

Week 3

Renewing Our Minds

A Daily Study of the Book of Romans

Week 3: January 18 – 22, 2021

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:1-2

Cornerstone Assembly of God
10551 Chalkley Rd., N. Chesterfield, VA 23237

How to use this study:

The year 2020 has pressured us to think and worry like “the pattern of this world” like never before. Many of us have been conformed to the world more than we realize. We need to take the beginning of 2021 and turn off the voice of the world and turn up the Word of God like never before. There, in His Word and in His Spirit, our minds will be renewed and our lives transformed.

That is why we are doing this in-depth study on the Book of Romans as a church. Through personal study and prayer, God will renew your mind with a Kingdom way to think and look at the world around you. It will cause you to understand the feelings in you as well. Most of all, it will help you recognize God’s voice and His glory in your everyday life. This is how we grow in our walk with God as He calls us to apply, by faith and by The Spirit, what He shows us as we read.

This study is divided into 20 days that you do Monday through Friday. You can use Saturday to catch up or reflect on all God has spoken to you. Each day contains the full NIV text of the Scripture passage along with **Study Questions** and a verse-by-verse **Commentary**. The commentary provides insights and answers to the study questions so you can process and learn.

Four sections of Romans were skipped in order to complete the study by the end of January. Those sections will be added as an appendix in the back at the end of the 4 weeks for you to study if you wish.

As we start 2021, our hope cannot be in a new year, but in a new way to think and know Jesus in deeper ways. I know King Jesus will bless you in ways beyond your expectations as you and your household walk with Him in this study every day!

Looking forward to Follow Jesus Together in 2021!

Pastor Shawn

SMALL GROUPS

Small Groups have one, simple purpose: to bring people together. We believe God created us to live in relationship with others and only then can we live the full life He intends for us. Sharing life through community is part of our design, but meaningful relationships aren't always easy to find. That's why Small Groups exist—to make these life-changing relationships relevant and accessible to you.

STILL LOOKING FOR A GROUP?

Check out our group listings here: <https://cornerstone.ag/smallgroups/>
Small Group Semester runs January 17 – April 4

Need more help finding the right fit?

Email Pastor Anedra at: abutler@cornerstone.ag

Join us for prayer each weekday morning on Zoom at 7:45am.

**Just go to the website home page (cornerstone.ag)
and click on the link for “Morning Prayer.”**

Struggling with Sin

⁷What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."^a ⁸But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. ⁹Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. ¹²So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good.

¹³Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

¹⁴We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

^a7 Exodus 20:17; Deut. 5:21

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In this passage, Paul answers two questions about the law. What are they?

First question (v7):

Second question (v13):

2. How does Paul describe the law?

v10

v13

v12

v14

3. In contrast, how does he describe the effects of sin working through the law?

v7

v10

v8

v11

v9

v13

4. How does Paul describe his own condition in verses 14-25? How does this compare to his descriptions elsewhere of the believer's condition in Christ?

Paul's Condition

7:14

7:18

7:19

7:23

7:25

The Believer's Condition In Christ

6:14

6:18

7:6

8:2

8:9

★ PRAYER POINT ★

VICTORY OVER SIN AND SINFUL ATTITUDES IN YOURSELF OR TOWARDS OTHERS

- Was there ever a time in your life, prior to trusting Christ when you tried to “turn over a new leaf,” to change your life for the better? How did it turn out?

COMMENTARY

v. 7 “I would not have known what sin was except through the law” . . . The law takes the general pangs of conscience which all men have (2:14-15) and exposes their root cause: rebellion against a holy God and His requirements. It points an accusing finger at specific acts of disobedience and names them as “sin”, rather than “mistakes” or “character flaws”.

“I would not have known what coveting really was” . . . It is instructive that Paul chooses the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17) as his example. All the other commandments, such as those prohibiting murder, adultery, and theft, could be interpreted in merely an outward sense. Thus, a pious Jew might view the Law as something which could be kept fully (see Matt. 19:16-22). But the commandment against coveting demonstrates that the law has to do with the heart, and not merely the outward actions (see Matt. 5:21-30). It was this commandment which brought home to Paul his own sinfulness.

v. 8 “sin ... produced in me every kind of covetous desire” . . . Paul speaks of sin as an active force which uses the law to produce acts of disobedience. Thus the law fulfills one of its primary purposes (Rom. 5:20).

