

CAN JEWS STILL BE SAVED?

Romans 11:1-6

Intro: Let me briefly review for you the message of the book of Romans so as to help us all to see what Paul was doing in the six verses we will be considering today.

In the first eight chapters we have the most thorough treatment of the doctrine of salvation to be found anywhere in the Bible. Paul began by showing our need for salvation because of our sin. And then he carefully led us through the great doctrines of justification, sanctification, and glorification. In justification we have our present position before God, fully accepted, freely forgiven, and all because of what Christ has done for us in His death on the Cross. In sanctification we see our present condition before God, not perfect, but being perfected through the work of the Holy Spirit. In glorification we our present expectation of what we will be when the work of salvation is completed in us. We will be like Christ. In the words of Rom. 8:29 we are predestinated "to be conformed to the image of his Son."

Paul began all of this by saying in chapter 1, verse 16, that the Gospel is God's power unto salvation to everyone who believes, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," or Gentile.

However, when we get to chapters 9, 10, and 11, the second main division of the epistle, we see that the history of Israel shows that there was generally a failure on the part of the Jews to understand that salvation is by grace and by faith. And so there was an increasing emphasis after the death of Christ to get the Gospel to the Gentiles -- and this had been especially fruitful. There is no question but that in OT times God was working primarily with the Jews, and only in a secondary way with the Gentiles. But in NT times it seems to have been reversed -- to the Gentiles primarily, and only in a secondary way to the Jews. Even Paul had been commissioned by God to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles. And yet at the beginning of Romans 9, and again at the beginning of Romans 10, Paul expressed his great desire and burden to see his people come to the Lord. Paul has left no doubt as he made his way through these great truths that God had intended from the very first to save both Jews and Gentiles. And yet, after reviewing how Israel had not only misinterpreted the Law by making it a way of salvation, but they had a record of stoning the prophets who had been raised up by God to take the Gospel to them. We have seen how the great prophet Isaiah lamented the fact that so few had believed his preaching.

All of this, then, raised the question with which Paul began Romans 11.

I. THE QUESTION (Rom. 11:1a).

Here is the question: "Hath God cast away his people?" By "his people" Paul meant the people of Israel. And by casting away he meant, Is there the possibility that God has driven His people away from Himself so that He does not intend to have anything more to do with them? Or we could state it this way: Have they rejected the Lord so long that now He has repudiated them, and will drive them away? IF SO, THEN THIS WOULD MEAN THAT WE CAN NO LONGER EXPECT TO SEE ANY JEWS BEING SAVED!

And so this is a very important question because it will greatly affect the missionary outreach of the Church. There is no need to witness to Jewish people if God has decided that He is no longer going to save any of them.

Perhaps we can understand it if God has closed the door on the Jews. Official Judaism had practically to the man opposed the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry. They wanted to kill Him long before they were able to secure His crucifixion by Rome. They did everything possible to discourage any Jew from trusting in Christ. Those who even appeared to be sympathetic with the Lord were put out of the synagogue. And after the resurrection and ascension of Christ the attitude of official Judaism remained the same.

Philip experienced this at the hands of the Jews, and they stoned him to death. And it is interesting that Philip used this very verb two times in the message he gave just before he was killed. The first time he used it is in Acts 7:27 when he was telling about how Moses tried to negotiate between the two Israelites who were fighting with each other. The one who had done the wrong "thrust him [Moses] away" and refused to let Moses do anything. In fact, he wanted to know if Moses intended to kill him as he had killed the Egyptian the day before.

Later on in that same message Philip was speaking of how the Israelites had rejected Moses while they were on the way from Egypt to Canaan. And Philip said this according to Acts 7:39:

To whom our fathers would not obey,
but **thrust him from them**,
and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt.
They in their hearts had cast Moses away. They wanted to have nothing more to do with him. Is this what God has done to Israel?, Paul was asking.

And so there was a great deal of evidence to show that God had every right to close the door forever against the salvation of any Jew. Therefore, the question is, "Hath God cast away his people?" We need an official, authoritative answer to this crucial question, a question which an apostle needs to answer.

Let us see how Paul answered that question.

II. THE ANSWER (Rom. 11:1m).

Paul's answer was very brief, but very strong, and very clear. It took him just two words to answer it in Greek, and our translators have given us just two words in English. The words, as you can see are, "God forbid."

I have discussed the expression with you before in our studies in Romans, but let me go over this again. This is the ninth time out of ten times that Paul used this expression in Romans. Cf. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11. Paul used this expression once in 1 Corinthians and twice in Galatians, and he is the only one to use it in the NT. Actually Paul did not use God's name. The expression in Greek lit. means, Let it not be! Or, May it not be! It is a powerful negative. It would be the equivalent of our, No! Absolutely not! Arndt and Gingrich, in their Greek Lexicon, suggest that translations, "By no means, far from it."

The words not only answer the questions in a strong way so as to suggest that such a thing would be impossible, but also amazement that anyone would ask the question. And yet quite obviously Paul had heard this question many times. It was sad that such a question would be asked because behind it was probably a feeling of revenge against the Jews. The idea would be that Israel rejected God, and so God has rejected Israel, and we are glad He has!

But God has not rejected Israel! Of course, we need to take the Gospel to the Jews! And, of course, Jews not only can be saved, but they will be saved. The history of Israel in her relationship with God has not been a good one, but we should forever dismiss from our minds that God will have no further dealings with the Jews.

And then Paul proceeded to give four proofs that God continues to minister to Jews, and to save them.

III. THE PROOFS OF PAUL'S ANSWER (Rom. 11:1b-6).

Please keep in mind that the six verses of our text for today do not give the full list of proofs contained in the chapter,

but, because of our limited time, I am only going as far as verse 6. Next Sunday, the Lord willing, we will go on in the chapter, and the Sundays after that until we get to the end of chapter 11, and then we will have Paul's full answer.

But what are the three proofs that he gave here.

A. Proof #1 (vv. 1b, 2a): the salvation of Paul himself.

If God had cast away the Jews, then Saul of Tarsus would never have become the Apostle Paul. He would still have been a hater of the Lord Jesus and a hater of all who loved the Lord Jesus. Saul had not been seeking salvation when he met the Lord on the road to Damascus, but the Lord was seeking Him. He did not want the Lord, but the Lord wanted him. And the Lord found him, and subdued him, and transformed him, so that he afterwards loved the Lord Jesus as much (or more) than he had hated the Lord before.

In 1 Timothy 1:16 Paul told Timothy that God had saved him as an example of the longsuffering of God in order to give hope to others. God manifested his grace in two ways in saving the Apostle Paul:

- 1) Because he was a Jew.
- 2) Because he was a great sinner.

So Paul himself was proof that God was still saving Jews. And so was Peter and James and John and all of the apostles. And so was every Jew from Jerusalem to Rome who knew the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. If God had cast them away, none of them would have been saved.

And then you can see Paul's statement backing this up at the beginning of verse 2, and leading on to Paul's second proof: "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew."

As bad as Israel's history has been, Paul was indicating here that you and I will never understand the work of God until we get our eyes off of people, and get them on the Lord. If you look just at Israel, God had countless times when He could have cast Israel away. And the same is true of the Gentiles. But let us not look at the Jews or the Gentiles for a moment; let us look at God! And when we do, we look at Him through this statement: "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew."

Now, if your memory serves you right, you will remember that we had this word back in Romans 8, and verse 29, where Paul spoke of those (in verse 28) as those who were called according to God's purpose as being foreknown. And then Paul

followed that with a series of very important words in verses 29 and 30:

- 1) Foreknown.
- 2) Predestinated.
- 3) Called.
- 4) Justified.
- 5) Glorified.

Now let us think of that word "foreknow" because Paul uses that to trace the origin of our salvation.

The word very clearly means to know beforehand that something is going to take place. And if you know the truth about God you know that He is omniscient, that He has all knowledge, that He knows the end from the beginning -- and so we have no problem with that.

But the word has a stronger meaning than that in Scripture when we relate it to God. He knows things beforehand because He has ordained what is to be. And in Scripture the foreknowledge of God has to do with His own sovereign choice of those who are to be saved, or what we know as the doctrine of election (when we are speaking of salvation).

And so what Paul was saying here is that God is not going to change His mind concerning His people, those whom He has ordained, chosen, for salvation, and in this sense has foreknown them.

So we come to another divine attribute, or characteristic. Not only is God omniscient, but He is immutable, unchanging. And we can also add another attribute: He is omnipotent, meaning that He is all-powerful, and able to do what He has ordained from before time began.

This is where we have to start with salvation. We start with God. The people who have trouble with election have that trouble because they are looking at salvation from man's perspective, not God's. And the people who think that God changes, or that He cannot do what He intends to do, or that people can lose His salvation once He has saved them, are people who need to look at salvation from God's perspective.

And so Paul said, "God hath not cast away his people which He foreknew," meaning, He has not, He will not, He cannot! What blessed truth this is! God has laid out His plan. He is carrying out what He planned to do. And under no circumstances will He ever revise His plan -- concerning "His people."

Now in the two cases of proof which follow Paul gave help so

that we would understand what is meant by "His people." Does it mean every Israelite, or does it have some other meaning?

B. Proof #2 (vv. 2b-4): from the life of Elijah.

I think that most of you know the story about Elijah and the contest he had with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. It is recorded in 1 Kings 18. God answered by fire, and not only was Elijah's sacrifice consumed, but also the wood and the stones, and all of the water he had poured on his sacrifice was "licked up." After this had the prophets of Baal taken down to be brook Kishon, and they were all killed there.

When Jezebel, the wicked queen of Israel, heard what Elijah had done, she sent a message to him saying that she would kill him by the same time the next day. This caused Elijah to fall into a great depression, and this is when he said what is recorded here in Rom. 11:3. (Read.)

How did God answer him? See Rom. 11:4. (Read.)

You see, God was doing a work in Israel about which the prophet Elijah knew nothing. He thought that he was the only true child of God left, but the Lord told him about 7,000 of the Lord's people who were just as faithful as he was! Outwardly things look very bad spiritually, but God was at work fulfilling His own will -- and there was nothing that Jezebel or Ahab or anyone else could do to stop it.

Now let us follow the Apostle as we move from verse 4 to verses 5 and 6, and we have our third proof:

C. Proof #3 (vv. 5, 6) -- from the doctrine of election.

Let us keep in mind as we read this that the Apostle Paul was not speaking as I am speaking to you today. I am simply trying to explain what he wrote, but he was writing by divine inspiration. The Holy Spirit was guiding him so that he would speak (or write) the truth, and do it without error!

However, without detracting in the least from the conditions under which this epistle was written, let me hasten to say that Paul could have written these verses also knowing what he knew about the eternal sovereign purposes of God in election.

Here is what he said: God had an elect people then, not every Israelite, but "a remnant" within the nation, and that is true of every generation of Jewish people. And one big

reason that God will not go back on His purposes is because it was not based upon their works, but upon the grace of God. And Paul very carefully explained here in these two verses that it cannot be both by works and grace, and if it is by one, then it cannot be by the other. Grace can't be works, and works cannot be grace. If it were dependent upon works, then we would expect to see God casting away His people. But because it is based upon the grace of God, then the people whom He has chosen, however unworthy they might be (like the Apostle Paul), they will most certainly be saved, kept, sanctified, and ultimately glorified.

Concl: As far as I know I am not speaking to a single Jewish person today. Perhaps some Jewish people will hear this message on our radio broadcast. I hope so. But I am speaking to Gentiles. Jewish people are certainly welcome to attend our church, but I am not aware that we have any.

But since I am speaking to Gentiles, let me say that the same truths apply to us, and can give us the same kind of comfort that they gave to Jewish believers in Paul's day. Yes, God is still saving Jewish people. And, yes, He is still saving Gentiles. When we look at the situation today as far as the Lord's work is concerned, we see a lot of activity and big churches, but we wonder often how much is going on. It seems that the number of people who want to do the Lord's will, and who want to learn more about the Word of God, and who go to church for the Christian fellowship they will find there, not to be entertained, are growing less and less in number. We, too, like Elijah, can feel very, very lonely. But what about God? What is He doing? He is doing what He has always been doing, calling His elect people to Himself. And if the shades were lifted so that we could really see what God is doing even in our day, we would be greatly encouraged, and find ourselves praising the Lord with all of our hearts!

What we need to do to keep from getting discouraged is to get our eyes on God, remember Who He is, remember how powerful He is, how wise He is, how unchanging He is. He has not said anywhere in His Word that He ever intended to save everyone. But we do read that He has sovereignly chosen those who are to be saved, and they are being saved! Not one of His chosen ones will be missing when we get to glory!

So let us take heart and believe God. And let us do what we are supposed to be doing, living for the Lord, and telling everyone who will listen to us about the marvelous grace of God and His willingness to save all who come to Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Even today His work is right on track, and so be encouraged, and serve Him until He comes.

GOD'S INFINITE WISDOM
Romans 11:7-12

Intro: As we come closer to the close of this second main section of the book of Romans, we have many things which are difficult for us to understand. One reason for this is that God's ways and our ways are entirely different. We cannot interpret the doctrine of salvation according to human wisdom. Probably most of us have been taught in our earlier years that salvation is a provision that God has made for all, and that even He doesn't really know who is going to accept or reject it. And then we run into the doctrine of election in the book of Romans, and we really don't know what to do with it. And so we either ignore it, or make it apply to something other than salvation, or make it dependent upon God's knowledge of what each person would do when he is presented with the Gospel. And yet we keep running into that doctrine of election which tells us that anyone's salvation is ultimately dependent upon whether or not he has been chosen by God. And so many do not know what to do with this truth, and would rather leave it alone than to try to understand it.

Let us leave the problems connected with it for the moment, and go to the end of chapter 11. I think it will help all of us to see how Paul concluded his words in Romans 9, 10, and 11. It may be, and probably is, that his words express his amazement at the whole truth of salvation. And so he concluded this part (chapters 9-11, and possibly 1-11), before he got into the practical section, with a heart full of worship and praise to God for God's great and glorious work of salvation.

Look at the last four verses of this chapter, verses 33-36, and listen as I read as I read them to you. (Read.)

Now you have to remember that for many years, perhaps more than thirty, Paul was a part of that nation which steadfastly refused to believe that salvation was by grace. They refused to believe that salvation was for the Gentiles unless the Gentiles were willing to become Jewish in their beliefs and practices. We have plenty of evidence that they insisted on Sabbath observances. The Jews believed that no Gentile man could be saved unless he submitted to circumcision. Read the Gospels and you will see that to the Jews salvation was a reward given by God for good works. Most of them knew nothing about the grace of God which would open the door of salvation to the Gentiles just as wide as it was open to the Jews. They believed in election, all right. But they believed that election had to do with God's choice of Israel, and that it included all of them unless a Jew would willingly

turn his back on the nation. To be cast out of the synagogue was the equivalent of being eternally damned, and that possibility was feared by most devote Jews.

But in these last four verses Paul was declaring in so many words that salvation is not at all what he had formerly thought that it was. He had absolutely no argument with God or the truths that he had been writing about. God had opened his eyes, and he had seen that salvation had originated with God, and that God had every right to do what He wanted to do about salvation. Paul could only marvel at it. He even confessed that there were aspects about salvation that he did not and could not fully understand. But he was willing to accept what God had revealed in OT times and in NT times as the truth, and it left him overwhelmed with adoring wonder at the grace of God in salvation.

So, as we go through the verses which we have this morning, let us remember that God's Word is true, and that God is right -- always right! And we can be sure that we have understood what Paul has written in these first eleven chapters of Romans if those chapters leave us feeling like Paul felt as he finished writing them.

Now having seen where the truth led the Apostle Paul, let us turn to our text, chapter 11, verses 7 through 12. And the first thing we see is:

I. ISRAEL'S FAILURE TO BE SAVED (Rom. 11:7).

Paul was not speaking of every Jew without exception. Many Jews had been saved. He had been saved. But, for the most part, the nation had not found what she was looking for. She was looking for acceptance with God, but she had not found it. You never do have peace that way.

Why had she not found what she was looking after? Paul told us in the last four verses of chapter 9. Let me read those to you, starting with verse 30. (Read.)

The Gentiles who had been saved had found salvation because they sought it by faith. They realized that salvation is not something that we earn by doing something, or lots of something, for God. They knew that salvation is a work that God does for us, and in us! And so the Gentiles were finding what the Jews were looking for, but could not find.

But now our text for today takes us a step beyond that of the salvation of the Gentiles. Paul has told us here in Rom. 11:7 that there were Jews who were saved, who found acceptance with God, but they were the elect. They were those

Jews who had been chosen by God to be saved. "And the rest were blinded."

The word translated "were blinded" is a word which means to be covered with a thick skin, or to be callused. This meant that they lost their power to understand. God did this to them.

An illustration of a callused heart can be seen in those words which our Lord spoke from the Cross when He said, "Father, forgive them; **for they know not what they do**" (Luke 23:34).

Still another example is found in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. Listen to what he wrote in 1 Cor. 2:7 and 8:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery,
even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained
before the world unto our glory:
**Which none of the princes of this world knew:
for had they known it,
they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**

Now as difficult as it may be for us to understand this, yet let me say that God hardened their hearts, and yet held them responsible for their actions. It should help us to understand this when we see those who rejected Christ doing what they wanted to do, and there was no way that anyone was going to change their minds.

What Peter said in his memorable message on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 fits into all of this. Here is what he said, and his words are recorded in Acts 2:22 and 23:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words;
Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you
by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him
in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:
Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel
and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken,
and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

Some of the people who heard Peter say these words were saved that day; others were not. But notice that Peter said what God did before he referred to what they did. (Explain.) And so we can see that just because a person appears to be hardened at a certain time in his or her life, it doesn't mean that they will always be hardened. But we never know.

However, I want you to notice the words at the end of verse 8 which really belong with verse 7: the words, "unto this day." It was true in OT times. It was true when Paul wrote

Romans. And has been true ever since down to the present day. The great obstacle to the preaching of the Gospel and the salvation of sinners is the hardness of men's hearts. God hardens whom he will, and He opens the hearts of those whom He intends to save. If He didn't open hearts, nobody would be saved.

At this point Paul did again what we have seen him do repeatedly in Romans: He proved what he was teaching by referring to certain OT Scriptures. Let us call this:

II. THE TESTIMONIES OF ISAIAH AND DAVID (Rom. 11:8-10).

Although David lived before Isaiah, Paul referred to Isaiah first, and then to David. But it is important to see that there is perfect agreement between the two. David lives about one thousand years before Christ, and Isaiah came along about three hundred years after Isaiah.

A. The testimony of Isaiah (Rom. 11:8).

This was probably a quotation from Isa. 29:10 (but see vv. 9-14, with possibly a hint of what we read in Isa. 6:9-13.

People had eyes, but they could not see. They had ears, but they could not hear. They had minds, but they could not understand. God had shut their eyes and closed their ears and had rendered their minds unable to understand. And yet notice that that there would be "a tenth" (probably not to be taken as an actual percentage), and this was the elect, the remnant who would be saved.

These words of judgment are harsh words, but we must not reject them just because we can't fully understand what the Apostle was saying. We need to accept even what we cannot understand just because it is the Word of God. That is what opens the door for understanding the Word.

But now let us look at:

B. The testimony of David (Rom. 11:9, 10).

This quotation is from Psal. 69:22, 23.

Haven't you been shocked as you have read David's words in Psalm 69? I can assure you that I have. And yet the Holy Spirit directed Paul to quote from this Psalm as evidence of what God does in hardening the hearts of those who have not been chosen. And it is evident that Paul agreed with Isaiah and with David.

