

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST  
Supplement 16

**The Greatest Letter Ever Written**

*Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans*

4 messages delivered by:  
*Brother Linford Berry*  
*Calvary Mennonite Fellowship 2014*

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

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*The Editor*

**The Greatest Letter Ever Written**  
Overview Book of Romans  
Message 1 – Romans Chapters 1 to 4

Welcome to our service here today; pray that your heart has been already conditioned and that the ground is fertile and ready to receive what God wants to share with us through his Word today.

Today we are going to begin a series of sermons from the book of Romans and what I want to do is a kind of brief flyover so we are going to have four sermons covering the 4 main sections in the book of Romans, today we are going to be looking at chapters 1 through 4 which is basically an introduction to the book and then the problem or the bad news.

Next we will look at chapters 5 through 8 which contain the solution to the problem with the good news and then chapters 9 through 11 which deal with the theological implications of this good news.

And then chapters 12 to 16 deal with the practical implications of this good news.

Now why would we do Romans this way, why would we kind of flyover and only hit the peaks when there is so much deeper riches here?

Well it has been my experience, especially in the Anabaptist world, that we often misuse the book of Romans, there are certain sections and certain verses in Romans that we really like and we spend a lot of time preaching and teaching and referencing them, then there are other parts of the book of Romans that we ignore, we pretend like they don't exist, and the parts that we do use we tend to usually either take them out of context or lift them from the context in isolation.

I myself have preached from the book of Romans many times, many different passages, but it has been scattered and it has not been well connect-

ed, many times attempts to preach through the book of Romans in a more detailed way often end up kind of getting bogged down in the details and losing focus on what the whole book is about.

So my attempt here in this first series of sermons on the book of Romans is to help us keep the whole book connected and then to establish a foundation for further study of more of the details later so that we don't end up with just lots of little bits and pieces but that we end up with a picture of the glorious whole.

Now this letter of Paul to the Romans is by many people considered to be the greatest letter ever written and it is the greatest letter ever written for a couple of reasons but the main reason is because it contains the greatest message ever, the greatest ever written.

We will see that this letter is all about the good news of the Gospel from beginning to end but that good news is built upon some terribly bad news, in fact the bad news is worse than we think it is, but the good news is even more glorious and even more beautiful than we could ever have imagined and so this is the greatest letter ever written.

I tremble with both excitement and with fear at the thought of even attempting to live and preach through this great letter.

Now before we get started in our study of Romans I have a few preliminary assumptions or considerations that I want us to keep in mind.

First of all we must assume, we must consider, that this is the Word of God and as such we must take it seriously and we must take it as authoritative. It is given to us, has been given to us as the inspired word of God breathed out by God and as 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16 tells us all Scripture is breathed out by God, is useful and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that men and women of God may be competent, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So may God use our study of this book to make us into more competent Christians who are better equipped to serve God and others.

Secondly another assumption or consideration we must bring to this text is this letter to the Romans does not in any way contradict the rest of the Bible. God is One, when He reveals himself He reveals himself as One and therefore He cannot contradict himself.

Now there are many charges against the book of Romans that it does indeed contradict other parts of the Bible, I say this cannot be because on the positive side this book of Romans is full of references to the Old Testament, over 57 of them, the Apostle Paul appeals to the authority of Scripture which was then the Old Testament.

This book is consistent with the Old Testament but also it is consistent with the gospels and the rest of the Epistles, the message of the book of Romans is a more thorough treatment of Christian doctrine or the Gospel than any single book but it is the same Gospel not a different Gospel but the same Gospel that we find in every other page of Scripture, Old and New Testament.

In fact as many serious students of the Scripture have discovered, and as I have discovered personally in my own study, a good understanding of the book of Romans turns the lights on for understanding everything else in the Bible.

So don't be looking for or assuming contradictions, be looking for congruence, be expecting consistency not inconsistency.

Thirdly this letter, this greatest the letter ever written, is weighty, it is rich, it does have complexity to it, and some people accuse it of being hard to understand.

Now I would say to us that in reality it isn't so hard to understand as long as we are willing at the outset to let it say what it says, to just let it say what it says.

You see the problem with this book is not that it is hard to understand, the problem with this book is that it is offensive to the natural man, it is offensive because the Gospel is offensive, it is not so hard to understand but hard to believe and so it is our inclination to read it and to say, especially at certain places, surely it doesn't mean that? And so we figure out elaborate ways to make it say something else.

And this is the source of most of the confusion surrounding this book.

It is kind of like Mark Twain's declaration that it isn't the stuff in the Bible that he doesn't understand that bothers him it is the stuff in the Bible that he does understand that bothers him.

If we approach this study, if we approach this book or any of the rest of the Scripture for that matter, if we approach it honestly and openly as it is writ-

ten and as God intends it than the result should be one of surrender, surrender to the authority of it whereby we say yes Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief. But if you are not willing to approach this text or any other text of Scripture in this way then you will not understand it and it will not have the desired effect.

Fourthly this book is a well-reasoned argument, it is some of the best logic to be found on the pages of Scripture, this book is a well-reasoned argument but it is not argumentative, there is a big difference, you see some people read this book like bitter medicine when in reality it is the most beautiful the most glorious explanation of the Gospel that we can find in any one place anywhere.

Many people use the text of Romans, or pieces of it at least, as a sledgehammer to kind of win an argument or a debate and I would say if we take it apart and use it in an argumentative way then we do a disservice to the text and we do a disservice to ourselves.

If the only tool you have to deal with the book of Romans is a sledgehammer then every problem is going to look like a nail, that's just the way it's going to be.

So instead be looking for the beauty and glory of God, be looking for the love of God along with the terrible wrath and judgement of God, it all comes together in this glorious letter and if you do find a sledgehammer please, please use it on yourself first before you pick it up to use it on others.

Fifthly this letter is for us today, it isn't just some text written to some first century Christians that does not apply to us today. In the words of John MacArthur in his introduction to his commentary on Romans he says this, "The Epistle to the Romans speaks to us today just as powerfully as it spoke to men in the first century.

It speaks morally about adultery, fornication, homosexuality, hating, murder, lying and civil disobedience.

It speaks intellectually telling us that the natural man is confused because he has a reprobate mind.

It speaks socially telling us how we are to relate to one another.

It speaks psychologically telling us where true freedom comes to deliver man from the burden of guilt.

It speaks nationally telling us our responsibility to human government.

It speaks internationally telling us the ultimate destiny of the earth and especially the future of Israel.

It speaks spiritually answering man's despair by offering hope for the future.

It speaks theologically teaching us the relationship, between law and grace, between works and faith.

But most of all it profoundly brings God himself to us."

This is for us today, here.

Let's pray.

Our heavenly Father we approach this study with fear and wonder for you are a great God and in the pages of this book, this letter to the Romans, we get a picture of ourselves and our sin and we get a picture of you and your Holiness and this causes us to tremble.

We also find that you are a gracious and a merciful God.

We ask that you would cause us to learn and grow in our understanding of who you are and who we are and what you have done on our behalf and then we ask that you would instruct us as to how we should respond to you and how we should live in light of your glory and of your grace.

Equip us and perfect us by your Word in through your Gospel.

We ask for the illumination of the Holy Spirit and then the gift of repentance and faith so that we can rightly respond to your revelation.

May Christ be exalted and His glory revealed in all of our hearts, Amen.

*Body of message from Romans 1 through 4.*

Now we did not have a Scripture reading this morning because I want to read for us the first 4 chapters of Romans, I won't ask you to raise your hand but I wonder how many of us have sat down and read the whole book of Romans at one sitting, if you haven't done that I would urge you to do so and more than once.

Perhaps I should just read the whole book of Romans this morning but my fear was that I might lose some of you along the way so in the reading of the first 4 chapters I want you to pay attention, however that works for you, for some of you that means following along in the copies of your Scripture for others that means just sitting there and listening, whatever it is that helps you not to be distracted I want you to hear the first 4 chapters of this greatest letter ever written.

I will read it, we'll stop at a few places to call attention to a particular aspect of it but pretty much we'll read through the first 4 chapters.

*From The Editor – To our readers:* Please use your own copy of the Bible to read Romans Chapters 1 through 4, also note the following two places where the speaker makes extraneous comments, the ESV or English Standard Version is the translation used in the speaker's fellowship.

The speaker makes two comments during his reading as follows:

1. At Romans 1 verse 17 the speaker notes: Notice all of the conjunctions in this text and all of the fors and the wherefores and therefore keeps it all connected for long notice those words.

2. At Romans 3 verse 20 the speaker notes: And now some of the most precious words in the Book of Romans "but now"

*On completion of reading Romans chapters 1 through 4 the speaker ends with:*

And so ends this reading of God's holy and inspired inerrant word, may he write its eternal truths on all our hearts.

Now go back with me to Romans chapter 1.

Now as I said we will hit a few of the high points here.

First of all the author, Paul, a slave of Christ, and Apostle, the Apostle to the Gentiles he calls himself many times and that brings us to who he is writing to, the church in Rome, those who are the saints, those who are loved by God and called to be saints, he writes to them grace to you he says and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now who were these saints in Rome? Well evidently no Apostle had been there yet, Paul had not made any missionary journeys to Rome yet although he indicates in this passage that he wants to come to them, it seems the saints in Rome had become saints as the message of the Gospel was brought to them from the disciples, the followers, of Jesus who had migrated to Rome over the years but the church in Rome had not had the privilege or the advantage of apostolic teaching.

The church in Rome was made up of some Jews and probably more Gentiles as he references a couple of times here in the text.

The main purpose of the Apostle Paul in writing to the Romans is outlined for us here in the first few verses, Apostle Paul a slave of Christ Jesus called to be an Apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God. And then he gives us very simply in a couple of verses a summary of the Gospel of God right off the bat.

So this purpose for bringing this book for writing this book is to explain the Gospel of God and that's what he does from the first verse to the last, the Gospel, the good news, the good news which also includes some very bad news which makes the good news "gooder" better, and then why does this matter, why does this matter to Jews, why does this matter to the Gentiles, how should Jews and Gentiles relate to each other in light of this good news?

And how it should be then to live as saints in the world with each other and with the world in which we live?

It is all part of the Gospel the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul gives some other reasons for writing this book as well, some of them we find here in chapter 1 others we don't find until chapter 15 but first of all he says I want to come and see you folks, I want to encourage you and I want you to encourage me, and he is writing this letter by way of introducing himself to the saints in Rome, kind of gives them some preliminary kind of introduction.

Paul asks for prayers from them, this is found in chapter 15, he asks for prayers as he journeys to Jerusalem where he knows he may face imprisonment, he hopes that the offering that he has collected in Corinth, where he probably was when he wrote this letter, he hopes that this offering will be accepted there by the Jews from the Gentiles, he asks the Roman church to pray for him, he is hoping that the Roman church will support him because he intends to go to Rome and then on to Spain for missionary service there, it seems he is asking the church in Rome to support him there in that endeavour.

And the Apostle Paul seems to be aware that there might be some conflict between Jews and Gentiles in Rome and so we have a chapter or a chapter and a half, 13 and 14, that deal with some of this conflict, for the most part the book of Romans is not like many of the other Epistles which are written as a corrective, the book of Romans is written basically as an explanation of the Gospel.

The Gospel is the message as I said of this book from beginning to end and in chapter 1 verses 16 through 17 we find the Apostle Paul's thesis statement right here, some of the most potent words you will find in the text of Scripture: For I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

And the rest of the book of Romans is all about that, it is all about explaining, demonstrating, defending that.

Now our usual inclination may be to think that once we have heard and responded to the Gospel in conversion then we could move on to other more important things.

That idea is foreign to the Apostle Paul and it ought to be foreign to us. Instead of moving on to other things the Apostle Paul goes deeper into the Gospel; he says I am eager to preach the Gospel to you, the saints, called by God in Rome.

This is the most important thing he could do.

