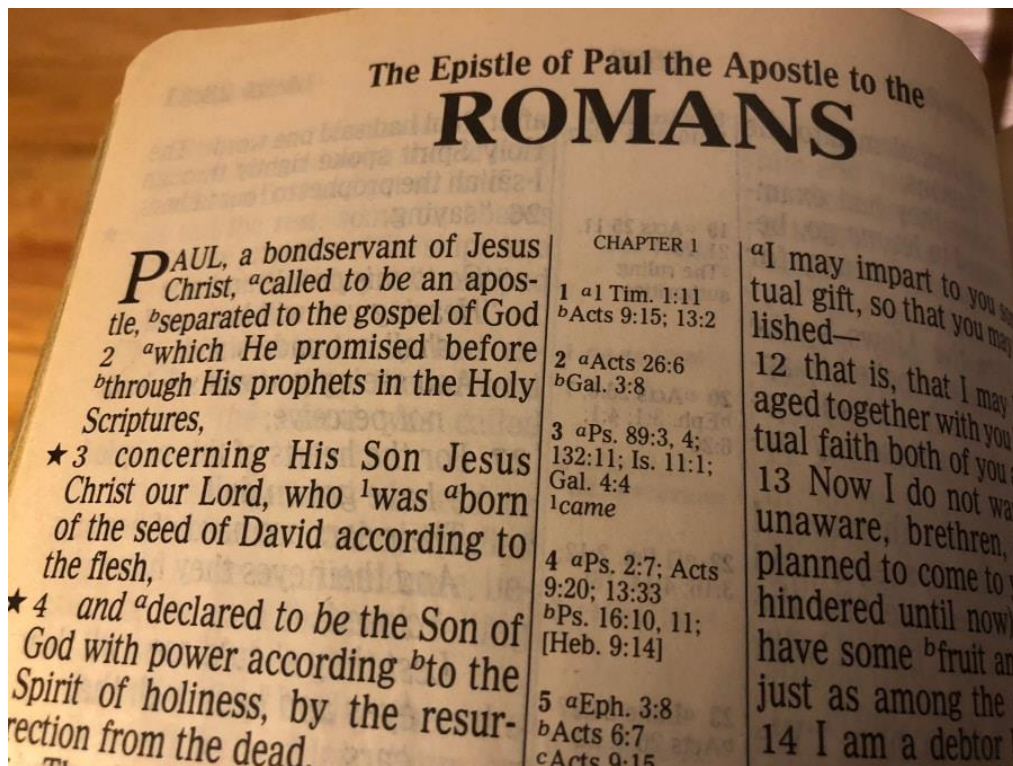


Basic Training Bible Ministries

presents

The Five Theological Threads of Romans



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The Five Theological Threads Throughout the Book of Romans

The Five Theological Threads

*“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power of God to salvation** for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it **the righteousness of God** is revealed **from faith to faith**, as it is written, ‘**the just shall live by faith.**’ For **the wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”* Romans 1:16–18 (emphasis added)

STUDY ONE: THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

“... separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Romans 1:1b–4)

A. The Content of the Gospel (Rom. 1:1–4)

The Gospel message, the “Good News,” is all about Jesus Christ. In this brief introduction to the epistle, Paul nails down the essence of the Gospel. First of all, he declares that it is the central promise and focus of the prophets. In our dispensational hind-sight, we can read the Old Testament and see the expectation of the Savior in every book. The quintessential truths, on which the prophets focus, are His incarnation as humanity and His resurrection from the dead, as proof of His eternal deity. The Bible story is truly, as J. Vernon McGee said, “*the romance of redemption*,” in which a loving God enters into His own creation to redeem a fallen and dying race.

It is worth taking note of the first reference to the Holy Spirit in the book. When Paul speaks of “*the Spirit of holiness*,” he employs a term not found anywhere else, but which sets the tone for the aim of the whole book—which is the power of the Spirit of God to renew and empower sinful men to be “*conformed to the image of His son*” (Rom. 8:29).

B. The Scope of the Gospel (Rom. 1:5, 14)

The Gospel is for all nations, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. Not only this, but we get the hint from v. 15 that the Gospel is for both unbeliever and believer. As we will see in study two, it offers deliverance both from eternal condemnation and from temporal wrath.

When Paul says things like, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 3:23–24), he is making the point that the work of redemption is just as universal as is the curse of sin.

He reinforces this point later when he says, “*for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him*” (Rom. 10:12b). There are none that Jesus Christ is not Lord over, and all who call upon Him in faith will be justified. Finally, in Romans 11:32, he says, “*For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.*” In fact, one of the most profitable word studies in Romans is the little word “*all.*”

Not only is the scope of the plan of redemption universal to all the nations, but it is also comprehensive for those who believe. In Romans 1:14–15, Paul declares himself a debtor to all mankind, and then says, “*I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.*” In other words, the Gospel is not just a message for the lost, it is also a message for those who have believed. The truth contained in the Gospel includes the ramifications of the cross of Christ in the lives of those who believe, from the moment of regeneration to their entrance into the presence of Christ. This is made clear in the next segment.

C. The Intent of the Gospel (Rom. 3:21–26; 5:1–5)

Since the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be the basis of eternal judgment (Rom. 2:16), it is critical that the offer of justification by grace through faith be made clear to all men. Here, Paul declares that justification is freely offered to all who believe based on the redemption and propitiation accomplished through Christ. He is our “*Passover*” (Rom. 1:25b; 1 Cor. 5:7); therefore, God is just in justifying those who believe. We’ll see much more on this theme in study four.

But the Gospel message goes far beyond providing information for initial salvation (justification). It moves the new believer on in the spiritual quest of sanctification.

Possession of eternal life, combined with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, creates in the soul a “*living hope*” (Rom. 5:2, 4–5, compare 1 Pet. 1:3). This inner assurance of purpose and destiny is able to carry us through the trials and pitfalls of life in the ongoing pursuit of maturity, service, and completion of the race which God has allotted to us (see Rom. 12:4–8 with Matt. 25:15, “*to each according to his own ability,*” and Mark 13:34, “*to each his [own] work*”). As Jesus said, there is a power inherent in the faith that responds to the Gospel that, like the mustard seed, though being so small, is able to grow into something great (Matt. 13:31–32).