“apart from law, sin is dead” . . . Every parent has experienced this. Nothing is more certain to cause a child to do something than to forbid it! Without law, sin is “dead”; i.e. dormant. It can only produce disobedience when there is a prohibition to rebel against.

v. 9 “Once I was alive apart from law” . . . Paul is speaking here of a time in his life when, although instructed in the law, he had not come to realize its full force. He saw the law merely as a set of outward rules to be obeyed. But when he came up against the commandment against coveting, he realized the depth of his own sin. When he fully grasped the law’s demand, he began to covet all over the place! (v. 8). Sin “sprang to life”, and he saw himself as he truly was, a sinner condemned to death. His self-delusion that he was alive ended, along with his hope of pleasing God through law-keeping.

v. 11 “sin...deceived me” . . . There is always an element of deceit in sin. It disguises itself so that we don’t recognize it; it makes itself appear attractive; it makes us think there will be no negative consequences.

v. 12 “So then, the law is holy, righteous, and good” . . . Before proceeding to the next question, Paul summarizes his answer to this one (v. 7). The law is not sin, rather, it is used by sin to produce disobedience and death.

v. 13 “Did that which is good, then, become death to me?” . . . Paul now moves on to a second question: Even if the law itself is not sin, doesn’t it cause death? The assumption is that something which causes death must be evil, not good. But Paul emphatically denies that the law causes death; rather, it is sin, working through the law, which kills. Verses 14-25 give an illustration of this from Paul’s own experience: People agree that the law is good, but when they attempt to follow it, they find they cannot; instead they do the opposite, because they are slaves to sin.

. . . **“in order that sin might be recognized”** . . . Sin revealed its true colors by producing death, not through something bad, but through something good! Only something utterly evil could twist something good and make it produce death.

v. 14 “the law is spiritual” . . . The law is divine in its origin and character. Unlike sinful man, it is morally perfect and flawless.

“I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” . . . The word translated unspiritual is literally “fleshly,” *i.e.* made of flesh. It emphasizes the fact that the physical body is the instrument through which sin works (v. 23).

v. 15 “what I want to do, I do not do” . . . Only the person who has truly tried to resist sin understands its full strength. The problem with the law is that it shows what is right, but provides no power to do it.

v. 16 “I agree that the law is good” . . . The fact that Paul does not want to do evil shows that he agrees with the law, even though he is unable to keep it.

v. 17 “it is no longer I myself who do it, but sin living in me” . . . In one sense, it is Paul himself who does these evil things. In another sense, it is sin which does them, because sin lives in him and controls him as its slave. Paul is unable to resist sin, because the law provides him no power to do so. What sin demands, he does, whether he wants to or not.

Life Through the Spirit

¹Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,^a ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature,^b God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.^c And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

⁵Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

⁹You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

¹²Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.^d And by him we cry, "Abba,^e Father." ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

^a1 Some later manuscripts Jesus, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit; ^b3 Or the flesh; also in verses 4, 5, 8, 9, 12 and 13; ^c3 Or man, for sin; ^d15 Or adoption; ^e15 Aramaic for Father

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What was the law unable to do? Why? (v. 3)
2. Who then accomplished it? How? What was the result? (vv. 3-4)
3. Compare the two kinds of life which Paul describes

Living according to the sinful nature

v5

v6

vv7-8

v13

Living according to the Spirit

v5

v6

v13

v15

4. These two ways of life characterize two classes of people. According to verse 9, what is the spiritual condition of those who are “controlled by the sinful nature”? Of those who are controlled by the Spirit?
5. Whom does the Holy Spirit indwell? (v. 9)
6. According to verse 13, who is responsible for putting to death the misdeeds of the body? How is this accomplished?
7. In Galatians 5:16-26, Paul contrasts the “acts of the sinful nature” with the “fruit of the Spirit”. In the space below, list his examples of each.

★ PRAYER POINT ★

TO UNDERSTAND AND EXPERIENCE MORE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOUR LIFE

Are you inviting the presence of God through The Holy Spirit to come into your life each day?

