

97-07-20a

As we continue our worship this morning, turn with me to Galatians. We will be concluding our study of the epistle to the Romans this morning. And as we have noted several times during that study, there are many parallel thoughts in the letter to the Galatians, as we find in Romans.

If you look at Galatians 3, beginning at verse 19, Paul is in the midst of discussing one of the central ideas in both of these letters, and that is the relationship of law and grace. One of the misapprehensions that we have had as we see these Scriptures in the modern day is we tend to think, well, I don't personally have a big problem with the law of Moses. I understand that I'm not under the law, and so much of this doesn't seem to have impact on us.

But over the course of these months, we have seen that any system of righteousness by doing, any measuring of the worth and value of our lives by our accomplishments, rather than the transformation that God does in our soul, falls under this category. And this is, in fact, the way that that manifested itself in Paul's day, and in every generation since. So when we see references to the law by way of application for ourselves, this is religion.

This is the vindication or justification of ourselves by how active we are in ministry, or how active we are in the lives of other people. The degree to which we have an impact, or our presence, or our ministry, makes a difference to others. The thing we always have to be careful of in saying that is not to discount the worth of those things.

Ministry and the exercise of one's spiritual gift, being of value, being a blessing to others, is a wonderful thing. So is the law. What does Scripture say about the law of Moses? The law is holy and righteous and good.

It's not the law that was bad. The law is good. The law came from God.

It is the place that people assigned to the law in their thinking and in their lives, turning the law into a system of righteousness, rather than a communication from God that would lead to a change of heart. It led them to believe that by keeping the law, they would be righteous in their own eyes, in the eyes of others, and in the eyes of God. And Paul has been clear time and again to say, by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

So the two misapprehensions that have made it harder for us to get value out of the book of Romans and the book of Galatians are, first of all, not seeing what the law represents in our day and in our lives, which is that common viewpoint that we're really measured by how we behave. Are we active in church? Are we active in ministry? Do people see us as making a difference? That connection to the law is critical. The second important connection is to see that when Paul engages in this discussion, in both of these books, he is not talking about salvation.

It is easy to move in that direction, because the same principles apply at salvation as in the

Christian life. We are justified by faith in life. We're also justified by faith at the point of salvation.

Salvation comes by grace through faith, and so does living righteousness. The principles are equally applicable in both cases. What we have done in traditional Christianity is lean very far over toward only seeing salvation and not seeing the application in our lives.

It's a fairly easy observation to make that these books were not written to unbelievers. They were written to churches. They were written to believers.

Because the bulk of these letters deals with this issue of justification by faith, Paul is not trying to re-evangelize. He's trying to talk about our lives. Those two observations are key to getting the most out of what the New Testament has for us here.

With that in mind, let's begin at Galatians 3. What purpose, then, does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made, and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now, a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Here's the crux of it in verse 21.

Is the law, then, against the promises of God? Certainly not. For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. Based on what we have just said, is our righteous works contrary to the promises of God? Paul is arguing against a system that people have said, wait a minute, this law of Moses, these are good deeds.

These are good things. Not to lie, not to steal, not to commit adultery, and so forth. These are good things.

The protections that the law provides between people, to keep them from hurting one another, to penalize the criminal, penalize wrongdoing, and encourage people to do right. How can you argue against that? But Paul is arguing against it. And so, people say, well, what then? You say the promise of God doesn't come through keeping the law.

It doesn't come through righteous deeds. So, are they contrary to one another? And Paul says, no, they're not. If there had been a system of good works given, which could have given life, then righteousness would have been by that system of good works.

What he's saying is all of these good works don't bring about life. It doesn't happen at salvation, does it? We can't do enough good things to be declared righteous for salvation. Nor can we do enough good things after salvation to be declared righteous in the eyes of God.

Life doesn't come through what we do. Life comes through who we trust. Both at and after salvation.

Verse 22, The scripture has confined all under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law,

kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore, the law was our tutor.

And most English translations have two or three words in italics here. The law was a tutor or a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. But you notice that to bring us is in italics.

And the word there is *unto*. It's the Greek preposition that I think is best translated *unto*. The law was our tutor *unto* Christ, before Christ, up until Christ, so that we might be justified by faith.