D. The Reception of the Gospel (Rom. 3:27–4:16)

Paul stresses that the “*law of faith*” supersedes the law of Moses (Rom. 3:27–31). Abraham becomes the standard, for both Jew and Gentile, that justification is “*apart from the deeds of the law*” (Rom. 3:28), and that “*to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness*” (Rom. 4:5). Therefore, “*it [justification] is of faith, that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed ... to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all*” (Rom. 4:16; see Rom. 11:6). We will deal with this a bit more in study three on the power of God to save.

E. The Provisions of the Gospel (Rom. 5:1–11)

Here, Paul lays the foundation for the wider scope of the Gospel message, which includes what we call “sanctification” (Romans 6–8; 12–15). Believers need to see that the work of Christ has provided everything necessary for a life lived in the power of the Spirit. These provisions are:

1. A standing of “*peace with God*,” v. 1
2. “*Access by faith into this grace in which we stand*,” v. 2
3. The joy of hope (confident assurance) of the glory of God, v. 2b
4. The ability to “*glory*” (rejoice, boast) in our trials (see 2 Tim. 2:12)
5. The knowledge that spiritual growth requires testing, vv. 3–5
6. The experience of the love of God, poured out in us by the indwelling Holy Spirit, as we overcome tests and trials, v. 5 (see James 1:2–5, 12; 1 Pet. 1:3–9)

These spiritual provisions set the stage for living the victorious life of an overcomer in Romans 5:6–8:39, and 12:1–15:33. Every believer needs to understand that all provisions necessary for a life of power and purpose are made in the finished work of Christ, to which the Gospel message testifies. All of the doctrines contained in the New Testament are grounded on the foundation of Christ’s victory over sin and death (1 Cor. 3:11). The possibilities of spiritual growth, effective service, and great eternal reward are available to each and every one who believes. As a child of God, you have been created for spiritual greatness!

F. The Historical Role of the Gospel (Rom. 10:14–17; 11:28–36)

The “*they*” in this context refers to unbelieving Israel (Rom. 10:1–4). They cannot believe unless they hear, and they will not hear without a preacher. Paul here defends his efforts to reach the Jew, knowing that he will ultimately be vindicated. Beginning in Romans 10:18–21 and through chapter 11, Paul shows that part of the mission of the Church is to keep the Gospel message before the children of Israel. In the wisdom of God, Israel’s rejection of Christ has opened the door to the Gentiles, who in turn will be the instrument used by God to finally reach His chosen people. Read Romans 11:28–36 with this in mind, and note the heavy emphasis on “*mercy*.” This becomes very relevant in the next study.

G. Summary: Doctrine of the Gospel

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” Romans 1:16

1. The Gospel is given in seed form in Genesis 3:15.
2. The message of the Gospel is illustrated by Noah and his family, Genesis 6–8; 2 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 11:6–7.
3. God proclaimed the Gospel to Abraham, declaring that the promised Seed (the Savior) would come through his lineage, Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–6; 22:7–18; Galatians 3:6–9.

4. The Gospel tells what Jesus Christ accomplished between His incarnation and His resurrection, Romans 1:1–5; 4:20–25.
5. Because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, the Gospel offers eternal life to all who believe in Him, John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Romans 4:3–5; Galatians 2:16; 3:6–9, 26–29.

STUDY TWO: THE WRATH OF GOD (Rom. 1:18; 2:4-5; 5:9-10)

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven ... but in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds.” Romans 1:18; 2:5

Although mentioned last in Paul’s theme statement (Rom. 1:16–18), this topic needs to be studied before the other “threads,” as it lays the context and foundation for our understanding of their full meaning. Further, it is in understanding the wrath of God that we are able to answer one of the great questions of both theologians and philosophers: the problem of **theodicy**. This word comes from *Theos* (God) and *dikaio*s (justice). The question is often framed: “How can a loving God allow such evil in the world?” Or, “If God is both good and all-powerful, why does He permit so many evils in the world?” It is for this reason, I believe, Paul declares the revelation of both God’s righteousness and His wrath at the beginning of the book of Romans.

Wrath is a major theme in Romans that is almost totally overlooked by most commentators. God’s wrath is an inescapable ingredient of His justice. Note the connection:

“For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed ... for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven ...” Romans 1:17–18

Whereas God’s righteousness/justice is revealed in the Gospel, His wrath is revealed experientially in the lives of those who “*suppress the truth in unrighteousness.*” The means of this suppression is “*ungodliness,*” which speaks of an attitude of disregard and irreverence toward God. This, in turn, produces “*unrighteousness,*” which speaks of the outward conduct and actions that are offensive to the holiness of God.

The evidence, or revelation, of the wrath of God is seen in the downward spiral seen in Romans 1:19–32. In the face of the clear and inescapable evidence from creation (vv. 19–20), mankind as a whole (see Rom. 3:10–18) chooses a course of rebellion which leaves every person “*without excuse*” before God, and, therefore, subject to His wrath. Here are a few additional passages which confirm this truth:

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” John 3:36

“Among whom [the sons of disobedience] also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind [i.e., ungodliness and unrighteousness], and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” Ephesians 2:3

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not be partakers with them.” Ephesians 5:6–7 (see Colossians 3:4–5)

“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 5:9

A. The Downward Spiral

In Romans 1:18–32, we see the downward path that calls forth the wrath of God. This is paralleled in Ephesians 4:17–19, where Paul exhorts us as believers to *“no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind.”* The pattern in both passages reveals the process of the hardening of the heart, which is first freely chosen by man, and then is judicially confirmed by God.

In man’s rebellion against God, he first refuses to honor or be thankful to the God he knows exists; gradually proclaiming his “enlightenment” (v. 22), he turns to idolatry—the ultimate affront to God. As he persists in this rebellion, God “gives him over” to the desires of his heart, resulting in increasing hardness and blindness.

