

November 7, 2021

## **The Crux of the Matter**

### **To the Romans**

*"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand...what shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means...we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with..."*

*"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your reasonable act of worship."*

The most prolific writer of the New Testament was the Apostle Paul. That is not to say that he set out to write any part of what we identify as the New Testament. Rather, as the Apostle who carried the gospel across much of the known world of that day planting churches wherever he went he had a huge mailing list and many of his letters survived to become a large part of our New Testament.

While it is essential, I think, to carefully study and understand what the Apostle wrote in all those letters, it is also important to follow the common threads that demonstrate his Spirit-inspired authorship of those same letters. Over the next several weeks we will try to draw some of those common threads from each of Paul's letters.

In doing this kind of study, I think it is essential to begin with Paul's most defining work and that has to be his letter to the believers in Rome. In this letter he establishes the fundamental principles of the gospel which is the central focus of everything he preaches and teaches. In this letter he calls himself the Apostle set apart for the gospel of God and states, **"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..."**

So everything that Paul writes in his letters will always share this common thread; the central theme will always be the gospel. Through this letter the Apostle will define that gospel for us and then call us to reasonably respond to what God has done for us.

The gospel or good news, the Apostle explains, only makes sense if we understand that we are hopeless sinners and that all sinners, no matter their sins, face only the wrath of God. **"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."** Paul writes, **"and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."** (Romans 3:23-24) God made Jesus, the Apostle explains, the **"sacrifice of atonement"** for our sins.

It is that sacrifice, that death on the cross, supplied through God's overwhelming mercy, that is the crux of the gospel, the good news. The rest of Paul's letter to Rome, indeed much of what he writes through all his letters, is in response to God's grace. Over and over again he will challenge his readers to understand what their reasonable response to God's grace has to be.

In his letter to the believers in Rome he shows them that their only reasonable response to God's overwhelming mercy and grace is to present themselves as **"living sacrifices"**. I am convinced that much of what Paul writes in his many letters is really further defining what it means to live living sacrifice .

As those who have died to sin and now live for Jesus what kind of lives should we be living? How does God's overwhelming mercy and grace, poured out through God's sacrifice of his one and only Son on the cross impact our lives? Ultimately these are the questions that the Apostle will always be answering for us.

