

97-07-20b

Okay, we're back now from our break, and as we leave this very wonderful and very important letter, hopefully when we think back on this study and think back on the passages that we have gone through, if we return to these passages at a future time, we'll be able to put them into context and remember what their place is in the larger theme of the book. And what I hope to do is, in a few summary observations, help us to do that, help us to remember what the flow of the argument in this letter is and how the parts of Paul's argument all combine and cohere to make this very important point, which is fundamental to each day that we live. Why are we here? What are we doing? What should we be doing? How can we perceive error when it is presented to us? How can we keep from being led astray? It is the active wish of Satan that we not understand our calling, and either by letting believers alone when they stray on their own or by actively encouraging them to error, Satan is pleased when we misunderstand why we're here.

When we get distracted and are not fulfilling our calling, there's nothing that does him more good than us not operating correctly. And in many cases, when people feel a sense of prosperity and feel like everything is going well, it's because Satan is leaving them alone because they're doing just what he wants them to. So, we don't want to be distracted.

We want to be wise concerning what is good, as Paul says here in chapter 16. So how can we identify this false thinking that so easily deceives and so easily creeps into Christian life and Christian culture? Well, if you go back to the beginning of the book, we're going to do a very quick survey of some of the larger ideas. This is not an exhaustive review.

There are so many wonderful points you'd have to reteach the whole book to cover them all. But here are a few ideas that we can bring away and try to remember. I have numbered these just for convenience.

And the first observation from Romans that I think is helpful to us by way of application is if we want to avoid righteousness by works, if we don't want to fall into that trap, even unconsciously, we have to know what its characteristics are. And Paul gives us one of the key characteristics of this false Christianity in chapter 2 of Romans. The righteousness by works type of thinking is characterized by judgment of others.

A characteristic, an inherent symptom of this kind of thinking is it's going to have eyes on people. It's going to be looking around and making judgments about where others stand. It's going to seek to influence others and seek to change others and conform them to its own way of thinking.

You remember what Jesus told the Pharisees, one of my favorite sayings of Jesus to the religious thinkers of his day is he says, you canvass the earth to make a proselyte and when you find him, you make him two-fold the child of hell that you are. This is an inherent part of righteousness by works thinking, to judge others. A verse that sums this up is chapter 2 verse 3. Do you think this,

O man, you who judge those practicing such things and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? So first of all, righteousness by works thinking is characterized by judgment of others.

Secondly, righteousness by works thinking will be judged by God. There is judgment at each end of this thing. If we think this way, we're going to be critical of others, we're going to find fault with others, we're going to be constantly worrying about what they're doing and we ourselves will come under judgment from God.

Look at chapter 2 verse 8. Those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, don't understand that obedience to the truth, faith in the truth, righteousness by faith is the key, will receive indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish on every soul of man who does this evil. So it judges others and it is judged both in time and in eternity. If righteousness is not measured by what we do, then where is it? Righteousness, this is the third point, righteousness is found in the heart, not in works.

This is very difficult for us because there are good works. There is such a thing as good works. It is possible to do good unto others.

Love expresses itself in doing good to and for others, even one's enemies. This is the subtlety and this is the deception that is inherent in this system. How can you say something that is good is not good? How can you be doing something good and actually be doing evil? Look at chapter 2 verse 29.

He is a Jew who is one inwardly and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God. This is another characteristic. If we are trying to establish our righteousness by our deeds, it is impossible to not look around and see who is watching.

I hope someone knows about this. I hope someone realizes what I have done here. I hope they appreciate what I have done.

I sort of expect some appreciation here. We find the symptoms of this kind of thinking in our own soul when we start finding ourselves sensitive to the opinions of others and looking for the approval of others or looking for the gratitude of others or looking for the esteem of others. If they are mentioning someone in some context, you will have someone stand up and start mentioning people who have participated or who have contributed or who have helped out.

It can be something as simple as a meal or as a gathering or something. It can go all the way up into Christian organizations and recognition banquets and this kind of thing. If we ever find ourselves being hurt or being wounded and seriously thrown off kilter because we don't get recognition, people don't seem to approve of us or don't seem to recognize or even be aware of what we have done and we start getting cross over that in our soul, that is a red flag because

righteousness is in the heart and our praise comes from God and not from man.

If we are looking for that praise from man, we are in the first stages of this kind of thinking. It is something that ought to shock us and it ought to stop us and draw ourselves up short. It is better that no one ever knows.

