

Jan. 2, 2000

"The Creator, Humanity and Sex"
Romans 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

- I. The nature of humankind as sexual beings
 - A. Gen. 1:26-27 People made "in Our (God's) image," i.e., with God's eternal potential, in day six of creation.
 - B. Gen. 2:18-25 A male was made eternal (God breathed into him an eternal spirit) in day seven, but he felt incomplete without a companion with an eternal nature also. The God of creation met that companionship need by involving the male in creating a female companion of another gender (sex). They were by God's designation a family, man and wife,.
 - C. Gen. 6:3-7 Mankind from the beginning of their history disappointed God who made them, and the Lord promised that his Spirit would not always strive with mankind. (Gal. 5:16-18; II Thes. 2:7)
 - D. Gen. 19:4-11 The depth of mankind's sin against God was expressed by deviating (through homosexuality), i.e., from God's original plan of sexual intimacy (heterosexuality), i.e., between a male and female as man and wife. (Review Gen. 2:23-25) [I cite this original male-female condition as man and wife, because Jesus recalled this same concept in discussing male-female relations in Mk 10:2-12. - WA]
- II. Biblical testimony against pseudosexual (carnal, not natural) activities between people of the same sex:
 - A. Old Test. Gen. 19:5,24-25; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:17; I Kings 14:24
 - B. New Test. Rom. 1:18-32 (esp. vss. 24,26-27); I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:9-10;
 - C. Necessity of spiritual perspective, Matt. 16:23; I Cor. 2:14
- III. Sexual activities of a married (publicly committed) couple of one male and one female are pleasing to God.
 - A. Old Test. Gen. 1:28; 9:7; Prov. 5:18-23;
 - B. New Test. Mk 10:2-9; I Cor. 7:1-9; 11:11-12; Eph. 5:31-33; I Tim. 3:2,12; 4:1-5.
- IV. Sexual awareness and stimulus development in humans
 - A. Born with sex (gender) already determining physical features and characteristics, but innocent (neutral) in sexual stimulus
 - B. Physical desires regarding sexual urges develop during chronological period referred to as puberty, i.e., that time in person's life when he or she is capable of reproducing another human. This time in life can vary over a considerable period, but usually the time occurs at 12 years in girls and 14 in boys.
 - C. Well before and especially during a youngster's reaching the puberty stage, normal behavior patterns should be nurtured by proper instruction and introduction by caring and loving parents. (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:1-4; II Tim. 3:13-16)
 - D. In the early years of a child when the transitional period between childhood (sexual innocence) and adulthood (sexual awareness) is occurring, an individual usually confronts a mixed feeling

between his or her maleness and femaleness. This mixed feeling is most often due to the gradual introduction of those glandular products of secreted hormones produced in the ovaries of the female and in the testicles of the male. This period of adolescence is related for David in I Sam. 18:1-4 just after he had slain the giant, Goliath of Gath. David and Jonathan became especially enamored of each other. David's later relationship with females leaves no doubt concerning his later sexual maturation. (I Sam. 18:27; II Sam. 11:2-5)

V. Sexual relations are well defined and ordered in the Bible. The special relationship of a male and female married couple who share mutual sexual intimacies should involve a unique, distinctive, and one-of-a-kind sharing. That oneness is so distinctive that the Bible refers to it as "one flesh," or like to Christ's relationship to his bride, the church. (Eph. 5:31-32) Marriage of a woman and man is therefore sacred, i.e., it is an intimate merger of one each of the two genders which God created for such a relationship in the beginning. When persons practice activities involving sexual excitation and consequent activities outside such a marriage (sacred, sanctioned by God), the end result can be nothing short of distress, anxiety, shame, disorder, guilt or misery in the short and/or long term of life. God's word is very specific regarding the nature and intent of why he created the two genders within humanity. There are, in my opinion, two primary reasons for why God made the two genders. First, the obvious one is the procreation of the human race. But, there is another reason which is more difficult to express and less definable. The emotional sense of well-being and self-esteem resulting from sexual expression in a God-approved married state is so distinctive that only a loving God Almighty could have created such. It is possible to reach a sexual, sensual, emotional experience through other activities than a Biblically approved marriage, but as clearly defined in Rom. 1, such displeases our God. Also in that same chapter (vss. 20-22) declares that he has built into the conscience of all men a sure feeling of guilt for those who practice such a perversion of God's original purpose of mankind's two distinct genders. The Judeo-Christian Bible makes very clear that mankind can and do practice sexual activities other than those pleasing to our God such as prostitution, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, against another's will (rape), and fornication, but that same Bible makes such human conduct contrary to the will and purpose of humanity's Creator. It is common for those who practice sexual irregularities also to practice other hurtful activities in defiance of God's will. Paul is explicit in Rom. 1:24-32 to enumerate a group of such companion evils along with the practice of homosexuality.

VI. Conclusion: At Matt. 19:10-12 Jesus gives three reasons why some persons cannot enjoy marriage. Those born impotent, have been neutered, or choose to devote full and exclusive time to God's work. This passage should not be interpreted to mean that homosexual lifestyles are inbred, innate, inherent, inborn, intrinsic, or natural such as physical deformity, race, or skin-eye-hair color. Homosexuals are those who become sexually attracted to persons of the same gender through sexual immaturity and an ungodly choice. Examples of other such ungodly (sinful) choices are: polygamy, pedophilia, masochism, and sadism.

Jan. 9, 2000

"The Law and the Spirit"
Romans 2

Couples Class
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Teacher

I. Introduction to Romans: On Paul's third missionary journey, he spent over three years in Ephesus and went thereafter to Corinth in Greece in the winter and spring of 58 AD. (See Acts 20:3) He had every intention of going to the capital of the Empire, and if God permitted, to Spain also. (See Acts 19:21; 23:11; Rom. 15:24). Recall that his Rome visit was delayed for over two years while he was imprisoned in Caesarea. Phoebe, a deaconess in the neighboring Cenchrea church, (Rom. 16:1-2) was about to leave for Rome and very probably carried the letter to the Roman believers. The church at Rome was most likely started by the Jews and Jewish proselytes from Rome who attended the first Pentecost celebration in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus, see Acts 2:10. Also, the Roman believers could have been started or reinforced by those who were forced out of Jerusalem following the murder of Stephen, see Acts 8:4; 11:19. There is no Biblical evidence that any one of the apostles started the body of believers in Rome. They did know through the letter we are discussing about Paul as early as 58 AD when it was delivered to them by Phoebe. The Scriptural evidence of this fact is found in Acts 28:15 where believers from Rome rushed down to meet Paul all the way south of Rome at Appii Forum and The Three Taverns. When Paul's letter to them arrived, the beliefs understood and practiced by the believers in Rome were probably very rudimentary, especially regarding the problems relating the Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah with the Gentile believers who worshiped with them. However, Paul had been declaring that God also accepted nonJews throughout the Mediterranean Basin, and it is likely that some such believers had moved to Rome from there. To reconcile doctrinal differences, which no doubt were held among the congregation at Rome, was Paul's deliberate purpose in writing this letter to them. This purpose he stated in 1:16-17 and introduces what may be called Paul's understanding of the religious meaning of the world's history. The Roman letter does, without doubt, contain the fullest and most systematic exposition of not only Paul's teaching but also his own character.

II. Summary of Rom. 1: Paul outlined the universal ungodly practices of all humanity. He included his own persuasion that all people are worthy of spiritual separation from the loving God who created them. He, as a result of that persuasion, concluded that the only power able to salvage human spirits was the Good News (Gospel) brought to the world by and through Jesus, God's Messiah. Paul was, in this context (everyone is short of God's glory), happily willing to profess a lack of shame for relying upon the Gospel of Christ and its power to save. In fact, his everyday living was entirely justified by that reliance in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And further, that "power of God unto salvation" is available to all Jews and all nonJews alike, anyone who will believe, Rom. 1:16-17; Philip. 2:9-13.

III. Rom. 2 Because everyone is guilty before God, no person is able to judge another person's spiritual condition in God's sight.

That judgment is exclusively God's prerogative, and every person's deeds is evaluated by God who has no respect for one person over another, whether Jew or nonJew. Paul (God's Word) then is telling us that if we set ourselves up as spiritual judges, we are not only attempting to usurp God's exclusive prerogative, but also condemning ourselves, Jam. 2:10. The only way a human can judge another is by citing a breaking of God's law, and God has assigned that responsibility exclusively to the only perfect (without sin) human who ever lived on earth, the God-man, Jesus Christ, 2:16. Paul stresses that God has demonstrated extreme, ultimate patience with mankind's weaknesses and rebellion. The purpose for this delay of judgment by God on all humanity is to show his love through forgiving grace and thereby bring about repentance and eternal life, Rom. 2:3-7. Paul then relates Jews and Gentiles in their willingness to follow God's will, i.e., believe that Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah. God's judgment will fall on those of both groups who disobey him. The Jews have had a special advantage in that God gave them the law (tenets of God's will). The Gentiles, on the other hand, did not have the written law to guide them, but God did put his eternal spirit in them so that they actually have an inner conscience to guide them. The final evaluation is not based on what one knows to be God's will, but the deeds produced by the knowledge which everyone has. One cannot boast about what he or she knows about God's nature and will, but about what his or her life demonstrates or fails to show of Godliness in daily living, Jam. 2:18. The fruits of the right spirit determines if the person's spirit is from above (God's throne). In this regard note all of the evil human acts given in Rom. 1:21-31. A person can know that God's law (will) makes it clear that one should not steal, but steals; should not commit adultery, but commits adultery; should not give credence to idols, but commits sacrilege (covets - Col. 3:5). God's name is held in contempt by those who do not know him, because unbelievers observe those who profess to know God and who, at the same time, do those things which the unbelievers know (from their eternal nature) God hates. Take, for instance, circumcision (baptism) is supposed to indicate that one is living within God's will. However, if one who has been circumcised (baptized), conducts his or her life in disregard of God's influence, the professed willingness to follow God's will is shown to be null and void, a farce. A true believer (Jew or Christian) is one whose inner spirit is controlled by God's Spirit, not one who knows God's law. The genuineness is known by the following of God's Spirit, not just knowing his law (letter). God makes the final decision.

