

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ROMANS 11-12

Ironically, Paul speaks of the failure of the Jews... *in Chapter 11!* Israel went spiritually *bankrupt, belly-up!*

Romans 9 opens with a list of privileges God gave to the Hebrew people. But they failed to receive the righteousness of God in Christ. Rather than trust in Jesus, they relied on their own good works - *self-righteousness* rather *God's righteousness*. And it caused them to go *spiritually bankrupt!* A people who were once **elected** by God, were now **rejected by God**.

Yet **Chapter 11** reveals God's reorganization plan.

In the future all God's glorious promises to Israel will be fulfilled. In the end all the Jews will be saved.

Romans 11 begins, **"I say then, has God cast away His people?"** Here was the big question on the minds of Paul's readers, **"Is God through with the Jew?"**

And Paul answers the question with his own credentials... **"Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew."**

Paul was a Hebrew *and he had been saved*. Though God put the nation on the bench, salvation was and is open to everyone who trusts in Jesus - *Jew or Gentile*.

Paul's first argument for God's faithfulness to the Jew is *personal*, but his second argument is *historical and biblical*... In verse 2 he declares, **"Or do you not know what the**

Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, *“LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life”?*

Recall Elijah’s depression. He had stood up to 400 false prophets, and yet one woman scared him. He tucked tail and ran from the wicked Queen Jezebel.

In essence Elijah prayed, *“Woe is me, I am all alone. I am the only person left who’s faithful to God.”*

And sometimes we all feel that way - like we’re the last Christian standing. Yet Paul points out God always has a remnant of believers - even among the Jews.

Paul writes in verse 4, *“But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself 7000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”* Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” At times it’s a skeleton crew, but God always has His people. Don’t ever think God has abandoned you. *There’s more of us than you think!*

And according to verse 6 everybody who belongs to God was saved by grace! He writes, *“And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.-But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.”* Apparently, grace and works are mutually exclusive - *it’s one or the other.* And Paul is clear, we’re saved by grace - not works.

Grace is grace, and works are work.

Grace and work are like oil and water. They represent two distinct ways of approaching God. *Work is about what you do. Grace is about what Jesus did.*

It's grace that unlocks the door. Works slam it shut.

Verse 7, *“What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.”* Paul divides the Jewish people into two groups - *the believing minority* and *the blinded majority*.

“Just as it is written (in Isaiah 29 and Deuteronomy 29): “God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.”

Paul brings up a concept called **“judicial blindness.”** And to me, this is the most frightening doctrine in all of the Scripture.

Natural blindness is the result of being born in sin, but *judicial blindness* is a specific judgment from God.

If you harden your heart to God over and over, God eventually lets you have your own way. Persist in your stubbornness and God will let you destroy yourself.

Paul stresses a similar thought from *Psalm 69*. He quotes, *“And David says: “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always.”*

David prophesied, *“Let their table become a snare...”* It reminds me of what occurs every Passover in Jewish homes. The Seder table is full of symbols that point to Jesus. The hidden matzo is a symbol of His body. The cup of redemption parallels with His blood. The Jews stared at these symbols

year after year... but don't see the picture being painted of Jesus!

Why? Because blindness has happened to Israel.

On one of our tours to Israel we had a guide named "Amnon." He was a tank driver in the Yom Kippur War. The man had chutzpah, and could tell a good joke.

Here's one of Amnon's jokes... *A rabbi and a cabbie die and go to heaven?* The cabbie gets in, but the rabbi doesn't. And he wants to know why! The angel tells him, *"When you preached you put folks to sleep, but when he drove he caused his passengers to pray."*

At night we ate dinner with Amnon and shared our love for Jesus. We took him to the OT and showed him how Jesus was the Messiah, *but he never budged.*

Finally, I asked him, *"Amnon, what do you think of Jesus?"* His response broke our hearts, *"I don't think about it at all. I'm not allowed to think about it."*

Amnon's rabbis teach their constituency that it's a sin to even consider the Messianic claims of Jesus of Nazareth. The joke he told us was no joke after all. Today's rabbis are putting the Jewish people to sleep.

We've all met people whose unbelief is irrational. All their honest questions have been answered, yet they still choose not to believe. It's a spiritual blindness.

You open their eyes with love and prayer.

