

The Closer Walk: Roman's Fruit

The Closer Walk:
Roman's Fruit
3rd Edition

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The Closer Walk: Roman's Fruit

You will need three things to take this journey:

1. The ability to read
2. The ability to grow
3. A Bible

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PREFACE

This is not an exhaustive explanation of the epistle to the Church in Rome. I personally believe that God's word can never be exhaustively explained because it is living and living things are not static, but dynamic. And, in the same way that it is impossible to fully describe the exact position of a moving race car as it speeds around a track, we cannot ever think that what one human received from an intimate revelation of God's Word is all there is to say about any verse, passage, or book. This is simply the fruit of a Bible study God told me to do looong ago that was so fruitful to me, I thought I would share it with you. I am candid and talk about issues in my life with open candor, this may not, therefore, be appropriate content for the immature mind. My hope in being so candid is to break the evident curse of “churchiness” and people's desire to appear holy. Yes, we ought to exhibit righteousness in our lives, but not to the point that we feel uncomfortable in exposing our dirtiness to those who are supposed to be our brothers and sisters, for they are the one's who must bear our burdens as we bear theirs. For those who are not saved, get saved. I don't care what you think or say until you are grafted into the family of faith and saved from hellfire. That is the MOST important decision you could ever make, and one day you WILL know that statement to be true, I just pray you make that decision before it's too late.

Finally, this Bible study can get a little deep at times. Don't get discouraged, go slow and, if you need to, skip reading the phrases in parentheses until you get what the sentence is saying. This can be incredibly fruitful for you, and, with all sincerity and, at the expense of some of my personal

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privacy, I pray it is. I love you, though we have never met. God loves you even if you've never met Him. This world will never love you no matter how much it tells you so. Keep this in mind beloved and fight on until victory is in hand.

GENESIS

What makes a mind great outside of the fact that it is? There must be a factor that transcends both the uniqueness of our individuality and the commonality of our humanity to elevate each individual out of the pit of mediocrity. For the differentiation of views, thoughts, hopes and dreams is a condition that is common to all men and simultaneously speaks to the true essence of what it means to be human. So, simply being different cannot be the measure that makes a person great, for we cannot all be effortlessly great by the definition of the word in the context that I meant it.

Great – Markedly superior in character or quality
(Merriam-Webster)

So, how do I become “great” and why should it matter at all? My resolve is that I am destined to be “great”, along with every other man and woman on this planet. Yet, the inevitable truth is that the grand majority will succumb to the throes of complacency. I therefore conclude that if I find He who is and mirror His every step for me, greatness will no longer simply be a word that describes me, it will be the very definition of my walk, and the totality of my life will be “great” because it represents the will and capacity of a Being more grand than myself and all of mankind put together...

Mostly every morning, with a cup of hot coffee in my hand, I have conversations like this with God over the bleating of my neighbors; goats, llamas and sheep. Raising

the black lava to my mouth and tasting the sweet burn of the caffeine melding with my being and imbuing me with superhuman-like powers, I stare off into the dark dawn, waiting for the glimpse of light to penetrate the currently invisible horizon. I find peace in pondering the ways of the Divine, and, even though I know my thoughts can't get anywhere near to the completeness of God, I find purpose in the pursuit. Bible in my lap or on the table, I begin to read where I perceive He is guiding me in that moment. Although I can't accurately describe it, I can tell you it's more than a feeling. Perceiving the Voice. The will and move of God in this world is deeper than the simplicity of the "feels" and rather is something that moves the soul. His voice is crystal clear, yet is not often heard with these natural holes on the side of my head. However it comes, when I hear Him one thing is sure; I am challenged to make a choice. Every time. I am challenged choose to either walk in obedience towards Him and the way He is leading me or count His voice and direction as unprofitable and conclude to go in a direction of my own design. If we as "Christians" not only willingly, but consistently choose the latter, even to the point that we don't even consider God's desire, what is the profit in Him speaking to us at all? If we refuse to stretch ourselves in the direction God is pulling, we become the disobedient child who has stopped up our ears and drowns out any sound of reason with our own babblings. The end of that road is either a spanking or our running away, neither of which are things that the professed Christian would voluntarily pray for. So, it is with that conclusion that I challenge you, the reader, to put away all your thoughts of my education (or lack thereof), disregard the inevitable typographical errors that slipped by the spell corrector and editors, and quiet your desires to do anything

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but use this book as an opportunity to hear what God is desiring from you in this season. Respond. Hear Him through my madness and respond in obedience. That is my challenge to you. You yourself will have to discern what that means, and, by the end of this work, I pray that you will have found an answer.

ROMANS 1

READ VERSE 1

In order to be willingly used of God in high capacity, one must have sold himself/herself over fully to bond service with Christ, essentially becoming Christ's slave. This is what it means to have Christ as "Lord" over one's life, as that word is literally translated into master, as in the master over a stock of slaves or teacher in the lead position of authority. This requires complete and total devotion, to the point that one must become separated from the world for the specific purposes of the gospel. Of course, perfection is hard pressed to be found in the midst of any man's life, so the mere calling of God to follow after Him requires God (Christ) to make any part of the walk worthy in His eyes (Isaiah 64:5-6). Therefore the walk does not achieve the salvation, but only indicates it. If it were the former, then only perfect walks would lead to salvation, making it unattainable. As it is, one's fidelity (i.e. servanthood) to the whim of the Master is a direct expression of relationship with the Master and the servant's depths of devotion (i.e. level of faith).

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READ VERSES 2 – 4

God's word is being fulfilled through the Holy Scriptures in that all that was prophesied through the prophets has been made complete through the manifestation of His Word (i.e. Jesus Christ), and the gospel being spread to the utter parts of the world such that even the Gentiles may receive salvation.

READ VERSE 5

The function and reason for Christ is clear, that we can receive grace (for sins) and function (for works) in the kingdom of God. These are two things that are fundamental to the exhibition of our obedience to the persuasions of our moral conviction (the foundation of any true faith) and to bring the superiority of His name honor in the uttermost parts of the earth.

It is only through Christ that we are able to be obedient to the faith (fidelity, trust and response to the will of God), which is what we should be characterized by. Not forgetting that doing "good" is not righteousness but following the will of God leads to righteousness that can only be understood by completely receiving and understanding the gospel as truth.

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NOTE:

While movement from faith to faith (verse 17) does imply growth with God, it also logically illustrates to futility of religion.

As long as the gospel of Christ is truly at the center of one's fundamental belief and every auxiliary part of the system is born purely of the relationship fostered by knowing Truth, then one's actions towards God will be ever developing (as Truth more clearly reveals Himself) and ever increasingly fruitful. It is only through the cultivation of such a "koinonia" relationship with the Creator of all that one can stand poised to be counted righteous in the eyes of God. This is because God is undeniably the only being that could logically and factually exist who is perfect and righteous. Therefore He is also the only being that is qualified to impart these qualities and judge whether or not these qualities exist within any other individual.

READ VERSE 6

Beyond the scope of one's national fidelity and zeal for the governmental system that rules over them physically, is the call of Christ to rule over man completely.

READ VERSE 7

Now that the superiority of servanthood to Christ has been established over patriotism for one's country, Paul addresses those who are of Roman nationality specifically (address of the letter), yet still highlights the superiority of God over country (He is the source of the grace and peace).

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To address them before expounding on this truth would not help his current argument (man's reason for creation is for worship and stewardship to God).

READ VERSE 8

This is a good outline of how to exhort someone without stirring up pride within the exhorted. Paul thanks God for their obedient actions (proven so by their fruit) that have led towards the edification of the Kingdom.

READ VERSES 9 – 10

Paul's function (as well as all men's ultimate function) is to serve in the gospel, the teaching of the Truth (Christ). This service is to God, who is Spirit, those who relate to Him in any capacity must do so in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). This service, therefore, cannot be superseded by one's own desires as highlighted by Paul's prayer for his brethren in Rome. He makes both mention of them (self-less) and request (could be selfish) of his own that He might journey prosperously in God to them, which, as a servant of God, is impossible to do without it being God's will.

READ VERSES 11 – 12

For the Christian, the center of all desire towards another individual should be Godly intentions; that Christian salvation, edification, and/or maturation occur. If that is not the heart of the matter, then Jesus is probably not at the center of the motive, and the event will likely lead to vanity.

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READ VERSES 13

Having a good plan with Godly intentions is not enough however. God does not jump into the basket of man's ideas to be carried into the next situation. He Authors everything and has a will to be accomplished. That is the way that He will prosper to produce "God fruit"; all other ways, even in "prosperity", can only yield "man fruit". Good plans with God intentions do not even compare to God plans with God intentions.

READ VERSES 14 – 15

We must be obedient to those divine plans in all situations and to all people in the timing and the season of the One who Authored those plans. However, there is an easily missed conditional in verse 15. Paul states, "as much as is in [him] is, [he] is ready to preach." This highlights that we have an obligation to grow in and according to God's Will so that we may expand our usefulness in the kingdom (2 Timothy 2:15-20). The more Truth that we house in us the more we can be used to articulately share and demonstrate that Truth. This is the foundation of maturation in Christ.

READ VERSE 16

The gospel of Christ is for everyone, yet we cannot overlook a very important statement. Articulating God's love for us can be difficult at times, but it is the duty of everyone that has received Christ to show that reception, for that is the entryway of salvation to others. We must not simply preach Christ when convenient, but demonstrate

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Christ in our actions at every conscious level.

READ VERSE 17

Through living this faith in Christ (the power of God unto the salvation of everyone that believeth) we are able to mature it into something more than what it started as. Growth of anything only occurs through practice. One becomes a better doctor through practicing medicine; one becomes a better athlete through practicing his/her craft; one can then only become a better Christian through practicing Christ in daily living. Doing this consistently is the foundation for salvation of others and the essence of Christianity, for, unlike the doctor who knows when he is in the operating room and when he is not, or the athlete who recognizes the difference between the field of play and his/her living room, Christians are incapable of knowing when that critical moment of presenting Christ arises until it is upon us and if our actions do not present Him beforehand it becomes hard and almost incredulous to present Him in that moment. That is why we (the just) are called to live by faith (that is, to live from the originating point of faith as a substance and not a remote/separate thing), not live with faith (that is, to live separate of the faith that keeps us or to have the ability to live without faith but choose to have it with us).

READ VERSE 18

This is the consequence of those who choose to live with a faith instead of living by true faith. Without salvation being the leaping point from which everything springs, the foundation of world view will lack Truth,

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which eventually will lead to both inconsistency and unrighteousness. When these two things manifest, there is always an opportunity for repentance (turning back, self-evaluating and finding the point at which Truth is not included within the paradigm) before God pours out His wrath, yet one can be sure, unrighteousness mixed with the refusal to repent always leads to the wrath of God.

READ VERSE 19

Constructing one's world view in a carnal way will always lead to inconsistency and a lack of answers that both satisfy reality and don't contradict the current world view (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). The individual at that point has a choice to conclude that what they established was wrong and go back and reconstruct their world view (repentance) or complicate this world by holding on to his/her conceptions and justifying his/her world view in a world they did not create (evidence that they are not qualified to be the creators of a true and unbiased world view). This is the seed that leads to unrighteousness; the notion that one is qualified to know without God (Genesis 3:4-5).

READ VERSE 20

One cannot/will not be judged as unrighteous until God has revealed Himself to that individual and they have had an opportunity to accept Him (and His righteousness, which also happens to be the only true and absolute righteousness) or reject Him. HOWEVER, God clearly presents the need for His presence to all manner of man through the simple logic of His creative works. If you

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simply wake up one day in a house, fully furnished and perfectly equipped for everything you need to survive, the ultimate question that must eventually surface is, “Who built the house?” (a fundamental question of philosophy). THEREFORE, NO MAN is without excuse by the time they stand before God’s judgment for He judges justly and perfectly according to the experience and understanding He has allowed them to gain.

READ VERSES 21 – 23

Take Adam and Eve. Take the Israelites. Take the Sodomites and the Gomorrahites, the Amelakites, the Jebusites, the Assyrians and any other organized group of people in history. Look deeply, beyond your religious suppositions and perceive the nature of man. There is a point at which man must realize that there is One who is One, and Creator of all that is, yet at that point of realization man must also concede that he is not that One. To admit the second point tugs at the strings of pride in such a way that is almost unbearable to the carnal nature of who we are, for it is to admit that we have no control; we have no absolute power over the unfolding of our “self-evolution”; that we can never be in the position to be adequate masters of our own fates. Although, the seat is quickly left vacant whenever we want it by a God who is so kind and gentle and loving that He allows us to blissfully stroll into the depths to She’ol as opposed to dragging us kicking and screaming into unity with Him (though He incessantly calls for us, His children, to return to Him and it pains Him to watch us choose destruction over wholeness).

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When man rejects God as the Head and the Master, we then set ourselves up to be in that position, or (for those who think themselves wise enough to know they don't know it all, but still don't want to subject themselves to the growth walk required by God) set up images, creatures, and/or other spirits in divine assignments and give them title of deity.

READ VERSES 24 – 32

After giving the opportunities for repentance divinely deemed necessary, God will allow man to follow these perverted, self-made parameters (abortion, same-sex marriage, prostitution, “legal” lying, etc.). This is the beginning final stage of self-corruption, reprobation. For though we do have a duty to serve mankind, it ought not supersede our obedience and service to the Almighty, for that is the first and greatest commandment. When we therefore make laws, statutes, and traditions that directly offend the will of our Creator and think not to stop these practices for reasonings of our own hearts we have begun to walk down a path that leads to the justification of these ungodly practices as morally right (the entrance to a reprobate mind). However, the full manifestation of reprobation cannot manifest within someone who hasn't known Truth. Those who have not yet met God and hold ungodly practices (the blind) are not to be held in the same category as those who know God in the fullness of the Truth (that is that He is Supreme and Creator of all) yet find it sensible to put their own human reasoning above God's (this is the fullness of a reprobate mind).

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After setting up all these posits Paul goes on to what seems to be the crux of the chapter. MAN was created to worship (implied) and SOMEONE/SOMETHING has to be God/god in their lives (stated). Who do you worship? Do your actions say that? Do you go to work to pay your bills and fill your belly and the belly of your family or do you do it out of obedience so that you are positioned to fulfill a divine purpose?

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Some things to think meditate on:

If there is rejection of God in any area of one's life, it leads to acceptance of self or someone/something else as "god". Do you choose yourself, your comfort, your well-being, your "peace of mind", your _____, over God in any area life? Write those things down and post them in a visible place and ask yourself are you willing to let God be God over those things too.

GUILTY

I remember the feeling even now. It was darker than despair, watching the paper machete plan I had self-authored for my life immolated with the fires of my current circumstance. Hand cuffs, two stern-faced police officers, and a healthy bag of marijuana all testified in that moment that I was no longer Femi Ariya the soon to be doctor. I was Femi Ariya the criminal. Law breaker. Is that a term that describes you? It describes me. At that time, I had no idea of the glorious refrain that the title housed. I was only aware of the crushing fact that I was going to jail. For the first time... ever. Scared couldn't possibly describe my state of mind as I re-lived scenes from Oz and every prison movie I could remember. Somehow McLennan County Jail had morphed into the underground super-max penitentiaries you hear horror stories from. Granted, there may have been some discrepancies between my nightmarish fantasy and the reality of what was about to happen but you couldn't have told me that, not then.

I tried everything, short of defecating on myself (I wouldn't have been able to live that one down as one of my best friends sat in the seat next to me, he still laughs at me for trying my sob story), and about halfway to my all-expense paid "vacay" I had accepted the truth. This was going to happen. I started reviewing my dusty memory of pressure points and vital zones and strategized self-defense scenarios against "Bubba", the mental personification of everything bad about a prisoner. If he decided to get fresh with me in the showers, was I was gonna break his knee caps and risk actual prison time in an effort to remain a

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virgin in my backside? So many decisions. So many life choices that were jokes in classrooms and social circles were now on the table of my life. Screw prison, I'd gladly take a "trip to solitary" and an extra week in the "box" to maintain my ability to properly have bowel movements. Things had changed. I was a hardened criminal now. I had to think like a survivor... Did I mention this was my first time going to jail, ever?

After the frustrating and laborious task of being booked and the demoralizing experience of being strip searched (thank God they didn't do a cavity search), I was relieved to be placed in a holding tank filled with guys who looked just like me and my partner in crime, most of which were too drunk or high to care about our existence. Except for this one guy, I will call him, Jim. Jim was caught by the police with eleven ecstasy tabs and instead of facing federal time he decided possible death by overdose was a safer risk and swallowed all 11 of them. Needless to say, he was "trippin", hard. He told us in between fidgets, leg spasms and body rubs that he wasn't going sleep and he "wouldn't let nobody mess with us". It concerned me more than it consoled me, but I was high and sleepy and, because there was no food around, I grabbed the blanket I was given, a burlap sack made of sand paper and the broken dreams of Taiwanese sweat shop workers, and went to the closest sleep-like state I could muster in a room full of drunks, addicts and a guy passed out in his own vomit.

I am a Christian. I am saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, and that stay in jail (without counting the 5 other trips I would later take) is one of the many reminders to me that I am not in the position to judge anyone, because

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I am a lawbreaker in need of grace. And I'm willing to bet, if you be honest with yourself, you'll admit the same...

ROMANS 2

READ VERSE 1

There is no lawfulness that any human has kept any better than any other human in the eyes of God for we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. We who know the judgments of God are no better than those who do not know that judgment and commit the same acts if the atoning blood of Christ is removed. Therefore, to suppose that our thought of what holy is and what it truthfully manifests itself as are anywhere close to the same thing is folly as God is absolutely Holy and Pure, which we are incapable of conceptualizing in our mind since it was shapen in iniquity and sin (1 John 3:15; Matthew 5:28). It is prideful therefore to believe that one is any better than the other, for if this were so, then there should be one spiritually qualified to judge another on earth. Yet we are told there is no such man.

READ VERSE 2

God alone is therefore the only one qualified to judge as He is Absolute Truth.

READ VERSE 3 – 4

“either/or” modus Either we judge because we presume that we are somehow better than the individual

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found in sin OR we despise the love, mercy, patience and forgiveness of God in that we know God will forgive that person of the wrong we think they should be punished for (the stance of Satan as the “Accuser”) if they repent.

Yet we miss the fact that it is through that love, mercy, patience and forgiveness all man is drawn to God and away from the evil in his/her heart (Matthew 12:2-8).

READ VERSES 5 – 6

Seeing God’s mercy when we believe “justice” is deserved can make us calloused and angry at life’s situations (i.e. when a repentant rapist gets saved and starts preaching or the murder of one’s mother/father gets saved and begins to worship at the same church he/she goes to, how would you feel? Be honest). But God will justly render according to every man’s deeds (these seem to be expressed as physical action, but are clearly spiritual manifestations in this realm, Jeremiah 17:10 Romans 8:27).

READ VERSES 7 – 10

See Galatians 6:7 and tie the two together.

READ VERSE 11

It doesn’t matter who you are/were in this world or what you believe. God will judge all.

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READ VERSE 12

We are incapable of understanding this judgment as believers as even when we reject God, we have the Law. Yet God seems to have a system and ability to judge those who've sinned and not yet received what we know as the Law of God

(with Law = Israelite, Children of Abraham; i.e. us;
without Law = gentiles; pagans)

It stands to be noted here that though many live what we call a "pagan" life style, they are not in actually pagan, but more so are rebels to the kingdom (i.e. antichrists; people who know God, and have rejected God). True pagans are those who have not yet received the Law.

Not Receiving versus Denying Something - are two different things that require two different categories.

Jew – A Hebrew; One physically born of the lineage of Abraham; specifically, of the tribe of Judah. *(Also can be a term used to describe an individual who lived in the province of Judaea during the rule of the Roman Empire.)*

Israelite – One who is a recipient of the promise of God to the sons and daughters of Abraham (does not have to be a Jew)

Gentile – One who was not born of Hebrew lineage (can still be an Israelite)

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Pagan – One who was not born of Hebrew lineage and retains forms of worship that are not toward God Almighty

Anti-Christ – One who is knowledgeably in opposition to the Lordship of Christ

Notice further that those without the law (pagans) never even have the opportunity to life eternal (a moment of judgment). They perish. Those with the law however, are judged by that law. Remembering Paul's words earlier when speaking of no man being without excuse, we see that God reveals Himself in due time and season to every manner of man in such a way that they may begin a journey towards relationship with Him. Furthermore, the Word (i.e. the Law) is God, and, when taking off the veil of religion and practice, the Law of God is simply what He tells each person to do. For Adam and Eve, that meant not eating of the Tree of Knowledge, a Law given well before the Mosaic Law was given. So, to be clear, obedience to God is the beginning of the pathway that will lead to growth with Him and ultimately a relationship with Christ (He will draw all men unto Himself) in whatever form that may be (missionaries, a bible, a divine encounter, etc.). The heart reason for obedience becomes the dividing line between the Christian (who knows perfection is unattainable in this form) and the Pharisee who is more imperfectly devout to the Law than to the One who gave and is the Law (God). The Christian follows the Word of God because they want to please their Heavenly Father. The Pharisee believes that his/her imperfect devotion to a checklist of things contemporarily justifies him/her before an absolutely perfect God and misses seeing the need for a connection to the Giver and Essence of Christ. For when Christ came, a

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new age began, one in which obedience to the Mosaic Law was no longer the measuring stick for righteousness, but rather a demonstration of gratitude for righteousness freely given through the acceptance of Christ. Furthermore, because of this great transition, God is able to communicate with each believer directly, instead of having to relay everything through a priest, judge or prophet. This makes it so that every believer has the ability to hear God's will for them personally (the Law, God, will be written on their hearts Jeremiah 31:31-33). Be not deceived however, it is the same God that gave the Mosaic Law, so the underlying principles and essence of that Law have not changed; the physical manifestation of those principles may change depending on God's will for each person in this world.

READ VERSE 13

Hearing is worthless if doing is not the result.

READ VERSES 14 – 16

Hearing Mosaic Law is also not required for doing the Law of God in this age, it simply helps (for the Law will be written on the seat of man's soul; some look for it and find it without being told what it is). Therefore, religious manifestation should ultimately focus less on hearing the Word of God and centralize on **DOING** the Word of God. That is what He will judge us by, not the Word we heard, not even action by action, but the life we lived in totality. Thus, our motivation, will, emotions, and inner desire (i.e. the soul) will be what stands trial that great day (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

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READ VERSES 17 – 29

So, if you call yourself a Christian, make sure that you are keeping the marks of Christ; walking as He instructed and instructing as He taught. This is the “inward Jew” who’s fidelity and boast is in the Almighty and not of his church, his pastor, his religion, his salvation, his righteousness, his holiness, his relationship, his faith, etc.

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Some things to think meditate on:

- The fundamental truth Paul wished to express was judgment and the qualifications for it.
 - Man cannot and will never be qualified to make judgment on a spiritual level due to our naturally sinful disposition.
 - God is the Divine Judge and will judge every man according to the works manifested from the heart. That is, He does not only specifically judge each action, but concerns Himself to judge righteously what is called the “heart” or the core of the soul.
- Seeing this judgment played out on earth can sometimes tick humans off as God’s love is unending and mercy endures forever (for example, when we see someone we thought should have been smitten given grace and love) another reason why we cannot be Absolute Judge, we rationalize restoring balance by force and removing inequity through pain and suffering, God restores balance through a Divine Purpose and Will we cannot understand and removes inequity through grace and love. Can you remember a time when you felt the need to “make things right”? What happened when you tried to fix it? How often do you seek God’s guidance before making a decision on something even if it seems trivial?

SPECIAL

I had grown popular. No. Infamous. The term “Femi Restriction” was now a unit name and was the description of the outrageous length of time that a child was to have no contact with any technological marvel of the civilized world as punishment for wrong-doing. I unscrewed cables (and hid them), pulled power plugs and made every conscious effort to make sure the child was sent in to the closest rendition of the Stone Age I could fashion without getting fired. However, as damning as the “Femi Restriction” was, there were several other youth counselors at the facility in which I worked who caught a lot more push back than I for placing kids on what was our only legal defense against undesired behavior. I believe the reason for which was both my patience in putting up with what the kids knew was intolerable behavior and the countless warnings I gave before the hammer fell. So when the last straw was pulled and the hammer fell, it fell hard. Where other counselors inserted days I inserted weeks and months without television, video games, computer access, and/or outside privileges. I didn’t patronize the kids, but rather listened to them and reasoned with them so that they could see the logical error in their choices. Instead of calling them “dumb” or telling them they made a “stupid decision” I challenged them to think the consequences of their actions through and see the folly of their ways. Though they still didn’t like “Femi Restrictions”, most of the time they respected their punishment and they knew that there was always an opportunity for a reduction in sentencing, usually tied to a task that involved digging in the bible and writing an essay or giving a description of a

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passage. Of course, they weren't being studious in the Word because of a real desire to know God (oh, how I wished). They were doing what they were told so that they would get the result they wanted, which, in their circumstance, was the reduction of a very long time without something they wanted to do. In a sense, I guess that made them special, they had a relationship with someone who wanted to see them do better over the easy check offered for doing nothing for their development. They were also personally connected to a person who was able to reduce their sentence or throw it out altogether and, in spite of outstanding evidence, declare them innocent. How beautiful of a position is that? But there was one problem, they weren't obeying the law because they generally cared about me, the lawgiver (at least, not initially), they were escaping the wrath of a "Femi Restriction" or attempting cajole a reduction. One day that truth became all too apparent.