And since we ourselves need to understand more and more the scope and magnitude of God's mercy and grace no matter how long we have been believers then we should meditate on and study this Gospel and seek to live it out, to live out of its power out of its grace.

This Gospel is for all of us.

Another difficulty that we have is that in looking for application to our lives we look often only for the stuff that we can do, Just tell me what to do! people say, but in Romans and indeed in the rest of Scripture much of the application involves a change in our thinking, a change in our thinking, and we should not underestimate such a change for if we think differently about God and about ourselves and if we think differently about God's purpose then our whole lives will be influenced as a result.

The purpose of the Gospel is not just to cause us to do something but to cause us to be somebody, to be children of God, to be fashioned after the likeness of Christ.

This is about being, this is about being transformed, this is about being sanctified and saved.

Now the Apostle Paul does give us some things to be doing but they are usually towards the end of his Epistles and after we have been taught about being but the being has to come first.

One of the main themes of this book and of the entire Bible is that merely doing will never suffice.

The issue is that we must trust God exclusively for our being.

But we can do in our own strength many things so that is what we tend to gravitate toward and therein lies the problem as expressed here in Romans chapter 1 and following.

One of the biggest issue, one of our biggest issues is that we put ourselves at the centre of everything including the Gospel, notice that is not what the Apostle Paul does he calls this the Gospel of God, this is all about the Son of God through whom we have received grace for the sake of His name.

In verse 16 this is the power of God, it is to display the righteousness of God.

And we put ourselves at the centre.

This is the picture we get in verses 18 through 32, this is the bad news that we have put ourselves at the centre, we have put ourselves in the place of God, and so the wrath of God has been revealed, has been made manifest, has come upon us and we suffer the inevitable results.

It should be no surprise to us that we see here in verse 24 that this depravity, this unrighteousness starts in the heart; therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts, that's what they wanted so He let them do it. And furthermore this corruption enters the mind, verse 28, they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

This selfishness starts in the heart, it is developed in the mind and it finally fleshes itself out in horrible behaviour, we see this in the last couple of verses of chapter 1.

It should be no surprise to us then if that's how the flesh works that the Gospel happens first by a change of heart and then accomplished by Christ a development of the mind as we change our thinking and that is followed by a resulting change in behaviour.

But too often we go at this backwards we attempt to change the behaviour first and then the mind and finally the heart and all that does is reveal to us

that we are still at the centre of our gospel. We don't really see God at the centre of the Gospel we see ourselves.

And lest we misunderstand the Apostle Paul then goes on in chapter 2 to point out where we go wrong. We look at other people and we say, ha, those are bad ones and look at me I'm so much better!

No you are not, no you are not, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, there is no one who meets God's standard of perfect righteousness.

You might say I'm better than that person over there and God says: Who cares you, are still not as good as me. Not even for the Jews, the Jews who had special access to the things of God, He says you keep the law and you are circumcised, great, but if you are uncircumcised and keep the law you too are a child of God, if you don't keep the law it doesn't matter who you are descended from, it doesn't matter who you are related to, you are subject to the wrath of God.

And so you say then okay I get it, I get it, I'll keep the law.

Not so fast. Chapter 3 tells us that even the Jews, the Jews the ones who were entrusted with the oracles of God, the law of God; they were not able to keep the law, what makes you think you're going to keep the law?

The news is worse than we thought, you see the law is a cruel taskmaster not only does it give us an impossibly difficult standard to meet and then it tells us, Oh by the way you can't do it and meet it.

And so in chapter 3 verses 19 through 20 he says every mouth will be stopped, everybody is going to have to shut up because God has the last word and God will hold every man accountable according to his standard. And he says by works of the law no human being will be justified in God's sight, it doesn't matter if you're a Jew, doesn't matter if you're a Gentile, doesn't matter if you're a pagan, doesn't matter if you're a Mennonite, no human being will be justified by the law since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

That is what the law is for, the law shows us up, the law shows us how bad we really are but then comes the good news.

It's a pretty bleak picture isn't it, an impossibility, yes impossible to please God, impossible to be righteous according to the law and then comes verse 21 chapter 3 some of the sweetest words in the Bible begin with the conjunction "but" but now, something's happened, Christ has come, Christ has

come and He reveals and makes manifest and displays the righteousness of God.

Now notice the law and the prophets did point to Him, they did say it was coming, it isn't anything new, it isn't anything that is foreign to the Old Testament, the Apostle Paul has been using the Old Testament all along and he continues to but now Christ has come, the righteousness of God, the righteousness that we need that we must possess if we are going to experience the glory, the honour, the peace of God that we read about in verse 10.

This righteousness of God is available but it is only through faith in Jesus Christ, we must believe, we must trust, we must acknowledge and admit that we are sinful at our core, that we are unrighteous, that we have rebelled against God, we must trust that the work of Christ for our redemption in propitiating or averted the wrath of God is enough that it will save us.

And all of this requires that we accept this as a gift.

Do you know how hard it is to receive a gift? For some of you it is harder than others right, somebody wants to give you something and you are just dead set on not letting them give it to you. Why, why is it so hard for us?

Because we want to do it for ourselves! That's our problem!

That's our problem all along, it's been the problem from Romans 1 all the way through Romans 3 we want to do it for ourselves and God says, no go, you can't do it for yourself.

The Gospel tells us we are wrong, we are very wrong, we are not right, we are fatally wrong, the only hope we have is the gift but that gift requires that we give up on ourselves, that we give up on our desires, and our ability to be right and we trust only in Christ.

And so the Apostle Paul asks in verse 27 what becomes of our boasting then?

Kind of puts it in its place doesn't it, you think you're special think again, you think you have it altogether think again. There is no favouritism with God, there is no other way to be made right with God then to come to him in faith and trust and be justified by his free gift of grace.

And then in chapter 4 we hear the Jews chiming in, Yeah but what about Abraham, didn't he count for anything?

Yeah, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. So if you too believe and trust God and not yourself then you are a child of Abraham.

And then in the end of chapter 4 we have this definition of faith the kind of faith we are talking about here it says Abraham hoped against hope because he heard the word of God and he believed, God said it and he knew it was going to be true, it didn't stop him from believing when he considered his own limitations, he was as good as dead, he was 100 years old, how was he going to have a child and Sarah she was 90 something and barren, Abraham believed God. He was fully convinced that God was able to do what He promised.

And in verse 22 it says that is why his faith was counted as righteousness.

And then the sweet conclusion here at the end of chapter 4, this is not just for Abraham, this is for us, if we believe, if we trust like Abraham did, if we believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead the One who was delivered up and died for our trespasses and raised for our justification, if we believe Him, if we trust him, then we will be counted as righteous before God.

This righteousness will be nothing that we can boast about because it is not ours to start with it has been given us to us as a free gift by the grace of God, him that glories, him that boasts let him boast in the Lord.

This is not about you it is about Him.

Now what are you going to do about this?

Faced with all the evidence that the Apostle Paul brings to us here in these chapters what will be your response?

Over and over again in in this great letter the Apostle Paul writes about the obedience of faith, the reality of this Gospel, the reality that we are selfish rebels, that God is a righteous judge, and then the reality that this righteous judge has come has made a way at very great cost to himself through no goodness of our own He has made a way to be brought into right relationship with him, this good news demands a response.

There are only two possible responses: Yes Lord or No Lord.

The only two possible responses are either a further rejection of the truth of who God is and a further pursuit of selfishness or in obedience to the faith

whereby we say, yes Lord, yes Master, I surrender myself, I surrender my selfish desires, I trust you completely.

If you say not now I'm going to wait! you are in fact rejecting God and you are subject to his wrath both in this life and in the judgement. And the judgement is coming.

But if you say yes Lord, even if you don't fully understand, you can still pray as the father who had a child who was healed by Jesus says, I believe, help me in my unbelief.

Then you will have demonstrated the obedience of faith and then you too can be a child of God, a child of Abraham and be justified in the sight of God.

So which will it be this morning right here, right now?

Go back and scan chapter 1 verses 28 to 32 see if you see yourself there anywhere, anywhere, if you can't find yourself there look at chapters 2 and 3, I assure you you are there.

What are you going to do!

Way down in the deep dark recesses of your heart you have to admit that even if you are better than most of your friends you still don't measure up to God's standard and that my friend is the standard that matters.

You, all of us, must be, we need to be saved from the righteous wrath and judgement of God.

God will judge that is a certainty! The question is: Are you going to presume on his kindness and his forbearance and his patience? As he says in chapter 3 don't you know that these things are God's means to bring you to repentance, don't presume on that, if you do it says you will be storing up in yourself the wrath of God.

Will you repent, will you agree with God about your status before him, will you agree with God and will you trust God or are you going to harden your heart and store up the wrath of God which will be poured out you?

The choice is yours, the time for decision is now, what will it be?

I beg of you, I plead with you be reconciled to God.

Let's pray.

God we come before you as unworthy, unworthy to even utter your name, we know that you are righteous, you are holy God, we know that we can never in ourselves measure up to your standard of perfection of Holiness, we are grateful that you have seen us in our pitiful state that you have made provision for our rescue, for our salvation.

I pray that you would work by your Holy Spirit and through your Word to convict all of us.

Father I would ask that you would do your good work in the hearts of those here who have already surrendered to you, help us to have greater confidence in a new and greater love for you and make us vessels of service and sacrifice for your glory.

For those here who have not yet surrendered and trusted in your Son Jesus I plead with God that you would glorify yourself by changing their hearts and minds, help them to see themselves as they really are, to see you as the beautiful Saviour and Lord of the universe and of their life.

Amen.

## **The Greatest Letter Ever Written**

Message 2 - Romans 5 to 8

Dead to Sin – Alive in Christ

I want to welcome all of you especially those of you who are visiting with us we hope and pray that you can enter into worship with us and that we can learn together this morning would God would like to say to us through his Word.

Today we are going to be looking primarily at Romans chapters 5 through 8, you have just heard and read Romans chapter 5 we may read the last three chapters 6, 7 and 8 if we have time at the end.

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> sermon on the book of Romans we are taking this book in 4 sections and looking at each section briefly.

The book of Romans is, as I said last time, a book about the Gospel of Jesus Christ it is what the Apostle Paul set forth to write, it is what he set forth to accomplish to make known the Gospel of Jesus Christ and this, the book of Romans, is an extended discourse on that very Gospel, it is an explanation of the Gospel particularly and why, why do we need this good

news and then how does this work and finally what difference does it make?

Those are the questions that the Apostle Paul is answering in this great work which has been called by many the greatest letter ever written.

In the first 4 chapters of the book of Romans the Apostle Paul makes a case for why we need the Gospel, in chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2 he demonstrates that the Gentiles or the pagans are under the righteous condemnation or wrath of God because they have rejected him even what little they know of him through creation they have rejected and so He has brought increasing darkness into their experience and they are suffering now because of their sin, He is bringing the consequences to bear on them.

In chapter 2 and on into chapter 3 he points out that the Jews, God's chosen people, aren't really any better off than the Gentiles or the pagans because even though they have the oracles or law of God they have rejected God, they have rejected God in this way that is they have determined by following the law of God, the oracles of God, they will be made righteous through their own efforts and by doing that they have rejected God, because God says the only way to be righteous is by trusting him and the Apostle Paul demonstrates this in chapter 4 where he uses Abraham, who was the father of the Jews, to demonstrate to the Jews that indeed righteousness comes only through faith in God and not through trust in humanity or human ability.

Then at the end of chapter 4 the Apostle Paul says, and I want you to look here, the end of chapter 4 the Apostle Paul says that this wasn't just for Abraham's justification through faith through trust in God, this wasn't just good for Abraham, this is good for all of us – if we believe God and trust that what He has done through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is sufficient then we too will be counted righteous as Abraham was.

And now then in chapters 5 through 8 the Apostle Paul goes on to explain how this works, so he has developed, he has shown, he has demonstrated the need for the Gospel, why we all need the Gospel because we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Gentiles, Jews, all of us.

