

Bible Study # 63
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Life and Letters of Paul Series—Romans

We are getting into the book of Romans this evening—moving through our Bible study series. This is the halfway spot in this series of the Life and Letters of Paul. After this evening, we will be halfway through this particular series. **We are focusing this evening on Paul's letter to the Romans.**

Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire. It was the great city of the ancient world. At the time of Paul, Rome had a population in excess of 1.2 million. It was the largest city that existed up until modern times. I think London surpassed this population somewhere around 1800. London was the next city to reach this sort of population. Rome went into a decline in later years. During the period of the Middle Ages, the population was dramatically lower than this. After the decline of the Roman Empire, it was all the way up into the 1800s before London, and later Paris, reached a population of this magnitude.

Rome was a sizable city. A city of a little over a million people is a large population. Rome had a population about like Houston, Texas—only it was more compact. You'd have trouble getting around in Houston if you had to depend on horses and chariots. Even in being more compact, it was a big place. With that many people together, it still had to be somewhat spread out because you didn't have the multi-story buildings that we have now.

The size of the building was limited up until the late 1800s when two things were discovered. One was the use of interior steel girder construction where they went up multi-stories. Another was the elevator. This made possible the skyscrapers. Up until then, there was much more of a limit that was imposed in terms of the height of buildings and what it was practical to do. At that time, you had to go out rather than up. There is only so far out that you can go and still have a city that's going to get over a certain size. Then you have to go up, too. Rome was a very sizable place.

It had a pretty sizable Jewish community. Over half of the population of Rome were slaves. This was a part of the economic base of Rome and the empire. The first settlement of Jews in Rome had been somewhere around 70 B.C. At least, it was the first documented settlement of any size.

The Christians in Rome were more of what we would think of as a loose-knit Bible study rather than a fully-organized Church. There was no record of any Church having been officially established in Rome. There were individual Christians in Rome who met together. They assembled together at homes. There were probably different groups of them because, again, if you have a city of over a million population spread out, just getting from one end to the other, if you're depending on walking, can be a pretty sizable distance even though things tended to be more compact.

Rome would naturally have had Church members because it was a large metropolitan area. There were people continually coming in and out of Rome. It was the center of the empire. Because of trade, commercial reasons and a variety of things, there were people who were coming in. There were Jews from Rome who had been in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost 31 A.D. They are specifically mentioned in Acts 2:10. Some of them were converted. What happened to them?

Well, eventually, they went back to Rome. People tend to move into a place like Rome. So, over a period of time, you had people from Rome who had been converted elsewhere. They had been somewhere else for a short time on business. The Jews were very much involved in trade, commerce and business, as many of them are today. These things took them to different areas and then they returned to Rome.

The nucleus there was Jewish converts. There were others who had come in contact with the Church through either friends in the synagogues or through members. Not only did the Christians in Rome have Jews among them, there were also a number of Gentiles, many of whom had come from Antioch, Greece and various places in the surrounding areas. There were individuals who had congregated there.

We are going to notice when the book of Romans was written. We can show from the context that Paul wrote it from Corinth in the winter of 55 A.D.—56 A.D. Phoebe, who was a deaconess in the Church in Corinth, carried the letter to Rome. She was evidently a widow who had considerable property and was traveling to Rome on something related to business. She took the letter with her. Paul entrusted that to her and she delivered it when she got to Rome.

There is one thing that I really want to focus in on because it has to do with a very basic claim—the claim for papal supremacy, the claim of the pope as the Bishop of Rome. His “claim to

fame” is that St. Peter was the first Bishop of Rome. As Bishop of Rome, he was the Successor of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. Bishop of Rome is part of his title. Some of the titles that he claims for himself are Pontifex Maximus, the Successor of the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of St. Peter and the Prince of the Apostles. He goes through a long list. Someday, I will bring a copy of his titles; all the titles he claims for himself takes up about six or seven typewritten lines.

The point is that the whole basis of papal authority and the authority of the Catholic Church gets back to the claim that Peter established the church at Rome. They claim that Peter was the first Bishop of Rome and that all subsequent Bishops of Rome have been successors of Peter; therefore, they have primacy over all other bishops worldwide. This was the basis of the claims to papal authority that were made, even anciently.

What we are going to see, very clearly, is that Peter was not in Rome. The Catholic Church dates Peter being in Rome to 42 A.D. We’re going to show that there’s no way in the world that Peter had been in Rome for the last 12 years when Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans. I’ll show you what I mean by that.

How do we date the book of Romans? As we have gone through this series, I’ve tried to cover the books in relationship to the book of Acts. Let’s go to the book of Romans and we will see a little bit of how we date the book internally.

Romans 15:24-28, “whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.”

Notice the timing; we are told the timing right here. This is when Paul is getting ready to leave and go to Jerusalem. He is going to Jerusalem to take the offering from the area of Macedonia and Achaia (Greece)—Corinth and Philippi. He’s getting ready to take that back to Jerusalem.

That’s where we were in 2 Corinthians, where Paul told the Corinthians Church that he was on his way to come to them.

2 Corinthians 9:1-5, “Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your bountiful gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he was getting ready to go to Corinth and collect the foodstuffs he had told them about earlier.

