



OHBC MEMORY VERSE – WEEK #47

THIS WEEK'S VERSE: II CORINTHIANS 4:18

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Why II Corinthians 4:18?

Because it is such a vivid reminder that we tend to live our lives upside-down!

I think we would all agree that no human being has been more mightily used of God in the church age than the Apostle Paul. There are certainly many reasons for his incredible effectiveness, but II Corinthians 4:18 gives us one of the most, if not THE most significant reason. It was because of where he was looking!

Simply put, Paul's focus was not on the things which can be seen with physical eyes. His focus was in the realm that can only be seen through spiritual eyes — the eyes of faith (Heb. 11:1). Unlike most American Christians, Paul understood that there is another half of reality which cannot be seen. He, therefore, made a calculated daily decision that it would be that unseen world that he would make his focus, because he also understood that all of the things his physical eyes were looking at were temporal and would one day be dissolved (II Peter 3:10-11), and that only the things seen through the eyes of faith would last forever.

From a practical, biblical standpoint we could say it this way: You can take everything in life — absolutely everything, and place it on the conveyor belt of time. Once it passes through the sifter of eternity, there will be only two things that come out on the other side: the Word of God and the souls of men. In all of life, those are the only two eternal things! And Paul said, “That's what I'm going to make my focus. That's where I will make the investment of my life. That's the arena in which I will set my spiritual eyes and affection (I Cor. 4:18; Col 3:1-2).

Unlike Paul, we are prone to live life reversed. What God intended to be the MEANS we have made the GOAL, and what God intended to be the GOAL we have made the MEANS. In other words, we use people to acquire things, rather than use things to invest in people.

One day in the very near future, however, we will see life exactly the way Paul is describing in this week's memory verse. We will all stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ on that great day of accounting, as the Lord Jesus Christ walks us back through our entire life. This time, however, we will see it from His vantage point. This time, we will see it from an eternal perspective. The only problem is, on that day, it will be too late to do anything about it! The key is seeing life like that now.

As we hide this verse in our hearts, may God help us to begin to see what He sees now, so we will make the most of every opportunity to invest the eternal Word of God into the eternal souls of men.

DAY 232

TODAY'S READING: ACTS 15-17

OVERVIEW:

The Jerusalem church addresses false teaching (chapter 15); Paul's second missionary journey (chapters 16 and 17).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Acts 15 introduces to us continuing controversy surrounding the salvation of the Gentiles. When Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch of Syria they are met by some false teachers who are disputing with and convincing the newly saved Gentiles that they must be circumcised to be saved. Indeed, circumcision was a significant symbolic act under the Old Testament law, but through the blood of Jesus Christ, the law had been satisfied and circumcision was no longer necessary (Galatians 5:6). Paul, seeing the

gospel in jeopardy, begins “no small dissension and disputation” (15:2) with these false teachers. Finally, it is determined that this question must be addressed by the apostles in Jerusalem.

Peter weighs in with the point that whether Jew or Gentile all are saved by grace so “why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (15:10). James settles the dispute: “my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (15:19, 20). If the Gentiles are saved by grace, then why do they have to “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication” (15:29) when none of those things is related to salvation or sanctification? James answers the question in verse 21: “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day”. These stipulations were placed upon the Gentiles in an effort to keep the door of faith open to the Jews. This is the same principle Paul followed in his ministry and described in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 where he states, “unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law . . . I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake”. Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas deliver the letter to the church at Antioch and there is much rejoicing at the decision of the apostles.

In approximately 50 AD, Paul and Barnabas determine to revisit the cities where they had preached the gospel and planted churches, but they can't agree on who should be their companions. Even the heroes of our faith are carnal at times! Barnabas takes his nephew, John Mark, who abandoned them on their first journey, and heads for Cyprus following the original route (15:39). Paul selects Silas (also called Silvanus) and takes a new route through Syria and Cilicia (15:40, 41).

