

Faith Foundations Study Guides

The Grace of God

A Journey of Discovery in the Book of Romans

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How to Use This Book

Welcome to the Faith Foundations study guide on Romans! Whether you are just beginning your new life with Christ, or have been a Christian for many years, this study guide is for you. It is designed to help you discover, through personal study and group discussion, the incredible riches of God's Word, and to help you grow in your walk with God by applying what you learn. This book is divided into 26 lessons, each of which contains the full NIV text of the Scripture passage, several study and discussion questions, and a verse-by-verse commentary. So, together with a Bible to look up cross-references, you have everything you need for your "journey of discovery" in Romans.

Why Small Groups?

These materials can be used profitably in personal study or in an adult Sunday School class. But their value will be best realized when they are used in small groups, meeting either at church during the Sunday School hour or in homes during the week. There are several reasons for this.

First, no one has perfect insight into every passage of Scripture; we can all benefit from hearing the perspectives of other believers as we seek to understand and apply the Bible. A small group gathering, using the discussion questions included in this book, is an ideal way to stimulate a sharing of observations and ideas.

Second, a small group provides a community of fellow travelers who, along with us, are seeking to follow Christ in the midst of family responsibilities, job pressures, and personal struggles. In today's fragmented and mobile society, the natural networks of neighborhoods and family no longer provide the support they once did. We need some way of making connections with others for mutual support, people with whom we can share our joys and sorrows—people who will listen, who will pray with us, who will offer a helping hand and a word of encouragement, and who will confront us in love when we've gotten off track.

Finally, a small group combines the benefits of Biblical insight and community support by keeping us accountable. If we only study the Scriptures alone, or listen to them taught in a large group, it's easy to let them go "in one ear and out the other". But when a small group of people are learning the same things at the same time, they can help one another to apply the things they are learning.

How Are the Groups Organized?

The groups should be composed of 6-14 people: if they are smaller, any absences can make it difficult to maintain the discussion; if they are larger, not everyone can participate. You can meet from two to four times a month; if the group meets less than twice a month, the members aren't spending enough time together to build relationships. Some groups find that meeting three times a month during the school year, with a break during the summer, provides a good rhythm of involvement and time off.

You may choose to include a mix of married and single, older and younger members, or you may organize your groups by age or marital status. There are benefits to homogeneous groups in which the members are going through similar life experiences, but there are also benefits of a diverse group in which the younger members can benefit from the experience of the older.

Each group needs to have a recognized leader, preferably one selected and trained by the pastor or church leadership. This person's role during the meeting is not primarily to teach (although preparation of the lesson is a must), but to guide the discussion and keep the group from getting bogged down on side issues. He or she does not need to be the host; in fact, it is preferable that group responsibilities, such as providing a home in which to meet and organizing refreshments, be shared among the members.

Finally, membership in the group should be based on three commitments: To prepare for each meeting by completing the lesson in advance, which takes from 1/2 to 2 hours (but come to the meeting even if you haven't done the lesson); to place a high priority on regular attendance and come to the meetings except in case of emergency; and to keep confidential anything of a personal nature which is shared during the meetings (except when it is necessary to communicate concerns to the pastor).

What Is the Group Meeting Like?

Each group meeting should last from 1 1/2 to 2 hours, and provide time for discussion of the lesson, prayer, and fellowship. A problem in many groups is for the lesson to take up most of the time, with only a few minutes left over for prayer and fellowship. This must be avoided for the goal of building relationships to be achieved.

Here is a suggested schedule:

15 minutes:	Gathering
30-45 minutes:	Discussion of the lesson
20-30 minutes:	Prayer
15-30 minutes:	Refreshments

As for child care, experience has shown that in order to receive the maximum benefit from time spent in the meeting, all members of the group need to be free to focus on the discussion, rather than caring for children. Therefore, with the possible exception of infants under one year, parents should make arrangements for child care during the meetings. Some options include "trading" child care with parents whose group meets on a different night, having a baby sitter care for children in another room during the meeting, or providing child care for all the groups at the church.

Introduction to Romans

Importance

The importance of this book has perhaps best been summarized by Martin Luther, in the preface to his Notes on Romans: *"This Epistle is the chief book of the New Testament, the purest gospel. It deserves not only to be known word for word by every Christian, but to be the subject of his meditation day by day."* Luther also spoke of it as *"a light and way into the whole Scriptures."*

Author

It is almost universally agreed that the author of Romans is Paul the apostle. Not only is he identified as such in the letter (1:1, 5), but both the external and internal evidence testify clearly to his authorship. The letter is referred to as Paul's by the church Fathers (the pastors and theologians of the early church), and the early lists of New Testament books list Romans as one of Paul's letters. The internal evidence includes the strong linguistic and theological similarities to Paul's other letters.

Date and Place of Origin

From the description Paul gives of his circumstances, it is not difficult to place the writing of Romans relative to his journeys. He considered his church planting work in the Eastern part of the Roman empire to have been completed. He was about to set out for Jerusalem with the offerings collected from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, before going on to Spain (15:18-28). This corresponds with the three months he spent in Greece (i.e. Achaia) after passing through Macedonia (Acts 20:1-3; 24:17) during his third missionary journey. The possible dates for this time can be narrowed to A.D. 54-59, based on the events of Roman history which form the political background of Acts.

It is likely, in view of Paul's close relationship with the Corinthian church, that he spent these three months in Corinth, the capital of the province of Achaia. The commendation of Phoebe, a "servant of the church in Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:11) points to Corinth, as Cenchrea was Corinth's eastern port, and the Gaius mentioned in Rom. 16:23 may be the same one baptized by Paul in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14).

Recipients

The recipients of this letter were the believers in Rome, whom Paul had never visited (1:7, 10). The church consisted of both Jewish and Gentile Christians (15:7-12). Since there is no mention in Acts or any of the epistles of missionaries being sent to Rome, it was likely founded by ordinary Christians in the course of their travels.

Occasion and Purpose

The occasion of the letter, as Paul indicates, is his plan to visit Rome and to spend some time in fellowship with the believers there, ministering to them and being ministered to by them, before proceeding on to Spain (1:18-16; 15:14-33). Paul's purposes in writing the letter include the following: (1) informing the Roman Christians of his plans to visit them, (2) informing them of his plans to go to Spain, possibly with a view to securing their support, (3) soliciting their prayers (15:30-32). However, these purposes do not explain the content of the main portion of the letter (1:16b-15:13).

Why did he choose this letter to present such an extended treatment of the central doctrines of the Christian faith? One explanation is that Paul, having never visited the Roman church, chose to introduce himself to them in a way which highlighted his identity and purpose as an apostle, through a presentation of the gospel which he had been preaching during the many years of his labors. The relative length and completeness of the presentation may be due to the size and importance of this church. Perhaps Paul was also motivated by a desire to set down in comprehensive form a statement of his mature thinking and reflection on the gospel, not only for the benefit of the church at Rome, but for the greater Christian community as well.

Summary

After identifying justification by faith as the theme of the letter in 1:16-17, Paul first lays out the cause of man's utter alienation from God--his sin. No man is righteous before God, but rather "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin" (3:9). In light of this fact, the righteousness which comes from God through faith in Christ is the only means of justification (3:21-31). Abraham is no exception, for he also was justified by faith rather than works (4:1-25).

The life which results from justification is described in 5:1-8:39. It is a life characterized by peace with God, due to our separation from Adam and union with Christ (5:1-21); a life characterized by obedience, since our justification, rather than giving us license to sin, actually frees us from the tyranny of sin (6:1-7:25); a life characterized by the indwelling of the Spirit and the certainty that the possibility of condemnation for the believer has been forever abolished (8:1-39).

Paul then discusses the status of the Jewish people before God, arguing that their rejection of Christ does not indicate the failure of God's promises. Rather, it reveals that God's promises apply only to those who are sons of Abraham through faith, demonstrating that salvation is according to the sovereign will of God. Although Israel has been cut off from God due to unbelief, her rejection is not final.

Finally, Paul exhorts his readers to fulfill the duties of obedience to which Christians are called and concludes with greetings to individuals.

Unit 1 – Salutation

Romans 1:1-7

Text

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—
² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life ^a was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power ^b by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from ^c faith for his name's

sake. ⁶ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.
⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

^a 3 Or who according to the flesh

^b 4 Or was declared with power to be the Son of God

^c 5 Or that is

Open

- This is a chance to get to know the other group members better. Have everyone introduce themselves and answer this question: What was your nickname growing up, and how did you get it?

Discover

1. Key words are those which, because of emphasis or repetition, stand out as being central to the message of the passage. What are some key words or phrases in this passage?

2. (a) What do you think of when you hear the word "servant"?

- (b) What is Jesus' attitude toward being a servant? (Mark 10:43-45; Luke 22:24-27)

- (c) How do the attitudes of Paul (v. 1) and Jesus toward servanthood differ from those of most people?

3. What can you learn about the gospel (literally, "good news") from this passage? (vv. 2-3)

4. Why does it matter that the gospel of Jesus Christ was anticipated in the Old Testament? (v. 2; see Luke 24:25-27; Acts 26:22-23)

5. **Word study** - "called". The goal of a word study is to understand the meaning of a word in a specific passage by examining how it is used in other places in the Bible.

(a) For each of the following verses, briefly state the *purpose* of God's call.

Romans 1:5, 6, 7

Romans 8:28-30

1 Corinthians 1:9

Colossians 3:15

2 Thessalonians 2:14

1 Timothy 6:12

1 Peter 3:8-9

1 Peter 2:20-21

1 Peter 5:10

(b) What does 2 Timothy 1:8-9 tell us about God's call?

(c) In light of your word study, what does Paul's use of the word "call" in verses 5-7 tell us about our relationship with Christ?

6. What can you learn about Jesus from this passage? (vv. 3-4)

7. Why do you think Paul specifies that Jesus' descendency from David was "as to his earthly life"? (v.3)

8. What does Jesus' resurrection reveal about him? (v. 4; see Acts 2:22-36)

9. Why is it significant that Paul received his apostleship from God? (vv. 1, 5)

10. What people were the primary "target audience" of Paul's ministry?

Apply

Do you think of yourself as a servant of Christ? Of other people? How does your life reflect this attitude, or lack of it?

How did God call you to belong to Jesus Christ? How is your life different as a result?

Commentary

- vv. 1-7 Paul writes his introduction in the form common to letters in his day; this included the name of the sender, the name of the recipient, and a greeting. However, the greetings in Paul's letters are longer than normal, because he often uses them to communicate some aspect of the gospel (see the introduction to 1 Corinthians for an example). This one is rather formal in comparison with his other letters.
- v. 1 **"a servant of Christ Jesus"** The word translated "servant" here, *doulos*, is also used of a literal slave (see Eph. 6:5-9). For the people of Paul's time, freedom and independence were highly prized; it would be unusual for someone to willingly refer to himself as a servant or slave. But Paul has a different attitude, as reflected also in 1 Cor. 9:19 and 2 Cor. 4:5.
- "called to be an apostle"** The basic meaning of *apostle* is that of a messenger or representative, one who is sent out with a purpose. Paul here stresses that he was not a self-appointed apostle, nor one appointed by men, but rather by God (see also the account of his call in Acts 9:1-19 and Galatians 1:11-24). At times, he felt it necessary to defend his apostleship, as in 2 Cor. 12:11-12 and Galatians 1:1.
- "set apart for the gospel of God"** We typically think of being "set apart" as negative—being separated from something. But Paul uses it here in a positive sense, to be separated to the gospel. This separation includes his work of preaching the gospel, but also refers to the fact that his whole life is influenced and controlled by the "good news".
- v. 2 **"the gospel he promised beforehand"** Paul here emphasizes that the gospel is part of God's eternal purpose. The fact that it is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy shows that God can be trusted, because He keeps His promises, and also that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, because it comes from the same God whose acts in history are recorded in the Old Testament (see Luke 24:25-27; Acts 26:22-23).
- v. 3 **"regarding his Son"** The gospel is essentially concerned with the person and works of Jesus Christ, especially his death and resurrection.
- "who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David"** Jesus was qualified to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, or "anointed one," because he was from the royal line of Israel's King David. The phrase "as to his earthly life" carries the implication that his life extended beyond this world.
- v. 4 Jesus' resurrection from the dead demonstrated once and for all that He is both the Son of God and our Lord, as Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost expresses (Acts 2:22-36). In the *Septuagint*, the Greek version of the Old Testament, the proper name for God, *Yahweh*, was translated "Lord," so that Greek Christians familiar with the Bible would likely understand calling Jesus "Lord" to be as a reference to his deity.

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- v. 5 ***“we received grace and apostleship”***
Paul tells us several things about his ministry of apostleship (“we” is probably an editorial “we,” referring to Paul only): (a) it comes from Christ; (b) it was granted for Christ’s glory, or his “name’s sake”; (c) it was received by grace; in other words, it was not earned or deserved in any way; (d) it was given for a purpose, “to call people”.
- “to call all the Gentiles”*** Paul’s special area of ministry was to the Gentiles, just as the apostle Peter’s was to the Jews (Gal. 2:7).
- “obedience that comes from faith”***
Paul’s mention of obedience as the goal of his ministry fits well with his reference to himself as a servant, since a servant or slave owes his master complete obedience. The order, however, is essential. The faith produces the obedience, not vice versa.
- v. 6 ***“And you also are among those Gentiles who are called”*** Paul reminds his readers that it is not only apostles who are called by God, but all believers.
- v. 7 ***“his holy people”*** This is another term for “Christians”, having the basic meaning of being set apart or separated. It does not refer to unusually pious or spiritual people. Rather, it highlights the fact that believers belong to God and are set apart to Him.

Unit 2 – The Gospel — The Power of God

Romans 1:8-17

Text

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,^a that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,^b just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."^c

^a ¹³ The Greek word for *brothers and sisters* (*adelphoi*) refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God's family; also in 7:1, 4; 8:12, 29; 10:1; 11:25; 12:1; 15:14, 30; 16:14, 17.

^b ¹⁷ Or *is from faith to faith*

^c ¹⁷ Hab. 2:4

Open

When you go on a trip, do you like to plan everything out ahead of time, or just get in the car and go?

If you could spend one week anywhere in the world, and cost were no object, where would you go?

Discover

1. Key words are those which, because of emphasis or repetition, stand out as being central to the message of the passage. What are some key words or phrases in this passage?

2. What reasons does Paul give for wanting to go to Rome? (vv. 11-15)

3. Compare verse 14 with 1 Corinthians 9:16-17. In what sense is Paul "obligated"? Do we have any obligations of this kind? Why or why not?

4. Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel (vv. 16-17)? Why might he feel a need to state this? (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

5. In what sense is the gospel powerful? (v. 16) How is that power demonstrated?

6. What else can we learn about the gospel from verses 9 and 16-17?

7. **Topical study - the gospel**

(a) What does 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 tell us about the content of the gospel message?

(b) Look up John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. What do these verses tell us about the gospel? How does this relate to Romans 1:16?

8. What is the significance of the fact that the righteousness revealed in the gospel is "of God" and is "by faith from first to last"? (v. 17; see 3:20-21 and Galatians 2:16).

9. In what sense is the gospel universal? (vv. 14, 16; see Revelation 5:9; 7:9)

In what sense is it limited? (v. 16; see Hebrews 4:2)

10. What characteristics of Paul stand out to you from this passage?

Apply

According to Paul's example, to whom should we go if we need encouragement? Is this what we usually do? Why?

How might this passage affect your attitude toward the pastor and other church leaders?

Do you ever see the Christian life or your service to God as just another obligation or duty? What tends to bring on this attitude? What helps to get rid of it?

Have you ever felt "ashamed of the gospel"?

Commentary

- vv. 8-15 In this section, Paul assures the Roman Christians that, although he has never met them, they are constantly in his prayers as he gives thanks for them and intercedes before God on their behalf. Not only that, he eagerly looks forward to visiting them so that he may minister to them in person (a desire which was never fulfilled).
- v. 8 **“I thank my God through Jesus Christ”**
The fact that all human access to God is mediated through Jesus Christ is one of the central themes of Romans; Paul has alluded to this once already, in 1:5. See also 1 Tim. 2:5 and Heb. 13:15.
- “because your faith is being reported”**
Paul is not commenting here on the quality of their faith; rather, he gives thanks simply that there are believers at Rome.
- v. 9 **“whom I serve in my spirit”** Paul emphasizes the depth of his commitment to serving God. His service is not for the sake of appearances or to gain men's approval; rather, it comes from the core of his being.
- “God . . . is my witness how constantly I remember you”** Paul seeks to assure his readers of the sincerity of his concern for them. Not only does he pray for them constantly and at all times, but he emphasizes the truth of this statement by calling on God Himself as a witness.
- v. 10 **“now at last by God's will”** Even though he strongly desires to see them, Paul recognizes that as a servant (1:1) his plans are subject to God's overruling. It is God's will, not his own, which must determine whether his desire is fulfilled. This is not merely an acceptance of "fate", but a trusting reliance on the One who controls the future. See James 4:15.
- v. 11 **“so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong”**
Paul here reveals his motives for desiring to visit the Roman Christians--that he might build them up in the faith. Paul wishes to strengthen them by imparting, or sharing his gifts with them--that is, by exercising his gifts of ministry among them. The Greek word *charisma*, or gift, is used in 12:6-8 and in 1 Corinthians 12 to describe special abilities granted to believers by the Holy Spirit for service. It is also used in Romans 5:15-16 and 6:23 to describe the gift of salvation.
- v. 12 **“that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith”**
Paul graciously and humbly clarifies his meaning. It is not as though the blessing would all be in one direction; rather, both Paul and the Romans would be encouraged by one another's faith as they ministered to one another. As Paul's example shows, even the most gifted leaders need to allow themselves to receive encouragement and ministry from others.
- v. 13 Paul emphasizes that the absence of a visit so far is not from indifference: he had actually made plans to see them, but was unable to carry them out. He desires to have a harvest among them. This phrase translated literally means "get some fruit". Paul refers to "fruit" in other places to describe the changes in the life of the believer brought about by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:10). Here he seems to be referring generally to the anticipated beneficial effects of his ministry among them, including salvation (vs. 16).

vv. 14-15 God gave Paul a special responsibility to the Gentiles (non-Jews); see Acts 9:15 and Gal. 2:7-9. He was obligated by the commission he had been given at the time of his conversion (Acts 9:1-19). His obligation was not only to the wise and cultured, but also to the foolish and uncultured. Paul seems to be diplomatically explaining why he has not come sooner to Rome, the capital city of the Roman empire.

v. 16 Paul states that he is not ashamed of the gospel; perhaps he was concerned that the Romans would interpret his lack of a visit as indicating he was ashamed of his message. Paul certainly knew that the simplicity of the gospel was looked down on by those who considered themselves wise; see 1 Cor. 1:18-25 and 2:14. Jesus also warned about this in Mark 8:38.

“it is the power of God” The Greek word translated "power" is *dunamis*, from which we get words like "dynamic" and "dynamite". The gospel of Jesus Christ is not merely advice to people about how to live better, it is power, the power of God.

“that brings salvation” The power of God which operates in the gospel is not random or purposeless; instead, it has a specific goal and result—salvation.

“to everyone who believes” The gospel is both universal and limited. It is universal in that the same good news is for every people-group, every "tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). It is limited in that it is only effective for those who believe (see Heb. 4:2).

v. 17 **“the righteousness of God . . . that is by faith”** The way to have a right standing before God is not through personal achievement, nor through good deeds, but through receiving in faith what God offers us. Righteousness is not something which comes from ourselves, but from God.

“is revealed” the gospel is not something that could have been discovered by man. Who would have ever thought that God, in order to bring man into fellowship with Himself, would send His own Son to suffer and die in our place? It could only have been known to us if God revealed it.

It is **by faith from first to last**; that is, by faith through and through. Righteousness does not come from intellectual agreement with the facts of Jesus' life, or from attempting to live according to the principles Jesus taught. It comes from recognizing our own inability to live up to God's standards, and trusting in God's offer to credit Christ's righteousness to our account.

“The righteous will live by faith” One way to read this is that "He who is righteous by faith shall live," and this seems to agree with the context. Paul is saying that the one who becomes righteous by faith will have eternal life.

Unit 3 – God’s Wrath Against Mankind

Romans 1:18-32

Text

¹⁸ First, The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Open

Do you enjoy getting back to nature, or is your idea of "roughing it" a hotel without room service?

Have you ever had an encounter with the natural world that was completely awe-inspiring?

Discover

1. What has God revealed to mankind about Himself? How has He done this? (v. 20; see Psalm 19:1-6)

2. How should people respond to God as a result of this "natural revelation"? (v. 21)

3. What is the result of their failure to respond as they ought? (v. 22)

4. What is God's response to the evil acts listed in this passage? (vv. 24, 26, 28) How is this an expression of wrath? (v. 18)

5. Why do people continue sinning if they know that "those who do such things deserve death"? (v. 32; see vv. 18, 21-22,28)

6. Who do you think Paul is writing about in this passage?

7. What is mankind's general attitude toward the truth about God? (vv. 18,25)

8. One response to vv. 26-31 would be to think that we are pretty good in comparison to others because we are guilty of only a few of these sins. What do the following passages have to say about that?

Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28

Romans 3:9-12

James 2:10-11

9. As an illustration of how total mankind's rebellion against God is, compare the description of human behavior found in this week's passage with the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-21). How well does man live up to God's standard?

Actual Behavior / Verse Reference	Commandment

Apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Do you think most people would agree with Paul's evaluation of the human condition?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> From this passage, how would you answer the argument that it is unfair for God to condemn people to Hell who have never heard the gospel?</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Which of the acts that Paul lists as symptoms of mankind's sin and depravity are considered acceptable, even as a source of pride, by people today?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Is the revelation of God in creation sufficient to bring about faith and salvation? Why or why not?</p> |
|---|---|

Commentary

In this section, Paul explains why it is that we need the salvation which he refers to in 1:16-17, why it is that we need a righteousness that comes from God rather than ourselves. For it is only as we recognize our sinfulness that we can truly accept and appreciate the forgiveness God offers us in Christ. It is only as we understand that God hates and punishes sin that we will see a need to be saved from his wrath.

v. 18 ***“The wrath of God is being revealed”***

One of the key ideas in Romans is that God does not simply ignore or overlook sin. There will be a future "day of God's wrath" when those who do not repent will be punished (2:5-8); those who know Christ will be saved from this wrath (5:9). But not only will God judge sin in the future, He is actively engaged in opposing sin now. His wrath is being revealed (present tense).