It was Saturday morning and Marcus wanted to go on a trip with an extracurricular group he was a part of. He bounced downstairs with his typical goofy and bubbly smile and proceeded to announce his departure. I had a problem with that, mainly because every Saturday each kid is assigned a deep clean chore and our unit policy was "no one does anything "fun" until the chores are done" (I had a song and dance to it, too). He was livid. He explained that the bus was leaving in 15 minutes and he didn't have time. I didn't care. In my opinion, he should have got up earlier to allow time to handle his responsibilities. He argued to the point of tears for 5 minutes before he realized that he would not be allowed to leave before finishing his chores. You could always tell when Marcus was mad because his

normally clean mouth turns into a cesspool of profanity and swear words. Profanity is against our policy and normally means restriction, but, me being the benevolent counselor I was and seeing how much he wanted to go on this trip (he'd been talking about it all week), I figured I'd have him read Ecclesiastes 3:10 and tell me what that means before he left instead. Huffing and puffing and smelling like floor cleaner and genetically modified oranges, a winded Marcus announced his completion of his chore for review. I checked it (and gave him a LOT of slack, his job was pretty crappy) and told him of his final assignment. What I figured would be a quick 30 second convo turned disastrous as he exploded in a violent rage of profanity and tears. He felt I had betrayed him. He felt I just wanted to keep him from the trip. He felt... He thought... Yackaty-Schmackaty... I told him he could have been done and on the bus five minutes into his soliloquy. He flung a nearby flower pot on the floor (it was plastic, this was basically a private organization operating like they had government funding) and stormed out to some place away from me. "Oh... You're gonna have to clean that up too before you leave..." I spoke out as he stomped off. I won't repeat what he said in response, but it certainly wasn't "Love you, Mr. Femi!" though I'm sure it rhymed with that phrase. He came back about thirty seconds later in the stillness of the living room where the apocalypse had just taken place and picked up the flowers and the plastic "hair" stuff that went in the place of dirt. He then snatched up the bible from its location (he threw that too) and stood in front of me with his lip poked out as if he had tried to make out with a hive of Africanized bees. "I don't even know where it is," he said between snuffles. After helping him use the table of contents and having a brief sermon and speech about the

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temporally wasteful and inappropriate tantrum he just threw and there being a time and season for everything I released him to go do what he wanted. “Is that how I treat God?” I wondered as he ran off to stop the bus that had left late and was just crossing in front of the unit’s location. Do I polish myself up on the outside to get the benefits of Christianity and throw the bible to the floor in a violent rage when God challenges me to stand for the stuff I read about?

ROMANS 3

READ VERSE 1

Paul continues to outline the existing differences of one who has received the law and has a formal knowledge of God vs. one who is without the law and has absolutely no formal knowledge of God (see Jew vs. Pagan above) in relation to being an inward Jew through asking a reciprocal question. Essentially, what advantage does the blood of the Hebrew lineage have if what matters is the individual’s heart condition towards God?

READ VERSE 2

Those who are first given knowledge of God got to see for much longer and from a first-hand perspective the miracles of God, an undeniable and persuasive testament to His existence.

READ VERSES 3 – 4

If those, who have received such an awesome advantage and opportunity and can claim to have known God for far longer than any pagan, disown God as truth or disown Christ as Savior, can that justify the non-existence of God or a claim that Christ is not Lord?

Paul's argument here seems to follow the modus of relationship and education. For example, one cannot credibly speak about the floor plan of a house that they've never visited, but one can speak on a house they live in. And, if after living in the house for some time they say, "There is no back yard in the house," to a potential buyer who has never seen the house, that buyer would be apt to believe the individual over the truth that is unknown to him. However, that does not make the existence of the "backyard" dissolve.

God will exist and show Himself through time at a volume level that deafens the ears of humanity, we must choose to tune in to His frequency and listen until we are deaf to the rhythm and blues of the world even if it means tuning out the people who have claimed to walk with Him the most. As expounded on in verse 4. When we speak in rhythm with the Truth of God, our words are proven through our faith and its fruit both now and at the hour of judgment.

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READ VERSES 5 – 6

Paul then asks, since God has implicitly given every human an ability to choose, and humans sometimes choose unrighteousness in forsaking the Almighty and the Way He has given, causing their ultimate judgment. Is God then wrong for judging them?

The answer is a bold no (He asks God to forbid that), for the fundamental reason that God **MUST** judge the world and every man according to his own actions (Ezekiel 18:20; Jeremiah 31:28-34) for that is what He said He would do and His perfection includes justice which requires judgment.

Furthermore, we must keep in mind the grace and love of the Master will not necessarily cause Him to reign down judgment immediately after the first act of sin, but rather, when the heart has fully given itself over to the sinful nature and the appointed time has come, God will bring judgment. E.g. Sodom and Gomorrah existed for at least 600 years before God destroyed them.

READ VERSES 7 – 8

So then, since God's righteousness is openly displayed through the judgment of the iniquity in man why are those sinners receiving such a punishment (we received revelation from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and God was glorified when Pharaoh's army was drowned in the Red Sea).

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Paul begins this argument it seems to stave off the intellectuals of the day who were contending that, if God's glory is shown through our sin, why not sin that His Glory may be the more self-evident?

But he reminds us that though you learn a stove is hot by putting your hand on the eye of the stove, if you willingly did it when your Father told you not to, your being burned is a just the result of your primary action and the logical conclusion to your actions, regardless of the Father's ability to make a perfect example out of you to the other children from such a painful situation. One must realize that the Father would prefer to make us examples of obedience, not examples of consequence and punishment.

READ VERSES 9 – 18

So since we have such a clear revelation and understanding as believers, does that make us any better off than the pagan? No, we are all sinful by nature and far from righteous by ourselves.

ASIDE VERSE 11

None of us have put all the pieces together by ourselves to the point that we can accurately follow after God by ourselves. All of our "suniami" (translated as understanding, but is a compound word of "sun" which means to put together, unite, associate, or comprehend and "hiemi" which means to send) comes from someone first teaching us and opening our eyes to our own ignorance. No child learns the English language without first hearing it and figuring out the meanings; no scholar earns a degree

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without first toiling away at a college or university. Likewise, not one person on this planet has ever got to the point that they can understand God, without God.

ASIDE VERSE 12

No matter how straight one's path is now. If one were to take the total sum of any person's life and express it as a line that illustrates deviations from perfection EVERY human's line on at least some point will deviate. Since perfection and imperfection are mutually exclusive states and the only non-arbitrary measure of goodness is given by God, who is perfect, imperfection no matter how brief falls short of the measure of God who is absolutely and totally perfect and good.

READ VERSE 19

Therefore our reason for having the law in the first place is to expose our sinful nature to the world and ourselves that we all may realize how guilty, dirty, faithless, and depraved we are on our own.

READ VERSE 20

The law (not just the Torah, but the supernatural impartation of discernment of sin, i.e. disobedience to God) would condemn us all if we alone stood before God, which is the purpose of God showing us His Holiness through the law. More poetically, our extremely sinful nature and its cleansing is more than a Sunday service away. The distance that exists between what we think to be holy and what God actually is is a chasm unfathomably large.

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READ VERSES 21 – 22

Yet now, through Christ, we can achieve that righteousness without following the law completely to the “T” from the age of accountability until death. This has been prophesied through the Torah, Ne’vim and Khe’tuvim as far back as the days of Moses, Abraham and David.

And it is not specific to any belief system, any nationality or any other method of human segregation. The bottom line is if you truly have living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you will be counted righteous.

READ VERSE 23

Without some sort of redemption, we have all fallen short of God’s glory and deserve spiritual death.

READ VERSES 24 – 26

Yet we are justified and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ who God purposely sent for that reason (without having to as if He owed us anything); the redemption of man so that SOMEONE might make it to heaven and be counted as righteous.

READ VERSES 27 – 28

This act to give us a Redeemer was not to show our righteousness as believers in Him, but can only display His righteousness in, without cause or requirement to do so, giving us a Savior and Way back into communion with Him.

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Therefore, we humans can't say ANYTHING about ourselves in regards to our righteousness. And it doesn't matter how long you've been a deacon, or served on the usher board. It doesn't matter how much of a "saved little Christian" you've been in the past "X" amount of years.

Nothing qualifies you for an eternity with the Father except a perfect record or the blood of the Lamb. So now we see a new law written. One not of the "do not's" but of one simple "do"; have true, living faith in Christ, yet that is an action word and not a mere proclamation of vanity for access to heaven.

Faith without works is dead, so we are then called to work this faith to truthfully have this faith and be justified by this faith and exempt from maintaining the deeds of the law for our salvation, but rather expected to give earnest effort to application of the law as a result of our faith and love for the Law-Giver.

READ VERSES 29 – 31

God is the absolute God of all, His law applies evenly to everyone He applies it to. Therefore, we have a duty to either be perfect or have faith in Christ our Redeemer, yet as we said before, faith without works is dead, so that requires us to "establish" the law through our faith. However, there is a great differentiation given here, being the use of two different prepositions; "by" (ex, ek in Greek) for those of the circumcision and "through" (dia in Greek) for those of the uncircumcision. The implications given by the original language were made clear to me in this explanation:

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A man named Circumcision stands *by* a tunnel that leads to heaven and, because he saw the One who dug out the tunnel, he can attest to the legitimacy of the claim that it leads to heaven and points this Way out to Uncircumcision, a guy who must go *through* the tunnel to have the same experience. Now, while Circumcision stands by the tunnel, he too must eventually go *through* it to reach the destination, especially if he believes his own claims about the legitimacy of the One who built the tunnel and the evidence of the Way the tunnel makes.

Establish → Histemi (Greek) – To cause to or to make to stand, to put in place, to place in balance, to allow to continue unharmed, to be made immovable, to hold up, to lay present, to abide in

I.e. We shouldn't live right and follow the law because we are under the law and will be condemned if we break it, we should live right and follow the law because true faith in the LORD (Master, Lord, Great One) Jesus calls us to live a life that emulates His, one of perfect submission to the Father. And, because the Father (God) is the One who gave the law in the first place that would mean our faith will cause us to live as closely to the law as we can, still understanding that when we fall we are not going to face judgment, but be expected to get back up and become stronger and walk closer.

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Some things to think meditate on:

- Do you as a Christian today see an ought to follow the law given in the Old Testament now? Why or why not?
 - If you don't believe that Christians should strive to obey the Logos and Ramah word of God (the law is in the Logos category), do you think people who are liars (not people who have lied, but people who do lie and will continue to do so), whoremongers (not people who have committed fornication, but those who practice it habitually with no remorse or recourse other than, at best, saying a prayer), murderers (not people who have committed murder, but people who have a mindset to destroy the lives of the innocent) will go to heaven because they claim the Blood of Christ?
 - Are you one of those types of people?
- The law is extensive and is not merely a list of do's and do not's, but an exposition from the Almighty of a cultural lifestyle and mindset to be lived. What are some things you can work on from the law to bring yourself closer to the image of Christ?

NEHEMIAH TO NOAH

I found myself on my knees in a puddle of sweat. Exhausted, physically and spiritually, I had violently collided with the emotion I had pushed into the recesses of my mind, despair. How could they leave me to do this alone? I thought we were a family of faith. I thought that we were the ones who believed God and were ready to step out on our faith and move in the direction that God established. I thought this was what we all agreed God was revealing as the next step, a bigger building and the expansion of the ministry. Why was I here alone? I believe God was calling us as a holy people into the Promised Land to help rebuild a shattered and dispersed Israel, to expand the Kingdom in a corporately confirmed and agreed way. Yet my reality spoke a different language as I cringed from the soreness of my back from laboring under a half built stage in the middle of a non-air-conditioned warehouse at the end of a Texas Summer.

I was elated at the fact that the vision my current pastor often shared and the one I had since college fit so perfectly together in that season. The congregation was growing; to the point that the small unit the church currently rented would soon be standing room only every Sunday. The planets were aligned and all the signs seemed to be pointing towards moving into a bigger facility. Pastor had been feeling that also and we had taken several trips to buildings that were for sale and prayed over the property. He had visions of a bigger church, a day care and an outreach center with a radio station and live-streaming eventually. Simultaneously, every free moment I had was

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filled with the thoughts of an outreach center that God gave me one night while studying in college. The first lady was already acting as a day care director of sorts, and, in a very miraculous way, it became clear to me that God had positioned three people together with a similar, unified vision and opened the doors for a 5,000 square foot building at pennies of the market value. But there was a problem, talks about growth and building plans slowed to murmurs when I told them about the opportunity to get more than three times the current space for less than double the current price paid for the smaller office unit being rented out. When I felt led to offer the building rent free to the church, static and uneasy silence filled the air where rejoicing and fervor once was. I would have been fine and stopped immediately if our leader would have told me that they don't think that was the direction they wanted to go. I would have stopped and prayed and planned more if they would have told me to. I would have been content even if they would have said, we aren't hearing from God at the moment, let's stay still. But in return for all the news and updates about the opportunity all I received was a string of "Praise the Lord" and "Amen" and a quickly changed subject. Our congregation had come to a screeching halt at the edge of a land where giants trod, and no one was moving.

The next step was clear; at least, it seemed so to me. All of the signs seemed to say that it was the season to take a corporate step towards the vision God had given us. A door was open on a location in which the rate and deposit was drastically reduced. Yet, somewhere between the vision of a powerful and active congregation in the body of Christ triumphantly marching into this new territory together and

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the moment I was melting in, all the support disappeared and the congregation left me to hold the note, remodeling, and management of a 30,000 square foot facility on my own. Did I move too quickly? Honestly, I don't think so, especially now in hindsight, but that is a possibility. Maybe. Maybe, that step forward (that I was hoping would inspire someone to move with me) wasn't the right move. Then again, maybe it was, and the ones I was hoping to inspire didn't respond. I can understand though, it takes the rare concoction of faith and courage, almost to the point of foolhardiness, to move out into such deep and dark waters with only the voice of God as your guide. What if we misstep? What if we heard the wrong voice? What if...? I decided long ago I wouldn't live out my life in a way that would cause me to look back and regret not go out in faith when I felt God was calling me, even if it meant enduring the most bitter root of wormwood for a foolish mistake. I would believe God and act on it, and through living like that, I figured I would gain the most enduring and productive growth with God possible.

I shared the lament of my hopes for a Nehemiah moment crash landing into my current situation with one of my neighbors who ran a music studio a couple doors down. He, who was also a professed Christian, looked me squarely in the face and said, "Man, you sound more like Noah to me." That statement hit me in the gut harder than a left hook on an open belly. Regardless of how it started and what had been planned before, it was now just me and God on this journey to a now unknown land and I only had Him to trust with every step.

ROMANS 4

READ VERSES 1 – 3

Paul expounds on the previous truth he highlighted in the last verse of the previous chapter by asking a reciprocal question (remembering that Romans and the other epistles were letters, not books and did not originally have chapters). This is done to further illustrate the stark differences between believing God, i.e., responding to His Word with anticipation for its manifestation, versus appeasing God, which is doing what you believe to be right in order to justify your relationship and status with God.

Furthermore, even if it were possible to qualify for holiness according to God's standards (which, invariably, is not possible as a human), the honor or grounds to receive honor would not be something to bring before God or even credit to Him. "Human work" or righteousness that we create through good works is no match for anything that is a "God work", because "God works" consistently and undeniably allow righteousness both in the individual and in the world.

READ VERSE 4

If one were to work for the righteousness freely given by God, then that righteousness would be a credit owed to the individual, in the same manner as a payroll check is owed to the employee who worked a certain number of hours. Paul is stressing that if it were even possible to earn righteousness there would be no room in

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this universe for grace and, ultimately, no reason for Christ to have come at all.

READ VERSE 5

Therefore, God's Divine Will (the culmination of what He both perfectly and permissively allows) is further revealed as His grace is given to those who do not deserve it because of their own works but rather receive it freely because of a convicted response to the call of the unseen God of all.

READ VERSES 6 – 8

Here the above illustration is reinforced as Paul quotes Psalms 32.

READ VERSE 9

He asks another reciprocal question, presenting the stark and deep difference between the spirituality base of Christianity and the religious base of Judaism by pointing out that the moment the Almighty God called forth Abram (later Abraham), who is considered the “father of the Israelite peoples” and the original receiver of the promises of God, he was neither circumcised nor a Jew, but rather a pagan who worshiped the man-made idols of his father.

I believe this brings clarity to the truth of salvation. That one's “religion” has very little to do, if anything, with the gift of salvation, which is currently an all-access road through Christ alone. Bearing in mind that before Christ, there was period when man's sins ultimately distanced him

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from God and the only way to cultivate a righteous relationship with God was through the obedience of the atonement sacrifices of innocent blood that God declared as substantive (therefore making it so) for the sins committed. So a standardized way of life, filled with rules and traditions needed to be realized in order to minimize both confusion and sin and maximize fidelity to God (generally speaking, this is the essence of all monotheistic “religion”) was set in place until the ultimate Way back into holy relationship with God was given.

So now we see at the coming of Christ, a tearing of the veil and destroying of the distance factor religion imposes in regards to man and his Creator, offering full access to complete righteousness through relationship, that is call and response, and effectively ushering what should have been an end to “religion” which is essentially, a list of “do's” and “do not's”.

READ VERSES 10 – 12

Because the Jewish nation literally did not yet exist, there was no way to discern as to whether Abram was of the circumcision (Jew) or uncircumcision (Gentile), and further points out that one's belief system, that is, how they praise, whose doctrine they most closely identify with, how many times they hold communion a month, what phonetic sounds they use to identify the Almighty, etc, is COMPLETELY unrelated to one's salvation.

Here at the birth of the Jewish nation, we have a man who worshiped earthen dolls as gods and was said to be found righteous and it had nothing to do with the

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worship or the earthen dolls. His response to the call of the Almighty allowed him to be found as righteous. Therefore, I would challenge you to conclude that what one does or doesn't do at their religious place of gathering has ABSOLUTELY NOTHING to do with whether or not God sees them as righteous, but rather this title bestowed by the grace of God is granted to all who respond to his call just as Abram did in that fateful day.

Therefore, the ultimate question for the one aspiring to belong in the family of the Most High should be this, what has God called me to respond to and how do I respond to it? Paul's illustration I believe steers us directly to the feet of the cross where God has called us by accepting His Son Jesus the Christ as Lord of our lives. That simple response is the foundation from which God imputes His righteousness upon us and we receive both grace and mercy.

READ VERSE 13

Abraham did not receive the promise by following the law, but by a convicted response to God (i.e. faith with works). Likewise, our promises are not predicated on our fidelity to following all the rules of religion, but by having a convicted response to God or, more traditionally spoken, having faith and acting with it.

READ VERSE 14

If it were possible to follow "all the rules" and earn the promises of God, then there would never have been any need for faith and, further, there would be no need for a

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promise of salvation as that promise would at that point be a debt and not something believed in and accepted based of the word of the Giver, but something owed and based of the merit of the recipient.

READ VERSE 15

Therefore the purpose of the law was simply to illustrate that the recipient has no merit with which to receive anything from the Giver, and the realization of that fact is the entrance into really understanding what Holiness is and the first step of relationship with God. For to come to God and to assume that as a human being, His creation, we are somehow spotless and anywhere close to the perfection that He is, is to miss God completely and alienate yourself from the hope of ever knowing Him.

Finally, I believe this to be an indicator of the entrance into the “age of accountability” for, now that a reasonable being realizes that there is a God and how infinitely far he/she is from His perfection by himself/herself, he/she *should* be compelled to seek a Way back to God (who wants a relationship with His creation). Those who have not realized this have not reached the age of accountability.

READ VERSES 16 – 17

Therefore we must understand that it is by the grace God freely gives to those that respond to Him that we have access to the promises of God. And this grace and these promises are accessible to ALL manner of man only through living and active faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

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This brings to mind the difference between the religious version of obedience verses the spiritual one. Religious obedience is going to church faithfully, paying your tithes, meeting for pray service, living a “saved” life, and following all of the other rules of the establishment one worships God through. Spiritual obedience is simply understanding that God is way more righteous than one could ever be, humbling themselves to admit that and responding to the instructions He will give from the relationship that is cultivated out of that humility.

READ VERSE 18

The word “against” here does not mean contrary to or opposed to, but is rather the Greek word “para” which means beside or near. Therefore, Paul is saying that Abram didn’t believe until God drew near to Him. He had no reason to believe in the invisible God until God first made Himself known and was near to Abraham, and he received such a great blessing because in that time when Hope came near to him, he unwaveringly believed in Hope.

In that same respect, God gets near to us at some point in our lives and gives each and every one of us an opportunity to believe. Our response at that critical moment is what steers the trajectory in that season of our lives. Believing in and responding to God in the moments He reveals Himself then is a vital key to receiving His promises and being adopted into sonship/daughtership.

READ VERSE 19

This response will call you to a new level of walk

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with God in which He will require you to believe and respond to more and more outlandish things, like Abraham being 100 years old and Sarah being about 90 when they had their first son together, Isaac. Praise God He doesn't ask for such faith immediately! Yet, as He grows us, He desires to do greater and greater works both in and through us. A big testimony requires a big mountain and the bigger the mountain for the believer, the greater the glory to God.

READ VERSE 20 – 22

So then, knowing the omnipotence of God to a reasonable measure, the proper response when presented with the huge mountains we face in life is not staggering in unbelief and impossibility, but becoming stronger in faith and giving glory to God, knowing that He who made the promise, no matter how wild, is able to keep it. This response is the trigger to receiving God's righteousness.

Applied to our contemporary circumstance, we must believe that no matter how vile, disgusting, depraved, lustful, prideful, rebellious and outright evil we were in the past or are even right now, we must find the resolve to know that when God promised that, though our sins be as scarlet, He would wash us white as snow, that He is able to keep it (Isaiah 1:18). That the blood of our Savior is sufficient for all our past mistakes and future mishaps that would otherwise alienate us from the category of the righteousness in which God resides (2nd Corinthians 12:9). We must believe that no matter what God ushers into the arena of our lives is for our good and God's glory.

READ VERSES 23 – 25

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The verse in which it is written that righteousness was imputed to Abraham because he believed in the promise given to him was not written haphazardly, but serves as a beacon of hope that if we can in the same way believe in the promise given to us (i.e. salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ) we can receive the same imputation of righteousness, and become heirs to the promise of God through the Blood of the Lamb that reconciles us and a resurrected Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father and justifies us.

Remember, the law will always point out the follower who stumbles; the cross points to God who causes us to stand. So the question I challenge you to ask yourself is this, “Am I doing this because I’m “supposed to” or am I doing this because God told me to?” There are times and seasons for everything, and obeying what God told us to do last season is possibly disobeying what He is calling us to do in this one. We must stop looking to be justified by what we do and start listening to the desires of the One worthy to give commands. Here’s a test for you, what are some things God called you to do in the last week as pertaining to His will for you? If you can only name generic things like pray, love, and give then I would challenge you to listen more deeply to the voice of the Divine.

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Some things to think meditate on:

- What is your response to God's grace?
- How can you make that response more fruitful towards the will of God in concerns with your salvation and remaining earthly life?
- What elements of Christian religion do you still retain in your life? Think critically and maybe even pray that God reveal them to you.
 - Even more importantly than identifying those things (if they exist for you), are you truly willing to let them go for the sake of gaining more Christ in you? Don't just answer with your mind, many say they will die for Him, but know in their heart they hope the day will never come that such an ultimatum is presented for they hope the grace of God will forgive them for failing Him instead of standing by their word. What is your word today rich young ruler? Are you truly willing to forsake all, pick up a cross and follow Messiah? Even if it's to the site of your own crucifixion?

DREAMING OF WHITE COATS

“ARRRGGHAA!!! Sacamelo! Sacamelo!” The first word I wrote was my best attempt at phonetically spelling the noise I heard. I’d never heard a human make that sound before. It was disturbing to a part of me that transcended my current situation. Legs hoisted up in stirrups and completely naked, a petite Dominican woman thrashed violently in the middle of pangs that I knew to be child birth, and a complicated one at that. It seems that she had not dilated enough and the child’s head was now tearing through her lady hole. And this was not the pretty drug induced stupor of the American child birth it was the... wait a minute, what are they doing with those scissors?! No!!! I don’t think you’re supposed to cut that!! How are you gonna... did she just crap herself?! Oh wow, this is too much. And she doesn’t even seem to care that her two holes are now one... Oh hey, there’s a healthy baby boy! Just like that, it happened. My first day in a bustling Santiago hospital during my medical fellowship in the middle of the Dominican Republic culminated in a blissful moment of seeing a woman become a mother. The absolute joy of seeing her beautiful child completely overshadowing the hours of labor she had been in, the possibly life-threatening tears she had or the intense pain she suffered from a labor without the aid of meds. It was an indescribable moment, but a moment that I wouldn’t have been able to experience without first receiving an essential tool, justified clearance.

You see, just because the Dominican hospital was run differently didn’t mean it did not have protocol, and the typical civilian is barred from the backrooms in which the

grotesque scenes like the one I'd just witnessed play out. If you weren't in the club, you had to sit outside with the rest of the plebs, only fantasizing about the gory unfoldings that transpired behind the doors marked "area restricta". So, in order to get in we were given a beautiful gift by our supervising physician, white coats. In that moment I was no longer Femi the criminal. I was Femi the doctor. I still remember her words to us. Just put these on, everyone will think you are doctors and you can go everywhere I go (though she was Dominican, she spoke perfect English). Now, was I qualified? Heck no! I didn't know the difference between a mesolimbic pathway and a mesocorticolimbic pathway, but, because I was attached to someone who did and they vouched for me, I didn't matter. Wherever she could go, we could go, but we didn't go anywhere she didn't take us because the same one who gave us the free gift and authority could quickly take it back if we didn't follow her directions (which would mean I wouldn't get to see all of the cool stuff and participate in all of the awesome procedures we got to participate in). So, closely behind our guide, we dove deep into the unknown wonders of what I so desperately wanted to be my immediate future.

ROMANS 5

READ VERSE 1

As a concluding statement, Paul states that the only way to have peace with God, that is, not incur His wrath and, instead, experience the things He has meant for us in this world, is by being justified by our convicted response

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to God and the call He makes to each of us. That call for the contemporary believer is to put on the white coat... um, I mean, receive His Son Jesus Christ as His Own and God Himself made flesh, come down to the world to reconcile it unto Himself that there might be a way to realize righteousness as a human in the physical form.