Chapter 16 opens with Paul and Silas arriving in the neighboring cities of Derbe and Lystra. Paul is impressed by a young disciple named Timotheus (Timothy) who has a remarkable testimony in his hometown, Lystra and another city, Iconium (16:2). Paul invites Timothy to join him and Silas on this second journey but determines that Timothy must first be circumcised since he is half Jewish (16:1,3). Timothy was circumcised not as part of his salvation or sanctification, but in preparation for preaching the gospel to the Jews (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). After passing through Phrygia and Galatia (16:6), Paul's team is “forbidden of the Holy Ghost” to go anywhere but Macedonia. Once the team lands at Philippi, a chief city of Macedonia, we discover exactly why God wanted them there: He had arranged divine appointments with lost souls like Lydia and her family (16:14), a young girl possessed by a demon (16:16-18), the Philippian jailer and his family (16:30-34), Jews and Gentiles in Thessalonica and Berea (17:1-4,10-12) and Dionysius, Damaris and others in Athens (17:34). Proverbs 16:9 declares, “A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps”. Paul's heart was leading him to Asia and Bithynia, but God directed his steps to Macedonia. Imagine the consequences if Paul had been stiffnecked, insisted upon his own plans and strategy, and forced his way into Asia and Bithynia and neglected Macedonia? He would have missed God's supernatural orchestration of events and those listed above may have entered eternity in the flames of hell. Has God put obstacles, hindrances or roadblocks in the path of your plans? Don't be stiffnecked; trust the Lord. Brethren, let the Lord direct your steps.

DAY 233

TODAY'S READING: ACTS 18-21

OVERVIEW:

Paul's ministry at Corinth (chapter 18); Paul's ministry at Ephesus (chapter 19); Paul begins his journey to Jerusalem (chapter 20); Paul's arrival in Jerusalem (chapter 21).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

By the time we open our Bibles to Acts 18 in today's reading, Paul and his missionary team have preached throughout Syria and Cilicia (15:41), the cities of Lystra and Derbe (16:1), throughout Phrygia and Galatia (16:6), the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea (16:11,12; 17:1,10) of Macedonia and Athens, Greece (17:15). With the preaching of the word came persecution. In II Corinthians 11:23-28, Paul described his persistent sufferings in these terms: “in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in

perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” What a resume! If God’s “whatever, wherever, whenever” for you (and me) included such persecutions, would you still obey Him? “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

Acts 18 begins with Paul traveling from Athens to Corinth, a city in the Roman province of Achaia (18:12). Corinth was a wealthy city, a center of intellectualism and famous for its excess, perversion, and vice. Everyday was Mardi Gras in Corinth. It was the New Orleans, Amsterdam or Bangkok of biblical times! To be a Corinthian was to almost automatically be associated with sexual promiscuity. In fact, “Corinthian woman” was a proverbial phrase for a prostitute, and “to play the Corinthian”, is to play the whore, or indulge whorish inclinations. Paul was sent there to shine the light of the glorious gospel of Christ in their great darkness. Prior to Paul’s arrival, God had already arranged a meeting between Paul and a Jewish couple (Aquila and Priscilla) who were exiled from Rome. This couple became faithful followers of Christ, using all of their resources to further the gospel of Jesus Christ. Aquila and Priscilla were found in doctrine having corrected Apollos’ outdated teaching (18:25,26); Paul called them his “helpers in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 16:3) because they had “for my (Paul’s) life laid down their own necks” (Rom. 16:4); all of the Gentile churches also gave thanks for Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:4); and when they returned to Rome, their home became the meeting place of the church (Rom. 16:5). Aquila and Priscilla knew what marriage was all about: a joint venture in advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Paul carried out a fruitful ministry in Corinth for “a year and six months” (18:11). In that time, some prestigious men came to Christ: Justus, whose house was structurally connected to the Jewish synagogue; Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue; and eventually, another chief ruler of the synagogue and the man who had caused a riot over Paul’s preaching: Sosthenes (18:17; I Cor. 1:1,2). In due time, Paul and Aquila and Priscilla departed for Ephesus where Aquila and Priscilla were left, and Paul continued on to Caesarea eventually returning home to Antioch of Syria (18:22,23). While at Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla met a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt named Apollos, a powerful preacher who needed to be brought up to date doctrinally. Apollos was still preaching the gospel of the kingdom of heaven and performing the “baptism of John” – talk about a time warp! He had no idea that Jesus the Messiah had already come and gone, that God’s plan for Israel had been postponed, and that the Church Age was already in effect. He was probably still wearing his hair in a mullet! (I love the bumper sticker, “Friends don’t let friends wear mullets”.) Aquila and Priscilla enlightened this evangelist and brought him into the present by explaining the events of the past 22 years (18:26). Apollos humbly and joyfully receives the new revelation, preaches that Jesus is the Christ and moves on to Corinth (19:1).

