passage invites us to focus anew on the power that comes from knowing Christ. Of course, much of that power comes from God’s love for us despite our brokenness and sinfulness.

**Questions for reflection:**

How do we normally react when someone tells us not to do something we like to do? How do we normally react when someone tells us the uncomplimentary truth about ourselves? Do we sometimes decide to do what is right but somehow end up doing what is wrong? Do feelings of guilt and failure over not living up to some standard make it easier or more difficult to abide by that standard in the future? When we try to live up to difficult regulations, do we keep noticing how we are doing and end up focusing on ourselves rather than on God?

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**24. Romans 8:1–11**

Hence, there is now no ruin in store for those who are in Christ Jesus, because in Christ Jesus the Spirit’s life-giving rule has liberated you from sin’s and death’s rule. What the Law could not do, since it was weak due to our outer self, God did by sending his own Son in a form similar to our sinful outer self and to deal with sin. God passed judgment on sin in the outer self so that the just requirement of the Law might be performed in us who act not by the leading of our fallen self but by the Spirit. Because those who are in their fallen nature set their minds on fallen things, but those who are in the Spirit set their minds on the promptings of the Spirit. The thoughts of our fallen nature produce death, but the thoughts of the Spirit produce life and peace; because the thoughts of our fallen nature are hostile to God for they do not submit to God’s law; nor can they. And those who are in their fallen nature cannot please God. But you are not in your fallen nature but in the Spirit, if indeed God’s
Spirit resides in you. Now if anyone does not have Christ’s Spirit, this person does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your old self is mortal because of sin, God’s Spirit is alive to produce righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead resides in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will make even your dead selves alive through his Spirit who dwells in you. (8:1–11)

Having shown that the Mosaic Law cannot overcome sin, Paul insists that the Holy Spirit can. The Law is part of the old age, part of the fallen realm and, therefore, cannot transform our deepest selves and redirect our thoughts and desires and enable us to act in a radically better way. Hence, as we have seen, the Law does not even help us keep its own demands. By contrast, the Spirit is the cutting edge of the new age and can transform our inner selves so we focus on God and the salvation he offers and, as a result, act righteously, including fulfilling the ethical demands of the Law.

The Holy Spirit is central to Paul’s religious experience and thought. Throughout his writings Paul keeps referring to the Spirit. He discusses the various charismatic gifts she bestows (especially, 1 Cor. 12–14). He sees her as the source of Christian freedom (2 Cor. 3:17). He insists that she is the transforming power that makes us become like Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18). In the passage we are presently considering, Paul simply assumes that having the Holy Spirit is the primary precondition for being a Christian. Anyone who does not possess the Spirit does not belong to Christ.

Unfortunately, in subsequent Christianity Paul’s rich experience of the Spirit has been the exception. Some Christian movements have identified the Spirit with a narrow range of ecstatic gifts—especially, speaking in tongues. Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 12–14 already criticized restricting the Spirit in this way. Instead, he insisted that the Spirit empowers every gift and, especially, inspires the supreme gift of love. By contrast, most Christians from the second century on do not seem to have had much day-to-day awareness of the Holy Spirit.
Whereas people spoke often of their relationship to Jesus or to God or even to the Virgin Mary, there was little mention of the Holy Spirit. Only in the formulation of Trinitarian theology was the Spirit a major topic of discussion.

Nevertheless, we must face the fact that until we recover Paul’s understanding and experience of the Spirit we will not be able to make sense of his theology as a whole. Down through the centuries people have, of course, discovered individual ideas (e.g., justification by faith) in Paul which have sparked personal conversions and even movements of corporate renewal. There has been, however, a continuing inability to make sense of Paul’s thought as a whole. No doubt, many factors are at work in producing this ignorance. Nevertheless, if the Holy Spirit is so central to Paul’s religious experience that he can assume that a person who does not possess her is not even Christian, then we cannot hope to understand Paul until we understand what Paul means by the “Spirit.”

For Paul the Holy Spirit is basically the mind of God, as Donald Gelpi, S.J., has pointed out. A revealing passage in 1 Corinthians insists that the only one who can truly know a person is that person’s own spirit. Paul goes on to note that the same is true of God (1 Cor. 2:11). Then Paul states that Christians have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Consequently, whatever else the Spirit may be for Paul, she is especially God’s mind.