The reference to "their table" is probably capable of being interpreted in two ways:

- 1) David was probably referring to those times when the Jews observed their feast days, but their minds and hearts were so blinded that they could not understand the significance of them.
- 2) We know that it was customary of many of the Jews, while keeping up with their own feast days, would participate in the feasting of those who worshipped heathen deities. And so it seems that David was praying that their idolatry would only cause their blindness, their hardness, their callousness, to intensify.

This is what the Bible has become to many: "a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them." The same thing can be said about the Lord's Supper, and about baptism. They can read the Bible, and yet never see the truth. They observe the Lord's Supper, and repeated the right words, but the truth completely passes them by. And baptism so often has become the way of salvation rather than a picture of it.

"A snare" speaks of the kind of a trap which catches birds suddenly and unexpectedly (Thayer, p. 472). The **"trap"** was used to catch wild animals, and destroy them (Thayer, p. 290). The **"stumblingblock"** was that which would cause them to fall into deeper sin, and thus they would face greater judgment. This is spoken of in Rom. 9:32, 33 as a reference to Christ. **"A recompense"** is that which a person is paid back for what he has done.

David also prayed that their eyes would continue to be blinded, and that God would "bow down their back alway." This meant that they would continue to experience the bondage, the slavery to sin toward which their carnal ways were leading them.

This is strong language for all of us. We can't say that this belonged to OT times, but that it is not for today. Paul quoted it here in the NT book of Romans. It ought to make us realize what a terrible thing it is to reject the truth and to resist the Lord. It also emphasizes the holiness of God, a theme which we hear far too little about in our day. Just because God has not taken steps against people every time they sin, does not mean that He will not once again most in terrible judgments. We have warnings in the floods, the earthquakes, AIDS, which have fallen upon our nation, and more is certain to come when we turn our backs upon God. A man is a fool who tries to work against God, and many people are doing that very thing today whose doom is absolutely certain.

But now in the last two verses of our text, verses 11 and 12, we begin to see why Paul said what he did in 11:33. Here we see GOD'S INFINITE WISDOM.

III. GOD'S INFINITE WISDOM (Rom. 11:11, 12).

We have been thinking in verses 7 through 10 about God's wrath upon the wicked, upon the non-elect. It is a wrath which we all deserve, but, in the providence of God, a great host of people, chosen by God who will, or have chose, Christ, will be saved.

But just as there was great jealousy in the hearts of the Jews toward the Gentiles, and the Jews did not want to see the Gentiles blessed with salvation, so God has been very, very wise in what He has done?

Paul's question here is, "Have they stumbled that they should fall?" That is, speaking about the whole nation, is God finished with the nation Israel so that we can no longer expect God to save any Jews? You can tell that this is a return to the question we had at the beginning of the chapter. (Read verse 1.)

Or we could state the question this way: "Has God gotten so tired of the Jews and their sins that He has left them and is now saving only Gentiles?"

Paul gives his familiar and astonished answer to this question: "God forbid." Instead of deserting Israel, one of God's reasons for turning to the Gentiles is to provoke jealousy in the hearts of the Jews so that they will turn to the Lord and be saved. It is the plan of God that when the Jews see that the Gentiles are saved, not by trying to keep the Law, but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they, too, will believe in the Lord and obtain that by faith which they never did obtain by the works of the Law.

But what about the Gentiles? If God is using His work among the Gentiles to bring the elect of Israel to Himself, then what is going to happen to the Gentiles as more and more Jews are saved?

The Gentiles have nothing to worry about. If the Lord turned to the Gentiles when the Jews fell by their rejection of Christ, then when the Jews turn to Christ it will mean even greater blessing for the Gentiles!

Do you see in this GOD'S INFINITE WISDOM? He works in such a way that both Jews and Gentiles, the elect in both groups, will ultimately experience the fulness of God's blessing in

salvation.

Concl: I see a great lesson in this. There is always a tendency for us to believe that God's blessing upon someone else is going to take something away from us. Jews can be jealous of Gentiles, and Gentiles can be jealous of Jews. One church can be jealous of another church. Or Christians can be jealous of each other. But our passage teaches us today that instead of taking blessing away from us when God blesses someone else, it will only result in greater blessing for us as well as for them.

This is one of the wonderful ways of the Lord. If one member of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. But if one member of the body is blessed, the blessing is shared by all.

So the Jews had nothing to fear from God's work with the Gentiles. God was simply using that to make them turn back to the Lord so that He could give them all greater blessing, even the fulness of our salvation.

We can experience this now in many wonderful ways, but we will understand it more fully when the Lord comes and we all experience to the full what it means that we are saved.

GRACE AND MORE GRACE

Romans 11:11-15

Intro: Anyone who reads Romans 9, 10, and 11 will see, if they did not know it before, that the history of Israel has not been a good history. They were blessed as no single nation has ever been blessed. Look at what Paul wrote about them in Rom. 9:4, 5. Old Testament history, especially from Genesis 12 on, is a history of God's dealing with the Jews. The patriarchs were Jewish. The prophets were Jewish. The Scriptures were revealed by God to the Jews, and written by the Jews. On the one hand we see the amazing faithfulness of God, and, on the other, a just as amazing unfaithfulness of the Jews.

And so, as Paul was writing Romans, he anticipated questions from his readers at different intervals throughout this section. One question seemed to be especially reasonable. It was a question to which we might expect an affirmative answer; that is, a yes! You find this question in verse 1 of chapter 11: "Hath God cast away his people?" That is, is He through with Israel? Has He gotten so disgusted with Israel after all that He has done for them, that He wants nothing more to do with them? Has He cast them away?

We come to that same question at the beginning of our text for today: "Have they stumbled that they should fall?" The NIV translates this giving the correct idea: "Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?"

Thayer, in his Greek dictionary, or lexicon, says that this word means to cease, to come to an end, to disappear, to perish — and that with eternal significance. And so the question would mean, Has God's patience become so exhausted and so exasperated with Israel that they are going to disappear as a nation and be lost forever as far as God is concerned. Have the Jews used up all of the grace that there is for them?

This is a good question, and you can see by reading the OT, and then the Gospels, that from the circumstances alone, God would be justified if He had nothing more to do with them. And the crucifixion of Christ would then have sealed their doom.

How are we going to answer that question? It was answered once in verses 1 and 2a, but Paul evidently felt that it ought to be answered again. It still seems impossible that there could be any hope left for any Jew to be saved.

I'm indebted to Matthew Henry for a wonderful suggestion

which he made at this point as we come to the same answer here that the Apostle Paul gave in verse 1, the answer which he has given to several questions he raised. The answer is, "God forbid," let it not be. It is that Greek expression which means that Paul was horrified and dumbfounded that anyone would ask such a question. Why did he feel this way? Matthew Henry said, and I am sure that he was right, that we have here another instance of:

I. THE APOSTLE'S JEALOUSY FOR THE GLORY OF GOD (Rom. 11:11a).

If God were like we are, the answer would be yes! Human patience would have been exhausted long before the birth of Christ. But God is not like we are. He is God, a righteous God, an infinitely wise God, a good God, a faithful God. He does not allow man to overrule Him. He knew when He called Abraham that He was not getting any great prize. And yet He gave promise after promise to Israel that was not conditioned upon their faithfulness to Him. He committed Himself to Abraham unconditionally! Many of their blessings were conditioned upon their obedience, but not their relationship to God.

Paul was actually summarizing God's relationship with His people, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, when he wrote to Timothy those wonderful words in 2 Tim. 2:13:

If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful:
he cannot deny himself.

The writer of Hebrews stated it this way in Heb. 10:23:

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith
without wavering (for he is faithful that promised).

For God to abide faithful means that He is going to stand by His promises regardless of what we do. And so Paul was saying, in effect, that God cannot be God if He is not going to have anything more to do with Israel. When you see all that God did for Israel, and then see all that Israel did against God, and then see that God has not cast away His people in that nation, the only thing that you can possibly say is, **"What a truly great God, God is!!!"**

And yet, can't we say the same thing about God in His dealings with us? Those of you who are like I am, getting up in years, don't you marvel at God's grace with you? It is no wonder that Jeremiah said in the midst of his Lamentations,

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed,
because his compassions fail not.

They are new every morning: **great is thy faithfulness.**
And the longer we know the Lord, and the older we get, the greater the faithfulness of God appears to be!

And so Paul's answer means that he was never going to agree with anything that raised any questions about the perfect character of God. How wonderful it would be if we were all like that!

Back in Romans 3 Paul was discussing the unbelief of the Jews, and he said this:

For what if some did not believe?
shall their unbelief make the faith of God
without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true,
but every man a liar (Rom. 3:3, 4a).

Many feel that the expression, "the faith of God," in these verses, should be the faithfulness of God. Even when we give God all kinds of reasons for letting us perish, His faithfulness always prevails. This ought to make us love Him more, and to seek by His grace to be more faithful to Him.

But we still need to deal with the reason behind Israel's fall. If God is sovereign (and He is), and therefore could have prevented Israel's fall, then why did He not prevent it? What did He expect to accomplish through their tragic fall?

Here we have a tremendous example of:

II. THE AMAZING WISDOM OF GOD (Rom. 11:11b, 12).

This was not something that happened by chance. While the Jews were fully responsible for their rebellion against the Lord, and their rejection of Christ, yet that did not defeat God. He knew from the very beginning how He was going to use Israel's failure.

He was going to use it in two ways:

- 1) To bring salvation to the Gentiles.
- 2) To provoke the people of Israel to jealousy so that many of them would turn to the Lord.

In this way God's purposes for both Jews and Gentiles would be fulfilled. And so, instead of being defeated by Israel's rejection, God used it to do what He had said from the beginning that He would do.

Cf. Gen. 12:1-3, and then see Paul's interpretation of verse 3 in Gal. 3:8.

You can see this emphasis on salvation for the Gentiles all through the OT. It is in the prophets; it is in the Psalms. You see it in the salvation of Rahab and her family. You see it in the salvation of Naaman the Syrian. You see it in the preaching of Jonah in Nineveh. But it is not until after the resurrection and ascension of Christ that the emphasis shifted in preaching of the Gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles.

On Paul's first missionary journey, he and Barnabas had gotten to Antioch in Pisidia, and they went to the synagogue to preach the Gospel to the Jews. The Jews of the city rejected Paul and Barnabas, but the Gentiles wanted to hear the Word. And when the opposition of the Jews increased, Paul and Barnabas said to the Jews the words we find in Acts 13:46-49. (Read.)

And then the Jews ran them out of town.

But this started the mighty movement of the Spirit of God which we read about in the book of Acts, a movement among the Gentiles which has continued to this very hour.

But now I want you to see how Paul described what it meant to the Gentiles as they were being saved. Look at verse 12 in our text, and you will see the word "riches" twice. (Read.) Paul spoke of "the riches of the world" and "the riches of the Gentiles," two ways of saying the same thing.

He was speaking of spiritual riches! Cf. 2 Cor. 8:9, "For ye know the grace..."

How are we as the people of God rich? We are rich in the forgiveness of our sins. We are rich because of our acceptance with God. We are rich with eternal life. We have every spiritual blessing in Christ. Before we were without Christ, without God, and without hope. And all of this did not cost us a penny! It is the free gift of God. We are rich, rich, rich! Rich because of Christ, and rich in Christ.

But now we must ask, "If we have gotten rich through Israel's fall, but then God turns again to the Jews, what is going to happen to our riches?" Then jealousy begins to take over in our hearts, and so we say, "If we got our spiritual riches through Israel's fall, then let's do everything that we can to keep them down! Don't give the Gospel to them because we might lose what we have. After all, isn't there only so much to go around, and if God gives riches to the Jews, won't it mean that He will have to take something away from us?"

That's the way we would normally think. But Paul said that is according to man's wisdom, not God's. God in His wisdom says that if we got rich through Israel's fall, we will have even greater blessing through "their fulness."

What does this tell us?

It tells us how infinitely rich our Savior is. When someone else is saved, whether Jew or Gentile, we don't lose any-

thing! In fact, all of the people of God gain. There is no way that anyone can calculate the riches of Christ!

Can you begin to see why, although Paul was commissioned to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles, he had such a burden for the Jews -- which he expressed at the beginning of chapter 9, and again at the beginning of chapter 10? The salvation of every Jew meant even greater blessing for the Gentiles. This also helps us to understand why David wrote in Psalm 122:6,
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
they shall prosper that love thee.

But now we come to the last point in these five verses. It has to do with:

III. THE MINISTRY OF PAUL (Rom. 11:13-15).

After the Lord struck down Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, and blinded him, he was led by the hand into the city. And after three days without sight or anything to eat or drink, the Lord sent Ananias, a believer, to see Saul after telling him this:

Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me,
**to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings,
and the children of Israel** (Acts 9:15).

Later when Paul had returned to Jerusalem, he was defending himself before the Jews, and they listened to him until he told how the Lord had told him to get out of Jerusalem because, as the Lord said, "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21). After that there was a great uproar as the people shouted, took off their clothes, threw dust in the air, and shouted,

Away with such a fellow from the earth:
for it is not fit that he should live (Acts 22:22).

So you have a very strange situation. Paul's life was in danger from the Jews wherever he went, but he preached to the Gentiles, which made the Jews jealous, and God had assured him that this would make some Jews jealous so that they would turn to the Lord, and this would result in greater blessing for the Gentiles, not less blessing!

He didn't expect to save a large number of Jews, but he did expect to see "some" saved.

In fact, this was Paul's expectation even among the Gentiles -- not many, but "some." And yet, in the providence of God, he did see many saved.

Doesn't this verse remind you of that passage in 1 Cor. 9,

verses 19-22, where you read these words:

For though I be free from all men,
yet have I made myself servant unto all,
that I might gain the more.
And unto the Jews I became as a Jew,
that I might gain the Jews;
to them that are under the law, as under the law,
that I might gain them that are under the law:
To them that are without law, as without law,
(being not without law to God,
but under the law to Christ,)
that I might gain them that are without law.
To the weak became I as weak,
that I might gain the weak:
I am made all things to all men,
that I might by all means save SOME.

And what was one great reason for his motivation even though his life was in danger everywhere he went? Because he longed to see "life from the dead." This meant blessing, great blessing for those who were being saved, and even greater blessing for those who had been saved than they had experienced before.

Paul's whole ministry can be explained in those four words in verse 13: **"I magnify mine office."** No man could possibly have been more satisfied, yes, even delighted, with his calling from God, than Paul was. Although he had been a Gentile hater before he was saved, now he had devoted his whole life to fulfilling the calling that he had received from God. He knew that winning Gentiles could result in winning Jews, and that his was a work of bringing to both groups the glorious, the priceless, riches of salvation.

Concl: The leaders of the world are frantically looking for a solution to the problems of the world. Our President seems to think that it can be bought as government gets bigger and bigger with more and more money to spend. Different people have different ideas, but hardly anyone is talking about the right answer. Our big problem is that spiritually we are paupers; we are spiritually bankrupt and in rags. What is needed is for people's hearts to be changed so that their lives can be changed. What we need is not to be concerned about what makes people happy, but about what is pleasing to God. That can only start and be carried on through the Gospel. People need to hear that there is such a thing as sin and a holy God in heaven Who judges sin. And the only way for sinners to be changed is through the Gospel. Let us ask God for the grace to magnify our calling that it may be the burden of our hearts so to live and to preach Christ that we, too, might "save some."

GENTILES, BEWARE!

Romans 11:16-24

Intro: As I have pointed out to you repeatedly, from the beginning of chapter 9 on, we see Paul's great concern for the people of Israel. Even though he was commissioned by our Lord to carry the Gospel to the Gentile, no one could possibly have had a greater burden for the salvation of Jewish people than the Apostle Paul did. He declared at the beginning of chapter 9 that he was willing to give up his own salvation if only his Jewish brethren could be saved.

However, Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was one of the major reasons he was hated with such intensity by the Jews. It seemed to them that to seek the blessing of Gentiles amounted to being a traitor to Israel. And so, we should recognize that, in a very real sense, Paul was defending his ministry to the Gentiles, not as being against Israel, but ultimately resulting in Israel's restoration and greater blessing. We saw in my last message that God's ministry to the Gentiles had been specifically designed to provoke the Jews to jealousy, and so cause them to return to the Lord.

Look at 11:12. (Read.) And then look at verse 15. (Read.) Paul himself had every reason to be thankful for the way the Lord had turned to the Gentiles because this had even been a factor in his own salvation. As I sought to bring out in my previous message, even today we need never fear when God sees fit to bless someone else. It never takes anything away from us. Instead, it means greater blessing for all of the people of God. Another person's blessing means blessing for you and for me, blessings which we could not have in any other way.

However, we can see as we come to our text for today that Paul was issuing a warning to the Gentiles. It is true that the Lord's work at that time was undergoing a great change, a change which even many Jewish believers were not prepared to accept. That change was the way in which the Gospel was being preached to the Gentiles, and, as a result, the way in which many Gentiles were turning to the Lord. Nothing in Old Testament times could compare with what was taking place after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. He Who had begun His ministry by telling His disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any of the cities of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5, 6), concluded His ministry by saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

And we could add to these words the command that the Lord gave to His people in Acts 1:8 when He said, "Ye shall be

witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem [that was all right], and in Judaea [that was still all right], and in Samaria [that was not all right], and unto the uttermost part of the earth" [that could not have been worse as far as most Jewish people in that day were concerned]. Unbelieving Jews hated Christ, but they did not want to share God with anyone. But, as I have said, it was hard for Jews who had come to Christ to believe that Gentiles could be saved without in some way submitting to the Law. Paul did not agree with that, but he did find it necessary to show that his ministry to the Gentiles did not mean that he believed that God was finished with the Jews.

As we come to verse 16 in Romans 11, I agree with Robert Haldane who, in his excellent commentary on the book of Romans, said that he believed that in verse 16 of Romans 11 we have Paul's third argument in which he was seeking to prove that God has not cast away His people, Israel.

His first argument was, in Rom. 11:1, 2a was that he himself had been saved, which would not have been possible if God had cast away His people.

His second argument was that God has always had "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). That was true in Elijah's day. It was true in Paul's day. And it is true in 1994, in our day. Even in the OT we do not see people were being saved because they were Jewish. Some Jews were saved; some Jews were not saved. In OT times, and even through the ministry of our Lord, God's work was primarily with the Jews. But our Lord Himself had changed that. As a result, there was tremendous fruit among the Gentiles. And the Lord's ministry primarily, but not exclusively, to the Gentiles, continues to the present day.

God does not change His purpose in election. Not all Gentiles are being saved now, but His elect among the Gentiles are being saved. And in OT times God had His elect among the Gentiles who were being saved. Not all Jews were saved in OT times, but the elect were. And in NT times God also has an elect people among the Jews even though His work among the Jews is not as prominent as it was in OT times. But it is all the outworking of God's plan resulting in the salvation of Jews and Gentiles.

What was Paul's third argument to show that God has not finished His work with the Jews, that there is still a future for Israel? Look with me at Rom. 11:16.

I. THE THIRD ARGUMENT (Rom. 11:16, 17).

Be sure to notice that Paul used the word "holy" three times in this verse. The message of this chapter would seem to indicate that Paul was using this word in its basic meaning, that which is set apart. It is practically a synonym for election. And it would seem that Paul was going back to the very foundation, or root, of God's dealing with Israel. That had to be with Abraham. Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel, and the promises given to him find their fulfillment not only in him, but also in his seed -- here mentioned with reference to the elect in Israel.

