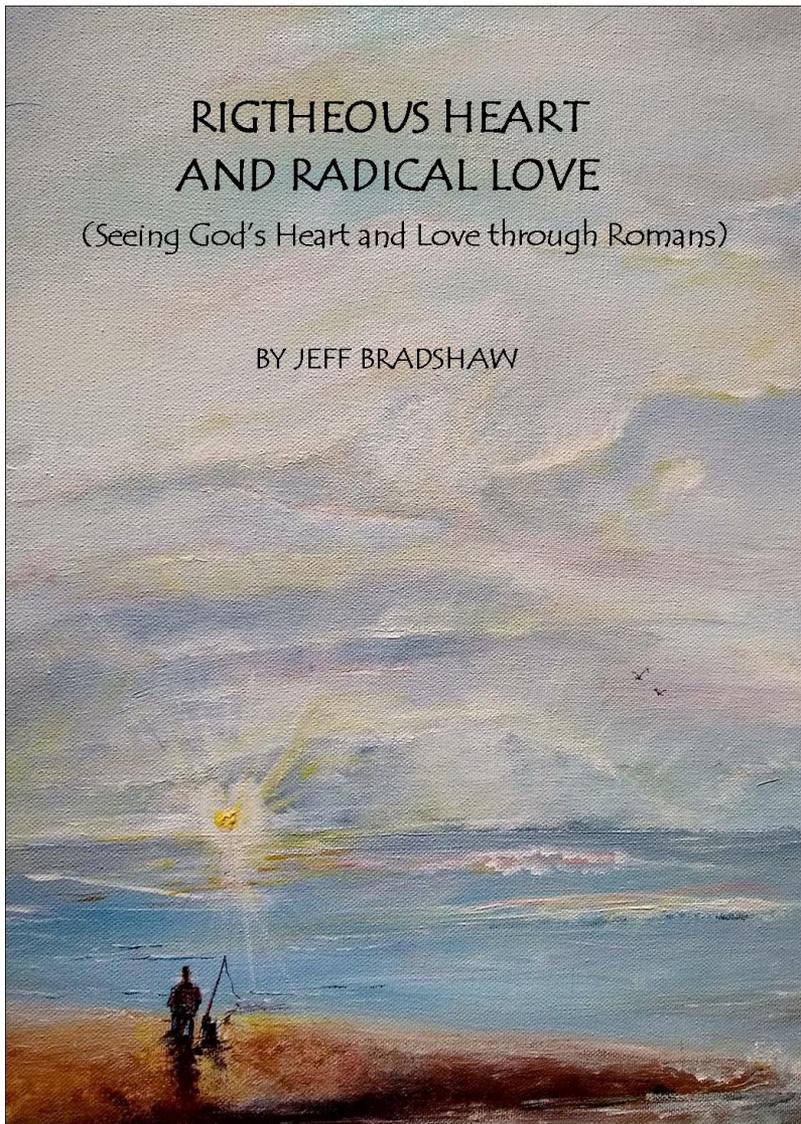


RIGTHEOUS HEART AND RADICAL LOVE

(Seeing God's Heart and Love through Romans)

BY JEFF BRADSHAW



Righteous Heart and Radical Love

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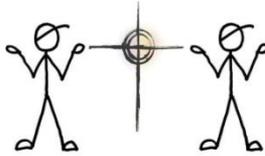
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“serving in love, sharing the Gospel and discipling”

EMAIL: united.missions@aol.com

**US MAIL: 2403 Griffin Court
Ocoee, FL. 34761**

URL: www.unitedmissionsinc.com

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*“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed
from faith to faith; as it is written,
‘The just shall live by faith.’ (Romans 1:17)”*

Introduction - Jesus Implanting His Gospel Life

The Lord desires to implant His fingerprint of the Gospel into every heart in humanity. The Apostle Paul shared these words as one who had received the Gospel fingerprint implanted on his heart: ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (Romans 1:16)”*** This Gospel implant gives them personal, spiritual insight into God’s highest calling for life; it draws them close to His heart of “righteousness and radical love”. Knowing and trusting in the Gospel message enables one to embrace the road God has called His people to travel with Him.

The “Book of Romans” is a gift in Scripture to humanity which teaches what new life in Christ is founded upon. It instructs Christians about God’s unparalleled “righteousness and radical love”, His will for His people. The Lord’s finished work on the cross is the fullest expression, greatest single example of God’s “righteousness and love” seen by the world. Why was this act combined with the model of the Lord’s life so important to humanity? Jesus was and is God’s visible gift of “grace and truth” given to humanity. His life now leads God’s people to ***“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33)”***.

This book written by the Apostle Paul teaches God’s children about their greatest need and how they can be empowered to live life fully through God’s righteousness and radical love. God sent the Gospel to humanity so that they would know Him, grow in their knowledge of His work and experience God’s presence and leading in their daily lives. Ideally, the best way to read this book is to read each section of the Epistle of Romans referenced in the Bible along with each section that follows.

