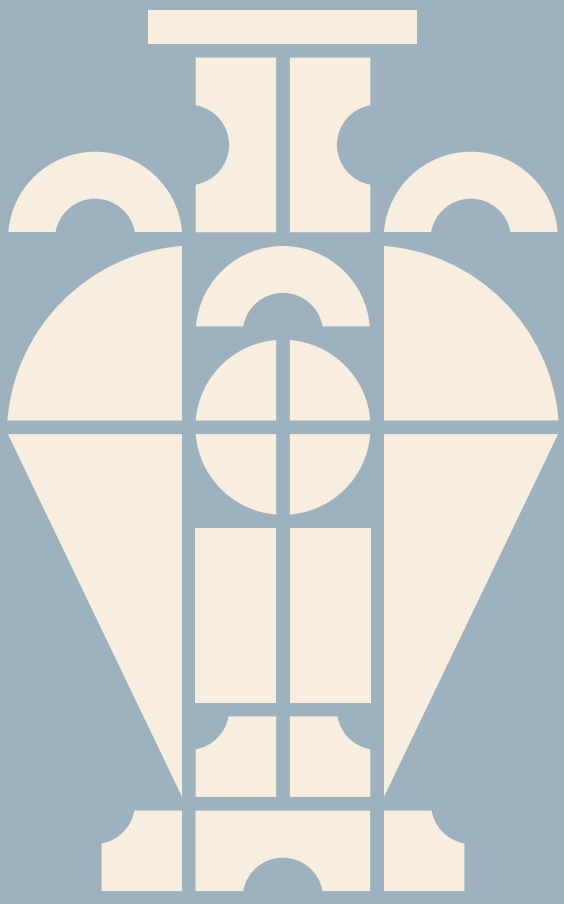
Bible Study Fellowship

ROMANS

FROM GUILT — TO GRACE





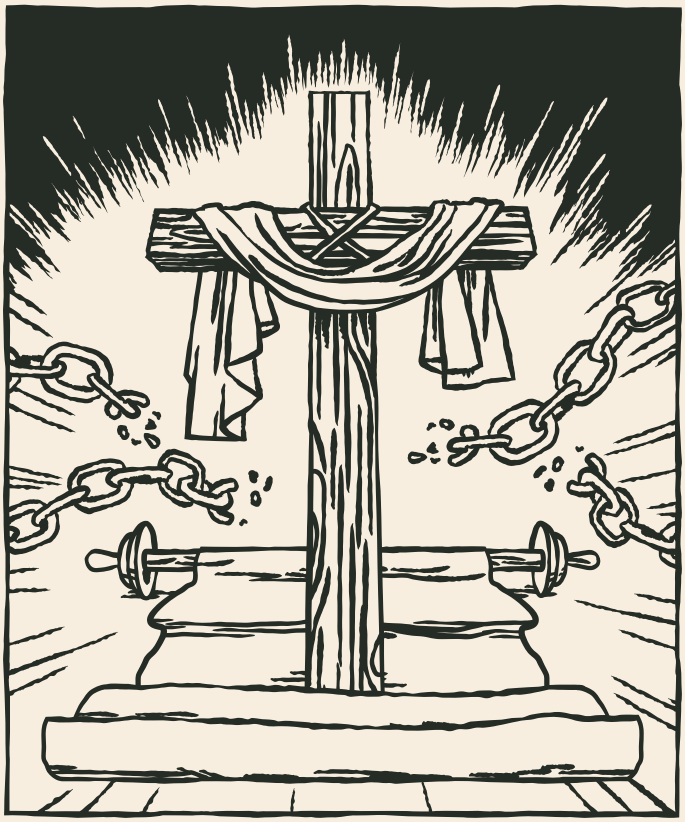
THE GOSPEL PRESENTED IN ROMANS

The book of Romans reveals humanity's guilt, the good news of the cross, God's salvation plan for Jew and Gentile, and lives transformed by grace.

Humanity's Unrighteousness and Great Need of True Righteousness | ROMANS 1:1–3:20 Lessons 1-4



God's Gracious Gift of Righteousness Through Jesus Christ | ROMANS 3:21–8:39 Lessons 5-15





Proof of God's Righteousness in His Sovereign Plan | ROMANS 9–11 Lessons 16-20



God's Righteousness Worked Out in His People's Lives | ROMANS 12–16 Lessons 21-28

Bible Study Fellowship

ROMANS

FROM GUILT —— TO GRACE

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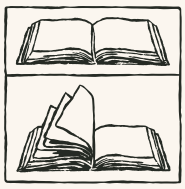
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ROMANS AT A GLANCE

INTRODUCTION

SCRIPTURE:
Various

DOCTRINE:
The Bible



Romans: The World's Most Influential Letter

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul's letter to Rome's believers presents a well-reasoned and powerful explanation of essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 1:16

ROMANS EXPLAINS TIMELESS, ESSENTIAL TRUTHS FOR TODAY AND ETERNITY.

ROMANS 1:1–3:20 HUMANITY'S UNRIGHTEOUSNESS AND GREAT NEED OF TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

1

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 1:1-17

DOCTRINE:
Righteousness



Humanity's Need for the Gospel

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul opened Romans by identifying himself as a set-apart apostle eager to share the gospel with all—Jew and Gentile.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 1:17

GOD REVEALS HIS SAVING POWER FOR ALL PEOPLE THROUGH THE GOSPEL.

2

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 1:18-32

DOCTRINE:
Wrath of God



God's Wrath Against Sinful Humanity

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul explained that God's wrath is revealed against humanity for rejecting creation's witness to Him and choosing idolatry and sin.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 1:20

NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HOW WE RESPOND TO GOD.

3

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 2

DOCTRINE:
Judgment of Believers and Unbelievers



No Excuse for Anyone

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul warned that all people, including those who judge others, are guilty of sin and will be judged by God's truth.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 2:11

GOD ALONE PERFECTLY JUDGES EVERY PERSON.

4

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 3:1-20

DOCTRINE:
Sin, Its Character and Universality



No One Righteous

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul taught that God justly brings His wrath on all humanity—Jews and Gentiles alike—for rebelling against Him, and all are equally accountable.

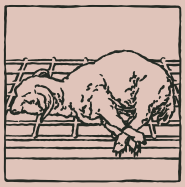
FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 3:10-11

ALL PEOPLE ARE CONDEMNED FOR THEIR SIN AND ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD.

5

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 3:21-26

DOCTRINE:
Salvation



How God Saves Sinners

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul clarified that access to God's righteousness and salvation comes only through Christ's atoning sacrifice.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 3:22-23

GOD HAS MADE THE WAY TO BE DECLARED RIGHT WITH HIM.

6

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 3:27-31

DOCTRINE:
Faith



Justification by Faith, Part 1

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul unpacked why no one is justified by the law—salvation comes by faith, so neither Jew nor Gentile can boast.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 3:28

GOD JUSTIFIES PEOPLE THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE.

7

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 4

DOCTRINE:
Justification



Justification by Faith, Part 2

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul used the Old Testament examples of Abraham and David to prove that salvation comes through belief and forgiveness—not works.

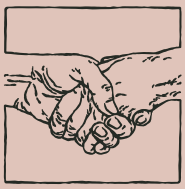
FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 4:20-21

GOD GIVES CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM.

8

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 5:1-11

DOCTRINE:
Reconciliation



Peace with God

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul proclaimed that justified believers have peace with God, hope through suffering, and reconciliation made possible by Christ's death.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 5:1

BELIEVERS HAVE PEACE WITH GOD AND HOPE IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.

9

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 5:12-21

DOCTRINE:
Grace



God's Gift of Righteousness

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul explained how Adam's disobedience brought sin and death to all, while Christ's obedience offers righteousness to those who believe.

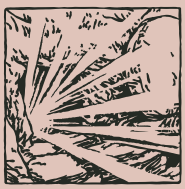
FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 5:18

CHRIST'S GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS TRIUMPHS OVER ADAM'S SIN.

10

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 6:1-11

DOCTRINE:
Salvation



Death to Sin

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul exhorted believers not to presume upon grace by sinning freely but to live transformed lives through unity with Christ.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 6:11

A BELIEVER'S NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST FREES THEM FROM SIN'S POWER.

11

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 6:12-23

DOCTRINE:
Redemption



Alive to God

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul reminded believers they are freed from sin and are called to live obedient lives as God's servants.

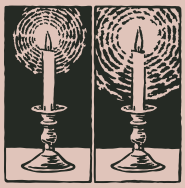
FOCUS VERSE: Romans 6:23

GOD'S GRACE MAKES BELIEVERS ETERNALLY RIGHT WITH HIM AND FREES THEM TO LIVE HOLY LIVES.

12

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 7

DOCTRINE:
Sanctification



The Law and the Believer

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul defined the believer's death to the law and described the ongoing battle believers face against sin.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 7:24-25a

BELIEVERS BELONG TO JESUS EVEN AS THEY STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN.

13

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 8:1-17

DOCTRINE:
God the Holy Spirit



Life Through the Spirit

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul affirmed no more condemnation for believers, contrasting fleshly living with Spirit-filled, holy living as God's children.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 8:1

THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS GOD'S CHILDREN TO LIVE HOLY LIVES.

14

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 8:18-27

DOCTRINE:
Suffering



Suffering and Glory

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul explained that even as believers suffer now, creation and believers await the day when God will bring full glory and freedom from sin.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 8:18

BELIEVERS EAGERLY AWAIT GOD'S PROMISED ETERNAL GLORY.

15

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 8:28-39

DOCTRINE:
Eternal Security



Secure in God's Love

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul proclaimed nothing can separate those God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified from His love and purpose to make them like Jesus, His Son.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 8:32

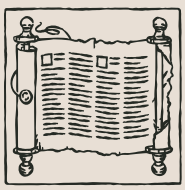
GOD'S PEOPLE REST SECURELY IN HIS GOOD PURPOSES, SALVATION, AND LOVE.

ROMANS 9–11 PROOF OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IN HIS SOVEREIGN PLAN

16

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 9:1-29

DOCTRINE:
Election



God's Sovereignty in Salvation

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul grieved Jewish unbelief, affirming that God's just election chooses Abraham's offspring through faith, not lineage or works.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 9:23-24

GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER HIS CREATION AND FAITHFULLY KEEPS HIS PROMISES.

17

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 9:30–10:13

DOCTRINE:
Righteousness



Our Responsibility in Salvation

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul contrasted Gentile faith and Jewish works, affirming that righteousness comes through faith in Christ, who fulfills the law and saves all who trust in Him.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 10:9

EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.

18

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 10:14-21

DOCTRINE:
Repentance



Our Privilege in Salvation

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul articulated how faith comes by hearing Christ's message, which Israel rejected despite God's gracious invitation through His messengers.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 10:17

GOD FAITHFULLY SENDS HIS MESSENGERS TO PROCLAIM CHRIST TO THE WORLD.

19

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 11:1-32

DOCTRINE:
Fulfillment of Prophecy



Salvation for the Gentiles and for Israel

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul taught that while Israel rejected Christ, their unbelief opened the door for Gentile salvation, and God promises their future restoration through faith.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 11:25

GOD ALWAYS WORKS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PERFECT PLAN FOR ALL PEOPLE.

20

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 11:33-36

DOCTRINE:
God the Father



All Glory to God Forever

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul praised the depth of God's wisdom, knowledge, judgments, and plans, glorifying His greatness and eternal majesty.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 11:36

GOD'S ABSOLUTE SUPERIORITY CALLS FOR UNENDING PRAISE.

ROMANS 12–16 GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS WORKED OUT IN HIS PEOPLE'S LIVES

21

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 12:1-8

DOCTRINE:
The Church



Christian Worship and Service

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul urged believers to offer themselves to God and serve the Church humbly with their Spirit-given gifts.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 12:1

GOD TRANSFORMS AND EQUIPS SURRENDERED BELIEVERS FOR THE GOOD OF CHRIST'S BODY.

22

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 12:9-21

DOCTRINE:
The Cross for a Believer



Christian Love

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul taught that sincere Christian love humbly and graciously overcomes evil with good and leaves judgment to God.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 12:9

GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO LOVE LIKE HE DOES.

23

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 13:1-7

DOCTRINE:
Sovereignty of God



Christian Submission to Authority

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul instructed believers to submit to governing authorities as established by God in His sovereign will.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 13:1

GOD SOVEREIGNLY PLACES PEOPLE IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY.

24

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 13:8-14

DOCTRINE:
The Second Coming of Christ



Christian Living

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul described believers' call to love others and live holy lives, since love fulfills the law and Christ's second coming is near.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 13:14

JESUS'S PROMISED RETURN CALLS BELIEVERS TO LIVE HOLY LIVES OF LOVE.

25

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 14

DOCTRINE:
Judgment of Believers and Unbelievers



Christian Liberty

LESSON SUMMARY:

Believers are called to accept those weaker in faith without judgment, avoiding division and stumbling blocks and instead pursuing peace and mutual encouragement.

FOCUS VERSE: Romans 14:17

GOD CALLS BELIEVERS TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER EVEN WHEN THEY DISAGREE ON DISPUTABLE MATTERS.

26

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 15:1-13

DOCTRINE:
God the Son



Christian Unity

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul encouraged believers to accept those weaker in faith, avoiding division and stumbling blocks and pursuing unified encouragement in Christ.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 15:13

GOD EMPOWERS BELIEVERS TO LIVE IN UNITY AND HOPE AS THEY FOLLOW CHRIST.

27

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 15:14-33

DOCTRINE:
Works



Paul's Ministry and Plans

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul expressed his desire for community and prayer, reviewed his gospel mission, and shared his plans to proclaim Christ.

FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 15:17

GOD INVITES HIS PEOPLE TO JOIN IN HIS GOSPEL WORK.

28

SCRIPTURE:
Romans 16

DOCTRINE:
The Church



The Gospel's Impact in Rome and Corinth

LESSON SUMMARY:

Paul closed his letter with greetings, commendations, warnings, a blessing, and praise.

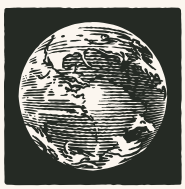
FOCUS VERSE:
Romans 16:27

GODLY RELATIONSHIPS REFLECT THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

29

SCRIPTURE:
Various

DOCTRINE:
Humanity: Creation and Purpose



Responding to the World's Most Influential Letter

LESSON SUMMARY:

The gospel of Jesus Christ calls believers to live as new creations by the Holy Spirit's power.

FOCUS VERSE: Romans 15:14-15

THE HOLY SPIRIT GROWS BELIEVERS IN HOLINESS AS THEY REFLECT ON AND RIGHTLY RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL.

Welcome!

We are glad you have chosen to study with us this year.

At BSF we exist to magnify God and mature His people. We offer global, in-depth Bible studies designed to help people grow in their commitment to Christ, His Word, and His Church.

As you encounter God through His Word in BSF, we pray you grow to know and love Him more deeply, trust Him more fully, and reflect His Son, Jesus Christ, more clearly.

Romans: From Guilt to Grace is about God's astounding grace to undeserving sinners. God has made it possible for sinful people to escape His wrath, enjoy His fellowship, and flourish within the diverse community of believers. Jesus's sacrifice for humanity's sin opens the way for new life with God through faith because of God's abiding Spirit. When believed and applied, the doctrinal truths of Romans revolutionize how we view sin, failure, judgment, and one another in this fallen world. This study has the potential to transform thinking, anchor belief, and reorder life's priorities.

The book of Romans presents the power of the gospel that brings people from rebellion to right standing with our righteous God. Paul proclaimed in Romans 1:16-17: "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. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

Throughout history, people have tried to earn God's favor but have universally fallen short. While comparing ourselves to others may provide a false sense of security, human efforts can never satisfy God's perfect righteous standard. Romans reveals the truth about our brokenness and God's solution. Whether new to Scripture or a seasoned Bible student, you will benefit from studying the profound truths about salvation and righteousness in Romans. Christ's sacrifice makes His righteousness available to sinners and changes everything about life now and forever.

Study Overview

Paul's letter to the Romans presents a well-reasoned and thorough statement and explanation of Christianity's foundational truths. Paul addressed humanity's inherent sinfulness, God's perfect righteousness, justification through faith alone, and the freedom Christ gives for living redeemed lives within the faith community. These profound salvation truths impact every person who has ever lived. They have the power to pierce your heart and change your life.

The book of Romans is rich in doctrine and practical application. The letter helps readers grasp the magnificent truths of the gospel. Paul vividly presented the bad news of sin's universal corruption: Every human being is born with a sinful nature and stands in rebellion against the perfectly righteous God. Yet, there is hope! Paul also proclaimed the good news, the gospel: God has revealed His grace through His provision of salvation through His Son, independent of any human effort.

Romans provides a deep and compelling examination of Christ's sacrificial work on behalf of sinners. Paul's letter unpacks the high cost of sin and God's solution in a way that reveals God's gracious heart and the eternal hope available to humanity. Regardless of background, all people who accept Christ as their Savior are liberated from sin's condemnation and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live for God. The benefits of this salvation impact both present life and eternity.

Study Outline

With 30 lessons covering 16 chapters, our study of Romans invites us to discover the truth about our sin and the incredible gift God offers through His Son, Jesus: a right relationship with Him. We pray this study will help you understand and experience how God saves and transforms sinful people by His grace.

Romans 1:1–3:20 – Humanity's Unrighteousness and Great Need of True Righteousness (Lessons 1-4)

Paul introduces the gospel as the power of God for salvation to all who believe. He then exposes humanity's biggest problem—all have sinned, no one is righteous by their own merit, and the law reveals sin but cannot save.

Romans 3:21–8:39 – God's Gracious Gift of Righteousness Through Jesus Christ (Lessons 5-15)

Paul presents the core of the gospel: Humanity is justified by faith, not by works. Through Christ, believers receive peace with God and freedom from the power of sin and death. Although daily struggles with sin and suffering remain, life in the Spirit brings eternal security and hope for future glory.

Romans 9–11 – Proof of God's Righteousness in His Sovereign Plan (Lessons 16-20)

Paul proves God's righteousness in His sovereign plan. Although Israel rejected Christ, God's promises remain, as "true Israel" is defined by God's sovereign choice and believers' sincere faith, not lineage or works. Israel's unbelief opened the door to salvation for the Gentiles, with redemption offered to both Jew and Gentile through faith in Christ.

Romans 12–16 – God's Righteousness Worked Out in His People's Lives (Lessons 21-28)

Paul shows how God's righteousness is worked out in His people's lives. Romans 12–16 calls believers to live as transformed, humble servants, united in Christ. Paul urges submission to authority, harmony, patience, and respect for differing views on disputable matters. He ends his letter with greetings, a warning against division, and praise of God's wisdom.

Study Theme: From Guilt to Grace

The book of Romans speaks directly to humanity's deepest struggles—doubt, pride, fear, and shame. Over 30 weeks, we will discover how the gospel leads us from guilt to grace, peace, life, confidence, faith, security, surrender, redemption, service, and genuine community.

Guilt to grace: "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." (Romans 1:16)

Performance to peace: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

Death to life: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

Condemnation to confidence: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:1-2)

Fear to faith: "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. And by him we cry, '*Abba,* Father.'" (Romans 8:15)

Separation to security: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

Striving to surrender: "Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." (Romans 10:3-4)

Rejection to redemption: "As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.' For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" (Romans 10:11-13)

Self-focus to service: "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." (Romans 12:1)

Conflict to community: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." (Romans 14:19)

Key Truths

Throughout Romans, salvation is explained through the key doctrines of sin, righteousness, justification, redemption, regeneration, reconciliation, sanctification, and glorification. This means:

- All people equally deserve judgment from God—the only righteous judge.
- God has made it possible for all people to become righteous in His sight through faith in Jesus Christ.
- God has always declared people righteous by faith, apart from works.
- The gospel of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone overcomes divisions among God's people.

- The gospel supremely expresses God's lavish, ever-present love for humanity.
- New life in Christ, by the Spirit, liberates believers from sin's control and condemnation.
- The power of Christ's work on our behalf secures believers' eternity with God.
- Believers will share in Christ's suffering on earth and glory in eternity.
- God remains faithful to Israel and continues to work out His plan for their salvation through faith in His Son.
- Practical expressions of sincere love for God and others characterize believers' lives.
- The Spirit works to transform every area of a believer's life.

Parallels to Life Today

- This world offers many misleading paths to God while rejecting the need for Christ's sacrifice.
- Cultural influences often lead people further into sin's harmful effects and downward spiral.
- More people suppress God's truth than embrace saving faith.
- Many Christians try to prove their worth to God, others, and themselves through good deeds and religious rituals.
- For some, living a holy life feels more like following strict rules than being motivated by a deep understanding of God's love.
- In the ongoing fight against sin, believers need encouragement and a hopeful understanding of the Holy Spirit's power to overcome.
- Spiritual teachings and privileges are often ignored or rejected from one generation to another.
- People misunderstand, overlook, or dismiss the greatness of God's mysterious plans.
- Disputes over secondary issues cause division within the Church, harming its witness.

The One Big Takeaway

The righteousness offered through Christ's sacrifice transforms everything about life–now and forever.

What to Expect in Bible Study Fellowship

Each week as you engage with God's Word personally and in community, we invite you to draw on BSF's distinct four-fold approach to in-depth Bible study, which incorporates the following:

1. Questions for Personal Study

Each week's lesson includes questions rooted in a weekly Bible passage, intended for personal daily study. The questions are designed to help you understand God's Word, develop a heart connection with God, and lay the groundwork for meaningful small-group discussion. The first-day questions reflect on the previous lesson's notes and lecture. The second day begins the new passage for that week.

2. Small Group Discussion

Each week's BSF gathering includes a small-group discussion centered on the weekly Bible passage.

3. Lecture

Each week's study includes teaching on the weekly Bible passage developed and delivered by a BSF-trained Bible teacher. If you are using our study book, note-taking pages are provided to use as you listen. Ask your leader if you need help accessing the lecture.

4. Lesson Notes

Each week's lesson contains a written explanation of the weekly Bible passage developed by BSF Staff in collaboration with our trusted network of theologians.

If you have come across these materials and are not yet a member of BSF, we welcome you to explore BSF class and online group options through our website at bsfinternational.org.

Resources for this study can be found on the BSF app or by logging into mybsf.org or bsfonline.org and searching the Resource Library or Lessons page. We provide audio formats for notes and questions as well as lessons and lectures for download. May the Lord bless you and keep you this year as you study His Word through Bible Study Fellowship.

Study Helps

“All Scripture Is God-Breathed”

Each time you read your Bible, you are reading God’s inspired, inerrant, infallible Word (2 Timothy 3:16). Time spent with your BSF lesson is an opportunity to grow in your relationship with God and apply His truths to your life. Intentionally and prayerfully surrender yourself to God and His truth by faith. Ask others to pray for you and with you that you will draw nearer to Him and be transformed. As you apply God’s Word by faith, the person God created you to become will be revealed. You will see and love the world and people around you in His way. You will magnify God and mature in your loving commitment to Him and your compassion for people.

Studying the Bible with BSF

The purpose of Bible study is to spend time with God and in community to know Him better, to grow in Christlikeness, and to make Him more fully known. Studying God’s Word in BSF follows two main principles that, when properly understood and applied, will transform your time in God’s Word.

1. Context Is Key

A key to in-depth Bible study is to know the context of the verses you read. Without this, you risk misunderstanding and misapplying the intended meaning of the text. Before you come to class, it may be helpful to:

- Read or listen to the week’s entire passage at least one or two times.
- Examine what comes before and after it.
- Consider the original audience to whom the passage was written and the author’s purpose for writing.

The daily study questions will help you identify the facts of the passage and make important connections to other parts of Scripture and equip you to reflect on the central truths in the text. Your group discussions, class lectures, and lesson notes will provide invaluable historical, literary, and cultural context that will deepen your understanding of the passage.

2. Scripture Interprets Scripture

What God’s Word says it means matters more than what we think or feel it means. God’s revelation in Scripture is coherent, cohesive, and consistent. To understand the intended meaning of a passage and avoid personal bias in how we approach the text, we use other Scripture references to help us understand and interpret Scripture faithfully. The cross-references in your Bible and footnotes in the lesson notes will help you understand how the passage you are reading fits into the whole narrative of Scripture.

Helps for Studying Romans

1. Follow Paul's Thought Flow

Pay attention to the four sections of the study outline mentioned earlier in this Preface (Romans 1:1–3:20; 3:21–8:39; 9–11; 12–16) as well as to transitions within the letter, such as "therefore," "so then," and "but now." These words signal shifts in Paul's reasoning and help you understand the progression of his argument.

2. Reflect on Relationships

Consider how each passage speaks to your relationships with God and others. The gospel of grace not only reconciles us to God but also transforms how we relate to those around us.

3. Take Your Time

Romans is rich and complex, filled with deep theological language. You may not be able to grasp all the details at once. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide your understanding as you work through each week's lesson.

4. Apply What You Learn

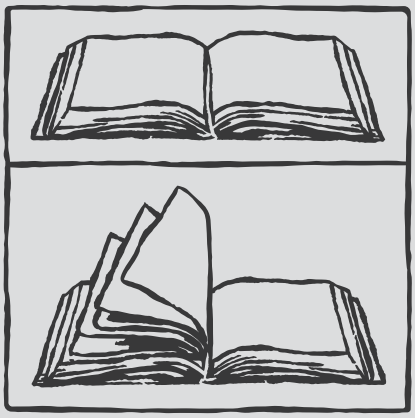
Doctrine is unchanging truth about God that speaks to our deepest concerns and transforms our lives. Let each passage shape your daily life. Ask God for His help in understanding how the truths of Romans can influence your decisions, attitudes, and relationships in practical ways.

Bible Study Fellowship

ROMANS:
From Guilt to Grace

SCRIPTURE:
Various

INTRODUCTION
LESSON



Romans: The World's Most Influential Letter

Lecture Notes

Next step: Continue this lesson with the notes.

