

Day 336

Concerning Gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12.1 – 14.40

Paul now turns to address a key matter with the Corinthians – their practice of the Holy Spirit’s gifts among them and how they conduct themselves in the gatherings when they meet.

1 Cor.12.1-3 From Paul’s words’ ‘now concerning’ here, it may be assumed that this is one of the areas the Corinthians wrote to Paul about in their communication with him.

Paul actually sets out to look at the *spiritual things*, or *things of the Spirit*. The word ‘gifts’ does not appear in the original and is supplied by English translations. (Greek πνευματικῶν *pneumatikon*, ‘of spirituals’.) By this, Paul is referring to the things of the Spirit. Our term ‘spiritual’ to refer to all things inner is not Paul’s understanding of this word. He is speaking of the action of the Holy Spirit.

It is clear that it is the Holy Spirit who enables the confession of Jesus as Lord. In former times, the believers served dumb idols, who did not speak, but now they serve a speaking God, and things said in His Name need to be evaluated – thus, any curse against Christ cannot be sourced in the Holy Spirit. They need to learn how the Spirit’s leading works.

1 Cor.12.4-11 Although the gifts (Greek χαρίσματα *charismata*) are varied, they come from One Holy Spirit. The purpose of the gifts is for the good of all, as a *contribution* to the overall (Greek συμφέρον *sympheeron*) . The NIV has ‘common good’ here, which is a helpful reading.

1 Cor.12.12-14 Paul employs the metaphor of the body to convey the interdependence of the church in its various gifts. We have been immersed into this body by the same Spirit, who is the life of the body, even though it has different limbs, organs and expressions.

1 Cor.12.15-21 Just as our natural bodies need all the parts working together, so the body of Christ, the community of believers, needs all the parts participating, without denigrating anyone’s role nor rejecting anyone as superfluous.

1 Cor.12.22-26 Just because a part of the body is visible and high profile does not accord it higher honour. We treat with modesty and cover the private parts, but they serve a key role in our wellbeing. Similarly, our inner parts, which are never seen, are not seen because they need to work well internally. In the same way, visibility and being ‘seen’ in the body of Christ does not infer greater importance of honour over other less visible operations in the community. Paul calls for ‘equal concern’ for one another, and for participation in one another’s joys and sorrows.

1 Cor.12.27-31 Paul is clear that each believer is part of the body of Christ, and indispensable to it. The kind of gifts to build up the church are emissaries, speakers of Christ’s mind, communicators of God’s purpose, those who mediate Christ’s healing power to people, those who facilitate the body to gather and run to order, and those who

pray and praise God in ecstatic and mysterious speech. But Paul has a key to share which all gifts need in their operation.

1 Cor.13.1-3 Whatever gift is being exercised, without the oiling of its operation with love, it is useless. The Greek word ἀγάπη *aghápee* is used here, implying the love of God which is selfless, unconditional, differentiated from parental, friendship or sexual love. Love must be the driver of all giftedness.

1 Cor.13.4-13 Love's qualities are exclusively altruistic and other-focussed. Unlike spiritual gifts, which will cease to be needed when the fulfilment of being present face-to-face with Christ comes, love has no end. Paul ranks love alongside faith and hope in significance, but elevates love above the others.

1 Cor.14.1-5 Paul now addresses an issues which seems to be particularly exercising the Corinthians, that of speaking in unlearned languages or ecstatic speech, commonly referred to as the gift of tongues. Paul commends love and mother-tongue prophetic words to them as key factors in their life together.

It may well be that the church in Corinth was permitting or even encouraging unbridled ecstatic utterance in the church, for long periods, perhaps believing that God would edify the body or give understanding to the hearers supernaturally.

Paul is clear, though, when one speaks in tongues, God is being addressed, not men. Thus, on the day of Pentecost, the one hundred and twenty were not speaking to each other, but 'declaring the wonderful works of God.' Tongues are not designed to be used for human communication.

Prophecy, on the other hand, speaking in a mother tongue the words inspired by the Holy Spirit for the building up, cheering up and stirring up of the body is a person-to-person communication, and key to the well-being of the community. Paul is not dismissing the place of tongues, but points out that the gift is for self-edification, while the gift of prophecy is for building up one another. It is better to prophesy to the body than to speak in tongues, unless there is an explanatory interpretation of what is being said to God for mutual benefit.

1 Cor.14.6-12 Paul suggests that if he stands before them and addresses them in other tongues, it will be of no use to them, unless accompanied by comprehensible speech designed to build them up. Just as musical instruments play recognizable tunes and battle-horns sounds agreed calls in battle, so in addressing the assembly, intelligible words (Greek εὖσημιον λόγον *évseemon lóghon*, a well-framed word) are necessary to communicate with the people. Paul wants them to put their energy into speaking words that build others up.

1 Cor.14.13-19 Paul indicates that there are occasions when a tongues-speaker may address the assembly, but this needs an explanation, an interpretation. Both prayer in the Spirit and prayer with the mind have a place, but in the gathering, there needs to be a sense of common purpose.

Paul makes it clear that the gift of tongues is a personal experience of his, but he does not use to teach the church! He would much rather speak intelligibly than otherwise.

It is important that these words of Paul are taken in context of the rest of the Scriptures. There have been moves to turn his balanced and wise words to Corinth into legislation for the use of tongues in the body of Christ. When compared with the experiences in Acts, the other places where tongues is recorded, it can be seen that the expression of ecstatic speech there is spontaneous, simultaneous and uninterpreted, particularly in its first instance of appearance in the upper room in Jerusalem. If we say that tongues can never be spoken in a gathering as a form of corporate worship and praise to the Lord, as is practiced in almost all charismatic assemblies today, we would have to forbid the upper room speakers on that basis. Likewise, in Acts 10, when the Spirit broke upon the gathering in the house of Cornelius, the result was corporate, simultaneous speaking as a sign of God's presence.

This needs to be brought into the equation and put beside what Paul is saying. The import of his teaching here is that when an assembly is being addressed by a speaker, intelligible words are to be used. In a context of corporate praise and worship, there is no danger to order if all are speaking to God, in tongues and mother-tongue, for the focus is Godward, not body-ward.

1 Cor.14.20-22 Paul draws from the Scriptures to illustrate what he is teaching, taking Isaiah 28.11 and 12 as showing that tongues will be a feature of the coming kingdom. They are a sign, an indication of God's presence and activity, so that unbelievers will witness God's action, but believers do not require this kind of sign, and prophecy is needed.

1 Cor.14.23-25 Paul also highlights the usefulness of prophecy to speak to unbelievers who think the church is crazy for their tongues speaking; when they hear in their own language words of knowledge spoken to them, they will turn to God.

1 Cor.14.26 -33a Paul emphasises the purpose of contributions in the body – they are for mutual building-up. If there are addresses in tongues, they must be interpreted, or else the tongues speaker must pipe down, and speak to God without addressing the assembly.