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart, you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Romans 2:5

The understanding of this process is critical at the very beginning of Romans, because it explains much of what Paul will later say in regard to both Pharaoh and Israel (Romans 9). For now, we can best understand the wrath of God as the just consequences which follow the willful rebellion of mankind against God. Therefore, while wrath is revealed in man’s self-induced misery and perversion, God’s righteousness is revealed in His power to deliver those who are by nature His “enemies” (Rom. 5:10), yet who choose to believe the Gospel.

In fact, in Romans 5:9–10, there is expressed the need for us, as children of God, to be delivered from wrath. Since the wrath of God is expressed against *“all ungodliness and unrighteousness,”* it is evident that the believer who “walks according to the flesh” would bring on himself the adverse and painful consequences of God’s wrath. Thank God, however, that *“having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him ... we shall be saved by His life.”* We will focus on this idea more in study three.

B. Four Critical Issues about Wrath

In the book of Romans, the following four points are crucial for us to understand, and are inter-related to each of the other theological strands that run through the book.

Wrath is:

1. Revealed by universal experience (1:18–32)
2. Demanded by God’s righteousness/justice (3:9–20)

3. Demonstrated in the history of Israel (9:1–33)
4. The focus of the believers' present deliverance (5:9–10).

It is this last point that is most relevant to our personal understanding and application of this epistle to our lives. Believers who live contrary to the revealed will of God will also suffer the adverse consequences, which result from divine displeasure. In addition to this, because we are His children, we will also receive discipline from the heavenly Father (Heb. 12:5–11). Because of this, we who have believed need daily deliverance from sin and its harmful and painful effects. This is why Paul proclaims not only the hope of justification, but also the hope of sanctification, when he says:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:16–17

His goal, for both unbeliever and believer, is to bring about “*obedience to the faith*” (Rom. 1:5 and 16:26). This also explains why he is eager to preach the Gospel to those who have already believed (Rom. 1:15), and this is the subject of our next study.

C. Summary: The Wrath of God

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Romans 1:18

1. Most commentators think of the wrath of God as a reference to eternal condemnation. This is not, however, how the Bible generally presents it.
2. The first reference to the wrath of God is when He drowned Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, Exodus 15:7. This is important, for it shows two things about God's wrath:
 - a. That it is the consequence of persistent rebellion and disobedience.
 - b. That it speaks, not of eternal judgment, but of judgment in time. This idea is confirmed in Exodus 22:22–24 and Exodus 32:7–10.
3. Paul tells us that ignoring the truth and pursuing unrighteousness, whether by God's people or by unbelievers, provokes His wrath, which brings increasing spiritual hardening—self-induced misery—which ends in premature death, Romans 1:18–32; Deuteronomy 9:7–8; Hebrews 3:7–15; 1 Corinthians 10:1–5.
4. God is always patient and longsuffering before He inflicts wrath. This goodness, far from encouraging us to continue in disobedience, should bring us to repentance, Romans 2:4–5. Otherwise, we are increasing the intensity of His wrath when it comes, Romans 2:8–9.

5. When Jonah proclaimed the impending wrath of God on Nineveh, the people all repented from their evil ways (Jonah 3:5–10), and God spared the city. There is great instruction in this for America and all nations today!
6. When the Scribes and Pharisees came to John to be baptized, he challenged them, “*Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*” (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). In the context, that wrath refers to the baptism of fire, a passage which does speak of eternal judgment (Matt. 3:11–12).
7. However, John’s warning is in the context of the Tribulation Period, which is identified in the Bible as “*the day of ... wrath,*” (see Ezek. 7:19; Zeph. 1:15, 18; Rev. 6:16–17; 11:18; 19:15).
8. Though God visits His wrath on cultures and nations throughout history, believers can be delivered from sharing in that wrath by living in the resurrection life of Christ, walking in the Spirit, Romans 5:9–10; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 5:5–11.
9. When believers live lives that dishonor Christ, they will ultimately share in the wrath that falls on God’s adversaries, Hebrews 10:26–31. This does not involve loss of eternal salvation, but simply a dishonorable departure from this life (example, Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:5–10).

STUDY THREE: GOD’S POWER TO SAVE—FROM WHAT?

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation [deliverance] for everyone who believes ...” Romans 1:16

The book of Romans is all about salvation. The question needs to be asked, however, salvation from what? Historically, it has been assumed that “*salvation*” in Romans is all about rescue from eternal judgment. However, as we will see, this aspect of God’s salvation is only part of the marvelous story of redemption and deliverance. It is worth noting that Paul distinguishes between our “justification” (Rom. 3:21–4:16) and our later deliverance, or “salvation from wrath” (Rom. 5:9). Let’s consider the distinction:

- Justification—deliverance from eternal condemnation (Rom. 3:21–26; 4:1–16). We have already dealt with this topic under study one. Here, we are concerned with “justification,” whereby the unbelieving sinner is declared righteous on the basis of faith apart from works. But Paul had a keen sense of the time in which he lived. The prophecy of Jesus regarding Israel (Matt. 23:37–39; Luke 21:20–24) would soon be fulfilled in 70 A.D. Believers would not be exempt from the chaos and affliction of this time. The goal of Paul is not that they escape tribulations (Rom. 5:3), but that they escape from experiencing God’s wrath.
- Sanctification—deliverance from temporal wrath (Rom. 1:18–21; 2:1–11; 5:9–10; 6:1–23; chapters 12–15).

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Romans 5:9–10

Zane Hodges considered these two verses some of the most important in the entire epistle for rightly comprehending Paul’s overall theme (See *Romans, Deliverance from Wrath*, pp.140–144). It is this deliverance that occupies most of chapters 5–15.

Paul declared that due to Israel’s rejection of Jesus as Messiah, *“Wrath has come upon them to the uttermost”* (1 Thess. 2:16). However, as the author of Hebrews wrote, they could escape *“a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries”* (Heb. 10:27).

The idea of deliverance from wrath is perhaps the most surprising revelation of the book of Romans for the average believer. But to Paul, this was a critical element of the Gospel ministry: to warn of the danger and to expound the way of escape. Sanctification refers to the process of spiritual growth by which the believer is gradually *“conformed to the image of [Christ]”* (Rom. 8:29; 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The believer who refuses to grow will suffer the consequences of their selfish decisions, inflicting self-induced misery. This will be compounded by increasing divine discipline (Heb. 11:5–11), culminating in the experience of wrath. Although modern commentators commonly assume wrath refers to the lake of fire, in the New Testament, it is almost always a reference to the temporal judgment on persistent evil.