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Introduction Lesson Notes

Overview

Focus Verse

"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." (Romans 1:16)

Outline

- The Influence of Romans
- The Background of Romans
- An Overview of Romans

Engage

People everywhere long for connection and community, yet division often dominates our world. Differences in political views and theological perspectives often create tension and break relationships. Crime and corruption go unchecked, and tolerance is demanded—but only for what is popular. Those who follow Christ are often mocked and marginalized.

These challenges are not new. When Paul wrote from Corinth to the early Christians in Rome, they faced similar struggles. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul penned one of the most influential letters ever written—the book of Romans. In it, Paul explained the good news of Jesus and how the salvation He offers changes everything. The gospel has the power to bring all people from guilt to grace. As we begin this new year studying God's Word, we will discover how Romans speaks to life's biggest questions and deepest difficulties. It teaches us about salvation, grace, and the new life we have in Christ. **Romans explains timeless, essential truths for today and eternity.**

The Influence of Romans

Throughout the centuries, Paul's letter to the Romans has changed countless lives, transformed diverse cultures, and impacted history. The great Bible translator William Tyndale said of this epistle that no one "can read it too often, or study it too well." Martin Luther's friend Philip Melanchthon copied the book of Romans twice by hand because he wanted to take its message to heart. The impact of this great book endures today.

Augustine (AD 354-430)

Augustine, a brilliant and gifted man, lived an immoral life that greatly disappointed his Christian mother. Just like many people today, sin held Augustine in a vice-like grip. One day, while in a friend's garden, Augustine heard a child singing the words "take and read." He understood this

as a message from God and obeyed. He rushed to the other end of the garden, where a copy of the Bible lay. Opening it at random, he read from Romans 13, "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime. ... Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh."[1] **God's Word spoke exactly what Augustine needed.** His response to God's Word surpassed his mother's earnest desire and heartfelt prayers. Augustine came to faith in Christ and became a leading theologian whose influence was extensive.

Martin Luther (AD 1483-1546)

Unlike Augustine, Martin Luther served as a pious, earnest monk—an apparent Christian. But peace eluded him. Luther wanted to please and be accepted by God. Yet, the harder he worked, the more unattainable his soul's salvation seemed. Instead of growing closer to God, Luther felt increasingly distanced from Him. He reasoned that God required a humanly impossible and unattainable standard of righteousness. Luther found himself hating the very God he should love. In desperation, Luther turned to study Paul's letter to the Romans and found his sought-after solution in 1:17: "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" As God revealed the meaning of this verse to him, Luther realized his need for righteousness from God alone. **God's righteousness could not be gained through Luther's own works but *only* by faith in Christ.** Luther took God's Word to heart and believed in Him. Submitting to this truth, Martin Luther, who became a pillar of the Protestant Reformation, taught that every believer should know Romans well and read the book daily, word for word. His personal, transformative encounter with the book of Romans still profoundly impacts the world today.

The Relevance of Romans Today

People in our skeptical, rapidly changing world today sometimes challenge or scoff at testimonies such as Luther's or Augustine's. While circumstances may have changed, people have not. More importantly, God has not changed. **Jesus Christ and His gospel remain the most powerful force in history.** The book of Romans presents profound truths that bring blessing, spiritual revival, and transformation.

The Background of Romans

Author and Place

Formerly named as Saul,[2] Paul identified himself as Christ's servant, an apostle set apart for God.[3] A Jew and a Roman citizen, Paul hailed from Tarsus, a Greek city. Later in life, Paul demonstrated that he was well acquainted with Greek literature and culture.[4] As a child, Paul received a Jewish education in Jerusalem that also likely influenced his intellectual development. Descended from Pharisees, Paul trained under the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel.[5]

1. **Clothing of Christ:** Romans 13:13-14
2. **Saul:** Acts 7:57–8:1; 9:1-31; 13:9
3. **Servant of Christ:** Romans 1:1
4. **Tarsus and Greek life:** Acts 17:16-23, 28; 21:39
5. **Paul, a Pharisee:** Acts 22:3; 23:6

God's Word and Paul's Letter

The Doctrine of the Bible

The book of Romans is a letter written by the apostle Paul to first-century believers in Rome. As one of the 66 books of the Bible, Romans is God's powerful Word. Inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, more than 40 human writers authored the Holy Scriptures. **God's Word, recorded long ago, offers timeless truth for yesterday, today, and eternity.**

The Bible is God's true and living Word, the written revelation of God Himself. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells God's story—one of salvation through Jesus Christ. Because God cannot lie or make mistakes, the Bible's original manuscripts present absolute truth. Applicable today and throughout history, the Holy Scriptures lead and guide God's people. Every Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus's first coming came to pass. The prophecies regarding His return to earth at the end of the age remain just as certain. Given hope through God's promises, believers await Jesus's return and the fulfillment of prophecy.

Those who fail to recognize the Bible as God's true, inerrant Word regard Scripture as just another book. Considering the encounters of God's ancient people as fantastical stories or God Himself as a fictional character is a grave error. God has revealed who He really is—the one true, sovereign, almighty, holy, everlasting, creator God, who rules and reigns over all. People who are indifferent toward or have disdain for the Bible trust in themselves and rely on their limited power. Without the Bible as an anchor, the conclusions of academic scholars and humanity's most brilliant minds leave people greatly wanting.

Believing God's truth, revealed in the Bible, deeply grounds the life of every believer. Through His Word, God provides true comfort for pain and helpful guidance for life's confusion. Believers open the Bible to seek and find eternal truths that provide a framework for every circumstance they face. We learn to trust God more each time we read His Word and take it to heart. Our strength grows as God's truth stretches and challenges us. God's Spirit helps His people understand God's Word and shapes us into the likeness of Jesus, who loves us and will never leave us. Do you long to understand God more deeply and be more like Jesus—every time you read God's Word?

Paul became a zealous Pharisee[6] who classified Christians as heretics. His extreme persecution of believers[7] ended abruptly. One day, as Paul traveled to Damascus, he met Jesus, and his life changed forever.[8]

Paul most likely wrote to the Romans from the city of Corinth. Most scholars suggest that the apostle arrived in Corinth one winter, sometime during AD 55-57, about 25 years after Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Paul stayed three months in Corinth[9] before traveling to Jerusalem.

6. **Paul's zealousness:** Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:4-5
7. **Persecution by Paul:** Acts 8:1-3; 22:3-5; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6
8. **Road to Damascus:** Acts 9:1-22
9. **Paul in Corinth:** Acts 20:1-3

Prompting and Purpose

Christianity in Rome probably originated with travelers to and from the great city who communicated the gospel message. Some of those believers may have been among the gathering on Pentecost—the day the Holy Spirit powerfully descended upon God's people.[10] Rome's church, a growing community of believers, consisted mostly of Gentiles. Perhaps this is one reason Paul longed to visit Rome. **Paul sought a harvest among the Roman Gentiles.**[11] He desired to stop in Rome on his way to Spain to fellowship, encourage believers, and receive assistance.[12] Paul needed this influential church's partnership to share the gospel in Rome and beyond.

In his missionary letter, the book of Romans, Paul focused on God's provision of righteousness for Jews and Gentiles in the universal Church of Jesus Christ. He repeatedly pointed to humanity's sinful spiritual condition before a holy God. **God alone is righteous.** All people, all nations, Jew and Gentile, share the same great need—the righteousness only God can give. Romans paints a glorious picture of God's reconciliation of sinful people to Himself through Christ. The direct application of this truth is profound: United under the gospel, Jews and Gentiles can worship God in harmony with one another. This rich theology flowed from God through Paul's heart as a pastor, a missionary, and a wretched sinner rescued by Christ.[13]

An Overview of Romans

Human Unrighteousness – 1:1–3:20

Romans begins with words of hope before plunging into humanity's dire condition apart from God. The first three chapters contain a perceptive analysis of human nature in relationship to God.

A Personal Word from Paul (1:1-15) – Paul's opening words point to his central message: "the gospel of God." Gospel means "good news." At the center of the gospel is God's Son, Jesus Christ, and His saving work for all humankind on the cross. **The superlatively good news announced by Paul comes from God.**

The Letter's Theme (1:16-17) – **The gospel is God's revelation of His righteousness that comes to believers by faith, apart from human works.** The gospel holds God's power to transform lives. Without God's power, we cannot live as God designed us to live. No one can please God by hard work or a moral life. God's people need only rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose on our behalf.

Human Rejection of God and God's Wrath Against Humanity (1:18-32) – Paul clarified that the intricacies and beauty of God's entire created world prove to people that He exists. **Creation should draw people to seek God.** Instead, people wrongly worship what God created rather than God, the Creator. God punishes this willful and rebellious ignorance by giving people over to their sins. The lives of irreligious people, who reject God, show that sin's power holds them. Apart from God, the spiritual outworking of sin drags humanity downward, enslaving them in invisible chains.

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10. **Spirit's power:** Acts 2:1-11
11. **Harvest among Gentiles:** Romans 1:13
12. **Paul's plan:** Romans 15:23-24
13. **Wretched before Christ:** Romans 7:24-25

Romans: A Brief Outline

The following simple outline will help with grasping the teachings of Romans:

- Romans 1:1–3:20—Humanity's unrighteousness and great need of true righteousness
- Romans 3:21–8:39—God's gracious gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ
- Romans 9–11—Proof of God's righteousness in His sovereign plan
- Romans 12–16—God's righteousness worked out in His people's lives

***No Excuse for Sin (2:1–3:20)* – The tragedy of sin involves all people.** This includes moral people and the piously religious. Moral people fail to live up to the higher moral standards they claim to embrace. Piously religious people (in Paul's day, Jews) stubbornly refuse to believe in Jesus as Messiah—their only hope for reconciliation with God. Outward conformity to human laws in their own strength does not prove godliness and cannot change human hearts.

God's Gracious Gift of Righteousness – 3:21–8:39

In this portion, Paul's letter moves forward to cover the work of Christ on behalf of those who believe. **Paul takes his readers through the full scope of God's provision from justification by faith (being declared righteous before God) to sanctification (the ongoing process of being made holy by God.)**

***Salvation from God Alone (3:21-31)* –** Now the gospel's good news makes its glorious entry. Sin's grasp firmly holds every sinner. People remain unable to do good, understand the gospel, or seek and find God. But God took the initiative to offer salvation to the world. **Through Jesus Christ and His work on the cross, God provides the righteousness human beings lack.** He did this not only for Jews, who might expect it, but for Gentiles as well.

***Proof from the Old Testament (4:1-25)* –** Paul cited Old Testament examples to demonstrate that faith has always been God's means to save sinners. Abraham, Israel's founding patriarch, and David, Israel's beloved king, looked forward in faith to Christ's coming. Before the cross, all who believed God and looked forward in faith to the Messiah received God's righteousness, even if the details were not fully understood. **Believers today look back to the cross for salvation, united by the gospel and God's unchanging path to salvation.**

***Justified by Faith, First Results (5:1-11)* – Now justified by God through faith, God's beloved children receive new privileges.** His Spirit sanctifies and molds us into His character. He provides a previously unknown peace with God and foundation for peace with others and with circumstances. Certain of their eternal destiny, believers can bear suffering with hearts that rejoice in every situation and trust God fully.

Union with Jesus Christ (5:12-6:23) – Paul began to describe the profound results of God's work of salvation. **God not only justifies and redeems, but He also sanctifies believers to do His will.** Once saved, believers belong to the living Lord Jesus Christ for eternity. We no longer live for sin, which leads to condemnation and death. Instead, we step forward with Christ and live for His righteousness. This is entirely because of God's great grace, His undeserved favor.

Believers and God's Law (7:1-25) – Human attempts to obey God's law will ultimately fail. Paul used his own personal struggles to prove that human efforts toward moral uprightness cannot measure up to God's holy standard. **Justification by grace through faith releases believers from the law's demands.** This does not mean God's law lacks value. The law expresses God's perfect, holy character and reveals sinful humanity's need for a Savior.

> *The law expresses God's perfect, holy character and reveals sinful humanity's need for a Savior.*

Justified by Faith, Final Victory (8:1-39) – **God's work in Christ accomplished the law's righteous requirements.** Sin threatens defeat, but God began His good work in all who believe and will continue that work to the end. Paul draws our gaze to God, who provides victory over sin by the Holy Spirit's power. He closed this section with God's glorious promise that nothing in heaven or on earth can ever separate God's children from His inexpressible love and power.

God's Righteous Plan – 9–11

As Paul continued with his theme of believers' security in Christ, he turned to the question of how unbelieving Israel fits into God's long-term plan. He stated that sin traps Jews and Gentiles alike. **Christ alone saves sinners and gives eternal salvation.** God will never deny His Son's work on the cross. All believers are united with Christ for eternity. Some may ask, "What about God's ancient people? What about Jewish people who have rejected Jesus Christ?" Paul answered that God has not broken faith with Israel. God will call many in Israel back to Him one day, showing that God keeps the commitments He makes to us in salvation. He is the same covenant-keeping God yesterday, today, and forever. God's steadfast love endures forever.

The Sovereignty of God (9:1-29) – With Israel as an example, God has never saved anyone based on heritage, status, or works. Instead, He calls people to salvation because of His sovereign purpose and gracious promises. Human effort, family ties, and national identity cannot save. God saves no one based on church attendance, high moral standards, or generous gifts. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. **Salvation cannot be earned by human effort or accomplishment.**

Jewish Unbelief (9:30–10:21) – Salvation is God's work that flows from His plan and activity. This does not excuse people from personal responsibility for their unbelief or rebellious actions. **All who fail to believe in the gospel of salvation through Christ are responsible for their own personal choice.** God does not create unbelief, though He understands, foretells, and works through it. Praise God that human failure is not the end of the story.

"All Israel Will Be Saved" (11:1-32) – God works to save sinners. God worked through the rejection of Jesus by most of His chosen people to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. **God also uses the Gentiles' embrace of the gospel to provoke Israel to jealousy, so that He may do a great work among them too.** In the process, God will keep promises He made to Israel, showing He keeps His word to us about deliverance for those who embrace Him. Paul offered a triumphant conclusion: "In this way, all Israel will be saved."[14]

The Meaning of History (11:33-36) – Ultimately, history is God's story—the story of Jesus and God's choice of Israel for Himself. **God works in all things to perfect and glorify His people so they can live with Him forever.** This tremendous thought caused Paul to burst out in glorious praise to God in one of Scripture's greatest doxologies.

God's Righteousness Applied – 12–16

Paul, a pastor and missionary, considered biblical doctrine a practical tool for right living. His teachings always apply to real life. **In the final chapters of Romans, Paul traced the gospel's work in the real-life details of individuals, churches, and nations.** Paul's point is that only saving faith in Christ can make a difference that brings lasting positive change in a person, a community, or the world.

Transformed by the Holy Spirit and looking toward Jesus's future return, believers are commanded to wake from their slumber and live holy lives of love in ways that shine the light of Christ.

A Christian's Worship, Service, and Love (12:1-21) – With God's mercy in view, Paul calls believers to go into the world as living sacrifices with renewed minds. Our thoughts directly influence our actions. **With minds focused on God's Word, believers are to put on Christlike thinking and live transformed lives.** A lack of genuine concern for God and His ways leads people away from Christ and to lives lacking in loving, sacrificial, God-glorifying behavior. This is evident throughout every age, including today. For believers, right thinking begins with a proper view of God, self, and others. As humans, we often hold an opinion of ourselves that is too high or too low. God has gifted every believer to enrich the entire body of Christ. Our response should be to love and serve God and others with the gifts He bestows on us. We are to think more about others and less about ourselves.

A Christian's Relationship to Governing Authorities (13:1-7) – Paul and the Christians of his day lived under a hostile and oppressive government, yet Paul insisted that believers submit to governing authorities. **Romans unfolds the proper God-given role of a secular state and tells how Christians should live.** These principles remain extremely helpful for understanding the social and political responsibilities of believers today.

Living in the Last Days (13:8-14) **– God's people are to live in the present with their eyes fixed heavenward.** Transformed by the Holy Spirit and looking toward Jesus's future return, believers are commanded to wake from their slumber and live holy lives of love in ways that shine the light of Christ.

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14. All Israel will be saved: Romans 11:26

The Responsibility of Strong Christians for Weaker Christians (14:1–15:13) – Paul used the conflict around Torah observance to speak to Christians' responsibility to one another in times of disagreement, especially concerning Christian liberty in disputable matters. **Paul revealed how to preserve unity through kindness and Christlike love for one another.** Because God has accepted us in Christ, Paul compels us to accept all other Christians. Mature believers should seek to encourage and help those who are new in faith rather than look down on them.

Paul's Future Plans and Final Greetings (15:14–16:27) – This final section reminds us once more that Romans is a letter. Paul gave glory to God alone, saying, "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me." **Paul sent personal greetings and expressed his hopes to visit Rome after he traveled to Jerusalem.** His letter concludes with a simple yet powerful benediction.

Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome provides a foundation upon which people in every age can build their lives. The presentation of the gospel in Paul's letter to Rome's believers provides a firm foundation for believers throughout the ages. **Romans explains timeless, essential truth for today and eternity.** We can anticipate God's blessings as we study this letter—inspired by God and sent to us through Paul.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Romans reveals human sin against the backdrop of God's holiness. Sin's downward spiral leads people away from God, their Creator. Understanding humanity's entirely helpless and desperate state helps us understand our greatest need—the righteousness only God can give. **God provided His solution to human hopelessness: the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.** Those who trust in Christ's saving work are no longer condemned sinners.

Salvation does not just look back but also looks forward; believers are not only saved by Christ but also transformed to live for Him. **Paul's letter to Roman believers takes us beyond the good news of the gospel to explain how redeemed people live.** First and foremost, God's people recognize the greatness and wonder of God Himself. We present ourselves to God as living sacrifices, seeking His transforming power to permeate every part of our lives. Believers live with an eye on this world and a steady focus on eternal matters. Because God provided the way to reverse sin's death penalty, He leads His people to live with passion for Christ in all they say and do. When we mirror who God is, we live as light amid darkness and help others to find their way to Him.

Apply It

Paul unmistakably revealed the truth of humanity's sinful state—absolutely no one is righteous before God.[15] Without God's intervention, we are doomed and face a tragic future—accountable to God and guilty before Him.[16] Human effort futilely attempts to bridge the gap between sin and our holy God. Most people fail to recognize the eternal danger they are in apart from Christ. Have you consciously considered the chasm sin creates between you and God? We will not

15. **No one seeks God:** Romans 3:10-12
16. **Accountable to God:** Romans 3:19

seek God without a deep understanding of the gravity of our sin. What keeps you from facing the truth about all the ways your thoughts, words, and actions do not meet God's righteous standards? How might God be leading you to face your sinfulness, acknowledge specific sin, and confess that sin with a repentant heart? We prefer to believe we are OK with God if we have not committed murder or other terrible sins. However, God wants us to face the truth about our own sinfulness. What next steps will you take to repent, seek Christ, and surrender to Him?

No doubt, sin separates us from God. However, God does not leave us without hope. Romans presents God's great solution to the problem of human sin. **There is no condemnation for those who believe and trust in Jesus.**[17] No condemnation! No guilt, no shame, no fear of God's wrath! Let these words flow from the page to your heart. If you are a believer, how deeply have you thought about or understood that you face no condemnation? For all who believe, Jesus took sin's condemnation upon Himself when He was nailed to the cross. Are you thankful to God for sending Jesus to pay the price for your sin? What does Jesus's sacrifice on the cross mean to you personally? Perhaps, as you read these words, you have questions. Maybe you do not yet believe or do not consider yourself a believer. Know that these words are also for you. Will you make today the day you profess faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? With condemnation gone forever, we can live as God originally designed us to live as His children, reflecting Him. Salvation moves us from fear of judgment to freedom of living in grace!

The truth Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome proves as relevant today as in ancient times. How will you aim to take these truths to heart as you study this year? **A true understanding of God's Word, including the book of Romans, is reserved for all who search with open hearts.** God promises to fill those who diligently seek Him with righteousness.[18] Though the profound teaching in this book is deeper and richer than we can fully comprehend, trust the Holy Spirit to help you grasp eternal truth in new and fresh ways. As we seek God through His Word, we discover His amazing grace. We come to love and trust Him more and more. As a result, He deepens our faith and transforms our lives. How will you approach your study of Romans? How will you be intentional to read expectantly and search this book honestly, humbly, obediently, and prayerfully? Paul's letter to the Romans has transformed people, churches, and even nations for more than two millennia. The gospel of Christ powerfully unites people across backgrounds, differences, and divergences in Christ, all to the glory of God. We can confidently study this book, knowing that God always honors and keeps His Word. He will use our study of Romans to renew our minds and transform our lives, making us more like the Savior, who has redeemed us by His grace.

17. No condemnation: Romans 8:1
18. Hunger and thirst for righteousness: Matthew 5:6

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LESSONS 1-4

ROMANS 1:1–3:20

Humanity's Unrighteousness and Great Need of True Righteousness



SYNPOSIS

Paul introduces the gospel as the power of God for salvation to all who believe. He then exposes humanity's biggest problem—all have sinned, no one is righteous by their own merit, and the law reveals sin but cannot save.

Lessons 1-4 remind us that without Christ, all humanity is covered in and bound by sin.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

① Stormy Sky
② The World
③ Covered in Sin
④ Bound by Chains



Humanity's Need for the Gospel

Lesson 1 Questions

First Day: Read the Introduction Lesson Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What stands out to you in the notes regarding Paul's letter to the believers in Rome?

2. How did the lecture challenge or encourage you as you embark on your study of Romans?

Second Day: Read Romans 1:1-7.

God called Paul to present the gospel to Roman believers.

3. a. How did Paul describe himself to the believers in Rome?

   b. What additional information about Paul do you find in Acts 9:20-22 and 1 Timothy 1:12-16?

4. a. The word "gospel" means "good news." What good news is proclaimed in these verses, and why is it good?

   b. How have you experienced this good news?

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5. a. In what ways did Paul encourage and uphold the Christians in Rome?

   b. How might this encouragement impact your interactions with other believers?

Third Day: Read Romans 1:8-10.

Paul thanked God for the believers in Rome.

6. Why was Paul thankful for the believers in Rome?

7. a. What did Paul pray for specifically, and how did God answer his prayer? (See also Acts 21:33-34; 22:25-29; 28:14-16.)

   b. What do these verses teach about the relationship between serving God and prayer?

8. How do Paul's prayers encourage you to pray, and for whom or what will you pray?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 1:11-15.

Paul longed to visit the believers in Rome.

9. Why did Paul want to visit Rome, and what might have kept him away?

10. How might Paul's experience offer encouragement when you encounter obstacles when serving God? (See also Acts 28:11-16.)

11. a. Describe Paul's obligation to all people and his attitude toward his obligation. (See also Acts 26:11-20.)

    b. How does the call to share your knowledge about Jesus with others impact your life?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 1:16-17.

Paul emphatically stated the gospel's worth.

12. Give reasons for Paul's unashamed confidence in the gospel of Christ.

13. In what situations might you find yourself tempted to be ashamed of the gospel? How do Paul's words strengthen or encourage you?

14. a. How are verses 16 and 17 a part of Paul's personal testimony? (See also Philippians 3:4-9.)

    b. Describe how verses 16 and 17 may relate to your experience of the gospel. What word or phrase stands out to you or is a part of your personal testimony?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 1:1-17.

God reveals His saving power for all people through the gospel.

15. What power do you find in the gospel of Christ? How do the truths in this passage empower you to unashamedly share this good news with others?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 1 Notes

Romans 1:1-17

Focus Verse

"For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" (Romans 1:17)

Outline

- Paul's Calling – Romans 1:1-7
- Paul's Concern – Romans 1:8-15
- Paul's Confidence – Romans 1:16-17

Engage

What helps you navigate life when competing voices surround you? Our circumstances, often challenging, can lead us either to swerve into compromise or to solidify our commitment to what matters most. We face emotions kindled by life's adversities. Our own sin and missteps can cause shame and sorrow. How do we proceed compelled by faith rather than crippled by fear? We live in a world that is antagonistic toward Jesus Christ and those who believe in Him. Drawing unwanted attention or facing condemnation from others seems treacherous. What helps us fix our eyes on heaven's priorities? **Steadfast faith in Jesus and the power of the gospel lead believers to know they have nothing to lose in standing for Christ.**

The apostle Paul lived a turbulent life in troubled times, yet he unashamedly proclaimed Christ wherever he went. Despite persistent persecution and peril, he boldly shared the gospel. Believers today experience the same call Paul did—to go and make disciples in a hostile world. As a forgiven sinner who had pursued, persecuted, and participated in killing Christians, Paul understood the opposition Christ's followers face. Perhaps his past fervor urgently fueled his God-given mission to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul recognized the futility of misplaced allegiance and the necessity of God's grace in salvation. He boldly preached the gospel of Christ, asking God to ignite faith in both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) all over the world. God's gracious gift of salvation in Christ should not be selfishly hoarded but urgently shared. **God reveals His saving power for all people through the gospel**.

Paul's Calling – Romans 1:1-7

Paul opened his letter to the Romans by stating his name and that of his recipients, a common practice in his day. Letters in the Roman world often began with a simple one-word greeting.[1] However, the gospel so consumed Paul's heart and mind that his greeting continued for seven verses rather than one short word.

1. **Simple greetings:** Acts 23:26

Identity – 1:1

Paul introduced himself with three phrases, first identifying himself as "a servant of Christ Jesus." Paul placed himself on level ground with the Roman believers. All who believe in Jesus belong to Him and willingly serve Him.[2] Next, Paul stated his calling as an apostle—meaning sent one, emissary, or messenger. He wrote with God's authority, expressing God's own words to people who believe in Him. Finally, Paul noted that in calling him, God had set him apart "for the gospel of God."