Acts 20:1-3, we tie this in with, “After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to him, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece [Corinth] and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.”

Verse 4, there accompanied him these various individuals. We find that Paul was in Corinth.

Remember the story we went into last time. Paul had written 1 Corinthians in the spring of 55 A.D. from Ephesus. Then in Acts 19, we see how he had to leave Ephesus. He went on over, crossed into Macedonia up to Philippi. When he got to Philippi, he met Timothy whom he had sent down to Corinth to check up and see what the results from the letter were. Timothy reported to him, so he sent a letter (2 Corinthians) back.

He told them he was coming to see them. That’s when he left and came through Greece and stayed there three months (Acts 20:3). This time of year is wintering months (December, January, February), which are very difficult months in which to travel. He wintered there in Corinth. He was originally going to sail, but he traveled overland back up to Macedonia. This is when he is leaving to go back to Jerusalem in the spring of 56 A.D. to be there for Pentecost.

Acts 20:16, “...for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.”

We find, here, the story of Paul’s return to Jerusalem. But when Paul wrote Romans, he had not left to go back to Jerusalem. He was telling

the Romans that he was planning to come visit them. He said, 'I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. I am going to take this offering that I have from Greece to Jerusalem, and then when I get through with that, I am going to leave. I am planning to go to Spain and stop and visit you on my way to Spain' (Romans 15:24-28). We have the setting. The setting is right around the time before he left to go back to Jerusalem.

We know he wrote it from Corinth because he makes reference to that in Romans.

Romans 16:1, "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea..." The word "servant" in the Greek is "*diakonos*." It is the feminine form of deacon. She is a deaconess of the Church at Cenchrea. Cenchrea was a suburb of Corinth. It was the port of Corinth. Phoebe was a deaconess from Corinth. He told the Church at Rome, 'I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is a deaconess here at Corinth.'

Verse 2, "that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."

Paul is sending this letter from Corinth by Phoebe. He is sending it right at this particular time. We can pretty well date when Paul is doing this. It would have been the time during the three months that he was wintering in Greece (Corinth, Acts 20:2-3). It was probably towards the end of that because it was approaching the time he was going to leave and it was also approaching the time Phoebe was going to be able to set sail. He wrote the letter and since she was going to Rome, he entrusted it to her that she would deliver it.

We know that Peter wasn't in Rome as the Bishop of Rome. The Church at Rome wasn't even what we would call an "established" Church.

Romans 1:9-11, notice what Paul says, "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 some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you might be established..." Paul wanted to come and impart to them a spiritual gift so that they could be established. That says they weren't established.

Now, if Peter had been there as the first pope for 12 years, that would be kind of an insult. If that

was the case, it would be like if a minister in an adjoining area wrote a letter here to Lafayette and says he is anxious to come and visit you because he would really like to establish you as a Church. That would be a little odd. We have been a Church here for years. I might take a little bit of exception to that.

This is what it would have been like if Peter had been there for the last 12 years. **Paul writes a letter and says he is really anxious to come and visit the people so that he can impart a spiritual gift to the end that they may be established.** That's not all because, as we come back a little further in the book of Romans, we find something else.

Romans 15:19, "in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."

Illyricum is an area north of Greece. It would be a portion (just the very bottom tip) of what is now modern-day Yugoslavia. It is right on the Adriatic Sea across and just east of Italy. Italy comes down as a boot. There's a sea that comes down. You have Yugoslavia and then Greece down on the bottom. Well, Paul had gone up as far as Greece and even north of Greece, but he had never been over into Italy. He says, 'I have gone all the way from Jerusalem, over to north of Greece and I have fully preached the gospel.'

Verse 20, "And so I made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation..." Paul says, 'I have been preaching the gospel all the way from Jerusalem up to the north of Greece. I haven't gotten to you yet. Wherever I have gone, my purpose has been to go into areas where Christ has not been preached, so that I am not building on someone else's foundation. It's my job, my commission, to lay a foundation. Other men come in and build on that foundation.'

Paul is telling them he desires to come and see them to the end that they may be established. He's telling them that he's not in the position of going in and building on other men's foundations. He goes in and preaches in areas where the gospel has not been proclaimed. Now, if Peter's been in Rome for the last 12 years, he must be doing a "slow boil" about this time because this is quite an insult—saying Peter hadn't established them, hadn't preached the gospel and hadn't laid a foundation. That would really be insulting.

Romans 16:1-3, "I commend to you Phoebe ... assist her in whatever business she has need of

you; Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus...”

Verse 5, “Likewise greet the church that is in their house.” Priscilla and Aquila were friends of Paul that he had met at an earlier time. They were Jews from Rome who had been expelled from Rome at an earlier time. There was an expulsion of Jews from Rome that had occurred; Priscilla and Aquila had been caught up in that and had been affected by it.

We’re moving back in time several years earlier, going back about six years from the time Paul is writing Romans 16. Let’s turn the clock back six years.

Acts 18:1, “...Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.” This was the first time Paul went to Corinth.

Verses 2-3, “And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.”

Paul had gotten acquainted with them because he had stayed with them and they had worked together being of the same craft. It started out as a friendly relationship where he was rooming with them. He was probably renting a room in their house, working, doing piecework out of Aquila’s shop. They had taken an interest in the Church and had become converted. In the meantime, the Jews had been allowed to return to Rome.