Now how does this work?

Well these 4 chapters are indeed rich both in theology and in practical implication and it would be good and beneficial and interesting if we were to take these chapters and dig very deeply into them, and that hopefully will come in later sermon series when we will take the time to go more deeply into these texts, but today I want us to catch kind of a bird's eye view of these texts, these 4 chapters in the book of Romans, because I think it is good for us to understand how these verses, how these claims of truth in the book of Romans, how they fit together.

Too many times as I said in the last sermon we take these verses out of context, we take these truths in the book of Romans and we pit them against each other or we pit the truth here in Romans against the truth we find in the gospels and I believe we do that because we don't understand the overarching premise of the book, of the whole Gospel.

So what we are going to do we are going to walk through these chapters, I'm not going to read them right now, but I hope you will follow along in your copies of the Scripture, follow along as we walk through here and I will attempt to do what the prophets of old did when it says they got up and read and then they gave the sense of it, so I'm going to try and help you understand the sense here of Romans chapters 5 through 8.

First of all I want you to look back again at the very end of Romans chapter 4, our righteousness, our rightness in the sight of God is not dependent on our own ability, it is not dependent on our ability to keep the law but it is dependent on God and what He has done and our trust and confidence is in God who has done this, this God here has the power to raise Christ from the dead.

And then notice this Christ, our Lord, it says died or was delivered up for our trespasses, our sin, and was raised for our justification, Christ was delivered up, He was crucified, He was killed for our sin, for our trespasses, and He was raised in the resurrection for our life, for our justification, for our righteousness and this sets the stage for everything that is to follow in chapters 5 through 8 that is why the word in verse one of chapter 5 the first word is "therefore."

Whenever you see that word therefore you need to look back and see what it is there for and what it is there for is to tell us it is because of Christ's death and resurrection we are now beneficiaries of the grace of God.

These last verses in chapter 4 also set the stage for the context or the ideas that the Apostle Paul is going to unpack and develop here; primarily the idea of death and life, and here in comes the title of our sermon today “Dead to sin, Alive in Christ.”

We have here in Romans 4:25 something of the reality of death and life and this should inform us, this should clarify everything that follows in the book of Romans what we are talking about is death and life, we will explore how this works in various facets.

First of all though the cross of Christ, the death of Christ is a glorious thing but it’s a terrible thing. As we have noticed here already the death of Christ is how our sins are dealt with, Christ died, He was delivered up for our sins. It is through the death of Christ that the righteous wrath and judgment of God is satisfied, or propitiated is the old word which means the wrath of God is averted it is taken care off, it is absorbed, and so Christ’s death breaks the power of sin over us and removes the wrath of God against us, Christ takes that wrath, Christ takes in his body the wages of sin which is death even though He himself isn’t a sinner, it says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:21 that for our sakes He, that is God, made Christ to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Do you understand what is happening here?

The innocent is dying for the guilty so that the guilty might go free.

That messes with us doesn’t it, it messes with our sense of justice and fairness and rightness, the innocent don’t go get punished for the guilty, no, the guilty are the ones that bear the punishment.

And so what Christ has done on the cross is of glory, the innocent dying for the guilty so that the guilty might go free so that the justice and wrath of God would be satisfied, what glory that is but that is only half the story and down through the ages the Church has often been guilty of only promoting the first half of the Gospel, trust in Christ, Christ died for you, He has taken care of your sins, you are forgiven, He has wiped away the guilt, the wrath of God toward you has been averted, yes it has.

But there is more.

And without the other half of the good news the cross is not so great, the rest of the story is that Christ was raised from the dead for our justification,

not only is our sin problem dealt with but through resurrection life we can be positively righteous, we can become the righteousness of God.

This is what is meant by justification to be made right, to be made righteous, this is not merely the removal of sin, although it includes that, but it is a putting on then of what is right in place of what is wrong but notice death comes first and then life and this is the way it always is in God's economy, death and then life.

Now let's look at how this works in more detail here in chapter 5.

First of all in chapter 5 we see that this justification, this work of Christ through his death and resurrection, has made it possible for us to have peace with God.

You see as long as we were sinners subject to the righteous wrath of God there was no way for God to be at peace with us and for us to be at peace with God, his stand toward us his position towards us was one of wrath and judgement as we saw in Romans chapter 1 and 2. It is not a position of peace.

We were his enemies it says here in chapter 5 verse 10, look at that, for if while we were enemies, that's who we were, that is who we are apart from Christ, you cannot be at peace with an enemy, there was no way for us to come to God and receive anything but wrath and destruction and punishment.

But Christ's death and resurrection make a way possible for us to have peace with God, Christ takes that wrath, that judgement He bears is in himself so that we can have peace with God and with this peace comes access through Christ, through him we have also obtained access, a beautiful word access, by faith into the grace of God.

As his enemies we had no access to the grace of God we had access only to the wrath of God but because of what Christ has done now the door is open and when we trust God we can come in and we can experience the glory of God.

It is wonderful news, the best news there is.

But, but we experience the glory of God the same way Christ did, are you ready for this, we experience the glory of God the same way Christ did and how did Christ experience the glory of God?

Through suffering, through death and then subsequent resurrection.

So we see here in Romans 5 and in Romans 8 that the experience of suffering is woven through this Gospel, it is woven through these chapters in Romans, it is woven through the entire Word of God, it is because of this reality that we can rejoice in our suffering, not just grin and bear it, but actually rejoice in it, positively rejoice, we are experiencing the glory of God just like Christ experienced the glory of God through suffering and death.

Now this is one of the very key distinctives of Christianity, this is one of the things that makes Christianity different from every other religion in the world, there is no other religion where their God suffers with us and for us thereby giving true meaning and true purpose to our suffering.

So we see that this reconciliation to God is made possible through the work of Christ and that his subsequent suffering, his serving to bring glory to us and hope to us through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us, we see that this is a pattern after Christ in what He experienced on the cross.

And secondly we see in the last half of Romans chapter 5 that this dying and this living is directly related to who we are in, to who we are in.

So we see in chapter 5 verses 12 to 21 that the reason we sin and the reason we die is because we are in Adam, that's our problem we are in Adam.

And you say what does that have to do with anything?

Let me break it down for you, we have already learned from Romans chapters 3 that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Why is that, why do we sin?

Well we sin because we are sinners and we are sinners because Adam sinned.

That's the argument here, follow with me, we don't become sinners because we sin we rather sin because we are sinners, there is a key distinction here.

You see who we are at a very basic level apart from Christ is a sinner, that's our nature, that is who we are, it is what defines us and this is the result of Adam's sin, this is our nature, we inherited this from Adam, all of us.

And now you say that isn't fair, I wasn't there in the garden of Eden, I didn't commit the sin that Adam committed why should I be charged with that sin with that failure, it isn't fair, why should I suffer the consequences of someone else's sin?

Yes but you were there, you were there in the sense that Adam represented you, matter of fact if you would have been there you would have done the same thing, maybe even worse. Remember who Adam was, remember how Adam came to be, Adam was created perfect, Adam had direct communion face-to-face communion with God prior to his sin, he had all of the advantages and none of the disadvantages that we have.

Do you think you would have done any better than Adam? Do you think you would have made a different choice?

So while it may seem unfair to you it is nevertheless true that in Adam we all sinned.

Now those who would deny this teaching of Scripture regarding original sin due to it not being fair must also then deny the gift of Christ in the Gospel. For you see the way that we are made right with God is through a representation and identification with the new Adam, Jesus Christ, you see that here in these verses.

So if you don't want to be a part of the old Adam, if you don't want to be a part of the old Adam's sin then you cannot be a part of the new Adam's righteousness because this is how it works.

If it isn't fair to be held accountable for Adam's sin it certainly wouldn't be fair to benefit from Christ's death and resurrection neither of which you can participate in directly but both of which you can be in through representation.

We can't have our cake and eat it too.

If there is no doctrine, if there is no teaching, if there is no truth of the original sin then there is no truth of Christ's redemption and the Gospel, in Adam we all sinned, in Christ we can all be made righteous.

This is about identification with Christ, this is about being in Christ just as we are naturally in Adam.

The only problem is that we must die to the first Adam before we can live in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam, we cannot be in both, we cannot identify with the new Adam while still being in the old Adam.

And this is what Christians are referring to when they talk about being born again, why is it necessary to be born again to have a new birth? Because we must die first from the original birth from first birth into Adam and we must be born again into Christ. Jesus said you must be born again in order to inherit eternal life.

This means you must be dead to Adam and alive to Christ and that is what chapter 6 is all about.

Dead to sin and self and alive to God.

Now the Apostle Paul anticipates the objection to the argument that he has just made, the argument that through no effort of our own we are in Adam, you are born this way, you didn't choose to be this way you are born in Adam and you suffer the consequences of that birth.

And now Christ comes and through no effort on your part He dies, He is raised again so that you can be in him.

And the objection comes, and you are probably wrestling with it yourself about now, so if I am a sinner because of nothing I have done in myself and if I am made righteous through no action of my own then I might as well continue on doing what I want to do, right, I might as well continue to sin so the grace of God can continue to abound.

And the Apostle Paul in the most forceful language in the book of Romans and you will read it time and time again says, No, by no means, God forbid, it doesn't work this way!

He says how is it even possible anyway, how can we who died to sin still live in it?

You see if you have identified with Christ that means you had to de-identify with Adam, you cannot have this both ways, either you are in Adam and continue to be enslaved to sin or you are in Christ and walk in a new way a new path.

Here he says don't you know that all of us who are baptised in Christ are baptised into his death, we died to the old Adam, and we are raised now in new life just as Christ was raised from the dead, we participate with Christ in his death and in his resurrection, we die to Adam, we are raised in Christ.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, verse 5, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

And here comes the important part listen carefully, We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

So in order to be alive in Christ we must die to Adam which is a representation of our self, we must die to who we are in Adam in order to live in Christ. This is the reality of the Christian experience.

When we come to Christ in faith we change our allegiance, this is the biggest part of what trusting faith is, are you going to trust yourself or are you going to trust Christ? That is the test, that's the issue who are you going to trust, are you going to trust yourself or are you going to trust God and if you trust God that means you must die to yourself.

Indeed this is what is pictured in the death of Christ, the death of Christ wasn't just about a man hanging on a cross, that was the kind of front and centre public kind of view of the crucifixion but remember what Christ experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane, remember when He said, not my will but Thine be done. That was a part of the cross, that was a part of the death, not my will but Thine be done.

And then when He was on the cross He says, Father into thy hands I commend my Spirit; I'm giving myself up to you Father.

And so Christ pictures for us that kind of death to self that we must experience this death to self and surrender to God, we exchange our allegiance from ourselves with Adam as a sinner we exchange that for allegiance to Christ, identity in Christ and this happens as we die to self.

So this means then that it is impossible to continue living in sin under the power and dominion of sin and be in Christ because if we do so, if we continue to live in our selfishness, in our sin, we are basically making a statement we are saying my identity hasn't changed, my allegiance hasn't changed, I am still a sinner.

And this is what he goes on to illustrate then in the last part of chapter 6. But maybe before we review that maybe a bit of an illustration would be in order to help us understand this transfer off allegiance and this death in life this dying to self and living to Christ.

So there is a story and I don't know the sure that it is true but it sounds like something that could be true, it is the story of a Cuban national, we will call him Salvador, he was recruited by Castro's government and sent as a spy to Miami to learn military secrets from the United States, however, as Salvador came to the United States and as he associated with Cubans who were living in the United States they eventually led him to renounce his allegiance and his loyalties to Castro, to the Cuban government, and as a result of this Salvador turned himself in, that is he surrendered to the US government, and he said I was here as a spy but I am no longer loyal to the

government of Cuba and to Fidel Castro, I no longer want to serve him I have seen that that is error that that is wrong, I have seen that he does not want the best for me I'm turning myself in to you.

