

97-06-29a

As we continue our worship this morning, if you'll turn with me for our Scripture reading to Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2, beginning at verse 11. This is a passage that is very closely related to Paul's theme and his message in the book of Romans. And we're going to see that relationship very clearly this morning.

Ephesians 2, 11. Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands. Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then, you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Turn over to our passage this morning in Romans chapter 15.

Romans chapter 15 beginning at verse 14. Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to admonish one another. Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me in word and deed to make the Gentiles obedient. In mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation. But as it is written, to whom he was not announced they shall see, and those who have not heard shall understand. For this reason, I also have been much

hindered from coming to you.

Now, no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while." He goes on to talk about his anticipated trip to Jerusalem to deliver a financial gift that had been collected from the Gentile churches for the Jewish churches. But the point here in Romans 15 is that Paul is writing here, he has written this letter boldly on some points, he says in verse 15 of chapter 15, reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ, to whom? To the Gentiles.

Minister of Christ to the Gentiles. Ministering the gospel of God, why? So that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. What kind of offering are the Gentiles? Or what are they intended to be? Well, where did we just recently see the idea of offering here in Romans? Remember back at the beginning of verse 12? What does he say? I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.

Very similar language, isn't it? Which is your reasonable service. Your reasonable worship service is what this word implies. It's a word used for service in the temple or service in the synagogue.

So it's an offering. These believers to whom Paul writes are to offer themselves to God and to be holy and acceptable. And then he says in chapter 15, verse 16, that ministering the gospel of God, Paul does this so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

So we see once again another confirmation of what we have seen many places in the New Testament, that the idea of the preaching of the gospel is not limited to evangelism, although it certainly includes it. But the ministry of the gospel is a ministry to believers. And when Paul says that he is ministering the gospel of God so that this offering can be holy and acceptable, that's exactly the goal of Romans 12, 1 and 2, isn't it? To be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

To be an acceptable sacrifice after salvation. And it tells us that this ministry that Paul has is unique. This is an apostolic ministry.

He says, I'm confident in verse 14 of chapter 15 concerning you, my brethren, that you are full of goodness, you're filled with knowledge, and you're able to instruct one another. You're able to speak the truth to one another. But Paul has a unique ministry.

He says, I have written boldly, even though you have knowledge, even though you have goodness, even though you're able to instruct one another, I have written to you because of the grace given to me by God. What's he talking about there? What can he write to them about that

they don't already know? What can he minister to them if they've already got goodness and wisdom and are able to instruct one another? What is Paul adding to that? He's adding the unique revelation that is a part of his gift as an apostle. That's a part of his gift as a communicator of God's truth.

It's unique to the apostles. It's special. It's the thing that the apostles did in the first generation of the church, which has been set down in writing so that it continues to minister to all of us.

Paul can do something that a pastor can't do. Paul can do something that a good, knowledgeable, qualified-to-teach believer can't do. And that is reveal New Testament, Church Age truth.

That's his gift. That's the grace that has been given to him. He doesn't say the grace given to us by God, does he? He says it's been given to me.

He says, I'm an apostle. This is my function. And through that gospel that he ministers, the offering of the Gentiles can be acceptable and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

That's why we concentrate our time in studying the Word of God. We don't concentrate our time studying philosophy. We don't concentrate our time studying tradition.

We don't concentrate on creeds. We don't concentrate on formulations or systematic theologies. We don't come to church or to Bible study and crack open Hodge or Schaeffer or Erickson or any of the other theologians who have written systematic theology works.

Why? They are good men. They're knowledgeable men. They're able to instruct in the truth.

But they're not the primary source of Church Age New Testament teaching. The apostles are. And so we go to the ministry of the apostles which is set down in the Word of Truth.

That's why God has preserved for us these letters in the New Testament. And this is where we come for our truth. Now that may seem self-evident like the preamble.

We hold these truths to be self-evident. But you would be surprised at how these scriptures that we have in our presence this morning and in our observation this morning are not considered to be sufficient. They're not considered to be necessarily even the primary source of our understanding.