While Apollos is at Corinth, Paul begins his third missionary journey passing through Phrygia and Galatia (18:23) and landing at Ephesus (19:1) where he finds some of Apollos’ converts. As Jesus said, “The disciple is not above his master” (Matt. 10:24), so Paul finds some unsaved disciples who, like their discipler Apollos, have been baptized with the baptism of John the Baptist. They are also unaware that the Messiah has already come and gone. Therefore, these disciples are most certainly not saved because salvation comes only through Jesus Christ (see John 14:6) and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost is evidence of that salvation (Romans 8:9b “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”). These disciples, however, have never even heard of Jesus Christ or the Holy Ghost (19:1-4)! Paul preaches the gospel of grace to them, they are water baptized in Jesus’ name, and then they receive the Holy Ghost, speaking with tongues and prophesying (19:4-6). Remember: tongues are a sign to skeptical Jews (I Cor. 1:22; 14:22). The events here at Ephesus are exactly like the events in Samaria (Acts 8:14-16): Paul’s apostolic authority and his message is validated by the sign of tongues. These Jewish disciples of Apollos now know for certain that Paul’s gospel is the true gospel.

Paul had a fruitful few years at Ephesus (19:9,10,18-20), and the Word of God had free course throughout Asia (modern day Asia Minor). However, his success was stifled by a massive riot which forced him to begin his journey to Jerusalem (19:21; 20:1). On his way to Jerusalem, Paul revisits many of the places wherein he had planted churches and preached the gospel, edifying the disciples. Paul, knowing that Jerusalem would mark the beginning of his end, is not afraid to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (21:13), because long ago, at his salvation, Paul had already laid his life in the hands of Jesus: “for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (II Tim. 1:12). Paul fearlessly and confidently declares in II Tim. 4:6-8, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,

which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”.

O God, let us live fearlessly abandoned to you that we may have the confidence of Paul at our death!

DAY 234

TODAY'S READING: ACTS 22-25

#### OVERVIEW:

Paul's testimony before riotous Jews (chapter 22); Paul's testimony before the Jewish Council (chapter 23); Paul's testimony before Felix, the governor of Judea (chapter 24); Paul's testimony before Festus (chapter 25).

#### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem marked the beginning of his end. In Acts 21, the Jews of Jerusalem had stirred up a riot crying out, "Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place" (21:28). The Roman chief captain of Jerusalem not wanting this riot to reach Caesar's ears for his job's sake, immediately halted the riot, rescuing Paul from certain death (21:31,32). Chapter 22 is Paul's testimony before the riotous Jewish crowd, but as soon as he mentions preaching to Gentiles (22:21, 22), the crowd returns to a nearly unmanageable uproar. The chief captain was about to scourge Paul until he discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen. With that revelation, Paul inserted himself into the flow of the Roman legal system, thereby guaranteeing him an audience with leading political figures in the Roman government, even Caesar himself. The following chapters record Paul's testimony before a few of these figures. In chapter 23, Paul stands before the Jewish council once again in Jerusalem. In chapter 24, Paul is transferred to Caesarea, the Roman provincial seat of Judea, where he stands before Governor Felix. Felix is replaced by Festus (24:27), and in chapter 25, Paul gives testimony before Festus and the Jewish council.

Though there are many truths and applications we could pull out of today's reading, let's focus primarily on a few truths related to Paul's suffering.

