



Helping Our Children Learn to Share the Gospel of God Part II

**Growing Godly Family Series
Manual 11**

By

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Growing Godly Families Series

This series of manuals is the result of a series of weekly e-mail topics that have been prepared and e-mailed over a period of years. They originally started out as a one page topic that gradually grew to the point where most topics are about three pages in length.

This series is especially designed for those who are already Christian leaders to give them Biblical principles for the development of godly physical and spiritual families. Because they give Biblical principles for developing godly families, they are also helpful for new Christians that want to grow and become godly families.

Mark 10:43-45 says, "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." In these verses Christ taught that godly spiritual leaders do not have the attitudes of leaders in the world. Worldly leadership is based on power and authority and is designed to benefit the leader and place him above others. In contrast, godly spiritual leadership is designed to help every Christian reach their full potential in Christ. The following three statements give a summary of three styles of leadership. The purpose of this series is to help every family develop their full potential as godly families.

If we drive people, we will drive them until they can get out of our way.

If we lead people, we will be able to lead them as far as we have gone ourselves.

If we serve people, we will help each person develop their full God given potential and equip each person for the ministry that Christ has prepared for every Christian.

In the world people often measure success by the amount of things that they accumulate in this world before they die. However, they are unable to take any of those things with them when they die. Mark 8:36-37 says, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Success produces rewards until we die but it produces nothing for eternity.

In contrast, God measures effectiveness by our faithfulness and obedience. Matthew 6:19-21 says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Effectiveness produces eternal rewards. Mark 10:29-30 says, "So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life." I Corinthians 10:31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." The Growing Godly Families Series is designed to help your family life count for eternity by bringing glory to God.

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Learning the Benefits that God Gave to Israel

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our children learn to rest in the love of Christ. We saw several things that we experience in our daily lives that cannot separate us from the love of God. We also saw that things both in the world and throughout the entire creation will not separate us from that love. Finally we saw that nothing can ever separate us from the love of Christ. Today we want to see how God showed His love to the nation of Israel. We will see that even though Israel received many blessings from God that it did not cause the people to serve the Lord.

We begin by seeing the great concern of Paul for the people of Israel. Romans 9:1-5 says, “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* 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*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.” Here we see that Paul had great sorrow and continual grief in his heart for his people, the Jews. Here we see an example of the concern that we want to have for the people of our own family, tribe or nation.

Paul said that there were several ways that the Romans could know that Paul was speaking the truth when he spoke about this concern. He said that he was telling the truth in Christ. He said that his conscience also gave witness that he had this concern. He said that the Holy Spirit could give testimony to the fact that he had a clear conscience as he spoke about this sorrow and grief that he had for his people. Paul also said that he could wish that he were accursed from Christ if that would cause his family and the Jewish people to all turn to Christ. Although Paul knew this was impossible, he was saying by this statement that he would be willing to experience eternal destruction if it would mean that all of the Jewish people would be saved. Here we see that he had such a great love for his people that he would be willing to follow the example of Christ and suffer in their place if that would cause all of the Jews to be saved.

Then Paul went on list some of the blessings that the Jews had received from the Lord. The first blessing was the adoption of Israel by God. In Exodus 4:22 God told Moses, “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Israel *is* My son, My firstborn.”’ Here we see that God had chosen the nation of Israel to be His firstborn. The second blessing of Israel by God was the fact that God allowed the people of Israel to see His glory. Exodus 40:34 says, “Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” This glory of the Lord was present with the people of Israel throughout their time in the wilderness. God also gave the people of Israel His covenants beginning with His covenant with Abraham.

Other blessings in the wilderness included the giving of the Law, the pattern for the building of the tabernacle and everything in the tabernacle. God also gave Israel several promises. These

promises were first given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 where we read, "Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The greatest promise was that One would come from Abraham that would bring blessing to all of the families of the earth. That was a promise to Abraham that Christ would come from the family of Abraham. That particular promise brought eternal blessing to all who placed their faith in Christ from all of the families of the earth.

Romans 9:6-9 goes on to say, "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this *is* the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." Here we see that some were saying that all of those blessings had not come on all of the people of Israel. It is true that the blessings had not given life to every descendent of Abraham. In addition to Isaac, Abraham had several other sons including Ishmael and all of the sons of Keturah. These other sons were called the sons of the flesh. They were physical descendents but they did not receive the blessings that God promised to Israel.

However, the promise to Abraham was that in Isaac would his seed by called. God gave a promise to Abraham and Sarah. Genesis 17:19 says, "Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his descendants after him." Here we see that God made this everlasting covenant with Abraham and promised that it would pass on to the future descendents of Abraham through Isaac and not through any of the other sons of Abraham. As a result, God said that only the descendents of Isaac would be the children of promise.

We want to help our children understand another key thing about the family of Abraham that did carry on the promise. Even within those descendents only a small part of Isaac's family were spiritual descendents and were able to enjoy the blessings that God gave. A spiritual descendent is one who also placed his or her faith in the promises of God. Many of the people of Israel turned from God to worship idols. In the time of Elijah we see that most of the people had turned from God to idols. In fact Elijah said twice in I Kings 19:10, 14, "So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." Here we see that Elijah thought that he was the only person left that truly served the Lord.

However, the Lord told Elijah in I Kings 19:18, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." Here we see that God had reserved 7,000 of the Jews who were spiritual descendents as well as physical descendents. They had placed their faith in the promises of God and so they were able to enjoy the spiritual blessings that God had promised to the nation of Israel. In every generation of the Jews, God has always kept a remnant of the Jews that have been faithful to the Lord and are spiritual descendents as well as physical descendents.

At the same time we see that not even all of the physical descendants of Abraham actually became a part of the nation of Israel. Romans 9:10-13 says, "And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." Here we see that Isaac also had two sons. In fact they were twins. Before these two sons were even born, God explained to Isaac and Rebecca that one son would be the one who would carry on the promise that had been made to Abraham.

At the time God told Isaac and Rebecca about their two sons, they had not even been born yet so they had not done either good or evil. God told Rebecca in Genesis 25:23, "And the LORD said to her: "Two nations *are* in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; *one* people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger." Here we see that God continued to carry out His promise to Abraham. However, God said that the promise would be carried through the line of Jacob and not the line of Esau. We also read that this was according to the purpose of God and He was going to carry out His purpose.

In the same way once our children place their faith in Christ we want to help them understand that God wants to carry out His purpose through their lives. Our children will experience great joy as they yield their lives to the Lord and let Him carry out His purpose through their lives. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Christ has created every believer so that every believer is able to do good works. God has prepared those good works for each of us so that our lives will have real meaning and purpose.

We also see that God said to Israel nearly 1500 years after the birth of Jacob and Esau in Malachi 1:2-3, "I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' *Was* not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness." God had shown His love to the descendants of Jacob by preserving them. At the same time He had allowed judgment to come on the descendants of Esau. In Genesis 25:34 we read, "And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised *his* birthright." Here we see that Esau sold his spiritual leadership for a bowl of stew because spiritual leadership meant nothing to him. That is one reason why we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the value of spiritual leadership. God will only really bless our lives as we seek spiritual blessings and not physical blessings. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children the importance of seeking spiritual blessings in their lives.

Learning Why God Shows Mercy

In our last topic we saw that God promised many blessings to the people of Israel. However, not all of the people of Israel had the privilege of enjoying those blessings. Many were only physical descendents of Jacob and did not place their faith in the promises of God. As a result, they were physical descendents of Abraham but not spiritual descendents of Abraham. We saw as we concluded that topic that Esau rejected the opportunity for spiritual leadership and sold that opportunity to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Today we are going to build on that topic and learn how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand why God shows mercy.

Romans 9:14-16 says, "What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." Paul knew that some people might think that God was unrighteous to judge Esau. As a result, we see that Paul answers that question so that we can learn to answer that same question if our children also have that question. Paul began these verses by pointing out the fact that God certainly was not unrighteous. Paul used the statement of God to Moses to make that point clear.

In Exodus 32 we read about the nation of Israel choosing to worship the golden calf instead of following the Lord. The people all deserved judgment and those who were committing immorality along with their worship of the golden calf were judged by those who chose to stand on the Lord's side. However, the rest of the people had also worshiped the golden calf and also deserved judgment. As a result, Moses prayed for the people. Later in Exodus 33:18-19 Moses prayed again, "And he said, "Please, show me Your glory." Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Here we see that God chose to show mercy and compassion to the people even though they all deserved judgment. God is the One who has all authority and He can choose to show mercy even though we have all sinned and we all deserve judgment.

It was not our will that caused any of us to turn to God. It was not anything in our own efforts that caused us to turn to God. Instead Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Each of us who have become Christians has been saved because of the grace and mercy of God. We were saved by grace through faith. Even that faith was not our own faith. Instead we see that the faith that we had to believe was a gift that was given to us by God. God did not give any of us that faith as a result of our own efforts because God knew that we would then boast about what we had done. Instead God chose to save us by His mercy even though we did not deserve mercy.

Romans 9:17-18 goes on to use another illustration when those verses say, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you,

and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens." In these verses we see that God used Pharaoh as the illustration. Pharaoh had already hardened his heart and refused to let Israel leave the land of Egypt several times. As a result, God said in Exodus 9:16, "But indeed for this *purpose* I have raised you up, that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." God explained to Pharaoh through Moses that God had raised Pharaoh up for the very purpose that God could show His power in Pharaoh and that demonstration of the power of God caused the name of the Lord to be declared throughout the earth.

We read at least six times that Pharaoh hardened his heart. God made it clear that He could choose to show mercy to those that He desired to show mercy. However, God also chose to harden those that He willed. Six times it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Six times it says that the heart of Pharaoh was hardened. Six times it says that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh. Both the people of Egypt and the people of Israel had been rebellious against God. God could have judged them all. Exodus 12:12-13 says, "For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are*. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt." Here we see that the people of Israel showed faith in God by putting blood on the top and sides of their doors and that the death angel then passed over their houses and spared their firstborn.

Romans 9:19-21 goes on to say, "You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?" Many times people do not follow the Lord and try to find an excuse for their sin. We see that Paul is answering the questions that would come from such individuals here. Such people want to blame God for their own sin. They might say that God should not find fault with them if God did not choose them. They ask how they could be accused of resisting the will of God.

Paul uses a very interesting illustration to answer such individuals. Paul chose to use a lump of clay as an illustration. Can a lump of clay tell the potter what kind of a pot to make from that lump of clay? That is the choice of the potter. Jeremiah 18:2-4 says, "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make." Here we see that the potter is the one who chooses what to make with the clay. The potter can use a lump of clay to make a fancy pot, a water pot or a pot for garbage. That is the decision of the potter and not the decision of the clay. The point that God is making is He is free to choose what He does and how He works in the life of each individual.

This is why Romans 9:22-24 says, "*What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had

prepared beforehand for glory, *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” God is a perfect God and yet has chosen to allow sin. He is also a holy God who must show His wrath against all sin. At the same time God has accepted the payment that Christ made for the sins of every person when Christ died on the cross. This means that Christ took the wrath of God against sin for every person. As a result, God must show His wrath by bringing judgment on every person that does not repent and turn to Christ. That way God is not unfair. He accepts the payment for sin by Christ for all those who turn to Christ. To be fair He also judges all those who reject the payment of Christ and choose to pay for their own sin.

In addition to showing His wrath against sin, we also read that God chose to make His power known. We read in Romans 1:19-20, “Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” Here we see that the very creation makes it possible for people to see the power of God. Each person must choose whether to recognize that power or try to deny that power. God shows His longsuffering even to those who choose to deny that power by giving them a lifetime to repent and turn from their sin. Each person that refuses to repent has still seen the longsuffering of God.

In contrast, those who turn to Christ see something very different because God chooses to make known the riches of His glory on all those who turn to Him and accept the mercy that He offers. Here we see that God has chosen to accept the payment by Christ for our sins by all of us who come to Christ in repentance and faith whether we are Jews or Gentiles. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God planned that salvation for us before He ever created the world because of His desire to help us understand the riches of His glory.

Then we see that God called each one that He chose. Romans 8:30 says, “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” God determined to give us eternal life before He ever created the world. Once we were able to understand God began to work in our lives to call us to Himself. When we came to Him in repentance and faith, God justified us and declared us righteous in His sight. In His sight He has already glorified us and looks forward to the day when we will be in His presence.

Although none of us deserved mercy because of our sin, we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that God has shown His mercy because of His desire to enjoy fellowship with us forever. He could show that mercy because Christ paid the penalty so that He could freely forgive our sin. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the greatness of the mercy of God.

Learning Why the Prophets Said Israel was Blinded

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why God chose to show His mercy to all of us who repented of our sin and placed our faith in Christ. We saw several illustrations of the fact that people were shown mercy even though they deserved judgment. Today God continues to show His mercy. That is a fact for which each of us who have placed our faith in Christ can be thankful. Today we are going to see why the prophets of God said that the people of Israel had been blinded.

