

PAUL, THE NEW AND UNIQUE APOSTLE

Last time we saw that God raised up Paul and sent him out to preach a message of grace to the Gentiles. We also saw that when he did this, it turned the world upside down (see GIYJ, Winter, 2008, at www.godinvidesyou.com). Why? Because for the Jews, Paul's message meant God had temporarily set aside His program with Israel. And for the Gentiles, it meant that all their human philosophies and idolatrous religions put together amounted to nothing. All have sinned, all are coming short of God's glory, all are lost—Jew and Gentile alike. We all need God's salvation, and we need God to give it to us freely by grace through faith.

God surprised the world with the ministry of Paul. Anyone who knew their Bible in Paul's day understood that the next thing God was supposed to do was to come back to judge the world, purge it of His enemies, reverse the effects of sin and establish the long-awaited Kingdom of Israel on earth. This is what the Old Testament prophets said would happen. This is what Jesus in His earthly ministry said would happen. And this is what Peter and the 12 said would happen in Acts.

But there is a big problem: This is not what happened! The Kingdom never came. We can try to "spiritualize" this fact away, as most theologies do, but it just will not work. The O.T. prophets stated clearly that this Kingdom would be earthly and visible, manifesting itself in many obvious ways. Israel, for instance, would be the head of the nations not the tail as they are today. In addition, God's knowledge would cover the earth **as the waters cover the sea** (Is. 11:9)...and...**the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb...and...the leopard shall lie down with the kid...and...the calf and the young lion and the fatling together...and...a little child shall lead them** (Is. 11:6). When the kingdom is established, the world will be a place of justice, peace and safety.

Needless to say, this did not happen. If you do not believe me, just turn on your local TV news tonight, and see for yourself. Israel is not ruling the world, God's righteousness is not covering the earth, and little children are not leading lions and leopards around, let alone playing with them. The world is not peaceful and safe. The Kingdom of God that Israel's prophets had spoken about never came, plain and simple. Paul is the one who explains why.

According to Paul, God would have been perfectly right and just to come back in wrath to judge the world, just as the prophets had said, but He decided to do something else instead. Now, God is holding shut the floodgates of His surging wrath with arm, while He extends His grace and peace to the world of lost sinners with the other. Now, God is holding back the deserved wrath against His enemies (after all, mankind as a whole had just crucified its Creator and Savior) for a little while longer while He overflows the world with His grace and peace. Instead of giving the world what it deserved--His wrath and judgment—He decided to give it what it did not deserve--His grace.

This Grace-dispensing ministry was new and unique and God gave it to Paul through direct revelation. Paul calls this divine economy the Dispensation of the Grace of God, and Paul's divinely given job was to make it known to the world through his preaching and to us through his Epistles. But why Paul? God already had 12 able-bodied apostles. Why didn't He just use one or more of them? Modern day theologians and Bible teachers usually answer this question in one of two ways. Some say Paul should have been one of the 12, and that Peter and the others were wrong to select Mathias in Acts 1 to replace Judas. Others say Peter and the 12 were bigoted and ignorant Jews who refused to obey God's instructions to go out to the Gentiles. God raised up Paul to do what they refused to do.

Neither of these answers, however, will hold up to the scrutiny of Scripture. Acts states clearly and repeatedly that Peter and the 12 and their followers obeyed God and were under the total control of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1-3). As for the idea that Paul should have been one of the 12, Acts 1 gave a list of requirements that a candidate had to meet to be numbered among the 12, and Paul did not qualify! To be a member of the 12, for one thing, you had to have been with Jesus since the beginning of His earthly ministry, "**from the baptism of John...until He was taken up from us**" (Acts 1:21). Paul had not been with Jesus since the beginning of His earthly ministry, therefore, he could not be one of the 12.