And so the US government offered him protection, asylum, and a new identity because you see once Salvador had surrendered to the US government once he had acknowledged his role as a spy the Cuban government was after his head and so the US government in order to accomplish this new identity for Salvador they masterminded a murder of Salvador, they made it look as if he was murdered, as if he was killed, as if he had died so that the government of Castro would assume that he was dead.

And once this plan was carried out then Salvador was issued new documents, he was issued a new name he could now live a new life, a different life.

But you see what had to happen, what had to happen in order for Salvador to be free in order to live a new life in order to have a new identity he had to die, he had to change allegiance and he had to die.

So the Apostle Paul explains here in Romans chapter 6 that we must die to sin, we must die to self in order to experience new life in Christ.

And the last part of chapter 6 goes on to explain the actions or the fruit of our lives demonstrates to whom we belong, demonstrates where our allegiance is, so it says you are the slaves of the one whom you obey.

Now that seems pretty obvious to us at first glance you are the slaves of the one whom you obey, yeah that's right. So if you offer yourself up as a servant to self and sin guess who you are a servant of guess who you are slave of, guess who you are in, you are still in Adam.

If you offer yourself up to Christ in the obedience of faith then you are slave of righteousness and he says here in verse 17 but thanks be to God that you who are once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed and have been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

This is how it works, you are the slaves of the one whom you obey, if you continue living in sin and under the power of sin then you demonstrate that you are a sinner that you are slave to sin and you will receive the fruit, you will receive the results of that sin which is death, the wages of sin is death. It is the inevitable consequence of sin.

But the free gift of God if you are slave of righteousness is eternal life. So if you want to continue living the life of a sinner namely doing what you want to do then you will experience the wages of sin, the consequences of sin, you cannot claim to be in Christ and still be alive be serving sin.

Now probably here you are getting concerned, you are starting to wonder okay so what do I do with the sin in my life, I have claimed to believe in Christ to trust in Christ but I know the reality is I still sin so what does that make me, am I in Christ or am I in Adam?

What are we going to do with this dilemma?

Well one clarification I probably ought to make here is that living in sin and living under the dominion and power of sin is somewhat different then sinning, not much different but a little different.

Different in this way, when we are controlled when we are under the power or the dominion of sin that means that everything we do, everything we want to do is sin, there is no desire to do anything different, there is no regret at the ultimate level when we do sin we are simply fulfilling our desires.

Now we might be sorry we got caught, we might be sorry about the consequences of our sin but we are living under the power of sin in the dominion of sin and everything we do is sin.

The book of Romans says later everything that is not of faith, not done in faith is sin.

The alternative is to live in Christ to live under his power and under his control, and yes we still may sin and we will still sin but the sin will now cause us to grieve, to repent, we will be saddened, alarmed, frustrated, discouraged by our sin, sin no longer reigns over us we no longer have to sin we can indeed through the power of God working in us live in righteousness.

That's the difference between living in sin, under sin, and living in Christ in the flesh but here comes the problem you see there are 2 parts of us at least, maybe 3, there is the outer man and there is the inner man. In the scriptures very clearly in Romans 7 and Romans 8 we see that the outer man is still in bondage to some degree he is still enslaved to some degree.

It is the inner man that identifies with Christ, it is the inner man that becomes one with Christ and in whom Christ lives and so it sets us up for this cosmic struggle this battle within us.

It's a problem, it's a problem we all face.

Let's look at how Paul deals with it.

In Romans chapter 7 the Apostle Paul continues the argument and now he switches to those who are the Jews who know the law who think okay, I'm not going to be a slave to sin, I'm going to do the right thing myself, I'm going to follow the law going to pull myself up by my own bootstraps, I'm going to do what has to be done, I'm going to be holy.

And the Apostle Paul says, brothers, and he is speaking to his fellow Jews here the ones he says who know the law, don't you know, don't you know that when you are born to Christ you had to die to the law? Don't you know that if you are still trying to satisfy God by the law that you haven't yet lived to Christ? Evidently the Judaizers had infiltrated the church, probably even the Roman church, they were those who called themselves Christian but they still wanted to keep the law as a way to be extra holy to get special favour with God.

And Paul asks the question are you still trying to be righteous through the law, to the keeping of the law? You need to understand something death frees you from the law when you died with Christ you died to the law you can't have it both ways, if you are still living under the law if you are still trying to justify yourself then you cannot live in Christ.

And he uses the example here of marriage he uses this as an illustration, just as a married person cannot remarry rightfully while their spouse is still living so we cannot be joined to Christ while we are still married to the law, you can only be married to one person at a time and death is what provides the separation necessary for a change of relationship.

And then again the Apostle anticipates the objection, verse 7 of chapter 7, What then shall we say?

What do we do with this, what do you mean then is the law sin? If we are supposed to die to the law in order to be raised in Christ does that mean that the law is sin too? Does that mean that the law is a bad thing? And the Apostle Paul once again says no, by no means, the law is a good thing, the law is a good thing because it shows us our sinfulness how else would we

know we are sinner except that the law says this is sin. And so the law is holy and righteous and good even though it reveals sin.

And then the objection comes again and once again the Apostle Paul is ready for it, So is it the law's fault that I'm a sinner? Ah, so if sin is only known by the law then the law is to blame, that's why I'm a sinner; I wouldn't be a sinner except for the law.

No, no, by no means he says again, he says it was sin in me that makes me a sinner, all the law does it shows me how much of a sinner I really am, the law does not have any power to change who I am all the law can do is reveal who I am, it can show me who I am. The law has no power to change me into a non-sinner.

Remember how sin happens and why we are sinners it is because we are in Adam and the law has no power to change that all law can do is say, see, look there you are a sinner, you're a big sinner.

But the law has no power to change me or you or anyone else into a non-sinner and this is the primary argument of the rest of chapter 7.

This is the chapter in Romans that causes so much consternation, we are going to have to leave a detailed discussion of it for a later time, but just to be clear on it the Apostle has this debate here with himself and this is a description of how we relate to the law, so the law says not to do something, but remember it has no power and so we do it anyway and the law says see, you are a sinner.

And we have to agree that the law is right and the law is good.

If it is up to me I have no way of living right even if I would want to obey the law, like the Jews they still couldn't get it done.

And this is all because of the sin that lives in us that dwells in us.

So what is going to be the solution to this problem?

We cannot live rightly according to law we have no power in ourselves, the law has no power to change us, what we need then is something else to dwell inside of us, we need that sin to die and we need Christ to live within and that's what it says here in Romans chapter 7, the last few verses of chapter 7, wretched man that I am! As we evaluate our condition unable to do what the law demands yet condemned by the law, the law with no power to change us and we evaluate ourselves and say, oh, this is terrible, I'm a

terrible person, I am wretched person! Yes, yes. Who will deliver me from this body of death? How am I going to escape this impossible dilemma? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! That is how we are going to be delivered, that is the good news of the Gospel. So then I myself serve the Lord God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

So the Apostle Paul sets up again this idea that there are 2 parts of us, at least 2 parts of us that are at war, and with our mind, with our will, we identify with Christ and we say I have died to Adam and sin; I have surrendered to you God. But in this life our flesh is still with us and our flesh is still subject to the curse and we still wrestle with this sin in us.

And then we come to chapter 8, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

You see the answer is to be in Christ, to be identified with Christ, that is the way, that is the way we are going to overcome.

Not only has Christ done everything necessary for our salvation outside of us but now He comes to indwell us to live within us by the person of the Holy Spirit. Colossians 1:27 says God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

That's how God works, He kills and He raises to life.

And so whilst our assurance of salvation whilst our justification is rooted in this work of Christ outside of us it is also true that we know that we live in him and He in us because He has given us of his Spirit.

Too many times we miss this, we think of Christianity, we think of salvation as something that happens outside of us, yes it does, in history Christ dying, being raised again, accomplishing for us what we cannot do for ourselves, but that is not where it stops, God by his power through his grace comes and dwells within us and lives within us and creates in us this glory of the resurrection and so God has done what the law could not do.

The law couldn't change the state of my heart, the law couldn't change what was dwelling living in me. God can and will.

And this is the way He will deal also with our body of flesh with its temporal body still subject to the curse, it isn't without hope either, it says here in Romans 8 if the Spirit of him who has raised Jesus from the dead lives

in you then what? then He will also give life to your mortal body through his Spirit.

So even though we live in a body that is subject to sin and death and decay and when Christ dwells within us it begins the process of restoration and glorification and we will not finally be like Christ until we see him as He is when we join him in his heaven but we can in this life here and now belong to Christ, we in him and He in us.

It says here his Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, children of God not children of Adam.

We belong to a new family we have a new identity we are now in Christ.

This union in Christ we find it all through scriptures, we don't have time to go to all the places where the scriptures references this, in John Jesus talks about himself being divine and we are the branches, there is this union with Christ, this life-giving union.

The Apostle Paul appeals this union of Christ throughout all his Epistles.

In Adam we possess union with Adam first, we possess sin and judgement and condemnation and fear and alienation but in Christ we possess righteousness and holiness and eternal life and justification and adoption as sons.

And the Apostle Paul declares in Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me.

Crucified with Christ, dead to self, raised to newness of life.

And so this indwelling Spirit of God brings suffering, brings death to us, we don't like that very much, we don't like suffering, we don't like death but we must continually face it we must continually face the death of self day by day in order to live in Christ. The glory of it is here in Romans 8 that we do have the firstfruits, verse 23, where you have the firstfruits of the Spirit, that is a down payment or deposit of the Spirit, we wait with groaning for the day when we will be released from this bondage, the redemption of our bodies.

It is the already and not yet, we are not yet there but yet we already can experience something of the glory of God even in our bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:22, "for as in Adam all die so in Christ shall all be made alive." This is the great exchange the Apostle Paul is talking to us about here in Romans 5 through 8.

And as Jesus said to Martha the sister of Lazarus who had died, Jesus says I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me though he were dead, that's us, yet shall he live.

And so we are dead men walking, we are in Christ even though our body is dying.

And so this all comes down to a question about where your allegiance is.

John Piper says this, "A Christian is not a person who believes in his head the teachings of the Bible, Satan believes in his head the teachings of the Bible, a Christian is a person who has died with Christ, whose stiff neck has been broken, whose brazen forehead has been shattered, whose stony heart has been crushed, whose pride has been slain and whose life is now mastered by Jesus Christ."

And this brings us to the end of Romans chapter 8.

All these great blessings, all these great promises that we so enjoy that we so like at the end of chapter 8 all of them are contingent on whether or not we are in fact in Adam or in Christ.

For those who are in Christ, for those who Christ is in everything that happens to them is good.

Now this doesn't mean we won't suffer, it doesn't mean that we won't experience hardship, bad things, even death, Christ did, it means that in those things we are being more completely transformed into the likeness of Christ, we are becoming more alive in Christ even as we are dying in the flesh.

If we are in Christ and Christ is in us then what happens to us is by God's design but can we trust Him, can we trust God if we surrendered to him and say, God, I'll let you do whatever you think is best in me.

Can we trust him, is He a good God, is He good enough?

Well think about this Romans 8: 32, He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all.

We have a God like that, a God who gives his own Son for us, how will He not also with his Son graciously give us all things?

Can we trust him? Yes, we can trust him completely because He has demonstrated in his own sacrifice and suffering that He is after our well-being, that He is after our eternal joy and life.

And so if we are in Christ and Christ is in us then who shall bring any charge against us, how shall we suffer? Is it written for your sake we are being killed all the day long, we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered but in all of these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

And Paul closes with these great words, this conquering benediction, For I'm sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rules, nor things present of things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So are you in him? Is He in you? Or are you still trying to have it both ways and follow your own desires to make yourself good enough. That isn't how God works, God works through suffering through the death of self.

And so I urge you, I plead with you, surrender, give up, it is not going to happen by trying harder to be good, it is not going to happen by more vigorously obeying the law, the law has no power to change you from the inside out only God can do that and He does that by indwelling you but you must surrender, you must surrender to God.