“of God . . . from heaven” Both of these phrases emphasize that God's wrath is personal. The consequences of sin in the life of the unbeliever are not merely the result of an impersonal process of cause and effect in a moral universe; they are the manifestations of God's anger against sin.

“who suppress the truth” men do not merely ignore the truth, they do everything they can to actively hinder it (although this opposition may be subtle or disguised rather than open).

vv. 19-20 ***“God has made it plain to them”***

Paul makes it clear that men do not sin out of ignorance. God has plainly revealed Himself to them, even to those who have never heard the gospel. The created universe speaks eloquently of God's power and divinity (see Psalm 19:1-4). Therefore, all who die apart from Christ will be condemned, not because they never heard the gospel, but because they failed to respond to God's revelation of Himself in nature. To the extent that they knew the difference between good and evil, they chose evil. They are without excuse.

v. 21-22 ***“although they knew God”***

Paul repeats that all men have a knowledge of God. Not only that, they are accountable to Him: they are responsible to worship and give thanks to Him. But instead they reject Him in favor of foolishness.

“their thinking became futile . . . Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools” Those who reject God often think themselves to be wise, sophisticated and enlightened. In contrast, they view Christians as naive, superstitious simpletons. But exactly the opposite is true (see 1 Cor. 1:20-27; 3:18-20, Psalm 111:10, and Isaiah 55:8-9).

“their foolish hearts were darkened”

The word "heart" is a comprehensive term for a person's whole inner life; the mind, emotions, and will. When a person rejects God, every aspect of his or her being is affected.

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- v. 23 One example of the foolishness and darkness of men's hearts apart from God is that they choose to worship things which are far inferior to Him. Instead of worshipping the God who is immortal and incorruptible, they choose to worship pictures and statues of things which die and decay (see Isaiah 44:9-20).
- v. 24 **"God gave them over"** This phrase is repeated in verses 26 and 28, and emphasizes the fact that God is personally involved in opposing sin. Because men reject Him, God allows them to wallow in their sin and to degrade themselves. In effect, their punishment is to be allowed to continue sinning, to be permitted to fully express the "sinful desires of their hearts". However, God's purpose in this is merciful; He desires that in experiencing the full consequences of their sin, they will see their error and repent (see 11:32).
- vv. 26-27 Paul further expands on the effects of rejecting God. The examples of sexual immorality which Paul describes as "shameful" and "unnatural" are lesbianism and homosexuality. In Paul's time these were not only accepted, but even regarded as superior forms of physical love.
- v. 28 **"just as they did not think it worthwhile"** Men do not lack knowledge of God because they lack opportunity; rather they deliberately choose not to know Him because they do not think it "worthwhile". They prefer other things to God. As a result, they lose the ability to discern between right and wrong; their minds and their consciences become defiled (see Titus 1:15-16).
- v. 32 **"although they know . . . that those who do such things deserve death"** Again, men do not sin out of ignorance. With full knowledge that what they are doing is wrong, and that the penalty of sin is death, they continue to choose sin.

Unit 4 – God’s Righteous Judgment

Romans 2:1-16

Text

¹ You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ² Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God “will repay each person according to what they have done.”^{a7} To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who

does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism.

¹² All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶ This will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

^a6 Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12

Open

When you were growing up, which parent was the disciplinarian? The "softy"? Which one do you most resemble now in your relationships with your own children?

Did you ever get punished by your parents for something one of your brothers or sisters did, or vice versa?

Discover

1. Why are those who pass judgment on others actually condemning themselves? What do they not understand about sin and judgment?

2. Why else should we avoid judging others?

Matthew 7:1-5

Romans 14:4; James 4:12

3. Paul states that eternal life will be given to those who seek it by "persistence in doing good" (v. 7). How can this be reconciled with his teaching later in Romans (3:20-24, 3:28; 6:23) that salvation is a free gift and comes through faith, not works? (see Matthew 7:15-23, Galatians 5:6; James 2:26).

3. **Topical Study: Judgment.** In this passage Paul refers to "the day" of God's judgment twice (vv. 5, 16), and uses the word "judgment" or "judge" nine times. The purpose of this topical study is to gain a deeper understanding of God's judgment by examining other passages which discuss it.

Who will be the judge? (Rom. 2:16; see John 5:22-27)

Who will be judged? (see 2 Cor. 5:9-10)

Rom. 2:6	Rom. 14:10-12
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What will be judged? (see the Notes on vv. 6-10)

Matthew 12:36	Romans 2:6-10 (see Matthew 16:27)
Matthew 25:31-46	1 Cor. 4:5
Romans 2:16	

What will be the outcome for believers? (see John 3:18; 1 Cor. 3:8; Eph. 6:8)

Matthew 25:46	Romans 8:1
Romans 2:7, 10	1 Corinthians 3:10-15

What will be the outcome for unbelievers?

Matthew 13:40-43	Romans 2:8-9
Matthew 25:41, 46	

4. Will those who have never heard of the Ten Commandments be condemned for breaking them? Why or why not? (vv. 14-16)

Apply

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| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Just as the Jew addressed in this passage relied on his ethnic identity to gain God's favor, people today rely on many things other than Christ to make them acceptable to God. What are some of those things?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> What effect has God's "kindness, forbearance, and patience" apparently had in the lives of the Jews whom Paul is addressing here?</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> What effect have these things had in your own life?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Did any of the passages listed under question 2 hit home—make you go "ouch"?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> How does it make you feel to know that God will judge men's "secrets" through Christ?</p> |
|--|--|

Commentary

Whereas Paul in the previous section was describing non-Jews, here he speaks directly to Jews. The Jews prided themselves on being morally superior to Gentiles, due mainly to the fact that they possessed God's Law. But Paul here tells them that merely possessing the Law is not enough; what God requires is obedience. And by that standard, all men, both Jew and Gentile, fall short.

- v. 1 This verse could be likened to a sudden cymbal crash after a long, slow musical passage. The Jew reading 1:18-32 would be silently agreeing with Paul, condemning the Gentiles for their many sins. And then...

"have no excuse" By using the same phrase to describe Jews which he used to describe people in general (vs. 1:20), Paul emphasizes that both Jews and Gentiles are guilty before God.

"you who pass judgment" By condemning others for failing to obey God's law, the Jew was admitting that those who disobey the law ought to be condemned. And this sealed his own doom, because the Jew did not obey the Law perfectly himself. He was guilty of the same things.

- v. 2 **"God's judgment . . . is based on truth"** God's judgment is not based on the face we present to the world, or on the opinion that others have of us. Although we may be able to deceive other people, we cannot deceive God. He knows our hearts and our hidden sins (see vs. 16; also Luke 12:2-3).

- v. 4 **"do you show contempt"** Those who judge others, while considering themselves exempt from judgment, demonstrate that they have contempt for God's patience. They do not realize that their own lives hang by a thread, and that the only thing which prevents God from utterly destroying them is that He is "patient...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9; see also Psalm 86:15).

Tragically, many people misinterpret God's patience as a reprieve. They think that God will never judge their sin and they scoff at warnings of judgment. *"They . . . say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'" (2 Pet. 3:4).* But the phrase "forbearance and patience" implies a *temporary* halt to hostilities. God has delayed his judgment, not cancelled it.

"repentance" This word means "turning" and implies a change of heart, a turning *away* from sin and *toward* God. It involves a recognition that our former way of life was wrong and an acceptance of God's authority over our lives. It is not the same as remorse, or sorrow for sin, which may precede repentance (see 2 Cor. 7:10).

- v. 5 **"storing up wrath against yourself"** All men are storing up something for future judgment; the godly are storing up treasures (Matt. 6:20), the ungodly are storing up wrath.

vv. 6-10 **“God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done’ ”**
Paul uses a quote from Psalm 62:12 to introduce his point that judgment and reward are based on actions rather than ethnic identity. The first of these—judgment—presents no problem. It is the clear teaching of the Scriptures that judgment is based on works; those who die apart from Christ will get what they justly deserve (see Matt. 12:47-48). But the second statement, that God will give eternal life, and “glory, honor, and peace” to those who do good, is more difficult. We know that Paul is not saying salvation comes by good works; he denies that in very clear terms (Rom. 3:20-24, 28; Gal. 2:16, 3:11).

What then does he mean? It seems most likely that Paul is speaking here of good works as bringing eternal life in the sense that those works are an expression of faith. The faith is what saves, and the works are the fruit of faith. This is consistent with other New Testament passages which speak of works as the natural expression of faith (Matt. 7:15-23; Gal. 5:6; James 2:26).

v. 11 **“God does not show favoritism”** Before God, all men are equal. No one will receive special treatment due to birth, social status, wealth, skill or achievement, or any other factor. The only thing which matters is whether we possess the righteousness which comes from faith in Christ (Rom. 1:17).

vv. 12-13 With regards to sin and judgment, it matters little whether one has God's revealed Law, as the Jews did, or not. When Gentiles sin, they will perish even though they do not have the special revelation contained in the Mosaic Law (the legal statutes contained in the first five books of our Old Testament). When Jews sin, they will be judged by that Law. It is not enough for the Jew to possess the Law; he must also obey it. And this he does not do (see 3:9-12, 19-20). The statement that “those who obey the law...will be declared righteous” is hypothetical, because no one obeys the law perfectly, as is required (James 2:10).

vv. 14-15 This passage answers the question raised by verse 12: How can a person who does not have God's revealed Law be held accountable for his actions? The answer is that all people, being created in the image of God, have an innate sense of right and wrong. They have a conscience which tells them what the “requirements of the law” are, and this conscience is constantly evaluating their actions, either accusing them or defending them. People may not know that God's law forbids stealing, but they know that stealing is wrong. Although they may attempt to convince themselves otherwise, they know deep down when their actions are wrong. Even their good actions serve to condemn them, because the fact that they do good things shows that they know the difference between right and wrong, so that when they do wrong, they have no excuse.

v. 16 **“This will take place”** This (the judgment referred to in verse 12) will take place on Judgment Day, and Jesus Christ will be the Judge. For Christians, this will be a time of rejoicing, because their judge is also their savior.

Unit 5 – The Jews and the Law

Romans 2:17-3:8

Text

¹⁷ Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; ¹⁸ if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; ¹⁹ if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."^a

²⁵ Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. ²⁶ So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? ²⁷ The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the ^b written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

²⁸ A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such

a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

¹ What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?

² Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

³ What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? ⁴ Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written:

"So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."^c

⁵ But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) ⁶ Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?

⁷ Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?"

⁸ Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result?" Their condemnation is just!

^a 2:24 Isaiah 52:5 (see Septuagint); Ezek. 36:20,22
^b 2:27 Or who, by means of a
^c 3:4 Romans 3:4 Psalm 51:4

Open

- What do you remember most about your religious training as you were growing up?

Discover

1. What attitudes and actions characterize the Jew described in this passage?

2. How had he missed the point of what the law was all about?

3. What does Paul mean by "circumcision of the heart"? (v. 29) (see Deut. 10:16, 30:6)

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4. **Topical Study: The Law.** The term *law* is an important one for Paul; he uses it 72 times in Romans alone. Usually it refers to the law of Moses; the law of the Old Testament. The purpose of this topical study is to gain a deeper understanding of Paul's view of the law in Romans.

What functions does the law fulfill? (for further study: Rom. 7:5, 9-10)

Romans 2:12	Romans 3:20, 7:7
Romans 3:19	Romans 5:20

What functions does the law not fulfill? (for further study: Rom. 8:3-4, 9:31-32)

Romans 3:20-21	Romans 3:28
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What is the believer's relationship to the law? (for further study: Rom. 3:31; 8:1-2)

Romans 6:14-15	Romans 8:3-4; 10:4
Romans 7:4, 6	Romans 13:8-10

5. In 3:1-8, Paul uses a series of rhetorical questions to raise and answer possible objections to the points he made in the previous section. In the space below, summarize each question and answer.

Question	Answer
vv. 1-2	
vv. 3-4	
vv. 5-6	
vv. 7-8	

6. What issues are at stake in this passage (3:1-8)?

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Apply

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What are some things which people today rely on to claim moral superiority over others? Why do they do this? | <input type="checkbox"/> What kinds of objections do people use today to resist the gospel? Are they the same or different than the ones Paul faced? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do you think Paul's opponents really misunderstood his message? If not, why did he spend so much time answering their objections? | |

Commentary

In this section, Paul continues to undermine the basis of the Jews' false security, in order that he may build a solid foundation of faith in Christ. The Jew took pride in two things as evidence of his special relationship with God: first, the law, which God gave to the Jews through Moses; and second, circumcision, which was the outward sign of the covenant God made with Abraham, the father of the Jewish people (Gen. 17:9-14). But Paul teaches here that even for the Jew these things have no significance in themselves. Knowledge of the law is meaningless if not combined with obedience, and outward circumcision is worthless if not combined with "circumcision of the heart", or faith.

In short, Paul's message is that true religion is a matter of the heart, and is expressed not merely by words, but by deeds. The problem for both Jews and Gentiles is that no one meets God's standards (see 3:9-12, 19-20, 23).

- v. 17 **"if you rely on the law"** The "if" here and in verses 18-19 does not express doubt on Paul's part. In the original Greek it is clear that Paul is assuming these statements to be true, i.e. "if you rely on the law (as indeed you do)..."
- "rely on the law"** The Jews relied on the fact that God had given them the law as evidence of His favor toward them. But Jesus made it clear that for those who do not trust in Him, the law would be their accuser on the day of judgment, not their defender (John 5:45).
- v. 18 **"if you know his will"** Again, Paul is agreeing that what the Jew claimed was true. He did know God's will; he was instructed by the law and as a result was able to make moral judgments. Thus, his disobedience to the law made him all the more guilty.
- vv. 19-20 **"if you are convinced"** The focus now shifts to the Jew's view of himself. He saw himself as superior to other ethnic groups--a "guide", a "light", an "instructor" and "teacher"--because he possessed the law. Non-Jews, by contrast, were "blind", "in the dark", "foolish", and "little children". There was truth in the Jew's position. The law was, in fact, a source of "knowledge and truth" (see Psalm 19:7-11; 119:97-105). But the Jew's error was in thinking that mere knowledge of the law qualified him for moral leadership.
- vv. 21-24 Having exposed the Jew's high opinion of himself, Paul attacks his hypocrisy, launching into a recital of ways in which the Jew's life did not measure up to the moral standards he professed. In spite of his high ideals, the Jew of that day did not practice what he preached. Instead, he violated the very law he was so proud of, causing others to curse God's name as a result!
- v. 21 **"do you steal"** As Paul's conclusion in verse 24 makes clear, these questions are really accusations. While the Jew preached against stealing, he himself was a thief (this could be referring to actual robbery, or to dishonesty in general).
- v. 22 **"do you rob temples?"** It is not precisely clear what Paul had in mind. It is possible that some Jews actually stole from pagan temples (see Acts 19:37). It is also possible that Paul is referring to Jews who made profits from business ventures such as the sale of small idols for use in such temples.
- vv. 23-24 **"do you dishonor God by breaking the law?"** The Jew saw no inconsistency between claiming to honor God on the one hand, and violating His law on the other, but Paul does.
- vv. 25-29 Paul now moves to the Jewish ritual of circumcision. Just as knowledge of the Law is empty without obedience, so also circumcision has no meaning unless it points to an inward spiritual reality. Unless faith is present, the ritual is meaningless.
- v. 25 **"circumcision has value if you observe the law"** For a Jew, circumcision has value as a sign that one belongs to the people with whom God made his covenant through Abraham. But it has value only if one lives as a faithful member of that community by keeping the law. Otherwise, one becomes, in effect, uncircumcised. The sign of circumcision becomes meaningless if the spiritual reality to which it points does not exist. (see 1 Cor. 7:19)
- v. 26 The opposite is also true. God will consider as circumcised those who by faith do what the law requires, regardless of whether they have ever received circumcision of the body. Not that one can be saved through works, or keep the law completely; Paul denies this in chapter 3. But obedience is an outward expression of the faith which comes from an inward "circumcision" (see 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; Col. 2:11).

vv. 27-29 Paul now makes his point explicit: that true circumcision happens not in the physical body, but in the heart, and is performed not by human hands, but the Spirit (see Deut. 30:6). Just as the physical circumcision of the Jew symbolized participation in the covenant God made with Abraham, so also the spiritual circumcision of one who trusts in Christ symbolizes participation in the New Covenant which comes through Him (Luke 22:30; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 9:15).

Paul now pauses to respond to some possible objections to his teaching in the previous section. These objections deal with three primary issues: the value of belonging to the Jewish race, the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promises, and the justice of God in punishing sinners.

v. 1 **“What advantage”** The first question arises naturally from chapter 2. Paul seems to be saying that there is no real difference between Jew and Gentile; that the most highly prized symbols of the Jew's special relationship with God are actually of little importance. It is as though Paul's (imaginary) opponent were asking, "Do you really mean this? Is there no value at all to being a Jew?" This question cut to the heart of the Jew's identity, because he saw himself as a member of a special race, chosen out of all the peoples of the earth to be the objects of God's love. And this was true! As Moses declared to Israel:

“ . . . The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments” (Deut. 7:6-9).

Therefore, for Paul to minimize the Jew's unique position seems to call into question God's reliability and trustworthiness.

v. 2 **“Much in every way”** Paul denies that the Jew has no advantage. True, the Jew did not have the advantage he thought he had-- exemption from judgment on the basis of ethnic identity alone. But he did have at least one great advantage, that God had chosen the Jews to be the recipients of his revelation through the prophets. The Jews had light which no other people had. But with greater light came greater responsibility, a responsibility which they had neglected. (see also Romans 9:4-5)

vv. 3-4 **“What if some were unfaithful?”** This question does not come from an objector, but is a continuation of Paul's response to the first question. God's trustworthiness is demonstrated by the fact that He will fulfill his promises to Israel, even though some individual Jews did not respond in faith to the "words of God" which they received (see Heb. 4:2). Paul discusses this more fully in Romans 11, especially verses 25-32.

vv. 5-6 Now the objector takes a different approach. "Granted," he seems to say, "your description of the moral failures of the Jews is accurate. But even so, doesn't this glorify God by making His righteousness more obvious?" In other words, at least I'm helping God out by serving as a bad example! So then, how can God justly punish me? This argument seems foolish, even humorous to us. Paul acknowledges that he, too, thinks it foolish by calling it a "human argument", but since he had been trained as a Pharisee, he knew how the minds of the Jewish rabbis worked. Doubtless he had heard this argument before in his dialogues with Jewish opponents. He refutes it by pointing out that if serving as a negative example made one immune to judgment, then God couldn't judge anyone! For both Paul and his opponents, this ended the matter, because both agreed that there would be a judgment.

v. 8 Whenever the gospel is clearly understood, i.e., whenever people grasp that salvation is by faith, then this objection is raised: "If God is glorified by forgiving sins, then why not sin up a storm and create more opportunity for God to forgive!" Paul answers this objection more fully in Romans 6:1-15; here, though, he is responding to those who slanderously attribute this teaching to him. "Their condemnation," he says, "is just". In other words, by their willful and malicious distortion of the gospel, they have demonstrated their rejection of it.

Unit 6 – No One Is Righteous

Romans 3:9-31

Text

⁹ What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. ¹⁰ As it is written:

- ¹¹ "There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.
- ¹² All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."^a
- ¹³ "Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."^b
"The poison of vipers is on their lips."^c
- ¹⁴ "Their mouths are full of cursing and
bitterness."^d
- ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways,
¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know."^e
- ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."^f

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in ^g Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all

are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, ^h through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰ since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹ Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

^a 3:12 Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20

^b 3:13 Psalm 5:9

^c 3:14 Psalm 140:3

^d 3:14 Psalm 10:7 (see Septuagint)

^e 3:17 Isaiah 59:7,8

^f 3:18 Psalm 36:1

^g 3:22 Or through the faithfulness of

^h 3:25 The Greek for sacrifice of atonement refers to the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant (see Lev. 16:15,16).

Open

- How would you describe your parents' disciplinary style when you were growing up? How has this affected the way you discipline your own children?

Discover

1. In this passage, Paul uses both inclusive terms like "all", "every", and "whole" and exclusive terms like "no one" and "none". Note how Paul uses these terms and summarize what they tell us about people.

Inclusive Terms ("all", etc.)

v. 9

v. 12

v. 19

Summary:

Exclusive Terms ("none", etc.)

v. 10

v. 11

v. 12

v. 20

2. Paul also emphasizes the complete sinfulness of man by referring to several different parts of the body that man uses to disobey God. In the space below, identify those body parts and write in your own words the description Paul gives them.

v. 13	v. 15
v. 14	v. 18

3. According to this passage, what does the law do? What is it unable to do?

4. What is it that causes "every mouth" to be "silenced"? (v. 19; see v. 27)

5. What does the latter part of this passage (vv. 21-31) tell us about righteousness and justification?

Where they come from	How they are obtained	Who receives them
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6. What does the phrase, "there is no difference," tell us about the gospel? (v. 22)

7. How does the death of Christ demonstrate God's justice? (vv. 25-26)

8. How does the principle of justification by faith "uphold the law"? (v. 31)

Apply

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How does Paul's view of mankind compare with that of most people? How do you explain the differences? | <input type="checkbox"/> What are some examples of the kind of boasting that is inconsistent with faith? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Why couldn't (or didn't) God simply declare people righteous without the need for Christ to be put to death? | <input type="checkbox"/> When did you first understand that your position before God was not based on your "works"? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Verse 25 tells us that in the time before Christ, God exercised forbearance by temporarily withholding punishment for sin. Is God doing the same thing today? What will be the eventual outcome? | <input type="checkbox"/> Do you ever find yourself trying to gain God's favor through performance, or "measuring up" to his standards? |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> What impact is God's grace having on your life right now? |

Commentary

This passage concludes the portion of the letter (1:18-3:20) in which Paul makes the point that all men, Jew and Gentile alike, are sinful and deserving of God's judgment. This point is essential to the message of Romans, because unless there is something to be saved from, there is no need of the gospel. Here Paul finishes off his argument by bringing together several Old Testament quotations which describe man's utter sinfulness.