With prophetic input, there needs to be evaluation by the body. It is not to be a floor show for gifted speakers, but a place where God's voice is discerned by all. Also, speakers must give way to each other, and not hog the floor. In some Radical congregations of the Reformation, this was called the *lex sedentium*, the 'law of the sitters', meaning that those speaking were required to give place to others who had input to bring. And the claim of ecstatic compulsion does not hold water with Paul, for he states that prophets are able to moderate their own wills and behaviour – the spirit of the prophet is under the control of the prophet, not the Spirit! God is the author of order (Greek εἰρήνη *eiréenee*, peace, calm) not disorder.

1 Cor.14.33b-36 Paul addresses the voluble women of Corinth here, who it appears have taken advantage of their new found freedom in the body of Christ to come out of the cultural bondage they have been in – they obviously have space to pray and prophesy alongside the men, (see 1 Cor.11. 5) a far cry from the separation of the synagogue. But

they are to quieten down and not interrupt. Paul is obviously not silencing them, or that would contradict their praying and prophesying. But their interruptions and outspokenness are unseemly and disorderly. Again, it is important not to make Paul's words legislative – he is writing to a known situation.

1 Cor. 14.37-40 Paul commends his words to them for evaluation, but urges that they be heeded and not ignored.

In case in reading his words the Corinthians apply them harshly, Paul encourages them again to be eager to prophesy, but not to clamp down on tongues because of what he has said. His aim to restore to them decency and order (Greek εὐσχημόνως καὶ κατὰ τάξιν *evscheemónos kai katá táxin.*)

Day 337

The Hope of Resurrection and a Riot in Ephesus

1 Corinthians 15.1 – 16.24; Acts 19.23 – 20.1

1 Cor.15.1- 58 This is considered in three sections

1. The Gospel according to Paul
2. Jesus Christ risen from the dead
3. The future hope of Christians for bodily existence in the resurrection.

1 Cor. 15.1 – 12 Paul states for the record what he sees as the core of the good news of Jesus Christ. That is, the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, his burial and his resurrection from the dead, being witnessed by hundreds of people, including Paul himself. Paul counts himself among those who have seen the risen Christ. Not just a vision, or a hallucination, but the Lord Himself. Paul witnesses to how crazy this is, seeing how he set out to destroy the church of Jesus by persecution. Yet, he says, by God's grace I am what I am – an apostle, one sent by Jesus to bear witness to His saving death and resurrection .

For the early believers, the resurrection was a non-negotiable. When Paul came to Athens, just down the road from Corinth, he was accused in Acts 17.18 by the Epicureans and the Stoic philosophers of promoting strange Gods, because he preached the resurrection of the dead.

Paul says in his good news that the death of Jesus is vital – by it our sins are forgiven; Jesus, the Passover lamb has been killed, so that the death we should have died would be averted.

1 Cor. 15.13 - 28 Paul goes on from verse 13 to dismiss those who are preaching that there is no resurrection of the dead. He is absolutely clear about it, that everything stands or falls by the fact of the resurrection. If there is no resurrection, then Jesus is not risen from the dead, and Christian faith, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the miracles, the teaching, all is futile. Paul really doesn't mince his words.

Paul states that if Jesus is not risen from the dead, your faith is futile, and they are still in their sins.(v.17) Paul is saying that the release from sin is not just dependent on the cross, but on the resurrection.

Not only that, but no resurrection means those who have died believing in Christ have been annihilated, with no future. The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of our future real existence with God.

If we are just having happy time here and now, says Paul, with Jesus, then we are to be pitied more than anyone. But says Paul in v20, ‘ now is Christ risen from the dead, the firstfruits of them sleep’. And just as death has reigned since the first corruption of man, so through Jesus Christ, all can be made alive. Paul talks in v.26 of death being the last enemy, which Jesus will conquer. And we will see that day when everything, including the scourge of death is subject to Him.

1 Cor. 15. 29 – 34 Here is a strange practice, in verse 29, the reference to baptizing for the dead. There is no occurrence in Scripture of any other reference to baptism for the dead. The most likely explanation is that was a local practice, or even one occurrence of a believer dying before they were able to be baptized, so someone else was baptized by proxy in their place, as testimony to their faith and to confess that they also were part of the covenant community. It isn’t something any orthodox Christian practices, but Paul is saying, what was the point of that, if the dead person is never going to rise again to enter the benefits of that resurrection life?

Paul is adamant, then. Jesus is physically risen, He is the one that was dead and is alive for evermore.

1 Cor. 15.35 – 50

Death is a robber; death is no man’s friend. Whenever it comes, it is unwelcome.

Paul is quite sharp with the questioner who asks, what will the new body be like. You fool, says Paul, think of sowing a seed. It will be of the same matter as the seed. Sown, he says in v43, in corruption, raised in incorruption. Sown a body and soul, raised a spirit-powered body. Paul makes the clear distinction between what was as being soul-powered, and the new which will empowered by the Spirit.

And in v.49, Paul is clear – as we have been made in the image of God in the earth, so we will also be made in His image in the resurrection.

1 Cor.15.51 – 58 Paul ends the chapter with an amazing image of the resurrection, when the dead will rise, and those still living will be transformed. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, that is, in an atom of time, in the twinkling of an eye, and this decay, this body will have put on immortality, that same immortality Jesus has now, which means He is with us by His Spirit. And it will be a physical body, as physical as we have now. It is, in fact, reincarnation. But not that shameful thing that some men believe in, where the spirit is trapped in an endless cycle of self-improvement in this world until you achieve nothingness. It is being re-embodied as a spiritual-physical being as Jesus Christ is now. We are coming back as ourselves, risen and glorified, if we believe in His resurrection.

1 Cor. 16.1-4

Giving financially we can see has been part of the service and worship of believers from the beginning. For Jews, tithes and offerings were a part of their ongoing walk with God, and the upkeep of the temple was key in their giving.

This practical aspect to worship is continued in the early church, not for the upkeep of the temple, but for mutual support and ministry, and for enabling the work of the mission which Jesus had commanded. But here Paul is not writing to Jews, but to Gentile believers, who have not had a pattern of giving in their lives. Pagan worship involved sacrifice, but this was for specific purposes. Regular giving would not have been familiar to the Corinthians just in their culture. They would have paid for a priest's services or a fortune teller as and when they needed one.

First of all, Paul tells the Corinthians to do as he has told the Galatians to do. If Paul is writing from Ephesus, and the opposition he refers to is that of Alexander the Silversmith in Acts 19, then in Acts 18 he had just travelled through southern Galatia on his way from Syria to western Turkey, and has left instruction with them. Paul wants to make it clear that this is not just something they do as a local custom, but he is making the point that it is a practice to be adopted by all the churches.