1. The Gospel Reveals One's True Identity

As the Gospel message is shared in the world, humanity's God-given identity is revealed; to be united with God's "righteousness and mercy". Through God's righteousness bestowed by faith upon humanity, believers are supernaturally joined with His gift of eternal life found only in His Son (John 14:6). The perfection of Christ has been revealed to humanity through the "Living Word (Gospel)". All who hear, receive, and take the message to heart live as follows: "the just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17)". God's righteousness is meant to be the daily, life sustaining bread for His people now in Christ which empowers them to walk with God forever trusting in His provision. They trust that the Gospel is the Superior Word spoken over this world that offers permanent fellowship between God and humanity.

*"For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is **the power of God to salvation** for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For **in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith**; as it is written, '**The just shall live by faith.** (Romans 1:16-17)'"* Now, God's justice comes to humanity through the Gospel, His "Good News" for the world. ALL people were created to be formed into the image of Christ, the "Living Word". When people live separated from God's "righteousness and love (mercy)", they attempt to satisfy their souls with the kinds of behavior spoken about in the next section of Romans.

Note: This section highlights Romans 1:1-17.

2. People Seek their Own False Identities

Many false identities are forged in unrighteousness as people reject the Gospel and live instead for unrighteous “words and deeds”. **Those defying God’s will, to be made in the image of Christ, attempt to forgo His identity for them with unrighteous ones.** The source of all false identities is traced back to the first sin that the first couple mentioned in the Bible, “Adam and Eve” committed as they tried to establish their own righteous identities. Their first act of unrighteousness, sin and disobedience led the world into all kinds of false identities.

Humanity without Christ in them, the eternal hope of glory (God’s image) lives separated from God’s eternal “righteousness and justice”. The second Adam, the Lord Jesus has come to unmask ALL these false identities forged in sin and unrighteousness. There are two general categories of people who continue to wear masks forged in their unrighteousness: 1) those who totally reject the Gospel and 2) those who are familiar with the Gospel but still choose to wear their false identity of unrighteousness rather than being identified by the righteousness of Christ. Jesus addressed the second group in Matt. 7:21, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven”*. Humanity must turn away from its unrighteousness and sin. **Each act of unrighteousness listed in verses 24-32 shows the depravity of sin, how far humanity can fall from the image of God.**

There are two destructive paths that unrighteousness takes in one’s life: a) one destroys our relationship with God (upwards) and b) the other cripples our ability to love others (outwards). Humanity was created for holy fellowship (God’s justice); perfectly formed in God’s righteousness and fully equipped to enjoy life-giving relationships with Him and others (Kingdom justice).

This fellowship in God's righteousness is being established through the Gospel in both heaven and earth. Jesus spoke of this life which is NOT focused on unrighteous acts as follows: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27)". **When humanity pursues its false identities and worships idols they create, they become worshippers of themselves and their hearts are deceived by the spirit of anti-Christ. Their misguided lifestyle demonstrate that the physical needs of their body have dominion over their greater eternal need of possessing a soul that is in holy fellowship with God.**

Note: This section highlights Romans 1:18-32.

3. God Alone is the “Judge of Righteousness”

Whether one believes in the God of the Bible or not ALL will be judged according to God’s “Standard of Righteousness”. ***“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law. (Romans 2:12)”*** God sent His Son to provide His covering of grace and overcome the judgment of sin. He sets humanity free from sin as “faith in Christ” eternally binds their hearts to His “Righteous Heart”.

God gave to the Jews “The Written Law” through the prophet Moses to reveal His righteousness. Even without “The Law”, God gave everyone a general sense of what’s “right and wrong” through their conscience. Both by one’s conscience and the written Law, humanity was being led to ***“do to others what you want them to do to you (Matt. 7:12)”***. God’s righteous way is far above the state of humanities fallen conscience and its ability to perfectly obey God’s will, directions.

Therefore, the Scripture warns us to be humble in our dealings with others. One’s attempt to live a righteous life does not compare to the perfect righteousness of the Heavenly Judge God sent, His Son, to judge ALL sin. Therefore, the Lord is the only One who can perfectly judge the work of God’s way that does the complete work of moving hearts towards Him. ***“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Romans 2:1)”***

The judgment of sin has made the way for God's children to receive His righteousness. This gift is received as one trusts in the life and ministry of the Redeemer (Christ) who now sits on God's "Throne of Grace". Christ reigns NOT to condemn humanity but to fill their hearts with God's "Spirit and Truth", radical love and righteousness to form them into God's image (John 3:16-17). The righteousness that humanity possesses without Christ is inferior to God's righteousness. Therefore, self-righteousness like sin must be buried because it fails to meet God's standard.