The reason they had left Rome was because Claudius had expelled all the Jews. Ever so often the Roman emperors would get “hard up” for cash, so they would expel the Jews. They would confiscate and liquidate their assets. It was a good way to raise a little ready cash and kind of blame somebody for all the problems going on.

This is an old story that’s been going on for a long time. Politicians always like to blame somebody else for all the problems. They like to have a scapegoat. There have been different scapegoats at different times. The Jews have traditionally been a popular scapegoat; they are easy to blame.

Priscilla and Aquila were back in Rome, and there was evidently a group of Christians who were meeting at their house.

In Romans 16:5-15, Paul greets the Church there at their house. He starts listing all these various people, a number who had come from Corinth. He names off a gigantic list of people. But when

you go through the whole list, one of the things you find is there’s no mention of Peter. Paul names more people by name in the book of Romans than he does any other book. He says “Hello” to everybody that he knows in Rome. He tacks it on the end of his letter. But there is never a mention of Peter. Now, if Peter was there as the pope, you talk about being insulted! Paul ignores him totally.

Paul says, ‘I need to come over and establish you. The foundation hasn’t been laid. I go and preach where nobody has preached yet, so I’m going to come to you people and preach. I don’t build on another man’s foundation. And you need to be established. Say “Hi” to everybody I know, starting out with Priscilla and Aquila, in whose house the Church is meeting.’ He kind of works his way down. There’s no way that you can truthfully and objectively look at the book of Romans and think that Peter was in Rome as the Bishop of Rome.

The whole basis of the claim of authority that the Catholic Church has absolutely collapses on the basis of an objective look at the book of Romans. It collapses on several other bases as well. We don’t have time to get into all of those. We will get into some of them at a later time. I think it’s important to understand this because it is a major issue. The claim of papal supremacy is the claim of supremacy of the Bishop of Rome because he is the successor of Peter. Peter is not in Rome. Peter didn’t establish the Church in Rome. He was not in Rome up through this time. This is made plain.

Let’s get on into more of the book of Romans. There were Jews and Gentiles in the Church at Rome—the Gentiles being primarily the Greeks and Romans. There were some problems as there traditionally are. They all had a problem with each of them looking down on everyone else. The Jews knew that they were superior to everybody else because they had the Bible. Since they were God’s own special people, this obviously made them better than everybody else. On the other hand, you couldn’t convince the Romans of that. The Romans knew they were the superior people; they were the master race because they ruled the world. That was pretty much evidenced.

The Greeks knew that they really were the ones who were superior to everybody else because they were the ones who conducted the schools to teach the Romans. In their minds, that proved that they were smarter than the Romans because they were employed by the Romans to teach them. The pagan religions of Rome and the great

philosophers all quoted Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the great Greek philosophers. The Greeks' claim to superiority was their culture and philosophers.

The Romans claimed the superiority because they ruled everybody else. That should make them number one. And the Jews looked down on them and said, 'Neither one of you really has what we have. We're number one. We are the ones on speaking terms with God. The rest of you are not.'

You have people in the Church who have come out of these backgrounds—each of which kind of looked down a little bit on the others and figured what they had made them better than the others. They all took pride in certain things. Paul begins to address that subject.

The first thing he started with was the Greeks and Romans. He really "chewed them up and spit them out."

Romans 1:18-22, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools..."

Paul blasts the philosophers of the Greco-Roman world in about as strong terms as possible. He says they are a bunch of fools. Paul says, 'The things you take pride in are your great philosophers, your great educational system. Let me tell you about the great educational system; the people that founded it were fools.' You can imagine a few people were probably squirming in their seats about that time. They maybe thought he had quit preaching and gone to "meddling" because he was really beginning to take apart the things in which they had pride.

Verse 24, God gave them up to uncleanness.

Verse 28, he begins to go through and talks about how God had given them over to a debased (KJV, "reprobate") mind. You don't have to dig very far before you realize what a major role the sexual sins, sexual perversion and homosexuality played among the intellectuals and the intelligentsia of Greece. There were vile things that were a part of some of these things. Paul really begins to go through and "rake them

over the coals" for the things in which they took pride.

This is being read orally. About the time we've gotten down this far, some of the Jews are sitting there feeling pretty smug because this is what they thought all along.

Then he gets on down.

Romans 2:11, "For there is no partiality with God."

Verses 13-15, "(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, ..."

The Gentiles didn't have the Ten Commandments given to them. Moses didn't come to Rome or to Athens and give the Ten Commandments. 'You Jews are pretty proud of that; He gave them to you. But let me tell you something. It's not the hearers of the law that are just; all you Jews have heard the law. It's the doers of the law.'

Which do you think God is most pleased with: a Roman who never heard the Ten Commandments that didn't commit adultery or a Jew who heard them and did? Which do you think God is the most pleased with: a Jew who heard the Ten Commandments yet worked some shady deals and stole, lied or murdered, or some Greek or Roman who never had the law taught to them (in terms of the Old Testament), but figured out you shouldn't lie or steal or murder somebody?