1. Suffering was a natural part of Paul's commission as it is a natural part of our commission. When God commissioned Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, he described his ministry in this way: "he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:15,16). God promised that Paul would have the incredible privilege of preaching the gospel to Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel, so what Paul was experiencing in Acts 21-25 was God's faithfulness in keeping His promises. But God's faithfulness also included the promise of suffering. In the depth of the night, God compassionately reassured Paul of His promise: "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). Paul accepted suffering as the natural result of following Christ and reckoned that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). Paul placed all of his hope in eternity because that is what he had invested in. God promised those of us who would desire to live like Paul: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12). If we witness and seek to live holy lives, we will suffer for it, but if we have invested in eternity, a greater hope is yet before us.
2. Suffering brings us into a deeper intimacy with Christ, because we experience a taste of His sufferings. It would be natural for Paul to be angry with God; it's not hard to imagine Paul saying something like, "God, here I am witnessing for you, seeking to live a holy life, and this is what I get?"! It's the complaint we often hear from the lost: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" In reality, however, this is a very self-righteous and self-centered question. Self-righteous because we are calling ourselves "good" when Romans 3:12 states, "there is none that doeth good, no, not one". Self-centered because we think life is all about us when Revelation 4:11 declares, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created". The real question should be, "Why do good things happen to such bad people?" And this is Paul's perspective. Paul is so thankful for the price that Jesus Christ paid for him that he considers these sufferings a blessing.

In fact, suffering like Christ was one of his goals in life: “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 3:8-10). Through suffering, we become more intimately acquainted with Christ.

DAY 235

TODAY’S READING: ACTS 26-28

OVERVIEW:

Paul’s testimony before King Agrippa (chapter 26); Paul’s journey to and arrival in Rome (chapters 27 and 28).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into chapter 26 today, we find Paul giving his testimony before king Agrippa, the great grandson of Herod the Great who sought to kill Jesus at his birth (Matthew 2:1-16). At this point, let’s pause and consider the SINCERE CONCERN of Paul’s message, and the SIMPLE CONTENT of Paul’s message.

First, the SINCERE CONCERN of Paul’s message. It would have been easy for Paul to despise the corrupt and wicked rulers before whom he had been on trial. Clearly, none of them were willing to take a stand for the truth and declare Paul innocent (23:27-29; 24:12, 13; 26:31). The Jews falsely accused Paul and wanted to kill him (21:28, 29; 23:12-15). Felix kept Paul in prison in hopes of a bribe (24:26), and to please the wicked Jews (24:27) and likewise, Festus kept Paul bound to keep the Jews happy (25:9). It seems that “justice” went to the highest bidder or the best liar. Despite all of this injustice and corruption, Paul, rather than becoming incensed, declares the gospel of Jesus Christ, sincerely longing for the salvation of these wicked men. Even when king Agrippa, one of the most perverted and corrupt men imaginable, sarcastically commented to Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (26:28), Paul sincerely responded, “I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds” (26:29). Paul could see through the wickedness of these men to the cross where Christ died even for their sins. With all the love in his heart, Paul longed to see the salvation of his persecutors. How successful are you at obeying Matthew 5:44: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”?

Second, the SIMPLE CONTENT of Paul’s message. It is important for us to pay attention to the content of Paul’s message each time he stood before a government official. If it were me, I would be up all night, wracking my brain, trying to fashion the most moving and powerful sermon ever. But not Paul; each time he stands before a world ruler, he simply gives his testimony and a simple gospel presentation. Nothing fancy; simply, “I once was lost, but now I’m found.” In fact, God told Paul that he would “be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard” (Acts 22:15). Paul was only responsible for preaching what he had seen and heard. As believers in Christ, we don’t have to be intellectual elitists, eloquent preachers, or Bible experts; we simply need to declare boldly what we have seen and heard! The great evangelist H.A. Ironside was once interrupted by an atheist shouting, “There is no God! Jesus is a myth!” and finally, “I challenge you to a debate!” Ironside responded, “I accept your challenge, sir! But on one condition: when you come, bring with you ten men and women whose lives have been changed for the better by the message of atheism. Bring former prostitutes and criminals whose lives have been changed, who are now moral and responsible individuals. Bring outcasts who had no hope and have them tell us how becoming atheists has lifted them out of the pit! And sir,” he concluded, “if you can find ten such men and women, I will be happy to debate you. And when I come, I will gladly bring with me two hundred men and women from this very city whose lives have been transformed in just those ways by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” You can’t argue with a changed life. Ask God to open a door today for you to tell someone what you’ve seen and heard.

After a difficult journey, Paul finally landed at Rome (28:16) around 60 A.D., and was allowed to live in a rented house where he preached to both Jews and Gentiles and received guests. For the next two years Paul continued “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (28:31). It is believed that Paul also wrote his

epistles to Philemon, Timothy, Titus, the Ephesians, the Colossians and the Philippians at this time. According to tradition, Paul was beheaded sometime after 64 A.D. during Nero's severe persecution of Christians. During this same persecution, Peter was crucified upside-down because he didn't consider himself worthy to be crucified in the same fashion as his Lord and Savior.