A devout Pharisee before he met Christ, Paul strictly observed God's law and viewed Christ's followers as heretics. He exhibited narrow self-righteousness and murderous cruelty toward believers.[3] **When Paul met Christ, God separated Paul to Himself and called him to be a steward of His gospel.** As he humbly and joyfully embraced both Jews and Gentiles, Paul always marveled at how God had graciously redirected and propelled his life.

The Gospel – 1:2-4

Paul introduces his readers to the gospel message by defining the gospel. "Gospel" means "good news." **Paul's letter to Rome's believers centers on the good news of Jesus Christ.** Jesus's saving work on the cross on behalf of all humanity, His resurrection that gives us new life, and His promise of the eternal kingdom to come are central to Paul's message and the life of every believer.

From God (1:2) – The Christian gospel may have seemed new to Paul's original audience, but the incredible good news of salvation through the work of Jesus Christ was not a novelty. **God promised this good news "through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures."**[4] God's prior revelations during the Old Testament period pointed to God's gift of His Son.

The prophets recorded God's announcements of the gospel. When Paul referred to the Holy Scriptures, he spoke of the Old Testament. We cannot find the totality of God's good news in experiences, impressions, or any other subjective way. God has given us His own words in writing to study and understand.

The gospel is God's gospel. God announced and accomplished the gospel. He sent His apostles to preach and He blesses the gospel message wherever it is proclaimed. Through the telling and retelling of the good news of Christ, God rescues people from sin and brings them to faith in Him. Because God cares deeply about His Word and for His people, we can be confident He will bless our teaching of the gospel.

From Jesus (1:3-4) – **God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, stands at the center of this amazing good news.** The eternal and unique Son of God the Father,[5] Jesus is also the promised human son, David's descendant. Paul contrasted Jesus's two natures—His human nature and His eternal, divine nature. Paul used each word with precision and significance: In only 28 Greek words, Paul provided an entire Christology—the doctrine of Christ.

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2. **Belonging to Christ:** John 8:35, 47; 14:24; 16:15
3. **Paul's persecution of believers:** Acts 7:57–8:3; 9:1-2; Galatians 1:13-14, 23; Philippians 3:4-6
4. **Gospel through the prophets:** Isaiah 40:9; 52:7; 61:1
5. **Jesus, God's Son:** John 1:14, 18

Paul used the Greek word *sarx* to write of Jesus's earthly life. This Greek term describes not simply the body but the whole person. Because Jesus is entirely without sin, the word *sarx* refers to Jesus's full and perfect humanity.[6] **Jesus's physical descent from King David more than proves His fulfillment of Old Testament promises and proclaims Jesus's true humanity.**

At a particular point in history,[7] the second person of the Trinity became fully human without ever ceasing to be fully God.[8] **From eternity past to eternity future, God the Son was, is, and always will be fully and equally God.[9]**

Resurrection Power (1:4) – Jesus "was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead." The verb "appointed" corresponds to Jesus's deity: Jesus was appointed the Son of God by the testimony of the resurrection. Recognizing the striking revelation of God's power demonstrated in Jesus's resurrection helps us understand these words.[10] The words "Spirit of holiness" likely identify the Holy Spirit as the agent of the resurrection. **Jesus's resurrection, accomplished by the Spirit, demonstrates God's power and offers undeniable proof of Christ's deity.** Some hold that "through the Spirit of holiness" could be translated "as to his spirit," referring to Christ's divine nature, which exists alongside His human nature.

Another view of this passage focuses on the words "in power" (or "with power" in some translations). In this view, Paul is saying Jesus's resurrection unmistakably declared Him to be the powerful Son of God. **Through the resurrection, God undeniably declares Jesus's unique person, deity, and power.** Paul's precise purpose in this section culminates as he declares "Jesus Christ our Lord."

The Gospel's Call – 1:5-7

As Christ's servant, Paul extended God's peace to both Jews and Greeks.[11] He preached the gospel in Rome to those who did not know God as well as those who loved God. Paul remained steadfastly committed to champion the gospel of Christ to all.

To Gentiles (1:5-6) – God called Paul to invite all Gentiles to faith in and obedience to Christ. While obedience cannot create or replace faith, saving faith in Christ produces obedience that pleases God. The Christian faith centers on Jesus Christ—almighty Lord and Prince of Peace—who is worthy of all praise and worship. **God invites all people to rightly turn from rebellion and worship Him.**

The Christian faith centers on Jesus Christ—almighty Lord and Prince of Peace—who is worthy of all praise and worship.

The good news of the gospel requires a committed response. For this reason, Paul stressed his role as an apostle. God had commissioned him as Christ's ambassador. **Paul pled for people to be reconciled to God, turn from sin, believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, and follow Him as Lord.[12]** God calls believers to follow Paul's example.

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6. **Jesus's sinlessness:** 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:19; 2:22; 1 John 3:5
7. **Appointed time:** Luke 2:1-2
8. **Jesus's divinity:** John 1:14; Philippians 2:6-8
9. **Jesus as God forever:** John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3; 13:8
10. **Power in Jesus's resurrection:** Acts 2:24, 32; 17:30-31
11. **Jews and Greeks:** Ephesians 2:11-22
12. **Call to follow Christ:** Acts 17:13-31; Romans 6:1-2; 10:3, 16; 16:25-27; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

When we fail to recognize God's good news as a command to obey, we minimize sin and make discipleship optional. This denies God's glory and deludes some—who are perishing without Christ—into thinking all is well.

To Believers in Rome (1:7) – At last, Paul named his letter's recipients. He wrote to "all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people." **Paul had not yet visited, but he knew God's deep love and extensive call to His people in Rome.**

Paul had previously met some Roman believers,[13] but he had no part in founding the Roman church. Perhaps the Roman church began during the days when Paul still persecuted believers.[14] Some visitors from Rome were present in Jerusalem at Pentecost.[15] Perhaps some among the three thousand people who turned to Christ on that day established Rome's first church upon returning home. **The church in Rome has existed from Christianity's very earliest days.**

Terrible brutality existed alongside the beauty, intellect, and power of ancient Rome. Slavery, infanticide, and dehumanizing sexual sin permeated the culture. **Yet, in this city where evil reigned, a fellowship arose of people who rejected Roman values, worshipped Christ, and lived differently.** Christlike holiness marked their new lives of faith. They shared one another's burdens as they loved and cared compassionately for the downtrodden. God had planted His new humanity atop the deteriorating carcass of deeply entrenched sin! Paul extended to Rome's believers what he had received and we need every day—grace and peace.

Paul's Concern – Romans 1:8-15

In a typically pastoral way, Paul added a more personal word to the Roman Christians. He expressed his thanks to God and assured them of his prayers. Paul's desire to visit ignited his eagerness to preach the gospel to them.

People, Prayers, and Plans – 1:8-13

Paul thanked God for the believers in Rome. Their changed lives created a God-honoring reputation around the world. News of their widely known faith and transformed lives reached secular sources. The Roman church demonstrated such love for God that others noticed. Paul always remembered these precious believers in prayer, repeatedly asking God to open the way to visit them.

Paul longed to visit so he and the Roman believers might be mutually encouraged. He fervently prayed many times to visit this church, desiring a harvest among them like he had experienced among other Gentiles. Yet time after time and for reasons Paul did not explain, God prevented Paul from traveling to Rome. **When Paul eventually reached Rome, he came as a prisoner.** Even then, Paul remained unshakably convicted of God's continued work in his circumstances.[16]

13. **Roman believers:** Romans 16:1-16
14. **Church in Rome:** Acts 7:57–8:1
15. **Romans at Pentecost:** Acts 2:10-11, 36-41
16. **Gospel advanced through Paul's chains:** Philippians 1:12-14

God's Gift to Believers

The Doctrine of Righteousness

Righteousness means rightness or being upright in all things. Paul's letter to the Roman believers explains God's righteousness and humanity's lack of righteousness. Only God is holy, pure, and utterly perfect; He knows no sin. Every human lacks true and perfect righteousness.[1] While we may gain a measure of security by finding someone whose behavior seems worse than our own, righteousness cannot be measured by imperfect human standards. **Righteousness must be measured by God's holy and perfect standard—by which we all stand condemned and without hope.**

God understands our weakness and does not leave us hopelessly enslaved by sin. He extends compassion and offers His grand solution to our utter unrighteousness. God sent His Son to provide us His own true and perfect righteousness. **When we believe Jesus bore the punishment our sin deserves, God freely gives us His righteousness, apart from any contribution on our part.** This is the only way to be right with God. This transaction is called "justification" because we are counted as "just," or back in proper relationship, with God. Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."[2]

To overestimate ourselves and reject the righteousness God offers through His Son leaves us with only our sin-stained attempts to be good enough. **Ignoring the sin that infects our motives and actions means missing what God requires.** We desperately need Jesus's perfect righteousness—God's ultimate gift. Without turning to Christ, the peace we long for eludes us. The ineffective game of comparing ourselves with others we deem worse leaves us filled with uncertainty and doubt.

Belief in Christ clothes God's children in His righteousness. This amazing transfer of Christ's perfection to us takes place by God's doing, not our own. We contribute nothing, yet through faith in Christ we receive what we cannot earn. Though we remain sinners, God sees us through the lens of His perfect Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. We enjoy peace with God because we belong to Him. **God counts believers as righteous, equipping them in their ongoing battle with sin on earth.** God's righteousness transformed Paul's life. Constantly amazed by God's grace, Paul made sharing that wonder his life mission. Do you?

1. **Without righteousness:** Romans 3:9-18
2. **Justification:** Romans 4:25

Ambition – 1:14-15

Paul was firmly convinced of his obligation to take the good news of Jesus Christ and His atoning death to the entire world. God intended the gospel message even for the most civilized people but also for those outside the Roman empire who did not speak Greek or Latin. Paul made the gospel available for the educated and for those without formal education. Paul's obligation to the Greeks and non-Greeks came from understanding that when God saved him, he received a gift that did not belong to him alone. Have you realized the gospel is not simply your personal possession? Like Paul, we are obligated to share the gift of God's good news about Jesus.

Paul's Confidence – Romans 1:16-17

Paul spoke confidently about how people can become right with God. All humans are born morally and spiritually against God, infected by rebellion, and deserving of God's judgment. In our own strength, we cannot make ourselves right with God. But God has already accomplished precisely what we need. He provides righteousness through His Son, Jesus Christ. This is truly good news!

From Shame to Salvation – 1:16

No Need for Shame – Paul's eagerness and excitement about God's good news came to life as he announced he was not ashamed of the gospel. Why might Paul have thought that something so gloriously good could be considered shameful? The good news of Jesus Christ may have seemed disgraceful, foolish, or even confusing to some. After all, Jesus died a humiliating death on a Roman cross. His early followers consisted of Jewish peasants, slaves, and commoners. Paul, however, remained steadfast and fully convinced of the gospel's power. **Paul believed with all his heart that the gospel's saving and transforming power is the greatest news of all.**

Through the good news of Jesus's life, atoning death, and resurrection, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, God transforms people who believe in Him.

The Power of God for Salvation – The gospel is the very power by which God accomplishes salvation in everyone who believes. Many do not understand the gospel's divine work. Unbelievers often mock the gospel message. Nevertheless, wherever the gospel is preached, God's Spirit breathes salvation into rebellious hearts. Through the good news of Jesus's life, atoning death, and resurrection, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, God transforms people who believe in Him. By God's power alone, He saves people from slavery to sin, setting them free to know, love, and obey God. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because the good news about Jesus demonstrates God's mighty hand at work. **God does not simply tell us about salvation; God Himself provides salvation through the gospel.**

***For Everyone* – The gospel is for everyone who believes.** Paul explained God's systematic disclosure of His gospel—first for the Jews and then the Greeks. Chronologically, the Hebrew nation occupied an advantageous place in God's dealings with humanity. As God's chosen people, they received amazing privileges, the greatest being that God's promised Messiah came from their nation and the line of Judah.[17] During this time, Gentiles lived apart from God, worshipping other gods and living without the hope of the Messiah.

Paul did not set Jews above Gentiles or Gentiles above Jews. Paul expressed this point: the gospel is for Gentiles and Jews alike. Scripture resoundingly supports this truth. **The gospel is for everyone who will believe.** John wrote that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life.[18] At Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophet Joel when he declared, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."[19] Indeed, the final chapter of the final book of the Bible invites the thirsty to come and those who wish to "take the free gift of the water of life."[20]

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17. **Israel's privileges:** Romans 9:3-5
18. **Eternal life for believers:** John 3:16
19. **Call on the name of the Lord:** Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21
20. **Receive salvation:** Revelation 22:17

Righteousness from God Through Faith – 1:17

In our natural human state, we live corrupted by sin and in rebellion toward God. **Against the backdrop of human unrighteousness, the gospel reveals God's righteousness.** Paul spoke to the Romans about a new hope—righteousness revealed in the gospel.

God's Gift of His Own Righteousness – The only way to be saved from God's wrath is to receive righteousness from God's own nature, alien to sin-corrupted humanity. Those who receive salvation in Christ through faith receive the right standing with God that they could never earn. **The heart of the good news is God's gift of righteousness.** Unless God willingly gives this righteousness, the mere existence of His perfect righteousness would not be good news at all. On the contrary, the truth about God's perfection would only increase our sense of condemnation.

God revealed His free gift in Christ so those who come to know Christ might stop fruitlessly striving and simply trust Him. **We find rest when we believe that God gives Christ's righteousness to all who trust in Him.** Believers stand before God, not in their own self-righteousness—which is actually not righteous at all—but in the life-giving righteousness of Christ.

By Faith from First to Last – Paul lived many centuries before the Reformation led by Martin Luther. However, Paul seemed to anticipate the 16th-century battles over the role of faith in salvation. Paul emphasized the role of faith both in this initial statement of his thesis and in his fuller development regarding the gospel in Romans 3. Here in Romans 1, he speaks of "a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"[21] What is faith? Faith is not a human work but rather believing God and receiving His offer of Christ's righteousness. Dead in our sins, we can only truly live—now and eternally—through faith in Christ. This is the gospel Paul proclaimed and to which God's people cling. **God reveals His saving power for all people through the gospel.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul introduced himself as God's called apostle—set apart and propelled by the powerful gospel of Christ. Paul's life and ministry reflected his call to bring the gospel message to Gentiles but also to the Jews. Paul earnestly prayed for Roman believers and desired to meet with them in person.

Paul's confidence stemmed from his unashamed belief in Jesus Christ and the power of the gospel. He preached the good news that Jesus is both fully God and fully man.[22] He celebrated the righteousness God revealed and generously bestowed upon His faithful ones through Jesus's shed blood on the cross. The content of the gospel, after all, points to Jesus—His person and His work. There is no good news without Jesus. Everything Christians believe, know, and hope for centers on the power of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the Messiah, the unique Son of God.

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21. **Faith:** Habakkuk 2:4
22. **Deity and humanity:** Colossians 2:9

Apply It

God intends His gospel to permeate the entire world. Out of compassion, Jesus came for every sinner across the globe. Christians can easily forget or willingly ignore Jesus's commission to go and make disciples of all nations.[23] Even so, God's gospel message should not remain a personal possession or lie in reserve for certain people. **The whole world needs the powerful gospel—the good news of God's grace to sinners, which He provides through the atoning death of His Son, Jesus Christ.** Who in your personal sphere needs exposure to the powerful gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? What next step will you take to introduce this person to Jesus?

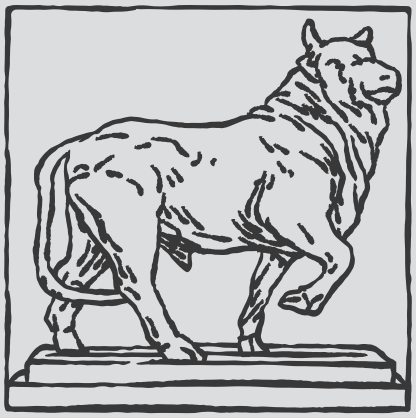
Throughout time, the unbelieving world continually approaches God's gospel with hostility, ridicule, and outright opposition. What mockery or disdain for God and His gospel message have you witnessed? People despised the gospel in Paul's day, and the same response rings true today. In what ways might your life echo agreement with the world's disdain for the gospel? Might you unintentionally or unknowingly despise or ignore the gospel? Do you experience fear or shame when you consider sharing the truth of the gospel of Christ? Paul acknowledged the gospel as "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."[24] Yet, Paul met temptation's lure to shame with refusal. He wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." Paul also encouraged Timothy not to be ashamed.[25] Despite popular opinion, Paul compassionately and powerfully proclaimed the gospel's life-giving power of salvation for all who believe. This same gospel holds undeniable power today. In what ways will you seek boldness like Paul and proclaim the gospel's sweet power of salvation?

Paul lived set apart for the gospel. God's gospel transforms believers. **The gospel creates life within a believer at the very first moment of faith.** The gospel ignites power deep within the believer's soul, fueling the spiritual walk with Christ like food to one's body. In what ways do you depend on Christ's transforming power in your day-to-day life? How might you live like Paul, as one called and set apart for Christ and His gospel? If you do not know Jesus or the power of His gospel message, will you consider bowing before Him in prayer? Ask Him to reveal the power of His gospel to you personally. God's gospel invitation extends to all. There is no higher calling than to believe in Christ and shine His light into this dark world.

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23. Jesus's commission: Matthew 28:19-20
24. Stumbling block: 1 Corinthians 1:23
25. Not ashamed: 2 Timothy 1:8

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God's Wrath Against Sinful Humanity

Lesson 2 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 1 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture build your confidence in the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

2. From the notes, what good news about Jesus Christ stood out to you?

Second Day: Read Romans 1:18-20.

God reveals His wrath against sinful people.

3. Define "wrath" and explain why God is revealing His wrath.

4. Define "suppress" and explain why people might suppress the truth about God.

5. a. What does the natural world reveal about God, and how is this meaningful to you?

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b. What does the natural world not reveal about God, and where can these truths be discovered? (See also Matthew 5:14-16; John 1:4-9; 8:12; 2 Timothy 3:16; and any other verses you know.)

Third Day: Read Romans 1:21-23.

Humanity exchanged worship of God for idolatry.

6. Describe humanity's response to God's revealed truth and the results of this response.

7. What "exchange" is described in verse 23? (See also verse 25.)

8. What substitutes for God do you worship or serve, and how might you come to recognize them?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 1:24-28.

God gave humanity over to sexual sin.

9. a. What phrase occurs three times to describe God's response to humanity's choice, and what stands out to you as you read the progression of the phrase?

   b. How does this phrase help you understand God's wrath?

10. a. In what ways does Scripture help you understand Paul's link between the sin of idolatry and sexual immorality? (See also Genesis 1:26-27; 2:24-25; Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:1, 8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 18-20; Ephesians 5:31-32; and any other verses you know.)

    b. What lies about sin have replaced God's truth in your culture or in your life?

11. Write a prayer for yourself or others you know who are living with the consequences of suppressing God's truth.

Fifth Day: Read Romans 1:28-32.

God gave people over to sin's depravity.

12. a. Why did God give humanity over to a depraved mind?

    b. How is a "depraved" mind different from one that does "not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God"?

13. What does approval of these sins look like in your culture and perhaps in your life? Why might sin receive approval?

14. How has God changed your thinking about a sin you previously approved and maybe even practiced?

15. With whom is God prompting you to share the good news of righteousness through faith in Jesus, and when might you do so?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 1:18-32.

Nothing is more important than how we respond to God.

16. What do you learn from this passage about the results of humanity's rejection of God and His ways?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 2 Notes

Romans 1:18-32

Focus Verse

"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." (Romans 1:20)

Outline

- No Excuse – Romans 1:18-20
- No Thanks – Romans 1:21-23
- No Limits – Romans 1:24-32

Engage

"Chase your desires and follow the latest trends." "Find your own truth and create your own identity." "Unrestrained pleasure is the cure for stress, conflict, and boredom." "Contributing to your family's reputation defines your worth." "Fulfillment comes from following cultural traditions." **Different cultures offer confounding versions of what marks a successful life, yet the world seems more chaotic and desperate than ever.** Is this quest for self-determination the cure for the world's chaos and pain or the cause? Does anyone really know what is true? Does a supreme being exist, or is religion just a mythical crutch for needy people?

Paul reveals the root of this world's confusion: humanity's mutiny against God. Intentional rebellion against our Creator has fractured our relationships with Him and one other. Our sinful nature blinds us to God's evident presence in creation. People look to nature, themselves, and one another instead of glorifying God. We believe we are good and getting better with each passing generation. But when we look around, issues such as hatred, violence, and selfishness persist. With eyes closed to God's truth, people remain guilty of sin and separated from Him—now and forever. God's wrath remains on every person who refuses to worship Him. But God continues to reveal Himself in creation and through the one who has made Him known: Jesus Christ.[1] **Nothing is more important than how we respond to God.**

1. **Jesus revealed the Father:** John 1:18; 5:19

No Excuse – Romans 1:18-20

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel—God's power to save from His righteous wrath against sin. With his confidence in the gospel affirmed, Paul next accused wicked people of suppressing the truth about God that creation reveals. In Romans 1–3, Paul presents evidence that builds toward

a climactic conclusion: "Jew and Gentile alike are all under the power of sin. ... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."[1] **The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to offer timeless realities about God's holy wrath and humanity's struggle with sin.**

God's Wrath Revealed – 1:18-19

***Wrath's Reality* –** Many believers steer clear of biblical teaching about God's wrath, thinking enlightened Christians should abandon this notion. However, biblical writers shared no such reluctance. In the Old Testament, more than 20 words in nearly 600 passages refer to God's wrath. In the New Testament, Jesus and the early Church fathers frequently spoke of God's wrath.[2] **God's wrath against sin perfectly expresses both His justice and mercy.** Sin kills, so it deserves to be judged. God's compassionate love cannot allow sin's destruction to proceed unchecked.

Scripture portrays God's wrath as building up over time, like water collecting behind a dam. God will pour out His full wrath in His final judgment.[3] However, Paul also explained God's wrath in the present tense: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness." **Because the world has rejected God, humanity's self-inflicted downward slide leads away from God and toward sin's consequences, not only in the future but in the present.**

Properly understanding God's present and coming wrath invites people to seek God now. **One day all who face God apart from Christ's righteousness will stand condemned.** In Romans, Paul offers the gospel as the solution to God's wrath.[4] Slow to anger, God does not explode in petulant temper but expresses righteous, measured fury in appropriate response to sin's offense.

***Wrath's Reason* – In Paul's day and ours, everything about God offends fallen human nature.** Preferring the delusion of personal autonomy, we reject God's sovereignty. Our desire to freely practice sin causes us to disregard God's holiness. We resent God's omniscience because we desire to live without accountability. We delight in the easy path of cultural conformity because we dislike God's immutability, which overrules our ever-changing whims and demands.

God displays His wrath against "the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth" about Him—not accidentally but "by their wickedness." Because of God's abundant evidence of Himself, people must actively hold down truth to avoid God. Why do we do this? Self-satisfying sin lures us, then becomes more appealing than the revelation God provides and the submission His way demands.

God is sovereign, always! He is holy, always! He is omniscient, always! **God's glorious eternal attributes contrast radically with our tarnished, time-bound, fickle, sinful human desires.** In our unredeemed, unbelieving, unsaved state, we not only dislike God, we reject His authority over creation and our lives. Even redeemed believers continue to battle lingering fleshly appetites that rebel against God—rationalizing pet sins and avoiding challenging truths.[5]

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1. **Humanity's sin:** Romans 3:9, 23
2. **God's wrath:** Matthew 5:22; 8:10-12; 18:8; Mark 9:42-48; John 3:36; Acts 10:42; Romans 2:5-8; 4:15; 5:9; Ephesians 2:3; 5:6; Colossians 3:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 3:11; 4:3; Revelation 6:15-17; 14:10
3. **Final judgment:** Romans 2:5-6; Revelation 6:17; 20:11-15
4. **Wrath in Romans:** 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4
5. **Sin in us:** Romans 7:14-20

God's Qualities Revealed – 1:20

***The Invisible Made Visible* – God's self-revelation in nature is sometimes called "general revelation"—always available to everybody, everywhere.** God is Spirit, unseen by human vision. However, as a painting reveals the artist's existence, creation reveals the Creator's existence. While general revelation does not reveal everything we need to know about God, all people can see two things through creation: God's "eternal power" and His "divine nature."

Creation reveals God's eternal power. The sparkling night sky testifies to God's powerful orchestration of the orbiting cosmos.[6] He sets the seas' boundaries despite their raging tempests.[7] The sun's pulsing radiance and an atom's pent-up energy hint at the scope of God's eternal power.

Creation also reveals God's divine nature. God is sovereign, holy, and omniscient. Nature reveals additional attributes of God's divine nature, which differs dramatically from human nature. In kindness, God orders the atmosphere to bring rain and seasons that produce crops to feed the earth's inhabitants.[8] God's creation declares His breathtaking beauty in a sunset, rainbow, bird's song, or majestic mountain. As the source of all life, God gives breath to every person, determining when and where they will live so they might "seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him."[9] No one who refuses to acknowledge and worship God does so because they lack concrete evidence.

General revelation also includes an internal or subjective element. **God gives all people a conscience—the gift of knowing right from wrong and comprehending the evidence for His existence.[10]** We have "clearly seen" the truth and "understood from what has been made." Conscience, an internal knowing, propels people past creation as a god to recognize the God who created it. Humanity stands accountable for responding to what nature reveals about God "because God has made it plain to them."

What is sometimes called "special revelation" provides additional insight into God's invisible qualities. Paul explains in Romans 2 and 3 that, by grace, increasing special revelation came to the Jews through God's relationship with Abraham, through the law, and through the prophets. The gospel then presents the special revelation of Jesus Christ, explaining the path to God's righteousness.[11] This good news is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.[12] Responding to God includes humbly seeking what He makes known through His Son, His Word, His Spirit, and His people.