Then, Paul gives them a time to do it and a way to do it. The first day of the week was the anniversary of Jesus' resurrection. Days and seasons were very important to Romans, and there were many feast days and gods festivals. It seems that the first day was a common meeting day, as we find the believers in Troas meeting on the first day of the week in Acts 20.7, coming together to break bread. It's worth noticing the move away from the Jewish Sabbath which this implies, as the establishment of a different order and a break from the crippling restrictions of the *Shabbat*.

There is also integrity in what Paul is doing. He is not asking for the Corinthians to pay him the cash. He is going to arrange for some of their own number to take the gift, with his accreditation, and if he decides to go as well, they can travel with him. When it comes to finances, checks and balances are important, Paul knows that. He is a wise leader.

1 Cor.16. 5 - 24

What comes out in this chapter is Paul's strong relationships. We see Paul working not solo, but as the leader of a team, which includes Timothy, Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla. And we'll see too that he doesn't get all his own way.

He mentions first his beloved Timothy, who seems to be a son to him – not in any institutional way, but enough for Paul to write warm and personal letters to him. Timothy was the actual son of a Greek man, whose name we don't know and a Jewish woman named Eunice. He became very close to Paul, and several of Paul's letters are written with his involvement and input – Philippians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians and Philemon all

mention him. We've already learned in chapter 4.17 that Timothy is on his way to Corinth, and here Paul instructs the Corinthians to receive him.

It's interesting that Paul tells the Corinthians not to disrespect or despise Timothy. He tells Timothy in the letter he writes to him, not to let anyone put him down because he is young (1 Tim 4.12) – perhaps Paul had Corinth in mind, knowing how they were so factional, and this is why he commends Timothy.

Paul makes it clear in v 12 that although he and the team have urged Apollos to come, he is set against it, but will come at a more auspicious time, when things are right. Notice here that Paul doesn't get all his own way with people. Apollos has obviously said no to Paul's request, and Paul has respected that.

And Paul has particularly warm words at the end of this tremendous letter for one brother in Christ – Stephanas. From Paul's words we know that Stephanas with his family was one of the first believers in Corinth. Paul calls him the firstfruits, and now, he has paid a visit with fellow Corinthians Achaicus and Fortunatus (whose name means Lucky) to see Paul in the midst of his troubles in Ephesus.

Paul says a beautiful thing about these three –they refreshed my spirit (v18). The Greek word really means, they made me take a break, they made me relax. (Greek ἀνέπαυσαν *anépavsan*) For a leader in turmoil, that must have been like water in the desert.

And Paul says something else about Stephanas – in verse 15, in the authorised version, it says that Stephanas addicted himself to the service of the saints. (Greek ἔταξαν *étaxan*) Other translations say 'devoted' or 'doing all they can.' Paul simply says, I want you to get behind him and such as these.

At the end of his letter, there are warm greetings. The churches of Asia send their love to Corinth - the word means 'hugs' (Greek Ἀσπάζονται *aspázondai*). And Paul tells them to give each other a holy kiss. This would be perfectly in keeping with a warm culture.

As with some of his other letters, Paul now takes the pen from the scribe, the amanuensis, who will be writing the letter for him in his careful professional hand, to make the most of expensive vellum scroll. Now Paul's big, unprofessional Greek letters put a personal touch, so they can see his passion for them.

But then, while he's wishing them all the best, he puts in a touch of severity – let all those who don't love Jesus Christ be *anathema*, the Greek word for a Hebrew word, *cherem*, which means forfeit to or given over to. Paul is making the point that there is no escaping Christ's overall lordship. In the OT, those who were *herem* were marked out for destruction, because of their resistance to God's ways. Paul is reminding us very seriously at the end of the work that eventually all will have to come to acknowledge his Lordship.

Paul ends with grace and love, two things which mark his ministry and his writing.

A Riot in Ephesus

Acts 19.23 – 20.1 Ephesus is the centre of the worship of Artemis or Diana, and this brought a great deal of trade to the local economy. Paul's message of one God, and against idolatry is causing upset among the idol-makers. In particular a silversmith named Demetrius rouses a mob who manhandle Paul's colleagues Gaius and Aristarchus into the amphitheatre. Paul wants to go and defend them to the crowd, but his friends dissuade him, fearing for his safety.

The town clerk finally takes matters in hand, and appeals for calm, given that Ephesus is well-known as the centre of Diana worship; if there is any legal case to be answered, it needs to be through the courts, but otherwise, there is a danger of Demetrius's mob bringing the city into disrepute. On this basis, the crowd is calmed and slips away.

Acts 20.1 Paul now chooses this moment to leave for Greece, bidding his friends goodbye and leaving them with encouragement.

Day 338

Paul's Second Letter to Corinth

2 Corinthians 1.1 – 9.15

The second letter to the church in Corinth seems to have been written about 56-57AD, when Paul arrives in Macedonia. He explains to them his original intentions to come to them again, but these have been delayed for the time being.

1.1 – 2.4 Paul and Timothy are involved in putting the letter together, which is going to Corinth and the believers in surrounding Achaia.

He brings the usual words of encouragement, pointing to the Lord as the god of all comfort and compassion, especially in the midst of the sufferings which the churches are going through.

He refers to the opposition experienced in Asia, which includes the rumpus at Ephesus. However, this has only increased their reliance on God.

Paul speaks of his regret at not getting to visit them personally, but repudiates the idea that he had only said he would come on a whim. He fully intends to come, the seriousness of his words reflecting the integrity and reliability of God's Word in Jesus Christ, whose promise can be relied on to be fulfilled.

2 Cor.2.5-11 Paul now refers to the issue of the man who has been put out of fellowship because of his immorality, referred to in the previous letter. Paul seems tender towards him, and urges his restoration to the church, now that the situation has been addressed. Paul urges forgiveness to be practiced.

2 Cor.2.12-13 Paul mentions that part of the delay in coming to them is the time spent in Troas, the Turkish port, where Paul had intended to preach, but without Titus to support and back him up, he gave up and came across the Aegean to Macedonia, possibly to Thessalonica or Philippi.

2 Cor.2.14 – 3.6 Paul speaks of the fruitfulness of the ministry the Lord has called him into, service of which they are also the fruit, and the testimony of Paul's work among them. This does not mean Paul is taking the credit himself, but he does acknowledge the Holy Spirit's life evidenced in the work.

2 Cor.3.7 – 18 Indeed, this pouring of the Holy Spirit into the ministry of Paul and his co-workers is evidence of the glory, the weight and import, which is accompanying the sharing of the good news about Jesus. Just as Moses experienced the fire of God's presence filling him so much that the people of Israel asked him to wear a covering to protect them, so God is making His glory visible in the work of the new covenant, which has an even greater weight and beauty.