No, Paul was not one of the 12 nor was he God's plan B apostle because of their disobedience. He is that new and unique apostle, raised up by God to proclaim a 'secret' purpose He devised in eternity past but had kept hidden within Himself until He revealed it to and through the Apostle Paul (Eph. 3:1-12). If we miss this Biblical distinction we miss everything. You see, it is the Bible commentators and theologians who refuse to acknowledge Paul's distinct ministry who, in their Gentile arrogance, are ignorant and bigoted, not the 12. The 12 operated in complete accord with what God had revealed to them. Would it be that the commentators and theologians followed their lead and operated in accord with God's revelation for today, the revelation He had given to Paul.¹

So, why Paul? We can begin to see the answer by comparing Jesus' call of the 12 in the Gospels with that of Paul in Acts.

**And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed
Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said unto them,
What seek ye?...They said where do you dwell? He said unto them,
Come and see. They went and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him
that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his
own brother Simon, and said unto him, We have found the Messiah...(Jn. 1:37-41).**

You can almost feel the excitement and joy expressed by these disciples. They had been looking for their Messiah, and they found Him in Jesus so they followed His call. They were friends looking for their Master.

Now let's read about Paul's calling:

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the

¹ There is much more on this topic on the God Invites You Website (www.godinvitesyou.com).

**disciples of the Lord...that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And...
he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the
earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul,
why persecute thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecute: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.
And...
he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what
thou must do (Acts 9:1-6).**

Where the calling of the 12 was characterized by excitement and joy, the calling of Paul was characterized by fear and terror. Paul was looking for something alright, but it was not Jesus. He had rejected Jesus and was terrorizing His followers to destroy them. Paul was Jesus' enemy, not His friend. He did not just participate in this persecution, He led it! With the 12, Jesus Christ was saving His friends. With Paul, He was saving His enemy. In saving His enemy, Paul, God forged the mold by which He would save all lost sinners today—by grace through faith.

Today God Is Blessing His Enemies! What a change from the way He had dispensed His blessings before. In Israel's program (under which the 12 operated), God had always blessed His friends. Remember what He told Abraham and his progeny: **I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee...And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3).**

Abraham's progeny, ultimately Israel, was His chosen nation. The special friend He cared for. Gentiles (whether nationally or individually) received God's blessings by coming to Israel and converting to Judaism or, short of that, becoming God-fearers in the Temple or synagogues. They participated in God's blessings when they befriended Israel. For in befriending Israel, they befriended God.

With Paul, however, this all changed. At the crucifixion of Christ, God brought the whole world—Jew and Gentile--into His court where He pronounced them all guilty and found them all worthy of condemnation and sentenced them all to everlasting death. That is our naturally derived position before God. We are hopelessly dead in sin and worthy of His just condemnation and death.

But just then, when God's wrath was ready to fall...at that very moment when Christ was about to come back in judgment...in that very instant when Christ would return to condemn and destroy His enemies...right then, when things were most dire and hopeless and impossible for mankind...**God did something amazing.** Rather than executing the death sentence that the world of His enemies deserved, He instead GAVE US, HIS ENEMIES, WHAT WE DID NOT DESERVE--HIS GRACE AND PEACE! A short reprieve. A short Day of Salvation.

When we keep this in mind, the answer to the question of Why Paul? becomes obvious. God chose Paul because with the ore of Paul He would forge in the crucible of His grace a new mold by which He would save lost sinners in this new program called the Dispensation of Grace. Listen to Paul's own explanation:

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain...yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me...(I Cor. 15:9-11).

Paul was God's enemy, who **beyond measure persecuted the church of God, and wasted it (Gal. 1:13), the chief of sinners (I Tim. 1:15)**. Today, God is not judging rebels; He is justifying them. He is not purging His enemies; He is calling them unto Himself. He is not condemning sinners; He is saving them out of their sin, giving eternal life to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