Verse 11, *"I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not!"* Recall the old commercial: an elderly

woman falls on the floor, and you hear her high-pitched cry, “I’ve fallen, and I can’t get up!”

Well, the Jews had fallen, *but they would get up!*

“(For) through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.” The Jews rejected Jesus, but God was still reaching out to the Jews.

Paul introduces a concept... **jealousy evangelism.**

You’ve heard of *mass evangelism, door-to-door evangelism, street evangelism, literature evangelism, life-style evangelism, and media evangelism...*

But God created another form of evangelism to reach the Jews - **jealousy evangelism.** God saved the lost Gentiles to make the Jews jealous, and cause them to desire the same salvation for themselves.

My last two years playing High School football I was the starting quarterback for every game, but one. I opened my senior season with a couple of poor performances, and for the first time in two years my coach benched me. The next game I didn’t start.

But it was a stroke of genius on his part!

For when I finally got into the game, toward the end of the first half, I immediately threw a TD pass. I ended up the starting quarterback for the rest of the season. *But my benching had supplied needed motivation.*

And this was God’s strategy with Israel. He benched the Jews, and exalted the Gentiles, in order to make the Jews jealous of the salvation that’s in Christ.

Verse 12, “Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of *them.*” Understand how much the Jews despised the Gentiles - they considered them kindling for the fires of hell...

There’s a joke among Jews, “*Why did God create Gentiles?*” The answer, “*Somebody has to pay retail.*”

But Paul plays on this animosity. Why should lowly Gentiles be recipients of God’s blessings, while Jews stayed on the outside looking in? Paul flaunted the salvation of the uncircumcised to provoke the Jews.

I heard of a scientist in Naples, Florida who invented a new way to kill mosquitos. They’re drawn to a trap by a tantalizing fragrance called, “*cow's breath.*”

The man invented a synthetic chemical that mimics a cow's breath. And mosquitos love the aroma.

Well, we need to effect lost people, the way *cow's breath* effects a mosquito. *Do we live an attractive life?* Is there a bounce in our step, a peace in our heart? We should make folks jealous of the joy we have in Jesus.

“For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead? God set aside the Jews, to reach the Gentiles, but when the Jews are brought back in it’ll be glorious.

For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches.” Verse 17, “And if some of

the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them...”

Here Paul refers to the Jews as the natural branches on God’s tree. The Gentiles are wild olive branches.

The natural branches of Jews were broken off, so the wild branches or Gentiles can be grafted in.

“And (Gentiles) with (the Jews) became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches.” Gentile and Jewish believers are both part of the same tree - of the same stock.

Paul is cautioning the Gentiles from getting haughty or feeling superior to the Jews. For the Gentiles have been grafted into promises intended for the Jews.

Interesting before we came to Christ the Gentiles were called a *“a wild olive tree.”* We were the original *“wild thang.”* The Jews were domesticated by God. They were the natural branches, raised under the Law, seedlings in God’s garden. Whereas, the Gentiles were *wild shoots* - they lacked the moral foundation and spiritual upbringing of the Jews. *They were grafted in.*

Verse 18, *“But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.”* Here Paul is worried about *reverse discrimination.*

For centuries the Jews were prejudiced against the Gentiles. Now Paul fears the Gentiles will return the favor. They’ll look down at the Jews for rejecting Christ.

Paul is afraid the Gentiles will condemn the Jews for their current rebellion - look down on them for being cut out of the

tree - rather than realize our obligation to them for being the stock of the tree, or its foundation.

Let's not forget the Jews gave to the world the Word of God - the Written Word, the Bible, and Living Word, Jesus. God's Son was a Jew. The Gentiles owe the Jews a debt of gratitude. *How can we be anti-Semitic?*

Yet, the last 2000 years of human history has validated Paul's concern. Sadly, the Gentile Church has been the number one enemy of the Jewish people.

I love the quote, "How odd of God to choose the Jew. But not so odd, as those who choose the Jewish God, and hate the Jew." Christians should love, support, pray for, and witness to Jews - at home and in Israel.

Verse 19 addresses the Gentiles, "You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off."

Rather than *spurn the Jews*, Christians need to *learn from the Jews*. The Jews failed to persist in their faith. They didn't continue in God's goodness. And if we repeat *their mistake*, we will surely suffer *their plight*.