The Law was given to inform humanity about the difference between their righteousness and God's life-giving "thoughts, words and deeds"; the righteousness that gives life and has power over sin. Only a life which receives the righteousness of Christ by faith will be made perfect in God's sight on the inside (soul) and out (body). Even one's practice of religion (tradition) can keep one's heart far from God's standard of righteousness. "*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly nor is, circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly and; circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)*" Without God's Spirit, what seems right to a man (and woman) could stand against God's holy standard of righteousness.

Note: This section highlights Romans 2:1-29.

4. People Live Separated from God by Sin

“There is none righteous, no, not one. (Romans 3:10)”. When a person sees how their sin separates them from living eternally with the “God of Righteousness”, they begin to understand why God’s Son came into the world as He did, sent from heaven (John 3:13). God’s “Living Word”, perfect obedience made visible in humanity has come into the world. Only those who receive the gift of righteousness (perfect obedience) in Christ, overcome the separation and power of sin. Without “faith in Christ”, the power of sin keeps humanity prisoners sentenced to death through their unrighteousness. No one of their own power can overcome through their own righteous efforts sin and its wages, death. This hopeless state of being under the power of sin is emphasized in Romans 3:23 ***“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”***.

Being captive to sin is NOT God’s will for humanity (John 6:40). The righteous “Son of God”, NOT born of man but born of the Spirit of God’s glorious life, has made God’s righteousness available to all through His “life, death, resurrection and ascension (leading to Pentecost)”. ***“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. (Romans 3:21-22)”*** Christ, “The Living Word” intercedes for sinful humanity. *‘Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32)’*

Note: This section highlights Romans 3:1-31.

5. God Provides Salvation through Faith

The “Most High”, God has interceded for humanity’s lack of faith through many acts of grace (mercy). Scripture reveals God’s mercy gathering a people of faith to Himself as the people are enabled, justified by trusting in Him. ***‘For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness (Romans 4:3-5)’.***

This lifestyle of faith that the patriarchs such as Abraham demonstrated to us for walking with God in righteousness, being justified by faith, is the same lifestyle of faithfulness the Son of God, Christ taught His followers to emulate. Abraham believed God’s promise that even in his old age he would father a son and be the father of many nations. Abraham believed in the ***“God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did (Romans 4:17)”***. Like Abraham, Jesus trusted in the prophetic words of Scripture as He went to the cross and in doing so received God’s reward. ***“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end (Isaiah 9:6-7)”***

What promise in this section of Romans do believers cling to as they are justified by faith? ***“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. (Romans 4:7-8)”*** Believers like Abraham, have lived in covenant with God to overcome sin and look towards receiving His promise.

Since the coming of Christ, God's children are united with the righteousness of Christ through faith in His life (Romans 4:20-22). The grace of the Old Testament covenants has been rolled into the unending covenant (grace) found in Christ. God's promise of eternal life and His Kingdom come rests upon the righteousness of the resurrected King of Glory, the Lord Jesus. God is forever glorified through the blood of Jesus. All who are yoked to the life of Christ bring glory to God as they worship God by trusting in the teachings of His Son. In doing so, the lifestyle of faith in Christ continues for *"without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6)"*.

Note: This section highlights Romans 4:1-25.

6. Hope, Love and Peace in the Son's Life

“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:5).” “Living Hope” found in the “love of God” has come to humanity and established eternal peace with God. It is received as the Father’s love is poured upon those hearts who trust in His Son through the Holy Spirit. God continues to bring “hope and love” to humanity born of His eternal peace which stands upon the incorruptible righteousness of Jesus. Even as humanity’s sin stood against God, the Son of God who walked in God’s righteousness loved humanity by going to the cross. ***“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)”***

God brought “hope and love” into Abraham’s life as Abraham believed God for a son and a future born out of his hopeless situation; for he and his wife were far beyond childbearing age when God approached them. God did this even though at times they sinned against God and those around them in their new land (Canaan). Nonetheless, God provided them with a son and made Abraham the father of faith to many nations based upon His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 21:2). What God did in Abraham’s life is a forerunner of what God desires for all of humanity, to give them new life; to forgive them and bear fruit through them. Now God’s eternal “hope and love” is available through the new covenant God has made with humanity through the perfect, spotless blood sacrifice of His Son. Now, through the “peace of Christ” won for humanity at the cross, God has reserved the right to be merciful to ALL in ALL instances (Romans 9:15).

Only in and through Christ the “Living Word” does God bring His amazing grace, “hope and love” to bear. God has made this act of amazing grace the means to deliver humanity from its hopeless situation of being imprisoned by sin. The Lord Jesus paid the ransom for humanity’s sinfulness on the cross despite their unworthiness. Now, humanity can take possession of God’s ordained destiny for them through faith in Christ and be eternal children of God’s holy love rather than children of the world’s destructive sin. This hope paves the way for radical change in the lives of God’s children as they come to know God through His radical love and eternal peace.