Let's pray.

Father God we thank you that you have not left us to wallow in our sins, that you have not left us without hope of life and life eternal.

You are a great God, you are a loving God, you are a good God, a God who sent his own Son to die for us

and we cannot even fathom the cost of this and yet we trust in you, we reach out to you in hope.

Pray that you would fill us with your Spirit that you would indwell us that you would make us righteous even as we wait in these mortal bodies and even as we groan with the struggle that we face from day to day.

Would you work in us, would you be pleased to dwell in us and to bring us into glory, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

**The Greatest Letter Ever Written**  
Message 3: Romans Chapters 9 to 11  
What Shall We Say Then?

*By The Editor – To our readers:* Please use your own copy of the Bible to read Romans Chapters 9 through 11. To conserve space these chapters have not been inserted in the transcription. The translation used in the speaker's fellowship is the ESV or English Standard Version.

Indeed sweet are the promises and we can trust but did you ever think about what it takes for us to trust God, what it takes for us to be able to trust He will fulfil his promises, have you ever thought about that? This morning we are going to think about that, we are going to see what God himself says about that.

What kind of God does He have to be in order for us to be able to trust his promises, in order for us to be able to follow him unreservedly, what kind of God are we talking about?

These are the kinds of questions the apostle Paul asks and answers in Romans chapters 9, 10 and 11, and that is where we are today in our sermon series on the book of Romans we are doing a bit of a flyover, for sermons on this great letter, big book, the book of Romans.

And as we begin I think it would be good for us to look back a bit and see where these 3 chapters this morning fit into the whole book.

Some of you are visiting with us and so we will try to catch you up a little bit and some of you, most of us, probably forget where we have been so let's start at the beginning.

This book of Romans chapter 1 is written to the Christians in Rome, these Christians had never had that the benefit of direct apostolic teaching, they had not had the benefit of the apostle Paul visiting with them and preaching to them and walking with them teaching them as he had so many other churches, instead they had the Old Testament, they had at least part of scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures and they had undoubtedly some believers there who had come from Jerusalem who had been witnesses to what had happened in the life of Jesus and the death and resurrection of

Christ and so they knew enough, they had enough information to be Christians, they knew about Jesus, they knew what He had done and they trusted him.

But the apostle Paul is writing this letter to them as an extended explanation of the Gospel and perhaps he is writing to encourage them I'm sure, probably he is also writing to fill in some of the details that they might be missing and he is certainly writing to answer some of their questions.

Now these Christians in Rome were probably primarily Gentiles, there were probably also quite a few or some believing Jews in the church at Rome and in the first couple of chapters of the book of Romans the apostle demonstrates how all people, including the Jews, are unrighteous apart from God, both Jews and Gentiles need the same Gospel.

Now certainly the Jews did have some initial advantage, they were the ones through whom Christ had been revealed to the world, they were the ones through whom God had chosen to reveal himself, but that advantage didn't make them less sinful or more holy. Then the apostle goes to great lengths in chapters 3, 4 and 5 to show that the righteousness that God requires only comes through faith in him.

And this is the way always was and always has been even with Abraham, this is how Abraham was counted righteous before God.

And then in chapters 5, 6 and 7 the apostle explains how this faith and righteousness work, how does this work? And he goes into detail about that and he talks about as we looked at 2 Sundays ago he talks about how we partake of union with Christ, we become dead to our sinful state and would become alive in Christ, but then there is still bit of an interface, this dilemma that we face between our mortal bodies, the flesh, and our spirit which is made alive in Christ and how this is going to work out itself in our lives as we are not yet fully glorified. And so Romans chapter 7 and then into chapter 8 talk about this.

And in Romans chapter 8, probably the high watermark of this entire Epistle, the apostle gives us a beautiful description of the promises of God that are ours through Christ and what beautiful promises they are, sweet are the promises. Yes they are.

And then we come to chapters 9 through 11 and it seems like the apostle changes gears here but we will look at this more closely this morning and

then following chapters 9 through 11 we have a couple of chapters, chapter 12 outlining the practical outworking of the Gospel in our daily lives, so how does this affect the way we live day to day with each other in our world, so this is the end of the Gospel in terms of the outworking of it.

And I know that some of you that is what you are waiting for, you just can't wait until we get to the practical section of Romans, you want the apostle Paul to tell you what to do, you don't have much use for all this debatable theology and long explanations.

Well not so fast, let me remind you of a few things.

First of all the practical outworkings of the Gospel are of very little value without an understanding of the Gospel, without an appreciation for the Gospel. So if you want chapters 12 through 16 then you have to have chapters 1 through 11 otherwise everything you do in chapters 12 through 16 is empty and void of any lasting value.

Well you say then just give me chapter 8, I can deal with chapter 8.

All right, chapter 8 is beautiful, it is encouraging, it is promising and we can resonate with that.

Well let me attempt today to show you how the promises in chapter 8 depend on chapters 9 through 11.

The promises in chapter 8 are not very sweet, they are not very good unless we have a God who is good and a God who is true and a God who is sovereign and a God who is powerful otherwise those promises are worthless.

You see in chapter 8 we have all these great and precious promises regarding the work of Christ on our behalf from eternity past 2 eternity future, if we come to him in faith we can experience, we can participate in these blessings.

But, the Christians to whom Paul is writing they had read the Old Testament, they had heard about God's chosen people the Jews, they had read all the promises that God had made, all the blessings that He had given to the Jews, his chosen people, and then they looked around and they saw that the Jews were not being blessed the way God had promised, in fact it looked as if those promises were empty, it looked as if they had failed.

So how were they going to believe these new promises that the apostle Paul was giving them in Romans chapter 8?

And what was going on with the Jews anyway, weren't they God's chosen people, why are they still in their sins, why do they not believe?

And perhaps there were some believing Jews in Rome, as I have already said, perhaps they were a little bit miffed why were these Gentiles getting all these blessings and yet the Jews are not, God's own chosen people shouldn't they be receiving the blessings?

And so this is the context now for these next 3 chapters and I'm going to read all 3 chapters, 9, 10 and 11 and then I am going to make some comments but before I read I think it would be helpful to us to keep a few other things in mind to prepare us as we hear the Word of God.

First of all it is so important that we let these texts of Scripture, these chapters, let them say what they want to say, we have to approach the Word of God with humility, we have to approach the Word of God with the attitude of yes Lord, yes. We must try to approach the text of Scripture, all Scripture, with this honest willingness to hear and understand.

Now it is our temptation, our inclination to bring out preconceived ideas and understandings to the text and then read it in light of what we already know.

Let's try not to do that this morning.

Secondly let's keep in mind that there are lots of implications that we will not have time to unpack or explore this morning, this is rich text, it is rich text format, okay, those of you who know anything about computers you know what I am talking about, this is rich text, there is lots of things here that we could spend a lot of time on but we don't have time for that this morning and even if we did have time for it I still don't think we could unpack it all, alright.

Because this is bigger than us.

So you are going to have to be okay with that, you're going to have to be okay with reading this and not understanding everything.

You must be willing to rest in and trust God with some of these things, you don't have to have it all figured out but you can trust God does have it all figured out.

So don't trust in your own ability to make sense of it all.

And thirdly it is often a temptation when we run into some of the hard teachings in these passages to dismiss them or to disregard them because they don't fit with our view of whom God is, Surely God couldn't do that? No, God isn't like that!

Well let me remind you, you are not God, and He is.

And secondly He has revealed himself to us and this is part of his revelation.

And remember one other thing this isn't a God who is aloof, this isn't a God who sits in some heavenly mansion far removed from the reality of his people and his created world and who capriciously or arbitrarily issues commands and judgements.

No this is a God who has entered our world, this is a God who came and lived with us and walked with us and died for us, this is a God who loves us, this is a God who loves us to the extent that he gave of himself for us, this is a God who cares deeply. He is a God who knows how it is, he is a God who cares, who knows, who loves, who acts accordingly.

So before you charge God with being unjust or cruel or arbitrary think who you are talking about.

Now let's read Romans Chapters 9 through 11

That ought to cause you to worship, that is the only proper response.

Now I realise we don't have much time left to unpack all of this but I think it is important for us to have the weight of this text to come to bear on us and we'll come back through this later, Lord willing, in a later sermon series and take it in more detail and dig down deeper, but this morning here is what we are going to do in the time that we have left is to go through these 3 chapters and to note the places where the apostle answers objections and where he answers questions.

In quite a few places he writes "what shall we say then" or "but how" or "I ask" and as he has done so many times before in this book the apostle anticipates questions, he anticipates the objections and he takes them head on. And I think by looking at these objections, these questions we can more clearly understand the point he is trying to make otherwise the objections

or the questions would be irrelevant but we can see through the questions, see through the objections what he is really getting at. And so that's what we are going to do today we are just going to take all these, I think is about 11 of them, and we are just going to go through them one at a time.

So the first question, and the first question is not stated in this way but I believe this is how it goes, so if the Israelites had all of these promises, they had this list here in chapter 9 verse 4 and following, if the Israelites had all of these promises of God how come they are not experiencing them? How come they are not being made effective in their life?

And the underlying question is so has the word of God failed have the promises of God failed, is that what has happened here?

And the apostle Paul says no, that's not what has happened here. But you have to understand he says is that not all the physical descendants of Israel, not all the Jews by flesh, by birth, are the real Israel. No the real Israel are children of the promise, the ones whom God has said you shall be born as He said about Isaac.

Not all of the descendants of any of the fathers are children of the promise, so not all of Abraham's children are children of the promise, remember there is Ishmael also a son of Abraham; he wasn't a child of the promise.

And then there were Jacob and Esau, and Jacob was the child of promise not Esau even though they had the same father.

And so what he is pointing to hear it doesn't matter your lineage, it doesn't matter who you are a descendant of, that doesn't bring you any special favour with God. No what brings you favour with God is if you are a child of the promise. The only people who are God's people are the ones of the promise and so there is the Israel who are Israel by the flesh but then there are the true Israel who are Israel by the promise.

And now you say, wait a minute here, wait a minute, and the apostle Paul anticipates this objection and he says, What shall we say then, verse 14, is God unjust?

This doesn't sound right to us does it, is God unjust, this isn't fair.

Well let me ask you, do you really want fair, do you really want what is fair, do you really want justice? Then none of us would receive anything but the wrath of God. The apostle Paul has already made that very clear, all of us, Jew, Gentile, all of us are subject to the wrath of God.

So we don't want fair, we don't want fair we need mercy and he says here God has mercy on some, now this isn't fair, remember it is not fair, we don't want fair but it is just and here is why it is just and here is what he says: If God's mercy depended on something that we have done to deserve it, if God's mercy depended on who we were related to and then He did not show us mercy He would be unjust.

But because God's mercy depends not on our will, not on our efforts not on who we are related to then He can be just, and He is just in showing mercy to whomever He wills because it does not depend on who we are related to, it doesn't depend on what we have done to try and earn favour with him.

So He is just and showing mercy to some and letting others go their way to destruction.

But then there is a 2<sup>nd</sup> objection that comes quickly on the heels of the first, why does He still find fault? verse 19.

Okay, so God chooses whom He will show mercy to, okay, then why does He still blame me for my choices and my actions?

And the apostle realises that this is going to be the objection this is going to be the question so he deals with it head on and he says, Who are you O man to talk back to God? Who are you anyway and who made you anyway? And if God made you and He holds you responsible for your choices and actions then who are you to disagree with them?

And he goes on to explain don't you see how He can use those whom He has created to accomplish his purposes, He has that right, He can take out of the same lump clay and He can make different kinds of clay pots and some of them can be used for very honourable purposes and others for more ordinary purposes, that is his prerogative because He is God.

Maybe He wants to use the Jews and their rejection of himself to accomplish the salvation of the Gentiles, that is the right of God to do that.