Paul is clear it's up to us not just to have faith, *but continue in faith*. Belief is not a one time, sign-on-the-bottom-line

proposition. We have to “*continue*” in faith if we expect to be saved, otherwise we’ll be “*cut off.*”

I once read of a woman in Toledo who was found guilty of manslaughter. She shot her boyfriend. The article said it occurred as they argued over the Bible.

And though it wasn’t reported, I’ll bet I know what the couple was discussing - *once-saved-always-saved!*

Some of the most hostile, vehement discussions I ever had with other Christians were over this doctrine.

I want to explain what I believe about *once-saved-always-saved* - but before I do, I admit there are good, godly, Bible-believing Christians on both sides of the debate. This is not a subject worth dividing over. At the end of voicing our opinions, we can agree to disagree.

So here’s my position... It’s nothing we can do or not do that earns our salvation. Thus, neither is there anything we can do or not do that forfeits our salvation.

The only requirement for salvation is faith!

But if salvation is by faith, and you renounce your faith, and no longer have faith, how then can you expect to be saved?

You have to continue in your faith.

Understand, faith is not a date on the calendar - or a contract you sign; then go off and forget about - it’s an attitude you grow and cultivate. Faith is like a plant. Starve it and it dies. Feed it and it’ll live - and bear fruit.

For the record, I don't believe in once saved always saved, but I do believe in **eternal security**. I believe as long as you're trusting in Jesus you're eternally secure!

If you want to study this further read: [Colossians 1:21-23](#), [Galatians 5:1-5](#), [Hebrews 10:35-39](#), [1 Peter 1:8-9](#) - and there are many more if you need them. The perseverance of faith is taught throughout the Bible.

Back to verse 23, “**And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.**” The Jews didn't continue in faith and were cut off - but here's good news: *if they turn from their unbelief they can be grafted back in.*

“**For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?**” A horticulturalist will tell you it's far more difficult to graft a wild branch into a vine than it is to re-graft a natural branch that was formerly broken off.

God did the hard work of saving the Gentiles, thus it'll be much easier bringing home the Jews. I like the quote by CS Lewis on the salvation of the Jews. He explained, “**In a sense, the converted Jew is the only normal human being in the world. Everyone else is a special case dealt with under emergency conditions.**”

Verse 25, “**For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the**

fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” A biblical *“mystery”* is a truth we learn through *revelation* not *investigation*. We wouldn’t know it if God didn’t reveal it – a mystery is a *sacred secret*.

And in the OT the Church was a mystery. God began salvation with the Jews, and He’ll end salvation with the Jews. But today we’re in that gap where the Jews have been cut off, and God is grafting in the Gentiles.

Notice, in verse 25 Israel’s blindness is temporary.

When **“the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,”** God will re-engage the Hebrew people. I believe the phrase, **“fullness of the Gentiles”** refers to a specific number.

I believe when the last Gentile gets saved - at that exact moment - the Lord Jesus will come in the clouds and snatch away His Church... *That means if you’re the last holdout, I hope you get on with it, and give your life to Jesus. The rest of us are ready to go home!*

Verses 26-32 have prophetic implications.

It begins, **“And so all Israel will be saved...”** When *the fullness of the Gentiles* has come in, and the Church is raptured, God turns His attention again to Israel. He’ll use seven years of great tribulation to purify the Jews.

“As it is written (in [Isaiah 59](#)): “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” The Hebrews will be forgiven.

Every Jew alive when Jesus returns in power and glory will put their faith in Him and be saved. The Bible teaches that one day, **all Jews will be Jews for Jesus!**

Zechariah 12:10 tells us how it'll happen.

The Lord says, "I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son..." When the Jews see the Savior's scars they'll realize their mistake. They executed Messiah.

They'll repent of their sin, and put their trust in Jesus.

In a sense, Thomas is a type of the *End Times Israel*. Thomas refused to believe until he saw His scars. Likewise, this is what will convince the Jews.

Verse 28, "Concerning the gospel *they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*" God's promises aren't like a gallon of milk. There's no expiration date.

Israel rejected God's blessings, but God doesn't take them off the table. To the contrary, the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable! Rather than "for a limited time only" - they're available until the end of the age.