READ VERSE 2

Not only are we justified by exhibiting a convicted response to God, but we are also given access to things (namely, grace which allows us to stand before God as holy and hope that we will share in God's glory) others who do not demonstrate such a response do not get access to.

READ VERSES 3 – 5

We must remember that a convicted response to God does not equate to only the things that we as humans would deem pleasurable or praiseworthy, but that same response to God also calls trials and tribulations into the realm of our lives. However, unlike the tribulations we bring on ourselves, these tests are designed by the Creator of the universe with a positive end in mind. Simply put, humans putting themselves in the midst of troubles and trying to see the good out of it is very different from God bringing a purposed trouble into a humans life only for the purpose of creating greater inside of them.

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The common pathway of tribulations authored by the Divine is as follows:

Tribulation → strengthens one's endurance/perseverance/hardiness → which allows one to safely have a new experience → seeing God still be God in such a new and unsolvable situation should give one hope that God is able in any situation → which ought to give one a new level of boldness to speak, stand on, and live by the Word of the One who loved us enough to both reconcile us and save us time after time from troubles, which is an indicator that we are ready for a new level of → Tribulation → And the cycle continues

READ VERSE 6

Before we were at the point in physical life when we were completely unable to save ourselves from the wrath our sin had merited, there was a season appointed for Christ to come and make recompense for all who truly believed in Him (that is have a living faith in His life, death and resurrection and as a result, become submitted to the way that He provides) knowing full well the scale of sin that was stacked against us.

READ VERSES 7 – 8

When comparing that to the action and modus operandi of man, you see the disparity between the perfect loving heart of God (which He calls us to grow towards and by the Way) and the pitifully selfish heart of man, for there are very few times that you will find a person willing to die for someone else solely for the merit of the victim's

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“righteous” character and there are even fewer times when someone is willing to die for someone simply because they were of good character, but God showed us the height and the depth and the breadth of His love for us in this, that while we rejected Him, while we spat in His face and yelled “Crucify Him!” through our actions, our thoughts and our heart, while we cursed His name and gave disregard for His heart, He sent us His most precious gift, the only physical manifestation of Himself to be born of human flesh and walk planet earth, to be beaten, tortured, mocked and die in the place of us who, by the nature of our flawed character, condemned Him to a brutal death.

READ VERSE 9

And much more than that, He paid a fee we could never pay, effectively giving us two gifts simultaneously. He died for us in our place, that is, he paid the penalty for our sins and in that same moment gave us a way to access the very abode of God, not as thieves or criminals, but as His justified sons and daughters, seen as equal with the One who guided us to Himself.

READ VERSE 10

This point touches on a key point that I believe many in the faith miss. Reconciliation and salvation are two very different things and must be understood as such to clearly understand what the pathway Jesus provided us truly is. By the death of Christ on the cross, every believer was reconciled to God, that is, our debt was paid and the scales were re-balanced and we were presented with merely the opportunity to now approach God. However, that

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balancing of the cosmic scales is not the saving of our souls, but only merely the dissolution of the wrongs that would have made it impossible to be saved. However, that same act, Jesus' sacrifice, is the gateway to the salvation of our very souls, which leads us to maturation, sanctification.

While being reconciled of our debt incurred through sin is required to be counted in the book of Life, it is not the exclusive step to making it into eternal communion with the Almighty. All Jesus' death did was cancel the debt we owed. To make it into the Kingdom of heaven we must be saved; we must become sons and daughters (those known by the Father), which requires other steps. In other words, Jesus' death alone cannot save us if we neglect to confess with our mouth and believe the whole truth of the Son (the Messiah died and rose with the power of God) while here on earth and accept Christ as the Lord (i.e. Master) of our lives. That is a key point in why we must realize that Christ must be both our Lord AND Savior (master and agent of salvation).

Thus, it is through a submitted life, that is, the rendering as dead all of one's old ways to assume the walk of Christ, that we become known to the Father. Yet again, this submission is not expressed as a zeal for religious practice, or devotion to doing what man has found to be righteous acts, but living as Jesus expressed in John 5:30, doing nothing on our own, but listening for the instruction from the Father and making the decision to do what the Father has just told us to do (this implies that we have to get to a point that we can hear our Father clearly).

READ VERSE 11

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Furthermore, this complete devotion of one's life to God through Christ (who reconciles us and is the Way to salvation) will lead to joy in Him, which is more properly translated as realizing the praiseworthy glory both in and through Him.

READ VERSE 12

The first Adam (please note that "adam" is literally the phonetic Hebrew translation for "man" or "male") who caused sin to enter the world through breaking the ONE simple law that God gave, passed that sin and its consequence, death, to every human being connected to him.

READ VERSE 13

Sin is sin regardless of whether the law was or was not; however, sin is not imputed where there is no law. Wrong is wrong, period. It seems suggested that God did not judge the blind wrongdoings of man before He brought them into the "age of accountability" through giving them a command that they understood (as a baby who pulls the trigger on a loaded gun and kills a man would not be thought to be tried as a murderer).

READ VERSE 14

From that pivotal point on, death reigned over all, even those who didn't sin in the same fashion that "Adam" did (direct disobedience by eating of the "tree"). Thus, in the same way that "Adam's" one action affected the whole course of humanity in regards to relationship to God, Jesus'

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(sometimes referred to as the “2nd Adam”) one action shifted the whole course in the equal and opposite direction.

READ VERSE 15

The free gift of grace is bestowed upon all mankind, in the same way that sin was bestowed, yet produces the exact opposite effect. Where sin equated to death and separation from God, the grace we receive equates to life and reuniting with the koinonia walk with God. I believe this highlights the omnipotence of God in that no action can thwart God’s plans to provide an open avenue to have fellowship with His creation (man). However, gifts must be accepted, and to know that a gift was given yet never accepted is synonymous with never getting the gift at all.

READ VERSES 16 – 17

This type of mirrored symmetry is also seen when analyzing from this perspective, sin entered through one man and meant judgment and condemnation for all, but the grace enters for many offences and equals one absolute justification (one [Adam] → many, then many → One [Jesus]). I believe this highlights the reconciliatory heart of God that led to the sacrifice of His Son. He actually wants to forgive, not condemn. So much so that He would give the only One He begat by the flesh to reverse the effects of our screw up.

READ VERSES 18 – 19

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Finally, the understanding of both notions shows a final correlation. That one offence caused the judgment of all in the same way that one sacrifice provided justification of all. I believe this highlights the finality of God's action, that in the same way that Adam's sin led to an absolute and inescapable fate for man, the acceptance of the Way (Jesus) leads to absolute and inescapable justification for man, regardless of the sin-soaked lives we may have.

READ VERSES 20 - 21

Therefore we can now see true purpose in the law that God gave, not to provide a way to Him, but to illustrate the futility in trying to reach Him through our own efforts and thus effectively diagramming and proving that the only Way to Him was through Him, literally. And no matter how much sin we commit, He is ready to reconcile us unto Himself and call us His own, at the moment we take Jesus as our Lord and Savior so that in the same way sin led us to the pits of hell, accepting Christ as the Master and Director of our lives will lead to life eternal. And fully, that where sin waits to condemn God's grace abounds that much more waiting to save and justify.

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Some things to think meditate on:

- When's the last time God asked you to suffer for Him? What did He ask you to do and do you think that such level of suffering is a good representation of how long you have been walking with Him or do you think that in all your years of “church”, God is still calling you out of the sandbox of an infantile, under-developed faith?
- How can you get closer to God through the things you are suffering now?
- Where are you at in your maturation/sanctification process with God? Or are you even saved? If you are saved (I pray more than anything that you are or do get saved immediately), do you consider yourself a spiritual newborn, teenager, young adult, or full-age? Why and what do you believe are the next steps God has placed in front of you to continue your development?

SHACKING

Ah, young love. What savor of this world could come any sweeter to the heart of a pubescent teen in the Armageddon of high school? I admit, I didn't know what love was (and still may not for that matter). At that time, the closest my mind could fathom was the illicit sexual fantasies that flooded my hormone driven mind every 6 seconds (according to the national average). And truthfully, at that time in my life, I would have gladly equated whatever my mind was fabricating as love with authentic identity (shoot, me and my friends had a girl we visited every week to enjoy certain "favors" from and I knew, somehow, that what I wanted to do with my high school crush and what we did with that girl were two different things). But I had a problem. The unique unfolding of my childhood, lack of contemporary socialization and my overall social awkwardness in high school made my ability to talk to girls in a romantic capacity stifled to say the least. Sure, I was smart, funny and charismatic in comfortable social circles, but put me on stage to speak publicly or send me off alone with a member of the opposite sex and the resultant event would have easily been the first viral video YouTube sensation. I just wasn't good at it, at first. Time went on, and, like most kids my age in high school, I eventually "found myself". I became comfortable with my own limitations (forcefully at times I admit) and soon found that my charisma, charm, and comic relief was translatable in the public and romantic setting. Then a beautiful tragedy unfolded... I met her again.

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There she was. Right there at a random gas station in my home town right after I got back from college. I just knew it was fate. And I got out of the car to reintroduce myself to the girl turned woman of my dreams (I thought). Friendship picked up, it seemed, almost right where it left off, though we were both older, and my new abilities as a young man seemed to be paying off. Soon we were no longer friends, but a couple. I was frantic. I was no longer the hormonal teen with more of a draw towards her beautiful curves than her beautiful mind, I was a young Christian, struggling to balance honoring God and fulfilling my relationship duties of keeping my woman happy, and she wanted to be kept *happy*. I would say in hindsight that most of that was probably my fault. I opened many doors to lust-filled situations and allowed temptation to slowly eat away at our continence instead of being the agent that allowed for change and growth to occur. For that I truly lament.

The worst part of that situation, however, was not the fact that I was likely the agent of its own annihilation; it was the battles raging in my mind. My last enduring relationship ended with me knowing one thing among many others, that God would not honor a relationship in which I did not submit myself to Him first. The problem was in that last relationship we were “shacking”, the religious term for people playing married without being married, and I had NO enduring model of what a Christian relationship looked like. Sex was the reward for good behavior; it was the refrain to a long days work; it was the glue that made the make-up after bitter arguments sticky sweet. And now I was in the first relationship I had ever tried to have in which I was purposely trying to not put sex

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on the idolatrous pedestal it had been for literally every other relationship model I had experienced in the past. We got close a couple of times. Actually, technically, we got more than close more than once. Yet, every time went horribly and though I could feel the absolute bliss my flesh wanted to revel in, I couldn't enjoy one moment (which also is a good word as a descriptor of the events, bah-dum ching). I knew it was wrong and I was filled with uneasiness and lament for choosing my own pleasure over what I felt to be Godly behavior. I could not continue the path I was on with God and be ok with what I was doing. But I didn't know how to fix it. I didn't know how to truly start over and move forward in God's way together, and, before I could figure it out, it ended.

ROMANS 6

READ VERSE 1

HOWEVER, God's grace is NOT a license to continue or seek sin, for to abort the mission of removing oneself from sin because one knows that God will "forgive him/her" is a rejection of the Light itself that wishes to grow you away from sin, like a plant growing in the opposite direction of the sun (insert Son for a good John 15 sermon model, that one's for free, lol). It is seen that for one who truly accepts Christ, their acceptance and fruitful growth while in God's grace through a faithful dedication to assume the walk of Christ is the evidence of salvation, while petitioning that same grace through the knowledgeable perpetration of sins after being equipped to succeed over that temptation is a form of godliness that

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denies the power of God (2nd Timothy 3:1-7). Therefore, to purposely remain in sin knowing that grace is abounding is to deny renewing by the transforming power of Christ, meaning that though grace is abounding, you may not be accessing or sharing in its benefits (which is an incredibly scary thought to me).

READ VERSE 2

Here, Paul illustrates the stark difference between the old self and the new self and the transformation that should occur with the acceptance of Christ as one's Lord and Savior.

READ VERSE 3

The act of baptism is the symbolic death of the old self and the rebirth of the new. It is the Christian's symbolic act of death, burial, and resurrection as a new being that the things of this world should no longer touch, and, when we accepted the truth that is the foundation of the act of baptism, we accepted the fact that Christ died for our sins and therefore, as our new journey in this world is to become models/imitators of Christ, we live to become dead to our sins.

READ VERSES 4 – 5

And in the same way that He was resurrected on the third day, we too should embrace the newness of our life and walk as saved and changed people in the seasons that growth and transformation occur.

READ VERSE 6

If that is the case then, our new bodies have no part in being touched by the things of our old lives (much in the same case that Mary and Mary were told not to touch the new, resurrected body Jesus as He must first go to His Father to be glorified, John 20:17) and we should assume a new state/way of being. Notwithstanding, our transformation does not immediately make us perfect in the flesh and we will fall short in our walk with God even the day before we are called home. This is because the Blood of Christ does not make us perfect, but rather covers our imperfections, not for the purpose of giving us a get out of jail free card when ever we feel like it, but rather to pardon us when we, in our “humanness”, fight the good fight and still come up on the short end of the stick because we haven’t been spiritually matured to physically be victorious in the given battle (1st Timothy 6:11-12).

We must remember that the acceptance of Christ as the Way means that we are reborn and must mature in the same manner that we do in the flesh. This means that some things are too heavy or even dangerous for us to lift as a “child”, but that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t “eat our vegetables” and work hard so that one day we will be strong enough. That also doesn’t mean that we stand next to that dangerous thing and excuse our not leaving with the fact that we haven’t grown enough to remove it. That would make our Father mad and may even lead to a spanking! We must work diligently to grow as Christians and as we learn to do better and the transformative power of Christ allows us to resist temptation through submission to Christ (James 4:7) we will, but we must know that the

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Blood is not the power to resist, but only the entrance to knowing and realizing any meaning in resisting at all.

READ VERSE 7

While it is true that physical death means the end of sinful activity in this world, Paul is referring to the notion that once we become resurrected with Christ as this new being called a Christian, then our desire to be, say and do the worldly things that cause sin and are sinful should be superseded by our desire to please our Father. That's what it means to be resurrected WITH Christ; you take on His countenance, His Blood, and His dispositions. Resurrecting with Him in the simplest form means that we are to be emulations of Him and as He lived fully submitted to the Father so that the Father's will may be done through Christ, we are to grow more and more towards full submission to the Father such that we operate not to fulfill our fleshly will, but Gods (Spiritual). This is true death, which must occur more and more each day as we arrive closer to the perfection of Christ.

READ VERSES 8 – 9

Accepting this “death” as explained above also entitles us to freedom from condemnation, as we have literally received atonement for our second death before facing our first one and the Divine judgment that comes after. Meaning, that, after these physical bodies are taken back to the earth from which they came, we will be both free from the condemnation of sin and the death it equates to.

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READ VERSES 10 – 11

When Christ died, He died to pay the wage of sin over everyone who would accept Him and He lived in complete and total submission to God Almighty. In the same fashion when we accept Christ's death and blood we accept the payment for our sins in exchange for a resurrection, and we didn't exchange our banged up, barely working hooptie for a new luxury vehicle to continue the same reckless driving we've been doing. With a resurrected spirit should come a resurrected attitude on how we should live life. Doing anything different is spitting on the very gift we were given and rejecting the resurrection we all "want" so dearly.

READ VERSE 12

Therefore, the mind and desires that you used to have must be bound into a death-like submission (how many people escape the shackles of death?), such that though you may want to do the things from a fleshly perspective, your desire to please your Father lives that much more. That is what it means to no longer let death reign. Example, Jesus did NOT want to be crucified, and prayed and prayed and prayed in desire that the Father would atone for man perhaps some other way, but regardless of His own will, He valued the Father's desires over His own. In the same way, we must desire the Father's values over our own regardless of what they may be (i.e. sex [homo or hetero], debauchery, deceit, greed, pride, etc.).

READ VERSE 13

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Also, don't let any part of you be used to birth any form of unrighteousness into this world, for in that moment you are throwing off the mantle of Christ and assuming a role as a seed of Satan. There is no middle ground either you are doing what God wants, or you are doing what Satan wants (either directly or indirectly), for all Satan wants is for man to NOT do what God wants (rebellion).

Therefore, treat your new life as if you were supposed to have fatally died in a tragic accident and the coroner pronounced you dead and at the moment they brought you to the morgue you woke up screaming and gasping for air. I would imagine an experience like that would change one's outlook on life, and, children of the Most High have received an even more miraculous thing than that, yet we are brought back to the land of life everlasting and hop off the coroner's table, walk by all of the shocked faces and fainted bodies and go right back into the bar to destroy ourselves all over again, This should not be. As people who physically receive a second chance at life are drastically changed and see the world differently, we too, who have been given another chance, should be drastically changed and see the world differently.

READ VERSE 14

By accepting Christ's blood we have received everything that we need to be victorious over sin. Not just retrospectively, but absolutely, for now we have total access to the Character and Spirit of God. He can literally take up residence in us and the more we accept of Him the more of Him we can have, there is no limit to how much He will

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inhabit us, and the Word tells us, greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (1st John 4:4).

READ VERSES 15 – 16

But because we have received such grace that we would be pardoned from sin for the sake of a relationship with the Father, should we continue to sin, knowing that we will not pay the penalty? Not at all. For at the moment that the mind changes to no longer view salvation as the access point to personally know the mind and nature of God, but simply to as the pardoning token for our sinful activity in this world, we miss the mark, our hearts re-accept corruption and our minds begin the path to reprobation.

READ VERSE 17

Therefore, it is through a fully convicted and submitted heart that we find salvation. As stated before, the blood of Christ only offers reconciliation and the HOPE of salvation. Salvation is actually found through having the relationship with God that Christ's blood allows.

READ VERSE 18

Furthermore, starting and nurturing this relationship is the key to freedom from sin, as you will become so focused on pleasing your Father that there will literally be less and less of time to even devote to sinful desire let alone the sinful activity it births (James 1:13-15).

READ VERSE 19

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The beautiful thing is no matter how many times you bang your luxury car up into a hooptie again, Christ's blood is able to wash and make you new. All that's needed is true repentance, i.e. a turn from that old way and an earnest desire to begin a new path with God as the driver. Through giving way to the will of God more and more in our lives, we will see the cessation of iniquity and sin, and, furthermore, it is truly the only way to conquer it. To be clear, we can't conquer sin ourselves, this will lead to relapse. We must rather ignore fighting sin and devote ourselves wholly and totally to filling ourselves with as much God as possible in the 24 hours we have each day. Through this method, there will eventually, no longer be any room for that same sin in your life. However, stopping/starving the relationship with God in any aspect may be the entrance back into sinful nature, so we must be resolved that once we are free, we continue to do the things that led to freedom so as not to slip back into sin.

Freedom from sin is not about stopping this or quitting that; it is simply about starting a true relationship with God and committing yourself to it. Instead of focusing on keeping that hand from buying another pack of cigarettes, we are encouraged to focus on keeping our every moment filled with the thoughts that bring us into the throne room of God. Conclusively, success from this perspective is assured not through regulating action, but rather regulating thought that leads to action until the heart, from which thoughts spring, is changed by the hand of God.

READ VERSES 20 – 21

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It is written, you will know the tree by its fruit (Luke 6:39-45). When we commit sinful acts willingly without a repentant heart, we “show our cards” so to speak. We are human, yes. We will make mistakes and miss the mark sometimes, yes. But when we get to the point that we can know the difference between right (God’s will) and wrong (disobedience to God’s will) we are challenged to make the right choices, not because wrong choices will condemn us to hell’s fire, but rather because our commitment to consistently place God’s desire over our own or anyone else’s is a direct manifestation of our love for Him and His Lordship in our lives. At what point would you be willing to directly disobey the will of God? If you can define that moment you have also defined the boundaries at which Jesus is no longer Lord of your life. Our job as believers however, is not to despair for the inevitability of our flesh, but rather, live out our lives to find those boundaries and push them out towards infinite infallibility (God). This is the essence of repentance. As willing agents of the fallen, our sinful actions release our grips from the promise of salvation. As saved people with an honest heart to reach the heart, mind and essence of God without limit or condition, our sin ought indicate what we should be praying about, confessing and working to repent from through a more devoted walk in peak times when temptation comes, for sin is an excellent indicator of when and where we are restricting God from our lives.

Furthermore, we must be clear, that while the savor of sin is sweet to the lips at first taste, it quickly sours and leads to a world of pain and depravity. Ask any dope fiend who hasn’t had any drugs in a long while and is speaking from their right mind. Sin feels good, come to terms with

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that fact, but its fruit, no matter how good it initially tastes, will quite literally kill you.

READ VERSE 22

Thus, by the same context, when we submit to God with a humbled heart, we become His Sons and Daughters and can claim boldly the fruits of salvation and righteousness, which, from a worldly perspective don't taste all that sweet initially, but once it ripens, is the sweetest thing man could ever know.

READ VERSE 23

So, if you till the ground diligently around your fleshly tree and reap the fruits of the flesh, all of your sweat and effort to feel good for the moment will have effectively earned you death, much in the same way that working at a fast food restaurant for two weeks will effectively earn you a check. However, there is no amount of work we could do to earn our salvation. All that is required is the rejection of our labor around our flesh trees to commit ourselves to be in position to watch God grow in us a tree of life paid for by the blood of Christ. Think of your actions that stand out in your mind last week. If you were a tree and those actions were your fruit, would you be a righteous tree or an unrighteous one? Holy or unholy? Sweet or sour? Write a few out and analyze them. Let's challenge ourselves in this season to both look at our actions as the fruits of our souls and commit to creating the most Christ-compelling fruit possible in the situations God allows to unfold in our lives.

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Some things to think meditate on:

- What sin is living in your life right now? Have you confessed it to someone who is responsible to hold you to accountability and walk with you into victory?
- Are there any remnants of your old self that you haven't died to? What steps can you take to do so effectively?

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Her lips were as soft as kissing a silk pillow filled with rose petals, but something was wrong... This didn't feel right... I sat quietly trying to come to the conclusion in my head as to what was going on. The kiss was great, but... I don't know. I have to say it was the most aloof kiss I had ever had. In the middle of that moment I felt a very familiar uneasiness wash over me as a thousand questions flooded my mind. Wait, I know her and her husband are separated, but isn't she still married?! Am I aiding in wrecking a home right now? She walked away from the marriage; shouldn't I be encouraging her on submission and covering her home instead? She has kids, I don't know if I'm ready to be thrown into fatherhood mid-stride! There are too many open questions. I... I can't do this, especially if she's married. But she does seem to be a godly woman... What should I tell her? God? Are You there?... Silence.

Now to be fair, before we continued in a relationship I asked several times if she was still married to her husband or if she felt that God was leading her to reconcile with him. I had no intentions of being the obstacle of something God joined together, but I also had a genuine desire to be with a Godly woman, a commodity seeming to be in short supply those days. So, still filled with uneasiness at the whole construct of this relationship, I moved forward, telling myself, "she's divorced, there's nothing wrong with what I'm doing," and pushed the strange feeling I had to the back of my mind.

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The relationship was short and rocky, our characters rubbed abrasively together and it seemed that no matter my efforts, we could not meet on middle ground sometimes pushing me to the point that I wanted nothing to do with her. Mix that with the fact that it became clear that her relationship with her ex-husband was not as over as I thought it was and the resolve became clear. This could not continue. I neither had the desire to be the hurdle one had to clear to walk back into a productive and purposed marriage (even as I write this I can still feel lament for the damage I caused), nor the interest in being someone's side portion of a Godly man (sort of, I was working on it and getting better). So it ended as quickly and strangely as it began.

ROMANS 7

READ VERSE 1

As those who know the law of God (that is, His desires from us expressed by command or petition; also, take note that knowing the law and being bound to the law are two different things) we become brothers and sisters in the body, even if we become rebellious. And, as those who γινώσκω the law or, know it to the point of understanding (standing under) the law, our life equals union and submission to the natural and supernatural laws and consequences of God.

READ VERSES 2 – 4

Paul expounds on his statement by using an analogy of 3 things, a wife (us; humans), the law (the law of God which imputes sin), and a husband (what the law binds us to; sin and our sinful nature). As long as sin lives in us, that is, has dominion over our lives (i.e. our daily choices, motivations, and reasons for acting are found solely in selfish gain, physical pleasure, and/or anything in opposition to God's will or word for us) we will also be bound to the law of God which only offers death for our unrighteous marriage. Understand that, in this analogy, all three characters (the wife and 2 husbands) may reside in one being; the wife being the soul of an individual that can marry to either the flesh or the spirit and the 1st husband being the flesh/sin. When we choose to seek following God's law to earn our righteousness then, we are like the abused wife who has resolved that her violent husband really loves her and she can change him. Paul has also illustrated that we are essentially marrying ourselves to the flesh, making ourselves unavailable to seek a marriage to the Blood of Christ which is the only Way to the Holy Spirit and, ultimately the Father (God).

Likewise, if the flesh (husband) dies within us, we are freed from the law that binds us to it and the result of that marriage will make us available to enter into a new marriage, with Christ. For, while the flesh (husband) reigns as the head and director of our lives, we literally cannot marry into Christ except we be marked as an adulterer, and Christ is NOBODY'S "side-piece". So, the husband (flesh) MUST die (be removed from the head of our lives) before we are made available to marry Christ. The oxymoron in

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that situation is that the only way to truly kill the flesh is through the marriage of Christ. So where does that leave us? It is simple, Christ doesn't require us to have vanquished our flesh before He comes to take residence in our lives; He only requires that we be committed and willing to surrender to Him totally, and He will come in and do the vanquishing. Poetically speaking, the death certificate doesn't have to be in hand, but the signed divorce papers do.