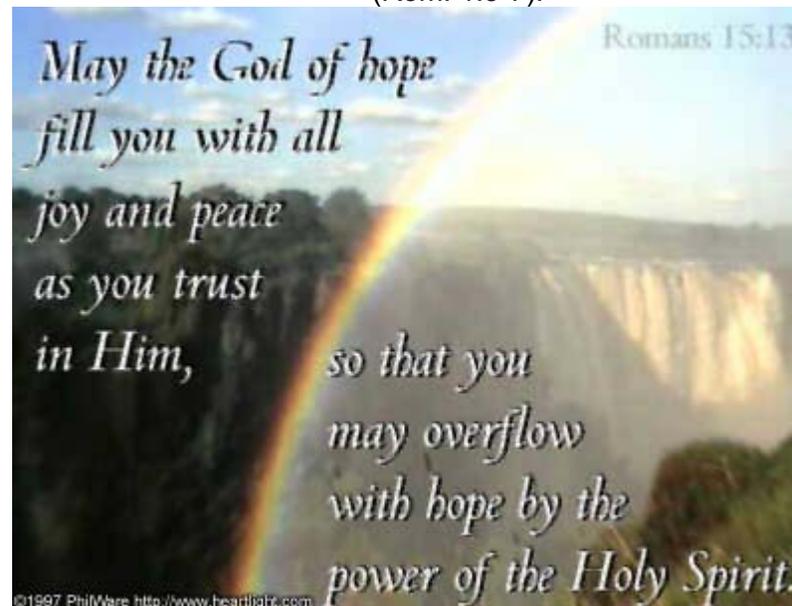
For when we were yet

WITHOUT STRENGTH, in due time Christ died for the UNGODLY...But God commends his love toward us...while we were yet SINNERS, Christ died for us. ..when we were ENEMIES, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son... (Rom. 5:6-10)

When God chose Paul to proclaim this new message of grace, it was the best choice He could have made. Just as Paul failed to qualify for the ministry of the 12, Peter and the 12 did not qualify for the ministry God gave to Paul. Saul the Persecutor and Enemy of Jesus became Paul the Apostle of Christ to the World of Rebels, **ESPECIALLY THE GENTILES**.

Now, read verses 1-7 again and appreciate the richness of their meaning. These verses turned the 1st century world upside-down and inside-out, and they ought to do the same to ours.

Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:5-7).



EVERYMAN'S GUIDE TO ROMANS

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. (Rom. 1:8-12)

INTRODUCTION

If we fail to appreciate what God is trying to accomplish through the Apostle Paul in the first seven verses of Romans 1, we will fail to appreciate what He is trying to accomplish in the next five verses as well. God's activities with regard to Paul and Israel are highlighted in Rom. 1:1-7. With regard to Paul, God raised up a new apostle. He gave Paul a new message—the Gospel of Grace. He sent Paul out to the Gentiles. In short, God actively began a new program through the Apostle Paul.

But we also see God actively fulfilling His “old” program with Israel. He entered humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ via the line of the David of Israel. God raised Christ up from the dead to fulfill Israel's Covenants. He empowered Jesus' earthly ministry in the Gospels and the 12's ministry in early Acts. In short we see God faithful to His people Israel.

This convergence of two divine programs ought to peek our interest. On the one hand God is seen fulfilling His “old” program with Israel. On the other He is seen beginning a “new” program through the Apostle Paul. As a friend of mine use to say, “What's that all about?” Which is it to be? One? The other? Or both?

Here the *long-prophesied* program God revealed to Israel's prophets since the world began intersects with the previously *un-prophesied* program He was then revealing to His “new” apostle, Paul, after having kept it secret since the world began. One of the major reasons God had Paul write Romans was to explain this intersection of divine programs. In Romans, God will have Paul explain that His “old” program with Israel was diminishing until it had vanished from view for a time while His “new” program for the world is seen growing brighter and brighter until it would be the only thing in sight.

These verses comprise a panoramic view where we are shown the setting of the sun of God's "old" program with Israel, and at the same time see the rising full moon of His new program for the world through Paul. By the time we get to the end of Romans, Israel's program will have been completely set aside, put on hold and inactivated, whereas God's new program made known through Paul would be brought into full view, activated and full steam ahead.