So now, there is no need to hide the glory which the Holy Spirit is imparting through the good news of Jesus, rather, it can be seen and seen to be increasing among them, because of the liberating work of the Holy Spirit. He is changing believers from one degree of glory, from one level of the import of God's life to another, forming Christ ever more deeply in their lives. This is the joy of the work of the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Cor.4.1 – 12 Given this Spirit-fired ministry, there is no need to resort to underhand or deceptive ways and means, but they are openly declaring Jesus to all. If people cannot receive it, it is because they are blinded by the enemy. But God is causing their lives to enlighten and illuminate the earth, so that the face of God may at last be seen in the person and life of Jesus Christ, proclaimed to the world.

However, the message also comes in clay pots, with all the fragility and weakness of their humanity; thus in the midst of the glory there is suffering. This is not success in human terms, but a reliance on the Lord for sustaining power to get through. But even if it costs their lives, Jesus is being seen in their offering and sacrifice.

2 Cor. 4.13 – 18 They are prepared to go on speaking, even in the face of threats of death, because there is a promise of resurrection through Jesus Christ. Even though the outward body is under affliction and pain, inwardly they are growing stronger and being encouraged by the Holy Spirit who is sustaining them.

2 Cor.5.1 – 10 The hope of the believer in Jesus goes beyond this human existence in the here and now. There is a longing to be in that new dimension beyond this mortality, but in faith hope is maintained in what is to come.

2 Cor. 5.11- 15 Perhaps Paul is worried that this assurance of the future will cause to him to appear arrogant or self-assured, thus he reminds the Corinthians that it is because they are such an encouragement to him that he ventures such assurance, but only because Jesus has provided all that is needed for their rescue.

2 Cor. 5.16 – 6.10 Paul is just an instrument of Christ's amazing ministry of reconciliation and re-creation, which is bringing a renewed humanity to birth. Paul's desire is to see people united with God's life, and rescued from their darkness.

For this reason, they seek to accept the hardships so that they don't stop anyone responding to God, enduring the most terrible oppression and opposition for the joy of seeing people brought close to God.

2 Cor.6.11 – 7.4 It seems that there is a need for reconciliation between Paul and his readers, as well. Maybe his candidness with their situations in his former letter have left them offended or bruised in some way. Paul feels they are holding out on him as a result.

He warns them about continuing in fellowship with evil, which indicates there may still be some issues about the meat offerings to idols; Paul is anxious for their purity and holiness, and wants them to stand clear of contamination.

Paul urges them to respond to him in love, so that their relationship is not impaired by bitterness in any way, for Paul rates them very highly in his own estimation.

2 Cor. 7.5 – 16 It seems that this news of their reaction to Paul's earlier letter has been communicated to him in Macedonia by Titus, who has come from Corinth to meet with Paul. In a time of stress and persecution, Titus arrived and encouraged Paul, both with his presence and with his news of the good things going on in Corinth. Paul has been told of their discomfort and upset with some of the things he has written to them, but he is not sorry at their pain, since it has led to change and formation in character. Here is a warning to the Christian leader not to measure fruit by people's comfort. Rather, the fruit is to be measured by the likeness of Christ being formed.

In any case, Titus has come refreshed and enlivened by his time in Corinth which lets Paul know they are going to be well and follow through in faith.

2 Cor.8.1 – 15 Often, believers are wary of speaking of giving financially. Paul has no such qualms, and commends to the Corinthians the church in the north of Greece, where he is, who are giving so generously, despite their having little to give from.

Paul speaks of the Corinthians' good start, but he is looking for more, and asks them to be just as generous, giving out of their plenty to ease the poverty of others.

2 Cor.8.16 – 24 Paul is sending to Corinth, presumably bearing this letter, brother, including Titus who are known to them and are of good character. He urges them to receive them well and to entrust to them the financial gift which is going to the Jewish churches to assist them.

2 Cor. 9.1 – 5 Paul is very clear about his expectations of the Corinthians, since they have promised to raise a substantial gift for the poor relief, of which Paul has been telling others in Macedonia, presumably the Thessalonians, and therefore the brothers who come with this letter will be putting that gift in place, to ensure that Paul is not misplacing his confidence in them.

2 Cor.9.6-9 Paul encourages generous and good-hearted giving as a sowing of seed – there is a spiritual principle at work, that giving generously yields a harvest. It should

not be coming out of compulsion, but out of desire to bless, and with joy, because the Lord loves a joyful (Greek ἰλαρός *ilaros* – root of the English *hilarious*) giver.

2 Cor. 9.10 – 15 Paul invokes God blessing of supply upon them, not so that they can grow rich, but so that they can have plenty to give away in the new economics of the kingdom of God. This will result in increased prayer toward them, and will testify to the abundant grace that is upon them. In any case, the Lord has given in Christ a gift that passes description, which cannot be outgiven!

Day 339

Paul Defends His Credentials as an Emissary

2 Cor. 10.1 – 13.14; Acts 20.2-3a

There now emerges a theme in this second letter to the Corinthians which takes up again a theme from the earlier letter. It seems that Paul's integrity as a true emissary of Jesus is being questioned, and also his ability as a gifted leader. He now turns the pen to address this thorny issue, making his case as the Holy Spirit enables him.

10.1- 11 It appears from Paul's words that he is being seen as a weak leader and not able to speak with full authority into the church. There is criticism that his verbal presentation does not match his written material, and that he is ineffective as a speaker. Paul responds that such criticism is misjudging the issue, and that he is as much a representative of Christ as those pushing their own credentials in Corinth.

10.12 – 18 Paul homes in on the way in which the ministries which are speaking so poorly of him to the Corinthians are making comparisons which are odious, boasting of themselves and their achievements. Paul will only present what God has done, and his desire to see that grow and expand beyond Achaia. The people who are boasting in Corinth are in fact boasting about work which Paul was involved in founding, thus they are going beyond their rightful limits. Paul suggests that the only promotion going on should be of the Lord and His greatness, and not of one's own achievements.

11.1 – 6 Paul continues this theme, reminding them of his foundational teaching, and his promising them for Christ alone. He fears that the present teachers who are seeking to mislead them are teaching them a different Jesus than the one originally presented to them – possibly a Gnostic version, since Paul refers to not being an orator, but still having 'knowledge' (Greek γνώσις *gnosis*.)

The Gnostic threat which was creeping in combined Christian elements with other religious ideas, such as from Zoroastrianism. It taught that God cannot have anything to do with the material world, and that the creator of the world is an evil sub-deity who must be overcome to achieve the true God. Jesus, who is not really flesh, has come, in their teaching, to impart secret *knowledge* to enable believers to negotiate their way through layers of spiritual forces, to reach the true God.

A similar threat will be discerned in the material of the writing to the Colossians.

2 Cor .11.7-11. Paul points out that when he came to them, preaching the good news, he did not make any charge to them or rely on their support. It may be that the intruding ‘apostles’ are claiming that Paul is out to get their money, but Paul puts the truth to them so that they are not deceived. In fact, the Macedonians provided for his needs when he came south to Achaia, so as not to burden the young church with anything.