"For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have

mercy on all.” We’ve all been in God’s doghouse - Jews and Gentiles. No one should get the bighead. If we *receive anything from God or become anything for God*, it’s all due to God’s incredible mercy.

For 3 chapters now Paul has pounded out some of the most mind-crunching theology in the Bible, but he closes his *theology* with *doxology*. We go from head-scratching to toe-tapping - from pondering to praise.

If we could know all there is to know about God with our pea brains, He wouldn’t be much of a God.

That’s why Paul closes Chapter 11 with praise!

Verse 33, **“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!**

If you think you’ve got God *wired*; then you’ve got God *wrong*. **His truth is like a river... it’s so simple a child can stand, but so deep a theologian can drown.**

The Bible is a reliable record of God's dealings with humanity, but if you've got to have every question answered, and every nuisance explained before you'll believe, *then you'll never believe!* Faith in an infinite God requires a certain amount of mystery. I love the adage, **“What’s over our head is still under God’s feet.”**

And faith in God also requires a certain humility. God calls the shots, not me. Verse 34 teaches us God has **no colleagues, no counselors, no creditors!**

"For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" *God has no peer... He needs no help... He owes no one anything!*

God is in a class all by Himself...

This is a problem for the proud, but a comfort for the humble. Romans chapters 9-11 closes, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." God is our all in all!

Chapter 12, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God..." For eleven chapters Paul has discussed the "mercies of God." By this point we all should be in awe of God's salvation! We are justified and redeemed, and salvation is God's to give... He gives it to whoever He wills, and He's chosen us!

But after savoring the sweet taste of salvation, it's time to realize its ramifications. *For in light of God's love and grace toward us; how then shall we live?*

And here's the first step... "That you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." The Levitical sacrifice of the OT was a butchered carcass burned on the altar.

But in the NT God no longer likes His sacrifices well done. Today, he orders them rare. He wants a sacrifice that's alive. He wants a sacrifice that's still kicking and mooing on the plate. God is now into living sacrifices!

Abraham's son Isaac, was a living sacrifice.

He willingly offered his body to God, and allowed old Abraham to bind him to the altar. Isaac had no plans of his own - nothing he had to do - no place he had to be. He was available to whatever the Father had in mind.

Once a little girl was sitting at the end of the row at church. When the offering plate passed - she took it, sat it down in the aisle, and stepped into the plate.

An usher asked her, "Honey, what are doing?" She replied, "*I learned in Sunday School today that I'm suppose to give myself to God.*" And she's right! After all God has done for us, it's the least we can do for Him. As Paul puts it, it's "*your reasonable service.*"

The first step in living for God is to **give your body**. But the second step is to **renew your mind**. Verse 2 tells us, "**And do not be conformed to this world...**"

I love the Phillips translation of this verse, "**Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.**"

Resist the pressure to follow the pack - go with the flow. Remember toilet paper goes with the flow, not Christians. Rather than *blend in* we need to *stand out*.

A Christian is either a **thermometer** or a **thermostat**.

Some believers are **thermometers** - they conform to room temperature. They try to "*be cool*" or gravitate toward "*what's hot*." Others dictate the life they live.

But God wants us to be a **thermostat**. Rather than register the temperature - we should be setting it!

Don't conform, be transformed.

Paul continues, verse 2, “But be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Here’s the key to transformation... “*renewing your mind.*”

Jesus changes our heart, but we have to change our way of thinking. It’s up to me to *put on* a new identity, and cultivate character... I *put off* the old logic, and sinful perceptions, and evil rationales, and ugly habits.

To walk worthy of God’s mercies *give your body, renew your mind*, and then third, *humble your heart*.

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” The word “*soberly*” means “*in one’s right mind.*”

The idea is objectivity, honesty. It’s seeing myself **not** as *others see me*, or as *I see me*, but as *God sees me*.

“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

Notice, Paul refers to the church as a body.

If you're an adult of average weight, its amazing what your body does every 24 hours: "Your heart beats 103,689 times, your blood travels 168 million miles, you take 23,040 breaths, you inhale 438 cubic feet of air, you eat 3.25 pounds of food, you drink 2.9 quarts of liquid, you lose 7/8 of a pound of

waste, you move 750 muscles, and you exercise 7 million brain cells."

No wonder you feel tired at the end of the day!

Your body is made up of several trillion cells all linked together, all functioning as one unit.