Several times, Paul explains that this change in programs was not due to any unfaithfulness or unrighteousness on God's part (Rom. 3 and 9). God had been in the very process of fulfilling the Israel's Davidic and Abrahamic Covenants when Israel rebelled against Him, rejected her Messiah, Jesus Christ, and refused to participate in the things of God. It was because of Israel's unfaithfulness and unrighteousness, not God's, that God temporarily set Israel's program aside while at the same time beginning a new program through Paul.

God gave Paul the responsibility of introducing this "new" revelation to the world, and Paul wasted not time in carrying it out. He wrote this Letter to Rome to lay down the foundation and build-up the framework for this "new" program through which God would now freely offer His grace and peace to a world of rebellious sinners, Jew and Gentile alike, without distinction, not because of who they are, or what they have done, but because of who Christ is and what He has done, saving all those who believe.

TRIVIALIZING GOD'S WORD

If we do not understand this, we will trivialize what Paul says in the next 5 verses. Everyone agrees that Romans 1:8-17 expresses Paul's strong and urgent desire to visit the Romans personally. But the agreement ends there. Some Bible teachers describe this section a "greeting," "salutation," or "preface." Paul was merely fulfilling the letter writing customs of his day, in which, He is flattering the Romans, hoping they would treat him nicely when he visited them.

But this trivializes God's Word. We tend to skip over things like "introductions" and "prefaces," viewing them as incidental and unimportant. We most often do this when we do not understand a passage and read our own ideas into it. But the minute we read our own impotent and superficial ideas into a passage, we simultaneously read God's powerful ones out of it.

Unfortunately, trivializing God's Word is as habit forming occupation. Like drugs, you take a small amount of a little thing and then before long you are doing more and more. Well, it works the same way with trivializing the Bible. First, we trivialize a small passage in God's Word by reducing it to the level of our own thinking. Then, before we know it, we find ourselves trivializing everything in sight.

With this Bible passage, for instance, we start out kind of small, trivializing Paul's great longing for the Romans (v. 11) by reducing it to a mere "greeting," an unnecessary appendage inserted to meet the letter writing customs of that day but of little importance beyond that. Once we have done that, we get hit by the cravings of addiction, trivializing it again by reducing Paul's spiritually deep prayer for success in establishing the Roman assembly through a personal visit (v. 10) to the level of our own superficial prayers for things like "traveling mercies."

Finally, faster than saying, “I’m hooked!” we are unable to stop ourselves from doing it again, trivializing it again by reducing the power resident in the mutual fellowship (vv. 11-12) that flows out of Paul’s preaching of Jesus Christ according to the Revelation of the Mystery (Rom. 16:25) to our own powerless notion of the modern ‘church social’, where gossip and gab have replaced the edification of fellow believers in the Bible rightly divided.

At this point, intervention is needed. Like the addict who destroys his family and life, we have destroyed Paul’s (and God’s) purpose in writing this passage. Let God intervene, and rely on Him to kick the habit! So this passage can regain the importance God intended. Substituting God’s words with our own always leads to the trivialization of the Bible. We do this because we do not understand what He is saying, let alone what He is doing, because we fail (or worse refuse) to recognize the distinctive ministry God gave to Paul.

But when we do appreciate Paul’s unique ministry, and we begin to understand what God is doing today, this passage opens up and provides a treasure-trove of indispensable information for successful Christian living.

PAUL AT WORK: Romans 1:8-15

Paul wasted no time carrying out this new ministry. He hit the road, went into the Gentile world, preaching and teaching the revelation of Christ that God had given to him. To his surprise, everywhere he went he heard about a faithful group of believers in Rome. While Paul had not founded this assembly directly, he had founded it indirectly through his co-workers. Now, he wanted to go there.

But why? Why had Paul been so eager and determined to visit the Roman assembly personally? Listening to some Bible teachers and commentators (who, perhaps, impose the ease of modern day travel onto that of the ancient Roman Empire), you would think that Paul wanted to travel half way across the world to merely “socialize” with these believers. That he wanted to “coffee-clutch” and “shoot-the-breeze” with them. But this is just another instance of trivializing God’s Word.