Note: This section highlights Romans 5:1-11.

7. The New Destiny in One Man's Obedience

*“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. **And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’**” (Genesis 2:15-17)* Adam’s disobedience, occurring shortly after receiving God’s commandment for living in the garden of Eden, started the reign of sin over humanity. Adam, through his disobedience, unknowingly had tried to establish his own godless righteousness, one which made himself the judge of “right and wrong”. Unknowingly, Adam had been deceived to do the same thing that the angel Lucifer had done in heaven before he was expelled from heaven; satan had sought his own throne as he declared himself a lord of righteousness saying *“I will be like the Most High (Isaiah 14:14)”*. Lucifer’s action resulted in him being cast out of heaven into hell; *“Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit” (Isaiah 14:15).* Life NOT “death and judgment” is the “God of Life’s” destiny for humanity. Lucifer and then Adam had tried to lift their righteousness over the Creator’s. Humanity through grace is given the opportunity to be re-united with God’s righteousness through the “New Covenant”, perfect union between the Father and the Son (John 17:3).

For the purpose of God’s grace, Jesus came to earth as a man and destroyed the works of the devil, sin (1st John 3:8) in humanity’s flesh as He took back dominion through His holy life and once for all blood sacrifice. That first sin of the first Adam brought death and suffering (judgment of sin) into the realm of humanity’s existence in this world. Jesus, the second Adam through His total obedience directed His judgment towards Lucifer and sin.

Jesus fulfilled God's righteous requirement of the Law and placed humanity back upon its proper righteous path of living united with God. Now God's grace and its power places the Lord's righteousness upon all who trust in Jesus. ***"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)"*** The perfect man Jesus and Lord of Life, not Lucifer or fallen humanity will be judge over ALL. While humanity still suffers a bodily death, its soul lives forever and waits for the Lord's second coming. ***"For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth. (Psalm 96:13)"*** When Christ returns, after God's judgment the resurrection of God's children will occur and restore humanity fully in "body, soul and spirit" to live with God forever.

Note: This section highlights Romans 5:12-21.

8. Death to Sin and Newness of Life

*“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? **Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)**”* As one is baptized into Christ, the death that Christ suffered on the cross brings death to the “dominion of sin” in their life. Then as One rises from the baptism waters, their life is joined with the resurrection of Christ from the grave. Death to sin as one is baptized into Christ initiates the dominion of God’s righteousness, through “grace by faith” over one’s life as their sin is completely forgiven. ***“For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. (Romans 6:10)”***

How does God’s newness of life take hold as one is made new in Christ? God’s promise of life in Christ, shuts the door to sin through God’s finished work of forgiveness and the leadership of the Spirit. *“Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:13-14)**”* Faith in the Gospel and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit brings about newness of life that transforms one to be instruments of God’s righteousness. Humanity’s course (destiny) is changed for those who have chosen life over death, God’s righteousness over their sin. ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)”***

Note: This section highlights Romans 6:1-23.

9. Holy Union with God's "Righteousness and Love"

"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. (Romans 7:4)"

Prior to encountering and receiving (trusting in) the "Life of Christ", one is married to their body of works; what seems right to them and its fruit. The Jews believed that they were perfectly justified before God by following "The Law". Certainly, the Law led them to a better life. However, following the Law wasn't empowering them to live separated from sin in their hearts. Approaching God solely through animal sacrifices and one's works fell short of God's righteousness. This lifestyle misses humanity's greatest need, to walk in the fullness of God's holiness and grace. *"I desire mercy not sacrifices says the Lord. (Hosea 6:6)"* The people's hearts had grown cold and unresponsive to God. Their religious pride led them to believe that simply following the Law made them sanctified before the Lord. However, like an inattentive marriage partner to God His people were cold (dead) in their sin.

Spiritual pride in the hearts of the religious leaders made them cold to the ministry of Christ. God sent His Son, the "Living Word" full of "grace and truth" for them to be fully alive, NOT dead in their hearts to Him. God was calling humanity to a new covenant like a marriage (intimate union). The Law declares if one partner dies, the other can remarry. The pharisees had become blind to God's dilemma; He was yoked to a spiritually dead people. The ministry of Christ and the Gospel reveals the dead state of one's heart. Despite one's ability to look righteous on the outside, without God's holy presence one remains yoked to their inward sin nature.

The Jewish life of being joined to God by the Law had only produced exterior works of their flesh; ***“for when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. (Romans 7:5)”*** From the perspective of a Holy God, this was an unacceptable place for His bride, humanity to remain. The Law had kept His people of faith together, but it wasn’t transforming their souls into the image of God. The Jewish people through their shallow and sometimes begrudging works of the Law looked like a disinterested partner in a marriage to God. The Creator, “God of Abundant Life” ALWAYS desired a union with a people who possessed eternal, holy life and would be fruitful in this union. Sin in their hearts kept their trees unfruitful, incapable of carrying God’s holy life.