You have nice people all over the world, whether they are Arabs or Chinese or people in Africa or South America. You can go anywhere in the world and find some nice people, the kind you would like to have as next door neighbors. They don't go around raping, murdering, pillaging and doing all kinds of terrible things. Just because somebody's not in the Church doesn't mean that they are a thief, murderer and rapist. The point he's making is that the Jews were smug.

He says, 'Let's understand; it's not the hearers of the law but the doers.' There were people in Rome of Greek and Roman background. Even though the law was not delivered to them as a codified canon of law, if they understood and did some of these things, God was pleased with that.

Verses 17-20, "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are

confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.”

‘You Jews are pretty proud of yourself, aren’t you? You rest in the law. This really gives you “one up.” Well, let me tell you something.’

Verses 22-24, “You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written.”

Oh, now, all of a sudden, the Jews are the ones squirming in their seats. They’ve been sitting there looking pretty smug until a few minutes ago. Now, as the letter proceeds to be read, Paul says, ‘You Jews, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of your lousy example. You rest in the law and make your boast in the law and you’re not keeping the law. People know the kind of example that you’ve been setting and the name of the God of Israel is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of your lousy example.’

About this time, there are some who are uncomfortable and squirming in their seats because they weren’t really comfortable either. He says, ‘Look, where does righteousness come from?’ The Jews’ “claim to fame” was that they were circumcised; they’re the seed of Abraham. Circumcision is the sign of the covenant; they’re identified as the children of Abraham (Israelites) to whom was delivered the law. This was the basis of their claim to a relationship with God. They had this patronizing approach toward the Gentiles, which in turn, some of the Gentiles (particularly the Greeks and Romans) had a pretty patronizing approach toward everybody else. They said, ‘Maybe you have a few things, but after all, we’ve developed this wonderful educational system and we’ve produced this great culture and civilization.’

Greek and Roman civilization was a major accomplishment. There are many beautiful things. Look at some of the great architecture and art. Many great things come from the Greco-Roman civilization. It is the basis of much of western civilization. These are positive things, but the problem is that’s the basis of people’s confidence.

Verse 25, “For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become

uncircumcision.” Paul says, ‘Look, you know what circumcision profits? If you keep the law and you’re doing what God says, it is fine.’

Verse 26, “Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?” If he’s doing what God says, that counts a whole lot more than someone who is a Jew who is not doing what God says.

Verse 29, “but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, ...”

He’s gotten through “slamming” the Gentiles and the things they were proud of. Then he turned around and “slammed” the Jews and all the things they were proud of. So, nobody had anything to be proud of. This is the point that Paul wanted to make.

Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” Paul says, ‘You’re all in the same boat. You Gentiles and Jews don’t have anything to be proud of. You’re all sinners. You’re all in the same boat, and the question is how to get out of that boat and into another.’ This was Paul’s approach in dealing with a situation where there was a certain amount of rivalry and friction—this sort of attitude and problem that some had towards one another.

Now he needs to come back and address the subject of the advantage of being a Jew.

Romans 3:1, “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?” Is there an advantage to being a Jew?

Verse 2, “Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.” Yes, there is one great advantage because to them were committed the oracles of God, the Word of God. The Jews were given the truth—the Bible.

Verse 3, even if some didn’t believe it, their unbelief will not make God’s faithfulness of no effect. In other words, God faithfully preserved His word through them, even if some of them didn’t believe and practice it. There was a tremendous advantage they had. They had access to the written and preserved Word of God.

The oracles of God basically consist of three things. Some of it was written; some, not written. The oracles of God consist of the Old Testament Scriptures preserved by the Jews. You know two other things the Jews preserved? They preserved the knowledge of which day is the Sabbath.

Exodus 20:8-10, you can read in the Old Testament, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.”

But if somebody had not been keeping every seventh day, how would you know which day is the seventh? The Jews preserved the knowledge of which day is the seventh. If there had not been a people keeping the Sabbath consecutively every week through every generation, then how would you have kept up with it?

We pretty well use one standard calendar in the world today. Anciently, that was not the case. Every nation had some calendar. The Jews preserved the knowledge of which day was the Sabbath. The Old Testament preserved the knowledge that the seventh day is the Sabbath, but which day is the seventh day? The Jews preserved the order of the days of the week.

Another thing they preserved was the knowledge of how to calculate the calendar. That was another part of the oracles of God. God tells us that the Passover comes on the 14th day of the first month. That's great. But how do you figure that out? That didn't mean that the 14th of January was Passover, did it? It is not the 14th day of the Roman calendar but the 14th day of the first month of the *sacred calendar*. Who preserved the calendar? The Jews did. That's why it is called the Jewish calendar or the Hebrew calendar.

The oracles of God consisted of: (1) the Old Testament, (2) the knowledge of the seventh-day week and (3) the knowledge of the sacred calendar and how to compute it. The Jews preserved that information.

And according to what Paul said here in Romans 3, they preserved it faithfully. Even though some of them didn't believe it, in the full sense of the word, God used them to preserve that knowledge. That's a tremendous advantage.

Romans 3:10-12, but the point is, "...There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." Everybody's culture and civilization has gotten off the track. 'Greeks, Romans and Jews—you've all missed the point. You've all sinned. None of you have an inherent "leg up" in terms of a relationship with God.' This was important.

We get into the concept of law and grace. There's a lot about that in the book of Romans.

Verse 28, "...a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."