Abraham was "the firstfruit" set apart for God and for salvation. He is also referred to as "the root" of the tree. "The lump" has reference to a lump of dough made from "the firstfruit" of grain. Since "the firstfruit" is set apart for God, we can be sure that what comes from "the firstfruit" is also "holy," or set apart from God. The same can be said of the tree, and that part of the illustration is that which Paul carries on through the rest of the chapter (at least to verse 24).

God set apart Abraham for salvation, and all of his seed -- not all of his natural seed, but those of his descendants who were, like he was, chosen of God.

Some of the natural branches were "broken off." Notice that the verb does not suggest that the branches broke themselves off, but that they were broken off by someone else. That "someone else" was, of course, GOD! And this is what had happened following Israel's rejection of Christ. Not all were broken off because it was God's purpose to save some. The Apostle Paul is an example of a branch which was not broken off.

Being broken off does not mean that some were saved, and then they lost their salvation. He is speaking of the nation generally, what had happened to Israel as a nation. The branches were broken off in the sense that God was no longer dealing with the nation Israel as He had before.

In Israel's place the wild branches were grafted in. This is what had happened to the Gentiles. The Gospel was sent to them. And they were given the privilege of partaking of "the root and fatness of the olive tree." They were brought into the place of prominence in God's dealings with the people of the world, and a ministry to the Gentiles began which had never been the case before.

I like that expression: Paul was saying that "with them," i.e., with the elect of Israel, the Gentiles were made partakers of "the root" (Abraham and the promise of salvation

given to him, "and the fatness," the abundance of the salvation that God has promised to those who trust in the Savior.

It seems to me that Paul wants us to think in terms of what we might call the Jewish world and the Gentile world. God's plan from the beginning has been that at a certain time He would turn from dealing with the Jews as He had, and turn to the Gentiles. And this is what had happened, this was going on, as Paul wrote Romans. And this continues to the present hour. We are in "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). The Gospel has been going out to the Gentile world. A predominantly Gentile Church has been spreading the Gospel. And the whole world has benefitted from what God has done. In our own country we have had blessings innumerable which have affected all of our lives, even those who have not believed, and they have come because of the preaching of the Gospel and the influence of the Gospel upon American life. Other Gentile countries have benefitted in the same way. But it is for this very reason that the Gentile world faces its greatest danger and the removal of blessings we have taken for granted.

And so this led Paul to issue:

II. A MOST SOLEMN WARNING (Rom. 11:18-21).

It is stated at least three times in these verses:

- 1) In verse 18: "Boast not against the branches."
- 2) In verse 20b: "Be not highminded, but fear."
- 3) In verse 21: "For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."

Let us look closely at what Paul said.

First, "Boast not against the branches," i.e., the natural branches. The warning is issued to the Gentiles, and it has to do with their attitude toward the Jews.

We all know that a person who boasts is a bragger. A boaster is a proud person. And there are two ways that we can boast, and they are both bad!

We can boast just by telling people how good we are, and how many great things we have done. We can boast about our abilities. In this kind of boasting a person will not be concerned about others, but mainly about himself.

But there is another kind of boasting when we exalt ourselves by putting others down. Have you noticed that this is very prominent today in advertizing? The people who make Wheaties not only tell you how good their cereal is, but how much

better it is than Corn Flakes! Sprint not only tells you about the services that they offer, but they tell you that they are much better than AT&T. Now I'm not taking sides with any company, but I will say that when competitors begin to pick on a certain company or product, I am inclined to feel that it is the inferior trying to bring down the superior.

This was the kind of boasting that Paul was speaking about in verse 18. He was warning the Gentiles not to think that God was dealing with them because they were better than the Jews. Instead of rejoicing in the goodness of God to them, the Gentiles were inclined to think that God was dealing with them because they were better than the Jews.

And in verse 18 Paul went on to tell the Gentiles that if they felt this way, then they were indicating that instead of being supported by the promises given to Abraham, they were making themselves the root, that salvation was to be found in them!

Therefore, they felt justified in saying, "The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in." (By the way, g-r-a-f-f is the Old English spelling for the word graft.)

Pride is a terrible thing, and it gets us into all kinds of difficulty. Pride has been responsible for a lot of bad theology. We forget that we are saved by grace. We forget how really sinful we are. We forget that we would not be able to believe unless God gave us faith. And it somehow makes us feel better to be able to say that God got rid of somebody else so He could take me.

In verse 20 Paul was willing to admit that Israel had been broken off, but it was because of their unbelief. But he quickly added that they, the Gentiles, only had their place of favor with God, not because they were Gentiles, but by faith, God-given faith.

And so he issued the warning again: "Be not highminded, but fear."

The only other time that Paul used this verb, to be highminded, was in 1 Tim. 6:17 where he warned the rich not to trust in their "uncertain riches." And so the word means to boast in what we have that other people don't have, or in ways that we are better than other people.

So instead of thinking that God had turned to them because they were better than the Jews, the Gentiles were to realize that they had nothing in them that looked good to God, and

they ought to "fear" God, worship Him, praise Him, do everything that they could to please Him, remembering all the while that they were just as unworthy of salvation as any Jew ever was.

Pride has been called the root sin. It was pride which got the Devil into trouble. Pride was involved in Eve's sin, and then in Adam's sin. Pride is somehow involved in every sin which we commit.

And then Paul concluded his warning in verse 21. (Read.)

The verb, "take heed," is not in the original text. We could translated the last part of this verse, neither will He spare thee, or, He may not spare thee. This is where I got my subject, GENTILES, BEWARE! This is practically a prophecy of what would eventually happen because the Gentiles would have no better record than the Jews.

Look at what is happening in the Gentile world today. Or even look at what is going on in the professing church today. We are not paying any attention to God, or to His Word. People are doing what they want to do; they don't even give a thought to what is pleasing or displeasing to God. We are killing our unborn children. We violate the marriage relationship. We lie and cheat in government and in business and in personal affairs. We are a covetous people, interested mainly in having a good time and getting all of the material things that we possibly can. The Bible is not read. People are not going to church like they used to. The Gentile world is ready to be cut off. If God did not spare the natural branches, what makes us think that He will spare us when we have done what the Jews did, and in many cases, even worse?

But we can be thankful that the Apostle Paul did not leave us at verse 21. Look at what we have in verses 22-24. Let me call it:

III. THE DIVINE PROVISION FOR OUR HUMILITY (Rom. 11:22-24).

We all struggle with pride, and we are all inclined to compare our performance with others, provided it is going to put us in a good light. But the cure for pride is to be found in keeping our eyes upon God.

Nobody really begins to understand God unless they see that He has a severe side as well as a loving and kind side. This is another way of saying that God is righteous, but He is also good and kind.

Why has Israel been cut off? Primarily because as a nation

they did not "continue in his goodness," which means that they quit trying to please Him. And so they faced His judgment.

Why has God turned to the Gentiles? Because He is a good and kind and loving and gracious God. It is not because Gentiles are better than Jews; in their hearts they are both the same, sinners deserving of the worst from God. And what happened to the Jews needs to be a lesson to the Gentiles because if they live like the Jews lived, the same thing will happen to them that happened to the Jews.

What an impact this should make upon us, helping us to understand that there is nothing more important that we have to do than to please God. On the other hand, there is nothing worse that we can do than to ignore God or deliberately do that which is displeasing to Him.

But the goodness of God leads us to see another thing about God. It is this: If the Jews repent and turn to the Lord, the Lord is able to graft them in again. And this is exactly what is going to happen. There is a glorious future ahead for the people of Israel, the elect of Israel. God is not going to fail them. He will keep His promises to them. How thankful we can all be for the power of God, meeting us in our weakness and rebellion, changing our hearts, making us what He wants us to be.

Concl: How careful we should all be about our relationship with God! How the very thoughts of pride should alarm us, and cause us to flee to the Lord, humbling ourselves before Him, beseeching Him to keep us reminded that we are only sinners saved by grace, and completely unworthy of the least of His favors. Let us spend our days looking at God, learning of Him, and seeking with all of our powers to do only those things that will please and glorify Him.

But let us remember one other thing: the power of God in restoring those who have turned away from Him.

When we get into the practical section of Romans, starting with chapter 12, we are going to come to a verse in chapter 14, verse 4, which is connected with what we have seen in chapter 11 today. Let me read it for you as I close:

Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?
to his own master he standeth or falleth.

**Yea, he shall be holden up:
for God is able to make him stand.**

May God keep us faithful, and may God give us hearts of compassion for all who are in spiritual need.

THE UNVEILING OF GOD'S PLAN
Romans 11:25-29

Intro: The truth which Paul discussed in Romans 9, 10, and 11 is very important doctrinally, prophetically, and, ultimately, an exaltation of the glory of God! This is brought out in the last verse of chapter 11. (Read.)

We have seen that from Abraham on down God had indicated in His Word that He had a glorious future for His people, a future which included not only Jews but Gentiles as well. And for approximately 2,000 year God saw fit to deal primarily with the Jews -- ministering now and then to some Gentiles, but mainly to the Jews.

However, when the ministry of our Lord on earth was completed, and He had returned to heaven, the ministry of the Church was mainly a ministry to Gentiles -- and yet not completing excluding the Jews. At this point the question which Paul was seeking to answer was: Is there a future for Israel, or has God completed His work with them, only saving a few here and there? In the light of the history of Israel, God would certainly have been justified in forgetting Israel IF HE HAD ONLY BEEN DEALING WITH THEM ON THE BASIS OF THEIR WORKS! But God has never dealt with people primarily on the basis of works. Salvation has never been by works, but always by grace. And so we have seen here in Romans 11 that Paul has proven conclusively that God is not finished with the Jews! And, as we are going to see today, the reason we know that God is not through dealing with the Jews is because of the promises in His Word. The Jews failed the Lord time and time again, but God's Word stands. The Gentiles are right now failing the Lord just as badly as the Jews did, but God's Word stands for them, too. And behind the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles is the wonderful doctrine of election. Therefore, the only way that either Jews or Gentiles who know the Lord can have any certain hope of their final salvation is by looking at God and His Word, not by looking at themselves.

And so, as we begin today with verse 25, I want you to see that Paul was bringing his discussion about Israel and the Gentiles to a close by pointing them to:

I. THE WORD OF GOD (Rom. 11:25-27) .

All of you can see that in verse 25 Paul began quoting from an OT prophet. He introduced the prophet's message with the familiar words, "It is written." And you probably have a note in the margin of your Bible which tell you that the prophet is Isaiah, and the quotation is taken from Isa.

59:20, 21. So this is an OT quotation.

But before we consider that, I want you to look at what he wrote in verse 25. There he used the word "mystery." To us that means something that is difficult to understand, or perhaps even impossible to understand. But that is not its meaning in the NT. The word "mystery" speaks of truth which God has revealed, but which He did not reveal until the NT was written. So when you see that word "mystery" in your NT (and it is used some 16 times), you can be sure that the writer, or the speaker if he is being quoted, was speaking of some truth which had not been revealed at all, or at least had not been made clear, until the NT was written. And remember that for God to reveal something means that it could not be known in any other way. The truth of God had to be revealed, or people would never have even known that there was such a thing.

Scientists of all kinds have made amazing discoveries throughout human history. But they have been dealing with natural phenomena. Every day we are learning new things about the world and the universe which go beyond what most of us are able to comprehend. But over and above human knowledge, however it made be learned, there is a vast amount of truth which has to do with God, His ways, and His purposes, which the natural man could never discover. Therefore, God has to bring it down to us. It has to be revealed. This is what the Bible is, and why the Bible had to be written. God was speaking to man through men, and so the Holy Spirit showed them what to write, and guided them in the very words which they used. That is why we say that the Bible was divinely and verbally inspired.

Paul was explaining the difference between wisdom which man can discover for himself as compared with wisdom which cannot be known unless God reveals it, makes it known, when he wrote these words to the church at Corinth:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,
neither have entered into the heart of man,
the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.
Up to this point Paul was quoting from Isa. 64:4. But then he went on to say this:

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit:
for the Spirit searches all things,
yea, the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:9. 10).
The Spirit of God has revealed to us what no man could ever tell us unless the Spirit of God had revealed the truth to him.

However, I have said that God did not reveal the Bible all at once, nor to only one man. The OT was written before Christ

came; the NT was written after He came. And the truth which God held back until after Christ came is called a mystery because God kept some things back until He was ready to make it known.

Again, Paul in writing to the church at Corinth said this:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery,
even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained
before the world unto our glory (1 Cor. 2:7).

So the NT mysteries were not plans or truths which God made after the OT was written. They were "ordained" by God "before the world unto our glory." God had His own reasons for waiting to make them known.

There are several verses in the NT which define a NT mystery, and we have two of them here in the book of Romans. Please turn over to the last chapter, and look with me at the last three verses of this epistle: Rom. 16:25-27.

Now I hope you understand what a NT mystery is. But let me apply this word to what Paul was teaching about the salvation of Israel and the salvation of the Gentiles.

It was not a mystery that God had plans for the salvation of the Jews. That is very clear from the OT. But neither was it a mystery, a secret which God held back, that He intended to save Gentiles. That is also very clear from the OT. But the mystery was this: There would be a time when part of the nation, and evidently a large part, would be so hardened that they would want nothing to do with Christ or the Gospel until God's purposes with the Gentiles were fulfilled. This was the mystery. And the amazing thing about the way God would work would enable Him to fulfill what He had promised in OT times that He would do. Genesis 12:3 contains the promise of God that through Abraham's seed "all families of the earth" would "be blessed." Paul explained in Gal. 3:8 that when God said "all families," He meant "all nations."

Now that God has revealed this mystery, that is, how He was going to do both -- save Jews and save Gentiles, too -- we can see how He will do the one without failing to do the other. And so the Word of God stands, God is glorified because He is keeping His Word, and worldwide blessing will finally be experienced by God's chosen ones in Israel as well as His chosen ones among the nations of the earth.

What we are seeing among the Gentiles today does not mean that there will be no future for Israel. Paul explained so that we Gentiles would not get conceited, that God has blinded, has hardened, Israel "in part." That is, not every Jew without exception, but most of them. The Word means that

they have become stupid where the Word of God is concerned, they are calloused to the truth of the Word of God.

Now you can't call Jewish people stupid in all things. They have proven themselves to be as brilliant a people as any nation on earth. But they are not brilliant where the Gospel is concerned. God has judged them with hardness of heart and mind "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." This means that Israel is going to remain in her present condition until God's purpose for the salvation of Gentiles has been completed. And then "all Israel shall be saved."

Does this mean that every single Jew will come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior? Absolutely not! Do you remember what Paul taught us about Israel in chapter 9? (Read Rom. 9:6-8.) And add to this what we have in the last two verses of Romans 2.

"All Israel" means all of the elect of Israel. Cf. Rom. 9:27. In the same way, "the fulness of the Gentiles" does not mean that all Gentiles will be saved, but that the elect of the Gentiles will be saved. But what all of this adds up to is the fulfillment of the word which God gave through His prophet Isaiah, and which Paul quoted for us in verses 26 and 27 of our chapter.

And so God will be faithful to His Word. As we look at the world today, we cannot see how all of the promises of God will be fulfilled, but when we look into the Word, we see it perfectly. We await the coming of the Deliverer, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who "shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob," speaking of the nation.

But let us look again at Rom. 11:25. Notice what Paul said about "this mystery." He said,

But I would not, brethren,
that ye should be ignorant of this mystery,
lest ye should be wise in your own conceits...

Here I would like to make this as personal for all of us as I possibly can.

You have practically this same statement in 1 Thess. 4:13 where Paul was beginning to talk about the coming of the Lord more in detail, and he said, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, (comma) brethren..." I heard a man say many year ago, and say it with a twinkle in his eye, that perhaps we should drop the comma, and read it, But I would not have you to be ignorant brethren. There is nothing more pitiful than ignorant brethren, or ignorant sisters. God moved upon the hearts of certain people over a period of 1600 years to give us a book of truth which had to be revealed (because there

was no other way to get it to us), and He has given us the Holy Spirit to guide us into this truth (cf. John 16:13-15), and yet in many respects we continue to be ignorant of divine truth! Why?

Because we are not reading it, and re-reading it, and reading it again. We don't think about what we are reading. Many Christians don't go where the Bible is being taught. We don't cry out to the Lord for Him to teach us His Word as His people used to cry out for understanding.

Or we may be interested in certain parts of the Bible, but not in all of its parts. And because we are ignorant, we often believe the wrong things, and are always in danger of living the wrong way. The world has so gripped the attention of even the Lord's people that it has robbed us of the true enjoyment of the Word of God.

I know that we can't spend all of our time reading the Bible, or even reading good books which will help us to understand the Bible. We need time for exercise. We all need to shift gears mentally and physically every day. We have our jobs, our responsibilities, which we need to take care of. I am not overlooking that. But how much time are we giving to the Lord and to His Word. Is it as important to us as the food we eat? It was to Job. Is it as important to us as the money we make? It was to the Psalmist. Does the Word of God give you more pleasure than anything else? It did to Jeremiah. What kind of a report would you have to give yourself if you compared the time this past week that you have looked at the Olympics as compared with the time spent in reading the Word, meditating on the Word, talking about the Word, memorizing the Word? I have watched a lot of it, but all of this has made me think about myself.

To boil all of this down to a simple question, let me ask you (and I ask myself), What are we doing so that we will not have to be classified as ignorant Christians? There is no need for us to be ignorant when we have the Word of God in our own language, and have the Holy Spirit with us 24 hours out of every day to teach us what He has given us in the Word. The opportunity to know the Word and to know the Lord of the Word is there for every single one of us. Let us ask the Lord to give us understanding that we may glorify Him for His faithfulness in the past, and for His faithfulness which is yet to be seen.

And now we come to the last two verses of our text for today. In these verses we have:

II. PAUL'S SUMMARY CONCERNING ISRAEL (Rom. 11:28, 29).

Paul has two things to say about Israel. One has to do with the present; the other has to do with the future.

For the present, with respect to the Gospel, "they are enemies for your sakes." This means, probably among other things, that the Lord has blinded Israel with their attempt to Judaize the Gospel, in order to preserve the Gospel in its purity for the Gentiles. However, at the same time, "they are beloved for the fathers' sake."

What "fathers" did Paul have in mind? It has to be the patriarchs of the nation, those chosen by God, to whom God gave the promises of salvation, promises which were given to all of the elect of Israel. And they are promises which will all find their fulfillment when the Lord returns. Then they will have their King, and then they will have their land, and then they will enjoy the blessings of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also their Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

Why is all of this true?

"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." That is, the purpose of God in salvation are irrevocable! They cannot be changed, nor can they be cancelled and forgotten! And all of this is to be glory of God.

So, in spite of Israel's failures and the failures of the Gentiles with respect to the Gospel, God's Word stands. We fail, but He never will. And it is amazing to see, as God pulled the veil aside, how He used the unbelief of the Jews to open the door to the Gentiles, and how He will use the blessing of the Gentiles to provoke the Jews and to bring them back.

Concl: What better evidence do we need that salvation is all a work of God? As we look at history, past and present, it seems that Jews and Gentiles have done everything possible to keep God from fulfilling His promises and purposes in salvation. But in spite of all that people have done, even the elect people (such as Paul himself), God prevails, and His Word stands.

An illustration: What Joseph said to his brothers after the death of their father when they feared that Joseph would then get even with them for the evil they had done to him. Here is what he said. The words are recorded in Gen. 50:20.