We need a fellowship. We need a community to help us interpret. We need to look at church tradition to help us see what is a worthy object of faith and what is not.

And this is in the very center and heartwood of conservative evangelical Christianity which is where we like to think of ourselves. So, I just want to emphasize that because that's what the Word of God emphasizes. This is what the apostles claimed for themselves.

This is what Jesus stated. We saw this Friday night. This was going to be their specific ministry.

They specifically, the twelve, the eleven disciples and Paul are specifically commissioned to communicate New Testament truth, church age truth to the church. They're the primary source. And all of us receive the ministry of the gospel from them.

We ought to be filled with goodness. We ought to be knowledgeable in the scriptures. And we ought to be able to speak the truth to one another in love.

But that is secondary. That is building on the foundation that someone else has laid. The foundation is laid by the apostles.

We don't lay foundations. The cornerstone is Jesus Christ and that's the preaching of the gospel for evangelism. And we come to faith in Christ, we're saved, quote, unquote.

The foundation that we've studied in our Fundamentals of the Faith that's recorded in Hebrews chapter 6 and so forth, where do we get those truths about change of mind away from dead works, faith toward God, and so on? It comes to us from the New Testament epistles, from the New Testament teaching of truth. It comes to us through the apostles. That's how that foundation gets laid.

And nobody else can lay that foundation. Nobody can say, here's the real Christian life. Here's the real deal.

Here's the way to be righteous. It's already been laid by the apostles. That's what they were doing in the first century.

Other men can build on that foundation. So, why is Paul writing this letter to this church? We've studied 15 1/2 chapters now of the message that he has to say. He does a wonderful thing in this book.

He does what they always tell you to do when you're an instructor, which if you boil it down in very simple terms like they do in the Marine Corps, is tell them what you're going to tell them, tell it to them, and then tell them what you told them. And that's what Paul does. You remember back in chapter 1, along about verses 14 and 15, along in there where he says, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

It is the power of God for deliverance to everyone who has faith, to everyone who trusts, the Jew first and also the Greek. Now, that's not an idle phrase, the Jew first and also the Greek. That is a key to understanding the book of Romans.

Jew and Greek. Our scripture reading in Ephesians 2 this morning, what does it remind us about? The Jews got there first. They were the ones who were near to God.

They had a foundation laid in the Old Testament. To them were entrusted the law and the prophets and the worship and all the things that Paul mentions back at the beginning of chapter 9 of Romans. They're Israelites.

To them pertained the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God and the promises, of whom are the fathers and from whom according to the flesh Christ came. The Israelites had this way back. The Jews of Jesus' day and Paul's day had this heritage.

They were near. The Gentiles were on the outs. If you wanted to come to God before Christ and before Pentecost, you came to Israel.

You joined up. You became a Jew. Paul says, here's the new program.

Here's the new plan of God. We no longer have everything piped through the nation of Israel. There's a new program.

God has broken down the dividing wall and has created a new body that is composed of Jews and Gentiles. And this was a profound change and a profoundly difficult thing for people to get a hold of in the first generation or two of the church especially. It was a hard thing.

It would be the equivalent. Well, I can't even think of the equivalent in our day. It was a profound change.

So, a lot of Paul's teaching bears on this. Explaining to the Jews why the Gentiles are acceptable. Explaining to the Gentiles that they don't have to become Jews.

Each party had to come to a new understanding of their status with relationship to God. So, how does that bear on our study of Romans? Well, let's review and pay close attention. This is our last book-wide review of Romans.

We are within an eyelash of finishing the book and in days and months and years to come I hope that when you think back and, you know, I studied Romans one time. We spent a year and a half in Romans. Well, this is your last chance to be able to explain in a nutshell what the book is about.

This is our overview of what we have covered in this book. And that is important because that's going to explain to us why Paul says what he says in chapter 15 and in chapter 16. Paul began this book by talking about something that everybody could agree on.

After his preliminaries and his introduction, his reminder that he is an apostle and he has a right to speak even though he's never personally visited Rome. He starts out and he says there are a lot of people who are guilty before God. What does he say in chapter 1? God has revealed Himself and men are without excuse.