IV. Review: Can a person be right with God (spiritually salvaged, born again) and always act as God's children, i.e., act as God wants him or her to in every detail? (See I John 1:8-10; but see also John 3:14-16; "- - whosoever believeth in him should not perish. but have everlasting life." John 10:28-29 "- - neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. - - no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Eph. 1:13-14; "- - after you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of [God's] promise which is the deposit of the purchased [with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection] possession - -."

Jan. 16, 2000

"The Jews, Law, and Grace"
Romans 3

Couples Class
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I. If Gentiles can be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, was there an advantage in being a Jew? Was there an advantage in keeping the Abrahamic covenant? Yes, Paul states, those mechanical rites ever kept before the Jewish nation and its citizenship the fact that Abraham believed God (demonstrated faith in God's promise), and God equated that faith with righteousness (pleasing to God), Heb. 11:8-10; Gal. 3:6. Further, the law (which here also includes the prophets and poetic books as well as the Pentateuch, Law) was communicated to mankind through God's people who were chosen to disseminate that explicit knowledge of God's will to all humanity. But they (God's people later known as Israelites and Jews) did not do God's bidding to be evangelists of God's will (Law) through the world. They became too concerned with temporary matters rather than everlasting, spiritual truths, Matt. 23:13-15.

II. Paul is quick to proclaim that while it is true that the nation of Israel as a whole did not follow God's leading, some of them did. The fact that God was not believed by all did not destroy or make untrue the "faith of God." This reference to "God's faith" is most interesting. We continually think of people having faith in God, and here Paul refers to God's faith! To understand what Paul intended to communicate in using this term, we probably should examine how "faith" is meant in Scriptures. There is first a reference to a faith which means the totality of ones faith in Jesus as God's Savior, one could say the true Christian faith, see Jude 3-4. Second, there is faith referring to that which is really unworthy of trust in a person or cause. For example, a person can be depending upon (have faith in or trust) rules, laws, ordinances, things, power over others, prestige, popular opinion, or ones family background, etc., Mk 3:24; John 8:33, 37. Third, assurance or reliability can be expressed by the term faith. This is used in Heb. 11:1 where faith is defined as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Fourth, faith can be simple belief (as a little child, Mk 10:15) which James uses in his letter at 2:14-26 where some people say, "I believe" with no commitment. That use of the word "faith" as just knowing the Law as God's will, but not incorporating it into ones life. James contrasts belief (which the devils themselves have about God) with true faith which is demonstrative belief. Fifth, as Paul brings out in vs. 3, means loyalty, faithfulness, or reliability. The "faith of God" means that God is reliable and can be depended upon. Paul is saying that, although men do not all accept God's offer of eternal life, God has not changed his mind or offer. Even if everyone refused to accept God's love in Jesus Christ (John 3:16), God will still remain the same. If God changed his position, i.e., that mankind should live by faith in God, God would thereby reveal inconsistency and unrighteousness. (I, [God], promised you eternal life [for believing in Jesus], but if you sin, it is only temporary !!, I Cor. 1:9; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; I John 2:1; 3:20). Paul was quick to state that he was uttering such a thought as a mortal.

Mankind's decision not to live by faith in God reflects on people's wrong, not in any way reflects negatively upon God. God's correctness is proved consistent by sending his Son and placing on him the sins of all who will trust (have faith in, rely upon) him. Jesus is accepted by God as a sacrifice for any person who will believe that he is, in fact, God's Son, a personal Savior for that person who trusts him. Is it necessary for a person to sin to prove that Jesus will be able to save him or her? (Paul's position was so interpreted by some, i.e., if faith saves, then one could say he or she has faith and not worry about living contrary to God's will.) Paul says that not one person can claim justly that he or she is without need for forgiveness by God. Jesus said as much in John 5:46-47 when he said that he himself was truly the personification of the righteousness of God's promise in the Old Testament. The recurring theme in this chapter is the universal unrighteousness (displeasing God) of all people, vss. 9,10,11,12,13-18,19,20,23. The law, in essence, makes people know that they must have more than an attempt to keep that law in order to please a holy and just heavenly Father who loves them, Gal. 3:24.

III. Now Paul refers to the "righteousness of God," another term as interesting as "faith of God" used above. After stating that those who know the law (the Jews) and who say they are keeping it to so please God, have, in fact, failed. According to Paul's position (vs. 19), the law condemns every person in God's sight, and therefore God had to furnish his own righteousness to cover mankind's sins. This position is not strange, because the law and prophets witness to this fact, Psa. 14. The Law's value is in indicating to people that they need something (actually someone) more, to be happy and satisfied in God's presence. That "righteousness of God" is childlike faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ. This faith is number three above, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is faith like Abraham had, one which causes one to become a child of God and act like it! (See fourth faith above and Matt. 18:3) Justification before God is a free gift by his grace through God's redemption (redeeming, purchasing for repossession) that he prepared through sacrificing Jesus Christ. God forever can be declared just by everyone, because he justifies anyone who accepts his displacement of unrighteousness through believing in his Son who lived perfectly and died specifically for salvaging people's spirits (their everlasting nature). It is not possible for one to claim correctly such a spiritual quickening by ones own merits and boast of such as self-accomplishment. Paul then, as a result of the above, uses another strange term, "the law of faith." Again, this faith is that attitude and will that makes one act like a child of God that he or she has become through that faith. In other words, people who have become God's children through faith in Jesus Christ want to keep God's law, i.e., do his will. On the other hand, keeping God's law, according to ones own judgment, will not make one a spiritual child of God (reborn from above), John 14:6. Paul says that by exercising our faith in Jesus Christ as God has ordained, we thereby create the desire to do God's will because of what he has done for us as sinners (those spiritually separated from God). Oddly enough then, our faith in Christ, rather than eliminating the need for the law, establishes the desire to keep it.

Jan. 23, 2000

"Exercising Faith"
Romans 4

Couples Class
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I. Introduction: Paul has made his position clear in Chap. 3 that a person is not spiritually salvaged by his or her own good deeds, but rather desires to do what God wants done because God has through his own (God's) righteousness in Jesus Christ, shown grace to every believer by making him or her eternally alive spiritually. In other words, the desire to do good works that are pleasing to God follow spiritual salvation, but do not produce that salvation. By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God, Rom. 3:20, but evidence of ones right relationship with the Heavenly Father will be seen in his or her attitude and actions, Jas. 2:24. Now, in this next chapter (4) Paul calls to mind examples, Abraham and David (especially Abraham), two who pleased God through having faith in God's promise and then exercised their faith through their lives.

II. The faith of the Jews was grounded solidly (so they thought) in the fact that they were descendants of Abraham (John 8:36-44), and there is Biblical evidence that many early Christian believers had reservations about the part that lineage played in being right with God, Gal. 2:11-21; 3:2-3,6-7. Paul asked the rhetorical question about Abraham's spiritual accomplishments on his own. Did the welfare of Abraham's spirit rest upon a choice of doing what God requested? No, his eternal well-being was assured by simply believing what God promised him, Gen. 15:6. Had his spiritual destiny rested upon his own efforts, he could have boasted about how great he was to have accomplished so great a courageous feat. Paul reveals God's righteous requirement is simply believing God's promise. Abraham believed God was honorable and would therefore honor his promise. His belief, in a figure, wiped his sinful spirit clean. His belief was accounted to his spiritual account as righteousness in God's sight. If Abraham had earned his favor with God, God would have owed him his spiritual reclamation. Such an arrangement would have meant that God would not have had to exercise grace in reclaiming a human spirit. Every human spirit that is made right with God is justified by God himself through that human spirit's simple belief in God's promise in his word. Jesus claimed himself as the link between every person and God's perfect requirement in John 3:14-16; 14:6. Note the simplicity of the process. When the genealogical children of Abraham (the Jews, Israelites) were in the wilderness after God's freeing them from Egypt, the people sinned (disbelieved God's promise), and the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, Num. 21:4-9. Those who were bitten by the venomous snakes died physically. The sinful people asked Moses to pray and seek God's mercy and help. Moses was instructed by God to make a likeness of one of the serpents and raise it on a high pole so that it could be seen by anyone who would look in its direction. If a person were bitten by a snake, all he or she had to do to continue living was to do what God had promised, i.e., look at the likeness of the serpent. Simply viewing the likeness meant life instead of certain death. In God's Second Covenant based upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

Christ, all one has to do to be assured of spiritual life eternal with God himself is to look to Jesus and trust God's promise through him. With a child-like faith one is spiritually salvaged through this simple promise of God, Matt. 19:14. What a mystery! What a promise! Please note that God did not tell Moses to have a concerted snake-kill or even to set up a counseling program for those family members whose family had been stricken by the calamity. They were not to kill the ring leaders who were exciting the people to complain against God's promise to lead the Israelites onward to God's promised land. Neither were the people encouraged to reverence or worship the likeness of the serpent, but, in fact, some did later, II Kings 18:4. The simplicity of becoming a spiritual child of God, an eternal citizen of God's kingdom, is so uncluttered and without adulteration that "the proclaiming of the cross is to them that perish [sheer] foolishness," I Cor. 1:18.

III. Chap. 4:6-25: The Christian believer is to seek with all his or her heart to please God as led by God's Holy Spirit, but not to justify oneself before God. Only faith in what God did through his Son, Jesus Christ, satisfies God according to God's account. Then Paul underscores his position (God's) regarding God's grace by citing Psa. 32:1-2. There David relates how God had forgiven him, not maintaining his condition as sinful (separated from God), after confessing his sinfulness., see also Psa. 51. God had made him happy by assuring him that his sin would no longer be charged against (imputed to) his account. Again, referring to Abraham, Paul states that the patriarch had, in fact, received God's promise before the sign or symbol of the relationship represented by circumcision. Abraham was promised by God, God's blessing (heir of the nations of the world) even before the Law was given. The Law outlines a perfection which God requires that indicates mankind's inability to please God while in the flesh, Rom. 3:20; 7:22-25; Gal. 2:16-21. Therefore, only faith can make any person justified in God's sight. In other words, God makes what is impossible for a person to accomplish by himself or herself, possible, through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Consider this, Paul states, God promised Abraham an offspring when he was about one hundred years old and Sarah, his wife, was much older than a human female who can naturally conceive and bear a child. And yet, Abraham did not doubt God's promise but rather was "fully persuaded" that what God had promised, God would deliver. That persuasion (faith) was imputed (credited with, ascribed as, accounted as) as being right (righteous). Now, in the Second (current) Covenant, all people everywhere are being asked by God not only to believe (trust, be persuaded) that God resurrected his only begotten Son, Jesus, the Messiah (Savior), back to life again after he had died physically, but also, that believing that will also assure ones own resurrection to eternal life (forever together with God spiritually). Jesus was committed to hell (separated from God temporarily, Acts 2:31; I Pet. 3:18-22.), even though he had never deviated from God's will, even once. His resurrection was performed precisely so that those who have personal faith in God's Son, Messiah-Savior, will be justified before their Creator God and Heavenly Father. What a mystery! What a promise! Praise God from whom all blessing flow!