Would you like to understand your relationship with the Holy Spirit more? Go onto Cornerstone’s Small Group page and search for Pastor Shawn’s “Introduction To The Holy Spirit” group.

COMMENTARY

In vivid contrast with the previous section, which describes Paul's failed attempt to find righteousness through law-keeping, 8:1-17 lays out the believer's new life of freedom from law.

v. 1 "There is now no condemnation" . . . In contrast to times past, we have now been released from the law and are no longer under its condemnation.

v. 2 "because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free" . . . Through Christ, Paul was set free from the bondage to sin and death described in 7:7-25. The "law of the Spirit of life" is the principle of new life in Christ which the indwelling Holy Spirit brings us. This nullifies the principle which previously operated in us, the "law of sin and death". As a result, there is "no condemnation" for those who are in Christ.

v. 3 "what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature" . . . Paul's description of his own experience in 7:7-25 is a vivid illustration of this principle. The law is unable to overcome sin in us, not because of any defect in the law itself, but because of the weakness of our "sinful nature", or flesh.

"he condemned sin" . . . This means more than just exposing sin as evil; the law was able to do that. This condemnation means pronouncing the sentence of death on sin itself, rendering it powerless. This is what the law could not do, and what God did through Christ (see Rom. 6:9-12).

"in the likeness of sinful man" . . . Paul is not saying that Christ had sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Nor is he saying that Christ only appeared to be a man. Christ is fully human, but his humanity includes neither Adam's sin nor any sin of his own.

v. 4 "in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us" . . . Through the death and resurrection of Christ, our guilt and sin were credited to him, and his perfect righteousness was credited to us. Thus, the righteousness demanded by the law was fully satisfied.

"who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" . . . The righteousness which we have in Christ is first of all a legal righteousness, or a right standing before God. But we also experience a changed life, as we walk in accordance with the indwelling Holy Spirit. The freedom from sin which we have in Christ means both freedom from the ultimate penalty of sin and also freedom from the present power of sin.

v. 5 This verse presents a contrast between unbelievers, "those who live according to the sinful nature," and believers, "those who live in accordance with the Spirit." While the focus of the unbeliever's mind is on himself and his own desires, the focus of the believer's mind is on Christ and the things which please and glorify him.

v. 6 The mind of the unbeliever is focused on those things which bring death, while the Spirit-controlled mind is focused on those things which bring life and peace.

v. 7 "The sinful mind is hostile to God" . . . The mind of the unbeliever is not merely neutral concerning God's law; it is hostile to it. It does not submit to the law, because it cannot do so.

What then, are we to make of people such as the Pharisees, whom Christ called “sons of hell” (Matt. 23:15), but who were observant of the law? The answer is that they were hypocrites, observing the outward requirements of the law, but rebelling against God in their hearts. They were zealous of the law as a means of prideful self-righteousness rather than as a means of glorifying God (see Matt. 23:23).

v. 8 “It is impossible for the unbeliever to please God” . . . Not even his inadequate attempts to “do the right thing” or keep the law give God any pleasure; they are nothing more than “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

v. 9 “You, however” . . . This introduces a sharp contrast. Believers are not under the control of the “sinful nature”, or flesh, but are under the control of the Holy Spirit.

“if the Spirit of God lives in you” . . . It is not just certain super-spiritual Christians who are controlled by the Spirit, but all believers, because all believers have the Holy Spirit. Paul makes this clear by his next statement: “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”

v. 12 The “sinful nature,” or flesh, while still a part of us, no longer has any rightful claim on us. Our only obligation is one of obedience to Christ.

v. 13 Paul here contrasts the lifestyle of the unbeliever and the believer. One is a life lived according the flesh, which brings death. The other is a life of continual “putting to death” of the deeds of the body through the power of the Holy Spirit, which leads to life. This is a description of the believer (see Gal. 5:16-18). Note that both our will and the Holy Spirit are involved in this “putting to death”. We must choose to obey, but His power produces the results. Note also that Paul is not laying out requirements for salvation. This “putting to death” requires that we have the Holy Spirit, which is true only of those who are already saved.

v. 16 “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” . . . Believers have an “inner witness,” the Holy Spirit, by which they know they belong to God.