At the point that Christ came, God's plan and the emphasis in God's plan shifted from demonstrating the insufficiency of works to demonstrating the sufficiency of God through faith. After faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. And this, verse 25 tells us, gives us a contextual clue that what he's talking about in verse 24 is the chronology.

Until Christ, we were under the tutor. Now that faith has come, we're not under the tutor any longer. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free.

There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. This is a summary of the theme of both the book of Galatians and the book of Romans.

And we're going to attempt to summarize and draw conclusions from our study of this entire book this morning. So if you'll turn with me now to Romans chapter 16, this is where we began our study about a year and a half ago. When we began the study of this letter to the Romans, we saw that Paul was writing from Corinth to believers in Rome.

Believers many of whom he had never met. He had never visited these groups of believers in Rome. But he had many acquaintances there.

We've seen all of the times that he uses the term brothers to indicate that he's writing to the believers in that city. And he wants to communicate to them the gospel. Not to evangelize them, but this is the gospel that encompasses not only the good news about salvation in Christ, but also the good news of life in Christ after salvation.

And so when we began in chapter 1 and saw Paul establishing his apostleship, expressing his wish for grace and peace to them, mentioning to them that their faith has been spoken of throughout the whole world, and that he prays for them, and that he may have a chance to visit them. But he says in verse 16 of chapter 1, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God for deliverance to everyone who trusts.

This is one of the classic verses that we have pretty much dropped in the salvation category. Salvation from the lake of fire. And that principle is certainly true.

But Paul isn't restricting it in that sense. He's writing to a church and he says, I am ready to preach the gospel to you brethren who are in Rome. And it's the gospel of deliverance through faith.

This deliverance has two aspects. It's deliverance out of the power of sin after we're saved, and it's deliverance into the potential to be heirs of God, to reflect God's glory and to fulfill God's purpose. That's what the gospel does for us after we're saved.

After we come to Christ and have been regenerated and all of the 36 things, however many you want to count, that happen at the point of salvation, we still in our experience and in our life need deliverance out of the power of sin, out of old habits and bad behaviors and patterns and influences and the desires of our flesh. Those still need to be overcome. They don't just drop away at the point that we're saved.

But this gospel that Paul wants to preach is the power of God for deliverance to everyone who trusts. And that limits the group. There is the larger group defined by those who have come to Christ and are not going to the lake of fire.

There is a smaller, in fact, unfortunately, much smaller group within that category who will be delivered by the power of God from sin and into fulfillment of God's call and God's purpose. And that group is defined by faith, by believing. The gospel of Christ is the power of God for deliverance to everyone who is believing, the Jew first and also the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed.

Let's think about this for a minute. All through this book, Paul has been talking about righteousness. We know the theme of Romans is righteousness by faith.

What is righteousness? If you just think about it in practical terms, what does it mean to stand before God and be declared righteous? Well, we would say it's not sin and it's not evil. It means that we have somehow met God's standard. But what is the result of that? If you boil it all down, it is approval by God.

It means we are qualified for contact with God, for fellowship with God, for relationship with God because we stand approved. There is no obstacle standing between us and God. There's no condemnation.

There is no unresolved issue. We stand before God approved. A workman who does not need to be ashamed.

That is a precious thing. There's nothing more important in this life or in the next than having no issues between us and God to be fully qualified to receive every spiritual blessing that exists in the heavenly places. That is the goal of our life, to be approved by God.

That's what righteousness is, to be declared righteous by God, is to be approved by God. Well, that righteousness, the way to be approved, that's what Paul says in Romans 1.17 is revealed in the Gospel. If that's the most important thing in life, it would be handy to know how it is attained.

And there's a false idea of how to be approved by God that was circulating, and that was this righteousness by works that we just talked about in Galatians and that we have seen over the last year and a half contrasted with approval or righteousness by faith in this letter. So, that is the issue that Paul is addressing. This is the Gospel.

And Paul has presented that in this letter, the good news of how to be approved by God. That ought to be the focus. When we wake up in the morning and we think, how am I going to spend this day? What are my plans? We immediately start thinking of the schedule, the agenda.

Well, I've got this at this time. I've got to have this done by this time. I've got to be here and do this.

I've got to be there and do that. And we think in terms of human accomplishment. And that is our Achilles heel.