As the mind of God, the Spirit is also a transforming, life-giving power. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” also mean “wind.” Wind is an invisible power. So too the Spirit, as the Divine Mind, gives us divine energy and allows us to exercise new gifts and endure greater hardship.

Consequently, for Paul possessing the Holy Spirit is a foretaste of the resurrection. In 2 Corinthians Paul calls the Holy Spirit the down payment of the future glory that is to be ours when we rise from the dead (2 Cor. 5:5). Here in Romans Paul stresses that if we have the Spirit of the God who raised Jesus we know that God will also raise our mortal selves. In a couple verses Paul will go on to call the Spirit the first fruits of the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). As long as we are in this
fallen world, we must await resurrection, but even now we can possess the mind of Christ and the transforming power she bestows. The Spirit, therefore, points us toward the final liberation that will one day be ours.

Paul held that Jesus followed the leading of God's mind perfectly and by doing so gave us a new model for living. From Adam and Eve on, people followed the conventional way of thinking and focused on themselves. This self-centeredness led to vice (cf. Rom. 1:18-32). Then when people learned to distinguish right from wrong, they focused on the law. As we have seen, however, focusing on law did not limit sin, but, paradoxically, caused it to multiply. One reason it did so was that focusing on the law was simply another way of focusing on oneself. People were primarily concerned with how they measured up to the legal standard. Hence, to the extent that they could keep the law, they tended to become proud, and to the extent that they failed to keep it, they became ashamed. Of course, both the pride and the shame further separated them from God and led to further violations of the law. By contrast, Jesus focused on God and was fully obedient to him. God's Spirit was the Spirit of Jesus. Hence, Jesus offers the world a different pattern for how to live—a pattern of the righteousness that comes through allowing God's own mind to transform and empower us and center us in him.

The model provided by Jesus exposes the inadequacy of the model provided by the fallen world. Jesus was fully human or, to use Paul's language, Jesus was "in a form similar to our sinful outer self." Precisely because Jesus was like us, he enabled us to see a superior way of being human and thereby exposed our "normal" ways of living. Hence, Paul can write that through Jesus "God passed judgment on sin." The life and peace which Jesus manifested and which others gain from living by his Spirit make the vice and inner division which come from following the world particularly obvious and ugly.

Paul makes it clear that the reason that Jesus could give us a better model is that he existed before he entered the fallen realm and, consequently, was not corrupted by it. No other
human being existed before being born and, hence, every other human being necessarily succumbed to the reign of sin that stretched back to Adam. By contrast, God sent Jesus from the heavenly realm, and, as a result, he could take on a human form without the sin that all other human beings necessarily had due to their earthly origin. Hence, Jesus could adopt "a form similar" to our sinful self, not the actual sin.

Because the Spirit is God's mind, she enables Christians to redirect not only their actions, but even obsessive thoughts and desires. Earlier we noted that Paul especially emphasizes the law's inability to transform our inner selves. In practice, the command not to covet caused people to covet. By contrast, Paul emphasizes that the Spirit renews us from the heart. For example, in the passage we are presently considering, Paul emphasizes that those who dwell in the Spirit think about spiritual things. The reason the Spirit is able to renew us from the heart is the Spirit allows us to experience God's unimaginable love for us as shown in the crucifixion of Jesus (Rom. 5:5), and this love transforms our desires and focuses us on God.

Questions for reflection:

Does my Christian community place much emphasis on the Holy Spirit? Do we experience her in our worship? Do I experience the Spirit in my own life? What can we do to help allow the Spirit to redirect our obsessive thoughts and desires? What would it mean to be led by the mind of God?

25. Romans 8:12–17

So then, brothers and sisters, we are not indebted to our fallen nature to live by it, because if you live by your fallen nature, you are destined to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the practices of your fallen nature, you will live. For all who are guided
by God’s Spirit are God’s children. For you did not receive a spirit which will bring you back into slavery and make you afraid, but you have received a Spirit which makes you adopted children. By her we cry out, “Abba” (“Father”). The Spirit herself testifies along with our own spirit that we are God’s children. And if we are his children, we also are his heirs. We are God’s heirs, fellow heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with him that we may also be glorified with him. (8:12-17)

Now that Paul has once again emphasized that Christians have a choice, he urges us to follow the leading of Christ’s Spirit. Without that Spirit, we would have to conform to the sinfulness of our fallen environment. Since we have the Spirit, however, we are free to follow either the old corrupted order of sin and law or the new order of freedom and righteousness. Paul urges us to do the second.