It is crucial in the verses quoted above to note two very important exegetical points. First, the phrase, *“we shall be saved from wrath”* is what is called a gnomic, future tense. It is not predictive of something inevitable. Rather, it is prescriptive of what should naturally follow our justification.

Second, Paul bolsters this interpretation in v. 10 when he reiterates the truth of v. 9, but adds, *“we shall be saved [from wrath] by His life.”* This “resurrection life” is spoken of in Romans 6:4 as *“newness of life”* in which we *“should walk.”* This life is declared to be possible in Romans 7:6 by *“the newness of the Spirit.”*

And finally, in Rom. 8:11, Paul comes back to this idea when he says, *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”* And then adds, *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* (Rom. 8:13).

A. What Does Wrath Look Like for the Believer?

From Romans 5:12 through 8:27, and again from 12:1 through 15:13, Paul presents the path of growth and fruitfulness as the means of being delivered from wrath. It is also the means of

increasing eternal reward (Rom. 8:17–18). Some of the evidences of wrath at work in believers’ lives are as follows:

1. Bearing the body of sin/death, Rom. 6:6; 7:24
2. Sin reigning in your mortal body, Rom. 6:12
3. Slavery to sin, Rom. 6:16
4. Paying the wages of sin, Rom. 6:23
5. Bearing fruit unto death, Rom. 7:5
6. Becoming a slave to the law, Rom. 7:8–11 (experience of spiritual defeat/death)
7. Confusion and inner turmoil, Rom. 7:15–20
8. Wretched existence, Rom. 7:24
9. The condemnation of not walking in the Spirit, Rom. 8:1
10. Walking according to the flesh, Rom. 8:5–8
11. Failure to move from childhood to maturity, Rom. 8:16–17 (resulting in loss of sharing the inheritance of the firstborn, Rom. 8:17 with 8:29b)
12. From chapters 12–15, failure to apply God’s Word to the Church and society in general is the evidence of failure to come to “*obedience [of] the faith*” (Rom. 16:26).

B. Summary: Eternal Salvation or Temporal Deliverance

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” Romans 5:9

*“Few verses in this epistle are more crucial to the correct understanding of Paul’s letter than the present [above] verse. Here, the Greek participle *dikaiothentes* (**since we have ... been justified**) is the functional equivalent of a conditional clause that is assumed to be true. Its truth has been established by Paul’s argumentation in Romans 3:21–4:25. The conclusion to be drawn is naturally expressed in the future tense since it refers to something that is logically expected to follow from it. Thus, it should be carefully observed that the verb *sothesometha* (**we shall be delivered**) is a gnomic future, not a predictive one. To read some idea of ‘inevitability’ out of the future tense would be an error that is excusable only in an elementary Greek class.” Zane C. Hodges, *Romans, Deliverance from Wrath*, p. 141 (emphasis his).*

1. All too often, commentators and believers assume that every time the word “save” is used in the Bible, it refers to eternal salvation or justification.
2. However, the predominant use of the word in the ancient world was very similar to the way we use it in everyday language. If someone is rescued from a perilous situation, we say that they were “saved” by the rescue workers. The ancients used the word in much the same way.
3. When James uses the word (five times in his epistle), it is never used for eternal salvation. Consider James 1:21; 2:14; and 5:15, 20, which are all addressed to believers, and speak of being delivered from the effects of wrath for persistent disobedience.

4. When Paul speaks of being “*saved [delivered] from wrath*” in Romans 5:9, he is dealing with the need of every believer for ongoing “deliverance” from the sin and suffering that results from it.
5. Paul declares, in Romans 5:10, how this deliverance is appropriated. He says, “*we shall be saved [delivered] by His life.*” The resurrection life of Christ is imparted to us as we walk by means of His Spirit, Romans 6:4–5, 13–14; 7:5–6; 8:1–4, 11–13; Gal.5:16.
6. While the book of Romans certainly addresses how we can obtain eternal salvation (Rom. 3:21–4:8), the majority of the book is written to those who are already believers, urging them to live so as to avoid the consequences of sin and disobedience, which provokes God to wrath.
7. Two good examples of how wrath affects believers are given in Romans 6:15–23 (slavery to sin), and Romans 7:7–25, taken from Paul’s own experience, of the wretchedness of knowing God’s Word, but failing to obey it.

STUDY FOUR: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS/JUSTICE OF GOD

“For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness [justice] of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:17

One of the central questions in Romans is this: **Is God fair?** Can the justice/fairness of God be upheld in the face of man’s (and Satan’s) accusations to the contrary? Remember that the book of Job reveals Satan’s claim that God is not fair because He gives special protection to His people, and they only worship Him because it “pays off.”

The book of Romans, more than any other book in the Bible, helps us to deal with the question of “**theodicy**,” which has puzzled theologians and philosophers down through history. The question of theodicy is stated thus: “If God is all-knowing and all-good and all-powerful, why does He not put a stop to evil?” Another way of putting it is: “The fact that God permits evil shows that He is either not good, or that He is not all-powerful, or both.”

John Calvin, and many Calvinists since his time, have declared that God pre-ordained everything that happens; therefore, everything that occurs in time is done by God for His glory. This thinking is diametrically opposed to Paul’s approach in Romans. The approach taken by Paul, and articulated in this book, is that the justice and fairness of God is unassailable and will, in the end, be vindicated before men and angels. In fact, the declaration “*that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow ... [and] every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil 2:10–11), will result from the failure of both men and angels to find fault with His perfect justice.

In the Person and work of Christ (Phil. 2:5–9), God’s “*manifold wisdom ... [will] be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Eph. 3:10–11).

This means that all attempts by men to “accuse or excuse” one another will be futile in the face of God’s judgment, which will be based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:15–16).