- v. 9 **"What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage?"** The "we" here refers to Christians, as in 3:8. Having condemned Jewish law-breakers in 2:17-27, Paul now reminds believers that they are no better off. (This is similar to 2:1, where he turned from describing sinful Gentiles to describing sinful Jews.) Sin and guilt are not unique to Jews or Gentiles, but are universal.

"Jews and Gentiles alike" This phrase encompasses all mankind. All are "under sin;" under its power and control (see Rom. 6:15-17).

- vv. 10-12 **"As it is written"** In the following verses, Paul strings together quotations from several Old Testament passages, to emphasize that what he is saying is not some new doctrine, but is the consistent teaching of the Scriptures. This quote is from Psalm 14:1-3.

"There is no one righteous" Paul makes absolutely clear his main point: all men, without exception, are sinners. (See also Solomon's prayer in I Kings 8:46).

"All have turned away" Men do not merely ignore God, they actively avoid him (see Isaiah 53:6).

- vv. 13-14 **"Their throats are open graves"** In verses 13-18, Paul emphasizes the complete sinfulness of man by specifying different parts of the body, along with the sins which are characteristic of each one. Here, using quotes from Psalms 5:9, 140:3, and 10:7, Paul emphasizes the corrupt and deadly nature of men's speech. (See also James 3:6, 8.)

- vv. 15-17 This passage is a quote from Isaiah 59:7-8. Here Paul brings out the speed with which men rush to commit sins; also, its habitual nature—sin is not an occasional pastime, but a way of life.

- vv. 19-20 **"Now we know"** In response to the possible objection that this description applies only to Gentiles, Paul invites his readers to reason with him. He reminds them that the law was given, not to make men righteous, but to expose their sin and eliminate any excuse of ignorance. As a result, it is impossible to achieve a right standing with God by keeping the Law.

The next major section of Romans begins with 3:21-5:21. In the previous section, Paul demonstrated beyond any doubt that all men are sinners and deserving of God's judgment. Now he turns to the question of how our guilt can be erased and God's judgment avoided.

- v. 21 **"righteousness of God"** Paul is speaking here of a right legal standing before God, of being "declared righteous in God's sight" (3:20). This righteousness does not come from within ourselves, or from our right actions; rather, it comes from God.

"But now . . . has been made known" These phrases indicate that the gospel is something which was not previously understood, although it was alluded to in the Old Testament (see Luke 24:25-27; Gal. 3:23-25). The gospel is a "mystery", something which was part of God's plan from the beginning, but which only now has been fully revealed (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:3-9).

- v. 22 **"through faith in Jesus Christ"** Faith does not earn salvation; salvation has already been earned for us by Christ. It is merely the means through which salvation comes. Note that this faith is specific. It is not what many people mean when they say "have faith", a general confidence that everything will work out. It is faith in a specific person, Jesus Christ, and in his saving works on our behalf.

"There is no difference" This phrase is a "hinge", linking what comes before with what comes after. The righteousness which comes through faith in Christ is to all who believe. There is one way of salvation for all men, because there is one common problem: all have sinned. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, between those raised as Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, between "good" people and "bad" people. All have the same problem, and that problem has only one solution.

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- v. 23 **“fall short of the glory of God”** It is difficult to pin down the precise meaning of this phrase, but the general intent is clear enough. Because of sin, man falls short--of God's holiness, of the divine image he had when first created (Gen. 1:27; Psalm 8:5), of fellowship with God (Ex. 34:29, 33-35). In the Scriptures, "glory" describes the dignity and honor which come from fulfilling the purpose for which we are created, and that is what sin prevents.
- v. 24 **“and all are justified”** This justification is synonymous with being "declared righteous in God's sight" (3:20). It does not mean to be made virtuous, so that one no longer sins. Rather, it means to be acquitted of sin, so that one is no longer considered guilty. This comparison to a court of law is appropriate, because Paul has just stated that the law is what makes us conscious of sin and makes us accountable to God (3:19-20).
- “through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus”** Here Paul uses another comparison: prison and the slave market. The word "redemption" was used to describe the release of prisoners after payment of a ransom, and also to describe the freeing of slaves after payment of a price. The key idea here is that Jesus Christ purchased our freedom from sin by paying the price of his own life (1 Cor. 6:20; Rev. 5:9).
- v. 25 **“a sacrifice of atonement”** The Greek word translated "atonement" has the primary meaning of propitiation, or the turning away of wrath. God temporarily withheld punishment for the sins committed before Christ, but that punishment was only delayed, not eliminated. Through his death on the cross, Christ suffered God's wrath for sins past, present, and future, so that those who have faith in him would not experience it. Even now, God is demonstrating his patience, withholding punishment for sins so that people can have every opportunity to repent and be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).
- v. 26 **“he did it to demonstrate his righteousness”** This verse tells us why Christ had to die. In order to demonstrate his mercy, God desired to save sinners. But he could not simply overlook their sin and remain just; sin must be punished. So in order to do both, Christ died in our place to satisfy the demands of justice.
- v. 27 **“Where then, is boasting?”** Someone who was able to achieve righteousness by her own efforts could justifiably take pride in that accomplishment. But there is no place for self-righteous pride in Christianity. In order to have faith in Christ, we must realize that we cannot make ourselves acceptable to God (see Eph. 2:8-9).
- vv. 29-30 **“is God the God of Jews only?”** Here Paul uses one of the Jews' most cherished doctrines, the belief in one God, as an argument for the gospel. It goes like this: if there is only one God, then He must be the God of all people. And if there is only one God for all people, then any salvation which is limited to Jews must be false. Thus, the true way of salvation must be open to all people, and it is: faith in Christ!
- v. 31 **“Do we then, nullify the law”** Having faith does not mean that the Law is meaningless. Rather, faith upholds the law by giving the law its rightful place--not as something to keep to earn salvation, but as a standard to show us our sin and prepare us for Christ (Gal. 3:24).

Unit 7 – Abraham Justified By Faith

Romans 4:1-25

Text

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”^a

⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

⁸ Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”^b

⁹ Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. ¹² And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he

would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.”^c He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”^d ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”²³ The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

^a 4:3 Gen. 15:6; also in verse 2

^b 4:8 Psalm 32:1,2

^c 4:17 Gen. 17:5

^d 4:18 Gen. 15:5

Open

As a child, who were your “heroes,” people you looked up to and wanted to be like?

Who is one person you can always rely on to keep their promises?

Discover

1. This passage assumes that the reader is familiar with Abraham and the promises God made to him. In order to better understand what Paul is saying, look up these verses and record those promises.

Genesis 12:2-3

Genesis 15:4-5

Genesis 17:4-8

2. What arguments does Paul use to show that Abraham was justified by faith?

4:3-5

4:9-11

4:13-15

3. Why is it so important for Paul to demonstrate that Abraham was justified by faith?

4. Paul speaks of Abraham as a "father". Whose father did the Jews consider him to be? Whose father is he? (vv. 11-12, 16-17)

5. What does this tell us about the recipients of God's promises to Abraham? (vv. 13-16)

6. What made it difficult for Abraham to trust in God's promise? What truth about God helped him to persevere in faith?

Apply

Who was your spiritual "parent," the one who led you to Christ? What are you doing now to be someone else's spiritual parent?

When have you trusted God's promises and seen them fulfilled? What are you trusting Him for today?

What's the difference between "trusting" God for something and "asking" Him for something?

When is it hard for you to trust God?

What helps you to trust God in difficult circumstances?

Commentary

This chapter is a "case study" in justification by faith. Paul has emphasized that for both Jew and Gentile, there is only one way of salvation--by grace, through faith, not by works of the law. Further, he has stated that circumcision has value only as an outward sign of an inward faith. Paul now makes these doctrines concrete by applying them to one of the central characters in Judaism: Abraham, the father of the race. If Paul can show that even Abraham was justified by faith, then his point is proven.

v. 2 **"If . . . Abraham was justified by works"**

This was actually the view of many Jewish teachers of Paul's day. Abraham was regarded as someone who had kept the whole law perfectly, although the law was not given through Moses until hundreds of years later! (Gal. 3:17)

v. 3 **"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness"**. This

is a quote from Gen. 15:6. The Jewish teachers of Paul's day taught that Abraham's faith was a work by which he earned righteousness. But Paul rejects this. Abraham's righteousness was not earned or merited, but credited.

vv. 4-5 Paul uses an everyday illustration to show that earning righteousness is incompatible with having it "credited". Someone who receives a paycheck for their work doesn't regard those wages as a gift, but simply as what they have earned. So if what the Jews believed about Abraham were true, the Scriptures would say that Abraham "earned" righteousness. But instead, they say that it was **credited to him**.

On the other hand, for those who do not work, but trust God (as Abraham did), **"their faith is credited as righteousness."** Paul is not contrasting hard work with laziness, but faith with law-keeping. Those who attempt to achieve righteousness through their own efforts will fail, while those who trust God for righteousness will receive it (Rom. 9:30-32).

vv. 6-8 Paul quotes Psalm 32:1-2, written by King David, to further support his argument. David's sins are well documented (2 Sam. 11), so no one could claim that he had obeyed the law perfectly. In this Psalm David speaks of God's blessing coming not to the man who obeys the law, but to the man whose sins are forgiven, covered, and not counted against him.

vv. 9-12 The Jewish teachers of Paul's day regarded circumcision as a saving act that guaranteed escape from God's judgment. But Paul asks a simple question: was Abraham circumcised *before* or *after* he was declared righteous by God? The answer is that he was circumcised several years afterward (Gen. 15:6; 16:16; 17:1). In that case, reasons Paul, circumcision could not be the basis of Abraham's righteousness! It was not a saving work, but only a sign of the righteousness he already possessed through faith.

vv. 11-12 **"he is the father"** This is Paul's conclusion: Abraham is the spiritual "father" of all believers, both circumcised and uncircumcised. Jewishness was always a matter of faith rather than circumcision (Rom. 2:28-29), so Abraham is the father of believing Jews. But God declared him righteous *prior* to circumcision so that he might be the father of believing Gentiles as well.

vv. 13-15 Paul now turns to the covenant that God made with Abraham. He argues that God's promise that Abraham would be heir of the world (Gen. 18:18; 22:17-18) cannot depend on law-keeping for its fulfillment. This would be to ask the impossible, because the law brings condemnation and wrath; it has no power to produce obedience (Gal. 3:21-22). A promise which was contingent on such a condition would be worthless. Paul's basic point here is that law and promise are mutually exclusive (see Gal. 3:18).

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- vv. 16-17 The fact that God's promises to Abraham were received by faith and not works is no accident. God arranged things in this way so that His promises would be guaranteed, not only to Abraham's physical offspring (believing Jews), but to his spiritual offspring as well (believing Gentiles). Paul applies the statement that Abraham would be the **father of many nations** (Gen. 17:5) to all believers. Those who share Abraham's faith are his spiritual offspring, and will come from "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).
- v. 17 **"the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not"**
This could refer to God calling into existence the Jewish nation through Abraham and Sarah, who were "as good as dead" (v. 19). It could also refer to God's ability to raise up sons of Abraham from spiritually dead Gentiles. And it could refer to the resurrection of Jesus, by which believing Gentiles are made members of God's household and become recipients of the promises (Eph. 2:19; Gal. 3:22, 29).
- vv. 18-25 Paul discusses Abraham's hope that God would give him a son (Gen. 15:4-5). Just as Abraham's trust in God resulted in righteousness being credited to him, so also our faith in God will result in righteousness being credited to us. The content of that faith may be different--for Abraham it was faith in God's promise to give him a son, while for us it is faith in God's promise to give forgiveness and eternal life through Christ. But the object of that faith is always God.

Unit 8 – Peace and Joy Through Christ

Romans 5:1-11

Text

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we ^a have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we ^b boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we ^c also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person

someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

^a 5:1 Many manuscripts *let us*

^b 5:2 *Or let us*

^c 5:3 *Or let us*

Open

- What is your favorite way to spend a free Sunday afternoon?

Discover

1. What terms does Paul use to describe our condition prior to salvation?

v. 6

v. 8

v. 10

In your own words, summarize what these terms tell us about man's condition apart from Christ.

2. Paul uses the word "through" several times in this passage, highlighting the fact that Christ is the mediator between God and man. What benefits does this passage tell us we receive through Christ?

v. 1

v. 2

v. 9

v. 10

v. 11

3. What does it mean to be "reconciled" to God? (vv. 10-11; see Ephesians 2:14-16, Colossians 1:19-20)

4. What is the "hope of the glory of God" that Paul refers to in verse 2? What do these passages say?

Matthew 16:27

Romans 8:16-19, 23

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

Colossians 3:4

1 John 3:2

5. How is God's love for us so amazingly different than any human love? (vv. 6-8)

6. What does it mean that Christ died "at just the right time"? (vs. 6; see also Galatians 4:4, Hebrews 9:26)

7. What do God's past actions on our behalf tell us about our future? (vv. 9-10)

8. Why can believers rejoice in the midst of suffering? (vv. 3-5; see also James 1:2-4)

9. What kind of suffering do the Scriptures commend? (1 Peter 3:14-17, 4:12-16)

Apply

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How does the description in this passage of man's condition apart from Christ compare with what you thought before you began studying Romans? | <input type="checkbox"/> How could you apply what this passage tells us about God's relationship with us to your own relationships with other people? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Which verse in this passage is the most encouraging to you? | <input type="checkbox"/> Is your hope for the future really in the glory of God? Or something else? How does this affect your joy? |

Commentary

In this section, Paul moves from the *source* and *means* of justification to the *effects* of justification: peace and joy. In addition, Paul mentions that the death of Christ brings reconciliation with God and escape from His wrath.

v. 1 **“peace with God”** This is not the peace of God, the freedom from fear and anxiety that God gives to those who trust Him (Phil. 4:7). It is peace *with* God, the objective fact that we are no longer God's enemies (see v. 10; also Col. 1:21-22). Although the unbeliever may claim that his feelings toward God are neutral or even positive, the Scriptures tell us that he is in fact hostile toward God and His Law (Rom. 8:7).

v. 2 **“through whom we have gained access”** This verse reminds us that to reach God, we must go through Christ (Heb. 4:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:5). The perfect tense of the verb expresses the continuing effects of a past action. Because of Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 4:25), we now have continual access to God's grace.

“the hope of the glory of God” Not only do we look forward to seeing the glory of Christ which will be revealed when he returns (Luke 9:26), but we anticipate eagerly the glorious changes which will take place in us as well (Rom. 8:16-23; 1 Cor. 15:42-43; Eph. 3:20-21; Col. 3:4; 1 John 3:2).

vv. 3-5 **“we also glory in our sufferings”** The change in our standing before God is so dramatic that it produces great joy; not only as we anticipate the glorious things to come, but also as we experience present difficulties. This is because God can use those difficulties for good; to produce in us Christlike character and to strengthen our hope for the future. (The hope of a glorified body is much sweeter to a paraplegic than to someone who has never experienced physical suffering.)

“hope does not put us to shame” The hope Paul is speaking of is not mere wishful thinking; it is faith in God's promises. This kind of hope will always be rewarded (Rom. 8:24-25; Heb. 11:1).

v. 6 **“at just the right time”** This phrase emphasizes God's sovereign control in salvation. Jesus spoke of the fact that the time and manner of his death were under his own control (Matt. 26:18; John 10:17-18). But there is more to it than this. Christ's death was part of God's plan from the beginning, the event toward which all of history until that point had been moving. Thus, Christ came “when the set time had fully come” (Gal. 4:4), the “culmination of the ages” (Heb. 9:26). In the same way, the events of the past 2,000 years have been preparing for his return (1 Tim. 6:14-15).

“when we were still powerless” This was not a case of “God helps those who help themselves,” but rather of God helping those who were completely unable to help themselves.

“Christ died for the ungodly” Christ did not die for good people doing their best to find their way to God. He died for ungodly sinners (vs. 8) who were his enemies (vs. 10). There was nothing about the people for whom Christ died which made them worthy of salvation, nothing within them which drew God to them.

vv. 7-8 These two verses bring out the completely unexpected nature of Christ's death. The way in which God chose to save people--by sending His own Son to suffer and die in the place of guilty sinners--is not something that men would ever have come up with. It is possible, Paul says, that someone might die for a good man. But Christ's death was not like this. God's love is far greater. Christ died, not for good men, but for guilty sinners! And he did it, not after they had reformed, but while they were still sinning! It is absolutely incredible. No wonder that “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor. 1:18).

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- v. 9 Here Paul reasons from the greater to the lesser: if Christ has done the great work of dying to justify guilty sinners, he will certainly do the lesser work of saving us from God's coming wrath (1 Thess. 1:10).
- v. 10 **"while we were God's enemies"** Whether men realize it or not, if they have not been reconciled to God through Christ, they are His enemies and His wrath rests upon them (Eph. 2:3).

"we were reconciled" Reconciliation refers to the elimination of the barrier of sin between God and men; the restoration of a relationship; the ceasing of hostilities (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 1:19-20). Paul speaks of this as a past event, one which took place at the cross.

"we shall be saved" The logic Paul uses here is similar to Rom. 4:25; both Christ's death and his resurrection have significance for believers. It was through Christ's death that our sins were forgiven and we were reconciled to God. But it is through his resurrection life that we obtain positive righteousness and it is that life which will save us from God's coming judgment. In a way, the distinction is artificial, because both Christ's death and resurrection were part of God's plan of salvation. But it is important to realize that what Christ did affects believers not only in the past and present, but also in the future and throughout eternity.

Unit 9 – Death Through Adam, Life Through Christ

Romans 5:12-21

Text

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

¹³ To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many

trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

²⁰ The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Open

- How far back can you trace your family tree? Any famous (or infamous) "branches"?

Discover

1. This passage consist mainly of a series of comparisons between Adam's sin and Christ's obedience. In the space below, identify these comparisons.

Adams's Sin	Christ's Obedience
v. 15	
v. 16	
v. 17	
v. 18	
v. 19	

2. What is the "one trespass" referred to in verse 18? (see Genesis 3:1-19)

What is the "one righteous act" referred to in verse 18? (see Romans 4:25 and Philippians 2:8)

3. Paul uses the term "one man" nine times in this passage—six times to describe Adam and three times to describe Christ. Locate all the occurrences of this term in the text and circle them. What do you think Paul is emphasizing through the repeated use of this term?

4. Who are the "many" who are made sinners by Adam's disobedience? (v. 19; see v. 12)

Who are the "many" who are made righteous by Christ's obedience? (v. 19; see v. 17)

5. If death is the result of sin, and if sin is not taken into account when there is no law, then why did people die before the law was given to Moses? (vv. 12-14)

6. What does Paul mean by the phrase "all sinned," when he states that "death came to all people, because all sinned" (v. 12; see vv. 15 and 19)

7. What phrases does Paul use to indicate that Christ's act of obedience is more than adequate to overcome the effects of Adam's sin?

v. 15

v. 17

v. 20

Apply

How do you feel about Adam's sin being credited to you? How about Christ's righteousness being credited to you?

Can you think of any everyday examples in which one person is held legally responsible for the actions of another, or suffers the consequences of actions taken by someone representing them?

Why do you think Paul spends so much time contrasting Adam and Christ?

Commentary

The basic point of this passage is that Adam and Christ are the heads of two races of people: Adam of a race of condemned sinners, and Christ of those who have received "grace and . . . righteousness". Paul develops his point through a series of comparisons between Adam and Christ. These comparisons demonstrate the consequences their actions have had for the two races--death and condemnation for one, and life and justification for the other.

- v. 12 **"sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin"** Paul's use of the phrase "one man" throughout this passage, to describe both Adam and Christ, emphasizes the individual responsibility each one possessed as the head of a race of people. Adam exercised his responsibility by bringing sin and death into the world.

"death came to all people, because all sinned" This phrase has been understood in two main ways. One interpretation is that all men die as a result of their own sins; we all imitate Adam by sinning, and as a result we die. The problem with this view is that the context clearly speaks of the consequences we suffer because of Adam's sin, not ours: "many died by the trespass of the one man" (vs. 15); judgment and condemnation are "the result of one man's sin" (vs. 16); death reigned as a result of "the trespass of the one man" (vs. 17); condemnation "for all people" was "the result of one trespass" (vs. 18); and "through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners" (vs. 19).

The second problem with this view is that it doesn't fit the comparison which Paul is making between Adam and Christ. We aren't saved because we imitate Christ's obedience and do good works; we are saved because his righteousness is credited to us. In the same way, we are condemned because Adam's sin is credited to us (vs. 18). This is not to say that we don't deserve God's wrath for our own sins as well. But that is not what Paul is talking about here. He is talking about the fact that when Adam, our head, sinned, we all sinned. God credits Adam's sin to the whole human race, just as he credits Christ's righteousness to the whole race of believers.

We Americans live in a democracy and are used to having some say in decisions which affect our lives. So the idea that Adam's sin brought condemnation to all of his descendants, before they were even born, seems strange to us. But we should not reject a doctrine on the basis of what seems right to us at first. In fact, there are many examples from everyday life in which one person is held responsible for the actions of another; for example, a wife who is legally responsible for debts incurred by her husband. There are also many examples of people who suffer the consequences of decisions made by others acting in their behalf. For example, all U.S. citizens experienced the consequences of actions taken by the President and Congress, even though they have no direct say in which bills are passed into law.

- vv. 13-14 Here Paul supports what he has just said by appealing to the fact of universal death. From Adam until Moses, every person eventually died, even though some of them lived several hundred years. But none of them sinned as Adam had, by breaking a command. And God doesn't consider us guilty of sin when there is no law (see 4:15). If death is the result of sin (6:23; Gen. 2:17), what explains the deaths of all these people? The answer is that they died because the guilt of Adam's sin was credited to them.

"Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come" Adam was a "pattern" of Christ in the sense that he was the head of a race of people and his actions had consequences for all the members of that race (see 1 Cor. 15:45).