As the Son of God was revealed to His people, He legally offered them the acceptable way in God’s sight to leave their fruitless marriage (unchanged souls) under the Law. Under the New Covenant, Christ brings the bride to God that He desires for His partner through grace by faith. “Faith in Jesus” now unites two to be one, God and humanity forever in holy marriage (union). Finally, humanity has a way to remain perfect, radiant, and new to God every day from the inside out. God’s righteous heart and radical love flows through “faith in Christ” into the hearts of His people. Now, God’s bride is spotless both on the inside and outside. She is walking down the center aisle toward Him and the wedding altar. It is why the Apostle Paul wrote these words, ***“rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again rejoice (Phil. 4:4)”***

Note: This section highlights Romans 7:1-12.

10. The Letter of the Law was Powerless Against Sin

When it comes to living under “The Letter of the Law”, the Apostle Paul knew how to be a righteous Jew. Nonetheless, he struggled like any without Christ to overcome the power of sin within. At his worst, he even took delight in the murdering of many early believers as he sought to rid the world of Christ followers. At his best, he still struggled with the desires of his fallen, inward man. For Paul, living under the Law increased his knowledge of the limits of his power to overcome his sinful “mind and flesh”. ***“For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (Romans 7:22-23)”*** While one’s strength might lead one to be the best version of one’s self under the letter of the code (law) they follow; the power of sin exposes the limits of one’s ability and power to live a righteous life.

Paul described his battle with the sin within him this way, ***“for the good that I will to do, I do not do. (Romans 7:19)”*** The battle of sin inside one’s heart (inward man) without faith in the power of God’s “forgiveness and righteousness” encounters an unmovable wall that exists between humanity’s sin and God’s holy will. Only the blood of God’s lamb (John 1:29) and power of the Holy Spirit removes this wall that separates humanity from being made into God’s image (will). ***“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Romans 8:14)”***

Simply knowing the difference between “right and wrong” doesn’t empower one’s flesh to obey God’s will. Look at what happened when Adam and Eve sought after God’s righteousness without His presence and blessing. The story in Genesis after the fall goes from bad to worse.

Paul wrote this about living with intimate knowledge of “good and evil” in God’s sight without the power of obedience found in Christ (God’s holy presence), ***“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. (Romans 7:18)”***. The Lord Jesus came into the world to make both the knowledge of God and His power available to His “people of faith”. Previously, they had no hope of being set free of sin’s clutches in the Law and could only muster up at best an outward appearance of obedience to God’s holy will. ***“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24-25)”***

Under the New Covenant, faith in the life and sacrifice of Christ, brings His life to bear in delivering God’s children from sin. In God’s sight as one stands by faith in Christ: one’s sin is totally covered; one’s heart is transformed and one becomes a vessel for God’s power sourced from His “forgiveness and righteousness” to flow through them. The testimony of many a believer including Paul speak of God’s power setting them free from the power of sin.

Note: This section highlights Romans 7:13-25.

11. The Spirit of the Law is Freeing and Fruitful

Therefore, those who are married to the “righteousness of Christ” are united to God’s highest standard of righteousness for humanity, the obedience of the heart and flesh of Christ. They live by faith in the Lord’s house of the New Covenant. Here, there is NO condemnation that prevents a person from entering through “grace by faith” into God’s “Holy Household”. ***“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. (Romans 8:1)”*** Only the new covenant of unity through the “forgiveness and righteousness” of Christ holds everything together. “Faith in Christ” empowers one to follow Jesus, the One who lived a sinless life. His Spirit alive within His followers, leads them to live a fruitful life that brings glory to God.

“And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (Romans 8:10)” Therefore, the “new life” a believer receives focuses one on the “life of Christ”, His “finished work” and the Holy Spirit which now abides within them. “Faith in Christ” leads one to walk in this “new life” which can’t be beholden to sin and abides in the “righteousness of Christ” (John 15:4). The Holy Spirit has convicted the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The believer now follows the “Spirit of the Law”; to *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”* The second is this: *‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Mark 12:30-31)”*

As one follows the Lord’s “Way of Abundance in Love”, unity with God in His holiness leads one to “hunger and thirst” for a deeper, personal knowledge of the Lord (John 17:3, Matt. 5:6). As one lives by faith in the “Kingdom of God”, the newness of life in Christ changes one to become a holy instrument of God’s love.