In our last topic we saw that God is God both of the Jews and also of the Gentiles. In our topic today we are going to see that God said through the prophets that God has also blinded the nation of Israel for a period of time. We begin first with a quotation from the book of Hosea. In Romans 9:25-26 we read, "As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved." "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God." In the book of Hosea we see that three children were born to Hosea and his wife. These children were given names that told what God was going to soon do to the nation of Israel.

The first child was called Jezreel because God said that He would soon bring judgment on the nation of Israel and cause Israel to be defeated in the Valley of Jezreel. The second child was named Lo-ruhamah which means "unpityed" because God would show no pity when He judged Israel. The third child was called Lo-ammi. Hosea 1:9 says, "Then *God* said: "Call his name Lo-Ammi, for you *are* not My people, and I will not be your *God*." Here God warned the nation of Israel that the time would soon come when they would be judged with spiritual blindness. This spiritual blindness came on the nation of Israel very soon and later also came on the nation of Judah. If God would have said nothing more, it would have looked like there was no future for either Israel or Judah.

However, Hosea 1:10 says, "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You *are* not My people,' *there* it shall be said to them, 'You *are* sons of the living God.'" Then Hosea 2:23 adds, "Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on *her who had* not obtained mercy; then I will say to *those who were* not My people, 'You *are* My people!' And they shall say, 'You *are* my God!'" Here we see that God also promised Israel and later Judah that He would one day restore the Jews to a place of blessing. That time is still future and has not happened yet. The fact that God used Hosea to speak of both the judgment of Israel and the future blessing of Israel shows that Israel will only be blinded for a period of time.

God also gave this same warning of judgment through Isaiah. Romans 9:27-29 says, "Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel (Isaiah spoke to the southern part of Israel called Judah): "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the LORD will

make a short work upon the earth." And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah." God used Isaiah to compare the number of people in Israel to the sand of the seashore because there were so many people. Isaiah 10 22-23 says, "For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them will return; the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a determined end in the midst of all the land." Here we see that God said through Isaiah that only a small remnant of that once great nation of Israel would be saved.

Then in Isaiah 1:9 the once great nation of Israel was compared to two other cities. That verse says, "Unless the LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah." The only people that escaped the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah were Lot and his two daughters because the Lord had mercy and brought them out of the city before He destroyed those cities. Here we see that God used Isaiah to help the southern kingdom of Israel which had been renamed Judah to help them realize that judgment would also come on them except for the small remnant that God preserved.

As we see from these quotations from Hosea and Isaiah, God did bring judgment on the Jews and spiritual blindness for a period of time so that God could show mercy to the Gentiles. However, that spiritual blindness was the result of their own sin because they refused to believe the message of salvation and forgiveness of sin and tried to be saved by their own works. That is why Romans 9:30-31 says, "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness." As Gentiles we were not looking for God.

We were not trying to be right with God. In fact Romans 3:19-20 says, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, 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." In fact as Gentiles we were all guilty before God because of our sin. We were not trying to find a way to be righteous in the sight of God. In spite of this failure to seek God and His righteousness, God brought the message of salvation to us as Gentiles. In fact Paul quoted from Isaiah 65:1 when he said in Romans 10:20, "But Isaiah is very bold and says: 'I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.'" As Gentiles, we were not looking for God but God still sent Christ to die for our sins as well as for the sins of the Jews.

In contrast, Israel was trying to make itself right with God by pursuing the law. In the time of Christ, the Pharisees thought they were right with God because they did try to keep the law. In Luke 18 Christ gave a parable about the prayers of a Pharisee and a tax collector. Those prayers are recorded in Luke 18:11-13 where we read, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" Here we see that the Pharisee thought that he was

righteous because of the things that he was doing. Christ said just the opposite was true. Christ declared the tax collector righteous while also saying that the Pharisee would be brought down. The Jews could not receive the righteousness of God by their own efforts.

Romans 9:32-33 goes on to explain why the Jews could not receive the righteousness of God, "Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.'" The Jews could not receive the righteousness of God because they did not seek that righteousness by faith.

Galatians 2:16 says, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." The Jews tried to be justified by keeping the Old Testament law. However, they could not be justified because they did not keep the law perfectly.

Salvation by faith was like a stumbling stone to the Jews and they stumbled at that stumbling stone. Isaiah had explained the choice that each of the Jews had to make hundreds of years before Christ came to this earth. Isaiah 8:13-14 says, "The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; *let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.* He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." In these verses we see that Isaiah said Christ would be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both of the houses of Israel. This meant that most of the people of both Israel and Judah would reject Christ at His first coming.

That stone is explained in Isaiah 28:16 where we read, "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily." Ephesians 2:19-20 tells us, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner *stone.*" Then Paul adds in I Corinthians 3:11, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Christ is the One who is the precious cornerstone and the sure foundation.

We have the privilege of helping our physical and spiritual children understand the fact that the Lord has given them the great opportunity to explain to others how they can make Christ the foundation for their lives. Our children will experience great joy as they see the Lord works through their lives as the Lord causes their lives to have a growing impact in the lives of others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children develop a growing ministry as they share the Gospel of Christ with others.

Learning How People Receive Salvation

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children grow and understand the fact that God wants to help them learn to share the Gospel with others. God set aside the Jews as a nation for a period of time because of their sin. As a result, God has chosen the church during this time to share the message of the Gospel with others. We saw that we want to help our children understand this great opportunity and privilege that we have been given to share the Gospel with others. In our topic today we want to help our children learn how to explain to others how they can receive salvation and forgiveness of sins.

In Romans 10:1-4 we read, “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” God called Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles. However, that did not mean that he forgot about his own people the Jews. Here we see that Paul continually prayed for the salvation of the Jews just as he continually prayed for the salvation of the Gentiles.

Because of his own background, Paul knew that the Jews had a great zeal for God. As a Pharisee, Paul had tried to keep the law. Paul describes his zeal that he had for God as a Pharisee in Philippians 3:6 where we read, “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” He showed his zeal for the law and especially for the rules of the Pharisees by persecuting the church. He said that in his efforts to keep the law that he considered himself blameless. Here we see that Paul had tried to establish his own righteousness by keeping the law. Because of the fact that he was working to keep the law by his own efforts, he realized later that he had not submitted to the righteousness of God. The law and the rest of the Old Testament showed that everyone was sinful and guilty before God. Instead of recognizing his sin and guilt, Paul thought that he had kept the law.

When Paul met Christ, he realized that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Paul recognized that that He did not meet the holy standard of God. When God stopped Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul asked the Lord two questions. The first was, “Who are you Lord?” The second was, Lord, what do you want me to do?” Suddenly Paul realized that He had to believe in Christ instead of depend on his own righteousness. Later in Galatians 3:24-25 Paul explained the true purpose of the law when he wrote, “Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” Paul wanted others to know that the purpose of the law was to show all people their sin so that they would come to God in repentance and believe in Christ by faith.

Paul goes on to contrast the difference between law and faith. Romans 10:5-7 says, “For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live

by them." But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' "(that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." In Leviticus 18:5 Moses wrote, "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the LORD." Here we see that Moses pointed out that in order to be righteous in the sight of the law that a person would have to keep the law perfectly and never disobey a single commandment.

In Deuteronomy 30:12-15 God told the people of Israel that they had a choice they could either choose life or they could choose death. Deuteronomy 30:12-13 says, "It *is* not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor *is* it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'" Here we see that the righteousness which is by faith does not ask us to ascend up into heaven to try and find Christ. We are not to descend into the deep to try and find Christ and bring Him back from the dead. Such an effort to become righteous would be impossible.

Instead Paul goes on in Romans 10:8 to tell how we receive the righteousness of God. Those verses say, "But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach)." Here we see the contrast from Deuteronomy 30:14 where we read, "But the word *is* very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." Here we see that God made it clear to Israel that the way to choose life was by faith. God had offered them life and they had to choose that life by faith.

Paul went on to explain the message of faith in Romans 10:9-10 where we read, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." True faith means that we confess with our mouth that we want to make Jesus our Lord. We make that choice because of the fact that we believe in our heart that God raised Christ from the dead. That is why God could say in Deuteronomy that the Word which was near them had to be in their mouth and in their heart.

We see that it is in the heart that a person believes or places his or her faith in the Word that God has spoken about Christ. I Corinthians 15:3-6 says, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep." Old Testament scriptures such as Isaiah 53:3-4 spoke of Christ's death when those verses say, "He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." Then Old Testament scriptures like Psalm 16:10 spoke of Christ's resurrection when that verse says, "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." As a result, we believe by faith in our hearts that Christ died for our sins and the Father showed that He was satisfied with that payment of Christ by raising Him from the dead.

We see that then we confess with our mouth the fact that we have believed in the death and resurrection of Christ by faith and made Him our Lord. The word “confess” means to say the same thing. Here we see that confession is saying the same thing that the Father says about Christ. In the previous verse we saw that the Father said that Jesus is Lord and showed that He was satisfied with the payment that Christ made for our sins by raising Christ from the dead. We see that when we believe these things by faith and agree with the Father that Christ is our Lord that God says that we are saved.

Romans 10:11-13 goes on to promise us, “For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”” Here we see that salvation is for all people. Isaiah 28:16 says, “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily.” Then Isaiah 49:23 adds, “Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with *their* faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I *am* the LORD, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me.” In these quotations from Isaiah we see that the contexts include both the Jews and the Gentiles. As a result, any who believe in Christ will not be ashamed.

Paul also makes it clear that salvation is available for all whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Those who come to Christ in repentance and faith are made one in the body of Christ. Ephesians 2:14 says, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.” As a result, we see that it is the plan of God for people of every background to receive salvation as a free gift. In that way people of every nation, tribe and tongue are able to experience the riches that Christ provides to all who call upon Him.

God promised through Joel in Joel 2:32, “And it shall come to pass *that* whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls.” Here we see that Paul quotes that verse to point out the fact that God had promised in the Old Testament that God wanted people of every nation to call upon Him for salvation. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that it has always been the plan of God to save both Jews and Gentiles. We also want to help our children learn how to explain to any person with whom they talk that people can receive salvation as a free gift through repentance and faith. Repentance is turning from the sin of unbelief to God. Faith is coming to God through Jesus Christ. We want to help our children learn how to explain this clearly to others so that they are equipped to share the good news of salvation with all people whether they are Jews or Gentiles. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to share with others how to receive salvation.

31.

Learning How God Has a Concern for the Whole World

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others how they can receive salvation and forgiveness of sin. We also saw that we want to help them understand how to explain the meaning of repentance and faith clearly. To help them to explain faith clearly, we saw that we need to help them be able to explain the importance of the death and resurrection of Christ. In our topic today we are going to see that God has a concern for the whole world to hear this message so that all will have the opportunity to receive salvation.

We concluded our last topic by seeing that Romans 10:13 says, "For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." That statement is followed by a series of questions in the verses that we will be studying today. Romans 10:14-15 says, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" Here we see several very important questions that help us realize the importance of helping our children learn to explain the Gospel clearly.

The first question is, "How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" The word translated "believed" means to think that something is true, to be persuaded of or to place confidence in something. This requires that a person must first receive a certain amount of knowledge of the Gospel in order to be persuaded. In order for a person to believe that Christ died for their sins and that the Father showed that He was satisfied with that payment by raising Christ from the dead, a person has to be shown from the Word of God that they are separated from God by sin, that Christ is without sin, that Christ died for their sin and that the Father was satisfied with the payment and showed it by raising Christ from the dead. It is impossible for people to call on Christ if they have not yet come to the point where they believe that these things are true.

The second question is, "And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" It is impossible for a person to believe in someone of whom they have never heard. This can be true even if a person is reading a part of the Bible if they do not understand what they are reading. This is illustrated by the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:34-35 where we read, "So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him." The eunuch was reading from the book of Isaiah. However, he had no understanding of the fact that Isaiah was talking about Jesus. As a result, he needed to have Philip explain to him what Isaiah was teaching about Jesus.

The third question is, "And how shall they hear without a preacher?" The word that is translated "preacher" means to speak openly about something that has been done. One of the last things that Christ said to the disciples and was spoken for every Christian to obey is given

in Mark 16:15 where we are commanded, "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Since this command is to share the message with every person in the world this command is to every Christian including each of us and each of our physical and spiritual children. The particular message that we are to share is the Gospel of Christ.

The fourth question is, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" The word that is translated "sent" means to send a person forth. Here in this verse it means to be sent forth to deliver the message of the Gospel of Christ. Christ used this same word when He said to His disciples and through them to each Christian in John 20:21, "So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." Just as the Father sent Christ to this world to bring the message of the Gospel, Christ has now sent us to take that same message to the world. Paul then quoted Isaiah 52:7 which says, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Here we see that the message that we have been commissioned to share with the world is a message of good news for the world.

