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INTRODUCTION

Dear Friend,

I wrote this book for you. When I wrote it, I tried to put myself in your shoes. I thought of you as one who wants to become better acquainted with the Savior who died for you and gave you life. Until recently, you may not have been interested in getting to know Him better. I once had this attitude, but a tremendous change occurred. I know the change pleased the Lord Jesus because He loves to become more important to us. He also will reward such an attitude change. Having the desire to know Him better will help you discover the enormous riches you have in your hands — the Bible. The more you read it, the more you will find your love for the Lord Jesus increasing. It doesn't matter how old or young you are. What matters is the change in your feelings towards the Lord Jesus and what He has become to you. This is why you now want to start reading the Bible. With this book, I want to help you read and study the Bible. Here are a few practical tips that might help you:

1. Provide yourself with a good translation of the Bible. Some good translations are the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), the *New King James Version* (NKJV), the *New Translation* by J.N. Darby (JND) and the *King James Version* (KJV), preferably with the New Scofield word updates. I will be using the NKJV (with permission) when referencing and quoting Scripture unless I note otherwise.
2. I tried to write this book in a way that encourages you to use the Bible. At the beginning and end of each section, I have listed the Bible verses pertaining to that section. I encourage you to read those verses before and after reading the section. It would be a good idea to keep your Bible open to those verses so you can easily refer to them.
3. Self-discipline is very important. You have to be willing to

discipline yourself to take time to understand the Bible better. You need to read the Bible at a set time that's best for you. To help you with this, I have divided this book into sixty sections. You can read one section, with its verses, every day in about 15 minutes. You take more time eating each day and certainly *spiritual food* is as important as physical food. If you can be self-disciplined in this, then after only two months, you will have gained a little more insight into one of the most splendid letters of the Bible. The whole Bible is a splendid book and it's my prayer that you'll get this impression in an increasing way.

Middelburg, Netherlands, 2003

1. THE GOSPEL OF GOD

(Romans 1:1-7)

Romans is the first epistle (or letter) of the New Testament. If you've just started your journey to read through the Bible with *Romans*, you have made a good choice. In it you'll discover how God saw you while you were unsaved and how He sees you now that you know Him as your Savior. This knowledge will give you assurance of having made the right choice. You will still have to learn how to walk on the Christian pathway, but at least you will know the pathway itself is correct.

Paul (as inspired by the Holy Spirit) was chosen by God to speak to you about this pathway in this letter. In verse 1 he tells us what he is going to talk about — the gospel of God. The gospel you accepted was not devised by man, but it went out from God. It is *His* gospel. In the past God spoke of this gospel through His prophets. You can read about it in the Old Testament, called “the Holy Scripture” in verse 2. During the time of the Old Testament, God tested people repeatedly to see if they would serve Him, but they failed each time. Finally, God made it known that He Himself would act. This happened when He sent His Son. The contents of the gospel of God are centered in the Son of God. It is the gospel of God “concerning His Son” (v.3). This gospel is not a religion, but rather about a Person with whom you now have a living relationship through faith.

Much can be found regarding the Son of God in the Bible. You can only begin to grasp the real meaning of any portion of Scripture if you are able to see what it has to say about the Lord Jesus. Verses 3 and 4 mention two things regarding Him that are important to be able to understand the contents of this letter. First, He was “born of the seed of David.” As the seed (or descendant) of David, He was entitled to the throne of Israel in Jerusalem. Since Israel has rejected Him, His ascent to the throne has been delayed. In Romans 9-11 you will see how God will fulfill all the promises He made to David.

Second, what is spoken of the Lord Jesus comes from the rejection of

Him by His people, Israel. The Holy Spirit who led the Lord to die as a Man by crucifixion, has made it clear, has *declared*, that He also is the Son of God when He rose from the dead. His resurrection from among the dead (since everyone else has remained dead) was “according to the Spirit of holiness.” This is important: everything the Lord Jesus did during His life was in total agreement with the Holy Spirit. Since all was in harmony with the will of God, we know He committed no evil in His life, but in the three hours of darkness He certainly did come into contact with evil. He was *made sin* and *bore our sins* in His body. Therefore God judged Him for our sins and gave Him the wages of sin, which is death. When He rose from the dead, the “Spirit of holiness” could unify Himself completely with Him since all sin and wrong deeds were completely judged by Him.

If you can now see who the Lord Jesus is and what He has done, it will not be difficult to acknowledge Him as the Lord of your life. Paul was so impressed by this Person that he wanted to go out to all nations to bring people into obedience by faith in Him (v.5). I hope something will radiate from your life and mine, both in our words and deeds, so others will come to obedience by faith in the Lord Jesus.

Now read Romans 1:1-7 again.

Reflection: Tell God in your words who the Lord Jesus is to you.

2. PAUL'S LONGING

(Romans 1:8-15)

"First, I thank my God." One of the first things Paul conveys in almost every letter he wrote is to thank God for the believers. We live in a world full of unthankful people. We even allow ourselves to become influenced by this thankless attitude and forget that God knows of it. This is why He often reminds us in the Bible to give thanks. Giving thanks is an expression of joy and happiness. We thank God for things we receive from Him because we know only God can give us good things. I once read of a man who fractured his spine during a fall and ended up in a wheelchair. At first he cursed God for it, but after he was saved he said, "When I stand before God's throne, I will thank Him for breaking my back. If God would have let me live the way I was living, I would have gone to hell." The things God does will always make us thankful.

Have you ever thanked God for your brothers and sisters and for other believers? Your former friends probably have abandoned you, but others have taken their place. Paul heard about the believers in Rome because their faith was being spoken about in the whole world. The thoughts that occupied his mind were connected with their faith. His spirit and his thought-life were saturated with one thing: serving God in the gospel of His Son. If you have just been saved, many thoughts of your previous life may still occupy your mind. This is why it's good to think on things that have to do with the Lord Jesus.

Paul longed to go to the believers in Rome. He had never seen them, but he was interested in them. He constantly remembered them in his prayers. They needed encouragement and he could give it to them by "imparting to [them] some spiritual gift." After this he immediately presents an explanation, "That is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." We also need this strengthening of our faith. This is why we should seek to come together and share the experiences of our faith with each other. It is a comfort for both, and it doesn't matter where you or the other believers are in spiritual growth, whether newborn or mature. This was

true of Paul and the Roman believers. Paul had much experience in the faith, but was still able to receive comfort from the believers in Rome who had fewer experiences. So look up your fellow believers; you need them and they need you.

Paul had often wanted to go to Rome because he wanted to have some fruit among them. He wasn't looking for glory, but was indebted to God because *He* had called him to this service and responsibility. He could only discharge this debt if he fulfilled his service by preaching the gospel. But didn't these people already know the Lord Jesus? Yes, but the gospel implies more than preaching repentance and faith. The word *gospel* means *good news*. It's called "the gospel of God" since the heart of God is expressed in it. God has much more to say to us than "Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus." In fact, it is not until we have repented from our sins that we are capable of discovering all He wants us to know from His heart. It's good for us that Paul wasn't able to go to Rome since he then wrote this letter to the Christians there, and therefore we can now be better acquainted with the gospel he wanted to preach to them.

Now read Romans 1:8-15 again.

Reflection: Thank God for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Mention their names to Him.

3. THE GOSPEL — THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION

(Romans 1:16-21)

Have you ever felt ashamed of the gospel? I have! I think the reason for this is we haven't yet fully realized the active power of God in the gospel. We pay too much attention to what people think because we are more concerned with their reaction towards us. But haven't you discovered the effect of the gospel: salvation for lost people? Don't you believe this? You have become a partaker of this salvation through faith. Maybe in the past you tried to earn your salvation by living as good as possible. At some point you had to acknowledge that man has no strength in himself to be saved. This doesn't mean God comes to *assist* a person in his attempts to be saved and that He will cause the "good" things to outweigh the wrong things. The gospel shows that if God saves man by faith and not through his efforts, He does this in a righteous way. This is the meaning of the expression, "the righteousness of God."

The righteousness of God is one of the main themes of Romans. This phrase means that God is righteous in His deeds. At this point it is sufficient to know that the power of God and the righteous deeds of God have saved you. So your salvation isn't dependent on how you feel, nor is it a requirement for you to feel a certain way. Having faith in God's plan of salvation is the key to receiving His salvation, and as long as you live on earth you will live by this faith. This *faith* (or belief) doesn't have a sense of uncertainty that people often associate with the word. Faith in the Bible refers to steadfast trust. *Faith is therefore a firm confidence in God and a steadfast trust in Him who has done all for you to save you.* He will also do all for you to guide you safely through this life until you are with Him. How vitally important it is to be saved!

"The wrath of God." These are striking words! How many people contemptuously ridicule the thought of the wrath of God! This wrath is revealed against all forms of ungodliness. It is ungodly to ignore God.

This wrath also comes on all the unrighteousness of people who hold the truth in unrighteousness. These are people who claim to know the truth, but manipulate it for their purposes. Therefore God includes them among those against whom His wrath is revealed. The awful part of it is that man doesn't pay attention to "what may be known of God."

No person could have apprehended anything concerning God unless He had revealed it to man. In creation, the work of His fingers, God made visible His eternal power and Godhead. Every rational person *must* conclude there is a God because of the wonders of what he observes around him in creation. The fact that there must be a God should lead him to glorify and thank God. However, the sad result is that he who shuts God out of his mind lapses into foolishness (such as evolution) and loses any light of the origin, the meaning and purpose of life. Their foolish hearts are darkened. What can be expected of such people?

Now read Romans 1:16-21 again.

Reflection: Ask God to help you not to be ashamed of the gospel.

4. MANKIND WITHOUT GOD

(Romans 1:22-32)

These verses won't impress you with the greatness of man. Attempts are often made to get us to believe that people are basically good morally and everything is getting better. The opposite is true, and God bluntly says so. He honestly describes (maybe this is why it seems stern) how deep mankind has fallen after turning their backs on Him. What God says here was true of both you and me before we accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior. It is a description of the way we lived. God didn't create mankind in wickedness. Genesis 1:31 says, "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." This includes mankind, but when a person abandons his connection with God, he is given over to himself by God. We read this phrase three times in this portion (vv.24,26,28).

When people abandon the glory of the incorruptible God and replace Him with something else that looks like a perishable man or animal, God gives them over to it. He then gives them over to uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts. You can see the result of it all around you. People who change the truth of God into a lie are given over by God to degrading passions: homosexuality among both men and women. Today this is called an alternative lifestyle that we should accept. Rather, we read here that this is a judgment of God; they receive in themselves what they deserve for their error. If the creature is honored and served above the Creator, then this is the result. God created man to honor and serve Him. God has instilled this within the very nature of mankind.

The ability to attain to true humanity only comes when mankind lives for God. If he does, he will experience the greatest of joy and happiness. This was what God desired when He created man, but if man doesn't act accordingly, God gives him over to a life of abnormal relationships as Paul has described here. We can see this more and more around us, and the unnaturalness of it is openly denied. It is considered wrong to say anything against it, and we are supposed to accept it as normal or perhaps face prosecution for discrimination.

This is how the truth of God is being changed into a lie within the so-called Christian western countries.

The third time God gives people up to themselves and how this happens is described in verse 28. Since they push God out of their thoughts, God gives them over to a “debased mind” or perverted way of thinking. This is why they begin to act disrespectful.

At this point quite a list is summed up. You may recognize with shame some things you also have done. All you gained was “death” rather than the satisfaction and pleasure you expected. All these things are present in man’s heart and revealed in his deeds when he lives without considering God. He produces, for himself and others, things that must only be reckoned as dead. There is nothing good toward God in these things. Deep down in their hearts they know what God thinks about these things, but they don’t care. They live their life as they please, and express their agreement with others who live the same way.

Now read Romans 1:22-32 again.

Reflection: Tell God that He is right in His judgment of mankind.

5. THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD

(Romans 2:1-8)

You may know people who know exactly how others should act. They enjoy telling about the shortcomings of others. These aren't the people who live in the loose manner described in chapter one, but when they see others who live like that, they condemn them. It doesn't cross their minds that by doing this they are condemning themselves because the same things are present in their hearts.

An example of this is found in John 8:1-11. The leaders of the people of Israel came to the Lord Jesus with a woman caught in the act of adultery. In answering their question regarding what was to be done with her, the Lord said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (v.7). Upon hearing this they all went out! Not one of the accusers was blameless. In their hearts they had all committed the same sin. This is indeed true for every person who thinks he isn't guilty of the terrible sins he points out in others, but you and I know they will not escape the judgment of God which will come upon them in righteousness. A day will come "when God will judge the secrets of men" (v.16). Then it will become clear how God has always viewed things.

Fortunately, there is another side to the matter. There is the *mercy of God* by which you and every other believer have come to repentance. What a wealth of goodness, forbearance and long-suffering (patience) is present with God! God didn't want you to continue on the road of ruin. He met you and let you see what you were doing and what would become of you. Your conscience was made active and it made you acknowledge that God's judgment would have to strike you. *Repentance* is seeing yourself as God sees you and accepting His judgment over you as rightly deserved. You once had high thoughts of yourself and low thoughts of God. This has radically changed in you and now you think of yourself more lowly, and more highly of God. This is really just the starting point for the rest of your life, but we need to continue to learn this more and more.

This new view of yourself and God has been given to you by His mercy. People who pass by God's mercy display their hard and unrepentant heart. Such a person feels he is good enough by himself to appear before God. Even though deeds can appear good in our eyes, all deeds done with an unrepentant heart form an ever-increasing mound over which God's judgment will come in the day of wrath. God will righteously judge the deeds of man and reward them for all they have done. He gives eternal life to everyone who seeks for glory, honor and immortality by persisting in doing good deeds according to God's standards — only possible for a saved person. But God will pour out His wrath on all who have followed the natural inclinations of their hearts and have not considered His rights.

In both of these situations, each person has shown what he pursues in life. This is the way God acts with people who have set up standards and values for their lives. But no man has received eternal life from God as a reward for his exemplary and faultless life. Only the Lord Jesus was perfect, and He who *deserved* life, entered into death. He voluntarily did this. And now He, who *is eternal life Himself*, gives this eternal life to everyone who admits his inability to earn it himself.

Now read Romans 2:1-8 again.

Reflection: Think about a way to present the gospel to someone who thinks he is doing everything right.

6. JEWS AND GENTILES

(Romans 2:9-16)

Let's begin with a review. Romans 1:19-32 speaks about the Gentiles. Then in Romans 2:1-8 Paul addresses people who think they are not as bad as the Gentiles. Now in verses 9-16, Paul continues with this topic, but he makes a distinction between the two groups of people: Jews and Greeks. The Greeks are also called the Gentiles or heathen. The word *heathen*, translated as *Greek*, doesn't just mean those with little civilization. When he addresses the heathen, Greek or Gentile people, Paul refers to *all* people who are not Jews — those with whom God didn't make a special relationship as He had with the Jews. Jews are the people to whom God made His will known by giving them a law. God didn't make himself known to the Gentiles in that way.

You could apply this to the situation in which we live. There are people who have grown up in a Christian family and there are people who have grown up in families in which God's will has not been made known. Even so, God does not show partiality or favoritism to persons in the future judgment. He who does wrong, either Jew or Greek, will receive tribulation from God and will feel anguish because he lived for himself, thinking he could escape God's judgment. He who does good deeds, being either Jew or Greek, will receive glory, honor and peace. The difference is the standard that is applied for judgment.

Jews and Greeks have both received something from God through which they know what is right and wrong. God gave the Jews a law in which He made known what they were to do. They will be judged by this law. The Gentiles never had a law and will perish without one, but they have something else — a conscience. For example, most heathen know by nature they shouldn't steal, even though God never told them through a law. If they still plan to do it, they will be troubled by their conscience. It speaks to them, and if they listen to the voice of their conscience, they won't steal. Therefore they show that the work of the law is written in their hearts because in the law it is written, "You shall not steal" (Ex.20:15).

He who does what the law says, even though it has never been made known to him, will be justified. It doesn't matter whether you have heard of God's will or not, but it does matter whether you do what God wants. Every person, even if he is ignorant of God and His will, has received a conscience passed down from the fall of Adam through which he knows the difference between good and evil. This conscience is formed or deformed in proportion to the values set up by parents and surrounding society. A person can try to not listen to the voice of his conscience, but deep in his heart it is still there. Others around him may remind him about these wrong things. Certain rules are enforced by the groups in which people live. If someone oversteps these rules, he is judged. If someone is judged and it becomes evident he hasn't committed a crime, he will be cleared. This is how it works with people who have no knowledge of God.

But God looks further than deeds. God also sees the *source* of a person's works. He sees the secrets of the heart where reasoning takes place. He knows the motives through which a person lets himself be led. We can conceal our real motives from each other, but not from God. A day will come when God will judge these secret things through Jesus Christ. This is an unpleasant thought for most people. They would rather not think about it. However, this judgment also is part of what Paul calls "my gospel." Motives are just as important for God as deeds. People can be misled by deeds, but not God. He who really lives with God will not have any difficulty in opening his heart completely to God.

Now read Romans 2:9-16 again.

Reflection: How do you view the thought that God knows all about you?

7. THE JEWS AND THE LAW

(Romans 2:17-29)

Now Paul addresses the Jews. He makes it clear to them that they also need God's gospel. He first sums up a number of things in which the Jews boasted. They boasted that they were in connection with God. They were confident they could be leaders, lights, instructors and teachers in divine things because they thought they knew God's will through the law. They imagined others were inferior: blind, in darkness, foolish and babes. They felt superior and elevated above other people. And God *had* revealed His will to them in the law. What they didn't realize was that first of all they had to obey it.

Christians also can boast like this about knowing the Bible. They tell others how to behave, but they have never seen themselves in the light of the Bible. They only know it for others. They may condemn stealing if someone else does it, but if they do it, they call it taking something to which they have a right. Similarly, they say it's wrong to commit adultery, but they forget the Lord Jesus said that "whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt.5:27-28). They know an idol is an abomination, but they do not mind using their time, strength, property, intelligence, etc. for themselves instead of for God. So, if someone is boasting of knowing the will of God, but is not obeying it in his life, he then dishonors God. Isn't it true that God's name is blasphemed because people go to some religious meeting on Sunday, but during the rest of the week they try to enrich themselves as much as possible at the expense of others?

Paul then mentions *circumcision*. You can read about its establishment in Genesis 17. In the Old Testament, circumcision was the external sign that someone belonged to God's people, Israel. So you might expect a circumcised person to respect God's will, but if someone didn't obey God, his circumcision would mean nothing. The external sign of circumcision was only valid if the desire in the heart was to behave like a member of God's people. This desire found its expression in doing God's will. This even meant that an uncircumcised

person (someone who didn't belong to Israel, but who respected the rights of the law) was owned by God as a member of His people. The result of this was eventual judgment on those who were only circumcised externally and not with the heart. The conclusion of this is seen in the last two verses. It deals with circumcision of the heart that leads us to the real meaning of circumcision.

In Colossians 2:11 we read of a believer who has been circumcised in Christ's circumcision. The context shows this refers to Christ's death on the cross when He died under God's judgment for sin. Someone who believes this with his heart is "circumcised of the heart." He who is a real Jew speaks of one who praises God. Belonging to God's people only externally attracts human honor. Man likes the visible side of religion because it makes him more important, but God looks at the heart. The *external* has only value for Him if it is a sincere representation of the attitude of the heart. God praises those in whom He finds "truth in the inward parts" (Ps.51:6). This is what counts with God.

Now read Romans 2:17-29 again.

Reflection: Ask yourself on which points you are still sensitive to human honor.

8. GOD TRUE, EVERY MAN FALSE

(Romans 3:1-8)

After considering the previous section, you might have started to think being a Jew wasn't much of an advantage even though God had called them His elect people. Likewise, the advantage of circumcision might come into question even though it had been given by God as a sign of His covenant with His earthly people. Paul now deals with this thought. It is advantageous in many ways to belong to the people of God. Among these many advantages, they were entrusted with the oracles (the words) of God. For us who live in so-called Christian countries, it also is an advantage to have the Bible, but this advantage made the Jews and us more responsible. The way we deal with the Bible does not affect its contents. God remains faithful to His Word even if there are those who claim to belong to His people, but who do not respect His Word. This only confirms that God is true and every man is false.

Maybe you have heard someone say (or perhaps you said it yourself), "God doesn't exist." This is not a new thought. Someone who speaks like this is just expressing what God wrote down a long time ago. Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" God's Word provides proof that God is true and every man false. If man acts according to his evil heart, he only proves what God has said in His Word long ago. In this way God justifies Himself by His own words.

If man is presumptuous enough to judge God and make Him responsible, it will be clear that God is the winner and man is the loser. God's righteous acts are confirmed by our unrighteous acts. Nothing can refute this. A way of life that doesn't respect God must bring God's wrath upon that life. God cannot act in any other way. He is obligated to do so because He is holy and righteous. He cannot overlook His holy and righteous character as we sometimes do. When God observes everything in this world, He cannot act as if nothing is wrong. He must execute judgment over this world. He hasn't executed this judgment yet because He is patient. He is "not willing that any

should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet.3:9). Yet a time will come when He will have to judge. His patience has an end. Then righteousness will take its course and wrath will be executed: the punishment must come. Denying this only indicates that one doesn’t take God seriously.

Another way that some do not take God seriously is when they misuse God’s righteous dealings. They say, “If I lie, it increases the truth of God. With my evil walk, I only contribute to His glory because this makes the sacrifice of Christ worth even more. Isn’t this pleasing to God? In fact I deserve a reward, so why should I be judged as a sinner?” They reason, “Let us do evil things that good may come.” At the time the apostle Paul wrote this letter, people were spreading the false rumor that Paul was teaching this false doctrine. In this way they tried to vindicate their own ungodly walk while slandering the apostle. Paul doesn’t refute them. There’s no arguing with people like that. His answer is simple: “Their condemnation is just.”

Now read Romans 3:1-8 again.

Reflection: Mention some privileges you have as a Christian.

9. NOBODY IS RIGHTEOUS

(Romans 3:9-20)

After having disproved the evil objections of unbelief in verses 3-8, in verse 9 Paul referred to verse 1 where he asked about the advantages of being Jewish. He then showed that everything in which the Jews boasted actually witnessed against them. Had God's Word been entrusted to them? Well, God's Word was quite clear about man's nature and practice. At this point the Jew was not far superior to the Greek. The accusation that all are under sin is emphatically stressed by some Old Testament quotations. The description is held before them (and before you and me) as a mirror in which they must recognize themselves (as we also must). There is no one righteous. No one understands and none seeks after God.

This account used to describe you. Maybe you previously thought you conducted yourself righteously and had understanding, but when God met you it became clear you were living for yourself. You had disregarded God's goal for your life and you had become useless and unprofitable. Maybe you thought you were useful to those around you, but when God met you, it turned out you weren't living for Him. Consequently you realized you had never done anything good by yourself, even if perhaps you had boasted in your many good deeds. True good deeds are only done out of love for God. What is on the inside will find its expression through your body — through words and deeds.