It is better that no one ever says a complimentary word than to fall into this error because to fall into this error is to fail the grace of God. It is to fall short of the glory of God. It is to leave the narrow path that leads to life and nothing is worth that.

Remember what Jesus was always saying about those that did their righteousness to be seen by man. He said they have their reward. That is all they get.

We will see more about that here in a moment. Righteousness is found in the heart, not in works. In the parallel to this over in Galatians, it is impossible to go through Romans without also thinking about what Paul says in Galatians.

Look over in Galatians chapter 3 verse 10 through 12. As many as are of the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for even the Old Testament scriptures say the just shall live by faith.

Yet the law is not of faith, but the man who does them shall live by them. So there is a contrast. There is a distinction.

Genuine righteousness, genuine approval from God takes place in the heart, not in the deeds. Our fourth summary observation, without faith a system of works cannot be perfectly implemented. You could go this route and say, well, I am going to be justified by my ministry, by my impact, by the effect that I have on others and by their approval and gratitude toward me.

But it is never perfect. It can't be completely implemented. This is what the law demonstrated.

Nobody was ever able to perfectly keep a system of works. It is impossible to keep that system without divine power on the inside. You can come close.

You can do 75 or 80 percent in a superficial observation. I haven't broken any commandments. I haven't done any serious missteps.

But you can never fully fulfill the law because, in fact, you wind up violating the very first and greatest commandment, which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength. If you are looking for approval from people more than approval from God, you have already violated that commandment and you are shot down to begin with. Without faith a system of works cannot be perfectly implemented, nor can God's approval ever be gained.

You can see this in Romans 3.9. Are we better than they? Are we better than these who have failed in the Old Testament age? Not at all, for we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. Then he quotes Old Testament scripture that is addressed to the Jews, addressed to the people who were given the law, addressed to the people who were doing their best to keep the law, and they are condemned by these passages. What is the conclusion? Verse 19, we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God.

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Anytime you try to set up a system of deeds, or a system of actions, or a system of accomplishments to establish righteousness, all it is going to do is demonstrate the imperfection and the sin in our nature, because we can never fully fulfill that apart from inner transformation. It cannot be done.

We are a fallen race, we are a fallen nature, and we don't have that power in us even after salvation. God's approval cannot be gained without faith. Faith through works.

Our fifth point, righteousness, approval from God, comes by faith as a grace gift. This is the heart of the matter. A lot of the things that we have observed up to this point are fairly obvious and fairly clear.

You can say, boy, I've heard that before, I believe that, that makes sense. But we are coming up to a distinction that we might not have thought of, that we might not have really emphasized in our own thinking. This is leading up to something.

Approval from God comes by faith as a grace gift. Now that makes sense, but we are going to think about that for a moment and see something very interesting. It's important that it's by grace.

It makes a difference that this is a grace gift and that God's approval and God's declaration that we are righteous comes by grace. That's extremely important. Paul establishes that here in chapter 4, verses 4 and 5. To him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as a debt.

If we earn approval from God, this is tit for tat. This is recompense. We have earned something and we are receiving payment.

But to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. If we engage in righteousness, in vindication, in approval by what we do, we are operating in this sense of earning something. We are trying to earn approval, earn gratitude, earn respect, earn vindication, whatever it might be.

Look at verse 16. Righteousness is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed. Here's the point.

Why is it important that this righteousness comes by grace? Because that's what makes it sure. That's what makes it certain. If it comes by works, who does it depend on? It depends on the worker.

It depends on us. Now it's uncertain. In fact, it is certain that we won't get it because we are all going to fail.

If you transgress even once, the whole system is out the window. Suppose that you could keep the law. It would be like a contract.

God says if you keep every point of righteousness, think of the law in the present day. Think of the Christian life. Let's say that you did everything that is traditionally associated with being a great believer.

You go door to door and do some evangelism. You're ministering down at the church. You read your Bible and pray.

You speak the truth to one another in love. You wash the feet of the saints. You do all of these things.

You do everything that anybody could possibly think of that would be righteous. You're a good spouse, a good parent, a good child of your parents. You do everything.

You don't fall down. You don't commit any sins. What is your contractual recompense for that? Well, look at the example of the Mosaic law.

The just shall live. The law was something that said if you hit every mark, you won't die. Your life won't be cut short.

You won't be given the death penalty. If you observe all of these things, you will live. So, at best, by keeping every point of righteousness, you have avoided the death penalty.

The contractual obligation is pretty well complete at that point. And life is good. God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

A lot of the prosperity promises that you see in the Old Testament, that if you keep my commandments, you will live in the land and prosper. There will be milk and honey. I'll give you freedom and safety from your enemies and so forth.