A. God is Fair, Man is Without Excuse

“[God] who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds... For there is no partiality with God ...” Romans 2:6, 11

These two statements are at the heart of God’s justice. In the Old Testament, a repeated requirement demanded of those in position of judges was that they be impartial. They must use the same standard of judgment, without respect of persons, in hearing and adjudicating every case (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; 16:18–20; 2 Chr. 19:7). Every judgment must be fair and just, and transparently so. Paul is making a crucial point in Romans: that God judges according to the same standards to which He holds earthly judges:

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne, mercy and truth go before Your face.” Psalm 89:14

The word “*righteousness*,” which is used in Rom. 1:17 is from the same root word as “*justice*” (see Rom. 3:26). In the Hebrew of Psalm 89:14, “*righteousness*” is *tsedeq*, again referring to the character of God, from which “*justice*” (*mishpat*), or right-judgment, is made. The point is that God’s righteous essence cannot give any other than fair and just judgment. Because God’s dealings with all men are fair and just, all men who reject His provisions through Christ are declared to be “*without excuse*” (Rom. 1:20; 2:1). In the cross of Christ, provision has been made for every member of the human race to escape the condemnation of sin and death, and every soul stands accountable for their own response to the love of Christ (Matt. 23:37–39; John 3:18).

Calvin declared, the justice of God is not simply His right to do whatever He decides because He is God. This is nothing short of tyranny—“might makes right.” Rather, God has displayed openly His dealings with men, and in such a way that all mankind, as well as angels, will be forced to admit that He is fair and just. The fact that God’s justice can be known and evaluated by men is shown in the passage where Abraham intercedes for Sodom (Gen. 18:25). Abraham says to the Lord, “*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*” We may be tempted to ask, “Who is Abraham to judge whether God is just or not?” Actually, Paul will declare that God will vindicate all His ways before even unbelieving men, who in their sinfulness want to prove Him wrong!

B. God Vindicated When Judged by Men

“For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness [and justice] of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written, ‘that you may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged.’” Romans 3:3–4

It may sound strange to say, but the day is coming when men will bring accusation against God. Every unsaved member of the human race, in seeking to justify themselves, must seek to declare God unjust and unfair. Paul anticipates this in the verses quoted above. The phrase “*without effect*” means “to make invalid, render powerless.” In other words, does the unbelief of the mass of humanity demonstrate injustice or unfairness in God? Paul’s answer to this is rather astounding!

There is coming a time when God will be judged by men. At that time, God will be “vindicated” and will “overcome.” The time in view is the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11–15), when men will seek to “accuse or excuse one another” (Rom. 2:15) before God. Yet, by all standards of righteousness and justice, which are known and professed by men, God will be vindicated.

Remember that Jesus declared, “*For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*” (Matt. 12:37). This is why Luke reports, “*And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified [vindicated] God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him*” (Luke 7:29–30). In the end, those who trusted in Christ will be justified by their own declaration that He is the Savior of the world. In the end, those who rejected Him will be condemned by their own refusal to believe.

C. Is the Wrath of God Unfair?

*“Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Certainly not!
For then how will God judge the world?”* Romans 3:5b–6

This question lies at the heart of the book of Romans. Paul will continue to develop it right up to chapters 9–11, where he brings it home to the nation of Israel. In fact, it will culminate in Romans 9:14, where Paul deals with the question, “*What shall we say then. Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!*”

No doubt Jewish leaders had confronted Paul in many synagogues claiming that he was a false teacher due to his teaching that God was now working through the church, not Israel (Rom. 11:25).

Like Stephen before him (Acts 7), Paul could demonstrate through the history of Israel that their continued rebellion against the prophets, and now crucifixion of the promised Messiah, could only culminate in a wrath that would destroy the nation (see Matt. 23:37–39; Acts 7:51–60; 1 Thess. 2:14–16; Acts 18:6; 28:25–31). Paul is declaring that God inflicts wrath in perfect harmony with His righteous and just nature, and that this justice and fairness will be evident to all mankind. In the end, no one will be able to say that God has been anything but just and fair to every soul.

D. The Wrath of God and Israel

*“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?
Certainly not!”* Romans 9:14

In Romans 9–11, Paul answers the questions he posed in Romans 3:1–6 about the privilege of the Jew, the problem of Israel’s unbelief, and the justice and fairness of God. No doubt in synagogue after synagogue, all over the Mediterranean world, Paul had heard these questions. They all followed a similar line of thinking:

“If God chose the nation of Israel above all other nations,
and brought forth the Messiah through her, isn’t it unjust
of God to now reject Israel, and visit wrath on her?”

While we cannot do a thorough study of these three chapters here, we can at least hit the high points. Just as Stephen reviewed the history of Israel’s rebellion in Acts 7, so Paul does here, with this exception: He is able to give not just Israel’s past (Romans 9), but also her present (Romans 10) and her future (Romans 11).

Paul’s grief over Israel (Rom. 9:1–3; 10:1–3) is precisely because they, like all men, are “*without excuse*” (Rom. 1:20; 2:1) for rejecting Christ. God had richly blessed Israel above every nation on Earth (Rom. 9:4–5). He had chosen “*the fathers*,” by whom the nation would be known, and through whom Christ would come. This election (Rom. 9:6–13) was for special service—not eternal salvation. It was to provide the way of eternal life for all mankind, including the descendants of Ishmael and Esau. (This is a study for another time, but all indications are that both these men were believers). Never forget that: “Election is a process of selection, which requires exclusion, for the purpose of inclusion.” In choosing the line of Christ, all others had to be excluded. But this exclusion was for the ultimate purpose of including them in the offer and possibility of receiving eternal life.

God’s dealings with Pharaoh (Rom. 9:14–18) show God’s just dealings with a man who first chose to harden his own heart against God and, in turn, was hardened by God (this is in accordance with what he taught in Rom. 1:18–32; 2:4–6). Thus, Pharaoh stands as a warning to Israel in the present, who also have hardened themselves in unbelief (Rom. 9:19–23). God had foretold this very thing through the prophets, as a warning to Israel (Rom. 9:24–29), yet they did not listen (remember Matt. 23:37–39). Therefore, Israel stands fully accountable for her unbelief, and yet the offer of deliverance still stands (Rom. 9:30–33).