This touches on a very important key. Those who are happily married to the flesh have no desire and do not see a need to marry into Christ. Thus, for those people, the absolute worst thing you could possibly do for their walk to Christ is force them into relationship before they are fed up with their first husband. For an individual to be ready to follow the Way of Christ, they must first have had their fill with the vanities of the flesh. Discerning this point is a fundamental element in becoming an excellent "fisher of man". Some people want to continue to figure it out themselves and, until they realize they can't, there's no point in trying to "save" them as, if they are saved in this state, He will only become useful to them when they feel they need Him if they even accept Him at all. For those people, we must be the example of Christ in the midst of their blind brokenness. But, when you find the broken person who is no longer blind to the reality of their situation; when you find that person who has tried it all and done it all and is tired of the feeling it gives and the disappointment that follows; when God brings you to that person who realizes that the world is fun but the emptiness they have from it outweighs their desire for more fun. It is only at that point that they are ready to truly begin that

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walk. This presents in a number of ways and people are really good at looking like it's all hanging together, but the truth will come out eventually if God has led you to that person for "fishing purposes".

So, through accepting Christ fully we are able to be reconciled with God and begin a whole new path and journey. We are freed to start a brand new relationship and marriage and, in the same way that the physical marriage requires time, effort, and growth, the working out of our salvation, faith and overall relationship with God requires time, effort and growth. He will always listen and respond to us, but we must choose to always listen and respond to Him.

READ VERSE 5

When we were married to our flesh, we did what our flesh wanted which caused us to experience certain effects of the law that presides over the flesh and the soul connected to it, the ultimate one being the spiritual death of our souls at the hour of judgment before the Almighty.

READ VERSE 6

So now, being dead to the flesh and married to the Spirit through Christ, we should do what the Spirit wants which will cause us to experience newness in the Spirit. That is, instead of being found "guilty" (the "oldness" of the letter) through our sinful actions according to the law, we shall be found "not guilty" (newness of the spirit) through the blood of Christ that stands between us and the law that was made to expose our condemnatory actions in

the flesh.

Note that, in the marriage analogy, Paul did not state that in this new marriage there was no law, only that the death of the first husband (flesh) legally enabled her to “marry” again (and enter into a *new* covenant, i.e. law). He shows that, by the death of her first husband, she was freed from the law that bound her to the flesh and its fruit (sin and death), and he expresses a new law (a new marriage) that binds her to her new husband, Christ. Therefore, the only difference in the marriages is this, the identity of the husband and the mediation that now stands between us and the old law that before condemned us, such that we are now counted as righteous. For Christ did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. (Matthew 5:17).

READ VERSE 7

Understanding this, we cannot say that the law is sin. Truthfully, the law is Holy (coming from God and *is* God i.e. the Word) and depending upon who we choose to marry (either the flesh or the Spirit) it imputes death or life. We could never have known the difference between the two in this world without understanding what the Judge between the two expects from us, which is why the law was sent. So that we might know two things:

1. How much God expects from something that is Holy
2. How dreadfully far we fall from that mark on our own

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READ VERSE 8

Furthermore, through knowing what was forbidden, man's lustful spirit was amplified and inflamed, growing concupiscence (strong lust) for that which was forbidden, much in the same way that children are drawn to do those things which are against the rules. Before that time of knowing right and wrong, our actions could only be dictated by necessity and want without any sense of moral foundation, making it impossible for us to know what was wrong. Or simply put, without rules to break, sin could not live.

READ VERSE 9

Again, before a law was given (before the law of God came to "Adam" in the garden, before the law of Moses, etc.), we were with God and indeed alive, but the moment we had opportunity to do wrong, iniquity was found within us, the we were immediately disconnected from the Spirit within us (ultimately, the reason for spiritual death), and our souls, the bed of our choices and faced condemnation.

READ VERSE 10

The commandment (the law), being Holy, diagrams the path to life for man to follow (which is impossible to do in that it requires a perfect walk at least from the age of accountability until physical death). Because we are all imperfect and sinful by nature, that diagram inversely showed us that we are not qualified to experience Spiritual life (I believe this is a key difference between man and the

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angels. God qualified them to experience Spiritual life in and of themselves, which is why they have no known route for repentance and restoring a right relationship with God. God did not qualify us to experience Spiritual life in and of ourselves, which is why we have a Way to reach Him in spite of the fact that we fail Him and disobey.)

READ VERSE 11

By the law, the sin that we commit categorizes us as unrighteous and worthy of death.

READ VERSE 12

The law, again, is Holy breathed from the very mouth of God (it is the Word of God).

READ VERSE 13

Therefore it is not the Holy law's fault that we face death. In other words, we do not face death because of the law, we face death because of our sin (disobedience to God's command over our lives) and through knowing the law, we also know what this disobedience is and have no excuse when we choose it.

READ VERSE 14

The law is a wholly spiritual creation from God, and man is a carnal and spiritual one, the moment we enter into the flesh suit we are sold and bound under sin.

READ VERSE 15

This speaks volumes on the warring between the Spirit's desire to obey God for the sake of holiness in us and the flesh's desire to do disobey its "self" for the sake of carnal pleasure. This war does not occur in the same fashion in someone who is reprobate and has concluded that sin is "ok".

READ VERSE 16

If we do something, anything at all, the logical notion is that we did it for good reason. i.e. no one with a right mind would chop off their hand if there wasn't good reason for it. Neither would anyone rob a bank unless they are convinced that there is some good reason for it. Yet being convinced that something is good and something *actually* being good are two different things and is the core basis of how Satan beguiled Eve in the garden. The law is the standard that shows us what is good, therefore, it is good.

READ VERSE 17

So, when we become convinced that a thing which has been declared wrong by God is right (believe a lie), it is no longer the full man/woman that condones the act, but the flesh (sin) within him/her that deceives him/her to act and brings judgment upon the whole being (Spirit, soul and flesh). Yet, when we are born again, our identity is found in the Spirit through Christ so that we are no longer beings of the flesh (found guilty), but of the Spirit (found not guilty).

READ VERSE 18

The flesh and everything of the flesh leads to sin, that is, disobeying the will of God for your own, in any given moment. For the Spirit, which desires to obey the will of God (for it is God in man) is present, but doing those things of the Spirit is not a consistent thing with man because we are not perfect, we were given the ability to make choices and our tendency to sin many times outweighs our tendency to obey God.

READ VERSE 19

In the war between the flesh and the Spirit (which only exists in the children of God who have been born of both the Spirit and flesh, i.e. born again), our souls desire to manifest the will of God, but our bodies often end up doing the works of the flesh.

READ VERSE 20

Read the revelation from Verse 17 again. This is important:

When we become convinced that a thing which has been declared wrong by God is right (believe a lie), it is no longer the full man/woman that condones the act, but the flesh (sin) within him/her that deceives him/her to act and brings judgment upon the whole being (Spirit, soul and flesh). Yet, when we are born again, our identity is found in the Spirit through Christ so that we are no longer beings of the flesh (found guilty), but of the Spirit (found not guilty).

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READ VERSE 21

So, as we are transformed from fleshly creatures to Spiritual creatures presently trapped in a fleshly vessel, we find that our desires of holiness (Spirit) will always be ever present in tandem with desires of evil (flesh) in this realm. For while we are born again of the Spirit, we are still inside of an earthen vessel that has the same tendencies it has always had.

READ VERSES 22 – 23

The reborn us (soul married to the Spirit through Christ) delights after the things of God, but the elements to make the old us (the “ex-husband” of the previous marriage of our soul to our flesh) is still in the same man and can cause us to relapse into the tendencies of the old life.

READ VERSE 24

It is a lamentable thing to know the newness of life with Christ yet not be able to immediately depart from the carnality that caused your separation in the first place.

READ VERSE 25

The mind is an integral part of the soul, and Paul is not saying that he still carelessly does the same things he’s always been doing, but rather that he is completely “souled out” to Christ and married to the Spirit, yet the desires and lusts of the flesh are still just as present with him as before (though he now fights against them).

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Some things to think meditate on:

- What things do you struggle with and how are you warring? Within yourself? In the comradery of a fellowship? Are you clinging steadfastly to self-help books and drug-releasing patches? It is a given that until the day we leave this earth, we will struggle with some part of our carnality, the manner in which we do it is the deciding factor as to whether or not we will achieve victory. How often do you pray about your struggles? Do you listen and look for God's response after? When He challenges you to action, do you do it? Fight the good fight this season, let us be alert as to the things God is showing us and the steps placed in front of us by the Deliverer of our souls from the body of this death.
- Have you signed the divorce papers on your marriage to the flesh and the law? Are you eagerly awaiting/accepting the marriage to Christ? Or are you hoping that He will marry you and endorse "weekend visitations" from your old lover?

EXTREME EXCERPT

The following is an excerpt from my second letter back to my home church fellowship and other supporters during my first missionary music tour:

I pray God has smiled favorably upon you since I last reached out. It feels like only yesterday I sent the first letter. More and more each day, I begin to see this season of ministry that God has called me to as mission work, both domestic and abroad, with the “valley of dry bones” scenario ever in my remembrance as the Almighty carries me on this journey. Even more profound, my idea of where the valley is has expanded. My original sentiment was that the valley was always and forever “out there” beyond the walls of my church, beyond the walls of my community, beyond the walls of my own salvation. Yet, in these past few days especially, I have come to see a valley of dry bones in every group that I see, even if only for a season. I have come to learn that brokenness and the feeling of being weary to the point of desolation and dryness is a part of the cycle of weeping that must endure for a night, and that with every refreshing of the Spirit in our communities, within our group, or even within ourselves, there is a growth that occurs; the well gets dug a little deeper; the corner stone gets set a little more firmly in place. That being said, our enemy has not relented in his attempts, though he has not gained any substantial success. However, my concern is that he may have affected the hearts and minds of our immediate leadership in this journey. Please pray that they move in the Spirit of the Most High and not in the rituals of form and practice. For many obstacles have been presented

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and through confession it is known that their firm grip on protocol and the overall burden that they carry has sometimes bred a mindset of simply “making it” from city to city, town to town and show to show in an attempt to vainly see the end of the journey, forgetting the Divine purpose therein. My attempts to share my view on this have been met with defense and pride, so I ask also that you pray that, if I am to speak again, that God give me the words to say that will encourage our leadership towards what the will of God is and the strength to be found in His truths, and that they be received without a sense of condemnation coming from me...

...Please keep us and the rest of the body in prayer, the opposition that pushes against us is strong, but our God is stronger. Even on the way here (Omaha, Nebraska and Council Bluffs, Iowa) I and my brother in Christ, Kiesh, were led to stop and aid a hitchhiking brother named Jeff. We told him of our mission work and the show going on the next day in Council Bluffs and, in the conversation, this man shared something deeply profound and insightful that both Kiesh and I acknowledged. He said that, “At the name of Jesus, demons have to flee.” While the foundational truths that inspired that statement in and of themselves were profound and insightful, the implications of that statement as it pertained to our current mission were unreal. I imagined it as our walks with Christ being equal to encountering different groups of people who cannot swim, yet are all chained to boats (demonic forces in high places) soon to set out to sea. If I run up and start right off with the “my faith” and the “Jesus” speech, the demon (boat) will take off and that person with it. I believe we as people often experience this manifestation as various verbal hostilities

towards God and “church”. Instead, Kiesh and I, discussed later, if we rather show them the chains of Christ (that is, unconditional Love “boat”) they will gravitate and cling to it, for Love not only endures all and bears all, it covers a multitude of sins. In essence, the absence of God’s love is the condemning void that each person chained to the “death” boat was seeking to fill, and, when they experience it, I have noticed they naturally cling to and grab a hold of the Love “boat”. At that critical moment God usually presents the opportunity to share why we have that Love, and, at the knowing of the presence of the true Christ, demons get real uneasy to the point that they would rather not be around. And, as the “death” boat begins to take off, the person, who presently chained, would easily be dragged away by the force of the boat’s powerful engine, now has a tremendous choice to make, and God comes down in that precious moment with bolt cutters to either free them from the shackles of dark and carnal bondage or free them from His eternal love once again and sorrowfully watch them be dragged out into the emptiness of vanity and self-deprecation.

ROMANS 8

READ VERSE 1

Thankfully, God knew imperfection and sin would still be an occurrence after His redemptive act of sending His Son and knew to send Him to pay for ALL sins of those who are in Christ, past, present and future. Therefore, for those who are truly in Christ, there is no condemnation waiting for them, for every “slip up”, every mistake, every

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sin committed by their flesh is no longer counted against them.

READ VERSE 2

This offers insight into what Jesus meant when He came to fulfill the law. Knowing that the law, which is holy and exposes sin, equates to death for all mankind who are bound to it as the vessel that justifies them, and, also knowing God's desire that we might be known as His children (also spoken from the same mouth of the One who sent the law) and counted as holy as one who followed the law without ever erring, Jesus shed His blood, fulfilling the requirement for innocent blood to atone for sin and literally making it legally impossible for us (those who are truly in Christ) to be judged as guilty of sin and deserving spiritual death.

(Note that spiritual death is not death of the Spirit which God sent to and resurrects in every man that believes on Christ, but our soul, which is the part of us that will stand trial on the Day of Judgment [Matthew 10:28])

READ VERSE 3

Paul is not saying here that the law God sent was a weak creation, but that, when put up against the desires of the flesh, the heart of man consistently chose sin (the flesh) though the law, which diagrams the path to perpetual and uninhibited obedience to God (i.e. righteousness and holiness), was literally right in their faces. So, through illustrating that, when given two options, man would eventually pawn an everlasting relationship with God in the

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age to come for finite gratification in the present age, he shows that God simply giving us the law to follow was not strong enough to compel man away from his naturally sinful nature. He also gracefully illustrates that the ONLY way to be found as holy is to be covered by and infused with holiness, which is what Jesus did for every believer on the cross and the reason why He is the ONLY true and realistic path to an everlasting relationship with the Father.

READ VERSE 4

Now, being covered by the Blood, we are forgiven of our sins, given a new being through resurrection with Christ Jesus in the Spirit, and can fully demonstrate to the letter the principles inside of the law God sent from the moment that we are born again. We are literally reborn in the Spirit, the part of us that became inaccessible when Adam sinned, and we are characterized by that “us” and not the “us” of the flesh that, though still exists, is on its way toward death. It’s like we have two boats floating within us. One, the flesh, is headed towards a terrible waterfall with jagged rocks below and the other, the Spirit, headed towards perpetually peaceful shores, but inaccessible until the key to the boat (reconciliation through Christ) was given. We then as believers have made the commitment to place our souls in the boat headed to safety and life (that act is salvation to the soul) and depart from the boat headed to destruction. Thankfully, because of Christ, that “flesh” boat will be an empty ship when it faces the un-scalable cliff of death and will not have our souls attached to it!

READ VERSE 5

Those who never are reborn in the Spirit are essentially required by default to mind the things of the flesh because there is no alternative for the soul to choose from. This does not mean that unsaved people are incapable of doing what man would call “good”. However, God is not interested in us being “good” from our perspective, but instead asks for obedience to Him (the essence of true good, which may or may not line up with our ideas of “good”). The purpose of a law is simply to define the parameters of obedience and disobedience given by an established authority. From the divine perspective, obedience to God is both general and specific which allows for each man to have both a specific, guided destiny and a foundation which serves as a code of conduct while carrying out specific divine assignments. Though this ultimately means that God would require different things from different people in some circumstances, in all cases it requires the ability to hear God, the ability to discern His voice from the other voices vying for your “ear-space”, and an obedient response to Him. Therefore, being a Christian and finding salvation has nothing to do with being/doing good from the human perspective, but everything to do with being obedient to God’s commandments, both general and specific. That should be the paramount motivation for all those who walk according to the Spirit for it is the chiefest and most perceivable evidence for the lordship of Christ in the life of the believer.

READ VERSE 6

A mind (a critical part of the soul) tied to the flesh means either the individual was never born again in the Spirit or he/she has utterly rejected the reborn Spirit within them (this is a crucial step in blasphemy of the Holy Spirit). Note that sin for those in Christ is not rejection of the Spirit, but a consequence of being a human. The more time spent as a child of God, the less sin may occur (being mindful that it will never fully leave us in this world). Rejection of the Holy Spirit is not simply sinning after being saved or thinking sinful things, but rather is a more complex matter that involves a cognitive choice and rejection of the Spirit reborn in the individual and the purposes He wills and a “remarriage” or covenant with the flesh to knowingly re-establish self or something/someone else as god in his/her life.

A mind tied to the Holy Spirit then equates to life and peace.

READ VERSES 7 – 8

A carnal mind (a soul tied to the flesh) is literally in absolute opposition to God. Because when He revives the Holy Spirit in an individual, that Spirit IS God and stands 180 degrees from the position of the flesh. So a man or woman who chooses to be completely committed to the things of this world and satisfy the flesh stands in absolute opposition to God and His will over his or her lives and furthermore can in NO WAY please or be obedient to God, for the purpose of His commandments to humans are unity with Him, which an individual would be rejecting if they

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remain tied to the flesh.

READ VERSE 9

If the Holy Spirit is revived in you then chances are that you are in the Spirit, yet if you have not been reborn, then you have no access to spiritual life because you literally are still spiritually dead (i.e. you do not have a connection to/relationship with the Holy Spirit).

(Note that you CAN, however, establish a soul connection with other spirits who can *seem* holy, but are/can be extremely deceptive.)

READ VERSE 10

It's like a ship with an escape pod. If you are in Christ, then you are no longer in the ship, but in the escape pod, even if that temporarily means that you are still on the ship. From the construction of the ship you knew that the ship was on a "suicide mission" and would eventually be destroyed, and, when the time for destruction comes, you will remain alive because you were no longer in the ship, but in the escape pod. Sure you might feel a little more "constrained" and regulated in the pod, while the pod is still aboard the ship, especially when you see all the "free" people who don't have access to or even realize there's an escape pod just for them. But in truth, they are trapped, they just don't know it, for while you chew on your MREs and they sip fine wine in the dining hall, that ship is, at any given moment, one missile away from being sunk and when it goes down, you will remain free and everyone who hasn't committed themselves to being in their escape pod will go down with the ship.

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READ VERSE 11

In the same sense that a tree bears fruit your soul being tied to the Holy Spirit will produce the fruit of life both in and through your mortal body.

READ VERSES 12 – 13

For all of these things, chiefly for Christ giving us an escape pod that will allow us to escape the snares of spiritual death, we owe God more than we could ever pay and ought not reject such a precious gift to go and tie ourselves to a sinking ship. For through staying in the escape pod, you will find life.

READ VERSE 14

If your soul (mind [not the brain], volition and emotional complex) is tied to the Spirit, it will be in submission to Him and follow where He leads which will lead you into more than being a child of God, but into the realm of “sonship”/“daughtership” which is the entrance into a deeper personal relationship. A baby isn’t given commands but is carried around and provided for as best seemed to the parent, a son or daughter is loved enough to receive the ear of their Parent in any time, be it 12pm or 3am while an unrelated child does not have the same privy to relationship with the same Person if not their Parent (think of a child in a traditional teacher/student relationship vs. a child in a parent/son or daughter relationship).

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READ VERSE 15

We were not tied to the Almighty so that we would be scared senseless and apprehensive to approach Him, but the Holy Spirit adopts us into the hands and family of our Father that we may cry out to Him with a personal name, knowing that we know Him and He knows us.

READ VERSES 16 – 17

The Most High looks at the condition of our soul in relation to the Holy Spirit within us and the flesh and confirms that we are His. And if we are His sons and daughters, then we are also heirs to His inheritance (i.e. everything He has is also ours) and able to receive from Him in the same fashion of Christ Himself. However this will require that we live a life in similar fashion to Him, forsaking all to follow the Father, even if it means our own physical destruction.

READ VERSE 18

Yet, even if our conviction in Christ means our physical end, it is of no comparison by any stretch of the imagination to the glory of eternal life in/with the Father.

READ VERSES 19 – 20

All of creation that God placed subject to us as chosen stewards yearns for this moment, when mankind, in a unified and convicted way, throws off the shackles to the flesh and binds himself tightly to the Holy Spirit.

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READ VERSE 21

Because of mankind's corruption, we have literally affected everything in creation on this planet, causing it all to fall under the bondage of our sin because of our given dominion over it.

READ VERSE 22

And because those two things: man's corruption and the dominion God gave man over the entire created planet (in the physical sense), every plant, fish, animal suffers due to our covetousness, greed, malice, lust, deceitfulness and other fruits of the flesh (which is corrupted).

READ VERSES 23 – 24

And not just the non-human created things, but even we ourselves fall victim to the suffering created by the fruits of the flesh. Lustful desires cause disease to run rampant. War destroys homes and families from malice. Greed supersedes love for fellow man and teaches us to make decisions that benefit us rather than the whole of our community. Et cetera, et cetera... What makes it worse in our cases, is that we are the first receivers of the fruits of the Spirit (patience, long suffering, love, peace, compassion, mercy, joy, etc.), causing a stark dichotomy within humanity, the manifestations of the flesh which we may never escape in this present world, and its antithesis, what every man, woman, and created thing waits for earnestly, the manifestations of the Spirit, which we can only pray for in this world and hope with expectancy for in the next (except for the sons of the fallen one who would

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not exist in a world liberated from corruption).

READ VERSE 25

We are saved and made righteous by an intangible Force and though our hope of Heaven is sure, it and the One who promised it to us are still a ways off from being tangible. Plus, if we have a sure sight of what we hope for, then what we feel would not be hope at all. For faith, the substance of things hoped for, requires that thing to also be unseen. Therefore, from the biblical perspective, we can only hope for things that have not come into manifestation in the realm (physically and mentally). This should greatly change the way in which we apply faith, for that means that if God lets us see a thing/situation, then it quite literally is already ours to have/experience, and we then must believe that fact in a convicted manner (action/works, not born out of uncertain hope, but hope made certain, as if the thing hoped for has already been received), even if it has not yet manifested in the physical yet. Our measure of faith then is to be effectively applied to the yet unseen promises of God like healing, peace, homes in heaven, His existence, etc. All of these will require faith that they are and that they belong to us until God allows us to see them, then they will require the conviction and action born out of that conviction that what we have seen is ours and WILL manifest in due season so long as we continue to walk towards them.

READ VERSE 26

Therefore, it is impossible for mankind to initially have had the described faith except that God first give it to us through His promise as we wouldn't have any idea what

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to initially have faith in! This is the reason for the Holy Scriptures, not to put the entire explanation of who and what God is in a box/book, but to offer a point of entrance for faith, belief, conviction, adoption, and ultimately sonship/daughtership. That's why there's power in prayer through unknown tongue, as we in the physical cry out to God through the Spirit for those things that we know not to pray for. The audible sound is not needed (though there is power in speaking into this world), but neither is the lifting of hands to have a praise, both are physical manifestation of what is going on within.

READ VERSE 27

This act illustrates the unity of the Triune God as we see His working in us (the groanings of the Holy Spirit), for us (the intercession made by Christ and His Blood), and over us (orchestrating His Perfect will as Father).

READ VERSES 28 – 29

So, with this perfect unity working in, for and over us at all times, we who have a reconciliation and relationship with the Holy Spirit, are immediately put in an environment where everything we go through works towards the divine purpose God authored in us since before the foundation of the world, which is ultimately for our good.

READ VERSE 30

This destiny we were given before man was created and our acceptance to its call comes with justification from

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the Almighty which allows us to be glorified as His Son was glorified.

READ VERSE 31

So, if the Creator of all is in us, for us and over us, who/what possibly can triumph against us? For an enemy to us at that point does not fight us, but rather the Almighty Himself who is in us, for us and over us.

READ VERSE 32

He (being the highest divine being) gave up the most precious thing man could ever conceive, Himself through His ONLY begotten Son simply to offer us the hope of salvation, so it becomes inconceivable that a God that loves us *THAT* much and already gave us the most expensive gift imaginable would not also freely give us anything else.

READ VERSE 33

Furthermore, because He, who is also the Judge of all AND Supreme over all, paid the unbelievably expensive price knowing that it was sufficient to atone for the sin of every man, woman and child, there is no lesser being that brings an accusation or evidence unto the account of God's elect that can outweigh His act of justification.

READ VERSE 34

Jesus Christ, the Holy Son of the Most High and God made flesh to dwell among man on earth, is the One

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who died and lives again for the salvation of man, what being in creation, known and unknown to man, has the power to overrule the action of the Divine? It is Christ alone that either condemns those who rejected Him or makes intercession for His own who received Him.

READ VERSE 35

Because Christ Himself is the one who says He will love us and did not base that love off of anything that we must do, there is no one who can cause that connection that He establishes and maintains by His Blood to break. No sin, no human, no power, principality or even the highest order of fallen angels, none of that has the power to undo what God did through Christ. Even when we go through the most disparaging of times, man must be mindful that unpleasantness in our current physical lives does not equate to God not loving us, we must understand that our current situations, pain and pleasure, do not equate to how much or little God loves us, because He values this life as nothing in comparison to the next one, and He only wants us to choose Him in this world so that we may live with Him in the next (that is the true meaning of life: find God for yourself and choose Him over all other pleasantries and joys; choose Him when in the most destitute of situations; in the middle of hurt, pleasure, and all in between, our task in this life is to choose God.).

READ VERSE 36

Also, we must understand that our choice for a relationship with our Heavenly Father is one that will bring both separation from and, sometimes, unpleasant situations

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in this world which is exactly the opposite of what most people are looking for when they choose Jesus. We are persecuted for our beliefs, not praised for them. We are called all types of names, spat on and sometimes even killed, because we love Christ above all things.

READ VERSE 37

Yet, despite all of these terrible things that happen to us for the sake of our salvation, we are called more than conquerors, I believe for two reasons. One, because we triumph over every reason in this world to forsake Christ including the threat of physical death and two, because ultimately our salvation allows us to experience a reality (heaven) that this present world can't even emulate properly.

READ VERSES 38 – 39

There is NOTHING ever made or created by the breath of the Most High that has the power to overcome His Word and declaration. And because HE said “He loves us,” because HE said “He will never leave us nor forsake us,” because HE said that “NOTHING will pluck us from His hand,” there is nothing in existence that has the power to cause those things not to be. That means that true acceptance of Christ as our Lord and Savior begets holiness, righteousness and salvation, not because we earn these stripes, but because HE said, that if we accept Him as our Lord and Savior, these things will be counted unto us, by faith we are to receive that.