Before we end, let's consider what may be the most important lesson of the Book of Acts: God takes full responsibility for accomplishing His own mission. Acts is rather comical when you consider how confused these "great men of God" were for the first 27 years of their ministry. The believers in Acts 1-7 had no idea whether or not Christ would immediately restore the kingdom to Israel so they sold their houses and all of their possessions and camped out in Jerusalem so they didn't miss the Second Coming of Christ (Acts 1:6,7; 2:44-47; 4:34,35; Zechariah 14:1-9); the Apostles were dazed and confused when the Samaritans and Gentiles started getting saved (Acts 11:1-3,18); the Jewish believers had an extremely difficult time letting go of circumcision and the law of Moses and trusting solely in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 15:1,2); the Apostles were most certainly shocked when God postponed His dealings with Israel in order to begin working with a ! new institution, the Church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 11:25; Eph. 3:1-13). From a human standpoint, living in the time of the early church would have been frustrating and confusing IF you were trying to analyze and formulize God. But if you "walked by faith, not by sight," then every day would have been an adventure. At exactly the right time and in exactly the right place, exactly the right people were saved, connected and moved on. Consider God's ancient arrangement of the Jewish holy feasts so that the Jews would at the right time and in the right place, witness the crucifixion of their Messiah at Passover, and fifty days later at Pentecost, have a chance to repent of their fatal error (Acts 2). Remember how God intervened on behalf of Peter and John, freeing them from prison to continue preaching to the people (Acts 5:17-20)? Think of how the persecution that arose after the stoning of Stephen served God's purposes in motivating the obstinate Jewish believers to get out of Jerusalem and carry out the rest of God's mission to Judea, Samaria and the uttermost (Acts 1:8; 8:1f). Remember how God supernaturally arranged Philip's meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-30)? Consider also, the perfectly timed salvation of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9) and Peter's visit to Cornelius' house (Acts 10). We could go on and on. The bottom line is God will accomplish His own mission despite our cluelessness. If we surrender ourselves to Him daily, we have the amazing honor of joining Him where He is working.

Have a great adventure with God today!

DAY 236

TODAY'S READING: ROMANS 1- 3

OVERVIEW:

The righteousness of God required by the heathen (chapter 1); the righteousness of God required by the hypocrite and Hebrew (chapter 2); the righteousness of God required by all of humanity (chapter 3).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

To this point in our reading through the New Testament we have been in the historical section. In the four Gospels, we were able to see four historical perspectives of Jesus Christ's person and ministry. The Book of Acts revealed to us the history of the early church through the "acts of the apostles," and allowed us to see the transition that occurred from God's dealing with the Nation of Israel to God's dealing with the Church. As we have learned, there are three transitional Books in the New Testament:

1. Matthew, which bridges from the Old Testament to the New Testament.
2. Acts, which bridges from the Nation of Israel back to the Church.
3. Hebrews, which bridges from the Church back to the Nation of Israel.

We have just crossed the bridge provided by the Book of Acts, and are now entering the doctrinal teachings of the Church Age.

The Book of Romans is the greatest Book in the Bible on Christian doctrine. It is very different from the other New Testament Books in that Paul is not writing to address doctrinal or practical problems with this church. What the content of this Book actually becomes is the handbook that gives us God's viewpoint on what He is doing in and through His church. That's why God placed this Book immediately following the Book of Acts. Right after you come through the historical section of the New Testament, and prior to getting into the other church epistles, God gives us His handbook for understanding the doctrine of the

church. It is interesting that the order of the letters to the churches in the New Testament follow the prescription laid down in II Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for :

- DOCTRINE – Romans (the New Testament Book on Christian doctrine)
- REPROOF – I and II Corinthians (Books that reprove sin)
- CORRECTION – Galatians (A Book specifically written to correct false doctrine)
- INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians (Books teaching righteous living based on sound doctrine)

The apostle God used to write this epistle (letter) is identified in the first word of the first verse of the first chapter of the Book. It was written by Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), as were all of the letters to the churches. Paul was uniquely qualified to be the one God chose to write the Book of Romans in that he was born a Jew (Acts 21:39; 22:3), was completely familiar with Greek culture (Acts 21:37), and was the possessor of Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37; 22:25; 23:37).

