

Paul's Letter to the Romans Lesson 6

As we endeavor to study Paul's letter to the Romans in full context, it seems clear that Paul is addressing the entire church in Rome, while focusing his primary message to the members of Jewish descent within the congregation. While tackling the issues of circumcision, the Law, and the oracles of God, Paul emphasizes that within the church there is neither Jew nor Greek; all are of equal standing in the Lord. So why is Paul writing in such detail to the Romans? Chapters 1 – 8 reveal that the Jewish believers are having a difficult time living under the grace of God instead of the letter of the Law which brings nothing but condemnation and death. As seen in chapter 8, "there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The Jewish believers in Rome are bogged down in the restrictions of the Law, constantly fostering condemnation, and failing to recognize the love of God which brought about the grace of God which then fulfilled all the demands and penalty of the Law. It is Paul's desire that all of the Israelite descendents of Abraham come to know the love of God in Christ Jesus, but not all of Israel will come to this position in Christ. Israel was the elect nation to be God's chosen people. Israel had no choice in the decision; God elected her. Given the oracles of God, Israel should have accepted Jesus as the Messiah when He came to them, but she did not. He was rejected and despised by His own people. At one time, even Paul rejected Jesus. Now, knowing what he knows, Paul grieves for all of Israel who still live in rejection and denial.

Romans 9:1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ²that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, ⁵whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Love of God – In Romans 8:36-39, Paul quotes a familiar verse from the Jewish hymnbook.

Psalm 44:22 But for Thy sake we are killed all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

As seen in context in Psalm 44, Israel suffered a great defeat in spite of her faith and perceived obedience to God. While the writer of the Psalm cannot understand why God is allowing the Jews to be defeated, he does understand that the real reason for all the tribulation and defeat is to prove her commitment to the Lord. In God's perspective, suffering is not always punishment; at times, suffering produces the battle scars of loyalty to God. In spite of the scars of the battle, nothing that comes can separate the child of God, an heir of God, from the love of God, for "... there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The Jews were the first to be promised the adoption process. These same Jews were the first to catch a glimpse of glory, the covenants, the Law, and the Savior, but few made the

transition to the Messiah. Paul made the transition. His belief was in Jesus Christ the Messiah. He knew about the glory, the covenant, the Law, and he wanted all his kinsmen to partake of the wonderful love of God through Christ Jesus. He grieves for his kinsmen because of their unbelief. If he could, Paul would give up his position in eternity with Christ if all his kinsmen would come to a belief in Christ as Savior. God knows the heart of Paul and testifies that Paul would give everything he has for Israel to come to know the Lord. Paul knows it is impossible because nothing can separate him from the love of Christ once he has placed his belief in Him.

⁶But *it is* not as though the **word of God** has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." ⁸That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

Word of God – Most of the Jews of Paul's day misunderstood the word of God to Abraham and Paul is trying to correct the problem. He interprets the Gen. 21:9-12 passage stressing the point that it is to be through Isaac that the descendants are named, even though the Egyptian woman has given birth to Abraham's son Ishmael.

Genesis 21:9-12 Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. ¹⁰Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." ¹¹And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. **¹²But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named."**

Distressed, Abraham worries about all his descendants, those of Isaac and those of Ishmael. God calms his distress by giving him a promise that his true heirs will be named through Isaac's descendants. Although it is not seen here, we find in the last verses of this chapter that Jesus is the descendant of Isaac. He will name all those who are sons of God according to the promise given to Abraham when He establishes His kingdom on earth. The word of God has not failed the Jews; they have failed to understand the word of God. Having Isaac's blood runs through their veins does not mean that they are automatically heirs of the promise of Abraham. They may be heirs of Abraham according to the flesh, but they are not heirs of the promise without being named by the stone of stumbling (Romans 9:33), Jesus Christ the Lord. Genesis 21:12 is not the only promise given to Abraham.

⁹For this is a word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."

Word of God – Paul repeats a promise previously given to Abraham in Genesis.

Genesis 18:10 And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

Sarah was almost 90 years old and past the childbearing years. Only divine intervention from the Lord could fulfill this promise. One year later Isaac was born.

¹⁰And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹for though *the twins* were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to *His* choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, ¹²it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." ¹³Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

Word of God –Paul then establishes the fact that the promises of God's are always fulfilled. Isaac married Rebekah and when she was pregnant with twins, God promised that Jacob would be the line in which the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled. Although Jacob and Esau were conceived at the same time, Esau would be born first followed by Jacob. In God's plan, Esau would end up serving Jacob. God's purpose in this promise was to establish that God is over all. Paul quotes both Genesis and Malachi, the first and last books of the old covenant.

Genesis 25:21-23 And Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²²But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I *this way*?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples shall be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; **And the older shall serve the younger.**"

Malachi 1:1-3 The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. ²"I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How hast Thou loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. **"Yet I have loved Jacob; ³but I have hated Esau,** and I have made his mountains a desolation, and *appointed* his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness."