Nobody has an excuse. Nobody can say I was dropped on my head as a child. Nobody can say I never got a missionary.

I never got the gospel. God has revealed Himself. He's revealed Himself in nature so that men are without excuse.

Nobody will have an excuse for failing to trust Christ as Savior. God has faced everyone. And we can spend a lot of time wondering how that happens with infants who die and people in Borneo that never got a missionary thousands of years ago and so forth.

The fact remains, God says that men are without excuse. He has revealed Himself in His deity, in His omnipotence, through creation. He has also made a mark on the human conscience.

He's revealed Himself in the soul. Paul will argue later on that the law of God is written in men's conscience. Men know.

Men have a feeling of guilt even if they've never heard the Bible. They know that they've done a ratty, despicable thing. Your conscience tells you that and you can't get around it.

Why is that? Why are we not just free of the pangs of guilt and the burden of conscience? Because God has built it into each one of us. And it is evidence of God Himself. The fact that there is a moral standard in the universe.

Paul makes that point and he says, in a nutshell, truth has been revealed and men are accountable for their reaction to the truth. Well, everyone can agree. Keep in mind who's the audience here.

It's a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. These two people that for centuries have been on opposite sides of a dividing wall. Men of God on one side, pagan Gentiles on the other.

If you want to become a man of God, you've got to get on the other side of the wall and become an Israelite. Join the nation. Enter the culture.

Be in the place of worship and provision. So Paul is writing to a group who's now an amalgam of these two groups. And so what's a great way to start even from a rhetorical point of view? Find common ground.

Everybody can look at the gross things in the world and say that's awful. There's a standard of truth that these people have violated. So that's what Paul establishes in chapter 1. He says, professing to be wise, they became fools in 122.

They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. What is Paul saying here? Every idolater has exchanged the glory of God. Every idolater started out with the knowledge of God and has

rejected it in favor of something else.

He doesn't say they never came to a knowledge. He's saying here they had it and they exchanged it. Can any of us go down to Walmart and exchange our red boat for a blue boat? No.

None of us have a red boat. You can't exchange something you don't have. You exchange something when you possess it.

And this is a powerful argument in chapter 1 that we are all responsible. We're all accountable to God because we all have revealed truth. It doesn't take a missionary and it doesn't take the spoken gospel.

All it takes is the revelation of God in nature and in the conscience that is sufficient to condemn us for rejecting. Well, everyone agrees. Those rotten pagan idolaters out there exchanging the glory of God.

God gives them over to their uncleanness and they deserve it. The wrath of God that comes on them, the judgment that comes on them is deserved because the truth has been revealed and they rejected it. That's what he argues in chapter 1. But as you recall, there's a big turning point at the beginning of chapter 2 of Romans.

He says, Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, in the Roman church, you Jewish man, you Gentile man. Primarily here, he has the Jewish men in view. You are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge.

For in whatever you judge another, you condemn yourself. For you who judge practice the same things. He says, You people in the church who are so self-righteous, you're looking over here at Walt Disney doing these terrible supportive things for the homosexuals, you are inexcusable because you're doing the same thing.

Well, this has shock value. People say, How can you possibly compare us in the church, believers in Jesus Christ, to the pagans? Well, what is the basis of comparison? Believers in the church have revealed truth just like the pagans do. And everybody agrees that if God reveals the truth and you reject it, you're guilty and you deserve the punishment that comes from God.

Well, how can that possibly be true of people in the church? We responded to this truth. We didn't exchange the glory of God for an idol and so forth. But Paul says in verse 4 of chapter 2, Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to change your mind? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart, you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds.

Eternal life, and this is not in contrast to going to hell, this is life that partakes of the divine for everyone who, by patient continuance, in well-doing, seek for glory, honor, and immortality. This

is works, isn't it? This is not those who trust Christ, who acknowledge the Savior. This is a reward for those who patiently continue in well-doing.

These are believers who have made the choice to dedicate their life to pleasing God, and they're patient, and they persevere. They keep at it. No matter how many times they fail, they keep coming back, continuing to seek for glory, and honor, and immortality.