It is important to note that though God chose to use Paul to write this epistle to the Romans, Paul himself had never actually been to Rome. He had a passion within him to get there to minister to the believers, but somehow in God's sovereignty, He had not allowed it. In Paul's introduction in chapter one, he feels compelled to let the Romans (and us!) know that. He writes, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles." I don't know how your mind works, but when you read verses like that, don't you just have to ask, why wouldn't God let Paul get to Rome sooner? I mean, if he's the apostle to the Gentiles, why wouldn't God allow him to go and minister to his heart's content? And don't you think Paul had that very same question? But then think about it. Do you realize that most of the believers to which God would use the Apostle Paul to establish in Christian doctrine (1:11), would be people just like the Romans, who had never and would never see Paul face to face? God uses his ministry through Paul to accomplish the same purposes in us that He did in the believers in Rome in the first century! It's a very subtle reminder, that when we have a passion for a good thing that God doesn't bring to pass, it is most likely because He is serving a much more grand and glorious purpose! In this case, if Paul would have gotten to Rome on his time schedule, we wouldn't have the Book of Romans!

Following the introduction in 1:1-15, beginning in 1:16, Paul identifies two ways God exhibits His power.

First, He demonstrates His righteousness to those who receive the gospel by faith (1:16,17). Second He demonstrates His wrath to those who reject His truth by ungodliness (1:18, 21). In the remainder of chapter one, Paul catalogs the sins of the Gentiles, beginning with their rejection of His glory (1:21-23), which resulted in their perversion physically (1:24-25), emotionally (1:26-27), and mentally (1:28-32).

Having proven the ungodliness of the Gentiles in chapter one, he now turns the spotlight on the sins of the hypocrites (2:1-16) and the Hebrews (2:17-29). He begins chapter two by showing the hypocrites the inexcusability of their behavior (2:1-4). Anticipating their objections, Paul informs them of an inescapable appointment with God's judgment (2:5-16). Paul concludes the chapter by exposing the unreliable confidence the Jews place in the law (2:17, 24) and in the unprofitable ritual of circumcision (2:25-29).

In chapter three, Paul will reach the conclusion to which he has been moving since chapter one, verse 18. The conclusion is identified in 3:9, "For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all UNDER SIN." Whether you're a HEATHEN (1:21-32), a HYPOCRITE (2:1-16), or a HEBREW (2:17-29), the scriptures conclude that "there is none righteous, no, not one" (3:10). You see, Paul realizes that before someone receives the "good news" of the gospel, they must acknowledge the "bad news" of their sinfulness. So chapter three begins by proving all of humanity's condemnation before God (3:1-20), and concludes by manifesting the availability of righteousness to all who choose to receive it (3:21-31). Take note of the fact that God's righteousness is offered with three conditions:

1. It must be received apart from the law. (3:21)
2. It is only available through Christ. (3:22-26)
3. It can only be accepted by faith. (3:21-31)

Note some key facts and figures about the Book of Romans: Approximate date of writing: 60 A.D. Key Verse: Romans 1:16, 17 Key Words: Righteousness; appears 39 times Christ is seen as: our righteousness (Romans 3:23, 24); Chapters: 16; Verses: 433; Words: 9,477

Here is a simple outline to guide you through the Book:

- The Revelation of Righteousness In The Gospel:
- The Righteousness Received In Salvation (Chapters 1-8)
- The Righteousness Rejected By The Jews (Chapters 9-11)
- The Righteousness Reproduced In Sanctification (Chapters 12-16)