Verse 31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

Again, we get back to the issue of circumcision. Circumcision revolved around the issue of access to God. We went through this in greater detail in the book of Galatians. This was what the whole controversy was about. This was the thing that was difficult to grasp. How do you gain and maintain access to God? What is the basis of our relationship with God and of having access to God? Is it simply a matter of ceremonial requirements?

If you go into the Old Testament, there were requirements in terms of circumcision and even in terms of serving in the temple—things of that sort. There were certain bodily impairments that someone was not able to have and serve in the temple. There were physical things of uncleanness that would temporarily exclude you. There were physical things that determined your access to the sanctuary and to proximity to God.

But those were simply to teach a spiritual lesson. The issue that had to be understood was that the basis of our relationship with God is a spiritual relationship. It is not simply the performance of a ritual or a penance or doing certain things. Grace is not conferred through the seven sacraments. That's not where you get God's grace. Those of you who were Catholics know that's not the way grace is conferred.

Grace is God's gift, and Paul makes plain that our relationship with God is predicated on faith. It is a spiritual relationship.

Verse 31, a spiritual relationship does not make void the law. This does not tear up the Ten Commandments and throw them away. It is not the performance of a ritual that determines access to God because we are looking at a spiritual relationship.

The Jews needed to understand that they didn't have some inherent, automatic relationship with God simply because the ritual of circumcision had been performed. That was not the basis of a spiritual relationship with God. Circumcision was the outward, physical sign that identified them as the covenant people, the descendants of Abraham. That was fine, but it did not give them a "leg up" toward inheriting the Kingdom of God.

As the covenant people, they did have access to the Scriptures and knowledge of the truth. That's well and good, but you still have to act on it. It's not the hearer of the law that is going to be justified (Romans 2:13). The fact that you sat in the synagogue and heard the law read doesn't put you one "leg up" on anybody else, unless you have acted on what you have heard.

The same can be brought down and applied to us in the Church today. It doesn't matter how many years you've sat in the Church or if you grow up in it or if your parents were in it before you were born. It doesn't matter how many generations of your family has been in the Church or how long or how short a time you've been in the Church. It's not the hearers of the law that are going to be justified; it's the doers. It's not how many sermons you've heard; it's what you've done with the ones you have heard. A person who has only heard one and acted on it is a whole lot better off than the guy who has heard 1,000 and hadn't really gotten around to doing anything with any of them. It's not how many; it's what you've done with the ones you have heard. This is the key, and Paul is bringing this out.

Then he gets into the matter of justification. Again, justification is the basis of our relationship with God in the sense of gaining access to God. How are you justified? Was Abraham justified before God by circumcision? Was that the basis of Abraham's spiritual relationship with God?

Paul says, 'Let us go through and analyze.'

Romans 4:2-3, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" Genesis 15 says this, which was before he was circumcised.

Verse 10, "How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised." He says, 'Look, he was uncircumcised when he believed God and acted on it.'

Verse 11, "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, ..." Paul is trying to explain a concept to them.

Abraham's relationship with God was not established by the performance of the ritual of circumcision. That's not what gave Abraham his relationship with God. God established that as a covenant sign with Abraham, but there was a relationship with God that Abraham already had for over 20 years. God made the promises to Abraham before circumcision was ever mentioned.

He uses this to illustrate to the Jews who had trouble turning loose of the fact that you really couldn't be assured of access to God if you were uncircumcised. This was based on the fact of physical exclusion from the court of the Israelites. Remember, around the tabernacle and later the temple, there were courts. There was an

outer court, the court of the Gentiles, beyond which someone couldn't pass unless he was a circumcised Jew.

We will see it in the next Bible study or two, Acts 21, when Paul went back to Jerusalem. He was arrested and charged with bringing uncircumcised Gentiles into the temple precinct. The issue of access is the whole thing. The issue is not doing away with the law. The issue is: what do you do that gains access to God? How do you gain access to God? What is the basis of your having access? Paul is explaining that here.

What is the promise to Abraham?

Verse 13, "For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." What is the promise to Abraham? He would be the heir of the world. God didn't promise to Abraham that he was going to go to heaven. He promised him he would inherit the earth.

Galatians 3:29, if he is going to inherit the earth, that's why we are told, "And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Which promise? The promise God made to Abraham, the promise that he would be the heir of the world. We spiritually all become accounted as the children of Abraham and we inherit through him, in effect, as his spiritual offspring. The promise was that he would be heir of the world.

Matthew 5:5, therefore, it shouldn't surprise us when Christ said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Revelation 5:10, it should also not surprise us when we read, "And have made us [margin, "them"] kings and priests to our God; and we [margin, "they"] shall reign on the earth." The earth is what God promised. Abraham was going to be the heir, the inheritor.

Romans 4:20-21, "He did not waver [KJV, "stagger"] at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." This was the basis of Abraham's relationship with God. He believed God. He trusted God. He developed a relationship with God based on confidence. That needs to be the basis of our relationship with God.

Romans 5:1-2, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, ..." How do we gain access to God? Through

Christ we have access by faith. Christ made the access possible, but we have to believe it. We have to act by faith, and it is through Him that we have access through faith. He discusses this and shows that God took the initiative in establishing our approach to Him.