Their new life, eternally positioned in the love of Christ leads them to co-labor in the Gospel and to bear eternal, spiritual fruit. Their new life of walking in the Spirit leads them to experience God's radical "love and righteousness" flowing through them. The "life of Christ" is a gift that accompanies one and moves them to the place of finding contentment within first and foremost (Phil. 4:11). It is the place where there is no condemnation because everyone, both strong and weak in faith are relying upon God's life-giving gift of His Son. It is the place where all have been humbled and represent the truth of the Gospel in this fashion, "***Freely you have received; freely give. (Matt. 10:8)***"

Note: This section highlights Romans 8:1-11.

12. Transformed Hearts through Adoption

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:15-17)” The children of God through “faith in Christ”, now live to bear witness to the Spirit of adoption, God’s work of making those who trust in His Son part of His royal family, joint heirs (a royal priesthood) with Christ. The light of the Gospel (Living Word) in them bears witness to the arrival of God’s Kingdom into this world in both fruitful times and challenging times (Romans 8:28).

Creation has been waiting, groaning for the day of the full revelation of God’s glory, the fullness of Christ in humanity (Romans 8:19). Humanity’s sin has submitted this world to its folly. God’s freedom through faith in the righteousness of Christ has far reaching ramifications for the world. Therefore, Romans points out the truth that beyond one’s heart even the physical world is waiting and yearning for total freedom so it can be all that it was meant to be. This explains why when Jesus carried the “Good News” of the Gospel He demonstrated its power over nature through His miracles. At the same time, Jesus encouraged those who received Him to endure the suffering that this fallen world would subject them to (John 16:33). This suffering is described like the labor pains a woman suffers in childbirth as she awaits the gift of new life on the other side of her ordeal (Romans 8:18-25). While there is suffering, God’s children still believe that they have access to the supernatural life of Christ. *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. (John 14:12)”*

God's redeemed (adopted) cooperate as they grow in their understanding of the Gospel, the direction His truth is leading them in their lives. ***“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)”*** God is moving hearts from bondage to sin – to sonship, an eternity of co-reigning with the “Risen Christ” over creation. They trust that knowing and believing God’s Word NEVER returns void. Even as they might face death in this life they hear these words shared from the Lord to the thief on the cross who believed in Him right before he died together with the Lord, *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise. (Luke 23:43)”* Paradise is possessing a soul eternally free from bondage to sin that’s been adopted into God’s royal family and Kingdom.

Note: This section highlights Romans 8:12-30.

13. Letting the Love of God Have Full Access

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32)”

Believing God is all-in for one’s soul (Jesus going to the cross), moves redeemed hearts to look at their temporary afflictions like the hardened shell of a seed. When it opens, it reveals the new life planted within its hard exterior. This aspect of “faith in Christ” connects them to the truth that as a member of the “body of Christ” they have become the “Apple of God’s Eye”. God looks at them like He gazes upon His Son. God does NOT see the hard shell, that this world places upon all who live in it. Rather, through the incorruptible seed of His Son’s life, He sees the incorruptible, eternal, new life now being brought forth through the “righteousness of Christ” in His children.

Maturity in Christ leads God’s children to see themselves this way through faith in the Gospel of Christ, ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Rom.8:33-37)”*** God’s children now walk with holy boldness born out of God’s “Living Word” that lives in their hearts. God’s Word alive in them has them abiding in Christ and the knowledge that they are destined to know fully the love of God; ***“to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:19)”***. They live out their temporary lives in this world as conquerors of them as they rest totally in what the victory of God’s love over “sin and death” has eternally done for them.

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)” God has formed a holy, unbreakable union, forged in the blood of Jesus between His children and His “Chosen One”. As God looks at the “body of Christ” beyond the hardened shell of their temporary situations through the finished work of His Son on the cross, He sees His children of faith in the same light that He saw Jesus Christ at His baptism. All of God’s children in Christ have become objects of His love. They can hold onto these words spoken over Christ as Christ lives in them, *‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. (Matt. 3:17)’*”

Note: This section highlights Romans 8:31-39.

14. Carrying the Gospel Seed of Christ

Christ followers have been impregnated with His holy seed, God's promise. ***“Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah. (Rom. 9:29)”*** Unlike both Christ followers and the patriarchs of faith, the religious teachers of Israel in their zeal to follow the Law had lost sight of their need to be the children of God's promise. They had become occupiers of God's land via the Law rather than children totally dependent upon the mercy of God, first and foremost. By elevating the Law over God's promise, they let their religious pride deaden their hearts to the benevolence of God and its purpose. They had reached the place where they had become incapable of receiving God's Messiah (mercy). God desires mercy (Hosea 6:6) because through mercy God brings about the redemption of humanity; ***“that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory. (Romans 9:23)”***

“In Isaac your seed shall be called. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise. Isaiah 9:6-9)” The seed (promise) is the incorruptible newness of life, the supernatural life-bearing work of God's “Spirit and Truth” bringing to fruition His will in both creation and His people. In Christ, the time for the prophecies of the Messiah to be fulfilled and God's seed of mercy to become visible to the world had come but the pharisees had no place in their hearts for this. God's promise (seed) will always be greater than fallen creation and humanity's ability to obey God. Living through the supernatural power of “God's Seed” is how one overcomes the world in Christ.