We read some examples of this in verses 13-18. The throat, tongue, lips and mouth are all connected with death and corruption. The words we spoke, when we were ignoring God, lacked life. These can still be heard in what people say around us. This should no longer be the case with us. Regarding our feet and ways, we misused them before our conversion and therefore the same must be said. The way of peace was "not known" to us. We were willing to teach someone a lesson if they hurt us. Maybe we have not committed murder, but we sought revenge on someone with or without literally shedding blood. To shed blood means to make life impossible for someone. Behind us

we left a trail of destruction and misery. How many have been hurt by our godless behavior? It was all because the “fear of God” was not before our eyes until God met us and held this mirror up to us. Then we recognized ourselves in it. Not that we were all guilty of these things to the same degree, but all of this was in our hearts. And since we still have an old nature, it is still in our hearts.

The above was directed especially at the Jews to convince them of their sins from their Scriptures in which they boasted. Yet every person who checks himself honestly using this description will recognize it applies to him as well. Then in verse 19 a conclusion is drawn. This conclusion applies to the whole portion of Romans beginning with chapter 1:18 until here. The conclusion is “that every mouth” — both of the heathen and the Jew — “may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” It is impossible to obtain God’s approval for our acts carried out under our own strength. The law makes it clear we have sinned because we have transgressed it. Only one Man exists to whom the preceding doesn’t apply. This is the Man Christ Jesus. All through His life He lived completely God-centered and did everything for Him. And so, He is God’s answer to all guilt and sin which man has heaped on himself and from which he could never free himself. This is what the next portion covers.

Now read Romans 3:9-20 again.

Reflection: In what way can you now be useful to God?

10. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

(Romans 3:21-31)

After the somber description of man living for himself, like you and I once did, the light breaks through in these verses. In this portion God tells what *He* has done to change man, fallen in sin, into someone who can be with Him without fear. Man turned out to be completely hopeless and useless for God. God looked for His own solution to this problem and He found it. In His solution He can declare a sinner *justified* [declared righteous] if that sinner believes in Jesus Christ. This is true for everyone without discrimination.

Isn't it true that "all have sinned"? Therefore all have fallen "short of the glory of God," but God has this strong desire to have people with Him in His glory. What everybody needs then is the *remission* [release, forgiveness] of their sins, the evil deeds they have committed. God cannot permit any sin in His presence. Christ Jesus brought about and accomplished this redemption and made it available for everyone: "Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth as a propitiation" (or "mercy-seat"). A seat or throne reminds us of governmental authority and judgment. Justice is administered from a throne. God had to judge our sins, but the wonderful thing is that He judged our sins in His Son when He was hanging on the cross. Now the judgment-seat has become a mercy-seat to everyone who in faith accepts this salvation from God's hands. The blood of Christ is the only way for God to forgive sins.

Hebrews 9:22 reads, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." God does not accept the sinner by overlooking his sins. It is only because His holy and righteous demands were satisfied that He was able to justify you. This gives you the assurance of the remission of your sins. It is not what you *think* of it, but it is *how God sees it*. God could pass over the sins of the Old Testament saints (who had believed God) because He foresaw the work of Christ. He did not overlook their sins, but He acted righteously when He forgave them because He knew Christ would shed His blood for them.

Today, the same principle holds. To us who live after the death of Christ, the work of Christ is behind us. *God cannot help but justify everyone who believes because He Himself is righteous.* Hasn't the blood of Christ been shed? God knows its value and that it blots out sin. So, God will no longer see sin within someone who has confessed that Christ shed his blood for his sins. His sins no longer exist. They are gone forever. *To God, a believer is no longer a sinner, but someone who belongs to Him and with whom He desires to have a relationship.*

God has made you righteous. A righteous person is someone who is seen by God no longer in his former life of sin, but completely apart from his sinful life and who looks (morally) like Himself. What a change this is! All of our boasting is excluded; this should be clear now. Everything came from God and was brought about by Him. The only thing for you to do was to believe. It is by faith and not works that you now have redemption, the forgiveness of sins and justification. God is not the God of the Jews only, but He is also the God of the nations. God sees all unsaved people as sinners because everyone has sinned. It is then true that everyone can only be justified by faith.

But what about the law? Is the law completely useless now? No, the law is still present and in its full power. If we look at the law, it becomes clear we are sinners because we cannot keep the law. The law made it clear that we were sinners and powerless to redeem ourselves from the curse of the law. When we recognize this, we confirm the authority of the law. This means we were under the curse of the law, but Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by bearing the curse on the cross. In this way He has fully confirmed the authority of the law.

Now read Romans 3:21-31 again.

Reflection: What does "the glory of God" mean to you?

11. A HAPPY MAN

(Romans 4:1-8)

Paul now highlights two important people from Israel's history in the Old Testament to clarify that God's righteousness can only be obtained by faith. You also saw this in the previous section with respect to the law. God takes special care to demonstrate that man has no part in obtaining God's righteousness. Everything comes from Him. The more you understand this, the more you will honor Him for it in your life.

Abraham is mentioned first. He was the patriarch (father) of the Jews. God traced the origin of the people of Israel to Abraham's descendants. The Jews boasted in this fact. They even used it in their arguments with the Lord Jesus. They said, "We are Abraham's descendants" (Jn.8:33). They thought that being Abraham's posterity, they were rather privileged. After all, the promises had been given to him. In addition the law had been too difficult for them to keep, but God would at least bless them (they thought) because they were Abraham's posterity. But this is not how it works. You and I are not blessed because our ancestors were blessed. If our ancestors were blessed, it is because they believed God, not because they deserved it. We too receive the blessing only through personal faith with God as its object. This was the case with Abraham and so it is with his posterity.

Scripture says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." The object of faith is not a man, but the clear word of God. In Genesis 15 God promised Abraham an heir and numerous posterity. Abraham believed this even when, humanly speaking, it was no longer possible to have children. He and Sarah were too old for that, but he still trusted God to fulfill His promise. This faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. When God was going to fulfill His promises, he was not expecting Abraham to help Him. If Abraham had been able to help in this, he would have deserved some kind of payment because he had worked for it. Just as with Abraham, so with you; you are justified by faith. You are then not honored, but

God is glorified. Your happiness is to be found in receiving God's righteousness without having to work for it.

In Psalm 32 David speaks about righteousness without works. Read in verse 5 how he says, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.'" And what does God do? "And You forgave the iniquity of my sin." If we acknowledge our sins instead of covering them up, then God does exactly the reverse with them. He forgives them. He puts them where they can no longer be seen. How happy you are once you know this! God no longer imputes our confessed sins because Christ shed His blood for them. How marvelous and what grace! Words fail to express the wonder of what God has done to make us righteous. People whose sins have been forgiven are happy people. At times, we can be in difficult circumstances, but our sins are no longer a source of unease. All of this has been dealt with perfectly. God Himself is the guarantee for it because He did it Himself.

Now read Romans 4:1-8 again.

Reflection: Realize that God no longer thinks of your sins.

12. ABRAHAM'S POSTERITY

(Romans 4:9-17)

I have to take you back to Genesis 17 to help you understand the subject of verses 9-12. When treating Romans 2:2-29, I also alluded to this. You may want to read section 7 again as a reminder. In Genesis 17 we read about a covenant God made with Abraham. As a sign of this covenant, all boys and men had to be circumcised. This was an outward sign that every boy received on the eighth day after his birth. With this sign God separated all of the people who were to be born as Abraham's descendants — Israel — from the rest of mankind. It was a great privilege to belong to God's earthly people, but as to receiving the righteousness of God, there is no difference for God. It doesn't matter whether you belong outwardly to God's people to know the happiness that forgiveness brings. The thing that matters is what's on the inside — your faith in Him.

When Abraham's faith was reckoned as righteousness, he had not yet been circumcised. He received circumcision as a seal of the faith he had when he had not as yet been circumcised. This is brought out here to indicate that Abraham is not only the father of a literal posterity, the people of Israel, but he is the father of a *spiritual* posterity as well. In fact, there are three kinds of posterity. In verse 11 he first is called the *father of the uncircumcised*. This deals with non-Jews who, being uncircumcised, believed in the same way as Abraham did when he hadn't as yet been circumcised. This is the first kind of posterity.

In verse 12 you find the second and third kinds of posterity. He is called the *father of circumcision* which deals with his literal posterity, the people of Israel, but this literal posterity consists of two groups. The first group is Abraham's posterity *outwardly* by the outward (physical) circumcision. The second group is Abraham's posterity both in an outward sense and in a spiritual sense. These people show they are Abraham's spiritual posterity by walking in the footsteps of the faith he had while he was still uncircumcised. The promise that Abraham and his posterity would inherit the world wasn't given as part

of the law. The law has a different connection than circumcision between God and his earthly people. But in Abraham's days, the law was many years in the future. But if a law had been given by which they could obtain the promise, then faith would have been no longer necessary because the promise would have been dependent upon personal merit or effort. However, this would have resulted only in wrath rather than a fulfillment of the promise because no one could fulfill the demands of the law. The certainty of the promise is in faith and grace.

Everything is strongly linked with God who is the Object of the faith and the One who shows grace. To Abraham, God was personally present. Abraham believed Him, trusted Him and knew He could work where, as a man, he was powerless. To Abraham, God could raise the dead, just as He could create out of nothing. Look at creation! Psalm 33:9 says, "For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." By believing in this way, Abraham was made by God "a father of many nations." Similarly to when Abraham believed God's words, you who know God in your life may hold Him to the promises He has given you in His Word.

Now read Romans 4:9-17 again.

Reflection: Are there any promises that God has made to you? Do you trust Him to keep them?

13. THE ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY OF FAITH

(Romans 4:18-25)

From the reference verses, it is clear what Abraham believed. In Genesis 15 God called Abraham out of his tent at night to have him look at the sky. There he could see countless stars. Then God said to him, "So shall your descendants be." Abraham believed what God had said. He was about 100 years old at the time and that is too old to be able to father children. Sarah was ten years younger, but much too old to get pregnant.

Abraham didn't shut his eyes to this; he was "not weak in faith." He didn't stop at an impossibility for man. His faith looked up to God. What is impossible with men is possible with God. Therefore, he didn't doubt God's promise. By his faith he was made strong. I presume you have experienced at times the faith that gives you strength. Faith is not a fuzzy notion that requires a lot of imagination, but faith brings God into view. This rock-solid faith in God's power made Abraham overcome all his doubts. Abraham no longer looked at himself and his weakness. When he learned to forget himself and look up to God in the strength of faith, he was fully assured that God had the power to do what He had promised.

Anyone who sees the Almighty God in that way will stop doubting whether God is able to give life where death seems imminent. Such an attitude honors and glorifies God. God then reckoned this faith to Abraham as righteousness. God saw that Abraham recognized, trusted and thought of Him correctly. The righteousness that God reckoned to Abraham was from His perspective to Abraham, "If you think about Me in such a way, you belong to Me."

Verses 23-25 follow with the application that is very important to you as someone young in the faith. That which was said to Abraham was also said to teach you how to receive righteousness. Righteousness means that you, who used to be a sinner far away from God, now belong to God. There is nothing left to fear from Him.

God needed a righteous basis to give you that wonderful position. He could not act as if you hadn't sinned because God cannot act in conflict with Himself. Since you had sinned, God, being holy and righteous, would have had to punish you, but now He doesn't. He provided the solution Himself. The Lord Jesus completely fulfilled all God's holy demands and God raised Him from the dead. This is the basis for our justification: He has raised Jesus our Lord from the dead! The Lord Jesus was given up by God to fulfill the work of redemption on the cross for you. God's righteousness has been fully satisfied for your sins in the Person of the Lord Jesus who bore them on the cross.

God judged your sins in Him and the Lord Jesus died, but how could God leave Him dead when He had suffered for your sins to God's fullest satisfaction? Therefore God had to raise Him. God had an obligation to Himself and to His Son's work to carry this out. The raising up of the Lord Jesus by God is the firm and unchangeable proof that God requires nothing else concerning your sins. All His demands have been met. Your sins no longer exist according to Him. He no longer sees them; they are gone forever. The Lord Jesus is the eternal witness that your sins have been done away with. Never again will we have to fear that God will take back His provision. He has provided everything Himself for your justification. He no longer looks on you in connection with your sins, but in connection with a risen Christ. In the next chapter you will see the tremendous results this brings about for you.

Now read Romans 4:18-25 again.

Reflection: Keep short accounts regarding any doubts about the certainty of your faith that you may still have.

14. PEACE, ACCESS AND HOPE; PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

(Romans 5:1-2)

Since these two verses are filled with wonderful thoughts, they need a separate section. It is good to memorize them. From the previous sections you should better understand what it took to justify you. You have seen that everything originated with God. You received God's righteousness and He has provided everything. You can rejoice! You have been justified, not by your works, but because you believed God. The result is that you have *peace with God*. Once you were living in rebellion against God. You didn't listen to Him and you did your own will. You didn't find enjoyment in doing God's will at all. God judged your deeds very differently from how you judged them yourself.

When you saw God had the right perspective about you and that through the Lord Jesus Christ He has taken away all your sins, there is peace in your heart when you think of God. There is *peace with God* because all the righteous demands of God have been met. When you think of God you will feel rest, joy and gladness that He is with you. You can simply call on Him and talk with Him in your thoughts. You are favored by Him. What a grace it is to have free access to God, the God who would have had to judge you for all your terrible sins. You can come to Him now without having to make an appointment or stand in line, and without fear He will send you away. You can tell Him everything that's on your mind or that you are experiencing. He appreciates this demonstration of confidence in Him. In the future you will be forever in God's glory. You should rejoice in this hope.

In the Bible *hope* is never something uncertain. Today, it indicates a degree of uncertainty. We say, "I hope so," when we mean we would like it to happen, although we are not certain it will happen. In the Bible, hope always represents a certainty, but of something still awaiting fulfillment. If you are hoping for something, it is not yet present. It is just the same with God's glory. This is where you will be

forever. But you're still living here on earth. However, that you will arrive in God's glory is a fact beyond a doubt. It is even something in which to rejoice.

The guarantee is not in your faith and strength, but is anchored in what God has done in raising the Lord Jesus. This has made you righteous (Rom.4:24-25). What a change has occurred in you! Remember Romans 3:23. You read there that you fell short of God's glory. Your sins had cut you off completely from Him. It is impossible for God to allow sin into His presence and into His glory. Now you have been justified and you look forward to it with all your heart. And so does He! What a miracle of God! What a reason to give thanks to Him!

When you come to God with all you have in your heart, He wants you to thank Him for all He and the Lord Jesus have done. Just lay this book aside for a moment to tell God what you have understood so far from this letter He wrote to you. Tell Him you love Him. Then you will experience what the Bible calls *communion*. You can talk with Him about things that are very valuable to you and Him. Do it right now and then you can continue reading.

Now read Romans 5:1-2 again.

Reflection: Memorize these two verses.

15. BOASTING IN TRIBULATIONS AND BOASTING IN GOD

(Romans 5:3-11)

The word *glory* may make you think of being glad. Well, why shouldn't you be glad when you see your future before you in verse 2? The prospect of being allowed to enter God's glory gives you joy, even though you're not there yet. You're still on the way to glory and living a life on earth with all its cares and troubles. Is this something in which to "glory" or to be glad? Verse 3 reads, "We also glory in tribulations." Well, that sounds like a beautiful text, but you may wonder how it is possible. To make this possible you must first be able to say, "we ... know" with full confidence that all these tribulations are not happening at random.

If God permits difficulties to enter your life, He has a purpose for them. God uses the difficulties that confront you to prove the reality of your faith. It is not so difficult to have faith when everything is running smoothly in your life. It is only when difficulties come that you can show of what your faith is made. If your faith is real you will endure and keep on trusting God. Then you will not, at the first sign of trouble, lose your assurance. You will find these difficulties will only strengthen you because you know it is all in God's hands and will never get out of His hands.

The real problem comes when a tribulation lasts longer than you think it should. This is when you will need "perseverance" or endurance. You must count on the faithfulness and help of the Lord to endure these difficulties that seem to have no end in sight. He will sustain you and give you the strength to endure. The result is that you will experience His support. This is the "experience" that is spoken of in verse 4. Some translations, including the NKJV, NASB and NIV translate this word as "character." Others, including the KJV and JND, use "experience." You can feel His help. What a marvelous experience this is when surrounded by all these troubling things! The result of this experience is hope. Once you have the experience of

who God is in your life, you will know He will never leave you, but He will bring you to where He wants you to be, in His glory. You can see how these things create a cause and effect.

Now *love* is added to these things. Love is God's nature. God is love and He has shed abroad His love into your heart. Things may be ever so difficult, but in your heart you have the conviction that God in His love will never lose grip of what is happening. You don't have to carry out special things to experience this love of God. You don't have the power to make yourself feel His love, just as you didn't have the power to justify yourself before God. But now there is a new power source within us, "the Holy Spirit" who has been given to us. The Holy Spirit, being Himself God, has shed abroad God's love in you.

The strongest proof of God's love is the fact that Christ has died for powerless and ungodly ones. Occasionally among men someone dies for another because the other is worth such a sacrifice, but that is not the way God loves. God demonstrates His love toward you, in that while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. God couldn't find any attractive thing within you, but God is love. He gave Christ out of His own desire without you asking for it, because He is love. If God proved His love in such a way when you didn't want Him, would He not in His love take care of you as long as you are still on earth? You have been justified by Christ's blood. You belong to Him. God always sees Christ's blood. He no longer sees you as a sinner, but in connection with the Lord Jesus.

Christ is the guarantee that you will be saved from wrath. It is now impossible for God's wrath to touch you. God's wrath over you had its effect on Christ when He died for you. He bore your sins! You once were an enemy of God. You had to be reconciled to God. Now you're no longer an enemy of God. You have been reconciled to God, and the Son of God is no longer dead. He lives eternally! Do you know why He lives? He is alive to save you. The phrase "shall be saved" means to guide safely through all life's dangers and to bring you into God's glory. Do you think He is able to do that? You can be sure of it!

The third time the idea of *glorying* occurs is in verse 11: "We also rejoice in God." This is the best way to rejoice. It is not rejoicing or glorying in the hope of the glory of God as in verse 2. Neither is it boasting in tribulations as in verse 3. In verses 2 and 3 the glorying is

connected with the present and future. The future will one day reach its fulfillment and everyday life will one day come to its end. Therefore the glorying of verses 2 and 3 will one day end, but with the rejoicing of verse 11 it's different. It is rejoicing in God Himself as the source and origin of all blessings. Here you're no longer talking about yourself and what you have received. God the Giver is before you in all His greatness. You may now rejoice in God through the Lord Jesus Christ through whom you now have received the reconciliation. To "rejoice in God" is something you can start with right now, and it will not cease even when we have arrived in the glory of God. Throughout eternity He will be the Subject of your admiration and adoration.

Now read Romans 5:3-11 again.

Reflection: Tell God what you think of Him. Tell God how you appreciate experiencing His love towards you from day to day, and for the gift of His Son.

16. ORIGINAL SIN

(Romans 5:12-14)

A new section of Romans begins here. It's important for your spiritual life to think deeply about these verses. So far, Paul has talked to you about your sins, the deeds you did in disobedience to God. Paul told you that God has forgiven your sins and that He can do this based on the fact that Jesus Christ has shed His blood. God no longer sees your sins. He now looks at you as a righteous person, as someone who has a *right* to belong to Him. Nothing is left that hinders God from having you close to Him. This should make you feel at home with Him. Think again of the first two verses of this chapter.

Although you do not have any more problems about your evil deeds keeping you from the Lord, you probably have discovered you're still capable of sinning. You don't *want* to swear, steal, say bad things or hurt others anymore, yet these things suddenly happen. How can this be? The answer is, You still have an evil nature. This thought can be compared to a tree. If you pick all the apples from an apple tree, all the fruit will be gone, but it will still be an apple tree. The following year the tree will again grow apples. The apples can be compared to our *sins*, the wrong deeds we have done. God has put away your sins, but their *root* is still within you. This is where those evil deeds come from. This root is *sin* still living in us, which *ruled* us when we were sinners.

The remaining part of this chapter and the next two chapters explain what God has done with *sin*, with this evil nature. The way God dealt with sin living inside you, your evil nature from which your evil deeds come, was different from the way He dealt with the evil deeds. Therefore you should allow yourself enough time for the teaching of these chapters to become clear to you. This portion isn't simple, but it is very important for you to understand it so your faith can grow balanced and healthy. This importance is indicated by the extensive treatment Paul gives to this subject.

Paul starts off in verse 12 by stating that *sin* entered into the world by one man, Adam, the first man. Death entered by sin. Therefore, sin and death are inseparable. In Genesis 2:17 God said to Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." The serious consequence of Adam's sin was not just limited to him. *All people born after Adam have inherited from him the same evil nature.* Consequently all people who have ever lived have died, except Enoch and Elijah — both saved people — who were taken to heaven without dying. Nobody of Adam's posterity has remained alive. In this, you can see how serious the consequences of Adam's deed are. Since everyone sins, everyone makes it clear he is a descendant of Adam. But happily, as the next verses demonstrate, this is not all that can be said.

Verses 13-17 form a parenthetical section. First, verses 13 and 14 say it was not just the Jew who was confronted with the problem of sin. Sin had been in the world long before the law was given to Israel: sin did not begin at that time. The only thing the law did was to command or prohibit something. As long as no law had been given, you could not *trespass* (overstep) the law. Therefore you could not be punished according to the law. But this doesn't change the fact that death reigned. Adam had violated a commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and died. Everyone who lived in the time between Adam and Moses also died, even if they hadn't violated such a commandment.

It is clear that by Adam and since Adam, sin and death entered the world. But death and sin do not have the last word. Where such terrible things entered by one man, Adam, another Man has come -- Christ, who has worked wonderful things. And so, in a certain sense, Adam is an example of Christ who was to come. This is explained in the following section.

Now read Romans 5:12-14 again.

Reflection: Do you know events from your own or someone else's life that had consequences for someone else?

17. CHRIST AND ADAM

(Romans 5:15-21)

Here a comparison is made between Adam and Christ. They are both at the beginning of a generation of people. The whole of mankind can be divided into these two groups. Someone belongs either to Adam, the head of a generation fallen in sin, or to Christ, the head of a justified generation. The consequence of Adam's deed extends to the whole group that belongs to him; the result of what Christ has done extends to the whole group that belongs to Him. This section is not easy to explain. We will consider it verse by verse. I will try to help you by showing the differences between Adam and Christ as they are mentioned in these verses.

Verse 15: Here the gift in grace, Christ given by God, and the offense, Adam's sin, are compared. Both the offense and the gift in grace have far-reaching effects on others. The offense of one, Adam, meant death for every person. Adam's deed still works in his posterity. Happily, there is an opposite to this; it is the gift of God in Jesus Christ. This gift too, works in those who have accepted Him, and it extends far and wide beyond the offense. Anyone who belongs to "the many" will thankfully admit this. Don't you?

Verse 16: Here the gift is compared to the act of sinning. The occasion for judgment was the result of a single sin. The need for our justification was our many trespasses (sins). God put them all away when He judged His Son at the cross.