v. 17 “heirs of God” . . . One of the implications of being related to God is that we look forward to an incredible inheritance! This inheritance is both physical and spiritual (see Matt. 5:5; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Eph.1:11-18; 1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Future Glory

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

^a26 Or how

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What kind of “present sufferings” does Paul have in mind here? (v. 18; see Romans 8:35) What “glory” is he talking about? (1 Corinthians 15:42-43; 1 John 3:2)
2. Who are the “sons of God”? How will they be revealed? (see 1 Corinthians 15:49-54)
3. Paul pictures “the creation” looking forward with anticipation to the return of Christ and the revelation of the sons of God. What images does the Psalmist use to describe this time? (Psalm 96:11-13; 98:7-9)
4. What effect will the revelation of the sons of God have on creation? (v. 21) What will this look like? (see Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:1-2, 6-7)
5. How did the creation become subject to “frustration” and in bondage to “decay” (see Genesis 1:26-28; 3:17-19)
6. Paul mentions three kinds of “groaning” in this passage. For each one, identify the cause of the groaning, the one doing the groaning, and the hoped-for outcome.
v22
v23
v26
7. How does the Holy Spirit help us in prayer? (vv. 26-27)

★ PRAYER POINT ★

GOD’S VICTORY OVER SUFFERING WHETHER CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE SOON OR NOT

What do you do when you have difficulty praying?

Do you really consider your own sufferings to be “not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us”? How can you foster this attitude in yourself?

COMMENTARY

Although Christians do suffer, that is not the end of the story. We will someday share in Christ's glory. And when we do, all of creation will share in that glory as well.

v. 18 “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing” . . . Paul does not say merely that the glory to be revealed is superior to our sufferings, but that it is incomparably greater than them. This is even more amazing when we think of the kind of sufferings Paul has in mind: persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and death (8:35; see 1 Cor. 11:23-29). In 2 Corinthians 4:17, Paul refers to our present suffering as “light and momentary troubles” that will result in “an eternal glory that far outweighs them all”. He is not minimizing the severity of our sufferings, but instead emphasizing the incredible glory that is to come.

“the glory that will be revealed in us” . . . This is the glory of Christ which will transform us (see 1 John 3:2; also the Commentary on Rom. 5:2).

v. 19 Paul pictures the whole cosmos as waiting in eager anticipation for the consummation of history and the revealing of the sons of God. (see Psalm 96:11-13, 98:7-9; Isaiah 35:1-2, 55:12).

vv. 20-21 “For the creation was subjected to frustration” . . . Man's sin affects not only himself, but all of creation as well, since God made man ruler over the earth and all living creatures (Gen. 1:26-28). One example of this is the curse God put on the ground (Gen. 1:17).

“the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay” . . . Paul looks forward to the time after Christ's return when the earth and all its creatures will finally fulfill the purpose for which they were created. (See Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:1-2, 6-7).

v. 22 “the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth” . . . Christ identifies these things as “birth pangs” which signal the end of the age: “wars and rumors of wars. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.” (Matt. 24:6-8). Since Adam's sin in the garden, the earth has been experiencing labor pains, and these will continue to intensify until Christ's return.

v. 23 “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit” . . . The gift of the Holy Spirit which we now possess is evidence of the rich blessings of God still in store for us (2 Cor. 5:5). And we, too, look forward eagerly to Christ's return, the end of the age, and our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For those who have died, this will be resurrection; for those who are still alive, it will be transformation (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

vv. 24-25 “Who hopes for what he already has?” . . . It is possible that some at Rome shared the skepticism about bodily resurrection which Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians 15. Some at Corinth apparently considered themselves to have been “raised from the dead” already, interpreting this in a spiritual sense. But Paul emphasizes here that the resurrection is both physical and future.

vv. 26-27 “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” . . . This chapter deals with the Holy Spirit several times. He provides guidance and power for us to “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (v. 13), he testifies to our spirits that we are children of God (v. 16), and he helps us in prayer (v. 26).

“the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” . . . As we pray, the Holy Spirit prays to God on our behalf in a way that is perfectly consistent with God’s will.

More Than Conquerors

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,^a who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."^b

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^c neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

^a28 Some manuscripts And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God.