Now, you either have to say that salvation from the lake of fire comes by works, or recognize that this is not a judgment for salvation. This is a judgment of believers. And that's who Paul is talking to.

He's turned the corner in chapter 2, and he's saying, okay, Christians, you self-righteous snobs looking at the unbelievers out there doing these depraved things, you're doing the same thing. Because if you reject the truth, you're doing the same thing they are. Well, what is the truth that they are rejecting? Well, they are rejecting the New Testament truth that the apostles reveal, that there's been a change, that believers and the people of God are no longer under the law of Moses to seek righteousness or to seek to please God.

That's the truth that is being rejected in the church. This is the big controversy. The Jewish believers are saying, fine, we understand Jesus is the Messiah, and that's great, but that doesn't change the fundamental way you live your life.

In the Old Testament, once you come to God and acknowledge him and you want to serve him, you join the group, join the nation, and the nation has a constitution, the nation has a law delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai, and that's the way we please God. And that hasn't changed. If you're a Gentile and you come to faith in Christ, you still need to jump under the law.

You need to be circumcised, you need to keep the feasts, you need to observe the days, and so forth. Watch the dietary laws. Paul says, no, you're doing the same thing the pagans are.

God has revealed some truth. He has documented it. He's manifested it.

He's marked it out as being from him, and you're rejecting it. You're not listening to the new revelation that has come in this age. And you're just as bad in that sense as the pagans who reject that initial revelation of God.

He says, there is no partiality in verse 11 with God. As many as have sinned outside the law will perish outside the law. As many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.

It's not the hearers of the law that are just, but the doers of the law who will be justified. And he points out that God has marked the conscience in verse 14 of chapter 2. When Gentiles who don't have the law by nature do the things in the law, these, even though they don't have the law, are a law to themselves. In other words, the law of God is written on the hearts.

Verse 15, their conscience bears witness, and they are either accused or excused based on how they respond to conscience. And it's possible for us to suppress our conscience. It's possible for us to establish a pattern of life that violates our conscience.

We know it's not right, but we do it anyway because we prefer it for some reason. Well, whether you're a Christian or not, you're accountable for revelation. If you're not a Christian, you're accountable for the revelation that God is in His heaven and Christ is His Son in this age.

If you are a Christian, you're accountable for the revelation of what pertains to life in this age as a believer. And there is no excuse. There's no out.

We can't claim ignorance. We can't claim somebody else told me. God bears personal witness through the Holy Spirit to every single human being.

Both accountability for what thinking of Christ and accountability for how we live after Christ. And there is a judgment associated with each of those accountable decisions. Unbelievers will be judged at the great white throne because God revealed Himself and they said, well, that's all fine, but I'm really not interested.

Believers will be accountable because God says, here is the way for glory, honor, and immortality. And if you reject that, you're accountable and you store up wrath for yourself. There's no getting around it.

You'll start to taste it in time and you'll definitely taste it at the judgment seat of Christ. So in verse 17, he says, Indeed, you're called a Jew. You rest on the law.

You make your boast in God. You know His will. You approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law.

You're confident that you're a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, instructor of the foolish, teacher of babes. You have a form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? And this is a picture of the self-righteous believer who thinks he's got everything figured out and is now busy trying to foist it on everyone else.

And is judging others and saying, You need to come under my standard of righteousness. Why is this person guilty? Not because he's instructing others, but because he himself has rejected the truth. That's how this chapter started.

He says, You, O man, are doing the very same thing. The truth has been revealed to you. You've rejected it.

You're clinging to something that is not the truth. And not only are you clinging to it, but you're foisting it on others, and you're judging others by it. We've got other passages of Scripture that we have seen where he says it's bad enough to hold to an error yourself, but if you teach others

so, you come under a double condemnation.

That's what these people are doing. That's what the Jews are doing in the church. That's what they're doing in Rome.

Not only have they rejected the revelation that there's been a change in the way believers live, but they're trying to bring other people under it. They're foisting it on the Gentile believers. This is an error.