Verse 17: Here the *results* are compared. The result of the trespass of the one, Adam, was that by him *death* entered the world and reigned over it. Now look at the result of the gift. Everyone who has received the gift of righteousness will reign in *life*. This is made possible by that other "One," Jesus Christ. Someone who belongs to Him has passed from death into life.

Verse 18: Here we have the *consequence* of the single deed of Adam and the *result* of the single deed of Christ. The consequence of

Adam's single deed extends to all people, and that means condemnation for everyone. This refers to the one who belongs to Adam, the one who is unconverted, who will be judged. Likewise, the result of Christ's deed extends to all people. Everyone *can* partake of the new life to which the judgment cannot reach.

Verse 19: In this verse you'll find the last comparison: who now belongs to Adam and who to Christ. All sinners belong to Adam because he was disobedient. All righteous ones belong to Christ because He was obedient. There is a difference between verses 18 and 19. Verse 18 says that all people are under judgment as a consequence of Adam's deed, but on the other hand, all can be justified as a result of what Christ has done. So it is to whom the *results* of the deeds of Adam and Christ extend — to all people. But in verse 19, it is not "all men" but "many." Here it is a matter of to whom the results of what Adam or Christ have done *actually apply*.

Verses 20-21: One who belongs to Adam has been constituted a sinner. One who belongs to Christ has been constituted righteous. When the law came, man was already a sinner, but the law made this much clearer because he transgressed (overstepped) it. So man was a hopeless case from the beginning and even more so when the law came. But what do you read next? "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." God's grace always surpasses the sin of man by far. For you it is no longer true that sin reigns through death. Grace reigns for you. Notice that grace reigns through righteousness, and not because one is living as if sin no longer exists. Grace has been shown to you because God's righteousness is satisfied in Christ's work on the cross. The result of this is that you have received eternal life. And later (no one knows how soon that may be) you will enjoy this life in all its fullness in God's glory, all through Jesus Christ, our Lord. What a God we have, and what a Lord!

Now read Romans 5:15-21 again.

Reflection: Look for some more differences between Christ and Adam (for example, look up 1 Corinthians 15:45).

18. BAPTISM

(Romans 6:1-7)

First I would like to ask a question. Have you ever been baptized? If not, I hope you will be baptized soon. In the verses now before us, the meaning of baptism is explained. If you have already been baptized, it is still profitable for you to think about it again.

Those addressed here were Christians who had already been baptized. Some of them had forgotten what baptism meant. Their thoughts were quite contrary to what they had shown in their baptism. Therefore Paul reminds them of their baptism. And you too need such reminders. I'm sure you've been amazed at the abundance of grace God has shown you through Christ. The greater the sin, the more abundant the grace, but does this mean you can continue to live in sin? If you think this way, you don't have much understanding of Christ's work and of what God has done with sin. Do you remember what God has done with sin? In Christ He judged *sin*, that is, the *source* from which our evil deeds come; you have also died in Christ under God's judgment. That you have died to sin is as certain as Christ having gone into death. Doesn't this make it impossible to continue to live in sin?

Paul points to baptism to give additional support for this reasoning. One who gets baptized recognizes and declares in being baptized that death was God's only solution for sin. God can only proclaim the judgment of death over someone who is living in sin. By being baptized you recognize this and are symbolically buried with Christ. It is the same as with physical life. Someone who has died must be buried. His life on earth is over, and after the burial nothing is left of him to be seen. The same holds for you, if you have been baptized. In picture it is all gone, your old life in sin. The life you live from now on is one lived in newness of life.

To make this possible the glory of the Father descended into the grave of the Lord Jesus and raised Him from among the dead. Now you belong to that glory. You have been made one with Him in His

death. You have been made one with Him in His resurrection. You can show you have changed to a world around you that hasn't changed. You live now in a new and different way. The world in which you used to feel at home has nothing to offer you anymore. How can you please someone who has died? It is useless to offer something to a dead person because he cannot accept it, or can anything be expected of him. He is unable to perform any task.

Christ's work at the cross is very radical. Our old man was crucified with Him and our body of sin has been annulled. The "body of sin" refers to everything in your existence that sin could use to manifest itself. Wasn't everything you did when you were still a sinner in sin's hands? Didn't you live only for yourself? Hence, all of your existence was crucified with Christ.

Now sin can no longer lay hold of your life to use it, because everything concerning sin has been annulled or done away with. You're no longer serving sin because you have died. Everyone would agree that we shouldn't expect anything from a dead person. Spiritually, it is the same. If someone has died, no valid accusation can be brought against him. Such a person is rightfully free from sin. You may now say, "All right, that's how it's written here, but I am still aware that sin can make use of me." Paul will deal with this experience later. For the moment it's important to accept in faith that what has happened with Christ when He was crucified, died and buried, has also happened to you. God judged you in Him. You should believe this just the same as you believe that your *sins* have been forgiven by His blood.

Now read Romans 6:1-7 again.

Reflection: How important is it for you to be baptized? Why?

19. LIVE FOR GOD!

(Romans 6:8-14)

So, you have died with Christ! Keep this in mind. This is the way God looks at you. Believe it. Whatever you see or experience of yourself, don't let it trouble you. You have died in God's eyes. One more thing you can believe — you can know for sure — is you will live with Christ. God is looking at you as completely *one* with Christ. You can be assured of this because Christ didn't remain dead. He was raised from the dead. He has left death behind. Nevermore will death have any power over Him. He will not die again. In death He has once and for all dealt with sin. Never again will it be necessary for Him to die.

Christ came to earth to solve the problem of sin. Every day of His earthly life He had to deal with sin and come into contact with it. He was surrounded by it. But He didn't sin (1 Pet.2:22), know sin (2 Cor.5:21), nor was sin in Him (1 Jn.3:5). On the cross, however, during the three hours of complete darkness, He was made sin and put away sin by His sacrifice. So His dying was with respect to sin. Nothing needs to be added to it. And now, as to His life, He lives with respect to God.

What the previous verses mean for you stands out in verse 11. This verse tells how to find strength for a life with God. It starts, "Likewise you also" which means *in the same way*. Look at what Christ has done for sin and what He is doing in His life. Has He died? Then I too have died. This needs to be made evident in the life of a Christian. Therefore, it is a responsibility in daily practice to keep yourself dead to sin. God looks at you as having died with Christ. Well, look at yourself in the same way! You're not told to die, but that you *have* died. It has happened. Consider this and don't live as if you haven't died.

With Christ's life it is the same as with His death. Is Christ alive and does He live for God? Yes! Likewise, you too are alive in Christ Jesus for God. This is how God looks at you. Sin no longer has any claim to your body. No longer is there any reason to obey the lusts of your

mortal body because you have died. Therefore say “No” to sin if Satan tries to make use of you. Do not permit the members of your body to be sin’s tools for working unrighteousness (evil things). Do not let your mouth swear or lie. Do not let your eyes look at uncleanness. Do not let your ears listen to any ungodly music of this world.

The members of your body are no longer at sin’s disposal. Your body is now an instrument of the life from God to be used for Him. You can use your hands to help others. You can use your mouth to speak kind and comforting words. You can use your eyes to admire the beautiful things in God’s creation and to read beautiful things about the Lord Jesus. Your ears can listen to what others want to say, maybe about their problems or maybe about their life with the Lord. Your members retain their proper function, but they have become tools to be used by God to work righteousness (good things). Give yourself to God in these ways because you’re not under the law, but under grace.

There is an immeasurable difference between the law and grace. The law proved you to be a sinner and trespasser. It showed you couldn’t live up to its demands. Grace, on the contrary, doesn’t demand but gives! God has done everything and even gives the strength to live for Him. He has put an end to your former life in sin by letting you die in Christ’s death. Because of this, sin no longer reigns over you. You have died; sin exercised its power over you through the law, but you now have nothing to do with the law. You’re standing under grace now. Grace means you expect nothing at all from yourself and surrender completely to God. Only under grace can you have the strength to live for God.

Now read Romans 6:8-14 again.

Reflection: How do you think you can put the members of your body into God’s service?

20. SERVING UNDER GRACE

(Romans 6:15-23)

Knowing that you're now no longer under law doesn't mean you can do whatever you like. Do you know what has happened to you? Your 'boss' has changed. You used to be a slave; in fact, you're still a slave. A slave has no right to anything for himself. He lives all the time for someone else who tells him what to do. There is not one person who is really free. Everyone is a slave, but whose slave are you?

If you put yourself in sin's service, to obey sin, you are a slave of sin and your life will end in the second death (eternal separation from God). If you put yourself in service to do what God says, this will be manifested by your life. In your life you will respect God's will and you will show this by doing things that are right and positive before God. So it is one of the two, either a slave of sin or of righteousness. You can thank God that being a slave of sin has all passed. You can thank God the Lord Jesus has come to take its place. He is the substance of the doctrine you have been taught. He is your example, telling you how a slave of righteousness should behave.

In the previous chapters you read all that God has done through Him. We pray this has impressed you and for this reason you have become more obedient. This is not obedience to some law, but obedience to a divine Person to whom you have given your heart.

You have been set completely free from sin. In the world people have to fight for freedom. Those who are oppressed long for it. They feel relieved when the time comes when they are at liberty to go where they like and do what they want without fearing the authorities. This is even more true with sin. Sin no longer has power over you because you are now a slave of righteousness. Once, you used to do unclean things, living in lawlessness. Lawlessness means you do not recognize authority or listen to anyone. You were living for yourself and determining your own values. Although you thought you were free, you were a slave nonetheless to sin, just as everyone without God still is.

Now you may serve righteousness. The object is your *sanctification* which means that *you live set apart for God* in this world. Living in sanctification is not walking around with a halo over your head. Sanctification simply means you're no longer going with the world, but now you're God-centered. As a slave of sin you didn't do what God wanted. You *couldn't* please God. You followed your desires and lusts. Thinking back, you can only feel ashamed. The only result of that life was death. Thank the Lord, God didn't execute this judgment over you, but over the Lord Jesus. It was this way that you were freed from sin and made a slave of God.

Now a completely different fruit appears from your life. This fruit does not bring about shame but joy. This fruit is sanctification. If you live as God's slave, you live completely dedicated to God, turning your back on sin and the world. God is looking for this fruit of sanctification in your life. The more this fruit becomes visible, the more easily you will see the glorious end of the eternal life to be enjoyed perfectly when you're in heaven.

Verse 23 summarizes the previous thoughts in a few words. (Memorize it!) With sin, you get what you deserve. Everyone, without exception, deserves death. God offers the alternative to this. It cannot be earned. It is a gift of grace to which no right exists. This gift is eternal life! God gives it in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Everything that God has given is in connection with the Lord Jesus. Through Him all blessings from God's heart come to you. He has taken away all your hindrances and sees you in connection with Christ. For that reason, God can give you the great blessing of eternal life. Eternal life is the very life of Christ: *He is the eternal life* (1 Jn.5:11,20).

Now read Romans 6:15-23 again.

Reflection: What can you say about your sanctification?

21. FREE FROM THE LAW

(Romans 7:1-6)

You're free from guilt. This was made clear to you in sections 10 through 15 which cover Romans 3:21 to 5:11. You've been liberated from the power of sin. This was made clear in the last part of Romans 5 through chapter 6. Now something else needs to be learned — that you also have been freed from the law. This is what Romans 7 is about.

The most difficult thing to accept in faith is freedom from the law because our experience may tell a different story. Romans 7 shows how difficult it is. You meet someone who has the new life and who, as a result, wants to do good, but all the time he is doing wrong. It is no surprise that he feels miserable. I had a time like this in my life. You'd like to live for the Lord, but every time you do it all wrong. This is because consciously or unconsciously, you *oblige* yourself to do something. You want to serve God and you feel the best way is to keep certain rules, to keep the law. After all, God gave the law. But the effect of such trying to keep it is you feel terribly inadequate. The joy of faith rapidly fades away. Witnessing is out of the question. You're completely self-centered. The words 'I' and 'me' occur some 40 times in Romans 7. The release from this miserable situation comes only at the end in verse 25. Therefore you have to let the whole of Romans 7 speak to you.

Verses 1-6 are an introduction. Concerning the application of the law, it is clear to everyone that the law reigns over a man as long as he is alive. Nothing is more absurd than to fine someone who has died in a traffic accident he caused. Someone is fined if he is accountable for an offense and if he is alive to pay for it. With a dead person, this is impossible. Paul illustrates this with the example of a marriage. He wants to teach you that a connection between two parties is valid only as long as both parties are alive. But this connection is broken when one of the parties dies. Only then, in marriage, the woman is free to marry someone else. Otherwise she is an adulteress if she becomes the wife of another man while her first husband is still alive.

Paul applies this to the believer and the law, saying that according to the law the sinner had to be put to death, but you have already died to the law through the body of Christ. When Christ died, you died. So you are no longer connected with the law, but with the risen Christ who has nothing to do with the law either. Hasn't the law been fully applied to Him? You're now connected with the risen Christ instead of the law. You can now bear fruit for God.

When you were in the flesh, that is, when you were an unbeliever and doing your own will, you gave in to the lusts of sin. The more the law prohibited something, the more you enjoyed doing it. You know how this goes; forbidden things are thrilling. But this was only fruit for death and not for God. You were living as a prisoner of the law. The law told you what you ought to do and it exercised authority over you. You were its slave. Now that you have died, the law has nothing to say about you. You now are serving in an altogether new way. You no longer serve "in the oldness of letter," that is, in a way that is exactly prescribed. You're now serving "in newness of spirit," that is, in a way that you let the new spiritual life work in you, the life centered in the Lord Jesus.

Now read Romans 7:1-6 again.

Reflection: Ask yourself this question: Do I live my life in connection with the Lord Jesus or in connection with the law?

22. BY LAW IS KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

(Romans 7:7-13)

A lot has already been said about the law. In the following chapters in Romans, and in the other letters of Paul, a lot more will be said about the law. Thus you need to understand why the law was given. You may have started to think the law is something sinful. All it does, it seems, is give you an opportunity to do evil things. This is not the way it is.

Romans 3:20 said, "By the law is the knowledge of sin." Notice the word *knowledge*. It doesn't say the law *causes* you to sin, but the law manifests the sin already present. Take *lust* for example. Lust is something you cannot see. It is in the heart. You wouldn't have known that lust is sin if the law hadn't said, "You shall not covet" and "You shall not desire" (Dt.5:21). Knowing this is said so clearly in the law, you realize it's true. Sin living in you awakens lust and so a commandment was given to tell you not to lust.

An example may make this clearer. My children may take a cookie from the cookie jar when they come home from school. Suppose one morning I tell them, "When you come home, you may not touch the cookie jar nor look in it." The result is that, when they come home, they must restrain themselves to obey my commandment. In them the lust has been brought out by the commandment. Sin uses the commandment to bring out lust. As long as I hadn't given the commandment, there was nothing wrong. Sin was present, but it was dead, that is to say it wasn't experienced. But once the commandment had come, sin was awakened and they were made aware of its presence.

Here you can see the real function of the law in practice. Once, being unconverted, you were living without the law. You didn't care that the law said, "You shall not covet" and "You shall not desire." You had no desire to obey the law. Only when you let God into your life did you think about His law. Then your eyes were opened to sin because the law showed it to you. You also discovered that the law condemned

you, because you couldn't keep it.

The commandment that was for life (in Leviticus 18:5 God had said, "Keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them.") turned out to mean death for you. This was because of sin living in you. Sin used the law by seducing you and bringing you to do wrong and evil deeds. So the law is not to blame, for the law came from God and is holy. The commandments of the law are holy, righteous and good. Would the good that comes from God so you might live through it, mean death to you? This cannot be true, can it? But why then are you under the death-sentence of the law? It is because of sin. Sin used the good to work death for me. Sin used for evil what God had meant for good.

But another thing has happened. The law has shown the real form of sin. Through the law sin became even more sinful. You saw in Romans 5:20 what this means. Sin was in the world before the law was given. Once the law was given, sin became worse because the law showed what sin was. And now you and I know what sin is.

Here is a simple example to make this clearer. In England the law dictates that people must drive on the left side of the road. If you go to England without knowing it is a left-sided driving country and you drive on the right, you are *trespassing*. But if they had told you that England is a left-sided driving country and you still drove on the right, you would be even more guilty. This is how it is with sin and the law. Through the law you are made aware of what sin is. And you are more responsible for the sins you do because now you know what's allowed and what's not.

Now read Romans 7:7-13 again.

Reflection: How can you know that the law is good?

23. WRESTLING UNDER THE LAW

(Romans 7:14-25)

In these verses you'll meet someone who's struggling with the law. He's converted and has life from God. This is clear from verse 22 where it says he delights in the law of God. An unbeliever would never say this, but the man of Romans 7 struggles with sin living in him. While struggling, he's sinking deeper and deeper. He's like someone who is stuck in the marshes. When you become stuck in marshes, you begin to slowly sink. Every attempt to get yourself out only causes you to sink faster. Marsh-walker, as we'll call this man, tries to free himself from the power of sin by obeying the law of God, but time and time again, he's defeated. He always does what he hates to do when he's trying his best to do well.

Can you relate to this struggle? I think struggling like this is a necessary experience when you earnestly desire to live with God and with the Lord Jesus. This doesn't mean you'll be struggling for the rest of your life. There's a way out, but someone who doesn't know about this kind of struggle is often just a superficial Christian. This war teaches you the tough reality that in you, that is in your flesh, there is nothing good.

How does this war start? It starts when the law is used incorrectly. What then can you do with the law? In a general sense you know the law is spiritual -- that is, the law makes you God-centered and tells you how to serve Him. Why then don't you succeed? Because you are fleshly, sold under sin. This is where the troubles come from. You can't do it; you'd like to serve God, but you don't. Rather, you do what you hate to do.

This experience tells you something. If you do what you don't want to do, you recognize the law is good, for the law doesn't want you to do wrong either. So you and the law agree. Then there must be something else that does the wrong. Well, there is something else and it is *sin* living in you. But you can't blame sin for the wrong you are doing because it's your fault when you let sin use you. This is because

you don't have the power in yourself to resist sin. You want to do what's good, but in your flesh, the old sinful nature, there is nothing good. For this reason, you get to the point where you do wrong, but then it's not you who's doing it, but sin living in you.

What are *you* experiencing? If you desire to do well (and that's a good desire), evil is present in you. In your heart you feel joy about God's law and you desire to live according to it. This desire results from the new life you have, but you still have the old nature which wants to assert itself. This old nature, the law of sin, makes you its prisoner and is fighting to keep you under control. This fight is taking place in the members of your body. What is at stake is *who* is exercising authority over your members. Since your conversion, your hands, eyes, feet, mind and body are in God's service (see Romans 6), but while struggling, it feels as if *sin* still has them under control. This makes you feel like the most miserable person on earth. Your body is a body in which death is working and from which you'd like to be delivered. How can this go on?

Notice the word "who" in verse 24. It's as if Marsh-walker starts to look around for someone else to save and deliver him. This is the end of all the struggling. His eyes look to God. He sees that God has already prepared the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. One who sees this immediately starts to thank God. (Now you can read again how this salvation was brought about in the beginning of Romans 7.)

The last verse gives a conclusion of the characteristics of the two natures within a believer. You'll keep these two natures as long as you're living on earth, but this shouldn't be distressing since the old nature no longer has authority over you. In the next chapter you'll see many more things that God has given you to lead a victorious life.

Now read Romans 7:14-26 again.

Reflection: Do you sometimes have the feeling described in these verses? What should you do?

24. WALKING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

(Romans 8:1-7)

After experiencing the struggle to leave the marshes in Romans 7, you now have firm ground under your feet. This firmness is in Christ. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Isn't this a relief? This is how God sees you and this is how you should see yourself.

Every fear of judgment is gone because Christ bore the judgment and rose from the dead. If you have come far enough in your faith-life to be Christ-centered instead of self-centered, then the Holy Spirit can start working in you. The Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of life" here. The Holy Spirit doesn't work death, but life. This is how He worked in the Lord Jesus. Everywhere the Lord Jesus went, He brought life. When the Lord Jesus died, He rose from the dead by the power of the Spirit of life. In the same way, the Spirit of life has delivered you from the power of sin and death. Remember how the law promised life to anybody who kept it, but no one could keep it. Not because the law wasn't good, but because in the flesh there wasn't the power to keep it.

I once read the following comparison that may help make this clearer. Imagine a skilled woodcarver who can create the most beautiful figures from a piece of wood. He has the best tools money can buy. But if you give this man a piece of rotten wood, he can't do anything with it. You can't blame him, for he's certainly skilled enough. Nor can you blame his tools because you won't find any better. What then is to blame? The piece of wood! This is how it is with the law and us. God is not to blame. He is perfectly skilled. Nor is the law to blame: it is holy, righteous and good, as we saw in Romans 7. It is therefore our fault if the law is not seen to its full advantage. It is our flesh that makes the law powerless.

How marvelous that God didn't leave us struggling all by ourselves! When it became clear it was impossible for the law to deliver you from sin and death, God set to work. He sent His own Son as Man into this world. At the cross of Calvary, God judged sin in His Son when He

made Him sin for us (2 Cor.5:21).

When verse 3 says, "In the likeness of sinful flesh," this applies to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, that is, His becoming Man. In this respect He became like us, but with the exception of sin. He didn't partake of the wicked, sinful flesh that we, being born from sinful parents, have from our birth due to our human nature. Being like us applies to His outward appearance which was that of a man. When the Lord Jesus was hanging on the cross, and even then, only during the final three hours, did God condemn sin in the flesh. He has finished with it completely and put it away forever (Rom.6:10; 8:3).

The new source of power that wants to work in your life from now on is the Holy Spirit. If you let yourself be led by Him you will fulfill the righteous demand of the law. Am I then still subjected to the law? Of course not. But do you think the Holy Spirit would have you do something against the law? No, of course not. For that reason, if you allow yourself to be led by the Spirit, you will automatically, so to speak, do what the law says. But this is not the aim of walking according to the Spirit. Walking according to the Spirit means a lot more than this. It means you give the Holy Spirit freedom in your life and that He fills your thoughts.

The way you think makes it clear what is guiding you. On what do you fix your thoughts? What do you long for? You have been converted. You have been given the new life. You have received the Holy Spirit. Despite the battles you'll have to fight now and then, you'll have other things on your mind than before your conversion. Then you were thinking fleshly thoughts; you were self-centered. What is the result? Nothing other than death. Now that you think of spiritual things, your life is God-centered. What are the results? Life and peace!

The real and true life is what you received in your inner being and it becomes visible by the way you live. You now have a different outlook on the things around you than before. Only now does life have a real significance. You know God and you know Christ. There is peace in your heart because in relation to God everything is in order. Read Romans 5:1-2 again. You will experience this peace in deeper and deeper measure as you surrender yourself to God in all the areas of your life and if you stay God-centered.

With the flesh it is entirely different. In the flesh there is no life or peace. On the contrary, whatever it thinks of is always at enmity with God. The flesh is completely evil without the possibility of improvement. It can't subject itself to God's law, nor does it want to. Keep all the things mentioned here as characteristic of the flesh and of the Spirit firmly in mind. Then you will recognize whether a certain desire is from the flesh or the new life.

Now read Romans 8:1-7 again.