What are all of those things? Preservation of life. You'll live long in the land and prosper. Well, that's fine as far as it goes, but is that all you want out of life? Is that all you want from God is just an extended physical existence, relatively free from trouble? Is that what you want? That's the contractual nature of the Mosaic law.

If you keep these things, you'll live, and you'll live well. You'll have a nice life. But that's all it promises.

It doesn't promise inner transformation. It doesn't promise fellowship with God. It doesn't promise future glory.

It doesn't promise knowledge of the hidden things of God. It doesn't promise all of the things that we have as a potential through faith in Christ. Doing all of these things has a very limited reward if, in the hypothetical, you were able to keep all of those.

Well, we aren't. And what we do in trying to operate under that system is secure our own condemnation. Because we're not perfect and because we are fallen, we can never keep that system.

And the best that that system had to offer was human life and a pretty good human life. But we pursue that system, we fail it, and we come under the condemnation that is also a part of that system. If you don't keep it, you're condemned.

So there's no future in that. So without faith, that system of works, any system of works, the Mosaic Law or the one that people try to promote today cannot be kept. And the result is that we condemn ourselves.

It comes from God by faith as a grace gift. And the great thing about being a grace gift is grace depends on God. The declaration of righteousness now depends on God's character, God's faithfulness, God's perfection and not our own.

The promises and the fulfillment of those promises is dependent on God, not on us. It's guaranteed by God, not by us. It's a far greater system.

And that's what Paul talks about in verse 16 of Romans 4, the fulfillment of inheritance promises that were made to Abraham. He says, this is from faith so that it's according to grace, so that the promise may be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all. You can see this also in Galatians chapter 5, verses 4 and 5. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law, by works.

You have fallen from grace. Why is it so bad that they've tried to be justified by doing good deeds? Because they've fallen away from grace. If you leave grace and leave the system that depends on God, you're in big trouble.

He says in verse 5, we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. And the hope of righteousness by faith is grace and it rests on God's reliability, God's character. And I would much rather pin my present and my future on God than on myself.

We want to stay in grace. We don't want to get off in relying on ourselves. So that's the fifth observation.

Approval from God comes by faith. Righteousness comes from God by faith as a grace gift and that's essential. Why? Our sixth observation.

Righteousness through works depends on us. Righteousness through faith depends on God. Romans 5.15, the free gift is not like the offense.

You remember that very heavy section in Romans chapter 5 where he says here in Adam all die and Christ will all be made alive. And he says by the offense of one death reigned and as through one man's offense judgment came. And it's really easy to get entangled in chapter 5. What is the point of what Paul is arguing in chapter 5? This is it.

Righteousness through works depends on us. Righteousness through faith depends on God. The free gift is not like the offense.

The offense came because of what man did. The free gift comes through what God does. You can see this in Galatians chapter 5 verses 16 through 26.

Walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. The flesh wars against the spirit. The spirit against the flesh.

These are contrary to one another so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the spirit you are not under the law. The works of the flesh are evident.

It gives a long list. Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Where does inheritance come from? The fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5.22 and 23.

Verse 24 says those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the spirit let us also walk in the spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Notice when you are walking in the flesh this one another business keeps coming up. You are envying, you are jealous, you are provoking, you are dissenting, you are arguing, you are judging. Eyes are on other people.

Eyes are on self in relation to other people when we are in this bad mode of thinking. That is the symptom. That is the red flag.

If we are waking up in the middle of the night concerned because of what other people think. If when we get around people we suddenly find ourselves feeling inadequate or insufficient or somehow not up to snuff. We are falling into this kind of thinking.

It is critical that we stop and think that our justification and our vindication depends on God and

satisfying God's desire for us. God's calling to us which is simply to trust Him. If we look at ourselves and say I may not be meeting this other person's standard but I trust God.

I am confident of His promises. I know who I am and why I am here. That should give us joy and give us peace because that is what counts.

God's approval comes when we trust Him. Not when we meet some mark or clear some bar that somebody else has set. It doesn't depend on our past.

It doesn't depend on what we are currently doing. It doesn't depend on what we are going to do. Ultimately and at its source it depends on who we trust.

That is the central message of this book. Righteousness through faith depends on God. Our seventh observation.

Righteousness by works demonstrates the presence and power of sin. Anytime we try to vindicate ourselves, justify ourselves, make ourselves righteous by what we do, we demonstrate the presence and the power of sin because it can't be done. It cannot be done.