- vv. 15-17 Paul contrasts the results of Adam's sin with the results of Christ's obedience. First, the work of Christ is far greater than the work of Adam. Not only did Christ reverse the effects of Adam's sin, but he brought abundant life; his grace "overflowed". Where sin increased, grace increased "all the more" (v. 20). Second, Adam's sin brought condemnation, while Christ's gift of grace brought justification.

“death reigned” This phrase, repeated in verse 14, highlights the complete power which sin and death had over mankind as a result of Adam's sin. All people were "slaves to sin" (6:16-17), completely unable to escape either sin or death. But Christ brought about a complete reversal: those who have received the gift of righteousness will reign in life by grace through Christ (see vs. 21).

“gift of righteousness” The fact that righteousness is a "gift", and that it is "received", points to the fact that Paul is not talking about ethical righteousness, or good behavior. He is referring instead to judicial righteousness, the right standing before God which has been credited to us because of Christ's work on our behalf.

vv. 18-19 **“the many”** This phrase is used twice; first to refer to the whole human race, and second to refer to all those who have received God's grace. Both usages refer to an entire race of people; the "many" who through Adam were made sinners, and the "many" who through Christ will be made righteous.

Unit 10 – Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ

Romans 6:1-14

Text

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with^a that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that

since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

^a 6:6 Or be rendered powerless

Open

- What was your first job and what did you earn?

Discover

1. What does Paul's imaginary questioner understand correctly about sin and grace? (v. 1; see 5:20-21)

2. What wrong conclusion does this person draw?

3. What does water baptism symbolize in this passage? (vv. 3-4; see Colossians 2:12)

4. What does this passage tell us about our union, or identification, with Christ? Note the verse references along with your observations. (To get started, circle every occurrence in the passage of the word "with".)

5. What bearing does our union with Christ have on the question Paul is addressing in verse 1?

6. What is our relationship to sin prior to salvation? (v. 6; see Romans 6:16-20)

7. What is our relationship to sin after salvation? (vv. 6-7 and 11-14)

8. What aspect of our union with Christ brought about this change? How? (vv. 6-7)

9. What does Christ's resurrection tell us about our future? Why? (vv. 8-10)

10. To summarize Paul's argument, why must we not go on sinning after salvation?

11. What are the key things we are to do in resisting sin?

v. 11

v. 12

v. 13

Apply

Do you think most Christians take sin seriously? Do you?

What have you found helpful in resisting sin?

What mistakes do we make in attempting to resist sin?

How has this passage affected your view of sin?

Commentary

In this passage, Paul anticipates the likely reaction of his readers to the preceding two verses, 5:20-21. If it is true that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more," then why not go on sinning and let grace increase? In other words, if God's grace is sufficient to cover any and all sins, then let's sin and give God an opportunity to display his grace! Paul responds that a continuing lifestyle of unrestrained sin is inconsistent with our identity as believers. The person we used to be, a person in slavery to sin, has died. We now have a new life, one which comes from Christ and frees us from sin's control. Therefore, our lives should reflect this new reality.

- v. 1 **"Shall we go on sinning . . . ?"** The question Paul poses is whether, after our conversion to Christ, we can continue to live the same way we always have. After all, wouldn't this cause grace to increase, and thus glorify God? Note that Paul never denies the basic assumption behind this question, that more sin results in more grace. What he does say, however, is that this is not an acceptable way for Christians to glorify God.
- v. 2 **"we . . . died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"** The reason that we can no longer continue in a lifestyle of sin is that we have *died*. The person who previously was under the control of sin *has died*. Paul's reference to our conversion experience as death emphasizes the complete change that took place (see Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3). It is inconsistent with our identity as Christians to live as if that change had never taken place.
- vv. 3-4 **"all of us . . . were baptized into his death"** Here Paul refers to the beginning of the Christian life, to our initial faith and baptism. He wants us to understand exactly what happened when we trusted Christ, so that we will understand what the results of that event ought to be. First, we *died*. Being submerged under the waters of baptism symbolizes our identification with Jesus Christ in his death and burial (Col. 2:12). We were baptized "into Christ" and became spiritually united with Him (see Phlp. 2:1). Thus, when he died, we died with him.

Second, we were *reborn*. Our emergence from the waters of baptism symbolizes our identification with Jesus Christ in his resurrection. The new life which Jesus received from God now belongs to us as well. Therefore, we should live according to the principles of this new life, rather than those of the old. Note that what saves us is not the physical act of water baptism, but what baptism represents--our identification with Christ through faith (1 Pet. 3:21).

- v. 5 **"we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his"** The believer's new life in Christ has both a present and a future aspect; it is both "already" and "not yet". Spiritually, we are now united with Christ and share his life. But our physical resurrection lies in the future. If through faith we have become united with Him in his death, then we will certainly live with him through resurrection (2 Tim. 2:11).
- vv. 6-7 **"our old self was crucified with him"** The "old self" is Paul's way of referring to the person each of us was before our conversion, a person under the control of sinful impulses. That person has died with Christ. The result is that the "body ruled by sin," i.e., the physical body viewed as sin's instrument, has been made powerless. Sin no longer has the power to use our physical bodies to do evil. As a result, we have been freed from slavery to sin. In the same way that a dead slave is free from his master's authority, so we, having died in Christ, are free from sin's authority over our lives.
- vv. 8-9 **"death no longer has mastery over him"** Death's ultimate victory was in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But that victory quickly became death's ultimate defeat, when through the resurrection of Christ its power was broken forever (1 Cor. 15:55; 2 Tim. 1:10). Those of us who share in Christ's death through faith also share in his victory over death.

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- v. 11 ***“count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God”*** Just as Christ, having died, was released from the power of sin and death, so we too should consider ourselves as “dead” with respect to sin. In other words, we should act in harmony with what we truly are. We should recognize that the power sin formerly had over us was broken by Christ, and we should live in accordance with that understanding
- vv. 12 -13 ***“do not let sin reign . . . Do not offer any part of yourself to sin”*** As a result of the victory Christ has won over sin and death, we now have a choice. We can continue to allow sin to control us, even though it no longer has any legitimate authority over us. Or we can choose to offer ourselves and our bodies to God for His use as an “instrument of righteousness”. To continue to serve sin would be like a slave, having been freed from a wicked master after the Civil War, voluntarily continuing to obey that master.
- v. 14 ***“sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace”*** In Paul's mind, law and grace are incompatible. One brings slavery and death, the other brings freedom.

Unit 11 – Slaves to Righteousness

Romans 6:15-23

Text

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

¹⁹ I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as

you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in ^a Christ Jesus our Lord.

^a 6:23 Or through

Open

- If you could have any job, what would it be?

Discover

1. What question is Paul answering in this passage? (v. 15; see 6:14)

2. In this passage, Paul contrasts the former condition of his readers with their present condition. In the space below, list these contrasts (include verse references):

before salvation	after salvation

3. In your own words, summarize the argument Paul uses to answer the question in verse 1.

4. What two kinds of slavery does Paul describe? (note the various terms he uses for each kind)

What freedom do these two kinds of slavery offer?

What is the result of each kind of slavery?

5. In what sense is our slavery a matter of choice? Explain.

6. What does it mean when Paul calls death the "wages" of sin? (v. 23)

7. The master/slave relationships is used several times in the New Testament to describe the relationship between God and His people. Review the references listed below and note what they can tell us about the Christian life.

Luke 12:35-40

Luke 16:13

Luke 17:7-10 (see also 1 Corinthians 9:16-17)

Luke 19:11-26

John 15:18-20

Romans 14:1-4

Ephesians 6:5-6

Apply

How is our relationship with Christ like that of a slave to his or her master? How is it different?

From the last two lessons, how important would you say obedience is for believers? Why?

What examples can you think of in which exercising the "freedom" to sin actually results in slavery? Or when "slavery" to Christ results in freedom?

Commentary

Paul continues his argument that grace does not mean Christians may go on sinning with abandon. In 6:1-14, he showed that sin is inconsistent with our new *identity*, because we have become united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Now he shows that sin is inconsistent with our new *status*, because we have been freed from slavery to sin and have become slaves to God.

- v. 15 **“Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!”** This question is a bit different from the one in 6:1. There, the question was whether we should sin in order to cause grace to increase. In other words, “Let’s sin so that God will have an opportunity to demonstrate his abundant grace!” But here, the question is whether sin really matters. In other words, “If we are no longer under the law, why should we be concerned about sin at all? Let’s go on living the way we always have and not worry about it!” But Paul rejects this in the strongest possible terms.
- v. 16 **“when you offer yourselves”** It was possible in Paul’s day for someone to voluntarily become a slave in order to pay off a debt, or just to make a living. By choosing to follow Christ, we chose to serve and obey him as our master; we voluntarily became slaves (see 1 Cor. 7:21-22). The master/slave relationship is often used to illustrate the relationship between Christ and his followers: see Matt. 10:24-25, 18:21-25, 24:45-51, 25:14-30; Luke 16:1-13; John 13:16.

“you are slaves to the one you obey, whether . . . sin . . . or obedience”

A slave is obligated to serve his or her master completely. Therefore, a life of compromise between sin and obedience is not an option; no one can faithfully serve two masters (Luke 16:13). However, independence is not an option either, because believers are slaves of Christ and those who do not know Christ are in bondage to sin. Therefore, our only choice is which master we will serve.

- vv. 17-18 Paul now personalizes these ideas by applying them to the Roman Christians. They had formerly been slaves to sin, but were set free from it and became slaves of righteousness instead. The past tense of “obeyed” indicates that Paul is referring to their initial obedience of faith and repentance in responding to the gospel. It was this which brought about a change of masters for them.
- v. 19 **“because of your human limitations”** Paul is using an illustration because their ability (and ours) to grasp spiritual truth is hindered by the weakness which is part of our present human existence; we “only a reflection as in a mirror” (1 Cor. 13:12).
- “just as”** Where before they had offered the members of their bodies to sin, they are now to offer them to righteousness (see 6:13). Their devotion to obedience should be as complete as was their former devotion to sin.
- v. 20 **“When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.”** Before coming to Christ, we felt no obligation to do what was right. We did the right thing when it suited us, otherwise, we did whatever we wanted. We felt “free”, but in reality this freedom was slavery to sin.

v. 21 **“What benefit did you reap”** Paul asks them to reflect on the results of their former way of life. Was there any real benefit from their sin? The answer, of course, is no. The only result is shame. Note that the shame Paul speaks of is now, not then; it is the grace of God which they received in Christ that allows them to see their sin for the shameful thing it really is.

vv. 22-23 Throughout the passage, Paul has been contrasting the results of sin and obedience. Sin leads to death (vv. 16, 21, 23) and obedience leads to righteousness, holiness and eternal life (vv. 16, 19, 22, 23). But there is a critical difference between the results of sin and obedience. Death is the wage of sin; it is what we earn by our sin. In other words, there is a cause and effect relationship between sin and death. But eternal life is not what we earn, it is what we receive by grace as a gift of God.

It is helpful to understand that Paul is not here laying out a detailed doctrine of salvation, but contrasting two kinds of lives: one lived in slavery to sin and one lived in slavery to God. The end result of the first is death and the end result of the second is righteousness, holiness, and eternal life. The result of the first is earned as a wage, and the results of the second are given as a gift.

Unit 12 – An Illustration From Marriage

Romans 7:1-6

Text

¹ Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? ² For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. ³ So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

⁴ So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you

might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ⁵ For when we were in the realm of the flesh, ^a the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

^a 7:5 In contexts like this, the Greek word for *flesh* (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit.

Open

- What is the most memorable wedding you ever attended (other than your own)?

Discover

1. As believers, what is our new status with regard to the Old Testament law? What caused this change in status?

2. Paul uses an illustration from the law of marriage to illustrate the change in our relationship to the law. In what ways are we like the wife in this illustration?

3. How have we "died"? (see Romans 6:3-8)

4. How did our death bring about a change of "husbands"?

5. How did this change affect the way in which we serve God? (v. 6)

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6. In your own words, how is serving God "in the new way of the Spirit" (under grace) different than serving God "in the old way of the written code" (under law)? (v. 6, see Romans 8:14, 2 Corinthians 3:17)

7. How does Paul characterize our condition prior to salvation? What was the result? (v. 5)

8. What effect does the law have on unbelievers? Can it make them righteous? (v. 5; see Romans 3:20, 5:20)

9. **Summary.** In the last three lessons, Paul has used different pictures to explain what it means for a believer to be "under grace" rather than "under law". What point is he making with each of these pictures?

6:1-14; death

6:15-23; slavery

7:1-6; marriage

Apply

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What words or images does the word "freedom" bring to mind? Is this what you associate with Christianity? | <input type="checkbox"/> Do you feel that you are "married" to Christ, or to a set of rules and regulations? Why? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How is the world's idea of freedom different than God's? | <input type="checkbox"/> Does your "ex-husband" continue to cause you problems? Why? |

Commentary

In 6:14 Paul states the principle that believers "are not under law, but under grace". In 6:15-23, he denies that this means we can continue sinning without restraint. Now, having dealt with a false view, Paul gives the true purpose. God released us from the law, not so that we would be free to sin, but so that we would be free to serve Him.

v. 1 **"the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives"** Paul is apparently using the term "man" here in the generic sense of "person", since he applies this principle to a woman in the next verse. His point is that the Old Testament law applies only to the living. This seems obvious; it wouldn't do much good to write laws regulating the conduct of dead people! But the real force of this principle comes when we understand that those who have trusted in Christ have become united with Him in his death (6:3-8; 7:4), and are therefore free from the authority of the law.

vv. 2-3 Paul uses an example from the law of marriage to illustrate his point. As long as a woman's husband is alive, she is "bound" to him: she is obligated to remain sexually faithful to him and to submit to his authority (the Greek word for "married" woman literally means one who is "under" or "subject to" a man). If, while her husband is still alive, she violates this by marrying another man, she is called an adulteress. However, if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she chooses without violating any law.

At least three parallels between the marriage relationship and our relationship to the law can be seen in this passage. First, just as a wife is under the authority of her husband, so also we were under the authority of the Law. Second, just as death releases a wife from her husband's authority, our death to the law through Christ has freed us from the law's

authority. Finally, just as the husband's death freed the wife to marry another, our death to the Law has freed us to become united to Christ. The parallels are not perfect, since the husband's death frees the wife, while it is our own death in Christ which frees us. But the point is clear. Death frees one from the law's authority, and we have died in Christ; therefore, we are free from the law's authority.

v. 4 Paul now applies this principle to the Roman Christians (**"you . . . died, that you might belong to another"**), emphasizing the fact that these are not just interesting theological truths, but practical truths with relevance to real people.

"you also died to the law through the body of Christ", that is, Christ suffered real bodily death on the cross, and when we become united with him through faith, we share in his death also. It is that death, Christ's death on the cross, which has released us from the law.

"that you might belong to another" Christ did not die to make us independent of all authority. He died to release us from the law, so that we might belong to Him and bear fruit for him. That fruit is our obedient service to God, in contrast with the "fruit for death" which was the result of our "sinful passions" (7:5; see Gal. 5:22-23).

"him who was raised from the dead" Paul's use of this term to describe Christ emphasizes that death is not the end. Not only did Christ die to free us from the law, he also rose again to give us new life (6:4).

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- v. 5 Paul clarifies why it was necessary for us to die in order to bear fruit for Christ. When we were under the law's authority, the law actually aroused sinful passions within us which worked through our bodies, so that our lives were characterized by death rather than life (see 3:9-18). We were controlled by the sinful nature (literally, "in the flesh"). Note that the law did nothing to restrain sin in us, rather, it stimulated it!
- v. 6 **“so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code”** The result of our freedom is not independence, but a new kind of service. Our service to God is now both guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, rather than being guided merely by a list of regulations which have no power to bring about obedience (see also 2 Cor. 3:6-7.)

Unit 13 – Struggling With Sin

Romans 7:7-25

Text

⁷ *What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."^a ⁸ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. ⁹ Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰ I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹ For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. ¹² So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.*

¹³ *Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.*

¹⁴ *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I*

do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. ^b For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ *So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature ^c a slave to the law of sin.

^a 7:7 Exodus 20:17; Deut. 5:21

^b 7:18 Or my flesh

^c 7:25 Or in the flesh

Open

- When you were growing up, did you ever do the opposite of what your parents wanted just to assert your independence? Do your own children do this? How?

Discover

1. In this passage, Paul answers two questions about the law. Write these questions in the space below and summarize Paul's answers.

First question (v. 7):

Answer:

Second question (v. 13):

Answer:

2. What is the main thing Paul is trying to do here?

3. How does Paul describe the law?

v. 10	v. 12
v. 13	v. 14

4. In contrast, how does he describe the effects of sin working through the law?

v. 7	v. 10
v. 8	v. 11
v. 9	v. 13

5. How does Paul describe his own condition in verses 14-25? How does this compare to his descriptions elsewhere of the believer's condition in Christ?

Paul's condition	The believer's condition in Christ
7:14	6:14
7:19	7:6
7:23	8:2
7:25	8:9

6. Do you think verses 14-25 describe Paul's experience before he became a believer, or after he came to faith? Why?

Apply

What is the significance for our lives of verses 14-25 if Paul is describing his experiences as a believer? If he is describing his experiences as an unbeliever?

Was there ever a time in your life prior to trusting Christ when you tried to "turn over a new leaf," to change your life for the better? How did it turn out?

Commentary

- v. 7 ***"I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law"*** The law takes the general pangs of conscience which all men have (2:14-15) and exposes their root cause: rebellion against a holy God and His requirements. It points an accusing finger at specific acts of disobedience and names them as "sin", rather than "mistakes" or "character flaws".
- "I would not have known what coveting really was"*** It is instructive that Paul chooses the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17) as his example. All the other commandments, such as those prohibiting murder, adultery, and theft, could be interpreted in merely an outward sense. Thus, a pious Jew might view the Law as something which could be kept fully (see Matt. 19:16-22). But the commandment against coveting demonstrates that the law has to do with the heart, and not merely the outward actions (see Matt. 5:21-30). It was this commandment which brought home to Paul his own sinfulness.
- v. 8 ***"sin . . . produced in me every kind of coveting"*** Paul speaks of sin as an active force which uses the law to produce acts of disobedience. Thus the law fulfills one of its primary purposes (Rom. 5:20).
- "apart from law, sin was dead"*** Every parent has experienced this. Nothing is more certain to cause a child to do something than to forbid it! Without law, sin is "dead", i.e. dormant. It can only produce disobedience when there is a prohibition to rebel against.
- v. 9 ***"Once I was alive apart from law"*** Paul is speaking here of a time in his life when, although instructed in the law, he had not come to realize its full force. He saw the law merely as a set of outward rules to be obeyed. But when he came up against the commandment against coveting, he realized the depth of his own sin. When he fully grasped the law's demand, he began to covet all over the place! (v. 8). Sin "sprang to life", and he saw himself as he truly was, a sinner condemned to death. His self-delusion that he was alive ended, along with his hope of pleasing God through law-keeping.
- v. 11 ***"sin . . . deceived me"*** There is always an element of deceit in sin. It disguises itself so that we don't recognize it; it makes itself appear attractive; it makes us think there will be no negative consequences.
- v. 12 ***"the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good"*** Before proceeding to the next question, Paul summarizes his answer to this one (v. 7). The law is not sin, rather, it is used by sin to produce disobedience and death.
- v. 13 ***"Did that which is good, then, become death to me?"*** Paul now moves on to a second question: Even if the law itself is not sin, doesn't it cause death? The assumption is that something which causes death must be evil, not good. But Paul emphatically denies that the law causes death; rather, it is sin, working through the law, which kills. Verses 14-25 give an illustration of this from Paul's own experience: People agree that the law is good, but when they attempt to follow it, they find they cannot; instead they do the opposite, because they are slaves to sin.
- "in order that sin might be recognized"*** Sin revealed its true colors by producing death, not through something bad, but through something good! Only something utterly evil could twist something good and make it produce death.
- vv. 14-25 This passage has been the source of much controversy concerning whether Paul is speaking of his experience before or after he met Christ. Most agree that verses 8-13 point to Paul's pre-conversion experience. But what about verses 14-25? The majority of commentators conclude that Paul is speaking of his ongoing experience as a believer. They argue that: (1) the change in verb tense from past (vv. 8-13) to present (vv. 14-25) indicate that Paul is shifting from describing his past to his present, (2) only a believer would desire to do what is good and delight in the Law, (3) only a believer would see himself as a "wretched" sinner in need of deliverance, and (4) this passage agrees with our own experience of the Christian life and with Paul's description of the Christian's struggle with sin in Galatians 5:17.
- Those who believe that Paul is speaking of his pre-conversion experience reply that: (1) present tense verbs can be used to convey a sense of immediacy or "being there" when recounting a past event, and thus the change to present tense does not necessarily indicate a change in time reference, (2) Paul speaks of unbelieving Jews as holding the Law in high regard (Rom. 2:17-20), thus the ability to "delight in God's law" is not limited to believers, (3) the unregenerate person has a conscience which accuses him or her (Rom. 2:15), and is therefore able to see himself as "wretched", and (4) because of this conscience, both unbelievers and believers can struggle with sin. However, while the believer's struggle in Gal. 5:17 is between the flesh and the Spirit, the struggle in this passage is between the flesh and the mind (7:23, 25). The Holy Spirit is never mentioned.

In addition, while verses 14-25 speak of Paul's unsuccessful struggle to keep the law, believers have been released from obligation to the law (7:1, 6). Finally, Paul speaks in this passage of still being in slavery to sin and the law (7:14, 23, 25), which is the opposite of the true state of the believer, who has been freed from slavery to sin (6:6, 14, 17-18; 8:2) and released from the law (7:6).

The author of this study guide finds the "pre-conversion" arguments more persuasive. Does this mean that believers do not struggle with sin? Of course not. But it does mean that the believer's struggle is not one of hopeless slavery to sin. We have been freed from the control of sin in order that we may serve God under the control of the Spirit (7:6; 8:9). While sin still acts in and through us, its absolute power over us has been broken by Christ.