***Visibility Removes Excuses* – No excuse exists for humanity's failure to believe, worship, and thank God—the reasonable responses to God's visibility in creation alone.** Nevertheless, every generation offers excuses for suppressing the truth God reveals. Excuses perpetuate unbelief, unrepentance, and failure to realize that nothing matters more than seeking God and His plans for His creation. Romans 3:19 describes what will happen to excuses when people face judgment: "Every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." Because of God's abounding grace and love, He faithfully moves people from general to special revelation as they respond to Him. The gospel of Jesus Christ offers all who believe God's singular, gracious solution to His deserved wrath.

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6. **Skies declare glory:** Psalm 19:1
7. **Seas' boundaries:** Jeremiah 5:22
8. **Rain for food:** Acts 14:17
9. **Giving life:** Acts 17:24-28
10. **Conscience:** Romans 2:15
11. **God's righteousness:** Romans 3:21-26
12. **Power of God:** Romans 1:16-17

God's Righteous Hatred of Wickedness

The Doctrine of the Wrath of God

The first part of Paul's important letter addresses God's wrath—the manifestation of His hatred of sin and wickedness. Paul describes God's wrath as both a present and future problem for fallen humanity.[1] In the present, God's wrath is experienced as He gives people over to sin's consuming consequences.[2] In the future, apart from salvation through Jesus, God's wrath against sin ultimately brings spiritual death and eternal, conscious separation from God.[3] God perfectly expresses His holiness and love as He righteously exercises His justice. As He pours out His wrath on sin, He also mercifully provides an escape from His wrath through faith in Jesus, the perfect atoning sacrifice.

God is not like us. He is not wicked, evil, depraved, envious, or driven by irrational anger.[4] God does not exercise His wrath as payback or to get even. Because of His compassion, God hates the destruction in sin's wake and seeks to save sinners. Because of His omniscience and wisdom, God perfectly measures His punishment to fit each sin. Because of His impartiality, God will hold all people accountable for their response to His truth. **Because all people are born with a sinful nature, no one meets God's righteous standard.**[5] All people deserve God's wrath and need a Savior.[6]

When people do not admit the reality of God's wrath, they excuse sin and suppress plain truth for which they are accountable to God. **An insufficient understanding or outright refusal to believe in God's righteous wrath against sin leaves people blind to sin's consequences and without reason or urgency to seek the Savior God sent to receive His wrath in their place.** Skewed and self-oriented attempts to define reality leave people facing eternal peril.

When we believe that our sin deserves God's wrath, we love God more and more for sending Jesus to bear His wrath in our place. The reality of God's wrath compels us to joyfully declare the righteousness Jesus offers sinners by faith. Have you accepted Jesus's substitutionary death in taking on God's wrath on your behalf? If so, how does your life express your gratitude for God's gift of eternal protection from His wrath through the atoning sacrifice of His Son?[7]

1. **Present and future wrath:** Romans 1:18; 2:5-6
2. **Gave them over:** Romans 1:24, 26, 28
3. **Consequence of death:** Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15
4. **Human wickedness:** Romans 1:29-31
5. **No one righteous:** Romans 3:9-18
6. **Objects of wrath:** Romans 9:22
7. **Believers' eternal life:** John 3:36

No Thanks – Romans 1:21-23

After his opening statement about God's wrath against humanity's truth-suppressing wickedness, the rest of Romans 1 incorporates Paul's examples from the irreligious—people unwilling to live in alignment with God's Word. These verses paint a painful picture of how, in the absence of God's truth, sin corrupts human thoughts and values. **We should read these verses amazed at God's grace that can save us from the downward spiral Paul describes.** At the same time, though saved

by grace, believers also mourn sin's devastating impact on the world; grieve for those who remain shackled to sin and pray for their deliverance; and bear witness to the gift of salvation Jesus offers.

Futility and Darkness – 1:21

The shimmering stars call for breathless wonder. A newborn baby's cry invites humble gratitude. The splendor of majestic mountains, canyons, or waterfalls summons appreciation. And yet, people see God's qualities, experience Him through creation, and still fail to honor Him. God deserves thanks for the food the earth produces and praise for the wonders creation displays. **When people refuse to give God glory and thanks, both personal and global disaster results.**

Futile Minds – Willfully rejecting God as creator and provider renders human thinking futile. **When the truth about God is suppressed, only inadequate and insufficient understanding remains.** People can make superficial observations, but without God as the starting point, no one can discern spiritual, moral, and practical realities beneath the surface. Distorted thinking launches further disaster.

Foolish, Darkened Hearts – All reasoning that suppresses God becomes folly and leads to foolish, darkened hearts that people who turn away from God do not recognize. Instead, they speak of "bright new ideas" or "seeing the light," heralding their own limited insights. But because God, the giver of humanity's intellect, is the sole source of light, all light apart from Him is mere illusion.[13] In the Bible, a fool's guilt includes intellectual folly, moral folly, and wickedness. Consequently, the Bible often connects fools with denying God. For example, the Psalms repeat the warning: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"[14] **While finite humanity cannot know eternal God fully, "foolishness" describes the darkened heart's willful rejection of God's truth.**

Substitute Religions – 1:22-23

Instead of acknowledging their darkened hearts, people who willfully suppress God's truth call themselves "wise." The Greek word *sophos*, translated as "wise," is the root of such words as "sophisticated," "sophomore," and "philosophy." A philosopher loves wisdom. Sophisticates consider themselves wise in worldly ways. In Paul's day and ours, those who reject God's truth mistakenly imagine themselves as intelligent and sophisticated as they value creation above the Creator.

Rather than praise God's unique glory, people "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles." Two verses later in verse 25, the word "exchanged" occurs again. Rather than flourish in relationship with their Creator, people "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen." God designed people to worship Him. **When the God of creation is not worship's focus, people satisfy their inborn design for worship with substitute gods.** Spirituality, religious affiliation, good deeds, valued possessions, and personal interests, even when good in and of themselves, can become gods of our own making, suppressing God's general and special revelation of life-giving truth.

Sin first shattered God's creation in a similar exchange.[15] God placed the first human couple in a perfect place and in perfect relationship with Himself and one another. **Adam and Eve sinned, exchanging a perfect relationship with God for the false promise of attaining Godlike perfection.**

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13. **Light's source:** John 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; Revelation 22:5
14. **Fools deny God:** Psalms 14:1; 53:1
15. **Sin shatters creation:** Genesis 3

All their descendants—all human beings ever born—share the consequences of their rebellion.[16] This traumatic and heartbreaking separation from God is known as the Fall. Even now, the Fall echoes throughout humanity because God's revelation confronts our sin. In our fallen state, we want almost anything more than the true God. This idolatry fuels humanity's downward slide, which Paul goes on to describe.

No Limits – Romans 1:24-32

Corrupted behaviors flow out of corrupted thinking, beliefs, and values. We do what we do because we think what we think. When people try to extinguish the truth about God's existence, darkness blinds them to ultimate accountability for their choices.[17] Paul's vivid explanation reveals the impact of unchecked wickedness on creation.

God Gave Them Over – 1:24, 26, 28

Paul repeated "God gave them over" three times. **God allows people who persistently reject Him to go their own way.** If we remain stubbornly in unbelief, He removes His restraints on our sin. What an irony! God's punishment grants what humans have fought to achieve since Adam and Eve rebelled. Eve believed the lie that God withheld something good, and Adam joined her by approving of her sin. Because sin corrupted God's creation, humanity pushes God away. People's actions scream, "God, leave me alone and let me get on with my life." So, God does.

Unfortunately, the autonomy sin craves promises satisfaction that never materializes. We believe the lie that God unfairly withholds what we desire.[18] We think running from God will expand our horizons, reveal our identity, and inaugurate our freedom. Instead of satisfaction, we find dead ends that lead to insatiable longing. Rather than find authenticity, we lose identity. We experience sin's bondage, not freedom. Without a restored relationship with our Creator, we cannot fulfill our purpose.

"Gave them over" is a Greek legal expression for handing the guilty over to receive their sentence. God gives people over to the consequences of their rebellion. When God releases sinners toward their sinful desires, they do not drift off like an object in space without gravity. Instead, they tumble downward like glass, getting cracked and chipped and ultimately shattered along the way. The path away from God will always careen downward to destruction. To illustrate humanity's progressive decline into increasing brokenness, Paul used illustrations from his day that are also familiar to modern readers. Apart from God, sin ravages people.

"God gave them over ... to sexual impurity" (1:24-25) – Verses 24-25 address sexual impurity as part of idolatrous worship. Writing from Corinth, Paul would have encountered depraved sexual activity at the temples of Greek and Roman gods who were also worshipped in Rome. The use of sex in worship practices drew people away from the true God, not toward Him. **When God releases sinners, false worship turns to degrading cravings.**

Outside of marriage, in which a man and a woman become "one flesh,"[19] sex becomes distorted and breaks God's moral law. Any sex outside the godly covenant of marriage is adultery.[20] Sex within marriage is God's gift to humanity. In the Old Testament, God used marriage to illustrate

16. **Sin's consequences:** Genesis 3:16-24; Romans 5:12; 8:19-22
17. **Accountability denied:** Psalms 10:13; 73:7-12; 2 Peter 3:3-7
18. **The lie:** Genesis 3:1-7
19. **Man, woman become one:** Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6
20. **Sex outside marriage:** Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:18; Proverbs 6:32; Matthew 5:27-32; Revelation 17:2-4

His covenant relationship with Israel.[21] This intimate, mysterious union pictures the purity and beauty of Christ's oneness with His Church.[22] **People willingly exchange God's truth for the lie that God does not exist or deserve their worship and obedience.**

"God gave them over to shameful lusts" (1:26-27) – Why did God remove His restraint and abandon people to shameful lusts? Because "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped created things rather than the Creator–who is forever praised. Amen."[23] **If we are unrepentant, our human nature, corrupted in the Fall, will devolve into corrupted worship—giving glory to the objects of our selfish desires rather than rightfully worshipping God.**

Paul used homosexuality to illustrate cascading shameful lusts that result when God's wrath comes against the wickedness that suppresses revealed truth. Scripture condemns homosexuality,[24] but even general revelation reveals God's natural design for reproduction through the sexual union between a man and a woman. Paul clearly communicates that unrestrained freedom to pursue human lust invites suffering. **When God releases sinners, lusts become destructive passions.**

"God gave them over to a depraved mind" (1:28-32) – Suppressed truth, corrupted worship, and shameful lusts compound into depravity. A depraved mind is wholly unfit to discern right from wrong. The 21 sins Paul listed describe fallen humanity. Everyone has been guilty of something on this list. Which ones have you been guilty of? Apart from God, nothing is sacred, and no one is safe. **When God releases sinners, depraved thoughts lead to deadly obsessions.** This is the tragic dead end of a Christless life.

"Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death," Paul wrote, "they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." **At the end of this downward slide of abandoning God, people "approve" and derive pleasure from evil.** Paul is not describing people who show grace when someone repents and returns to God. Approval here means celebrating error as truth and defining truth as error. Sin's grip on humanity characterizes beauty as ugliness and ugliness as beauty.[25]

People who worship and condone the sin that destroys them live in spiritual and moral insanity. This present darkness should lead believers to our knees to call upon the Lord to fill us with His wisdom, mercy, compassion, and truth to bear loving witness to our friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances, who can still find true hope in Jesus. **Nothing is more important than how we respond to God.** The fallen world might discount Paul's presentation of God's presently revealed wrath as fiction or an outdated perspective. However, Paul offers a painful glimpse into "living hell" on earth, where unrestrained sin ravages those who deny God. Meanwhile, God's truth reveals salvation from this living and eternal hell through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God has graciously made Himself known to humanity through His beautiful creation. God displays His power, presence, and grace clearly in both the world He created and in His people. God is not

21. **Union with Israel:** Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:1, 8; Hosea 3:1-5
22. **Oneness with Christ:** Ephesians 5:31-32
23. **Exchanged for a lie:** Romans 1:25
24. **Homosexuality condemned:** Leviticus 18:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11
25. **Calling evil good:** Isaiah 5:20

hiding Himself or withholding good from humanity. His lavish gifts, astounding glories, and patient kindness leave humanity without excuse for their ingratitude, self-centeredness, and idolatry.

God reveals His wrath on the earth today, as He has throughout history. God has righteously ordained sin's justified consequence—unchecked pursuit of whatever people desire more than Him. **Romans removes our blinders to behold human depravity.** God will not protect those who persistently reject Him from their destructive desires. As descendants of Adam and Eve, we are all great sinners. But God stands ready to rescue us from sin's deadly trap. God's heart for the wayward consistently beckons, "Come back to me. I love you."

Apply It

God's absolute love, compassion, and mercy delight us, while God's absolute holiness, justice, and truth collide with our prideful cravings. **When God's incomparable attributes confront our foolish preferences, we face temptation to suppress God's truth.** The broken world bombards people with lies. Which lies are you most tempted to believe? What truth about God or from God would you rather not know? As we pray, study Scripture, and fellowship with other believers, the Holy Spirit steadily peels back layers of suppressed truth, renewing our minds. What would it look like this week to exchange long-believed lies for truth from God's Word?

What do you desire more than God? A thing? A person? A position? A feeling? **Do you consider God relevant in your life and the world today?** Progressively, the world pushes God to the margins. But ignoring Him is a terrible mistake. Nothing is more important than a right relationship with God. Only God can provide true understanding of Himself, His creation, and His purpose for each person. Without God's truth as our anchor, futility and foolishness rule our thoughts. How could your relationship with God gain greater importance in your life?

Paul invited believers in Rome to humbly remember their own need for the righteousness God's powerful gospel offers fallen people. Apart from God's grace, the sins mentioned in this lesson dominate our fallen nature and earthly lives. But God's revealed truth can deliver anyone from moral and spiritual darkness into His true light. **Believers were once in the dark before God's illuminating work revealed a new reality within them.**[26] In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul explained that "the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth" and encouraged people to "find out what pleases the Lord."[27] The light God shines into believers' lives displays the power and wisdom of God's plan to save the darkened world. God transforms people who respond to His revealed truth and His glorious gospel.

The world has much of God's good order reversed. Confused and upside-down thinking saturates governments, neighborhoods, and families. How should sincere believers engage with a morally insane world spiraling toward God's eternal wrath? With the gospel of Jesus Christ! "It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."[28] **Faith in the gospel offers peace-filled righteousness and clarity to live by—today and forever.** Do not be ashamed of that gospel! Offer God's truth as a beacon of hope and allow His light to shine into the foolish darkness all around you. God is still revealing His saving truth to His beloved creation.

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26. Darkened understanding: Ephesians 4:18
27. Children of light: Ephesians 5:8-10
28. Gospel power: Romans 1:16

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No Excuse for Anyone

Lesson 3 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 2 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture challenge you regarding sin?

2. What teaching from the notes helped clarify your understanding about idolatry and accountability to God?

Second Day: Read Romans 2:1-4.

Paul revealed shocking truth about God's judgment.

3. What message does Paul clearly give his readers in verse 1?

4. a. Explain the difference between God's judgment and that of a mere human.

   b. What happens to those who judge others, and why?

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c. In what ways do people wrongly judge others, and how are you prone to fall into this sin?

5. a. For what do we show contempt when we judge others? What truth about God and repentance do we miss?

b. How might God use you to extend His kindness and lead others to repentance?

Third Day: Read Romans 2:5-16.

God will bring judgment against all sinners.

6. What traits do the people Paul describes possess? What do they store up for themselves?

7. a. From verses 7-11, what are the two types of people Paul speaks of? What do they seek and what will they receive?

b. What do you seek, and what do your actions reveal about your heart attitude toward God?

c. As you ponder the truth that God shows no favoritism, what challenges or encourages you?

8. Give details about how God's law impacts His judgment. When will this judgment take place?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 2:17-24.

Paul questioned the religious superiority of the Jews.

9. a. What led the Jews to wrongly see themselves as superior to others?

b. What privileges have you received from God, and what is your attitude toward those privileges?

10. a. Which commandments does Paul address in this passage, and why might he have mentioned these commands?

b. What happens when people violate the standards they proclaim?

11. In what way might you excuse or justify sin in your own life?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 2:25-29.

Paul defined true circumcision.

12. Read Genesis 17:9-14. What did circumcision represent to the Jews, and why did Jewish people point to this rite with pride?

13. What outward signs do people seek or rely on today as evidence of a right relationship with God?

14. According to this passage, how did Paul describe a true Jew, and what does this mean to you?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 2.

God alone perfectly judges every person.

15. What does the truth about God and His righteous judgment of sinners mean to you today?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 3 Notes

Romans 2

Focus Verse

"For God does not show favoritism." (Romans 2:11)

Outline

- Morality Versus Truth – Romans 2:1-16
- Outward Religion Versus Inner Transformation – Romans 2:17-29

Engage

No matter when or where we live, we often attempt to minimize or excuse sin. Perhaps we present extenuating circumstances or situations outside of our control as satisfactory explanations. We defend our reasons for being late, breaking traffic laws, or lashing out at loved ones. We may even attempt to rationalize our sin, even to God. Or worse, we blame God for our sin. However, we have only ourselves to blame. **All sin is rebellion and an offense against God.**

Paul continued his letter to the church in Rome and to us by demolishing every excuse for sin. He excused no one. Instead, he accused both Jews and Gentiles of sinful rebellion against God, freeing us from erroneous, self-serving explanations and removing the camouflage of self-designed morality and outward religion. Not only does sin condemn us before God, but we also condemn ourselves when we judge others. Only God is righteous, pure, and holy—worthy to judge sinners. **God alone perfectly judges every person.**

Morality Versus Truth – Romans 2:1-16

Paul previously explained that the whole human race is under God's wrath.[1] Rebellion against God fills people with every kind of wickedness. From murder to disobedience, Paul denounced depraved sinners as God-haters who invent ways of doing evil.[2] **Next, Paul specifically addressed Rome's believers with startling truth: All people are without excuse for their sin.**

Condemned by Any Standard – 2:1

Paul did not excuse anyone based on position, heritage, or religion. **Instead, Paul's shocking argument declared that all who judge others condemn themselves because they do the very same things for which they are judging.** All people are equally guilty of terrible sin. Morally upright people may wrongly believe that Paul's harsh words do not apply to them. Perhaps they

1. **God's wrath:** Romans 1:18-20
2. **God-haters:** Romans 1:29-31

feel superior to others who defy their culture's moral code. However, because their own moral standards allow them to recognize sin's offense against God, they heap guilt upon themselves.

Every human falls short of any standard that measures sin. Even the seemingly basic human expectation to treat others with kindness and fairness becomes increasingly difficult when we encounter sarcasm, angry words, or rude actions. Sadly, we often find ourselves behaving our worst with those we love the most.

Biblical standards confirm Paul's point. The Ten Commandments[3] and Jesus's Sermon on the Mount[4] reveal God's standard for living rightly and expose humanity's inborn compulsion toward sin. Inherent human frailty and the power of sin leave every person utterly incapable of perfectly upholding God's standards. Even seemingly little sins reveal a giant gap between God and us.

***The Ten Commandments* – God's law, given to the Israelites through Moses, has greatly influenced the laws of many countries.** While some of God's commands may seem easy to uphold, a closer look reveals our own guilt regarding each command.

The first four commandments focus on our responsibility to love, worship, and honor God above all else. Anything or anyone, even ourselves, that replaces God as first in our lives becomes an idol. Using God's name in an unholy or profane manner defames the very character of the God who created us. We are called to set aside a day each week to worship the Lord and make Him our utmost priority. Even with our best effort, we fall short of loving God with our whole heart.

Inherent human frailty and the power of sin leave every person utterly incapable of perfectly upholding God's standards.

The remaining six commandments deal with our responsibility to live upright lives among others. The fifth commandment requires us to honor, or respect and esteem, our fathers and mothers. With a contrary thought, an untruthful word, or an unkind action against our parents, we break this command. The sixth commandment forbids murder. God judges our thoughts and attitudes, not only our actions. Jesus equated feeling anger toward another with murder.[5] The seventh commandment forbids adultery. Pornography, certain aspects of media, and some music promote all sorts of sexual promiscuity that run rampant in today's world. Even people who belong to Christ can wrongly tolerate sinful desires. Jesus said we are guilty of adultery if we look at another person with lust.[6] The eighth commandment forbids theft. Purposefully not returning a borrowed item or leaving a debt unpaid breaks this command. Neglecting God's call to generously offer our time, talents, and treasure and to care for the poor and for widows also breaks this command. The ninth commandment forbids false testimony. God sees a small or seemingly insignificant lie the same as giving false testimony in a court of law. Because silence can leave the wrong impression, we can even lie without speaking. The tenth commandment says we must not covet. To covet means to want something others have out of desire rather than need. The marketing industry preys upon this human weakness. Later in Romans, Paul identifies his own status as a lawbreaker, confessing his own internal battle with coveting.[7]

3. **Ten Commandments:** Exodus 20:1-17
4. **Sermon on the Mount:** Matthew 5–7
5. **Anger as murder:** Matthew 5:21-22
6. **Lust as adultery:** Matthew 5:28
7. **Coveting:** Romans 7:7-11

Jews in Paul's day intensely prioritized God's law—the Ten Commandments. As God's covenant people, every Jew cherished God's law, yet all failed to keep it. Many Jews claimed God's favor based on their heritage, failing to measure their sinfulness against the law God provided. **God's righteous standards condemned all people then and condemn all people now.**

***The Sermon on the Mount* – Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount apply the Ten Commandments not only to outward acts but also to internal heart attitudes.** Jesus's sermon strengthens rather than weakens God's Old Testament standards. In the Beatitudes, Jesus explained qualities that God blesses and commends as flourishing life.[8] Only Jesus Himself fully embodies the characteristics He described. Gentle in spirit, Jesus mourned for sin. Meekness, mercy, and purity flow majestically from our Lord. Jesus, a peacemaker, not only embodies righteousness but suffered to provide righteousness for all who seek Him. His sermon also contains the Golden Rule: "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you."[9] This command sums up Jesus's teaching on the Law and the Prophets but also condemns every human being.

With either a human or biblical measure, Paul's correctly states, "At whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself." When asked which command was the greatest, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"[10] Jesus's clarifying standards remain impossible for humans to carry out. Only Jesus fully upholds and provides the righteousness God requires.

God's Call to Repent – 2:2-4

Paul next addressed those who depend on their own moral living. **God will judge the self-righteous alongside those who live steeped in depravity.** God bases His judgment against all sinners upon His truth, which overrules any attempt to excuse sin. God's judgment cuts through all excuses and the sins we try to hide, ultimately revealing our stubborn unbelief. No one can escape God's judgment with His truth as the standard. God explains truth; Jesus, the way, truth, and life, embodies truth.[11]

Any human who judges another yet commits the same sins will not escape God's judgment. Our choice to judge others by standards we ignore ourselves shows contempt for God's love, kindness, and patience. With rich kindness and tender compassion, God calls us to repentance. To willfully turn our backs on God means choosing instead to receive His judgment and wrath against our sin. God patiently holds back deserved judgment, allowing individuals every opportunity to turn to Him. **Only those who humbly respond to God's kindness in repentance and turn to Jesus for salvation will escape God's judgment.** Tragically, those who defend their own self-righteousness await God's final and certain judgment.

8. **Blessings:** Matthew 5:1-12
9. **Golden Rule:** Matthew 7:12
10. **Most important commands:** Mark 12:30-31
11. **Jesus, the truth:** John 14:6

God's Just Judgment – 2:5-16

In Romans 1:18, Paul wrote, "The wrath of God is being revealed." God does not withhold His wrath until the final judgment day. When He abandons humanity to sin,[12] God reveals His wrath in real time today. Here, Paul's second reference to God's wrath points to His future, final judgment. On that day, His "righteous judgment will be revealed." In Romans 2:2, Paul revealed God's basis for judgment. **Now and in the future, God always bases His judgment on truth.** For those who have not received the salvation God offers through His Son, He will exercise the judgment they deserve based on their own sinful desires and deeds.

***According to What People Deserve (2:5)* – Because all people sin, everyone deserves God's final judgment.** Stubborn refusal to confess sin and turn to God stores up His wrath against those with unrepentant hearts. Ignorance of God provides no excuse because God reveals Himself through nature.[13] All humans have enough knowledge to seek the One who created them and the world. Instead, the rebellious suppress God's evident truth.

God will rightly judge all people, based on their knowledge of and disregard for His kindness.[14] People who show contempt for God by trying to forget, dismiss, or atone for their own sin store up God's wrath with every rebellious word, thought, and action. Like emails, social media posts, and digital images that are never truly deleted, their complete record of sin accumulates and remains.

***According to Deeds (2:6-11)* – God will base His judgment on what people do with the life He has given them.** These verses describe two very different paths that greatly differ in motivation and destiny. Everyone is on either one path or the other. There is no middle ground. Some seek glory, honor, and immortality, persisting in doing good. In stark contrast, the self-seeking people on the other path reject truth and follow evil.

Paul lists the ultimate desires that motivate a believer's persistence in doing good:

- **Glory** refers to the Holy Spirit's internal transformation that allows God's children to reflect His Son while on earth and long for eternity in God's presence, unhindered by sin.[15]
- **Honor** refers to God's approval of Christians, a sharp contrast with the dishonor the world heaps upon God's people.[16]
- **Immortality** refers to the resurrection hope of God's people, who will experience eternal life that conquers the death and decay of this world.[17]

Believers pursue this path by God's grace and through His power. Through the Holy Spirit, God delivers His children from sin, brings them to saving faith in Christ, and grants them eternal life. Can people persist in doing good apart from the gospel's truth and the Holy Spirit's power? They cannot! The only perfect path requires humble, perpetual submission to God. Self-consumed sinners would never choose this path by their own will and cannot persistently walk along this path in their own strength. Only those empowered by the Holy Spirit will walk this glorious path to and with Jesus.