And so is the Body of Christ. *We are many members, but one body.* We're a blend of unity and diversity. We all should be working together as one.

And each member contributes to the whole by using the gift God has given them. Verse 6, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them...*" Upon his death, famous violinist, Niccolo Paganini, donated his instrument to the city of Genoa, Italy. But with a stipulation - *the violin was to never be played.* It was for *preservation* not *utilization.*

When Jesus died He too gave gifts to His Church, but Jesus intends for His gifts to be used! Jesus didn't give us gifts to sit on a shelf. He wants us to use them.

The Holy Spirit has imparted to every Christian at least one of the gifts listed in these next three verses...

Realize these are spiritual gifts - not learned skills or natural abilities. They're supernatural enablings...

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 points to three types of spiritual enablement. It speaks of "gifts, ministries, activities." I call them **motivations, ministries, and manifestations.**

1 Corinthians 12 lists supernatural *manifestations* like speaking in tongues or healing... Ephesians 4 lists a four

ministries... While here in Romans 12 we find seven *motivations* provided by the Holy Spirit.

God puts into the heart of every Christian at least one specific motivation. It's an implanted spiritual tendency that colors our perspective and pursuits.

First is **prophecy**, "**If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith...**" We often associate this with *fore-telling*, but its primary meaning is *forth-telling*.

It's said, "A prophet was not known primarily for his *hindsight* or his *foresight*, but his *insight*." Here's a person who boldly speaks the message God gives him.

Second in the list is **ministry**, "**or ministry, let us use it in our ministering...**" This is a *supernatural knack* for helping others in practical ways. This person preaches sermons in sweat. They love to serve in tangible ways!

Third on the list is **teaching**, "**he who teaches, in teaching...**" This gift helps *earthly minds* understand *heavenly truths*. He or she puts the cookies on the bottom shelf. The teacher makes complex truths understandable. "A teacher's task is to take a roomful of live wires and see to it they are properly grounded."

The fourth gift is **exhortation**, "**he who exhorts, in exhortation...**" The gift of teaching instructs us *what to do*, whereas exhortation *encourages us to do it!*

This gift is like the spiritual jumper cables. It jump starts brothers or sisters with weak batteries.

The fifth gift is **giving**, “**he who gives, with liberality...**” Every believer should develop the discipline of giving of their resources to God - but the person with the *gift of giving* has a special knack for opening their wallet to bless others and to further God's work.

I'll never forget one guy who came to our church and gave **\$100 handshakes**. He'd shake your hand, and slip you a crisp new \$100 bill. I never missed shaking that fellow's hand on a Sunday AM! He had this gift.

The sixth gift is **leading**, “**he who leads, with diligence...**” Call this gift, “**spiritual management.**”

It's been said, “**Don't agonize - organize.**” The person with this gift can strategize in godly ways.

1 Corinthians 14:40 instructs us to do things “**decently and in order.**” This gift helps do just that.

And the final motivational gift is **mercy**, “**he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.**” Mercy has been defined as “**Two hearts tugging at the same load.**”

Again, we all should show mercy, but the person with this gift exudes an extra helping... Paul's point with all the gifts is whatever gift God gives you... **just do it!**

Of course folks ask, “**How do I discover my gift?**”

Here's a helpful exercise... Let's say a little girl came running down the center aisle carrying a potted plant she made for me in Children's Ministry. But half-way down the

aisle she slips and drops it - *crash* - dirt and pottery spill everywhere. *Well, how would you react?*

If you'd jump up and start looking for a broom you have the gift of **ministry**... If you'd pull out your wallet to pay for the broken pot yours is **giving**... If you say to the girl, *"Young lady be warned. Thus saith the Lord, there're will be many opportunities to stumble in life!"* That's **prophecy**... If your reaction is to show her a clever foot maneuver she can use to right herself the next time she slips then your gift is **teaching**...

If you think, *"Oh, why don't we rearrange chairs so this doesn't happen again,"* that's **leading**... Or if you'd give a pep talk, *"You'll do better next time!"* That's **exhortation**... Or perhaps you'd run up to the child hug and cuddled her, and then kissed her *"ittle-bitty-boo-boos"* - well, obviously you have the gift of **mercy**.