Paul understood that many of the Jews had rejected the Gospel of Christ. As a result, he gave several quotations from the Old Testament to show that God wants all people, both Jews and Gentiles, to hear that message. Romans 10:16-18 says, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: "Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." One of the greatest passages in the Old Testament on the sufferings and death of Christ is recorded in Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53:1 says, "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" We see that Paul quoted part of that verse to show that many of the Jews had not believed what the Old Testament teaches about Christ.

Paul goes on to tell us what is required for people to have the faith to believe what the Word of God says about Christ. We see that, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." In order for people to come to a true faith in Christ, we see that they have to have the Word of God explained to them. As a result, we want to help our children understand the importance of sharing the Word of God with others and not their own ideas or experiences. It is the Word of God that is living and powerful and not our words.

All people do know about God through His creation. Romans 1:19-20 says, "Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." In fact we see that Paul quotes from Psalm 19:4 to show that all people have knowledge of God from His creation. However, that knowledge of God from His creation is not the thing that brings people to faith in Christ. The Jews had both the creation and had heard the Word of God but most of them still did not believe. In these verses we see that it is the Word of God and particularly the message about the life, death and resurrection of Christ that bring people to the point where they come to a true faith in Christ. That is why it is so important for us to help our children

learn to understand and explain what the Word of God teaches about Christ so that they can share that message from the Word of God with others.

Because most of the Jews did not believe God and most failed to place their faith in Christ when He came to this earth, God had warned long before that He would use someone other than the Jews to take the message of the Gospel of Christ to the world. Romans 10:19-21 says, "But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: "I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation." But Isaiah is very bold and says: "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me." But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people." Here we see that Israel did know the Word of God. However, they chose to try and earn eternal life through their own efforts instead of coming to God through Christ by faith.

God had told Israel more than 1400 years before Christ came to this earth that He would use someone other than the Jews to bring the message of Christ to the world. Moses told Israel in Deuteronomy 32:21, "They have provoked Me to jealousy by *what* is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by *those who are* not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation." Here in Romans we see that Paul quoted this verse from Moses to show that God had said that He was going to use someone other than the Jews to take the Gospel of Christ to the world. Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." The body of Christ, the church, is the group of people that God is using to take the Gospel of Christ to the world today.

Paul then quoted from Isaiah 65:1-2 which says, "'I was sought by *those who* did not ask *for Me*; I was found by *those who* did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation *that* was not called by My name. I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way *that is* not good, According to their own thoughts.'" The first verse speaks of the church. The second verse speaks of the Jews. Here we see that God said through Isaiah that as Gentiles we were not seeking God. Instead God had to come to us and say, "Here I am. Here I am!" Even though we as Gentiles were not a part of the nation that God chose to be His special nation He has given us the privilege of sharing the message of the Gospel of Christ with the world.

In contrast, God said that the people that He has chosen to be His special nation has been a rebellious nation has been set aside for the present although we will learn about their future in the next topics. We want to help our children understand the greatness of the privilege that we have been given to share the Gospel of Christ with the world. This great privilege gives each of us as Christians a real purpose for life. As we help our physical and spiritual children understand how to carry out this purpose that God has given them, it will give great meaning to their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand that God wants to bless and use their lives because of His concern for the whole world to hear the Gospel of Christ.

Learning How God Has a Remnant in Israel who Believe

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the Gospel of Christ to others. We saw that because the Jews have rejected that Gospel that God has set them aside for the present and given the church the privilege of taking that message to the world. However, the fact that God has set aside the Jews in the present does not mean that God has forgotten the Jews. In Romans 11 we are going to see that God has a great future for both the Jews and the church. That will be the focus of this topic and the next two topics.

Romans 11:1-4 says, "I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, *of* the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Here we are reminded again of the concern that Paul had for the Jews even though he was the apostle to the Gentiles. This is a reminder of the concern that we should all have for our own people. Paul was a part of the nation of Israel. He was a descendent of Abraham. He was from the tribe of Benjamin.

Paul makes it very clear that God has not forgotten the Jews. The word that is translated "foreknew" means to have knowledge beforehand or to foreknow those God has chosen to salvation. This word was used in Romans 8:29 where we read, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." In this verse we see that God knew each of us as Christians before He created the world and determined in advance to conform us to the image of Christ. God knew the nation of Israel beforehand and chose them to be the nation that would experience His blessing. However, that did not mean that every person in that nation would be saved but rather that the nation would enjoy blessings and privileges as the nation God chose through which Christ would come.

In fact in the time of Elijah, he thought that he was the only one left in the nation of Israel that still served the Lord. God had to explain to Elijah that he did not recognize that there was still a group of people in Israel that followed the Lord. Elijah said in I Kings 19:10, "So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." God answered Elijah in I Kings 19:18, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." God knew those who were still faithful to the Lord even though Elijah did not. Throughout the years God has always had at least a small group of Jews who are faithful to the Lord even during the times when most of the Jews turned away from the Lord.

Romans 11:5-6 goes on to say, "Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according

to the election of grace. And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.” Paul also explained why God has always caused at least a small group of Jews to be faithful to the Lord. Paul said that at the time he was living that there was a group of Jews faithful to the Lord according to the election of grace. The word translated “election” means those who have been chosen by the act of God. God has chosen each person that comes to Him by His grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Here we see that God gives each person who places their faith in Christ that faith so that they are able to be saved by faith.

God wanted to make it clear that no one can be saved by works. If a person could be saved by works, then grace would be unnecessary. If a person could be saved by his or her own works, then grace would mean nothing. However, our works could never save us. Titus 3:3-7 says, “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” It was the grace and mercy of God that makes it possible for each person to be saved.

Paul went on to describe the condition of most of the people of Israel at the time that he was living. Romans 11:7-10 says, “What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.” And David says: “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always.” In the time of Paul most of the Jews had not placed their faith in Christ. Instead only those Jews that God had chosen had received faith and placed their faith in Christ. God said that the rest had been blinded. They had physical sight but they lacked spiritual sight. Paul quoted two Old Testament passages written by Isaiah and David to show the blinding of the nation of Israel.

Isaiah said in Isaiah 29:10, “For the LORD has poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep, And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; and He has covered your heads, *namely*, the seers.” Here we see that in the time of Isaiah that he said that God had given Israel a spirit of deep sleep. Their eyes had become closed. Deuteronomy 29:4 says, “Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this *very* day.” Here we see that Isaiah wrote about something that had already happened in the time of Moses. In the time of Moses the people had already closed both their eyes and their ears. They did not want to see the works of God and they did not want to hear the Word of God. Spiritual blindness will continue in every person until God gives spiritual sight and spiritual understanding.

David also spoke of this spiritual blindness when he wrote in Psalm 69:22-23, “Let their table become a snare before them, and their well-being a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, so that

they do not see; and make their loins shake continually.” Because of sin people are in rebellion against God. As a result, they are spiritually blind and cannot see. God said through David as He also said through many other Old Testament writers that the people of Israel could not see or understand spiritual truth. As a result of this lack of spiritual eyesight, their lives were filled with fear.

However, Paul went on to point out the fact that the spiritual blindness that God had brought on the people of Israel would not be permanent. Romans 11:11-12 says, “I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!” Here we see that God said through Paul that the Jews had not stumbled so that they would permanently fall.

When someone stumbles that person is able to get up again. However, when a person falls completely, that person is not able to recover from that fall. Here we see that instead of a person that Paul was speaking about the people of the nation of Israel. Paul said that their stumbling certainly did not mean that they had fallen completely so that they would not be able to have their eyes opened by the Lord in the future. In fact that future when Israel will again experience the blessing of God is foretold in this very chapter. Romans 11:26 says, “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” Here we see that God promises that the day will come in the future that the entire nation of Israel will turn to God.

We also see that God explained the reason why Israel has stumbled. God said that He allowed Israel to be blinded and stumble so that salvation could come to the Gentiles. God also said that salvation for many Gentiles would provoke the Jews to jealousy. In Isaiah 49:6 we read, “Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” In this way we see that way that God said that He would use His Servant (Christ) to minister to both the Jews and the Gentiles. God said that Christ would raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved ones in Israel. This was a promise of future salvation for the Jews. Then they will become a witness to the world.

God went on to say that the temporary fall of the Jews would allow the Gentiles to receive the riches of God. However, God also said that when the Jews are given spiritual sight and go out to share the Gospel to the ends of the earth that their fullness will mean even greater blessing on both the Jews and the Gentiles. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that when God opens the eyes of many Jews and also many Gentiles that the people will receive even greater blessing. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the way that God is working to bring blessing to both Jews and Gentiles even though only a remnant of Jews believe today.

Learning About the Spiritual Blindness of Israel

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why the Lord allowed temporary spiritual blindness to come on the people of Israel. We saw that God allowed spiritual blindness so that spiritual blessing could also come to the Gentiles. We saw that the day is coming in the future when that blindness will be taken away so that both the Jews and the Gentiles can enjoy the fullness of the blessing of God. We are going to expand on that topic as we study the next section of Romans 11.

We go on to read in Romans 11:13-15, “For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?” Here we see that Paul began to explain to us as Gentiles how God was working through the ministry of Paul to the Gentiles to save some of the Jews.

Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. When God sent Ananias to restore the sight of Paul in Acts 9:15-16, those verses say, “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.” Here we see that God had chosen Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles long before Paul was even born. The leaders of the early church also recognized this same call. Galatians 2:9 says, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” God made it clear not only to Paul but also to the other Jewish leaders of the church that He had chosen Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

In this chapter we see that Paul said that he glorified God for his ministry. In addition to the opportunity to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul also prayed that the Lord would use his ministry to provoke to jealousy some of the Jews and bring them to salvation. Many of the Jews had developed the attitude that God did not care for the Gentiles because He had chosen the Jews as His special nation to bless. They forgot what God had said to Abraham when God first called Abraham. In Genesis 12:3 God promised Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God had told Abraham that all of the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham.

Paul looked forward to what God was going to do for the Jews. He realized that God was using this temporary setting aside of the Jews to bring the message of reconciliation to the entire earth. That message has given us as Gentiles the message of life from the dead. John 5:24 says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” However, the message of salvation will also give the Jews life from the dead. Romans 11:26-

27 says, "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." God will never forget His covenant with Israel but will one day cause all of the Jews to turn to Christ.

God went on to illustrate what had happened to the Jews. Romans 11:16-18 says, "For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root supports you." Here we see that God compared the nation of Israel to two different things. In the Old Testament the people would give the firstfruits of their harvest to the Lord. God said that the fact that they gave the firstfruits to the Lord meant that the whole harvest was holy. Second, God compared Israel to an olive tree. God said that if the roots of the tree were holy that then the branches of the tree were also holy.

Then God compared us as Gentiles to the branches of a wild olive tree. God broke off some of the Jewish branches of the olive tree because they did not trust in the Lord. Then God grafted us as Gentiles who are like branches of a wild olive tree into the good tree. (A wild olive tree usually produces very small olives while a tame olive tree usually produces larger olives.) By grafting us as Gentiles who are like wild olive branches into the olive tree, we have become able to enjoy the blessings of the good roots of the olive tree. However, we are reminded not to boast against the other branches (the Jews). We are to remember that we do not support the root. Instead the root supports us. The promise of God to Abraham that through him all of the families of the earth would be blessed means that we are now enjoying the blessings of salvation that came through Abraham and ultimately through Christ.

We are not to boast because we have also been given the privilege to enjoy the benefits of salvation. Romans 11:19-21 says, "You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either." There are some Christians who say that God has forgotten the Jews and that the Gentiles have replaced them. This passage reminds us that only some of the branches were broken off. However, it also gives us a warning. Those who were broken off were broken off because of their unbelief.

We as Gentiles have been grafted into the tree because of the fact that we have placed our faith in Christ. We are to remember that the root of the tree is holy. The tree is still the source of blessing. God is continuing to bless those Jews who believe and He is allowing us to share in those blessings as Gentiles. Galatians 3:13-14 says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Here we see that Christ bought us back from the curse of the law and so we now share in the blessings that God promised to Abraham. We have received this blessing by faith.

As a result, we are not to be proud. Instead we are to have a godly fear. We realize that God could remove us just as He removed those branches that continued in unbelief. That godly fear will cause us to pray for the day when all of the Jews will again turn to the Lord so that both Jews and Christians can experience the full blessings of the Lord. As Romans 11:32-33 tells us, "For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!" As Jews and Christians we can all look forward to that day when we will experience all of the blessings that God has for everyone who has come to Him by faith.

Romans 11:22-24 says, "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree?" Here we are reminded that God shows both goodness and severity. He shows severity to those who reject the offer of eternal life by faith. Those who reject the offer of God's goodness will experience eternal judgment.

In contrast, all those who come to God by faith in Christ will experience the goodness of God. The word that is translated "goodness" can be translated goodness, gentleness or kindness. The word is used ten times in the New Testament, three in these verses. It is also used in Galatians 5:22 where it speaks about the fruit of the Spirit. It is translated kindness in Titus 3:4-5 where we read, "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." Here we see that the kindness and love of God caused Him to save us by His mercy. It was that kindness that grafted us into the holy root.