Jan. 30, 2000

"Jesus and Adam"
Romans 5

Couples Class
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I. Introduction: The first four chapters of Paul's letter to the believers in Rome in about 58 AD had to do with God's justifying sinful persons who exercise faith in Jesus Christ. The following four chapters (5-8) relate how believers are to respond to God's loving generosity, his grace through Jesus Christ, his Son. Now that one is through the door of God's grace and is spiritually salvaged, how does one live the remainder of one's physical life (in the flesh)? One's faith has granted citizenship into God's kingdom and that begins the salvation process as heir of all of God's precious promises made also to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, etc., I Cor. 15:20-28; Heb. 11:39-40. What should one expect in a life nurtured by God in the person of his Holy Spirit? Everlasting life is as sure as God's promise which can not be voided by anything or anyone in all of God's creation. With God's promise of eternal life comes also God's promise of eternal forgiveness, for the two are inseparable, Rom. 8:38-39; I Cor. 4:3-5; I John 1:8-10; 2:1; 3:20.

II. Chap. 5:1-6 Based upon what Paul has made clear in the first four chapters and especially his conclusion in the last sentence in chapter four, he now announces his glorious conclusion at the beginning of this chapter, Chapter Five. We (those who are trusting God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ) are now unquestionably justified before God's throne. Since this relationship has been made indelible by God himself through Jesus Christ, we believers have peace with our Creator, Almighty God. Further, we have continual access by that same faith that initiated our relationship with God, to his bountiful, unlimited, loving grace. Therein we have taken our stand and rejoice in that hope which reflects the very glory of God himself. We do not consider sorrows or tribulations in our temporary, fleshly lives to cause that hope to be severed or even to waver at all. In fact, we glory in the very midst of those sorrows and tribulations knowing that God's promise makes us sure through them all. The tribulations for us believers temper us to have patience through the adverse experiences which, at the same time, strengthens our hope in God's promise through Jesus Christ. This childlike hope makes us (what for unbelievers would be shame) bold to demonstrate God's love as his Holy Spirit reveals his will for us. We are humbled by the fact that we know even before his Spirit convicted us of our need to trust in God's righteousness in Jesus Christ, we were ungodly and without the power to love God and seek to please him. But God interceded in our lives on our behalf, and in due time sent Christ to die and thereby redeem us.

III. Chap. 5:7-11 One can believe perhaps that a person could be convinced to sacrifice his or her own life to save the life of one other person, especially if the one to be saved were an exemplary personage. But observe what God has done for every believer, even sacrificed his only begotten Son so that we (every believer) can enjoy life forever with the Heavenly Father. Not only are we justi-

fied by Jesus' blood (life), Lev. 17:11, 14, but note especially the way "blood" and "life" are related in Rom. 5:9-10. Christ's death (sacrifice) reconciles a believer to God, but Christ's resurrection to life is the assurance for every believer of eternal life beyond the grave (physical death). Yes, it is God's Christ (Messiah, Savior) who is the one who alone established the reconciliation bridge between the Creator and his wayward likeness (mankind) in the world. It is God through his Son that fills our spirits with unlimited joy! His Holy Spirit is the One who reveals this glorious truth to us!

IV. Chap. 5:12-21 At this point in God's revelation to us through Paul, he draws a parallel between the one man, Adam, and the other man, Jesus Christ. [Both were direct sons of God; see Lk 1:34-35 and Lk 3:38.] The one mystery left not completely solved is the fact that Adam's sin made physical death necessary and mandatory through personal choice of sin by every human that followed Adam's posterity, except Jesus. We are told that Adam's sin passes death (physical) to every person who lives, because everyone, without exception, does choose to sin (disobey God's perfect will). One can believe that Adam and Eve's children (all of us) were, after their sin, relegated to a sinful state of being that makes sinning an innate part of one's very nature, I Cor. 15:45-50. Human rationality could wonder about a general system that leaves no real choice of whether to sin. The answer to that query is that Jesus was human and did not perform one sinful act or think one sinful thought. Vss. 13-17 are parenthetical and relate to the law's part in mankind's history. In that passage we learn that Adam's sin was singularly grievous to God. From Adam to Moses God had not outlined his specific will for people to follow, i. e., the Law. Even so, those who lived in that period were sinful and died physically as a result. God then gave the Law to cite explicitly how mankind was deviating from God's perfect will. That law was given through Moses to teach people the need for a Savior who could offset the effect of the sin of Adam, Gal. 3:24-26. What we find in this revelation is that God has progressively revealed himself and his will to mankind as mankind has become able to receive and assimilate God's will and purpose, Heb. 1:1-2. For a reason we do not fully comprehend, through one person, Adam, every person who followed him were sinners (except Jesus) and were made to suffer death (including Jesus) because of his (Adam's) sin (separating themselves from God). Likewise, our understanding is not complete (I Cor. 13:12) concerning why it was necessary for one man, Jesus Christ, to die so that some of mankind (believers) could be made right with God (reconciled). Our hope as believers in this reconciliation through faith in God's Messiah, Jesus Christ, is sealed through God's current messenger, his Holy Spirit, John 14:26; Eph. 1:13-14. As Paul puts it in vs. 21, as death reigned because of Adam, eternal life for believers will reign forever through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

PREVIEW: What about sin in the life of the believer? Romans 6

Feb. 6, 2000

"Free From Sin"
Romans 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The Jews were from the beginning of the Gospel period suspicious of it because of the lack of a requirement to keep their sophisticated interpretation of Moses Law. The Jewish priests were steeped in myriads of minute details which were not understood by the ordinary Jewish faithful, Matt. 5:20-48. Jesus reprimanded those leaders for misinterpreting God's will in the law. Paul stated in I Cor. 1:18-31 that the Gospel's simplicity was to the Jews a stumblingblock and to the Greeks, foolishness. To those who believe, however, the Gospel is the power and wisdom of God. Also to many, God's grace seemed to set aside the law as telling believers in Jesus Christ what God wanted those believers to do to please him. In Romans 6 Paul reminds believers that God's love has admitted them to his glorious kingdom by means of their faith in Jesus' reconciling sacrifice. The fitting response to God's love in Christ should be the living of a holy life, including God's desire for the living standards outlined in his law. Jesus said that those who love him should keep his commandments, John 14:15-16. Paul states in Eph. 4:30 that believers should "not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are SEALED unto the day of redemption."

II. If believers are in God's favor through faith in God's sacrificing Jesus Christ, can such grace be multiplied by continuing to sin? In other words, is God's grace as determined by God's love effective only to the extent that a believer sins (displeases God)? Paul's answer to this question is that when a person publicly (Matt. 10:32) accepts (as is indicated by baptism, vss. 4-7) Jesus Christ as his or her Savior, that person is guaranteed eternal life by God and is therefore not subject to a sin which will separate him or her from God as Father, Rom. 4:24-25; 5:1-2, 21; 8:38-39. If a believer is indeed "dead to sin" (and "freed from sin" as the same term used in vss. 7, 18, 22), why should he or she live as though such an eternal relationship had not been certified by God? We have identified our lives with Christ and should therefore walk a lifestyle that becomes the new relationship we have with our Father, God. Paul states that the experience of baptism itself illustrates such a fact as one is buried beneath the water as one is buried in the earth after physical death and is raised from the water as Christ was raised to life eternal in the resurrection. Baptism in its symbolism identifies a believer with Christ in his eternal life. A believer is freed from the wages of spiritual death. Our old selves have been killed with Christ, and even though our mortal bodies will follow the sin-route for physical destruction, we are new spiritual creatures in responding to the leadership of God's Holy Spirit and will therefore never die spiritually, John 11:25-26. We are no longer separated from (spiritually dead) God's family and should not serve that which indicates otherwise.

III. Our hope of eternal life is a corollary of having our sinful spirits reborn by God. Our relation with God is dependent on our faith in what happened to Jesus Christ. He died but was raised from death to life and will never die again. His death was caused

by sin (the sin of all other humankind), but he now lives (is with God the Father). We too are to follow the same pattern of events in that we died (were separated from the sin that keeps every unbeliever separated from his or her Creator) but are now alive spiritually due to our faith in Jesus Christ. Our character is to be shaped by our relationship with God. We are not to let that which separated people from God in the first place reign in our temporary, fleshly bodies and which can encourage a believer to lust after actions and situations which displease God as our spiritual Father. (Such actions also cause unbelievers to question our true spiritual identity.) God's relation with people is based upon his love for us, John 3:16. Should not our love for God, because of what he has done for us through Jesus Christ, make us delighted to please him in the way that we live our lives?