^b36 Psalm 44:22

^c38 Or nor heavenly riches

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the believer's "good" that God is working for? (vv. 28-30)
2. In verse 28, Paul refers to "those who love him" and those "who have been called according to his purpose" as one and the same group. What does this tell us about the nature of the "calling" he is speaking of? (see John 6:37, 44)
3. In verse 34, Paul mentions that Jesus didn't just die for in the past but is also doing something for us right now (see Hebrews 7:25). What is He doing and how does that support the good news of verses 37-39?
4. Verses 31-36 are composed of a series of rhetorical questions in which Paul identifies and rejects possible obstacles to God accomplishing his purpose in us. In the space below, identify these questions, and the answer (or implied answer) for each.

Question

Answer

v31

v32

v33

v34

v35

5. In what sense are we "more than conquerors"? (v. 37)

★ PRAYER POINT ★

RENEWED FAITH AND FOCUS ON JESUS IN THE MIDST OF THE ENEMIES YOU FACE

Of the enemies listed in vv. 38-39, which is the most real to you? How is it affecting you now?

COMMENTARY

In the previous section, Paul deals with the fact of suffering by focusing on the future, emphasizing that our future glory is far greater than our present suffering. Here Paul continues to deal with suffering by emphasizing that God is sovereign in our lives, and that nothing can separate us from Him.

v. 28 “In all things God works for the good of those who love him” . . . Note that Paul does not say that all things are good in themselves, but that God is sovereignly working through all things for the final blessedness of his people. Note also that Paul is not merely saying that everything will somehow work out for the best, but that God is actively working to bring about the best.

Not everyone, however, can trust that God is working in all things for their good, but only those who have been called according to his purpose. This call is not the general invitation that God issues to all men through the preaching of the gospel. It is a specific call, a summons by which God speaks to the hearts of the elect and draws them to himself.

vv. 29-30 “those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son” . . . Predestination is a difficult idea for many. God created and honors our free will. Romans 1:24 tells us that God even honors free will to the point that He “turns them over” to the sin they desire. While different denominations believe differently about this passage, we, at Cornerstone, believe that God “foreknew” who, “of their own free will”, would respond to his invitation, and then predestines them and calls them based on their decision. This is consistent with John 6:44 & 65, that only those he calls may come to him; not that we have the “capacity, apart from God’s enabling grace, “to choose him”. In this way predestination and free will are totally compatible. This can be a challenging concept for many believers but in the end we know God loves and wants every person to be saved.

“that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” . . . It was God’s plan from the beginning to create many sons through Christ (1 Pet. 1:20).

“those he justified, he also glorified” . . . Paul has just spoken of our glory as future (v. 18); it is unlikely that he would contradict himself here. Instead, he is emphasizing the absolute certainty of our glorification by putting it in the past tense, as if it had already happened.

v. 31 “If God is for us, who can be against us?” . . . Paul is not saying that Christians will never be opposed. Rather, he saying that since God is on our side, it doesn’t matter who opposes us. Nothing that they do can threaten our salvation or separate us from God’s love.

v. 32 Paul reasons from the greater to the lesser. If God was willing to sacrifice his own Son for us, doesn’t it stand to reason that he will give us every other good thing as well? He has already given us the one thing which was most precious--the life of His own Son.

v. 33 Paul now begins a series of rhetorical questions, each emphasizing an aspect of our security in Christ. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? (literally, “God’s elect”). Paul is not saying that no one will ever accuse a believer, but that no accusation will stand, because God has justified us. Satan is called “the accuser of the brothers” (Rev. 12:10), but his accusations against us fall on deaf ears, because Christ intercedes on our behalf

(vs. 34; Heb. 7:25). We need to remember this when the “flaming arrows of the evil one” come our way (Eph. 6:16).

v. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus...is also interceding for us . . . What effect could any word of condemnation have when the judge (2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Cor. 5:10) is also our defense attorney?

x. 35-39 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” . . . Paul now launches into a long list of things which cannot separate us from Christ’s love. The most striking thing about the list is its exhaustiveness. Paul uses all the extremes he can think of--life and death, present and future, height and depth--to indicate the scope of powers that are inadequate to separate us from Christ, and then finishes with “nor anything else in all creation”. The meaning is absolutely clear: nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from Christ. Rather, we are “more than conquerors,” in spite of whatever opposition and suffering we face.