When reading though the book of Genesis and the stories of Jacob and Esau, we have difficulty seeing the reasoning behind God's decision to choose Jacob over Esau. Esau seems to be an upright man, who takes care of business, and even forgives Jacob of all his indiscretions towards him. Jacob is dishonest and crafty in all his dealings during his early life. The first change in Jacob occurs when his future father-in-law deals with him as Jacob has dealt with others. Jacob begins to grow up in his thinking and deals rightly with his father-in-law over a period of about 21 years. Jacob is being molded into the man that God wants him to be. Finally Jacob encounters the angel and wrestles with him all night. Jacob latches on to the angel and not let go until the angel blesses him. The blessing comes, but not without a price; Jacob's hip will be out of joint for the rest of his earthly life. He has grown from the deceiving child to the man who can be used of God and God gives him a new name, Israel.

The descendants of Esau did not follow the example of their father. By the time Malachi was written in 400 BC, Esau's children and children's children were living their lives far from godliness. Esau's children fight with their cousins, the descendants of Israel, and cause them problems. Through the generations, the battle between Jacob and Esau has continued. Esau's descendants are the Arab tribes who hate Israel today and want her destroyed. We must not ever forget that God is omnipotent, that is, knowing all and seeing all the future before it transpires. While these two boys were still in the womb, God looked down through the pages of time and saw the struggle that would ensue. Today that struggle is still primarily between two nations, just as it was in the womb. We call these nations Israel and Islam; both are nations and both are religions. God could see the future and He hated Islam.

¹⁴What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!

¹⁵For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." ¹⁶So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

Word of God – Paul continues to proclaim the fulfilled promises of God by quoting from Exodus.

Exodus 33:19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; **and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.**"

Moses is on the mountain again with the Lord. The first tables of stone carved by the finger of God have been destroyed in Moses' fury. Now Moses pleads with the Lord for His favor. Moses also pleads to see God with his own eyes. The text of Exodus 33 states that God spoke with Moses like a man speaks face to face with another man. Moses really means that he heard the voice of God like a man hears the voice of another man in a conversation. There on the mountaintop, Moses begged to see the face of God, but God would not allow it. God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock and covered him while He passed by. He then allowed Moses to see His back. According to the text, if Moses had seen the face of God, he would have died. Moses had sinned against God by destroying the stone tablets, but God understood. Moses questioned God about his sin and God's reply was that He had found favor with Moses and would have compassion on him. God grants Moses' wish, in His way, in order to show Moses that He is God. Moses' sin should have precluded him from any further conversations with God, yet God is gracious to whom He desires to be gracious, and He has compassion on whom He desires to have compassion. God knew the heart of Moses. There is no injustice with God because He looks at the heart. God sees past the fury of the moment when Moses destroyed the tablets; however, God did make Moses carve the new stones which God would engrave.

¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."

Word of God – Continuing to show how God keeps His promises for the purpose of showing that He is God, Paul reminds the Roman church of God's dealings with Pharaoh. The nation of Israel was in captivity in Egypt. Moses arrived by God's direction to lead Israel out of Egypt. Pharaoh was stubborn and a series of plagues ensued. Finally Pharaoh relented and the nation of Israel was allowed to leave Egypt, but God was not through with him. Pharaoh rushed after the Israelites to bring them back into captivity, the Red Sea parted and the Israelites made it through safely, but the Egyptian army drowned in the sea. The stories of the plagues, ending with the passing of the death angel, as well as the parting of the Red Sea spread throughout the known world. The God of Israel became known throughout the world and God used Pharaoh to bring this knowledge to the world.

¹⁸So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

¹⁹You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

²⁰On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? ²¹Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?

Word of God – We must not forget that Paul has just said to the Roman church, "For we know that God works all things for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." God is at work in the lives of everyone who loves Him. God uses both evil and good people to bring good to those who love Him. He used Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Moses and Pharaoh, to bring about the ultimate good for those who love Him. He placed Pharaoh in his position and hardened his heart to make His presence known throughout the whole world. Yet in the end when his army was destroyed, Pharaoh too knew that the God of Israel was God and creator of the world and that there was no other God besides Him.

We must not overlook the questions from the Roman church that Paul is attempting to answer, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" The Jewish believers in Rome are struggling with God's kindness for the Gentile believers. Paul knows the real struggle within the Jewish heart. They are struggling with their heritage, all that they have endured as the chosen people, and they are questioning why God would allow Gentiles into the blessing of the promise to Abraham. We too must remember the promise.

Romans 9:6-8 But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; ⁷neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but:

"THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." ⁸That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

God uses whom He wishes, in the manner that He wishes to bring about good "to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose," Jew or Gentile, Greek or barbarian. If a person of any nationality loves God and the Lord Jesus Christ, God is working all things for his good. God is the potter and He loves every vessel that He has created, Jew or Gentile.