The carriers of “God’s Seed” do NOT lose sight of the eternal life-giving, sanctity of life found in God’s Word, His seed of “righteousness and radical love” working together. ***‘What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” (Romans 9:14-16)’*** The Creator knows and sees exactly what He is forming. A diamond is formed from a lump of coal and gravity, the weight compressing it. Likewise, the “Pearl of Great Price”, humanity made new in Christ is formed through God’s mercy and the pressure of His righteousness, His justice conforming one’s “lump of flesh” into God’s image.

God’s incorruptible seed is passed on from “faith to faith” as His children rely totally upon His “mercy and righteousness” to bring newness of life to all (Rev. 21:5). Believers acknowledge that they only carry the seed and they share what has been given to them freely. (Matt. 10:8) This seed has been implanted in them through the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. *“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:13-14)”*

Note: This section highlights Romans 9.

15. Sowing the Seed of Righteousness in Christ

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:5)”. Jesus has delivered God’s Superior, Final Word (Seed) to bring new life to humanity through grace, God’s gift of His righteousness. The life of Jesus is the fulfillment of ALL Scripture which has been given to empower life, not to enslave life but to make all things new (sanctified). The Lord’s righteousness now speaks through the Gospel and the Spirit into hearts drawing them into God’s Holy Kingdom. All hearts have the potential to be good soil for God’s seed. *“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. (Genesis 1:26)”*

“But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above)’ or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)”’. *But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)”:* *that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:6-9)”* The holiness of God impedes humanity from presenting itself as being worthy of acceptance into eternal, holy fellowship with God. It’s pure foolishness for one to think that they can judge the Son of God thinking in their heart that they could descend into hell or ascend into heaven and lift themselves up above Christ as they stood before God’s holy presence. This is exactly what one thinks when they believe that they alone can withstand the judgment of a holy God and enter heaven based solely upon their merit. The righteousness of God and His holy seed (God’s Son) has been sent to humanity to speak God’s saving wisdom (grace and truth) into hearts. God’s children must be transformed from spiritually dead to spiritually alive through the righteous faith of Christ.

God has intervened for humanity by sending His Son Jesus to be both the “Savior and Lord of Righteousness” for all who have received Him through faith. Eternal life is received as one: 1) confesses that their life totally depends upon the “righteousness of Christ” and not upon their self-righteousness; 2) trusts in the testimony and teachings of Christ (Living Word) and 3) has a faith in Christ that allows the Lord’s eternal light and resurrected life to shine through them as they follow Him (John 5:24). ***‘For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” (Romans 10:10-13)’***

When a stranger comes knocking on the door of one’s house with an expensive gift, they are often welcomed in. The gift of God’s righteousness comes to humanity like a stranger that has come knocking on one’s door. Have you opened your heart to this present, presence of unparalleled righteousness? The Lord’s righteousness leads one to live like this, *“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me (John 5:30)”*. We acknowledge that only the Holy Spirit can open the door of one’s heart and lead them to receive God’s righteous way. The Spirit prepares one’s heart through the Gospel message to follow God’s Way; to let the Lord be the judge of the way they live their lives. They come to the end of their journey of being separated from God by sin. They receive the Lord’s new beginning, the unending newness of life now offered to them through His life-giving gift of His righteousness (holiness).

Note: This section highlights Romans 10.

16. Growing in the Gospel and Shining its Light

What central truth about the triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) does the Gospel Light illuminate? *“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! ‘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?’ **For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.** (Romans 11:33-36)”* Treasures unspeakable enter into the lives of those who walk in the “Light of the Gospel”. This Light unlocks the riches of heaven’s Way for God’s children to walk in intimate knowledge of God and to be yoked to God’s glorious life; the Father above us, the Son alongside us and the Spirit within us.

When one believes in the goodness of God (mercy) and repents (turns to God), how do they genuinely love the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” back for all they’ve done? *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.** (Romans 12:1-2)”* The faithfulness of the Lord Jesus led Him to give His life for all sin on the cross of Calvary. The faithfulness of a follower of Jesus leads them to present their lives to God through what is good, acceptable and pleasing to Him as His grace has equipped them with the knowledge that they are His redeemed, His beloved.

As the Light of the Gospel shines upon God’s people what fruit does it produce?