Living Sacrifices and Renewed Minds

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In your own words, what is the main thing Paul is trying to communicate in this passage?
2. What do you think it means to “offer your bodies as living sacrifices”? How is this an act of worship, and why are these sacrifices “holy and pleasing to God”? (v. 1)
3. What does it mean to “renew your mind”? What are some practical ways to do this? Why is this necessary? What’s the result of doing it?
4. In your own words, what is Paul telling us to do in verse 3? What is he telling us to avoid?
5. What is the point of the “body” illustration in verses 4-8?
6. What does Paul mean when he says that “each member belongs to all the others”? (v. 5)
7. Based on your interests and experiences (and Pastor Shawn’s sermon this past Sunday), list one or two of the gifts in verses 6-8 that you think you may have.

★ PRAYER POINT ★

THAT GOD WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO USE YOUR GIFTS AT CORNERSTONE TO HELP OTHER FOLLOW JESUS TOGETHER

How has this passage affected your view of worship?

What do you feel is the greatest impediment to your serving God more faithfully with your gifts?

What ideas and beliefs of the world should you reject?

COMMENTARY

This passage begins another major section (12:1-15:13) in which Paul is primarily concerned with Christian living. This follows his typical pattern of dealing first with doctrine, and then going on to discuss the working out of that doctrine in the life of the believer (as in Galatians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians). and illustrates the fact that our behavior depends on our belief.

v. 1 “Therefore” . . . This could refer back to 8:39, before Paul begins his discussion of the Jews and their future; it could refer to the immediate context of 11:30-32; or it could refer to Paul’s whole argument up to this point. In either case, “therefore” establishes the connection between belief and action. The doctrines Paul has been teaching are not just interesting theological ideas, but are meant to have an effect on how we live. The worship, obedience, and service we offer to God are expressions of our gratitude for what He has done for us in Christ.

“offer your bodies as living sacrifices” . . For some believers, following Christ may mean martyrdom. But for most, God’s desire is that we give Him our lives, not in death, but in service. This involves offering our bodies to Him “as instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13).

“this is your spiritual act of worship” . . . For the Christian, there is no separation between “sacred” and “secular” activities. Anything we do, if done for God’s glory, can be an act of worship. Paul gives some examples of such service/worship in vv. 6-8.

v. 2 “Do not conform ... but be transformed” . . . The verb translated “do not conform” is passive in the Greek; literally, “do not be conformed”. The fact that both verbs are passive implies that there are opposing forces battling for our hearts and minds: the “powers of this dark world and...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12) on the one side, and the Spirit of Christ on the other. Our responsibility is to yield to the Spirit’s transforming work in our lives rather than to adopt the lifestyle and values of this corrupt world system.

“by the renewing of your mind” . . . As the believer matures in Christ, her attitudes, desires, opinions, and values are influenced less and less by the world and more and more by the Spirit of Christ living within her. The result is spiritual discernment, the ability to judge what is good and pleasing to God (see Heb. 5:14; see also Eph. 4:22-24).

v. 3 “by the grace given me I say to every one of you” . . . This gives double emphasis to the fact that Paul is speaking to all believers, not just especially gifted ones. First, it is to every one of us. Second, by referring to his apostleship as a gift of God’s grace, he acknowledges that his position and his ministry abilities come from God and not himself (see Eph. 3:7-9).

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather...with sound judgment” . . . Paul begins his discussion of spiritual gifts with an appeal to humility. If it were up to us, many would choose the “showier” gifts, such as teaching or leadership. But exercising those gifts properly requires just as much humility as exercising the “quieter” gifts of serving or mercy. They all come from God, and all are meant to be used for His glory, not our own. We need to be sober-minded about ourselves; not arrogant or prideful, but on the other hand not denying that God can work through us.