If we follow the leading of the Spirit, we become God’s children because the Spirit conforms us to Jesus. Through the Spirit we participate in the relationship to God that Jesus himself had. Paul emphasizes that the Spirit allows us to call God “Abba” (“Father”). “Abba” is not Greek but Aramaic, the native language of Jesus. The early church remembered that Jesus called God “Abba” (Mark 14:36), and apparently Christians used to cry out “Abba” while praying during the liturgy. When Paul’s readers called God “Abba,” they implied that they had the same relationship to God by adoption that Jesus had from the beginning. As God’s Son, Jesus had the Holy Spirit and loved God and obeyed him even to the extent of accepting the cross. God then raised him from the dead and made him Lord of the universe. Paul stresses that if we follow the Spirit’s call to suffer for God as Jesus did, we will also share in Jesus’ triumph. We too will rise from the dead and with Christ reign over all things.

Because the Spirit assures us we are God’s children, we no longer need to be afraid. Earlier Paul emphasized that both sin and law make people afraid. Sinners know that they deserve God’s punishment (Rom. 1:32) and are anxious. People who
concentrate on living up to the law inevitably fail and are frustrated and frightened. Of course, everyone also knows that we must all die, and by nature human beings are afraid of death. Moreover, after death there is final judgment, and sinners rightly are afraid of God’s ultimate condemnation. All such fear robs us of tranquillity and leads to further sin. By contrast, those who accept the Spirit’s invitation are at peace.

Consequently, obedience to the Spirit is in reality freedom. Paul emphasizes that following God’s Spirit does not lead to a new slavery. Instead, it leads to liberty. One reason that Paul can make this claim is that through the Spirit we can actually perform the virtuous acts that we previously chose to do but in the end could not accomplish. The Spirit gives us control over our own selves and lets us do what we desire. As we do these virtuous acts, we also obtain the peace and joy we wish. Hence, we have the paradox that serving the Spirit is in fact liberty.

Paul’s argumentation implies that an important key to overcoming evil is to think about God’s love as shown by the Spirit. If we are facing difficulty or temptation, we must focus our minds on the Spirit and the divine love to which she bears witness. If we instead try to overcome evil by thinking about the law and its demands, we cut ourselves off from God’s power and will fail. By contrast, if we focus on the Spirit, she will remind us of God’s love and give us that enabling hope which will allow us to overcome evil.

Questions for reflection:

Does their religion make many people anxious? Why? How can we be at peace in our relationship with God if we also affirm that God will punish sin? What happens when we feel tempted and focus on regulations? What happens when we focus on God’s love? Do we believe that through Jesus’ Spirit we can have the relationship to God that he had? Does obeying the Spirit lead to freedom in our own lives?
26. Romans 8:18-23

*I think that the sufferings of the present time do not merit the glory that will be revealed for us. For the yearning of the creation eagerly waits for the revelation of God's children. For the creation was made subject to frustration, not voluntarily but due to the one who made it subject in the hope that even creation itself would be set free from bondage to decay for the freedom which is part of the glory of God's children. We know that the whole creation has groaned and suffered birth pains together until the present time. Not only it, but even we ourselves who have the initial deliverance which the Spirit produces groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption, the liberation of our full selves. (8:18–23)*

Now that Paul has urged us to follow the leading of the Spirit, he reminds us of the unimaginable blessings that one day God will freely give us. Our present sufferings—great though they may be—are insignificant in comparison and do not merit such a reward. For Paul salvation is God's supreme gift and can never be deserved.

Paul believed that we receive part of these blessings when we die. In his letter to the Philippians he tells his readers that if he is executed he will depart and be with Christ and that this future existence will be far better for him personally (Phil. 1:21–23).

Nevertheless, Paul primarily looked forward to the greater hope of the whole creation being liberated from suffering and decay. As the passage we are presently considering makes clear, Paul does not limit salvation to human beings, and he does not see salvation as an escape from the created order. Instead, he looks forward to a new age when both the living and those who are presently dead will fully participate in a transformed world where the natural order will be free from its present miseries. Of course, as Paul knew, much of the Old Testament had looked forward to something similar (e.g., Isa. 11:6–9).

Of course, Paul has no idea how God will accomplish all this, but Paul assumes that anything less would be unworthy of
the divine power and love which are already visible. Paul gives no details about the new creation, presumably because he does not claim to know them. What he does know is that God created both humanity and the natural order and loves them both. He also knows that God has begun to redeem the fallen universe by sending Jesus who died and rose from the grave and by giving Christians the Holy Spirit. These past acts point forward to a final consummation when God will complete what he has begun so forcefully and so well.