Reflection: What is the difference between walking according to the flesh and walking according to the Spirit?

25. IF THE SPIRIT DWELLS IN YOU

(Romans 8:8-14)

For someone who is in the flesh, it is impossible to please God. Being in the flesh means having yourself, your abilities, your labors, your plans and intentions as a center. Even if someone in the flesh would try to please God by keeping the law, this would be unacceptable to God. The starting point is wrong. God has dealt with the flesh, the nature of man corrupted by sin, once and for all. So how then could He accept anything from it?

There is a definitive separation between God and the sinful flesh. He who has received God's Spirit is no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who lives inside you. The Spirit of God doesn't make you important, but Christ does. You are connected with Christ and you belong to Him through the Spirit of God. If someone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, he doesn't belong to Him.

Why do these verses suddenly speak of the Spirit of Christ? I think it is to show you that the Spirit you have received is the same Spirit by which Christ was led during His life on earth. When you read the Gospels, you can see this all the time. For example, take the Lord's temptation by Satan in the desert in Luke 4:1. There you read how, filled with the Holy Spirit, He returned from Jordan to the desert. Then when He was in the desert, He in His perfect holiness was led by the Spirit. His holy nature was not tempted by outside temptation: there was no failure with Him. He was God-centered. With you, the Spirit wants to do the same. The Spirit of God is living in you because Christ is in you. The Spirit of God can only connect Himself with something of Christ. This implies that the body, as used by sin for evil practices, is dead. Otherwise God's Spirit couldn't enter it to live there. But now, Christ being in you, it is completely right for the Spirit to live in you and to have authority over the life you now lead, just as it was with Christ.

Another important thing is connected with the indwelling of God's Spirit within you. This has to do with the resurrection of your mortal body. Your body is still subject to the consequences of sin. It can

become sick and it can die, but look at what God has done with the Lord Jesus. God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. So, what do you do with yourself now? Your body is still mortal. Is this consistent with the Spirit of God living in you, who has everything to do with life? The answer is that God will raise your mortal body as He has done with the Lord Jesus because His Spirit is living in you. Other verses, like Philippians 3:21, tell us this will take place at the return of the Lord Jesus for His own, commonly called the *Rapture*.

All of this puts you under a certain obligation. You have become a debtor to live according to the position God has given you. He has provided you with all it takes to live a godly life — the new life and the Holy Spirit. You no longer have any obligation towards the flesh. It has no claim on you because you died as to your former life. You still have the flesh in you, but you shouldn't give it an opportunity to manifest itself. If you live according to the flesh, you will die. This must be the case. God's judgment over the flesh never changes, but now you have the responsibility to deprive the flesh of any possibility to regain authority in your life.

By the power the Holy Spirit gives, you have the ability to stop sinning in your body. Though you will never reach a state of sinless perfection here on earth, yet moment by moment you are responsible and able to not sin. Then you will live life with God as God meant it to be. Everyone who is led by the Spirit of God looks like the Son of God, the Lord Jesus. Sons of God are people in whom God recognizes the Son. In Him God found His joy and His pleasure. If you will be led by the Spirit, God will be pleased by it.

Now read Romans 8:8-14 again.

Reflection: How can you kill the workings of the body?

26. HEIR OF GOD

(Romans 8:15-21)

Being led by the Spirit is quite different from planning your life according to some law. If your rule of life is a law, then you're nothing but a slave to it. A slave doesn't have a tender and intimate relationship with his master. He must simply do what he is told. In the back of the mind, there is always the fear of doing something wrong. The Spirit, that is, the new life you have received, has nothing to do with slavery and fear. The Spirit you have received is a Spirit of *adoption*. There's the difference! Through this you can address God as Father. You say, "Abba Father." This indicates a trusting and friendly relationship. You know the Father as someone who is very close to you and to whom you have been brought very close. He loves you and you trust Him completely. You have been brought into a family relationship with Him. You have become His child.

The Holy Spirit living in you witnesses with your spirit, that is, the new life you have received, that you are a child of God. You are a child of your parents because you have been born out of them. This is a completed, irreversible fact. Nothing can change this. Similarly, you're a child of God because you have been born of God. Nothing can change this either. Hence it can be said that once a child of God, always a child of God.

In a child the features of the parents are visible. Likewise, God's characteristics find their expression in a child of God. In Philippians 2:14-16 you can read about this, but there it addresses more your responsibility. Here in Romans 8, it speaks more of your privileges. This chapter is full of them. If you're a child, then you're an heir as well. An heir is someone who receives property from someone else. God is the owner of all creation. He will give His property to you when you are glorified with Christ. Christ is the heir and you are a joint-heir with Him. Whatever you receive, it is always in connection with Him. This includes suffering.

If you suffer with Him, it proves you possess the new life. Here it is the

kind of suffering our Lord Jesus knew when on earth. He suffered in this creation when He saw what sin had done and how it was doing its devastating work. You will suffer in the same way if you see the consequences of sin around you. What misuse man makes of what God has created! He uses everything for his own glory and satisfaction.

Don't you long for the moment when the inheritance, the creation, will again be in the hands of its rightful owner? Paul did. He was looking forward to the future glory he was going to see. The suffering he had to bear was nothing compared with the future glory. For us, this is an encouraging lesson. The more this glorious future becomes a reality to you, the more you will be able to bear the unpleasant things you experience as a believer.

What does the "revealing of the sons of God" mean in verse 19? This means a moment is coming when all the sons of God, all the believers, will *visibly* appear in this creation to reign over it together with the Lord Jesus. As a result of man's mismanagement, creation fails to yield as much as God intended. Despite all the attempts of man to reach a fair distribution of creation's riches, the chaos is steadily increasing. Man trusts in his abilities, but forgets he is fallen in sin. He has dragged creation along with him in his fall. So, creation has been made subject to vanity, not of its will, but by the conscious sin of man. And yet, there is hope for creation. She will be set free.

Currently the curse rests on creation like a slave's yoke. You can tell this by the corruption that attaches itself to everything. The corruption of the creation means that creation has been pulled downward to a lower state. She no longer has the glorious state of Eden. This pulling down is because of the corruption that entered creation along with sin. But the moment is close when the children of God will be in glory. When the Lord Jesus takes them away, they will really be free and out of the reach of the corruption in creation. And soon afterwards, the creation itself will be set free. Do you also look forward to this?

Now read Romans 8:15-21 again.

Reflection: Can you say what Paul says in verse 18?

27. THE SPIRIT HELPS YOUR WEAKNESS

(Romans 8:22-27)

In a concordance of the Bible, look up how often the words “we know” occur in all the letters. These words fit only in a Christian’s mouth. Man without God makes much of his knowledge. By research he attempts to understand everything. Yet even the simplest Christian has a source of knowledge these very knowledgeable people have no idea exists. By the Spirit of God who lives in him, he has insight into the true state of creation. He sympathizes with the need it is in. For example, take a look at the vegetation. The short-lived beauty cries out for a new creation. These groans are compared to someone at the point of giving birth to a new life. The travails of creation point forward to the new birth of creation. In Matthew 19:28 the Lord Jesus calls this “the regeneration.” Then the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus, will sit on the throne of His glory and will direct everything in such a way that creation will meet its goal by being a blessing and enjoyment given by God to man.

Inwardly, you already have seen a renewal. You have received “the firstfruits of the Spirit” (v.23) when you received the new life. The new life is a work of the Holy Spirit. You already are a new creation (2 Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15) because God sees you completely in connection with Christ and His finished work. Only your body still awaits redemption. If you understand that your body can still be sick, tired and suffer pain, you realize that through your body you are still connected to this creation. For this reason there are, besides the groans of creation, groans within yourself. You’re longing for the redemption of your body. This will happen when the Lord Jesus returns to take us to the Father’s house. Then He will change your body of humiliation into a body that is like the glorified body He now has (Phil.3:21). Philippians 3:20 says we eagerly await the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, which speaks of Him as the Redeemer.

So here in Romans you can see that the Lord Jesus is not only the Redeemer in regard to your sins, but in regard to your body as well. The first happened when the Savior died on the cross. The latter will

only happen at His coming. Don't be disturbed then by people who claim you shouldn't be sick. Sickness has entered the world through sin. Sin has been judged by God in Christ, but not all of its consequences were removed through this, not in creation nor in your body. God uses these consequences to keep alive your desire for the full result of Christ's work. If you're prospering, you're more likely to forget this.

God wants you to live in hope that aims at the future. Then redemption will be complete; your soul and body will no longer be affected by the consequences of sin. But this full redemption isn't here yet. If it were, there would be nothing left for which to hope. Although you haven't seen what you hope for, you are sure it will come. Since you still don't have it and you have to wait, *perseverance* is necessary. It can all weigh heavily on you, and at times you may feel as though you've lost all hope.

How marvelous to know that the Spirit helps you in your weakness. You can have moments or even periods when you don't know how to tell God the way you feel. You can't find the words for it, but the Spirit living in you knows all about it. He makes Himself one with you in the way you feel in this creation that is under the curse. He tells God what you cannot express. God searches the heart and there He meets the Holy Spirit, as it were. The things the Holy Spirit tells God will never be misunderstood by God. The Spirit knows exactly how to tell God about all your experiences. How good God is to help us in such a way in all our weaknesses.

Now read Romans 8:22-27 again.

Reflection: What are you hoping for?

28. CALLED ACCORDING TO GOD'S PURPOSE

(Romans 8:28-30)

There are only three verses this time. They're so full of blessings that you must read them carefully and let them speak to you.

Again this portion starts with "We know." It indicates a contrast with verse 26. There it said we *don't* know what to pray for. If you feel in your body and spirit how much everything is corrupted by sin, it results in a sense of powerlessness, of not being able to cope. It could even make you feel depressed, but then come those encouraging words, "We know." This is the language of faith. If you see everything around you decaying and that your body is so vulnerable, you may know that for those who love God, *all things work together for good*.

What a rich comfort to know God is above all change. He even uses it to make those who are His own richer, that is, richer in their life of faith. Haven't you experienced that when something miserable happened to you, it brought you nearer to God? Notice "Those who love God" in verse 28. It's not true to say that all things work together for good. You can only say that *if you love God*. Your love of God will affect you so you will not doubt Him, even with the disappointments that will come in your life.

He really makes *everything* work *together* for good. This doesn't allow for any exceptions. Would it hold as well for the sins you do? Yes! Peter experienced this. Three times he denied the Lord. He repented of it and thus received forgiveness. This is a necessity, but as a result of this he came to love the Lord Jesus more when he saw the Lord hadn't let go of him. He had a better understanding of himself and of the Lord. But in the first place, "all things" have to do with everyday life. God makes all things that take place in it to work together for good. He uses all things, including sickness, joblessness, poverty, disability, an accident, even death to loosen you from the things around you and to direct your desire to eternal things.

How real are those eternal things to you? Do you know that in eternity

past God had the intention of calling you? God was thinking of you long before you came into being. He knew you all along as someone for whom He had a magnificent destination in mind. Isn't it wonderful that He wants to transform you into the image of His Son? This is incredible, but God says it is so. He formed this idea when nothing had yet been created and when sin had not yet entered the world. And what God thinks of and says, He will do. He is able to make people who are nothing but poor, tiny, rebellious, lost creatures look like His Son. This makes an enormous change in their situation. This change has come through what the Lord Jesus has done. Therefore, among all those people who are like Him, He will have the first place, the place of honor and respect. This is what matters to God. He wants His Son to be the radiant center of all the redeemed ones, among whom you may count yourself.

What becomes clear to you through these verses is that God works according to His own intentions. What you have done as a sinner isn't mentioned in these verses. You can have a look into God's heart here, knowing He doesn't lose control of anything, even if everything around you seems contrary to this. He has a purpose with your life and He will reach it.

In verse 30 you can see how He reaches this purpose. You can see what He has done. He destined you for this purpose (from verse 29) before you were even born. When you were born you turned out to be a sinner who couldn't participate in God's glory. Then God called you to Himself to make clear He didn't want you to perish. Instead of perishing, He had a plan to which you belonged. He couldn't execute that plan with you being as you were. Therefore He justified you. In the previous chapters of Romans you have read about this.

You are someone who belongs to God because everything of you that didn't belong to God has been put away by the work of the Lord Jesus. In its place you have received the new life that is at home with God. And to make this complete, God sees you as glorified. To Him, it is already finished. What God intends to do will happen. If *He* is the guarantor, would you doubt the outcome?

Now read Romans 8:28-30 again.

Reflection: Thank God for His counsel.

29. GOD IS FOR YOU!

(Romans 8:31-39)

You've just read a powerful final note. Paul reached it because he was so impressed by everything God had done. He has explained all of this in the previous chapters. If you let this speak to you, you can only come to the same rhetorical question, "What then shall we say to these things?" God is for us! Maybe you have doubted this. You knew the Lord Jesus died for your sins and that God couldn't punish you anymore. In itself, this was a great relief. Despite this, you were still somewhat afraid of God, the strict Judge who was against you. But now you have seen the opposite is true. God has made everything right by giving His Son so you could be saved. There was no clearer way for Him to prove His love for you.

And even this is not all. With His Son, God will give you all things. You will share with the Lord Jesus everything God has given Him as the wages of His work. Now this is something! Is anyone left, man or angel, who wants to lift an accusing finger against you? God defends your cause! You are someone He has elected to have with Him. He is the One who justifies. He acquits you because He sees you in Christ. Hence, no one can condemn you because Christ has died for your sins. And more than that, He has been raised for your justification. Christ is in heaven now, and God has given Him the place of honor, at His right hand. Christ has gained the victory and has received the reward that belongs to Him.

But this doesn't mean He is there doing nothing. He fights for those who are His and are still here on earth, by praying for them. He speaks continually with God about you because He knows from His own experience how difficult it is to live in a world where God and His Word are not respected. Everything you experience He knows from experience, apart from sin. He can sympathize with you because He hasn't forgotten what He endured while He was living here. No matter how much you suffer, nothing can separate you from the love of Christ. God's love goes out to you more and more when you are oppressed or persecuted because you follow Him and do His will. His

love enables you to go straight through all dangers and conquer them. You are a conqueror who gives all honor to Him who loves you.

So, with the fullest certainty you can say that nothing can separate you from the love of God. Death cannot separate you from the love of God. If you died you would go immediately to the Lord Jesus in whom God's love has come to you. Life cannot separate you from the love of God. All the problems, troubles and cares you experience in your life give God occasion to make you experience His love.

Neither are angels able to separate you from the love of God. The devil is a powerful prince of the angels who rebelled against God and dragged other angels with him in that rebellion. They are always trying to create a separation between you and the love of God, but they are conquered enemies. They have been defeated by the Lord Jesus and they are subject to Him. The same is true for the principalities and powers. But they can make life difficult by proclaiming laws that believers cannot keep because those laws hinder them in serving God.

Neither can all sorts of events, present or future, separate you from the love of God. You may hear of catastrophes in nature or of threatening wars. It shouldn't make you worry. God's love will stay with you. *Powers* may make you think of *spiritual* powers that in a shrewd way try to undermine your faith so you start to doubt the truth. God's love is always greater.

Don't be fooled by the achievements of man who in his arrogance tries to climb higher and higher in many fields. God's love towers far above all that. Christ Jesus our Lord is ascended above all the heavens (Eph.4:10). There, as conqueror, He has taken His place at God's right hand.

Can a deep fall separate you from the love of God? However deep you have fallen, even there, God's love is present. The love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord, descended to you when you were a miserable fallen creature. He descended even deeper than that into judgment for your sins. These struck Christ in full wrath and laid Him in the dust of death. God did this to lift you up and bring you to His heart. There is *nothing* that has the ability to separate you from the love of God. Take your time now to thank and praise God and the Lord Jesus. He is

worthy of it because everything has come from Him.

Now read Romans 8:31-39 again.

Reflection: Sing a song of victory to God's glory!

30. PAUL'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL AND ISRAEL'S PRIVILEGES

(Romans 9:1-5)

Romans 9 begins a new subject. This new subject is about Israel. God made all kinds of promises to Israel. Now, after all the things you've discovered in this letter, it looks like these promises could never be fulfilled. You have seen how, to God, there is no difference between Jews and heathen. They're all equally guilty before God. Their only way to salvation is faith in Christ. But then there is an unavoidable question. What about all the promises God made to Israel? Will they come to pass? Does Israel still have a special place in God's thoughts?

Perhaps you don't know much about the prophecies concerning Israel in the Old Testament. If so, then Romans 9-11 is a wonderful portion to help you. In these three chapters Paul treats Israel's past, present and future. Romans 9 covers the past, 10 the present, and 11 the future. If you are aware of the current events in and around Israel, you will realize the present significance of these chapters for our time. The contents of these chapters are happening before your eyes, as it were. But let's first have a closer look at the first five verses of chapter 9.

What stands out is the tender love Paul has for his people. So it is completely out of place to claim, as some do, that the people of Israel no longer mattered to Paul. It was his heart's desire for them to become partakers of the righteousness of God. The plain language of verse 1 clearly shows his attitude towards Israel. In verse 2 you get a look into his heart's feelings. With these words, his feelings are expressed because he had a great love for this people even while the people continued to reject Christ.

In verse 3 he had wished to be separated from Christ by a curse if that would lead to Israel's salvation. This is an example of the divine love he had in his heart for these people. Moses said something similar in

demonstrating his love for his people (Ex.32:32). But both Paul and Moses were in themselves sinful and for this reason God could never fulfill their wishes. However, we learn from these men of God that their burning love for the people of God was not a matter of words alone. They would sacrifice themselves for them.

Paul was linked to this people with natural ties; after the flesh, physically, they were his brothers. He calls them Israelites, the name God gave to Jacob in Genesis 32:28. Paul then summarized a list of 8 privileges God gave to them.

- **The adoption** (v.4). God had adopted these people as a son. There is an adage that says, "A good son is like his father." God wanted these people to be like Him. This would have been joy to His heart.
- **The glory** (v.4). God's glory lived in the pillar of cloud with His people. With it, He protected them and led them through the wilderness.
- **The covenants** (v.4). Here I will only mention two of them. God's covenant with Abraham implied that God obligated Himself to bless Abraham. This was a covenant without conditions on Abraham's side. You can read about this covenant in Genesis 15:4-6. Then there is God's covenant with the people of Israel made near Mount Sinai. With this covenant, the people obligated themselves to meet certain conditions. *If* they obeyed, they would reap God's blessing. You can read about this covenant in Deuteronomy 27-28.
- **The giving of the law** (v.4). With this, God gave righteous laws to the people to make their life as comfortable as possible.
- **The service** (v.4). God gave instructions for a full divine service to let them know which sacrifices He wanted to receive and on which occasion He wanted to receive them.
- **The promises** (v.4). God made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob about the blessings He was going to give them.

- **The fathers** (v.5). In the first place, these are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom God made Himself known in a special and personal way. In addition you may think of great men like Moses, David, etc.
- **The Christ** (v.5). This is the absolute pinnacle in this list of privileges. The Lord Jesus was born of this people. But to guard His honor Paul adds, "Who is over all, the eternally blessed God." This is an important witness concerning the humanity and divinity of the Lord Jesus. Both of these were perfectly and completely present in His Person. In the end, He is the center of everything, forever. He is blessed forever. Amen.

Now read Romans 9:1-5 again.

Reflection: Is there anyone you know who you would give everything if he or she would thereby be saved? Something to pray about once more!

31. GOD'S ELECTION OF ISRAEL

(Romans 9:6-13)

God wanted to bless His people Israel. This blessing could only come if the people accepted the Lord Jesus. There is not a single blessing for anyone that God can give apart from the Lord Jesus. If God blesses, it is always in connection with Him. Since God's people have rejected the Lord Jesus, God puts the blessing within the reach of the heathen as well. Currently there is no longer a difference between Jews and Gentiles. Does this mean that the words God spoke about His people, Israel, will never be fulfilled? Paul says God's Word hasn't failed! God will prove to be true in what He said. But God won't give His blessings to those who have turned their back on Him. This is what Paul means in the second part of verse 6. Someone may call himself an Israelite because he belongs to them by birth, but this is not sufficient. Something more is needed. It also must be a matter of the heart. For the majority of the Israelites, to belong to the people was merely an outward matter or name. This, Paul says, is not Israel, even if someone is born an Israelite.

In verse 7 the same is repeated in connection with the patriarch Abraham. Not every descendant of Abraham is called a child of Abraham. If this were the case, Ishmael should have been seen as such and he too should have a part in the blessing, but God had determined that the blessing would come through Isaac. Ishmael is the son after the flesh. This son was begotten of Abraham by Hagar, the maidservant of Sarah. At that moment, Abraham wasn't trusting God because God had promised to give him a son who would be born of Sarah. In God's time Isaac, the son of promise, was born of Sarah. So, as to the blessing God wants to give, there must always be a connection to Abraham through Isaac because "the children of the promise are counted as seed."

Next comes an example of God's election that's even clearer. With Abraham, Ishmael was born of a maidservant and Isaac was not. Isaac had two sons by the same wife, Rebecca. While these two sons, Jacob and Esau, were still in the womb, God had already determined

their relationship, "The older shall serve the younger." At that time, nothing was known of how they would behave towards one another. When God spoke of this, they had done neither good nor evil. So apart from their behavior and apart from their works, God had determined the election of Jacob, the younger one. He elected Jacob to receive the blessing. Jacob ranked above Esau. God appointed it before the birth of these two boys.

With this, nothing has been said of Esau's disadvantage. This is something that you must understand as well, for you will likely come into contact with people who want you to believe that God has appointed people to be lost forever. In the latter part of Romans 9, you will discover that such is not the case, but these people offer Romans 9:13 as proof. They say the text says, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." Sure, this is what the text says, but something comes before this, "*As it is written.*" *Where* is it written? At the end of the Old Testament in the book of Malachi. At the end of a long history in which the descendants of Jacob and Esau had every opportunity to prove themselves.

The true descendants of Jacob have over the course of time shown their weakness, but at the same time shown their desire for God's blessing. In the same way, this could be found in Jacob's life. And this is why God says, "Jacob I have loved." Esau's descendants have over the course of time shown they were not interested in God's blessing. In Hebrews 12:16-17 you can read about Esau as a profane person who sold his birthright for one meal. He was rejected because there was no repentance in him. You can find these traits in his posterity. This is why God says, "Esau I have hated."

God wants to show in these verses that, at the origin of the people of Israel, He acted according to His own election. His blessing flows towards certain people, not because they deserve it, but because He has elected them for it. It all stems from "Him who calls" (v.11). It is important to see that in the past, God acted in this way. At present, God acts in the same way. If God works according to His own election, He is not restricted to Israel, but He can extend His election to the heathen. You are living proof of this. Although you probably don't belong to His earthly people, you will admit you don't deserve God's blessing. But God has elected you to be blessed. More will follow on this subject.

Now read Romans 9:6-13 again.

Reflection: Let the fact that God has elected you speak to you. How do you react?

32. GOD IS SOVEREIGN

(Romans 9:14-18)

From the examples of the last portion, it is clear that God works according to election. This immediately brings opposition. You can feel this opposition rise inside yourself, saying, "This is not fair. God is not acting righteously when He deals with man in that way." We think or say this because our thoughts are centered on man rather than on God. Paul leaves no room for this thought. He writes, "Certainly not!"

