peace they have not known:

18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

“So then, Paul says, “Are we Jews better than the sinful Gentiles, or are we “worse”? The answer in either case is that the Jews are no better or no worse – all are lost! all are sinners! Jews are no different from Gentiles in this respect. Sin has affected everyone born of human parents (3:10-12), and has affected every part of a man (3:13-18). There is not a single righteous person (cf. Ps 14:1)... there is no one who has a right understanding of God... there is no one who even seeks after God (cf. Ps 14:2) – if left to himself, fallen man would never seek God; nobody even tries to discover what God is like, let alone cares about what God wants. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that anyone ever seeks God. All have gone astray from God; all have become corrupt; there is not one who lives a good life, not even one (cf. Ps 14:3). Conversely, men’s throats are like an open tomb; their speech has been consistently deceitful (Ps 5:9); their conversation flows from poisonous lips (cf. Ps 140:3). Their mouths are full of cursing and hatred (cf. Ps 10:7); their feet are swift to carry them on missions of murder (cf. Is 59:7); they leave a trail of ruin and misery (cf. Is 59:7)... they have never known how to make peace (cf. Is 59:8)... they have no respect for God (cf. Ps 36:1; Job 28:28; Prv 1:7; 9:10; Ecc 12:13) – for a Jew not to fear God was the height of sin and folly. Paul was careful to show his Jewish readers that he was not contradicting the Old Testament. This is God’s X-ray of the human race – it reveals man’s universal unrighteousness, ignorance and independence toward God. In short, it reveals the “total depravity of man” – sin has affected every part of his being.

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are *under the Law*, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become *accountable to God*; 20 because of the *works of the Law* no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

When God gave the Law to Israel, He was using Israel as a sample of the human race. The Law's ministry was so that every mouth may be silenced (Jew & Gentile), and the whole world held accountable. It is the same as when a health inspector takes a test-tube of water from a well, tests the sample, finds it polluted, and then declares the entire well polluted. So when Paul speaks to those who are "under the Law" (the people of Israel), he does so to close the mouths of everyone (Jews & Gentiles), because all are guilty before God. The lesson is clear: "No one can be justified by keeping the Law" – because no human can keep it! The Law was not given to justify people – it was given to produce the knowledge of sin. We could never know what a "crooked line" is unless we knew what a straight line was – when men test themselves by it, they then see how crooked they are. We can use a "mirror" to see that our face is dirty, but the mirror is not designed to wash our dirty faces. Conversely, a "thermometer" will tell if a person has a fever, but swallowing it will not cure the fever. The Law is good when it is used to produce conviction of sin, but it is worthless as a savior from sin. As Martin Luther said, "Its function is not to justify but to terrify."

Justification by Faith (3:21-31)

21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith of Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. 27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. 31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

Now we come to the heart of Paul's letter to the Romans, when Paul answers the question: "According to the gospel, how can ungodly sinners be justified by a holy God?" He begins by saying that the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the Law (verse 21) – that means God has put in place a plan whereby He can righteously save unrighteous sinners by not requiring them to obey the Law. Because God is "holy," He cannot look on sin or condone sin – it must be punished, and the punishment is "death." The gospel reveals how God can save sinners without compromising His righteousness. His righteous plan is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets – it was foretold in the types and shadows of the sacrificial system that required the shedding of blood for atonement; and it was foretold by direct prophecies (cf. Gen 3:14-15; Is 51:5-8; 56:1; Dan 9:24). The righteous salvation of the Lord is obtained through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 3:22; 4:3-25; 5:1-11; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 2:21). Paul goes on to tell us that this salvation is "to all who believe" (both Jews & Gentiles – there is no distinction). The availability of the gospel is as universal as the need – "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (verse 23) – everyone's thoughts and deeds "miss the mark" of God's standards (literally, that's what the Greek word for "sin" means – *hamartia*). Sin is the greatest problem people have – and every person is enslaved to it.