As we wait for this final deliverance, we share in the sufferings of the present universe. As J.C. Beker has stressed, Paul believes that Christians are necessarily in solidarity with the entire creation. We in no way escape its sufferings. Even though we have the Spirit we still inhabit the fallen world, and its pain is our pain.

Moreover, as Brendan Byrne, S.J., has emphasized, Paul believed that ultimately it was human sin that caused the suffering of creation and that, therefore, the redemption of human beings would lead to the renewal of the natural order. According to the first two chapters of Genesis, before human beings sinned, the creation was pristine. There were no thorns, and animals did not eat one another. It was only when Adam sinned that God responded by cursing the earth (Gen. 3:17–18). Of course, the story of Adam was central to Paul's theology. Indeed, as we have seen when dealing with chapter 5 of this letter, Paul traces the problems of humanity back to Adam and insists that the coming of Jesus is more than undoing the consequences of the fall. Jesus is calling human beings to a new righteousness and fulfillment, and, inevitably one result will be the transformation of the natural world.

I believe that Paul's vision of the suffering and redemption of the natural order should inspire us to take action to preserve the ecology. If Paul had believed that human sin had not harmed nature, that God only saves human beings, and that God saves us by removing us from the creation, then it would be easy to appeal to Paul to justify wanton disregard for the ecology. In fact, some Christians have claimed that this is what
Paul believed and have, accordingly, been indifferent to ecological degradation. Once we realize that Paul believed that human sin has harmed nature and that God will redeem the ecology as well as humanity, then, if we follow Paul’s lead, we must struggle to help the natural order, just as we must struggle to help other human beings.

Questions for reflection:

Do we agree with Paul that God will redeem the whole of creation? What role should Christians presently be playing in that redemption? Is it important to feel the sufferings of the natural world? Do you agree with Paul that there is a yearning in all things for liberation? If so, is this yearning evidence that ultimately such salvation will occur? Can we affirm that the dead are with Christ and still maintain that even they look forward to a transformed world?

27. Romans 8:24–25

Because it is in this hope that we are saved. A hope whose object is already in view is not real hope. For who hopes for something that is already in view? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it patiently yet eagerly. (8:24–25)

For Paul the primary way that we experience salvation in the present is through hope. Of course, we have the other consolations and gifts which the Spirit inspires both in our individual lives and in the Christian communities to which we belong. Nevertheless, Paul is far from saying that such “spiritual” blessings are adequate compensation for the sufferings which Christians, and, indeed, the whole creation must endure. On the contrary, as he wrote the Corinthians, if there is nothing more to life than what we as Christians already have, then we are merely to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:17–19). What makes life worthwhile is
the hope of final deliverance from sin, suffering, and death, and it is only by looking forward in expectation that we experience salvation in the midst of our wounded lives and broken universe. Such hope allows us to endure the tribulations of the present and to make costly sacrifices in order to obey God.

Of course, as we have seen, Christian hope is based on the faithfulness of God. For Paul hope is never optimism resulting from improving conditions in the world. As he emphasizes in the present passage, if we can see something already, we really are no longer hoping for it. Christian hope is based on the unseen power and love of God. It is the result of the sufferings and resurrection of Jesus viewed as the revelation of God’s power and wisdom; it is the result of the hidden presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Hope looks forward to that which not only cannot be seen, but which can scarcely be imagined—the full liberation and glorification of all things.

Consequently, hope is a virtue, and a virtue that must be nourished. It depends on continuing to trust the God who has been faithful in the past, and we come to have that trust by meditating on what God has already done and is already doing.

One price of hope is a discontent with the present world. Because we look forward to a fundamentally better life, we are restless and long for the final triumph of God.

Questions for reflection:

Do people often claim that the inner blessings they experience make their lives worth living despite great suffering? How do you feel about such claims? Would life be worth living if there were no hope for life after death or the redemption of the universe? What are we doing to nurture Christian hope? Does our Christianity make us restless, or are we basically content with the world as it is?
Similarly, the Spirit also comes to our aid in our weakness. For we do not even know what we need to pray for, but the Spirit herself pleads with inexpressible groans. And he who searches our hearts knows what is on the Spirit’s mind, and that, in accordance with God’s will, she appeals on behalf of Christians. (8:26–27)

As we wait for the redemption of all things, the Spirit mysteriously gives shape to our feeble prayers. Since we continue to be assaulted by the evil of the present world order, even our meditations and petitions remain very imperfect. Indeed, we do not even know what we should pray for. Nevertheless, as we struggle to pray, the Spirit somehow completes what we do only partially. Thanks to the Spirit, we pray for more than we are aware, and because we pray for more than we know, we receive more than we expect.