Paul then cites two more examples from the Old Testament to clarify the reason for saying, "Certainly not!" These examples show that God acts according to His own will, also called God's sovereign will. He is the only One who can act according to His own pleasure without having to give an account to anyone. This doesn't mean God acts without a purpose. He is not a tyrant who makes and executes decisions without restraint. God can always defend everything He does before anyone. But if we think we can judge God, we assume an attitude that is not appropriate for us. As a result of this attitude, we're not able to understand God's actions. We must start by recognizing that He is God and has the right to do whatever He deems necessary. Then we will have to recognize that we're only tiny human beings, creatures completely dependent on our Creator.

God said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." Was this another instance of the unrighteousness and arbitrariness of God? But if you try to find out *why* God said this and what the occasion was, you might change your mind. So, what was the situation? While Moses was with God on the mountain, the people made a golden calf and then worshiped it. This was sheer idolatry! The result was that God had to judge all the people, but because of the intercession of Moses, there was mercy and compassion. God is so merciful and compassionate! He didn't wipe out all the people, but had mercy and compassion on some of them. This history makes it clear that the main point is not what *man* does and works, "not of him who wills, nor of him who runs" (v.16), but that *God* is compassionate.

After the example of God's compassion, comes another example regarding the judgment of God. Verse 17 starts, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh." When you look this quotation up in Exodus 9, you see it is God Himself who said this to Pharaoh. So if here in Romans 9 we find that "the Scripture" says it, this means God and the Scripture are in absolute harmony. This emphasizes strongly the importance of knowing what the Bible says. Then you will learn to know God and to be guarded from going astray.

Pharaoh was raised up by God with a twofold object. God wanted to show His power in him, and to declare His own name to all the earth. Pharaoh could be used to this end by God, but don't think that Pharaoh was an unwilling instrument! Pharaoh remained fully responsible to God for his attitude and actions. Thus, it was only after Pharaoh had hardened his heart several times that *God* hardened his heart. Only then did God use him as an example of the judgment He would bring over people who continue to resist Him. God has compassion on whomever He wills (as with some of Israel when all of Israel were under judgment) and He hardens whomever He wills (like Pharaoh who was likewise under judgment).

Maybe you are still wondering about the phrase, "I have raised you up" (v.17). Does this mean God had him born for this purpose? No! "To raise up" here means that God led Pharaoh's life in such a way that Pharaoh would show by his actions what was in his heart towards God. Those actions clearly were a history of rebellion against God, and it became clear there was no desire to listen to the warnings God sent in the different plagues that hit the country. In the next section we will say more about this.

Now read Romans 9:14-18 again.

Reflection: Do you sometimes think God is unrighteous? How do you cope with this thought?

33. VESSELS OF WRATH AND VESSELS OF MERCY

(Romans 9:19-23)

Do you know what so often hinders us? Our human logic, our natural and darkened mind! We reason within ourselves saying, "Out of all human beings, God has elected a certain number to bless them. All others won't be blessed, so therefore they have been appointed by God to be lost. Who could resist His will? Isn't everything fixed at our birth? Can anyone change this in any way?" This kind of reasoning shows we are judging God.

But the first thing we must keep in mind is that God is sovereign in all He does. He determines everything without having to answer to man. God judges and condemns man, not the other way around. The competence to judge is with God alone. Paul wants to bring home to us the idea that God has the power to do all things without anyone having a right to say anything about it. God possesses absolute power and the absolute right to execute His will. What right do we have to call God to account by asking why He made us this way and not different?

God's sovereignty is compared with a potter's sovereignty. A potter clearly has the power to make either an ugly vessel or a beautiful one out of the same lump of clay. Once more God's sovereignty is stressed here, which doesn't mean God acted in a similar way. The way God acts is demonstrated by Paul in the following verses. To understand this, you must compare verses 22 and 23. You see two kinds of vessels here, vessels of wrath (v.22) and vessels of mercy (v.23). Notice the way these vessels are spoken of.

Of the vessels of wrath the following is said:

- God wanted to show His wrath and to make His power known,
- He has endured them with much longsuffering
- They were prepared for destruction.

The greatest difficulty is given by the last point. *Who* prepared these vessels for destruction? Did God do that? If you say this, you declare God to be a maker of evil as if He really urges man to do deeds that will bring destruction upon himself. But it is God's longsuffering we are reading about here. What sense would it make to speak about God's longsuffering if God was preparing these vessels for destruction? 2 Peter 3:9 tells us it is because of God's longsuffering that the judgment hasn't yet come. No, these vessels prepare *themselves* for destruction. You understand that "vessels" refer to people. As you have seen in verse 17, Pharaoh is an example of such a vessel preparing himself for destruction.

Then of the vessels of mercy, the following is said:

- God wanted to make known the riches of His glory on them
- God had prepared them beforehand for glory.

Here the big difference between the vessels of wrath and mercy becomes clear. *God*, not the vessels themselves, has prepared them for glory. And God has done this beforehand. He has not made it dependent on their behavior in this life. So in these two vessels the following is presented — on the one hand man's responsibility and on the other hand the counsels, the plans and the intentions of God. You will find these two truths throughout the Bible. We as human beings are not able to connect them. Only God can do that.

They have been compared to two rails of a railroad track that always run parallel. If you look far away, it seems as if the two meet. In a similar way, the lines of man's responsibility and God's counsels run parallel through the Bible. At the cross, you see the two lines meet, as it were. In Acts 2:22-23 you can read about this. It says the Lord Jesus was:

- given up by the counsel and foreknowledge of God (God wanted it to be that way)
- crucified and slain by the Jews, by the hands of lawless men (that is what man did, for which he is responsible).

Apart from God, who can connect these two sides of the cross? Don't try to comprehend the incomprehensible. This comprehension hasn't been given to us human beings. Thank Him that you can see both sides of the truth. It is important for you to gain insight into your responsibilities as a creature in regard to God. In your practical life

you will take this into account, and the new insights into His counsels and plans will not fail to have their effects in your life. In this way, your life will be a very rich life. The things God asks from you may be difficult, but if you see what His plans and intentions are, it will motivate you to honor Him in your life.

Now read Romans 9:19-23 again.

Reflection: Think of God's greatness.

34. THE NATIONS AND ISRAEL

(Romans 9:24-33)

The starting point of God's acts has been clearly demonstrated. He is God and He has the right to act as it pleases Him. God is sovereign even when showing mercy. God is not obliged to restrict His mercy to the Jews. He has the right to call people from the nations or the non-Jews. This can be seen even in the Old Testament. Paul quotes examples from Hosea and Isaiah which show that God let His unrestricted grace go out to the non-Jews as well.

The first quotation occurs in verse 25 and is taken from Hosea 2:23. There the people of Israel are the subject, but since they showed their unfaithfulness to God, God had to call them "not My people." God no longer recognizes the connection with His people. But now, Paul applies this verse to make it mean that God will in the future again speak about them as "His people" and Israel as His "beloved." This can only mean there will be those from the people of Israel who will believe on the Lord Jesus. They are the people who are recognized by God as "My people." Maybe it can even be applied to the nations surrounding Israel. They had always been "not My people" and "not beloved" because God hadn't formed a special tie with them. But if from out of these nations, people accept the Lord Jesus as Savior and Lord, they may consider themselves as part of "My people."

The next quotation from Hosea 1:10 speaks about the calling of the heathen. The "sons of the living God" are mentioned. This is typically an expression for the relationship the Christian has with respect to God. God could no longer have contact with either Jews or heathen. Of both groups it had been said, "You are not My people." To the Jews, this was true since God had to break His connection with them as a consequence of their unfaithfulness. The captivity 2500 years ago, and the "times of the Gentiles" ever since have been the sad result of this. God had always let the heathen go their way. And now Paul, the apostle to the heathen, quotes this verse as proof that all those who have been called by God from among the Jews and the nations are called "sons of the living God" by Him.

Likewise, Isaiah the prophet is quoted by Paul to support his discourse about God's sovereign grace (Isa.1:9). However numerous Israel might be, if God's righteousness would follow its course, judgment would have to come over all of it. Nothing would be left of Israel, but God's unlimited grace provides salvation for a *remnant*. The work that God will finish on the earth (v.28) is the judgment which will strike the unbelieving people of Israel in righteousness. This will only take place after the rapture of the Church. That there will be a remnant at all, will be due to God's sovereign mercy. While it may seem all His plans are failing, He will still be the Lord of a great nation that will develop out of this remnant in the Millennium. It is all due to the fact that, for this remnant, the righteousness of God has been fully exercised upon the Lord Jesus. This will be recognized by the remnant. Other prophets also speak of this.

In verses 30-33 the conclusion comes. The nations have participated in the righteousness on the principle of faith. Earlier in Romans you saw that faith is the only way to be justified before God. Israel failed in obtaining its righteousness before God. Why did they fail? Because they thought God would give His righteousness to them based on keeping the law. But when Christ came they were offended by Him. He revealed their attempts at keeping the law only served themselves by making them feel more important. Their evil state of mind was made evident by His coming "in Zion" (v.33; Isa.8:14; 28:16) — in Israel — and by His appearance among them. This was what they couldn't bear and therefore they rejected Him. When they were offended by Him, they stumbled. This is how they put themselves outside the blessing.

Romans 9 concludes by pointing out one more time that the heart of God goes out to "whoever," without difference between Jew and Gentile. The only condition to partake of the blessing is to believe on Him! In doing this, you will never be ashamed!

Now read Romans 9:24-33 again.

Reflection: Why is it important to know the Old as well as the New Testament?

35. CHRIST IS THE END OF THE LAW

(Romans 10:1-4)

In Romans 9 Paul made it clear that in the past God made Himself known as a God who is sovereign. He gives the Gentiles access to the blessings, and *some*, a remnant, from Israel also receive the blessings because God is a God of grace.

The people of Israel as a whole have been rejected by God. Romans 10 gives the reason why. In Romans 11 it is said this rejection is certain, but not final! There will be a restoration. And this rejection isn't something in which Paul rejoices. He doesn't say, "Oh well, they should have listened better." No, the first verse shows how his prayer was going out to God for their salvation. This is another proof of his heartfelt bond with this nation. He was aware of the good that could be found with them — their zeal for God.

In Galatians 1:13-14 we see that before Paul's conversion, this zeal was in him as well. Being zealous for God is good, but it must be according to knowledge. This is important for you too. If you're recently converted, you're ready to go! You want to witness! This is a good thing, but if you are led by your enthusiasm, without the knowledge of the will of God, you are likely to mess things up. This is not meant to discourage you in your activities. There's a lot to do. I hope with all my heart you will see a lot of work you can do for the Lord and that you will be active in it. But with the Lord, education and activity go hand in hand. Take care to gain an understanding of the will of the Lord. What you're reading at the moment may help you with that.

Now back to Romans 10. Two reasons are given for Israel's fall. First, they didn't know God's righteousness. Verse 3 says, "They being ignorant of God's righteousness." This means the righteous dealings of God were ignored. This righteousness is the great subject of this letter. To get an idea of what is meant by this, look at the Lord Jesus and at His work on the cross. There you see the righteous dealings of God. Only by the Lord Jesus is it possible to receive God's

righteousness, but Israel has rejected Him. Instead (and this is the second reason for their fall), they tried (and still try) to gain their own righteousness. In this way they ignore the fact that no one is able to live so righteously that God can declare him or her righteous.

Today too, many people are busy trying to work for their righteousness. These say in effect it wasn't necessary for Christ to die. Nor do they subject themselves to God's righteousness. They are of the opinion that God will have to accept them because, as they calmly claim, they have never done anything wrong.

But God judges differently. To Him there is only One righteous and that is Christ. Christ and the law, Christ and one's works, Christ and one's righteousness, will not work. With Christ's coming to earth, the end has come of the law as a means of being justified. Now, God can only give His righteousness to someone if that person recognizes in faith that he needs Christ. For such a one the law has been dealt with because the law has attained its end as soon as one recognizes the impossibility of being justified by the law.

To stop looking at one's own works and to look away at what Christ has done and to believe it, is to subject oneself to God's righteousness. God points everyone to Christ: Christ is the only possibility to get in touch with Him. It is wonderful to see this! Let's point out Christ to all those who think they live so deserving, thinking that God will be content with them without Christ. Everyone who is compared with Him will have to agree that his life falls very short of His. But most of all, he will have to recognize shamefully that Christ's death and resurrection were necessary to save him. This is what the next set of verses discusses.

Now read Romans 10:1-4 again.

Reflection: Consider your zeal for God.

36. BELIEVE WITH YOUR HEART AND CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH

(Romans 10:5-11)

In the law in Leviticus 18:5, God said to Moses that someone could obtain life only by being obedient to the law. In saying this, God indicated that someone can earn his righteousness by keeping the law. But no one kept the law or can keep the law.

Now there is another way to get righteousness and this is on the principle of faith. One's "own righteousness" is out of the question. When we talk about faith, all of our works to get to heaven are excluded. At the end of verse 6 Paul strongly states that our works to get to heaven are a denial of the ascension of Christ. It is the same as saying, "Let Him come down again; I've no need of His work because I'll accomplish it by my strength." But His work *was necessary* to give you God's righteousness. He has gone to heaven as proof that His work has been completely accepted by God.

You wouldn't say then, "Who will ascend into heaven?" Here is the thought of reaching heaven by one's efforts. As long as this is being thought, the work of Christ is slighted and He is pulled down. And don't say either, "Who will descend into the abyss?" This is to say you need to descend into the abyss to wipe out your debt with some kind of penance. This would be impossible. Who can ever descend into the depths of misery into which Christ descended? The one who tries this takes Christ up out of death, thinking Christ's death for himself was unnecessary and he can satisfy God as to his debt by himself.

But if you believe God's actions are righteous, you'll know that God in Christ has come very close to you. You don't have to go to Him; He has come to you. He has come so close to you that He has laid His word in your mouth and heart. You have been saved because the word of faith has been preached to you. The content of the preaching is to confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him up from the dead. If you believe this, you

know God no longer is against you and no longer has anything against you. On the contrary, He is for you.

The order is remarkable. First it is your mouth and then your heart. The mouth is mentioned first because your faith can only be observed by others in what they hear and see from you. You can't say someone is saved if you don't notice anything of it in his or her behavior and talk. The confession of Jesus as Lord is what it's all about. It's just not possible to accept Jesus only as Savior, as Redeemer from your sins. A moment came in your life when you acknowledged you couldn't save yourself and couldn't exist before God because you had failed in everything. You failed because you were listening to a different master, the devil. And then, God showed you He has given over the Lord Jesus to death for your sins. The Lord Jesus has freed you from the burden of sin which you couldn't bear. Aren't you incredibly thankful for this?

Now you're His property. I hope others can see the Lord Jesus is your Lord. Of course, the heart is what it's all about. With your heart, you believe unto righteousness. But it must become outwardly visible because it is with your mouth you confess unto salvation. Maybe you view your confession very poorly; it could have been a lot better. I wish I did it much better. But keep in mind what Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame" (v.11). Faith has to do with trust. For your salvation, you have put your trust in God and no longer in yourself. This trust gives you the strength to witness, because it is not self-centered, but God-centered. By reading the Bible, you'll get to know God and the Lord Jesus better, and your faith will increase. The more you study the Bible, the more you'll see it in your practice both in word and in deed.

Now read Romans 10:5-11 again.

Reflection: What is the relation between your mouth and your heart?

37. BEAUTIFUL FEET

(Romans 10:12-15)

In Romans 3:22 you read that on account of sin there was (and is) no longer a difference between Jew and Greek (Greek and heathen being the same). Every person is a sinner and is guilty before God. Here you read that the same Lord is rich over all who call on Him, whether Jew or Greek.

Note that Paul constantly quotes verses from the Old Testament to support what he said. He's doing it to prove that God is not merely the God of the Jews, but also the God of the heathen. Well, you as a heathen (Gentile) may know from your experience that He is a Lord rich in grace and that He has shown mercy to you, a poor sinner! He's not a brutal Lord who wanted to keep you outside of grace. Since verses 11 and 13 mention "whoever," it doesn't leave room for limitations. However the condition "believes" is in verse 11, and "calls on the name of the Lord" is in verse 13.

To be saved you have to call on the name of the *Lord*. This means to give honor to Him or to adore Him. You will agree with me that before your conversion you didn't pay Him the honor due Him. Before, other things were important and you lost yourself in them, including sports, studying, your career, money or the way you looked. Maybe you were religious as well. However, it didn't bring you happiness and didn't offer you salvation. This is why you called on the name of the *Lord* to be saved. When you did this, it was the first time you really honored Him. He wants to be your Savior. This is exactly the meaning of the name of Jesus: *the Lord is Savior*.

Then in verse 13 there is a quotation from Joel 2:32. Isn't it remarkable that He who is called *Jehovah* (rendered as LORD in many translations) in the Old Testament is the same as He who receives the name of *Jesus* in the New Testament? So the Lord Jesus is Jehovah of the Old Testament, but in the New Testament He comes to His people as Man.

It is clear that, for the Jew, salvation was only to be found in Him. But what about us who belong to the nations? He didn't come to us. We didn't know of Him and didn't believe in Him. So how then could we call on Him? Still, we were lost and had to be saved, but to be saved we had to believe in Him. If this is so, then we should be told about Him. And how could we ever have heard about Him if someone hadn't preached Him to us?

Here you see again it's not the law and doing something that's important, but the preaching, hearing and listening to the Word. Someone must be sent if he is to preach. This sending is not done by some church or missionary union, but by the Lord: He is the Commissioner. And isn't it a wonderful service for which you too have received an assignment? It is a service of proclaiming peace, proclaiming good things.

One who's proclaiming the gospel has "beautiful ... feet" (v.15) as opposed to the time when his feet were swift to shed blood (Rom.3:15). The citation of the "beautiful ... feet" is from Isaiah 52:7. There, the messenger of peace is one Person — the Lord Jesus. Isn't it a wonderful thought that in proclaiming peace and good, you are being His follower? In a world of unrest, a world in which evil reigns, you may be a messenger of peace and of good things. Many people around you are waiting for this message. Will you leave them where they are, in their misery, or are you going to tell them of that wonderful Lord?

Now read Romans 10:12-15 again.

Reflection: With whom and when did you last talk about the Lord Jesus?

38. THE PREACHING REJECTED

(Romans 10:16-21)

Maybe the previous verses gave you fresh courage to preach of peace and of good things. You want to tell others what the Lord has done with you and how happy you now are. You can see it quite clearly. You think others will be impressed by your testimony and will be converted to the Lord, but many will not be converted. This will be a sad disappointment. The results you were so fervently hoping for won't come. Instead of conversions based on your testimony, they will turn against you.

Isaiah knew something about this. He spoke a lot about the Messiah who was to come to His people, but few believed his preaching. At the coming of the promised Messiah, were the masses of people awaiting him? You know they weren't because He didn't meet their expectations. They didn't like it that He came as a baby in a manger. Had it been someone appearing with pomp and circumstance, which would have been very different, they would have accepted Him. But what was their response? "Away with Him" (Jn.19:15). The Lord Jesus was rejected and He returned to heaven. You can't see Him now. To have contact with Him, faith is required, and this faith must be stirred up by preaching. And the preaching must have the Word of God as its contents. Only then can man discover himself, who God is, and what He has done to save him.

Consider the following question. At the time when the Word of God had not come to the Gentiles by way of preaching, hadn't God already spoken to them? Certainly! So Paul quotes from Psalm 19. In this psalm David praises God's glory and the work of His hands as seen in creation. The testimony of God that speaks from creation was and is not limited to Israel, but can be perceived all over the world. Here we have proof from the Old Testament that God preached to the Gentiles to enable them to have knowledge of Him and to believe in Him.

But then there is another question. Should Israel have known that God would make Himself known to the Gentiles, or shouldn't we blame

them for resenting God for also blessing the Gentiles? Moses is the first to speak in verse 19. He was Israel's great leader and they respected him. He was the one who told them of their unfaithfulness and that God would turn to another "nation" because of their unfaithfulness. By doing so, He intended to awaken their jealousy so they would return to Him. Note that *jealousy* is a good thing: it is wanting to maintain what is rightfully yours. *Envy* is wanting what the other person has, and is generally bad.

Isaiah is also quoted. Paul says it in the following way, "Isaiah is very bold, and says." This implies it was quite a bold venture of Isaiah, which it was. For it really was a direct attack on Israel's national pride as God's nation to tell them that God would consider another nation.

Romans 10:21 is the most penetrating. God Himself speaks. You can taste the sorrow of His heart when you read what He has to say to His people. You can see God, His hands wide open to bring His people to His heart. And God doesn't remain with this attitude for only a few minutes, but "all day long." This refers to the entire time He dealt with that nation. Is there anything more grievous than being rejected in such a way? From His viewpoint, God did everything to bless His people, but the only answer of His people was disobedience and opposition. They turned their backs on Him. The people broke their connection with God. Therefore, God had to put His people aside, but thankfully not forever, because in Romans 11 we read that a new day will rise for Israel.

Now read Romans 10:16-21 again.

Reflection: What do you experience when your testimony is rejected?

39. A REMNANT ACCORDING TO ELECTION OF GRACE

(Romans 11:1-6)

After all that has preceded, you might wonder if God has totally rejected His people forever. This question gets the same clear answer from Paul, "Certainly not!" He can point to himself. He was an Israelite. He was of the seed of Abraham to whom God had given His promises. He was from the tribe of Benjamin, which had almost disappeared from among Israel because they refused to judge evil (Jud.19-21). If God had rejected His people, there wouldn't have been a place left for Paul. But no, God hasn't rejected His people as a whole. God knew His people in advance; the infidelity of the people did not surprise God. It only gave Him an opportunity to show His grace in a very evident manner.

To illustrate this, Paul refers to what the Scripture says in the story of Elijah (1 Ki.18-19). Basically it came down to Elijah who was a hero on Mount Carmel where in the LORD God's name he opposed the false prophets who claimed Baal was god. The people were watching. Elijah gained a great victory for the Lord that day, and the people were shouting, "The LORD, He is God" (1 Ki.18:39). But a little later when he was threatened with death by Jezebel, he fled to save his life. Having lost courage, he reached Horeb, the mount of God. There this man of God started accusing the people of Israel. He began to tell God all the things they had done wrong. He felt he was the only faithful one. And now they wanted to kill him too.

Is this a good reason to accuse the people before God? Do you recognize yourself in all this? I recognize myself. It is tremendous to live for the Lord and to be successful like Elijah at Mount Carmel. You hear the praise of the people. How wonderful! Then you're threatened, ridiculed, laughed at, and you're on the run. No one cares for you. How alone you feel when left on your own! "Well," you say to God, "this is a nice mess; if this is the way it works, I'm no longer interested. I'm the only one who serves You faithfully. The others take it easy.

And now they're even trying to silence me." And you are sure God agrees wholeheartedly. After all, you're only telling the facts. But listen to the divine answer, "I have reserved 7000 in Israel" (1 Ki.19:18). Ouch! That hurts! God always has many more people who have remained faithful to Him than you and I think. In Elijah's case there were 7000. God said, "*I have reserved for Myself.*" This means *God* has taken care of it.