But as for you, ye thought evil against me:
but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass,
as it is this day, to save much people alive.

That was a small illustration of the great work that God has yet to do for His elect people, both Jews and Gentiles.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

Romans 11:30-36

Intro: We come today to the last part of Romans 9, 10, and 11, but it is also the conclusion to all of the first eleven chapters of Romans. Actually verses 30, 31, and 32 give us the conclusion of Romans 9, 10, and 11, while verses 33, 34, 35, and 36 give the conclusion to the whole epistle.

We will get to those last four verses in a few minutes, but let us look first at what Paul said in verses 30 through 32 by way of summarizing the situation regarding the Jews and Gentiles in chapters 9 through 11.

At the risk of boring you, I want to repeat what we have learned from chapters 9, 10, and 11 about the salvation of the Jews and the Gentiles. It is very important that we get firmly fixed in our minds what Paul has been teaching in these chapters because the glory of God is involved.

Anyone who reads the OT with any understanding at all, can tell that from Abraham (in Genesis 12) on through the history covered by the OT, God was dealing primarily with the Jewish people. The same can be said about the time that our Lord was here on the earth. According to the Lord's words in Matt. 10:5, He told His disciples not to go to the Gentiles, nor into any city of the Samaritans. They were to go to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Some Gentiles were saved in OT times (perhaps more than we read about in the OT), and some Gentiles were saved during our Lord's ministry while He was here on earth. But the main emphasis in the work of God throughout the OT and through the Gospels, was upon God's work among the Jews.

However, after our Lord's resurrection, He sounded a new note. The Gospel was to be taken to the Gentiles. The apostles were to start their ministry in Jerusalem, spread out through Judea, go into Samaria, and then "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This began a shift in emphasis for the servants of the Lord. Without neglecting the Jews, the apostles were to turn to the Gentile world in a way that was different from anything that had been done before.

This change raised a question of major importance which Paul has answered for us in Romans 9, 10, and 11. The question was this (and you can see it for yourself in Romans 11:1: "Hath God cast away his people?" The question means, Has God turn to the Gentiles and away from the Jews meaning that He will never turn back to the Jews again? The answer is a very strong, NO!

The question really means (to state it in a positive way), Is there a future for the nation Israel in the plan and purpose of God? And to this Paul says, YES!

Then, if God is going to turn back to Israel, why did He ever turn away from them?

That question has two answers:

- 1) He turned away from them because of their unbelief. The Lord came as their Messiah, but they rejected Him, and crucified Him. And so what God has done is a judgment upon the nation because of their unbelief.
- 2) He has turned to the Gentiles because He had predicted from His first promises to Abraham that the salvation that God in His grace was supplying would include "all families," or all nations, "of the earth." And so we see repeatedly throughout the OT that salvation is not just for Jews, but it is for Gentiles, too.

So the unbelief of Israel gave the Lord the opportunity that was needed to turn to the Gentiles, which was according to His original promise that salvation would go to all of the nations of the earth. God was bound by His promise to send the Gospel to the Gentiles throughout the world. God is always faithful to His promises.

But when we talk about promises, we must turn and think about His promises to Israel. They were absolutely certain, too. And so we know that, although God has turned to the Gentile world, He cannot turn away forever from Israel. If He did, He would be unfaithful to His promises to them. So how will God do both and be faithful to His promises to the Gentiles as well as His promises to Israel?

This sounds like a major problem to us, but this is where we see evidence of what Paul called in verse 33 of our text, "the wisdom and knowledge of God." The things which are impossible to man are not impossible with God.

And so this is what God has ordained.

God has ordained that His ministry to the Gentiles is going to make Israel jealous so that they will turn back to the Lord themselves. They will turn from their unbelief to believe in the Lord.

But will this mean that God will then turn away from the Gentiles? Certainly not! If you look back to Rom. 11:12 you will see that Paul taught that if the Gentiles got their blessings of salvation through the fall of Israel, when Israel turns to the Lord, it will mean even more blessing for

the Gentiles. And so the day is coming when we will see how marvelously God has fulfilled His promises to both Jews and Gentiles. When the Lord Jesus finally comes in His glory as Israel's Messiah and King, He will reign over the whole earth. It will be as Isaiah predicted in his prophecy, chapter 11, verse 9, **"For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."**

But remember: What Paul spoke of the salvation of Israel, and the salvation of the Gentiles, he was not saying that all Jews and all Gentiles will be saved. He was saying that all of the elect of Israel will be saved, and that all of the elect of the Gentiles will be saved.

This, briefly, is what we have learned, or should have learned from Romans 9, 10, and 11. The point is that neither Jews nor Gentiles deserve to be saved. The Gentiles did not show any great interest in the Gospel in OT times. And now that the Gospel is going to the Gentiles, we see that the Gentiles today are behaving toward God in the same unbelieving way that the Jews did in the past. So both Jews and Gentiles are deserving of the judgment of God, and would be hopelessly judged **IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE MERCY OF GOD!**

And this is Paul's emphasis in the first three verses of our text: verses 30, 31, and 32.

Let's call this first part of our text:

I. THE MERCY OF GOD (Rom. 11:30-32).

Do you see the word "mercy" in verse 30? In the original this is a verb, "obtain mercy." And do you see the word twice in verse 31? The first is a noun; the second is a verb like in verse 30. And do you see it again in verse 32? Here it is a verb again, "have mercy."

Verse 30 has to do with those of us who are Gentiles.

Verse 31 has to do with the Jews.

Verse 32 has to do with all of us, Jews and Gentiles.

Look at those Jews who were saved in OT times and during our Lord's ministry here on earth, on what basis were they saved? There is just one answer: the mercy of God! And when you look in the NT after the Gospels and down to the present hour here in 1994, on what basis has every Gentile been saved? There is just one answer: the mercy of God! And when you look at the Gentiles who were saved in OT times and while our Lord was here on earth, on what basis were they saved? There

is only one answer: the mercy of God! And when you look at the Jews who are being saved today, on what basis are they being saved? There is only one answer: the mercy of God!

We have all been in unbelief. We have loved darkness rather than light because our deeds are evil. We have not feared God, nor sought His salvation. We are deserving of God's judgment not only because we are sinners by nature, but also sinners so often by choice. Sin has defiled us. Sin makes us totally unacceptable to God, whether we are Jews or Gentiles. Therefore, if it were not for the mercy of God, no one, neither Jew nor Gentile, would be saved.

What is "mercy"?

It describes God as One Who takes pity on us in our misery. He is kind and compassionate toward sinners. Man by nature pays no attention as to whether or not a thing is pleasing or displeasing to God. And so we get ourselves into a lot of misery and miserable situations, and we don't understand why things turn out the way they do. And we will look everywhere for help except to God.

The best example of mercy that we can see on a human level is when someone has pity on someone else when he has no obligation whatever to help. Cf. the parable of the good Samaritan. Cf. Luke 10:25-37. The only reason the Samaritan did anything for the man who was half dead was because he had compassion in his heart for him. He did not know the man. He owed the man nothing. He had no prospect that it would ever mean anything to him if he helped the man in his misery.

What a picture this is of God's dealings with us? He didn't get us into our trouble. There was no possibility that we could do anything for Him if He did help us. The only reason that the Lord has saved any of us is because of what is in His heart, not because of anything that is in us. He is a merciful God, and He determined before the foundation of the world that He was not going to let us die in our sins.

And God has so ordered the circumstances of the Jews and the Gentiles that He is able to fulfill His promises to them on the basis of mercy alone.

Cf. Eph 2:4-9, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love..."

Now, when you see how God has ordained that He will fulfill His promises to His elect in Israel, and to His elect among the nations of the earth, without overlooking a single one, what remains but THE DOXOLOGY? And so let us turn now to the

second mountain peak of the book of Romans. The first was in the closing verses of chapter 8 (vv. 35-39).

II. PAUL'S DOXOLOGY (Rom. 11:33-36).

When you take the whole account of salvation into consideration, the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, the works of justification, sanctification, and glorification for all of the elect, the only conclusion you can come to, if you understand what God has done, is, TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

Paul marveled at three things having to do with God:

- 1) His wisdom and knowledge.
- 2) His judgments.
- 3) His ways.

After all that Paul had been able to write under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, He felt overwhelmed with it all, overcome with a realization of the greatness, the majesty, the power, the perfection of the God of his salvation, and of our salvation.

God is rich in wisdom and knowledge, and His riches are deep, incomprehensible and inexhaustible. When God contemplated the redemption of sinners, He knew exactly what He had to do, and what He wanted to do. He wisely planned all that had to do with salvation, leaving nothing out and guaranteeing that everything necessary would be done. He made full provision for His own glory and for the eternal happiness of all who would be redeemed. Man would never have been able to devise such a plan. When we look at it on the pages of Scripture, you would think that God planned it for people who were worthy of the best and the highest. But we know that it was ordered for the worst and the lowest, for even the chief of sinners. And how wonderful that God did it to give all of His people both perfect and eternal acceptance with Himself.

What about His judgments?

These are His decisions, His purposes, His decrees. Paul said that they were "unsearchable." That is, they cannot be examined so as to be completely understood. We can know what they are, but just how God has arrived at all of them, is beyond our ability to understand. Paul probably had in mind the truth of election.

But then he added, "His ways." These would be the measures which God takes in the exercise of His sovereignty to do what He has decreed shall be done. Perhaps Paul was thinking about His own salvation in this connection. How God reaches

those who don't want to be reached, and draws those who don't want to be drawn, and works in such a way that we respond to His working, and come to Him to trust Him, and to love Him, and to devote our lives to doing His will and serving Him.

Paul said that all of this is so far beyond us that we will never, at least this side of heaven, be able to understand the will and the ways of God. We could understand it much easier if He had let us all go to hell, but all that He has planned and carried out for our salvation, is not to be understood with our finite minds.

And then Paul asked some questions.

First, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" That is, Who among us has known what the Lord has intended to do, and how He intended to do it?

Second, "Who hath been his counsellor?" That is, Did He get advice from us as to whether or not there should be any salvation, and, if there were, what it should be, and how it could all be done?

The answer to both of these questions is, No one!

And then the third question: Did any of us contribute anything to our salvation so that God was in any way obligated to do for us what He has done?

Again, the answer is the same: No one! Nobody has had the least part in anything that has to do with our salvation. Paul has established these truths in what he has written, but he wanted to declare it more forcibly as he came to this part in his epistle.

And so this can only lead to the doxology with which this great doctrinal section come to a close:

For of him (i.e., from him), and through him,
and to him, are all things
(that have to do with our salvation):
to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

We don't really understand the nature of our salvation until we can at least say this. Why God has done what He has done, and how He can accomplish all that He has ordained to be done for all whom He has chosen, and throughout time and eternity, we cannot fully comprehend all of that. But we can understand that we have not had anything to do with it, and, therefore, all of the glory belongs to God, and to God alone!

Concl: When we understand this, then we will have no problem with election. When we understand this, then we will have no problem with the truth that sin has affected our whole being. When we understand this then we will have no argument with the truth that the Lord has to draw us to Himself, or we would never come. If we understand this, then we have at least gotten the basic message of Romans 1-11. Salvation could never have become a reality for any of us if it were not for God -- from start to finish.

God ordained our salvation, determining what it would be and how it could be guaranteed. He saved us, keeps us, perfects us, and finally will glorify us. He uses means in accomplishing all of this, but all of the glory belongs to Him.

And so let this be the theme of our lives. Let this move us to greater devotion to the Lord, and to greater obedience. May this humble us and make us spend our days thankful for what the Lord has done for us, and will continue to do for us, until we stand before Him perfected in the very likeness of our precious Savior. The very nature of the Gospel means that we can proclaim it to everyone. We are not telling people what they need to do for God; we are telling them what God in His mercy and grace will do for every sinner who puts His trust in the Savior.

Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, I plead with you to trust Him today before you leave this place. He said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them..." (John 10:27-29).

OUR PRIESTLY SACRIFICE
Romans 12:1, 2

Intro: Last Sunday we finished the doctrinal section of the book of Romans. Today we start the practical section. This does not mean that there are no practical exhortations in the first eleven chapters -- because there are! Neither does it mean that as we move into the practical section of the book, that there is no doctrine from this point on -- because there is! But it means that from chapter 12 on Paul's emphasis will be upon the kind of living that is consistent with the teaching of chapters 1 through 11.

Many have pointed out before me that what we believe will determine how we behave. People who don't know God demonstrate that fact by the way they live. On the other hand, a person who does know God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, will live a life which shows what they know and what they believe. Therefore, what we believe is extremely important in more ways than one. The reason we have so many moral and social problems today is because people do not believe what they should believe. God has given us His Word to show us the truth.

Paul has given us the truth of God in this book of Romans. He has demonstrated that man is a sinner, a sinner by nature and a sinner by choice. He has shown us that sin has defiled man and made him completely unacceptable to God. This means that He is under the judgment of God, and something had to be done about it.

However, if we expect man to help himself, we are hoping for something that can never be. Oh, he may make himself more respectable in the eyes of his fellow-men, but making himself acceptable to God is another thing, calling for more than he can do. No person, if he devoted his life to doing good things can ever win acceptance with God. God is too holy, infinitely holy, total perfection. Man cannot please God. All of his good deeds are an offense to God because they are an attempt to cover up his true condition before God.

But this is where we come to the most amazing truth in all of human history. Although God is perfectly righteous and cannot accept man in his sin, yet God has taken steps to meet man's need, and He has done this in sending the Lord Jesus Christ to die as a Substitute for sinful men. It is through Christ that sinner by faith find full acceptance with God. By the miracle of the new birth sinners are declared righteous before God. They become new creatures in Christ, and then the life-changing work of the Holy Spirit begins. That work is called in Scripture, sanctification. And then end of

that work is glorification when we are with the Lord and become like He is.

— This is the doctrine that we have been learning from the book of Romans -- what God has done through His Son's death on the Cross to change sinners under divine judgment into saints with perfect and eternal acceptance with God.

Why do we have the gigantic problems that we have in the world today? It is because people are sinners, out of fellowship with God, and under divine judgment. The only way to change behavior is by changing people's hearts, but people's hearts will not be changed until they believe the Gospel and are trusting in Christ for their salvation. Sin has blinded us to what is wrong with us. And it has blinded us as to what the solution is. It is only through understanding the Word of God that we can see what the problem is, as well as the solution which God has provided.

— The solution is in Christ by Whom we are justified by faith, sanctified, and ultimately will be glorified. And this salvation is for all people everywhere, whether Jew or Gentile. It makes no difference where a person lives, what language he speaks, or the color of his skin. Spiritually we are all alike, and we desperately need a Savior. This is what Paul has been telling us in the first eleven chapters as he has set forth the truths of God's salvation.

The Apostle Paul sounded the keynote in Romans 1:16. (Quote.)

The big question, therefore, is not only do you know what Paul has been saying (that is very important), but do you believe what he has written? Are you trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Do you know that you are no longer in darkness but have come into the light? Can you tell that your heart has been changed? Do you have a desire to know God, and to please Him? Do you yearn for a greater understanding of the Bible? Do you enjoy being with the people of God? Do you hate those things which you once enjoyed, things which you can now see were not only displeasing to God, but an abomination to Him?

— If so, then you are ready for Romans 12. But don't think for a moment that you can live the life Paul describes here unless the Lord Jesus Christ is your Savior. If the first place, you won't want to. And, in the second place, you won't be able to. This is truth for the Lord's people, people who have eternal life because Christ has saved them. To be saved the Lord does not ask us to do anything for Him; He calls upon us to trust in Christ so that we can be saved.

But now let us look at the first two verses of this chapter. I don't promise to get through both of them this morning, but what we don't get today we'll get next week, the Lord willing.

We have in verse 1 AN EARNEST APPEAL. The thing that makes it so important is that it comes from the Apostle Paul and that He was speaking under the direction of the Holy Spirit. So this definitely comes from God.

Then in verse 2 we have INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO OBEY THE APPEAL.

However, let me say right from the beginning that Paul was not speaking about something that we do once, and then forget about it. He was speaking about what we have to do every day that we live. It is wonderful to do what he said we should do, but it is not easy. Everything about the Christian life is different from the way we lived before we came to Christ. But the wonderful part about what Paul has told us to do, is that the Lord will help us, will never leave us, but will always be working in us.

All right! Let us look first at:

I. THE APOSTLE'S APPEAL (Rom. 12:1).

(Read.)

How gracious the Apostle is! He said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." I say "gracious" because we learn in 1 Cor. 6:19, 20 that those of us who know the Lord are not our own. That is, we no longer are our own masters; Christ has bought us by His blood, and so we are to glorify Him in our bodies. (Repeat 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.)

There are many ways to describe a Christian, but Paul described him to the Corinthians as one who belongs to God! Before we were saved, we paid little or no attention to what God wanted; now what He wants is to be the main thing.

But Paul did not begin the practical section of Romans like a military leader issuing a command and forcing everybody to submit. Paul spoke in the most loving terms, urging the Roman believers (and all who have trusted Christ from that day to this) to do what he was about to say. How tender are his words, and yet how strong! While speaking in the most gracious way, exhorting, urging, pleading, yet we gather from his words that what he was saying was extremely important.

Now let me call your attention at this point to one word by

itself, and then a phrase in this verse. The word which stands by itself is the word, "therefore." The phrase is, "by the mercies of God."

"Therefore"! "I beseech you ~~therefore~~." That word, in a sense, wraps up all that Paul has taught in chapters 1 through 11, and ties it together with a cord called, "therefore." And remember, he was speaking to those who believed what he had been saying. He was speaking to those who were trusting in Christ as their Savior. And he was saying, "In view of all that Christ has done for you, I want you to know that there is only one real conclusion that you can come to. It is that you must present your bodies "unto God" as a living sacrifice." He was saying, "You didn't contribute in any way to your salvation, but because of what He has done for you, you belong to Him."

And now notice the phrase, "by the mercies of God."

What are "the mercies of God"? That phrase was Paul's way of describing our salvation. We really deserve judgment, but He has extended mercy to us. The total of His mercies equals salvation, but looking at its individual parts it is made up of justification, sanctification, and glorification -- these are God's mercies which Paul has so thoroughly described for us in this first part of this epistle.

So Paul was saying that, in the light of what God has done for us, we can come to no other conclusion than that this is what we need to give to Him. But Paul said it in a pleading, beseeching, urging way because while they owed the Lord this sacrifice, yet He wants us to give it because we want to give it, because our gift comes from our hearts. We don't get any pleasure in things which people do for us if they are only doing it because they have to do it. God is like that, too. And so He works in us to make us willing, and then to enable us to do what we would never do otherwise.

What does God want? He wants "our bodies."

I don't agree with those who try to distinguish here between our physical bodies and our inner spirits. And I disagree because of all that Paul wrote in chapters 12, 13, 14, and 15 in particular. When Paul spoke of our bodies, he meant every part of our being -- body, soul, and spirit! He meant the members of our bodies (eyes, mouths, hands, feet, etc.), but he also meant our wills, our affections, our thinking -- all of each one of us -- the whole person!

Now, although Paul had not actually talked about what is implied in these words, yet I want you to see here that he

was picturing each one of us as a priest. It was the business of the priest in the OT to present the sacrifices to God. No one else had that privilege. The individual Israelites in the OT could only approach God with their sacrifices by the priest. To go before the Lord themselves would have meant instant death. But that is different now. Every believer is a priest. And we have sacrifices to offer to God. Look for them in the NT. Know what you are to present to God. But this is the first sacrifice! This comes before anything else. The Lord wants us as living sacrifices. And this means that we are giving ourselves to Him, to do His will. And so we are both priests and sacrifices, as was the case with our Lord Jesus Christ.

