

Sunday, December 2, 2018—Romans 9-11

When children ask, “Why?” related to a decision or an action, parents often tell their children, “You’ll understand when you’re an adult.” There is a reason, but the child cannot grasp it. Time and maturity will help.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul lays out the guilt of man due to sin in the first four chapters and then explains the peace from God brought by Jesus and the freedom which comes through faith in Him. Paul then seems to answer the question, “Why would God do this?” He says, “And what if God, wanting to display his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath prepared for destruction? And what if he did this to make known the riches of his glory on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory?” (9:22-23).

In other words, God provides salvation in order to make clear His wrath toward sin and His mercy toward those who come to Him in faith. Israel had great privilege because the Law and Jesus came through them, but Jew and Gentile alike only receive salvation through faith (9:32). Paul saw the Jews as trying to establish their own righteousness (10:3) and heard Moses and Isaiah proclaiming from the past that God would use the Gentiles to prompt the Jews toward faith (10:19-21, 11:11).

In looking at this, Paul asks, “Who has known the mind of God? To whom does He go for counsel?” (11:34). Paul is stunned by the wisdom of God, and he worships Him. Pray for a fuller understanding of what God is doing through the gospel in your life. Worship Him even when you don’t understand all He is doing.

Saturday, December 1, 2018—Romans 5-8

To describe the relationship one has with Christ require certain legal language. After all, God gave the Law to Moses, a set of standards describing His holiness and the punishment required for violating that holiness. To sin is to incur guilt. The work of Jesus removes that guilt.

In a beautiful series of chapters, Paul describes to the Romans exactly what Jesus does for sinful people. When someone comes to an understanding of his sin and the

subsequent guilt, shame, and weakness that brings, he then declares his faith and trust in Jesus to remove those impediments and to restore his relationship with God. The righteousness imputed through Jesus provides peace with God. The faith-filled one is no longer a rebel, dead in sin, but a son, brought to life and adopted.

Baptism symbolizes the death to sin and the newness of life, so Paul wanted the Romans to realize the necessity and power of sanctification. Salvation comes in a moment but progresses for a lifetime. In Romans 7, Paul described the wrestling match of the old nature and the new. “Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me” (7:20). Jesus continually rescues him from himself, Paul testifies, and declares to him there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1). There is overcoming victory available for those who daily walk with Him (8:37).

Praise God for the victorious life available in Christ.

Friday, November 30, 2018—Acts 20:2, Romans 1-4

Modern technology allows communication in a variety of ways. Text messaging allows quick thoughts. Email provides lengthier, instantaneous messages. Video messaging and phone calls provide sound and sight to enhance the words being shared. Sometimes, because of the depth of the topic or the need of the moment, nothing replaces good, old-fashioned, face-to-face conversation.

Having already addressed churches in Galatia, Thessalonica, and Corinth, Paul stopped in Greece for three months and turned his attention to the believers in Rome. Not having visited Rome like the previous audiences, Paul did not address a specific doctrine or dysfunction. He wanted to make clear the gospel itself. Discussions of truth and error have their place, but this letter to the Romans was a celebration and explanation of what God had done for humanity through the work of Jesus Christ.

Paul saw a world where people had evidence of God and His truth but exchanged His truth for a lie. They even applauded those who practiced this sinfulness. In it all, they brought judgment on themselves. No one had an excuse. All were

condemned by their sinfulness. Only those whose hearts had been changed by God (2:29) had hope for forgiveness. “The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction” (3:22).

Thank God today for the righteousness available in Jesus Christ. Praise Him for not only promising that salvation through many prophets but for also displaying that salvation through Christ’s coming to earth.

Thursday, November 29, 2018—2 Corinthians 10-13

From the earliest moments in the Garden, Satan has attacked the people of God at the core of their being. He appeals to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:19). Paul taught the Corinthians this reality remained when he said, “For although we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh, since the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds” (10:3-4).

This battle raged on as Paul worked to shape the Corinthian church, laboring with all his might “because I have promised you in marriage to one husband—to present a pure virgin to Christ (11:2). Their numerous issues, which he addressed in both letters, were not simple behavioral issues they needed to correct. These were spiritual battles only God could solve with the power of His indwelling Spirit.