I have applied Elijah's history to you and me personally. But the aim of this quotation in Romans 11 is to show there is always a remnant of the people of Israel, according to the election of grace, even if we don't see it. With this, God proves that even under judgment, He must rule over Israel; Israel's rejection is not an overall one. To make it even clearer, if there's a remnant, then it is by grace and not by works, which infers it is not by any merit of that remnant.

Did you know this reference to Elijah's accusations is the only time an Old Testament believer's sin is referred to in the New Testament? However, this shouldn't cause us look down on Elijah. He remains a wonderful example of the courage of faith. After all, he stood firm against all those idolatrous priests while not one of the 7000 was anywhere to be found. But as soon as he began to exalt himself for his faithfulness and started accusing others before God, he was set right by God. *Accusing* is a sin we all easily commit, but it is Satan's work. In Revelation 12:10 Satan is called "the accuser of our brethren." If we see unfaithfulness with our brothers and sisters, let us rather do what the Lord Jesus did. He is the One who prays for us, going to God for those who are His to ask Him to help them to become faithful again.

Now read Romans 11:1-6 again.

Reflection: Consider your prayers. Do you accuse your brothers and sisters or do you pray *for* them? Also consider your conversations with others. Do you accuse your brothers and sisters before others?

40. THE FALL AND ACCEPTANCE OF ISRAEL

(Romans 11:7-14)

If God elects a remnant, it is by grace, not because that remnant deserves anything. This is how it was with you. Israel looked for an opportunity to build up its righteousness before God, but they didn't receive it because they failed. God has given this grace to the elect. All others have been hardened. God only hardens someone if not a single opportunity to bring someone to repentance is left. In a threefold testimony from the Old Testament, Paul makes this hardening evident. He quotes texts from the prophets (Isaiah), the law (Deuteronomy) and the Psalms.

In Isaiah and Deuteronomy it is God who exercises this judgment of hardening by giving "them a spirit of stupor." God's patience will end. In Psalm 69 David asks for God's judgment upon Israel because of their rejection of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Such statements are not fitting for us. We live in the time of grace and we ought to ask God to forgive our enemies. This is what the Lord Jesus prayed while on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Lk.23:34). Therefore, grace can be offered now to the worst of sinners. Of these, Paul considers himself the most prominent example. He says that to him, the chief of the sinners, mercy was shown (1 Tim.1:13-16). To the remnant grace has been shown through the intercession of the Lord Jesus at the cross according to the election of grace. But all others will fall under the judgment that God must bring over them because they put the Lord Jesus to death.

It was proper for His earthly people (in the Old Testament as well as in the future when the Church has been taken up) to ask God to punish evil. And God will do that. He is the God of justice who will bring about this justice for His elect. Later, when in the Great Tribulation (the Church having been taken up and we thus in heaven), the believing remnant will suffer terrible persecution and the Lord Jesus will return to earth to save them (Zech.12:1-4; 14:1-4). He will do this by judging the persecutors. In many psalms the feelings of the believers in those future days resound with their desire for deliverance, imploring God to

judge their enemies. In essence, this is what David does here.

Now you may wonder if all this happened to Israel with the goal of allowing them to fall. But once again this idea is taken away when Paul says, "Certainly not!" They didn't stumble to be rejected. But once they had stumbled, God offered His grace to the nations. He did so with the purpose of provoking Israel to jealousy. You must not restrict the sense of *jealousy* to a grudge, as if Israel would envy the nations because grace was offered to them. The sense is, it would cause Israel to long for the salvation that was offered to the nations.

It is good to realize these riches have come to us as a consequence of Israel's trespassing. Salvation wasn't offered to us because we were better in any respect. It is through Israel's trespass and loss, although negative for them, that such riches have gone out towards the world. What blessing for the world also will result from Israel's conversion and restoration! Then a wonderful blessing will go out from this people in which all the nations will share. This will be the situation in the Millennium, the Lord's 1000 year reign (Rev.20:4).

Although Paul was the apostle to the nations, he was still connected with his people in both heart and soul. He had an eye for their present state of hardening. He also had an eye for their future restoration. His commitment in his Lord's service was closely connected with these people. When he speaks of "some," this means he didn't think he could bring all the people to conversion. He saw it as a glorification of his service if he could save "some" out of Israel. The individuals who are now converted out of Israel form the *remnant according to the election of grace* in this present day.

Read Romans 11:7-14 again.

Reflection: What is your attitude towards Israel?

41. GOD'S TESTIMONY ON EARTH

(Romans 11:15-17)

The rejection of Israel meant the offer of atonement could go out to the world — to the nations, to the Gentiles. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 it says, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.” This does not say the whole world was reconciled to God; it is only true for those who recognize the necessity of Christ’s work of atonement for themselves. There is no such thing as a universal reconciliation — that everyone, even the devil, will be saved. This idea is often justified by saying, “God is a God of love,” but don’t let yourself be fooled by this! The Bible speaks clearly enough of an everlasting judgment (Rev.20:11-15).

These verses in Romans 11 cover the situation *before God* of both Israel and the world. At the moment, God is not publicly dealing with Israel as a nation. When Israel will be again accepted, this will be “life from the dead.” A description of this is found in Ezekiel 37:1-14. God desires to have a people on earth to give testimony of Him and proclaim His virtues. In the past, Israel failed to give a testimony of the only true God, and even today they don’t do so. At the present time, this testimony should be given by Christians. But is Christianity doing a better job?

The portion from Romans 11:16 onwards, is very important. It teaches you to understand something of God’s dealing with Christianity. Both from Israel and from Christianity, God expected a testimony to be given of Him in this world. With the image of the olive tree and its branches, Paul shows the degree in which they have succeeded. In verse 16 we first read about the “firstfruit” and the “lump.” The *firstfruit* are the first fruits collected from the harvest. They are *holy*, which means separated to the Lord. From these first fruits, for example the first grains of wheat, dough is made. This dough would automatically be holy as well. This thought holds as well for a tree’s roots and branches. These two examples of the “firstfruit ... lump” and the “root ... branches” speak of the fact that where the *origin* is holy, anything springing from this origin is also holy.

Next we see a wild olive tree of which the branches are broken off to be grafted into the good, "cultivated" olive tree in verse 24. In this way the branches of the wild olive tree could partake of the root and the fatness of the good olive tree. In addition, from the good olive tree, branches have been broken off. This was done to make room for the branches that had been broken off from the wild olive tree. By how Paul speaks of the branches, it is clear this is figurative language speaking of people.

Let's go back now to verse 16. The root represents the origin from which something grows and becomes visible on earth. In verse 17 the following image then arises that some branches (which speak of the unbelieving part of the people of Israel) are broken off (which speak of being put aside by God). Other branches remained (which speak of the faithful remnant). In place of the branches that were broken off, branches of the wild olive tree (which speaks of the believers from among the Gentiles) have been grafted in. As a result these Gentiles (who used to have no right to anything) could partake of the root and the fatness of the olive tree (which speaks of partaking of the promises and blessing that belonged to Abraham and his posterity).

Before the end of Romans 11 the subject is God's testimony on earth and how God judges it. Both Israel and Christianity are responsible for the testimony they show of God. God couldn't maintain Israel as His witness. Christianity has replaced Israel as God's witness on earth. But do Christians perform their task any better than Israel? This is what we will see in the next section.

Now read Romans 11:15-17 again.

Reflection: In which way can you proclaim God's virtues? See 1 Peter 2:9.

42. PRIDE WILL HAVE A FALL

(Romans 11:18-22)

We Christians are now the bearers of the testimony that God gives of Himself in this world. Israel has been put aside. There is a danger for us Christians to boast in the place God has given us. It is easy to feel we are better than Israel. Well, if you have some idea of the testimony that Christians give in the world, it wouldn't even enter your mind to boast. Just think of countries like Northern Ireland or Lebanon where recent civil wars were fought between militant groups under outwardly-Christian religious names.

God in His grace gave this testimony to us instead of Israel. It's only in this way that we have acquired the blessings which God wanted to give to His people. We, heathen by nature, had no right to anything. Remember, we don't support the root, but the root is supporting us. God put unbelieving Israel aside and we have come in its place. But remember *why* Israel was put aside. They lost this place on earth because of their unbelief. They rejected God and His Son. It's not because we are better that we have taken their place. Yet, to be able to keep this place, we must remain standing in the *truth of faith* and not our personal trust of faith. Here it's not *that* we believe, but *what* we believe. To be maintained by God as His testimony on earth, Christianity must have an undiminished adherence to the Bible because therein is our truth of faith.

Now comes Paul's warning for us not to be proud. Christianity as a whole shouldn't think that God will maintain it. If they don't fear Him, they will share in Israel's fate. From other portions of Scripture, it is clear that Christianity as a whole also will become unfaithful and God will have to cut it off. This increasing unfaithfulness is already visible. In many denominations, doctrines are proclaimed about the work and Person of the Lord Jesus that are not scriptural.

More and more, Christianity is presented as a religion that is equal to other world religions. This hides the great difference between all other religions and Christianity. Christianity is the only religion to offer the

solution for a lost man to become clean before God. This can only come through the Lord Jesus who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn.14:6). This excludes every other possibility. The Lord Jesus is not merely one possibility among others.

Christianity also is used to further political causes. The testimony of who God is and who the Lord Jesus is has been obscured by all this. Man has been placed on earth to serve God. In the Bible the Christian has been given *principles* to know how to do this. It's only by faith in the Lord Jesus and His completed work that he is able to do this. But faith is more and more evolving into something hollowed out. Christianity has already given up the greater part of the truth of faith and will continue to do so until the complete giving up of the Christian faith occurs — the *apostasy* or "falling away" of 2 Thessalonians 2:3. This is the eventual result. Christianity will not keep standing in the faith. This is what God's Word teaches us. Will we go this way too? In case this disturbs you, I will say something about it in the next section.

Now read Romans 11:18-22 again.

Reflection: What is the meaning of "Be not haughty, but fear" in verse 20?

43. THE GIFTS AND THE CALLING OF GOD ARE IRREVOCABLE

(Romans 11:23-29)

I concluded the previous section by asking if we will end up going the way of apostasy. Can we conclude from Romans 11:22 that this will be so for you and me, even though we believe in the Lord Jesus? John 10:28-29 answers this. One who is a child of God will remain so forever. Unfortunately, we may on occasions behave unlike a child of God. This has to do with your personal responsibility. If you sin as a child of God, you must confess it or be disciplined (child trained — Heb.12:5-12).

In this current portion we see the responsibility of the Christian testimony that has taken Israel's place. If this testimony as a whole becomes unfaithful, God cannot maintain it anymore than He could maintain Israel's. With Israel some Israelites had a personal relationship with God, but in general Israel consisted of people who didn't want God. The same is true for Christianity. Many who call themselves Christians have a relationship with God on the basis of a personal faith, but in general in Christianity, emphasis is increasingly being placed on an emotional experience rather than the experience of true faith. God's thoughts are not sought after. The Bible is left unread. As a result God can no longer recognize Christianity as His testimony on earth, so He will have to judge it. So you have to distinguish between one's proper, personal responsibility before God and what God expects from Christianity as a whole. I hope this has helped to make the distinction clearer.

Now on to verse 23. In this verse Paul says that Israel will again take the place of God's testimony on earth. This is a biblical mystery. A mystery in the Bible is something that was unknown in the Old Testament, but is now made known. This mystery concerns the rejection and acceptance of Israel, including the current time when God has accepted another people for His name. In the Old Testament this wasn't known.

To avoid being “wise in your own opinion,” you must realize the hardening or blinding that has come over Israel hasn’t come over all Israel, but only over part of it — the mass of unbelieving Israelites — but it leaves room for a remnant. This remnant *eventually* will be all of Israel because all the ungodly and unbelieving Israelites will perish by God’s judgment during the tribulation. What remains will thus be considered “all Israel.”

God will go on with this *new* Israel after the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (v.25). This last expression means that the Christian testimony on earth will have completed the time of its testimony and reached its end. God will cut it off (after the rapture) because it didn’t abide in “goodness” (v.22). After this, Israel will again be the object of His love. The Redeemer or “Deliverer will come out of Zion” to liberate His people from the enemies who want to destroy them. Many Old Testament prophecies tell how this will happen. They also will receive the assurance that God will fulfill the covenant He made with His people by taking their sins from them. It is necessary to be free from the burden of sins to really enjoy God’s blessings. The huge burden weighing on the people will be their rejection of the Lord Jesus. They will confess Him as Lord, and God will forgive them. Zechariah 12 to 14 tells how all this will take place.

God will execute His plans with respect to His earthly people. He will do what He has promised; He will not revoke it. Israel now behaves with hostility towards the preaching of the gospel, but as to election God loves them because they are descendants of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were the ones to whom God gave His promises. As a result of the people’s unfaithfulness, the fulfillment of the promises had to be put off. But with God, delays are no problem. He doesn’t revoke His promises. He doesn’t change His mind regarding what He has promised to His people and to which He has called them.

Now read Romans 11:23-29 again.

Reflection: What is a mystery?

44. TO HIM BE THE GLORY FOREVER!

(Romans 11:30-36)

The final verses of Romans 11 summarize all that Paul expounded in the preceding chapters. It became clear that we, belonging to the Gentiles, didn't believe in God. By believing the gospel, we received mercy. But we also saw that the gospel could only have gone out to the Gentiles when the Jews failed to respond to the many times God called on them to repent. Then when they saw grace going out to the Gentiles, they couldn't bear it and became enemies of the gospel. In Acts we read about this time and again. With this attitude they arrived at the same place before God that the Gentiles used to be. Just as we Gentiles didn't believe in former days, the Jews don't believe now. God's purpose with this is to show us that all, without exception, are unbelievers. As a result, mercy has gone out to everyone without exception. He wants to prove He is merciful. Is there a better way to do this than first showing that everyone needs this mercy?

This brings Paul to praise God in verses 33-36. In these verses he admires God's wisdom and knowledge. In the Lord Jesus we see God's wisdom. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 He is called the "wisdom from God." Who would ever have thought of solving in this way the problems caused by the sin of man? God has perfect knowledge of all that has happened and He knows how to deal with it in a perfectly righteous way. This encloses a depth of wisdom which is unsearchable for us.

In His judging the situation that has arisen, or the perfect insight He has in the situation that has arisen, He is exalted far beyond us. For man, no prospect was left. He couldn't offer a single solution. All he could do was make sin worse. Then God started working. Who can search the ways in which He has acted? No one can. Now, after the cross, we can admire Him since He has completed His work in Christ. Could anyone except God ever have devised this way? Would God have needed a counselor for this plan? Who could have been His counselor anyway?

Everything God has in wisdom and ability, He possesses in Himself. He doesn't have to take it from others. There is no higher power in the whole universe than God. And there is no one who could give Him something of which He is in need and of which He should repay. God alone is independent. All things exist by Him. All things find their origins in Him. In Romans 4 God created the things that were not, as if they were. All sources of matter, wisdom and knowledge are within Himself. Things not only proceed from Him, but He Himself also accomplished and achieved all things.

In verse 36 we come to the "to Him." Of all His plans and actions, He is the great Object in which it all ends. God glorified Himself in everything He did. The astonishing and admirable thing that will eternally raise our adoration is that God has included *us* in His plan. In eternity you will be allowed to contribute to His glory. Isn't it overwhelming, thinking of your former state, to see the place God has now given you? You cannot but agree with Paul saying, "To whom be glory forever." There is nothing more to be added to this other than "Amen." This reminds me of Revelation 5 when, after the praise in verses 13-14, an "Amen" follows and all the elders fell down and worship. No words are heard anymore. Hearts lose themselves in a boundless and unspeakable admiration for God and the Lamb. Amen.

Now read Romans 11:30-36 again.

Reflection: Think once more about verse 36.

45. BE TRANSFORMED

(Romans 12:1-2)

If you have considered all that God has done for you (how much He loves you and how merciful He is) you can only exclaim, "Lord, here I am, fill my life!" God expects you to show in your life that you understand something of the teaching you have received. You didn't read these lessons merely to memorize them. What you've seen are the mercies of God. You have experienced them for yourself, and this is what Paul takes for granted when he sets out to teach you how to live as a Christian for God's honor.

Verses 1 and 2 can each be summarized with one word: verse 1 is *dedication* and verse 2 is *obedience*. Since you've accepted the Lord Jesus, God has a right to your whole life. It shouldn't be difficult for you to present your body as a "living sacrifice" when you think of what God has done for you. So Paul points to the mercies of God. It is a joy to God's heart when His mercies are answered with the sacrifice of your body, when dedication and devotion are manifested in your life.

At one time you used your body to live for yourself. You were willing to receive honor for yourself because of the things you did and who you were. But your body is no longer yours. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, "you were bought with a price" (the price the Lord Jesus paid), and therefore you should "glorify God in your body." This is what the "holy" in verse 1 is all about. *Holy* means to be set apart for a certain object. Your body has been set apart with the object of glorifying God in it and with it.

How can you do this? In the way you treat your body and in what you do with it! God wants to see something of the life of the Lord Jesus when He was here on earth. Then the sacrifice of your body will be pleasing to God as was the case with the Lord Jesus. On several occasions, God allowed His satisfaction with the Lord Jesus to be heard from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt.3:17). This pleasure is what God is looking for in your life. God won't be pleased by an occasional pious mood or feeling

without giving a thought to what you're really doing.

It is an "*intelligent service*." This means it's a way of life in which you're conscious of everything you're doing and not doing for the Lord. Your decisions are made before Him. This is very important because it's easy to allow yourself to be led by what's common in the world around you.

God wants to make His will clear to you. Do you ask for His will in all things? Your whole life, the way you behave, talk, act, dress and treat people, shouldn't be conformed to this world, but must be changed completely. You don't have to decide the way in which this change should take place. This happens from the "renewing of your mind." Your mind used to be self-centered, but by the new life and the attitude from your new life, you now can be God-centered.

Paul wrote this as an exhortation, so it's not an *automatic* change. You have to *devote yourself to it* to allow this transformation to take place. If you're recently converted you may need to rely on God's patience. Not everything in which you were conformed to in this world will immediately be removed from you. God will show this to you step by step. If you've been converted for a longer time, you also need this exhortation. You can't escape the influence of this world. Therefore, you must always strive to make this transformation. Is that what you want to do? This is the point here. Only then will you be able to prove what is the "good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Knowing His will is an absolute necessity to show God's mercies in your life. What a rich life will be yours if you learn to look at it this way!

Now read Romans 12:1-2 again.

Reflection: Are there things in your life that you know must be changed to please God?

46. WHAT IS YOUR TASK?

(Romans 12:3-8)

Romans 12 divides into three parts. Verses 1-2 form the first part that speaks about your relation with God. The third part comprises verses 9-21, discussing your relation with people around you. The current portion is your relation with your fellow-believers. You must understand you're not better than another; on the contrary, modesty and moderation are fitting.

God has imparted to everyone a certain amount of faith. This is exactly the amount of faith you need for the task He wants you to perform. God has done the same with your fellow-believer who also has received a task from God with the measure of faith needed for that task. Having received this from God, couldn't you boast about it or tell it to the entire world?

Even Paul didn't do this, and he was an apostle. He addresses you and me by the grace [undeserved favor] given to him. This is how we should approach each other, realizing the grace that has been given to us. He makes a comparison with the human body. A body has many members. All those members have different functions. With us, things work in a similar way, but in a spiritual sense. All believers together form one body in which every believer has his or her proper place and function.

In 1 Corinthians 12 this is treated more extensively, where stress is placed on how all those members belong together. They can't manage without one another. Here in Romans 12 we have your *attitude* with respect to others. You have your unique task that only you can properly fulfill. Do you know your function? Difficult, isn't it? There is a verse that says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Eccl.9:10). In other words, look around you and you will see a lot of work.

In verses 6-8 a number of these *gifts* are mentioned. What it comes down to is your attitude. A practical way to demonstrate the

transformation of your mind is to be helpful to someone else. What counts is what we are with respect to each other (v.5). We all have received a different gift of grace from God. God didn't give it to us to neglect it, but to start working with it.

Prophecy is the first gift mentioned. 1 Peter 4:11 gives a good description of prophecy, which is "speaking the oracles of God." The more you learn about God, the better you can pass on God's thoughts. Then the next thing you read is "in proportion to our faith." Passing on God's thoughts can only be according to the measure of your personal communion with God, according to the measure in which you have learned to trust Him in your practical life of faith.

Maybe *servicing* suits you better. This is a more practical way of being occupied. Archippus, in Colossians 4:17, was such a person. He had to be exhorted to fulfill the ministry he had received from the Lord. You and I may need a similar exhortation.

Maybe there's a *teacher* hidden in you. In Ezra 7:10 you find an important order. Ezra directed his heart to seek the law. Then he acted according to it. Then, only after doing the first two, he taught the Law in Israel.

Then there is *exhortation*. To exhort means to encourage or to comfort, but it may also mean to point out wrong things. This is not a popular activity, but a necessary one. Believers are always in danger of backsliding from the Word. Therefore, they must be warned. Deviations always have unpleasant consequences. The object of exhortation, therefore, is to bring believers who have gone astray, back to the Lord. In James 5:19-20 you can see the blessed result this can have.

There are brothers and sisters who have the gift of *giving*, that is to share with others what they have. To me, this gift of grace seems much more rewarding than the preceding one. But using this gift requires spiritual exercise. It must happen wisely, generously and without ulterior motives.

Leading is a special gift too. Being diligent in this is necessary because leading is a matter of being a good example yourself and not of handing out assignments. Nehemiah of the Old Testament was a

good example of a leader.

The last gift mentioned here is *mercy*. There are believers who, on seeing others in misery, are ready to help them. For them it is important that they fulfill their task *cheerfully*. However, this is not easy because help is not always appreciated.

Paul has not given an exhaustive list. What he has tried to make clear is that every believer, including you, has a gift and this gift must be used correctly. There will certainly be something that will keep you occupied. Ask the Lord to lead you in this matter *and then get busy!*

Now read Romans 12:3-8 again.

Reflection: Ask the Lord to help you in seeing and performing your task.

47. RULES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE — I

(Romans 12:9-13)

In this passage we have a whole series of different exhortations. All deal with everyday life and are presented in short, pointed sentences. Take your time to understand the meaning of each sentence. Try to connect each one with the Person of the Lord Jesus. He showed all these things every single day of His life, as seen in the Gospels. But since you have come to know how God sees you, through the work of the Lord Jesus, He therefore expects you to behave as it is written in this part of Romans 12. It is not so much your outward appearance as the tone, way and spirit of your life. Note how everything is directly opposed to the usual behavior of people in the world.

The passage begins with *love*. Love must be without hypocrisy, which means without hidden purposes. This is how the Lord Jesus was. You won't find this in the world. Often people only want to contribute to a charitable work if the amount is made known along with the name of the giver.