Verse 6, “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

Verses 9-10, “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

We’re reconciled by the death of Christ; we’re saved by His life. There was an old Protestant hymn, “Saved by the Blood.” We are not saved by His blood; we are saved by His life. We are reconciled by the blood—by the death and by the shedding of blood. Restitution for sin was made that paid the penalty. We have the opportunity to live because Christ not only died, He lives again and became the Author (KJV, “Captain”) of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10).

Again, we get into this issue of reconciliation, this issue of justification. God took the initiative to bring us into a relationship with Him. We were cut off. We were alienated by sin. Whether we are Jews, Gentiles or whatever—regardless of our ethnic origin—we were all in the same category and alienated from God through sin. God took the initiative to bring us into a relationship with Himself. That initiative was taken through Jesus Christ. Our relationship with God is a spiritual relationship, and it is not based on performance of physical rituals.

Let’s notice one thing. The question comes up about the Ten Commandments existing between the time of Adam and Moses.

Verses 12-14, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses,”

If there had been no law, there would have been no sin. If there had been no sin, there would have been no death. Right? That’s what it says, ‘Sin entered into the world and death entered by sin. Death spread to all men because all have sinned.’ The Ten Commandments were in effect between Adam and Moses because sin was imputed—sin was counted. It was still a sin. When Joseph, back in the book of Genesis, was tempted to

commit adultery by Potipher’s wife, he said, ‘How could I do so and sin against my master and against God. How can I do this sin?’ Joseph knew it was a sin to commit adultery. How did he know that? If there is no law, there is no sin.

That’s the way they want to solve the crime problem. They want to do away with some of the law. We have a big drug problem. If we make it all legal, then it won’t be a crime anymore and crime will go down. Right? If you legalize murder, you can say the crimes of murder have dropped to zero because it’s not a crime anymore. What if you abolished the speed limit? Then you wouldn’t have the speeding violations anymore.

Up until the energy crunch in the 70s, Montana didn’t have a speed limit during the daytime on the major highways. There simply were no speed limits. There were practical reasons for that. You could probably drive 50 miles and not see another vehicle. You would have to go to some trouble to have a wreck.

The point is that if there is no law, there is no sin. We know that there was sin between Adam and Moses; therefore, there was a law. Paul had to deal with some of the misunderstandings that had arisen. He’s bringing out how we’re justified and the basis of a relationship with God is not predicated on the performance of physical ritual. Some want to “jump into the other ditch” and say, ‘It doesn’t matter about sin and keeping the law because grace comes freely; we can do whatever we want to do and God will just give more grace. Since God likes to give grace, the more we sin, the more God can give grace. God’s happy and we’re happy.’ That’s not the way it works.

Romans 6:1-2, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” He said, ‘What do you mean? Do you mean that you can just keep on doing whatever you want to do because, after all, God will give grace? Don’t you realize that when you become a partaker of grace, you died to sin? You turned from sin.’ You said, ‘I don’t want that way anymore.’ There’s a difference between living in sin and tripping up and making a mistake sometimes. There’s a difference between missing the mark and not even aiming for the target.

It is interesting. The primary word that is most commonly used for sin, both in Hebrew and Greek, refers to sin in the sense of mistakes that Christians make. It comes from words in the original that basically mean to miss the mark. In

the Hebrew, it's the word that was once used to refer to an archer who was able to shoot a target and not miss the mark. What it's talking about is missing the mark, not quite hitting the bull's eye. It's talking about conduct not quite being on target. Paul is bringing this out. There's a difference between missing the mark and not even aiming for the target. Missing the mark is predicated on the fact you were shooting at the target. You were aiming, but you don't always hit it "right on" as you should.

But shall we continue in sin? No. We died to sin. We're not trying to live that way anymore. We may miss the mark sometimes, but in terms of sin as a way of life, we've turned our back on it. Verse 4, he goes through that we're to walk in newness of life.

Verse 6, we're not to be slaves of (KJV, "serve") sin.

Verse 12, sin is not to reign in our mortal bodies. Verse 16, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slave whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?"

Verse 23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We are not under the law in the sense that we're not under the penalty of the law. We've died to that. We're delivered from the penalty of the law.

Romans 7:6-7, "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'"

Paul said, 'I wouldn't have known sin except God had spelled it out in the law.' The purpose of the law is to define sin. You wouldn't know right from wrong if God didn't tell you. You don't know what the speed limit is unless there's a sign posted. This is the purpose. This is what the law serves.

Verse 12, "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." The problem is not the law.

Verse 14, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." The problem wasn't the law; the problem was with the people.

Verses 18-21, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is

present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good."

What am I going to do? In my flesh dwells no good thing. I have made up my mind that I desire to serve God, but the pulls that I have inherent within me are taking me in the other direction.

Verse 22, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."

Verse 24, "...Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

God will through Jesus Christ.

Verse 25, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." With my mind I have made a decision and I'm locked on to serving the law of God. As long as I am in the flesh, I am still battling the pulls that can take me in the other direction.

Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." He is talking about not continuing to walk after the flesh. We have a battle going on. We're pulled in two different directions, but we've chosen the direction we're going in. We're going in that direction even though there may be pulls and may be occasional slips in terms of completely and perfectly walking the way of God.