This is a transgression. This is a sin that believers in the Roman church are committing. And Paul says, Compare yourself.

Look, you know what happens to people who reject God's truth. Chapter 1. Well, you're doing the same thing. Chapter 2. Now Paul is going to go forward in this letter, and he's going to reinforce to them the truth that they should already know, and that they need to make a change in their thinking about.

And so he goes on forward in Romans from there, and he says, Well, what advantage is there for the Jew then in chapter 3? Much in every way. They've got the oracles of God. They ought to know better.

This ought to be a natural extension of their Old Testament truth, their Old Testament knowledge. They've got a great foundation to build on there, and they're not doing it. So he says, The righteousness of God, the standard of God, applies to everyone equally.

And just because they started out near to God, just because they started out as the people of God in the Old Testament, doesn't justify them before God. God judges them by how they respond to His truth. God judges us by how we respond to the truth.

We can fall under the condemnation of chapter 2 by hearing the truth and not doing anything about it. It's not important enough to us. Something else appeals.

We like the stimulation that we get from some bad area of lifestyle, or we like the stimulation we get by being a big wheel in some area of the Christian life. We like being noticed and fawned over by other believers for some accomplishment or some status. Whatever it may be, if something substitutes itself for obedience to the truth, response to the truth, we're going to be judged for that.

So what is Paul doing here? He's writing to this mixed group. He's addressing a problem where these Jewish Christians are browbeating the Gentiles. They're saying, You're a latecomer.

We've had the things of God for years. We know what you ought to be doing, and this is what it is. And they themselves are under condemnation because they're not responsive to the truth.

They're as bad as the unbelievers, which of course to a Jew is a terrible thing. And so Paul is saying, Look, everybody is being measured by the same standard. It doesn't matter if you were near or if you were far off.

God is measuring you by what you do with the truth. And that's why he argues in Romans chapter 3 that the whole world is guilty before God. It doesn't matter if you're Jewish and you're less guilty, or you're a Gentile and you're more guilty.

The whole world is guilty before God, and everybody's falling under the same standard. And so he says that it's the righteousness of God which comes by faith, always has, always will, by which we're judged. Then he points to Abraham, and he says, Why does he use Abraham as an example? Because Abraham is pre-Moses.

There's no issue of Jew and Gentile. Was Abraham an Israelite? Well, who's Israel? Israel is Abraham's grandson, Jacob. So you can't really say Abraham, he's like a proto-Israelite, I suppose.

He's before that dividing wall sprung up. He's before the law of Moses. And Paul says, Look, you mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles.

Here's the one we claim as a model of faith. Here's the one the Jews claim as their father. Well, God judged him righteous because when God revealed the truth to him, he trusted it.

And this was as a believer. What was the truth revealed to Abraham? You're 100 years old, but you're going to have a son. And he's going to be the means by which the whole earth is going to be blessed.

From his descendant is going to come light to the Gentiles and so forth. Abraham believed God, Genesis 17, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And Paul uses a whole chapter in this book, chapter 4, to make the point that Abraham was declared righteous by God, and it wasn't because he was a Jew.

It wasn't because he kept the law. It was because he trusted God. He responded to the truth that was revealed to him, and he changed his life over it.

He didn't make Ishmael his heir, and he didn't make Eliezer, the servant, his heir. He waited for Isaac. He was righteous by faith, not by law.

And this is designed to correct this problem in the church. So Paul says in chapter 5, we are righteous in God's eyes when we trust Him as believers. It is universal for Jews and Gentiles.

It's hard to not get bogged down in chapter 5, especially chapter 5 of Romans, because he says, in Adam all die, in Christ all shall be made alive, if by one man sin unto the world, death by sin. You have all of this deep involved. But if you just look at chapter 5 as a whole, why does Paul

bring Adam into it? Why does he compare Adam and Christ? Well, if Abraham is before Moses, Adam is way before Moses.

And he's talking about universal things. All of us are subject to the same condemnation, Jews and Gentiles, because we're all in Adam. All of us have the opportunity to be declared righteous, to be pleasing in God's sight, because we're all in Christ.