Love must be directed into a safe path since we live in a world full of evil things. There is always the danger of expressing love wrongly. The first thing love can teach this world is the abhorrence of evil. This is what you can see with the Lord Jesus. How do you feel when you come into contact with some kind of evil? Do you abhor it? Sometimes you don't know if something is good or evil, but if something is clearly evil you must abhor it. This may cause people to criticize you for having a negative attitude, for never joining in, or as someone without desire for excitement. Then there is another side; to "cling to what is good." The good is what you find with the Lord Jesus. He is the good One. Everything good comes from Him.

In verse 10, brotherly love is mentioned. In this evil world there is a unique type of fellowship called the fellowship of the brethren. All those who are children of God belong to it. In this verse you are exhorted to be kind to them. This verse speaks of your spiritual family. In the world, true kindness is scarce. Therefore, people in the world

are strangers to each other. "In honor giving preference to one another" is uncommon in the world. There, the desire is obtaining as much honor for yourself as possible. Among brothers and sisters in Christ it is the other way around; at least this is how it ought to be. Therefore we must give preference in honoring others in such a way that sets an example to others.

"Not lagging in diligence" also is an exhortation. People may call you a fanatic, but being zealous is an important characteristic of a Christian. Zeal for God's house devoured the Lord Jesus (Jn.2:17). The question is simply for what or whom are you zealous? Are you "fervent in spirit"? Your zeal, commitment and motivation may contribute to the last words in verse 11, "Serving the Lord." Serving the Lord is willingly serving Him as a *slave*. Then you are completely at His disposal. He decides what you have and do not have to do. This includes your time, your strength and your capabilities. He wants to use everything.

The Lord redeemed you from the power of sin. He now wants your body as a living sacrifice. In the future you have a hope, a prospect in which to rejoice. The Lord will soon come. Then you will be with Him forever. With this future in view it is possible to be "patient in tribulation." You are aware too, of the necessity of prayer. This is how the Lord Jesus lived down here. In Psalm 109:4 He said, "I give Myself to prayer." All through His life He was in touch with His God and Father. With Him you can see how much He was thinking of others. He didn't live for Himself, and this is something you also can do.

In addition, there are believers who are in need. You may share what you have with them. Also, show hospitality. The word *hospitality* literally means a love for strangers. The only other occurrence is Hebrews 12:2 where you can read about the blessings that showing hospitality brings.

Now read Romans 12: 9-13 again.

Reflection: Use these verses as a check list to see how much these *rules* are visible in your life.

48. RULES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE — II

(Romans 12:14-21)

Verses 1-2 of Romans 12 are still the starting point for the verses before us now. So keep these verses in mind as we go on with Paul's exhortation or encouragement.

Let blessing flow towards others through your way of life, even if they behave unfriendly. *Blessing* means to wish someone well. We tend to dislike someone who's unfriendly to us, that is, to wish unpleasant things on him. To be able to bless while enduring persecutions, you must look at the Lord Jesus. He is again the perfect example. Did He not pray at the cross for His persecutors, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Lk.23:34)?

Is someone around you happy? "Rejoice" with him. This doesn't refer to the empty pleasure of this world. You can rejoice about the pleasant things God gives to others, even to unbelievers. Think of all kinds of earthly blessings like someone getting married or having a baby, or an unemployed person finding a job. You can join in the joy these things give. Yet, to "weep with those who weep" is more difficult. To share someone's grief is to sympathize. An incurable disease and death are terrible things. Unbelievers as well will appreciate it if we show sympathy. This can give an opportunity to talk of the Lord Jesus.

Experiencing certain things together, such as joy and grief, makes it easier to be like-minded with one another. We can have the same desires. This like-mindedness can exist only as we have the desire to live for the Lord Jesus. For this, being "humble" is an important condition! Striving after "high things" makes us feel elevated above others. Then we will begin to stand on our own, apart from the others with whom we form the one body in Christ (Rom.12:5). When we are not humble, we lose the ability to be like-minded. We can only learn this from the Lord Jesus (Mt.11:29). By learning from Him, we show we're not wise in our eyes.

To "repay ... evil for evil" was proper for the Israelite of the Old

Testament (an eye for an eye, etc.), but it's not proper for a New Testament Christian. Christians should radiate God's characteristics and have "regard for good things in the sight of all men." As far as it depends on you, you ought to live in peace with all people. This is not always possible as can be seen in the life of the Lord Jesus. He is the Prince of peace. Yet, by Him unrest and quarrels entered families because a choice had to be made either for Him or against Him. Maybe you have experienced this. But such discord should not be caused by a wrong act on your side.

When you're treated wrongly, you don't have to avenge yourself or become angry. You can leave the wrath to God. In His time He will execute His justice. What you should do is the opposite; you should make those who wrong you feel ashamed. Many have already been won for the Lord because of believers who did well to their enemies and blessed them instead of cursing them.

"Do not be overcome by evil." The world is filled with evil, and sin is still present inside you. *The world around you and the flesh in you are on excellent terms with each other.* But the body of sin has been annulled and you should no longer serve sin (Rom.6:6). In the same way that God has overcome the evil in us with the good that He gave in the Lord Jesus, you can now overcome evil with good. You thus overcome evil when the enemy fails to get you to react in a wrong way! You can use this opportunity to show the goodness and mercies of God. In 2 Kings 6:8-23 you find a beautiful illustration of such a victory in the way Elisha reacted.

Now read Romans 12:14-21 again.

Reflection: To what degree can these *rules* for the Christian life can be found in you?

49. THE AUTHORITIES

(Romans 13:1-7)

In Romans 12 you discovered you have to deal with people around you, both believers and unbelievers, in different ways. You also saw how to behave towards everyone. In this chapter we see proper behavior towards those in authority, the government.

These instructions are without any exceptions, so no matter what type of government is in power, we are told to “be subject to the governing authorities.” The reason is that the authorities have been appointed by God. If you want to be subject to God, you must listen to the government and the police. Not doing this will bring judgment on you. You don’t have to fear the authorities if you’re doing what is good. The authorities will praise you if you do what is good. But if you do what is wrong, they will deal with you in an unpleasant way.

Government is “an avenger to execute wrath” on those who practice evil (v.4). It has the right and the duty to do this. It must protect its subjects against injustice and violence. It has received means to do this, including administration of justice, imprisonment and capital punishment. But you shouldn’t be subject just out of fear because the government is God’s minister. It is representing God on earth and exercises authority on His behalf. If you see this, then you will be subject to it because of your conscience.

It’s not always easy to be subject to the government. It wasn’t easy for Paul either. He wrote this to the believers in Rome who were living under a cruel tyrant, the emperor Nero. “But that certainly wasn’t a government as God meant it to be,” you may think. “Why should one have to be subject to it?” Today, too, there are governments of which you could say the same thing. Another thought about the government that applies more to those living in the so-called free western world is, “If the decisions made by the government are wrong decisions, we must oppose them.” This reasoning is all around you. Civil disobedience is encouraged, but we shouldn’t become involved with such things. Through all this it is important to maintain our view of the

government as the institution God has placed over us and to which we must be subject. God has given authority to it.

But we cannot be obedient in things that require us to act contrary to what God says in His Word. Acts 5:29 says, "We ought to obey God rather than men." But even if we cannot obey in some matters, we must still be subject to the government by not showing a rebellious spirit. You can see a rebellious spirit all around you. People with such a spirit disagree with all kinds of laws. They feel taken advantage of and start protesting.

Here is an example of a law you couldn't obey: the prohibition of Christians coming together. The Lord wants us to gather together (Heb.10:25). Other examples of laws we could not obey may include no distinction being made between marriage and just living together, or that homosexuals must be given the right to behave according to their disposition in any religious body. To give another example, government is moving into the field of women's rights and could pass laws that would contradict what God has said about women's roles in the Church or family. Roles within the Church and family are something that God has arranged and thus the government shouldn't touch them.

Perfect government will only be here in the Millennium when the Lord Jesus reigns. Then everything will be perfectly righteous and according to perfectly righteous laws. At the moment, this isn't the case and you need to take care not to oppose the government.

The taxes you pay are in relation with government. Whether you like it or not, part of your salary is kept back. It's a matter for the government to decide what to do with it. In the same way, it is expected that you will do everything the government asks of you. For example, how do you act on the road? Do you observe the rules the government has established, such as speed limits?

A Christian knows what it means to give. To give doesn't always mean it happens voluntarily. In verse 7 "render" is an obligation. Do not shirk your duty, but give all their dues. Don't cheat on your tax forms; respect those who are appointed above you; give them the honor and the esteem due them. In all this you can show that you're a Christian who respects God's will. Then God will give you what's due you!

Now read Romans 13:1-7 again.

Reflection: How can you, in your situation, show you recognize the authorities as an institution of God?

50. PUT ON THE LORD JESUS

(Romans 13:8-14)

Getting into debt is easy to do. It is even presented as an attractive option. You don't have to deny yourself a little luxury. Borrow some money at a low rate of interest and your life will be more pleasant. With reasoning like this, many people have incurred deep debts. A Christian, while he may have various financial obligations to meet on a regular basis, such as a house payment or the electrical bill, is permitted to have only one real debt, and that's a debt that will never be repaid here on earth — *to love one another*.

Loving others is the fulfillment of the law. The law prohibits a number of things that could be to someone's disadvantage. But love hurts no one. So, one who loves others will not injure them. "But," you say, "I don't live under the law any longer. It was clear from Romans 7 that I have been freed from the law." This is true and these verses in Romans 13 do not contradict this. They say if you love others, you will do nothing prohibited by the law. In this way you fulfill the law. Love is not an achievement you reach because the law asks you to do this. Love is the expression of the new life that seeks to do good to others. If you seek another person's well-being and not his ill, then clearly you will fulfill the law automatically, so to speak.

Next we are given an extra reason to fulfill this responsibility of loving each other — the coming of the Lord Jesus. In his first letter, Peter also connects these two things: the coming of the Lord and loving each other. In 1 Peter 4:7 he first writes about the end of all things and then about loving each other. Thus, it is time to wake up from your sleep, to stand up. Wipe clean your eyes and look how much the night has advanced because it is a pitch-black night in the world. *Night* indicates the spiritual darkness that has come in by sin. But the day is close; the day will break when the Lord Jesus appears in this world. In Malachi 4:2 Jesus is called "the Sun of Righteousness." David, in his last words, speaks of Him as "the light of the morning when the sun rises" when a "morning without clouds" begins (2 Sam.23:4). Every eye will see Him then.

Every day brings you closer to that moment. You're now closer to it than when you first believed. If your "salvation is nearer" now, this implies in a certain sense you're not saved yet. Your salvation isn't *complete* yet. Yes, the salvation of *your body* is still in the future. Romans 8 says we're saved in hope (v.24). So when it says here that you're not yet saved, this has to do with the dangers that exist and the battle still to be waged. To overcome in this battle you must obey the orders of headquarters. Listen carefully to the orders here. You have to "cast off" something and "put on" something else.

First let's consider the casting off. We are to "cast off the works of darkness" because they belong to the night. Every kind of sin is a work of darkness. Is there anything left in your life you know to be sin? Break with it! You can do this by mentioning this sin to the Lord and telling Him you've been wrong about it. Ask Him to help you not give in again to that sin. In Proverbs 28:13 there is a great encouragement that says, "Whoever confesses and forsakes [his transgressions] will have mercy."

When you've done this, there will be room for the "armor of light." *You can put this armor on.* These weapons are different from the ones used by the world. The weapons of light are spiritual weapons. The Lord Jesus calls Himself the light. You'll get these weapons from Him and He will instruct you on how to use them to overcome. In the Gospels you can see how He used them. The devil tempted Him for forty days and nights. Then finally he tried his last three temptations, but Jesus beat the devil, saying, "It is written."

Once you have cast off and put on, then comes an exhortation to walk in a proper way. The characteristics mentioned in verse 13 can be abundantly found in the world, but they are not appropriate for you. You don't belong to the darkness where the sins of verse 13 reign supreme; you belong to the day. In your life "the Sun of Righteousness" has *already* risen. You may walk in the light of "the Sun of Righteousness" who is the Lord Jesus.

Then you're exhorted to put on not only the armor of light, but also the Lord Jesus Himself. He is named here with His full name. To put Him on means the same as (maybe it sounds irreverent, but this is the meaning) putting on a jacket that can be seen by others. By thinking

highly of yourself and being busy with yourself, dirty spots are going to mar and ruin that beautiful jacket. When the Lord Jesus comes, then it will be too late for everyone who did not choose Him. But you and I may display Him to the world today. What a blessing it would be if this brought others to know Him and accept Him as their Savior and Lord.

Now read Romans 13:8-14 again.

Reflection: How do you notice that it's night in the world and how can you let your light shine?

51. RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER

(Romans 14:1-7)

This begins a new section of the letter. It runs from Romans 14:1 through 15:7. What these verses are about is shown by the first and last verse. Both verses say, "Receive one another." This is important because you know that all Christians do not think the same about a number of things.

To make the differences clear, Paul presents two believers. The one is called *weak* and the other is called *strong*. The way faith is experienced doesn't determine whether someone is strong or weak in the faith. And it isn't the difference between living fleshly and spiritually either. If so, then in this case, the strong would be living spiritually and weak would be living fleshly.

What we have here is the influences from the past that may be playing a role in the Christian's life. Most notably, this points to converted Jews who still adhered to certain Old Testament ordinances. For examples, to eat or not to eat certain food and observing days as being more important than other days are mentioned. In these things, Christians can be weak. Those Christians are weak who are of the opinion they must still adhere to ordinances concerning food as given to Israel. In addition the weak are those Christians who feel they must observe certain sacred days as Israel knew them. For example, think of the so-called "Christian" feasts. Some think in all sincerity that we must observe these days. So, the weak one in the faith is *not* the negligent or unfaithful Christian, but rather a Christian who is very meticulous in his Christian walk.

In contrast, the strong one in the faith knows he can eat anything, except the things mentioned in Acts 15:29. And he knows the only day that is distinguished from other days for the Christian is the first day of the week. In Revelation 1:10 this day is called "the Lord's day," that is, the day which belongs to the Lord.

How you look at certain sacred days depends on your position in

Christ. One who knows he is a new creation in Christ will not make an issue of things like food and days. He knows how to deal with them. But that's not the end of the subject. The importance of this portion is how to deal with one another. If another has a viewpoint different from mine, do I despise him (when I belong to the strong ones) or do I denounce him (when I belong to the weak ones)? We must accept one another, keeping in mind that the other one is doing it for the Lord. This is our motive.

We should occasionally ask ourselves (and one another) the question, "Am I doing (or not doing) this for the *Lord*?" Then we will reach a certain conclusion for ourselves while others may reach a different conclusion. Everyone must be fully persuaded in his mind. If this is accepted by us, there will not arise a dispute when we talk with each other about these differences.

Everyone is personally responsible to the *Lord*. Did you notice how often *the Lord* is mentioned in this passage? The other one is under His authority and not under yours or mine; he is the servant of Another and subject to Him. We should be happy that debatable questions are dealt with in this manner. Our inclination is to give out prescriptions and to try to fix everything. This would leave nothing as an exercise of conscience. We need to be kept standing by God. Knowing this will keep us from an arrogant attitude. Isn't the aim of what we do, that the Lord will receive the honor due Him? This finds its expression in verse 6, saying that both the one and the other "give God thanks." Our hearts will go out to Him and we will stay together in His presence.

Now read Romans 14:1-6 again.

Reflection: Are you weak or strong?

52. EVERYTHING TO THE LORD

(Romans 14:7-14)

We are to “live to the Lord” and to “die to the Lord.” Everything is to the Lord. When you gave your life to the Lord and started listening to His commands, was He oppressive? No, it was liberating when you made the choice to surrender to the Lord Jesus. From the moment you surrendered to Him, you became completely His. Once it appeared as if you were your own boss, but in fact you were a slave of sin. Therefore, it can only be liberating to belong to Someone who has died and become alive again. The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus have been spoken of extensively in Romans.

The Lord Jesus rules over the living and dead now, and that includes you too. You can't be obedient to the Lord by judging or despising your brother. I don't say this is what you're doing, but these verses weren't put here for nothing. God knows how we can talk about one another. Every Christian is able to make these two mistakes. Denying this means you don't know yourself. And self-knowledge is an important weapon to guard you against these dangers.

Even more important than seeing these dangers is thinking of God's judgment-seat. We all will stand before it to have our *works* judged, not our right to be in heaven. This is a compelling thought. A judgment-seat, not one on which an earthly and fallible judge will sit, but a Judge who has perfect knowledge of all we have said and done. He will review all our motives. He knows exactly why we did or didn't eat some food. He knows exactly why we observed certain days as sacred or why all days were the same to us. He will make it perfectly clear on which points we have judged or despised our brother. And He will show us that the other was living for Him too.

As a reminder, these verses are *not* about wrong and sinful things such as immoral conduct and wrong doctrine. If we see something wrong in someone else, we *must* say something about it to them, and the local church may have to act in discipline. We do this because of other verses in the Bible.

Here we have our *personal* consciences. The conscience is not a perfect guideline for our lives; only the Word of God is such, but God will take the conscience into account. And this is what we must do in dealing with others as well.

The fact that a moment is coming when each of us will render a personal account to God, will have a positive effect upon us today. When I'm thinking of God's judgment-seat before which I'll have to stand, I want to live now as if I'm already standing before it. Therefore I want to give a daily account to God. This thought then will bring us to the conclusion that we shouldn't judge each other. We'll leave that to God. Everyone will personally bow before God and recognize Him as God. This makes us realize how small we are. This also makes us very careful in expressing our criticism of what a brother or sister feels he or she must do before the Lord. In our attitude, we'll be careful in what we think we should or should not do before the Lord.

It is possible too that our behavior is a stumbling block for spiritual growth to our brother who is a recent convert or who has little knowledge of his position in Christ. If you say you'd like to serve the Lord, everything you do has a considerable influence on those who want to serve as well, while having a different understanding of certain matters of personal conscience.

You may be convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Here it's not the uncleanness found in the world, but certain Old Testament regulations. For example, in those days someone could become unclean by touching or eating something that was declared unclean by God. This is no longer the case. God looks at every Christian in connection with Christ's work. Someone who still thinks some things are unclean, shows he hasn't appropriated the full freedom in Christ. Keep it always in your mind that here we have the *personal conscience* and the differences that can result in living the life of faith. The following verses make it clear how you should deal with this.

Now read Romans 14:7-14 again.

Reflection: What is your reaction when you think of God's judgment-seat?

53. DON'T BE A STUMBLING BLOCK TO YOUR BROTHER

(Romans 14:15-23)

If I were to ask if you wanted to make a brother sad, you would say, "No!" And yet you can cause your brother to be sad by something you do when you are not walking according to love, even though you may be perfectly right in what you're doing. As to yourself, you see no trouble at all. With regard to the Lord, everything is all right, but this is not the whole story. You must also consider your brother or sister. And if they are saddened by something you do, you're not being led by love. "Love does no harm to a neighbor" (Rom.13:10). You can even spiritually *destroy* someone (damage his spiritual well-being) for whom Christ has died with your eating (that is, making use of your liberty). This would be a very undesirable effect from the use of the liberty you now have.

To make things clear as to what your attitude should be regarding your brothers, Paul speaks about the kingdom of God. You and your brother were part of God's kingdom when you accepted the Lord Jesus. In the kingdom of God it's not eating and drinking that count. What counts is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Just as with the kingdoms of this world, you find a King and His subjects in the kingdom of God. Only the kingdom of God is not a visible kingdom with a visible king, but today, a hidden kingdom with a hidden King. The Lord Jesus is the King.

The Lord's name expresses the authority He exercises over His subjects. The Lord Jesus exercises this authority. His government is from heaven where He now is. In your life you can show He has authority over you by letting the Holy Spirit work in you. If you do this you'll be righteous in your interactions with others. You won't want to disturb the peace by pursuing your interests regardless of the conscience of others. If you deal in such a way with your brother, your fellow-subject in the same kingdom, then there will be joy in your heart. This is really serving Christ. This is pleasing to God, and people

around you will notice you are guided by different rules than the ones common to them and to the world around them.

You're exhorted to "pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another." You must work at this. It will not happen automatically. Peace and godly instruction are more important than food. Physical needs aren't wrong. God wants to supply those needs, but they're subject to His work. They should not cause you to do things that make your brother stumble.

For example, I know a brother from an African country. In that country eating eggs is connected with idolatry. He is not yet free of this thought in connection with eggs. Now, suppose I usually eat an egg every day. Nothing wrong with that! But if this brother is having breakfast with me and I offer him an egg, this could cause him to fall. Or I might try to convince him there's nothing wrong in eating an egg. But if I urge him to do so, this could bring him into a serious problem with his conscience. If I am aware of this, it would be far better not to eat an egg at that moment. This may be applied in all kinds of ways.

Your faith in God and in the work of the Lord Jesus is a personal faith. It's not said you shouldn't witness of it. That faith has freed you from all kinds of traditions and habits that have nothing to do with serving God. You're even called *blessed* if you enjoy this freedom in Christ without constraint and without subjecting yourself to all sorts of rules that men may make. It doesn't matter if they're so-called Christian rules or if they're rules that people in the world adhere to. What is important is that in everyday practical life you are led by your faith and not by your feelings.

Faith is centered in God and in His Word. If you have doubts about something, don't do it. Live by your faith. Faith is not an expression of uncertainty, which is how the word is often used. People say, "I don't believe it's wrong." They mean, "I don't *think* it's wrong, but I'm not sure." But God has revealed His will to us. *Everything we do, without having asked for His will, is sin!* This is a strong statement of God's Word, isn't it?

Now read Romans 14:15-23 again.

Reflection: What does the kingdom of God mean to you?

54. RECEIVING ONE ANOTHER AFTER CHRIST'S EXAMPLE

(Romans 15:1-7)

In this portion Paul summarizes what he said in Romans 14. In verse 1 he counts himself with the “strong” ones. He includes himself when he says, “We.” This is not haughtiness, but awareness of who he has become in the Lord Jesus. The “strong ones” are the Christians who know that by the work of the Lord Jesus they’ve been set free from every law and every slavery. But this freedom shouldn’t be a cause of grief to the other brother who is not strong. You shouldn’t try to force him to accept your correct conviction. On the contrary, you must bear with his infirmity. So here you have again to consider another as to what is profitable to *him*.

Pleasing yourself is contrary to this thinking. You mustn’t do what simply pleases yourself. Philippians 2:4 says something similar, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interest of others.” Then Philippians 2:5 gives the example that the Lord Jesus has given in respect to this.

It’s striking how the Lord Jesus is set as an example for us every time God demands something from us. For example, look at Colossians 3:13. There you read about forgiving each other, followed by the example of the Lord Jesus that says, “Even as Christ forgave you, so you must do.” And in 1 Peter 2:21 you can see the Lord Jesus very clearly as an example. Servants or employees are spoken of there. It is written so they can learn from the Lord Jesus how they must behave. So, every time something is demanded from us, we must look at the Lord Jesus. If God asks something of us, we can always learn from the Lord Jesus how to do it. Here in Romans 15:3 you find the same thing, “For even Christ did not please Himself.” In His whole life, Christ set His mind on the honor of God. This was what He lived for. He wasn’t living for Himself; He was so perfect in all of His interactions with God that when God was disdained, He felt it as His own.