IV. Sin (that which separates) is not to rule in the life of the believer, not because of a legal mandate (law), but because we are experiencing God's grace. Here, strangely, Paul again asks the question whether a believer should sin, because we are not under a legal constraint but are under God's grace. These two questions are not the same (vs. 1 and vs. 15). In vs. 1 the question has to do with remaining in a state of sin (state of being), and in vs. 15 the question relates to sinning in a state of grace (liberty). In vs. 1 the question could be well translated, "Shall we (believers) go on sinning to obtain (more of God's) grace?" In vs. 15 the translation would be, "Shall we sin because we are in grace?" Jesus said in John 3:6 that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh" indicating that mankind has a fleshly nature by birth. He said immediately after that statement that a person's spirit could, by his or her personal choice, be born from above, through God's work, John 3:7. In fact, in order to have eternal life one must be born from above through exercising faith in Jesus Christ. If, then, our eternal nature comes through God's love (grace), should we not listen to and obey our Heavenly Father rather than our fleshly desires that would grieve God's Holy Spirit? We know that sin causes death (separation), and we should therefore not be servants of death-causers. We have been made free from sin and are obligated to rightness as God sees rightness, i.e., as led by God's Holy Spirit. Even though we have a fleshly nature while we wait to join our Lord, we do not have to follow those fleshly desires which displease God. If sin has as its end death, we should abhor such and pattern our lives by those actions which are pleasing to God. We should not work for wages which separate us from the one we love (God) since God has given us eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. [I believe that Lk 15:20-21 expresses the attitude which demonstrates God's love for his children even though they do not always follow his holy will. Note, however, how glad the wayward son was that his father (God) still loved and accepted him as his child. How sorrowful we should be to disappoint our Heavenly Father by our attitudes, speech, or actions!!!]

V. God's Word states, "Sin not," but, "If you sin, we [believers] have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." I John 1:8 - 2:2.

Feb. 20, 2000

"The Believer's Challenge"
Romans 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: In order to understand Rom. 6, we thought of two aspects of the Law of Moses, the ritual or ecclesiastical and the moral or lifestyle which pleases God. To understand Rom. 7 we must consider a third facet of the law (including not only the Pentateuch but also the poetic and historical portions), the promises and requirements of God which we refer to as the Old Covenant. The context of Paul's revelation in the letter to the Roman believers must be understood not within that Old Covenant but within God's New (Second) Covenant with mankind. In Chap. 7 as in all Scripture the reader must be led by the same Holy Spirit that directed Paul to reveal it originally. The New Covenant established by God through sacrificing his only Son, Jesus Christ, eliminates keeping the law as the means of becoming a citizen of God's kingdom (a member of his spiritual family). Faith in God's righteousness (trusting Jesus as God's Savior, Messiah) is now substituted for ones attempting to be made right with God through performing all the requirements of the Law, Rom. 10:4. When Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished," the New Covenant of God became effective, and God resurrected his Son to prove it, Heb. 1:2; 8:7-13; Rom. 8:25. But we believers yet have a struggle with our old Adamic (and Eveish) natures to contend with until, through God's mercy, we receive our new bodies, I Cor. 15:42-50. In Rom. 7 Paul relates his, and our, challenge.

II. Chap. 7:1-5: In introducing the tension between a believer's temporary, fleshly life and his or her reborn spirit, Paul uses the most intimate of human relations, a married man and woman, spouses. It is understood that the married man and woman in Paul's example are joined by God, i.e., they are bound together as God wills in his law. The believers at Rome were, in part, Jews who had accepted Jesus as God's promised Messiah and who had first heard the Gospel at the Pentecost experience at Jerusalem following the resurrection of Jesus, Acts 2:10. They knew the law and its requirements of a Godly marriage. Each spouse is required by the law to be true to the other until one of them dies physically. When one dies the other spouse is no longer responsible to the marital commitment. As long as a husband lives, the man's wife is by the law not permitted to marry another man, and vice versa. The law states that if the wife marries another man while her current husband lives, she is guilty of adultery. Paul then states that believers are, in effect, by their faith in Jesus married to him, and the law is dead to them spiritually. If the law is dead to a believer, then he or she is as free as one of a married couple is free from his or her former mate when physical death occurs. When we are born from above spiritually, we become members of God's ecclesia (called out body), the body of Christ, Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:24, and therefore free to serve God ("bring forth fruit unto God"). Before we were reborn (still served self rather than God) spiritually, we were not only breaking the laws which determine physical death, but were also destined for spiritual death, hell.

III. Chap. 7:6-8: Now Paul (God's Word) states that we believers

are isolated from the letter of the law (the Old Covenant) and our lives are to demonstrate our new spirit which God has created in us through the New Covenant. What part does the law play in the new life of a believer? Is the law useless even though we believers are not separated eternally from God by it any longer? No, the law still tells us about the Savior God promised and the actions which displease (grieve) our Heavenly Father, Eph. 4:30. For example, the law tells everyone, including believers, that God does not want his creatures, humankind, to serve fleshly, lustful, temporary goals and to covet (worship idols, Gal. 5:18-26; Col. 3:5). In fact, if the law had not laid down explicitly what God's will was before God sent his Holy Spirit to enlighten all believers, Acts 2:14-18, mankind would not have an exact record of God's will. The written law gives concrete evidence of sin. Sin is brought to life by the law, vs. 8b. Grace brought fear and then relief.

IV. Chap. 7:9-13: Vs. 9 is a singularly important insight into every person's spiritual condition from birth through life. Paul continues a first person account of his own spiritual history. Note carefully that Paul said that as an infant and child he was spiritually alive without knowledge of God's will (the law), but when he reached spiritual awareness (what we refer to as the age of accountability) the law informed (Gal. 3:24-26) him that he was serving himself without regard to what his Creator wanted him to do. The result was that he died spiritually because of what the law conveyed to him. Thus, the holy law (carrier of God's message) was an expression of God's mercy to enlighten him concerning what makes him one (in agreement) with the God who created him. The law, then, is not bad in and of itself, but the breaking of it (doing contrary to God's known will) is sin (that which separates one from God). Doing an act which is against oneself and/or ones fellow human beings is bad enough, but then to know additionally that such displeases God Almighty (contrary to his law) makes such "exceedingly sinful," vs. 13b.

V. Chap. 7:14-25: Here Paul contrasts the two elements of the believers dichotomy: (1) The law has a spiritual goal, to make us alive spiritually, but (2) we have flesh-and-blood bodies that cannot escape the wages of sin (physical death). Between those two contrary elements there is a continual battle, Matt. 26:41. The fleshly (temporary) part of our (believers) beings want what our animal natures desire, and our born-from-above spirits (permanent) want only what pleases our newly acquired Heavenly Father. Every day we are confronted with two motivations: What our reborn spirits want and what the body we still live in desires. There are times when the animal-self (which ignores our spiritual well-being, vs. 18) simply takes over our decisions even though the law makes such actions clearly wrong in God's sight, vs. 22-23. Everything considered, I am, in a way, a miserable being before physical death releases me, but thank God through my faith in Jesus' righteousness, I know that while my physical being is destined for destruction, my reborn spirit is never to die or leave God's presence. How Wonderful Is God's Love! How Precious And Unfathomable Are God's Mercy And Grace! See Rom. 11:33 - 12:2; I John 1:8 - 2:2.!

Feb. 27, 2000

"God's Children Forever"
Romans 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: In Chap. 8 Paul ends the second major division of his discourse to the believers in Rome. In Chaps. 1-4 he makes the situation very clear that every human spirit is faulty, unclean (separated from his or her Creator) by sin (the separator), Rom. 3:9-11. The need for spiritual salvaging is satisfied or justified by only one God-ordained way, faith in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, his only Son, Rom. 4:9-25. Beginning in Chap. 5, the second major division begins, and Paul amplifies the factors following the believer's entrance into the new life of the Spirit. After being justified through trusting Jesus Christ for eternal life, a believer still must continue living for a while in this body of flesh. The experience involves the following sequence: conviction of sin (separation from God); seeking a solution after realizing the separateness (John 6:44,65); accepting Jesus through faith as the bridge to God by receiving (calling upon) him according to God's word, Rom. 10:13; at this point one is justified by God, Rom. 4:25-5:1; and the believer now, as a newly spiritually reborn creature (in one Spirit with Christ), begins eternal life justified and in a forgiven relationship with God (God's child through recreation, John 3:5-6). Chaps. 6-7 divulges the believer's relating to God, though still in temporary bodies of flesh. Paul gives considerable weight to the law (especially its moral or lifestyle aspects) and its part in the new creature's life within the New Covenant. However, he is very careful to make the law a catalyst to show us our need for Jesus Christ and for growing in God's grace, Gal. 3:24-25; II Pet. 3:18, rather than the agent for attaining that grace for salvaging human spirits. In Chap. 8 the Holy Spirit and his part in the believer's life is emphasized as the believer follows that Spirit rather than his or her own will during the temporary status, i.e., while in the present body, Matt. 6:32-34.

II. Chap. 8:1-8: Paul has referred to the Spirit only twice (5:5;7:6) in the letter before this chapter, but in this chapter he refers to the Comforter and Guide twenty times. This fact certainly proclaims the importance of Jesus' promise (John 14:15-21; 16:7-15) concerning the part the Holy Spirit's role would play in the life of every believer. Chap. 8 begins by a further assurance that the God of all creation no longer condemns those who are his by faith in Jesus Christ, because they live with spiritual (eternal) goals rather than fleshly, temporary goals. The phrase, "who walk not after the flesh," obviously does not mean that the human body is basically evil in and of itself. In fact, the word "flesh" here does not designate the sinew, blood, and bones of which the human body is composed physically, but the style of life which causes the body and mind to express a contrary intent to the purposes and will of God who created it. "God is Spirit and those who worship [recognize his superior worthiness] him must worship him in spirit and in truth," John 4:24. Living "after the flesh" does not mean such actions as eating, drinking, expressing anger, or performing the requirements necessary to maintain the temporary fleshly body, for our Lord did those things without sinning (displeasing the

Father). The emphasis here is walking after the flesh, i.e., styling ones life to satisfy sensuality, greed, self, etc. Believers are not subject to the law of sin which produces spiritual death, because God's forgiveness and gift of eternal life are sealed forever. The law could only designate right and wrong, but faith in Jesus' sinless life (blood) in human flesh alone removes a person's condemnation by God. God's Holy Spirit who directs the life of the believer assures that God's children are walking after the Spirit, not after the flesh (transit concerns). Even our (believer's) outlook (constant desire) is heavenly (spiritual, eternal, Philip. 3:20-21; Col. 3:16), and our future involves a glorious body to match that heavenly spirit which is already ours. We see about us every day those who are carnally minded with unquickened spirits who demonstrate attitudes against God and his divine purpose. The lifestyle they live ignores God's law (will), because they cannot please God with only fleshly, temporary goals, Eph. 4:17-32, ff.