It is important to understand that in this passage Paul is not primarily concerned with explaining how to live the Christian life; rather, he is concerned with defending the holiness of the law. Paul demonstrates that it is not the law, but sin acting through the law, which is evil. As he illustrates this through his own experience, he also demonstrates that obtaining righteousness through law-keeping is a hopeless task, because the law does not provide the power to resist sin.

- v. 14 **"the law is spiritual"** The law is divine in its origin and character. Unlike sinful man, it is morally perfect and flawless.
- "I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin"**
The word translated unspiritual is literally "fleshly", i.e. made of flesh. It emphasizes the fact that the physical body is the instrument through which sin works (v. 23).
- v. 15 **"what I want to do, I do not do"** Only the person who has truly tried to resist sin understands its full strength. The problem with the law is that it shows what is right, but provides no power to do it.
- v. 16 **"I agree that the law is good"** The fact that Paul does not want to do evil shows that he agrees with the law, even though he is unable to keep it.
- v. 17 **"it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me"** In one sense, it is Paul himself who does these evil things. In another sense, it is sin which does them, because sin lives in him and controls him as its slave. Paul is unable to resist sin, because the law provides him no power to do so. What sin demands, he does, whether he wants to or not.
- v. 18 **"good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature"** The word translated sinful nature is literally, "flesh". Paul is not saying that one part of him, the mind, is good and one part, the body, is evil. He is emphasizing sin's total control over his actions. Sin lives within him and controls the members of his body (vv. 17, 22). There is nothing good within him to counteract sin's power and authority.
- v. 21 **"this law"** Not the Old Testament law but the "law of sin" (v. 23, also 8:2); the principle that Paul (and everyone apart from Christ) is a slave to sin and obeys it whether he wants to or not.
- vv. 22-23 Paul describes a conflict between his "inner being", that part of him which knows the good and desires to do it, and sin, which is at work in the members of his body and holds him captive. He describes this as a conflict between the "law of my mind" and the "law of sin". Note that in this conflict the Holy Spirit is never mentioned, as He is when the Christian's struggle with sin is discussed in Gal. 5:17.
- v. 24 **"What a wretched man I am!"** This is the desperate cry of a man who has been enlightened by the law, who knows what God's righteous requirements are and who desires to obey them, but who has failed miserably and realizes he cannot do so.
- "this body that is subject to death"** the physical body, which is mortal and because of sin, dies.
- v. 25 **"Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** While verse 24 is the desperate cry of a pious Jew unable to keep the law, v. 25 is the answer he found when he met Christ on the road to Damascus. Jesus Christ alone can free us from this struggle, by dying for us and freeing us from the law (see 8:1-4).
- "So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin"** Romans 8:9 tells us that believers "are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." Unbelievers live in slavery to sin, because the law gives them no power to resist it. Believers have been freed from sin's power through Christ's death, and we are controlled by the Spirit.

Unit 14 – Life Through the Spirit

Romans 8:1-17

Text

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you ^a free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, ^b God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. ^c And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life ^d because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of ^e his Spirit who lives in you.

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. ^f And by him we cry, "Abba, ^g Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

^a 8:2 The Greek is singular; some manuscripts *me*

^b 8:3 In contexts like this, the Greek word for *flesh* (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit; also in verses 4-13.

^c 8:3 Or *flesh, for sin*

^d 8:10 Or *you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive*

^e 8:11 Some manuscripts *bodies through*

^f 8:15 The Greek word for *adoption to sonship* is a term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture; also in verse 23.

^g 8:15 Aramaic for *father*

Open

When was the first time you remember being confronted with the reality of death? How did you respond?

Discover

1. What was the law unable to do? Why? (v. 3)

2. Who then accomplished it? How? What was the result? (vv. 3-4)

3. What does "no condemnation" mean to you? (v.1) What words or phrases does this bring to mind?

4. In the space below, compare the two kinds of life which Paul describes.

living according to the sinful nature	living according to the Spirit:
v. 5	v. 5
v. 6	v. 6
vv. 7-8	v. 13
v. 13	v. 15

5. These two ways of life characterize two classes of people. According to verses 6-9, what is the spiritual condition of those who are "governed by the flesh"? Of those who are controlled by the Spirit?

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6. Whom does the Holy Spirit indwell? (v. 9)

--

7. According to verse 13, who is responsible for putting to death the misdeeds of the body? How is this accomplished?

--

8. In the context of this passage, what does it mean to be "led by the Spirit" (v. 14)

--

9. In Galatians 5:16-26, Paul contrasts the "acts of the flesh" with the "fruit of the Spirit". In the space below, list his examples of each.

acts of the sinful nature	fruit of the Spirit

Apply

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Which of these phrases do you agree with more: "let go and let God" or "God helps those who help themselves"? | <input type="checkbox"/> What do you think it means to be an heir of God (v. 17)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is putting to death the misdeeds of the body (v. 13) a one-time event or a continual process? | <input type="checkbox"/> What have you found helpful in putting to death sins which you find yourself committing again and again? |

Commentary

In vivid contrast with the previous section, which describes Paul's failed attempt to find righteousness through law-keeping, 8:1-17 lays out the believer's new life of freedom from law.

v. 1 **"There is now no condemnation"** In contrast to times past, we have now been released from the law and are no longer under its condemnation.

v. 2 **"because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free"** Through Christ, Paul was set free from the bondage to sin and death described in 7:7-25. The "law of the Spirit who gives life" is the principle of new life in Christ which the indwelling Holy Spirit brings us. This nullifies the principle which previously operated in us, the "law of sin and death". As a result, there is "no condemnation" for those who are in Christ.

v. 3 **"what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh"** Paul's description of his own experience in 7:7-25 is a vivid illustration of this principle. The law is unable to overcome sin in us, not because of any defect in the law itself, but because of the weakness of our sinful nature, or flesh.

"he condemned sin" This means more than just exposing sin as evil; the law was able to do that. This condemnation means pronouncing the sentence of death on sin itself, rendering it powerless. This is what the law could not do, and what God did through Christ (see Rom. 6:9-12).

"in the likeness of sinful flesh" Paul is not saying that Christ had sin (see 2 Cor. 5:21). Nor is he saying that Christ only *appeared* to be a man. Christ is fully human, but his humanity includes neither Adam's sin nor any sin of his own.

v. 4 **"in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us"** Through the death and resurrection of Christ, our guilt and sin were credited to him, and his perfect righteousness was credited to us. Thus, the righteousness demanded by the law was fully satisfied.

"who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" The righteousness which we have in Christ is first of all a legal righteousness, or a right standing before God. But we also experience a changed life, as we walk in accordance with the indwelling Holy Spirit. The freedom from sin which we have in Christ means both freedom from the ultimate *penalty* of sin and also freedom from the present *power* of sin.

v. 5 This verse presents a contrast between unbelievers, *"those who live according to the flesh,"* and believers, *"those who live in accordance with the Spirit."* While the focus of the unbeliever's mind is on himself and his own desires, the focus of the believer's mind is on Christ and the things which please and glorify him.

v. 6 The mind of the unbeliever is focused on those things which bring death, while the Spirit-controlled mind is focused on those things which bring life and peace.

-
- v. 7 ***“The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God”*** The mind of the unbeliever is not merely neutral concerning God's law; it is hostile to it. It does not submit to the law, because it cannot do so. What then, are we to make of people such as the Pharisees, whom Christ called children of hell (Matt. 23:15), but who were observant of the law? The answer is that they were hypocrites, observing the outward requirements of the law, but rebelling against God in their hearts. They were zealous of the law as a means of prideful self-righteousness rather than as a means of glorifying God (see Matt. 23:23).
- v. 8 It is impossible for the unbeliever to please God. Not even his inadequate attempts to “do the right thing” or keep the law give God any pleasure; they are nothing more than “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).
- v. 9 ***“You, however”*** This introduces a sharp contrast. Believers are not under the control of the “sinful nature”, or flesh, but are under the control of the Holy Spirit.
- “if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you”***
It is not just certain super-spiritual Christians who are controlled by the Spirit, but all believers, because all believers have the Holy Spirit. Paul makes this clear by his next statement: “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.”
- v. 12 The sinful nature, or flesh, while still a part of us, no longer has any rightful claim on us. Our only obligation is one of obedience to Christ.
- v. 13 Paul here contrasts the lifestyle of the unbeliever and the believer. One is a life lived according the flesh, which brings death. The other is a life of continual “putting to death” of the deeds of the body through the power of the Holy Spirit, which leads to life. This is a description of the believer (see Gal. 5:16-18). Note that both our will and the Holy Spirit are involved in this “putting to death”. We must choose to obey, but the power is His. Note also that Paul is not laying out requirements for salvation. This “putting to death” requires that we have the Holy Spirit, which is true only of those who are already saved.
- v. 16 ***“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children”***
Believers have an “inner witness”, the Holy Spirit, by which they know they belong to God.
- v. 17 ***“heirs of God”*** One of the implications of being related to God is that we look forward to an incredible inheritance! This inheritance is both physical and spiritual (see Matt. 5:5; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Eph. 1:11-18; 1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Unit 15 – Future Glory

Romans 8:18-27

Text

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that^a the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our

adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

^a 8:21 Or subjected it in hope. ²¹ For

Open

- Have you ever been present at the birth of a child? What do you remember most about it?

Discover

1. What kind of "present sufferings" does Paul have in mind here? (v. 18; see Romans 8:35)

What "glory" is he talking about? (1 Corinthians 15:42-43; 1 John 3:2)

2. Who are the "children of God"? How will they be revealed? (see 1 Corinthians 15:49-54)

3. Paul pictures "the creation" looking forward with anticipation to the return of Christ and the revelation of the sons of God. What images does the Psalmist use to describe this time? (Psalm 96:11-13; 98:7-9)

4. What effect will the revelation of the sons of God have on creation? (v. 21) What will this look like? (see Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:1-2, 6-7)

5. How is the creation now subject to "frustration" and in bondage to "decay"? (vv. 20-21) Give examples.

6. How did this happen? (see Genesis 1:26-28; 3:17-19)

7. Paul mentions three kinds of "groaning" in this passage. For each one, identify the cause of the groaning, the one doing the groaning, and the hoped-for outcome.

Cause	Who or What	Hope
v. 22		
v. 23		
v. 26		

8. How does the Holy Spirit help us in prayer? (vv. 26-27)

Apply

- When you are discouraged, what helps to encourage you?
- What do you do when you have difficulty praying?

- Do you really consider your own sufferings to be "not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"? How can you foster this attitude in yourself?

Commentary

Although Christians do suffer, that is not the end of the story. We will someday share in Christ's glory. And when we do, all of creation will share in that glory as well.

- v. 18 **“Our present sufferings are not worth comparing”** Paul does not say merely that the glory to be revealed is superior to our sufferings, but that it is *incomparably* greater than them. This is even more amazing when we think of the kind of sufferings Paul has in mind: persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and death (8:35; see 1 Cor. 11:23-29). In 2 Cor. 4:17, Paul refers to our present suffering as "light and momentary troubles" that will result in "an eternal glory that far outweighs them all". He is not minimizing the severity of our sufferings, but instead emphasizing the incredible glory that is to come.

“the glory that will be revealed in us”

This is the glory of Christ which will transform us (see 1 John 3:2; also the Notes on Rom. 5:2).

- v. 19 Paul pictures the whole cosmos as waiting in eager anticipation for the consummation of history and the revealing of the sons of God. (see Psalm 96:11-13, 98:7-9; Isaiah 35:1-2, 55:12).
- vv. 20-21 **“For the creation was subjected to frustration”** Man's sin affects not only himself, but all of creation as well, since God made man ruler over the earth and all living creatures (Gen. 1:26-28). One example of this is the curse God put on the ground (Gen. 3:17).

“the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay” Paul looks forward to the time after Christ's return when the earth and all its creatures will finally fulfill the purpose for which they were created. (See Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:1-2, 6-7).

- v. 22 **“the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth”** Christ identifies these things as "birth pangs" which signal the end of the age: "*wars and rumors of wars . . . Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.*" (Matt. 24:6-8). Since Adam's sin in the garden, the earth has been experiencing labor pains, and these will continue to intensify until Christ's return.
- v. 23 **“we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit”** The gift of the Holy Spirit which we now possess is evidence of the rich blessings of God still in store for us (2 Cor. 5:5). And we, too, look forward eagerly to Christ's return, the end of the age, and our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For those who have died, this will be resurrection; for those who are still alive, it will be transformation (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

vv. 24-25 **“Who hopes for what they already have?”** It is possible that some at Rome shared the skepticism about bodily resurrection which Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians 15. Some at Corinth apparently considered themselves to have been “raised from the dead” already, interpreting this in a spiritual sense. But Paul emphasizes here that the resurrection is both physical and future.

vv. 26-27 **“the Spirit helps us in our weakness”** This chapter deals with the Holy Spirit several times. He provides guidance and power for us to “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (v. 13), he testifies to our spirits that we are children of God (v. 16), and he helps us in prayer (v. 26).

“the Spirit himself intercedes for us with wordless groans” Some interpret this as speaking in tongues, but Paul states that it is the Spirit who groans, not the believer. Further, these “groans” are like the “groans” of creation (v. 22) and the inward “groaning” of the believer (v. 23), neither of which are audible sounds. Paul is speaking of the communication within the Trinity. As we pray, the Holy Spirit prays to God on our behalf in a way that is perfectly consistent with God’s will.

Unit 16 – More Than Conquerors

Romans 8:28-39

Text

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who ^a have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² 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? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution

or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”^b

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, ^c neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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.

^a 8:28 Or that all things work together for good to those who love God, who; or that in all things God works together with those who love him to bring about what is good—with those who

^b 8:36 Psalm 44:22

^c 8:38 Or nor heavenly rulers

Open

- As a child, what object or place gave you a sense of security?

Discover

1. What is the believer's "good" that God is working for? (vv. 28-30)

2. In verse 28, Paul refers to "those who love him" and those "who have been called according to his purpose" as one and the same group. What does this tell us about the nature of the "calling" he is speaking of? (see John 6:37, 44)

3. In verses 29-30, Paul represents salvation as an unbroken chain, such that those who experience its beginning also experience its completion. In the space below, trace out the chain of events:

For those God _____ he also _____	○	And those he _____ he also _____
--------------------------------------	---	-------------------------------------

those he _____ he also _____	○	those he _____ he also _____
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-
4. What do you think Paul meant when he said that God "foreknew" those whom he called? (see Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:1-2)

5. Verses 31-36 are composed of a series of rhetorical questions, in which Paul identifies and rejects possible obstacles to God accomplishing his purpose in us. Identify these questions, and the answer (or implied answer) for each.

Question	Answer
v. 31	
v. 32	
v. 33	
v. 34	
v. 35	

6. In what sense are we "more than conquerors"? (v. 37)

7. In order to emphasize our security in Christ, Paul lists several pairs of things which are unable to separate us from Him. List these below:

Neither ...	Nor ...

Apply

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> What is the main thing Paul is trying to accomplish in this passage?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> What is the basis of our eternal security? In other words, how can we be confident that, once we have trusted in Christ, we shall certainly be saved?</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Case study: You are going through some difficult times, and a friend tells you, "Oh, well, I'm sure everything will turn out all right." Is this encouraging? Why or why not? What would be a more Biblical response?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Of the enemies listed in vv. 38-39, which is the most real to you? How is it affecting you now?</p> |
|--|---|

Commentary

In the previous section, Paul deals with the fact of suffering by focusing on the future, emphasizing that our future glory is far greater than our present suffering. Here Paul continues to deal with suffering by emphasizing that God is sovereign in our lives, and that nothing can separate us from Him.

- v. 28 ***“In all things God works for the good of those who love him”*** Note that Paul does not say that all things are good in themselves, but that God is sovereignly working through all things for the final blessedness of his people. Note also that Paul is not merely saying that everything will somehow work out for the best, but that God is actively working to bring about the best.

Not everyone, however, can trust that God is working in all things for their good, but only those who have been *called according to his purpose*. This call is not the general invitation that God issues to all men through the preaching of the gospel. It is a specific call, a summons by which God speaks to the hearts of the elect and draws them to himself.

- vv. 29-30 ***“those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”*** Predestination is a difficult idea for many. Some attempt to evade the difficulty by saying that God predestines to salvation those whom he knows would, of their own free will, choose Him. But this makes God's choice dependent on ours and implies that we have the capacity, apart from God's enabling grace, to choose Him. This is false (see John 6:44, 65). God's foreknowledge doesn't mean that he know something about us, i.e., that we would respond to the gospel if offered, but that he chose us and knew us as His children before we were created (Eph. 1:4).

Further, the emphasis of Romans 8:28-39 is on God's work, not man's receptiveness. God predestined, he called, he justified, and he glorified. God is author of our salvation from beginning to end. This emphasis is essential to Paul's purpose in this passage: he is demonstrating the absolute security of our salvation by showing that it depends on God's initiative and power, not ours.

“that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” It was God's plan from the beginning to create many sons and daughters through Christ (1 Pet. 1:20).

“those he justified, he also glorified” Paul has just spoken of our glory as future (v. 18); it is unlikely that he would contradict himself here. Instead, he is emphasizing the absolute certainty of our glorification by putting it in the past tense, as if it had already happened.

-
- v. 31 **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”** Paul is not saying that Christians will never be opposed. Rather, he saying that since God is on our side, it doesn't matter who opposes us. Nothing that they do can threaten our salvation or separate us from God's love.
- v. 32 Paul reasons from the greater to the lesser. If God was willing to sacrifice his own Son for us, doesn't it stand to reason that he will give us every other good thing as well? He has already given us the one thing which was most precious--the life of His own Son.
- v. 33 Paul now begins a series of rhetorical questions, each emphasizing an aspect of our security in Christ. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? (literally, "God's elect"). Paul is not saying that no one will ever accuse a believer, but that no accusation will stand, because God has justified us. Satan is called "the accuser of our brothers and sisters" (Rev. 12:10), but his accusations against us fall on deaf ears, because Christ intercedes on our behalf (vs. 34; Heb. 7:25). We need to remember this when the "flaming arrows of the evil one" come our way (Eph. 6:16).
- v. 34 **“Who then is the one who condemns? . . . Christ Jesus . . . is also interceding for us”** What effect could any word of condemnation have when the judge (2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Cor. 5:10) is also our defense attorney?
- vv. 35-39 **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”** Paul now launches into a long list of things which cannot separate us from Christ's love. The most striking thing about the list is its exhaustiveness. Paul uses all the extremes he can think of--life and death, present and future, height and depth--to indicate the scope of powers that are inadequate to separate us from Christ, and then finishes with "nor anything else in all creation". The meaning is absolutely clear: nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from Christ. Rather, we are "more than conquerors," in spite of whatever opposition and suffering we face.

Unit 17 – God’s Sovereign Choice

Romans 9:1-29

Text

¹ I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised!^a Amen.

⁶ It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”^b ⁸ In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”^c

¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”^d ¹³ Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”^e

¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses,

“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”^f

¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. ¹⁷ For Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”^g ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

¹⁹ One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’”^h ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As he says in Hosea:

“I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people;
and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one.”ⁱ

²⁶ and,

“In the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’”^j

²⁷ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

“Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,
only the remnant will be saved.

²⁸ For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”^k

²⁹ It is just as Isaiah said previously:

“Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah.”^l

^a 9:5 Or *Messiah, who is over all. God be forever praised!* Or *Messiah. God who is over all be forever praised!*

^b 9:7 Gen. 21:12

^c 9:9 Gen. 18:10,14

^e 9:12 Gen. 25:23

^e 9:13 Mal. 1:2,3

^f 9:15 Exodus 33:19

^g 9:17 Exodus 9:16

^h 9:20 Isaiah 29:16; 45:9

ⁱ 9:25 Hosea 2:23

^j 9:26 Hosea 1:10

^k 9:28 Isaiah 10:22,23 (see Septuagint)

^l 9:29 Isaiah 1:9

Open

- If you had brothers or sisters growing up, did you feel your parents treated you equally, or did one get special treatment?

Discover

1. What blessings does Paul list to show that Israel was, indeed, the object of God's special favor? (vv. 4-5)

2. What objection is Paul responding to in verse 6? How does he answer it? (see Galatians 3:29, 4:28)

3. What is the point of the illustration concerning Jacob and Esau? (vv. 10-14)

4. What is the implied accusation against God in verse 14? How does Paul answer it? (vv. 14-18)

5. In verse 19, a third objection is raised. Paraphrase the question in your own words, and paraphrase Paul's response.

6. How do verses 22-24 explain why God prepared "objects of wrath" for destruction?

7. Who are the objects of God's wrath? (v. 22) Who are the objects of his mercy? (vv. 23-24)

Apply

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What is the main thing Paul is trying to demonstrate in this passage? | <input type="checkbox"/> How satisfying do you find Paul's answers to the questions he raises? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Why is it important to remember Romans 3:23 as we consider what it is "fair" for God to do? | <input type="checkbox"/> How has this passage affected your understanding of salvation? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What is one question you would like to ask Paul about this passage? | |

Commentary

In the previous section (8:28-39), Paul has written eloquently of God's sovereign power to save his people, and of the complete inability of any other power to separate us from his love. Now Paul moves on to a related subject: the place of ethnic Israel in God's plan. For if God has rejected his own chosen people, how can we as Christians know that he will not reject us as well? If God was unable to save Israel, can he really be counted on to save us? Paul answers these questions in chapters 9-11.

In the present section (9:1-29), Paul is dealing primarily with the issue of election, or God's choice. Paul's purpose is to show that membership in the family of God has always been by God's choosing, rather than by ethnic identity. Therefore, if only part of the Jewish race is saved, God is still faithful, because not all of the Jewish race belongs to the family of God.