That's our big weakness because we tend to go through the whole day meeting deadlines and accomplishing tasks. That's the way we think. That's the way we live.

And it's easy to transfer that into our spiritual life and think, well, my spiritual life is just like the rest of my life. It's the meeting of deadlines, the accomplishment of tasks. If I successfully accomplish the tasks, I'm okay.

If I fail to accomplish a task, I'm not okay. So, we think, well, what tasks are associated with my spiritual life? Well, I need to pray. I need to have some Bible study.

I need to do some good things. I need to be a blessing and a benefit to others in my periphery. And if I can look in my life and see that, well, I was able to contribute in this area.

I was able to be positive and help someone in this area. Well, I'm doing okay. We tend to vindicate ourselves and say we're being successful.

Paul argues against that in this letter. And right away we think, well, wait a minute. How can you argue against something that's good? Friday night of this week, we talked about one of the more recent developments in Christianity, a new sort of a denomination, if you will, called the Vineyard Movement that is receptive to the idea and actually cultivates the idea that supernatural manifestations of God's presence and power did not stop at the close of the apostolic age.

In their defense, this is not the central truth of their operation. It is one thing that is incorporated into their worship life. It's not the only thing they talk about.

It's not the only thing that they do, but it's included. And it is a natural extension of the kind of thinking that we find in more traditional churches. If your worth as a church and your value in the community and in the world is measured by the impact you have on people, the extent to which you minister, then this would be a natural extension of that.

Here's God supernaturally aiding in that ministry, in that evangelism, in that blessing and benefit to others. God will give you a prophetic word and give you insight into the problem that someone is hiding and that they don't want to talk about. God will give you a dream or a vision that tells you how to be in the right place at the right time to accomplish these worthy ministries and these worthy goals.

It makes a lot of sense if your theology is built on the assumption that Christian ministry and evangelism are the primary reason for being for believers and for the church. It just kind of makes sense. That's how God helped them in the book of Acts.

Why would he have stopped? Why would he make it more difficult for us to minister? Why would he make it more difficult for us to heal, both spiritually and physically, by withdrawing his power and leaving us without that asset? It's a powerful and a persuasive argument. Many people have fallen for it and more and more people are falling for it. It is very difficult to refute if people do not understand the message of Romans, if people don't understand the message of righteousness by faith, that righteousness is in the soul.

So it becomes important not only to understand these principles but also to maintain fellowship with other believers who do understand these things. We are under pressure from our peers and it is well-intentioned pressure. People are sincere.

People are deeply convicted that if you're not making a difference in the lives of others, your life is not worthwhile. You're not fulfilling the purpose for which God left you in this life. And they are anxious that you do that.

And they will worry about you and they will pray for you and they will try to express viewpoint to you and get you to wake up and start participating because they need help. It's a lot of work doing these ministries and having these impacts and they need all the manpower they can get and they want us to join in. And it's not a terrible black cloud of evil.

They're not malicious and vindictive in trying to exert this pressure. They are sincere. They have a zeal for God but it is not according to knowledge, just like Paul talks about the people who were going for the law.

So it is important for us not only to understand these principles but we also need to maintain fellowship with believers who do understand the genuine nature of the plan of God because our encouragement in fellowship, our encouragement in friendship, our encouragement to one another by speaking the truth and enabling each other to remember that we are not alone, we're

not the one stick in the mud in the entire flow of Christianity that hasn't got this figured out. That encouragement and benefit from fellowship is important and that's one of the reasons that we are encouraged to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. It's one of the reasons that God did not design the Christian life to be lived in isolation.

We are members of a body and we are encouraged to fellowship. We are encouraged to receive the benefit of fellowship with believers of like mind, believers who understand the plan of God. It's one of the wonderful benefits that we have in our assembly here because we all rub elbows with believers who don't understand the message of the book of Romans.

They're wonderful people. They're well-intentioned. They have a burden for those who are hurting and so forth and all of those are wonderful things but sincerity and good intentions are not a substitute for righteousness.

They're not a substitute and they are not a means of obtaining the approval of God. We have to want to please God more than anything else and when we do, God will reveal His will and this is it. So in chapter 16 of Romans, Paul seems to sort of lighten up.