God also has a tremendous promise for the Jews in these verses. God reminds all of the Jews that He is able to graft them back into the root again. It is much easier to graft the natural branches back into their own tree than to graft in wild branches. When God made His covenant with Abraham, God was the only One that ratified that covenant. In Genesis 15:7-10 God gave the covenant to Abraham and then told him to lay out the sacrifices so that this could be a blood covenant (everlasting covenant). When it came time to walk between the pieces of the covenant, Genesis 15:17 says, "And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces." God was the only One who went between the pieces of the sacrifice and so God is the only One who could break that everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendents. We want to help our children understand that the spiritual blindness that has come on Israel is only temporary and one day in the future God will cause all of Israel to turn to Him by faith. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand this future blessing for Israel.

Learning About the Future Blessing of Israel

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that God said that part of the branches of the olive tree of Israel had been broken off because of their unbelief. We also saw that some branches of a wild olive tree (the Gentiles) has been grafted into that holy root and were allowed to share in the blessings of God. We can thank the Lord for the fact that we have been allowed to share in those blessings. However, that does not mean that God has forgotten His promises to Israel. In our topic today we will see that Israel can look forward to great future blessings when the entire nation of Israel turns to the Lord.

Romans 11:25-27 says, "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." When we have the word "mystery" in the New Testament it speaks of something that was not revealed in the Old Testament that is now revealed in the New Testament. Here we see that God does not want us to be ignorant of the mystery of the reason why Israel received partial spiritual blindness. If we do not understand, we could become wise in our own opinion. Here we see that we are warned against any pride.

The mystery that God kept hidden in the Old Testament and is now revealed in these verses has two parts. First, we see that Israel experienced partial spiritual blindness. Second, we see that God promises that this partial spiritual blindness will only last for a certain period of time. That partial spiritual blindness will be on many of the Jews until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. The word that is translated fullness often refers to salvation. John 1:16-17 says, "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Christ is the One who brought salvation. All who have placed their faith in Christ have received grace and truth through Christ. Here we see that God has a great number of people from every tribe, tongue and nation that he will save.

However, once that number is complete we see that God is going to restore the full blessing that He has promised to the Jews. At that time we see that all Israel will be saved. Psalm 14:7 and Psalm 53:6 both say, "Oh, that the salvation of Israel *would come* out of Zion! When the LORD (God) brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad." These verses are quoted in Romans 11:26 to remind us that God is going to turn Israel from their sin back to Him. Then Isaiah 27:9 says, "Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be covered; and this *is* all the fruit of taking away his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altar like chalkstones that are beaten to dust, wooden images and incense altars shall not stand." Here we see that God promised through Isaiah that the day would come when God would remember His covenant with Israel and take away their sins because they will turn to Him in faith in that day.

Romans 11:28-31 goes on to say, "Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but

concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.” At the present time most of the Jews are rejecting Christ. That has given us as Gentiles the opportunity to place our faith in Christ and receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life. However, God will not forget His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and He will show His great love by drawing the nation of Israel to Christ in the future.

Paul reminds us that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Then Romans 8:30 says, “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” God called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the past and gave them the gift of salvation. Because the covenant that God made with Abraham is an eternal covenant, God says that after this period of temporary blindness to most of Israel that the time will come when He will call all the people of Israel and give them salvation.

As Gentiles, we were disobedient to God in the past and yet God still chose to show us His mercy and call us to Himself by giving us the gift of salvation. I Peter 2:10 says, “Who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.” The fact that Israel chose to live in rebellion against God gave us the opportunity to be called and receive the gift of eternal life. God chose to show His mercy to us. Paul described how God showed mercy to him in I Timothy 1:16 where we read, “However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.” God wants to show His mercy. Here God promises us that the day will soon come when He will again show His mercy to the nation of Israel and call them to salvation.

Romans 11:32-33 says, “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!” Here we see an example of the greatness of the love and mercy of God. Romans 3:19 said, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” The law showed that every person is guilty before God. No person could stand before God and defend himself or herself. Here we see that just as the law concluded that all are guilty before God that God can now make His mercy available to all. Certainly this shows us the greatness of the mercy and love of God.

In addition we see that the mercy of God reveals the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God. Ephesians 3:9-11 says, “And to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We see that God has chosen to reveal a little of His wisdom by the purpose that He has accomplished in the church. We also

see that His wisdom is infinite. Psalm 147:5 says, “Great *is* our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding *is* infinite.” We see it is impossible for us to understand the full wisdom and knowledge of God.

We also see the judgments and ways of God are past finding out. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, nor *are* your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” We know that there is really no way to compare the height of the heavens with the earth. In the same way there is no way to understand or compare the ways of God. That is why they are past finding out.

Romans 11:34-36 says, “For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?” “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.” Isaiah 40:13 says, “Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or *as* His counselor has taught Him?” We are very limited in our understanding. I Corinthians 2:11 says, “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” We realize that only the Spirit of God knows the things of God. As a result, that is why we need the Spirit of God to teach us. John 14:26 says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” Only as the Spirit of God teaches us can we know the things of God.

Job 41:11 says, “Who has preceded Me, that I should pay *him*? Everything under heaven is Mine.” As Paul quoted this verse in Romans 11 we see that God is before all things. No one has given anything to Him. In speaking of Christ, Paul wrote in Colossians 1:17, “And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” The Father willed the creation and the Son spoke the creation into existence. At the same time we see that the Spirit moved upon the face of the waters. As a result, we see that the entire Godhead was involved in the creation. That is why nothing could precede God. That is why God did not have to pay anyone for anything that was created. Instead we realize that everything belongs to God.

As we have seen in the first eleven chapters of Romans, God has shown the greatness of His love and mercy by making salvation available to all by faith. This includes both Jews and Gentiles. That is why He deserves all of the glory. This is why Romans 11:36 concludes these first eleven chapters by saying, “For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.” We want to help both our physical and our spiritual children understand why God deserves all glory. We want to help them realize that Israel can also look forward to the blessing that God is going to bring to the Jews in the future. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the great love and mercy that God has shown by making salvation available to all.

Learning about the Gifts God Gives for Service

In the first eleven chapters of Romans we have seen that God has made salvation available to all people whether those people are Jews or Gentiles. However, each person has to choose to receive that salvation by faith. We see that God is the One that has given us the faith to believe. In the coming group of topics we are going to see how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to act in faith once they have placed their faith in Christ. As Ephesians 2:8-10 says, we have been saved by faith and created for good works. We are going to see how God makes it possible for each Christian to carry out the good works that He has created us to do.

In Romans 12:1-2 we read, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Since Romans 11:36 concluded the previous chapter by saying, “For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.”, we see here that we are encouraged to present our bodies to God so that we can bring glory to God. We have seen in the previous eleven chapters that God has shown His mercy. Now we see that God calls us to respond by presenting our bodies to Him.

We also see that we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. In the Old Testament the people brought their sacrifices and presented them to the Lord as a covering for their sins. However, Christ presented Himself as our sacrifice to take away our sin. As a result, we see that our response is to present our bodies to Christ to carry out the will of Christ on this earth. The word translated “present” is also used twice in Romans 6:13 where we read, “And 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.” Then Romans 6:19 adds, “I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves *of* righteousness for holiness.” We see that we are to present our bodies to the Lord so that He can give us His strength to live holy lives.

As Christians we have been given a new nature that has a desire to do good instead of living to satisfy self. However, that new nature is to be revealed by the lives that we live. To be conformed to the world means to act like we acted before we became Christians. Here we see that we are to be transformed. The word that is translated “transformed” was used of Christ in Mark 9:2 where we read, “Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.” On that mountain the three disciples saw on the outside what Christ is like on the inside. In II Corinthians 3:18 we see that the same thing is to happen in our lives as we are being transformed. That verse says, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” We are to reveal the glory of Christ that is within us.

We see that the way that we are transformed is by renewing our minds. Philippians 4:8-9 says, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” As we think the thoughts that are in the Word of God and yield our human spirit to the Holy Spirit moment by moment, we see that the Lord gives us the power to be a living sacrifice because we are able to carry out the will of God in our lives.

Romans 12:3-5 goes on to say, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” Here we see one of the ways that our thinking is changed as we are being transformed. We see that we will learn to think of ourselves and the gifts that God gives us with an attitude of humility. I Peter 4:10-11 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Some of us have been given speaking gifts and we are to use those gifts to speak the Word of God. Some of us have been given serving gifts and we are to serve in the strength that God supplies.

Each Christian is different but we are all a part of the same body. We have each been given different ministries so we do things differently but we are the same body. We are dependent on Christ and one another because we are all part of the same body. That is why Ephesians 4:15-16 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Christ is the head of the body and we are all to get our instructions from Him. He is the One who makes it possible for us to work together. As we carry out the instructions of Christ we will all do our share. The result will be that the body will be built up in love.

Romans 12:6-8 gives a list of seven different spiritual gifts. Each Christian has been given at least one of these seven gifts. Those verses say, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” Here we see that we are told how to use whatever gift or gifts that have been given to us by grace.

The gift of prophecy means to speak forth the Word of God that has already been written down. I Peter 1:10 says, “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you.” Then Jude 14-15 says, “Now Enoch, the

seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." From these two verses we see that a person with the gift of prophecy will speak of the grace of God which provides salvation for all who receive it and the judgment to come for all those who reject it. This is to be according to the proportion of faith which means that the person is to share the Word of God and not their own opinions.

The gift of ministry or service is a serving gift that focuses on practical ways to serve other Christians. In I Corinthians 16:15 we read, "I urge you, brethren--you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints." Here we see that this entire family had devoted themselves to serving other saints. The word that is translated "teaching" is usually translated doctrine. The Christian who has this gift will focus on sound doctrine. Titus 1:9 says, "Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." Here we see that the person who has the gift of doctrine will teach sound doctrine to encourage those who believe and to expose from the Word of God those who contradict sound doctrine.

The gift of exhortation or encouragement is a speaking gift that encourages Christians to love, to good works and to godly living by giving specific steps from the Word of God. In I Thessalonians 4:9-10 we read, "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more." Comparing the three speaking gifts in these verses, we see that the gift of teaching will emphasize doctrine, the gift of prophecy will emphasize reproof and the gift of exhortation will emphasize correction.

The person with the gift of giving often gives to needs that are often not recognized by others. Ephesians 4:28 says, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." This person loves to share with those who have needs. The word that is translated "leads" means to stand before or to lead. I Thessalonians 5:12 says, "And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you." The person who has the gift of leading will lead under the leadership of the Lord so that the good works of all will be profitable and fruitful. The person who has the gift of showing mercy loves to provide comfort. II Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to use their spiritual gifts to serve one another to the glory of God.

Learning How to Minister to Others

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn what it means to present their bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice. We also saw that we want to help our children learn how to use spiritual gifts to serve one another and bring glory to God. Today we are going to study a list of character qualities that our lives will demonstrate as we are learning to walk in the Spirit, be led by the Spirit and live in the Spirit.

Romans 12:9 says, “*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.*” Here we see that there are three things that will be present in our personal lives as we learn to walk in the Spirit. First, our lives will demonstrate love that is without hypocrisy. The word for love is the word that Christ used in John 13:34-35 when He gave us the new commandment which says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Before we became Christians we worked hard to get our own needs met instead of meeting the needs of others. Godly love is demonstrated by self sacrifice to meet the needs of others.

Second, the word of “abhor” means to dislike or have a horror of those things which are evil. I Thessalonians 5:22 says, “Abstain from every form of evil.” Here we see that we choose to avoid every form of evil. Here we see that our lives will demonstrate a desire to avoid any kind of sin if we are walking in the Spirit. Instead we will do just the opposite when we are walking in the Spirit. Third, the word that is translated “cling” means to be fastened together or to be welded together. Here we see that as we are walking in the Spirit that our lives will demonstrate those things that are good in their character and beneficial in their effect. True love hates evil and practices those things which are good and beneficial to others.

Romans 12:10-13 says, “*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.*” Here we see a whole series of actions that a church that is being led by the Holy Spirit will demonstrate in their relationships with one another. We see that we will be devoted to one another with a strong family love. This reminds us that as local churches we are really a large extended family that has a great concern for one another. The statement that the world made about the early church was, “See how they love one another”. It was the love that the early Christians had for one another that had a great impact on the world around them.

We also see that as a body of Christians that we will honor one another by giving preference to one another. Philippians 2:3 says, “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.*” Here we see that we are not to focus on our own interests. Instead we are to have a humble mind that causes us to place a high value on others instead of placing a high value on our own desires. This value of others is shown by our actions.

We are not to be lagging in diligence. The word that is translated “diligence” means to put our whole effort into the things that we do and to do them with haste so that we do whatever we do for the Lord with a full effort. It is the same word that is used in Romans 12:8 where we read, “He who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” In that verse we see that it talks about those who are given the spiritual gift of leading. Here we see that it also applies to all Christians in their service for the Lord.