2 Cor. 11.12 – 15 Paul now openly denounces the incomers, speaking of them as ‘pseudo-apostles’ (Greek ψευδαπόστολοι *pseudhaporóstoli*) and servants of Satan, appearing as an angel of light.

2 Cor.11.16-29 In view of how foolish Paul is already appearing to them, he will go on being foolish by speaking of his credentials among them. In fact, they seem to be putting up with a lot of tomfoolery from those who are seeking to enslave them again, possibly with the Mosaic laws.

2 Cor.11.21b – 29 Paul speaks of his equal integrity and provenance to those who are now subverting the Corinthians. They must be Jews, for Paul also claims his ethnicity as Jewish alongside them, and his following Christ, as they claim to as well.

However, Paul’s experience of Christ includes the endurance of great persecution and physical abuse, danger and pressure.

2 Cor.11.30-33 Paul also reveals his weakness, escaping from Damascus in a basket out of fear for the authorities there, in case we feel Paul is overblowing himself.

2 Cor. 12.1-6 Paul continues to speak of his spiritual and mystical experience, disguising himself in the third person, but recounting his visit to ‘paradise’ (Greek παράδεισος *parádheisos*), the third heaven – presumably this was during his time in the desert of Arabia, when he was in training. But here Paul curbs his defence.

2 Cor.12.7-10 Paul now reveals that in spite of these amazing spiritual experiences he is still very much a human being, suffering from what he calls ‘a thorn in his flesh’ (Greek σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί *skólops tee sarkí*) although this is not specified. It is an ‘angel of satan’ (Greek ἄγγελος Σατᾶν *ángelos sátan*) or a ‘satanic messenger’ which torments him. We are not told what this is, and Paul has implored the Lord three times to remove it, but he is told only that the Lord’s grace will carry him through the struggle, since the Lord’s strength is shown to be more sustaining in the midst of human weakness. Paul must rely only on Christ for the way through this challenge. When he feels weak, therefore, Paul knows he is in the strong place of God.

2 Cor.12.11-13 Paul is hurt that the Corinthians are reckoning his ministry of less significance than these ‘very great’, superlative apostles now in their midst, even though the signs, wonders and miracles done by Paul are evidence of his being an emissary of Jesus also.

2 Cor.12.14 – 18 Paul says he is now ready to visit Corinth again, but he will not rely on their support financially, since he sees it as his place to invest in them, not them in him. Titus has not taken anything out of the kitty, and neither will Paul. Presumably this is one of the things which the false apostles are laying at Paul's door, that he uses the disciples in Corinth materially.

2 Cor.12.19-21 Paul wants them to see that it is not for his own protection that he is writing, but for their benefit. He is afraid that there will be sharp words to be spoken when he comes, and that it will be a painful experience for him and them, especially as he expects to find them still in some of the brokenness he raised in his previous letter.

2 Cor. 13.1 – 4 Paul warns of the power of Christ to correct the wayward – the early church already had experience of the Lord's ability to bring physical sanctions upon those who rebel against Him. This appears to be something of a threat, and shows how disturbed Paul is by the events taking place in Corinth.

2 Cor.13.5-10 Here is a call to do a health-check on their spiritual life, to ensure Christ is really living in them. Paul's aim is their thorough equipping (v.9, Greek *κατάρτισις* *katártisis*) – the word 'perfection' is perhaps misleading here. Paul is writing this way now so that when he comes, they may have taken action to shape up, and he won't have to be harsh.

2 Cor.13.11 – 14 Paul closes the letter with a warm but brief greeting, invoking the Lord's grace upon them.

Acts 20.2-3a Around 56-57AD Paul eventually travels into Greece, and no doubt includes Corinth in his visit to Achaia in a three month stay.

Day 340

Paul's Letter to the Believers in Rome

Romans 1.1 – 3.20

While he is in Corinth, Paul writes a letter to the believers in Rome; his close friends Aquila and Priscilla seem to have returned there, judging from his greeting to them in 16.3 . Before pursuing his intention to visit Rome, he wants to travel back to Jerusalem to accompany the gift given by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia which he has been referring to in 2 Corinthians. Thus he will be delayed coming to them.

Romans is sometimes called the Himalayas of the Bible, with Romans chapter 8 being the Everest, with its soaring heights of freedom in Christ and the inseparability of believers from the love of God. It is a masterpiece of the theology of grace over law, and bears much study, more than can be afforded in this brief approach.

Roms 1.1-7 Paul declares himself as the sender of this letter, at the beginning, as convention requires in his time. He is an emissary (Greek ἀπόστολος *Apóstolos*) of Christ, dedicated to the good news of God, who has declared Jesus Son of God by raising Him from the dead.

The letter is to all believers in Rome, blessing them with grace and peace from God.

Roms 1.8 – 15 Paul longs for an opportunity to come to Rome, since he has heard so much of the faith which is seen there. He wants to bring some spiritual gift to them, to impart something to them, and to share more of the good news with them, whether Jew or Gentile, learned or unlearned. This is of note with Paul – he is not just seeking the building up of the clever, but also of the simple, ordinary believers.

Roms.1.16-17 This good news he longs to bring is his inspiration and power (Greek δύναμις *dhýnamis* – source of the English *dynamite*) because it brings rescue not only to the Jews but to non-Jews, the *ethnoi*, the nations. This is because this good news is not based on people's ability to do the right things, but on their readiness to trust God implicitly – Paul quotes Habakkuk 2.4 in support, that 'the faithful one will live his life trusting.'

Roms.1.18-23 Paul teaches here that mankind has no excuse for the evil they are perpetrating, because God's existence can be deduced from the creation around, and thus man should beware of anything which breaks the harmony of the relationship with the Creator. Yet humanity is stuck in a downward spiral of sin and darkness, worshipping the non-gods of the pagan earth cycle, given the faces of animals and men.

Roms 1.24-25 Because of this, God has abandoned them to the lusts of their dark hearts, until they have lost sight of the awesome Creator and are worshipping the creatures instead.

Roms.1.26-27 The slide into degradation has descended to the point where even the joy of sex has been perverted by unnatural desires for same-sex connections, both in women and men, leading to bodily pain and disease brought on by abnormal sexual practices.

Roms.1.28-32 The dissipation and decadence of godless humanity has led to depravity and violence, murder and death. Man laughs in the face of God, and approves of the behaviour which leads away from Him.

Roms.2.1-5 Before the readers of Paul's words become too self-righteous in their agreement with his assessment, he urges them not to be the judges of others, since they also are implicated in the sinful world system. It is only the kindness of God, His gracious love which has brought them out from under the shadow of God's anger to

the renewal of their minds (Greek μετάνοια *metánoia*) which is key to the turnaround of repentance.

Roms. 2. 6-11 Paul is clear that there is a payback for human behaviour – persistently evil conduct will result in God’s rejection, persistent good will result in His favour, not dependent on ethnic or religious standing, but on life choices.