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Some things to meditate on:

- Self Examine: Are you SURE you are in the escape pod patiently waiting for the boats destruction? Or are you tip-toeing around the boat with your escape plan in mind and hope that at the time of the boats judgment, you'll be able to get to the pod quickly?

In other words, are you committed to denying your flesh the luxuries it desires in order to show your commitment to Christ or are there aspects of your life in which you value the carnal experience of living over the suffering and self-denial Christ called you to?

- What are those things that you like to do that keep you wanting to sneak out of the pod for the pleasures abundant on the currently floating boat?
- What steps can you take to sequentially break your connection to those habits and find comfort in the pod that lacks many of the pleasures of the doomed vessel? Write them down and create an action plan.

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- Are there any areas in your life where you have resolved to do your version of “good” instead of resolving to submit to the “good” God calls you to in His Word?
 - What areas of your life do you justify your actions with your intentions instead of justifying your actions with God's Word for you?

AN ARK WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS

Ever tried to push a mountain over? I dare you to try it next time you just so happen to find yourself in the middle of a mountain range. Make it easy on yourself and walk up to a relatively flat side of the craggy monster and push with all your might. Push until those tiny blood vessels in your forehead bulge and throb with the strain of futility. Push until your outer exertion makes your arms shake and your back ache and your legs strain, and when you've hurled enough profanities (or prayers) at the stubborn mammoth to soften its inert position... start to push all over again...

That's where I was in life. I felt abandoned by friends, family, and left to die pushing against a mountain that I could not and never initially hoped to move on my own. Why didn't the church want to move here? Didn't they see the fertile ground and hearts that could be healed through joint effort? Why aren't my family members, who have the means to substantially help, helping and sowing something into this fertile ground? Did they not see that I wasn't trying to rob from the "church building fund" or start my own cult? I wanted to cry. I wanted to give up. I wanted to douse the entire building in gasoline and burn the blessed mountain to the \$#?@*%! ground so, if only for a moment, I could feel the liberation of not having to strain and labor in and on this mission alone. I prayed to God, multiple times a day when it got really hard, to release me from such a desolate, lonely and discouraging position. All I got back in that season was silence. I felt the same tone rising up within me that made its tragic and regrettable

presence when I had had my fill of homelessness after Hurricane Katrina in college, “Why did you send me on this foolish mission!? Why am I the only one here that seems to give a care about this mission and the community enough to spend every dollar, every waking moment, every part of myself that I can willfully give to its improvement? If this fails and I have to go medical school after such a fruitless detour I’m leaving You, my family, and ALL of anyone that I currently know and knows that I’m in this position. I’m gonna be a rich a-hole, drive fancy cars and marry a wife only so I can go on extravagant vacations with as many mistresses that I can spread my seed to!” First, let me say thank God for His soft hand in spiritual guidance and growth and that He did not smite me for my immature tantrum or worse, allow such a lamentable reality to make its presence into this realm. Yet, needless to say, my explosion of emotion in the form of a spiritual temper tantrum was unmerited and not polite at all in respect to the Majesty that I was so disrespectfully addressing. I was mad and I had lost it. And I felt so alone and ignored by God that I wanted something, some response from Him even if it was a mortally damaging slap in the face.

I know, now, that my mission was not fruitless. That there was purpose authored in every footstep I took. I came to realize that I can’t make “it”, whatever “it” is, happen on my own. I can’t make “it” happen with me and a thousand well-wishing saints, unless the power and will of God is the fuel that burns within us. I pushed against that mountain with all my human might until God removed it from my ability to push on, even if “it” was a dream that He gave me and said would come to pass in the first place. After the mountain was thrown into the sea and I had licked my

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wounds and dried my tears (I was actually relieved when He took it) and gave my “I’m sorry for being a booty head” speech to God, He told me to look down at my arms and my legs. And I realized, in that moment, that my “fruitless” journey had made me stronger than I had ever known I could be.

ROMANS 9

READ VERSES 1 – 3

Paul’s love for man is only superseded by his love for Christ and he states that he would take on all the chains and burdens judged to befall his Israelite brethren that they may know and pursue Christ in the same capacity as he if he could. Expounding on exactly what that means and how it differs from taking on the burdens of any other peoples illustrates the great burden and beautiful gift associated with being divinely chosen. This is because the Divine does not imbue great power or knowledge for no cause but rather has shown specific purpose in the gifting of special selection and He expects fruit from this special relationship He established with His people such that all peoples of the world might come to know Him and follow Him as they do (or should).

READ VERSES 4 – 5

The Israelites were given adoption, a special relationship with the Father, before man was made worth adopting (for the purpose of showing God’s everlasting love to all through Christ who, in the parameters of the

flesh, came from them), and this adoption allowed them to experience many beautiful things in relationship to God.

READ VERSES 6 – 8

The promise of a world Savior came through Abraham who bore Isaac specifically and not Abram who bore Ishmael (Compare Genesis 15:4-6 and Genesis 17:3-8). This diagrams a very key element about the nature of God that we as humans tend to miss. God is Spirit and His promises transcend the boundaries of this physical world. Though Abram and Abraham were the same physical person the whole point of God renaming him was to illustrate that God had declared him to have a new identity and to make certain that His word and promise falls in the specific way that HE declared through HIS power and not what ABRAM declared through ABRAM's (and Hagar's; i.e. mankind) power. Not that Abram did not have a promise from God, but, upon comparing the promise God made to Abram and the promise that God made to Abraham we see the promise of a Messiah, the savior of the world was not even remotely mentioned to Abram, yet at least two Messianic overtones exist in God's promise to Abraham. When God therefore declares that you are new, though we still exist in the same physical body, we must understand that we are quite literally a brand new creature, someone that the world has never seen before, though still trapped in the old, broken container. A further look at the efforts between the two identities of this one man also further clarify the difference between a religious person, that is someone who relies on their own works to define their faith and a spiritual person, someone who's works are simply the physical manifestation of their faith. Abram,

being of old age, decided to lay with Hagar (who was able to bear children Genesis 16). He took the Word and promise of God and then decided (after persuasion) to bring it to pass through HIS OWN EFFORTS. This can never please God, for He did not equip us to bring the supernatural (Jesus) to pass but rather wants us to be faith-filled vessels as He brings the supernatural to pass through us. Abram did not get that, but rather became convinced that somehow the burden to fulfill the promise God gave rested in his own autonomous efforts. However, God does not search for those who hear and then move forward autonomously, for this does not indicate faith in the One who gave the word in the beginning. Example:

If a person tells another, "I am going to have you in a brand new house by the end of this year." Yet, the year progresses to November and it seems impossible for the word of the first person to come to pass unless something is done. So, the recipient of the word/promise goes out and buys lumber, mortar and brick and begins to construct a home because he figures that is the way the promise they didn't give should be fulfilled...

That doesn't make sense does it? I wouldn't go build a house because you said I will have a new house by the end of this year. If you, who gave me that promise however, were to ask me to go get lumber and mortar and brick at a specific time, that would be a different case. But God didn't tell Abram to lay with Hagar. The same principle applies if a person promises another a car, or a Person promises another a child in old age. The plausibility of the promise does not place anymore burden on the person who received the promise and, in truth, if the

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receiver takes action upon himself/herself to bring the promise to pass in any capacity by their own power or reasoning, they illustrate a lack of faith in the One who gave the promise and/or a selfish desire to simply have the end that the promise brings. I believe that this is why Abram had to be renamed and given a new identity and, though he got up and left his father's house to begin following God, though he gave up everything that was due him by birthright to seek a land he'd never seen, his action to "give" God Ishmael (without God asking for Ishmael, who He still blessed) could not be counted as the ultimate manifestation of righteousness that God credited him, for within those "faithful" actions lied his resolve to handle things in his own strength before seeking the face, heart and strength of God.

God searches for us who hear and move forward obediently, not autonomously. Ask yourself, "Am I taking logical steps in life or am I taking obedient steps?" Obedient steps aren't always logical, and logical steps aren't always obedient. It is for this reason that the ability to hear and perceive the heart of God and discern His will from our own or someone else's is paramount for the believer. For that is all He's ever desired from us, true and heartfelt obedience, not out of fear or resentment at the realization that He is terrible and great and "un-usurpable", but rather out of a reflection of the everlasting love He first showed us by giving us life and an opportunity to know Him. What does that mean, then? Well, that means both then and now that the promise of being a part of Israel, God's chosen people who will reign with Him forever, has nothing to do with one's actual blood tie but rather everything to do with the declaration of God and our

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response to it. Are you having trouble hearing God? I want to challenge you to increase the time you spend alone with Him. Find a quiet place where you cannot be found and give you and God at least half an hour each day together. If you can't hear, give Him more, in season He will speak, and if you are earnestly seeking in that season, you will find and hear Him.

Remember Rehab, the distant grandparent in the physical lineage of Jesus? She was not blood related to Abraham or Isaac. Yet this out-casted prostitute who lived in the walls of a pagan city could be found in the lineage of not just Israel, but Israel's King and Messiah. Also, keep in mind that mere blood relationship was not sufficient to cause God's promise to be an Israelite upon a people as the tribe of Dan, the blood descendants of Isaac, removed themselves from the lineage (Compare Exodus 1:1-5 with Revelation 7:4-8). Notwithstanding that there is power in the blood tie to Abram/Abraham, a look at the descendants of Ishmael and God's promise to them will clearly illustrate that.

READ VERSES 9 – 13

The blessing and promise of Abraham is contingent upon God's Divine will. It was God's perfect will that only one of the children born of Rebecca should receive the full promise of the covenant that He established with Abraham (for Esau and his descendants still became very numerous and blessed, yet they were not considered Israelites by blood and are even declared to be hated of God for the actions and heart of the people). Because God can see the end before the beginning, and because He is both the

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Author and the Orchestrator of our faith, we must know to trust His proclamations and judgments, even when they do not seem fair, for He alone knows the hours and seasons that must come for His glory to be revealed to all man according to His divine plan. Not that God had hate in his heart toward anyone, but He knew what would be done to cause salvation to come to all manner of men, even those of Esau and his descendants that came to trust in the Lord, which meant that, at the appointed time, Esau was to be cut off from his brother, birth-right, and Heavenly Father.

READ VERSE 14

For this reason, we cannot look at life circumstances and judge that because an unpleasant occurrence transpired, or the innocent were killed at a young age, or that evil people are allowed to rule the just, that God is a point of unrighteousness, for He causes everything to happen for good and, since it is only possible that His perfect and ultimate good occurs in tandem with the sinful nature of man, He does it. The only other ways to complete His purpose would include the total annihilation of imperfect entities that also have free will (us), to remove our abilities to freely choose (which would make “us” not “us”) or make us perfect as He is perfect (which He does through Christ). The fact of the matter is simply this, man, who through choice, ushered sin into the world and bound himself to it, disrupted the opportunity to live in a perfect and sinless world, yet did not change God’s divine, complete will as He already knew that these things would occur. Therefore, He, knowing exactly what **MUST** and **WILL** happen should not be questioned in His choices, for humans must learn to both trust Him in the midst of the seemingly drastic

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situations that He sometimes authors and accept that we are powerless to change any part of it. Rather, we are created to be changed by these situations for the good of our relationship with God. That is the only reason God allows anything to happen, that He may be glorified. So, Esau not being the carrier of the lineage of the Messiah was not done to show a hatred to Esau, but rather to show the sovereignty of God in any and every situation such that Esau and his descendants (along with all of humanity) now have an opportunity at life everlasting.

READ VERSES 15 – 16

The same principle applies to the opposite side of salvation. Doing all the right things, even if were possible, still would not be enough to earn the holiness of God, as He is the Ruler of all, not man. Therefore, we must play by His rules. The bottom line is this; humans can't earn our way to heaven; we can't force God's hand in any way and *require* Him to do anything but keep His word that He willingly gave us. So, if we want God's mercy, the burden is on us neither to walk right nor to run long, but first to choose to be chosen which will beget the other two. From this perspective, we must understand purpose in God's actions that sometimes do not seem fair. As a hard-working Christian may lose his job and be forced into destitution and the evil boss over him may be promoted higher into even more luxurious living, be reminded that God brings rain on the just and the unjust for the ultimate purpose of bringing the opportunity of salvation to everyone. Would you accept homelessness for a season if it meant that a sinner at your workplace would eventually come to Jesus? For it has been shown biblically and contemporarily that

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God will cause calamity to befall someone for the purpose of gaining a soul. And, why not? Do you count the comfort or lack thereof in this world to be any value in comparison to the indescribable glory that everlasting communion with the Almighty is? Are we so selfish as “Christians” that we would not allow a bit of pain in our lives so that one soul might be saved, when the Pinnacle of our faith, Jesus Christ, DIED for us? He didn’t just lose his job. He didn’t just have a few bad days. He didn’t just get ridiculed and reprimanded. He didn’t just get in a terrible car wreck and lose both of His legs. HE DIED, only so we could have a *hope* at life. Then, He asked us to be willing to do the same. That’s easy in word, but are you willing to perform that feat?

READ VERSE 17

People must understand that just because all of God’s activity was not described by the Bible, it does not mean that He was less present in the lives of non-Israelite people. Rather, lesser known historical research, wisdom and rational deduction strongly suggests that even when God was busy at work preparing the Way for Israel, He was just as busy in the lives and heart’s and minds of non-Israelites with whom they would interact with, directly and/or indirectly. This had to be so at least in the most minimalistic of imaginations to allow the people that the Israelites contact to be in their proper positions and primed to respond in the way God ordained (i.e. Pharaoh). Yet, even more deeply, there may also be evidence of peoples who worshipped God as the Israelites did and yet were not Israelites (Noah and his children, the Ishmaelites, the Edomites before their apostasy, etc.). Whatever the case

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truly is, we must expand our picture of what God's activity in our world truly is. He is ever present in the lives of every individual, believer or not, therefore, our adoption into "sonship"/"daughtership" cannot be predicated solely on His activity in our lives. It is our response and heart condition to His activity; it is our invitation of Him into our lives as Master (though He is already present); it is our love for Him that causes us to be considered "chosen". Again, God is present and active in every person's life whether they believe in Him or not, for everything created and made lives and moves and has its being in Him, bringing to remembrance Psalms 139, the fact that no matter where you go you cannot escape the hand and might of God.

READ VERSE 18

Because God is so omnipresent and has the road to the completion of His divine will mapped out before Him, He guides history and makes choices that man can only call "God-like" because He is God.

READ VERSE 19

Because of this the argument may be raised, since God is the guide and director of history, since God is the one who both hardens hearts and opens eyes, why does He find fault in those who have hard hearts? The answer lies in the condition of the heart, for God does not sway a man against man's own will. Even though God orchestrates, He does so within the construct He has created, which, for us, is a world in which man can exercise free will. So, that which God hardens already has the "concrete mix" inside of it. So, it is not God who makes man make the decision,

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but after searching man's heart, God sees either "concrete mix" or a "Jell-O mix" and knows what man's intentions, desires, and suppositions are/will be, and, because God can see that moment before the birth of each individual, God knows exactly where and how to place every human being at every moment within the dimension of time.

Furthermore, the fault does not lie simply in the action of man, but rather man's disobedience to God's will (which happens waaaaay before the action manifests in the physical realm James 1:13-15). It is the lusts and desires in our hearts that bring forth evil and crafts the fate of where we will be positioned in the propagation of history. Are we listening for the voice of the Father and searching after His steps, or are we listening to the "concrete mix" in our hearts and doing what seems best to us or our earthly advisors? Either way, God will get the glory and use each free-thinking and free-willing individual to accomplish His will. The question is, are you the rebellious child getting a whoopin' on aisle 6 or the obedient one holding the basket as instructed on aisle 7? In seeing this way, we are able to reveal the mystery behind the purpose of God giving us freewill; it is only so that we may choose to willingly surrender it for His.

READ VERSE 20

Yet, even if God did harden man's heart toward things that is against man's own will (this is being posited from the purely hypothetical stance as that act would be considered sinful in the eyes of God, as He would disobey His own Word [i.e. lie] in regards to free will), we as humans have no place to question our Creator. On what

authority do we stand? What reasoning can we bring to Him that we haven't received through Him? And even if we could show God fault, what could we possibly do to Him? Man tends to forget that God is just that, and our little feelings and emotions and judgments are ultimately meaningless packets of energy hurled at the feet of the divine usually when we don't get our way or when we cannot explain an experience. We are the created; it is not our place to dictate/impose our imaginations on our Creator.

READ VERSES 21 – 23

What if God, who purposed to make His wrath known to man in specific ways, formed certain ones for wrath and endured them and the choices He knew they would freely make until the appointed time? What if God, to make known the riches of His glory, made vessels appointed for mercy and glory at appointed times? What if they were one in the same and at some times we see God's wrath laid on one who will later receive mercy? What if they are separate and we see God's wrath utterly destroy and His mercy utterly reconcile? In all these examples, we see the multi-faceted dynamic of life and must realize that we are on the bottom looking up and can neither judge the God that made us nor the creations he has caused to dwell among us. It is for us to figure out *our* purpose in *His* creation, corporately and specifically, and live to please our Creator by serving our purpose well.

READ VERSES 24 – 25

So, the great dynamic of life as it was then and even as it is now was all purposed by God. Not forcefully, but rather in a calculated and controlled fashion as one who is playing chess against himself and is thinking ten moves ahead on both sides (Selah). God is in complete control, but inside of that complete control, God has given us the ability to choose which side of the fence we will reside on, yet, because He knows those choices before the foundation of the earth was laid, this doesn't pull from His absolute sovereignty.

Because of that, we can currently see that His plan was not to have an isolated, saved people within a lost world, but to call the entire world to His side initially using an isolated, saved people to show that we never deserved to be on His side by our own choices and actions. Those who reject Him walk the path to receiving hardened hearts that will keep them in a state of rejection towards God unless the Almighty Himself soften their hearts again, and those who answer to His call are choosing to be among His "chosen". I believe when we sacrifice our own "plans" and "ideas" (Romans 12:1-2) at the feet of God and accept the destiny God mapped out for us (Mark 8:34), we become chosen, essentially choosing to be a chosen one. God puts the choice in our hands. This does not however, mean that God does not already know what we will choose. However, someone being able to see the future does not equate to someone forcing the present into their own pre-fabricated future.

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READ VERSE 26

Now, the same people who commit the same actions and have the same sinful state of being, have the opportunity to be called a child of God, be covered by the Blood of Christ and receive grace and mercy.

READ VERSE 27

There are a lot of people claiming to be the sons and daughters of God, but when the trial comes and judgment is pronounced, only a small percent will be able to stand with life.

READ VERSE 28

Here there is a difference drawn between finishing the work (giving every human on the planet an opportunity to know God) and cutting it short IN RIGHTEOUSNESS (judgment that will separate the fakers from the true sons and daughters of His Holiness).

READ VERSE 29

God's people will face the same judgment as those who are not God's people, yet those who truly are the sons and daughters of God will live. All others, even those who claimed God as their Father yet lived lives that spoke the contrary, will face destruction, and it is only by the mercy of God (Jesus Christ) that a distinction will be able to be made, for every one of us, Christian and sinner, would be found guilty without the atoning blood of Christ in the eyes of our Perfect Creator.

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READ VERSES 30 – 32

The Gentiles, who did not receive the law of the Most High, have the opportunity to righteousness and have attained it (those who live by faith) whereas the Israelites did receive the law of God and could not previously attain righteousness for themselves for they were tripped up by a very important stumbling block. They regarded the law that was a tool to bring them closer to believing in the totality of who God is, as more sacred than simply believing God and responding to His Word. That is righteousness by faith, not by adhering to technicalities.

READ VERSE 33

If you have accepted Christ as your Lord AND Savior then the law cannot trip you up, for you no longer live for the sake of the law but for the sake of God who gives grace beyond sin and mercy beyond merit.

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Some things to meditate on:

- Are there any instances in your life where you are asking God to bless your Ishmael effort instead of committing to faith in Him for your Isaac? What are they and what is the foundational impediment of operating in faith?
 - Are there any areas in your life where you are actively trying to have God accept your Ishmael efforts over the long-suffering and lack of control in Isaac faith?
- When was the last time you operated in Ishmael effort in response to God's promise of an Isaac? What were the primary motivators for it and are those motivators still active in your life now?
- Are we listening for the voice of the Father and searching after His steps, or are we listening to the “concrete mix” in our hearts and doing what seems best to us or our earthly advisors?
- What do your choices say about your faith? Are you choosing to be chosen or are you fighting to establish your version of what you believe righteousness ought to establish in this life?

NO FOOD OR DRINKS IN THE SANCTUARY

I spotted him as soon as the door creaked open. Cup of coffee or some other brown liquid in his hand, he stealthily sat on the back row in the pew space closest to the door he'd just come from and away from nearly everyone else, who, at this point, had their eyes fixed on him. My soul was both indescribably ecstatic and desperately frantic at the same time for I knew who he was and simultaneously I knew where I was. Despite my current emotional conflict, I could not deny that right there, right in front of my eyes, was an answered prayer. One of the area drunks that attended our recent college ministry outreach was sitting and listening intently to the words coming through our pastor's mouth. We had prayed for him and others that came to that barbecue outreach, and, praise be to the Most High, somehow he managed to stumble in right at the "meat and potatoes" of our service, the sermon. But all was not well in the midst of such a beautiful picture. As my soul praised the Lord and prayed that something said would resonate with that man's spirit to the point that he both saw a need and grew the concupiscence to surrender his life to the Lordship of Christ, my eyes saw them coming. Shuffling, as best they could despite their age and the occasional human obstacle, were two "deacons" moving in the direction of the soul that hung in the balance. I almost cried out from my current position in the choir stand as they escorted him out of the sanctuary and out of earshot of the manna that God was freely giving in that place. I couldn't hear what was being said, but one of the deacons pointing above the door added weight to confirming my suspicions, above those doors was a sign in all caps that

read, “NO FOOD OR DRINKS IN THE SANCTUARY”

Now, before you start shaking your head and throwing your spiritual stones, let me be the first to say, I got it. These old people spent a good portion of their lives praying and dreaming about a bigger, newer sanctuary, and now, about a million dollars worth of a bank loan later and a nearly \$2,000 per month mortgage, they had, with their own hands and fortitude, achieved their own design of the vision that God may have indeed given them so long ago. This was a homeless man with a messy hot dog and all the fixin’s asking to get a ride to church as you sat in your brand new Lamborghini. It is a hard pill to swallow standing alone, but was nothing compared to possibly having to swallow the pill of a priceless soul burning in hell for all eternity because you didn’t want coffee on your pew. Now, I’m not going to talk about the fact that there wasn’t enough people in attendance to fill the relatively nice yet much smaller and older sanctuary they originally had or any of the other signs that building this new “church” was a human step taken with the hope for God to join in rather than a God step being made manifest through the steps of unified a body. Neither is it for me to say, for that building may very well have been in the will of God. My current plight was nestled solely in trying to decipher this biblical oxymoron. How do you as a people of God disallow ANYONE to be in the presence of a word that may lead to life change? Add that to the fact that the stupid “no food or drinks” rule isn’t even biblical and you begin to see the grounds for the livid state I was quickly feeling bubble over into an emotional situation I couldn’t control (I am VERY good at controlling my emotions, but when it comes to matters of salvation for the unsaved I can get VERY passionate). Their stupid rule posted up to keep their fancy

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new pews clean just caused a broken soul to miss out on the moment that may have forever changed his life. I see him walking every now and then and can't help but wonder, where would he be if they would have encouraged him towards Christ instead of pushed him towards conformity to their religion? I wonder if they even knew the damage they had done as the confused soul walked out of their "million dollar church". They just watched him leave, too. I didn't see any extra effort to reason with him; they just looked at each other and came back into the sanctuary. I started praying that day for God to release me from that place or change it into a truer representation of the fellowship of Christ, and before you knew it God had me preaching to the drunks and the homeless and praying to be released from them. People are frustrating. This I have learned, but I have also learned that I can have much more compassion for a drunk that is looking for his answer at the bottom of a bottle than for the "Christian" who is supposed to be communing with the Answer on a daily basis and hasn't identified the difference between Christ and religion. Pray for me.

ROMANS 10

READ VERSE 1

When Paul refers to Israel here he is referring to the physical nation; that is, the people who are made Hebrews by birth right, and again is illustrating the love one ought to have for his fellow neighbor, as, at this point many Jews would like to see him dead. This mirrors the sentiment the religious "church" sometimes harbors towards the true

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believer who challenges them.

READ VERSES 2 – 3

Paul has literally seen the fervent minds and intense faithfulness of the religious zealots in regards to who they believe God is, yet realizes through their fruit that they have no idea who God is, but rather cling tightly to their religious doctrine in an attempt to build their own stairway to God through being faithful to what they understand to be righteousness and rejecting anything else, even the true way to the righteousness of God.

READ VERSES 4 – 9

Here is it not saying that Christ has abolished the law, but rather that because of Christ we can see the fulfillment of the law, that is, the two states of existence that the law creates. For while the law does expose man's sin through our infidelity, a perfect walk under the law, which is impossible from the human perspective, is righteousness. Therefore, because of the blood of Christ, believers may see the previously unattainable end of the law, that is, what the law can create for those who are found to be blameless against it, not because we are being measured by the law, but because we are being measured by our choice towards Christ, which WILL lead us to incrementally grow in the manifestation of righteousness we have already attained through faith.