Travel in those days was extremely difficult and dangerous, especially for those traveling by foot or boat, more or less on their own. Paul was no exception. He suffered shipwrecks and robbers, hunger and thirst, cold and heat, rain and snow, all kinds of dangers (II Cor. 11). To go to Rome meant risking his life, and he was not likely to regard it lightly.

So, why go? The answer comes in verse 11: **For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established.** Paul wanted to personally give the Romans a “spiritual gift” that would establish them by anchoring them to the rock of the faith. And, what is that gift? Well, we do not need to try and guess because Paul tells us exactly what it is in Rom. 16:25: **Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.**

Paul knew what most so-called Bible teachers who came after him have not known. He knew that the only way to establish believers today is by the “preaching of Jesus Christ according to the Revelation of the Mystery.” If you do not know the “Mystery,” if the

“Mystery” is still a mystery to you, then you may be “established” in a lot of things but one thing you are not established in is God’s plan, purpose and will for today. It is that plain, and it is that simple.

The Mystery is not the preaching of the Old Testament prophets. Nor is it the preaching of Jesus in the Gospels. Nor is it even the preaching of Peter and the 12 in Acts (Acts 3:18-24). All of those “preachings” had been “spoken about since the world began.” But Paul says his message, the preaching of Christ according to the Mystery, had been “kept secret since the world began” (Eph. 3:1-11; Rom. 16:25). Now, if language has any ability to convey information and if words have any meaning at all then we can be sure of one thing: A message proclaimed since the world began cannot possibly be the same thing as a message kept secret since the world began.

Paul’s message was distinct from all others. It was a new and unique, and God, through Paul, begins to reveal to us here in Romans. Paul’s “preaching of Jesus Christ according to the Revelation of the Mystery” is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. It is the spiritual gift that will anchor the Roman assembly (and our assembly) in the “mutual faith” so they can “mutually comfort” one another. This is real fellowship.

Churches today have all kinds of “feel good” gimmicks for trying to produce genuine faith and comfort, but they all fall short. God’s way—the mutual fellowship and comfort flowing out of mutual faith based on a mutual understanding of Paul’s preaching—however, will always meet our needs and satisfy our desires. First, believers embrace the teachings of Paul. Then, on the basis of this mutual doctrinal teaching, they come together to form an assembly. This mature and united group of believers then interacts with one another the way God does, resulting in comfort and edification. And when this happens, individual believers along with the assembly as a whole, are doing the will of God.

[A POTENTIAL PROBLEM IN ROME](#)

This helps to explain one potential problem that Paul may have been trying to avert in Rome. Some in assembly may have been resorting to what they heard Peter preach on Pentecost. We know from Acts 2 that representatives from Rome were present in Jerusalem on that day, and we also know that they heard Peter and the 12 preach. They heard Him say things like, “You men of Israel! You have crucified your Messiah! Repent of this! Accept your Messiah, and He will return to fulfill all that the prophets had spoken of regarding Israel and her program. Jesus Christ is about to return and usher in the long awaited kingdom on the earth—just as all the prophets had said since the world began” (Acts 3).

But this produces an almost insurmountable problem. At the time Paul wrote the Letter to Rome, about 25 years had elapsed, and the things Peter said would happen had, in fact, never happened! Christ had not returned in judgment. Israel’s ‘times of refreshing’ had not come. The kingdom never arrived. It is only logical that some might begin to question: Why? Why didn’t the things Peter spoke on the Day of Pentecost ever happen?

This is the million dollar question of biblical Christianity, and Paul is the only one who can answer it satisfactorily. Everything hinges on this. If answered correctly, it will revolutionize lives according to God’s plan and purpose. If not, confusion ensues and successful Christian living will be stifled and nearly extinguished, bound in the straight jacket of error.