Roms.2.12-16 For those who claim exemption from judgement because they are part of God’s covenanted people, constituted under the *Torah*, God’s Rule for life, Paul pulls the rug out from under their feet, since they will still face retribution based on whether that have completely kept to that rule in all its detail.

For those who are not covenanted to God in Israel, their consciences are sufficient to lead them in God’s ways if they will pay attention to them, and on that basis they will receive the evaluation of their lives.

Roms. 2.17-24 The point Paul is making is that when Jews claim that the Torah of God makes them exempt from evaluation and verdict on their lives, they are deceived. Just failing to do what the life-rule requires in one point brings the whole weight of its penalty curse down on the head of the Jew claiming to be under its direction. Being a Jew is not a matter of outward marks and behaviours, but is a matter of having the self-protective, self-justifying cover of the heart removed and sacrificed to God which is the real issue, which only the Holy Spirit of God can bring about in new birth.

Roms.3.1-4 Paul then asks the question, is there any benefit at all then in being part of God’s covenanted people the Jews? Oh yes, says Paul, for they are the repository of the story of God’s revelation to mankind, theirs the heritage of God’s communication to Abraham.

And even if they don’t fully believe, God’s promise through Abraham is not nullified by their lack of faith and trust. God is utterly dependable, even if man is fickle and undependable. The covenant is God’s action, not man’s.

Roms. 3.5-8 Paul asks whether this means that God has just set man up for failure so that He can look good and righteous when he judges man. But this cannot be true, since God cannot be guilty of doing wrong. Man is not made to be sinful, he has gone that way through his own waywardness and choice. The consequences of his actions are down to his own wilfulness, not God’s orchestration.

Roms.3.9-18 This means that the Jews cannot claim exemption from the outcome of their sin just because they are Jews. Just like the rest of the nations (*ethnoi*) they are included in the total failure of mankind to follow God’s ways. – Paul quotes at length from Psalm 14.1-3, 53.1-3 and Ecclesiastes 7.20 to back up this statement from Scriptures.

Roms. 3.19-20 Since the Jews, however, have been especially entrusted with the *Torah*, God’s life-rule, they are the more conspicuously short of the mark because they have not lived up to that rule. A ruler can only measure, it cannot supply the

solution. The *Torah* can only show how near or far short one has come. What the *Torah* is indicating is how much of a failure Israel has become in its walk with God. Something else is needed to remedy the terrible shortfall .

Day 341

God's Amazing Solution to Man's Total Failure

Romans 3.21 – 8.39

Roms.3.21 – 26 Paul now takes a huge leap, and asserts that there is a solution available which operates without reliance on the rule of life, although the *Torah* and the Prophets both point to it. It is the setting of our lives and relationships straight with God, the restoration of what was marred, by entrusting ourselves completely to the provision of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

The legal requirements then become irrelevant, and the ethnic lines are of no significance, because every human being stands in failure and brokenness compared to the perfection of God; everyone, Jew and *goy* is acquitted only through acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to satisfy the just demands of God to bring us back to relationship with Him.

Roms. 3.27-31 There is now no scope for human pride in this outcome, for *Torah*-keeping brings no advantage in terms of restoring our relationship with God. This goes for both Jews and those of the nations (*ethnoi*) who are on the same basis, and whom God views equally. Paul asks if this means that the *Torah* is useless- Paul protests that it is useful, but not for bringing righteousness with God.

On a linguistic point, the English translation, revealing the prudish sensitivities of English readers on such matters insists on translating as 'uncircumcision' the Greek word ἀκροβυστία *akrobhystía*, which simply means 'foreskin', from a combination of the words ἀκρον *ákron*, meaning tip or extremity, and an Alexandrian derivative of Greek πώσθη *pósthee*, meaning penis. (The Latin Vulgate uses the word *praeputium*, or prepuce here, which is a direct translation.) The point to be made here is that Paul is not bashful or negative about the natural state of the male of the *ethnoi*, of the nations, but sees him as accepted through the same faith in Christ as the circumcised Jew. In all cases where English has 'uncircumcision', Greek uses the word 'foreskin'.

Roms.4.1-5 Paul now looks to Abraham, the key figure in Jewish self-understanding, to move the discussion forward. He homes in on the fact that in Genesis 15.6, before the covenant is made and before circumcision and the law is introduced, Abraham has trusted God, and this is credited to him as righteousness (Hebrew תְּצַדִּיק *tzedaqá*, Greek δικαιοσύνη *dhikaíosýnee*), that is, being in right relationship and acceptable to God. Abraham has not earned this gift, it is *counted, computed* as his through God's grace.

Roms.4.6-8 Paul includes David in as one who understood this principle of credited righteousness, quoting from Psalm 32, in which he extols the joy of the man whose sins are not held against him because of the Lord's grace.

Roms. 4.9-12 Paul maintains that because this imputation of righteousness to Abraham happened before he was circumcised, this means that the same blessing is available to both Jew and Gentile alike, and that Abraham is the father, the source of all the faithful.

Roms. 4.13-15 Abraham and the Jews are not accepted as the 'heir of the world' (Greek κληρονόμος τοῦ κόσμου *kleeronómos tou kósmou*) because they had kept laws and regulations, but by the restoration of relationship through trust. If an inheritance is gained through working for it, then it is not really an inheritance, but a payment for what is owed. Law is there to provide boundaries to show where sin starts, not to bring right relationship.

Roms.4.16 -18 The promise comes by receiving it on trust, not by working for it, then. It comes to those who live by the *Torah* and those who do not, since we share the same source in Abraham of our faith. The promise is also by grace, God's self-sacrificial, self-obliging *chesed* freely given to all who accept. By this *chesed*-grace, Abraham casts himself on God and, against all hope, becomes the father of the nations.

Roms.4.19-25 Abraham is the outstanding example for us of one who holds on to the promise of God when all seems to deny its possibility of fulfilment. This is why right relationship with God was granted to him, because of his faith and trust in God. In the same way, believers are brought into relationship with God through acceptance in faith of the death of Jesus for their sins, and the resurrection of Jesus for their acquittal, their justification.

Roms.5.1 – 5 Because faith is the basis of our coming to God, not law, we have peace with God, restored contact with Him and wholeness through Jesus Christ, who has provided the way in for us to the *chesed*-grace of which we are now the beneficiaries. And therefore, the believer can now look forward to the development in him or herself of the character of Jesus Christ, resulting in the full weight of His glory, even when suffering comes, because it is not punishment, but a means to build Christlike characteristics in them of stickability and hope.

Roms.5.6 – 11 The astounding truth is that even though we were God's enemies, Jesus offered Himself as the settler of all outstanding issues with God, and by His life, now invites us to share His new status of resurrection with Him. And on top of that, we have also been restored to clear and intimate relationship with the Father.

Roms.5.12-14 Death resulted from the disobedience and failure of one man – the prototype human, Adam, who infected all of his race with death, even before any kind of law was put in place for Israel. Jew and Gentile die because of Adam's sin, not because they break the law.