Believers are justified freely by God's grace (verse 24). God justifies sinners (makes them righteous) as a free gift and by an act of unmerited favor. God declares sinners "righteous" when they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 5:15, 18-19; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 2:21) – the righteousness of Christ is actually "imputed to the believer" (i.e., he is "made righteous") when he accepts Christ as his Savior (cf. 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:20-21) – therefore as believers, we now possess the righteousness (DNA) of Christ Himself; not because of any meritorious work on our part, but simply by the grace of God. Nevertheless, God does not declare a person righteous without an objective basis, without dealing with his sin – sinners are justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (verse 24) – redemption means buying back by payment of a ransom; the Lord Jesus bought us back from the slave market of sin with "His own blood" (verse 25). The blood of Christ was the propitiation or satisfaction of God's justice (cf. 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10; Heb 2:17) – thus His mercy can be shown on the basis of an acceptable sacrifice, and His wrath is averted. God's purpose in Christ's death was to demonstrate His own judicial righteousness. The prayer of the publican in Lk 18:13 was literally, "God be propitious to me, the sinner" – he was asking God to show mercy to him by not requiring him to pay the penalty of his aggravated guilt. The sins committed before the death of Christ – from Adam to Christ – were forgiven on the basis of the still-future atoning work of Christ (verse 25). God is "just" because He required that full payment of the penalty of sin be paid – thus He can justify the ungodly without condoning their sin or compromising His own righteousness.

Where then is boasting? It is excluded because salvation is by faith, not works. The justified person says, "I did all the sinning; Jesus did all the saving." True faith disavows any possibility of self-help or self-improvement – it only looks to Christ as Savior. The Lord Jesus died for the whole world of sinners, both Jews and Greeks – there is only one God, and He is the God of all. Though all are saved by faith, this doesn't mean the Law is worthless – the Law demands perfect obedience, and Christ fulfilled every requirement of the Law. Thus the gospel of salvation by faith upholds the Law by insisting that its utmost demands must be fully met.

Chapter 4

Justification by Faith Evidenced in the Old Testament (4:1-25)

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham our forefather, according to the flesh, has found? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. ³ For what does scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to the one who does works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,

Paul next deals with the issue of whether or not the gospel agrees with what the Old Testament teaches. Paul introduces his subject with a question, "What then shall we say?" – Paul uses this question six different times from chapter 4 through chapter 9 – they are: 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14; 9:30. This first question would obviously have been important to the Jewish people. Paul goes on to show that there is complete harmony between salvation in the NT and that in the OT. First, he considers Abraham and his experience according to the flesh. Scripture tells us that he was "justified by faith when he believed God" (cf. Gen 15:6), and then more than thirty years later he was "justified (vindicated) by works" when he was about to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering to God (cf. Gen 22; Jam 2:21) – this act of obedience proved the reality of his faith. Therefore, when Abraham "believed God regarding His promise to him," God put righteousness to his account – as such, he was "justified by faith;" works had nothing to do with it (verse 3).

Paul goes on to illustrate the difference between *“works”* and *“faith”* – when a man *works* for a living, he is entitled to get his paycheck at the end of the week; he has earned it; he is simply being reimbursed for his time and labor (verse 4). But that is not way it is in the matter of justification – a person cannot “earn” a right relationship with God – righteousness is a free gift from God, and this gift can only be received by faith. Therefore the justified man *does not work* – instead, *“he believes on Him who justifies the ungodly:”* he puts his faith and trust in Jesus Christ; he takes God at His word; furthermore, the merit is not in his faith, but in the *“object of his faith” (Christ!).* His faith is accounted as righteousness – God puts righteousness into his account, clothes him with righteousness, and makes him fit for heaven. God looks upon the *heart* (cf. 1 Sam 16:7; 1 Kg 8:39; 1 Chr 28:9; Is 11:3; 51:7; Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26-27; Mt 5:8; Lk 6:45; 16:15; Rom 10:9-10; Eph 3:17; 1 Pet 3:4) – when heart is *sensitive* toward God and the things of God, that man is reckoned as *“righteous”* by God, and God then enters into that person’s life in the person of the Holy Spirit. By placing our *trust* in God, and *believing* Him with all our heart, we experience salvation. Where does God look? He looks at the heart; he is not interested in our *works* – shabby as they be (cf. Is 64:6) – He is interested in our *hearts!* Thus God responds graciously and mercifully to the humble, believing heart. Jesus told a story about a tax-collector who had gone up to the temple to pray – humbly and shamefully he beat his breast saying, *“God, be merciful to me, the sinner”* (Lk 18:13). Jesus tells us that this man went away *“justified”* (Lk 18:14). So it is with every humble sinner whose heart is sensitive toward God.