This completely changes the dynamic of what righteousness is because the traditional school of thought is birthed from a “learn the law and live by the law” principle,

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equating to a presumption that the more fidelity you show to the law, the closer you are to God, and through your own efforts (fidelity to the law and your own sacrifices to God for your sins) you will be counted righteous. That “try hard and atone for shortcomings through sacrifice pathway” has been cut off (i.e. God is no longer accepting blood sacrifices of other creatures for the atonement of man who has been offered the blood of Christ) and has been proven over and over not to create righteousness in the heart of man. Therefore, our righteousness and salvation is now predicated solely on this, that we must completely and totally believe that the blood of the One who died (though we cannot go to any grave on the planet to find His body) and has risen (yet we cannot empirically prove so by bringing Him from heaven) is sufficient for us all, submit to His Lordship over our lives, first through submission to His Word and then through submission to the Holy Spirit He has sent for us, and acknowledge that, though we can't empirically prove with physical evidence His existence (yet), He is real and God has indeed raised Him from the dead.

READ VERSE 10

Belief, in its purest form comes from a mixture of our experiences which are housed in our minds, the emotional context with which they were founded and our desire to accept what we can deduce to be truth. Thus, it is with the entire soul and from its very core that we construct our belief system and everything we choose to define as reality. That being understood, if we look at our life experience with soundness of emotion understand that, in the complete summation of who we are, we cannot be

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considered righteous on our own, then within that same context we must realize that God is both real and must be purely good even if He may not seem it by our definitions. Thus, giving us a way to righteousness and communion with Him makes sense. Furthermore, it is within that same context that we must believe that God has made us righteous through what He has done, for we have already deduced that we cannot make ourselves righteous through anything that we could attempt to do.

It is from this abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks; it is the ultimate testimony of one's conviction. Under normal circumstances, a person with a properly set watch would not purposely give someone the incorrect time when asked unless they first made a conscious decision to deceive. This is because they accept the time on their wrist/phone as truth and when simply asked they automatically share it. Without laying on the complexities of religion, that is precisely how salvation works. Our life situations question our personal ideology and world paradigm on the subject of wholeness, completeness, salvation, righteousness, and any other subject that would lead to confession of Christ, eventually out of our mouths and actions should come a confession of our central convictions, that being Christ for the believer.

For example, if one started taking a new supplement that cures cancer and people know that he or she is sick, when he or she is asked about his or her previous illness or how he or she was cured, a person would not lie under normal conditions, but rather share the truth they have deduced about the supplement, simultaneously exposing the central foundation of their conviction towards that

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subject. So again in applying that to Christ as our salvation, when the world asks why we triumph over tests or endure great burdens with joy and fullness, our confession will be directly tied to our central conviction (which is the unadulterated truth about what we have chosen in our soul, the part of us that either receives salvation or damnation). For the believer, that confession should be Christ.

READ VERSE 11

If one is going to believe the spiritual aspects of the Bible in any respect, it is to one's advantage to believe it in full. That is to say, if you believe there is truth in the scripture enough to say there is a God who sent the world Jesus that we may have a path to an eternity as righteous entities in communion with the Father, then you should also believe that whosoever believes will not be let down for their belief.

READ VERSE 12

This applies to everyone at this point. For the earthly work of Christ is completed in that there is a way for each and every person on the planet to be made righteous and have a life everlasting with the Father.

READ VERSE 13

Notice the language used here. It does not say, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of God" or even the name of "Jesus". Paul was led to use the word "Lord" meaning so much more than our responsibility to call on Him, but also infers a sense of His ownership of those who

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call. Essentially, we must call to God AND must belong to Him, much as slaves belong to their masters. Therefore, salvation requires more than a heartfelt confession, but conviction, even to the point that the testifier identifies himself/herself as God's property.

READ VERSE 14

So, if this is not the case (that the individual identifies Christ as their Lord), then it is utterly impossible for Christ to be their Savior. For Christ only came for His sheep, those who follow Him, submit to His rod and know His voice. The only way to become one of His sheep is to hear the word of the **Lord** and respond to it, and that word can only come from the confession of those who are already saved or the Savior Himself.

READ VERSE 15

The only way one can have a confession of this sort is to have a relationship with God to the point that one knows who He is revealing Himself to be in his or her life and that individual submits to going and speaking where God has called them to go and speak. For the power is never in the specific words of the testimony, but the Truth it brings and the Spirit that is in the midst while the word is going forth. Getting to this point and receiving such a call from God is a glorious thing.

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READ VERSES 16 – 17

But, because of God's commitment to His word and the fact that He will not impose Himself on anyone (even if the Truth and the Spirit are stirred to the point that the cloud descends and the voice of God becomes audible), not everyone will believe and sometimes proclaiming the word of the Lord seems like a vain effort, but it truly is the key in planting the seeds of faith that lead to the fruit of greater faith.

READ VERSE 18

We are arriving to a point where every man, woman, and child will have had the opportunity to understand that there is a God, and we are fast approaching the moment when Christ has been preached to every corner of the earth. Yet, this does not mean that everyone who heard will convert and believe.

READ VERSES 19 – 21

Israel, privileged people that they are, has had the opportunity to be personally fed from the hand of a God who revealed Himself to them for centuries before the opportunity for the same relationship publicly spread among the gentile world. And; because of man's hard heart towards the idea of submitting; because of our pride when it comes to admitting we were wrong and turning back to God; because of our absolute infatuation with pleasuring ourselves in every possible way with, sometimes, complete disregard for our Maker, they have missed the exclusivity and privilege it was to be the first group of people on the

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planet that knew God was true by, generally, rejecting Him then and now. God loves us enough to send salvation to everyone in the face of those who worked so hard to be privileged as His own forgetting that their privileged state was nothing they earned or maintained.

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Some things to meditate on:

- Christ is the end of everyone trying to BE righteous (Verse 4), but Israelites (in the sense of religious people) are so zealous for themselves and standardized doctrine that it is hard for them to understand righteousness solely by faith. For that reason, God prophesied through Moses and Isaiah, He will call a nation His own that is not His own. Since the Gentile believers (pagans who have heard the Word of the Lord) have absolutely no holy works that would qualify them as righteous by Israelite (religious) standards, their only hope is to grab hold of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Are you trying to establish your own righteousness? Or are you submitting to the process of pruning that God has authored for you to prove your faith in the One who makes you righteous?

WAIT, YOU CAN'T DO IT ON YOUR OWN

I was so convinced that I was going to get it. I mean, why would somebody lie about it? But the reality hit me in the face. Either what I had invested a few hundred dollars in was a fraud or I had to do more work on this process to cause my desires to come to fruition; work that would consume both time and money, two valuable resources that I had in limited supply at the time. So my brazen statement to several people including the program director of the tour I was about to go on, “Yeah, I’m about to upgrade my equipment,” transformed from an amiss statement of faith on a design I had fashioned with my hands and was desperately wanting God to cosign on into an un-liftable burden, a jaw-breaking mountain of a task. How did my self-delusions and lack of discernment for the procession of God’s seasons turn into such an unscalable wall? How was I going to continue in this ministry if I know that the chiefest stumbling block in the road to its progress was laid not by the devil, but by me? How was I going to pay for the upgrade myself? What I posted to the music gear site’s wish list was well over \$50,000 worth of equipment. I couldn’t fart that out of my behind if you duct taped a leaf blower to my mouth and inserted the best thought plan to ever be thunk by a human being... I was stuck. But what was more disturbing was the fact that now that God had so graciously let me know that my original scheme was not of Him or in His will, He also wasn’t releasing me to tell the ambiguous person on the other end of that email that my deal fell through. Maybe it was fear. Maybe I was scared that if I stood up and told the truth, that my glorious plan to be Mr. Awesome was a crafting of my

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own carnal design and had burst into a firey ball of digital destruction; that my final scene in such a beautiful play would end up in place that I was all too familiar with... Rejection. I don't know, I couldn't honestly and undoubtedly tell you which at this moment if I tried. It's was most likely a little bit of both. But I did know one thing. That beyond the fear, beyond the mental logic of "do this and get that" that had so miserably crumbled, beyond the silent screams for a magic fairy to come down and whisk me away into never-never land where I had unlimited funds to conquer the world in Jesus' name, there was no peace. When I envisioned in my mind the letter that told the anonymous figure of my recent mishap, I could not feel God in it. But instead, when my matured silent prayers reached the heavens and the ear of God the only response I got was, "Just wait."

... Really?

The opportunity to participate in what may very well be the most meaningful event in my life hangs in the balance; a lifeless body with a badly fluttering heart on the table of life and instead of the Doctor yelling "Clear!" and injecting that powerful blast of energy that would set everything straight, He calmly says, "Wait."

What?!

Can't you see what I'm going through God? Can't you hear my prayers? Maybe You're misunderstanding. My bank accounts are all overdrawn or closed, I have two HUGE bills being imposed on me by a third party, I have NO high paying job because I've been busting my hump in

YOUR service to give YOUR name glory (oh yeah, it got real...) and here is this HUGE thing that I KNOW is from you because I couldn't have dreamed it up and bored it into the sphere of fruition if I had a million DeWalt drills and an oil rig. And You who have a cattle on a thousand hills, You who author and finish the tides of history, You who could, in a moment, cause a Brinks truck filled with money to burst into flames and flip over right outside my door... are telling me to wait?! "Wait," was the only reply. So I waited, and after receiving a stern once over by the Holy Spirit for my temper tantrum in the throne room of the Most High, I became hopeful and found comfort in knowing God is able. And in that exact same moment, began falling down the same hill I just climbed back out of. I began to esteem my works and my power to be sufficient to move the hand of God. I forgot that He has no desire for the garbage we call righteous works, that is, me doing something down here and expecting God to cosign on it. God only thirsts for our righteous faith, a complete surrender to us trying to do it on our own, trying to "fix it" on our own, trying to "straighten things out" and "set things right" and an earnest knowledge that God's will SHALL be done and it is for our good. And, in the event that He gives us the high honor of getting to do something within the unfolding of such an immaculate plan, that we do exactly what He said, nothing more, nothing less. I forgot that God could, in fact, do it ALL on His own, but it is His choice to let us do a little here and there, and through my stubborn efforts said, "God, I can handle this and this, I'll need you right here and right here. I'll call you next week to check your progress. How dare I? Approach the Creator and most elevated Being in ALL of existence with this janky little plan held together with poo and duct tape as if it was anything righteous and worthy for

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Him? Looking back in retrospect, it went a little something like this:

Me: I don't know how you are gonna do it Lord, but I bet you have someone, somewhere that's gonna see this anointing that you put in me. Matter of fact, maybe at that Objective thing in Nashville I'll get signed by a label and they'll invest a million dollars in me. I can get some cool equipment then. And they said that artists have been signed from the event, I know I'm talented enough, I just have to hit them with the "good" stuff...

Voice of the Deceiver: All things are possible... God is able... Why shouldn't it be you?... God gave you the gift and talent... You can do it!" SIDE NOTE: The devil doesn't just speak negativity, he will utter whatever words and take whatever form necessary to lead us astray from God's mind and will.

Me: Sure you're right! Let me just rub this genie bottle... I mean bible... God you are able to do all things but fail! God you said you would give me the desires of my heart! God, you said EXCEEDINGLY and ABUNDANTLY beyond all I can ask or think!

Still, Small Voice: "Wait"

Me: I rebuke you Satan! Those that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, it's His will that I go on this tour! And that Objective meeting will be the last time I go anywhere without major label representation and name it now and claim it into existence! Matter of fact, I'm not even going to worry about getting the money, that HAS to

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be why I am going to Nashville!

Still, Small Voice: “Wait”

ROMANS 11

READ VERSES 1 - 5

Yet this (continuing from the last verse in Chapter 10) does not mean God has altogether abandoned His people (the physical heritage of Israel born through Abraham), but more deeply He has reserved for Himself only those who will follow The Way (Jesus) regardless of prior affiliation.

READ VERSE 6

Salvation by grace and salvation by work CANNOT coexist. Either would nullify the existence of the other. If God requires our works to earn salvation and holiness then grace would be counter-intuitive as grace removes the requirement for work needed to achieve or obtain something (in this case, salvation). If God gives us salvation through grace then our works simply cannot count towards our earning salvation, as work brings the reward in and of itself, thus it (the reward, i.e. salvation) could not possibly be of the free gift of grace if works are required.

Yet, work does count for something, for, while it does not earn the salvation, it is the testimony by which our faith in and love for the Almighty is shown (Faith without works = dead faith; If you love Me you will keep My

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commandments [John 14:15]). Thus, our works and growing fidelity to the laws, statutes and commandments given ought to be manifestations that we *already have* salvation, not the payment for it or worthiness of it.

READ VERSES 7 – 8

Trying to assume righteousness by works is a blinding path of increasing pride and self-justification. One where, eventually, the disciple no longer feels the need to be saved by grace as he/she has already obtained “holiness” through his/her good deeds. Many in Israel and, truthfully, in the contemporary Christian church fall into this category in believing that because they are “good” people who keep the law or they go to “church” camp instead of the strip club that they are saved. However, as stated before these works bring us no closer to salvation but rather should be done because they truly are outward manifestations of what we have adopted in our heart.

READ VERSES 9 – 10

Paul’s words illustrate that the works that the religious work so hard for in regards to the “earning” of their salvation is the same trap that will keep them blind to the fact that they are distancing themselves from God, and evidence that they are proud in their achievements instead of humble in their humanity.

READ VERSE 11

God did not desire this to happen (that is, certain of His physical heritage becoming completely blind and

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unwilling to accept the truth of grace), but through their unwillingness to ultimately submit to God as master and way to salvation and, instead, submitting to their own works they have provided a way for the Gentiles, too, to be saved. Paul hopes that this causes the Israelites (the physical heritage of Israel born through Abraham) to see the abundance of God's mercy and richness of His blessing and become motivated to seek the same end as their new brethren.

READ VERSE 12

If their fall (the portion of the physical heritage of Israel that stubbornly adheres to the dogma of salvation through works) meant that the Gentiles may see the riches of salvation, how much more beautiful it would be if all of Israel accepted the same grace offered to all?

READ VERSE 13

Some common offices of service within the body of Christ:

Prophet – One who acts as the direct mouthpiece of God for any appointed time; speaks what “Thus saith the Lord.”

Apostle – A messenger commissioned by someone to go out and accomplish the goals of the commissioner; a chief agent in the establishment and growth of churches

Evangelist – A minister with the specific calling to reach the un-reached rather than gird up the growing

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Disciple – A follower of a specific way or doctrine (we are all this)

Minister – A servant of a specific way or doctrine (we are all this too)

Jesus called us all to be disciples and ministers. Teachers, preachers, bishops, elders, ushers, deacons, etc. are all human terms created to further define specific service performed inside of the church.

READ VERSE 14

Paul is preaching to the Gentiles so that those of his “flesh”, the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, may see him and sympathize with his position, and desire to do as he is doing (cast off form and fashion and follow Christ) that they may find salvation, too.

READ VERSE 15

Losing the a portion of Israel to save the world is great, but saving all would be far greater.

READ VERSE 16

Wherever you are in the Body of Christ, you are holy so long as you are in the Body of Christ.

READ VERSES 17 – 18

Thank God for salvation, but do not see yourself as privileged to assume a position of holiness as if you do the

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Body of Christ a favor (those who God imputes His righteousness on). For Christ makes you holy, not the other way around. Furthermore, the Gentile peoples, though just as valuable in the eyes of God, were not the original group of chosen people to walk in relationship with God and see His majesty unfold in a personal way in this realm. You see the imagery here where the original part of a tree was removed so that a “wild” or foreign part could be grafted in. This is a common horticulture technique as the grafting in of the branch or stalk of a wild “fruit-bearing” tree usually stimulates fruit production of the whole tree. BUT, the purpose of the process is to cause fruit production of the WHOLE tree not to show a preference towards the grafted branch.

READ VERSES 19 -21

Therefore, the native branches (the actual physical heritage of Israel born through Abraham) were not separated and broken off ONLY so that the wild branches (the Gentiles) could be grafted in (as if they were anything special). The wild branches were grafted in SOLELY for the purpose of fruit production of the ENTIRE tree. God is not a respecter of persons and He wants EVERYONE to ultimately choose salvation and relationship with Him i.e. He wants EVERYONE to become part of the original tree (I would say that was His plan from the beginning as He sees the end of a matter before it begins). Therefore, the Gentile must not look upon the Hebrew with even a thought superiority or preference from God, or, more contemporaneously, the spiritually connected person must not look upon those who cling to the form and fashion of the old construct of religious piety equating to godliness as

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if they “have it” and the old farts are missing the boat. For our salvation was meant to lovingly compel them, and every other being on the planet, to the same salvation, not push them further away from the arms of God. Furthermore, we all can face that same condemnation and removal from the body if we forsake the will of God for our own imagination of what holiness is, especially if God will not spare members of His elected ones who have done the same.

READ VERSE 22

God is both good and severe. We choose which side of Him we will experience, not simply by our actions, but by their foundations and what we then rely on. Self-reliance and self-justification leads to separation with God while surrender to His will and earnest pursuit of His Way leads to His goodness.

READ VERSE 23

God is eager to graft in anyone who will earnestly seek after Him and not some form of godliness acquired or deduced from experiencing Him. That’s what makes the trap of religion one of the most perilous. For we as humans tend to experience life as a cause and effect unfolding. “A” causes “B”. Prayer causes change. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that we ought to pray always. This can lead to the establishment of a rule which is the framework that both defines and separates religion from spirituality. However, there is a fundamental flaw in this approach. For, we as people tend to equate the tangible action, the “prayer”, with the effect, the “change”. Yet, anyone with any sense knows

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that prayer in and of itself cannot change anything (The Bible even says that we can pray amiss [James 4:3]). GOD causes change and “prayer” is a tool that He commands us to use (along with other tools) as a manifestation of our faith so that He is pleased to cause the said change. Therefore, true faith CANNOT be described or interpreted by *what* someone is doing in this realm, for praying when God calls a fast is just as disobedient as eating the fruit a certain tree when God says not to. True faith is therefore best described as one’s ability to hear and know the will of God and then respond to it with both obedience and expectancy. Count the number of times that the power of God healed the blind with a specific description of how it happened (there are at least two incidents where this miracle was documented in the gospel according to Mark alone [Mark 8:22-25; Mark 10:46:52]. Many more occurrences can be cited in the gospels and the acts of the apostles). It almost never unfolded the same way yet the effect, sight, was still the same. This diagrams that we, as humans, tend to look at the wrong thing as the cause for the effect. God is the cause of all good and is the constant in any situation in which good may arise (James1:17), it is our action that signifies the submission and obedience to God who will cause the effect to come to fruition, and it is our obedience to Him that allows us to be used as fruit producers towards that effect and give testimonies that compel others to desire to be grafted into the body as well.

READ VERSE 24

If God will go out and offer salvation to the godless, how much more does He long for the salvation of the original elected ones He called to be His own (who once

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knew how to, or, at the very least, that they ought to, seek His face)?

READ VERSE 25

We should not become ignorant to the depth of God's love and the reality of His true character, God allows seemingly crappy things to happen in life. He will even seem to keep you back from getting to a "good" place in certain seasons. He doesn't do this because He's hateful towards you, but only because God's intense love that pursues, apprehends, covers every one of us as a believer is equally intense towards those who do not know that love. And, the same God who did not spare His own Son, will not spare any of His other children (who pledged to give themselves up as a living sacrifice anyway through accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior [Romans 12:1]) if their temporary discomfort (our discomfort), their temporary pain (our pain), or even their temporary destruction leads to eternal salvation for those who cannot call on God as their Father. Therefore, when we see someone going through a struggle we should not conclude that they are simply "getting their due" and that the temporary pleasure you experience in life should be attributed to your selection as a child of God, but that God is yearning to be glorified through the good AND bad we experience here; the miracles and the crucifixions; the laughs and the tears. He is waiting for us to see His purpose in the valley as much as we praise Him on the mountaintops. For "testimony" cannot be spelled out without "test" and freedom for the lost may lie in the shackles God afflicts you with for a season. Are you willing to go through that? Do you realize that being a Christian

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means that you voluntarily signed up for that?

READ VERSES 26 – 27

Israel as God sees it is wholly expressed as “the tree”; those who remain connected to the nourishment of the “Root” (Jesus Christ, who bears us all), not as a blood lineage, not as a nation with borders and secular citizenship, but as the culmination of people who have remained attached to God from their calling as a nation, through submission to His will and the following of His Way (which is to accept Jesus Christ for their sins). Those who were born through the lineage of Isaac yet reject Christ as their Savior must bear their sins alone and will ultimately be found guilty. Likewise those Gentiles who never accept Christ will be forced to face God in the same way, which will lead to the same judgment, guilt. And those Gentiles who accept the Lordship of Christ, will no longer be Gentiles, but a part of Israel. Salvation for the sons and daughters of God’s promise (Israel) is now open to all through Christ, even if only for the fact that He declared it so.

READ VERSE 28

At this point in history, the religious Jews were grossly opposed to the gospel to the point of persecution of its followers, yet they were still beloved as they were the originally chosen and had the same opportunity to continue the path they walked with God through choosing salvation in Christ. Furthermore, there would be no gospel without them. Though many of the Jew zealots of the day were some of the chief opponents to the gospel of Christ and its

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followers, the gospel of Christ could not have come to the Gentile without the existence of the Hebrew peoples and the very same religiosity that persecutes Him.

READ VERSE 29

For when God calls a person out and bestows mercy, grace, and salvation, He will not take those gifts away. He will not change His mind about your salvation, though you may change your mind about accepting it, this applies to both the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as far back as Abraham and the Gentile.

READ VERSES 30 – 32

The people of Israel have denied the power of God in the past through unbelief and sin. Yet, through that historical unbelief, the Gentile has had the opportunity to receive mercy through Christ, and, through witnessing the undeniable power of God operate through the Gentile, those same unbelievers have the opportunity to be convinced of the authenticity of the Messiah and obtain that same mercy. For in God's eyes regarding both the elect and the pagan without Christ, we are all pitiful, unprofitable, and gone astray.

READ VERSE 33

God is too wise to fathom.

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READ VERSES 34 - 35

There is no one who can assume the will of God, or be credited with bestowing this knowledge to Him; He is the absolute and beginning of all wisdom.

READ VERSE 36

See John 1:3

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Some things to meditate on:

- Are there any areas of your life where you forsake the will of God for your own imagination of what holiness is? What are they and what will it take to sacrifice your control over that version of holiness for His?
- If salvation is not attributed to your physical heritage, why is the end times prophecy concerned with identifying and reconciling the original people God selected?
 - Who are they? (Keep in mind Revelation 2:9 and 3:9)
 - And why is knowing who they are important? (VERY deep question, take you time. If need be come back to this study after finishing this book)
- God is yearning to be glorified through the good AND bad we experience here. When's the last time you truly felt joy and elation in the occurrence of pain in your life for God's glory?
 - When's the last time you asked for a cross and some nails instead of perceived good times and opportunities?

YOU IN EYE TEA WHY

Go to YouTube and search this EXACTLY as it is typed:

You In Eye Tea Why “Aservant”

Watch the video then continue on.

ROMANS 12

READ VERSE 1

Because literally everything was made by the Word of the Lord, even your own bodies are His creation and, though it is rightly His to do with what He wills, He asks that we present ourselves to Him in surrender as a living sacrifice (which is a reasonable request), because though He has the right as our Creator to use us as He pleases without consideration for our wants, He wants our love for Him and dedication to Him to be the result of an autonomous choice and not an imposed requirement of our existence.

READ VERSE 2

And, now that you know that everything is the Lord's and have given your entire being back to Him willingly, we are called not do like everyone else who does not acknowledge that fact and lives by their own pleasures as if they made themselves, but rather let the mindset that “you don't even belong to yourself” change the way you operate EVERY facet of your life. Instead of living life like

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you're a self-made millionaire with a fleet of cars to drive wherever you want, live like a humble businessman/businesswoman of a well-respected company who has a rental with limited gas and an assignment straight from the CEO.

READ VERSE 3

From the perspective of one who has received the grace of the Almighty, it is completely clear how far we miss the mark by ourselves and to think of ourselves in any manner other than that is foolish and a pathway to failure. Rather, in the same way that God has given us faith, we must see ourselves for who we truly are alone and believe that God's grace is both freely given to even us, as sinful as we can be; that it is sufficient for the cleansing of our dirty past and speckled future; and let that realization keep us humble in our dealings with our fellowman regardless of which persuasion they are.

READ VERSES 4 – 5

As Christians, in all our diversity, it is paramount that we keep the perspective that we are one. We are the same (i.e. saved and redeemed by the blood of Christ). Every man, woman and child who has full reliance on Christ as their Lord and path for salvation in their belief system is a part of **one** body, regardless of any other doctrine that they may currently adhere to; regardless of the specific dirt on their lives that Christ's blood had to cleanse; regardless of the flaws in their current paradigm. Furthermore, each of us as one body have different things to do in this world, but all for the same reason, establish,

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nourish, grow, and make healthy the body of Christ (which is a key reason I believe that we, being one, are also so vastly unique and different in our individuality and expression of Christ, the unifying factor in our differences and the sole identifier of one's belonging to the body). It is just like the human body. There are thousands of specifically differentiated cells that serve a unique and special purpose to maintain the health and life of the **body**. However, inside of EVERY cell of that same body (at some point) is the same DNA sequence, the same Blueprint for who, what, how and why each cell should operate. This is Christ in the "body". This means that in every walk of life and function conceivable in this world, Christ is to be the sole motivator for purpose, action and resolve for the true believer.

READ VERSES 6 – 8

So, whatever it is that God made you do to in relation to the edification, health and growth of the body, exercise that gift with a commitment to excellence and fervent dedication. For, because of God's grace, He looked past our sinful nature and unworthiness and bestowed in us divine gifts, each one different in some way from another for the sole purpose of ultimately bringing glory to Him and propagating a unified, growing and powerfully equipped body.

READ VERSE 9

Love genuinely. Love without strings attached. Love unconditionally and cling steadfastly to all that Love creates, be completely horrified by any sign or indication of

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anything that was not produced by Love to the point that you detest that thing utterly and unify yourself with everything that is of God.