In all of this we must depend on God we must trust him we dare not second-guess or judge God, He has a plan for all of this and for all his people.

Hosea and Isaiah these Old Testament prophets they realised this they saw that unless God would work through the children of the promise we would all be like Sodom and Gomorrah, unless God would act, unless God would promise we would all be subject to destruction like Sodom and Gomorrah.

And then the prophets went on to acknowledge that not all the descendants of Abraham were really sons of God and God was using some of them to raise up other sons who were not physical descendants of Abraham.

And so the question comes then in verse 30 of chapter 9, What shall we say then? What are we going to do with this?

We can see that only those who have faith in God will be righteous, if we attempt to be in God's family by our lineage or by our attempts at obedience to the law we will not succeed, only those who believe in Christ will be saved. This is the way it has always been this is the way it will always be for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Chapter 10 verse 4.

But then another question comes immediately, So what does this faith consist of, what is the message?

Well the message is this you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

This applies to everyone, Jew and Gentile, Greek and Pagan, American and Chinese, everyone who believes in him everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, this offer is extended to everyone, the only people who will be saved are those who trust God, submit to his Lordship and believe that what He has done is sufficient for our salvation.

But then the 4<sup>th</sup> question, Okay, okay but how are we or how are they to call on him if we don't actually believe, how are we going to call on him if we don't actually believe and how are we going to believe unless we hear? In other words how are they going to get this promise so that they can believe and trust? This isn't fair is it, God is saying that you cannot be saved unless you respond to this message but how are we going to get the message?

Well we depend on God again, we depend on God.

Notice how this works, (chapter 10 verse 14) how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? How do they believe in him of whom they have not heard? How are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

And who does the sending? It's God, it is God who sent the prophets, it is God who sent his Son, it is God who sent the Apostles, it is God even today who sends missionaries and preachers and evangelists.

This all goes back to God. God has appointed messengers to deliver this news and He works in our heart so that this message takes roots, these are the means that God has chosen by which to bring the Word to bear on the hearts of those who will believe.

But here comes the 3<sup>rd</sup> objection. Okay but obviously not everybody that hear believes. Right, we know that, you can preach to the sinner until you're blue in the face but it doesn't mean he is going to believe.

So is there something wrong with the Word of God, is there something wrong with the message, is God not powerful? No.

How about the Jews? I mean the evidence here is that the Jews have the advantage, the Jews of all people ought to be believing. Maybe they didn't understand it maybe that is what the problem is, verse 19, did Israel not understand, I mean why have they rejected God? They heard yes, it says they heard and the words of God went to the ends of the world. So not hearing was not the issue.

Maybe the issue was with not understanding. No that's not the issue either. They understood it, they heard it they understood it but what happened? They were disobedient, they were contrary, they said I don't want it, I'm not going to obey, I'm not going to listen.

So they rejected the word of God and it indicates here in verse 20 that there were others outside of Israel's rule who were actually seeking the Word, they were actually seeking out the prophets even while God's own people were rejecting him.

So it was in a matter of understanding because these other people came and they understood and they believed.

So what does this all mean?

Chapter 11, I ask then so does this mean that God has rejected his people? Is that what this means?

By no means! God forbid! No it doesn't mean that.

God still has a people, the apostle Paul says I am proof that God has not rejected his people, I am an Israelite, I am of the tribe of Benjamin, in other places he talks about himself as an Israelite of the Israelites, I'm still here, God has not rejected his people!

And then he recounts the account of Elijah who had similar questions, God what have you done they have killed all your prophets, there is nobody left but me! And God comes and says no, I have kept a remnant, I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

God is faithful, God is faithful to his people, God still has his people.

True Israel is still obeying God, true Israel is still trusting God.

Remember not all of the descendants of Israel are children of the promise, all through history God has had his people, so it's says those whom God has foreknown, those whom He has chosen those have been his people even to the present time, verse 5 says there is a remnant chosen by grace.

Now this isn't based on whether one person is more righteous than another in their own effort, this is based on the grace of God.

Those who are the true Israel, those who trusted God by faith have always received the promise and blessings of God, God's promises have never failed for those who have trusted in him, ever!

And those who were not true Israel those who have rejected God have continued in their sin and disobedience and are subject to the wrath of God.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It is that certainty, it is that promise and it is that understanding of the sovereignty of God that empowers us and motivates us to pray for lost souls. Why would you ever pray for someone to be saved if you did not think God was capable of saving them? Why would you ever go preach or teach or evangelise if you didn't think that God was capable of saving those people when they heard his word.

God has always blessed, God has always fulfilled his promises to those who have been obedient to the faith.

So then another implication comes, another question comes.

So these non-remnant, the not true Israel ones, did they stumble just so that they would fall, is that all this is about? So they tripped and they fell just so that they could fall, is that the end of their purpose is that all they are good for? No.

What is the purpose of God in all of this? Even those children of the flesh God has used for his good purposes it says here in the failure and disobe-

ence of the Jews God has brought salvation to the Gentiles. And He has done this, and notice how this is, this is beautiful, so in the fall, in the stumbling of the non-Israel of Israel, the not true Israel, in their stumbling in their falling the Gospel is made known to the Gentiles and because of that Gospel being made known to the Gentiles the Jews become jealous and they are drawn back to God.

Who else could have thought up something like this? This is beautiful.

God has done this, God has used the failure and the disobedience of the Jews to bring salvation to the Gentiles, He has brought salvation to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous so they will be motivated turn back to God.

Now if, if their rejection of the Gospel it says here in verse 12, if their rejection of the gospel has done all this imagine what their inclusion will do and how it will be when they are restored, if God can use the failures and disobedience and falling and stumbling of the descendants of Abraham imagine what He can do with their obedience, imagine what He can do when they are included.

7<sup>th</sup> question. Now you mean to tell me as a Gentile the reason I am saved is because some Jew did not believe, that is what you are saying right? The reason that I as a Gentile can believe is because some Jew didn't.

Well not exactly.

And there is this long section here now in chapter 11 about this grafting process.

Now some of you are more agriculturally minded than others so you understand how this is but basically when you graft something you break off a branch of a tree, you might cut it off, but in any case you take off a branch from one tree, it might be totally unrelated, and you splice it in to a prepared place on another tree, you wrap it up and the sap begins to flow from the tree into this grafted on branch and it becomes fastened to the tree, it becomes a part of the tree.

It is amazing, who would have ever thought about something like that.

But this is how God works.

And so He works with his people, it is true that because the branches of unbelieving Israelites were broken off that did make a place where as a Gentile we could be grafted into the tree but he says be careful and don't

be proud about this okay, remember it is always unbelief and disobedience that gets the branches broken off, always, unbelief and disobedience gets the branches broken off, and it is always faith that fastens the branches to the tree.

That is the only way it works.

So if God didn't spare the natural branches when they didn't believe neither will He spare you, you are the wild branch that has been grafted in, if God didn't spare the natural branch when they became disobedient and unbelieving and He broke them off yeah you can be sure is going to do the same with you even though He took and grafted you in, if you are not going to believe you can be broken off just like they were.

And if through the mercy and grace of God those broken off branches, notice what he says here in verse 23 of chapter 11, and if they, the broken off branches do not continue in their own belief they will be grafted in, God is going to graft them in, He has the power to do so.

And actually by the way they are actually the natural branches so they are even going to be a better fit than you are, okay.

But what is all this going to depend on?

All of this is going to depend on the power of God, God has the power to graft them in again.

Guess what, a branch cannot graft itself, never, this is a supernatural work of God that must graft the branch in, He can do that with unbelieving Israel, He can do that with Gentiles but it is the same power of God that must work to graft either the wild olive tree or the natural olive tree.

So don't think you're so smart, don't think you have it all figured out, don't think you can do this in your own power.

Remember God is still at work even with unbelieving Israel, they have the same opportunity, they have the same responsibility as you do.

Remember at one time you too were disobedient, at one time you too were unbelieving and how did you come into the family of God?

It is only by the mercy and grace of God, it wasn't because you are smart, it wasn't because you are good, it wasn't because you were related to somebody.

No, the only way you have come into the family of God is by the call and mercy of God himself.

All of us it says here by nature are disobedient, God has consigned us all to disobedience, verse 32, so that He may have mercy.

And so we are obligated, we are obligated to humility, we are obligated to respect, we are obligated to awe, and our response must be the response of the apostle Paul.

The end of this weighty section in the book of Romans we get here and we are wrestling with some of these uncomfortable truths about God, we are wrestling with some of the uncomfortable realities of who we are, what are we going to do, what are we going to say then?

You see the bottom line is this, the bottom line of the whole book of Romans, the bottom line of Romans 9, 10 and 11 is this: If God does not act first we are all lost, every one of us.

If God doesn't act none of us stand a chance, neither Israel nor the Gentiles, only the children of the promise, only those who believe will be saved and the only way we are going to believe is if God does something, He sent his Son to die for us, He sent his messengers to preach the Gospel, we are dependent on him.

What this should cause us to do is to worship, to throw ourselves down before a mighty and holy God, an all-powerful God, a God who can and will fulfil his promises, a God who loves us, a God who sacrificed himself for us, we must throw ourselves on his mercy and his grace.

We cannot trust ourselves, we cannot trust our lineage, our heritage, we cannot trust our abilities we must trust Him and Him alone.

We can trust his great and precious promises.

We can trust his great and precious promises precisely because He is great and He is sovereign and He is powerful otherwise we could not trust him.

He is powerful, He is mighty to save, we have no other option but to say what the apostle Paul says here in the last few verses of Romans 11,

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, who has been his counsellor? Who is told him what to do? Who has given him a gift that He might be repaid?”

And the answer is nobody.

Our God is without peer our God is God and we are not.

Everything He does, everything He says is self-existing fall from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

## The Greatest Letter Ever Written

Message 4 - Romans 12 to 16

Changed Minds – Changed Lives

*From The Editor To our readers:* Please use your own copy of the Bible to read Romans Chapters 12 through 16. To conserve space these chapters have not been inserted in the transcription. The translation used in the speaker's fellowship is the ESV or English Standard Version.

Keep your Bibles open to Romans chapter 12 as we continue our overview of the book of Romans.

Today we are going to be surfing across the tops of the waves in Romans chapters 12 through 16 and you will need to follow along in your copies of the Scripture in order that we can together see across the waves and into the ocean of God's riches and his truth.

I would like you to stand with your Bibles, we are going to read a couple of key pieces of the rest of this section, I invite you to stand as I read and then we're all going to read together the doxology at the end of chapter 16.

But first go to the end of chapter 13 where it says in verse 8, Romans 13:8-10 <sup>8</sup> Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Then moving over to Romans chapter 15 verse 1, Romans 15:1-7 <sup>1</sup> We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. <sup>3</sup> For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on

me.”<sup>4</sup> For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.<sup>5</sup> May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

And then at the end of chapter 15 verse 30

Romans 15:30-33<sup>30</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,<sup>31</sup> that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,<sup>32</sup> so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.<sup>33</sup> May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

And now chapter 16 verse 17,

Romans 16:17-20<sup>17</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.<sup>18</sup> For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.<sup>19</sup> For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.<sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And then let us read together verses 25 to 27.

Romans 16:25-27<sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages<sup>26</sup> but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—<sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Amen, and may He bless the reading of his word, you may be seated.

Romans chapter 12 begins a new section in the book of Romans and this continues through to the end of the book, in this section in Romans the apostle Paul takes the propositional truth that we find in chapters 1 through 11 and he begins to issue imperatives or commands.

We often call these things application, things to do, how does the truth of God apply to our daily lives.

Now this is an important and necessary consideration.

But one thing that we must never forget is that applications or imperatives, commands, flow out of truth not the other way around so we have to have a life that flows out of what is true and right and good.

We do not just do right and good without it being sourced from what is true.

The application of Romans chapters 12 through 16 grows out of Romans 1 to 11, you cannot take one without the other, we must take them in their proper order, one comes first, the propositional truths of Romans 1 to 11 must come first.