6 just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: 7 “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.” 9 Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, “faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.” 10 How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

Next Paul turns to “David” to prove his thesis. The words *“just as”* at the beginning of verse 6 indicate that David’s experience was the same as Abraham’s. David said that the happy man is the sinner whom God reckons righteous apart from works (cf. Ps 32:1-2) – notice in this Psalm that when God doesn’t impute sin to a person, that person has a right standing before Him; he is justified and forgiven. David had been guilty of adultery and murder, yet he tastes the sweetness of a full and free pardon (verse 8) – instead of his *sin* being credited (*logizetai* – Ps 32:2) to his account, God credits (*logizetai* – Rom 4:3) *righteousness* to his account. David had performed no works to merit forgiveness, yet he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that God had forgiven him. In verse 9, Paul returns again to the argument that God’s justification might only be to the circumcised – therefore he addresses the experience of Abraham again; he shows that Abraham was justified (cf. Gen 15:6) before he was ever circumcised (cf. Gen 17:24). Hence, if the father of the nation of Israel could be justified while he was still *uncircumcised*, then why can’t other uncircumcised individuals (Gentiles) be justified? (verse 10). Circumcision was not the instrumental cause of Abraham’s justification – it was merely an *outward sign* in his flesh that he had been justified by faith (verse 11). Circumcision confirmed to Abraham that he was regarded by God as righteous through faith – Paul also argued that it was a *“seal”* of Abraham’s being declared righteous because of his faith. Abraham received the sign of circumcision that he might be the father of those Jews who are not only circumcised, but who also follow his footsteps in a path of faith – the kind of faith which he had while still uncircumcised. It is

one thing to be Abraham's descendants (Jn 8:37); it is quite another to be Abraham's children, because they do the "works of Abraham" (Jn 8:39). So "physical circumcision" is not what counts – there must be "faith" in the living God (cf. Gal 5:6). To summarize: there was a time in Abraham's life when he had faith and was still uncircumcised, and another time when he had faith and was circumcised – so Paul sees in this fact that both believing Gentiles and believing Jews can claim Abraham as their father and can identify with Him as His children. Whereas circumcision separated Jews from other people, faith united Jews and Gentiles who trusted in Christ (cf. Gal 3:28-29; Eph 2:13-14; Col 3:10-11, 15) – believers in Christ are "one."

13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified, 15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

Paul continues to address every possible objection to the gospel – He now deals with the objection that blessing came through the Law; therefore those who are without the Law (Gentiles) were cursed (cf. Jn 7:49). Paul points out that God promised Abraham and his descendants that he would "heir" of the world, and the promise wasn't conditional on adherence to some legal code – the Law didn't come along until 430 years after Abraham (cf. Gal 3:17). It was an unconditional promise of grace, to be received by faith – the same kind of faith by which we obtain God's righteousness today. The expression "heir of the world means that he would be the father of believing Gentiles as well as of Jews (v. 4:11-12), that he would be the father of many nations (v. 4:17-18) and not just the Jewish nation. It those who seek to be justified on the basis of lawkeeping, then faith is made void and the promise made of no effect (v. 14). Faith is completely opposite to Law – faith is a matter of "believing," while Law is a matter of "doing." Furthermore, the promise would then be worthless because it would be based on conditions that no one would be able to meet. The Law brings about God's wrath, not His blessing, because it condemns those who fail to keep its commandments perfectly – since not one can keep the Law, they are condemned to death. Conversely, where there is no law there is no transgression (v. 15) – note carefully, Paul does not say that where there is no law, there is no sin. Transgression means the violation of a known law – an act can be inherently wrong even if there is no law against it – but it becomes transgression when a "sign" is posted saying, "Speed Limit 25 MPH!" The Jews thought they inherited blessing through having the Law, but all they inherited was "transgression" – God gave them the Law so that sin might be seen as transgression (so that sin might be seen in all its sinfulness).

16 For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 (as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made you") in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. 18 In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be." 19 And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore also it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 23 Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, 24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

Because the Law produces God's wrath and not His justification, God determined that He would save men by "grace through faith". In this way the promise of life is sure to "everyone," not just to Jews, to whom the Law was given – but also to Gentiles who put their trust in the Lord in the same way that Abraham did, who is the father of us all (verse 16). To confirm Abraham's fatherhood over all true believers, Paul injects Genesis 17:5 as a parenthesis – "I have made you a father of many nations" (that fact is "emphatically" stated in the original text). God's choice of Israel as His chosen, earthly people did not mean that His grace and mercy would be confined to them. Following this parenthetical statement, Paul resumes his thought – Abraham is the father of all in the sight of God who believe – God who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist (verse 17). Though it was not possible for Abraham and Sarah to have a child in their old age – Abraham was 100 yrs old, and Sarah was 90 yrs old; as such, they were "dead" with regard to being able to bear children (cf. Rom 4:19; Gen 16:1-2; 17:17; 18:11; 21:5; Heb 11:11-12) – nevertheless, the patriarch Abraham (*against all hope*) did not waver in his faith but believed God's Word (verse 18), and God honored his faith, and he became the father (ancestor) of many nations – this was in accord with God's promise (Gen 15:5). God is the powerful God who created the world out of nothing; so it no problem for God to life to those who have been dead.