Here, as elsewhere, Paul assumes that, thanks to the work of Jesus, Christians somehow become caught up in the relationship that God has with himself. For Paul the Spirit is clearly God’s Spirit; yet in this passage the Spirit intercedes with God for us. Similarly, Paul believes that Jesus is God’s Son and pre-existed with him before being born (Rom. 10:6, 1 Cor. 8:6, 2 Cor. 8:9, Gal. 4:4, Phil. 2:6–7, Col. 1:15–16). Yet in a few verses Paul will stress that the Son also intercedes for us (8:34). Such intercession is not to placate a God who otherwise would be hostile to us, because as the present passage makes clear, the intercession itself is God’s will. It would take centuries for the church to be able to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity—that God is one substance in three persons. Nevertheless, the foundations of that doctrine are clearly found in Paul. If we may be forgiven for using later theological language, we may say that in this passage Paul suggests that the different “persons” of God work together to save us, and that our salvation is in fact the gift which they give to each other.
Questions for reflection:

Does God give a deeper dimension to your prayer that you do not normally notice? Do you feel that God’s Spirit somehow makes your prayers and deeds accomplish more than they “naturally” would? What are some of the ways that the Spirit has augmented your efforts? What are the implications of believing that our salvation is the gift that the “persons” of God give to each other?

29. Romans 8:28–39

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are summoned in accordance with his plan. Because those whom he chose from the beginning he also destined from the beginning to become just like his Son so that his Son might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. Those whom he destined, he also summoned, and those whom he summoned, he also set right, and those whom he set right, he also glorified. (8:28–30)

So what shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all. How will he not also give us all things along with him? Who will bring an accusation against God’s chosen? God is the one who justifies. Who will condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, was raised who is also at the right hand of God who pleads for us. Who will separate us from Christ’s love? Will affliction or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or the sword? It is just as it is written, “For your sake we are being killed the whole day. We are looked upon as sheep for slaughter” [Psal. 44:22]. But in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither what already is nor what is still to come, neither powers, neither height
Paul steps back and reminds us of God's whole plan. Long before we were born God decided that human beings would become his children through becoming brothers and sisters of Jesus in a new holy community. From the beginning God decreed that some people would have the special vocation of being the first to follow Jesus, join the Church, and find salvation. Now God has begun to accomplish his great plan by calling these individuals to this vocation and giving us the undeserved saving presence of the Holy Spirit. Soon he will complete his plan by bringing us to eternal life and making us share in the glory of the risen Christ and by liberating the whole creation from suffering and death.

Reflecting on this plan gives unconquerable confidence. If God has already fulfilled the first part of his great purpose by sending his Son and calling us, then there can be no doubt that he will bring it to completion by fully redeeming all that he has made. Indeed, so certain is God's triumph that Paul can write that his Christian readers have already been glorified even though, of course, chronologically this glorification is still to come.

As we wait for God to complete this redemption, we live in the assurance that nothing can cut Christians off from access to God's love. If God loved us enough to send his Son to suffer and die for us, then God will never allow anything to destroy us. Hence, we need fear neither sin nor death nor final judgment. Through the power of the Spirit, God will continue to overcome sin in us. The power that raised Jesus from the dead will also vanquish death, and because of God's love he will be merciful on the day of judgment. Indeed, Jesus himself will plead our cause. Nor do we need fear anything in the natural world or in the supernatural one. Christ will support us in the face of every worldly affliction, and he is more powerful than any angel or spirit. Of course, in the face of the disappointments and persecutions of this present life, we experience deep frustration. Nevertheless, we need not give into despair.
Moreover, as Paul has stressed earlier, even our sufferings, once they are offered up to God, become positive since they produce character (5:3–4). Hence, Paul can insist that “all things work together for good for those who love God and are summoned in accordance with his plan.”