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12. **Abandonment to sin:** Romans 1:24, 26, 28
13. **Revealed in nature:** Romans 1:18-20
14. **God's appropriately measured judgment:** Luke 12:47-48
15. **Glory:** Romans 5:2; 8:18, 30; 9:23; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 15:42-43; 2 Corinthians 3:12-18; 4:17
16. **Honor:** Hebrews 2:7; 1 Peter 1:7
17. **Immortality:** 1 Corinthians 15:42, 50-54

God, Our Worthy Judge

The Doctrine of Judgment of Believers and Unbelievers

Paul presents hard and challenging truth about God's righteous judgment. God will judge all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. Living among the Roman culture, Christ's followers in Paul's time likely witnessed rampant unbelief. Perhaps some who professed faith still participated in sinful cultural practices. Paul offers no middle ground when it comes to Christ. All people sin, and all people will face judgment. **God is perfect, and every judgment He makes is based on truth.** He is our worthy judge.

Scripture presents two basic types of judgment: punitive and evaluative. Punitive judgment, faced by unbelievers for unrepentant sin, refers to dreadful suffering in a conscious state throughout eternity. Scripture warns of this terrible punishment so sinners will flee to Jesus for rescue.[1] Believers, freed from God's punitive judgment, face only evaluative judgment[2] based on their service to Christ in this life. Sometimes referred to as rewards, this judgment should encourage believers to faithfully obey, honor, and serve God.[3]

Refusal to believe that God will judge every person requires exchanging God's truth for this world's lies. Selfishly seeking our own path allows sin-marred priorities to steer every thought and action. Without God's truth as our standard, sin is brushed off as comedy, Satan is depicted as a cartoon, and God's judgment becomes a source of scoffing. Refusal to turn to Christ in repentance tragically reaps this world's troubles. Even worse, those embroiled in this lie face the devastating eternal consequence of God's wrath. The choice to refuse God on earth leaves people void of His presence for all eternity.

When we believe that God knows the secrets of our hearts and will judge us on that final day, we rightly humble ourselves before Him. We confess our sin in contrite repentance before God and receive cleansing through the blood of the Savior, Jesus Christ. We live life on earth in peace, knowing that our sins are forgiven and trusting the Holy Spirit's enabling as we seek to please God. We know that when we see God face-to-face, He will see the perfection of His one and only Son, who died for us, rather than our sin and flawed human service to Him. We long for heaven's rewards and gratefully await our eternal home with God.

1. **Punitive judgment:** Acts 17:31; Romans 1:18, 28; 2:1-16; Hebrews 9:27
2. **Evaluative judgment:** Romans 8:1; 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10
3. **Believers' rewards:** 1 Corinthians 3:14; 15:58; 2 Timothy 4:8

Apart from God's intervention, all humans take the self-seeking path of sin. Paul describes the sinful motivations of those on the path of rebellion against God:

- Self-seeking people place themselves above God and everyone else, the opposite of the greatest commandment to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... [and] love your neighbor as yourself."[18]
- In the context of Romans 1–2, those who reject the truth about God revealed in His creation will proceed in further rejection of God and His truth.

18. **Love:** Matthew 22:37, 39

- The progressively downward path of unrepentant sinners described in Romans 1:18-32 means that those on this path follow evil, yielding to sin's degrading slavery.

What results from sinful rebellion? God promises wrath, anger, trouble, and distress upon those who turn away from Him. God's wrath and anger are tied to His fierce and absolute opposition to all evil. Trouble and distress are the effects of judgment on evildoers; the Bible frequently describes the suffering the wicked will face in this way.[19] **God promises to accurately and comprehensively examine all people and their deeds without showing favoritism.** All without faith in Jesus will be condemned. Family connections, church membership, culture, religion, status, power, comfort, or wealth will not suffice. The only path to eternal life is through Jesus Christ.

Righteousness in God's Sight (2:12-16) – Paul continued teaching about God's final judgment by addressing what his fellow Jews cherished—God's law. Once again, Paul shocked his readers. God's law is not contained on stone tablets nor upheld by flawed human effort. God must write His law on the hearts of His people. **Those who hear and obey the law will be declared righteous in God's sight.** Gentiles who live according to the law's regulations demonstrate that God has written the law's requirements on their hearts. God, who knows the heart of every single person, will one day judge every person's secrets through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Outward Religion Versus Inner Transformation – Romans 2:17-29

Paul shifted to specifically address the Jews of his day. Today his words could apply to anyone, including ardently faithful churchgoers. Spiritual advantages such as church membership, the sacraments, and stewardship are genuinely good, but they cannot save. God is not interested in outward expressions alone. Rather, the Lord looks at the heart.[20]

Religious Advantages – 2:17-20

Religious Jews of Paul's day claimed special spiritual advantages and religious privileges based on their nation's history with God. Paul questioned their foregone assumption of an elevated status with God, saying, "If you call yourself a Jew." The religious Jews boasted about and relied on their unique relationship with God and His law. Because God gave them the law, they knew His will and approved the most excellent moral standards. Therefore, the Jews had been guides for the blind and a light for those in darkness. They were instructors for the foolish and spiritual teachers of children. Each claim Paul mentioned was absolutely true, highlighting their important spiritual advantages. However, God called the Jewish people to proclaim Him to all nations through holy lives shaped by His law. Despite God-given privileges, they offered God only lip service while their external actions revealed unchanged hearts that dishonored God.

Religious Superiority – 2:21-24

Knowing God's ways is never enough. Paul asked in verse 21, "You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" **God judges according to truth, not appearances.** God measures what people do, not just what they say.

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19. Suffering of the wicked: Isaiah 8:22; Zephaniah 1:15-17
20. Outward appearance versus heart: 1 Samuel 16:7

Paul produced three examples of the Jews' "superior" way of life: The Jews possessed God's revealed law and knew God's commands regarding stealing, adultery, and right worship, yet they broke those very laws. **God is not satisfied with mere intellectual knowledge.** Paul had instructed the moral Gentiles that God measures our actions.[21] By God's standard, both Jews and Gentiles stand condemned. Their own words condemned them because they judged the actions of others yet did the same things themselves.

Paul quoted the Old Testament, stating, "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."[22] When openly religious people violate the very standards they proclaim, God's name is defamed, and people are confused. This remains true today. The watching world quickly spots hypocrisy. How faithfully do you practice what you preach?

Covenant of Circumcision – 2:25-29

Paul turned to address the circumcised Jewish men. Circumcision visibly identified these men as belonging to God's covenant people. God promised salvation for His people. He pledged to be their God and gave them circumcision as the sign of His covenant with them.[23]

Today, baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs of the new covenant for Christians.[24] Like circumcision under the old covenant, these sacraments point to spiritual realities. These God-given blessings help strengthen our faith. However, no outward sign has the power to save. **God looks within to correctly discern the truth about everyone.**

What is a Jew? Paul insisted that a Jewish believer must be a true Jew—one whose upright conduct flows from new life within. Paul clearly stated, "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 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." Only God can perfectly judge and change a human heart. No human can circumcise their own heart through their words, actions, or heritage. To become a part of God's people, we need hearts changed from the inside out. Jesus transforms us inwardly so that we may please Him outwardly. God knows everything about everyone. **God alone perfectly judges every person.** Our proper response is to humble ourselves before Him.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul spoke shocking truth about an outwardly moral or religious person's guilt before God in the same way he rebuked sinful unbelievers in Romans 1. Someone who judges another's sin stands equally accountable to God as they commit that very same sin. **All people, Jew and Gentile alike, are condemned by sin and await God's judgment and wrath.** No excuse will suffice. Even sins we consider small represent a chasm between us and God so big that we cannot rescue ourselves. While upright, moral living is good, nothing we can do will save us.

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21. **Knowledge versus action:** Romans 2:6-16
22. **God's name:** Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:22
23. **Sign of circumcision:** Genesis 17:10-14; Leviticus 12:3
24. **Signs of new covenant:** Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 22:20-23; Acts 2:36-47; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Our best efforts to save ourselves cannot meet God's perfect standards. While we may take pride in moral living, religious observances, or our family heritage, God knows the truth about every sinful heart. We offer God nothing worthy of His favor. Yet, in mercy and compassion, God has provided a way to redeem people caught in sin's trap. Paul will go on to explain the riches of the gospel. But first we must recognize our utter need of a Savior. Our sin runs deep, but God's love reaches deeper. Only the blood of Jesus Christ rescues us from sin.

Apply It

Paul speaks the naked truth to us, who, like Paul's readers, tend to minimize our sin. **There is no acceptable excuse for our sin.** Every single human is a sinner. No single sin is insignificant or hidden from God. No one escapes judgment for sin. God will perfectly judge every sinner. How might you consider yourself more righteous than others? Whom do you judge as more guilty before God, and how does that condemn you? Indwelt by the Holy Spirit and saved by God's grace, believers should view others with compassion, not revulsion or self-righteousness. Will you ask God to reveal the ways pride infects your thoughts, words, and actions? When will you repent?

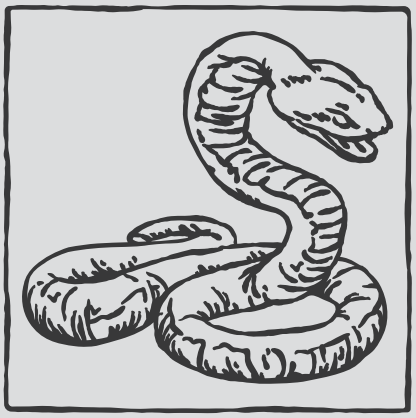
Neither moral behavior nor outward religion can overcome sin's permeating root within us. While socially approved sins claim to bring happiness and freedom, sin ultimately entraps us and dominates our hearts. Each step of indifference in regard to God's great mercy and kindness accumulates more of His wrath. Failure to worship, refusal to forgive, neglect of others, angry words, selfish thoughts, spiteful retorts, and harmful acts add to God's wrath. What sin holds you captive? How might your excuses for sin reveal indifference toward God? Sin so mars us that no external action can save us. **Only a heart circumcised by faith in Christ and transformed by God's Spirit can be set free from sin's bondage.** What is the state of your heart? How will you respond to God's mercy and thank Him for saving you from the eternal wrath all people deserve?

Paul spent time and used well-chosen words to intricately explain sin's deceptive hold on all humanity. And he is not yet finished! While we may cringe and long for relief, understanding the full extent of sin's damage makes God's plan to redeem us more precious. Paul will celebrate the realities of salvation in Christ but first allows us to feel the weight of sin's damage. The truth about sin humbles us before God. **Understanding the reality of sin prepares us to seek the salvation only God can provide.**

Jesus Christ opened the only right path to God. No true freedom from sin exists apart from Christ. Only Jesus lived in complete obedience to God and could absorb the full weight of humanity's sin. Only Jesus can place you in right standing with God. How do we find Jesus and His right path to righteousness? First, we must recognize that sin has led us in the wrong direction and turn to Jesus in repentance.[25] When we repent of sin and believe Jesus died on our behalf, He saves us. By His Spirit, God empowers us to trust, obey, and depend on Him. We offer sacrificial work on His behalf as a spiritual act of worship, giving Him glory and honor. God's kindness, tolerance, and patience offer a choice. Will you show contempt for God and His blessings or repent and look to Christ for salvation?

25. Turn to God: Isaiah 45:22; Jeremiah 31:18; Acts 3:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

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No One Righteous

Lesson 4 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 3 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What points from the lecture stirred your thinking about humanity's inexcusable sin before God?

2. How did the notes speak to you in a new way regarding God's judgment of believers and unbelievers?

Second Day: Read Romans 3:1-4.

Paul responded to objections about God's faithfulness.

3. a. What advantages might Jews have claimed because they were entrusted with God's very words? (See also Romans 2:6-29.)

   b. How does God's Word offer spiritual advantages? What other spiritual advantages do believers enjoy?

4. How do God's promises to the Jews help you understand God's faithfulness mentioned in Romans 3:3-4? (See also Genesis 12:1-7; Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Jeremiah 31:35-37; and other verses you know.)

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5. a. From Psalm 51:1-6; John 3:18-19; and James 1:13-14, who is responsible for a person's sin and unbelief?

   b. How does this truth impact your view of your own sin, and how can you pray for God's help?

Third Day: Read Romans 3:5-8.

Paul responded to objections about God's justice.

6. a. What "human argument" did Paul expose as wrong?

   b. Why is God's wrath justified? (See also Romans 1:18-32; 2:1-5.)

7. a. What does Paul's response to this human argument reveal about the people who believe it? (See also Luke 6:46.)

   b. What human argument do you give for your sin? What does this reveal about your attitude toward sin, and how can you ask for help?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 3:9-18.

Paul described humanity's sinful condition using Old Testament passages.

8. Write down the attributes that immediately follow Paul's use of the term "no one" in verses 10-12. What does this say about the state of humanity?

9. a. What words or phrases in verses 13-14 reveal how seriously God views our speech? (See also Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3.)

   b. What warning do you receive about your own words? (See also James 3:5-10; Matthew 12:34-37.)

c. How would you like God to grow and change the heart motives behind your words and actions?

10. a. According to verse 18, what root sin underlies the sins in verses 13-17?

b. What does it look like to fear (have a reverent awe for) God?

11. a. From these verses, what do you learn about the powerful effects of sin?

b. How have you seen sin's effects in your life?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 3:19-20.

Paul concluded his thoughts on human unrighteousness.

12. What did Paul conclude in verses 19-20?

13. What did Paul mean by "every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God"?

14. a. What excuses for specific sins have you been giving God, and why?

b. How do these verses impact your views on religious rule-following?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 3:1-20.

All people are condemned for their sin and accountable to God.

15. How has the study of Romans so far helped you to identify, confess, and turn from your sin?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 4 Notes

Romans 3:1-20

Focus Verse

"As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.'" (Romans 3:10-11)

Outline

- Inadequate Defense – Romans 3:1-8
- Inescapable Charges – Romans 3:9-18
- Indisputable Verdict – Romans 3:19-20

Engage

Anger, frustration, and disappointment often accompany failure. No one intends to flaunt their flaws, but human error is impossible to avoid. Some blunders receive grace and encouragement to try again. Other, more serious slipups result in shame and rejection. **How can we protect our sense of self-worth and community value when our failures and flaws are openly exposed?** Various coping strategies promise to ease the bad news of failure. Do you minimize the impact, rationalize the causes, or compare your mistakes with those of others? The world says we can ignore or try to make the best of our failures. But Scripture says something entirely different.

Paul emphatically declares and systematically proves that all people fail to meet God's standard of righteousness. No one can minimize, rationalize, or make the best of their sin against their Creator. God is the only just judge of humanity's ruined condition. **All people are condemned for their sin and accountable to God.** As far as righteousness is concerned, every human is a born a failure. This pride-killing truth makes Paul's gospel of righteousness from God by faith the best news humanity has ever received. Are you ready to accept the best bad news ever?

Inadequate Defense – Romans 3:1-8

In Romans 1–2, Paul established that God has made Himself known and that all people sinfully reject Him. Sin's corruption seeped out from the garden of Eden into every man, woman, and child. Sin's guilt plagues every demographic and cultural group. **Without this truth, people fail to recognize that only faith in Jesus Christ guarantees salvation.**

As chapter 3 opens, we read Paul's answers to challenging questions possibly arising from his blunt teaching in chapter 2. Paul continued his letter with a question-and-answer format that would have been common to Jewish and Roman audiences. **Refuting three objections,**

Paul asserted God's faithfulness and humanity's responsibility for unrighteousness. God's righteousness steadfastly remains untarnished by objections and accusations.

The First Objection – 3:1-2

Knowing God does not have favorites,[1] Paul's readers might have asked, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value then is there in circumcision?" This question casts doubt on the Jews' role in God's redemptive plan. Why did God choose Abraham and his descendants as His people?[2] Why did God give circumcision as a sign of His covenant?[3] Was God's work before Christ pointless?

Rather than dismiss Jewish spiritual advantages, Paul strongly affirmed them. Romans 9:4-5 lists many Jewish advantages: the adoption to sonship, the divine glory, the covenants, the law, the temple worship, the promises, the patriarchs, and the human ancestry of the Messiah. **God generously granted Israel these advantages to help them represent Him to the world and to one day recognize and believe in Jesus.** Tragically, most Jews trusted their spiritual advantages rather than Jesus for salvation from God's judgment. Without faith in Christ, abundant spiritual advantages lead to self-righteousness and unbelief.[4]

"The very words of God" had been entrusted to Jews before being shared with Gentiles. The Greek New Testament word used here for God's written revelation, *logia*, refers to His living, authoritative words, to be received with humility and submission.[5] God invites all people to know Him through Scripture's divine revelation. The Bible reveals God's unfolding plan to restore His creation through Jesus Christ. Without God's Word, we drift on a sea of human speculation. **To know God's Word is a priceless advantage anyone can access.**

The Second Objection – 3:3-4

Despite God's gifts and promises to His people, most Jews rejected Jesus, the Messiah. **Unbelief led Jewish objectors to doubt God's faithfulness to His people and His promises.** Answering this objection was so important to Paul that he devoted three chapters in Romans[6] to expand his bold response given in verse 4: "Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar."

God is eternally faithful and true; unbelief is never His fault. **We are each responsible and accountable for our unbelief.** Paul quoted Israel's King David to punctuate his point.[7] In the same Psalm, David confessed that his sin was not an isolated act but his pattern since birth.[8] Like David, all people sin because they are born sinful. We even attempt to blame the holy God for our sin when He reveals our unfaithfulness.

Many Jews believed that God's promises to Abraham entitled them to salvation. Today, many from Christian backgrounds also feel entitled to salvation because of believing parents, baptism, or moral lives. Some believe a loving God would never condemn anyone. While familiar, these

1. **No favoritism:** Romans 2:11
2. **Choosing Abraham:** Genesis 12:1-3
3. **Circumcision as sign:** Genesis 17:9-14
4. **Self-righteousness:** Romans 10:3
5. **God's words:** Acts 7:38; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11
6. **Faithfulness to Israel:** Romans 9–11
7. **God is right:** Psalm 51:4
8. **Born sinful:** Psalm 51:5

beliefs are untrue. **Our faithful God will save all He has promised to save—but not apart from faith in His Son.** Never mechanical, salvation comes by God's grace through personal faith in the one and only Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.[9] This alone defines true Christianity.

The Third Objection – 3:5-8

Paul continued by addressing the outrageous accusation that the gospel promotes sin to bring God glory. Chapter 6 also addresses this objection. The argument goes like this: "Paul, you teach that good works do not save anyone. You even say God's salvation of sinners brings Him glory. If this is true, why should we not sin even more to bring God more glory?" Paul condemned this reasoning as ridiculous slander. God does not require human evil to highlight His goodness. But humanity's sinfulness does make it clear that God is right to judge the world.

Jesus addressed similar thinking when He asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"[10] Paul affirmed God as the supreme, rightful, just judge of His creation. Jesus came to satisfy God's justice and save believers from sin's judgment and control. Jesus did not come to leave people trapped in sin's devastating grip. All whom God saves are joined to Jesus Christ.[11] He lives in believers and empowers them to deny their sinful desires, take up their crosses, and follow His example of holiness.[12]

Inescapable Charges – Romans 3:9-18

Paul's methodical argument finally reached its painful conclusion. **All people are sinful, helpless, and ruined.** While Paul's devastating charges are inescapably true, this is not the end of his letter. Many shrink from facing this harsh truth, but these dark realities melt before the brilliant light of God's powerful gospel as Paul intentionally unfolded it.

The Sinfulness of All People – 3:9

Paul's legal-style arguments concluded with a formal charge: "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin." The weight of conscious and unconscious guilt hangs over all people because of the sins we have committed. **People are held captive under sin's power, which constantly multiplies guilt and torments humanity.** We cannot meet God's righteous standard. On our own, people cannot seek God or understand Him. This ruined state is the definition of our total depravity. Tragically, human depravity makes accepting the reality of our doomed condition challenging.

What Sinners Cannot Do – 3:10-12

Paul outlined humanity's crippling limitations with Old Testament quotes. Like students studying for an exam, we would like to believe we have some power to prepare ourselves before God evaluates us. But we will never make the grade. When we accept our guilt and that we have no hope of pleasing God, we can then receive His undeserved favor—His grace.

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9. **Only one Savior:** Acts 4:12
10. **Jesus as Lord:** Luke 6:46
11. **Joined to Christ:** Romans 5:12–6:23
12. **Follow me:** Luke 9:23

The Deathtrap of Sin

The Doctrine of Sin, Its Character and Universality

Every person is equally sinful and subject to sin's powerful spiral of destruction and death. This biblical truth deals a crushing blow to human pride, signaling helpless defeat under sin's tyranny. Paul delivered this pressing truth to prove that every person needs a Savior more powerful than sin—Jesus Christ. Sin's just penalty brings death and eternal separation from God. Rather than defend ourselves and deny sin's presence in our lives, the gospel invites us to confess, turn from our sin, and seek Christ and His power.[1]

All people sin by failing to conform perfectly to God's will. As creator, God alone determines what is right and wrong. Adam and Eve defied God's will in the garden of Eden, releasing death into the earth and guaranteeing that all their descendants inherited their rebellion—a sin nature.[2] Humanity is not simply sick with sin; sin has rendered all people morally, intellectually, and spiritually dead—unresponsive to God.[3]

When we argue, rationalize, and deny the seriousness of sin, we remain trapped in sin's deceptive grip. Sin slowly steals joy and peace, separating people from a loving God and the abundant life He offers. **In the realm of unbelief, sin entangles people in an eternal deathtrap of condemnation,[4] masquerading as temporary freedom and pleasure.** Sin blinds unbelievers to their need for God's grace and mercy. To deny sin's destructive, deceitful character[5] and presence in every life[6] is to deny the necessity of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.

Through the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin,[7] God brings people to terms with sin's terrible power and consequences. When we accept that sin has corrupted us completely and believe that God sent Jesus to restore us, sin no longer determines our destiny. **Sinless Jesus willingly walked into sin's deathtrap, knowing He alone could walk back out again—triumphant!** Faith in Jesus's death and resurrection produces a powerful new life, no longer helpless before sin's temptations. As the victor over sin, Jesus graciously gives God's righteousness to sinners who seek Him in faith. Have you sought the deliverance from sin that only Jesus can provide? If so, how does Jesus's victory over sin on your behalf stir fresh gratitude today?

1. **Confess sin:** 1 John 1:8-10
2. **Sin inherent:** Romans 1–3
3. **Dead in sin:** Genesis 2:17; 3; Jeremiah 17:9; Ephesians 2:1-2, 12
4. **Sin's penalty:** John 3:36; Romans 1:18-20; 2:5
5. **Sin's deceit:** Hebrews 3:12-13
6. **Sin universal:** Romans 3:10-11
7. **Holy Spirit's conviction:** John 16:7-11

Unable to Be Righteous (3:10, 12) – Sin disintegrates human morality. As the psalmist wrote and Paul quoted, "There is no one who does good, not even one."[13] This does not mean people merely miss the mark by a little. The first chapter of Romans banished that illusion. **From God's point of view, we have no righteousness—goodness or right standing—on our own.** Nothing we do could ever make us acceptable to God.

13. No one: Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3

If we assess people from a human point of view, some look good or at least better than others. However, human goodness can never compare to God's righteousness. Our righteousness differs from God's righteousness as much a board game's play money differs from real currency. Just as we cannot spend play money on actual merchandise, our good works can never buy salvation. Despite their spiritual riches, Israel failed to find God because they offered God their play money rather than attain the actual currency only Christ could provide.[14] **God requires true righteousness that is only available through Him.**

Unable to Understand (3:11a) – Sin degenerates the human intellect: "There is no one who understands." From our view, some people appear to understand a great deal. However, Paul refers to a lack of spiritual perception, not just insufficient human knowledge. **From God's point of view, human wisdom is bankrupt; without Christ, no one truly understands or worships God.[15]**

Unable to Seek God (3:11b) – Sin demoralizes the human will: "There is no one who seeks God." From our view, attention to religious traditions, places of worship, and sacred relics convince us that people seek God. **From God's point of view, people hide their hearts from His care and guard their minds from His influence, using religion as a disguise.** Apart from God's gracious intervention, people cannot and will not seek Him.[16] God is less desirable to our sinful nature than anyone or anything else. Sin keeps us focused only on ourselves, desensitizing us to others. We do the opposite of the Great Commandment to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.[17]

Humanity in Ruins – 3:13-18

Romans 1 clearly describes humanity's grim ruin: "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, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents."[18] Ruined people have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, and no mercy. After such a complete catalog of sinful corruption, why does Paul confront readers with more sordid sins in chapter 3? The earlier verses offered the apostle's own descriptions of the human condition. In Romans 3, Paul cited convicting Old Testament quotes to confirm that people have always needed the gospel of grace. **These verses speak of three traits: wicked words, violent acts, and no fear of God.**

Wicked Words (3:13-14) – Paul identified the distasteful sins of gossip, slander, and boasting in Romans 1. As Paul's letter progressed, he quoted provocative psalms to deepen our understanding that offensive speech contains deadly power. **These poetic images vividly associate death with the body parts involved in speaking.** Paul invited his readers to picture throats yawning as open graves and tongues deceiving to destroy.[19] Imagine human lips dripping with poisonous venom and mouths oozing with cursing and bitterness.[20] Our words provide listeners a window into our hearts because "the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."[21] When God crafted humanity in His image,[22] He granted us the unique, beautiful, and powerful gift of speech. God intended our words to honor and bless Him and others, but tragically, our words often curse and kill.[23]

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14. **God's righteousness:** Romans 10:3
15. **Intelligence frustrated:** 1 Corinthians 1:18-20
16. **Cannot submit:** Romans 8:7
17. **Love God, others:** Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Philippians 2:1-11
18. **Ruined humanity:** Romans 1:29-31
19. **Throats and tongues:** Psalm 5:9
20. **Poisonous lips and cursing mouths:** Psalms 10:7; 140:3
21. **Revealing words:** Matthew 12:34
22. **God's image:** Genesis 1:26-27
23. **Blessings and cursing:** James 3:9-10

Views on Humanity's Will

As we consider Paul's words, a look at some ways Christians have wrestled with what Martin Luther called "the bondage of the will" may help us better understand ourselves and others.