Even when all the works are good, we demonstrate the presence and power of sin because we are ten foot tall hypocrites. If all we are doing is pursuing good deeds and we haven't pursued transformation of the heart, we are full of deceit and wickedness at the core. When we are doing all these good things, we are just demonstrating the lengths to which a hypocrite will go to be well thought of.

We manifest and demonstrate the presence and the power of sin when we pursue vindication, righteousness, approval by what we do in the eyes of other people or in the eyes of ourselves. We make ourselves bigger and bigger whitewashed tombstones. We shovel more and more dead bones into the nicely decorated grave and we demonstrate the presence and power of sin.

Good works cannot be done and cannot be approved if they don't result from something that already happened on the inside through faith. Righteousness by works demonstrates the presence and power of sin. This is Romans 7, 9-25.

Remember that great section in Romans 7 where Paul talks about himself in the present tense. He says, I was alive once apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. The commandment which was supposed to bring life, I found to bring death because I couldn't keep it.

Sin took occasion by the commandment to deceive me and kill me. The law is holy, the commandment is holy and just and good. Has that which is good become death to me? Certainly not, but sin produced death in me through what is good so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

Why did God give Israel this description of good, these good things that should be done by a man or a woman of God? To show us what hypocrisy is, to show us that we cannot do these things apart from divine power. When we try, we manifest the presence and power of sin. By the law comes the knowledge of sin because when we try to do these things, we manifest our degeneracy, we manifest our inadequacy, we manifest the fact that we don't have what it takes to do good apart from God's power.

Righteousness by works, that way of thinking demonstrates the presence and power of sin. Righteousness by faith conquers the presence and the power of sin. When we dedicate ourselves to pleasing God through faith, we will conquer the presence and the power of sin.

You see this in chapter 6, verses 11 through 13. Paul brackets chapter 7, this description of being sold under sin and being carnal, he brackets it in chapter 6 and chapter 8 with the overcoming of this syndrome through faith. In chapter 6, verse 11, he says, likewise you also reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in its lusts. Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. Now Paul wouldn't say that if it isn't possible.

It is possible to not let sin reign in our mortal bodies. There is a way to conquer it, its presence and its power. You see the same thing in chapter 8, verse 4. The righteous requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us.

What is the righteous requirement of the law? It's approval from God. It's genuine righteousness. That's what the law requires.

And that requirement can be met in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. It's possible. It is the goal.

It's our calling to conquer the presence and power of sin through faith. Our ninth observation, that was the eighth, that faith conquers the presence and power of sin. The reward for works at best is absence of penalty and in reality is death.

We've covered that a little bit earlier. But the best that the law offers, the best that righteousness by works offers is that you don't come under condemnation for having committed sin and having violated the commands. You can do these good things and you've avoided the death penalty, but that's the best that it offers.

And it continually depends on not messing up, not making a misstep, not making a mistake. And so you're constantly watching yourself and you're constantly watching others to see if they have made a mistake or they have made a misstep. And this is an interesting thing.

We haven't really talked about this before, but did you ever notice that in the law of Moses, who is called to obey the law? Who is it that's under the law? It's believers, right? It's a system of life for believers. Who is called upon to implement the penalty of the law? Does God say, if you break one of these commandments, I will come down and smite you to the ground? Who is it that has to do the observing and the effecting of the penalty? Who is it that executes the adulterer or the murderer? It's other people. They have to judge each other by the standard of the law, don't they? The law doesn't look inside the heart.

The law doesn't look at thoughts and intents or motives. The law is a prescription for behavior and it has to be applied externally. It's an external standard and it has to be applied externally by other people.

The Jews had to look at one another to see if someone had violated the law. They had to render judgment. They had to render the punishment themselves.

It's a system whereby people operate with other people. Do you really want to put yourself under that kind of system? Any system of righteousness by works is that way. It is inflicted by people on each other, even when the actions themselves are good.

This is the argument that we introduced our study this morning with. How can something good be spoken of as evil? How can you say that witnessing and evangelism are bad? How can you say that supernatural gifts that enable you to minister to someone and free them from guilt and show them that God loves them, how can you possibly say that that's bad? What was the argument to Eve in the garden? How can this fruit possibly be bad? It's desirable to make you wise. Look at me.

I'm a serpent. I ate it and now I can talk. This is a good thing that I'm setting before you.

In partaking of that kind of fruit we find that there is a way that seems right to a man and the ends thereof are the ways of death. You find this in Romans 10.5. The reward for works at best is the absence of penalty. Romans 10.5 is Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law.