In their zealous pursuit of righteousness (Rom. 10:1–4), they sought their own righteousness and rejected the righteousness of faith (Rom. 10:5–13). Their chief failure resulted from their unwillingness to confess “Jesus as Lord” (Rom. 10:9–10). The issue here is not “making Jesus Lord.” The quote in v. 13 (from Joel 2:32) makes it clear that they would not acknowledge Jesus as God in the flesh. Just as they did during His earthly life, they rejected the claim that He was “*equal with God*” (see John 5:18; 10:33). By refusing to accept His deity, they denied His “power to save” (Rom. 1:16, see Matt. 27:40, 42). They refused to hear the Word of God (Rom. 10:16–21).

Thus, the wrath of God rests on Israel, and God will turn to the Gentiles as His chosen vessels, while Israel is judicially blinded (Rom. 11:1–10, 25). However, this blindness is only temporary. In the genius only God could possess, the Gentiles will be the very instrument of Israel's deliverance (Rom. 11:11–29). Just as Israel brought the light of Christ to the nations, even so by the Gentile Church, Israel will, in time, receive that light (Rom. 11:30–36). Thus, God is able to have mercy on all, because all have sinned (Rom. 11:32), and it is to sinners that grace and mercy are extended.

This is a very inadequate rendering of this famous, and mostly misinterpreted section. However, three great truths are richly demonstrated:

1. That all mankind are sinners, and because of God's grace, all may be saved (Rom. 3:21–24; 4:16; 11:6).
2. That the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering of God toward all men is designed to bring to repentance (from self-reliance, Rom. 10:2–3) and faith (Christ-reliance) (compare Rom. 2:4–6 with Acts 17:24–31). Remember that *"The same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him"* (Rom. 10:12). There is no one He is not Lord over, and there is no one He is not willing to save!
3. Willful hardening results in wrath (Rom. 1:18–32). This wrath consists of the degenerating and painful consequences of evil decisions. As believers, we are delivered from wrath as we allow the life of Christ to be imparted to us through His Spirit (Rom. 5:9–10; 6:4; 7:6; 8:11).

E. Summary: Doctrine of the Justice of God

"... to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Romans 3:26

1. It is impossible to separate the divine attributes of righteousness and justice.

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne ..." Psalms 89:14; 97:2

2. Righteousness speaks of the nature or the essence of God; justice refers to the right and fair actions which come from that essence.
3. The righteousness/justice of God is reflected in all His commandments. What He commands us to do is a reflection of who and what He is. The will of God for every believer is expressed in the phrase, *"to be conformed to the image of His Son"* (Rom. 8:29, see 2 Cor. 3:18).
4. When it comes to doing what is just on this Earth, judges are repeatedly commanded not to show any kind of partiality, but to treat all persons, rich or poor, with equality and fairness, Exodus 23:3; Deuteronomy 1:17; 10:17; 16:19; Job 13:10; Proverbs 18:5; 24:23.

5. These commands are based on the fact that God never shows partiality to anyone, 2 Chronicles 19:5–7; Psalm 82:1–2.
6. Paul’s point throughout Romans is that, in the end, God’s righteousness and justice will be openly confirmed to all mankind, Romans 1:17; 3:26; 10:12–13.
7. The basis of this proof will be that Christ died for all, that God works to draw all, and that all who reject Christ will be “*without excuse*,” Romans 1:20; 2:1, 4; 3:23–24; 4:16; 5:18; 11:32.
8. At the Great White Throne Judgment, God’s justice will be “judged” by all mankind, and He will be declared perfectly righteous and just by all, Romans 3:4, 26.
9. It will be this inescapable evidence of the justice of God that will cause “*every knee [to] bow... and ...every tongue [to] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*” (Phil. 2:10–11).
10. This biblical truth is the death-blow to Calvinism, which has historically declared two impossible positions: First, that God is sovereign and ordained everything that happens, including sin and evil (both Calvin and Luther held this). Second, that because God is sovereign, He can do whatever He wants, and it must be right. No honest soul could justify a God who would pick some to go to Heaven, and consign the rest to Hell, with no possible chance of deliverance. In fact, it is when anyone believes in Christ, that they “justify” God for making salvation available to all.

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Genesis 18:25b

“And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.” Luke 7:29–30

STUDY FIVE: THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH (“THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH”)

“Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name ... Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ ... according to the commandment of the everlasting God for obedience to the faith.” Romans 1:5; 16:25–26

Take note that this theme “bookends” the epistle (an *inclusio*), from Romans 1:5 to 16:26. In essence, this thread encapsulates the other four threads. The obedience of faith, in fact, vindicates the truth of the Gospel, upholds the justice/fairness of God, delivers from wrath, demonstrates God’s power to save, and leads to peace, power, assurance, and victory (Romans 8).

The phrase can grammatically be taken one of two ways: The obedience that consists of faith (*i.e.*, trusting Christ is obedience to the Gospel message), or the obedience that is the fruit of

faith. There is absolutely nothing in the phrase to suggest (as “Lordship” people might claim) that obedience is the inevitable result of true faith.

My conviction is that we should, in light of the context of Romans, take the phrase fluidly, to include both the idea that faith is obedience (the message to the unbeliever), and that obedience is the fruit of faith (the message to the believer). We will find both of these ideas in Romans. Paul is urging any unbelievers who might hear or read the message of Romans to believe in the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the God-man who was crucified and rose again for our redemption (Rom. 4:23–25; 15:18). He is also strongly urging believers, living in a time of historical crisis, when the impending wrath of God is about to fall on Jerusalem and the entire Mediterranean world, to live obediently, in order to escape that wrath (Rom. 5:9–10). Let’s follow the teaching of obedience by faith through the book.

A. Faith is Obedience to the Gospel (Rom. 1:5)

Paul begins by telling us that he had, as a believer, received “*grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.*” In other words, the specific grace (gift) given to him was apostleship (this is the idea expressed in Rom. 12:3–8). The goal of this gift was to bring the Gentile nations into the obedience of faith in response to the “Good News” about Jesus Christ.

This very idea is captured in Romans 15:18, where he writes, “*For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient ...*” The idea here parallels that of 2 Corinthians 10:12–17, where he rejects the idea of boasting in another’s accomplishments. Paul did not take credit for what others had done. He had enough success as an apostle to stand on his own achievements.