We see that we are also to be fervent in spirit. The word that is translated “fervent” in this verse means to boil with heat. It can be used in either a good or a bad sense. However, in the New Testament it is used in a good sense to speak of a person that has a great eagerness to do what is good and pleasing to the Lord. We see that our eagerness to do what is good and pleasing to the Lord comes from our human spirit which can only happen as we are yielding our human spirit to the Holy Spirit. Our focus is to be on serving the Lord. The word that is translated “serving” is the word that means to serve as a slave. It was used of the Thessalonians in I Thessalonians 1:9 where we read, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Here we see that the Thessalonians had a great desire to serve the living and true God.

As we are being led by the Holy Spirit as a church we see that we will also be serving the Lord. We will be rejoicing in hope. We see that hope is based on two things. The first is the resurrection of Christ and the second is the return of Christ. I Corinthians 15:19-20 says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Then Titus 2:13 says, “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” This blessed hope also gives us the Lord’s strength to be patient in difficult situations. As we are led by the Spirit we realize the importance of practicing I Thessalonians 5:17 which says, “Pray without ceasing.” We also have a desire to share in the needs of other saints. Then in our relationship with one another in the body of Christ will look for opportunities to use our home as a place of ministry.

Romans 12:14-16 says, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.” Here we see a whole series of actions that a church that is being led by the Holy Spirit will demonstrate in their relationships with the people of the world that are around us. We see that we are to bless those who persecute us. Christ gave us four ways to treat those who are against us in Matthew 5:44 where we read, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” When we are led by the Holy Spirit we will be a blessing to others.

We will also minister to the people around us in other ways. We will rejoice with them and celebrate with them their times of joy. We will weep with those who are experiencing sorrow or grief. We will not treat some people special and reject others. We will not be filled with pride. Instead we will spend time with the lowly. In addition we will not think that our

opinions are better than the opinions of others. Here we see that whether people are Christians or not that we will follow the example of God and treat them with respect. I Peter 1:17 says, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear." We are reminded that the Father does not show partiality.

Romans 12:17-21 says, "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." In these verses we see how to respond to those who treat us as enemies.

When we are led by the Holy Spirit we will not return evil when someone does evil to us. As I Peter 3:8-9 says, "Finally, all *of you be* of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, *be* tenderhearted, *be* courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." Here we see that the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to respond with compassion when others are doing evil to us. We choose to do the things that are good and right to all people whether they are Christians or not. We do all that it is possible for us to do to be at peace with all people.

Instead of trying to get even when others do something evil, we choose to leave all judgment or vengeance to God. God promises that He will judge their sin. For those who place their faith in Christ, God has already judged their sin at the cross. For those who do not turn to Christ they will experience the eternal judgment of God in the future. In fact we are given some specific ways to show kindness to those who treat us as enemies. Proverbs 25:21-22 says, "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for *so* you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the LORD will reward you." As Paul quoted these verses from Proverbs, he made it clear that when we are being led by the Holy Spirit that we will look for specific ways to show kindness to those who are treating us in evil ways. We see that the Lord will reward us.

The final verse shows that the way that we overcome evil is by doing good. We want to show our physical and spiritual children by the way that we respond to others that we are led by the Holy Spirit and not by evil. I John 5:4 says, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith." We want to show our children that as we show kindness and do good to others that we actually have victory over those who do evil. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to minister to others.

Learning How to Relate to Governments

In our last topic we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example how to minister to others by the things that we do. We saw that as we learn to be led by the Holy Spirit that the Spirit gives us both a desire and specific ways to reach out to others and help them to experience the love of Christ in their lives. In our topic today we are going to see how to show our children how to let the Holy Spirit lead us the Spirit helps us to relate to our governments.

Romans 13:1-2 says, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.” We begin this section by seeing that we are to place ourselves under the leadership of those that God has appointed over us. Here we see that God had given various levels of government to lead us in our lives. We see that God is the source of all authority. We also see that He is the One who has given each leader their position of authority. This would relate to any level of government.

Here we see that those who rebel or fight against the leaders that God has allowed are actually rejecting the ordinance of God. This means that they are fighting against the God given authority that God has placed over them. Titus 3:1 says, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.” Here we see that if we are a leader in the church that we have a responsibility to teach those in the church that God has placed government authorities over us and we are to submit to them. If we fight against the government that God has placed over us, we can expect to be judged by that government.

Then we go on to see how government leaders will respond if we choose to fight against them. Romans 13:3-4 says, “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil.” Government leaders do not cause fear to those who are doing good works. Instead because governments are established to provide civil authority in any country, their leaders do cause fear in the lives of those who are doing evil because such leaders have been placed in authority to maintain order in any nation.

As a result, we do not have to be afraid of those who have been given authority to rule and carry out the functions of government. If we are doing the things that are good and useful in the society in which we live, we will receive praise instead of judgment from government leaders. Romans 15:2 says, “Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification.” Here we see that we are to do the things that will be for the benefit of our neighbors. We are to do the things that will build them up instead of destroy them. That is why government officials are the servants of God to do the things that are beneficial for our lives.

In contrast, if we do the things that are evil we have a good reason to be afraid and fearful. God says that government authorities do not bear the sword in vain. Here we see that it is their responsibility to carry out judgment against those who do evil. Right after Noah came off the ark in Genesis 9:6 God said, “Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.” Here we see that God established the principle that judgment for sin would be carried out by people under the authority of human government. God has given government authorities the responsibility to maintain order in society by carrying out punishment against those who do evil. Whether the rulers serve God or not, this is a responsibility that governments carry out against those who are doing evil.

However, we go on to see that there is a greater reason to be in submission to the government that God has allowed to be in authority over us. Romans 13:5 says, “Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.” In this verse we see that we are not just to be subject because of a fear of punishment. A much greater reason to be in submission is to have a clear conscience. II Corinthians 1:12 says, “For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.” Paul could say the things that he said because he had a clear conscience before God.

Here we see a very important principle that we want to help our children understand. At the moment that we become a Christian the Holy Spirit comes into our human spirit and renews our human spirit. As a result, we have a desire to do good and do the things that please God. God also renews our conscience so that it begins to work properly again. Romans 2:14-15 says, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*.” We may have seared our conscience before we placed our faith in Christ. However, at the moment of salvation God renewed our conscience. As a result, our conscience will accuse us when we do wrong as a Christian.

However when we are pleasing God, we will have a clear conscience. II Timothy 1:3 says, “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as *my* forefathers *did*, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day.” Here we see that Paul was thankful because he knew that his conscience was pure in the sight of God. As Christians the Lord gives us a good conscience when we are doing the things that are right and pleasing to Him. I Peter 3:16 says, “Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.” When people accuse us falsely we see here that Christ will cause our good conduct to cause others to be ashamed for accusing us falsely.

In II Corinthians 4:1-2 we read, “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” In II Corinthians 3:8-18 we see that as Christians we have been given the ministry of the New Covenant. This is the message of sharing the Gospel with others. Here we see another reason why it is important to have a clear conscience both with other people and with our government.

Here we see that the life that we live in relationship to our government and to other people determines whether our message will have an impact when we share the Gospel with others. The Lord has shown His mercy to us and has also given us this ministry. As a result, we do not give up or get discouraged. We also see that we have turned away from the hidden sins that would bring shame. We do not twist the Word of God or try to make it fit our ideas. Instead we make certain that we speak the truth. We do this so that we can have a clear conscience before God, before our government and before other people so that our message will have an impact.

Romans 13:6-7 says, "For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." Here we see the reasons why we pay taxes. First we see that we pay taxes because God has given governments the authority that they have. Second, we see that we pay taxes so that we can have a good conscience before God. Third, we see that we pay taxes because governments are actually the servants of God who keep civil order on the earth.

The word "render" means to give or to pay. Taxes are the first thing mentioned that we are to pay to our government. Christ was asked if people should pay taxes. We see His answer in Matthew 22:21 which says, "They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." We also give other things to our governments in addition to our taxes. Second we are to give customs to those to whom they belong. This word was used to speak of things like tolls and other indirect taxes on goods.

In addition to taxes and customs we also give the government two additional things. Third, we see that we are to give fear or respect to those who are in various positions of government. Here we see that we are to treat people who serve the government with respect because of the position that God has given them in the government. Fourth, we see that we are to give honor to those to whom honor is due. Honor is the placing of a high value on those who lead us because of the fact that God has placed them in that position for the benefit of all people.

As we help our children learn to relate properly to the government and to the people who hold positions in government, we are helping them to realize how God works through governments to keep order in society. The respect that they show also opens a door of opportunity for them to share the Gospel. This will include both opportunities to share with government officials and also with people who see our respect. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to relate to governments.

Learning How to Practice the Law of Love

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to relate properly to the various levels of government that are over them. We saw that this proper relationship included the paying of taxes. Christ gave us the example when He said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." We saw that a proper relationship to governments makes it easier to share the Gospel with others. In our topic today we see that we want to help our children learn to practice the law of love in their lives.

Romans 13:8-10 says, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law." The word that is translated "owe" in this verse means to be in debt, to owe something to another person or to have a responsibility to another person. The only debt that we are to continue to owe is the debt to love one another.

We also see why we have a continuing debt to love one another. That is a continuing debt because that is what is required in order to fulfill the Old Testament. The Old Testament law was divided into two parts. The first four commandments spoke of man's relationship to God. The second six spoke of man's relationship to other people. Christ was asked, what is the great commandment? Christ answered in Matthew 22:37-40, "Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." The six that discuss man's relationship to man are all covered in Romans 13:7-10. We saw in verse seven that we are to give honor to those who deserve honor. The first command of the six is to honor our parents.

The final five commands are all negative as we see them quoted in Romans 13:9. These five commandments all speak about different ways that we would harm another person. Adultery destroys marriages. Murder takes a life. Stealing takes the possessions of others. Bearing false witness lies about others and destroys their reputation. Coveting wants to take what others have. Once these things are done such actions cannot be reversed because they are already done. That is why this section is also summarized in a positive way. Leviticus 19:18 says, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD." Here we see that the positive way to avoid harming or destroying others is to love every other person as much as you love yourself.

One day a lawyer tested Christ and asked what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Christ asked the lawyer what the law said. The answer of the lawyer is given in Luke 10:27 where we read, "So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" Christ told the lawyer to do those things perfectly and he would live. The lawyer wanted to justify

himself and asked Christ who his neighbor was. Christ answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Christ asked the lawyer in Luke 10:37 which was a neighbor, "And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."" The parable of the Good Samaritan makes it clear that our neighbor is every person. That is why each one of us has a debt to love every person just as Christ loved every person. Christ showed His love by dying for every person and each person must choose individually whether to accept or reject that love. Here we see that love will never harm a neighbor but love will fulfill the law.

Once we help our children understand how to fulfill the law, then we want to help them understand when to fulfill the law. Romans 13:11-12 says, "And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light." Here we are reminded that we live in a certain age or period of time. The word that is translated "high time" is normally translated "hour". As a result, these verses point out the fact that we live in a very important age and this is the hour to wake up and begin practicing the law of love toward our neighbor. We show love to our neighbor by sharing the message of salvation so that he or she knows how to prepare for eternity.

We are also reminded that our salvation is nearer than the day that we believed. Romans 8:30 says, "Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." This verse gives the whole process of salvation. When Romans 13:11 talks about the day of our salvation being nearer than when we believed that verse is talking about the day when we will be glorified and will be with Christ. That is why it is important to show our children by our example that this is the hour to show love to our neighbor by sharing the Gospel with him or her because the day when we will be taken to heaven is coming soon.

Today we are living in a world that is filled with the darkness of sin. I John 2:9 -11 says, "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Here we see that every person without Christ is in spiritual darkness. In contrast, I John 1:7 says, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." As Christians we are walking in the light when we have fellowship with Christ. We realize that the darkness of this world will soon come to an end and those who are still in darkness will experience eternal judgment.

As a result, we are told to put off one thing and told to put on another. We are told to put off the works of darkness. These are those things that are sin and hinder our witness to the world. Instead we are to put on the armor of light. I John 1:5 says, "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." Since God is light, at all times that we are walking in fellowship with the Lord we are walking in the light. That is why I John 1:6 warns us as Christians, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." At each moment that we

commit sin, we are not walking in the light. That is why I John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” As soon as we realize that we have sinned, we need to confess that sin so that we can immediately walk in the light again.

Romans 13:13-14 tell us how to practice walking in the light instead of walking in darkness. Those verses say, “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.” Here we see that we are to learn to walk properly as Christians. This will also provide an example for our physical and spiritual children to follow. To walk properly means to be walking in fellowship with the Lord moment by moment. Like taking a walk during the daytime, we have the light of God to help us see where to go and what to do.