The man who does those things shall live by them. You also find it in Galatians 3.12. Another quote, the law is not of faith but the man who does them shall live by them. Galatians 3.13 says Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us so that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Romans 4.4 tells us that in reality putting ourselves under a system of works is going to lead to death. You find this also in Romans 4.15. You find it in Romans 7.5. You find it here in our context in Romans 8.12 and 13. Therefore brethren we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh for if you live according to the flesh you will die but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.

It doesn't just say the evil deeds of the body, it says the deeds of the body. We take our focus off of have I done good things and we live by the Spirit. We walk in faith.

Our tenth observation, apart from faith we are slaves to sin. This goes back to chapter 7 verses 14 and 15. Sold under sin.

Freedom, life, and peace are ours through faith. Look at Romans 8.2. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8.6. To be carnally minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

It also gives us future hope. Look at chapter 8 verse 11. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

There was no promise of resurrection in the Mosaic law was there? It doesn't say behold if you keep all of these precepts I will raise you from the dead on the last day. It says no you'll live long in the land. You will prosper in the land.

But there's no future hope associated with obedience to the law because that's not where that future hope comes from. It comes through the Spirit dwelling in us and God's promise through faith. It's faith that saves us.

It's faith that guarantees our resurrection and it's also faith that guarantees us reward and abundance and the privilege of reflecting God's glory in that resurrection. So you can see Paul is really making a strong argument here isn't he? He is firing off every gun in the arsenal to make the point that this system of teaching, this abuse of righteousness which is what was going on in Rome. They took a good righteous holy thing, the Mosaic law, and turned it into something bad because they said you've got to be approved by doing these things instead of gaining approval by trusting in God, claiming His promises and letting His Word do its transforming work in the inner man.

Our eleventh observation, we are heirs of God through faith not works. Look at chapter 8 verses 14 through 17. As many as are led by the Spirit of God these are the sons of God.

You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear. You received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified together.

We are heirs according to promise and there are stipulations on this promise aren't there? Esau was an heir of Isaac but he lost his birthright because he didn't meet the conditions of the promise. Ishmael was an heir of Abraham but Ishmael did not meet the conditions of the promise and lost his inheritance. We are heirs according to promise but that promise has conditions.

We have to operate by faith. We cannot fall away and go back into a system of works as the Galatian church was trying to do. You read Galatians after studying Romans and that book is so crystal clear.

It's a distillation and summary of everything Paul is arguing here. We are heirs of God through faith not through works. God's grace and mercy are not earned.

Chapter 9 verses 15 and 16, you know chapter 9 has been this big theological swamp where people have bogged down worrying about Jacob who I love, Esau who I hated. The main point is right there in verses 15 and 16 of chapter 9. God says I will have mercy on whomever I have had mercy. I will have compassion on whomever I have had compassion.

It is not of him who wills nor of him who runs but of God who shows mercy. We don't qualify for the inheritance. We don't qualify for the blessings of God by willing or by running.

We qualify for them because of God's grace. It depends on God not what we do. The focus is not on us.

It's on God and on our faith in God. We are heirs of God through faith not works. Romans 8 verse 14-17, God's grace and mercy are not earned.

Romans 9 verse 15-16, you can see this also in verses 30-33 of that same chapter. He says the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained to righteousness even the righteousness of faith. Israel pursuing the law of righteousness has not attained to the law of righteousness.

Why? Because they did not seek it by faith but as it were by the works of the law. So there you go. It doesn't get any clearer than that.

Chapter 10 verse 3, they being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness have not submitted to the righteousness of God. Deliverance from sin and the approval of God come through faith. Paul establishes this in chapter 10 verses 8-13.

The word is near you in your mouth and in your heart, the word of faith which we preach. If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be delivered. This is the deliverance Paul talked about in chapter 1 verses 15-16.

The gospel is the power of God for deliverance to everyone who is believing. It's not an heiress tense talking about the point of salvation, it's a present tense talking about deliverance in time. We saw this in Colossians chapter 1 and in Galatians chapter 1 where Paul says that Christ died to deliver us out of this present evil age, not just from the lake of fire.

Our 14th observation, this is probably one of the few times in history that I've given you points at all, much less this many points. Rejection of righteousness by faith brings judgment. This is

Romans 11.7, Romans 11.22. A change of mind, repentance, repentance, deciding to seek God's righteousness by faith brings mercy.

That's Romans 11.31 and 32. Growth and maturity, transformation never comes by works. I wanted to get to this point which is the 15th because this is where we fall down.