Verses 6-7, "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." Carnally minded is being primarily motivated by the pulls of the flesh that is pulling and taking us in a direction contrary to God. In the flesh we can't please God; we need the Spirit of God.

How do you know if you're going to be in the Kingdom? Here's the key.

Verse 11, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who [that] dwells in you." How do you know if you're going to be in the Kingdom? —If you have the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 1:13-14, "...you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise who [which] is the guarantee [KJV, "earnest"] of our inheritance

....” It’s the proof that God intends to do what He says.

God doesn’t give you His Spirit and then takes it back and then gives it back—on and off again like a light switch. That’s not the way it works. When God gives you the Spirit, you have the Spirit. You can drift far enough from God to finally come to the point of the unpardonable sin. There can finally come a point of no return when God would take His Spirit from you. But it’s not something that just goes back and forth. Once you have it, you have it as long as you use it, exercise it and seek it. Sometimes you may be on low supply because you haven’t been renewing it. But it is something that we have as a gift of God and God does not desire to take it from us. He desires to give us more.

1 Peter 5:5, “...‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”

Romans 8 goes through a very powerful section of Scripture.

Verse 14, we have received the Spirit of sonship.

Verse 16, we are God’s children.

Verse 17, we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Verse 23, we have the firstfruits of the Spirit.

Verse 31, “...If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Verse 35, nothing can separate us from God’s love and God’s power.

In Romans 9, Paul begins to address the subject of Israel. Israel as a whole is not being converted now. That was a mystery to many trying to understand.

Verse 3, Paul had a great desire to see his countrymen converted, but he explains something.

Romans 11:25-26, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, ...”

Verse 32, “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”

He is bringing out to the Gentiles that it’s not because they were somehow inherently smarter or anything else. God has blinded or allowed them to be blinded temporarily. He’s concluded them in unbelief that He may have mercy upon all. He will deal with them in His time. Israel is not converted right now because they are blinded.

God goes into the fact that He chooses whom He will call and when.

Romans 9:16, “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” He chooses upon whom He will have mercy and who will be blinded. That’s God’s choice. You and I understand what we understand because God has opened our minds to understand. It’s not because there may be others who are not somehow inherently worse than we are. It’s not because we were smarter than everybody else or because of some inherent quality of us. God in His mercy chose us; we have to understand the credit goes to God, not to us. God chose us. We didn’t take the initiative in our relationship with God. He took it with us. It’s not that we didn’t do our part in terms of seeking and searching, but if God had not revealed Himself, we could have never found Him. God revealed Himself. Paul goes through and explains some things.

There is one scripture that I always took a lot of encouragement in. I remember back at some “low times” in the state of the Church back in the 70s when there didn’t seem to be very much being accomplished and there were a lot of things that shouldn’t have been. This was one of the verses that I zeroed in on and took a lot of comfort from.

Verse 28, “‘For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.’” God is going to finish His work. He’s going to finish it and He’s going to cut it short in righteousness. That’s something to understand. God knows who’s who and He knows what’s what. He has a job to do and He’s going to finish His work. He’s going to cut it short in righteousness. He’s going to make a short work.

The full prophetic implications of that short work is something that I think we will just have to wait and see in terms of what God is going to classify as the short work. I don’t think that term would necessarily apply to the entire length of this age (era).

There have been various periods in the overall phase of the work. There have been times of great activity and accomplishment and times of somewhat of a lull. That’s been the state of things. It is one of those enigmatic statements that become clearer at the appropriate time. But it is a basis of faith and of confidence that God knows what He is doing. I think this has to be the basis of our relationship—*God knows what He is doing*.

If you take a bus or plane trip somewhere, you have to operate on the basis that the pilot knows how to get to the destination. If you don’t think

the pilot knows how to get to the destination, then you better find a different bus or plane. I'm not going to get on a bus and tell him every turn to make, when to slow down and stop. If I don't think he can drive, I am going to get off the bus.

The basis is: you identify where God is, where He is working, and then you trust Him to do it. And if you don't see why He's made that turn or this turn or why He's doing that or this other, just realize you are not the one who is driving. You don't have a road map. We have a general idea. In one sense, you can say the Bible is a road map. But all the details, prophetically and exactly everything God is going to do, you can't second-guess God. God has things in mind that go beyond our ability to entirely perceive.

Romans 11:2, "God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew."

Verse 8, "...God has given a spirit of stupor [KJV, "slumber"],"

Verse 26, "And so [eventually] all Israel will be saved, ..."

You can tie this in with Ezekiel 37 and other places that show a future time when there will be a time of salvation. God is not a respecter of persons, as Paul makes plain earlier in the book of Acts (Acts 10:34, KJV). If the time is coming when all Israel will be saved, then the time is also coming when all the Gentiles—all the nations—will also have their chance for salvation. That is made plain.

Matthew 11:24, Christ alluded to that in the instructions to the Pharisees when He said, "...it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for you."

Matthew 12:42, "The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here."

Matthew 12:41, "The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here."

Some of these people have acted more and have done better with the chance they had than you've done with yours. They are going to rise up in judgment with you and they are going to ask, 'What's wrong with you? If we'd had the chance you had, we would have done something with it.' Christ made plain that there's coming a time when all Israel is going to be saved. Since God is not a respecter of persons, there's going to be a time when they also shall have that opportunity.