He's given a lot of theology, a lot of very intense doctrine and argument in the first fourteen and a half chapters of this book after his greeting in chapter 1 but now in chapter 16, he starts talking about people who are in the church. He says, I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cancra. That word servant, by the way, is deaconess.

It's the feminine of diakonia, the word that is translated deacon in Timothy. She is in the church in Cancra. Paul is currently in Corinth when he's writing this letter and if you look at a map and find out where Corinth is and then look at Cancra, Cancra is nearby.

This is down in the Isthmus in Greece. Remember the games, the athletic contests that were held in this Isthmus. For some reason I have a mental block about how to say that word.

It's not Isthmian games. But when Paul talks about striving to stay on course and finish the race and so forth, he's talking about the games that were held in this Isthmus that has Corinth on one side and has Cancra down further south and so forth. Well, Phoebe is a member of that church in Cancra.

She ministers. She serves in that church. And Paul approves her and many others in this chapter for their ministry.

He's not arguing against ministry. He's not arguing against good works. He's arguing about where they come from and what place they hold in our thinking.

But he commends Phoebe, our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cancra. Phoebe is the one who is going to carry this letter to Rome. She is a person of some note.

It says she's a servant in the church, but she is apparently a patroness. Apparently she's a lady who is fairly well off and is able to do a lot in the church. She may even host the church down there in Cancra in her home.

But he says, I commend her to you that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever business she has need of you. For indeed, she has been a helper of many and of myself also. He goes on to say in verse 3, Greet Priscilla and Aquila.

Actually, the Greek here is Prisca. It's the familiar form of Priscilla's name. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risk their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

We don't have the details of this event with Prisca and Aquila. We see them mentioned in Acts and other places. They had to do some traveling.

They had started out in Rome and had been driven out when a period of persecution took place and show up in various other towns. And at this point, they have returned to Rome and are once again present in that community. Likewise, greet the church that is in their house.

I always love to encounter these passages where churches are meeting in people's homes. It gives me great comfort that we're not far off the mark. Greet my beloved Epinaeus, who is the firstfruits of Asia to Christ.

Some manuscripts say Achaia, but it's a scribal error. This should be Asia. The firstfruits of Achaia was the house of Stephanas.

Greet Mary who labored much for us. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners who are of note among the apostles who also were in Christ before me. Several places in this chapter, Paul, will talk about people as being his kinsmen.

And people have tried to say, well, perhaps these are actual family members of Paul. But these are Jewish believers. They're his kinsmen in the sense that they are Israelites.

And it says that Andronicus and Junia, these are both men by the way, my countrymen and fellow prisoners who are of note among the apostles. It doesn't mean that they are apostles of note. It means that they are known to many of the apostles.

They have circulated and have been of benefit and have been associated with several of the apostles. One of the ways we know this, in fact, I was very excited to receive in the mail yesterday a new reference aid. It is a compact disc that fits in with my Logos Bible software.

And also another disc that has quite a lot of reference material including a complete set of the early church fathers, which I have never had in my library. If you buy in text form the entire set of early church fathers, you need to build onto the house to hold them. And they are exceedingly

expensive.

A typical set costs in the range of \$400. Well, the entire works of the early church fathers, the anti-Nicene and the post-Nicene fathers are all on this CD. And the whole thing was only \$39.

And there is a ton of other stuff on there as well. So I was very pleased. I immediately went to the early church fathers and I started reading Clement of Rome and Ignatius and several of the other earliest of the church fathers.

The very earliest letters that we have from the post-apostolic age. One of the things that struck me right away was the clear distinction in their writings. These earliest writers, some of them are even before the fall of Jerusalem.

These are not inspired letters, but they are fascinating to read because these men were acquainted with the apostles. Some of them traveled with Paul. Some of them were disciples of John.

And it's fascinating to read what they have to say. One of the things that struck me in reading those first few epistles is that they have a clear distinction in their mind between the apostles and everybody else. Ignatius and some of these others knew each other.

And when they talk about each other, they talk about him as a wonderful, faithful man, as a disciple of the apostles and so forth. But when they say apostle, you know exactly who they're talking about. They're talking about Paul and Peter and John and the others.

They never refer to each other as apostles. They never refer to Barnabas or Silas or Timothy or any of the others as apostles. There is a very clear distinction in their mind as to who an apostle is.