Another proof of this idea that faith is itself an act of obedience is found in Romans 10:16–17. Speaking of Israel, he says, “*But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘LORD, who has believed our report?’ So then faith [i.e., obedience to the Gospel] comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” In other words, there is power in the Gospel (Rom. 1:16) to convict and enlighten the receptive soul, to bring one to faith. In the same context, Paul uses disobedience to describe unbelief:

“But to Israel he says: ‘All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.’” Romans 10:21

B. Faith Leads to Obedience (Rom. 1:17)

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

According to Paul, the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God in four specific ways:

1. First, it reveals righteousness as the essence of God’s nature. It is because God is righteous that He must express wrath against all ungodliness (Rom. 1:18–32).

2. Second, God is seen as righteous and just in judging Christ for all men; therefore, He is perfectly righteous and just to save all who believe (Rom. 3:4, 26).
3. Third, when anyone comes to faith in Christ, they are declaring that God is righteous and that they deserve judgment, but they claim the provisions on the cross for forgiveness and justification (in other words, they “justify God” in all His dealings (see Luke 7:29–30).
4. Finally, as the believer grows in grace and truth, the fruit of their ongoing faith in God’s Word will result in an obedient and victorious life (Rom. 5:17–8:30).

The phrase in Romans 1:17, “*from faith to faith*,” seems to be obscure in its meaning. Some think it means “from God’s faithfulness to man’s faith.” While this is a true statement, it is probably not Paul’s meaning here. The Greek would read “out from faith unto faith,” suggesting a progression of the life of faith, from initial justification toward sanctification. This idea is supported by the follow-up phrase, “*The just shall live by faith*.”

If we go back to Habakkuk 2:4 and consider the context, we get Paul’s idea. The prophet Habakkuk is perplexed at the announcement that God would use the godless Chaldeans to judge His chosen people. His complaint in the first chapter is similar to Abraham’s statement, “*Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?*” (Gen. 18:25). While God does not explain all His actions, either to Abraham or to Habakkuk, the point to both is that they must trust in a righteous God and live by the power of faith. We could say, “*The Just shall live by faith*” (emphasis mine). This captures a point Paul makes later.

C. **Faith’s Obedience is Life in Christ (Rom. 5:8–10)**

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Two phrases are critical to understand from the start. First, the phrase “*much more*” was used in the Greek philosophical argument to point to what would be a logical and reasonable outcome. In other words, if we have been justified and reconciled, it is reasonable to expect that “*we shall be saved*” (used twice).

The second phrase, “*we shall be saved*” cannot be talking about our initial justification, since our justification and reconciliation—as previously accomplished facts—are the basis of the “salvation” that follows. Paul specifically tells us that he is talking about being “*delivered from wrath*,” and that this deliverance comes “*by His life*.” While we are justified and made righteous by His death, we are sanctified by His life, which is lived in and through us by the indwelling Holy Spirit. As Paul makes clear later:

“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” Romans 8:11

Remember that the first reference to the Spirit in Romans speaks of Him as, “*the Spirit of holiness*” (Rom. 1:4) and shows Him to be the agent of the resurrection.

When we “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:16) and are “*led by the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:14), we are conducting ourselves as responsible, adult sons, in obedience to the Word of God. The result is that we are delivered from the wrath that is being revealed all around us. We live in a generation of fear—specifically, fear of what is coming. Mankind has a sense of impending disaster. This is nothing less than the awareness of God’s wrath being revealed against all man’s ungodliness and the suppression of the truth, which are rampant in our time.

This has given rise to a worldwide phenomenon: “Prepping.” There are tons of books and videos attempting to teach people “how to survive the coming apocalypse.” Ultimately, there is only one sure way to escape “*the wrath to come*” (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7): That is, to live daily in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:4; 7:6; 8:4, 11). This is a life of peace, power, and victory (Romans 8).

D. The Obedience of Faith Equals Power (Rom. 6:12, 17)

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts ... But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.”

The command to “*not let sin reign*” means that though sin will always seek to have dominion, we have the power—by the indwelling Spirit—to forbid its control of our lives. Paul’s argument through this whole chapter is that we choose whom we will serve. We have the power of decision. If we choose to serve sin, it will lead us to death (Rom. 8:15–16). This is the “*wrath*” he spoke of in Romans 5:9–10. Later, Paul warns us:

“For if you live according to the flesh you will die ...” Romans 8:13

The death in view here is not necessarily physical death. Since “*for to be carnally minded is death*” (Rom. 8:6a) and, even Paul as a believer had experienced this death-like struggle (Rom. 7:9–11), it is clear that he is speaking of a life cut off from the experience of resurrection power and joy.

Yet, he rejoices that the Romans had responded obediently to the teaching which they had received. There is a play on words in the phrase, “*that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.*” The word “*delivered*” could be used of turning one over to the authorities for confinement. It was also used for passing on vital information to someone else. By responding to the truth of the Word of God in obedient faith, these Romans had, as it were,

been placed under guardianship of God's authority. The result was that they lived in "the obedience of the faith."

E. The Obedience of Faith Equals Walking in the Spirit (Rom. 8:1–4, 11–17)

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:1

Many translations delete the last half of this verse, based on the Nestle's text and a few of the oldest Greek manuscripts. However, the Majority text includes it, as the greater number of available texts agree to its validity. The greatest argument for including the last half of v. 1 is context. Paul is not dealing here with positional issues, but rather with the practical question raised in Romans 6:1 about how we, as Christians, should live. The inner conflict of the Spirit vs. the flesh is the main theme of Romans 6–7. The condemnation Paul is referring to is the inner conviction of failure, illustrated by Paul's own experience in Romans 7:8–25 and his anguished cry for deliverance in v. 24.

F. The Battleground of the Mind

He then declares that the battle is won in the mind (Rom. 7:25), and the way of victory is now explored in chapter 8. The indwelling "*law of the Spirit*" (Rom. 8:2) has set us free from "*the law of sin and death.*" Based on the finished work of Christ on the cross (Rom. 8:3), we have been empowered to fulfill the spiritual requirements of the law, providing we "*do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*" (Rom. 8:4). The repetition of the phrase from v. 1 is added for emphasis. And this is accomplished by the decision to "set the mind on the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5–7). In other words, the key to spiritual living is developing a spiritual mind-set.