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good...Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. (Romans 12:9-13)” First and foremost the flower that proceeds the fruit must be unbridled passion for the holy love that God has demonstrated to His children. Secondly, God is greatly honored when one approaches both God and their service to others with the desire to exude the fruit of His Spirit which no law or judgment can stand against. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Gal. 5:23)”*

What’s God’s best strategy for releasing the Gospel Light into the world? **“Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)”** We know that evil is real and that its darkness tries to dim one’s light? Therefore, we must follow the example of Christ and His disciples, people of faith who have proceeded us. *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. (Hebrews 12:1-3)”*

Note: This section highlights Romans 12.

Conclusion – Representatives of God’s Kingdom

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17)” The Apostle Paul was a man who represented well the life of walking in the “righteousness, peace and joy” of the Holy Spirit. As a kingdom representative Paul wrote this about himself and those joined to the “body of Christ”, ***“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God. (Romans 1:1)”*** He ran a good race of faith knowing this about himself and the “body of Christ”, ***“There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2nd Timothy 4:8)”*** Kingdom representatives have embraced this revelation, ***“the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. (Rom. 3:21-22)”***

God’s children have taken hold of their “new identity” that the Holy Spirit is forming in them through the fullness of the Lord’s “grace and truth”. The Apostle Paul in his “Epistle of Romans” delineates between the “Gospel Light” and shining the “Gospel Light” using this word in *Romans 12:1* ***“Therefore”***. He exhorts all believers who possess new hearts, gift wrapped in the revelation of the “Gospel of Christ” to be opened each day for Kingdom business, to live from “faith to faith” as new creations in Christ. The “Gospel Light” within them has prepared them to release God’s light into their surroundings. This is how God’s Kingdom expands through the Holy Spirit in “righteousness, peace and joy”. This is how God is glorified in this age of grace. Now look at this table below. It summarizes this teaching on how God’s “righteousness and radical love” resides within His people.

“Turning Hearts Back to God through the Gospel”

Heart Event	Description	Refer To
Jesus implanting His Gospel life	Jesus brings the “Kingdom of Heaven”	Introduction (Romans)
The Gospel reveals one’s true identity	It sets one apart in God’s “Living Word”	Section 1 – (vs. 1:1-17)
People seek their own false identities	False identities are made in sin and unrighteousness	Section 2 – (vs. 1:18-32)
God is the “Judge of Righteousness”	People aren’t the judges no matter their level of faithfulness	Section 3 – (vs. 2:1-29)
People live separated from God by sin	Sin separates them from a righteous God	Section 4 – (vs. 3:1-31)
God provides salvation through faith	Faith in Christ saves God’s people	Section 5 – (vs. 4:1-25)
Hope, love and peace in the Son’s life	The Holy Spirit pours out the Son’s life	Section 6 – (vs. 5:1-11)
The new destiny in One man’s obedience	The second Adam overcame the sin of the first Adam	Section 7 – (vs. 5:12-21)
Death to sin and newness of life	Not a slave to sin but a vessel for grace	Section 8 – (vs. 6:1-23)
Holy union with God’s righteousness and love	Living married to righteousness and love	Section 9 – (vs. 7:1-12)
The Letter of the Law is powerless against sin	The flesh alone is weak against sin’s power	Section 10 – (vs. 7:13-25)
The Spirit of the law is freeing and fruitful	God’s indwelling love and power leads one to live victoriously	Section 11 – (vs. 8:1-11)
Transformed hearts through adoption	Hearts are transformed through adoption into Sonship	Section 12 – (vs. 8:12-30)
Letting the love of God have full access	Nothing overcomes God’s love in Christ	Section 13 – (vs. 8:31-39)
Carrying the Gospel Seed of Christ	From the beginning God’s children carried His promise	Section 14 – (vs. 9:1-16)
Sowing the seed of Christ righteousness	The righteousness of Christ calls all to repent	Section 15 – (vs. 10:1-21)
Growing in the Gospel and shining its light	Transformed to shine the Gospel light into darkness	Section 16 – (vs. 12:1-21)
Representatives of God’s Kingdom	Abiding in “righteousness, peace and joy” of Gospel	Conclusion (vs. 14:7-18)

“to be empowered and to empower others”

I pray that the reading of this book along with the Epistle of Romans might spurn you to go back now from Romans to read/re-read the Gospels and the Book of Acts in the Bible. I believe by doing so, God is going to bless you with a greater understanding of the Gospel and its impact on the early church. Its impact continues upon today's church as the Gospel transforms hearts and extends God's Kingdom into every nation on earth.

The people of faith constantly seek God through the Gospel because it is the lens which enables them to view a God who never stops drawing humanity closer to His "Righteous Heart and Radical Love". New life in Christ through the ever-increasing revelation of the Gospel is the gravity that keeps one's feet on God's holy ground. This life empowers them to run the race of abiding in the Lord daily. It keeps them on the righteous path, the track of the "Most High---Way" of "Obedience in Christ" that will never be replaced or forgotten whether one is living on this planet, earth or in heaven.

"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (1st John 2:6) Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1st John 3:2-3)"