Roms.5.15 – 19 Just as death was the result of one man's failure, God has accepted one man's death as the antidote for that toxic stream which flowed into our race. And

Jesus' blood given in covenant-binding *chesed*-grace is powerful enough to remove the burden of all mankind's sin, past, present and future.

Roms.5.20 – 21 Later on, once sin was already in full swing, the law was put in place to define just what sin was like, and how it could be measured (though sin pre-dated the law.) We needed to know what the charges are against us. Even so, once sin was identified as sin, God has dealt with its effects to bring acquittal from those charges through the payment of our penalty by Jesus Christ, whose self-obligated covenant gift reaches to us by faith.

Roms.6.1-4 In view of this inexhaustible self-obligation of God, Paul draws the obvious conclusion. Now we have this complete acquittal from God, and the guarantee of inclusion in His eternal life, surely we can just live as we want, and sin and fail with impunity, because Jesus has made it all OK!

Paul immediately rejects this thought, since in Christ we are as removed from the dimension in which sin and failure control life as the dead are from the living. We are living now from a different source, since we were immersed into His death and resurrection – which is promised also to us in real time after this body gives up.

Roms.6.5-11 Because we have been tied to Christ by His Spirit, His life becomes ours, including the future resurrection life, over which death has no more power. Because of this, we are to live as those separated from sin and failure by death, and living with Christ in His resurrection now.

Roms.6.12-14 Because of this, we are to put our bodies to the service of Christ, not of sin. We don't have to live obeying sin's demands and pull, for God's ruling ethos of *chesed*-grace has freed us from the vicious cycle of sin and death.

Roms.6.15 – 19 We now can no longer serve the pull of sin, because we are under new ownership. We have no obligation to the devil – we are free *not* to sin! Instead, we are now slaves to what is right and beautiful, captivated by grace and by God's love. Paul puts it in these terms to highlight the power of our new state, being in thrall to God's goodness, surrendered and fully yielded to His ways.

Roms.6.20-23 There was no good fruit from life lived enslaved by failure and sin, but now we are slaves of goodness and Godliness, the fruit is life lived to the full, and never-ending. Just as sin results in unending death, so God's free grace results in our sharing in Jesus Christ's unending life.

Roms. 7.1-3 Following this theme of being dead to sin, but alive to Christ, Paul likens the believer to a wife who is freed from a husband at his death, and is also free to remarry without fear of being called an adulteress.

Roms.7.4 – 6 In the same way, the follower of Jesus has been cut off by His death from all ties to whatever law bound him up before. We had no other way but to sin and fail, when the law was the only measure. But now, because of the death of Jesus, we are no longer in that terrible trap of sin, constantly breaking the law.

Roms.7.7-12 Paul is concerned that his readers might misunderstand him and what he is saying about the law. It may be thought that the *Torah* is sinful, because of the sin it measures. But Paul says this is a mistaken way of looking at the law. Law is neutral, simply a measure, a mirror of behaviour. It describes the reasons why man is not living to his full potential, but does not itself create the sin.

Roms.7.13-14 The law is not what causes the things leading to death. Rather, the law holds up a mirror to sin, to show how awful it is, and to show what needs to be remedied. The law itself is a Godly instrument, the gauge of spiritual normality. It is sin which enslaves, not law.

Roms.7.15-20 Paul presents the conundrum of the pull and pressure of sin. He doesn't want to fail, but failure is at work in him like a force, his selfish ego leads him off-limits and brings him to the place of entrapment again and again.

Roms.7.21-25 Therefore, Paul himself is a battle-ground of principles and dynamics shooting off volleys at each other. He loves God's rule of life, His *Torah*, but this love is constantly thwarted by ambushes from the sinful ego that wants to push forward and displace God. He comes to that place of hand-wringing desperation – how can he get out of this trap? Thank God, there is a way – through the action of Jesus Christ the Lord! He sees this ongoing battle, and is torn between his mental assent to the *Torah* and his bodily, self-indulgent service of the sinful passions.

Roms.8.1-8 Paul now soars to the heights as he lays out the solution to this terrible dilemma. A new law, a new principle is at work in him which has released him from the law/sin battle within. This is the *Torah* of the Spirit, the rule of life coming from Christ. What Paul has been unable to resolve in his own soul and body, God has done for him, for all believers, by condemning sin in the shape of one man, Jesus Christ, emptying on Him all the guilt, shame and condemnation for every man, woman and child. Thus, the penalty of the law was fully applied to Jesus, so that those who now receive His Spirit, receive also His new life and freedom from sin.

The new life is lived under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who lives in the believer to guide them and lead them. This is very different to what was, when we had no way of pleasing God because of sin.

Roms.8.9-11 When the Spirit of Christ is poured into us, we live from another source – from God Himself who inhabits us. It's as though our own inner engine, choked up with pollutants and blockages, has been overridden by an external source of power which now drives us, so that the old mechanism is redundant. This source of power in God is enough not only to give us inner life now, but will be enough to reignite our dead bodies when they finally conk out, giving us a new, Spirit-powered body like that of Jesus after His resurrection.

Roms.8.12-17 So now, there is no point trying to turn on the inner engine to power our lives. It just produces deadly fumes and poisonous waste. Instead, we draw constantly from the external source, which is now also the new internal source, which causes us to call out incessantly, *Daddy*, (*Abba* is the Aramaic and Hebrew word for Daddy) to our source of life. He also lets us know that this state of affairs is now our

native air, and will continue for always, even when we run into opposition and even danger. The power does not fail us.

Roms. 8.18-25 This new source of life is not only ours as human beings; it is the same source which will regenerate and restore the whole of creation when God calls time on the old order. There is a longing in us as in all creation to see this change occur, this resurrection of all things, but we can hope, knowing its fulfilment will come.

Roms.8.26-27 This new source of power also empowers our communication with God, and even gives us the means of connection when we don't have one ourselves. He gives us the insight into the thoughts of God, for He already prays for us along with Jesus!

Roms.8.28 – 34 God's purpose is the same for all believers, to make us like Jesus, to conform us to His likeness. All that is happening to us is happening to that end, so that His character can be multiplied throughout the earth.

In view of all this, how can we fail? God is shaping us, resourcing us, fighting for us, and rescuing us. Jesus Himself is pleading our case at the throne of God by the wounds in His hands, feet and side – what could be more secure a place?

Roms. 8.35-39 Because of this, Paul says, there is nothing that can cut us off from God's grace and love, because it is not dependent on us, but on Him. Paul's language seeks to grasp the breadth and height of this *chesed*-commitment, and takes us to the summit of the mountain of God's amazing story of bringing us back to Himself forever!

Day 342

The New Covenant Place of the Jews

Romans 9.1 – 11.36

The relationship between the Church of Christ and the Covenant people of God, the descendants of Abraham by blood, the Jews, has been marred by prejudice and violence, the nadir of which was reached in the unspeakable atrocities of the *Shoah* (Heb. **השואה**, meaning *Destruction*), perpetrated in Central Europe in the 1930s and 1940s up to 1945.