G. Life or Death is a Choice

Having set our minds on spiritual realities, through sound doctrinal teaching, the Spirit then works in our dying physical body to infuse us with the resurrection life of Christ (Rom. 8:11). We are debtors—both by grace and by gratitude to God—to live according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:12). The practical consideration of this fact is that living according to the flesh leads to death, whereas living according to the Spirit is true living "*in newness of life*" (Rom. 6:4), "*in the newness of the Spirit*" (Rom. 7:6).

H. Spiritual Infants or Mature Sons?

Paul's final thrust of argument is found in Romans 8:14–17. Those who are in the habit of being led by the Spirit are, in fact, mature sons of God. The word "*sons*" is *huios* and speaks of mature, adult sons, as opposed to little children (v. 16). Paul has used this contrast before in Galatians 4:1–7, and there also, the context is inheritance (Gal. 3:29; 4:7). If we are children of God, then we are His heirs (Rom. 8:17), but the point is that only those who mature to adult status, who "*indeed ... suffer with Him,*" will be "*joint heirs with Christ.*" As Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:12, "*If we endure [with Him], we shall also reign with Him.*"

This great truth is in keeping with other statements Paul makes. In Romans 2:6, he says that God “*will render to each one according to his deeds.*” This is true for us as believers also. Then in Romans 8:29, he speaks of Christ as “*the firstborn among many brethren.*” Remember that according to the right of primogeniture, the firstborn received the double inheritance. It is this “double portion” of eternal inheritance that Paul is urging us to lay hold of, by developing a spiritual mind-set, walking by means of the Spirit’s power, and becoming mature sons in the family of God.

I. The Obedience of the Faith Produces Beautiful Feet (Rom. 10:14–15; Romans 12–15)

*“And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written,
‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
who bring glad tidings of good things!’”* Romans 10:15

It is often missed in v. 14 that the “*they*” in question are the Jews (see Rom. 10:1–2). Paul, having expressed his great love for and desire to reach Israel (Rom. 9:1–3; 10:1–2), is now enlisting the whole Gentile church in the effort to reach them. And he stresses three times that a big part of the historical significance of the Church is to provoke Israel to jealousy—resulting in their ultimate restoration through faith (Rom. 10:19; 11:11, 14). This is an endeavor in which there is no time to waste (Rom. 13:11–14).

Romans chapters 12–15 are built on the theme of “*beautiful feet.*” Here, Paul is not developing some new set of laws, but rather laying down the means and methods by which we, as believers, can attain to the status of true “*ambassadors for Christ*” (2 Cor. 5:14–21) to this fallen world. We have a message that all the world needs: the promise of life—eternal and abundant—for all who will believe (see also John 10:10). It is no wonder that Paul begins this last section with the words, “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*” (Rom. 12:1). It is worth noting that the word “*mercy*” occurs only in chapters 9–11, in the section dealing with the Nation of Israel, and that it is used nine times! We are reminded that it is due to God’s mercies to Israel, into which we have been grafted “*contrary to nature*” (Rom. 11:24), that we possess all that we have in Christ. And this consideration leads us to our last point.

J. The Obedience of the Faith Equals Witness (Rom. 16:19)

*“For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf,
but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.”*

Here, Paul rejoices that the church in Rome (clearly made up of many house churches, based on Rom. 16:3–16), was known for their sound doctrine and faithful obedience to it. So great was the impact of their lives, collectively, that the report of their spiritual dynamism had spread throughout the Mediterranean world.

However, no one is ever exempt from the dangers of evil in this world, so Paul urges them (through their leaders), to be wise in discerning and doing the “*good and simple*” (innocent,

unmixed) regarding the “evil.” Paul has been contrasting “the good” of faith and obedience throughout the book. He has also clearly defined “the evil” which brings about “*the wrath of God*” (Rom. 1:18–32; 2:3–6; 3:8–18).

Later, in the section on the conduct of obedience (Romans 12–15), he warns us “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Rom. 12:21). A simple summary would be to say that the “evil” begins with the suppression of the truth (Rom. 1:18), whereas the “good” begins with a positive response to the “goodness of God” (Rom. 2:4). One is a path of unbelief leading to the revelation of God’s wrath (Rom. 2:8–9), while the other is a path leading to peace with God and power among men (Rom. 5:1–5; 8:31–39; Ch. 12–15).

It is worth adding that, elsewhere, Paul teaches that the unbelieving world is identified as “*sons of disobedience*” and “*children of wrath*” (Eph. 2:1–2). This is the natural condition of fallen mankind. It is due to their persistence in unbelief that “*the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience*” (Eph. 5:6). Paul’s warnings, in all his epistles, are designed to deliver us from sharing in the “*judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries*” (Heb. 10:27).

These warnings are of special significance to us, in this present generation. Ominous things are afoot in our world. As the ancients said, “something wicked this way comes!” Therefore, as the author of Hebrews says, “*Shall we [believers] not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*” (Heb. 12:9). Once again, to “live” refers to the enjoyment of “abundant life” (John 10:10), to the “newness of [resurrection] life” (Rom. 6:4), a life that will result in maximum inheritance and eternal reward at the Bema Seat of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:10–15).

K. Summary: Doctrine of Obedience

“Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.” Romans 1:5 (see Rom. 16:26)

1. When Paul speaks of “obedience to the faith,” in my opinion, he has two ideas in mind.
 - a. To the unbeliever—the obedience which consists in faith in Christ
 - b. To the believer—the obedience that is the outward expression of faith
2. It may be that this is what he has in mind when he writes, “*from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘the just shall live by faith.’*”
3. The majority of the book of Romans is written to believers, concerning how they are to reflect their initial faith by their life, Romans 6–8; 12–15.
4. Abraham, long after he had believed God, was commended for his actions in obedience to God, and received blessing as a consequence, Genesis 22:18.
5. The challenge of obedience is whether we will obey the flesh, or the Spirit, Romans 6.

6. The logical consequence of the obedience of faith in Christ is the obedience of life to His Word, 1 Peter 1:22–23.
7. Paul declares that the greatest witness of the Roman church was through their obedience to the Word, Romans 16:19.