Then we have three sets of examples of what it means to walk in darkness. First, this verse mentions revelry and drunkenness. The word translated “revelry” speaks of wild partying or parading through the streets that lasts late into the night. Such parties or parading through the streets are often accompanied by drunkenness. As a result, we are to put off or avoid participating in such activities because to do them means we are walking in darkness. Second, this verse mentions lewdness and lust. These two words deal with sexual immorality. I Corinthians 6:18 warns us, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.” Here we see that we are sinning against our own bodies when we get involved in any form of immorality. This reminds us that any form of sexual immorality involves walking in darkness.

Third, this verse mentions strife and envy. Strife is arguing and envy is another word for jealousy. I Corinthians 3:3 says, “For you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?” Here we see that when Christians are practicing strife and envy they are acting like people that are not even Christians. As a result, they are walking in darkness.

Instead of practicing the sins listed above, we are to provide an example for our children by following the instructions of Romans 13:14 which says, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.” To make no provision for the flesh means not to allow sinful desires to remain in our thoughts so that we begin to have a desire to carry out those thoughts so that they become actions. In order to avoid fulfilling the sinful lusts of the flesh, we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to put on Christ and walk in Him.

Learning why we Accept Others

In our last topic we saw that we are to show our physical and spiritual children how to walk in love. We saw that they will learn to walk in love as they learn to walk in the light. That involves taking root in Christ and walking in Him so that they are built up in Christ. Today we are going to see that one of the ways that we walk in love is learning to accept others. Our children will best learn to accept others as we set the example by the way that we accept them.

Romans 14:1-4 says, “Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.” The word that is translated “receive” is used four times in the first seven verses of this chapter. It means to accept a person or to hold that person close to your heart.

Here we see the way that we are to accept a person that is weak in the faith. We are to accept such a person with kindness. Another Bible translation says it this way, “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions.” Here we are reminded that immature Christians may have opinions about what they should do or what they should avoid because of their backgrounds before they became Christians. An example is given of two people that had previously worshiped idols. One felt that it was all right to eat the inexpensive meat that had been offered to idols and the other felt it was sin to eat meat offered to idols. At that time meat could be bought at a cheaper price at a market near a pagan temple because the meat had first been offered to an idol while the meat was more expensive at a regular market.

As more mature Christians we see that we are to accept both of these Christians and not judge their opinions. We are also to help them learn to accept the opinions of one another. If we do not help them learn to accept one another, we see that the one who eats meat offered to idols may despise the one who does not eat such meat. The word “despise” means to treat the person as worthless. In contrast, the person who does not eat meat that has been offered to idols may judge or condemn the other person. Romans 14:19 reminds us, “Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” We want to provide an example for weaker Christians by showing them how to build up one another.

We are reminded that God has accepted both the stronger brother and the weaker brother. The Lord knows that as each one grows and matures that each one will grow in love. That is why we are reminded that we are not to judge someone who is a servant of another. Both the stronger Christian and the weaker Christian are the servants of God. Romans 8:33-34 says, “Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” Here we are reminded that Christ is making

intercession for all of us whether we are strong or weak and so all Christians will be able to stand before God.

Romans 14:5-9 goes on to give a second area where Christians may have different opinions. Those verses say, "One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living." Here we see that Christians may also have different opinions about what special days to observe and celebrate.

For example, one Jewish Christian might think he should continue to celebrate the Jewish Sabbath and other Jewish feast days. In contrast, another Jewish Christian might think he should no longer observe those days. A Gentile Christian might feel that he should avoid any special days that were a part of his former religion because they were not related to Christ. Each person has to make his own decision about things that the New Testament does not clearly define for that person. The Holy Spirit renewed our conscience at the moment we became Christians. As we each mature and grow in the Lord as Christians, our conscience will give us peace about the things that we choose to do or to avoid. I Corinthians 10:31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." We are to provide an example and teach our physical and spiritual children to listen to their conscience as they seek the glory of God in all things. We also want to help them learn to give thanks to the Lord in all things.

We also see that we are not to live to self. In the same way we do not die to self. We have already seen that we are to glorify God in everything that we do. However, we are also to think of what will benefit others by what we do. Philippians 2:3 says, "*Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." This verse points out the fact that true Christian love does nothing with the purpose of self gain or pride. Instead true Christian love means that we walk with a humble mind and view others as better than self.

We belong to the Lord and true Christian love means that we will live for Him. The same is true if we die. True Christian love means that we will die in a way that will bring glory to the Lord. Paul showed this attitude when he wrote in Philippians 1:21-24 where we read, "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what *I* shall choose *I* cannot tell. For *I* am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you." Paul wanted to do whatever he did to please the Lord.

Christ gave us the greatest example of all. He died to pay the penalty for our sin. Christ rose again on the third day and now lives again. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer *I* who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which *I* now live in the

flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Here we see that Christ made it possible for us to live by faith as well. He is our Lord because He is the Lord of both the dead and the living. As our Lord, He has prepared a plan for each of our lives that will give us real meaning and purpose as we yield our lives to Him to carry out that purpose.

As a result, Romans 14:10-12 says, “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Since every Christian has been purchased by the blood of Christ, each Christian belongs to Christ and not to someone else. As a result, we are asked why we should even think that we have the right to judge our brother. In the same way we should not even think of showing contempt to our brother. We are to realize that each Christian is our brother or our sister and that we have no right to judge any person. In fact in verse 4 we saw that God will make them stand when they stand before Him at that day when we stand before the Lord to be judged for our rewards.

We will all stand at the judgment seat of Christ. I Corinthians 3:14-16 says that our works will be tested by fire in that day. Those verses say, “If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?” Each of us will receive a reward for the works that we have done that have eternal value. In the same way every other Christian will also receive a reward for the works that they have done that have eternal value.

Isaiah 45:23 says, “I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.” Every person will bow before the Lord and be judged. II Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” As we saw in the previous paragraph, every Christian will be judged for rewards.

Revelation 20:13 says that every non-Christian will also be judged when that verse says, “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.” That judgment will be eternal separation from God in the lake of fire and brimstone.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that we will each give an account of our own actions before God. That is one reason why it is so important for us to accept other Christians whether they are strong or weak. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children what it means to accept others.

Learning How to Accept Others

In our last topic we saw that we are to help our physical and spiritual children learn to accept others. We saw that we are to accept both those who are strong in the faith and those who are weak in the faith because God has accepted them. Instead of judging other Christians, we are to make it our goal to live to please the Lord by the way that we live. In our topic today we are going to focus on how we accept others.

Romans 14:13 says, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way." This verse both concludes the previous verses and also introduces the following verses. It concludes the previous verses because it reminds us not to judge one another any more. The fact that Paul used the word "anymore" means that the Christians had been judging one another. Here we see that we are to stop condemning other Christians. As Romans 14:4 says, "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." Each person is responsible to give an account to God instead of to you or to me.

Instead of judging one another we see that we are to make it our goal to avoid putting a stumbling block or to do something that would cause another Christian to fall. This introduces the following verses. It is important to understand what a stumbling block means. I Corinthians 8:9 says, "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak." As Christians we have liberty because we are no longer under the law. However, we are to be concerned about other Christians. We are to realize that if we do certain things that those things could cause a weaker Christian to stumble. Instead of causing others to stumble, Galatians 5:13 says, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Here we see that we are to use our liberty to serve one another through love by choosing to avoid those things that would cause a weaker Christian to stumble.

Romans 14:14-15 says, "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died." Peter had to be convinced by the Lord to stop calling certain things unclean. Acts 10:14-15 says, "But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." God had to help Peter understand that God can cleanse anything. From the viewpoint of Peter, the wild animals that God had shown him were unclean.

For the Jews it was considered a sin to eat the meat of an unclean animal. As a result, if any Christian considers a certain thing to be unclean or a sin, that Christian should avoid eating or doing that thing. As Christians, the entire Bible can be summarized by three things. In Luke

10:22 we see that we are to love God with our whole heart, soul, strength and mind. In that same verse we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Then in John 13:34-35 we are to love one another as Christ has loved us. As Christians we know that once we become Christians that we are no longer under the law and so nothing is unclean in itself. However, if we are taking root and walking in the love of Christ, we will show the liberty that we have in Christ by serving the weaker brother in love. As a result, we may choose to avoid certain things that might cause a brother or sister to stumble.

In these verses we see that if we grieve a weaker Christian and cause him to stumble because we eat certain foods that we are not walking in love. Paul encourages us not to destroy a weaker Christian for whom Christ has died by insisting that it is all right for us to eat that food or to do any other thing that would cause our brother or sister in Christ to stumble and fall back into a life of sin. Instead I Corinthians 10:31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." We are to make it our goal to bring glory to God by all that we do. If something we do would cause another Christian to stumble, then we are to show love by not doing the thing that would cause the other Christian to stumble.

That is why Romans 14:16-20 says, "Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed *are* pure, but *it is* evil for the man who eats with offense." There are various things that it might be all right for us to do because they are not sin. However, if they will cause weaker Christians to stumble, we should avoid doing those things for the sake of the weaker Christians. That way the things that we do will not be spoken of as evil. Instead we will see what is best for the whole kingdom of God.

Then we are given three things that are always beneficial to the kingdom of God and possible for us to do through the power of the Holy Spirit. First we see that it is possible for us to practice righteousness when we are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. Second, we see that we will have an inner peace when we are yielding to the Holy Spirit. Third, we see that we will be filled with joy when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact our lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 when we are walking in the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." Our lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit when we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we serve Christ by walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, we see that this is acceptable to God. We also see that it will be well pleasing in the sight of other people. As a result we are encouraged to pursue two things. The word that is translated "pursue" means to seek eagerly. First we are encouraged to pursue peace. James 3:18 says, "Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." As we practice righteousness that makes it possible for us to show others how to experience the peace of God in their lives. Second, we are encouraged to pursue the things that will build up others. Some things do not build up or edify others. I Corinthians 10:23 says, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all

things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.” In contrast, I Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” We are to follow the example of the Thessalonians and do the things that will build up others.

We are also reminded that we are not to destroy the work of God for the sake of food. This is a part of learning to serve one another in love. God has worked in the life of every Christian whether that Christian is strong or weak. As a result, we are not to halt the work of the Lord that is happening in the life of the weaker Christian by causing that Christian to stumble. That is why we want to make sure that each thing that we do on this earth has a pure motive. We want to show our children the importance of avoiding those things that would cause a weaker Christian to stumble just to satisfy their own desires and please self.

Romans 14:21-23 goes on to say, “*It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*” Here we see that if we are doing all that we do to bring glory to God that we will avoid certain things. We will avoid things that cause a brother to stumble. To cause a person to stumble means to put an obstacle in their path. We will avoid things that cause a brother to be offended. To offend a person means to cause him or her to distrust and fall away. We will avoid things that will cause a brother to become weak. We cause a person to become weak when we cause that person to become powerless or without strength.

When we are strong Christians it means that we may have strong convictions for our own lives. However, those are personal convictions that are between us and the Lord. Those make it possible for us to have a clear conscience before God in our own lives. However, that does not mean that we are to try and impose our convictions on other Christians. We also want to help each weaker Christian develop his or her convictions before the Lord. We want to help them learn how to let the Holy Spirit lead them through their conscience regarding the things that they choose to do and the things that they choose to avoid. Isaiah 26:3 says, “You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on You*, because he trusts in You.” Our goal is to help every Christian learn to experience inner peace because they have learned to trust the Lord to guide them instead of looking to other people to guide them.

If we try and impose our personal convictions on another person, they will not hold those convictions because of faith. Instead they will hold those convictions to please us. That will not help them develop spiritual maturity. As a result, we want to help both our physical and our spiritual children learn to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that they learn to walk by faith. II Corinthians 5:7 says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” A mature Christian learns to walk by faith. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to accept others so all Christians can learn to walk by faith.

Learning How to Function in Unity

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to accept others. We saw that some Christians will not have the same opinions about certain things that other Christians have about those things. As a result, we are to help our children learn to accept others even when they have different convictions. We also saw that we want to help our children choose to avoid doing certain things that would cause a weaker Christian to stumble. Today we are going to see how to help our children learn to function in unity as the body of Christ.

Romans 13:1-4 says, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." The word that is translated "strong" in this verse means to be mighty or powerful. It is translated mighty in II Corinthians 10:4 where we read, "For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds." As a result of learning to depend on God a strong Christian in one who acts in the strength of the Lord instead of his or her own strength.

The word that is translated "scruples" means an error that arises from weakness of mind. This would refer to the thoughts of a weak Christian that has not yet had his or her mind transformed by the Word of God. The word that is translated "bear" means to carry and is used in Galatians 6:2 where we read, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Here we see that stronger Christians are to actively help weaker Christians by helping them to carry their burdens instead of living to please themselves. When we see a weak Christian, we are to accept the opinions of weaker Christians because that is for his good and will lead to opportunities to build up the weaker brother.