Of course, Paul in his own life had especially experienced the truth that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ. As he makes clear in 2 Corinthians, Paul had himself suffered endless hardships while preaching the gospel (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:23). On many occasions he had been tortured (2 Cor. 11:24–25). Yet, even when all his own resources were exhausted, the risen Christ would comfort him and enable him to continue the missionary work (2 Cor. 1:3–10).

In this section Paul implicitly presents his solution to the problem of how Christians can claim that God is all-powerful when there is so much evil in the world. To be sure, Paul does not discuss the issue systematically. Nevertheless, the elements of his response to the question are clearly implied.

In this present world God’s omnipotence is primarily visible in the experience which Christians have that nothing can separate us from his love. In this fallen age evil is rampant, and people who are faithful to God suffer every sort of tribulation. Nevertheless, paradoxically, in the midst of these sufferings Christians experience that God is more powerful than anything else. Especially in 2 Corinthians Paul emphasizes that God sustains us in our weaknesses and thereby demonstrates his power. Indeed, Paul can write that God’s grace is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). In the passage we are dealing with here in Romans, Paul stresses that in the midst of our greatest sufferings God continues to love us and that we can continue to rely on this love and even experience it.

Of course, in the future when God judges the world, he will crush all disobedience and, hence, his omnipotence will be fully visible to all. He will expose all the deeds of both the righteous and the wicked. Everyone will receive what is just, and everyone will acknowledge the sovereignty of God.
When the omnipotence of God is fully visible to all, however, it will no longer be possible to find God through such virtues as faith and hope or to serve him by self-sacrifice. As Paul noted a few verses earlier, no one can hope for what is already fully available (Rom. 8:24–25). Similarly, we may add, there is no need for faith when the realities to which faith points are obvious to all. Nor, once good is fully rewarded and evil fully punished, is there any room for self-sacrifice in the service of God.

Hence, the reason that God has not yet used force to end the evils in the present world is that he wishes people to be able to choose such virtues as faith, hope, and self-sacrificing love.

Paul’s general reflections on suffering and hope probably had a special relevance to the Roman Church because of its history of persecution. As we will see when we discuss 13:1–7, a few years before Paul wrote, the Roman government expelled Jewish Christians from Rome. Subsequently, some of them managed to return, but we must suppose that they were the objects of suspicion and distrust and lived in considerable uncertainty. It was to such people that Paul wrote that in this world we are like sheep about to be slaughtered, but, nevertheless, nothing can separate us from God’s love. Such a message must have been most welcome.

The great climax that ends chapter 8 also completes the first half of the letter by emphasizing that the gospel is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The bulk of Romans can be divided into two long sections that together prove Paul’s thesis that the gospel is for the Jew first and also for the Greek. In the first section, as we have seen, Paul stresses that the Jews like the Greeks have sinned and that there is only one path to salvation. Hence, Paul warns the Jews not to be judgmental toward the Gentiles and not to be boastful. Naturally, this section of the letter would be especially appealing to Christian Gentiles. The magnificent climax in which Paul insists that nothing can separate us from God’s love as we wait for final glory signals that this section is at an end. Paul has shown that all Christians, especially Gentile ones—inherit the blessings of salvation. Indeed, in the closing verses of the chapter Paul emphasizes that the
very blessings which the Jews insisted were their national privilege—particularly being God’s sons and daughters (e.g., Exod. 4:22)—have been extended to anyone who follows Jesus.

Now in the second great section of the letter Paul will stress that the gospel is for the Jews first—i.e., the Jews still have a special place in God’s plan and, therefore, the Gentiles must not despise them.

Questions for reflection:

Would we rather live in a world where faith, hope, and self-sacrifice are possible or in a world where there is no need for these things? Can we imagine living in the second world if we had never lived in the first? At present, do we especially see the power of God in the endurance of those who are faithful in the midst of suffering? How might the experience of persecution change a person’s understanding of the Christian life?

30. Romans 9:1–5

I am telling the truth in Christ; I am not lying; my conscience confirms this about me by the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow and constant pain in my heart. I would wish myself to be an anathema to Christ for the sake of my brothers and sisters, my kin by blood. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption and the glory and the covenants and the Law and the cult and the promises. Theirs are the Patriarchs, and from their blood is the Messiah. He is God over all to be blessed forever. Amen. (9:1–5)

Paul begins the second half of Romans by emphasizing that the failure of most Jews to accept the gospel is distressing to him personally. Paul is emphatic. The disbelief of so many Jews is a source of constant pain. Indeed, he claims that he