But this application that we find here it comes out in a more general way than we might expect.

Most of us are kind of bottom-line people, we take a financial statement we look at it and go straight to the bottom line that's what's really important.

Many of us are a kind of get to the point people okay, and so we want to see a direct and immediate connection from the doctrine to the application and in preaching many times there is a tendency, indeed almost a necessity, to seek to find the meaning of a text and then directly drive home its application and of course it helps if it is very immediate and earthshaking and relevant to our lives. That's what we want.

And there are times, there are times when that should happen and what can happen but the run many other times when that is neither possible nor desirable.

Now we look for the practical applications of Scriptures, indeed we demand them, because we want to be shown that these truths are practical and relevant to us today but the relevance and applicability of God's Word is not always that quick, is not always that apparent.

Let me give you an analogy here, as we look at Romans 1 to 11 we can see it as something like a stew, now you never thought that I would talk about the word of God like a stew did you, but let me say it to you this way:

So the apostle Paul here he keeps adding in stuff to the stew, all right, one truth after another and yes they are all related because they are in the same stew okay, but he adds the carrots and the celery and the potatoes and some meat and it is all put into this stew and he doesn't just make a direct connection or direct application directly from the carrots to application or directly from the celery to the application, no he doesn't, he makes application from the stew to our lives, it is this stew that feeds us.

Now yes there are some juicy carrots in there and some crisp celery and some savoury meat and we delight in those things but we delight in them in the context of the stew.

The importance of this is especially evident when we recall that some of the truths which Paul taught in Romans 1 to 11 seem at least on the surface to be contradictory, so how are we going to deal with this in terms of application?

Paul taught the grace of God but he also taught that the law is in effect, what are we to do or what can we do with that, how are we can apply that?

The apostle Paul teaches the sovereignty of God both in salvation and in providence but he also teaches the responsibility of man.

If we attempt to link each doctrine directly with an application we may very well fall into the trap of emphasising only one element of truth rather than the sum total of truth, that is why we have to have the stew.

And so Paul's applications are based upon the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.

Paul's applications are based on grace and the law.

Paul's applications are based upon God's work in salvation and upon our striving in salvation.

Indeed even in this section of Romans 12, and onward of more direct application, the apostle Paul is going to be saying things that on the surface seem to be contradictory.

So for example Romans 14 verse 10 says don't pass judgement on your brother.

Romans 16 verse 17 watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles, avoid them.

Sounds like judging to me.

You see we have to take it all together we can't just pick one little piece out and make an extrapolation from that, we must take the word of God as a whole, we must apply every principle in every passage in view to what the whole text says.

And perhaps Romans 12 verses 1 and 2 here illustrate this better than anything else.

This very famous text most of us have heard this many times, I would say that this text has probably been misused, it has been abused and some of us have some kind of cringe factor that happens whenever this text is read.

This is a very powerful text it is very beautiful, it is very pertinent, what this text basically says to us is that the scriptures are not given to us to throw out all the rules, the scriptures are not given to us as a set of rules to rigidly follow.

The Bible, God's truth, is given to us so that we might have our minds transformed, so that we might have our minds renewed, the Bible is not given to us merely to provide us with a list of practices to do or a list of sins to avoid, the Bible is given to us to provide us with more than just a series of principles, as important as those are.

The Bible is given to us, God's truth is given to us to change our perspective, to change the way we think, to transfer all our way of seeing things so that we can see life in ourselves from God's perspective.

This new perspective, this new point of view I believe that it is what he is talking about when he talks about the renewed mind here in Romans 12 verse 2, this new perspective, this perspective that aligns with God's perspective this is the basis for transformed life.

And so it is that there is not always a direct line between a particular teaching or doctrine and a certain application, biblical truth is not necessarily to be understood that way in isolation but in context, in the context of the whole of God's word and in the context of our own lives.

So if you do not come away from this message today with a concrete area of application that's okay, that's fine, it doesn't bother me at all, I would hope however that our study of the book of Romans the entire book of Romans, would change your perspective significantly and it would change the way you think about yourself, the way you think about God, the way

you think about the world in which you live so that when you do live in this world you live differently, when you do think you think differently, differently from the world and that you live differently from what you formerly practised or thought.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves here, let me show you the basic outline of these last 5 chapters and then we will come back and dive in a little deeper at a few spots.

So first of all chapters 12 and 13 fit together and these chapters open with a call to surrender our bodies and the call to the transformation of our mind and then we have this explanation, this demonstration of how that works out in our daily lives in chapters 12 and 13.

And he says here in chapter 12 verse one that we are to present our bodies as a sacrifice because of and by the power of the mercies of God. Now what are the mercies of God?

Well that's what he has just been talking to us about, writing to us about in the first 11 chapters of Romans, this is the Gospel, this is the way God works in the world and in our hearts, the mercies of God, and it is because of this and by this that we are to surrender our bodies as a living sacrifice.

These mercies of God empower and command the obedience of the faith, the apostle Paul references that term at least 3 times in this book in chapter 1 and chapter 10 and again at the end of chapter 16 this call to the obedience of the faith.

This Gospel, these mercies of God require they demand a response, a response to obedience.

This Gospel, this faith, these mercies of God must result in a changed way of life, we must put off the sinful selfish way of living, the way of the flesh, the way our world goes about life we must put off, we must be renewed in our thinking so that we can live in ways that are according to the Gospel, that are according to the glory of God.

And chapters 12 and 13 give us some specific examples and commands for what this looks like in real life. The end of chapter 13 then wraps this up with a reminder that time is running out, so get up and cast off the works of darkness, put on the armour of light, put off our sinful self, our sinful fleshly desires and actions and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. These are commands, these are imperatives.

Then the 2<sup>nd</sup> section here is in chapter 14 through chapter 15 verse 13. And this deals specifically our with how we relate together as brothers and sisters in the family of God in the local church and the context is especially in areas where we disagree, areas where we have differences of opinion about how the Christian life is to be lived out and this of course is a continuation of the theme of living according to God's truth by a changed or renewed mind versus thinking and behaving like the world does. The goal here in these verses in this section is not just unity with God and obedience to God as individuals that goal here is how we together live together in harmony and unity in such a way that we live out the gospel together.

Then the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final section from chapter 15 verse 14 to the end of chapter 16 is the apostle Paul's commendation, first of himself to the saints in Rome, and then his commendation of the saints in Rome to the saints in Rome and then he gives us some final instructions about what to do with people who are divisive, who are heretics, and then this beautiful doxology which we read together and that doxology sums up the main point of the book of Romans, the whole book.

So now let's go back to chapter 12 and dig in a little bit, we will spend most of our time in 2 areas this morning in the time we have left, the first 2 verses of Romans chapter 12 and then we will look at Romans 14 and 15.

Now these 2 verses here, Romans 12:1-2, they are as I said the key verses here, the key to understanding the rest of this book, they serve as a bridge between the glorious propositional truths of the Gospel and the way this gets lived out in the real world and so we see the appeal that the apostle Paul makes here, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the mercies of God to do this.

You see the Gospel is all about the grace and power of God yes, it's all about the power of God on our behalf, but the Gospel is not a passive thing, the Gospel is not something that is done to us, the Gospel is done in us, the Gospel is an active work of God in us.

Now as I said at the close of the last sermon from Romans chapters 9 to 11 God must always act first in our salvation, He must take the initiative,

apart from God's initiative, his initiative mercy, his initiative grace and love apart from that none of us would be saved but God's initiative, God's work in salvation demands a response on our part and this is what the apostle Paul is talking about when he talks about the obedience of faith. Apostle Paul refers to that a number of times, God's salvation demands a response.

But how does this work or rather how does God work in us and how do we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling?

Well these 2 verses right here in Romans 12:1-2, tell us how this is, it says by the mercy and grace of God we surrender our body to him and for his use, living sacrifices, we give up our rights, we surrender to God.

The Bible talks about this in terms of repentance, repentance and faith, and repentance is the surrender, the giving up, the changing of our mind, the changing of our direction from our sin and ourselves to God and then we go about living in a way that conforms to God's way of thinking instead of the world's way of thinking and this change, from living according to the world's way of thinking and living according to God's way of thinking, this change happens through the renewal of our mind.

And the key here is our mind, the mind is the key to the Christian life.

That's why non-Christians do not respond to Christian truth it is because as it says in first Corinthians 2 they cannot discern it but for the believer the mind is the key area where this happens.

As I said the word repentance carries the notion of a change of mind, our thinking our minds must be changed from old ungodly ways of thinking to new godly ways of thinking. Our minds must be renewed, our thinking must be changed if our lives are going to change.

Now interestingly enough modern science has come to some of the same conclusions about this, they have found that repeated thoughts and repeated patterns of thinking actually change the cellular structure of our brains and so it is like ruts in the road if you drive down the muddy road a certain number of times it is kind of hard to get out of the rut. And so our mind through our patterns of thinking established these ruts and these ruts are identifiable through brain scans.

So at Harvard University they did a study where they took 3 groups of people none of which could play the piano and they put one group in a

room with a piano and an instructor and for 5 days they learned how to play a piano.

They put a 2<sup>nd</sup> group into a room with a piano but that group did not have anything to do with the piano, they didn't learn how to play it, they didn't think about playing it the piano was just sitting there and there were people in the room with it but that was it.

And in the 3<sup>rd</sup> group they put them in a room with a piano and told these people to imagine that they are playing the piano, to imagine that they are learning how to play the piano.

At the end of 5 days they took these groups of people and they did brain scans on them and they found out that the first group, the ones that had been taught how to play the piano, their brains had changed, and the areas of their brains that had changed the most with the areas that related to the movement of their fingers and their coordination with their hands, okay.

Okay the 2<sup>nd</sup> group the ones that were in the room with the piano but had nothing to do with the piano their brains showed no change whatsoever.

But the most surprising result was the 3<sup>rd</sup> group the ones who had imagined they were playing the piano, the brain scans of those people showed almost the same changes as the people who actually played the piano.

Now our world knows this in various ways, we ought to know it better than they, our world has a way of dealing with this, our world says think positive, think positive thoughts that's how you fix your problems that is how you change your world you think positive thoughts but it is all up to you, alright.

The Bible tells us something different the Bible's way of thinking about thinking is different than the world's way of thinking about thinking, the Bible says that the Word of God and the Spirit of God will change our thinking.

So we find this in Titus 3 where it says but when the goodness and the lovingkindness of God our Saviour appeared He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.

How did He do this? Listen, by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit whom He poured out upon us eventually through Christ Jesus our Saviour so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

So where the world thinks that they must just think positive the Christian thinks I must think God's thoughts, I must depend on God for his truth, for his Spirit to renew my mind.

So remember this if you forget everything else, the bottom line is that in our daily struggle against sin, which we all must be engaged in if we are going to be obedient to the faith, in our daily struggle against sin the battle is won or lost in our minds not in our physical bodies.

If you want your behaviour to change then the way you think must change and the way you think must change first, the only way you will be able to live a godly life is if you think godly thoughts and that means that you must be careful about the kinds of things that you think, the kinds of things you think about, and you must be intentional about filling your mind with God thoughts.

Philippians chapter 2, have this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.

We are called to have a mind that is patterned after Christ. And what kind of mind was that?

Well it says in Philippians 2 it was a mind that considered himself as nothing, considered himself humbly, became obedient to the Father even to the point of death on the cross.

So if you want to have a Christian mind instead of a worldly mind the first thing you have to do is think rightly about yourself and rightly about God in terms of obedience.

And so as we move on in chapter 12 from verse 3 and on we see this is where the apostle Paul goes immediately after he has told us how this change must happen through the renewal of our mind and how that because of that now he says for by the grace given to me I say to every one among you don't think more highly of yourself then you ought to think, think soberly, think with right judgement and think about this according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Remember what do you have that you were not given, what do you have that you were not given? And who gave it to you?