There is an implicit and in some cases explicit belief that if you do the right things you will become a better Christian. You will grow in grace, you will grow in Christ if you start getting in the habit of doing good works. That is not the case.

We do not grow, we do not mature by doing good things. A growing, maturing believer will do good things, but we reverse that order when we get into this righteousness by works. Growth and maturity come by faith, not by works.

Romans 12.2, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. He doesn't say be transformed by doing every good work. He says if you're transformed by the renewing of your mind, you will prove what is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God.

This flaw is evident in rampant Christianity today. People say, let me get you into a group, let me put some peer pressure on you, let me disciple you, let me mentor you, let me give you a good example and if you'll follow my good example you will grow and you will mature. It just doesn't happen.

It happens through faith, transformation of the mind. The fruit of a transformed, this is number 16, the fruit of a transformed, renewed mind fulfills the law. If you're trying to fulfill the law, you're never going to make it going directly there, but if you abandon righteousness by works, seek righteousness by faith, you will wake up to discover that you have fulfilled that law.

This is stated explicitly in Romans 13.8, Romans 13.10, Romans 13.14. And as we come up to the recent sections of this letter that we have studied, our seventeenth observation, righteousness by faith looks to God, not to man. This is 14.8 and its surrounding verses. If we live, we live to the Lord.

If we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. This ought to be the characteristic of our thinking.

If we wake up and find ourselves worried about what someone thinks, worried about whether or not we are approved by people or by the standard of people, we've fallen from grace. So what is the conclusion? What is the summary? There is a way of life that pleases God. There is a way of life that meets God's standard because it is fueled by God's grace.

It is sustained by God's provision. It is empowered by God's power, His Word and His Spirit. And that's trust in God, looking to God for provision, looking to God for our approval.

If we wonder about where we stand, we go to God, not to people. Go to God's Word. Seek the ministry of God's Spirit and content ourselves and rejoice in the fact that God approves us when we trust Him.

We don't have to meet someone's standard. We don't have to demonstrate that we are good believers or that we are fruitful believers by having an impact. It's not necessary.

God says this fruit is invisible. Sometimes your left hand doesn't even know what your right hand has done. It happens in privacy.

It happens out of sight. Look at the parables that Jesus told the Old Testament saints. When you do your good works, do them in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

If we're depending on things that are not secret, if we're depending on the observation of people, the approval of people, trying to meet the standard that people present for righteousness, we've missed the message of Romans, we've missed the message of Galatians and we've missed our calling in life. God has called us to something far greater than just avoiding the penalty for failure. He's called us to an opportunity to reflect His glory and participate in His plan in a way that transcends just having an impact in circumstances, making a difference at some point in someone's life, helping them through a tough time.

We can have an impact that is eternal, that makes an impact on the angels, that makes an impact in the eyes of God Himself. That's what Paul has offered us. To fulfill that we have to know God's Word, we have to seek it out, and we have to meditate on it.

It has to be important enough to us that we stop in the middle of our day, at the beginning of our day, at the end of our day, and think about it. I think that's one of the great patterns that we see in the lives of people such as Daniel and David. Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud, David says.

Daniel, how many times a day did he pray? Three times a day. Morning, noon, and night. What does that do? That stops us in the midst of circumstances, in the flow of interaction with people, and forces us to evaluate who we are and why we're here.

I think it's a very healthy pattern to set for ourselves, morning, noon, and night, to stop and meditate on the truth of God's Word so that we can make it the object of our faith. Through that faith be approved by God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. Through that Word of Truth be corrected, rebuked, instructed in righteousness so that we can be mature and thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you for all of the wonderful truth that you have communicated to us in this letter from Paul to the Roman Church. We thank you for the reality of

it.

We do possess the gift of the Spirit. We do possess the gift of your Word. It is not far from us.

It is in our mouth and in our hearts. We pray that these truths will come to the surface of our consciousness, that we will be reminded of them. God the Holy Spirit will use them as a sword to lay bare the innermost thoughts and intents of our heart.

We pray that we can be purged of false motivation and purged of the sinful desire to please people and to be approved by people and to satisfy the desires of our flesh. We pray that we will have insight and understanding of our own hearts and that through the transforming power of these truths we will be drawn ever closer to conformity to the image of Jesus Christ who is the fullness of deity and bodily form. We know that as a result of these things we have the privilege and the opportunity to reflect your glory both now and in the age to come.

It is our prayer that we will fulfill that calling and that purpose that you have for us. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.