Christ is the One who gave us the perfect example of One who perfectly pleased the Father and carried out His will. Psalm 69:9 says, "Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me." Christ accepted rejection and the evil and false words that were spoken about Him so that He could pay the penalty for our sin. Christ said in John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." We want to show our children how to carry out the will of God by accepting the opinions of the weak so that the opportunities to help them grow will come.

At the time that Paul wrote the book of Romans, many of the books of the New Testament were not yet written. As a result, Paul often quoted passages from the Old Testament to help people understand and grow as we saw in the previous paragraph. Here we also see the importance of the Old Testament for us today. As verse four says, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." This learning is explained to us in II Timothy 3:15-17 where we read, "And that

from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The Word of God including both the Old and New Testaments has been written to help every Christian grow to spiritual maturity. The Word also gives us patience, comfort and hope for the future. We will see some of these promises of hope that God gives to the Gentiles in the following verses.

However, first Romans 15:5-7 says, “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.” Before giving us those verses Paul reminded the Romans and us that God is the God of patience and comfort. Here we see that God helps each of us as Christians to develop patience. The word that is translated “patience” means to stand firm even in the middle of great trials and suffering. Romans 5:3-5 says, “And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” We see that patience or endurance is one of the things that God uses to give us hope.

We also see that God is the God of comfort. The word that is translated “comfort” means encouragement. It is a great encouragement to us as Gentiles to know that we can also have hope in Christ. Ephesians 2:12-13 says, “That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” As Gentiles we did not enjoy the promises that produce hope that were given to the nation of Israel. However, in Christ we can now also share in that hope. We want to help our children learn to share this hope with even the weakest Christian.

We also see that God wants us as Christians to be like-minded. As we saw in the previous chapter and the first part of this chapter Paul was writing to some Christians who avoided certain things while others saw no problem with those things. Here we see that Paul encouraged the strong Christians and the weak Christians to be like-minded. Paul wrote a similar thing to the Philippians when he said in Philippians 2:2-4, “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let* nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” To be like-minded means to be in harmony and accept the opinions of one another.

We also see why we are to be in harmony and accept the opinions of one another. Since we are to do all to the glory of God, we are to be able to do this with one mind and one mouth. One mind means that we think the same way. It is true that we do have different opinions. However, to think the same way means that we are going to glorify God by all that we think about one another. To glorify God with our mouth means that in spite of different opinions we are going to glorify God by all that we say about one another. In order to do this we see that we

must accept one another. Christ gives us the example of what it means to accept one another when we read that we are to accept one another just as Christ accepted us to the glory of God. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Christ died for us while we were sinners so we can accept one another even with different opinions.

We see in Romans 15:8-13 that God gave us some great promises as Gentiles so that we can also have unity as Jews and Gentiles. Those verses say, "Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name." And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope." Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." We see that Christ was circumcised because He was a Jew to fulfill the promises of God to the Jews. However, we see that Christ also became a servant to the Gentiles so that we as Gentiles can also glorify God for His mercy.

Verse nine is a quotation from II Samuel 22:50 which says, "Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name." Verse 10 is a quotation from Deuteronomy 32:43 which says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land *and* His people." Verse 11 is a quotation from Psalm 117:1 which says, "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" Then verse 12 is a quotation from Isaiah 11:10 where we read, "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious." Between these verses we see that Paul quoted from every section of the Old Testament to show that it was the plan of God for Christ to bring salvation to the Gentiles and give us hope.

That is why Romans 15:13 can conclude this section by saying, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Whether we are Jews or Gentiles we can all be filled with hope. Whether we are strong Christians or weak Christians we can all be filled with hope. As a result, we can experience joy and peace as we accept one another and our different opinions to the glory of God. As a result, we want to help both our physical and spiritual children learn to abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Father loved us and wants us to be one. Christ died for us so that we all may be one. The Holy Spirit gives us His power so that we can all abound in hope. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children grow in unity as they learn to accept one another.

Learning How God verified the Ministry of Paul

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to accept one another so that we can have unity in the body of Christ. We saw that whether we are Jews or Gentiles we have the same unity in Christ. We saw that whether we are strong or weak that we have that same hope in Christ. As a result, we saw that we can accept the fact that as Christians we may have different opinions and even different convictions and still have unity with one another because we all have the same hope in Christ and we all have the same Holy Spirit working in each of our lives. In our topic today we want to learn to show our children how God verified the ministry of Paul.

Romans 15:14-16 says, “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also 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.” Paul did not help start the church at Rome. In fact he had not even visited Rome at the point that he wrote this letter. However, we see that he had great confidence in the Christians that were in the church at Rome. We will see when we get to chapter sixteen that he knew many Christians in Rome even though he had never visited there.

Paul said that he was confident that the Christians in Rome were full of goodness. The word that is translated “goodness” speaks of being upright in heart and life. This word is only used four times in the New Testament. Twice it is used to speak of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 and Ephesians 5:9. The other place this word is used is in II Thessalonians 1:11 where we read, “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power.” Here we see that as Paul prayed for the Thessalonians He prayed that the goodness of God would be seen in their lives. In the same way, we want the goodness of God to be seen in the lives of our children.

In addition, Paul believed that the Christians in Rome were filled with all knowledge. Peter used this same word in II Peter 3:18 where we read, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.” Peter wanted those to whom he wrote to grow in knowledge. Here we see that Paul believed that many of the Christians in Roman were mature and filled with all knowledge. Paul also felt that the Christians in Rome were equipped to admonish one another. The word “admonish” means to encourage or warn. Colossians 3:16-17 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Here we see that all Christians are able to minister to one another by sharing the Word of God with one another as well as giving thanks and ministering to one another through music.

Although Paul knew all of these things about the Romans, he also told them why he had written this letter to them. He wanted to remind them of the fact that God had called him to minister to all Gentiles. The other apostles had also recognized the call of Paul to the Gentiles. Galatians 2:9 says, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” As we see the number of names listed in chapter sixteen we see that Paul had probably led quite a number of the Christians in Rome to Christ when they lived in other cities. We realize in our own lives that we need to be reminded of the things that we have learned in the past so that we continue to practice them. Paul looked forward to the day when he would have the opportunity to present some of these Christians to the Lord.

Romans 15:17-19 says, “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.” Here we see that Paul was thankful for the things that the Lord had accomplished through his life. The word that is translated “glory” is translated by the word rejoicing in I Thessalonians 2:19-20 where we read, “For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.” Paul was filled with rejoicing because of the fact that the Lord had chosen to use his life in such a way that others would also stand in the presence of the Lord.

Paul wanted to make sure that he did not try to take credit for the work that the Lord had done through the lives of others. Paul also realized that what Christ had accomplished through his life was the work of the Lord. He viewed himself as the bondservant of the Lord who was just being obedient to what the Lord had told him to do. This is illustrated by Romans 1:1 where we read, “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God.” The concern of Paul was to be obedient to the Lord by taking the Gospel to the Gentiles who had not heard the Gospel.

Paul realized that the Lord had worked through his life both by the words that Paul spoke and the miracles that the Holy Spirit had accomplished through Paul to verify his ministry as an apostle. In order to bring the Gentiles to obedience to Christ, the Lord had performed mighty signs and wonders through the life of Paul by the power of the Holy Spirit. II Corinthians 12:11-12 says, “I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.” God verified the message and ministry of the apostles by signs and wonders. The Lord confirmed that Paul was an apostle by doing signs and wonders through him.

The Lord had also used Paul to preach the Gospel from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum (the region north of Greece and across the Adriatic Sea from Italy). That meant that Paul had

preached the Gospel across a region that stretched about 1400 miles. Although Paul had not been to Rome at the time he wrote this letter, he had almost reached Italy in his travels to share the Gospel.

We also see that Paul had a goal or an aim as he shared the Gospel in the various places where he had taken the Gospel. Romans 15:21-23 says, “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.” Here we see that the goal of Paul was to take the Gospel to places where the Gospel had not yet been preached. We see that Paul did not want to build on the foundation that others had established. Instead he wanted to take the Gospel to places where the people had never heard the Gospel.

To illustrate his goal Paul quoted Isaiah 52:15 which says, “So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.” Chapter 52 of Isaiah talks about the time when Christ will rule in Jerusalem. However, before that can happen, it was necessary for the Gospel to be taken to the whole earth. That is why chapter 53 of Isaiah talks about the sufferings and death of Christ. Salvation had to be provided and then proclaimed to all nations before the day will come when Christ will rule in Jerusalem. As a result, Paul said that he had a great desire to take the Gospel where the Gospel had never been preached. He wanted the people of the nations who had never heard to hear. He wanted the people of many nations to see and understand the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Paul also said that he had been hindered from coming to Rome because his goal was to take the Gospel to places where people had never heard the Gospel. People from every part of the Roman Empire had moved to Rome and settled there. As we see in chapter 16 some of the people who had moved to Rome were people that had become Christians in other places. Because Paul knew that these Christians had moved to Rome, he knew that the Gospel was being preached in Rome. Romans 16:3-5 says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.” Priscilla and Aquila had been part of the team that had shared the Gospel with Paul both in the city of Corinth and later in the city of Ephesus. Here we see that he knew that they were now in Rome and a church had developed that met in their house in Rome. He also knew of churches in other homes.

The Holy Spirit had verified the fact that Paul was an apostle by doing signs and wonders through him. God had used his ministry to take the Gospel to a wide area from Jerusalem to Illyricum. In the same way the Lord wants to use our physical and spiritual children to take the Gospel to many places. This will happen as we help them grow to spiritual maturity. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children develop a vision to share the Gospel in different parts of the world.

Learning to Minister to One Another by Prayer

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the Holy Spirit verified the ministry of Paul as an apostle through signs and wonders. We also saw that Paul had a desire to take the Gospel to people who had never heard of the death and resurrection of Christ. We saw that we want to help our children develop a similar vision to take the Gospel to those who have not placed their faith in Christ. In our topic today we want our children to understand another important ministry. We want to help them learn to minister to one another through prayer.

We saw in our last topic that Paul wanted to take the Gospel to those who had never heard. As we come to Romans 15:24, we see that Paul had other places where he had a desire to take the Gospel. Romans 15:24 says, “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.” Here we see that Paul had a great desire to take the Gospel to the country of Spain. On the way to Spain Paul hoped to stop in Rome and visit the Christians there because he wanted to be an encouragement to them. Second, he also wanted to give them an opportunity to share in the ministry to Spain. Third, he just wanted to enjoy their company for a period of time. That would give him the time to visit the many Christians that he already knew in that city.

However, before Paul could come to Rome, the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had given him another responsibility. Romans 15:25-28 says, “But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.” Here we see that the churches in Macedonia and Achaia had realized that they had an opportunity to minister to the Christians in Jerusalem and so they had enlisted the help of Paul to carry out that ministry.

At the time that Paul wrote this letter we see that he was preparing to travel to Jerusalem to serve the saints that were in the city of Jerusalem. The churches from throughout Macedonia and Achaia had been collecting an offering to send to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Part of the reason for their poverty was due to the persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem by other Jews. Part of the reason for their poverty was due to the fact that they had used their resources to help care for the early Christians from other places while those new Christians grew in their spiritual lives. Acts 4:34-35 says, “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.” As a result, the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia saw the need in Jerusalem as an opportunity to help those who had helped to make it possible for the Gospel to come to them.

Paul said that it was very appropriate for the Gentile Christians to help the Jewish Christians because the very reason that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were poor was due to the fact that they had sold their possessions to make it possible for Christians from other places to grow and then take the Gospel back to their home areas. In fact Paul had given instructions to the churches about the way to gather their gifts for the poor in Jerusalem. I Corinthians 16:1-2 says, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” Here we see that Paul had explained to the Christians how to give systematically so that the money would be ready when he and the team with him came to take their gifts to Jerusalem.

In fact Paul said that all Gentile Christians had a debt to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem because of the way that they had sacrificed to help Christians from other areas in their spiritual growth after the Day of Pentecost. A few years later when persecution scattered the Jewish Christians that lived in Jerusalem Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Then Acts 11:19-21 adds, “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” Here we see that God used the Jewish Christians to begin to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles. Now the Gentile Christians wanted to share in the financial needs of the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul said that once he had completed this ministry on behalf of the Gentile Christians to help them minister to the poor Jewish Christians that then he wanted to visit the Christians in Rome on his way to Spain. However, Paul wanted the prayers of the Christians in Rome as he went to Jerusalem. Romans 15:29-33 says, “But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.” Paul looked forward to that visit with the Christians in Rome. However, we see that Paul felt a great need for prayer as he went to Jerusalem.

As a result, Paul begged the Christians in Rome to pray for him as he went to Jerusalem. Paul knew that there were many Jews that rejected the Gospel and wanted to see him killed. Here we see that his request for prayer is based on his love for Christ and his love for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. He asked the Christians in Rome to strive together with him in prayer to God. This is a request for the kind of prayer that the Christians demonstrated when they prayed for Peter. Acts 12:5 says, “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.” Paul wanted constant prayer for him until he had completed his ministry in Jerusalem because he realized that Satan would make every attempt to stop his ministry.