That's his point when he's talking about in Adam all die, in Christ all shall be made alive. There's been lots of dead seas of ink spilled about who is the all, and here's a universal all, and here's a limited all, and one thing and another. Paul's point in the context of this letter is, it doesn't matter if you're a Jew or a Gentile.

It doesn't matter if you came from a Christian home or you came out of a pagan background. It doesn't matter if you used to be a Buddhist, or you used to be a Catholic, or you used to be a Mormon, or you used to be an atheist, an agnostic, or whatever. It doesn't matter where you came from.

Everybody has the same shot. Everybody is judged by the same standard. In Adam, everyone dies.

In Christ, if you're in Christ, you're made alive. It doesn't matter what's in the past. It doesn't matter your heritage, your background, your culture.

And this is a thing that the Jews are wrestling with. Wait a minute. We thought we had this big advantage.

We thought we were the people of God. They were. They are.

They do have an advantage in that they are the trustees of Old Testament truth, but it doesn't do them any good if they don't respond to it. That's what he's telling them in chapter 2. You're guilty like the pagans. If you're a trustee of this truth, and you claim to have this truth, and you're not responding to it.

You're not seeing that Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament law, and therefore the law having been fulfilled, we're not under it anymore. New Testament truth revealed through the apostles. So, after he goes through chapter 5, and he says this is a universal thing.

You can't get hung up on whether you're a Jew or a Gentile. He goes on to say this is what the Christian life is really all about. We are dead to sin and we're alive to God.

Everything in the past we died to because Christ died and we died with Him. Everything that we now have is a new life. We're a new creation.

We ought to live our lives to please God and not please ourselves. Why? Because we've been

purchased. We've died to sin, and Christ, the life that He lives now in His resurrection, He lives to please the Father.

And that's what we ought to do. That's the only thing that counts. It's the only thing that lasts.

It's the only thing that matters. He says you've got the choice. Whoever you serve, that's who your master is.

You make yourself a slave of righteousness or you make yourself a slave of sin. You choose. Not many slaves get to choose their masters, do they? You go back and watch Roots and Kunta Kinte and all that.

They didn't get to choose and say, well, I like that white man back there in the third row. Let him purchase me. Slaves normally don't have a choice.

We have a choice. We are going to be slaves. Either slaves to righteousness or slaves to sin.

But unlike ordinary slaves, we have a choice. We get to pick our master. We're going to be slaves of one kind or another.

And that's what Paul argues in chapter 6. Well, the key has been handed to us and we get to decide what master is going to determine the course of our life. And we're accountable. This theme of accountability runs through the whole book.

So then in chapter 7, he says there was the old written code that didn't have life in it. There's new life in the Spirit. Why would you want to go back under the law which had a specific purpose? It was to demonstrate our weakness.

It was to demonstrate our sinfulness. Well, that's been done. That point has been made and God has turned a corner in His plan.

He's making a new point. That through faith, we can be righteous. Through faith, we can accomplish God's purpose.

There is no power that we have that can accomplish that. It comes to us through God's Spirit. And so in chapter 7, he talks about the slavery to sin that the law represents and that the law manifests, that it brought out.

It was designed to show us our need for God. That given a righteous standard, it's impossible for us to keep it. And we say, you know, I don't have what it takes to meet God's righteous standard.

Even after salvation, I can't do that. I need divine power. There wasn't a lot of divine power in the average believer's life in the Old Testament.

It was restricted to the prophets and to the kings and to a select few. But most of them struggled

like Job did. Read what Job says about life and how difficult it is.

And why is that? Because the Spirit was not yet given. Well, now we have it. And we're responsible for that.

We're accountable for that. And it's such a great opportunity. So there's life in the Spirit.

And he goes on in chapter 8 to talk about that and the wonderful advantage we have having the Holy Spirit. God hasn't said, okay, gut it out and you're going to have to work hard at this. All we have to do is take advantage of the power that He has placed at our disposal, which is His Word and His Spirit.

And so he addresses the issue of Israel again in chapter 9. And he says, well, what about Israel? They had all this Old Testament truth and so forth. We went through the whole issue of the broken branches. All of it's talking about believers.