But understand there'd be seven diverse reactions among the people in this room - and all are valid, God-ordained reactions. This is why we need each other.

We need all the gifts. A healthy church appreciates it's diversity - as it works together to show its unity.

For the rest of Chapter 12 understand a concept...

The rabbis had a teaching-style they called **"stringing beads."** As a lady places beads on a necklace one at a time, the rabbis would string together random truths...

And this is what Paul does for the rest of Chapter 12.

Verse 9, “*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.*” It amazes me how accustomed I can get to a putrid odor. I was always the last one to know when our child had a smelly diaper.

The stink was so strong it would knock a buzzard off a porta-potty, but with four kids your nose grows immune to the smell. *The same can happen with sin.*

We get use to the stuff that God abhors. We allow sin to play on our TV screen, we’d never approve of in real life...We need to *hate sin and hold to what’s good.*

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another, not lagging in diligence (be lazy), fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation...”

Horse racing fans will recall the famed thoroughbred, Secretariat. The Disney movie about him is a classic.

In the Kentucky Derby, a one-mile race, Secretariat clocked a faster time in each successive quarter mile. The horse got stronger as the race progressed.

And this is how God wants us to run! He uses tribulation in our lives not to wear us out, but make us stronger! Through trial after trial we grow endurance.

“Continuing steadfastly in prayer...” The greatest gift you can show a friend is consistent prayer...

“Distributing to the needs of the saints...” We need to see the needs around us and be ready to meet them. It’s been said, *“Love seeks not limits, but outlets.”*

Paul goes on, “given to hospitality...” A man named John Thomas wrote an interesting letter to Dear Abby.

“I’m presently completing the second year of a three year survey of the hospitality, or lack of it, in churches. To date, of the 195 churches I’ve visited I was spoken to by someone other than an official greeter only once, and then it was to ask me to move my feet.”

I hope John Thomas has never visited Calvary Chapel... There’s only one thing better than *Southern hospitality* - that’s *Christian hospitality!* Let’s show it.

Paul keeps stringing beads in verse 14, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”

There’s a Chinese proverb, “If your enemy wrongs you, buy each of his children a drum.” That’s a funny idea - *your blessing is actually a curse...* But we march to a different drummer. Let’s truly bless our enemy!

Recall Romans 5:9, “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...” God took the initiative to reconcile us while we were His enemies. In doing so He set a precedent. We make friends out of enemies by love.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” When we empathize and live our lives together it makes for a thick, full, rich way of living.

It’s been said, “A sorrow shared is but half a trouble. A joy shared is a joy made double.” Real fellowship will *divide our grief* and *multiply our happiness*.

Verse 16, “Be of the same mind toward one another.” Don’t play favorites or be bias. Treat everyone equally.

“Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.” Don’t just hang out with people who make you look good, or who occupy the next rung on the social ladder you’re trying to climb - *the in crowd*.

“Do not be wise in your own opinion.” Be rock solid in your beliefs, and doctrines, and convictions, but keep your personal opinions flexible and open to new input.

Verse 17, “Repay no one evil for evil.” This doesn’t mean be a sissy or a doormat. When men do evil, fight back - defend yourself and others - but with love.

Don’t fight evil with evil - fight evil with good. “Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.”

Verse 18, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” At times our stand for what’s true and right - and the other person’s opposition - might a workable peace an impossibility.

But make sure the problem is not your unwillingness to forgive - or your clutching on to a mere opinion...

Your personal opinion, and being right in your eyes, is not as important as “(living) peaceably with all men.”

“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.” The Law of Moses specified “an eye for an eye” - and *why*? Because the human tendency is to one-up the person who harms us...

Punch me in the jaw... and I'll crack your jaw *and* kick you in the shins. I'm going to try to do one better.

This is why God is the only person who can be trusted to dish out justice. He handles the paybacks!

Here's what we should do. *"Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."*

In ancient times folks didn't have a pilot light on their furnace. If their fire died they went next door to retrieve hot embers to relight their fire. They carried it back on their head. *"Coals of fire on his head"* was a kindness. We should be kind to our enemies, not vengeful.

Here's the big lesson, **"You never win by trying to even the score."** Fight back - assert yourself - don't just sit there and take it - retaliate - *but not with evil!*

Retaliate in like kind and you're no better than your enemy. Let's all take heed to verse 21, **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**