How the Romans answered it, especially those with a Jewish background, would determine the fate of the whole assembly. Some might begin to wonder about Peter and the 12. Maybe they had been simply wrong. Maybe they had been lying. Others might go farther, and begin wondering about God. Since His promises have not, apparently, been kept, maybe He is really unjust and unfaithful. Or Maybe He is not powerful enough to carry them out. Whatever avenue you go down, it is always a dead end that could push the whole assembly into a crisis of faith.

We do not, however, need to fear. There is an answer, and God gave it to Paul. It is the only answer able to sidestep this crisis of faith. Paul explains that Peter and the 12 were not wrong. Nor had they lied. Peter's God is not unjust and unfaithful. These promises were not fulfilled at that time because God temporarily set aside Israel's long-prophecied program, which is the program Peter and the 12 preached about. And He did not do this because He is unjust or unfaithful, but because Israel was unjust and unfaithful, rejecting her Messiah, Jesus Christ, in unbelief.

Paul explains the fact that Christ had returned, but instead of returning to establish Israel's long-prophecied kingdom, He returned to begin a new, un-prophecied program through His saved enemy, Paul, whereby He would offer grace, peace and all God's blessings to His enemies, apart from Israel. This is something God had never spoken about before. Everything ever taught by God before was blessing to the world flowing out through a redeemed Israel. This was something new and unique, a secret, a Mystery.

This answers everything and explains it all. This is the only true, divinely supplied answer to the problem of a potential crisis of faith in Rome, especially among those with a Jewish background. But there was even a greater potential problem looming over the Roman assembly beyond this. Most of the Roman believers had a Gentile background not a Jewish one. For them, the problem was that they had not been founded directly by Paul and his teachings. Rather, the assembly had been founded indirectly by his co-workers who travelled to this area.

This meant the majority had only received God's new revelation in bits and pieces. They had never received completely and systematically Paul's teachings, as the Corinthians, Ephesians and others had. They were doing well with what they had, but what they needed was Paul's teaching and preaching in full. Having received that, they would be established completely in the full-knowledge of God's revelation for today and equipped perfectly to carry out His will. Paul's teaching of God's full revelation for today would bring them to full maturity and unity which would allow them to mutually comfort one another in the faith.

PAUL'S ACTIONS

**First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.
For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing
I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last
I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift,
so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.
Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now),**

that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles (Rom. 1:8-13).

This passage is full of action words:

Paul **thanked** God (v. 8).

He **served** God (v. 9).

He **prayed** to God (vv. 9-10).

He **longed** to impart a spiritual gift. (v. 11).

He **comforted** (vv. 12-13).

These verbs form a progression of action words for victorious Christian living. Paul's thankfulness "jump started" his service for God, which caused him to pray with regard to God's plan for these Romans. Prayer directs Paul's emotions, a longing to give these believers a gift that would establish them in God's plan and purpose. And the end result of all this would be their ability to comfort one another in their mutual faith.

This passage is like one of those car GPS systems that tell us how to navigate unfamiliar roads. "Go straight on **Thanksgiving** Blvd. Merge onto **Service** Rd. Stop in the Cul-de-Sac of **Prayer**. Exit right and go north on **Grace** Avenue Move left and enter the Park of **Edification and Comfort**."

Just think of how many dead ends we would avoid if we followed these instructions. I know I would rather drive on *Whiner's Way* and park in the alley of *Self-centeredness and Fear*. Imagine, however, if we did it God's way! What if instead of complaining about the hand life has dealt us, we rejoiced in the hand God has dealt us through Christ? What if instead of focusing on ourselves, we focused on serving others in Christ? What if instead of panicking, we prayed? What if instead of living in doubt and fear, we lived edified in the Bible rightly divided and the comfort and security it gives?

This is what Paul did, and if it worked for him it will work for us too. He began by thanking his God *through Jesus Christ*. Everything hinges on the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ and His work *on our behalf* created this assembly in Rome, and it would be what sustained it as well. Remember, the Romans had been nothing more than a bunch of God-rejecting pagans. But now they were saints of the Most High God in Christ. What a change! Paul was thankful for that.