READ VERSES 10 – 13

Love your brothers and sisters in the body with a special love that cannot be given to the world (the word for “affectioned” used in verse 10 is the compound word [Philostorgos] Philos - actively fond; brotherly towards + Storge - paternal/maternal love, and the word for love used in the same verse is [Philidelphia] - brotherly love). Although you should show love to those who are in the world also (Agape, unconditional, divine love of God), the love you are able to share between the true members of the body ought to be that and more. Lead and walk with them in the ways that are right and bring honor. Do not be slothful or lazy, but rather stay on fire for God with the same zeal that you had when you first joined the body. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation and be always ready to pray and always praying about something before you give any other thought to it.

READ VERSE 14

Be the example of Christ to the ones that wish to persecute you, show them His love in spite of their actions towards you, submit only to the voice of God and let the Hand of the Almighty separate the wheat from tare (Matthew 13:24-30).

READ VERSE 15

Be a supporter of humanity. Understand the dynamic of what it means to be human and don't approach a situation with an "I'm holy, let me fix it" attitude (which is founded in pride), but rather have the remembrance that there are times to laugh, and weep and love. Share God in those moments, don't "be" God in those moments.

READ VERSE 16

Approach every human as a human and let God express Himself through your faith. You should eventually reach a level in your faith where you shouldn't have to try to express it, but rather, because you have been nourishing your spirit for so long with prayer, studying, meditation, fasting, and other techniques, it naturally and uncontrollably comes out. And, because that Spirit in you is the Holy Spirit of God, He will know exactly when and how to express Himself in humanity. Essentially, the maturing Christian should reach a level in which they don't have to try to look, act, or be "saved". Instead, their salvation uncontrollably leaks out of every part of their being in a natural and un-forceful way. This is the essence of being a worthy vessel in the house of God (2 Timothy 2:19-21). Furthermore, never be enticed to seek the extravagant pleasures of this world, but keep your mind humbled to the men of low estate, as you were once one. Don't "get blessed" and become some guru with all the answers or don't think that the lessons you've learned in life have made you any superior to anyone else.

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READ VERSE 17

Regardless of what someone does to you, as a member of the body of Christ, you are mandated to be a representative of Him who did not harm those who beat and slew Him, but rather went up willingly as a ransom for all. Meaning that when people privately and publicly abuse you and their misdealings reach the point of public exposure your immediate reaction should be deliberate love, patience and mercy towards them, only the voice of God should call us to raise up the physical swords He told us to carry (Luke 22:36; never be defense-less, instead, be harmless, for in God's hand is also judgment to the wicked and we know not when He calls us to be the edge the wicked fall by)

READ VERSE 18

If it is at all possible (and it is, just maybe not probable all the time), live peaceably with all men.

READ VERSE 19

Don't right the wrongs done against you, rather put that anger in a defined space (the ears of God) and let Him deal out the punishment, if any, that is fair and just for He knows beyond any what fair and just, truly is.

READ VERSE 20

Be kind to those who persecute you, it is far worse to them as they expect a violent reaction and get only peace and love. From that anger comes a feeling which burns inside the heart of an adversary and can ultimately humble

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the most belligerent of enemies to seek the Source of your resolve to maintain such an amicable demeanor. It is only God who can lead you in this for only He knows the times appointed for all. The time to kill and the time to heal.

READ VERSE 21

In this way, evil is defeated with good, not by involuntarily picking up the same gun (or a bigger gun) and standing on the other side of the fence to wage war out of your rage, but by giving no place to violent thoughts and only sending your obedience to God back. When it is time for them to get shot, God has some snipers in His hills and their guns are WAY bigger than anything you ever could fire out of your own imaginations (2nd Kings 15-17).

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Some things to meditate on:

- In what ways are you choosing not to be a living sacrifice to the Lord who redeemed you and sacrificed Himself for you? Is your job your provider and He doesn't have authority to pull you away from your work days because you “have to pay bills”? Is your home your fortress, and the thought of losing it so painful that you would rather not live if you were forced to be a wandering traveler with no where to lay your head?
 - What elements of your life are off-limits to God touching, taking away, or “tampering” with and how will you arrive at the point of laying those too at the foot of His cross?
- What unique thing did Christ gift you with for the edification and growth of His Body? Are you exercising that thing now?
 - If so, how can you do so to a more excellent degree?
 - If not, what is keeping you from doing so and how can you eliminate those obstacles?

JAIL

It was probably the most angry I'd been in a LOOOONG time. I was at that point when you're done talking and you feel like if one more straw is placed on your load, you'll snap, and, being that I was being processed at the Dallas county jail and surrounded by the men and women of the Dallas police, the representatives of the current source of my frustration, I was in a very dangerous place. I contemplated if a felony charge was worth hospitalizing a couple of guards (they couldn't shoot me, their guns were already checked in). They brought me into the nurse and she proceeded to ask me all of the, "are you a threat to yourself and/or others" questions. The arresting officer wouldn't make eye contact with me. I could only imagine that he was feeling guilt for the recent events that led to my being here. And in my opinion, if he didn't, he should have. Maybe you should know the series of unfortunate events that led to such a tense season before you make judgment...

First, let me be clear that I am not a lawyer, but because I am both "black" and an "American" my knowledge of what is lawful and is not lawful when dealing with the police is more refined than most only because this nation somehow believes that a higher melanin content in my skin makes me more violent and a natural at lying and lawbreaking, making my initial profile in the eyes of the average "cop" one of a prime suspect and not a "law-abiding citizen". When the police officially approached me, I was exiting my vehicle with intentions to pump gas. Technically, I was not operating a motor vehicle and by the

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letter of the law, I could have been a jerk and declined to identify myself (at this time, you didn't have to provide identification if you were not driving/operating a motor vehicle and/or were not suspected of a crime i.e. probable cause), but, because I try to cooperate with police (because it is generally the right thing to do and they have routinely been killing, maiming and beating the snot out of "blacks" since the establishment of their system for no reason at all... other than "blackness" of course) and I knew that they had been profiling me for 3 blocks before u-turning and "lighting me up" when I pulled into the gas station as they passed me to check my seat belt (they were looking for a reason to pull me over) I decided it to be in my best interest and not risk my life or current quality thereof to stand on a shaky technicality. They told me that my tags on the car (dealer tags which were valid and not expired) were only for transporting my vehicle during the day and they seemed altered (this is what you call, bovine fecal matter. Did you know that cops are legally allowed to LIE to you?). They asked me if the vehicle was stolen and lit up my car with their flashlights for anything in plain sight that would allow them to search as I gave them my information and sat back in my vehicle with the anticipation to continue on my journey of gassing up my new (to me) truck so I could make the trip to Waco for two singing opportunities and then a later trip to Houston to meet up with my tour team.

Then I got the "wait". For those of you who are not familiar with an encounter with "the law", there are two types of pauses that you will experience when you are pulled over. One is short as they call in verify your "ID" and the dispatcher or whoever responds to them that you are clear and another that is exponentially longer as they

listen to any warrants or offenses you may have and make a decision as to whether they could profit from arresting you or not (the “law” is so convoluted and biased towards those who uphold it that, if a cop really wanted to, they could arrest or ticket you at their whim and challenge you to prove the illegitimacy of their actions in court, well after you’ve been seriously inconvenienced). He comes back to my car with a familiar stride, gets me out of the car, puts me in hand cuffs and, basically, calls me a liar and says I had a bench warrant in TX for something (that neither he nor the judge could explain to me). Turns out I wrote a check to pay a bill in 2013 and it bounced and that hot check warrant was what I was charged with.

I didn’t break one law in that whole occurrence, not only because I didn’t want to go to jail, get beat up or die, but because my mark as a Christian requires me to operate as blamelessly in the eyes of man that I possibly can. The justification for my approach by the police was a question about a legal document that did not have anything wrong with it and was not fabricated. The justification for my arrest was a bounced check that had nothing to do with the reason that I was approached and the justification for my day in jail according to the system that put me there was that I was a criminal and deserved it. I term this common technique practiced by American police “profile fishing” and define it as the instance when a “cop” has a “feeling”, for a number of suspicions imposed by a flawed and biased social construct, that you are guilty of SOMETHING and stopping you will lead to helping society at large through catching more bad guys, even the ones who weren’t, at the time, breaking the law. It seems unfair. It thoroughly peeved me off, but my stay in jail allowed me to witness to

two individuals, and God welcomes the temporarily unfair and stressful of situations if it leads to His will being done and humanity receiving His word.

ROMANS 13

READ VERSE 1 – 2

God has appointed those who rule in this realm through His divine will, notwithstanding, He is the HIGHER authority. Yet, even if that ruler/group of rulers is doing evil in the sight of the Lord, their position is necessary in order for the things that must happen to come to be. So do not fight against them unless you are certain that God is leading you to do so or they are trying to impose ungodly practice through their authority, for to fight against established authorities because of a conclusion you have reached in your own understanding would be to resist the very power and will of God. Self-preservation became the subject of my first question here, since following the law has often led to tragedy for “black” peoples, but self-preservation should only be exercised when God Almighty ordains and guides it, not when it is solely the logical deduction of the individual. To value life and liberty worth preserving in and of themselves creates violent contradictions for the believer, for on the one hand you are saying that your life and liberty are laid down before God to do with as He determines best (which may be to not preserve it in a given occurrence), on the other you are placing a condition on that sacrifice of self to say that God’s will no longer matters when death or an unfavorable judgment (that you perceive threatens your liberty) arises.

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Keep in mind that the same God that allowed His innocent Son to be crucified also led Peter and John to resist the order of the Sanhedrin in regards to preaching in the name of Jesus. The key is not in the obedience to the declaration of man, but obedience to the declaration of God, who is sovereign and the highest authority (Acts 5:25-29). There are times and seasons for everything under the sun, but unless the God of all law and order tells you to rebel against the established law, he expects us as Christians to follow that law that we may be examples to the lawless and without blame or accusation in testimony.

READ VERSES 3 - 4

From the idealistic point of view, every ruler should make decisions with the intention to do the most good, however, both biblical and recent history shows that human leaders often carry their flaws and own agendas into their leadership, causing wrong choices to be made and ultimately evil being held up as good and vice-versa. HOWEVER, though an act is intrinsically evil, if God allows such a thing to remain, then such a thing must be necessary for His will to be carried out and, knowing that God's will is ultimately good, we must come to the conclusion that God's will is the greatest good possible and therefore the evils being permitted in this world, while neither godly nor good, are necessary outcomes of a flawed entity operating towards a perfect end, the point in history where vindication is had and God restores order with eternal and perfect finality. However, that does NOT mean we are to submit to such evil if it opposes the Word of God, for His law is above ALL law. If you look at Revelation, there is a perverse and reprobate world that is in existence when

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the signs begin. Perhaps, in the same way that Caiaphas was a necessary entity in the crucifixion of our Lord; evil is a necessary (yet temporary) part of our world such that God's will may be done. The devil is still in submission to the Father (don't be deceived), for I'm sure if he had his way he would evade the judgment of hell for eternity and immediately destroy every last remnant of the woman's seed, yet, by tempting many to stray, he becomes a chief agent to his own destruction. Analyzing everything, evil is still evil and good is still good, but mankind's definition of evil and good are different from God's definitions. As a Christian, I am called to always do good, but I can neither take that as a presumption that I know what good is in and of myself, nor can I take that as a mission to remove all "evil" from the world as it may be a necessary part of the picture that leads to the completion of God's will, which is the ultimate good. Therefore, my role as a Christian can be ultimately defined as not being the uncontrollable forest fire that eventually consumes the whole world, but the shining light that allows the world to see and choose between darkness and Light. Both are necessary for an autonomous choice to be possible, yet only one leads to life for mankind.

READ VERSE 5

Humans have to be under submission for two reasons:

1. Without a measure of control over us. Life events will eventually cause us to arrive at a point of wrath, anger and violence toward one another. Because as humans we always want to have our

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way, which leads to a paradox, as it is impossible for more than one human to completely have his/her way, since base things like food, water, and health depend on what sometimes present themselves to be finite resources. This causes conflict, conflict leads to violence and wrath. Therefore a governing entity (either God or man) is needed.

2. In order for there to be a proper balance of good to oppose the evil there must be government as human beings are naturally sinful (capable and willing to disobey God to achieve a goal) and, because carnal good to the individual can easily equate to carnal evil to society (i.e. killing someone with a resource so that you can possess that resource), unchecked progression of this nature will lead to both an imbalance of evil over good and an obscurity between the carnal perception of the two

READ VERSE 6

As leaders, regardless of their level of obedience to God or their own personal agendas, these people have been delegated as God's servants (whether they want to be or not; as God cannot do evil, but, because He gave us free will, He allows it and still accomplishes His purposes in spite of it). Therefore, when they ask of you for taxes, pay them, as they use them to arrive closer to the point which God has called forth since before man came to be. But if they impose a law that requires you to sodomize your son, you are then required to show them whose authority is higher, theirs or Gods. We should scrutinize the laws

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imposed on us and follow every one that does not keep us from obeying the highest law, the Word of God.

READ VERSE 7

And not just taxes, but all dues, levies, customs and the sort should be rendered to the proper bodies that request them whether you believe it to be fair or not. Respect those who you should respect and honor those who are put into honorable positions, even if they are acting unworthy of these treasures (Mark12:14-17). As a Christian, we must both shun even the appearance of evil and be the examples of everything that is godly in the world, meaning that sometimes it may feel as if we are receiving the “short end of the stick”, so to speak. But our charge to love those who hate us, and pray for those who misuse us rings clear here as we know that imperfect people are in positions of authority and may not have a care for our best interests and could intend to use our own dispositions for their benefits, yet we still must love out of the heart of our Christianity and leave it to God to separate the wheat from tare (Matthew5:43-48).

READ VERSE 8

Don't owe anything to anyone (whether it is physical or otherwise) except the love you are commanded to freely give. Make sure that the testimony of all who meet you is one of love, if you can do that, then you fulfill the law (the reason Christ came).

READ VERSE 9

Every commandment that was ever uttered hangs on the two greatest that Jesus spake, Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and Love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30). The first commandment is spiritual and allows the strength to perform the second. For, through a love relationship with God who looks past all of our faults to love us back, we are able to better understand how to love others who, in the face of that love, commit offenses against us.

READ VERSE 10

There is no sin that is given when love is given. God is righteous, i.e. without sin. God is also unmerited and unconditional love. Therefore, true, unconditional, agape love is a key to that righteousness and eternal relationship with God. It is the answer to how we can arrive at completion and fulfillment of the law. By loving God and man unconditionally regardless of circumstance or merit, we can arrive closer to the perfection that God created us to be.

READ VERSE 11

Every moment that passes is a moment closer to one of two events happening, either your death or the return of Christ. Therefore, the sooner that you wake up to the certitudes of what true salvation translates to in this world the better off you'll be. Drop the facades of religion and learn to love deeper, to the point that EVERY person receives your full love regardless of who they are and how

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you feel.

READ VERSE 12

We, even in our quest towards salvation have volition and must choose what armor we dawn. For truthfully, we were all sleeping at some point during the day (lost and blind to the truth before we were converted). We can continue to be blind to the Truth and the voice of God as He communicates His will to us or put on the armor of God and represent the kingdom we profess we are a part of. Simply calling yourself a Christian is not enough to be in this army, but you must be fully dressed and focused on the mission, which has been made emphatically clear. Love. Period. Unconditionally and irrevocably love God who created you and everyone else He created, knowing how to truly manifest that requires a wisdom only God can give which is why we **MUST** have the ability to hear Him

READ VERSE 13 – 14

Walking as a Christian is infinitely more important than talking as one. Let your walk be an upright one that reflects Christ in every step. Do not provide room in your life to fulfill any lusts of the flesh, but rather make every moment you live be one in the submission to the will of the Almighty, this is putting on Christ.

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Some things to meditate on:

- When this edition for the book came out, many churches closed because of a “government mandate”. I believe this to be wrong. What do you think and, if you are in agreement with the shut downs of fellowship, how far do you think the government we are to submit to is biblically ordained to go before we as Christians stand on the Word of God over the word of man?
- How are you manifesting your belief that God Almighty is the Highest authority in the midst of challenges to your faith in this ever deteriorating society?
- What persecutions are you prepared to face for standing on God's Word? Physical attack and detainment? Starvation? Beheading?
 - Are you growing in your faith to pay the ultimate price to defend the faith, and obey the Most High in spite of a world that wants you to burn with it?

A KEY QUESTION FOR THE CATHOLIC FAITH

Mary is not the Mother (with emphasis on the capital “M”) of God, she was the mother of Jesus who is God. Neither was she Deity to the point that I believed she should receive the high honor of deification that the prayer seemed to communicate. That is my position, why couldn’t they see the logical implications behind that? I don’t knock the Catholics for believing this as I don’t knock any religion for believing many of the other things that I believe to be non-biblical. Yet, these people, in a rather unfair way, seemed to be trying to convince me of the rightness of their position and the error of mine, which I still cannot logically substantiate.

There I was, the lone “Protestant” (which I don’t identify myself as) surrounded by a mob of Catholic intellectuals armed with historical contexts, Ph.D's and a series of justifications for their claim. I did not want to ask the question in the first place as I had gone to a Catholic university and had reached the conclusion in that season that any religion and its practices is a useful and then useless tool that allows one to be introduced to the truth of God, yet is not the measure by which God applies His ownership of the believer. My growth as a Christian in that season had made me content in knowing that some religions don’t lead to Christ and those that do, even then don’t have everything together. I knew that it was through Christ that we, the believers live and move and have our being, and our thirst to know Him more births a personal relationship with Deity and not a conformity to practice.

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But they wanted me to ask a question, so I did. One that I believe to be a problem in regards to the Catholic religion/faith/whatever you would like to call it. It did not mean that I believe Catholics can't go to heaven neither did it mean that I did not have similarly challenging questions for other religions, Christian and non-Christian alike. Maybe I am wrong. Maybe they were. I doesn't matter. When I went to their prayer meetings I honored their practice (though I did not participate in those things I felt disrespectful to the Lord) as I hope that they, too, will honor other practices that may not adhere to their established spiritual paradigm, yet are (hopefully) birthed out of the individual's earnest desire to please, commune with, or honor the Most High.

ROMANS 14

READ VERSES 1 – 2

Receive even the “weak-minded”, that is, those who cling steadfastly to doctrine or rigidly adhere to beliefs (that are not necessarily vital to the maturation and development of relationship with God) as part of their relationship to the Almighty for whatever reason without the intention to change them or get them to “see the error of their ways”. The example of food choice is a clear and visible example as the words of Jesus ring in memory, “It is not what goes in which defiles the body, but what comes out” (Matthew 15:11). Believers come up with all types of ways to justify doing what makes sense to them and, although it does not make it a requirement for all, it should be respected if it is not a hindrance to the propagation of

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the gospel, as long as they go through whatever sacrifice they have imposed upon themselves for the sake of the Lord (the key element in the action as we are to present ourselves a living sacrifice UNTO THE LORD). And in all ways, every one of us should have these “extra” things we believe we should do as an expression of our fidelity to the Lord (above and beyond fasting, prayer, etc.). This sacrifice out of love for the Most High over self is a pleasing aroma to His nostrils and is something we should take pleasure in doing, even if it doesn't feel good sometimes. Understanding this, Paul is telling us to respect these other practices that others do as to the Lord, since they are doing it, unto the Lord, regardless of whether God universally requires it or not. Love them as God commanded and He will separate the wheat from tare.

One final thing to notice is this is directed to members of the body in their address to other members of the body (Christians in dealing with other Christians). This means that any action that the person is undergoing for the Lord, should not conflict with God's desires for His people (i.e. child sacrifice for Jesus, orgies for God, etc). The defining point for this is the Holy Spirit, as we let Him lead, we will ask the right questions and get conviction in the correct way towards an edified corporate body expressed righteously in each individual member. The holiness or sinfulness of an action ultimately comes from the fundamental heart disposition (either towards God's will or away from it) that inspired the action, and, because we cannot see the heart, our exhortations should only come from the breath of the Holy Spirit who can.

READ VERSE 3

Do not hold as foolishness or make any decision about someone's walk or relationship with God because of their practices, whether you deem them good or bad. Because the truth is, you are not with them 24/7 and don't hear their silent cries to our Father and, moreover, you cannot discern His response. He has received those whom He has received and we cannot judge, in this life, who and how they should be, especially based off of actions/practices alone.

READ VERSE 4

Expounding on the last sentence, Paul asks the question, "Who are we (as servants ourselves) to judge another man's servant (other people)?" We are not the ones who will make them holy or cause them to plunge into the depths of the abyss. They will stand before God alone and His judgment shall be the lasting decree, and God is able to make stand any whom He has chosen, for He is able. Therefore, I believe now is a good time to reiterate our purpose as Christians. LOVE (Holy Spirit led and guided, not our imagination of love or desire to always be amicable). Through proper love we will properly lift up Christ to a dark world, and God will find those who truly respond versus those who walk for form and fashion. In addition, He will provide the correction if any life practice should be unpleasing to Him. We have to be mindful that it is not our job to tell someone how to believe in Christ, only to show them how much believing in Christ works through remaining obedient to the Holy Spirit.

READ VERSE 5

Regardless of how each believer truly walks out his/her faith, we must become fully persuaded in our own minds that *our* obedient actions, done for and to the Lord shall be counted as worthy, not because of the merit of the action, but because of the obedient heart behind it and the incorruptible blood that covers it.

READ VERSE 6

We must become increasingly discerning in knowing those things which dishonor the Kingdom of God vs. those things which don't and realize that life experience, doctrinal beliefs and world paradigms all have a profound affect on our practices and what we deem appropriate in society and spirituality. Therefore, differences in walking out this faith, that is supposed to have action behind it, are to be expected. The key in these differences is to understand them only so as to make sure the seed planted (action taken) was done as unto the Lord and the fruit born out of them is of God. Ask the question, am I placing God on top of a practice that I want to do/have always done or is God leading me to engage in this practice for His sake? Essentially, who is the foundation of the action? Self? Tradition? Friends? God? If the answer is anything but God, the action is not and cannot be right. Yet, we cannot even infallibly answer that question for all of our own actions (Jeremiah 17:5-10), and *our* hearts are the only ones we can even attempt to examine. At the point of that realization, what the action is becomes irrelevant and we do the most honor to the Kingdom in respecting and celebrating a different way to bring glory to our Father

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through Christ and submission to the Holy Spirit rather than criticize or try to correct an action that we ourselves have judged unworthy because of our perception of the action. Remember, judge the fruit of the tree, not the action (the tree itself).

READ VERSE 7

We as humans do not have the luxury of saying that our life is our own. This is especially true in regards to Christians, but even the atheist must admit that it is apparent through several systems (parental socialization, television, school, etc.), that we are a hodgepodge emulation of practices, culture, norms, mores, tendencies and events of our past. Therefore, anything that is done from true divine inspiration to bring glory to God and does, in fact, bear the fruit of glorifying God and bringing sinners to the repentant state of longing for redemption through Christ, is to be respected.

READ VERSE 8

We are God's property, whether we want to be or not. But for those of us who willfully choose to be in obedience to and communion with His Holy Spirit, we take upon a commitment to give every moment of the time we have on this earth towards the glorification of our master and humbly pointing to the cross that has assured our salvation, even if it means our own death. With that in mind, it is no man's job to practice in the way/doctrine of another man, but only in a way that brings God glory. Standardization only holds some minimalistic value when we come together as a congregation. The individual

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Christian's personal practices to relate to God are just that and should be respected so long as they bear righteous fruit.

READ VERSE 9

Because Christ both died and rose, He is the master of those who died before Him (as He descended into the pit of death, to preach to the captives), died after Him and those alive today giving everyone who ever lived on planet earth an opportunity to make Christ their Lord and Savior.

READ VERSE 10

So if that is the case, why do we act as master in the lives of our brother or sister? Telling them what we say/think is the right or wrong way? If their action does not produce enmity with God (of which God will respond and make evident that He is not pleased), we are not to be the mouth piece that speaks for God when He didn't tell us to talk.

READ VERSE 11

Let God speak. We should focus on our relationship with Him so that we know when He wants to use us and shut up when He isn't asking for "our help." He is God and will speak to every man according to the way that they should go, if they walk in disobedience, let God do the separating of the wheat from tare. Because there will come a time for every man, woman and child when we must confess that God is God, and give account for ourselves.

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READ VERSE 12

And when that time comes we will give account only for ourselves, not anyone or anything else.

READ VERSE 13

Therefore, knowing that we are ultimately responsible for our own decisions and God will hold us accountable for our choices, let's take our focus off of whether we believe the actions of our brothers and sister are right or wrong and rather act in such a way to encourage the right type of living and be as little of a stumbling block/agent of temptation as possible.

READ VERSE 14

There is no item in creation that can be deemed ritualistically unclean in and of itself as God created all things and at the end of each "day" of creation, He called them good. That word could not have returned void to Him (Isaiah 55:11). So, everything that God created is innately good, but, if a person holds the notion in his/her heart that a thing created by God is unclean to him/her, then it shall be. And if someone comes into agreement with the law for the Israelites out of desire to please the Master, then they shall be accountable for their vow. For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7; Luke 6:45). This reveals a lot about the relationship between our perception and our experiences in this world, for the less we can form prejudged ideas about the world around us (with a particular emphasis on the things that God created), the more we can experience the world in the freest way

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allowing truth to speak more clearly than our own thoughts. However, not everyone is able to think in that way. Therefore, to those who hold tightly to preformed judgments about the things God has created, whether they are good or bad, we must not be the hammer that shatters their world. Rather, we are called to live as the examples that encourage everyone towards producing the fruit of the Kingdom, whatever that may require (so long as it doesn't conflict with the two greatest commandments of God and the personal commandments He gives us everyday).