III. Chap. 8:9-17: Paul then contrasts unbelievers (they) who are in the flesh (not following God's Spirit) with believers (ye) who are "in the Spirit," i.e., following God's Spirit. The definition of a true believer designates those whose attitudes and pleasures in life are in Christ, vs. 14. [spiritually concerned with converts, character, and conduct - WA] The Spirit is life (together with God) and produces in his children righteousness (acts, attitudes, and speech which please God). Our responsibility (indebtedness, vs. 12) is to live a life showing our eternal nature (spiritually motivated). Believers have the spiritual power to overcome our base, animal natures. God's Spirit himself assures believers that they really are God's children. Therefore, we need not experience fear concerning our inheritance, because our future is allied with Christ's. We will be glorified with him, vss. 28-31. (He was a fellow human.)

IV. Chap. 8:18-39: It is realistic to allow that believers will not live without continual challenge (struggle) as related in Chap. 7, but a glorious future is as sure as the promise of God. The children of God (trusters in Jesus' righteousness) are still (before physical death) a part of all earthly creation which is separated from God because of mankind's sin. However, believers are to wait patiently with faith in God's promise even as his Spirit continues with us to commune with God on our behalf and direct our lives according to God's purpose. Remember that God is not limited by time and knew even before he created the earth that we would become members of his heavenly family. [An unfathomable mystery to human limitations - WA] Unquestionably, since such a Being is arranging our lives for us, we need fear no aspect of our future. Take a for instance, who would judge our being short of God's expectation for us? The ultimate judging has been assigned to God's Son, Jesus Christ, and he is the one who loved us so much that he not only died for us but sits at God's right hand soliciting God's mercy on our behalf. With that as an absolute (God's promise), who has the audacity to presume to interrupt the relationship of God with his children and who trust his Son to maintain that relationship, no one or no thing! Vss. 31-39 are explicit and definite!

Mar. 12, 2000

"Israel Has Rejected God"
Romans 10

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: That Israel rejected Jesus, the Person of God incarnate in human flesh, was not a new expression of national intent and activity of the Jewish nation. For four hundred years the Hebrews were held captive by the Egyptians, and when God delivered them from the captivity (slavery), they complained concerning their food and circumstance and actually wanted to return to Egypt, Exod. 14:12. While Moses was receiving specific instructions (the Law) from God on Mt. Sinai (Horeb), the people of Israel turned openly away from Jehovah God to an idol (a golden calf) and gave the idol credit for their delivery from slavery, Exod. 32:4. This betrayal provoked God, and Moses referred to the people as stiffnecked (stubborn), Exod. 33:9, as God himself had declared earlier, Exod. 32:9. Later, the Israelites rejected God's direct leadership through prophets and demanded a king like the surrounding nations had, I Sam. 8:6-8. God continued to raise up prophets among the people of Israel who proclaimed God's will, but they were not listened to by the Israelites, Mat. 5:12b. Of the Jewish leaders (Pharisees) Jesus himself declared that they were children of the devil, John 8:44. Regardless of current "politically correct" information, the Jews were, in fact, the reason for Jesus' having been crucified, Acts 3:13-15. In the sermon which Stephen proclaimed to the Jewish council and high priest, the newly elected servant of the Jerusalem believers stated plainly that the Jewish leaders were "uncircumcised in heart" and had resisted God's leadership (the Holy Spirit) by betraying and murdering God's Messiah, Acts 7:51-53. Paul was acutely and sadly aware of all of the above facts as he dictated (Rom. 16:22) this letter to the believers in Rome at Corinth in 58 AD.

II. Chap. 10:1-5 In vs. 1 Paul reiterates his profound concern for his fellow-Israelites; how he wished and prayed that they would accept God's Good News about Christ Jesus. He was very willing to witness about the Jews' strong zeal to please God. Ritually they were precise in remembering through ceremonies the events in their history when God had blessed and saved the nation of Israel in their earthly affairs. But their love for such religious zeal had caused them to miss the true message of God, faith in God's righteousness. They were ignorant of God's plan, "taken the bull by the horns," strayed from God's righteousness, and created for themselves a false righteousness based upon living according to their own interpretation of the Law God had given them. God's position is that mankind cannot attain a state of perfection apart from God himself, i.e., mankind is incomplete apart from God's Son, Jesus Christ. Why is faith in Jesus as the Christ (Savior) necessary to please God? Because God's New Covenant with all humanity is that Christ's death and resurrection terminated the Old Covenant based upon the Law. Now every individual who pleases God does so through the provision of God's New Covenant, placing ones total dependence upon the righteousness God himself has provided, faith in his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Rom. 9:30-33; Heb. 8:7 - 13. What God did in his Son eclipsed and superseded anyones legal attempt to satisfy him. "Christ is the end of the law for

righteousness to everyone who believes (in Christ)." Moses outlined the necessity of keeping every aspect of the Law in Lev. 18:5; 20:24,26. (See also Gal. 5:1-6.)

III. Chap. 10:6-11: Paul here interprets Deut. 30:12-14 as referring to Christ's mission to come. No longer is it necessary to assume that one must go to the very throne of God in heaven or even to the abode of the physically dead to learn of God's desire for mankind, for the Word (God's message) has come to earth in the person of his Son. He has been brought near (Christ has been among us.), and that message is being proclaimed. God's message of faith is simple: openly confess verbally that Jesus is Lord of your life (as opposed to anyone or anything else) and believe (without reservation) that God approved of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (refusing even to let Jesus' body decay, Acts 2:31). One becomes righteous (pleasing to God, the Creator) by believing (trusting Christ) inwardly (with the heart, being absolutely honest with oneself). The result of such faith will cause one to relate to others (confess) what God in Christ has done for him or her, Matt. 10:32-33, Lk 12:8-9. To reinforce Paul's position here he quotes Isa. 28:16 concerning the stone (Jesus Christ) whom God will make to be a sure foundation. On him you can build your spiritual foundation without fear of shame, Philip. 2:12.

IV. Chap. 10:12-21: This simple faith can be exercised by any person on earth, and "any person" means absolutely that with God there is no difference between Jews and nonJews, Acts 10:34. All who trust in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, by calling upon him will not be denied eternal life. Christ's atonement (ability to save) is without limit (rich), and therefore every person is covered who will exercise the simple faith related in III above. Paul at this point approaches the practical matter of the mechanics of learning about what God has done for mankind through Jesus Christ and how one can respond to the Gospel. Hearing of Christ involves evangelists or proclaimers. One who witnesses to God's love (expressed by sacrificing his only begotten Son) is a beautiful person in God's Sight, Isa. 52:7. A person who witnesses to the love of God through Jesus Christ. True faith is established by hearing and believing God's word. Paul then asks the question that had so disturbed him in vs. 1. Have the Jews not heard? Yes, but they would not believe as prophesied in Isa 53:1; Rom. 10:16. Israel did know, Psa. 19:4, but, and Paul gives an incite which is as mysterious as parts of Rom. 9 regarding God's selective choices, God has provided the New Covenant to provoke the Jews to jealousy. In fact, God has chosen to anger the Jews by means of including people in his kingdom who have previously been foolish by disregarding God. In Isa. 65:1 it is stated that people will come to God who had not been interested before at all. But Israel (as a nation) will continue to be disobedient and contrary as always toward God's outstretched hands as they have throughout their history, Isa. 65:2.

Next session (Romans 11) will answer the question: Will the Jews (as a people) be doomed by disbelieving in Jesus as the Messiah forever, and what about the Gentiles in this regard?

Mar. 26, 2000

"The Jewish Nation Will Return"
Romans 11

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. This chapter of Romans reveals a mystery of human history that only God Almighty himself could reveal. The information here gives specificity to the ongoing activities of humanity that makes rational and right what otherwise would leave historical events a hodgepodge of stupidity. God has a purpose for his creation, and although that purpose may appear entirely arbitrary to human reasoning, the final results will please God and all those who trust him. There is no doubt about God's final relationship with the Jewish nation, for his intention was repeated in many of the Old Testament prophets. I refer to those passages which declare God's plan to restore the Jewish nation to his favor as "restoration passages." They include at least the following: Isa. 66:5-24; Jer. 31:15-19; Lam. 5:21; Hos. 14:1-7; Joel 3:1-21; Amos 9:11-15; Obad. 19-21; Micah 7:15-20; Hab. 3:5-13; Zeph. 3:14-20; Hag. 2:15-19; Zech. 8:18-23; and Mal. 4:5-6. (Matt. 11:7-15) Many leaders of Christendom as a whole stand very near the position held by the Jewish leaders when Jesus was here with human limitations. Baptizing infants and assuming such a rite will enter the infants into God's kingdom without regard to the will of the one baptized is essentially the same position of circumcising an eight-day-old and declaring that the rite makes ones spirit right with God, Acts 7:51. Declaring certain individuals priests between God and other people into a hierarchical system in which one is the "high priest" with God's absolute authority over people's spiritual welfare, is very much like the Jewish priesthood given by the law (Old Covenant) to the Levites. This priesthood arrangement is duplicating the Old Covenant and overlooks Jesus' sacrifice as a once-and-for-all sufficiency to cover all sins of anyone who trusts him, Matt. 20:25; Heb. 8:7-13; 10:9-25; I John 1:8-2:2. Paul (God's Word) warns against Christians' following the Jewish leadership pattern in turning God's righteousness (faith in his plan) into their own "righteousness" through unbelief, Rom. 9:30-33.

II. Chap. 11:1-6: Has the New Covenant (new arrangement) caused God to discontinue his concern for the Israelites as a people? Of course not, as is witnessed by the fact that individual Jews such as Paul are accepting Jesus as Jehovah's Messiah (Savior). Paul cites Elias (Elijah) who prayed against Israel (I Kings 19:10,14) not realizing that there were others faithful to God among the Israelites, I Kings 19:18. The same condition exists now during the Christian era since some individual Jews have not refused to accept God's Son, Jesus as the Anointed One, promised by the prophets. This remnant is the result of a demonstration of God's elective grace. Again, Paul insists that believing in his divine plan of spiritual salvation is not due to a person's doing good works, but rather due solely to God's grace. Spiritual salvation must be free (God's Son paid the only price acceptable to God for making a human spirit pure.) on the part of a believer for such salvation is dependent entirely on God's merciful grace.