This precedes everything that Paul had to say by way of commandments. This indicates that our obedience is pleasing to God only if we have first given ourselves to Him.

As the Lord approached the time of His death, He told Peter that Satan had asked to be able to sift him as wheat. And Peter responded in these words:

Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison,
and to death (Luke 22:33).

That is very commendable, and I have no doubt but that Peter meant every word of it. Some are called upon to make that sacrifice, but not all. But we are all called upon to make ourselves "a living sacrifice" to God! It is good to present our children to the Lord as when we dedicate our babies (and I know that the Lord is pleased with that). But what about us? Have we who are parents done with ourselves what we have done with our children? Paul was addressing himself to each individual believer. No one else can present us to the Lord in this way; we must present ourselves as "a living sacrifice."

When I was growing up in the First Baptist Church in Tacoma, we had what was called, a Life Service League. It was made up of those who expected to enter what we called then, full time Christian service. There was a hymn we used to sing. Probably many of you know it. Listen as I read part of it to you. This is what Paul was speaking about here in Romans 12:1, not just for a few who are going to be pastors or missionaries, but for all of us:

Living for Jesus a life that is true,
Striving to please Him in all that I do;
Yielding allegiance, gladhearted and free,
This is the pathway of blessing for me.

Living for Jesus who died in my place,
Bearing on Calv'ry my sin and disgrace;

Such love constrains me to answer His call,
Follow His leading and give Him my all.

And then the chorus went like this:

O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,
For Thou, in thy atonement, didst give Thyself for me;
I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy throne;
My life I give, henceforth to live,
O Christ, for Thee alone.

I'm often amazed at how glibly we sometimes sing our hymns. Words can go out of our mouths with very little thought. How wonderful it would be if we could say for today, and then tomorrow, and then the next day, and on for the rest of our lives, "My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone."

That is what Paul was speaking about here. Have you done it, and do you continue to do it?

Paul said that it must be "holy, acceptable to God." That is a big order, isn't it? People in the world aren't interested in holiness nor in what is pleasing to God. And neither would we be if we weren't saved. What does it mean to be "holy, acceptable to God"? That is what Paul was preparing to tell the Roman church, and we will find the answer in this chapter and the chapters that follow. "Holy," of course, basically means that which is set apart for God alone. But in being set apart for God we are set apart also from the sin which has such a defiling effect upon us, and which is so displeasing to God.

It behooves every one of us to stay as far away from sin as we possibly can, and to pray daily that the Lord will make us hate what He hates and love what He loves.

At the end of verse 1 Paul describes all of this as "our reasonable service," or so it is translated in the KJV. What did he mean by this?

Well, it has been explained in various ways, but, without going into a lot of detail, let me say that Paul was speaking here of priestly worship, and yet worship which is both reasonable and spiritual. It is the primary way we worship the Lord as prompted by our minds and hearts. It ties in with the word "therefore" at the beginning of the chapter.

We have many ways that we can worship the Lord. We do it in prayer. We do it in singing. We do it with our money which we bring to the Lord. We do it with our service which we

render to Him. But that which gives it all meaning is that we have given ourselves to the Lord, not just as one single offering, but daily renewing our devotion to God. And throughout life our devotion to the Lord and our submission to His will, will increase as we grow in Him.

I know that the word "present" is in the aorist tense in Greek, and that this points to a once-for-all presentation of ourselves to the Lord. But the tone of verse 1 and verse 2 shows that we need to recognize and renew what we have done every day to give strength to our offering and to give added pleasure to the Lord.

Concl: We will learn more about this next week, the Lord willing, as we consider verse 2 which is actually a part of verse 1. But the important thing for each of us now is to ask ourselves if we have done this. We give the Lord our time, our service, our money, and so on, but have we deliberately and lovingly given ourselves to the Lord, to do His will, to be holy as He is holy, to seek above everything else that our lives will be pleasing to the Lord?

Remember that no one else can do this for us. We present ourselves, every part of us, to God. We want to use our eyes, our tongues, our ears, our hands, our feet -- all to please the Lord. And to that we add our love, our thoughts, our desires -- everything about us! We belong to Him, and He wants us to live that way. His love for us as seen at Calvary can best be thanked through our unreserved love for Him.

May God enable us to give ourselves to Him, and then to live each day "a living sacrifice."

(To be continued next week, Deo volente.)

LIVING A HOLY LIFE

Romans 12:1, 2

Part II

Intro: The practical section of the book of Romans begins with chapter 12. And the first two verses of chapter 12 are introductory to the whole section of the book. Salvation has its doctrinal side, but it also has its practical side. When a person really believes the Gospel and is trusting Christ for his or her salvation, the proof will be seen in that person's life. It is impossible to believe in Christ for salvation and yet remain the same kind of person. It is equally impossible for one who is saved to continue to live the same way that he or she lived before trusting Christ. A true Christian, one who is really trusting Christ for salvation, is, in the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17, "a new creature," or a new creation.

However, the initial change must be followed by other changes. A Christian is not perfect, but he is headed in that direction. He will finally be perfect, totally without sin, when he is with the Lord. But until that time he needs to continue to grow as a Christian, and to become more and more holy in his behavior.

There is a close parallel between physical birth and spiritual birth. A baby is born, but we become alarmed if he remains a baby. He grows. He learns. He learns to walk, to talk, to feed himself, to relate to his parents and family as well as other people. We seem him develop not only physically, but intellectually and emotionally. And that development should continue as long as he lives. We should never stop learning; we should never stop developing as human beings.

Christians are like that. We are born into God's family, but we need to grow. There is much that we need to learn. We need to know how to live so as to please God. That is why we read the Bible. That is why we pray. That ought to be the reason that we go to church. Our lives are to be different after we become Christians. We soon learn how important it is for us to trust the Lord if we are to be what He wants us to be, and if we are to live the way He wants us to live. The Members of the Godhead never leave us alone in this, but they are always present to help us.

We can see from Romans 12:1, 2 that Paul wanted us to make the right start. And we saw last week in verse 1 that the first thing that Paul told the Roman believers to do was this:

Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And the same applies to us! We need to do this. We need to recognize that we are "not our own," but that we belong to the Lord. He has purchased us with the precious blood of His Son. And we need to be sure to notice that Paul was speaking of "a living sacrifice." This is different from the animal sacrifices in the OT, but it is not different from the way the people of the OT were to live. To claim to be a child of God means that we are saying that we belong to the Lord.

But it is interesting to see the manner in which Paul presented this truth. He besought them "by the mercies of God" to give themselves to the Lord. In view of all that God had done for them, Paul was urging them to present themselves from their hearts to be living sacrifices to God. They were to be "holy" sacrifices, and so are we. And they were to be concerned about what is pleasing to God, not primarily what is pleasing to them, or pleasing to the world.

But let me point out something that ought to encourage all of us this morning.

Will you notice that the word "acceptable" is found in verse 1, and again in verse 2? It means well pleasing. But there is a difference in who is going to be pleased. In verse 1 Paul was speaking about what we must do if we are to be "acceptable," or well pleasing to God! In verse 2 we see that what is "acceptable" to God is also going to be "acceptable" to us, well pleasing to us! When we think of giving ourselves to the Lord, we may be fearful that it won't mean real happiness for us. But that is why we need to look at the Christian life as it is described in the Word, and not as our sinful hearts may try to make us think that it is. We have an in-born suspicion of God, and only the Holy Spirit using the Word can take it away. God has designed the Christian life to be pleasing to Him, knowing also that what pleases Him will also be most pleasing to us.

But now let us go on to verse 2. What is the relationship between verses 1 and 2?

Verse 1 tells us what we are to do; verse 2 tells us how to do it. Verse 1 speaks of a once-for-all commitment to the Lord; verse 2 shows how it is to be carried out in daily life.

As long as we live we are going to have to be careful about being conformed to this world. And as long as we live we are going to have to be equally concerned about being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Both words, "be not conformed to this world, but be ye trans-

formed" are addressed to us as our responsibility. We are to see to it that we are not conformed to this world. But we are also to see to it that we are transformed for the renewing of our minds.

But you will also recognize that both of these verbs suggest that there are powers and influences in the world to make us conformed to the world, while there are also powers and influences present in the life of a Christian to transform us by renewing our minds. The Devil tries to make us conform. Our flesh responds to the sin that is in the world. And the world itself exercises a power over every person on the face of the earth. So the pressures are everywhere about us.

On the other hand, we now belong to the Lord. God is at work in our hearts to make us willing, and then to enable us, to do His will. Christ is living in us, too. And we all should know that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In addition, we have a living and powerful Word in the Scriptures, and the Members of the Godhead work in us through the Word of God to make us what They want us to be.

So we find ourselves in the middle of a constant struggle. The world wants us to conform, but God wants us to be transformed. How thankful we can be for the truth that the Apostle John has given us in 1 John 4:4! In the first three verses of the chapter John was speaking of "the spirit of antichrist" which is in the world. And then he added this word in verse 4, showing how we can escape from that spirit:

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them:
because greater is he that is in you,
than he that is in the world.

Who is in the world? The Devil. Who is in us? The Holy Spirit. And who is the greater? The Holy Spirit -- far greater! He is our hope that we need not be conformed to this world, but can expect to be more and more transformed into what God wants us to be.

But now while the world exercises pressure upon us to conform, and the Holy Spirit works in to be transformed, let me emphasize as strongly as I can that you and I are responsible to see that the first doesn't happen to us, but that the latter does! We can't do anything without the Lord's help and blessing, but we are responsible to see that help so as not to be what we should not be, but to be all that God wants us to be. That is why we need to be faithful not just in reading the Word of God, but we need to feed upon it. And that is why we need to seek the fellowship of the Lord every day in prayer. God will help us, but we are responsible to seek His help. I can't emphasize this too much. We are going to heaven "on flowery beds of ease." We are in a

conflict, and we must learn to "endure hardness" as good soldiers "of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). There battles to be fought and victories to be won, but, praise God, in Christ, we are on the victory side!

But let us make sure we know what we are talking about.

I. WHAT IS THE WORLD?

Paul said, "And be not conformed to this world." What did he mean by, "this world"?

This is the Greek word, αἰών, not κόσμος. But sometimes these words are used almost synonymously. Both words speak of what is going on this earth. Αἰών looks upon the world from the standpoint of time. We get our English word eon from it. From the time that the Devil tempted Eve and brought about the fall of Adam, he has been the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). He has exercised his authority here. Within the sovereign oversight and limitation which God has placed upon him, things have gone the Devil's way. He has his way of doing things which is altogether different from God's way. The world has its own wisdom. It has its own objectives. It has its own fashions, but it also has its cares and its trials. The world is anti-God as well as anti-Christ. You and I were born into this world which is marred by sin, and which has no place for God. John described the cosmos as a place characterized by "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

So the world is a place which is characterized by lust, by desire — the lust for things, the lust for pleasure, the lust for money, the lust for power. "The pride of life" is the vainglory that is attached to this life. People will seek for rewards and notoriety of all kinds to such a degree that you would think that there was nothing else worthwhile.

In our occupation with sports today, we need to remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthians so many years ago,

Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown;
but we an incorruptible (1 Cor. 9:25b).

And the pursuit of these earthly honors leads often to crime, to immorality and dishonesty, to troubles that a person would not have otherwise. People can spend their whole lives seeking to gain the whole world, and all of the time they are losing their souls.

We are really living in a nation which has been God-less, and we are reaping the harvest. We have a younger generation which, in many respects, is out of control. We talk about peace when we have everything but peace. Pick up your news-

paper, or just look around you any day in the week, and you will be able to see what the writers of Scripture were talking about when they spoke of the world.

You not only see wickedness everywhere, but you see terrible spiritual blindness. Man really has no answers, but he keeps on thinking that he is going to find some somewhere, sometime. When you really see this wicked system which holds the people of the world in its grip, you see a whole way of life which is radically different from what it ought to be. And it is passing away. Cf. 1 John 2:17. The world has no place for that which is holy and good in God's sight. Oh, people may wish that things were different, but it is only for their own comfort and pleasure, not because they have any desire for God, nor any desire to please God.

Think of some of the verses which speak of the world and its sin. Cf. 1 John 2:15-17; Tit. 2:11-14.

The world has its laws and its own standards of morality, but most people have forgotten, if they ever knew, that the only way you can have a standard of right and wrong is by acknowledging that God Who sets those standards. Otherwise you have everyone doing what is right in their own eyes, and there can be no absolute standard, or true standard, that way.

So we look at the world. We have all been a part of it, and we have all been influenced by it. We continue to be influenced by it. We see its deceitfulness, its cares, its unsatisfied desires, its corruption. What is to be our relationship to it now that we know the Lord.

II. "BE NOT CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD."

What is conformity? What does it mean to be conformed, or not to be conformed?

It means to fit in with what the world is, and with what the people of the world are doing. We talk about young people being under peer pressure. This is pressure to look alike, to talk alike, to do the same things, to go the same places. If you are going to be accepted by the world, this is what you have to do.

Bishop Lightfoot, a noted Greek scholar and outstanding Christian of the last century, said in his commentary on Philippians that the basic ideas in this word "conformed" is that of instability and changeableness (p. 130). He would translate Rom. 12:2 that we are not to fall in with the fashion of the world. Everything in the world changes.

Dress codes change. Moral standards change. We accept immorality in public officials, and lawlessness. The world is in a constant state of change. And one big, enormous mistake the professing church has made is that of trying to keep up with the fashion of this world. There is much world-conformity among professing Christians today. The idea that the church should not change, is strongly opposed by many of her leaders. According to Bishop Lightfoot, if we are going to be conformed to the world, then expect evil to be called good, false apostles to be recognized as true, the Prince of darkness as an angel of light, and the ministers of Satan as the ministers of righteousness.

If you are going to conform to the world, this is what you can expect — the evil to be called good, and everything constantly changing, not to get better but to get worse!

But let me say another thing about this word, "And be not conform." Paul did not say, Do not conform yourself to the world. He, of course, would mean that, but it apparently was unthinkable to him that a true child of God would deliberately try to make himself like the people of the world. And so that was not his exhortation here. What he did say was, "Don't let anyone else make you conform to the world!"

You see, people are not content to be worldly themselves; they want to drag others down, too. Haven't you been under that pressure, and felt the power of it? The person who cheats wants to get others to cheat. The person who lies wants to get others to lie. Sins never travel alone, and neither do sinners. And young people, I hope you are listening to me today, there are people you will meet wherever you go who will be intent on making you conform to the ways of the world, ways that will not only bring you troubles, but heartaches, and regrets that you will have to live with for the rest of your life.

So don't conform yourself to the world. That is unthinkable and inexcusable. But be just as sure that no one else makes you conform. The path that leads to destruction is wide, and there are lots of people going that way, the way of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. The path that leads to life is narrow, and it will always be narrow. Dare by the grace of God to be like Daniel and his friends who would not defile themselves with the king's meat, and who would rather die in a fiery furnace than to fall down and worship anything or anybody except their God!

Concl: This is as far as I am going today. I have just been dealing with the negative side of a holy life. If you and I are going to be holy there are many, many things

that we must not do, nor should we allow anyone else to make us do them. If you are sinning in any way, if you are doing what you know is not pleasing to God, then by the grace of God stop it today, and don't do it any longer. Pleasing God starts with stopping sin. You can't stop in your own strength. Sin makes slaves out of us. It is only by trusting the Lord to give you the strength to stop, and then by staying away from those places that you will be tempted, that you can please God by refusing to be like the world, or to live like the world.

Those of you who are reading your Bibles have just finished the life of Moses. Moses had a very unusual beginning. As a baby he was taken out of the river where his mother had placed him in a little basket to preserve his life. Pharaoh's daughter found him, and until he was 40 years of age he was raised as a member of the royal family of Egypt. But God had been working in his heart all through those years, and when he was 40 he made a life-changing decision. We are told about it in the book of Hebrews in the NT 1500 years after he lived. This is what we are told. You will find it in Heb. 11:24-26. Listen as I read it to you.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years,
 refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;
 Choosing rather to suffer affliction
 with the people of God,
 than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;
 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches
 than the treasures of Egypt:
 for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

Moses knew that this life is merely a preparation for eternity. And he wasn't about to let himself be forced to conform to the ways of Egypt, the ways of the world. And so he cast his lot with the people of God. He may have given up the throne of Egypt, we can't say for sure. But whatever he did give up, he refused to be conformed to "the pleasures of sin." He was more concerned about pleasing God and spending eternity with Him.

Remember: We give ourselves to the Lord as a once-for-all sacrifice, "a living sacrifice." But we will need to spend our lives in this world refusing to be conformed to what people want us to be and do. We have a higher and happier calling; we want to please God.

THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

Romans 12:1, 2

Intro: This is the third Sunday that I have given to Romans 12:1, 2. I have done this because of the tremendous importance of these two verses to our lives as Christians. What we need to know about Christian character and Christian life is all in these two verses. It doesn't take long to memorize them (and this is something that we all should do), but it will take each one of us a lifetime to work out what Paul has told us here that we should do. Let me review briefly what we have learned, or should have learned so far.

We can tell from the language of the Apostle in verse 1 that he considered what he had to say here of the utmost importance. He wrote, "I beseech you." This was his concern as a child of God, as their brother in Christ, and as an Apostle: "I." It was not just something that the Spirit of God was directing him to write, but it was a message which came from his own soul, from the depths of his heart.

What did he want them to do?

He wanted them to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God. This was a big order, a tremendously big order. He could not have asked them to do more than this. They were to make this presentation to God, not just of their money, nor just of their time, but of themselves! They were to become living sacrifices. In a word, they were to become bondslaves of God.

But what was the basis for this request? What right did he have to ask them to make such a sacrifice, a life-long sacrifice?

The answer is found in the expression, "the mercies of God." This expression speaks of their salvation. It was because of what God had done for them that God had the right to ask for such a sacrifice, and it was because of what God had done for them that Paul was commissioned to write this. It is very similar to what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church when he told them,

Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit,
which is in you, which ye have of God,
and ye are not your own.
For ye are bought with a price.

What was that price? It was the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. By His death on the Cross He not only paid the penalty for our sins, but He purchased us for God. The controversy that has been going on for some time among evan-

gelicals as to whether or not the Lord Jesus can be our Savior without being our Lord, is surely answered by these verses.

And look ahead to Rom. 14:7-9. (Read.)

So it was by virtue of Christ's work on the Cross that Paul was exhorting the believers in Rome to give themselves completely to the Lord -- their bodies, every part of their being. This was their reasonable service of worship. It is as Bishop Moule said so clearly in his commentary on Romans, "The divine truths first, and then and therefore the blessed life" (p. 322).

Paul seemed to know this before anyone told him because when the Lord stopped him on the road to Damascus, he asked the Lord Who He was. And when the Lord told him, he responded immediately by saying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Cf. Acts 9:4-6.

What does the Lord want us to do? He wants us to give ourselves to Him as "a living sacrifice," not primarily to die for Him, but to live for Him!

But how do we do this? Our answer is found in Rom. 12:2, and there we are told two things:

- 1) "Be not conformed to this world," this age.
- 2) "But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

But now before we look in detail at the latter part of verse 2, let me remind you of something I said last week which is very important, ideas conveyed to us in these verses which we must not forget.