His first prayer request was that the Lord would deliver him from those in Judea who did not believe. Paul received many warnings about the dangers that faced him in Jerusalem. In Acts 20:22-23 Paul told the elders at Ephesus, "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me." In Caesarea Paul received a final warning before he got to Jerusalem. Acts 21:10-13 says, "And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.' " Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Here we see that Paul understood what he faced and knew he needed much prayer.

His second prayer request was that his service for Jerusalem would be acceptable to the saints. Here we see that Paul recognized that the Jewish Christians had heard many false things about Paul and this caused him to be concerned that the Jewish Christians might not accept the gifts that he and the team brought to Jerusalem. Acts 21:20-21 says, "And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs." Here we see that many false rumors had been spread among the Jewish Christians about Paul.

His third prayer request was that he would be able to come to the Christians in Rome with joy. This prayer was answered but not in the way that Paul expected. Paul arrived in Rome by the will of God but only after he had spent two years in Caesarea as a prisoner. Then on the way to Rome as a prisoner he was shipwrecked. Once Paul arrived in Rome he was imprisoned in a house with a soldier guarding him. However, he was able to minister freely. Acts 28:30-31 says, "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." God did answer all three of their prayers for Paul.

As we help our physical and spiritual children understand the importance of the prayers of the Christians for Paul, we also want to help them understand the importance of their own prayers for other Christians. Ephesians 6:18-19 says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints-- and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel." May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to pray for others.

Learning to Build Relationships with One another

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to minister to other Christians through prayer. We saw that Paul gave some specific requests as he asked the Christians in Rome to pray for him. We saw that God answered each of those prayer requests. One of those requests was answered in a different way than Paul might have expected but it showed that the Lord will answer according to His will as we pray for others. In our topic today we want to show our children how to build healthy relationships with other Christians.

In Romans 16:1-2 we read, “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 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.” Phoebe was the woman who delivered this letter to the church in Rome for Paul. She was from the church in Cenchrea which was a port city located very close to the city of Corinth. The word that is translated “commend” means to approve or to put together. It is used in II Corinthians 10:18 where we read, “For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.” In this verse we see that there is a difference between a person who approves of himself and a person who is approved by the Lord or another person. Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to know that he approved of Phoebe and viewed her as a sister in the Lord. This was a real encouragement to the Christians in Rome to build a good relationship with her.

We also see that Phoebe was a servant of the church in Cenchrea. The word that is translated “servant” is the word from which we get the word deacon or deaconess. It means a person who carries out the instructions of another. Here she was carrying out the instructions of Paul by taking this letter to the church in Rome. As a result, Paul encouraged the church to accept her in a manner worthy of saints. She was apparently going to Rome to take care of some kind of business so Paul encouraged the Christians to provide any help possible for her. Paul also said that she had helped many other Christians including Paul. Here we see that Paul helped Phoebe to build a good relationship with the Christians in the church at Rome by giving her a good introduction.

Romans 16:3-6 says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. Greet Mary, who labored much for us.” The first couple to whom Paul sent greetings in the church at Rome was Aquila and Priscilla. They had helped him establish the churches in Corinth and in Ephesus. Here Paul tells how they had given of themselves to help Paul in his ministry. He said that they had risked their own necks for the sake of Paul. Paul said that he personally thanked God for this couple. In addition, he said that their ministry caused many other churches of the Gentiles to give thanks for them.

Since Paul knew that one congregations of the church in Rome met in the home of Aquila and

Priscilla, he also sent greetings to that group of Christians. In the early church all of the churches met in homes or other places because the early churches had no buildings. We can show our children the value of hospitality today by hosting different groups of the church in our home so they learn how to use their homes for ministry. Paul sent greetings to Epaphroditus because he was the first person that Paul led to Christ in Achaia (some manuscripts say Asia which is the western part of what is presently the country of Turkey). Paul also sent greetings to Mary who had worked to the point of exhaustion to serve the churches. Here we see that Paul was helping to build relationships between various Christians in Rome by sharing with the other Christians how the Lord had used these Christians to help others.

Romans 16:7-10 says, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the *household* of Aristobulus.” Next we are introduced to Andronicus and Junia. Since Junia can be the name of a woman, this may have been a husband and a wife. They were countrymen of Paul. The word that is translated “countrymen” can mean a relative or someone from the same country. Acts 10:24 says, “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.” In this verse we see that the word is translated relatives. We also see two other things about this couple. At some place in his ministry they had been in prison with Paul. Their ministry was also well known and appreciated by the apostles so they had probably been Christians in Jerusalem, possibly before Paul had even become a Christian.

Amplias is the next person mentioned. We do not know much about this person. However, this was a common name among the slaves of Caesar at that time. As a result, it is possible that he would be included among those who were mentioned several years later by Paul in Philippians 4:22 where we read, “All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.” Here we see that there was a group of Christians among those who were the household servants of Caesar. Since several of his servants had the name of Amplias, that is why we say that this may have been a servant of Caesar.

The next four names, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, and Aristobulus, are only mentioned in these verses so we know only what is mentioned in these verses. Paul said that Urbanus had been their helper. As a result, this was a person that been fellow worker with Paul in one of the cities where he had ministered as this is the same word that was used in verse three to describe Aquila and Priscilla. In fact each place Paul used this word it described people who had ministered with Paul. Stachys was a person that Paul greatly loved although we do not know where or how Paul knew him. Apelles is described as one who is approved. This meant that a person was pleasing and was also used to speak about coins that were genuine so it probably talked about the fact that he was a man of high character. This greeting to Aristobulus was to his household so it is possible that his family and servants were Christians but he had not yet become a Christian.

Romans 16:11-16 says, “Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the *household* of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored

in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.” The same word is used to describe Herodian that was used to describe Andronicus and Junia so Herodian was either a relative of Paul or someone from his country. We also see that Paul sent greetings to the household of Narcissus. Some people believe that Narcissus may have been the secretary of the emperor.

Tryphena and Tryphosa are both female names. Their names mean delicate and dainty so it is possible that they were sisters or even twin sisters. Wherever Paul had met them they had worked hard for the Lord. The same is also true of another woman by the name of Persis who had also worked hard in the Lord.

Rufus is mentioned both here and in Mark 15:21 which says, “Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.” In Mark we see that Rufus is the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross for Christ. Since Mark wrote the book of Mark from Rome, people generally agree that Mark and Paul wrote about the same person. If so, Simon and his family probably became followers of Christ after Simon was forced to carry the cross for Christ. Rufus is also called chosen in the Lord and may have been a Christian who was well known for his service for the Lord. At some time in Paul’s travels the mother of Rufus had cared for Paul like a mother.

We also have two groups of names. The first group is Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. The second group is Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Since these groups are mentioned as groups, it is probable that these refer to the leaders of two of the other congregations that were in the city of Rome. Since verse three mentioned the church that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, this would indicate that Paul knew the leaders of at least three of the congregations in the city of Rome. This probably meant that Paul took time to listen and learn every time that he met a Christian that had come from Rome because of his love for people that he had led to Christ.

Paul encourages the Christians in Rome to greet one another with a holy kiss. Paul closes four of his letters by encouraging the Christians to greet one another with a holy kiss. Peter closed I Peter by encouraging the Christians to greet one another with a kiss of love. As a result, we see that this was a common form of greeting among the early Christians. The word that is translated “holy” is translated holy 161 times and saint or saints 61 times out of the 229 times that the word is used. Here we see that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to build godly relationships with one another and with other Christians that are characterized by acceptance, holiness and godly love. The Lord blesses such relationships. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to build such relationships with one another.

Learning to Build Unity in the Body

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to develop godly relationships with one another and with other Christians. We saw that Paul worked hard to build unity among the Christians and the various congregations that were in Rome by sharing various positive things about the various individuals and groups of Christians. However, there were also people in the church that Rome that were trying to cause divisions. As a result, we are going to see in this topic that Paul gives instructions about ways to recognize those who are trying to bring division to Christians and avoid such individuals so that the Christians can develop unity in the body.

Romans 16:17-20 says, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.” Here we see that Paul told the Christians in Rome to note those who cause divisions and offences.

The word that is translated “cause” means to make, to do or to cause to happen. The word that is translated “divisions” speaks of things that cause dissension or division. It is only used three times in the New Testament. In Galatians 5:19-21 it is mentioned in a list of the works of the flesh by people who are not Christians and is translated by the word sorcery. In I Corinthians 3:3 we read, “For you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?” In this verse it is talking about Christians that are immature and are acting like those who are not Christians. As a result, in Romans it is talking about people who were not Christians and were working to cause divisions in the church. The word that is translated “offences” means to set a trap or a snare to cause people to stumble. Romans 14:13 says, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way.” Here we see their goal was to cause others to fall.

We also see that these people were causing these divisions and creating these stumbling blocks by teaching false doctrines. Paul gave a similar warning to the leaders of the church at Ephesus. Acts 20:29-30 says, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” Here we see that Paul warned about two types of teachers who teach false doctrines. The first group would be people who are not Christians who have as their goal to destroy the flock. The second group would be professing Christians who are trying to build followers of themselves instead of followers of the Lord. In Romans we see that we are to avoid both types of teachers who teach false doctrines.

We also learn more about those who teach false doctrines in Rome served. Romans 16:18 says, “For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” We see that those who teach false doctrines do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ. Such false teachers seek to serve their own interests. Philippians 3:18-19 says, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things.” I Timothy 6:4-5 also describes such false teachers when those verses say, “He is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of* gain. From such withdraw yourself.” The goal of such false teachers is to deceive the weaker Christians with their smooth words and flattering speech. Such false teachers seek money or some other form of self gain.

We see the source of the teaching of such false teachers in II Corinthians 11:13-15 where we read, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” False teachers pretend to be Christians so that they can deceive others. They actually follow Satan as they pursue their efforts to destroy others with their false teaching. Because their works are evil they will receive eternal judgment. That is the reason why we want to help weaker Christians learn to avoid such false teachers. II Corinthians 6:14 says, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” Here we see that we are to help Christians learn to recognize and separate themselves from false teachers.

Paul knew that the Christians in Rome wanted to be obedient to the Lord. He had written in Romans 1:8, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” Christians everywhere knew about the faith of the Christians in Rome. As a result, Paul wanted them to have great understanding of the things that are pleasing to God. At the same time he wanted to free them from the twisted and destructive teachings of those who were false teachers.

Paul also reminded the Christians in Rome that God would soon crush Satan. In Genesis 3:15 we read, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” The Seed that God promised would crush the head of Satan is Christ. Satan thought he had won the victory when Christ died on the cross. However, that victory was very short like a bruise. On the third day when Christ rose from the dead Satan knew that he was defeated. Here Paul was reminding the Christians to look forward to the day when Satan will receive his penalty of eternal judgment in the lake of fire and brimstone. In contrast, as Christians we can look forward to experiencing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity.

In Romans 16:21-24 Paul also sent greetings to the Christians in Rome from those who were serving the Lord with him. Timothy had been a part of the team with Paul for many years.

Lucius, Jason and Sosipater were either relatives of Paul or from the same country. Tertius was the man who did the actual writing of the book of Romans for Paul. There are four men named Gaius in the New Testament. Since Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, this would be the Gaius mentioned in I Corinthians 1. Here we see that Paul had stayed with him and that his home was the meeting place for one of the congregations in the city of Corinth. Erastus was the treasurer of the city of Corinth. Quartus was also another brother in Christ who wanted to send his greetings to the church at Rome.

As Paul concluded his message to the church in Rome, Romans 16:25-27 says, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith-- to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.” Paul recognized that the Lord is the One who is able to establish every Christian. The word that is translated “establish” means to strengthen or make firm. II Thessalonians 3:3 says, “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one.” Here we see that the Lord is the One who gives strength to protect Christians from the evil one.

We have seen that in the New Testament that a mystery is something revealed in the New Testament that was not revealed in the Old Testament. The most important mystery in the New Testament for the Gentiles is explained in Ephesians 3:3-6 where we read, “How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Paul had been faithful in sharing the Gospel with the Gentiles wherever he went so that mystery was clearly revealed to the Gentiles both by word and by letter.

In the Old Testament God had said that Christ would bring the Gospel to all nations. Isaiah 42:6-7 says, “I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.” Here we see that this commandment was given by the everlasting God. This reminds us that the goal of God is to bring people of every nation for obedience to the faith. That is why all glory belongs to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Here we see that the goal of God is much more than unity in the local church. The goal of God is the unity of all true believers from every tribe and nation.

It is a great privilege to be able to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to develop unity in the local church by helping weaker Christians learn to recognize false teachers and their teachings and to avoid them. It is an even greater privilege to help them learn to have a part in taking the Gospel to all nations so that all may Christians may have true unity in Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to help other Christians experience unity in Christ.