III. Chap. 11:7-24: Israel as a nation, then, has not received

the salvation which it sought. The reason is that God elected some and made others among them stubborn. Paul quotes Isa. 29:10-13 in which the prophet states that the Israelites were put into a state of deep sleep as though they were given a book to read of God's plan but were unable (unlearned) to read the book. They spoke of God with their lips, but their spirits (hearts) were far removed from God's will. Again, Paul quotes Psa. 69:22-33 where David stated that the Jew's table (rites) would become a snare (trap), and their eyes (eyesight) would become dim so that fear would be their lot. (Note the other verses in this Psa. and how they relate directly to Jesus Christ.) Paul reveals that this refusal of God's plan on the part of Israel is a stumbling, but not a fall. This time of stumbling (trespassing) is God's occasion for the nonJews (Gentiles) to be able to become citizens of God's kingdom. This new arrangement will provoke the Jews to jealousy. If the temporary casting away of the Jews means the outstretching of God's hands to all people, how much glory it would be for God for Israel again to embrace God's plan of spiritual salvation, accept Jesus as the Messiah! In fact, we Gentiles are, as it were, wild branches which have been grafted into an olive tree (God's family, Israel) and the Israelites (Abraham's offspring according to the fleshly lineage) if they should accept God's holy plan in Jesus Christ, God will graft them back into the olive tree. Likewise, if the nonJews who claim to be God's children through their alliance with Jesus Christ, but, in fact, have turned away from true faith (confess Christ with their lips but not with their spirits, hearts, see the latter portion of I above) will be cut off from God's family.

IV. Chap. 11:25-36: Paul now states plainly that he is revealing a mystery concerning God's plan for history's purpose. Christian believers are not to consider themselves so intelligent and special in God's plan that they cannot fall. The blindness of the Jews is to be for a specific time period. That period is referred to here as the "fulness of the Gentiles." This "time of the Gentiles" noted in vs. 25 was also noted by Jesus in Lk 21:24 and by Daniel in Dan. 9:27; 12:1,7.7. In this period as God divides history (See Dan. 7:25 and II Tim. 2:15), the Jews are enemies of God's plan for the sake of us Gentiles, but the overriding plan of God is not to forsake his long-time beloved, the Jewish nation. He will, through his autonomous election process, bring them back in his fold again even as he promised through his prophet Isaiah at 59:20-21. As in the past when we Gentiles did not honor God (Rom. 1) and have now been permitted to know, believe, and accept God's grace so shall the Israelites again know, believe, and accept God's Son, Jesus as the Messiah. God has, in effect, reached the same conclusion concerning all people, both Jews and Gentiles, to have been unbelievers so "that he might have mercy upon all." Israel as a people will be restored to God's favor! How profound, deep, and rich (generous) is God's wisdom and knowledge! Truly his ideas are not our ideas! We are prone to think like Elijah in II Kings 1:10,12 and James and John in Lk 9:54, wanting God to destroy those who do not agree with the way we think. God is entirely autonomous and needs to repay no one. His current plan is that anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior is assured of eternal life!

I. Introduction: At this juncture in Paul's letter to the believers in Rome in 58 AD, he turns from outlining the panorama of human history to the practical expressions of one's love for what God has done for believers in and through his Son, Jesus the Messiah. Paul has comprehensively related how all mankind, both Jews and non-Jews have defied God through lack of faith in God's promise (unbelief). God has at last, in these final years of man's occupying the earth which God created, made himself more vulnerable to mankind's wickedness by becoming a human himself and living among people. Those people, his own (John 1:9-11), hated Jesus for his teaching and whom he claimed to be, God's Son. Paul felt so grateful for God's forgiveness in Christ that he wanted to live a Godly life and to encourage all those who accepted Christ through his witnessing to live wholesome lives also. So, in his letter to the Roman believers, he turns from what could be identified as doctrine to exhorting those in Rome to live lives worthy of their calling (God's election) in Christ Jesus, Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10; I Thes. 2:12. Romans 12 is an encouragement by Paul (God's Word) for believers to act as the offspring of God (those who have been born from above, John 3:3-7).

II. Chap. 12:1-2: Based upon the entire letter through the preceding chapter, Paul begs the believers to live in the flesh a manner of life that reflected God's mercy in which believers abide. A believer should sacrifice (kill or control) bodily lust and all moral impurities that bring displeasure to his or her heavenly Father, Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 4:30. Paul bases his plea on what he has related in Romans 1-11 and states that his request of them [and us] is rational (appropriate). The believer's life should reflect holiness (separateness, dedication) which is acceptable to God, Eph. 5:17. One who is trusting the righteousness of Jesus Christ for eternal (spiritual) life should at once be adjusting his or her attitudes and style of life for citizenship in a kingdom over which Jesus is Lord, Philip. 3:18-21; Col. 3:1-17. Loyalty should be to him and no other. What is most valuable is what is eternal and not that which is associated with the temporary life in the flesh. A believer's goal is to satisfy the Lord who has salvaged his or her spirit rather than satisfy the goals related to material (temporary) things where there is a conflict, Matt. 6:33.

III. Chap. 12:3-5: Every believer in his or her self-awareness should not consider self to be superior to (free to "lord it" over others, Matt. 7:1-5; 20:25-26) other believers. The rationale for this principle is that not every believer's faith is at the same point of development as compared to another, II Pet. 3:18. A given member's position of faith can be in one unique area of expertise in addition to various levels of maturity. Really, God is the only one capable of judging his children as to how well (perfectly or completely) they are developing. The evidence based upon Paul's observation is that God is giving to different individuals among his elected believers different assignments. Each local congregation

involves people for various functions. Paul here likens the congregation to a human body with Christ as its head, Eph. 4:14-16. [When a believer condemns another believer, that believer is condemning him or her self, Matt. 7:1-2. Both are depending on Jesus' righteousness to satisfy the judgment of God. Service in the kingdom is another matter as indicated by Paul concerning Peter in Gal. 2:11-21.]

IV. Chap. 12:6-13: Since Paul has confirmed that every believer has a different responsibility, he enumerates several such responsibilities and encourages those with these charges to be diligent in their performance. His checklist begins by identifying each believer's potential as a gift of God's grace. The call for expressing the proper attitudes and behaviors relate to associations among believers primarily. Each believer should consider every other member of the group important and a necessary component of the whole body. The net result is that the group develops into a community (koinonia) in which the group welfare is a concern of each member. Those who prophesy (witness) should do so according to their experience of faith in Christ. Those who serve the group in such areas as food service, fiscal management, etc., should do so equitably for all. Teachers should give full attention to teaching. Moral consultants (exhorters, counselors of ethics) should exercise sound judgment and wisdom in their suggestions. Those who give financially should do so unobtrusively, and ones chosen to supervise or moderate should be diligent (fair) in conducting the affairs of the group. Expressing love for others should be sincere and familial in nature. Evil should be abhorrent to all and goodness upheld consistently. Members should be fervent in their secular vocations considering such work to be serving the Lord. Rejoice in eternal hope, be patient during temporary setbacks, pray without hesitation, and distribute resources to believers everywhere as needs are known.

V. Chap. 12:14-21: In relating to people outside the congregation, do not curse those who persecute you but bless them instead. Be happy with those who rejoice, and be sympathetic with those in sorrow. Consider yourself equals with other believers, but refrain from assuming a haughty, high minded attitude as you associate with others, even if by secular standards they hold a lower status. Never presume yourself to be wiser or more intelligent than others. When someone does something maliciously that makes you appear inferior, do not reciprocate. Be a positive person (Phili. 4:8) and look for the best in others, encouraging them to be their best at all times. Even in situations when you are provoked to think or perform negatively, rise above the temptation to become a combatant and be a person of peace. Do not "get even" with those who abuse you, as a believer, for God is your Father and has promised to take care of his children. The result of such divine care puts the believer in a position even to feed his or her enemies. (If God is for us who can be against us, Rom. 8:31.). Simply do not permit evil to control your thoughts and actions, but let serving the Lord control all of your behavior. [This method of proper Christian attitude and actions is helped by reading the Word, giving time to prayer, and spending time with mature believers.]

April 9, 2000 "The Government, Neighbors, and Crises" Couples Class
Romans 13
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: How unthinkable it would have been for Paul in giving wise instructions to the new believers in Rome, the seat of political power of the empire, not to have made God's position clear as to how they should relate to that political power! Paul was very aware of the part the Roman government was playing in the spread of the Gospel, the Good News of what God was doing for people through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Remember in our study of Acts that when Paul was at Corinth (where he wrote this letter to the Roman believers), he was taken before the local Roman authority, Gallio, by the opposing local Jews. Gallio refused to convict Paul as a law-breaker based upon his having advocated and promoted a religion (followers of Jesus as Messiah) not on the official Roman roster of legally approved religions under Roman law, Acts 18:12-17. Further, the Romans had done much (though not for that purpose) to make the spread of the Gospel possible. The good road system and sea lanes; Pax Roma (widespread peace through law and military force); near universal language (mostly Greek but some Latin); and communication by courier (primarily for tax collection) kept information passing throughout the empire, all made Gospel spreading easier. Chapter 13 of Romans touches on three topics: believers' responsibilities to established political power, to neighbors, and to Jesus Christ during periods of jeopardy (physical) for believers.