The examples given by the Lord Jesus give you strength to do what is required. It is the same here in pleasing your neighbor. The Old Testament is full of examples. When you're exploring the Bible, everything that's been written can teach you something. God had it written with that purpose. It's not just a group of coincidences. 1 Corinthians 10 says everything that happened to Israel happened as an example for *you!* For this reason, you must read the Scriptures. Then you'll learn about endurance and you'll find comfort. You need endurance in this life because the life in Christ is made difficult by opposition and lack of understanding. Keep going! This is the encouragement that comes to you from Scripture.

You also need comfort in this life where so many things can cause you to become disheartened. In the Scriptures you find how believers found comfort with God. When you've found endurance and comfort in the Scriptures, then you'll have hope. Hope turns your eyes towards the future. The moment will come when endurance and comfort will no longer be needed. Then perfection will have come. Differences between weak and strong believers will no longer exist. Since these differences do still exist, endurance and comfort are still necessary. You can find them with "the God of patience and comfort." This God is your God! When you're centered on Him, you'll contribute to the lasting unity of the believers. The differences will not estrange you from any other.

To learn how to endure and to find encouragement, where must you go? To the Lord Jesus. Nothing could stop Him in His walk here on earth. He endured no matter how strong the opposition. And who met with more opposition than He? No encouragement was found in this world for Him, not even with the disciples. He found encouragement in knowing the Father was always with Him. If the Lord Jesus is our example in this way, we will with one accord and one mouth glorify God. If we quarrel with each other about things in which we should bear with one another, God doesn't receive the honor due Him. When we learn to bear with one another, this will give us even more reason to glorify God.

To really accept one another we must realize how Christ has accepted us; He accepted us just as we are. And He knew perfectly how we would behave. But even so He still accepted us. He put away our sins by giving Himself up to death, but we retain our peculiarities. To the

Lord Jesus this was no reason to turn us away. He accepted us in spite of our peculiarities, which are often so prominent. According to this example, we ought to accept one another.

Now read Romans 15:1-7 again.

Reflection: Which are you, the weak or the strong one? Why?

55. THE GOSPEL: FOR JEW AND HEATHEN

(Romans 15:8-13)

The Lord Jesus has become a servant! Think about this. He, the eternal Son of God, has accepted the form of a servant. He came to serve, not to be served. Here we read that He has become a servant to the circumcision. This means He came to the Jewish nation because circumcision had been given to that nation as a sign of the covenant God had made with them. He lived as a Jew among this people. The aim of His coming was, among others, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, like Abraham. These promises were spoken by God. They were as firm as God's truth because when God says something, He will do it. The Lord Jesus therefore came to confirm the promises.

But there was something more for which the Lord Jesus became a servant to the circumcision. This was so "that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy." Here Paul makes clear the coming of the Lord Jesus implied a blessing for both Israel and the nations. Isaiah 49:6 speaks of this in a wonderful way. There, God said to the Lord Jesus, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth." In the first part of this quotation we see it was in God's heart for the Lord Jesus to restore Israel. But this wasn't all. To God, the work of the Lord Jesus was so great He didn't want to limit its benefits to Israel. He wanted all the nations to share in the mercy which would come to man through the Lord Jesus. The result would glorify and magnify God.

What's surprising is that God spoke of mercy for the nations in the Old Testament! This mercy wasn't something new, but was only revealed in the New Testament. This is not about the Assembly or Church of God, for in the Old Testament, the Assembly was a *mystery*, that is, something God did not reveal to them. But even in the Old Testament time, God's heart was going out towards the nations outside Israel. They had a different standing, for Israel was and remains God's elect

people, and has a separate place in the history of salvation.

But God hadn't rejected the other nations. To confirm this thought, four verses from the Old Testament are quoted here. These four examples represent all the Old Testament, for they're taken from the law (Dt.32:43), the Psalms (Ps.18:50; 117:1) and the prophets (Isa.11:10). In Luke 24:44 the Lord Jesus listed these three parts as a summary of the whole Old Testament.

The first quotation, at the end of verse 9, is from Psalm 18:50. It may be considered as a heading over the other quotations. There we have the remnant's redemption by God out of the enemy's hand. This redemption is an occasion for them to confess God's name among the nations. The outcome of this is that in the second quotation in verse 10, the nations are called to rejoice with God's people. They are invited to share in the joy of the redemption.

In the third quotation, verse 11, "all $\frac{1}{4}$ peoples" and "all $\frac{1}{4}$ Gentiles" are called to worship and praise the Lord. Here the joy is not confined to the people of Israel, but all the earth's nations may share in it. Then in verse 12, the fourth quotation, the cause of this joy is indicated. The "root of Jesse" is mentioned, speaking of the Lord Jesus. Look up Revelation 22:16. He will rise to rule over the nations. Under His millennial reign there will be a time of joy and gladness that all the nations are now feverishly trying to attain in their own strength. A time will come when the nations will hope in Him.

He is able to fill you with all joy and peace in believing. It's still *believing* that counts. To believe means to trust in God who will make everything happen as He has said, even if everything around you seems to contradict it. If you're filled with this, you'll abound in hope. It will make you glad and you will be able to praise Him in a world where God and His Christ are being more and more denied. You don't need to try to be enthusiastic. This is what people without God do. They say, "Keep your chin up" and "Never say die." Exhortations like this don't give any real or lasting power. Man doesn't possess this power by himself. Your power is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come to direct your heart to the Lord Jesus. Only then will your hope be unshakable and plentiful.

Now read Romans 15:8-13 again.

Reflection: How can you receive “all joy and peace in believing”?

56. PAUL'S SERVICE

(Romans 15:14-21)

Although Paul had never met the believers in Rome, he was convinced they were full of goodness. He had heard enough about them to be able to say this. He also knew they were filled with all knowledge. By their goodness and knowledge they were enabled to admonish one another. Goodness and knowledge are things you shouldn't keep for yourself. You can serve others with these things. To *admonish* means to bring back someone who in one way or another is going in a wrong direction. It is a proof of goodness if we take care of one another in this way.

Paul almost apologizes for writing this. But he wanted to remind them of things that might have been forgotten. This is one thing you also will always need. If you're constantly reminded of a certain thing, you won't forget it. It will establish you, as Peter calls it (2 Pet. 1:12-15; 3:1) when just before his death he reminded the believers of the truth of God.

Paul had a special relationship with the nations, including the believers in Rome because they belonged to the nations. Here he calls himself a "minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles." It is the Holy Spirit who works conversion and faith in someone. This faith *sanctifies* (sets apart) the person: he is loosed from the world and now belongs to God. This is made possible by Christ Jesus' death and resurrection. He has done everything necessary for a person to be saved. Therefore there is glory only in Him in the things that count for God.

Paul's whole life was aimed at doing Christ's will. At his conversion, he asked at once, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" In everything he said, he had Christ in mind. This is an important example for us. If Christ wasn't working through him, Paul kept his mouth shut. He subjected everything to the Object of his life. That was very clear before his eyes in bringing the nations to obedience. Everything he said, everything he did and every gift he had received was directed at this. He didn't have the power in himself to do this. He was aware he

could only do so by the power of God's Spirit.

Everywhere he went, he preached the gospel. In doing so, he respected what had been entrusted to another. When he became aware that someone else was preaching the gospel in a certain region, he went to another region. To him, the preaching was more important than the preacher. He liked to be in places where the gospel hadn't as yet been preached. In such a way, you too have received a part of this world from the Lord, in which you may witness of Him. This part may become ever larger, but be careful you don't seek the portion the Lord has given to someone else. This will only result in trouble. We all may serve the Lord in the gospel, but everyone has his task and his place to do so.

Paul experienced much trouble through people who saw him in an unfavorable light. They told things of him that weren't true. When Paul was in one place, others came to say he was only seeking his own advantage. This wasn't the way Paul wanted to work. He had an eye for what the Lord had given to others. When he saw how others were used by the Lord, it made him glad rather than envious. For this attitude in preaching the gospel, Paul had a Bible verse in Isaiah 52:15. To him, this was a clear indication to go to places where Christ hadn't been preached yet.

This offers you an important warning when you want to do something for the Lord (and who doesn't want to if he loves the Lord?). Let yourself be guided by the Word of God. By feeding daily on the Word of God, you will receive answers to the questions you have. You will certainly have questions about many things. You won't easily find the answers. You must read prayerfully. In the situation Paul was in, he didn't get a note from heaven with the names of the places he was to visit.

With many questions in our lives, we experience the same thing. There are questions like, Which person does the Lord intend for me to marry? What education should I have? Which job should I choose? You won't find the literal answers to these questions in the Bible, but you can find the *examples* of God-fearing men and women, and *principles* of God's Word that should be maintained. You can pay attention to this in your decisions. In the same way, your choice for a job may depend on the question, Can I serve the Lord in it? or Will I

be pushed into doing things contrary to God's will? Believe God in His Word. He who believes on Him and trusts in Him will not be ashamed.

Now read Romans 15:14-21 again.

Reflection: What questions do you have? Where do you look for the answers?

57. HOW PAUL MADE HIS DECISIONS

(Romans 15:22-33)

Again, Paul let the believers in Rome know that he'd like to come to see them. At the beginning of this letter in Romans 1:11, he also said this. But now he said he would come to them when he journeyed to Spain. He would visit them on his way. He expected them to give him what he needed on his journey. He was counting on their love. He wouldn't go on before he had enjoyed their company. Yes, you can enjoy your brothers and sisters in Christ. You probably have had the experience of people around you who care about you and who are interested in you.

When you didn't know the Lord Jesus there were many people who behaved as if they cared. But often, this was only a pretense. They only cared for you as long as they could profit from you. Now that you've come to know the Lord Jesus, you're accepted into a new company of people. These people also know the Lord Jesus and have learned to love each other. And everybody who's added to that company is going to share in this love. Sure, sometimes you'll be disappointed in your fellow-believers. In themselves, they're weak, failing human beings. But if Paul, the great apostle who knew well enough that in Rome not everything was spotless, could enjoy the believers in Rome, then we can enjoy one another, can't we?

But before Paul could come to Rome, he had to do something else. He had money with him from a collection from believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The money was destined for the poor believers in Jerusalem. This collection hadn't resulted from a charity movement set in motion when they heard of the poverty in Jerusalem. It was a voluntary collection because twice it says "it pleased" them.

Yet there was a certain obligation too, since the nations had participated in the spiritual things that were first destined for God's earthly people. Since Israel had rejected the Lord Jesus the gospel had gone out to the heathen (the Gentiles) so they too could be blessed spiritually. Then the nations should do something in return

when there was need among the Hebrew saints in Jerusalem. It was a debt they could repay in this way.

This applies to us too. When you're blessed spiritually by a brother or sister, you can share with him or her with material gifts (Gal.6:6). You can give something in the collection at the meeting and you can give personally too. Paul took this service very seriously. He was mainly concerned about the spiritual well-being of the believers, but nonetheless this assignment with respect to the believers' bodily well-being was important to him.

When this assignment had been performed, he would come to them on his way to Spain. At least, this was what he was thinking. Later he went to Rome, but not in the way he had intended. He came as a prisoner. So you can see that even with this man of God, things worked out differently from what he had supposed. This was no disappointment to him. He knew God was leading his life.

In your life too, things can take a different course from what you expected. God knows the best way for you as well. If you think of this, you'll be guarded from disappointments. Paul knew something else too, that if he were to come, he would come with the full blessing of Christ. Well, that full blessing came. It was from the prison in Rome where he wrote letters about the highest blessings of the Assembly. We have these letters in our Bible. You can read about the "fullness of the blessing" in these letters to the believers in Ephesus, Colosse and Philippi. These letters provide you with a view of Christ's full blessing.

Maybe Paul had some feeling of what was before him. He appealed earnestly to the believers in Rome. This appeal was inspired "through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit." This is a fine way of appealing to someone. He could say this because he knew that both the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit stood behind this appeal. The Lord Jesus is mentioned here with His full name. You see too, that the Holy Spirit is a Person who loves. So this appeal of Paul to strive with him in prayer comes in fact from the Lord Jesus, while the love of the Spirit is the power to respond to it.

Paul speaks about striving in prayer. Do you know something of this? Real prayer is like fighting. This fighting is not done with hands and feet. It is a spiritual fight. We must fight so the service of the servants

will not be hindered by opponents, and the work of the Lord will go on as a blessing to the believers. In this way we can contribute to the servants doing God's will with gladness. The believers will be refreshed by this. The Lord's servants are not machines without feeling. They need prayer to be able to do their service with gladness and be refreshed by other believers. The God of peace is ready to give you inner peace and to help you in the fight you have to fight in so many fields.

Now read Romans 15:22-33 again.

Reflection: Is there someone to whom you would like to give or to send something? Do it and think of Matthew 6:1-4.

58. GREETINGS AND MUCH MORE

(Romans 16:1-16)

Greetings! Look at all those names. Shouldn't we skip this portion? To Paul, these names meant a lot. They were people who belonged to the Lord Jesus. Here you have a practical example of the unity of the believers. You greet people for whom you feel something special and with whom you are linked in a certain way. They are people you don't see every day. Maybe you've never seen them and you've only heard of them. But what you've heard gives you the sense of unity, of belonging together. It can be very encouraging then to receive someone's greeting. It makes you realize someone is thinking of you. This encourages you.

So greetings are important. They emphasize something you share. When someone tells you to greet this or that brother or sister, this is an important assignment. And so Paul here tells the believers in Rome they should greet a number of brothers and sisters.

What is striking in these greetings is something is added to many of the names. To Paul, this wasn't just a heap of names. These persons meant something to him. Every one meant something different. With every one he had a special relationship. In this way, your relationship with every brother and sister will be different. If you begin to have an eye for this difference, it will result in a huge enrichment in the interactions with your brothers and sisters.

There are names too that Paul mentions without adding something. You may ask yourself whether there was nothing special to mention. Was there nothing that made them noteworthy? Were they boring brothers and sisters? I don't know. Maybe they were simply inconspicuous brothers and sisters. In any case, they were included.

You see the same difference with the Lord's disciples. Of some, we don't know much because not much is said about them. Of others, we know much more because a lot is told about them. But there are disciples of whom we only know their names. What they did has been

kept hidden from us. But God knows it and He doesn't forget to appreciate their value. God has His own way with every believer.

It's nice when something more can be said of you than your name alone, but this is not to make yourself more important. It must be clear that you're driven by love for the Lord Jesus. You see this often with the names that Paul mentions. Often, something is added about the Lord Jesus. He was the motive for their labor.

I will only say something about some of the names. Think about the other ones for yourself. The first one mentioned is Phoebe, "our sister." Paul had a keen eye for the service of sisters. Of all the names he mentions, the first one is a sister's. And more are mentioned in these verses. Phoebe must have been a special woman. She had served the believers in a practical way. Maybe she had received them in a hospitable way or maybe she made visits. Maybe she wrote encouraging letters. However it may have been, by her service she had assisted many. This means the things she did sustained and helped many to be strengthened. Paul had experienced this as a blessing. Therefore he could *commend her* to the believers in Rome. When Phoebe came to them, they were to receive her in a worthy manner and to assist and sustain her. This is really a letter of commendation for Phoebe.

Then there was a couple which Paul especially brought to the attention to the believers in Rome. Her name was Priscilla and his name was Aquila. The wife is mentioned first here. They are mentioned in the reverse order in other places in the Bible. If bearing responsibility or explaining the Word of God is in view, Aquila is mentioned first. And if a practical service within the family is in view, for which the wife primarily is responsible, Priscilla is mentioned first, as here. Paul had stayed with them (Acts 18:1-3). The rest of Acts 18 shows it was dangerous to have someone like Paul in your house.

This couple had even risked their lives for him. Because of this, Paul was very grateful to them. But the assemblies of the nations could also be grateful to them. For through their courage, the assemblies of the nations could continue to reap profit from Paul's service. Likewise, when you're doing something for a servant of the Lord, it is also a service to others who are served by this servant.

I want to end by pointing out the last part of verse 16. Paul not only asks the believers to greet his acquaintances, but he sends greetings from all who were connected with them, "All the churches of Christ greet you." The assembly in Rome was linked with all the assemblies of Christ that existed in all sorts of places on earth. How good it is when this too is experienced. You know the Assembly is very divided, outwardly. Is it still possible to experience the unity of the Assembly? Yes, it is still possible. How can this be experienced? That's what the next letter (1 Corinthians) is about.

Now read Romans 16:1-16 again.

Reflection: Send greetings to someone who hasn't heard from you for a long time.

59. BE WISE AS TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD

(Romans 16:17-24)

In Romans 14 you've seen that the brothers and sisters in the assembly in Rome didn't think the same about everything. This was about observing certain days and eating or not eating certain foods. In Rome there were brothers and sisters who were not yet completely free of the influences of Judaism. They had to learn to live with these differences and to bear with one another regarding them. But now Paul tells them something about people whom they shouldn't bear with. Tolerance is a fine characteristic in dealing with *weaknesses*, but tolerance is definitely wrong in dealing with wrong, sinful, unscriptural things. You cannot tolerate these things.

If there are people among the believers who generate division and offenses *contrary* to the doctrine that has been taught you, you *must* turn away from them. The devil is always trying to cause divisions and quarrels among believers. He often follows the same approach as the one he followed with Eve at the fall in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of the Bible. He comes with the crafty question, "Has God indeed said?" (Gen.3:1). This is how he sowed doubt in Eve's heart about the things God had clearly said.

In the same way Satan tries to sow doubt among the believers about the doctrine. *Doctrine* is not a dull theory, but the living teaching of the Word of God. Yet there are always people who want to make you believe it's not really meant as said in the Bible and as you have learned it. You must "turn away from" (JND translation) these people. You hear these people speak more about themselves than about the Lord Jesus. They know exactly how to say or write things to mislead unsuspecting believers. These people don't serve our Lord Jesus, but their belly. It's only about themselves.

I hope it can be said of your obedience that it has "become known to all" and that other brothers and sisters have taken notice of it. Then you won't fall prey to those who sow division. To protect yourself from these people you need to be wise as to what is good, but simple

concerning evil. Therefore, occupy yourself with good things and not with evil. Occupy yourself with the Word of God and with the Lord Jesus. You don't have to inquire into the evil practices of this world to know how evil it all is. Rather, keep yourself far away from it. You shouldn't try out evil. If you do, it will bring you down.

A number of young people have played with occult games out of curiosity and have become entangled in the occult step by step. Some started with gambling only once and ended up as addicts. Others smoked one cigarette, with or without marijuana, to be tough, and ended up addicted in the drug scene. Don't try out sin! Take warning. The world you live in is now in Satan's hands. Maybe you know from bitter experience how corrupt the world is. If you've only recently been converted, you will abhor evil. Then you will keep yourself clear from it. Still, temptations will soon come to get you to join in again. Therefore, take care to be wise as to what is good. Keep on going with God!

Satan may hold sway in this world now; very soon he will be bruised under our feet. Do you know by whom? By the God of peace. What Satan wants is to bring discord. The God of peace will put an end to it. When you keep this before your eyes, you will keep peace in your heart. In this way the God of peace will remain your aim and Satan won't have an opportunity to occupy you with evil. To make this true in your life, you are wished "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Some more greetings follow from individual believers to the assembly in Rome. Tertius is among them. He wrote down what Paul dictated to him. This was how Paul usually wrote. As a kind of signature he sometimes added a personal greeting at the end, as in 1 Corinthians 16:21. In an exceptional case he would write the letter himself. The situation in the assemblies in Galatia was so serious that Paul took pen in hand to write them about it (Gal.6:11). Whether or not Paul made use of a writer doesn't diminish the authority of what is written. He, as an apostle, was the author and sender.

God wants you to know everything written down in this letter to the Romans. Your justification before God was the main concern. But with this, not everything has been said that God has to say to you. In the last verses of this letter you'll read some more things that are in God's heart to make known to you.

Now read Romans 16:17-24 again.

Reflection: How can you be wise as to what is good?

60. A DOXOLOGY

(Romans 16:25-27)

Here, Paul arrives at praise to God. God is before him. God fills his whole vision. God is so great to him, that in these last verses he says things about God that go beyond the theme of the letter. Having talked about God and His gospel in such a way, his heart is too full to restrain himself (so to speak) from saying something about the "revelation of the mystery."

The word *mystery* (used often in the New Testament) means that which was hidden in the Old Testament or was unknown, but has been made known in the New Testament. Paul doesn't dwell on this, but by mentioning it, he lets you know there is more than what you have discovered in this letter. This doesn't mean this letter is not as important. Without having studied this letter, you can forget about understanding anything of the mysteries. Paul's teachings in his other letters, especially in the ones to Colosse and Ephesus, are closely related to his letter to the Romans.

I would like to give you some good advice. Read the letter to the Romans regularly. Then you will remain in direct contact with the *basis* of your faith-life. On this basis you can build further studies in the Bible. God is mighty to establish you in what you have learned in this letter. Isn't the Lord Jesus everything to you? When the Word was preached, you came to know Him. He stands at the center of God's plans and thoughts. By accepting Him as Savior and Lord you're connected with Him.

The Lord Jesus is not on earth but in heaven. This means you're connected with the Lord in heaven, and because heaven is the dwelling-place of God and the Lord Jesus, you belong there also. You may ask, "Is that so special?" Yes, it is. Man was created to live on earth. The Old Testament shows this. The highest blessing the Old Testament believers knew was a life on earth under the Messiah's reign. The Lord Jesus in His future millennial reign will be the central point of the earth. Every blessing will go out from Him over the whole

earth and the whole earth will honor Him. The Old Testament believers longed for this time and they were looking forward to it. It will be a wonderful time.

But in the New Testament we have blessings that exceed this by far. In the time of the Old Testament, this could not be spoken of because it was hidden. But now it has been revealed! God has given the commandment to make known that people would be with the Lord Jesus in heaven. They are people who believe in the Lord Jesus since He has gone back to heaven. The Lord Jesus has then sent the Holy Spirit to earth to bring these people together. In other letters these people who are brought together are called the *Church* or *Assembly*. In those other letters you will discover what a huge privilege it is to belong to the Assembly.

In God's plan and heart, the Assembly existed before the world existed. To form the Assembly, God's commandment has gone out to preach Jesus Christ among the nations. Whoever submits himself to Him in faith will form part of the Assembly. Throughout eternity the Assembly will be in heaven in the Father's house. Throughout eternity, the Assembly will give glory and honor to Him who, in His great grace and love for man, has given such an all-surpassing position to men, though being sinners.

The only wise God was the only One who could devise this plan. His Son Jesus Christ was the only One who could execute it. Who would have formed the idea to elevate tiny human beings, murderers of God's Son, to the height of the Father's house? Who else but God could do this in a way that will bring us to eternal admiration and adoration? He sent His Son to the world while knowing what men were going to do with Him! And at the same place where people murdered the Lord Jesus, the same people could receive all the blessings that God had on His heart to give. Through Jesus Christ and His work at the cross, God will forever be given the glory that only He is worthy of.

Now read Romans 16:25-27 again.

Reflection: Give God honor for all He has shown you of Himself and of His Son.