This grateful appreciation to his God because of all Christ had done for him empowered Paul to serve God *in his spirit²...in the Good News of Jesus Christ*. The Greek word translated "in" carries with it the idea of being "within the sphere of something." It refers to a

² This is a revolutionary idea and something that only GRACE can do. Why then do so many so-called Bible teachers try to put us back under the Law. The Law was a system of commands that demanded obedience from our flesh but could not motivate or empower us to do it. The Law has never softened a hardened heart nor has it ever given life to one dead spirit. It was not designed for that, as we will see in Romans 3-7. Israel lived under the Law for 1500 years, under optimum conditions and direct access to God. Yet her history is not one of obedience and blessing! It is one of disobedience and cursing, one cycle of punishment after another. The Law is *always* a no win situation. When we approach God on Grace ground, however, the result always succeeds because it not only tells us what to do (with standards far higher than that of the Law) but also motivates and empowers us to accomplish them.

continuing action that occurs within a specific area. Here, however, we have a double sphere. Paul's acceptable service to God occurred "in" his spirit as it resided "in" the Gospel of Christ. It is as though Paul's service took place in a room in the house of his spirit which resided in the sphere of the Gospel of Grace.

This is how the Christian life works, and the only way. Service generated in any other way may be a lot of things, but one thing it is not is the Christian life. For Paul, true "service to God" never arises from good intentions or sincere feelings. It always arises from those things Christ did for us and gives to us. Things like redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, love, the indwelling Holy Spirit, eternal life, union with Christ; things of infinite and eternal value. This is grace, and the Grace Gospel in action is the only thing powerful enough to motivate, generate and execute true Christian living because it is the only thing that equips all believers freely with all they need to live unto God.

NEXT TIME:

MORE ON THIS SPIRITUAL GIFT OF THE MYSTERY AND THE CONDITION OF MANKIND.

An Epitaph

By Paul M. Sadler

I am told that an Indiana cemetery has a tombstone (more than a hundred years old) which bears the following epitaph:¹

*Pause Stranger, when you pass me by,
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so you will be,
So prepare for death and follow me.*

An unknown passerby read those words and underneath scratched this reply:

*To follow you I'm not content,
Until I know which way you went.*

This bids the question, where will you spend eternity—heaven or hell?

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

If you are standing at the crossroads of *destruction* and *life everlasting* perhaps you need some directions.

The way of destruction is the "way which seemeth right unto a man." It promises worldly pleasures, acceptance, security, glory, and numerous avenues to earn your own salvation. This road is paved with good intentions, but it leads to eternal damnation.

But, thankfully, there is *another* path. It promises deliverance from the bondage of sin. This path brings peace, hope, and eternal life. According to the Scriptures, Christ is "the *way*, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father," but by Him. This is God's way, the way of *faith*.

THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION

Dear sinner friend, have you trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Whether you realize it or not, you are dangling precariously over the lake of fire by one thin thread of human existence.

The Word of God teaches, "The wages of sin is death!" When Christ stepped across the stars into this world of sin and woe, death was powerless over Him. Christ knew no sin, therefore death could not lay its icy grip upon the shoulder of our Lord.

Tell me then, how is it that at the end of His earthly journey He is suffering and dying in shame and disgrace? You see, Christ wasn't dying for His sins, for He knew no sin. He was dying for *your sins* and *my sins* upon that cruel tree. Our sins and iniquities were laid upon Him that He might redeem us back to God through His precious blood.

Now God turns to a lost and dying world with the good news of Calvary. Simply believe that Christ died for your sins *personally*, was buried, and rose again the third day, and God will wonderfully save you from the wrath to come according to the riches of His grace.

Unsaved friend, there are *thousands* of ways to leave this life; when you do, make sure you do not leave without Christ. We beg you to remember the chilling voice of those that perished in the days of Noah, "*believe, before it's too late!*"

Endnote

1. James S. Hewett (Ed.), *Illustrations Unlimited*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL, 1988, pg. 145.