- vv. 1-3 ***"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish"*** Paul begins by identifying himself with the Jewish people and revealing the depth of his love and concern for them. He even states that he "could wish" to be condemned instead of them, if that were possible. He wants to make clear that his rejection of law-righteousness does not mean that he (or God) has rejected the Jewish people.
- vv. 4-5 Paul goes on to list some of the reasons why he has great love and respect for the people of Israel. These include the great blessings which Israel enjoyed as the people of God: adoption into God's family, the glorious work and presence of God among them (especially in the temple), the covenants and promises which God had made to them, the revelation of God's will and character to them through the Old Testament law, their proud ancestry of great men of faith, and finally, the privilege of being the people-group into which Christ was born.
- vv. 6-13 In these verses Paul demonstrates that, contrary to Jewish belief, membership in the true Israel does not come from being a physical descendant of Abraham. Rather, membership in the true Israel is on the basis of God's choice, or election.
- v. 6 ***"It is not as though God's word had failed"*** The fact that most ethnic Jews had rejected Christ did not invalidate God's promises, because those promises were made, not to the physical descendants of Abraham, but to his spiritual descendants (see Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:16).
- v. 7 Paul develops his argument through the example of Isaac and Ishmael. Both were the physical descendants of Abraham, but only Isaac and his offspring were considered true descendants of Abraham and recipients of the promises God made to him (Gen. 17:15-21; also Gal. 3:29, 4:28).
- vv. 8-9 ***"the children of the promise . . . are regarded as Abraham's offspring"*** These are the children born as a result of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah, that she would bear children in her old age (Gen. 18:10,14).
- v. 10 Paul now moves on to another example, that of Jacob and Esau. In this case, not only did they have the same father and mother, they were twins! Yet here as well, God chose one and rejected the other.
- vv. 11-13 ***"before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad"*** Paul leaves no doubt as to the cause of God's choice of Jacob over Esau. It was before they were even born that God announced his choice, before they had done *anything* good or bad! (see Gen. 25:23) The point Paul is making is that God alone determines who the true descendants of Abraham are, and that God's choice is based on His own will and purposes; it is not based on man's ancestry or on anything he does.
- "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated"*** Paul is not referring merely to God's emotions, but to his act of choosing Jacob as the special object of His blessing and rejecting Esau.
- vv. 14-21 It is important to realize here that Paul is dealing with election from God's perspective, not man's. We might wish for a more extended discussion of man's responsibility and how that squares with God's sovereignty, but Paul does not give us that. What he does give us is a strong defense of God's justice, arguing that God is not unjust in choosing some and rejecting others, because God, as the creator, has every right to do as He wishes with His creations.

vv. 15-16 **"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy"** God has absolute freedom to choose the recipients of his mercy and compassion without regard to "human desire or effort". It is important to remember that we have no claim on God, no "rights". This was true of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and it is true of us. God would be completely just in condemning everyone and saving none. The amazing thing is not that some are lost, but that any are saved.

v. 17 **"I raised you up for this very purpose"** Paul uses Pharaoh as a negative example of the principle of election. God did not show mercy to Pharaoh; instead, he chose to bring him to power for the purpose of humiliating and defeating him, so that God's own name might be glorified (see Ex. 9:16).

v. 18 **"Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden"** Here Paul expands God's freedom to include not only showing mercy, but hardening as well. This is a difficult statement for those who insist on man's "free will". It is sometimes noted that the Scripture says both that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exod. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8) and that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exod. 8:15, 32; 9:34). It is then argued that God hardened Pharaoh's heart in response to Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart. But this would contradict Paul's argument that God acts freely and that His choices do not depend on man (9:11-12, 16). In that case, the latter part of verse 18 would read, "and he hardens those who have already hardened themselves." But instead, it reads, "he hardens whom he wants to harden."

What, then, are we to make of the fact that both God and Pharaoh are said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart? Simply that both are true. From a human perspective, Pharaoh did harden his own heart. But from God's perspective, Pharaoh was acting out His sovereign purpose.

v. 19 Paul anticipates that the previous statement will raise an objection, namely, "How can God possibly condemn those who reject Him if they are only carrying out His will?" (By the way, this objection supports the above interpretation of verse 18; it would not be difficult to see the fairness of hardening someone who had already hardened himself, and the objection would not be raised in that case.)

vv. 20-21 **"who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?"** Paul responds to the objection by declaring it out of order. Note that Paul does not say the question has no answer, but that we have no right to demand answers from God, to call Him to account. This is not very pleasing to modern people, who believe that we should have control over all decisions and access to all information which affects us. We are naturally suspicious of authority figures who refuse to answer our questions. But when we respond like that, we are reacting according to worldly principles. God created us, and therefore has every right to deal with us as He chooses, the same right that a potter has over clay.

vv. 22-24 In these verses, Paul explains why God would create objects for "common use" (v. 21: literally, "dishonor"). He did it in order to "show his wrath and make his power known". In other words, for God to fully display his character as holy and wrathful, He created objects of wrath, "prepared for destruction". And instead of immediately exterminating them as soon as their wickedness became apparent, he "bore with great patience" and allowed them to fill up the measure of their sins (Rom. 2:5), so that their final destruction would bring even more glory to God. In addition, he did this to "make the riches of his glory known to the object of his mercy."

As we believers contemplate the destruction of those who do not know Christ, and as we realize that we deserve condemnation every bit as much as they, the riches of God's grace toward us becomes even more apparent.

vv. 25-26 The quote from Hosea originally applied to the ten tribes of northern Israel whose restoration is here promised. Paul uses it to support his point that the Gentiles, who formerly had not been a part of the people of God, could become a part of God's family by virtue of God's choice and call (see Eph. 2:11-22).

vv. 28-29 These quotes from Isaiah support Paul's argument that it is possible for only a small number of the Jewish nation to be saved (i.e., those who trust in Christ).

Unit 18 – Israel’s Unbelief

Romans 9:30-10:21

Text

³⁰ What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. ³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written:

“See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall,
and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.”^a

¹ Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

⁵ Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.”^b ⁶ But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’”^c (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’”^d (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,”^e that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”^f ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”^g

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”^h

¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”ⁱ ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. ¹⁸ But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did:

“Their voice has gone out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.”^j

¹⁹ Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,

“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.”^k

²⁰ And Isaiah boldly says,

“I was found by those who did not seek me;
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.”^l

²¹ But concerning Israel he says,

“All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people.”^m

^a 9:33 Isaiah 8:14; 28:16

^b 10:5 Lev. 18:5

^c 10:6 Deut. 30:12

^d 10:7 Deut. 30:13

^e 10:8 Deut. 30:14

^f 10:11 Isaiah 28:16 (see Septuagint)

^g 10:13 Joel 2:32

^h 10:15 Isaiah 52:7

ⁱ 10:16 Isaiah 53:1

^j 10:18 Psalm 19:4

^k 10:19 Deut. 32:21

^l 10:20 Isaiah 65:1

Open

In your household, which one can't seem to keep track of their keys, billfold, etc.?

Discover

1. Who or what did the Jews "stumble" over? (vv. 32-33; see Isaiah 8:13-14)

2. In verses 30-33, Paul reveals a surprising paradox. What is it?

3. How does he explain this turn of events?

4. What positive quality did the Jews possess regarding God, and what did they lack? What was the result? (vv. 1-3)

5. In 10:5-13, Paul contrasts two kinds of "righteousness". What are they and how do they differ?

6. From this passage, how would you answer the question, "What must I do to be saved"? How would the answer be different if you were talking to a Jew versus a non-Jew?

7. What events form the essential link between the facts of the gospel and the response of faith? (vv. 14-15)

8. Paul uses two rhetorical questions to show that the unbelieving response of the Jews was not due to a lack of information, but to hardness of heart. List these questions and summarize Paul's answers.

Apply

Case study: A friend of yours is involved in Eastern religions. When you talk with her about Christ, she says, "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere" How might you respond?

How does this passage emphasize the need for evangelism?

What is the main thing Paul is trying to demonstrate in this passage?

Commentary

In the previous section, Paul began his examination of the place of Israel in God's plan. He first defended God's faithfulness: the fact that only a small minority of Jews have trusted in Christ does not violate God's Word, because only those whom God has chosen are truly Israel (vv. 6, 24). Paul then defended God's justice in making such a selection, since God, being the Creator, has every right to do with his creatures as he wishes.

Now, Paul moves from God's sovereign choice to man's responsibility. Unbelieving Jews are lost, not because God has refused to accept them, but because they have failed to trust in Christ.

- vv. 30-32 ***“What then shall we say?”*** This concludes Paul's argument from the previous section. The end result of God's election is that the Gentiles have obtained a right standing with God, and Israel has not. Why is this? Because the Jews sought righteousness by their own works, rather than by faith. Note that Paul is speaking here in terms of groups, not individuals. Not all the Gentiles trusted in Christ, nor did every Jew reject Him. But in general, it was the Gentiles who received Christ rather than the Jews.

“the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it” This highlights the fact that salvation does not depend on human effort. The Gentiles were not even looking for righteousness! Yet when it was offered to them they received it through faith, while the Jews did not.

“the law as a way of righteousness” The law was a law "of righteousness," not because it was possible to become righteous by keeping it, but because it was intended to point men to faith in God by exposing their need for grace and forgiveness.

- v. 33 ***“a stone that causes people to stumble”*** Paul is quoting from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16. It is noteworthy that Isaiah 8:13-14 refers to "the Lord Almighty" as the stone, which here refers to Christ. The Jews "stumbled" and "fell" over Christ, because they refused to trust in him.

- v. 2 ***“their zeal is not based on knowledge”*** It is not enough to be sincere; one can be sincerely mistaken, as Paul was before his conversion (Acts 22:3-5, 26:9-11; Gal. 1:14).

- v. 4 ***“Christ is the culmination of the law”*** Paul may mean here that Christ is the *goal* of the law, the end toward which it points. The law was designed to show Israel their need of a Savior; it functioned as a tutor to prepare them for Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). Or he may mean that Christ is the *termination* of the law, in the sense that we are no longer under its authority (Rom. 7:1-6). Both are true.

- vv. 5-13 In these verses, Paul contrasts two ways of seeking righteousness. The first way is by self-effort and law-keeping. This amounts to self-righteousness, and is the way that the majority of Jews chose. As a result, they failed to obtain it (9:31-32, 10:3). The second is the only true way, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

- v. 5 ***“The person who does these things will live by them”*** Paul quotes from Leviticus 18:5 to demonstrate that the kind of "righteousness" the law brings (i.e., self-righteousness) is based on works, or "doing these things", rather than faith (see Gal. 3:12).

- vv. 6-8 The passage in Deuteronomy which Paul refers to (Deut. 30:12-14) is one in which Moses is emphasizing the availability of the Law to the Israelites--they did not have to do impossible things, such as ascend into heaven or descend to the bottom of the ocean, to retrieve it. God had simply given it to them. In the same way, salvation does not require that we meet impossibly high standards, but only that we trust Christ. We do not have to ascend into heaven to find Him, since he has already come in the flesh. We do not have to descend into the place of the dead, because he has been raised from the dead. We simply have to believe in and confess Him.

vv. 9-10 These verses explain what is meant by the "message concerning faith" in verse 8. This word tells us what is required for salvation—to "declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead". These are not to be understood as two separate acts, but as two views of the same thing; they are the inward and outward expressions of faith.

"Jesus is Lord" The Greek word translated *Lord* is used over 6,000 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to God. This confession acknowledges that Christ is God, and thus is due all of our worship and obedience.

"God raised him from the dead" The bodily resurrection of Jesus is an essential element of Christian faith, because it was this event which proved Christ's victory over sin and death on our behalf.

vv. 12-13 **"there is no difference between Jew and Gentile"** There are not two ways of salvation for Jews and non-Jews, but only one: faith in Christ. No one who trusts in Him will be put to shame; everyone who calls on Him in faith will be saved.

vv. 14-15 These verses contain a sequence of four rhetorical questions which contain the objections which might be raised to Paul's statement that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (vs. 13). How could the Jews call on Him unless God had sent someone to tell them the good news, so that they could hear and believe?

"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Paul is using this quotation from Isaiah 52:7 to indicate that the conditions listed in verses 14-15a have indeed been fulfilled. The good news has in fact been preached to them.

v. 16 The Israelites' rejection of Christ was foretold in the Old Testament. This quote is from Isaiah 53:1, in the midst of a passage which predicts the rejection and suffering of the Messiah (Isa. 52:13-53:12).

vv. 17-21 In these verses, Paul asks another series of rhetorical questions. He answers them by quoting Old Testament passages, and shows that while Israel had heard and understood the message of Christ, they had rejected it, while Gentiles had accepted it.

vv. 17-18 **"Did they not hear?"** Before one can trust in and call on Christ, one must hear about him. But perhaps the Jews have not had sufficient opportunity to hear? Paul denies this by quoting Psalm 19:4. The message has been preached openly, widely, and publicly. They cannot claim that Israel as a nation has not heard of Christ.

vv. 19-21 **"Did Israel not understand?"** If the Jews had indeed heard, then perhaps they had not understood the message? But Paul quotes Deut. 32:21 and Isa. 65:1-2 to show that Israel's failure to accept Christ was not due to lack of understanding. The Gentiles had accepted Christ, even though they had "no understanding"; they were not even seeking God! The Jews' rejection of Christ was due to the fact that they were "disobedient and obstinate". They had heard and understood. But they rejected the message.

Unit 19 – The Remnant of Israel

Romans 11:1-36

Text

¹ I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"^a? ⁴ And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."^b ⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

⁷ What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened,⁸ as it is written:

"God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes that could not see
and ears that could not hear,
to this very day."^c

⁹ And David says:

"May their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

¹⁰ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,
and their backs be bent forever."^d

¹¹ Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!

¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷ If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in."²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

²⁵ I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ²⁶ and in this way^e all Israel will be saved. As it is written:

"The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob."²⁷ And this is^f my covenant with them when I take away their sins."^g

²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now^h receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³² For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom andⁱ knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"^j

³⁵ "Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"^k

³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

^a 11:3 1 Kings 19:10,14

^b 11:4 1 Kings 19:18

^c 11:8 Deut. 29:4; Isaiah 29:10

^d 11:10 Psalm 69:22,23

^e 11:26 Or and so

^f 11:27 Or will be

^g 11:27 Isaiah 59:20,21; 27:9 (see Septuagint); Jer. 31:33,34

^h 11:31 Some manuscripts do not have now.

ⁱ 11:33 Or riches and the wisdom and the

^j 11:34 Isaiah 40:13

^k 11:35 Job 41:11

Open

- Do you prefer spending time by yourself, with just a few people, or with a large group?

Discover

1. This passage revolves around two rhetorical questions. Summarize the questions and their answers (vv. 1, 11)

2. What is the point of the illustration concerning Elijah? (vv. 2-5; see 1 Kings 19:9-18)

3. What does Paul identify as the cause of the faith of believing Jews? What does he identify as the cause of the hardness of heart of unbelieving Jews? (vv. 5-8)

4. Paul uses an illustration of an olive tree (vv. 16-24) to explain the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. From this illustration, identify:

The cultivated olive tree / olive root	The wild olive tree / olive shoot
The "branches" which have been broken off	The "branches" which have been grafted in

5. Why are some branches grafted onto this tree, while others are broken off? What should be our response to this? (v. 20)

6. What is the ultimate destiny of ethnic Israel? Who does this include?

7. According to vv. 28-32, what do Jews and Gentiles have in common?

Apply

- From this passage, what should be our attitude toward the Jewish people?

Commentary

In chapters 9 and 10, Paul has dealt with the problem of Israel's failure to receive Christ by emphasizing two things: God's sovereign right to choose the objects of His mercy, and the Jews' responsibility for rejecting their Messiah. Now Paul unveils God's ultimate purposes. The Jews' rejection of Christ is not permanent; God has only hardened them temporarily to open the way for the Gentiles. When the process of bringing in the Gentiles is complete, God will open the eyes of the Jewish people and they will turn to Christ!

- v. 1 **“Did God reject his people? By no means!”** In spite of Israel's rejection of God, He has not rejected them; He still has a place for them in his plan. Paul uses himself as an example: the fact that he, a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5), was saved shows that God has not completely abandoned the Jews.
- vv. 2-5 Paul refers to an encounter Elijah had with God (1 Kings 19:10-18), in which God told Elijah that even though it seemed the whole nation had turned to idol worship, He had preserved for Himself a "remnant" who remained faithful to Him. That remnant represented God's continuing commitment to Israel in spite of their apostasy. In the same way, the minority of Jews who have trusted Christ at the present time are God's "remnant" of faithful believers from the nation of Israel, and their existence proves that God has not abandoned Israel, even though most have rejected Him.
- v. 2 **“his people, whom he foreknew”** This does not mean that God predestined every Jew to salvation, but that He chose the nation of Israel in advance to be the special objects of His blessing and mercy.
- vv. 5-6 **“chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works”** Paul emphasizes once again that there are not two ways of salvation, one of works for Jews and one of grace for Gentiles. The believing Jews who presently make up God's "remnant" from the nation of Israel are chosen by grace, just as Gentile believers are. A salvation by works would be completely incompatible with grace.
- vv. 7-10 Here Paul combines quotations from several Old Testament passages (Deut. 29:4; Isa. 29:10; Ps. 69:22-23; 35:9; 38:4) to illustrate the fact that God had hardened Israel and blinded them to the truth of the gospel. The result is that Israel as a whole did not obtain righteousness (Rom. 9:30); only "the elect" did. This "elect" could refer to all the elect, i.e. all believers, but in the context it seems better to take it as referring to the "remnant", the elect of Israel.
- v. 11 **“Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!”** Paul now reveals that ultimately God's grace toward Israel will result in not only a remnant being saved, but the whole nation. Their alienation from God as a people is not final.
- “salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious”** God's intention in temporarily hardening the Jews was not to abandon them forever, but to provide an opportunity for Gentiles to be saved. Likewise, His purpose in saving Gentiles is to make Israel envious so that they will seek salvation.
- v. 12 **“if their transgression means riches for the world”** Christ came first to Israel (Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24). Likewise, Paul began his ministry among the Jews, but after they rejected him turned to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6). It was through Israel's rejection of her Messiah that the way was opened for Gentiles to be saved.
- vv. 13-14 Paul was God's apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7,9), and he applies to himself and his own ministry the truths of vv. 11-12. His hope was that as many Gentiles as possible would be saved through his ministry, so that some Jews would become envious and seek salvation as well.
- v. 15 **“life from the dead”** The injection of spiritual life into Israel, now "dead" through unbelief (see Ezekiel 37:4-6).
- v. 17 **“you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others”** These are Gentile believers, who through faith have been united with Jewish believers and have become part of the people of God (see Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6).

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- vv. 17-24 The olive tree is a symbol of Israel in the Old Testament (Jer. 11:16), and Paul uses horticultural metaphors to describe the relationship of Israel and the church. The church has been grafted spiritually onto the root of Abraham (Gal. 3:8-9), and now enjoys the blessings of faith along with believing Jews (the "remnant" of vs. 5, also the "others" of vs. 17). Although at the present time, unbelieving Israel has been "broken off", or rejected by God, there will come a time in the future when she is again "grafted in", brought back into the people of God through faith in Christ. In the meantime, Gentiles should not hold an arrogant attitude toward Israel, because God can reject the Gentiles for unbelief just as He rejected the Jews.
- v. 17 **"some of the branches have been broken off"** These are unbelieving Jews whom God has rejected (at least for the present).
- v. 22 **"Otherwise, you also will be cut off"** Paul is not referring to individual Christians losing their salvation; he is referring to Gentiles as a group. If God rejected Israel for unbelief, He can also reject the Gentiles.
- v. 25 **"mystery"** Something formerly hidden which could not be discovered by unaided human wisdom, but which has now been revealed by God.
- "Israel has experienced a hardening in part"** Not that the "hardening" was only partially effective, but that only part of Israel was hardened (see vs. 7).
- "until the full number of the Gentiles has come in"** God is waiting until His plans for bringing the Gentiles into His kingdom are fulfilled. Then He will act again on behalf of Israel.
- v. 26 **"and in this way all Israel will be saved"** This does not necessarily mean that every Jew without exception will receive Christ (see 2 Chron. 12:1; Dan. 9:11 for similar uses of "all Israel"), but that the Jewish people as a whole will turn to Him as their Savior. This must necessarily take place in the end times, since it happens at the close of the church age after all the Gentile believers have been saved.
- vv. 28-29 Paul sees Israel from two viewpoints. Concerning the gospel, they are enemies; both hostile to God and subject to His wrath for having rejected Christ. This is on your account, i.e. it happened so that the Gentiles could be saved (see vs. 11). But on the other hand, Israel is loved by God, and still has a place in His plan of salvation. This is not because of their worthiness, but on account of the patriarchs, i.e. because of the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He will certainly fulfill those promises, because His gifts and His call, once given, are not revoked.
- vv. 30-32 These verses emphasize that the conditions of Israel and the Gentiles with regard to salvation are essentially similar. Both groups are at some time disobedient, and both receive mercy from God. Further, God uses each group in some way to show mercy to the other. The end result is that both Jews and Gentiles are alike the recipients of God's mercy.
- vv. 33-36 These verses are Paul's doxology of praise and worship to God. They form a fitting conclusion to chapters 9-11, in which God's merciful plans for Israel and the Gentiles are explained. It is noteworthy that the focus of the doxology is not on what has been revealed, as wonderful as that is. Rather, the magnificence of what has been revealed concerning salvation causes Paul to break into praise of God's unsearchable wisdom and knowledge. The understanding that we have now is like looking at "a reflection as in a mirror" (1 Cor. 13:12); what remains to be revealed to us is more marvelous than we can even imagine (Eph. 3:20).

The deliverer is Christ; the reference is to His Second Coming at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period, when He will return to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom.

Unit 20 – Living Sacrifices

Romans 12:1-8

Text

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same

function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your ^a faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, ^b do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

^a 12:6 Or the

^b 12:8 Or to provide for others

Open

- When do you feel close to God?

Discover

1. In your own words, what is the main thing Paul is trying to communicate in this passage?

2. What do you think it means to "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice"?

How is this an act of worship, and why are these sacrifices "holy and pleasing to God"? (v. 1)

3. What does the "therefore" in verse 1 refer back to? (In other words, what's the "therefore" there for?)

How would you state the connection between that and Paul's command here to "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice"? (v. 1)

4. What does it mean to "renew your mind"? What are some practical ways to do this?

Why is this necessary? What's the result of doing it?