. . . **“in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you”** . . . The measure, or measuring stick, we should use to evaluate ourselves is the Christian faith. In other words, God’s word should guide the way we think about ourselves.

vv. 4-5 “in Christ we who are many form one body” . . . Paul uses the metaphor of the body in several places to illustrate the principle of unity amid diversity (1 Cor. 12:12-30; Eph. 4:4-16). His point is that we have unity with one another, not because we are all the same, but because we are all spiritually united with Christ. Furthermore, none of us is independent, but each member belongs to all the others. The gifts God gives us are to be used to build each other up.

v. 6 “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us” . . . The emphasis here, as throughout Romans, is on the grace of God. These gifts are not earned or deserved, but freely given.

vv. 6-8 Paul now lists some examples of the kind of gifts he is talking about. This is not a complete list; in fact, Paul gives several such lists in his letters, and each list is different (1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28-30; Eph. 4:7-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). But his point here is that God’s gifts are to be used to benefit other believers. Note that every gift is followed by an exhortation to use that gift. Another point which should be made is that God may bestow or withhold a gift according to His purposes at any particular time.

“prophesying” . . . *Pastor Shawn’s Sermon Definition: A God-given special ability to speak the truth with God’s insight, relevance and power.* Paul speaks of this gift in 1 Cor. 14; examples of it can be found in Acts (11:27-28; 13:1-2; 21:10-11). It appears to consist of the ability to speak directly for God, to communicate insights or revelation given by God.

Note that the gift of prophecy was to be practiced “in proportion to his faith.” Translated this way, it could mean that the prophet was not to speak anything unless he or she was certain it came from God. But the phrase could also be translated, “in accordance with the faith.” In this case, it would mean that any prophecy must be in harmony with the Christian faith. This would fit well with the instruction in 1 Cor. 14:29 to examine carefully everything which was spoken as prophecy (also 1 John 4:1-3).

“serving” . . . *Pastor Shawn’s Sermon Definition: A God-given ability to get things done!* The ability to support others in practical ways so that their needs are met and so that they are strengthened and encouraged spiritually in the process. Those so gifted are able to serve faithfully behind the scenes to relieve the burdens of others and to assist in practical ways in the work of the ministry.

How many in the church today would regard “serving” as a special gift of the Holy Spirit? Too often, opportunities for service are seen as something to be avoided, rather than welcomed. But in God’s value system, the ability to serve well is something to be thankful for, and something to be exercised willingly. Paul does not make this gift specific; there are an unlimited number of activities which would fall under this category. The important thing is that it involves meeting the needs of others.

“teaching” . . . *Pastor Shawn’s Sermon Definition: God’s special ability given to you to help others grow in Christ-like character, skill, knowledge and relationships.* It is the ability to

communicate clearly the truths of God's Word so that believers are instructed and built up in the faith. Although this gift can be developed and strengthened through formal training, it is still a gift of the Spirit. Not everyone with this gift has a Bible college or seminary degree, nor does a diploma guarantee that one has this gift. Note also that this gift is not the same thing as Bible or doctrinal knowledge. One must have knowledge and also the ability to communicate it in a way that touches hearts and minds.

“encouraging” . . . *Pastor Shawn's Sermon Definition: A God-given special ability to bring strength and comfort to others.* This word (Greek: “parakalon”) carries the idea both of “comfort” and “encouragement.” It is the ability to effectively urge believers to pursue a course of action; also, the ability to encourage and comfort another. It is the ability to say what is necessary and appropriate for each person (see 1 Thess. 5:14).

“contributing to the needs of others [giving]” . . . *Pastor Shawn's Sermon Definition: A God-given special ability to release what God has given to you to advance His Kingdom work.* The ability to give generously of one's possessions to the Lord and His work, over and above the ordinary level of stewardship. It involves sensitivity to needs and wisdom in meeting them.

“leadership” . . . *Pastor Shawn's Sermon Definition: A God-given special ability to blaze a trail that others will follow.* The ability to organize and direct the accomplishment of specific goals in a manner that honors God. It is to be exercised diligently. Biblical leadership requires hard work and dedication.

“showing mercy” . . . *Pastor Shawn's Sermon Definition: A God-given special ability to help those who are powerless.* The ability to perform acts of kindness toward the afflicted and helpless. It involves demonstrating sympathy, understanding, compassion, patience and sensitivity toward those who are suffering or unable to help themselves.