He says they've been broken off because they refuse to acknowledge the truth. They're under judgment because God has revealed this new truth and He's had to snap them off because they're not responding to it. They're believers.

Jesus Christ is their Savior. But they're not willing to pursue righteousness by faith. They still want to do it by works.

And so they're going to be snapped off. And Paul says the only reason you're in the tree and you haven't been snapped off is that you're seeking righteousness by faith. And beware.

If you don't get with God's plan for this age, you too can be snapped off. And don't be boasting over the branches and judging them and mocking them and condemning them and saying, well, you know, those Israelites, how dumb can they be? It's so obvious. He says if they start responding in faith, God can pick them up and grab them back in.

There is no way you can make that a picture of salvation from the lake of fire. Well, now you're lost. Now you're saved.

Now you're saved. Now you've been snapped off and you're lost. Oh, you're lost, but you can be grafted back in again.

Lost people never were in the tree. So there's not this picture of salvation from the lake of fire in view. It's function.

It's response and fulfillment of calling that is in view in that tree and in those branches. And so he says, well, do they have an excuse? Does Israel have an excuse that they haven't heard? He says, no. The gospel has gone out to the whole world.

This good news has been preached. And that's a point that he reinforces again when we get back

up here to chapter 15. But if you can keep that in mind, and the reason we've gone through this review this one final time is keep in mind anytime you come to Romans where you are.

If somebody takes you to Romans 3 or to Romans 7 or to Romans 9 and they want to argue predestination or they want to argue the wrestling match of the old man and the new man in Romans 7 or they want to argue that it's strictly salvation in Romans 3, think about the flow of thought. This book has been written to address a problem between believers. It's a problem that exists today.

It is as current and as big a problem today as it was in the days that Paul wrote this letter. There are people today who think that there's a way to please God and that it's through works. They don't necessarily go back to the law of Moses and say you need to be circumcised and offer sacrifices and keep the feasts.

They say you need to serve. You need to evangelize. You need to do good deeds.

You need to fulfill our standard of what being a Christian and being a witness in the world is. And it's wrong. And this book is written specifically to people who have that mindset.

Unfortunately, people who have that mindset have explained away the book of Romans. So Romans is talking about salvation. It's not talking about me.

It's not talking about my self-righteous judgment of believers who are not doing what I think they ought to do. And the purpose of the book and the heart of the book has been dismissed and explained away. And it's a very sad thing.

And it's unfortunate that historically in the church, this book has been misunderstood to be all talking about justification at the point of salvation and not righteousness in daily life for believers. So if we don't bring anything else away from our year and a half in Romans, I hope that that will stick in our minds. Think about the flow of this book from time to time and keep it.

We need to all keep it in our minds. This is a book about the Christian life. It is a caution.

It's a warning against being self-righteous and holding somebody up to a false standard. Being justified in God's sight, being a worthy believer, and fulfilling one's purpose is something that happens in the soul. It happens in the heart.

It happens when people trust God for the daily things of life. It doesn't happen by what they do. It doesn't happen by church attendance.

It doesn't happen by getting rid of your old habits. It doesn't happen by being a missionary or a pastor or a full-time Christian worker. It doesn't happen by Christian service in its various forms, whether it's evangelism or going out and having an impact on a lost and dying world or whatever else it might be.

It doesn't happen by experiencing God and looking to see where God is at work and joining Him in His work. This is what Romans was written to stop, to convict and to change. And the book has been explained away, unfortunately.

But that's what it's talking about. And we have to be careful. We know what this book says.

And we can't measure others by our standard of works. Well, I don't think you're active enough. I don't think you attend enough.

I don't think you study enough. I don't think you evangelize enough. I don't think your life is really a reflection of the things that a Christian ought to be.

That's not our place to judge. We have our hands full making sure that we ourselves don't fall under the condemnation of chapter 2. That's what this book is about. We're going to pause and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see how chapter 15 is such a fitting summary and culmination of that theme and that argument in this book. But we're going to pause here and take our break.