Pelagius and Augustine

About AD 400, the British monk Pelagius said, "If there is an obligation to do something, there must be an ability to do it." Pelagius believed sin does not prevent the human will from choosing God or righteousness. He believed the will is neutral—free to choose either good or evil. Augustine, bishop of the North African city of Hippo, said Pelagius failed to grasp sin's seriousness. Sin, an inherited condition, makes it impossible for people to decide to stop sinning. Augustine described this natural human inability as "not able not to sin." **The will is free of righteousness but enslaved to sin; free to turn from God but not free to come to Him.** Without God's supernatural help, no one stops sinning and chooses God.

Martin Luther and Erasmus

Around 1525, the reformer Martin Luther and the Dutch humanist Erasmus vigorously debated about the human will. Erasmus maintained the will must be free for human beings to be truly free. Luther agreed that people are free to choose lesser things. However, in the crucial area of choosing God, the human will is powerless. Luther stated, "We are wholly given over to sin." **Luther declared we must confess not only our sin but also our blindness and inability to choose God or please Him by our moral acts.** Luther encouraged us all to call on God for mercy, for He alone can help us. Those who call on the Lord will discover His loving conviction and gentle leading to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Jonathan Edwards

Eighteenth-century American theologian Jonathan Edwards looked at the issue differently. In his text *Freedom of the Will,* he defined the will as "that by which the mind chooses anything." Edwards believed the mind is never neutral but thinks some things are better than other things. **The will always freely chooses what the mind thinks best.** But what does the mind think best? Here lies the heart of the human problem concerning God. The will is free to choose God, but the mind prefers individual autonomy over faith in Christ and God's righteous reign. Therefore, the mind suppresses God's truth and turns from Him.[1] Unless God changes thinking through miraculous spiritual rebirth, all people freely choose miserable alienation from God for eternity.

Jesus lovingly promises, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."[2] This grand invitation strengthened Jonathan Edwards to insist the will is not bound without escape. But who desires to come to the Lord? The answer: no one, unless God is already at work. Depraved minds lack spiritual understanding—blinded to God's truth until the Holy Spirit reveals it. No one has ever stated this more plainly than Jesus, who said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them."[3]

1. **Truth suppressed:** Romans 1:19-25, 28
2. **Never drive away:** John 6:37
3. **No one can come:** John 6:44

Violent Acts (3:15-17) – Paul's vivid Old Testament illustrations progressed from evil words to violent actions. He quoted Isaiah's descriptions of violence that separated people from God's righteousness, justice, and light.[24] The path of people living without God bears three distinguishing markers: bloodshed; ruin and misery; and no knowledge of God's peace. **People who lack God's peace through Jesus Christ leave a trail of destruction behind them.**

No Fear of God (3:18) – The last passage Paul quoted explains the root cause behind every wicked act: "There is no fear of God before their eyes."[25] Fallen human nature rejects a reverent awe of God. Self-importance blinds people to both their depravity and God's glory. **Unable on our own strength to recognize and reject our sin against Holy God, all people must depend on God's grace and power to redeem.[26]**

Indisputable Verdict – Romans 3:19-20

In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul presents an unshakable case against humanity. Paul brings our thoughts, words, and deeds as witnesses against us. **The verdict is indisputable: We are all unrighteous.** No one can escape guilt for countless wrongs against God. No one can deny accountability to God for their actions. No one deserves God's declaration of righteousness.

The non-Jew without God's laws is unrighteous, and the Jew with God's laws is unrighteous. People suppress the truth God revealed,[27] but God writes His requirements on every heart. All have failed to meet the expectations of their consciences and God's Word.[28] All have sinned. All are guilty. All stand silenced before the Judge without excuse.

Until people realize they cannot dispute God's verdict or meet His righteous standard alone, they cannot escape the wrath their sin deserves. **All people are condemned for their sin and accountable to God.** But there is one path to righteousness that will withstand God's judgment—faith in Jesus Christ. God provides freedom from conscious and unconscious guilt as His gracious gift to all who cling to Jesus's redemptive work on the cross as their only justification. God is rich in mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, so He gives a way out.[29] This is the glorious subject of the lessons to come.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul exposed humanity's sinful condition and corrupted state, inciting objections and accusations against God. Human protests against God's righteous judgment will crumble. Through God's gracious gift of His Word, He invites all people to know Him and what pleases Him. Unbelievers cannot adequately rationalize their human doubts about God's faithfulness and truthfulness. God's self-existent glory brilliantly shines without the need for contrast with human evil. **God's sovereign status and righteous character endure eternally untarnished by human sin.**

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24. **Violent acts:** Isaiah 59:7-8
25. **No fear:** Psalm 36:1
26. **No recognition:** Psalm 36:2
27. **Truth suppressed:** Romans 1:18-20
28. **Conscience:** Romans 2:15
29. **Our escape:** Ephesians 2:1-10

While God remains perfectly pure and just, believers and unbelievers persist in sinful corruption apart from rescue by God. Sin exercises authoritarian control over our thoughts, desires, will, and actions. Sin infuses human words and works with toxic poison capable of destroying us and everything we love. People are powerless to escape sin's grip and deadly consequences on their own. Paul urged readers to accept this truth and seek God's power to rescue them. **God works through the gospel Paul preached, opening eyes to sin and hearts to Jesus's cleansing righteousness through faith.**

Apply It

The true, righteous, living God reveals Himself—His character and plans—to us in the Bible. These ancient words answer today's most important questions: How did we get here? What is my purpose? Is there a knowable Creator? Do my choices matter? By what standards will I be judged? What happens after I die? **God's Word explains the brokenness we experience in the world and the path to restoration through Jesus Christ.** God's truth in Scripture mercifully reveals sin lurking in our hearts and minds. How do you express value for God's Word? Perhaps you spend money to acquire expensive golden-edged pages, proudly displaying the Bible in your home or collecting as many copies as possible. Owning God's Word does not mean God's Word owns your heart. As we read and humbly allow Scripture's truths to direct our lives, the value of God's Word grows within our hearts. Truth is not relative; truth is transformative. What treasured truth about God's response to your sin can enrich and transform your life today?

It's obvious—no one is perfect! While many admit imperfection, few admit spiritual depravity. How about you? Depravity does not mean we are as bad as we could be or that we never do good. It means we ultimately lack what is needed to walk with God. In our fallen humanity, we are never good enough to match His character. Why can we more easily admit incomplete biblical knowledge than confess a complete lack of spiritual understanding? Do you find it easier to confess a tendency to wander off the right path rather than admit your path is entirely wrong? What makes it easier to offer excuses that justify sin than to abandon your pride and honestly confess you cannot meet God's standards? In our sinful hearts, we want to be good enough without needing God's perfect righteousness. Personal consciousness of sin's reality and destructive power blasts away the swirling fog that hides our need for Christ. **Jesus did not die to make us better but to make us new.** When we admit our need for Christ's righteousness and receive Him through faith, sin's power to separate us from God is forever broken and restoration begins. Have you confessed your sin and need for Jesus to save you?

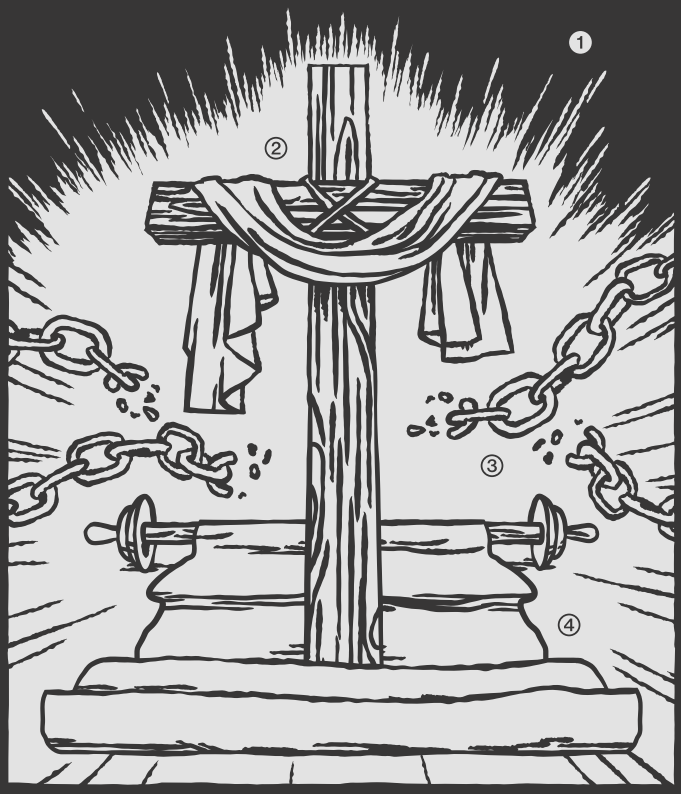
Sin's power to rule our lives is broken the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. If you have confessed faith in Christ, you receive freedom from sin's power and penalty as God's unearned gift of grace to you. However, sinful priorities, speech, and actions linger in a believer's life. Have you noticed how an innate desire to protect and advance yourself competes with glorifying God? How does sin continue to tempt you? Are you aware of how the people, products, and problems around you influence your values and choices? Believers enjoy the growing power to say "No!" to sin and "Yes!" to God's transforming work in their lives. **As believers cry out for God's help to turn from sin, they love as Jesus loves and increasingly want what Jesus wants.** One day, sin will be no more! Until that day, Jesus holds believers secure and invites them to confess their sins and receive His cleansing forgiveness again and again. The joyful gratitude of forgiven believers fuels their worship and witness about the gospel's power to save everyone who believes.

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LESSONS 5-15

ROMANS 3:21–8:39

God's Gracious Gift of Righteousness Through Jesus Christ



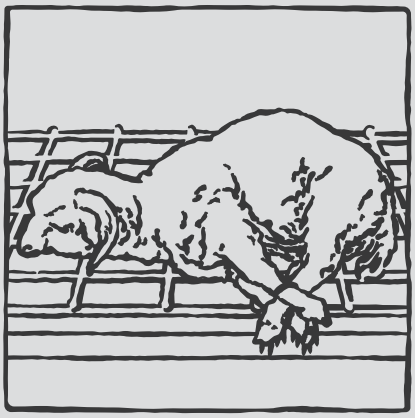
SYNPOSIS

Paul presents the core of the gospel: Humanity is justified by faith, not by works. Through Christ, believers receive peace with God and freedom from the power of sin and death. Although daily struggles with sin and suffering remain, life in the Spirit brings eternal security and hope for future glory.

Lessons 5-15 reveal how Christ's death and resurrection bring freedom for today and hope for the future.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

① Sunrise of Hope
② Cross of Christ
③ Broken Chains
④ The Gospel Revealed



How God Saves Sinners

Lesson 5 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 4 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture impact your understanding of humanity's sinful condition?

2. How did the notes raise your awareness of God's grace toward you, a sinner?

Second Day: Read Romans 3:21-22.

Righteousness from God has been made known.

3. a. Define righteousness. According to these verses, where does righteousness come from, and how is it received?

   b. What does "apart from the law" reveal about how people are tempted to pursue righteousness?

4. How do the Old Testament law and prophets testify that the righteousness God gives is apart from the law? (See also Genesis 15:6; Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 36:23-27; and any other Scriptures.)

5. What does God's willingness to give righteousness to all through faith in Jesus reveal about Him? (See also John 1:12; Romans 10:9-10.) How does this challenge or encourage you?

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Third Day: Read Romans 3:23-24.

All people need the salvation God offers by grace through faith.

6. Skim Paul's examples in Romans 3:9-18 of humanity falling short of God's glory. What additional examples can you give to explain this truth?

7. a. Define what it means to be justified.

   b. How is the justification of sinners accomplished? (See also Isaiah 53:10-11; Luke 18:14; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:9; Romans 8:1; or other Scriptures.)

   c. How does understanding this truth impact how you view your relationship with God?

8. a. How do Hosea 3:1-2; Ephesians 1:7-8; Titus 2:11-14; and 1 Peter 1:18-19 help you understand redemption through Christ Jesus?

   b. Why is God's grace in justification and redemption good news? With whom would you like to share this news?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 3:25-26.

Jesus's blood atones for humanity's sin.

9. a. Skim Hebrews 10:1-18. What does Paul mean in Romans 3:25 when he says Jesus was a "sacrifice of atonement" (also translated as "propitiation")?

   b. How does this assure you that God's justice has been satisfied? (See also John 19:30; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.)

10. What does Jesus's role in redemption and atonement reveal about Him?

11. How can you express your gratitude for such great love?

Fifth Day: Reread Romans 3:25-26.

God's justice has been satisfied.

12. How did God treat the sins of those who had faith in Him before Christ's sacrifice of atonement? (See also Genesis 9:5-6; Deuteronomy 28; and any other Scripture references for help.)

13. How does God's saving work through Christ prove that God is just toward sin and willing to justify sinners? (See also Romans 6:23.)

14. How do the following verses deepen our understanding of God's justice and righteousness in salvation?

    Psalm 33:5

    Psalm 89:14

    Psalm 103:6

    Isaiah 9:7

    Isaiah 51:5

Sixth Day: Review Romans 3:21-26.

God has made the way to be declared right with Him.

15. How have you responded to God's provision of righteousness for you through faith in Jesus?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 3:21-26

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 5 Notes

Romans 3:21-26

Focus Verse

"This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:22-23)

Outline

- Salvation Through Faith – Romans 3:21-23
- Salvation by Grace – Romans 3:24
- Salvation in Christ – Romans 3:25-26

Engage

We sometimes possess the ability to right a wrong, mend a misunderstanding, or repair a relationship; other times, we do not. Even a genuine apology can be refused. While a friend or loved one's forgiveness offers relief, the rejection of an insufficient or misguided effort to make amends fails to bring the comfort we seek. We often try to justify and defend our hurtful behavior, yet some offenses exceed justification. Some transgressions create chasms that even our best attempts cannot span.

Paul's convincing presentation of humanity's fallen condition in Romans 1:1–3:20 leaves us speechless and defenseless, rightly accountable before God. Sin's destructive force has separated us from our loving and righteous Creator. There is nothing we can say or do to justify ourselves and build a bridge back to God. But now, in the closing verses of Romans 3, glorious hope dawns like the rising sun, illuminating the only acceptable path to restoration. **God has made the way to be declared right with Him.** That way is through faith in Jesus Christ.

Salvation Through Faith – Romans 3:21-23

These verses mark the glorious turning point in Paul's letter, the hinge upon which the door to the gospel opens. Since the letter began, Paul exposed humanity's blatant rejection of God's revealed truth in creation, our inability to keep God's revealed law, and the power of sin over every person born since Adam and Eve. **From the grim truth of God's wrath against universal sin arises the wonderful news of God's grace to sinners through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

New Reality Revealed – 3:21a

The tremendously beautiful words "But now" introduce God's salvation plan to the Romans and all future readers. Theologian Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones called these words the turning point in God's

dealings with humanity.[1] Fellow Bible scholar Ray C. Stedman referred to verse 21 as "God's great 'nevertheless' in the face of man's failure."[2] **Paul's simple words introduce good news of great importance, echoed by all other gospel messengers.** The teaching recorded here repeats and expands on Paul's previously stated thesis,[3] emphasizing the gospel's power and importance.

The glorious news that unfolds in Romans 3:21 overrules the bad news echoed through the book's first chapters. In Greek, "made known" is sometimes translated as "revealed." **Now, instead of God's wrath,[4] His righteousness is being made known.** God does not keep His salvation plan secret.

All of this good news, especially God's mercy and compassion, is rooted in His character. We do not deserve grace, but God gives it. We are not worthy, but He loves us enough to extend a way out of the chasm sin creates. That is one reason the message is called the gospel, or good news.

Righteousness Apart from Law – 3:21b

After proving his point about sin through Old Testament citations,[5] Paul continued anchoring his good news in the Old Testament Scriptures: "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify." **The testimony of the Old Testament law foreshadowed Jesus's perfection and sacrificial death, while the prophets testified to righteousness that would come through God's promised Messiah.[6]**

Paul's explanation of God's salvation plan contains theological words and concepts—terms largely unused in modern culture—rising from the timeless testimony of the Old Testament law and prophets. Revisiting these familiar concepts tethered the heartstrings of Paul's original readers to generations of Abraham's descendants. **For both Jews and Gentiles, whether ancient or modern, examining God's salvation plan through an Old Testament lens magnifies the glory of the gospel.**

Israel's moral law, a gift from God, established behavioral boundaries, restrained evil, and made God's people distinct from surrounding nations. The inability to perfectly follow God's moral law aroused awareness of sin,[7] revealing humanity's need for a Savior. Obedience to the law or any other behavioral standard cannot save anyone. **Even though God gave the law as a blessing, salvation requires receiving God's righteousness apart from human efforts or work.**

In Paul's day and our own, all religions except Christianity suppose people can and must aid their salvation through personal effort. Only Christianity humbles all who believe before God in complete dependence on Him to save them. **The Bible insists that people can add nothing to what God has done on humanity's behalf through Jesus Christ.** Believers obediently follow Jesus as a grateful response rather than a saving necessity.[8] Because mercy has been extended to us, we are to be a humble people who reflect that love, care, compassion, and mercy to others.

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1. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Turning Point: But Now," February 22, 1957, MLJ Trust, audio, https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons/book-of-romans/the-turning-point-but-now/.
2. Ray C. Stedman, "But Now," 1976, Ray Stedman Ministries, transcript and audio, 40:50, https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/romans/but-now.
3. **Paul's thesis:** Romans 1:1-5, 15-16
4. **Wrath revealed:** Romans 1:18
5. **Old Testament proof:** Romans 3:10-18
6. **Old Testament testimony:** Luke 24:25-27
7. **Consciousness of sin:** Romans 3:20
8. **Follow Jesus:** Luke 9:23; 14:27

Righteousness by Faith – 3:22a

Paul left no doubt about how to access God's saving righteousness: "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." **Faith in Jesus Christ is the channel through which salvation comes to us and becomes ours.** The only means by which any person can be declared right with God is by believing and receiving what He offers through the work of Jesus Christ. Even in Paul's day, many felt God's plan to give righteousness by faith alone made escaping judgment too easy. However, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's saving work eclipses any human methodology, tradition, pattern, or promise. The result? We are left to marvel at how God accomplished what we never could.

Based on Paul's progressing discourse, we learn that faith, while essential, is not a work to achieve or accomplish. Like every good thing we experience or possess,[9] faith comes as God's gift. Ephesians 2:8-9 explicitly states, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." **Faith joyfully receives what Scripture affirms and God freely offers.**

No Difference – 3:22b-23

The church in Rome represented a multiethnic cross section of the Roman Empire. Though the Jewish law restrained some specific sins for Abraham's descendants, Paul effectively argued, "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Both Jews and Gentiles suffer under sin's corruption. There are no exceptions. **Because of our shared fallen condition, all people equally need restoration to a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.** God's plan for salvation by faith miraculously reaches beyond ethnicity, economics, and education to every person. In their saved state, formerly estranged people are reconciled to God and others. This salvation is both individual and corporate. It saves believers and connects fellow believers to one another.

Salvation by Grace – Romans 3:24

Because sin corrupts every person's moral, intellectual, and volitional capabilities,[10] God offers a magnificent, multifaceted plan to save us. God's grace—His delight in saving the undeserving—shines beautifully at the center of the gospel. **God's glorious grace joins together the great truths of justification and redemption.** These terms easily stirred wonder in Paul's original readers. But all who believe today can also rejoice that we "are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Justified – Paul clarified that justification comes by way of God's grace. Paul's original readers understood justification as a legal term. When a judge acquits someone of crimes, the judge declares them justified. Regardless of guilt or innocence, the judge's declaration or verdict of innocence gives the person right standing with the law. This news dramatically changes an accused person's life. **Similarly, God declares believers in right standing before Him—no penalty remains for their sinful offenses.** They are justified!

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9. **Good gifts:** James 1:17
10. **Sin's corruption:** Romans 3:9-20

Righteousness from God

The Doctrine of Salvation

Salvation is God's multifaceted gift of grace[1] that delivers fallen humanity from sin's penalty, sin's power, and eventually from sin's presence. Paul's meticulously presented gospel declares that God freely provides His own righteousness for people who possess no true righteousness of their own.[2] This perfect righteousness becomes ours through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, making it possible for God to declare sinners justified—no longer awaiting sin's penalty. The Lord Jesus, humanity's sacrifice of atonement, died to redeem fallen people from slavery to sin's power. This action connects us to God and to others. It is the basis for the formation of the Church, a spiritual community consisting of those who have experienced God's forgiveness in Christ. No Christian is to go it alone. The redeemed, who receive God's gracious gift of salvation through faith, will enjoy eternity in God's presence, where sin and its influence will be no more.[3]

Paul proved "there is no one righteous, not even one."[4] Every human needs God's gracious rescue regardless of ethnicity, economics, or intellect.[5] Because God desires to save humanity from His wrath,[6] His gift of righteousness gives immunity from His just wrath against sin.[7] **Salvation is possible only because God undertook the work of justification, redemption, and atonement and imparts the glorious results through faith alone.[8]**

God's Spirit and the Bible work together to open our hearts and minds to the salvation that God alone makes possible through faith in Christ. **Apart from receiving God's gift of salvation, we labor to justify ourselves to God through religious observances, pious works, and empty spirituality.** When we deny that only God's power can give us His righteousness, we reject accountability to God, assume our best is acceptable, and march toward His just judgment already condemned.[9]

The gospel eternally transforms the lives of all who place their faith in Christ. Former enemies of God become His friends. Those who were once far from Him enjoy a restored, loving relationship, free from fear that sin will ever again taint their right standing with God. Salvation also connects us to others and frees us to encourage one another as we seek to reflect what God has done for us. **People freed from sin's downward spiral stand as witnesses to God's grace, which He extends to any who would believe in Christ's atoning sacrifice.** Will you accept God's gift of salvation through faith and dare to tell others the good news that God offers it to them as well?

1. **God's gift:** John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9
2. **God's offer of salvation:** Isaiah 55:1; Romans 3:24; Revelation 22:7
3. **No more sin:** Hebrews 12:23
4. **No one righteous:** Romans 3:10
5. **Access for all:** Romans 3:22-24; 10:13; Titus 2:11
6. **God desires salvation:** 1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9
7. **No condemnation:** Isaiah 50:9; John 5:24; Romans 8:1, 34
8. **God's work:** Isaiah 43:25; 44:22; 1 John 1:9
9. **Condemned:** John 3:18

According to the Bible, justification of sinners is only possible by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. How can sinners become right with a holy God? How can humanity be reconciled to the God they rejected? How can God possibly declare guilty people righteous when justice must

be satisfied? Because of His grace, God accepts Jesus's death for sin in place of our death and freely declares those who believe as justified. What joy this brings to all who believe!

Justification is not a process but a once-in-a-lifetime, permanent pronouncement by God Himself. While God knows believers will not live the rest of their lives perfectly, He never reverses His ruling. By His ongoing grace, righteous living grows in a justified believer through a process called sanctification.[11] All true Christians, no matter how great their failings, stand before God in His Son's perfect, unchangeable righteousness.

Redeemed – Paul declared that God's grace also brings about redemption by Christ. On one level, Paul's original readers understood commercial redemption as buying and selling. They also understood redemption as a theological term revealing God's heart toward His people. God redeemed Abraham's descendants from Egyptian slavery, declaring His loving desire for a relationship with them. At an astounding cost, God purchased the freedom of His beloved people, who cannot change their fallen condition by themselves. **Because of God's grace, Jesus has freed every believer from slavery to sin by His death on our behalf.**

The prophet Hosea lived a heartrending picture of commercial redemption. Hosea purchased his adulterous wife out of slavery to her sin and sin's betrayal.[12] His wife deserved the suffering resulting from her sin, but Hosea's purchase modeled God's compassion for human helplessness. Apart from redemption by Christ, all people are hopelessly enslaved to sin and its consequences.[13] **Jesus paid the price for our redemption, "not with perishable things such as silver or gold," but with His own precious blood.[14]**

In the Old Testament law, *kopher* referred to a guilty person's redemption. If an ox mortally wounded someone, the negligent owner's life could be taken as repayment. However, the law allowed the ox's owner to pay the redemption price, the *kopher*, to the slain person's family and redeem that person's life. **In the same way, the Lord Jesus's death mercifully delivers believers from the death they deserve—the righteous punishment God has set for sin.[15]**

Another Old Testament term for redemption is *goel,* a "kinsman-redeemer" ("guardian-redeemer" in the NIV). Because Jewish law required land to remain within a family, the nearest relative was obligated to redeem property when death or financial hardship threatened its loss. This person was a "kinsman." If he purchased and restored the property to the family, he was a "kinsman-redeemer." Sometimes, the kinsman's duty extended to marrying the widow and raising heirs. Boaz, in the book of Ruth, was such a redeemer.[16] The *goel* had to be a willing close relative able to pay the ransom. A stranger or coerced relative did not qualify. Jesus fully met the *goel* qualifications to become humanity's kinsman-redeemer. He became our kinsman by taking on a human body. By His perfect life, Jesus alone could pay the price for sinful people, and He willingly offered Himself to save us. Redemption by Christ is a stirring display of God's personal, intimate involvement in mending sin's destruction.

If we are "justified freely" yet redemption involves a required price to secure sinners' freedom, some have wondered if salvation is truly free. **Though the Bible speaks of redemption's price, fallen people have no means to pay for their redemption.** Instead, God Himself pays the price through Christ so salvation may be free for the undeserving. What incredible news!

11. **Sanctification:** Romans 6–8
12. **Picture of redemption:** Hosea 3
13. **Under sin's power:** Romans 3:9
14. **Redeemed by Christ:** 1 Peter 1:18-19
15. **Death for sin:** Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23
16. **Boaz as kinsman-redeemer:** Ruth 3

Salvation in Christ – Romans 3:25-26

A Sacrifice of Atonement – 3:25a

Paul continued enriching his explanation of God's salvation plan with Old Testament imagery. The phrase "a sacrifice of atonement" (the Greek word *hilasterion*) and the related terms "atoning sacrifice" (*hilasmos*)[17] and "make atonement" (*hilaskomai*)[18] are rare in the New Testament. However, they support and deepen modern readers' understanding of atonement by pointing back to God's provision for sin's forgiveness under the law.