Paul concluded his illustration by saying, "This is why it was credited to him as righteousness" (verse 22). By the way, this divine declaration was not written for Abraham alone, but for us also, to whom God will credit righteousness if we believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (v. 24). Repeatedly in this passage, Paul referred to Abraham and other believers having righteousness credited to them because of their faith (Rom 4:3, 5-6, 9-11, 23-24). The Lord Jesus was not only delivered up for our sins, but was raised for our justification (verse 25) – our offenses were the problem, and our justification was the result of His resurrection; there could have been no justification if Christ had remained in the tomb – the fact that He rose from the dead tells us that the redemptive work of Christ is finished, the price has been paid, and God is infinitely satisfied with His sin-atonement work.

Chapter 5

Being justified by faith, we have peace with God (5:1-21)

¹ Therefore having been justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have obtained our *introduction* by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about *perseverance*; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, *hope*; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Paul now turns to the "benefits" of being justified by faith before God – First and foremost, the war is over! hostilities have ceased! we are no longer the enemies of God! we now have "peace with God!" We are now accepted by Him! We have been changed from foes to friends by a miracle of grace. Having been made righteous by God, we can now enjoy the permanent benefits of our favorable position with God. And we can now look forward with great anticipation to being in God's glorious presence in heaven (cf. Col 1:27; 3:4). With our future being so glorious, what about our present? How should we respond to the adverse conditions of the present? Paul says we are to "exult in our tribulations," because of their eventual results (they produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness – Heb 12:11). One of the delightful paradoxes of the Christian life is that "joy can coexist with affliction" (cf. Jam 1:2). The opposite of joy is sin, not suffering,

as many think. One of the by-products of tribulations is that it produces perseverance or steadfastness – to remain under difficulties without giving in (cf. Rom 15:5-6; Jam 1:3-4) – we could never develop perseverance if our lives were trouble-free (v. 3). Paul now goes on to say that perseverance develops character, which results in hope (i.e., confidence) that God will see them through (v. 4). And hope that is centered in God “does not disappoint” (cf. Ps 25:3, 20-21; 22:5; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6). The reason this hope does not disappoint is that God has poured out His love into our hearts (v. 5) – God’s love in the believer’s heart encourages him in his hope; it is the Spirit of God within who expresses the love of God to us. After the believer receives the Holy Spirit, there comes a deep-seated conviction that a personal God really loves you as an individual. The reality of the love of God in the believer’s heart gives him the assurance that the believer’s hope in God and the promise of glory is not misplaced. The believer’s hope isn’t a matter of wishful thinking, like hoping it will rain when you’re in the midst of a drought, when you really don’t know if it will rain or not – no, the believer’s hope is a certain future expectation; it is sure (cf. Heb 11:1), like the eager anticipation of being united in marriage with someone you love deeply just hours before the ceremony (when her failure to show up is not even an issue!). When someone we love deeply, and who loves us deeply – like a parent – makes a “promise” to us, there is not the slightest doubt that we will not be the recipients of that promise; we know it is certain, because they have never not been true to their word. The Hebrew term is often translated “wait” in Scripture (cf. Ps 27:14; Is 40:31), because one hopes for something that is still future (cf. Rom 8:24-25).

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath of God through Him. 10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exalt in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Paul now goes on to describe the “character of God’s love,” which explains why its pouring out assures believers of hope – God’s love went out to us when we were His ungodly enemies. Paul says, someone might die for a righteous man, but nobody would die for an unrighteous man – except God, and Christ died for the ungodly (v. 6); for sinners (v. 8); and even for His enemies (v. 10). Therefore, if God would show such love to us when we were sinners, will He not much more save us from His wrath? If God has already paid the greatest price to bring us into His favor, is it likely that He will allow us to perish in the end? Since God reconciled us to Himself through Jesus’ death while we were His enemies – i.e., we were hostile toward God – how much more now will Jesus’ life insure our complete and final salvation? (cf. Heb 7:25). As believers we have received “the reconciliation” from God – reconciliation refers to the establishment of harmony between God and man through the sacrificial work of Christ. The entrance of sin had brought estrangement and enmity between man and God – but putting away sin, the Lord Jesus restored us to an undeserved state of harmony with God (we were reconciled to God – cf. 2 Cor 5:19; Col 1:19-20) – and in this we greatly rejoice!