We are dependent on God.

And so as we think rightly and humbly and obediently about ourselves and our relationship to the Father then we begin to live in these kinds of ways and we have here the gifts of the Spirit lived out in zeal and in generosity and then we have these as marks of the true Christian.

What does this look like in real life?

And we have things that really seem backwards to us in a natural way of thinking, bless those who persecute you? Who are you kidding! Love your enemies, don't get revenge when somebody has wronged you? What is this, what's up with this?

Ah you see this is the way the Christian thinks this is not the way the world thinks, no it is not, it is different.

The Christian says vengeance is God's, God will settle the score because I know God and God is a God of truth and God is a God of righteousness and holiness He will not let this go unchecked, He will not let the score go unsettled.

But the world does not know that God so the world takes matters into their own hands, the world doesn't like to submit to authorities as we read about in chapter 13 this is not the world's way.

But the Christian says all authority is from God and so I joyfully submit to it even when it seems counter intuitive to my selfish way.

And the apostle follows that the commentary in verses 8 to 10 that we read earlier about the fact that love is the fulfilment of the law, it is really what God is after in the law as we reflect his Gospel in our lives God is after this, this fulfilment of the 10 Commandments and it happens by love, loving each other and loving God. (*Romans 13:8-10*)

And then in chapters 14 and 15 we have this kind of test case, a test case for us about how this is going to work out in some very pertinent and practical ways as it relates especially now to how we relate to each other in the church.

You see we can talk about loving our enemies, we can talk about blessing those who persecute us but that is harder when it gets closer to home, it is harder when it gets right here in our church, people who we know are sup-

posed to be godlike in their thinking and godlike in their behaviour and yet we have these disagreements, we have these issues.

And once again it is very clear that the way we are expected to think and the way we are expected to act is counter to the way our world thinks and acts.

You see it is easy for us to stand in judgement of each other, that's the natural thing to do to stand in judgement of each other especially when we see that someone is living in a way that is different than the way we think a Christians should live.

This was a significant issue in the Roman church and I think it is a significant issue for us here at Calvary, this is where we are at, and I'm sure this text deserves a sermon all to itself and hopefully we will get there in time, but let me just make a few summary statements based on what the apostle Paul writes in these chapters, and if you don't like it you could throw me out afterwards but I'm going to do as the apostle Paul does in Romans 15:15 where he says I'm going to be bold, I'm going to tell you some stuff you need to hear, okay, so don't shoot the messenger this is the word of God.

I think that we have some of the same dynamics here at Calvary that the Roman church had.

Now think with me about this, we have a group of people here who have grown up in a religious community that had fairly highly defined and regulated code of ethics and behaviour and this is not unlike what the Jewish Christians in Rome would have experienced.

At the same time we have a group of people here who did not grow up in that religious culture at all and the Gentile believers in Rome didn't either.

And then most likely we have some people here who rebelled against that religious culture, who rebelled against that code of ethics and behaviour and who think that they have found freedom in Christ and I imagine there were some converted Jews in Rome who fell into this category as well.

Now it is fairly easy for any of these 3 groups to take offence or to be offended by another group, it is actually quite natural for us, there is a reason why ethnic groups and cultural groups band together, there is a reason, birds of a feather flock together, we like to be with people who are like us, people who think like us, people who do like us that is where we are com-

comfortable and when somebody kind of cuts across that boundary it is easy for us to misunderstand, it is easy for us to take offence, it is easy for us to offend because we don't understand where they come from, how they think and how they see the world.

And so again the command of Scripture is to think like God thinks, to subject ourselves and our thinking to His way of thinking and this is how true unity in the church can come about.

But it is natural for us when we face these kinds of differences to point fingers to accuse those who seem to be in disagreement with us, this is the way the world works but it is not the way Christ wants his Church to work. Instead this is what he says, in chapter 14, you're first of all to realise that we will all be held accountable for our own actions. The first thing we need to know is that you that you are accountable to God for your own actions, that's the first thing you need to get straight, okay, each of us will give account for ourselves before God, that is where the chief concern must lie.

Secondly we must work hard to understand the motives of those who we disagree with.

You see what is important in God's economy is not always what is important in our economy, the apostle Paul is very clear here what is important to God is that we honour God.

None of us lives to himself, none of us die to himself, if we live we live to the Lord, if we die we die to the Lord so then whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord's

So we must, we must be about that and it says later on in chapter 14 that it is for God and his glory that we must live.

First Corinthians chapter 11 whether you eat or whether you drink or whatever you do, do all to the honour and glory of God.

That must be our motive. So as we see other people who don't seem to be doing Christianity the way we do it we must work hard to understand their motive why are they doing what they are doing?

It may be that they are doing it out of honour the God, it may be that they are not but we need to try and understand we need to call people to what is most important in God's economy.

And let's be honest this looks different for different people in different places at different times, let's be careful when we assign motive.

Thirdly we must be very careful not to offend or cause a brother to stumble even if we ourselves are free to do whatever it is, if it will offend our brother then we must sacrifice and do what is good for our brother. The apostle Paul says this in chapter 14 verse 16 don't let what you think is good and right become something evil because by doing that you cause a brother to stumble, rather than criticising, rather than accusing let us work together for mutual upbuilding and peace.

Now this is hard work I'm telling you, this is difficult; this isn't going to be easy.

The easy way is the way the world thinks, the easy way is to take the world's way of thinking, the easy way out, the way with least resistance.

But God's way is different, God's way is harder but God's way has different and better results.

And it says here rather than criticising and accusing each other let us work for mutual up building and peace and the apostle is very honest in chapters 15 verse 4 and 5, this is going to take some endurance, this is going to take the encouragement of the Scriptures.

He says therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, verse 7.

Let me ask you, How did Christ welcome you? How does Christ welcome you into the family of God, into the Church of God? Did He wait until you were perfect before He welcomed you? No.

Remember Romans chapter 5 says for while we were yet sinners, while we were ungodly, Christ died for you. So we are to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us for the glory of God.

So where is this going to work how is this going to work here in our church this week?

Will first of all let me tell you how the worldly way is, the worldly way of thinking is we see someone living in a way we disagree with and so we talk about them to other people and we say, did you see so-and-so, did you see what they were wearing, did you see what they were doing?

We talk about them to other people, we malign their character, we assign motives, we keep our distance from them, we might even go to church leaders those in authority and accuse them and say do something about this person!

That's not God's way, that's the worldly way. God's way is when we see someone whom we think is not living out the Christians life the way we think it should be lived what do we do? We do what Christ did, we love on them. That's what it says here, we love on them. We don't go around behind their back and accuse them, we don't talk about them, no, we go and we love on them.

Now some of you don't know what love on them means but if you go further south about 2 states you will find out that's where they do a good job at this, you love on them, in a self-sacrificing way you serve them, you love them like Christ loved us, you pour your life into them, you invest in them, you get close to them, you try to understand where they are coming from, how they think, how they see the world, how they see themselves. And through all of this and after all of this and in all of this we speak to the issues in a way that builds up rather than tears down, in a way that brings peace rather than division.

That's the kind of church the Romans needed to be and that is the kind of church we need to be.

Now in conclusion the apostle goes on here in the last part of chapter 15 he goes on to commend himself to the saints at Rome to ask for their participation in his work as an apostle especially as an apostle to the Gentiles.

Now I think he might have been rubbing it in here a little, okay, because there are probably some Jewish Christians in Rome who didn't think too highly of the Gentiles, that's part of this whole problem he has just been talking about it in chapters 14 and 15, and now he says I plead with you, I urge you participate with me in this Ministry to the Gentiles, and he talks about how he is planning to stop off in Rome on his way to Spain, he anticipates visiting with the church in Rome and he wants them he asks them to strive together with him in their prayers to God so that his travel will be safe and successful.

Now they didn't know, and the apostle Paul might not have known but God surely did, how the apostle Paul would actually come to Rome as a prisoner of Caesar and how he would live there and spend a lot of time there, but that was then and this is now.

And then the apostle Paul takes up 16 verses in chapter 16, get that, 16 verses, the apostle Paul takes up in this very weighty letter and he just gives commendation of the saints in Rome to the saints in Rome.

And you say well what is so significant about that?

Well I don't know for sure but I think if I read this right some of these names are Jewish names and some of them are certainly Gentile names, the apostle Paul is writing this personal letter to a church and in this church of saints, people of God, who are struggling to get along, people who are struggling to be unified because of their differences in upbringing and their cultural expectations, some of these people have walked with the apostle Paul in Ministry, some of them have served with him, and he is writing this letter and he wants the church to honour those who faithfully served regardless of their ethnic background, regardless of whether they are men or women, regardless of their stature in society.

Now I'm not sure, not totally sure, of all the names which are Jewish and which a Gentile, but the point is the apostle Paul is calling them out on their antics and he is saying he is urging them to see the value and benefit in their brothers and sisters in the work of God in the life of the church even when they don't belong to our culture.

And then in verse 17 so that they, and we wouldn't be mistaken about the way we are to relate to those with whom we differ, he makes one final appeal in verse 17, watch out for those who cause divisions.

Now the word divisions here is the word sometimes translated heretic, if a person insists on being divisive, if a person insists on teaching doctrine contrary to God's revealed truth, if a person will not act in love and grace toward other Christians then the apostle Paul says avoid them have nothing to do with them for, that's a heretic.

That is different to what he was talking about in other chapters where there is a difference of opinion about how you live out the truth of the Gospel how you live out the revealed word of God.

Here is a person who doesn't want to be united, here is a person who doesn't want to build up in love and peace and grace, here is a person who doesn't want to think God's thoughts, it says here this person they are all about their own appetites they are all about what they want.

And again that's a worldly way of thinking and it is contrary to the way of Christ, the way of Christ says I give, I serve, I sacrifice, I don't look out for myself but for my brother and sister.

And so we are very clearly to separate from those who do not think God's thoughts who do not think in a way that is transformed but we are to give grace, all manner of grace, and love and care to those whom God has

called to be his people, to those we have disagreements with in matters of opinion of how we should live out this Christians life.

But if, if they will not hear, if they will not serve, if they insist on causing divisions and creating obstacles contrary to the doctrine then avoid them.

And then the apostle Paul gives some final words and one of the curious things here is that the person who held the pen had to get his word in too, I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

You see the apostle Paul had someone else writing for him he was probably dictating to Tertius and Tertius is going to make sure the saints in Rome knew that he too wishes to greet them and bless them.

The hosts, the house that Paul was staying send their greetings as well.

It is interesting who this was and who is mentioned next, Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

That will be an interesting discussion for us when we come back and look more deeply into Romans chapter 13 in terms of our relationship to government.

Then we have this glorious doxology this kind of final summary statement the whole book of Romans.

Remember chapter 1 verse 5 the apostle talks about the obedience of the faith, chapter 10 the apostle talks about the obedience of the faith, and that is what he is after here, he wants the church in Rome to be obedient to the faith and they will be obedient to the faith as they come to know the Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ which is according to that revelation of the old Testament, it has been disclosed through the prophetic writings, it has been made known to all nations, all of this according to the command of God, God takes the initiative He is the one who reveals himself,, He is the one who provides salvation, He is the one who demands a response of obedience of faith.

And all of this because He is the only wise God, He is the only one who knows everything, who knows how to think and how to live and He is the one to whom must be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Let's pray.

Father we thank you and praise you for this glorious revelation of yourself in the book of Romans and we pray that together as your people that we

would learn how to live well, that we would see that it is through the transformation of our minds that we will live well according to your will, according to your desires, according to your ways.

So help us in all of our life in the things little and in the things big to think your thoughts, to pattern our minds our thinking and our life after you and we pray that all this will abound for your honour and for your glory for ever , in Jesus name, Amen.

Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon

E-mail: [shimaracourier@gmail.com](mailto:shimaracourier@gmail.com)

Web: [www.anabaptistmennonites.org](http://www.anabaptistmennonites.org)