²²What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

²³And *He did so* in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. ²⁵As He says also in Hosea, "I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'" ²⁶"AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,' THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD."

Word of God – Proving his point with Scripture, Paul draws upon the word of God spoken through Hosea.

Hosea 2:20-23 And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the LORD. ²¹ "And it will come about in that day that I will respond," declares the LORD. "I will respond to the heavens, and they will respond to the earth, ²² And the earth will respond to the grain, to the new wine, and to the oil, And they will respond to Jezreel. ²³"And I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, '*Thou art my God!*' "

The context of the Hosea passage deals with the 1,000 year kingdom of the Lord when all of Israel, true Israel, has accepted the Lord Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords. At that time the world will be filled with the mighty host of the Lord who are the church saints, clean and spotless, adorned in their white robes, and reigning with the Lord here on earth. The nation of Israel, which is comprised of only one-third of the Jewish people who are alive at the start of the Tribulation, is living on earth in human bodies along with all those from all the other nations who did not go up to fight against the Lord in the battle of Armageddon. In the Lord's kingdom here on earth, people of all races and tongues call Him Lord and worship Him on His great white throne. All these people love God and He loves them. He has prepared everything for them, working all things in time and eternity for their good.

²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE AS THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; ²⁸FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD UPON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY."

Word of God – Continuing in his address to the Jewish believers in the church at Rome by quoting Isaiah, Paul reinforces the precept that not all Israel is the true Israel, and not all descendants of Abraham through Jacob will survive.

Isaiah 10:22-23 For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, *Only* a remnant within them will return; A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness. ²³ For a complete destruction, one that is decreed, the Lord GOD of hosts will execute in the midst of the whole land.

Isaiah is speaking of the Assyrian invasion that is about to come upon the Northern Kingdom; nevertheless, Paul brings the context of the Isaiah passage into the setting of the church and directs it to the Jewish believers. Paul loves the Jews in the church at Rome. He is thrilled that they have placed their trust in the Lord, but his heart is still broken over the fact that most of Israel still denies the Lord. Let us not forget Paul's willingness in the beginning of this chapter to be accursed and lose his salvation if all of Israel could be saved. Not all of Israel will be saved, and Paul cannot forfeit his salvation. Paul applies this verse to the day of Armageddon when the Lord will bring about the judgment on those who oppose Him. In that day, Israel will be reduced to a remnant of new believers in the Lord.

Not to miss an important point, the destruction of Israel, will happen in the righteousness of God. At that time God will overlook the sins previously committed by Israel as a nation, looking at her heart, knowing her future thoughts, and will establish a remnant that will fulfill the promise and prophecy of God for Israel

²⁹And just as Isaiah foretold, "EXCEPT THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME AS SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH."

Word of God – Moving to the beginning verses of Isaiah, Paul alludes to the sinful nature of Israel. They are so sinful that only the kindness of God and His willingness to overlook their sins can save them. Their sins are great, as great as the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, deserving the same judgment of annihilation from this earth.

Isaiah 1:9 Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah.

But God has a plan, not only for the Jewish believers, but also for the Gentiles. God is not the God of the Jews alone. He is the God of all mankind.

³⁰What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. ³²Why? Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³just as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

Word of God - Using the prophecy of Isaiah to address the Jewish believers in Rome, Paul speaks to the heart of their problem. Jewish believers still hang onto the Law as if it can bring them salvation even though salvation was never attainable by the Law. Jewish believers want an element of works as part of the salvation process, refusing to accept the finished work of Jesus on

the cross for full payment of the debt brought about by sin. Knowing that the Jews would have this outlook on the Law, the Lord prophesied through Isaiah that a stone, cut without hands would become the stone of stumbling for all Jews.

Isaiah 51:1 "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, Who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, And to the quarry from which you were dug.

Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone *for* the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* will not be disturbed.

Isaiah 8:14 "Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, *And* a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

For those who know the rest of the Scripture, it is clear that Jesus is that stone of stumbling for Israel. She will stray from the Lord and Jesus will present Himself as their Messiah. Most of Israel will trip over Him and reject Him. But He will become the sanctuary for those who will accept Him into their lives. He will be their retreat of safety. He will be their place of worship.

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. **2**For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. **3**For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. **4**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Righteousness of God - All of Chapter 9 portrays Paul's heart for his Jewish kinsmen. Paul would forfeit his salvation if all his kinsmen would give their hearts to the Lord and be saved, yet that is not going to happen. Are his kinsmen religious? Oh yes, they are religious; they never miss a Sabbath, never miss a fast, never miss a holy day, and never miss a sacrifice. They are zealots for God, but they are zealots with a false theology. The Jewish leadership has created laws, loosely based on God's Law, which have led the Israelites away from the intent of God. The Jewish people are looking out for their own good and rejecting the righteousness of God. They reject Christ who fulfills all the demands of God's Law and causes the sins of everyone who believes in Him to be overlooked and wiped clean from the record books.