God gave Israel an annual remembrance that testified to their need for an atoning sacrifice—the Day of Atonement. The ark of the covenant, a gold-covered wooden box, contained stone tablets with instructions God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. This was the second set of tablets; Moses had broken the first set when the people forsook God for a golden calf.[19] The ark's lid was called the atonement cover or mercy seat. The lid featured two golden cherubim standing on opposite ends and facing one another. Their wings stretched upward and almost met directly over the ark. God's presence would meet with the high priest above the mercy seat, between the outstretched wings of the cherubim.[20]

God's people could not keep God's law. The law contained within the ark bore witness to the people's sin, which God does not ignore. Sin must be punished. God's judgment against all lawbreakers is deserved. But God does not leave His people in a state of guilt. **On the Day of Atonement, God instructed the high priest to make atonement for the people's sins by sprinkling the blood of a sacrificial animal on the atonement cover.** Symbolically, the blood of the innocent substitute covered the broken law. God declared the sin punished, satisfying His wrath and justice.

In grace, God lovingly established the sacrifice of atonement and justified all who came to Him through faith. The sacrificial animal pointed forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, who became the ultimate sacrifice for atonement. Jesus, and only Jesus, provides the perfectly sufficient atonement sacrifice.[21] His shed blood brings redemption and a renewed relationship between people and God. **With Jesus as the final, once-for-all sacrifice for sin, God gloriously cleansed sin, fulfilling what the Day of Atonement foreshadowed.**

God's Past, Righteous Justice – 3:25b

Paul anticipated the question, "What about the sins of people who lived before Jesus?" Paul explained that God's salvation plan had looked forward to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, who paid the penalties for past sins. **Eternal God always planned to provide Jesus as the ultimate atoning sacrifice.**[22] Consequently, "he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished." God's forbearance, His loving patience toward sinners, demonstrated that He is supremely righteous and merciful. God does not forgive sinners by ignoring their sin. Rather, despite their sin, He declares believers righteous. All because Christ paid the penalty they owed.

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17. **Sacrifice of atonement:** 1 John 2:2; 4:10
18. **Make atonement:** Hebrews 2:17
19. **Tablets:** Exodus 31:18; 32:19-20; 34:1, 28-29
20. **Atonement cover:** Exodus 25:17-22
21. **Jesus, not animals:** Hebrews 10
22. **Slain from the creation:** Revelation 13:8

For centuries, God graciously refused to condemn imperfect heroes of the faith who trusted in Him. **He stored up His judicial wrath and poured it all on His Son at the cross.**[23] God has always justified sinful people by their faith. We see God's grace extended to people such as Abraham, who compromised his wife's honor to save his own life,[24] and Moses, who killed an Egyptian.[25] David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband.[26] And Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho.[27] God's people lived by faith, despite their failings.

God counted all these sinful people righteous and delighted in fellowship with them.[28] He called Abraham His friend[29] and David "a man after his own heart."[30] He spoke face-to-face with Moses[31] and gave Rahab a privileged position in Jesus's ancestry.[32] Was God unjust when He forgave them? No! **The death of Christ vindicated God's righteous forbearance of past sins.** The cross proclaims that God acted justly when He justified the ungodly.

God's Present, Righteous Justice – 3:26

In the first 2½ chapters of Romans, Paul proved that humanity's biggest problem is God's wrath, His righteous anger against sin. The Creator of all things determines the standards for His creation, and His standard is perfection. No one can grasp the greatness of God's grace without coming to terms with God's wrath against wickedness. Human beings could not appease God's wrath with the animal sacrifices God ordained or by following the law He gave. God knew people could never save themselves by working toward a standard they could never meet. In mercy, God gave a law people could not perfectly follow to reveal their need for the Savior He would send. **Paul declared that God has eternally achieved justice and satisfied His wrath through Jesus's death.**

God has made the way to be declared right with Him. His wrath against sin and its harmful consequences flows from His overwhelming, protective love. God's loving sacrifice of His one and only Son[33] not only covered (expiated) sin's guilt but appeased (propitiated) God's wrath against sin so we may have a renewed relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

In Romans 1:16, Paul expressed his enthusiasm for the gospel, "because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." After he clarified humanity's sin, which only God's power could overcome, Paul offered the best news condemned sinners could hope to hear. **For all who would believe, the righteousness of God has been revealed.** Only God could save humanity from His wrath and remain perfectly righteous in doing so. Only God could judge sin while rescuing sinners. Only God could make a way for depraved sinners to meet His righteous standards. That is exactly what He has done by grace through Jesus Christ.

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23. **Once for all:** Hebrews 9:26
24. **Abraham:** Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18
25. **Moses:** Exodus 2:11-15
26. **David:** 2 Samuel 11
27. **Rahab:** Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25
28. **Sinful people righteous:** Romans 4:3; James 2:25
29. **His friend:** 2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23
30. **His own heart:** 1 Samuel 13:14
31. **Face-to-face:** Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10
32. **Jesus's ancestor:** Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31
33. **Sacrifice of Son:** John 3:16

How did Christ's death accomplish salvation? First, through justification. God legally declares the guilty righteous, justice achieved, and sin's penalty paid. Second, by redemption. Jesus, our dear Savior, brought us out of sin's powerful bondage, restored us to our heavenly Father, and set us free from sin's eternal consequence—death. And third, because of atonement. Jesus's blood covers a believer's guilt and satisfies God's wrath against their sins—past, present, and future. **Sin has been forever overcome by one God, through one Savior, with one grace-filled plan to offer salvation to all.**

Apply It

The amazing truth in this passage unfolds the heart of Romans and the entire Bible. God's compassion for sinners and plan to redeem them by His grace has been at work since humanity first fell into sin's corruption.[34] Unfortunately, today's readers often view the Old Testament books and prophets as unrelatable and irrelevant to their lives. Paul has carefully connected the message of the Old Testament with the reality of the gospel of Christ. God's laws for holy living, the rise and fall of His chosen nation, and prophecies of purifying judgment and restoration all point to God's deliberate intervention in human affairs to bring His plan of salvation to fruition. The glorious gospel is now made known to us in Jesus Christ. What encouragement do you gain from understanding God's heart to save humanity? How might the testimony of the Old Testament law and prophets heighten your appreciation for those books and increase your wonder at God's tireless saving work across the ages?

God's gift of salvation transcends every distinction we draw between people. He offers salvation to all who recognize their need for His righteousness and receive Christ's gift. Faith in Jesus's sacrifice makes salvation accessible to people of every language, skin color, economic status, gender, age, and background. If a person has a heartbeat, Jesus died so they could be justified and redeemed. Whom might you consider too far from God to turn to Christ for salvation? All who enjoy salvation today were hopeless cases apart from God's intervention. Will you pray that God deepens your understanding that all are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus? What helps you see everyone as God does and delight to share this powerful gospel?

God's gracious generosity in salvation invites us to worship Him and calls us to reflect His kindness and mercy to a world that desperately needs His righteousness. Does the good news of the gospel humble you before the Lord with deep wonder and gratitude? The gospel's breathtaking news of God's great power to save sinners reveals His grace. No human would conceive a plan where we are not the story's hero. We struggle to accept that we cannot offer God anything to appease His wrath against our sin, but the gospel frees us from trying to earn what God has freely given through Christ. Righteousness before God does not depend on our family, good deeds, intelligence, Bible study attendance, church denomination, or religious observances. Do you struggle to accept that your salvation only requires faith in Christ? Will you give up trying to make yourself acceptable to God and instead receive Christ's righteousness and the full benefits of His blood-bought redemption? If you have already been justified through your faith in Christ, how will you resist the ongoing temptation to make yourself or someone else the hero of your ongoing Christian journey? God has made the way to be righteous; His way always has been and always will be through Jesus!

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34. First prophecy of salvation: Genesis 3:15

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Justification by Faith, Part 1

Lesson 6 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 5 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth about salvation from the lecture struck you most, and why?

2. From the notes, what aspect of Paul's message contains good news for you or someone you love?

Second Day: Read Romans 3:27-28.

Paul revealed faith's impact on pride.

3. a. From verse 27, what is excluded? Why?

   b. What impact does faith have on pride? Why?

4. a. When might we be tempted to boast about our spirituality or relationship with God?

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b. What are some results of this type of boasting?

5. In what situations are you tempted to justify yourself to God, and how can you guard against self-righteousness?

Third Day: Reread Romans 3:27-28.

Paul declared faith's role in salvation.

6. a. Describe characteristics of saving faith by which sinners are justified. (See also John 1:12; 3:14-18; 20:30-31; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 10:9; Hebrews 11; or other verses.)

b. How do people understand and use the word "faith" in your culture? How does this understanding compare with the biblical definition?

7. Looking back to last week's lesson, explain in your own words why justification by faith apart from works is good news.

8. In what ways does your faith in Jesus impact your life choices and relationships?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 3:29-30.

Paul affirmed there is one God and one path to justification.

9. Who are Gentiles, and why would Jews in Paul's day look down on them? (See also Romans 2:17, 23, 25. Use a dictionary if necessary.)

10. How does the fact that "there is only one God" and one salvation compare with modern thoughts on spirituality?

11. What truths from Romans 3:21-30 could you share to respond graciously to people who see all religions as viable options or believe there are many gods or many ways to God?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 3:31.

Paul asserted that justification by faith upholds God's law.

12. a. In your own words, summarize what God's law requires. (See also Exodus 20:1-17; Romans 6:23; 13:8-10.)

    b. What role does the law play in a person's ability to attain righteousness? (See also Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:24.)

    c. How did Jesus fulfill the law? (See Romans 3:25-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:17; 4:15.)

13. If God has justified you through faith, give examples of how He encourages and enables your loving obedience. (See also Romans 8:12-17, 31-34; Philippians 2:12-13; 1 John 1:5-10.)

Sixth Day: Review Romans 3:27-31.

God justifies people through faith in Christ alone.

14. What does God's plan to justify sinners through faith alone reveal about Him? How have you responded to His invitation to faith in Jesus as your Savior?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 3:27-31

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 6 Notes

Romans 3:27-31

Focus Verse

"For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." (Romans 3:28)

Outline

- Faith Excludes Boasting – Romans 3:27-28
- Faith Necessary for All – Romans 3:29-30
- Faith Upholds Law – Romans 3:31

Engage

People live in seemingly constant competition for limited resources. Maybe you contend indirectly for income-generating work to buy what you need—food, clothing, shelter. Or perhaps you compete directly for access to clean water, agricultural land, or building materials. We struggle alongside other people who share the same basic needs to live and flourish. So many things in this life require focused effort and constant work. How do basic human needs impact your life each day? Have you focused on tangible resources at the expense of your spiritual needs? There is good news. **Your deepest need cannot be met through your struggle or competition.**

The good news of salvation by grace through faith alone negates human contribution and transforms competition. The limitless resource of God's righteousness shimmers before us in this lesson. We will never be more worthy of salvation than anyone else. Likewise, we will never be less worthy. Paul sought to help his readers understand that Jesus is the standard God uses to evaluate righteousness and bestow the blessing of justification—not titles, positions, or accomplishments. **God justifies people through faith in Christ alone.** Paul invites all people to believe in Jesus rather than pursue salvation through efforts that will always fall short.

So far in his epistle, Paul has explained sin as the problem all people have and God-pleasing righteousness as the need all people share. **But God has always given all people access to His righteousness through the same means—faith.** We will explore this important teaching in two parts:

- In Lesson 6, we will study Paul's premise that justification comes only by faith in Jesus Christ, nothing else.
- In Lesson 7, we will study Paul's proof that God has always justified people by faith in the truth He has revealed.

Because God justifies sinners by faith alone, no one can boast and everyone is welcome. **Jesus—who perfectly upheld God's law—receives all the glory for our salvation.**

Faith Excludes Boasting – Romans 3:27-28

God makes salvation possible through His provision of a Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus became the ultimate atoning sacrifice, redeeming people from sin and securing their justification. How do people under sin's power access the justification Jesus provides? By faith in Jesus's saving work. **Justification by faith leaves nothing for which any mere human can take sole credit.**

Boasting and Pride – 3:27a

This passage begins with a question followed by its answer, "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded." **Boasting expresses prideful thoughts and beliefs with self-elevating words or actions.** Praise that exalts us comes at the expense of acknowledging what God has done. The sin of pride reveals humanity's fallen condition. Paul's previous discussion of sin provided examples of pride rooted in human hearts.[1] People claiming to be wiser than their Creator become fools. People who judge others for sins they also commit condemn themselves. People who brag about knowing God's law dishonor Him by breaking it.

Sins of pride have plagued humanity since our beginning. When tempted in God's perfect garden, Eve expressed a prideful desire to "be like God, knowing good and evil."[2] The king of Babylon said, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; ... I will make myself like the Most High."[3] Jesus referred to Satan's prideful fall from heaven.[4] All forms of human competition or comparison with God attempt to diminish Him and bring Him to the level of a created being. However, the incomprehensible creator God exceeds His creation just as a craftsman exceeds the final product his efforts produce.

Sinful pride still plagues humanity today. Cultures around the world celebrate pride in oneself, one's family, or one's position as a valuable character trait. However, Proverbs 16:18 warns, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Pride's self-focus crowds out thoughts of God and the desire to seek, know, and follow Him.[5] Pride also breeds competition, which overtakes concern for others made in God's image.[6] **By grace, God's plan for salvation through faith alone frees humanity from self-exaltation's snare.**

Boasting and Law – 3:27b

Paul's rhetorical argument challenged his original audience to offer a law that people could keep or work they could do to earn justification. No such law or work exists, not even in the realm of religion. What is more, Paul had already recalled Jewish unfaithfulness to God's law.[7] Paul further proved his assertion that justification by faith excludes boasting by asking: "Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith." **If justification required law-keeping, our inherent inability to perform perfectly would lead to failure, not boasting.[8]**

1. **Examples of pride:** Romans 1:22-23; 2:1, 23
2. **Eve's prideful desire:** Genesis 3:5
3. **King's boast:** Isaiah 14:13-15
4. **Satan's fall:** Luke 10:18
5. **Self above God:** Psalm 10:4
6. **God's image-bearers:** Genesis 1:26
7. **Jewish unfaithfulness:** Romans 3:1-4
8. **Law-keeping:** Galatians 3:24

Religious pride tempted many Jews of Jesus's day to demand God's approval and claim their pious efforts made them worthy of justification. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus contrasted the prayers of a tax collector and a pharisee to confront such religious pride. The Pharisee boasted, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." Meanwhile, the tax collector humbly admitted he was a sinner needing God's mercy.[9] The Pharisee did not grasp that all people are under sin's power and unable to justify themselves through keeping the law.[10] But the tax collector received forgiveness and salvation through faith in God's mercy, displayed in the temple sacrifices that foreshadowed Jesus's death.

Approximately 2,000 years of human advancement have not cured prideful attempts to create systems of religious laws or good works about which people can boast. **Pride resists complete reliance on God for salvation.** Consequently, people still long to redefine goodness according to socially acceptable and achievable standards rather than God's superior righteousness. Even perfect adherence to flawed systems of morality or religion that human beings create offers no reason to boast. Successfully meeting manmade standards does not earn God's approval. Instead, celebrating religious success highlights self-promotion and prideful tendencies, tarnishing otherwise good works.

The good works of studying the Bible and serving others can lead to either prideful boasting or a closer relationship with Jesus. Paul, a former Pharisee trained by the esteemed Gamaliel and perhaps the brightest Christian theologian of his day, resolved to "boast in the Lord."[11] He boasted of Christ crucified and raised to life, rather than human wisdom or his own knowledge. Faith rises from knowledge of the gospel and God's redemptive plan. Even so, mere knowledge is not the same as saving faith.

Boasting and Faith – 3:28

Paul maintained the gloriously simple truth "that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." This truth invites readers of Paul's day and ours to joyfully and humbly receive God's gracious justification. Unfortunately, prideful tendencies often tempt us to turn faith into a work about which we can boast. Rather than accepting saving faith as a gift we cannot earn, we can turn belief into a rule we must follow—a perceived mandate that promises earthly honor and heavenly rewards. Manufactured, frail faith, however, inevitably leads to shame when it fails to withstand difficult circumstances. The faith we create ourselves is not real and cannot save.

In contrast, biblical faith is God's instrument of our salvation, not a reason for boasting. We are not justified because of our faith or on account of our faith. The Bible says we are justified by faith or through faith. Faith is the God-given channel by which God's righteousness in Christ becomes ours. God is at work in and through us. **Faith unites a person to the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.** We are saved by the perfect life, work, death, and resurrection of the Lord. Jesus's appearance on our behalf in the presence of God saves us. His righteousness, credited to us by God, saves us. The righteousness we receive is entirely Christ's. Salvation by grace through faith undercuts all boasting of any personal effort to achieve faith, if that were even possible.[12]

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9. **Jesus confronted pride:** Luke 18:9-14
10. **All under sin:** Romans 3:9-18
11. **Paul's boast:** 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
12. **Boasting in Christ:** 1 Corinthians 1:28-31; Ephesians 2:8-10

Faith Alone

The Doctrine of Faith

Justification by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the only true gospel. Christ's righteousness becomes our own through faith, which is God's gift.[1] **God-given faith makes belief possible for fallen people with fractured minds and broken lives.**[2] True faith propels people to act on their belief. God's gift of faith exceeds mere intellectual understanding or mental agreement with the Bible or theology; even demons believe this way.[3] A person can know that Jesus lived, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. However, saving faith requires a heart that acknowledges and surrenders to Christ as Savior.[4] The gift of faith enables us to receive the truth about Jesus[5] into our minds and allow its transformative root in our hearts.[6] By God's power, the roots of saving faith persevere through hardship and temptation.

The gospel Paul proclaimed[7] clearly presents Jesus as the object of saving faith that results in justification and righteousness. God freely offered Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for humanity's redemption. **People actively receive God's gift of faith by affirming Jesus Christ as God's Son and their Savior.** True faith incorporates belief that Jesus died for our sin, was raised from the dead for our justification, and ascended to heaven, exalted to reign with God. Such faith brings us into a community of faith, connecting us with others seeking to walk with God. Believers confidently anticipate that Jesus will return to vanquish evil forever and complete all He has promised. As faith grows, Jesus becomes the central object of our loving devotion and ruler of our lives.[8]

Without faith in Jesus, people can outwardly identify as Christians without experiencing the transforming effects of Christ's reign on their hearts, minds, and behavior. Faith in Jesus as risen Lord demands humble surrender, not self-exaltation. **When we continue treating Jesus like He needs our help to save us, we tragically pursue rituals and good deeds to prove we are worthy of God's favor and affection.** This ignores the saving truth the Bible proclaims.

Believing that faith is the only way to receive Jesus's righteousness as our own frees us from competing for a position in God's kingdom or trying to prove our worth. Faith in God's love for us shatters self-rule, inviting us into the safety of surrendering our lives to the one who controls everything in creation. Jesus's perfect saving work and God's endless grace secure our eternity and reorder today's priorities. We live for Jesus—who died for us—and delight in serving those He loves and seeks to save through faith alone.

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1. **God's gift of faith:** Ephesians 2:8-9
2. **Fallen people:** Romans 3:10-18
3. **Demons believe:** James 2:19
4. **Confess and believe:** Romans 10:9
5. **Truth about Jesus:** Matthew 16:16; John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 4:12
6. **Truth takes root:** Matthew 13:3-8, 13-23
7. **Paul's gospel:** Romans 3
8. **Surrender to Jesus:** Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 9:23; 14:25-27; Acts 3:19; 20:21; Romans 12:1-2

Faith in the glorious truths about Jesus exalts Him and eclipses human pride. Jesus alone was sent from heaven to show God's love by dying to save all who would believe.[13] Only faith in Jesus's words and saving work moves condemned people from death to life.[14] Jesus is the only light powerful enough to scatter sin's darkness.[15] Jesus, the resurrected Lord of all, alone has the power to save.[16] By faith alone in Jesus—who is gloriously worthy of our boasts—are sinful people justified before a holy God.

Faith Necessary for All – Romans 3:29-30

Justification by faith denies every attempt to consider ourselves superior to others. Paul's next questions confronted bigotry and invited humble unity among Roman believers in Paul's day and among Christians today. While boasting leads to alienation from God and one another, justification by grace through faith leads to reconciliation. **God invites all people to access justification by faith alone.[17]**

God of the Jews – 3:29a

Paul asked the Roman church, "Is God the God of Jews only?" Some erroneously believed so. The Jewish nation owed their existence to the loving favor God showed their ancestor Abraham.[18] As God promised, Abraham's descendants grew into a large nation who were called to serve the one true God and to be a light to the peoples around them.[19] The Shema reflects their monotheistic belief: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."[20] While the Israelites did not remain faithful to their calling, their monotheism separated them from their polytheistic neighbors, who did not acknowledge the one true God. **While believing foreigners such as Ruth and Rahab[21] joined God's people, many Jews failed to understand that God's affection toward non-Jews was for the good of the world, ultimately through Jesus.[22]**

Jewish devotion to the law of the one true God meant that some in the early Church struggled to understand how Gentiles could become part of God's people without fully adhering to the Mosaic code. Insistence on adherence risked creating division within the body of Christ. Jews believed Gentiles' only hope of salvation was in becoming Jewish and following Jewish law and customs. If following Jewish law was the only path to justification, their exclusivity and boasting would be appropriate. Instead, God's grace abundantly flows to all people equally entrapped by sin. **God affirmed justification by faith apart from the Jewish law when He also freely gave His Spirit to believing Gentiles.[23]** Consequently, early church leaders released believing Gentiles from circumcision and conversion to Judaism.[24]

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13. **Jesus lifted up:** John 3:13-17; 20:31
14. **Jesus brings life:** John 11:25; 14:6
15. **Jesus the light:** John 12:46
16. **Faith's profession:** Romans 10:9
17. **God's invitation:** 1 Timothy 2:3-4
18. **Loving favor:** Deuteronomy 10:15
19. **One true God:** Genesis 12:1-9; Exodus 20:1-6
20. **Lord is one:** Deuteronomy 6:4
21. **Foreigners included:** Matthew 1:1-16
22. **Chosen to bless:** Isaiah 42
23. **Holy Spirit to Gentiles:** Acts 10:44-46; 15:1-10
24. **Gentiles and law:** Acts 15:11-29

God of the Gentiles – 3:29b

Paul followed his question in verse 29 with another question and immediate answer, "Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too." Through faith in Jesus Christ, all people can be redeemed from sin and reconciled to God. God graciously revealed His eternal power and divine nature[25] to all people through His creation. Additionally, God revealed His holiness and sovereignty through Israel's law and history. Through faith in Jesus, Gentiles, like Jews, are liberated from degrading idolatry and invited into fellowship with their creator, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[26]

One God, One Justification – 3:30

To both Jew and Gentile Paul declared, "There is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith." **The one true God is equally God of all the people He has created.**[27] God offers salvation on the same terms to both Gentiles and Jews: justification by His grace through faith. God's impartial character and inexhaustible righteousness undergird a believer's call to proclaim the gospel to all peoples worldwide.

The gospel of the one true, living God refuses confinement to any one sect or nation. **Jesus's death secured one justification for all who believe—from every nation, tribe, and tongue.** Because of sin, regardless of good works or evil actions, understanding or lack of understanding, we are all equally disadvantaged before our holy God. Through God-given faith, the gospel offers the whole world access to the same hope.

Faith Upholds Law – Romans 3:31

In chapter 3, Paul twice repeated that salvation by grace is apart from the law.[28] Did his original readers question the law's role for Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus Christ? Did they wonder if God's grace set the law aside or if God had changed His mind about moral standards? **Paul asked and answered a question on his readers' behalf: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."** Justification by grace through faith upholds the law of God. Romans 6–8 will make the point that through the Spirit believers are empowered to do what God calls us to do.

Paul was beginning to address an erroneous belief system called "antinomianism," which he addresses in greater detail in Romans 5 and 6. Some forms of antinomianism include the belief that since salvation through faith in Jesus is for the soul, people can use their bodies as they desire. In other words, behavior makes no difference for those who believe in Christ. This belief system also proposes that the Holy Spirit's teaching and God's grace render God's law irrelevant; nothing matters but the law of love, as people define it. **These false beliefs dishonor God, denying His good purposes in His law and gracious salvation through faith.**

God, the creator of everything, gave the law to teach Israel how to live as God's people in God's world, promoting relational flourishing with Him and with one another.[29] **Jesus affirmed the**

25. **God revealed:** Romans 1:19-20
26. **Gentiles welcome:** Acts 17:22-31
27. **God of all:** Romans 2:11-12
28. **Apart from law:** Romans 3:21, 28
29. **Law a guide:** Psalm 119

ongoing value of God's law by summing up the whole law in the two Greatest Commandments.[30] The first is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." The second is, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Even though people cannot perfectly keep the law, the gospel of Jesus Christ does not void God's law.

Jesus explicitly stated, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."[31] **Jesus's life, death, and resurrection perfectly fulfilled the law's requirements, making faith in Jesus the only way sinful people can truly satisfy the law's demands.**[32] God's salvation plan through Jesus fulfills the law in two crucial areas: justice and righteousness.