READ VERSE 15

Your best intentions and actions are terrible abominations if you knowingly offend your brother/sister with them. Trying to force someone to know the truth is much more damaging than loving them where they are, living the truth in their presence and leaving revelation to God. Christ died for that person as well as you. You haven't died for anyone. Leave that person in the hands of God, and focus instead on being an agent of His Spirit.

READ VERSE 16

In this way (that is, being obedient to the Holy Spirit and operating in perpetual love and humility), your actions that you have meant for good will be perceived as good instead of imposing religious doctrine and dogma.

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READ VERSE 17

The technicalities of this world are not the essence of the Kingdom of God. So why spend precious moments of fellowship trying to illuminate someone on them? Our heavenly home is founded on righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Therefore, our actions should be initiated for the soul purpose of encouraging these things.

READ VERSE 18

For, if that is how you operate, you will be found acceptable to God and approved of by men.

READ VERSE 19

So spend your days with others seeking to do things that cause the edification of Christian elements and the essence of the Kingdom. If that requires eating steak on Monday, and Fish on Friday and a bean salad on Saturday then so be it. The Kingdom is not established on steak, fish and bean dip, but on love, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. So, if eating those things on those days caused more of truth, more of righteousness, more of peace and joy in the Sprit to be eminated from you the vessel, then it was worthwhile to do them. Find yourself laboring to “reap the harvest” not “chart the growth of the trees” so to speak. That is, focus on the end goal, not the technicalities that are only meant to help us arrive there.

READ VERSE 20

Just because *you* know that something is right NEVER means that it is *you* who has to correct it. God Almighty is the corrector and if He hasn't moved you to correct something then leave it to Him. Pushing the issue on another who may not have the same understanding will do more harm than good. Furthermore, because you do not completely understand the other individual's walk, your version of illumination may be the exact opposite of what that person needs in his/her life in that season. We must be ever mindful that, regardless of how much wisdom we get, we are not God and do not know the times, hours, and seasons He has appointed, even in our own lives let alone others. Therefore, we must be humble enough to know the truth and walk with grace towards others less knowledgeable so as to not push them towards offense or tragedy. There will be a season when God will present truth to that person, and you have to be ok with the fact that now may not be the time and you may not be the vessel He uses.

READ VERSE 21

Though everything created is innately good, it does no good to partake of them when doing so serves to hinder, offend or tempt another brother/sister (e.g. taking baths is a good thing, but if you have a brother/sister over that deals with lust issues and is attracted to you, taking a bath when they are at your house would not be a good thing at all).

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READ VERSE 22

In your walk with God you will receive convictions of truths that He will show you and you will (hopefully) adopt into your world paradigm, but that truth is not something you are to brazenly carry around like a banner, especially when it causes hindrance to illuminating the deeper Truth of Christ. Remember why we are here, exalt Christ. The technical truths that serve as the building blocks towards wisdom you must be wise enough to keep to yourself until God tells you to share them. You will be blessed in enjoying life simply in the revelations God gives and letting Him use you in the proper time to reveal to others, instead of making the decision yourself about how to apply the truths you have found. I'm happy to watch God build my castle, I'm even happier that He let's me help with some task every now and then too!

READ VERSE 23

In light of all that has been said, if you are unsure or opposed to something, do not engage in it simply because another has put it in front of you as truth. For things that you adopt as practice that are not founded in convictions of truths (given from God) are founded in either confusion or ignorance, both are fundamental thought patterns that lead to damnation. Whatever is not founded in something that God has given you, WILL lead to sin at some point.

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Some things to meditate on:

- What are some strange practices you have dedicated to the Lord that aren't necessarily biblical commands? Do you make a habit to always read your Word when you eat physical food (that's a *very* fruitful practice, btw.)? Or how about pray before traveling when you get in a vehicle? What loving idiosyncrasies have you brought into your spiritual life as a result with your relationship with Abba and how would you feel if someone downed you for doing them?
- Categorize some of your most repeated actions. Are you placing God on top of a practice that you want to do/have always done or is God leading you to engage in these practice for His sake? Essentially, who is the foundation of the action? Self? Tradition? Friends? Perception of necessity? God?
 - Come up with your resolution if the answer is not God.

FIRST DAY OF WORK

They told me I had a gift as I walked off of the stage. As I responded, I pointed my hand up towards the heavens to give glory to the Source of my gift and, in that moment, amongst the clamor of idle conversations and clunks of beer bottles, I realized how dark the place I was in really was. Not because of the dimly lit lights that made that place a little more mysterious, or the cancerous fog of smoke that hovered and danced in the ether. I realized in that instant that my action was a brief emission of Light inside a place that maybe had never truly invited His presence. I've been in bars before, I've sung to drug addicts still high and watched the Holy Ghost bring them into a sobering experience of His Glory, but this was... eerie. It was less like the environment was dark as a circumstance of its function and more so that, in some way that maybe I can't articulate properly, that place was *purposely made* dark and was purposed to hold dark events.

There have been very few times when I get that feeling, not the feeling that there was a devil present, but that I had literally walked into his home. However, the circumstance of the spirits that I found myself in the midst of where of a particularly disturbing breed, they were all forces that I have had to battle with and still wrestled within my spirit from time to time. My co-worker's cleavage was out, on purpose. My tab at the bar was able to be opened and available any time I wanted a drink, on purpose. There was even free access to go into an after-hours smoking session of marijuana. I believe that too, was on purpose. The stage was set and I could see myself being placed within a lion's den designed for my demise. The

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demons that I was to do battle with were no longer meeting me on a mutual battle ground of someone else's person. They seemed to be coming for me... and they wanted more than blood.

I learned later on my car ride home with my boss that they had much more in their arsenal to try to tempt me towards darkness than what I was allowed to see that night. Orgies, an open back apartment for "after-hour events", large amounts of money that could be made. For the first time in a long time, I looked at my situation and I was scared. Not because my God wasn't able, but because the weakness of my flesh was made all too apparent just within that first night. If I wasn't able to withstand the constant temptation presented to me on my first night, how was I going to withstand a beautiful woman who is taking her clothes off and casting invitations at one of these private events? How long could I make it as a good example when I knew I could get ANY drink I so desired at ANY time? How much marijuana smoke would I smell before my flesh listened to that little voice saying, "Just one time... just one little hit... It won't hurt..." I knew I could not make it through the three month assignment I had in Waco if God didn't somehow take me to a new and deeper place in Him. I needed to know that going into that den was His purpose for this season and not just my own desires, because no matter how good my intentions, I couldn't make it if He was not in the midst.

That night I sinned, and they hadn't even shot the big bullets yet. Upon waking up the next morning, still remorseful for my thoughts and actions and feeling the crushing weight of the reality of my situation, I went into

morning prayer. Immediately after, I read this text that “randomly came through on my phone, “Don’t be afraid; only believe - Mark 5:36b”. Did I believe? Really? That was a deep question that I needed to process through. In your darkest times, when you know you shouldn’t be scared, but the sheer height of the mountain you face made you pee... even just a little; when you come to the realization that the stakes are higher than before and the ante is higher than you could pay on your own; Do you believe? Really? It is ok to be weak sometimes. Truthfully, I am glad that I realized my weakness and was not fool hardy as to believe I would be ok at my current level and had no need to step my prayer game up when I approached that place again. For it was through that realization that it became apparent as to how much I actually had to trust God to make it through this situation. My transparency of this thing allowed me to go to my brothers and sisters with sincerity of spirit and humility of heart; all the while, my pride whispered, “You’re a Christian, God got this. Just keep doing what you been doing. Grace... Mercy... It’s ok to fall... Yackaty-Schmackaty...” Yeah, I knew that, but for a moment I had to be human and chew on the truth that “Femi don’t got this” because the more I realized that, the more I perceived God, not as a commodity in my Christian walk, but a necessity to maintain the integrity of my very being. Did I believe? Yes, but this time it was not because I knew God would come through, but because if I was to survive this assignment God *had* to come through...

ROMANS 15

READ VERSE 1

Strength is generally a relative term, predicated on the subject and the members of his immediate surrounding group. An ant is strong in the eyes of an aphid, yet is a weak creature against the power of man. Therefore, if one is considered strong in that he/she has received more truth than those they are around at the moment. They must also maintain the ability to sit through their weakness until God facilitates the proper time for change of the situation. Acting before or after this moment would prove to be damaging more so than helping as we cannot illuminate anyone on the mysteries of God without God's help. Therefore, we cannot strive to right the wrongs of society simply because it is the right thing to do and expect God to show up in the midst. In order to have a God movement, we must both be where God is at, and only move when He says to move.

READ VERSE 2

Try earnestly to be pleasing to your brethren in a way that edifies him toward Christ. This requires three things simultaneously:

- A desire to please even those who do not arouse feelings of reciprocal pleasure
- Understanding that all pleasure does not lead to the edification of Christ

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- Engaging in actions that induce both pleasure in and exaltation of Christ as much as possible

READ VERSE 3

This sometimes means that you have to forsake your own desires, proclivities and thoughts of what you would like to do in a given situation, so that those who sometimes may be a burden to be around or even downright offensive, are encouraged towards Christ, as the end goal for the Christian living in this world should be to see every human born again and covered by the blood.

READ VERSE 4

Even the writings of the Old Testament were written with that purpose in mind. That those who existed before Christ's first coming as Jesus, would have hope that a Savior would come to save those who believed and hoped in Him.

READ VERSES 5 – 6

Now that Savior has come, and God, who is the master of timing, patience and peace, asks that you be like-minded and have hope for your brothers and sisters salvation according to Christ, to the end that all glorify God as a unified body of believers.

READ VERSE 7

Therefore, receive your brothers and sisters exactly how Christ received you, just as you were. He did not require any changes before He covered you with His blood and made you holy, only your confession and acceptance of Him. In that same way receive your brothers and sisters that they too may also come to accept Him.

READ VERSE 8

Jesus was an Israelite by tradition, bloodline, and practice and served in a direction principally towards the Israelite peoples (though there are several occasions where He also served the Gentiles), but this was only so to confirm the previous prophecies given about Him. In other words, it wasn't His practice, or His nationality, or His culture's belief system that made Him the Son of God. He was that all by Himself. Rather, as the Son of God, and being God, and therefore unable to lie, all of the things given to the prophets about His coming needed to be fulfilled. It is only for that reason that Jesus came as He was. Simply, because God declared it to be so, it was so.

READ VERSES 9 – 12

Furthermore, because He came as He foretold, His death, burial, and resurrection offers hope to the Gentiles as well. Once you are covered by the blood of Christ, there is no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile, black or white, young or old, you are part of a collective body and the grafted branches of Israel are made of no distinction with the natural branches that believe (but there is

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prophetic profit in knowing who Israel is and is not, he who has ears, let him hear).

READ VERSE 13

It is through believing that hope, joy and peace abound. It is also through believing that you receive the Holy Ghost. Yet, ultimately, at the end of the day, one must choose to believe FIRST and that shall always and forever be the first step to finding the face of the Almighty.

READ VERSE 14

Paul, being human, is encouraging them from the human perspective, that, though loving unconditionally and bearing weakness is challenging, it is not impossible and he knows that they can do it and understands that there will be a time to admonish.

READ VERSE 15

He writes in this way because of the grace he has experienced from God in his transformative walk and testimony.

READ VERSE 16

He acknowledges that his whole life and testimony, his very walk as a human being has culminated in his calling to minister the gospel to the Gentiles that they might be made holy and filled with the Holy Spirit. Because of his unique position and testimony, Paul's life was able to speak persuasively to the Gentile person. Much in the same way,

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each believer's life and testimony was authored to speak persuasively to another such that the Holy Spirit may emanate through the pulse of humanity.

READ VERSES 17 - 19

And he makes boast of it (to glorify God) through Jesus Christ of the things which pertain to God concerning the obedience (i.e. salvation) of the Gentiles and sharing nothing that Christ has not led him to share, for he states that it was nothing but the power of God that caused the mighty signs and wonders that occurred during his ministry mission from Jerusalem to Illyricum (a region lying between present-day Italy and Germany, then Macedonia and Thrace) in which he preached to the Gentiles.

READ VERSE 20

The true heart of ministry lies in one's desire to bring the gospel of Christ to unsaved ears. To tell someone about Christ that has never heard the Name before or experienced the Truth expressed towards them and allow God, through our obedience, to draw them to the salvation that is available for them. A desire to preach salvation to those who have already accepted salvation is like selling a car to someone who just bought one, there's no need to build a foundation for someone who already has one, unless the foundation is faulty.

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READ VERSE 21

In acting this way, Paul is saying that his work is part of many that fulfill the prophecy that Christ will be preached to every manner of man in all four corners of the earth.

READ VERSE 22

Because of his mission work assigned by God, he hasn't been able to visit the Romans, something he has been longing to do. Because of the assignments given to us by God, we must forsake desires we have trusting that God both knows best and has the best in mind for each of us.

READ VERSES 23 – 24

Yet now because he has finished the assignment he has been given and he still has the desire to visit the Romans, he will plan to visit them when he goes into Spain. Eventually, there will be a time for us to enjoy our own personal wants in life. God did not put us here to work His works and die, but also to experience the beauty of all He has made. These desires, therefore, which remain in a heart that is actively seeking and submitting to God, may not be selfish wants that will conflict with God, but rather might be desires that God intends to give us in proper time and season if we continue diligently to seek after Him.

READ VERSE 25

Yet we must be ever mindful of the priority of our wants versus our heavenly assignment and be quick to check our emotions and reactions so that our focus remains on our assignment and not on our personal agenda and rewards that come at the end of the job. These two thought patterns create two distinctly different work habits; one is diligently centered on creating excellence in the moment to produce enjoyment later; the other is focused on expediting the present so that “later” can come as quickly as possible. The latter end is a folly and will cause the individual to fail and have to face consequences and possibly lose the opportunity they were so impatiently trying to get to. Give God your full attention knowing that everything will happen exactly when it needs to happen. Let patience, then, have her perfect work (James 1:2-4).

READ VERSE 26

As one body, when we see a lack in an area, it is our job to do what we are led to maintain the health and function of the entire body, and, if we truly are one body, that will ultimately mean another part of the body sacrificing to compensate. E.g. in cold weather environments the capillaries constrict and arteries shunt blood to the heart and vital organs to ensure that they stay warm and maintain body temperature. Because of that need and the body's response, the non-vital organs and tissues (skin, lips, tongue, eyes, etc.) suffer from malnutrition and enduring the harsh environment without extra aid, yet because they were made to endure that hardship, the entire the body can be preserved and everyone is sustained.

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Understanding self then, is an important part of being a highly efficient and functioning part within the body of Christ. Every person is able to endure different things at different levels and has a skill set unique to their training and experiences. Knowing these things fully and employing them at the right times is key to the body of Christ being both the most healthy and effective it can be in this world.

READ VERSE 27

Once you become united in Christ, as much as we are all joint partakers of the spiritual things that brings, those who receive these spiritual impartations from others are obligated to share in their carnal things, even more so than we are to the world. For, we are obligated to each other both individually and jointly as a body, and obligated to the world only as a member of the body of Christ that the world may know Christ and then, too, become a member of the body.

READ VERSE 28

Again, “Seek ye first the Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33).

READ VERSE 29

Have faith in the seed that you plant. Farmers don't drop seeds into the ground and water them faithfully under the pretense that nothing will happen. Rather they labor assiduously because they EXPECT a harvest at some point, and, in likewise fashion, when you drop a good seed in

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good soil, don't wonder whether or not it will grow, for the time you spend worrying is time you miss watering or planting elsewhere and you may then become the agent of the establishing your own fears into reality.

READ VERSES 30 – 32

When you are divinely placed in a position of ministry and the people there are not receiving you. You cannot simply walk away from it, but rather must be released from it by Him who sent you there. It may be hard, it may be hurtful, it may even be dangerous, but until God uproots you and sends you to your next assignment, you must work with the same diligence you had when you first arrived knowing that, if God still has you there, then there is purpose in your still being there.

READ VERSE 33

End of thought.

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Some things to meditate on:

- You are nearing the end of this walk. What things are you confident you are growing in?
- What things are you confident that you lack or need to grow in?
- Will you pray about imparting some offering to this ministry above the simple purchase of this book (if it was not freely given to you)?

ROMANS 16

READ VERSE 1

Phebe was sent to the Romans from a church near a port (Cenchrea) in Corinth. Note that the word used to describe her service within the body of Christ is the same word that is translated to “deacon”. I believe this speaks to the gross mis-focus of who Paul was stating was worthy to hold an office in some denominations of faith. In the times of the early church, the Holy Spirit qualified the chosen to their office. God made the decision as to who would minister where, and God, who is not a respecter of persons, ordained people to service according to the gifts He gave them, not their sexual orientation (though there is definite Biblical precedence showing God's preference and command that a man should function in positions of higher authorities, a full study shows that God ultimately desires a vessel that will carry His Spirit to lead, and there are a few times when that vessel was a female). To say, therefore, that God will NEVER allow a woman to lead would both be inaccurate (Judges 4:4) and a misinterpretation of several scriptures in the New Testament (this is my belief). That being said, I don't believe a woman should lead without being covered by her husband, and a husband should not quench the Spirit operating through his wife simply because God chose to use her for some work other than him.

READ VERSE 2

Because of a helpful spirit and a protective demeanor, Kingdom-minded people should receive fellow brothers and sisters in service with honor and help them when they are in need. Remember that we are called to go the extra mile to make sure even our enemies (Matthew 5:41) are taken care of, and here Paul is putting special emphasis to make sure that Phebe is given that same “extra” mile not because she is one of the “good guys”, but because the nature of the believers conviction requires that to be an unconditional response to EVERY person on the planet. Paul’s language indicates that loving reception of the traveler was not a foreign exhortation but rather is an inseparable characteristic of a “saint” (believer). This calls to question, after all that he’s written, why would he write this? This inspired me to reach a conclusion that was good fruit I received in a past conversation with my mother. When we receive the Word of God anywhere, two things can happen. Much like the outcome of sexual intercourse, if we go through the event and it doesn’t lead to conception (that is we become impregnated with the Word and give birth to good fruit; i.e. be fruitful), the event will simply be considered a “good time”. Example:

Person A: How was church today?

Person B: Oh, we had an awesome time in the Lord. Pastor sure did preach from the very heart of God!

Fellowship with the saints is a great thing but, if all of that laborious preaching did not birth in the listener something new that inspires us to change, to love harder, to

trust deeper, to live more dedicated, and then convict us to actually manifest those changes in this world, all of the time when spent listening to the preached word was a vain and meaningless “good time”. Much like hitting the sheets with a partner and not having any intention or consideration to conceive new life, our actions are fruitless and vain “good times” if we cannot hear the word of God and operate in the change required to be fruitful agents of His will. Paul spends a large portion of time exhorting the believers in Rome near the end of his journey and, yet, it still was a logical action to tell them to do what they were supposed to do by the very nature of their conviction. I believe this was because even though you can deliver the Truth in the most digestible way possible, one will never be relieved of the population of people coming to fellowship for the sake of a “good time”. Ask yourself, if there was no threat of hell, if there was no heaven beyond the unsearchable shores of death at the edge of this life, would you still dedicate your life to the persecution, obedience and sacrifice of being Christian and desiring to know God? Are you practicing your faith because of a desire for a “good time” or are you dedicated to growth with an unseen Father who wants nothing more than to call you as His own? How do you love specifically? The answer must lie in the manifestations of your heart convictions. For, until the day we leave this mortal coil, we are inseparably both flesh and spirit. Daily, we must choose which fruits we will bear, and those fruits are chief indicators of what we are choosing in our hearts as professed “Christians”. “Good times” or “God fruit”. So what does this say? Over all things, I earnestly pray that God has spoken to you during this journey with me. What is your response? Was reading this book a “good time”? Yay, you! Another notch on the

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belt and another book to put on the shelf. Or, are you inspired to change, to love harder, to listen for the voice of God with more intensity, to throw off the shackles of religious practice as a means to holiness and cry out for a closer walk with the Divine; not by words but by your every step in this life? What is your resolve? What is your response? I challenge you to pray and create an action list of the things you will do on purpose in an effort to walk closer with God. As you reach breakthroughs, breakdowns and even breakups, transparently testify the birthing process God is leading you through with the hash tag #RomansFruit (if you do social media at all and it still exists when you read this book). Your pain may be someone else's inspiration. Your triumph may be another's encouragement. When you feel led, search that hash tag and see the hand of God as it moves throughout the lives of the connected body of Christ. Pray for the struggles, rejoice for the victories, for we are all one in Christ, and their victory is also yours. God bless.

READ VERSE 3

See the revelations in verse 1.

READ VERSE 4

As a member of the body of Christ, we must recognize the importance of sacrifice. Our entire salvation hinges upon that very act, and therefore, our calling is first to be living sacrifices, and sometimes that may cause us to literally be sacrifices. If that point comes to anyone, God will have grown them to the level needed to bring His name glory and be victorious. Furthermore, whatever the

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outcome of our sacrifice may be, we must be okay with it, as no one knows if God's will is to deliver from or to deliver up, for He has done both and was at both times glorified. Therefore, we must be ready to do anything; even pay the ultimate price for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Remember that the Father did not withhold death from His only begotten Son, so as His sons and daughters we should not expect Him to withhold the hardest tasks from us either. There is fruit to be had in it, yet it also means that sometimes the beauty in life must be revealed through unpleasant situations.

READ VERSES 5 – 16

There should not be one member of the body of Christ that is unwilling to fellowship with another. If any type of obstacle lies in the way of fellowship and collaboration then one of the two (or both) parts of the body ("churches") is failing. Denomination, doctrine, race, income, nothing should pose as a bar that earnest, fruitful fellowship cannot surmount. This also speaks volumes about the mobility of a congregation. While it is important that a congregation have a "ground zero" or planted impact point, I think that Paul is highlighting the fact that it is equally important that we exhort other congregations and visit them as a family; for the "Church" should not be identified as separated entities operating in tandem, but rather as separated congregations operating in the same "Church". If there be any division in the body then there shall be weakness and an opportunity for the enemy. There is only one Church, and it is the collective body of true believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their souls. It is not a building on the corner. It is not a denomination. It

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is one body, one mind and one unified voice that cries out “Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty who was, and is, and is to come!”. A congregation, is simply an assembly of 2 or more believers, who have come together for the purpose of fellowship and collaboration for the kingdom. With that in mind, there should not be a need to identify what the world calls “churches” by name other than to clarify and indicate geographical location for future fellowship. Other than that, any name other than Jesus is meaningless.

To assume this mentality however, would mean drastic change in the way many “churches” operate and possibly cause divisions within the currently divided walls of the Church. Yet, the benefit of operating in this way would be best found in Acts. If every church united, it would allow for the seamless flow of the power and resources God has provided and, with the right leadership in place, could spell the solution to virtually every problem overnight (literally, research has shown that the net income of all “churches” combined in the United States was enough to end homelessness and unemployment with money to spare). Yet, should unification occur by chance, then the covetous nature of man, which has warped his natural ideals and paradigm of giving versus receiving, would likely become the biggest obstacle in opening channels of resource sharing. No individual or group wants to have worked much and watch it flow out evenly to those who have done little. This is an American ideal, yet is blatantly anti-Christian and the EXACT opposite of what the new Christians did in Acts when the Holy Spirit fell fresh. If the church can find a way to unite again, we can resume the life changing process of salvation in a whole

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new way and, quite literally, change the world in a day (Acts 2:38-47).

READ VERSE 17

Division is a chief tool of the enemy, yet oftentimes he is only aiding as an agent of temptation to stir up the sinful, prideful nature we already have to commit this condemning work. Anyone who promotes division and separation cannot be of God as He is a God of Love which generally brings people together with Him and does not tear them from Him or His fellowship. Thus, the only separation that can be considered good is the temporary (until they repent) separation of those who are bent on causing division or carrying out other deeds of the flesh.

READ VERSE 18

Unfortunately, those bent on division, often carry a lot of influence and are able to sway the hearts and minds of many people, sometimes making them hard to remove. This is because their desire to “fill their own belly” is an appealing concept to the masses. Why wouldn't it be? Everyone wants to have their own belly filled in some way. Yet if one analyzes the effects of this school of thought, it's clear that selfishness, depravity and other fruits of evil are its result. E.g. Lil' Wayne is a very appealing figure in our culture. The words that he speaks are disproportionately self-centered and revolve around his own success in finding pleasure in life and almost NEVER indicate a desire to share this pleasure with anyone, even those who support him. Yet those who recite his words do not speak them from HIS perspective, but THEIR OWN, wishing to

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assume the same success in finding their own pleasures in life, not realizing Lil' Wayne did not write those words with his listeners in mind. That is, when he recites lyrics about his Ferrari, he is talking about just that, HIS Ferrari. He could care less about the Ferrari those who buy his music dream about when they recite his line, yet people are drawn to him. And this is simply because man has a sinful nature (i.e. we are "belly fillers" by nature) and things that satisfy that nature are naturally appealing, this can cause us to become covetous to the point of blindness, not seeing Lil' Wayne's selfishness in his lyrics and not seeing our own selfishness grow as we assume the same reprobate and depraved mentality.

READ VERSES 19 - 20

Obedience is more praiseworthy than goofing up and having a scar and a story to tell (though mankind tends to follow more closely with the latter pathway). Therefore, we should spend our days becoming masters of those works which are good and praiseworthy and self-LESS and delve as little as possible into anything that is not. Doing so will put you in position to stand on the head of the serpent, Satan. Note that it is not your power or declaration that puts Satan under your feet, but your obedience which has caused you to be positioned over him. These are two different things. We do not put the devil under us, we are lifted above him, not by our specific works but by our obedience to God and the grace He freely gave, the fruit of all this is peace. Let your walk then be one of submission and humility, not boldly declaring the enemy defeated, but boldly declaring the power of your God who defeats the enemy.

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READ VERSES 21 - 24

Love is reciprocal.

READ VERSES 25 – 27

To the Almighty God be glory both now and forever.

Now. Go share this and produce #RomansFruit