5. In your own words, what is Paul telling us to do in verse 3? What is he telling us to avoid?

6. What is the point of the "body" illustration in verses 4-8?

7. What's the logical connection between the command in verse 3 and the illustration in verses 4-8?

8. What does Paul mean when he says that "each member belongs to all the others"? (v. 5)

9. Based on your interests and experiences, list one or two of the gifts in verses 6-8 that you think you may have. Then list each person in your group and at least one of these gifts that you think they may have.

Apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How has this passage affected your view of worship? | <input type="checkbox"/> How does the world try to squeeze us into its mold? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What do you feel is the greatest impediment to your serving God more faithfully with your gifts? | <input type="checkbox"/> What resources are available to us to assist in the renewing of our minds? |

Commentary

This passage begins another major section, 12:1-15:13, in which Paul is primarily concerned with Christian living. This follows his typical pattern of dealing first with doctrine, and then going on to discuss the working out of that doctrine in the life of the believer (as in Galatians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians). This is not a hard and fast rule; Paul discusses obedience, for example, in Romans 6:13. But it is generally true, and illustrates the fact that our behavior depends on our belief.

- v. 1 **“Therefore”** This could refer back to 8:39, before Paul begins his discussion of the Jews and their future; it could refer to the immediate context of 11:30-32; or it could refer to Paul's whole argument up to this point. In either case, *“therefore”* establishes the connection between belief and action. The doctrines Paul has been teaching are not just interesting theological ideas, but are meant to have an effect on how we live. The worship, obedience, and service we offer to God are expressions of our gratitude for what He has done for us in Christ.

“offer your bodies as a living sacrifice”

For some believers, following Christ may mean martyrdom. But for most, God's desire is that we give Him our lives, not in death, but in service. This involves offering our bodies to Him "as an instrument of righteousness" (Rom. 6:13).

“this is your true and proper worship”

For the Christian, there is no separation between "sacred" and "secular" activities. Anything we do, if done for God's glory, can be an act of worship. Paul gives some examples of such service/worship in vv. 6-8.

- v. 2 **“Do not conform . . . but be transformed”**

The verb translated "do not conform" is passive in the Greek; literally, "do not be conformed". The fact that both verbs are passive implies that there are opposing forces battling for our hearts and minds: the *“powers of this dark world and . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Eph. 6:12) on the one side, and the Spirit of Christ on the other. Our responsibility is to yield to the Spirit's transforming work in our lives rather than to adopt the lifestyle and values of this corrupt world system.

“by the renewing of your mind” As the believer matures in Christ, her attitudes, desires, opinions, and values are influenced less and less by the world and more and more by the Spirit of Christ living within her. The result is spiritual discernment, the ability to judge what is good and pleasing to God (see Heb. 5:14; see also Eph. 4:22-24).

- v. 3 **“by the grace given me I say to every one of you”** This gives double emphasis to the fact that Paul is speaking to all believers, not just especially gifted ones. First, it is to *every one of you*. Second, by referring to his apostleship as a gift of God's grace, he acknowledges that his position and his ministry abilities come from God and not himself (see Eph. 3:7-9).

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather . . . with sound judgment”

Paul begins his discussion of spiritual gifts with an appeal to humility. If it were up to us, many would choose the "showier" gifts, such as teaching or leadership. But exercising those gifts properly requires just as much humility as exercising the "quieter" gifts of serving or mercy. They all come from God, and all are meant to be used for His glory, not our own. We need to be sober-minded about ourselves; not arrogant or prideful, but on the other hand not denying that God can work through us.

“in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you”

The measure, or measuring stick, we should use to evaluate ourselves is the Christian faith. In other words, God's word should guide the way we think about ourselves.

- vv. 4-5 **“in Christ we, though many, form one body”** Paul uses the metaphor of the body in several places to illustrate the principle of unity amid diversity (1 Cor. 12:12-30; Eph. 4:4-16). His point is that we have unity with one another, not because we are all the same, but because we are all spiritually united with Christ. Furthermore, none of us is independent, but **each member belongs to all the others**. The gifts God gives us are to be used to build each other up.

vv. 6-8 Paul now lists some examples of the kind of gifts he is talking about. This is not a complete list; in fact Paul gives several such lists in his letters, and each list is different (1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28-30; Eph. 4:7-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). But his point here is that God's gifts are to be used to benefit other believers; note that every gift is followed by an exhortation to *use* that gift. Another point which should be made is that not every gift will necessarily be present at all times in church history. God may bestow or withhold a gift according to His purposes at any particular time.

v. 6 ***“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us”*** The emphasis here, as throughout Romans, is on the grace of God. These gifts are not earned or deserved, but freely given.

“prophesying” Paul speaks of this gift in 1 Cor. 14; examples of it can be found in Acts (11:27-28; 13:1-2; 21:10-11). It appears to consist of the ability to speak directly for God, to communicate insights or revelation given by God. This would have been especially valuable in the early church, when the New Testament was not yet completed, and what was written was not universally available.

Note that the gift of prophecy was to be practiced "in proportion to your faith". Translated this way, it could mean that the prophet was not to speak anything unless he or she was certain it came from God. But the phrase could also be translated, "in accordance with the faith." In this case, it would mean that any prophecy must be in harmony with the Christian faith. This would fit well with the instruction in 1 Cor. 14:29 to examine carefully everything which was spoken as prophecy (also 1 John 4:1-3).

“serving” The ability to support others in practical ways so that their material needs are met and so that they are strengthened and encouraged spiritually in the process. Those so gifted are able to serve faithfully behind the scenes to relieve the burdens of others and to assist in practical ways in the work of the ministry.

How many in the church today would regard "serving" as a special gift of the Holy Spirit? Too often, opportunities for service are seen as something to be avoided, rather than welcomed. But in God's value system, the ability to serve well is something to be thankful for, and something to be exercised willingly. Paul does not make this gift specific; there are an unlimited number of activities which would fall under this category. The important thing is that it involves meeting the needs of others.

“teaching” The ability to communicate clearly the truths of God's Word so that believers are instructed and built up in the faith. Although this gift can be developed and strengthened through formal training, it is still a gift of the Spirit. Not everyone with this gift has a Bible college or seminary degree, nor does a diploma guarantee that one has this gift. Note also that this gift is not the same thing as Bible or doctrinal knowledge. One must have knowledge and also the ability to communicate it in a way that touches hearts and minds.

“to encourage” This word, *parakalon* in Greek, carries the idea both of "exhortation" and "encouragement"; it is the ability to effectively urge believers to pursue a course of action; also, the ability to encourage and comfort another. It is the ability to say what is necessary and appropriate for each person (see 1 Thess. 5:14).

“giving” The ability to give generously of one's possessions to the Lord and His work, over and above the ordinary level of stewardship. It involves sensitivity to needs and wisdom in meeting them.

“to lead” The ability to organize and direct the accomplishment of specific goals in a manner that honors God. It is to be exercised *diligently*; Biblical leadership requires hard work and dedication.

“to show mercy” The ability to perform acts of kindness toward the afflicted and helpless. It involves demonstrating sympathy, understanding, compassion, patience and sensitivity toward those who are suffering or unable to help themselves.

Unit 21 – Love

Romans 12:9-21

Text

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. ^a Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends

on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^b says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."^c

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

^a 12:16 Or willing to do menial work

^b 12:19 Deut. 32:35

^c 12:20 Prov. 25:21,22

Open

- If you had the power to completely eliminate one form of evil in the world, what would it be?

Discover

1. What general principles is Paul most concerned about here? (vv. 9, 18)

2. What is the difference between "sincere" and "insincere" love? (v. 9; see also 1 John 3:16-18)

3. What examples does Paul give in this passage of what it means to be "devoted to one another in love"? (v. 10)

4. How are we to respond to those who mistreat us?

v. 14

v. 17

v. 18

v. 19

v. 20

v. 21

5. What does it mean to "Bless those who persecute you"? (v. 14) What kinds of people does this apply to?

6. What knowledge helps us to be "patient in affliction"? (v. 12; see Romans 5:2-5, 8:18, 8:23-25)

7. Why does Paul specify that we are to share with "the Lord's people" who are in need? (v. 13) Shouldn't we share with everyone? (see Gal. 6:10)

How does this command compare with 2 Thessalonians 3:10?

8. How does the Christian view of hospitality differ from the world's view? (v. 13; see also Luke 14:12-14)

9. What knowledge helps to keep us from taking revenge on those who mistreat us? (v. 19; see also Luke 6:35-36; Romans 2:9-11)

10. In light of the previous question, if God can take revenge, then why can't we? (v. 19)

11. In your own words, what is Paul saying we should avoid in verse 21? What should we do instead?

Apply

How do pride and conceit conflict with brotherly love? With peace?

Do you truly "hate what is evil" (v. 9), or only those evils which others commit against you?

Of the commands listed in verses 9-21, which do you find relatively easy to keep? Which are more difficult?

Commentary

Paul now passes from the topic of spiritual gifts to the topic of love, which is the goal and purpose of those gifts. (There is a similar progression of thought between chapter 12 and 13 of 1 Corinthians; see 1 Cor. 12:31). Both of these topics fall within the scope of Paul's exhortations to "offer your bodies as living sacrifices" and to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind". The way we serve and love our brothers and sisters in Christ is an expression of our service and devotion to God.

- v. 9 **"Love must be sincere"** The word "sincere" is literally, "without hypocrisy" (see also 2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Pet. 1:22). One example of hypocritical love is giving in order to get; or helping someone so that they will do something for you in return. Another example would be professing love toward others, or helping them, in order to gain respect and esteem in the Christian community. Sincere love, on the other hand, gives without regard to self.

"hate what is evil, cling to what is good" Love does not mean that we are indifferent to questions of right and wrong. True love seeks to protect others from evil. At times, this requires that we turn believers away from doing evil themselves (Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1), but the goal is always repentance, healing, and restoration to fellowship. In the same way, we demonstrate our love and concern for one another by promoting and defending what is good; those things which are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

- v. 10 **"Be devoted to one another in love"** The love that believers are to have for one another is more than just the love of good friends. It is to be the same kind of committed and self-sacrificing love that family members have for one another. This love should be so strong among believers that it is obvious to everyone (see John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; 1 John 3:11; 4:11-12, 20).

"Honor one another above yourselves" This is not a false modesty, but honest affirmation. It involves showing respect for one another, and highly valuing the good qualities and gifts of other believers.

- v. 11 **"Never be lacking in zeal"** The phrase "never be lacking" could also be translated, "do not be lazy". The proper love of Christians for one another is not passive, but active. It is energetic and fervent, serving Christ by seeking out and meeting the needs of other believers (Matt. 25:40).

- v. 12 **"joyful in hope, patient in affliction"** Christians can be joyful and steadfast in difficult circumstances because they have a confident hope in the future (Rom. 5:2-5; 8:23-25). They know that whatever they may have to endure in this life, it is *"not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"* (Rom. 8:18).

- v. 13 **"Share with the Lord's people who are in need"** Our first responsibility in meeting the needs of others is to care for "those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). It is entirely appropriate for family members to tend first to the needs of their own. In the same way, believers are to care first for the needs of those who are members of God's family. This is one way in which our love for one another is shown to the world.

"Practice hospitality" The difference between "entertaining" and hospitality is that hospitality ministers to others who are in need, rather than those whose company we enjoy most or who can repay us with dinner invitations (Luke 14:12-14). It will sometimes involve taking the initiative to reach out to others in the body of Christ who need help "fitting in".

- v. 14 **"Bless those who persecute you"** Paul instructs his readers, not merely to forgive, or to avoid retaliating against their persecutors, but to seek their good and to call down God's blessings on them! In this way we demonstrate God's love in us, *"because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked"* (Luke 6:35; see also Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36).

- v. 15 **"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn"** A Christian is not to be indifferent to the joys and sorrows of others, but to share them.

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- v. 16 **“Do not be proud”** Christian humility comes from the knowledge that anything we possess which is good or praiseworthy has been given to us by God (1 Cor. 4:7). The proud or conceited man is one who does not understand that apart from Christ he can do "nothing" (John 15:5).
- v. 17 **“Do not repay anyone evil for evil”** This prohibits Christians from taking revenge against those who persecute us out of hatred for the gospel. But the command also applies to our behavior toward other believers (see 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). In either case, we are not to "get even". God alone is the judge and He will ensure that justice is done at the proper time.
- “do what is right in the eyes of everyone”**
This could mean that we should do the things that everybody agrees are right; however, "everyone" is often wrong. It seems better to take this to mean that we should do the things that God's Word says are right, and do them in the full view of everyone (Matt. 5:16). One of these things is loving our enemies.
- v. 18 **“live at peace with everyone”** Paul recognizes that this is not always possible, but we are responsible to do what we can to live peacefully with our fellow man. This means that we will not initiate quarrels with others; it also means that we will suffer wrongs without retaliating, because it is difficult to maintain a conflict with someone who refuses to fight back. We are able to do this because we know that in the end, justice will certainly be done.
- On the other hand, we should not shrink back from proclaiming the gospel or standing up for the truth merely because these things are offensive to people. Christ himself was constantly at odds with the religious leaders of his day, because he exposed their hypocrisy and openly opposed them. And Paul was in conflict with the Jews and with all kinds of false teachers.
- v. 19 **“leave room for God's wrath”** It is not necessary for us to "even the score" with those who wrong us. God's wrath and judgment on their sins will be fully adequate to do that, if they are not believers (see Rom. 2:5-11). And if they are believers, then they are forgiven, just as we are.
- v. 20 Instead of taking revenge on those who wrong us, we should do just the opposite: we should show kindness toward them, even to the point of meeting their physical needs. In doing so, you will "heap burning coals on his head," a quote from Prov. 25:21-22. This could mean that if the evil person continues to do wrong after being shown kindness, his guilt and punishment on the day of judgment will be increased. Or it could refer to a ritual in Egypt in which the repentant person carried a bowl of burning charcoal on his head; in this case, the phrase would mean that our kindness toward our enemies will shame them into repentance.
- v. 21 **“Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good”** The one who is "overcome with evil" is not the one who is wronged by an evil person, but the one who retaliates with more evil and thus becomes evil himself. It is a great victory for Satan when he can tempt us into hating our enemies. On the other hand, we are to "overcome evil with good". This does not mean that good will always triumph over evil in the short term. It means that we refuse to allow evil to triumph in our own souls, that we refuse to do evil and thus become evil ourselves. Instead, we respond to evil with good (see 1 John 2:13-14).

Unit 22 – Submission to the Authorities

Romans 13:1-7

Text

⁹ Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if

you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Open

- If you could hold any government position (elected or non-elected; local, state or national), what would it be? Why?

Discover

1. How should Christians relate to government?

v. 1

v. 3

v. 5

v. 7

2. What reasons does Paul give in support of this position?

v. 1

v. 2

v. 4

v. 5

v. 6

3. **Topical study.** In your own words, what do these passages tell us about the Christian's relationship to human government?

Mark 12:17

Titus 3:1

1 Peter 2:13-17

Acts 5:29

Hebrews 11:31

4. How do verses 4-5 imply a limit on our obedience to human government? (see also Acts 5:29)

5. Why must we pay taxes? (v. 6)?

6. What else do we "owe" our government officials and civil servants? (v. 7)

Apply

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Why is rebellion against the government such a serious matter? What are its consequences? | <input type="checkbox"/> Case Study: An organization which promotes civil disobedience to prevent abortions, is organizing a rally in your city. You are on the committee which is responsible for recommending whether church members should participate. What do you recommend? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How might these principles be applied by Christians living in a totalitarian state in which evangelism and Christian church meetings are illegal? | <input type="checkbox"/> What do you think constitutes showing respect and honor to a president? A member of Congress? What would be excluded? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How might these principles be applied by Christians living in a democratic political system? | |

Commentary

In the previous section, Paul has written that Christians are not to take their own revenge, but to wait for God's justice. The issue might be raised, then, of the proper role of the state in punishing wrongdoers. In other words, if it is wrong for me as an individual to punish those who wrong me, how can it be right for the state to do the same thing? Paul's answer is that human authorities are God-ordained agents of justice. They are His means of maintaining order on the earth, and thus must be obeyed. This is consistent with other New Testament passages which urge obedience to civil authority, such as Jesus' statement that we are to "*Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's*" (Mark 12:17, see also Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

However, this raises other questions. What about unjust rulers? What about those who abuse their authority, persecute believers, command us to do something which God has forbidden, or forbid us to do something which God commands? It is important to understand that Paul is not trying to answer these questions. He is simply addressing the issue of whether the state has any legitimate authority over the Christian, and his answer is yes, because that authority is given to the state by God. He does not say what our response should be when that authority is abused, and the civil authorities do not act as "*God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer*" (v. 4).

In fact, Paul's words actually imply a limit on the authority of the state. Since the state's authority comes from God and is not independent, it cannot legitimately do or command anything which is contrary to God's Word. God's authority is higher than that of the state. Thus, when Peter was ordered not to preach in Jesus' name, he said "*we must obey God rather than human beings*" (Acts 5:29), and Rahab was commended for her faith when she protected the spies of Israel rather than obey her own king (Heb. 11:31).

vv. 1-2 "***Let everyone be subject***" There is no distinction between believers and non-believers. All must submit to the governing authorities. This submission is not merely outward obedience; it also implies a proper honor and respect for those in authority (v. 7).

"for there is no authority except that which God has established" This gives the basis for our submission: all human authority comes from God. Paul states this both positively and negatively, making it clear that there are no exceptions. God is sovereign over this world, and all worldly authority has been established by Him. Therefore, in obeying civil authority, we are obeying God. Likewise, if we rebel against civil authority, we are rebelling against God.

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- v. 3 **“For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong”**
Again, Paul is not dealing with every possible circumstance. It is certainly true that there are governments which persecute Christians, which punish good and reward evil. But Paul is discussing here the proper role of civil authority under God, and his point is that Christians should be law-abiding citizens. Under normal circumstances, this will result in praise from those in authority, rather than punishment.
- v. 4 **“the one in authority is God's servant for your good”** All human rulers, whether they realize it or not, are God's servants. God places them in positions of authority and removes them, as He wills (Prov. 8:15-16; Dan. 2:21). Therefore, human government is not an evil to be endured, but a positive good. Civil rulers are God's agents to maintain order so that we can live godly and peaceful lives (1 Tim. 2:2). They do this by acting as agents of God's judgment; when governments punish wrongdoers, they are actually executing God's wrath against evil!
- v. 5 **“it is necessary to submit . . . as a matter of conscience”** Christians are to submit to civil authority, not only because God has given governments the power to punish those who disobey, but also because it is the right thing to do. However, God's Word is a higher authority than human government, and therefore our conscience, guided by God's Word and the Holy Spirit, is the ultimate test of the validity of any human law. Just as our conscience tells us that we ought to obey civil authority, our conscience also tells us when obedience to civil authority would violate God's Word.
- vv. 6-7 **“That is also why you pay taxes”**
Governments could not function and fulfill their God-given role without money. Elected officials, policemen, judges, and all other public servants need to obtain a living from what they do. Therefore, Christians are to pay their taxes (see Mark 12:17). Christians are also to “pay” the proper respect and honor to those in authority, not only because they are important or powerful, but because God has appointed them as His servants.

Unit 23 – Love, For The Day Is Near

Romans 13:8-14

Text

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,”^a and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”^b

¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let

us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.^c

^a 13:9 Exodus 20:13-15,17; Deut. 5:17-19,21

^b 13:9 Lev. 19:18

^c 13:14 In contexts like this, the Greek word for flesh (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit.

Open

- How do you get along with your next-door neighbors? Have you had positive or negative experiences with neighbors in the past?

Discover

1. What words or phrases does the term "neighbor" bring to mind for you?

2. According to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), what makes someone our neighbor?

3. Look up the following Old Testament passages containing the word "neighbor" and write in your own words what they command:

Leviticus 19:13-18

Deuteronomy 5:20-21

Proverbs 3:28

4. How does Paul's statement of our obligation to our neighbor compare with those Old Testament passages?

5. What does Paul mean by the phrase "Let no debt remain outstanding"? Does this mean that we should never incur any kind of debt (for instance, to purchase a house)?

6. In what sense is love a fulfillment of the law? (vv. 8-10; see Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:13-14)

7. What does it mean to understand the present time? (v. 11)

8. What reasons does Paul give as to why we should "put aside the deeds of darkness"? (vv. 11-14)

9. What "slumber" is Paul exhorting his readers to awaken from? (v. 11; see Matthew 24:36-39, 25:1-13)

10. What are the "night" and "day" being referred to in verse 12?

11. What is the "armor of light"? (v. 12) Why does a Christian need it? (see 2 Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 6:13-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8)

Apply

- How is our debt of love to one another like a car loan or a mortgage? How is it different?
- How is Paul's view of love different from contemporary ideas of love?

- What do you think it means to "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ"? (v. 14) How would you go about doing this?

Commentary

Having instructed us to pay civil authorities the taxes and respect that is owed them, Paul now turns to what we owe everyone—love.

- v. 8 ***“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.”*** Paul told his readers in vs. 7 to “give to everyone what you owe them,” and applied this principle to the debt of taxes and respect which citizens owe their rulers. Now, he restates the principle and applies it to the debt of love which we owe to all people. By referring to love as a debt, Paul emphasizes that we do not have the right to withdraw from society and simply tend to our own needs. We have an obligation to extend care and concern to others, an obligation that comes from being part of the human race. This is a continuing debt, one that can never be paid off.

We owe this debt of love to believers and non-believers alike; the terms “others” in verse 8, and “neighbor” in verses 9-10 clearly extend the scope of the command to all people (see the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37).