This has led to an understandable deep separation between Jewish and Christian faith and practice. These chapters of the letter to the Romans which follow show, however, how closely Paul linked the Jews to faith in Jesus Christ. As Christian believers, through repentance, honour and respect for Abraham's people by blood, we need to repair those bridges, for they lead us to a deeper understanding of the story, of the overall purpose of God in mankind's story, which has been conveyed to the world through the Jewish people.

There is an old ditty which would be worth remembering

How odd of God to choose the Jews!

But odder still are those who choose a Jewish God, but spurn the Jews!

Roms.9.1 – 5 Paul, ethnically Jewish, and trained as a Pharisee, keenly feels the rejection he has experienced from many of his race because of his acceptance of Jesus as Messiah. He would give up his own salvation if it meant he could see the rescue of Israel and their fulfilment through Messiah Jesus. He recalls the heritage of his people, which is now blessing the nations, in fulfilment of the promise to Abraham – they have been adopted as God’s children, they have seen the full weight of God’s glory, the covenants of God with man are made with the Jews, and the *Torah* is written in Hebrew. They have met God in the Tabernacle and the Temple, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are Jews, as is Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah.

There is a debate over the translation of Paul’s words at the end of Rom.9.5, as to whether Jesus Christ is being called God here, or whether Paul is blessing God the Father overall as a follow-on to what he has just written, without reference to Christ as God. It is highly ambiguous, given that Greek manuscripts are written without punctuation, which gives no clue as to the real intention. It is impossible to conclude on the basis of this one verse that Paul is making a doctrinal statement on the deity of Christ; this doctrine is better built on other sources, such as John 1.1.

Roms.9.6 – 13 Paul does, however, introduce a distinction between those who are true Israel and those who are not. For Paul, true Israel are those who have received the promise, not those who are simply in the blood-line of Abraham. After all, Ishmael was not a son of the promise, neither was Isaac’s son, Esau-Edom.

Roms.9.14- 18 Does this mean God is capricious and favouritistic – not at all, says Paul, it just means that God is laying down the process as dependent on His action, not man’s, on His mercy, not on man’s deeds. It is God’s to steer the story to fulfilment in the way He chooses.

Roms.9.19-24 To those who take issue with God’s apparent continued hard line towards Israel, Paul turns this around, and points out that God is actually patiently bearing with the failure of mankind, so as to leave space and time for the demonstration of His greater glory breaking out through Christ not only on Jews but also on the Nations.

Roms.9.25-29 Paul backs up his argument with a number of Scriptures that show that God’s intention has been to include the Nations in His people, while still preserving the Jewish race by His keeping power – for this, Paul quotes Hosea 1.10 and 2.23 and Isaiah 1.9 and 10.22-23.

Roms.9.30-33 Paul now leads on in his thesis by stating that the Nations, the Gentiles, have been accepted by God on the basis of trust in God’s provision in Christ, while the Jews have sought to be acceptable to God through the carrying out of what was expected anyway of a covenanted people, which they have not been able to fulfil.

This has caused them to trip up and fall over the very thing which God has put in place to rescue them, as Paul points out from Isaiah 8.14 and 28.16, because their eyes are on their own doings, and not on God's provision.

Roms.10.1-4 Paul's longing is for his race to be rescued, to fulfil their true destiny in God. They are so God-oriented, and yet they are missing the point, because they are focussing on their own efforts to please God, instead of relying on God's provision for their salvation. This has resulted in them promoting their own puny self-righteousness, while choking on the provision of God in Christ, who has made the observance of regulations redundant for everyone who trusts in His gift of life.

Roms.10.5-13 There is a simple choice, according to Paul; either to live by the impossible burden of the law, or from acceptance of and reliance on the simple statement that 'Jesus Christ is Lord', accompanied by faith in His resurrection, an expression of heart and mouth which expresses that God has settled the issue in Jesus Christ. Jew and Gentile now come to God on the very same basis, by being included in the provision of Jesus Christ's final sacrifice and by acceptance of His Lordship.

Roms.10.14-17 This is what propels Paul to declare the good news to his race, for without the news they cannot respond. Even so, there will be those who will reject him as he holds out life to them, since the only way to be included is to believe what Christ says through him.

Roms.10.18 – 21 The Jews cannot say they have not heard, for the word is going out into the nations, just as the Scriptures promised in Psalm 19.4, Deut.32.21 and Isaiah 65.1. But they are hard-hearted, repeating their mistakes described in Isa.65.2, in their obstinacy.

Roms.11.1 -6 The question must be asked, then – are the Jews now rejected and replaced by another people? No way, says Paul, because he himself is a true Jew, a descendant of Abraham, and he is not rejected.

Rather, just as has happened before, God has kept a remnant, a small number through whom Israel will continue, but this will be by faith, not by keeping the regulations. The key factor in this remnant is grace, God's new covenant self-obligation.

Roms.11.7 – 10 For those who respond to this grace, they become the chosen, the elect of Israel. The others who refuse have been blinded, just as the Scriptures in Isaiah 29.10 and Psalm 69.22-23 foresee.

Roms.11.11-12 Does this mean they cannot recover the way? No, says Paul; although for this time they are distant from God's purposes, while the Nations are responding and receiving, still there is space for their restoration and completion in the Messiah to come.

Roms.11.13 – 16 Paul's hope is that in bringing the good news of grace to the Nations, the Jews will realise the benefits of this salvation and want them for themselves. At the moment, their distance from salvation is making space for the Nations, but they still can turn around; after all, their effect on the Nations has been to

bring holiness, yieldedness to the Lord, to all peoples, and they still have that role to play, as the story-keeper people.

Roms.11.17-24 At the moment, some of the olive tree of Israel has been broken off, while a wild branch has been grafted in – that of the believers in the Nations. However, there is no place for being smug that Gentiles are part of the tree now, while many Jews are cut off. Rather, says Paul, this should lead to awe of God, that even those He loves are pruned back. But the root from which we all spring, Jew and Gentile, is the root of faith in Abraham.

There is, then, a possibility of being lopped off this tree, if unbelief enters in, but there is also a wonderful possibility of the Jews being re-attached, re-grafted in to the tree to which they naturally belong.

Roms.11.25 – 32 Paul's expectation is that the Jews will turn to Messiah in due course, when the Nations have come to fruition in the good news. This is God's promise to them in Isaiah 59.20 and 21. Although they are distanced now, they are still the chosen nation, still God's people. The only reason God has let this occur, is so that He can gather them to Himself with love and tenderness in times to come.

Roms.11.33-36 Paul ends this discussion of the future of his people with a moving exclamation of God's power and greatness – 'oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!', in other words, no one can fully understand God's ways, but He is good, deep at the bottom of His being, for everything is summed up in Him.