Paul dealt with weaknesses himself, yet he boasted in those weaknesses so that Jesus would receive even more glory. He pled with God to remove those weaknesses, but God told Him His grace was sufficient, proving His power in Paul’s weakness (12:9). Paul discovered God often uses His people even more powerfully through their weakness than through their gifting. He wants people to see Him and worship Him.

Examine your faith (13:5) and maturity (13:9). Pray for God to continue shaping you as His spotless bride with the ability to boast in Christ as He works through your weaknesses.

Wednesday, November 28, 2018—2 Corinthians 7-9

So much of modern culture focuses on emotion and pleasure. “Follow your heart,” so many will advise. The world easily ignores what Jeremiah 17:9 warns—the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

Paul worked by a different standard. In many of his letter he allowed the indicative to build the imperative—what was true (the indicative) provided the foundation for what he taught (the imperative). “So then, dear friends, since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” (7:1). Nothing they faced or feared was stronger or more caring than God Himself (the indicative). Therefore, they needed to pursue holiness in flesh and spirit (the imperative) in the fear of God.

Paul saw this holiness demonstrated in the churches in Macedonia. Despite severe persecution and extreme poverty, they begged Paul to be a part of an offering going to the Christians in Jerusalem (8:1-5). Knowing the greatness of God and the needs of others, they felt compelled to sacrifice themselves with joy. Paul wanted the Corinthians to do the same. Their hearts, in part, knew to give the money because it was a genuine need. Other emotions said to keep the money because they had genuine needs of their own. How do you follow a divided heart? They looked beyond the emotion to the truth—giving this offering was a gift they had promised and one Christ would honor.

Give cheerfully, knowing God will make His grace abound.

Tuesday, November 27, 2018—2 Corinthians 4-6

Christmas is the season of lights, yet those lights shine brightest when their surroundings are the darkest. Jesus called Himself the Light of the world, but His light shines in the soul, a place human eyes can't see. In following Jesus, there will be paradox—absurdity which is actually true.

Paul knew the Corinthians were suffering. He himself had suffered physically, socially, financially, emotionally, and more, yet they did not give up. “Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our

momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (4:16b-18).

They lived by new standards. They walked by faith and not by sight (5:7). Their bodies were temporary dwelling places, so it wasn’t surprising that they would wear out, but God had something better prepared for them—a home built in the heavens. This gave them courage to live boldly each day and to appeal to others to find this same home and be reconciled to God. His love compelled them to live differently than the world.

They had a treasure hidden in jars of clay (4:7) to demonstrate their power was from God and not themselves. They were able to live the paradox of glory or dishonor, “as grieving, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (6:10).

Praise God for the light of Jesus which makes all things possible.

Monday, November 26, 2018—Acts 19:11-20:1, 2 Corinthians 1-3

Knowing God and His people brings satisfaction to the soul and gives purpose for life. The brokenness caused by sin twists that God-given design into prideful pursuit. Peter saw Ananias and Sapphira do a good thing for the wrong reason (Acts 5), and they died. Similarly, the Ephesians saw the seven sons of Sceva try to mimic the powerful work God was doing through Paul, and the boys suffered demonic attack as a result.

In Jerusalem and Ephesus, God was using powerful signs to draw attention to Him and His truth. “In this way, the word of the Lord flourished and prevailed” (19:20). This did not mean the people of God were comfortable. On the contrary, they were facing difficulties in financial, social, and spiritual settings, yet God was providing and protecting.

The challenges were also relational. As a faithful disciple-maker, Paul wrote honestly to many churches. His relationship with the church in Corinth was one of love and discipline. He wrote about uncomfortable topics and challenged them to grow in grace, knowledge, and discipline. He had planned to come to them on his way to and

from Macedonia (1:10), but God prevented that so Paul would not cause them undue pain. He loved this church deeply, and wanted to help them grow, not hurt them.

What Paul celebrated was the good news they all shared. The gospel gave them hope, boldness, and freedom (3:12-18), and they would be able to celebrate that no matter what issues they needed to address.

Praise God for the power of the gospel to change lives.