We give ourselves to the Lord as a once-for-all offering, a priestly sacrifice. But working out what that means will take us all of our lives. We constantly have to be on our guard against conformity to the world, its standards, its fashions, its objectives. And at the same time we have to be pursuing a transformed life. We need to be continually seeking through the renewal of our minds a life in which we are doing that will of God which will prove to be for us "good, and acceptable, and perfect."

Every day we face the negative, "And be not conformed to this world." But we also face the positive, "But be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds." The pressures are always on us to be what the world wants us to be and to do what the world wants us to do. But the Spirit of God is in

us to enable us to turn from the world, and seek by God's grace to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Please remember this. You and I must never let down our guard. The Enemy is always seeking our downfall. But if we are walking with the Lord, we are safe.

Now let us look at the latter part of Romans 12:2, "But be ye transformed..."

First let us think about:

I. TRANSFORMATION.

What did Paul mean by this?

The word that Paul used here is the Greek verb from which we get our English word, metamorphosis. This is a scientific term which basically means, a change. And it is a change which is brought about through growth. It is the process by which a maggot becomes an adult fly, or a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, or a tadpole becomes a frog. The change which takes place in each case is described as a change in structure and habits.

This word is used in the Gospels of Matthew (17:2) and Mark (9:2) to indicate that a great change came over our Lord as far as His appearance was concerned. He appeared in His glory before Peter, James, and John. Interestingly, Luke when speaking of our Lord's transformation used another Greek expression which is translated, "the fashion of his countenance **was altered**" (Luke 9:29). The idea is that His appearance became different from what it had been before. In our Lord's case, He was not changed, but His appearance was changed.

The only other time we find the Greek verb, _____, in the NT is in 2 Cor. 3:18, the last verse in our Scripture reading for today. There Paul wrote,

But we all, with open (unveiled) face
beholding as in a glass (mirror) the glory of the Lord,
are changed into that same image from glory to glory
even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The verb is a present passive, suggesting that this is a progressive, a continual change, which is taking place in our lives, through the work of the Holy Spirit! So this both agrees with Rom. 12:2, and gives us a little added light on what Paul meant.

What this all amounts to is that we need to be changed. And the verb speaks of an inner change which is going to result

in changes both in our character and in our behavior. We are responsible to see that the change is taking place, but we need to realize also that we can't change ourselves. We use the means that God has provided, but the Holy Spirit actually makes the changes that are needed.

This is what Paul was talking about. We are saved. We are on our way to heaven. We are the children of God. But we need to be changed! The change has to take place within us first, but it will become more obvious outwardly as we grow in the Lord.

Now we have learned that the Holy Spirit actually does this work, but, if we are to see that we are being transformed, what do we need to be concerned about? This brings us to the next part of the verse:

II. THE RENEWING OF OUR MINDS.

Paul's statement is, "But be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds."

What does this suggest to us? It suggests that sin has corrupted man's thinking -- your thinking, and my thinking. So our minds have to be renewed!

The only other time this word "renewing" is used in the NT is in Tit. 3:5,

Not by works of righteousness which we have done,
but according to his mercy he saved us,
by the washing of regeneration,
and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

To renew is to bring about a complete change for the better by producing something of a completely new and different quality. In order for us to be renewed, our minds have to be renewed. Our thinking has to be renewed. It has to be changed. Sin has corrupted our thoughts, and so everything is wrong in our lives until the Lord saves us. But even then it takes time for the changes to be made.

We see illustrations of this every day. The criminal needs help in his thinking. He does what he does because his mind is haywire. But you don't have to go to the criminal to see evidence of this. The man who spends all of his time and energy on things in this life, and makes no preparation for eternity, is fouled up in his thinking. The man who is unfaithful to his wife, or the wife who is unfaithful to her husband, isn't thinking clearly. The child who rebels against his parents and against society, is showing that his mind is not operating as it should. God has given us minds

to know right from wrong, to will to do what is right, and to do it because that is what we want to do. But sin keeps us from thinking right thoughts. People are continually getting into trouble because their thinking is off on the wrong track. And one of the things that the Lord does for us when He saves us is to get our thinking back on the right track. It doesn't all happen at once, but it gets started.

But how does this renewal come about?

The Lord starts this renewal when He convicts us of our sin. And when that happens we begin to start thinking about God and what He thinks about us and about what we have been doing. You see, one evidence of a corrupted mind is that people leave God out of their lives. People don't know God, and they are not interested in knowing Him, and they surely don't want Him telling them what to do, or not to do. In fact, they may have become so corrupted that they have convinced themselves that there is no God! What fools they are if that is the case! You don't need me to give you any more illustrations. Look at your own life, and you will see many reasons why you need to be renewed, parts of your life where you haven't been thinking straight.

The Lord starts the renewal when He saves us, but then it continues as we begin to read the Word, to learn about God, about His holiness, about how He defines sin. As 2 Cor. 3:18 says, the Word of God is a mirror. We see the Lord in the Word, but we also see ourselves. And the Holy Spirit begins to straighten out our thinking. We see how proud we have been when we have every reason to be humble. We see how sinful we have been and what we need to do to be holy. We not only see the littleness of ourselves, but we learn that God is so great that He has the heart of kings in His hand, and He turns them where He wants them to go. We begin to see how wonderful the Lord Jesus Christ is, and our hearts respond to what Paul told the Philippians, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

It is God Who gives us the ability to think correctly, and to want to do it, and to do it because we love Him. This is what it means to have our minds renewed. It means that if you want to get your thinking straightened out, you must give your attention to the Word every day.

This is why God told Joshua to meditate in the Word "day and night." David described the happy man who delights himself in the Word of God. We can't go wrong if we are living according to the Word of God, but everything will be wrong as long as we ignore the Word of God. Sin has corrupted us; only God working by His Spirit using the Word in our lives

can get us straightened out. This is why we need to read the Word. This is why we need to be taught the Word. This is why we need to memorize it. Everything about the Christian life is different from the lives people live in the world. We need to find out what God wants us to be and what He wants us to do, and the only place you can learn that is in the Word of God!

I hope the Lord is enabling me to speak to your heart today. We all need to be changed, and God brings about the changes that are needed by working on our minds.

But I have one more point.

III. THE PURPOSE OF A RENEWED MIND.

Obviously it is that we will be transformed, changed, made holy as the Lord wants us to be. But in coming to that, how did Paul express himself here at the end of verse 2 in Romans 12?

He said, "That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

To prove something is to test it. But the idea here is that in testing "the will of God," you and I will find that His will is what we have been looking for, that which we find to be "good" to us and for us, not merely "acceptable," but totally delightful and wellpleasing to us, and "perfect," that is, complete. We find that the will of God expressed in His Word is all that we need to make us acceptable to God and to bring the peace and joy and satisfaction which we have been looking for in the world, but could never find it.

Merchants try to get us to buy their products by offering us a thirty-day, money back guarantee. What are they saying? They are saying that they are so sure we will like what they have that after using it for thirty days we will want to keep it. Well, I have tried some of those products, and have sent some of them back because I wasn't satisfied.

God is not saying exactly that to us, but He is asking us to put His Word to the test and find that as the Word begins to get our thinking on track, we will find that God and Christ and the Holy Spirit and the will of God as expressed in the Word of God are all that we need. By nature our thinking leads us astray, and, if we continue in our own way things will get worse and worse. But if God in His grace has seen fit to make us hear, and we turn to Him, then things can be changed, and we will find a new joy in this life, and a prospect for glory throughout all eternity. The more we are

like the Lord, the more we will be pleasing to God, and the more we are pleasing to God, the greater will be our joy and blessing now and forever.

Concl: If you are not a Christian, that needs to be taken care of first. Christ died on the Cross for sinners. Our sins were that terrible in God's sight. That's where your thinking needs to be straightened out first. Come to Him today. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from the judgment of God. Things can never be right in your life until you know the Lord as yours Savior. He has promised that whoever believes in Him, trusts in Him, will be saved.

Most of you here today profess to know the Lord. Where do you stand in the light of Rom. 12:1, 2. Do these two verses describe the way you are living. If not, they should! We need to be holy, but the only way we can be holy is by refusing to go the way of the Word, and by seeking to be changed by the Holy Spirit as He enables us to be and do what we are told to be and do in the Word of God.

May God give all of us who know Him a greater desire than ever before to say "no" to the world and its way, and "yes" to God and His will.

ONE BODY IN CHRIST

Romans 12:3-5

Intro: We are in the practical section of the book of Romans. It is based upon the doctrinal section of the book. We need to have a foundation in Biblical doctrine before we can understand the Christian life. But, on the other hand, we need to remember that doctrine is not an end in itself. Doctrine leads into practical living. We are taught the truth of the Scriptures in order that we may live as God wants us to live. Any person who thinks he can live the Christian life and yet be ignorant of the doctrines of Scripture, is deceiving himself. We never stop learning. Or perhaps I should say that we never should stop learning. Some Christians do stop, but when they do, their spiritual progress stops too. If you stop learning you stop growing. It's as simple as that.

On one occasion when our Lord had given His disciples a practical lesson in the importance of humility (which we are going to be talking about this morning), He said, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17). Every doctrine of Scripture has its practical application. And it is when we practice what we have learned that we show that we have really learned it. It is impossible for us to overemphasize the importance of teaching if we are careful to follow it with the practical application of what we have learned.

For the three Sundays preceding our Easter Bible Conference we carefully examined the first two verses of this practical section of the book of Romans: Romans 12:1, 2. We saw that this is the foundation of all Christian living. We must first give ourselves to the Lord. We give our bodies as a living sacrifice to Him. Then, as we learn from Rom. 12:2, we spend our lives refusing to be conformed to these times in which we live, and, instead, seek to be constantly renewed, transformed, in our thinking, so we can prove by testing "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." We all are to do this. This is our responsibility individually before God. I can't do it for you, nor can you do it for me. We present our own bodies to the Lord. We refuse to let our lives be patterned according to the way the world goes. Instead, we see through the Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to get our thinking straightened out so that we will live according to God's will, not our will, nor anybody else's will.

Let me emphasize this. Romans 12:1, 2 must be taken personally by each one of us. If I don't give my body to the Lord, nobody else is going to do it. If I don't say "no" to the

world, nobody else is going to be able to say it for me. And if I don't say "yes" to God, nobody else is going to say it for me. Here we all stand on common ground before the Lord.

But now as we come to very 3, we enter upon another aspect of our lives as Christians which is extremely important -- and when I say "extremely," that is exactly what I mean. And this also has to do with the word "body," but in a different way.

For the moment I am going to skip over verse 3, and go to verses 4 and 5. In verses 4 and 5 Paul was teaching that the Roman believers were:

I. "ONE BODY IN CHRIST" (Rom. 12:4, 5).

As we are going to see in just a few moments, they were not the whole body of Christ, but they were a part of it.

In verse 1 Paul had said what we are to do with our bodies, these physical bodies of ours which have a head, and eyes, and ears, and a mouth, and hands and feet, and so on. But God has also given us the capacity to think, to will, and to exercise various emotions. Our whole being, body, soul, and spirit, is to be given to the Lord.

Now verse 4 gives us what we can call a self-evident truth. (Read.) We all know that this is true. In each of our bodies we have "many members," but they do not all perform the same function. I think with my brain. I see with my eyes. I hear with my ears. I speak with my mouth. I work with my hands. I walk with my feet.

My hands can't do what my eyes do, neither can my eyes do what my hands do. My ears can hear my mouth speak, but my ears don't speak. You can go on almost endlessly making contrasts like this. And we all know that this is true. We have many members, and they all have different functions. We really don't need the Bible to tell us this, but the Bible can point out a simple fact which we may not have paid much attention to.

So a person does not need the Bible to tell us what is mentioned in verse 4. If we have done anything thinking at all along this line, we have known this to be true.

But verse 5 is a revelation. This is something that we would not know if it were not in the Bible. What does it say? (Read.)

It says that all of us are individual members of Christ. We

"are one body in Christ." Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to tell us that the human body is a picture, an illustration, not only of our relationship to Christ, but of our relationship to each other. Just as the various parts of our bodies are related to each other, belong to each other, so that every member is needed, the same is true about all of us in the body of Christ. This is the only verse in Romans where the body of Christ is mentioned. But Paul did mention it in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians.

I am going to ask you to turn to Eph. 1, the last two verses of the chapter (22 and 23), to see what the body of Christ is. (Read.)

Here we see that the body of Christ is "the church." Paul said the same thing in Col. 1:18 where he wrote, speaking of Christ, "And he is the head of the body, the church."

In Eph. 3:6 we are told that Gentiles believers would be placed along side of Jewish believers in "the same body." In Eph. 4:4 we learn that there is only "one body." Christ does not have many bodies; He only has one -- and that makes sense, too, doesn't it? You and I don't have several bodies; we have just one. You ladies may have several dresses, and we men may have several suits, but each of us just has one body. So it is with Christ.

In Eph. 4:11, 12 Paul mentioned that "apostles...prophets...evangelists; and...pastors and teachers" have been given "for the edifying of the body of Christ."

And then in Eph. 4:15, 16 we have another very important statement about the body of Christ. (Read.)

Now let me ask you to turn to 1 Cor. 12 where we have the longest section in which Paul spoke about this great spiritual body of Christ called, the church. Please turn to that chapter and let me read several verses to you while you follow me in your Bible. (Read vv. 12-27.)

This verse gives us an excellent foundation for our text in Romans.

All believers are in the church, the body of Christ. We were placed there by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We are like members of the human body. We all have different functions in the body. We all are necessary. There is to be no schism in the body, no division. Just as our human bodies work the best when they are all working in cooperation with each other, the same is true about us in the body of Christ. We need each other. We function together. And working togeth-

er, growing together, we serve God most effectively and bring the greatest glory to Him and to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in these passages Paul was not saying that the church at Rome was the body of Christ. Nor was he saying that the church at Corinth was the body of Christ. Nor was the church at Ephesus the body of Christ, nor the church at Colosse. All of these were local churches. The body of Christ is made up of all true believers throughout the world and throughout this whole age. Those of us who are true believers in Christ at Trinity Bible Church are a part of the body of Christ, but we are not the whole body. The body of Christ, the true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth, is made up of all people throughout the whole world who genuinely know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. Part of the Church is already in heaven, but we are still here on the earth.

I hope you understand this. This is very important doctrine.

But now let me add this. The Scriptures make it clear that churches like Trinity Bible Church are to be miniatures of the body of Christ. That is, the truths that apply to the whole Church, the whole body of Christ, apply to us as a local church. That is one reason we are called a church. It is not right to say that we are the body of Christ, but we are a part of it, and we are to function as a body. The body of Christ is much greater in numbers than we are by ourselves.

Remember that when we speak of the Church, the body of Christ, we are not talking about church members. We are talking about people who know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Not all church members are saved. You can be a member of a local church without being in the body of Christ. Only those people who have been saved and are believing in the Lord Jesus Christ are in the true Church, the body of Christ.

But now let me go back to verse 3. Let me give this the heading:

II. THE NEED FOR SOBER THINKING (Rom. 12:3).

There is one great enemy which we all have as a part of our old sinful nature which is going to give us trouble until we are finally with the Lord. That enemy is PRIDE!

I recently listened to a couple of tapes in which a pastor was speaking about election, and he said that we find our self-esteem in the doctrine of election. He brought out that we are not chosen by God for anything in us, but then contradicted himself by bringing in self-esteem. Election was

never meant to feed our self-esteem. We all have too much of that already as a part of our sinful natures. Self-esteem is nothing more than a modern word for pride. Self-love, self-worth, self-esteem all fall into the same category, and they do not belong in the life of a Christian. When we rightly understand the doctrine of election it will humble us into the very dust of the ground. The doctrine election brings glory to God and ought to bring us into deep humility.

Isaac Watts had it right when he wrote,

Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?

'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly drew us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin.

What did Paul say in our text, in verse 3?

Notice the authority with which he wrote: "But I say, through the grace given unto me."

Do you remember in the Sermon on the Mount that the Lord said over and over, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time," usually referring to something that Moses wrote, but then He added, "But I say unto you..." You can have no greater authority than the Lord Jesus Christ. All He needed to say was, "But I say unto you." It was the equivalent of saying, "Thus saith the Lord" -- which we read over and over again in the OT. This was the authority of the OT prophets: "Thus saith the Lord."

Paul's authority was equal to that of the OT prophets, but it was designated authority. That is, it was authority given to him by God as an apostle. But whenever Paul wanted to say something that he wanted the people of God to notice, he might preface it with words like we have here: "But I say, **through the grace given unto me.**"

Paul's authority had come to him from God! He described it as "grace." This in itself was a statement characterized by humility. He was saying that he did not deserve the position he had, but he was carrying out what he had been divinely commissioned to write. Therefore, when we think of the Christian life, we must not forget this word found in the rest of the verse. (Read verse 3.)

Paul was not just speaking to the men, but lit. to all, to men, women, young people, children -- all who knew the Savior. Even one person who walks and/or who talks in pride can create great problems for any church. As Peter put it lit., we are to "be clothed with humility." Cf. 1 Pet. 5:5.

I hope you remember what I said two weeks ago about having our minds renewed! Sin has corrupted our thinking. We see illustrations of this every day we live. One of our Supreme Court justices announced his retirement this past week. He was probably a very brilliant man in many respects, but in at least one matter of great moral significance his thinking was corrupted, and some day, if he does not repent, he is going to have to face God for what he did in pushing the legalization of abortion.

But all of us by nature have corrupted minds. We do think more highly of ourselves than we should. Pride is woven into all that we say and do. And when you think of what Paul had said in verse 1 and 2, his words in verse 3 seem to be a warning that we can even be proud of our obedience to God. And when we are, that ruins it. Or we can be proud of the place we have in the body of Christ, or, to look ahead, we can be proud of the gifts that we have which God has given us to be exercised for His glory, NOT OUR GLORY! And, as our verse tells us, whatever place God has given us in the body of Christ, and however He may see fit to use us, it is always by "faith." This means that it is only by trusting Him that we can be or do anything that will glorify God, be a blessing to others, and bring contentment to our own hearts.

We need to learn "to think soberly." Not to think soberly is actually to be insane. When the Lord delivered the demon possessed man who broke chains and tore fetters apart, this word was used by Mark (5:15) to say that he was "in his right mind." The Bible indicates that a proud person is insane. He is like a drunk who needs to be sobered up. He says ridiculous things and does ridiculous things. They might be very acceptable to the world, but to God it amounts to insanity. Paul said,

For if a man think himself to be something,
when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself (Gal. 6:3).

Let me give you an example of thinking soberly. The words were written by Dr. James M. Gray who used to be the President of the Moody Bible Institute. Here is his testimony:

Naught have I gotten but what I received;
Grace hath bestowed it and I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase;
I'm only a sinner saved by grace!

Once I was foolish, and sin ruled my heart,
causing my footsteps from God to depart;
Jesus hath found me, happy my case;
I now am a sinner saved by grace!

Tears unavailing, no merit had I;
Mercy had saved me, or else I must die;
Sin had alarmed me, fearing God's face;
But now I'm a sinner, saved by grace!

Suffer a sinner whose heart overflows,
Loving his Saviour to tell what he knows;
Once more to tell it would I embrace--
I'm only a sinner saved by grace!

Only a sinner saved by grace!
Only a sinner saved by grace!
This is my story, to God be the glory,--
I'm only a sinner saved by grace!