II. Chap. 13:1-7: All power throughout the earth is subject to God's will, either commissively or omissively. All believers should be submissive to political authority over them for that very reason, for God is ordaining all ruling power. For a believer to resist political authority, then, is to resist God's judgment. To be against that authority brings God's wrath, because rulers (those in seats of political authority) are serving God when they promote and uphold good works and restrict or condemn evil works. A believer has a twofold reason to adhere to the "law-of-the-land," not to be punished for breaking the law and to maintain a good conscience before his Lord. Such yielding to political authority extends also to the payment of taxes levied upon believing citizens, Mk 12:17. The believer is to pay for all tax support including local, regional, and national. Deliver to all political authorities their dues, whether fear, custom, or honor. [We must at this point in Paul's (God's) admonition look at the larger Biblical context to examine further what is meant by "their dues." At Acts 3:19 and 4:29 when Peter had publicly witnessed to the validity of Jesus' being God's Anointed One (Messiah and Savior) and how the Jewish leaders had been the ones who had killed him (Acts 5:30), Peter asked the Sanhedrin members whether the believers should "obey God rather than men." It was, of course, a rhetorical question, because the obvious answer was that God is to be obeyed above everyone else. One could say that this opposition to spreading the Gospel was from religious leaders (the Jews) and not political. However, the Jewish leaders were under Roman authority at this time, and Peter's observation that "Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree," (Acts 3:13; 5:30) makes it clear that Roman authority (Pilate) permitted

the Jewish (religious) leadership to cause Jesus' death. If all authority is from God as Paul confirms in Rom. 13:1, then God himself sacrificed his Son, Jesus Christ, Psa. 22:1; Matt. 27:46; Rom. 8:32. What sacrifice and mercy God has exercised in our behalf! What can one deduce from this thought about Hitler's gross abuse of the Jewish people, God's beloved, Rom. 11:28? It is true that Jews even today interpret the victim of Isa. 53 to be the Jewish nation rather than (as we believe) Jesus, but see John 12:37-43. The overall factor in all these considerations is that Jehovah God is the Ruler of all his creation, and nothing occurs in human affairs that God could not change if he so willed, Rom. 9:16-24. Should believers in our time in a democratic government spend time and effort attempting to cause their political leaders to do those things by law which we believe to be against God's will (abortion, making homosexuality acceptable, using tax money for orienting children in public schools in religious beliefs contrary to ones own belief, etc.)? Is it possible that God wants us to vote our Holy-Spirit-led consciences on election day and then be satisfied that our heavenly Father will take whatever the results are (Democrat, Republican, or whatever) and use them for his, his Son's, and our glory? I believe so. If the results are in accord with God's will, so be it, but, if not, his Word speaks to that possibility also at Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35-37; Rom. 12:19.

III. Chap. 13:8-10: After making it clear that believers are to honor (obey) their government, Paul states that the believer's whole duty is to be unencumbered (Lk 12:31) with worry about political acts and laws since our motivation is first to love God and others. When one does what is done through love, the law is overshadowed. All of the do nots: committing adultery, murdering, stealing, bearing false witness, coveting, and all other commandments can be understood to be wrong when a believer is guided by love. The rule of gold is to care sincerely and profoundly for the welfare of others as one does about oneself. That practice is right because genuine love creates for one a desire to do nothing but good for his or her fellow humans. Thus, it is a fact that exercising love on every occasion causes one to meet all of the law's requirements.

IV. Chap. 13:11-14: Paul here gives the context of the period by stating that times were [and are] volatile and the world order is approaching the time for God to reorder history. The salvation process is nearing its conclusion, even nearer culmination than had been thought before. The darkened cover of sin is ever prevalent. [When Paul wrote this letter, a young Roman emperor by the name of Nero had been in power for four years. Before he died in 68 AD of suicide, he had, on occasion, lit the night in the civic center in Rome with the live, creosoted bodies of believers in Jesus Christ.] Then, as now, believers must be very aware that their lives (physical) must be lived in proper perspective with God's Holy Spirit (the Spirit that was in our Lord, Jesus Christ) guiding our choices. Subduing those desires which emphasize ones temporary life (physical) in deference to those desires which promote eternal values should be the earnest goal of those whose trust is in Jesus Christ. Next week: What is right when two believers are at odds?

Apr. 16, 2000

"Loving With Differences"
Romans 14

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The honest, sincere differences in personal consciences is considered here in Romans 14. The assumption by Paul obviously was that all believers would not have a monolithic spiritual position on all issues, especially those issues having to do with the relationship of necessary earthly functions of believers with consciences at various levels of maturity. These differences were particularly notable where considerable variations in cultural backgrounds existed. The first church at Rome was no doubt made up of both Jews and Gentiles very likely resulting from attendees at the Pentecost assembly at Jerusalem when God sent his Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus before his crucifixion, John 14:16; Acts 2:1-4,15,31-34. Another dispersing which happened later after Stephen's murder could have also added to the believers' going to Rome. He had witnessed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah God had promised the Old Testament prophets, Isa.53. Paul heard that message and intensified his efforts to annihilate the "wayward" Jews who "falsely" confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, Acts 8:3-4. I believe that it was Stephen's message on that occasion which resulted in Paul's conversion as it burned within his soul later on the road to Damascus. Paul's concern for the differences among the believers in the new group at Rome (Many of them Paul knew personally as we shall see in Chapter 16.) made, he felt, necessary the admonitions in this Chapter 14.

II. Chap. 14:1-2: There is a variation in the strength of the faith of different believers. Today we say that certain believers are "nominal" in their relation to other believers in church activities and goals, to support of missions, and to their emphasis regarding secular or nonchurch concerns. For example, some persons whose membership is in a given congregation can be "married" to their professions, businesses, or trades. Witnessing, Bible study, and even ones family are not high-priority concerns. The more avid church-goer and worker should not exclude the nominal for his or her lack of enthusiasm but love and encourage the weaker (less mature) believer. Among the early (first century) believers, Paul here notes that some were of the opinion that believers should not eat meats, because some of the meats sold in the marketplace had been consecrated (sacrificed) for certain idols, I Cor. 8:7. Paul's position, which is more definitive in I Cor. 8, is that whether meat is devoted to a false god (idol) or not makes no difference since we believers know for sure that there is only one true God who is the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, I Cor. 8:4-6. What others believe about another god or gods does not change that truth. Therefore, a believer is free to eat any meat with a clear conscience after giving thanks to Jehovah God, Gen. 9:3; Acts: 10:15. Paul by inference is stating that when a believer is convinced that eating meat already sacrificed to an idol displeases the Lord Jesus, one is weak in his or her faith. A believer who understands the truth about the matter is strong in the faith.

III. Chap. 14:3-23 What should be done about the differences of opinion held by weak believers and strong believers as defined in

II above? Here Paul (God's Word) makes the principle of individual accountability to God absolute. [Priesthood of every believer] He asked the question whether a certain slave is to follow the wishes of a master (owner) to whom he does not belong, or, his own master? If, therefore, a believer is a subject of the kingdom of God, he or she should be responsible to the king who reigns over that kingdom, Jesus the Messiah, rather than another member of the kingdom. That relationship of loyalty is true while the believer is still in the flesh and will be true even beyond physical death, vs.9. The same principle applies to timing believers' activities. Some early believers (especially those who had practiced Judaism) wanted to continue practicing the rites associated with Jewish feasts and holidays. The Sabbath as compared to Sunday as the right time to have formal worship bothered some, Col. 2:10-23, note vs. 16 especially. But no one is able to disregard the feelings of others while participating in the activities of the local church family, vs. 7. The answer to the differences lies in tolerance based upon the fact that only God can judge such differences. Every believer is scheduled to give an account of his or her service to God personally, vs. 12. One should be guided by whether expressing ones own freedom thwarts the service of a fellow-believer, vs. 13. A strong (in the faith) believer should not flaunt his or her spiritual maturity before a weak (in the faith) believer, because the latter's effectiveness as a witness could be lowered. Service in God's kingdom is not measured by such trivialities (mundane) as eating and drinking (including wine, vs. 21), but by doing what is right, promoting peace, and following the leadership of God's Holy Spirit, vs. 15. The guiding principles are: do everything motivated by love, do nothing which causes a fellow-believer to (stumble) be made weaker in faith, and do nothing which causes ones own Spirit-led conscience to come under a burden of guilt (displeasing to the Lord). In this chapter we are considering service in the kingdom of God, not initial salvation (becoming a child of God).

IV. Some other situations which do concern or have been concerns among believers: 1)Abortion, 2)Adultery, 3)Anger, 4)Associating with nonbelievers, 5)Autoeroticism, 6)Bathing mixed, 7)Birth control, 8)Blood tranfusion, 9)Card playing, 10)Child molesting/abuse, 11)Children, bastards, 12)Children's obedience to parents, 13)Church attendance, 14)Conceit, 15)Caffeine or nicotine, 16)Cohabitation of unweds, 17)Cosmetics/jewelry, 18)Covetousness, 19)Dishonesty, 20)Dishonoring parents, 21)Divorce, 22)Drug/alcohol use, 23)Effeminity, 24)Envy, 25)Euthanasia, 26)Fornication, 27)Gambling, 28)Gluttony, 29)Gossiper, 30)Hatred, 31)Homosexuality, 32)Hyprocrisy, 33)Impatience, 34)Incest, 35)Jealousy, 36)Laziness, 37)Liar, 38) Lust, 39)Marital fidelity, 40)Military service, 41)Movies or theater attendance, 42)Murder, 43)Pornography, 44)Pride, 45)Prostitution, 46)Prejudice, pro or con, 47)Rape, 48)Revenge, 49)Self-righteousness, 50)Sharp tongue, 51)Pool/billiards, 52)Social dancing, 53)Spiteful, 54)Sunday activities, 55)Stealing, 56)Swearing/cursing, 57)Tithing, 58)Court settling of church affairs, 59)Use of medicine and/or medical doctors, 60)Women deacons/ministers, 61)Women teachers of men, 62)Wearing clothing of opposite sex, and 63) etc.

I. Introduction: Paul is nearing the end of his epistle to the believers in Rome. The first section of this chapter continues encouragement for harmonious conduct within the Roman fellowship, and, in fact, is a continuation of the admonitions relating to believers' ethics given in the preceding chapter. Then Paul gives the basic reasons why he has written this long letter to the group there and his authority (responsibility) for having done so. He bases his authority upon God's grace and special assignment to the Gentiles, Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:8. He announces his intent to visit the believers in Rome as a part of a longer trip to Spain.