Romans 12 talks about our relationship to God as one of total sacrifice; we are to be a living sacrifice. We belong to God. We are His possession. We are to recognize that we are in the body (Church) where God has placed us and we are to carry out and serve in whatever opportunities we have available to us.

Romans 13 says we are to be subject to the civil authorities.

Romans 13:1, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." We are not to be involved in civil disobedience. We are to be subject to the civil law, realizing that God holds the civil government accountable and He deals with them. A Christian's job is not to be out trying to lead a revolution somewhere. We are to seek to live peaceably, to pay our taxes and to do the things that we should do. We are to try to be a good citizen and be respectful to government authority.

The one debt that everybody has is made plain.

Verse 8, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law." We owe a debt of love.

Verse 7, "Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." We are to show proper respect and proper deference. We are to show the appropriate signs of respect. A Christian is not going to be out burning the flag, whatever country he lives in. We are to be paying our taxes. We are to show respect and honor to individuals in authority and the symbols of that authority. The one thing we owe everybody is to love one another.

Verses 9-10, he explains a little bit of what love is.

In Romans 14, there was a problem concerning meats. But the issue was not clean and unclean meats. The issue was not that some were eating unclean foods and Paul didn't think it made any difference. The issue concerns vegetarianism.

Romans 14:1-2, "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables." What does it mean that one believes he may eat all things? Does it mean ground-up glass, arsenic, poison ivy salad?

1 Corinthians 10:27, what about the verse, "...eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for conscience's sake." A poison ivy

salad—are you going to eat that? That’s not what it is talking about.

“For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.” The issue is eating meat or not eating meat. The reason some were not eating meat was not because they were following Ellen G. White’s vision, the Seventh Day Adventist “star.” Some say she had a vision that meat in the latter days was going to be polluted. Yeah, it is “shot” full of chemicals, that’s right. So are your vegetables; so is your water and your air. Anybody who lives along the Mississippi River is in trouble. What are you going to limit yourself to that doesn’t have any pollutants?

I am not saying that we shouldn’t try to be careful of what we eat and that we shouldn’t obtain the best that is available to us. I certainly believe that we should be careful of our health and our diet and obtain the best that is available to us. But a little bit of common sense and balance has to come into the matter, too. You may die from breathing polluted air, but you are going to die a whole lot quicker from not breathing air at all. You’ll last years longer breathing polluted air—minutes not breathing air. If your choice is between polluted air and no air, then you better go for the polluted air. Now, if your choice is between polluted air and good air, then go for the good air. Go for the best you have available. Use a little bit of common sense.

But their issue was not some crackpot theory in those ways. The issues had to do with the fact that it was meat offered to idols. Paul goes on and addresses the subject.

Romans 14:14, “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean [KJV, margin, “common”] of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

“There is nothing common of itself.” Now the issue is not food that is unclean but food that is common—and there is a difference.

Remember when Peter had his vision in Acts 10. He saw the sheet and all the four-footed creatures.

Acts 10:13-14, “And a voice came to him, ‘Rise. Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’” Common and unclean are two totally different things. Food can be clean and, yet, not kosher. “Common” simply means it “wasn’t kosher.” Generally it was because it had been offered to an idol. That was the primary reason.

Also, there were certain matters of ritual slaughter.

What it amounted to was that in the major metropolitan Gentile areas, to obtain meat at the meat market or the places you went to buy meat, many times it was difficult to obtain meat that was kosher. There was no guarantee that meat that you obtained at the major meat markets was kosher. You could not be assured that some of it hadn’t come from an idol’s temple where it had been offered in sacrifice.

They slaughtered the animals, burned the entrails there on the altar, poured out the blood and the meat was carved up. The priests had a lot more than what they needed, so they sold it to the meat markets. A large part of the meat the meat market had was bought from various idols’ temples that morning.

A really strict Jew, unless he could be absolutely and totally assured that this meat had not been offered to an idol, wouldn’t eat it. They viewed it as having been polluted. It had become a major issue. Some of the people were saying they didn’t see that it was a problem for them to eat meat offered to idols. ‘If I go down to the store and buy some meat (some of the meat was not offered to idols), I don’t know if it’s offered to an idol. I’m not buying it to participate in the idol’s service.’

[Tape ends. Notes added come from another Bible study or a sermon given by Mr. Ogwyn.]

Romans 15:23-24, “But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.”

Paul had planned on going to Rome and then to Spain after he delivered the aid to the Jerusalem Church. But he was arrested and brought to Rome (Acts 22:25—28:31). He dwelt two whole years in Rome in his own rented house (Acts 28:30). At that point the Biblical record of Paul’s life ceased.

Evidently, from what Paul had said, his plans were to go from Italy to Spain, and there is every reason to think that he did so. He said he would in the book of Romans. Secular history and tradition maintains that he did. From Spain he went on up to Britain, which was the furthestmost outpost of the Roman Empire. He spent some time there, and then by the mid 60s, he returned to the Mediterranean area, particularly to the area

of Ephesus, for a short period of time. He then left Ephesus and went over to Macedonia. From there he was arrested and taken back to Rome. Next Bible study we will cover the book of Colossians and the book of Philemon.