Concl: These are the words of a man who was thinking soberly. He wasn't drunk on his own pride. He was seeing things clearly because he saw clearly who he was, and he saw clearly Who God was and Who the Lord Jesus Christ. I am a sinner; He is my Savior. I deserved hell; He is taking me to heaven. Pride was my ruin; grace has brought me salvation.

The Lord Jesus Christ has saved us. We are in His body, the Church. We are members of His body, with a special place and ministry which He has given us. Is this to feed my self-esteem? If it does, it is because I don't understand how much the Lord has done for me, and what it cost Him to save me and to put me in His Church.

All that God has done for us is for His glory, not ours. And in our relationship with God, with each other, and even with the world, we need always to remember that we are only sinners saved by grace!

If you are not a believer in Christ, if you are not trusting Him for your salvation, let me say that to ignore Him, or to neglect Him, or to feel that you are all right without him, is the worst kind of insanity. May the Lord make you sober this morning, and turn your heart in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ.

USING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Romans 12:6-8

Intro: I want to consider with you today verses 6, 7, and 8 of Romans 12. But before we turn to them, let me review with you what has gone before in this chapter.

Chapter 12 is the real beginning of the practical section of this letter to the church at Rome. In the first eleven chapters of Romans Paul taught them what they as Christians were to believe. Then from chapter 12 on he taught them how they were to live.

Their first responsibility (and ours), according to Romans 12:1, 2, was to give themselves to the Lord as living sacrifices. We present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. We do this once. We can recognize every day that we have done this, but we do it once. We do not do it over and over. However, every day we have to say "no" to the world, and "yes" to God, as far as our daily lives are concerned. Paul indicated in verse 2 that men naturally have had their thoughts corrupted by sin. And so we have to learn to think correctly, to think the way God wants us to think. We need to be concerned about what He wants us to do, and not just about what we want, or what other people want. This struggle (because that is what it is) will go on throughout our lives. But this is the way we grow and become stronger in the Lord. The Holy Spirit helps us. The Word of God shows us the way. But we are responsible before God to make sure that we are not continuing to be conformed to the world, but that we are seeking that transformation by which the God is making us more and more like His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second thing that we learn from Romans 12, in verses 3 through 5, is that when we are saved we are made members of a great spiritual body. Christ is the Head, and every true Christian is a member of this body. The body is called, the Church. All who truly know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior are members of His body. And, like a human body, we as members all belong, but we do not all have the same function. If we all were to do the same thing, then we would not be a body. A body has many different members. Each member fulfills its own particular function, and yet, at the same time, all of the members work in harmony with each other. Your body is an illustration of the body of Christ, the Church.

Now, beginning with verse 6 and going through verse 8, the Apostle gave seven member-functions that you will find in the Church. Let me point them out for you. (Read.)

Two other times Paul gave a list of members of the body. One

is in Ephesians 4, and the other is in 1 Corinthians 12. The one in Ephesians has to do with leaders in the Church; the one in 1 Corinthians also has to do with the leaders also, but it broadens out somewhat to other members of the body. 1 Corinthians 12 through 13 have to do with the subject of spiritual gifts.

None of these lists is necessarily complete. It is clear that we all have at least one gift, that is, a particular place or way in the body of Christ where the Lord expects to use us. We don't have to wait to find out for sure what our gift is. The Lord will make that clearer to us by the way He uses us. It is always important for others to recognize that we have a certain gift, or gifts. Sometimes people claim that they have certain gifts, but nobody else may feel that they do. So we need to pay attention to doors that are open to us, ways in which the Lord blesses us, and also that which gives us particular joy. Paul knew that he was called to preach the Gospel, and he knew also that he couldn't be happy doing anything else. And he was so devoted to the work that the Lord had called him to do that he would rather die than not do it. That is eventually what happened to him. He laid down his life because he would not stop preaching the Gospel of the grace of God.

Before we seek to define the gifts which Paul mentioned here, let me say one or two things about the use of our gifts.

Paul taught here in Romans 12 that we are to be humbled by the place that God has given us in the body. Even the apostles were not to be proud because they were apostles. Paul said that he wasn't worthy to be an apostle. We all should be able to say the same thing about the place that the Lord has given us in the body of Christ. Whatever it is, we are not worthy of it. It is ours by grace, and by grace alone. It is not some kind of a reward that we have earned; it is a gift, an honor, an undeserved honor, that the Lord has bestowed upon us. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote in verse 6 that our gifts are "according to the grace that is given to us." The Greek word for gift is _____, the root of which is the Greek word for grace, _____. So our gifts are not rewards; they are gifts, and that is why we speak of them as spiritual gifts.

A second thing that we learn from these verses is that no one of us is to try to do everything. God has given us our place in the body of Christ, and we are to serve the Lord where we are with the talents that we have. But one of the joys and blessings of the position that we have is that of working together with others. We always need to remember that we are members of a body, the body of Christ.

Then there is a third thing that I want to mention about spiritual gifts. They are to be exercised "according to the **proportion** of faith" (v. 6). What does this mean?

"The proportion" is the Greek word from which we get our English word analogy. This means that there is a direct relationship between our faith and the ability that we will have to exercise our gift. As we grow in the Lord, our faith in the Lord grows. And as our faith grows, so there will be an increase in our ability to do what the Lord has given us to do.

People often have the idea that if we have the gift from the Lord to do something that we will be immediately capable of doing that work with perfection. For example, if I have the gift of teaching, then I will be the best I can and better than anyone else. That is not what Paul was saying. He was saying that God gives us our gifts, but that our gifts are exercised by our faith. Therefore, as our faith grows because we are growing in the Lord, there will be greater blessing and great effectiveness in the exercise of the gift which we have. A growing faith is the result of our spiritual growth. As we learn to trust the Lord more, we are going to be more capable of serving the Lord in a manner that is more pleasing to the Lord, and more of a blessing to people, and with greater joy for ourselves.

Now let us look at the gifts which Paul mentioned here.

I mentioned that there are seven, and that there are two other lists in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Those other two lists begin with "apostles," and then go on to "prophets." Why is this different?

If you will look back verse 3 you will see that this list actually begins also with an apostle. Paul was speaking of himself as an apostle when he used the same expression that he used in verse 6: "through the grace given unto me." In verse 6 he said, "According to the grace that is given unto us." So he had his position in the body of Christ by the grace of God just as others did in their offices.

The first gift is:

I. "PROPHECY" (Rom. 12:6).

One thing we learn as we get better acquainted with the New Testament is that there were some gift which were temporary. The gift of healing was temporary. For example, even before the NT was completed we find that Paul left Trophimus at Miletus "sick" (2 Tim. 4:20). Evidently Paul did not have

the same power then that he had earlier in his ministry. The same can be said about speaking in tongues. As the Gospel became established among different groups, tongues were no longer used. What people call today speaking in tongues is not what the NT speaks of.

To some extent the same must be said about the gift of prophecy. NT prophets were preachers, but they were preachers who often spoke by divine revelation. More than that, they were preachers who built upon the revelations which God had already given. When the apostles spoke of Christ and His work, using quotations from the OT, they were exercising the prophetic ministry. Prophets were God's spokesmen, and they were to be very careful that what they spoke was in fact the Word of the living God! They all prophesied according to their understanding, but they were to make sure that they did not say anything that was not the Word of God. As their faith grew, so did their understanding, and so did their power and their effectiveness.

II. MINISTRY (Rom. 12:7).

This is a ministry which covers a lot which is done in any church. This is the word from which we get our word deacon, but it includes more than just the office of the deacon (although it includes that). It is a ministry of serving the Lord's people, a ministry of doing rather than a ministry of speaking.

Peter was contrasting this with the ministry of teaching when he wrote these words in 1 Pet. 4:11:

If any man **speak**, let him speak as the oracles of God;
if any man **minister**, let him do it as of the ability
which God giveth: that God in all things
may be glorified through Jesus Christ,
to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Think of all that goes on in a church, and among church people, which is primarily doing, not teaching. Here we have the work of our deacons, the people who prepare for our Communion Services, those who usher, those who serve refreshments on Tuesday and at other times, the men who tapes our services and mail them out, our Church Secretary, those who work in the nursery, those who make quilts for our newlyweds and their first babies. I could go on and on. It is interesting that the Lord places this before those who teach because the ministry of those who serve makes possible the ministry of those of us who teach of the Word. And it is equally interesting that deacons are mentioned in the book of Acts before elders. We see in all of this the high place of honor that the Lord gives to those who serve.

And all of this is to be done for the glory of God and is just as essential for the work of the Lord as anything else. Those of you who fall into this category are God's gift to Trinity Bible Church.

III. "HE THAT TEACHETH" (Rom. 12:7).

This includes many of us. How important it is that we teach the Word of God. And how important it also that our teaching get better and better. By that I mean that we show greater understanding of the Word so that we can be a greater blessing and inspiration to the people we teach. We need to revel in the truth so that those we teach will revel in it also. How wonderful it is to be able to teach like the Lord Jesus did on the road to Emmaus! He gave those disciples burning hearts as He opened the Scriptures to them.

If a person is going to teach, he has to study. And if he is going to study properly, he is going to have to pray. This is why we are all here: to be taught the great truths of the Word of God, and then to be shown how it is to be translated into our daily lives.

IV. "HE THAT EXHORTETH" (Rom. 12:8).

Two other possible translations of the word "exhorteth" is the word encourageth, or comforteth. The NIV has translated the first part of this verse in this way: "If it is encouraging, let him encourage." Or we could say, "He that encourageth, on encouragement."

When I was going through the darkest hours I have ever had in the ministry, there was a lady from Switzerland who, in addition to my own family, was my great encourager. I know that many were supporting me in prayer, but I was especially conscious that the Lord used dear Mrs. Edith Willies in those days to keep me going. She was my senior by a few years in the work of the Lord. She had been a missionary to South America, spoke four languages fluently, had walked closely with the Lord for many years, and she was my Encourager in those days. She had been supported by Central Bible Church from the time that she first went to the field. Lucille put together a notebook of letters that Mrs. Willies wrote to us during those days, and it is one of my most treasured possessions. And she never stopped writing those encouraging letters until the Lord took her home. She encouraged me by her faith which had been tested and proven through her years of fellowship with the Lord. What a dear she was!

Many of you have ministered to me in that way, and I have observed with thanksgiving how you have ministered to each

other. What would we do without that grasp on the arm, or that telephone call, or that letter? We all need our encouragers.

V. "HE THAT GIVETH" (Rom. 12:8).

The KJV seems to give the impression that there are some people who have the gift of giving. That may be true in some cases. I recently read the life of Henry Crowell, the founder of the Quaker Oats Company, a man who became very wealthy and who gave generously to the Lord's work, especially to the Moody Bible Institute. And such a person would be included here.

But this speaks of any of us when we are able to give. The Lord gives us what we have, and we need to honor Him with the money that He gives us, whether it be great or small. But let our giving be "with simplicity." This means that you and I are to be as generous as we can, and yet at the same time to be as quiet as we can about what we do. We are not to do it to get the praise of others. We are not to let even our right hand know what our left hand is doing. Cf. Matt. 6:3.

VI. "HE THAT RULETH" (Rom. 12:8).

This statement probably comes closer to singling out the work of the elders than any of the other gifts that are mentioned here. Elders are to be teachers, to be sure, but teaches do not necessarily need to be elders. However, it is the job of the elders to rule, to have the oversight of the Lord's work, and to make sure that it stays on track.

I am very thankful to the Lord that our elders are likeminded on this, but I have been in situations where you are always having to put on the brakes, or to keep the church on the road that the Lord intended for her to take. If you are engaged in that kind of work, always having to deal with people who want to go beyond the Word just to get a crowd, it can be very, very wearying! But those who rule are to be diligent! This means that they are to exercise the greatest care, and to do it eagerly and quickly. Churches today are being drawn away from the course laid out in the Word of God because there are so few among the leadership of our churches who are willing to rule. It is not always an easy task, nor a pleasant task, but it has to be done. The Church looks more like the world today than it does the Church because of failure at this point. And I say to the Lord's glory that we all should be thankful for the elders and the deacons that we have who are not afraid to stand for the truth of the Word of God -- in doctrine as well as practice.

The last point:

VII. "HE THAT SHOWETH MERCY" (Rom. 12:8).

Always remember that mercy is associated with misery. Where there is misery of any kind, there is the need for mercy. Mercy means to show compassion, and this can be by word, or deed, or both. An excellent example is in the Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan. A better example, the best example, is to be seen in our Lord's mission from heaven to earth to save us from the miseries we experience because of our sin -- the greatest of which is HELL!

This needs to be done in the church, but it also needs to be done in the world. Such compassion is often used by the Lord to open the heart of a sinner to the message of the Gospel. It takes time and it often takes money, but Paul's instruction to us is that it should be done "with cheerfulness."

This word, "cheerfulness," is the same expression that Paul used in 2 Cor. 9:7 where we read that we are to give, "not grudgingly, nor of necessity: for god loveth a cheerful giver." It lit. means that God loves a hilarious giver. And so if we are to show mercy with cheerfulness, we are not to do it reluctantly, nor because we feel that we have to, but we are to do it with very apparent joy, exuberant joy, because we have the privilege of helping someone in need. And we do it for the Lord's sake, because we know that this is one thing that pleases Him.

Concl: And there you have it -- one of several places in Scripture where we see God's pattern for His Church. It is to be seen in the body of Christ as a whole, but also in the local church, in our local church. If we are anything like this, let's not foolishly pat ourselves on the back. The glory belongs to the Lord, and so let us give it all to Him. And yet at the same time let us remember that statement, "according to the proportion of faith." No church is so good that it cannot become a better church.

When we read a passage like this we ought to feel like the disciples felt when they were told that they needed to forgive their brother seven times a day if he sinned and repented that often. They said, "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5).

These three verses, Romans 12:6-8, give us the Lord's plan for us His people. We need to have our faith increased so that, in trusting the Lord more than we do now, we shall be able to do an even better work of glorifying Him by being what He wants us to be, and by doing what He wants us to do.

THE WILL OF GOD FOR DAILY LIVING
Romans 12:9-14

Intro: Since beginning with the practical section of the book of Romans we have learned three things:

- 1) That we are to give ourselves to God as living sacrifices so that we may live according to His will.
- 2) That we are all members of a great spiritual body, the Church. And that, as such, we are members of each other.
- 3) That we all have a gift, or gifts, from God to be used in the ministry of the Church.

Now we know that all three of these great truths represent the will of God for us, His people. It is His will that we give ourselves to Him. It is also His will that we be members of the body of Christ. It is also God's will that each of us have a gift, or gifts, by which the Church is to be edified. And He has so gifted us. But as far as our daily living is concerned we are yet to be told what God's will is for our daily lives. And yet we were told in verse 2 of this chapter that we are to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." What, in particular, is the will of God?

The beginning of the answer is found in verses 9 and following. But it doesn't stop there; it goes on into chapters 13, 14, and 15. (Chapter 16 is devoted to greetings from Paul to particular people in the church at Rome.)

But the point I am making is that beginning with Romans 12:9 Paul became intensely practical. In a series of rather short statements Paul told the how they were to live. But, if you will look closely at those statements, you will see that they not only have to do with BEHAVIOR, but they have to do with CHARACTER. God is not just concerned about what we are going to do; He is concerned with what we are! If our obedience is merely an outward display, but does not come from the heart, it is hypocrisy. And the Lord has no use for hypocrisy. This is what the Lord found very objectionable about the scribes and Pharisees. They were hypocrites! They said a lot of good things, and they did a lot of good things, but it was all "show." In fact, the Lord said that they say, but do not! That is, they outwardly made a good appearance, but it did not come from the heart. And so the Lord totally rejected what they did.

That is often our problem. People outside of the church complain that there are hypocrites in the church -- and they are right! There are hypocrites in the church. But that does not mean that the Lord approves of them, nor does a true NT church approve of them. The OT and the NT severely con-

denn hypocrisy in any form!

This morning I am not going to take all of the verses from 9 to the end of the chapter, but we will only go, the Lord willing, to verse 14. That is about all that we will have time for. But I want to divide these six verses into three parts as follows:

- 1) In verses 9 and 10 Paul was speaking of love, the kind of love that you would expect to find in the church.
- 2) In verse 11 he was speaking of the Lord's work.
- 3) In the last three verses of our text, 12, 13, 14, Paul was speaking of trials.

Let us examine what Paul had to say about these three subjects.

I. LOVE (Rom. 12:9, 10).

If there is one characteristics you would expect to find among the Lord's people, it is love -- not mere human love, but divine love: "the love of God...shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

When our Lord was here on earth one of the things that He said about love to His disciples was this:

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,
if ye have love one to another (John 13:35).

The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:14,
We know that we have passed from death unto life,
because we love the brethren.
He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

So whatever else you might expect to find in the church, you should always be able to find love -- love for God, and the love that the people of God have for each other.

A. "Let love be without dissimulation" (Rom. 12:9a).

Paul said here that we should make sure that our love is "without dissimulation"! What is dissimulation?

That is a perfectly good, twentieth century English word, but probably most of us never heard it until we found it in our Bibles. It speaks of a person who tries to conceal one's true feelings or intentions by pretending to be just the opposite. That is why in most of our modern translations you will find the word hypocrisy. The NIV translates this statement, "Love must be sincere." Paul said that our love must be genuine. We must not only pretend that we love each other, but we must really love each other.

Now the very statement suggests that there are people in the church who are fakes. They are hypocrites because there is nothing to their pretended love. It behooves each one of us to search our own hearts to make sure that we really do love the people of God.

Judas Iscariot did a superb job of pretending to love the Lord when actually he didn't love the Lord at all.

But there is another way in which the love of the Lord's people can be tested, and this brings us to our second statement:

B. "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9b).

Most of don't like sin, and we don't want to sin, but how many of us really "abhor" sin? How many of us utterly detest sin? We all by nature have an interest in sin. We are curious about it. We may indulge ourselves in seeing others sin. But few really "abhor" sin!

If you abhor sin, you are like the Lord Jesus Christ. In Heb. 1:9 we read a quotation from Psalm 45 which is applied to our Lord, and it has this to say about Him:

Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity;
therefore God, even thy God,
hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness
above thy fellows.

It can be said of our Lord Jesus Christ that He loved righteousness and hated iniquity more than any person who ever lived. And what was the result? Did He miss something good out of life? Absolutely not! Although He was "a man of sorrows," yet His joy surpassed the joy of everyone else who has ever lived.

"Cleave to that which is good." "Cleave" comes from the Greek word for glue. Separate yourself from sin as far as possible, but get so close to that which is good that you can never been separated from it.

What is good? It is anything that has to do with God, and everything that has to do with pleasing God. We have a good God who does good, and who wants us to be good, i.e., like He is! The more you stick to God and are determined to please God, the greater your joy and blessing will be. And let us remember that we can't love God and sin at the same time.

It is very interesting to me to see how Paul began this practical part of the book of Romans.

Who in Scripture besides our Lord illustrates this? I would say that Joseph did. He was tempted every day by Potiphar's wife. One day he was carrying out his duties, and he found himself alone in the house with Potiphar's wife. She insisted that they engage in sin. Do you remember how Joseph answered her? Many men would not have even tried to resist such a temptation. But this is what Joseph said: **"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"** (Gen. 39:9). Joseph abhorred sin because he loved God so much.

That is the second thing that Paul had to say about love. What was the third? Look at verse 10.

- C. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10).