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned –

This section serves as a “bridge” between the first part of the letter and the next three chapters. Paul begins by comparing the work of Christ with the work of Adam – sin entered the world through one man, and in accord with God’s warning of death (cf. Gen 2:16-17; Rom 6:23; 7:13) – and through him death came to all men. The Greek past tense (aorist) occurs in all three verbs in verse 12 – so the entire human

race is viewed as having sinned in the one act of Adam's sin (cf. the aorist tense in Rom 3:23). Just as Adam was the federal head (or representative) of all humanity in leading us into sin... so Christ is the federal head that makes us a new creation. A federal head acts for all those who are under him – for example, when the President of our country signs a bill into law, he is acting for all of our citizens. As a result of Adam's sin, death entered into the world, and became the common lot of all his descendants; as such, all of Adam's posterity are reckoned as having sinned in him. Though Eve committed the first sin, Adam was the first to be created, and headship was given to him. So he is seen as acting for all his descendants. Though "federal headship" is a difficult issue for even the best theologians to accept and comprehend, it is clearly taught in Scripture and we are asked to accept it in light of the difficulty. The following might be helpful: Man is condemned on three grounds – he has a sinful nature, Adam's sin is imputed to him, and he is a sinner by practice. But his "crowning guilt" is his rejection of the provision which God has made for his salvation – the cross of Christ (cf. Jn 3:18, 19, 36). Another thing we can be sure of is that the Judge of all the earth will do right (cf. Gen 18:25); He will never act unjustly or unfairly, because all His decisions are based on equity and righteousness. Although certain situations pose problems to our dim sight, they are not problems to Him. When the last case has been heard and the doors of the courtroom swing shut, no one will have a legitimate basis for appealing the verdict.

13 for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. 20 And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Though sin entered human experience through the act of Adam's sin, sin expressed itself repeatedly in people's actions (cf. Gen 6:5-7, 11-13), from the point of its entrance "until" the Law was given. However, as Paul had already said, "Where there is no Law there is no transgression" (Rom 4:15) – this does mean that sin does not exist unless there is a Law; it means that sin does not have the character of being a transgression apart from the Law and therefore sin is not taken into account (imputed, reckoned) as such. So sin is not imputed or reckoned as a transgression when there is no law forbidding it – but it is still sin, though it is not a transgression. Nevertheless, death did not take a holiday during the age when there was no Law – why? because they all sinned (keep in mind the difference between sin and transgression).

A parallel exists between Adam and Christ as "heads of groups" of human beings (cf. 1 Cor 15:45-49). The details of the parallelism between Adam and Christ are given in verses 15-17. The "free gift" is not like the "transgression" – what Christ "gives" contrasts with what Adam "did" (trespass). The transgression of

*the one man brought **physical death to the many** (all humanity); **the gift of grace by the One man abounded to the many [by giving them **spiritual life**]** – while God's mercy is **offered** to all, His grace is **appropriated** only by those who trust Him as Savior (verse 15). A second contrast is this: Adam's offense brought about **condemnation**, and the grace of Christ brought **justification** (verse 16) – judgment vs. acquittal. A third contrasting parallelism combines the two preceding ones – if by the transgression of the one (Adam) **death reigned**, so through the righteousness of the One (Christ) **life reigned** (verse 17). Whereas death reigns like a tyrant over all, believers in Christ who receive God's grace, reign in life. In one case, people are **dying** victims under a ruthless ruler; in the other they become rulers (cf. Rev 1:6) whose kingdom is one of **life!***

The offense of Adam brought "condemnation" / the righteous act of Christ brought "justification."

The substitutionary death of Christ brought about the justification of all who place their trust in Him that results in **"life"** (verse 18) – believers are **"made alive in Christ"** (cf. Rom 6:4, 11; Eph 2:4-5). All those in Adam are condemned; and all those in Christ are justified (made righteous) – whereas by the disobedience of Adam all were made **sinners**. . . so by the obedience of Christ are many made **righteous** (verse 19). Where does the Law fit into all this? Paul explains, **"The Law was added so that transgression might increase;"** that is, the resultant effect of the Law was an increase in transgression – the Law did not originate sin, but it revealed sin as an offense against God. But God's grace proves to be greater than sin – **"where sin increased, grace abounded all the more"** (verse 20). What a contrast! No matter how great human sin becomes, God's grace overflows beyond it and abundantly exceeds it. No wonder Paul wrote that God's grace is "sufficient" (cf. 2 Cor 12:9). God's goal is that His grace might reign through righteousness (the righteousness of Christ imputed to those who believe), to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (verse 21; cf. Jn 3:16). Once again Paul spoke of reigning in connection with life – here God's grace is personified as reigning and bring eternal life.