And based on that very early witness, it's surprising to me that some people have argued that the gift of apostle or the designation apostle was applied in a wider sense in the early days of the church. It was not. All you have to do is go back and read those letters.

They knew who the apostles were and what the distinction was. So when it says here that these men are of note among the apostles, it means that if Peter and John or Paul and Peter saw each other and said, I saw Andronicus and Junius the other day, they knew who they were talking about. These were men of note.

And they were also in Christ before me. These are believers of long standing. They had come to Christ even before Paul's Damascus Road experience.

He goes on in verse 8 and following to mention several names. If you have an interest in this at some point, you can pick up a good commentary, the last chapter of the Anchor Bible commentary on Romans will give you a lot of fascinating archaeological evidence of where these

names show up in Rome. Some of these names are found in inscriptions.

Some of them are found in letters and so forth. The other thing to remember is these names are fairly common and it doesn't mean that because they have found this name in one place, it's the same as the person in the Bible. But there's a lot of interesting detail about these names.

I would go into that except that it is interesting but not edifying. I don't think that it would fuel our soul in the coming week. So, I'm going to simply make a few observations about the inclusion of these greetings and these names in this letter.

First of all, Paul typically did this any time he sent a letter to a church. It was usually either verbal in the mind and in the mouth of the messenger who took the letter or it was a postscript, maybe a separate sheet that wasn't included with the letter as a part of inspired Scripture. That's why we often don't find these personal greetings in even the letters that Paul wrote to churches that he was intimately acquainted with.

These went under separate cover, if you will. So, why are they included here? Why do we have these personal greetings included as a part of the inspired book? I can offer you a couple of reasons. One, Paul had not been to this church.

He had not personally ministered there. He had not had the chance to interact with the people there and provide guidance as far as fellowship goes. There is a division among believers in Rome.

Some of them are hung up on righteousness by works. Others are receptive to Paul's message and teaching about righteousness by faith. This idea of fellowship and communion with saints who have a right understanding is important in Paul's mind.

And by including this list of greetings in the body of his letter, he is implying these are people worthy of fellowship. These are people to seek out and keep company with. Here are some people that Paul knows.

He's run into some of them in other towns. He has known Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus and in Corinth. He has known many of these other individuals who have served with him or who are of note among the apostles.

And by including them in the greetings, he's saying if you want to nurture a right understanding of the Christian life, spend time with these people. Fellowship with the church that meets in their house. Here are some people who are trustworthy.

Here are some people who have got a right viewpoint. And their fellowship and their conversation will be an encouragement to you in the right way. That's why when you analyze these names, it's fascinating to see that there are people who are in the nobility, and there are people who are servants.

There are people who are Jews, and there are people who are Gentiles. There are people who are Romans, and there are people who are Greeks. By analyzing these names, you see a cross-section of the culture of the day.

And there are people at every level and every station in life who have a grip on what life in Christ is really all about. And Paul says if you're a servant, then here are some people who are servants. And you'll have a basis for fellowship with them, not only in the Word, but also in your circumstances.

If you're well-off, well, here are some well-off people. If you're Jewish, here are some fellow Jewish believers. And this is something that we can watch for in our own life.

In our periphery, God is going to put the opportunity for fellowship with believers of like mind. And in many cases, we will have other things in common with those people as well. This is not going to always be the case.

You can see in the lives of biblical figures such as Joseph and Elijah and Moses and David and many others that God will put us in periods of isolation, in times of isolation where He develops and nurtures our relationship with Him. But generally speaking, if we look around, we will find believers with whom fellowship can be meaningful and beneficial, mutually beneficial, the iron sharpening iron kind of fellowship. And we are encouraged to that.

We're not islands and we are not designed to go our entire lives simply concentrating on our relationship with God. Remember the two commands that sum up the Law and the Prophets. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

And love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, not that you spend all your time in Bible study and prayer, but that you love one another. Well, there has to be another there for that to be in evidence.

To be a disciple of Christ, we are fellow members of His body. And the role of other believers is not to be underestimated in our lives. God designed it that way.

And there's nothing to be gained by ignoring that aspect of our lives. And there's an entire chapter here in Romans that points that out. The existence of this chapter all by itself tells us of the importance of fellowship.