Without trying to get technical about the words that are used in this passage for love, let me point out that in verse 9 where Paul wrote, "Let love be without dissimulation," he used the word, ἀγάπη. But in verse 10 he used two words which have φιλέω as their root. Both are expressive of the love of God. In ἀγάπη we see God's loving choice; in φιλέω we see the intensity of God's love. God gets emotional about those of us who are members of His family, and He wants us to get emotional in our love for each other just as we are emotional in our love for our families. After all we are brothers and sisters in God's family if the Lord Jesus Christ is our Savior.

Think for a moment about how much we love our families, or let me state it this way — about how much you love your family. They have a place in our hearts which no one else has. The prodigal son's brother couldn't understand why his father got so happy when his sinning brother came back home, but I am reasonably sure that the reason was, because he was not yet a father. Do you remember what the father said after his prodigal son had returned? He called his servants, and told them to prepare a feast, and then said,

For this **my son** was dead, and is alive again;
he was lost, and is found (Luke 15:24a).

What are the key words in that verse? "MY SON!" "MY SON!" And everyone who attended that feast, and who shared that father's joy, was being "kindly affectioned...with brotherly love." ALSO DAVID'S CRY FOR ABSALOM - 2 SAM. 18:33.

When you and I love each other with the same kind of family love that we have for our own families in the flesh, then we are getting closer to what it means to be "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love."

How wonderful it is to be brothers and sisters in the family of God, and the Lord wants us to love each other that way because that is what we are.

The rest of the verse reads, "In honour preferring one another." What are we to learn from this?

The best way I know how to illustrate this so that we will all understand what Paul meant, is by asking you to remember how John the Baptist felt about the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were relatives, you know, probably cousins, related through their mothers. But John the Baptist gladly stepped aside when the Lord Jesus began His public ministry saying that "He must increase, but I must decrease." And all along John the Baptist had said that he was not worthy to untie the Lord's sandals. He spoke of the Lord as One Who was preferred before him.

How different were James and John early in their ministry when they wanted to sit on the right hand and the left hand of the Lord when He came into His kingdom!

What does this all mean? It means that we are to walk humbly before God and with each other, not driven by selfish ambition, but zealous for the glory of God.

Illus: Whitefield's comment about whether or not we will see John Wesley in heaven.

The next part of Paul's instructions have to do with:

II. THE LORD'S WORK (Rom. 12:11).

A. "Not slothful in business."

Paul meant by this statement that we are not to be lacking in diligence or zeal. We are all members of the body of Christ, and each one gifted in some way to serve the Lord. And we are to be diligent in whatever place the Lord has given us even though our efforts may go unnoticed. Laziness is totally unacceptable in the work of the Lord.

B. "Fervent in spirit."

The only other time this expression is used in the NT is in Luke's description of Apollos' ministry in Acts 18:25. This is the opposite of being "slothful in business." It means to be hot! It speaks of being zealous in serving the Lord, not just outwardly, but inwardly -- "in spirit."

C. "Serving the Lord."

We sometimes sing that hymn, "We have not known Thee as we ought." The fourth verse of that hymn goes like this:

We have not served thee as we ought;
 Alas! the duties left undone,
 The work with little fervor wrought,
 The battles lost, or scarcely won!
 Lord, give the zeal, and give the might,
 For THEE to toil, for THEE to fight.

It is easy to forget that we are serving the Lord, that we are the Lord's bondservants. He is worthy of our greatest zeal. Our best efforts fall far below what the Lord deserves from us. This does not call for some special assignment in the church, but doing what we are can do with the opportunities that are at hand. In the ordinary work of any day we should realize that we are serving the Lord.

I must hurry to conclude these verses which I have chosen as my text for the morning. Linking these with what has preceded, let me point out that faithful living (vv. 9, 10) leads to faithful service (v. 11), but both of these inevitably lead to trials and opposition in the work of the Lord. And so it should not be surprising to us to see that next in order Paul spoke of:

III. TRIALS (Rom. 12:12-14).

A. "Rejoicing in hope" (v.12).

David Brown, in his commentary on Romans in the JFB series, said,

It is more lively to retain the order and the verbs of the original: 'In hope, rejoicing; in tribulation, enduring; in prayer, persevering' (VI, p. 266).

One of the chief benefits of our trials in walking with the Lord and serving the Lord, is that it makes us look forward with greater anticipation and joy to the hope we have of glory. We are not to be here under the present conditions forever. We have but a short time to serve the Lord, and it must be done with joy in our hope even though the way is hard and the Enemy is always working against us. His doom is sure, and our victory in Christ is absolutely certain.

B. "Patient in tribulation" (v. 12).

The word "patient" does not mean that we sit and wait for the Lord's deliverance. It does mean that when the battle is the worst, we persevere. We do not give up the ship. We do not

surrender to the enemy. But we press on knowing that the outcome is sure, and that the victory will be claimed by our Lord in his own time and way.

C. "Continuing instant in prayer" (v.12).

We may not see prayer answered as soon as we would like, nor in the way we would like, but we continue on in prayer knowing that the Lord is our only hope. There is nothing like persecutions and trials to deepen us in our praying and in our realization of our need to trust the Lord for His blessing. All is lost unless the Lord blesses.

D. "Distributing to the necessity of saints, given to hospitality" (v. 13).

The "saints" are the people of God. In times when the church has suffered persecution, the saints have special needs. And their needs must be met. It is the work of the church to meet those needs, and homes to be opened to offer hospitality.

The idea of fellowship, sharing, allowing others to participate in what we have, is in the word "distributing."

"Hospitality" is the entertainment of strangers, meaning believers whom we may not know. Cf. the other time this word is used in the NT: Heb. 13:2:

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers:

for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

This is clearly a reference to the time when the Lord and two angels came to Abraham, and appeared to him as men. Cf. Gen. 18.

Finally we have,

E. "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not" (v. 14).

Instead of feeling bitter, and hoping for revenge, we need to be like our dear Savior Who on the Cross prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

We bless people by praying for them. We never know when the Lord may change the hearts of those who so strongly oppose the preaching of the Gospel.

Concl: And so the Apostle has spoken about the importance of love and what we love and who we love and how we love. He has shown us the importance of serving the Lord, and how we are to do that -- not the specific tasks, but the

spirit in which we are to serve. And finally what we are to do and how we are to behave when we face testings for the Lord's sake. Let us examine our own lives in the light of what we have seen in this passage to make sure that we are proving in these three areas "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

It is only as we live and serve in the Lord's way, that He will be glorified and we will see the blessing which we so earnestly desire and desperately need.

THE HUMBLE CHRISTIAN
Romans 12:15-21

Intro: We saw last Sunday that the Apostle Paul, beginning with verse 9 of chapter 12, and going to the end of the chapter, gave a series of brief commands in which he was giving guidance to the believers in Rome as to how they were to live. In other words, we have here a brief description of the Christian life.

We read first read over them it may appear that there is not much of a relationship between the commandments. But then, as we look at them more carefully, we can see that there are ways in which the commands can be grouped.

Last Sunday we considered verses 9 through 14. I chose to divide those commands into three groups -- and I trust that the Holy Spirit was leading me.

- I. LOVE (Rom. 12:9, 10).
- II. THE LORD'S WORK (Rom. 12:11).
- III. TRIALS (Rom. 12:12-14).

Today I would like to finish chapter 12 -- and here, it seems to me, that one theme is prominent in the last seven verses of the chapter: vv. 15-21. The theme is HUMILITY.

If there is one characteristic which should be prominent in the life of every Christian it is humility! That is clear from our Lord's words which are recorded in Matt. 11:28, 29. There we find that He said this:

Come unto me, all ye that labour
and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me;
for I am meek and lowly in heart,
and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Along this same line we have that great passage on the humiliation of Christ in Phil. 2, beginning with verse 5: "Let this mind be in you..."

In addition we have verses like 1 Peter 5:6, 7 which specifically exhort us to humble ourselves:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,
that he may exalt you in due time:
Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Our sin has made us proud, and pride will ruin us if it is allowed to dominate our lives. Pride keeps people from seeing their need of a Savior. A proud person has never seen the true condition of his heart before God. And pride con-

tinues to be a problem to those of us who know the Lord. Many of the trials we experience in life are ordered by the Lord to cause us to humble ourselves in His presence. One of the greatest purposes for all of the troubles Job experienced was to teach him greater humility of heart. We have his own testimony for that. Cf. Job 42:5, 6.

Now, thinking about our text, it seems to me that the Apostle Paul was thinking about humility in three different ways. You examine the text with me, and see if you agree.

First, in verse 15 and the first statement of verse 16, we have, HUMILITY AND COMPASSION. Second, in verses 16b we have HUMILITY AND OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD OURSELVES. Finally, in verses 17 through 21 we have HUMILITY IN RESPONDING TO WRONGS. Any person who has come to Christ for salvation has been humbled. It is humbling to have to admit that we are sinners in God's sight. It is humbling to have to admit that we cannot save ourselves. It is humbling to have to admit that our sins are so terrible in God's sight that His Son had to become a Man, suffer and die on the Cross, and be raised from the dead, in order to provide salvation for us. All of that is very humbling. And the reason, humanly speaking, that more people are not saved, is because people are not willing to humble themselves to that extent.

And so I say, without any fear of contradiction, that if you are a Christian, you have started along the path of humility. You and I have a long way to go to be as humble as we ought to be, but at least we have started. To be humbled before God means rest of mind and heart and body, and it also means blessing. Let us see what Paul had to say about HUMILITY.

I. HUMILITY AND COMPASSION (Rom. 12:15, 16a).

A. T. Robertson said that this fifteenth verse could lit. be translated, "Rejoicing with rejoicing people, weeping with weeping people" (IV, 405). This is compassion which is the product of humility.

Now let us make sure that we understand what we are talking about. What do we mean by humility?

The dictionary defines a humble person as one who is marked by meekness or modesty in behavior, attitude, or spirit. True humility must come from inside of any person; it has to come from the heart. A humble person shows respect for others, and does not insist on always having his own way. You don't have to be in a lowly place to be humble. There are many people in high places who are humble.

If you listened to the funeral service for former President Nixon this past week, you heard him eulogized as a compassionate man. That is another way of saying that he was humble. He noticed when people around him were having a hard time. That is a mark of humility. And this is what the Apostle Paul was saying in our text. (Read verse 15.)

The Persian king, Artaxerxes is an example of a humble man. He noticed one day when Nehemiah came to bring wine to him that Nehemiah was unhappy about something. And so he asked him what was wrong. He knew that Nehemiah had a sad heart. And Artaxerxes asked what the problem was because he was interested in making Nehemiah feel better. That is humility manifested by compassion.

The same thing can be said about the main man in our Lord's parable of the good Samaritan. The priest who went by had no time for the man who had been injured and robbed by thieves. He went by on the other side of the road. The Levite did the same. They didn't want to be bothered with the injured man. But the Samaritan came by, and our Lord said about the Samaritan, that "when he saw him," i.e., the injured man, "he had compassion on him" (Luke 10:33). And what did he do? Did he just sympathize with the injured man? No, he bandaged him up, took him to an inn, paid his expenses, and told the host of the inn that he would be back later to take care of any other expenses that it might have cost the host of the inn to take care of the injured man.

If you are going to rejoice with those who rejoice, you have to know who is rejoicing. And if you are going to weep with those who weep, you are going to have to know who is weeping. And this means that we have to be concerned about people. We have to be aware of what they are going through, and then be happy or be sad with them, as the case may be.

Now Paul was not talking about people who rejoice over the wrong thing, nor about those who are simply weeping because their pride has been hurt. He was speaking about legitimate reasons for rejoicing (like the man in Scripture who had found his sheep which was lost), or like weeping with Mary and Martha who were grieving over the death of their brother, Lazarus.

What I believe Paul was saying is that a humble person, one who is truly a Christian, is going to have compassion for people and, whenever possible, will do what he can to enter into either their joy or their sorrow. To do this is to be like God. He "hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants" (Psa. 35:27), and it is also said that "in all their affliction he was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9).

Now the test in this, especially with the rejoicing, is when a person may be rejoicing over some victory that you wanted. A person's humility is tested when he loses a race he wanted to win. How does he react toward the winner? Can he rejoice in another person's victory like he would have rejoiced in his own?

Now, to this statement in verse 15 Paul added the words which we find at the beginning of verse 16. They really belong to verse 15. Here are the words: **"Be of the same mind one toward another."** This means that, in as far as it is possible, you and I need to enter into the joys and sorrows of those about us, especially our fellow-believers. Without prying into other people's lives and making ourselves obnoxious to them, we must make other people's joys our joys, and other people's sorrows our sorrows. Humility and compassion are companion virtues.

But let us go on to the second point:

II. HUMILITY AND OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD OURSELVES (Rom. 12:16b).

The Apostle's word is this: **"Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate."**

Paul was not advising people to be without ambition or without goals, but he was warning them not to be always seeking the highest positions. James and John (and their mother for them) were minding high things when they wanted the chief seats on the right hand and left hand of the Lord when He established His kingdom on earth. Cf. Mark 10:35-45. The Lord rebuked them for such a request saying that while that might be the way men ordinarily make requests, it was not to be the way His people act and live. And then our Lord said this:

Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:
and whosoever of you will be the chiefest,
shall be servant of all.

For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto,
but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many
(Mark 10:43b-45).

Our Lord practiced what He preached when, in the Upper Room with His disciples shortly before His death, He took a towel and a basin of water and proceeded to do the work of a household servant, He washed their feet!

We can do no better than to do as our Lord did. Humility is manifested when do not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. See Rom. 12:3.

On the other hand, we are to "condescend to men of low estate." When Samuel came to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the King of Israel, he did not think enough of his youngest son even to bring him in. But he was God's choice, a lowly shepherd boy, but a man after God's heart.

Some people are always pushing themselves into the limelight, but we need to pay attention to the people who never say anything. It is usually the case that the still water is deep; the noisy water is shallow.

Our Lord's birth is an example of "men of low estate." And the same is true of the men whom the Lord chose to be His disciples. Sometimes those who are the poorest in this world's goods are the richest in faith, although rich men, too, can be lowly in heart.

The last of this verse reads, "Be not wise in your own conceits." The NIV renders this, "Do not be conceited." Paul meant that no one was to think that he had all of the wisdom, and that his opinion was always the right opinion. Ahithophel was a man wise in his own conceits. And when Absalom did not take his advice, he set his house in order and then committed suicide. Cf. 2 Sam. 17:23. Solomon advised his son, "Be not wise in your own eyes" (Prov. 3:7a). Solomon also wrote,

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes:
but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise
(Prov. 12:15).

I was the pastor of a church at one time where we had a man on the board who always knew what we should do, and he always said so. One day one of the other board members wisely asked him, "How is it that you always know so much when you never listen?" Solomon and the Apostle Paul would have approved of that question. A humble man is always most wary of himself.

But let us go on to the last five verse where we have:

III. HUMILITY IN RESPONDING TO WRONGS (Rom. 12:17-21).

One of the greatest tests of our character as Christians is to be seen in the way we respond toward those who do something wrong to us. Our natural response is to get even with them, and maybe to do something a little bit worse to us than they have done to us. And usually we want to be the ones who do whatever is going to be done. We don't like it when people take advantage of us. The Apostle Paul evidently felt that this was a major problem among Christians because he devoted so much space to it.

In verse 17 we have the negative instruction first, and then the positive. "Recompense to no man evil for evil." That is the prohibition. The positive side is this: "Provide things honest in the sight of all men."

A person has done you harm in some way. He has sinned against you. Paul said that you are never to do something bad to another person just because that person has done something bad to you. You don't repay people in kind when it comes to injuries. It makes no difference whether it is a man or woman, nor what the color of his skin may be, nor whether he is a friend or an enemy, nor whether a believer or an unbeliever. Retaliation is out!

Instead, "Provide things honest in the sight of all men." Notice how both statements are all-inclusive. Instead of doing wrong because you have been wronged, let your response be that which people generally will look upon as good and right and totally unexpected in circumstances like this. Your enemy expects you to get even; surprise him by doing something good for him.

Verse 18 gives us another special insight into a problem where someone has wronged you. The Apostle indicated here that the responsibility to get this settle lies with you. Now Paul said, "If it be possible," meaning that it is not always possible. And when you have done what you can to resolve it, you should not feel guilty if what you have done is turned down.

"As much as lieth in you" is an interesting statement, isn't it? And it is also very important. Lit. it could be translated, as to yourselves (Interlinear Greek New Testament, p. 428) or so far as what proceeds from you (Robertson, IV, 406). Paul was saying that what you have in you by way of true spiritual maturity, true spiritual resources, is what will determine how far you can go in resolving the difficulty. The Lord said, **"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God"** (Matt. 5:9).

What lies in you? The truth that you know. The wisdom that you have. The way you have learned to trust the Lord. The confidence you have in the sovereignty of God.

The trouble with many Christians is that they don't have much inside! And we are not always inclined to see the spiritual side of the troubles we face. The Lord could obviously have prevented them, but He didn't. And so it becomes a testing time for us who have been sinned against in some way. We want peace, but not peace at any price. It has to be peace in terms of what is right before God.

At this point Paul resorted to the Scriptures to prove what he was saying lest the Romans think it was just his advice to them. And so he repeated, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves." Don't retaliate. Don't try to vindicate yourself or to punish the other person. That is God's business. And Deut. 32:35 is the proof.

Paul was quoting from the Psalm which Moses taught the children of Israel to sing. And the song was to be used to prevent them from doing the wrong things. Here is what Deut. 32:35 says, and obviously the Lord is speaking:

To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense,
Their foot shall slide in due time:
for the day of their calamity is at hand,
and the things that shall upon them make haste.

Wrongs do not go unnoticed by the Lord. He will repay, and His vengeance will not be long in coming. We are to seek peace, but to leave the retaliation to the Lord. I repeat, that is His business!

What are we to do? Again the Apostle Paul turned to the Word of God. This time it was Prov. 25:21, 22, which reads in its OT setting,

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat;
and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:
for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,
and the Lord shall reward thee.

When we don't know what to do, the best thing is to turn to the Word of God for guidance. Cf. Psa. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

Commentators have differed as to the meaning of this reference to "coals of fire." Some commentators take it as meaning a form of judgment. But in the light of verse 21 it is more likely that it means that, if anything can win over our enemy, it will be through an act of kindness and not an act of revenge. Whatever the true meaning may be, we must follow what Scripture tells us to do, and leave the outcome to the Lord.

The last verse of the chapter, verse 21, tells us that we are not to let the evil defeat us (as it will if our hearts are full of a desire to get even), but we are to be the victors, overcoming the evil with that which is good in God's sight, and that which even our enemies would have to admit is returning good for the evil which has been done to us.

Concl: Can you see how humility leads to holy conduct?
There is nothing so attractive as true humility of

heart and life. And what is best, there is nothing more Christ-like. If anyone ever had reasons abundant to be filled with resentment and a feeling of revenge, it was our Lord. But instead, what person is there who has read the Scriptures and yet can forget those gracious words which our Lord spoke from the Cross: **"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"** (Luke 23:34)? That is not human; that is divine. And while we cannot find in our hearts such a feeling of forgiveness, yet the Lord Who lives in us can give it to us.

There isn't a one of us here today but has had, and will have again, occasions where we will need this passage of Scripture to help us when we are having trouble with somebody. Let us remember that we are to seek for peace -- if it is at all possible. At the same time we are to leave the recompense to the Lord. When we trust the Lord to do His part, and we seek by His grace to do our part, then He will be glorified, we will be at peace, and it may be that an enemy will not only become a friend, but will join us on our way to heaven as a child of God.

Closing verse: Micah 6:8.