DAY 237

TODAY'S READING: ROMANS 4 - 8

OVERVIEW: The righteousness of God received by faith (chapter 4); the revelation of the righteousness of God realized in the soul (chapter 5); the righteousness of God revealed in trials (chapters 6-7); the righteousness of God represented as eternal (chapter 8).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we discussed in yesterday's comments, in terms of doctrine, there is not a more important Book in the entire New Testament than the Book of Romans. And in terms of doctrine, God is more than just a little adamant about it! Though the heed and call in "Christian" circles is to "let go" of doctrine for the sake of so-called unity, God's clear admonition to His church is to "hold fast" (II Tim. 1:13) to sound doctrine, so that we can be genuinely unified with everyone else who wraps their hands firmly around the truth of His Word! It is not simply our love that unites us, but our love of the truth. True biblical love always has truth as its basis (See II John 1:1-4 and the usage of the word "truth" five times in these four verses). It is worth noting that in the epistles Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy and Pastor Titus (i.e. the "pastoral epistles") he mentions doctrine no less than 13 times! (See I Tim. 1:3,10; 4:1,6,16; 5:17; 6:1, 3; II Tim. 3:10; 4:2; Titus 1:9; 2:1,10.) Again, doctrine is what the Book of Romans is all about, not the least of which is the doctrine of salvation. There is no other Book of the Bible that provides more complete teaching on this most important subject than the Book of Romans.

Something else that is important to note as we make our way through this incredible Book is Paul's utilization of questions in presenting his case. Perhaps you picked up on that in yesterday's reading. In yesterday's reading alone (Rom. 1-3), do you realize that Paul asked over 25 questions?! It's almost as if he anticipates the objections a person might raise in response to the truth he is presenting, and takes away their argument before they even get there. It is a masterful teaching technique that the Spirit of God uniquely gifted Paul to employ. Pay close attention to this technique as we make our way through the remainder of this Book.

As we move into chapter 4 today, it is important to note a very significant transition that is being made. Whereas chapters 1-3 focused on the fact that God's righteousness is **REQUIRED BY SINNERS**, chapter 4 focuses on the fact that God's righteousness is **RECEIVED BY FAITH**. Whereas chapters 1-3 focused on the "WHAT," chapter 4 focuses on the "HOW."

In 4:1-8, Paul introduces us to the **REWARD** of righteousness by faith, namely that we are "justified." To be justified means to be rendered righteous. It may be trite for some, but a great way to remember the truth encompassed in the word "justified," is that it means "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. As an illustration, Paul reaches back into the Old Testament to the life of Abraham to point to one who was justified by faith (4:1-8). Then, Paul reveals three truths concerning how it is that justification is actually reckoned to us: 1) It is not by circumcision (4:9-12); 2) It is not by the law (4:13-15); 3) It is only by grace through faith (4:16-22). The chapter closes with the promise that just as God imputed righteousness to Abraham because of his faith, He, likewise, imputes righteousness to each of us who receive the gospel by faith.

Having laid down the reality that the righteousness God demands is not an **ACHIEVED** **RIGHTEOUSNESS**, but a **RECEIVED** **RIGHTEOUSNESS** (that is, a righteousness that is not of **WORKS**, but by **FAITH**), Paul then moves in chapter 5 to lay out the fact that because we didn't do anything to **EARN** our salvation (our righteousness), there is also nothing we can do to **LOSE** it! The doctrine of the eternal security of the believer (one of the most controversial doctrines in Christianity!) is firmly established in the Book of Romans, particularly in chapter 5. This chapter can be divided into two

sections. The first section (5:1-10) identifies the BENEFIT of justification by faith: SECURITY. The second section (5:11-21) identifies the BASIS for justification by faith: ATONEMENT.

As we move into chapter 6, another transition is being made:

- Chapters 1-5 teach us about JUSTIFICATION by faith.
- Chapters 6-8 teach us about SANCTIFICATION by the Spirit.
- Chapters 1-5 identify how God saved us from the PENALTY of sin.
- Chapters 6-8 identify how Christ saved us from the POWER of sin.
- Chapters 1-5 show us the GATEWAY to the Christian life.
- Chapters 6-8 show us the PATHWAY of the Christian life.

While there is a significant contrast between Romans 1-5 and 6-8, there is an equally significant connection between Romans 6, 7 and 8. The connection between these three chapters is linked to a little phrase in Romans 5:17: "reign in life." Notice that Paul does not fully explain (in this verse) HOW those who have been justified by faith in Christ shall "reign in life." The full explanation comes in Romans 6, 7 and 8. Check it out . . .

- Romans 6 explains how the believer can reign in life because SIN no longer REIGNS over us. (6:12)
- Romans 7 explains how the believer can reign in life because the LAW no longer has DOMINION over us. (7:1,4)
- Romans 8 explains how the believer can reign in life because the SPIRIT now gives LIFE and LIBERTY to us. (8:2,4)