II. Chap. 15:1-13: Believers who have strong reliance upon God's promise in Jesus Christ and understand their faith should not require that their own wishes take precedence where there are differences in mundane matters. A strong believer should receive the highest satisfaction in yielding in matters where there is not an obvious desecration of God's will. [Take this case for instance: John has been a believer for many years and witnesses regularly to those with whom he associates. He is a tradesman and works in a manufacturing plant operating a metal lathe fashioning automobile parts. Operating the lathe next to his is a new fellow, Jack, who has just moved from another area of the country. On coffee breaks and at lunch John makes a special effort to be friendly and welcome Jack to his new situation. Jack immediately begins telling off-color jokes using vulgar language, frequently using God's name vainly. Over time it became apparent to Jack that John was different, and, to make a long story (months) short, John led Jack to accept Christ as his personal Savior. Jack's language had become so established in his oral communication that he struggled with it continually, and, on occasion, John had to fight embarrassment as a result. John exercised the kind of patience and understanding Paul (God) gives in Rom. 15:1-5 to help Jack grow in God's grace and become an effective witness himself later.] Paul states that such patience demonstrates that a believer is following the example set by his Lord Jesus Christ. What Christ did for every believer was not pleasing to Jesus (as a human) at the time, Matt. 26:36-43. Paul here quotes Psa. 69:9 indicating that the Scriptures (Old Testament) were written for later believers to gain patience and comfort through the hope which they inspire. He states that the Psa. passage, "The reproaches (blame, discredit, or disgrace) of those who reproach you (Christ) have become mine (Sins of believers are transferred by the Father onto the Son.)," sets an example for trusters in Christ. In other words, people who blame the misery and discomfort which mankind has brought upon himself or herself through disobedience of God's will has been (by God) placed upon Christ for those who trust him, Isa. 53:6. Therefore, believers in identifying with Jesus Christ should be willing to accept also a "suffering servant" attitude in life. If Christ has received us while we were in an imperfect state, Rom. 5:8, we should likewise witness to unbelievers and embrace believers who are weak in their faith. We who are strong in our faith should uphold (undergird,

strengthen) those who are yet weak, and become servants for their welfare as Christ has for us. To further emphasize this point, Paul quotes II Sam. 22:50; Psa. 18:49; Deut. 32:43; Psa. 117:1; and Isa. 11:1, 10. In these passages the theme is that God is following a plan in which the Jews have laid a foundation on which Gentiles can and will trust, i.e., Jesus Christ whose human nature came from Abraham (Jesse in vs. 12 by quoting Isa. 11:1, 10). For this privilege of knowing the Creator God, Gentiles should be especially grateful and praise God for making such forgiveness available, vs. 9-11! In leaving this wonderful concept, Paul gives a short benediction in vs. 13: "Now (in view of the foregoing wonderful news) may the God of hope (promise of expectation) permeate you with undefinable joy and peace as you are trusting Christ, and be assured through the (absolute) power of God through his Holy Spirit," II Cor. 1:22; Eph. 4:30.

III. Chap. 15:14-21: Here in the letter Paul reveals his reason for writing to them. My example of giving you suggestions in matters of Christian ethics can be followed by you also as you grow in God's wonderful grace. As you increase in goodness and knowledge, you will be able to admonish and nurture one another, Heb. 3:13; 10:25. My boldness in writing to you as I have is because of God's special assignment in witnessing to the Gentiles. I am truly staying within my limits which God has assigned me, and which I have practiced all the way from Jerusalem through the entire northern perimeter of the Mediterranean Sea (Illyricum). My purpose has been to proclaim the entire message of God's recent acts as he has produced them through his Son, Jesus Christ. And I have done so in areas and locations where no one else had been before my arrival, Rom. 15:14-16,20. My intent has been to fulfill Isaiah's promise, "To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see and they that have not heard shall understand," Isa. 52:15.

IV. Chap. 15:22-33: Paul states that he would have been to Rome sooner as he had so hoped to do, but he was hindered from doing so. Immediately after writing and sending this letter to Rome from Corinth, he finished the collecting of relief money for the believers at Jerusalem. Remember in our study of Acts how Paul was arrested at Jerusalem, taken prisoner by the Roman military at the insistence of the Jewish leaders there, and held two years as a prisoner at Caesarea on the coast. There, as a last resort, Paul on the basis of his Roman citizenship, appealed to Caesar in Rome. Paul tells the believers at Rome that he is especially pleased that the money which is to be collected in Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) for the believers in Jerusalem (mostly converted Jews) is being given by Gentile believers. He notes that his visit to Rome is to be a part of a longer journey to Spain. In fact, Paul was asking in the letter for support while in Rome and for further travel to Spain. He also solicited their prayers for safety in Jerusalem on the relief mission and his further travels. Another short benediction is given here that the God of peace will be with them in Rome. [If one visits Spain today, one is told with assurance that Paul did, in fact, come there. The Bible does not reveal that he was ever there, and I prefer not to speculate - WA.]

May 7, 2000

"Romans Summary and Farewell"
Romans 16

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Introduction: Interesting and rewarding is a panoramic view of God's relating to mankind through the Gospels and Luke's account (Acts) of God's continuing his work through his Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised at John 15:25-27. God commissioned the recording of the Holy Word during the apostolic period which ended in about 100 AD. A special calling of Paul to become one of the apostles gave rise to the recording of a major number (thirteen of twenty-six, and I believe Hebrews also) of the New Covenant books, Acts 26; I Cor. 15:1-11. Examining this last chapter of Paul's letter to the Roman believers concludes our study of the most systematic revelations of God's plan for all humanity, both Jews and Gentiles. This letter was written, I believe, to give emphasis to God's plan of making known that ALL persons are qualified to accept spiritual, eternal life through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. The purpose and theme of the Roman letter is given in Chap. 1:16-17: "I am not ashamed to admit that my hope lies in my faith is Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior), for accepting that truth is the power of God which provides spiritual salvation to every individual who believes in Jesus Christ as God's Savior, BOTH TO JEWS AND GENTILES (any human). Through Christ God has revealed and makes available his righteousness which leads those who believe to greater and greater faith [to grow in God's grace]. The person who is to live in God's will must continually depend on his or her faith in God's mercy." Paul further amplifies this purpose as he describes God's righteousness at Chap. 3:21-31. The letter of Paul (God) to the Roman believers (and us) is the spiritual history of the world. Jesus' sinless life, death for the sins of all people, and rising to life from death is the center of all history. Before his coming all history looked forward to that event (victory over death), and since his coming, all history looks back to know God's plan of spiritual salvation (victory over death). The tragedy is that not all people believe and are therefore destined by personal choice to be eternally separated from the loving Creator.

II. Some highlights of Romans: In Chapters 1-3:20, Paul establishes and confirms mankind's absolute need for a Savior which mankind cannot himself or herself supply. The Gentiles and Jews had both fallen short of God's requirements, the former without the law of God and the latter with the law which God had given through Moses. The conclusion, therefore, is that ALL PEOPLE, to the last person, are without knowledge and do not seek God. How mankind is to be justified is given in 3:21-4:25, i.e., through an individual's faith in God's Savior, Jesus Christ. As one becomes a believer (truster) in the Savior, he or she wants to do God's will and thereby embraces the law which outlines that will, 3:31. The believer is a new person living a new type of life, being reconciled to God through Christ. Chapters 5-8 describes the new life as one led by God's Holy Spirit who gives absolute assurance of eternal oneness (spiritual life) with God, 8:31-39. In chapters 9-11 Paul explains God's plan for the Jews who will finally return to God's will (receive Jesus as Messiah) after a period when Gentiles are given the

special opportunity of faith. This mystery is not explained by human rationality but by God's absolute sovereignty, 9:6-29. Israel's problem was in trying to create their own righteousness apart from faith in God, 9:30-33. Jesus and his message were a stumbling factor, because he and his message, too, were based upon faith in God's mercy. At 11:21 Gentiles are warned not to forget that they also will be monitored, as were the Jews, regarding faith as the basis of pleasing God. Chapters 11-15 are devoted to following God's Holy Spirit in the believer's daily living. Pleasing God and harmony among believers are stressed in these admonitions. Jesus' attitude and behavior are to be examples for believers

III. Chap. 16:1-2: Paul here introduces the Roman believers to Phebe whom he commends as a sister in Christ and a deaconess (servant) in the assembly of believers. He introduces her first, in my opinion, because she was to be the carrier of the letter from Corinth to Rome. She lived in a suburb of Corinth, Cenchrea, where Paul was when he wrote Romans. She was obviously a very well-to-do, mature, responsible person, or Paul would never have entrusted to her such an important mission. The Greek term for deaconess (diakonon) used in vs. 1 is the same Greek term found in Philip. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8,12.

IV. Chap. 16:3-16: Priscilla and Aquila then lived in Rome and as ones who had risked their lives helping Paul among the Gentiles, Acts 18:18,26, Paul asked that they be greeted. They were then using their home as a meeting place for believers. Paul then mentions Epaphroditus who was the first one to believe in Achaia (Asia) and a certain Mary who had worked with Paul. Relatives of Paul, Andronicus and Junia, who had been with him in prison are mentioned as ones who had believed before Paul. Listed are Amplias, Urbane, Strychys, Apelles, and the family of Aristobulus. Another relative of Paul, Herodion, is greeted along with the family of Narcissus. Others listed are: Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus (whose mother had been like a mother to Paul), Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas. All of these are to be greeted affectionately (with a holy kiss) on behalf of the churches Paul knew. In all, 26 believers are listed, most of whom were Gentiles.

V. Chap. 16:17-27: Here Paul again emphasizes the urgency of harmonious relations among the believers at Rome. To maintain harmony he cautions against letting agitators cause divisions by introducing spurious teachings motivated by personal gain. Paul stated that such people were especially effective in upsetting weak believers. He commended them for reports of their faithfulness to true faith in Christ. He assured them that Satan is to be controlled by God in due time. Paul sends greetings from Timotheus and his relatives, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater. Tertius who is the secretary to whom Paul dictated the letter gives a personal greeting in vs. 22. Gaius in whose house Paul resided in Corinth; the Treasurer of Corinth, Erastus; and Quartus all sent their greetings to the Roman believers. Paul had a hard time in saying farewell as is indicated by the "Amens" appearing at vss. 20, 24, and finally in vs. 27.