- vv. 8b-10 ***“love is the fulfillment of the law”***
The commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” is found in Lev. 19:18. Jesus identifies it as one of the two greatest commandments, upon which depend “all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40). In other words, the Mosaic Law is simply a detailed explanation of what it means to love God and man. Note that Paul is not saying we should keep the Mosaic Law; he is saying that if we love one another, we will end up doing the things that the Law requires (at least as far as our relations to other people are concerned). As examples, he cites adultery, murder, theft, and coveting; all of these are prohibited by the law, but love would also prevent them, since “love does no harm to a neighbor.” (see Gal. 5:13-14.)
- v. 11 ***“understanding the present time”*** Paul wants his readers to understand that they must not delay in putting his words into action, since Christ’s return and the consummation of our salvation is coming closer with every passing moment. Perhaps in his call to “wake up from your slumber” Paul has in mind the parable of the five foolish virgins, who fell asleep waiting for the bridegroom and were not prepared for his return (Matt. 25:1-13; see also Matt. 24:36-51).

v. 12 ***“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here”*** The "night" is the present time, during which Satan still rules as the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), although he has been condemned and defeated by Christ (John 16:11; Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:15; Eph. 1:20-22). The "day" is the time of Christ's return, when the full effects of His victory will be realized, and His enemies will be made His "footstool" (Heb. 10:13).

“let us . . . put on the armor of light”

Paul uses the imagery of battle and armor several times in his writings (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 6:13-17; 1 Thess. 5:1-8). It is an imagery which is often glossed over today, but former generations understood that the Christian life is a battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Consider these words from the hymn *Am I a Soldier of the Cross?*, by Isaac Watts (1674-1748):

*“Am I a Soldier of the Cross, a follower
of the Lamb?*

*And shall I fear to own His cause or
blush to speak His name?*

*Must I be carried to the skies on
flowery beds of ease,*

*While others fought to win the prize
and sailed through bloody seas?*

*“Are there no foes for me to face? Must
I not stem the flood?*

*Is this vile world a friend to grace, to
help me on to God?*

*Sure I must fight if I would reign:
increase my courage, Lord;*

*I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
supported by Thy word.”*

The Christian's power is not military, but spiritual; we do not wage war as the world does. Yet our weapons "have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:3-4).

v. 13 ***“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime”*** We are to behave as people do in the daytime, since it is during the night that immoral behavior most commonly takes place (1 Thess. 5:7-8). The obvious allusion here is to spiritual "day" and "night"; we are to live as those who have been enlightened by Christ, rather than those who are still living in spiritual darkness (Eph. 5:8).

Unit 24 – The Weak and the Strong

Romans 14:1-15:13

Text

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister^a? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written:

“As surely as I live,” says the Lord,
“every knee will bow before me;
every tongue will acknowledge God.”^b

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. ¹⁴ I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. ¹⁵ If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

²² So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.^c

¹ We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. ³ For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”^d ⁴ For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews^e on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed⁹ and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing the praises of your name.”^f

¹⁰ Again, it says,

“Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.”^g

¹¹ And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;
let all the peoples extol him.”^h

¹² And again, Isaiah says,

“The Root of Jesse will spring up,
one who will arise to rule over the nations;
in him the Gentiles will hope.”ⁱ

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

^a 14:10 The Greek word for *brother or sister* (*adelphos*) refers here to a believer, whether man or woman, as part of God's family; also in verses 13, 15 and 21.

^b 14:11 Isaiah 45:23

^c 14:23 Some manuscripts place 16:25-27 here; others after 15:33.

^d 15:3 Psalm 69:9

^e 15:8 Greek *circumcision*

^f 15:9 2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49

^g 15:10 Deut. 32:43

^h 15:11 Psalm 117:1

ⁱ 15:12 Isaiah 11:10 (see Septuagint)

Open

- "Catch the Fib" - Have everyone make three statements about themselves, two true and one false. Then have the others try to guess which is the false one.

Discover

1. In this passage, what does it mean to be "weak" in faith? (vv. 14:1-5)

2. In 14:1-12, Paul describes the typical (wrong) attitudes of the meat-eater and the non-meat-eater toward one another. Paraphrase these attitudes in the form of a dialogue between the two:

Meat-eater to non-meat-eater:

Non-meat-eater to meat-eater:

3. Why should the "strong" and "weak" Christians stop judging one another? (14:3-4, 14:9-12)

4. Under what circumstances should we choose not to exercise our freedom? What should be the guiding principle in decisions of this kind? (vv. 14:13-21; 15:1-3)

What does it mean to "cause your brother or sister to fall"? (v. 21; see 1 Cor. 8:9-13)

5. If "all food is clean" (14:20), does that mean everyone should eat meat? (vv. 14:14, 22-23)

6. Are there any circumstances in which we should continue to exercise our freedom, even if it offends others? (see Gal. 4:8-11; 5:1; Col. 2:16-23)

Apply

- What are some other examples of "disputable matters" which the principles in this passage could be applied to?
- If you are not sure whether something is right or wrong, should you do it? Why?
- Are you more like the "weak" or the "strong"?
- Case Study: Bob was raised in a home where drinking alcohol was forbidden. Now, after studying Romans, he has decided that there is nothing wrong with drinking, as long as he doesn't get drunk. He feels so liberated by his discovery that he orders beer or wine whenever he eats with other believers, and tries to persuade them to join him in doing so. What do you think of Bob's behavior?

Commentary

Having exhorted his readers to love one another and to avoid "dissension and jealousy," Paul now considers one of the most common causes of disunity in the church: disagreements on the proper way to practice the Christian faith.

The identity of the "weak" brothers referred to in this passage is not clear. Perhaps they were Jewish converts who still retained some of their former attitudes toward "clean" and "unclean" foods, and toward holy days and feast days. Or perhaps they were Gentiles whose ideas about religion were shaped by their pagan backgrounds. It is clear, however, that both the "weak" and the "strong" believers were convinced that their way of living out the Christian faith was right, and that the other was wrong.

Paul does not side with either party (which probably frustrated both sides). Rather than try to settle the argument, he encourages unity in the midst of diversity. Instead of identifying either side as "right" or "wrong," Paul urges that each accept the other, and that the unity of the church be maintained. Therefore, on issues central to the gospel, Christians should seek agreement. However, when the issue is not salvation, but proper Christian behavior, then differences of opinion are permissible. In this case, we ought to live and let live, *"for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (14:17).

v. 1 **"Accept him whose faith is weak"** Paul does not mean those whose faith in Christ is weak, but those who do not understand the full implications of grace in their lives. He is speaking of those who do not understand that for the believer, such things as dietary habits and the observance of special days are irrelevant. The response of the church should be to *"accept him . . . without quarreling over disputable matters."* Such people are to be accepted, not merely tolerated. They are to be warmly welcomed into the life of the church and not treated as inferior Christians. They should not be criticized or ridiculed, nor should others attempt to argue them out of their views. They should be permitted to live according to their personal scruples, no matter how misguided the stronger believers think them to be. However, this does not mean that they should be allowed to impose their views on others.

vv. 2-3 Paul gives an example of what he is referring to: eating meat versus eating only vegetables. A similar situation had arisen in Corinth, where the issue was the eating of food which had been sacrificed to idols (see 1 Cor. 8:1-13). Paul identifies the pitfalls that both sides may fall into. The "meat-eater" is often guilty of despising or

looking down on the "non-meat-eater," judging the one who abstains from meat as spiritually immature. On the other hand, the "non-meat-eater" is often guilty of condemning the "meat-eater" as a sinner, because he is indulging in a practice which the abstainer considers to be sinful. But in reality both attitudes are sinful, because they are rooted in pride and self-righteousness. The judging which the "abstainer" is guilty of is especially dangerous when the effect is to put other believers under the burden of the law. In this case, the purity of the gospel is at stake. Paul did not tolerate this; in fact, he exposed and condemned it (Gal. 4:8-11; 5:1; Col. 2:16-23).

v. 4 **"Who are you to judge someone else's servant?"** Another reason to avoid judging one another's behavior is that we simply have no right to do so. The reason here is simple: our brothers and sisters in Christ are God's servants, not ours. They answer to God, and not to us. If God chooses to accept them, that is His business. We have no right to reject what God has accepted (see 15:7). (On the matter of who has the right to judge, see also 2 Tim. 4:1 and Matt. 7:1-5).

vv. 5-8 **"Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind"** Whichever view we take in such matters, we ought to be convinced that it is the right one. Whatever we do, whether we indulge or abstain from a given activity, we should do so because we believe it honors God. We belong to God, and our goal should be to glorify Him in everything.

One implication of these verses is that we need to accept the sincerity of those who disagree with us. We need to accept that they are acting out of genuine conviction. Furthermore, we must be willing to allow them to *remain* convinced of views which we think are wrong, at least regarding the "gray areas" of appropriate Christian conduct. We should keep our convictions on these matters to ourselves (14:22).

vv. 10-12 **"we will all stand before God's judgment seat"** When we judge someone else, we place ourselves in a superior position over them. (It is no accident that judges in the courts sit on an elevated platform.) But what we fail to recognize when we do this is that we are all equal before God. Each of us is guilty of sin; none of us can legitimately claim a position of superiority over another. Only God has the right to judge, and He will exercise that right at the proper time. When He does, any evaluation we may have rendered will be irrelevant. Thankfully, both the meat-eater and the non-meat-eater will "stand" in this judgment, because their righteousness comes not from themselves, but from Christ (14:4).

14:13-15:4 In the previous verses, Paul dealt with the attitude of acceptance we are to maintain toward other believers. Now he moves on to a different question: How should the convictions of others affect our behavior? His answer is that we should be willing to restrict our freedom in order to build up our brothers in Christ, even when that means avoiding practices which our consciences would permit us to engage in. The most important thing, then, is the welfare of our brother, not our own "rights".

v. 14 ***"I am convinced . . . that nothing is unclean in itself"*** As far as the apparent cause of the disagreement is concerned, Paul comes down on the side of the "meat-eaters". But, as he makes clear in the following verses, that is not the real issue. The real issue is love for one's brother.

"if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean" Even though, on an objective basis, there is nothing wrong with eating meat, that does not mean that everyone can eat meat. If I feel guilty when I eat meat, then I shouldn't do it, because it would violate my conscience, and that would be sin. If I have doubts, I should abstain (see 14:23).

vv. 15-16 ***"Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died"*** One reason that we shouldn't flaunt our freedom by openly doing what others consider to be sin is that this will encourage them to follow our lead. If they do so, they violate their conscience, and thus we are guilty of tempting them into sin, which is destructive to their spiritual life. This is what Paul means by causing someone else to "stumble" (14:20). But this is not the way of love. It is selfish and foolish to cause harm to a brother in Christ over such an insignificant thing as food.

vv. 17-18 ***"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking"*** This gives a reason why we should voluntarily choose to limit our freedom for the benefit of our brother: the "rights" of eating and drinking which we possess are just not that important (see 1 Cor. 8:8). The things God is really concerned with are ***righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit***. It is really no sacrifice to give up some food and drink in order to promote these things, and doing so is pleasing to God.

vv. 20-21 ***"it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble"*** It is important to clarify what is meant by causing someone else to "stumble". It does not mean simply that another believer objects to what we are doing, or is offended by it. In that case we would be slaves of everyone else's opinions (see Gal. 1:10). Instead, it means that the "weaker brother" is

encouraged to do what we do, and thus violate his conscience (see 1 Cor. 8:9-13). The distinction is important, for there will always be judgmental people in the church who attempt, through guilt-manipulation, to control the lives of others. By doing so, they make Christianity into a set of rules and regulations, which is antithetical to the gospel. Paul is not saying we should try to please these people. Rather, he is concerned that we not influence others to violate their consciences by imitating our behavior.

15:1-3 ***"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves"*** Those who are strong in faith have not been given that faith for their own benefit only, but so that they might assist others who are less mature. The burden of maintaining unity within the church falls most on the strong, for they have the greater freedom. They can partake or not partake, as they wish. They should not use this freedom to please themselves, but should exercise it in a way that helps others. By doing so, they will be following the example of Christ, whose whole life was given in service to others (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:4-5).

15:5-6 These verses form a "hinge" between the previous section and what follows. In 14:13-15:4, Paul dealt with the question of how differing opinions between believers should be dealt with in order to maintain unity. Now he turns to the question of unity in general, and these two verses are his prayer that God would grant unity to his readers. Note that Paul is not asking for unity of opinion; what he has just written demonstrates that this is not always possible. What he is asking for is a unity of love and faith. The result will be that God is glorified. We would do well to ask God for the same blessing.

15:7-13 These verses are difficult, but it seems clear that Paul is summarizing his appeal to unity by emphasizing that Christ is the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles. (This would indicate that the controversy which he is discussing in the passage as a whole was between Jewish and Gentile believers.) Christ became the Messiah and Savior of the Jews, and thus their servant, fulfilling the promises made to the Hebrew patriarchs (v. 8). He also became the Savior of the Gentiles, with the result that they "rejoice" (v. 10), "praise the Lord" (v. 11), and hope in him (v. 12). Not only that, but the quotations from the Old Testament indicate that the salvation of the Gentiles was anticipated in the promises made to the patriarchs; it is Christ's fulfillment of these promises that leads the Gentiles to "glorify God for his mercy" (v. 9). The unity of God's saving acts in Christ ought to result in a unity among those for whom Christ is a Savior.

Unit 25 – Paul the Minister to the Gentiles

Romans 15:14-33

Text

¹⁴ I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. ¹⁵ Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸ I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. ²¹ Rather, as it is written:

"Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."^a

²² This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

²³ But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, ²⁴ I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. ²⁸ So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

³⁰ I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. ³¹ Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, ³² so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. ³³ The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

^a 15:21 Isaiah 52:15 (see Septuagint)

Open

- How do you expect your life to be different one year from today? Five years from today?

Discover

1. In verses 14-16, Paul clarifies his attitude toward the Roman Christians and defends his writing style. In the space below, restate these verses in your own words.

2. From verses 17-22, what desires motivated Paul? Why do you think he tells the Roman Christians about these desires?

3. **The Trinity:** In this passage, God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are mentioned as working together in the work of the gospel. In the space below, identify what is true of each.

God the Father:

v. 15

v. 16

vv. 30, 32

God the Son (Jesus Christ):

v. 16

v. 18

v. 19

v. 29

God the Holy Spirit:

v. 16

v. 19

4. In verses 23-29, Paul outlines his travel plans. What reasons does he give for each stop on his itinerary?

Jerusalem:

Rome:

Spain:

Why do you think Paul included his travel plans in this letter?

5. In verses 30-33, Paul asks prayer for two specific requests. After reading what actually happened to Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-36; 23:12-15), summarize below what Paul's primary concerns might have been as he looked forward to the trip.

Apply

- How would you characterize Paul's attitude toward God and people from this passage? How does this compare with your image of what it means to be a "theologian"?
- Does it surprise you or bother you that Paul's plans were not carried out as he expected?
- What significance do you see in the fact that Paul asked the Roman Christians to pray for his trip?
- How do your ambitions compare with Paul's in terms of clarity? Eternal value?
- What in your life has impressed on you the importance of world missions?

Commentary

Paul now begins the conclusion of his letter. The personal tone, with references to his own travel plans, his need for prayer, and (in chapter 16) his greetings to individual members of the Roman church, emphasizes the fact that this is a letter, and not some abstract theological treatise. It was written for the purpose of meeting real spiritual needs in the lives of the Roman Christians. But it is also a letter written by the Holy Spirit to all believers at all times, and it can have the same benefit in our lives if we will study its message and respond to it in faith.

vv. 14-16 ***"I myself am convinced . . . that you yourselves are full of goodness"*** Paul's use of the emphatic "I myself" indicates that this is his own opinion. Even though he had written to them boldly, he did not want them to think that he disapproved of them. On the contrary, he thought very highly of them, as did many others (Rom. 1:8).

"to remind you of them again" Even though the Roman Christians were "filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another," they needed to be reminded of God's grace, as we all do. The prevailing currents of our culture are so contrary to the gospel message that we need constant and repeated reminders of it in order to live by it consistently.

"because of the grace God gave me"

Paul began this letter by stating that his ministry to the Gentiles was something that he had received from God by grace (1:5). Here he reaffirms that statement, emphasizing both that he has the authority to teach the things contained in the letter, but also that his authority comes from God, and not himself.

vv. 17-19 ***"except what Christ has accomplished through me"*** Paul would not dare refer to the fruit of his ministry as anything other than the work of God.

"by the power of signs and wonders"

Paul's ministry among the Gentiles was accompanied by the authenticating signs which are the "marks of a true apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12; see also Acts 13:6-12; 14:3, 8-10; 19:11-12). These were done "through the power of the Spirit". It is instructive to note how intertwined the work of God, Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are throughout this passage.

vv. 20-22 Paul explains why he had not been able to visit the Roman church earlier; he had been busy fulfilling his calling as a pioneer evangelist and church planter. Paul is not saying that church planting is the best, or only, work for every committed Christian, but only that this was his own calling (see 1 Cor. 3:5-10).

vv. 23-29 Paul lays out his plans for the future: after traveling to Jerusalem, he plans to journey to Spain and to visit the Roman Christians on the way (see Acts 19:21). While in Rome, he hopes to obtain assistance to help him on his way, perhaps money or traveling companions. This section is a good example of the principle that all human plans are subject to God's approval (James 4:13-15), because Paul's plans were never fulfilled. The trouble he encountered at Jerusalem prevented it (Acts 21:15-26:32), so that when he did arrive at Rome, he was a prisoner (Acts 28:11-16).

Paul's reason for going first to Jerusalem was to distribute a collection for the needy Christians which had been taken up in Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 24:17). For Paul, this was a very significant task (see 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. chapters 8-9). The offering would not only relieve the poverty of the Jerusalem Christians, but would also serve as a symbol of unity between Gentile and Jewish believers, and as a mark of gratitude for the blessings of the gospel which came through the Jews (John 4:22; Rom. 11:17-18).

vv. 30-33 ***“join me in my struggle by praying to God for me”*** Paul was asking that the Roman Christians become actively involved in his ministry through prayer. He asked for prayer concerning two matters: First, that he be ***“kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea”***. Paul well knew that there were fanatical Jews who would do anything to prevent him from spreading the gospel (see Acts 21:27-36; 23:12-15). He also asked prayer that ***“the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there”***. Perhaps Paul was concerned that the offerings of the Gentile Christians would be rejected by those Jewish believers who still held to the Law of Moses, or that he himself would be rejected by them (see Acts 21:17-26). His prayer was that he might avoid these things, and thus arrive in Rome refreshed.

Unit 26 – Personal Greetings

Romans 16:1-27

Text

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon^{ab} of the church in Cenchreae. ² I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

³ Greet Priscilla^c and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house.

Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

⁶ Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among^d the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

⁸ Greet Ampliatius, my dear friend in the Lord.

⁹ Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.

¹⁰ Greet Apelles, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test.

Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.

¹¹ Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew.

Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

¹² Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.

Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the other brothers and sisters with them.

¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them.

¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ send greetings.

¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put

obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. ¹⁹ Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

²¹ Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Jews.

²² I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.

²³ Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.

Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. ^{[24]e}

²⁵ Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from^f faith—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

^a 16:1 Or servant

^b 16:1 The word *deacon* refers here to a Christian designated to serve with the overseers/elders of the church in a variety of ways; similarly in Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8,12.

^c 16:3 Greek *Prisca*, a variant of Priscilla

^d 16:7 Or are esteemed by

^e 16:24 Some manuscripts include here *May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.*

^f 16:26 Or that is

Open

What's the most memorable letter you ever received?

Discover

1. Paul closes this letter with greetings to specific people. What does this tell us about Paul and his ministry?

2. What does the fact that Paul ended his letter in this way tell us about Romans and the purpose for which it was written?

3. How would you characterize Paul's words of greeting? What do they have in common?

4. What qualities does Paul commend?

5. What should be our response to those who cause division through false teaching?

How do these people typically operate?

6. How does Paul seek to encourage his readers?

7. How does Paul end this passage? (vv. 25-27) Why is this significant?

Apply

How have you grown as a result of this study?

- In your understanding of the Bible and the gospel
- In your relationships with other believers (including the members of your small group)

- In your commitment to evangelism and relationships with those outside the faith
- In your personal spiritual life and Christian walk

Commentary

Paul now closes his letter with a series of greetings to specific people, which affirms that it was ordinary people like these, and not just theologians, that Paul intended to help with his letter. He also includes a final warning and benediction.

- vv. 1-2 **“I commend to you our sister Phoebe”** Phoebe was most likely the one who carried the letter to Rome. Letters of introduction or commendation were often carried by travelers in Paul's day (see Acts 18:27; 2 Cor. 3:1). She was **“a deacon of the church in Cenchrea”**; Cenchrea was a port of Corinth, and this makes it likely that Paul was in that city when he wrote Romans. The Greek word translated "servant" is *diakonos*, which is also the word for "deacon," so Phoebe may have been a deacon of the Corinthian church. At any rate, her service to Paul and the church is highly spoken of. Since no traveling companions are mentioned here, she may have been traveling alone, which would indicate that she was a wealthy woman with servants.
- vv. 3-4 **“Greet Priscilla and Aquila”** From the list of names in vv. 3-15, these are the only ones we know about from elsewhere in the New Testament. Aquila was a tentmaker, whom Paul first met in Corinth. They were traveling companions and co-laborers with Paul, and are mentioned in Acts 18:2, 28, 26; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19.
- vv. 17-19 Here Paul inserts a final warning into the letter; perhaps as he thinks about all the people whom he has just mentioned and dearly loves, he cannot resist one final bit of paternal advice. The Roman Christians are to **“watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned”**. The specific nature of the false teachings is not clear, but they are identified by the fact that they differ from the gospel which the Romans had previously received. These false teachers are all the more dangerous because they are persuasive speakers, using **“smooth talk and flattery”** to **“deceive the minds of naive people”**. Paul does not issue this warning because he is worried that the Romans have begun to defect from the faith; he states that "everyone has heard about your obedience". Nevertheless, he wants them to be on the lookout.
- vv. 21-23 This section is a series of greetings from those who were with Paul. Tertius is evidently Paul's amanuensis, or secretary, in the writing of the letter. Timothy is Paul's right-hand man who is first mentioned in Acts 16:1-3. Concerning the others we know little.
- vv. 25-27 This doxology is a fitting end to the epistle, giving all glory to God for the gospel, which is **“the message . . . about Jesus Christ”**.

Acknowledgments

The primary commentary consulted in the preparation of this study guide was Leon Morris' *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988.

The two-volume work by C. E. B Cranfield was also referred to (*The Epistle to the Romans* , Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1985).

About the Author

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