Not just any fellowship, but fellowship with those who are approved, those who have a right understanding of the Word of God. We need to be watching for that to seek it out and to treasure it when it comes into our lives. It's a blessing from God.

It's a part of what God provides to us by way of edification. Remember Ephesians chapter 4, the parts of the body edify themselves in love. They minister to one another and build one another

up.

God could have done that strictly through the Word and the Spirit, but He has chosen to also build us up and edify us through fellowship with believers. So, it's an important factor. This is something we should consider when we make decisions, when we make decisions about where we're going to live or how we're going to spend our time.

Contact with believers of like mind is a factor to consider and it's an important factor. Here's an entire chapter that points that out. Notice in verse 17 that Paul breaks off his greetings or actually interrupts his greetings to make one final point.

I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned and avoid them. It seems kind of strange. We think, well, he's pretty well got all of his teaching nicely packaged in the first 15 chapters and now he's in the greetings and kind of the wrap up of his letter.

And then he goes back into a teaching and exhortation mode. But what's the nature of this exhortation? It actually is perfectly at home in the middle of this chapter, isn't it? Because this chapter emphasizes the importance of fellowship, the importance of quality fellowship with quality believers. And he says, I urge you to note those who cause divisions and offenses.

These are believers whose fellowship is not edifying, does not promote love and genuine good works. When you find those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, avoid them. There is a point at which we have to put a distance between ourselves and other believers when that contact produces offense, when it produces division.

When there is no edification, there's no building up, there's no potential for good fruit to be born in that contact, then we reduce that contact and in some cases cut it off. He doesn't say anathematize them. He doesn't say count them as accursed.

He says avoid them. Don't go out of your way to spend time with people whose fellowship and contact doesn't result in good fruit. He says avoid them.

Don't include them if you can help it. But at the same time, we're not to totally treat them as a heathen and a tax collector either. He says, for those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly, their own emotion, their own earthly desires, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

These are not going to be people who are raucous and overtly wrong. They're going to have smooth words. They're going to have flattering speech.

They're going to be able to make a good case. They'll quote a lot of Scripture. They will use the Scripture as the basis to point out errors in others and flaws in others.

And they will create these divisions by quoting Scripture. Isn't that what the Judaizers and the legalists and the ones who wanted to establish righteousness by the law, they quoted Scripture all over the place. They had smooth words and flattering speech, but they were creating divisions.

They were causing offenses and they were leading people away from genuine life in Christ. That's the discernment that we have to have and the perception that we have to have in order to fulfill this exhortation. Are they serving the Lord Jesus Christ or not? Of course, to make that call, we have to know what service to Jesus Christ really is.

Is it ministry for ministry's sake? Is it ministry measured by impact? Is it ministry measured by good works? Well, we have 15 chapters of teaching to tell us what that service is. Your obedience has become known to all. Therefore, I am glad on your behalf.

He says in verse 19. I want you to be wise in what is good and simple concerning evil. There's a lot that can be said between verse 18 and 19.

He says that these who do not serve Christ but their own belly by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. Then he says, I want you to be simple. But I want you to be simple about evil and I want you to be wise about what is good.

The people who are deceived in verse 18 are simple when it comes to good. They don't have a good grasp and a good understanding of what genuine agathos good is. What righteousness by faith is.

And if we don't understand what God is looking for, what the nature of our calling is, we are easily deceived. It's not being well schooled in evil that helps us avoid being deceived by these people. It's being well schooled in what is good.

The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

It's very interesting. It's almost as though Paul had a hard time wrapping up this letter to the Romans. I think he was really in a heartfelt mode of communication and if you look, there are six benedictions to this letter.

There are six times. It reminds me of some music that you hear. Have you ever heard a song where the Tijuana Brass used to do this every so often? They would go and get to a certain point and stop and you think, well, the song is over.

And then it would just pick back up and start again and fool you. And Paul does that six times in this letter. He comes to a conclusion and gives a benediction and you think, well, that's all he wrote.

And then it picks back up again. So what I'd like to do now is, first of all, we're going to point out

those benedictions. In fact, I think what we'll do first is take our break.

When we come back, I'm going to show you these six benedictions and then I'd like to give you some summary observations and conclusions to draw from this letter. But let's pause and take our break.