Jesus and Justice

Justification by grace through faith upholds the law's demand for justice. According to the law, sin's penalty is death.[33] By offering Jesus as a sacrifice for sin, God honored what His law required. **Jesus suffered the law's just penalty in our place.** God bases salvation on what Jesus's death accomplished rather than what we can or cannot do. Jesus eternally satisfied sin's penalty for those who look to Him in faith.[34] In this costly way, God upheld the law and provided the way to save sinners. Jesus's sacrifice for atonement demonstrates God's righteousness in punishing sin. God is "just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."[35]

Jesus and Righteousness

Justification by grace through faith upholds the law's demand for authentic righteousness. True righteousness fulfills the law at every point. The law reflects God's perfect holiness, making it impossible for sinners to fulfill. But Jesus, eternally God from the beginning and "fully human in every way,"[36] lived without sin, perfectly fulfilling the law for us.[37] Through faith, God credits the actual, unchanging, perfect righteousness of Jesus to every believer's account. **God justifies people through faith in Christ alone.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God's wise and perfect plan for justification by faith alone secures all glory and honor for Jesus Christ—who accomplished salvation for all who believe. Jesus's perfect life, death, and resurrection make available God's perfect righteousness, which we could never achieve ourselves. Access to this righteousness by faith apart from works abolishes pride's self-exalting drive, freeing people from the burden of boasting to prove their worth to God and others. Faith alone invites the whole world to experience the justification only God can provide through Christ, regardless of their background, heritage, or spiritual knowledge.

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30. **Greatest Commandments:** Matthew 22:36-40
31. **Jesus fulfills law:** Matthew 5:17-20
32. **Believe in Jesus:** John 6:29
33. **Sin's penalty:** Romans 6:23
34. **Eternally effective:** Hebrews 5:8-9; 9:11-12
35. **God is just:** Romans 3:25-26
36. **Jesus's nature:** John 1:1; Hebrews 2:17; 4:15
37. **Sinless life:** 2 Corinthians 5:21

While God's law reveals His plan for holy living in His world, no one can be justified by keeping the law. The law remains a blessing to God's people, but salvation only comes through faith. Saving faith is not an ideal or goal we labor to achieve. Instead, God graciously gives saving faith that transforms undeserving sinners into saints. God-given faith strengthens believers to endure life's trials and eternally unites them with Christ. **Justification by grace through faith alone reveals God's deep compassion for all people who are equally unable to justify themselves.**

Apply It

Look at me. Notice me. Value me. Love me. These real human desires can draw us to our Creator, who continuously sees us, perfectly knows us, and passionately loves us. Jesus's precious blood, shed for sinners and received by faith alone, proves God's merciful, loving nature and determination to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. What a liberating truth in a world where recreational scrolling through social media channels fuels constant competition for attention and affirmation! How are you tempted to boast about yourself to others? What prideful self-promotion overflows into your relationship with God? Do your prayers echo a sense of entitlement to God's blessings? Perhaps you take credit for your spiritual accomplishments when you see others struggling to stay on the straight and narrow. **Because God loves us, He has ensured that our salvation does not depend on us.** Your justification, or God's not-guilty verdict, depends completely on Jesus's power to live perfectly and love completely. Justification by faith alone frees us to embrace joy and humble gratitude for God's love and Christ's sacrifice. Do you believe this truth? If so, how has faith in Jesus granted you freedom to let go of this world's self-oriented focus and fully cling to Him?

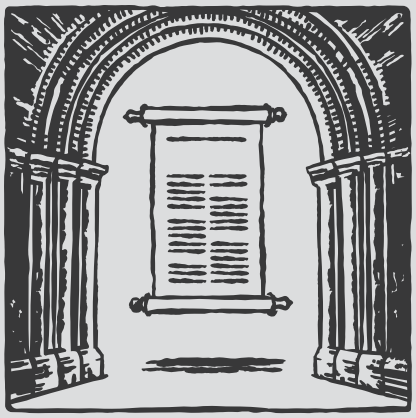
As faith causes truth about Jesus to take root in our hearts, we are transformed. The Holy Spirit sensitizes us to the impacts of immorality in and around us. We recognize humanity's deep need for Jesus. Paul has taught us that even those who reject the one true God have a sense of right and wrong stamped on their consciences.[38] When obeyed, God's law and moral standards protect us from sin's brutal consequences. How have you experienced the protective effects of God's law in your own life? We often regret the avoidable consequences of sin we face. **How might you increasingly surrender in faith to Jesus, the Lord and Savior who molds your values, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors to His own?**

Religious observances and communities of faith offer tangible touchpoints that connect people with shared values and expectations. However, we can wrongly view human expectations as requirements needed to earn God's love, favor, and even justification. What works do you believe God requires you to add to faith in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection as your source of your salvation? People who work hard expect others to work hard. What expectations do you have of others that might limit their access to Jesus or your willingness to share the good news of salvation? **Works-based righteousness creates unbearable burdens for us and uncrossable barriers for others.** When we believe someone is too sinful for Jesus to justify or too wicked to join our church, we forget that the grace we have received is for the benefit of the whole world. How might Paul's message about the one God and His one way of justification through faith impact how you view God and others this week? With whom will you share the good news of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone?

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38. Moral conscience: Romans 2

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Justification by Faith, Part 2

Lesson 7 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 6 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you understand that all people must come to Christ for salvation?

2. What truth from the notes did you find encouraging or challenging?

Second Day: Read Romans 4:1-5.

Abraham's example demonstrates that God justifies the ungodly.

3. Why does Paul say Abraham could not boast before God? (See also Romans 3:27.)

4. a. What did Abraham believe? In what ways did he honor God? (See also Genesis 12:1-9; 15:1-6, 18; 17:1-10, 23.)

   b. How does Paul say those who work for wages differ from those who trust God?

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5. What does your life reveal about your beliefs about God and reflect about your relationship with Him?

Third Day: Read Romans 4:6-8.

David's example demonstrates that God forgives and covers sin.

6. Read 2 Samuel 11–12 and Psalms 32; 51. How did David learn the truth Paul quoted from Psalm 32?

7. a. What do you learn from David's experience with God concerning his sin?

   b. How can these verses help someone struggling with guilt from past or present sin?

8. Spend time reflecting on your specific sins that God has counted against Christ. How will you thank Jesus for bearing your sins on the cross? Share with your group a time when you experienced the joy of God's forgiveness.

Fourth Day: Read Romans 4:9-15.

Righteousness comes by faith.

9. Read Genesis 15:1-6; 17:10-14, 24-27; and Galatians 3:15-18. Why is this sequence of events important in regard to God's declaration of righteousness?

10. a. What happens when a person depends on good behavior or outward religious observances as a measure of righteousness?

    b. Explain the value of upright living, or following "in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had."

11. Do you believe you are righteous in God's eyes? Why or why not?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 4:16-25.

God made Abraham the father of all who believe.

12. Who are Abraham's offspring, and how does God's guaranteed promise come to them?

13. a. What do these verses say about Abraham's faith, and what stands out most to you?

    b. What happened with Abraham's faith as he awaited the fulfillment of God's promise?

14. What do the words "it was credited to him as righteousness" mean for believers today, and how does this truth impact you?

15. How has God worked through a hopeless situation to strengthen your faith?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 4.

God gives Christ's righteousness to those who believe in Him.

16. As you review Romans 4, pay special attention to the places that the terms "credited" and "blessed" are mentioned. What have you learned this week about the way God justifies His people, and what influence does this truth have on your life?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 4

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 7 Notes

Romans 4

Focus Verse

"Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." (Romans 4:20-21)

Outline

- Faith, Not Works – Romans 4:1-15
- Faith, Not Sight – Romans 4:16-25

Engage

As we journey through life, we often stumble into moments that defy explanation or exceed imagination. A catastrophic flood, exquisite flower, or brilliant sunset can leave us breathless, wide-eyed, and filled with awe—unable to explain what we observe. At these times, we are reminded that as people we are both fragile and finite. In the spiritual realm, then, how do we begin to process the havoc sin releases in this world? How can we comprehend Christ's astounding death and resurrection and respond to Him as we should? God calls us to look beyond our limited perspective. **Only God provides answers to life's deepest questions and solutions to our greatest needs.** Only He can provide lasting peace when doubts and confusion overwhelm us. God's wisdom and purposes transcend our understanding. God is not limited by human limitations.

Paul's journey to faith in Christ helped him understand and explain breathtaking truths about salvation. Continuing his exposition to Roman believers, Paul called out two faithful witnesses from Israel's past to support his teaching about God's good news for sinners. Abraham's remarkable journey exemplifies true faith and testifies to God's faithfulness, and David's story illustrates the power of God's forgiveness despite human sin. Neither man earned salvation; only God can justify sinners and credit righteousness to believers. God did this for Abraham and David through faith, and He extends this same gift to believers today. In ways that surpass our limited understanding and exceed all expectations, **God gives Christ's righteousness to those who believe in Him.** God's provision of salvation meets our deepest need and magnifies His power and glory.

Faith, Not Works – Romans 4:1-15

Paul led his audience straight to the truth confirmed by God's Word and dealings with His people.[1] After explaining God's way of salvation by His gift of grace through faith,[2] Paul proved

1. **Truth about people:** Romans 1:29-31; 3:10-18
2. **God's way of salvation:** Romans 3:21-31

his teaching with two Old Testament heroes his Jewish audience deeply honored: Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, and King David, the shepherd, king, and ancestor of the Messiah.

The Case of Abraham – 4:1-5

God told Abraham, though childless at the time, that he would become the father of many nations.[3] God fulfilled this promise physically and spiritually. Through his sons Isaac and Ishmael, Abraham became the father of the Jewish and Arab peoples. **Abraham is also the father of all true believers in Jesus Christ.** Three times, the Bible calls Abraham God's friend.[4] The New Testament often refers to God's saving work of faith in Abraham.[5] To prove the gospel's truth, Paul had to show that God declared Abraham righteous by faith alone, not by works. If good works or human ability played a part in Abraham's salvation, Paul's case is lost, as are all people.

No Boasting (4:1-2) – Paul began by asking what Abraham discovered about his human ability to justify himself before God. Though an outstanding man, neither Abraham's goodness nor efforts could save him. If Abraham's life of faith and obedience could justify him in God's sight, Abraham could proudly boast before people. However, he could not boast before God, who intimately knew his every sin and shortcoming. **God's way of saving people makes boasting impossible.[6]** Abraham could do nothing to save himself from sin's penalty or power. No human can. How, then, could Abraham be saved?

For salvation from God's wrath to be real, the righteousness that makes salvation possible must also be real to be sufficient and acceptable to God.

***The Gift of Righteousness (4:3-5)* – God saved Abraham.** To prove this point, Paul asked, "What does Scripture say?" Paul's answer is found in Genesis, the Bible's first book. One night, God told Abraham—who was between 75 and 85 years old and childless—to look up and count the stars. God promised Abraham offspring as numerous as the countless stars in the sky. Genesis 15:6 says, "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." God saved people before Abraham, yet Abraham is the first individual specifically named in Scripture as being justified by faith. God imputed, or credited, His righteousness to Abraham.

Concerning the gospel, Genesis 15:6 is a critical verse with several interpretations. Many Jewish instructors in Paul's day taught that Abraham, whom God chose, became justified based on his goodness. They inferred that Abraham's upright behavior earned his salvation. This view, however, describes justification by works rather than by faith. A second interpretation acknowledges that Abraham did not possess righteousness. Because God wanted to save Abraham, God looked for something to accept in place of righteousness. This view states that God decided to treat Abraham's contribution of belief as righteousness. Belief, however, is not righteousness. For salvation from God's wrath to be real, the righteousness that makes salvation possible must also be real to be sufficient and acceptable to God. Salvation comes from God alone.

3. **Father of nations:** Genesis 17:4-5
4. **God's friend:** 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23
5. **Origins of salvation:** Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:54-55; Galatians 4:21-31
6. **Boasting excluded:** Romans 3:27; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31

Paul contrasted work for an employer with God's credited righteousness for those who believe. An employee earns wages based on the work performed. However, God gives His righteousness as a gift, not as compensation for human effort. How can righteousness come to an unrighteous person through faith? Understanding the word "credited," a bookkeeping term, leads us to the right understanding. In financial accounting, credits and accounts must reflect the actual state of the finances and be 100 percent correct. The same reasoning applies with justification. **When God saved Abraham, He credited real righteousness—God's own perfect righteousness—to Abraham.** Abraham received God's righteousness through the channel of faith. The Bible does not say people are saved because of their faith or based on their faith. God saves people through faith. Faith is necessary, but faith itself is neither righteousness nor a substitute for righteousness. Faith is the channel through which God's righteousness becomes ours. Righteousness through faith is a gift from God and not a result of our work—an example of God's grace toward us.[7]

The Case of David – 4:6-8

God credited Abraham with righteousness. David, Israel's shepherd-king and ancestor of Jesus Christ, used the same word—"credited" or "counted"—to speak of God covering and removing sin's unrighteousness. Scripture speaks of David as a man after God's own heart.[8] **David's story provides an especially helpful view of the righteousness God renders to sinners**. David personally experienced the depth of sin's burden. He also expressed the blessing of receiving God's righteousness and forgiveness: "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them."[9]

David committed adultery with Bathsheba, another man's wife. To hide his sin, he arranged for her husband to be killed in battle. David's plan seemed to work, yet his guilt remained. **Only when David confessed and repented of his sin could he be freed from his terrible guilt.**[10] In a picture of Jesus's atoning sacrifice, the blood of a sacrificial animal in David's day covered (paid for and blotted out) the sin of God's people on the Day of Atonement.[11] Only when David's sin was forgiven and covered could he call himself blessed.

What a full salvation God has provided! On the one hand, God imputes, or credits, a righteousness we do not possess to all who believe. On the other hand, He imputes, or transfers, our sins to Jesus. This is the great exchange, or double imputation, that stands at the heart of the gospel: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."[12] God covers believers' sins and removes them completely by placing them on His Son. On the cross, Jesus bore sin's full punishment for all who trust Him for salvation. **Believers can look at the cross and know that Jesus took the full punishment our sin deserves, completely and forever.** He left nothing to be paid—He took it all.

David's experience reveals that God forgives and releases us from the burden of sin. While Scripture uses several different words for "forgive" or "forgiveness," the Hebrew word in Psalm 32 and the Greek word in Romans 4 both mean "to carry away" or "release."[13] This points to the Day

7. **God's grace:** Ephesians 2:4-9
8. **David:** 1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22
9. **Sins covered:** Psalm 32:1-2
10. **Confession of sin:** 2 Samuel 11:1–12:25; Psalms 32:3-5; 51
11. **Atonement:** Leviticus 6
12. **Righteousness of God:** 2 Corinthians 5:21
13. **Release:** Psalm 32:1 (Hebrew *nasa)*; Romans 4:7 (Greek *aphethesan*)

of Atonement, celebrated by God's people in the Old Testament. On this day, the high priest would confess the people's sin over the head of a live goat and send it into the wilderness.[14] This act demonstrated the truth of God's forgiveness. When God forgives sin, He sends the debt of that sin away from the sinner. No human justice system can do this; only God can. David, who knew the blessedness of forgiveness so well, wrote, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."[15]

Religious Compliance Falls Short – 4:9-15

Paul's clear statements referencing the Old Testament prove that God saved both Abraham and David by faith apart from human works. Before his conversion, Paul trusted that his circumcision and obedience to God's law made him right with God. To correct this wrong thinking among Rome's believers, Paul again focused on Abraham.

The Timeline of Abraham's Justification (4:9-10) – When did God declare Abraham to be righteous? When did God justify and save Abraham? If God saved Abraham after his circumcision, which visibly identified God's covenant people, we might suppose circumcision was necessary for Abraham's justification. But by the account of Abraham given in Genesis, God credited righteousness to Abraham 14 years before He gave the covenant of circumcision.[16] **God saved Abraham before his circumcision.** Therefore, circumcision cannot be the basis for God's justification of Abraham, nor does circumcision grant salvation to anyone else.

Salvation's Signs and Seals (4:11) – If works or ceremonies do not save us, why did God give circumcision to Abraham's descendants? Similarly, we may wonder why Jesus commissioned baptism and the Lord's Supper for His followers. **Paul used two words for understanding the ordinances established for God's people: "sign" and "seal."** The sign of circumcision pointed to God's covenant with Abraham based on Jesus's future work. The sign of the Lord's Supper points to Christ's death and God's new covenant with His people.[17] The sign of baptism publicly identifies a person as belonging to Christ.[18]

An official seal on a passport or manufacturer's product guarantees authenticity. **Ordinances picture an aspect of our salvation and the work of God's grace.** Baptism illustrates the cleansing and new life we have from God.[19] Through the Lord's Table, known by many as Communion, we reaffirm what Jesus's death accomplished for us: the forgiveness of our sins and the new covenant relationship God shared with believers.[20] These external observances represent the internal reality that only comes through God's grace and intervention.

The Faith of Abraham (4:12) – **Abraham's example shows that God saves people through Christ regardless of their origins or actions.** Paul specifically denied circumcision's contribution to salvation. Circumcision saves neither Jew nor Gentile. Instead, all people need faith like Abraham's—the faith Abraham had long before his circumcision. Whether circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Gentile, Abraham is the spiritual father of all who believe. The gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is for the whole world, not just one nation or people.

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14. **Goat in wilderness:** Leviticus 16:20-22
15. **East and west:** Psalm 103:12
16. **Circumcision:** Genesis 17
17. **New covenant:** Luke 22:19-20
18. **Baptism:** Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:40-41
19. **New life:** Romans 6:3-4
20. **Communion:** 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Justified by Faith

The Doctrine of Justification

In Paul's day, Gentiles lived by certain behavioral standards, but only Jews had the advantage of the Old Testament law for moral guidance. Neither God's law nor human standards can justify sinners before God. **Justification comes through faith in Christ alone—as God's gift.** God declares righteous all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior.[1] God, our just judge, does not turn His eyes from human disobedience. He sent Jesus to bear sin's condemnation on the cross, satisfying His justice, holiness, and mercy toward sinners. Jesus died and was raised to life to justify believers.[2] From every believer's first moment of faith forward, they no longer stand condemned. God immediately declares them righteous in His sight and according to His perfect standard, not because they are righteous but because their Savior is. The penalty for their past, present, and future sin has been paid in full by Jesus Christ.

God removes sin's guilt from every believer.[3] Through His gift of salvation, God credits the righteousness of Jesus, who perfectly kept the law, to everyone who believes in Him. **Justification is God's irreversible act whereby He declares the guilty righteous.** Paul's words ring with powerful truth: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."[4]

People who do not place their faith in God's saving grace trust their ability to measure up to whatever standards they hold. When people try to justify themselves, God's promises become worthless to them, and His gift of faith bears no value. The dangerous belief that people are good enough to save themselves because they try to do good things brings devastating consequences. Evaluated by God's law, we all fail and await only His wrath.

God's people are released from sin and covered by His love. **Sinners who trust God alone for salvation through Christ alone are eternally justified—covered by Christ's perfect righteousness.** In great love, Christ died for sin that was not His own to give us righteousness that is not our own. The Bible affirms that God has declared all who believe as righteous in His sight. The truth of God's justification brings unspeakable confidence, thanksgiving, and deep, worship-filled joy to all who believe. God, who hung the stars in the sky, stooped to demonstrate His mighty love for wayward people by giving His Son to justify sinners.

1. **Justified by grace:** Romans 3:24-28
2. **Delivered to death:** Romans 4:25; 5:9
3. **Guilt removed:** Romans 5:17-19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:6
4. **No condemnation:** Romans 8:1-4

***Salvation and the Law (4:13-15)* – In the same way that circumcision cannot save, God's law also cannot save.** God gave the law to Israel centuries after Abraham died.[21] The law cannot be fulfilled in mere human strength, which proves guilt before God.[22] When we try to live by the law alone, we fail to recognize that we cannot satisfy God's requirements. When we rely on our faulty human contribution, we choose to face God's wrath.

21. **God's law:** Exodus 12:40; Galatians 3:17-18
22. **Guilty:** Romans 3:9-22

Faith, Not Sight – Romans 4:16-25

Abraham's faith reveals what true faith looks like. Against all earthly hope, Abraham believed God's promise. In fact, Abraham's belief in God did not waver through unbelief but grew stronger. We stand to learn much from Abraham and his faith.

Trusting God's Promise – 4:16-17

Abraham placed his faith in God and His promise. The words "promise" or "promised" appear five times in the last half of this chapter.[23] God's promise to Abraham had many dimensions: personal blessing, land for Abraham and his descendants, blessing upon his descendants, and a Redeemer to come.

Faith is only as good as its object. Abraham did not have faith in his own ability to believe or act. **Abraham's faith looked to God's promise.** This is essential for two reasons:

- First, faith in God's promise preserves the grace that makes salvation possible yet invites a proper response. While no one is saved by works,[24] not working to earn salvation does not mean inaction or passivity. True faith actively clings to God and His promises, resulting in faithful actions.
- Second, faith in God's promise opens salvation to all. Regardless of spiritual heritage, all who believe are God's children.[25] This makes Abraham the father of Jewish and Gentile believers alike and fulfills God's promise to Abraham.[26]

Regardless of Circumstances – 4:18-19

Abraham did not believe God for a promise that seemed probable. **Abraham believed God when everything Abraham and Sarah felt and experienced contradicted God's promise.** From a human perspective, Abraham's situation appeared hopeless. Faith does not ignore facts but sees beyond present circumstances to look to God. Because God had spoken, Abraham trusted Him.

Paul says, "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." No human hope existed that Abraham could have a child with Sarah. **Despite his circumstances, Abraham wholeheartedly believed God.** Faith is not irrational—not for Abraham and not for believers today. Nothing is more reasonable than believing God's Word. True faith stands with God—the creator of all things—and His unfailing Word, even when doing so appears foolish from a human perspective.

Fully Persuaded – 4:20-22

Abraham's resolute faith offers us an example. **Not only did Abraham not weaken in his faith, "he did not waver through unbelief."** He "was strengthened in his faith" and "fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." Abraham did not look to himself or his circumstances. Instead, Abraham looked to God and His promises. Faith grounded in God's character goes from strength to strength, for God is faithful.[27]

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23. **Promise:** Romans 4:13, 14, 16, 20, 21
24. **Works:** Galatians 2:21
25. **God's children:** John 1:12-13
26. **Father Abraham:** Genesis 12:2-3; 17:5
27. **God's faithfulness:** Psalm 84:5-7; Isaiah 40:31; Romans 1:17

Grounded in Christ – 4:23-25

Paul connected God's promise to Abraham to all believers. Paul's words emphatically claim that Abraham's faith was grounded in Abraham's pre-existent Savior and great descendant, Jesus Christ. The context of God's promise to Abraham makes clear what Abraham believed: His offspring would bless the whole world.[28] Jesus confirmed this when He said, "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."[29] This is why Peter proclaimed, "There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."[30]

God's tremendous promise opens salvation to all who come by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. He saves the ungodly who put their trust in Him. This is the gospel, and the depth of this good news is truly amazing. Paul says, "The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us." God's promise is for you if, like Abraham, you believe God's promise of salvation in Christ. Obviously, the content of our faith expands beyond what Abraham understood and believed—a promise of blessing to come. We have the gospel—the good news that "Jesus our Lord ... was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." **God gives Christ's righteousness to those who believe in Him.** This good news changes everything about our lives and eternity.

> *God's tremendous promise opens salvation to all who come by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.*

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul wrote about the lives of Abraham and David to prove that justification comes by grace through faith, not works. Abraham believed God's promise, and God credited righteousness to him. God forgave and covered the grievous sin of David, a man after God's own heart. Abraham and David reveal what true faith looks like and how faith works in the lives of believers. Through a believer's faith, God credits His righteousness to each of His children. Likewise, through Jesus's shed blood, every believer's sin is forgiven, atoned for, and does not count against them. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus covered and removed the sins of God's people.

Paul clearly makes his case that salvation comes through faith alone in Christ alone. Scripture records Abraham and David's lives for all to see. Regardless of any goodness these heroes of faith demonstrated, they still sinned. As sinners, they reveal the hopelessness of looking for salvation through works. Though considered an upright man, Abraham's good works could not save him. When David tried to hide the guilt of his sin, he suffered inner anguish. Neither received God's salvation because of who they were or what they did. Both men experienced God's lavish gift of salvation through faith. **Abraham and David confirm Paul's case that righteousness and justification come through faith, not works.**

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28. **Abraham's offspring:** Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5-6
29. **Abraham rejoiced:** John 8:56
30. **No other name:** Acts 4:12

Apply It

To support his teaching about the gospel, Paul introduced the faith of Abraham and David. Abraham, an imperfect man, exemplified outstanding, even growing, faith. When no earthly hope existed, he did not waver in unbelief but trusted God's promise. Abraham's example helps us better understand the needed focus of steadfast faith. **Like Abraham, we can be fully persuaded that God holds the power to fulfill His every promise.** Abraham's life proves that God works through seemingly hopeless situations to strengthen our faith. Jesus fulfilled God's greatest promise through His life, death, and resurrection, bringing justification and everlasting life to all who believe. How does your faith hold up when circumstances tell a different story? What causes your trust in God to waver? How does Abraham's example encourage you to draw closer to God and trust His promises in your current struggle?

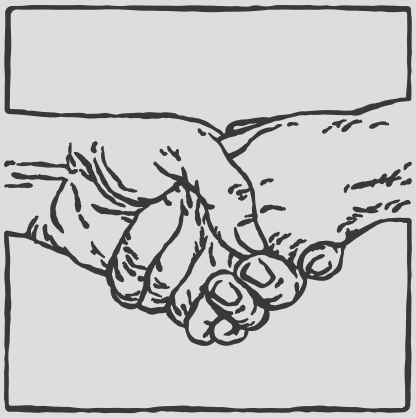
How might a past sin cause you recurring guilt that feels inescapable? Maybe a sinful habit holds you captive right now. **Through David's example, we see that God can accomplish what we cannot.** God separates sin from the sinner, placing that sin on Jesus Christ.[31] Like David, those who trust Jesus today live with the confidence that Jesus covers their sin with His blood and removes sin as a brutal taskmaster. And yet, believers continue to struggle with ongoing sin. God leads forgiven sinners in the process of sanctification, giving them power over specific sins as they walk in faith in obedience. What sin holds you captive? Will you confess that sin, placing it at Jesus's feet? Believers trust the Holy Spirit to bring the deliverance that their own efforts cannot achieve. God's power breaks sin's bondage. This is where true freedom begins.

When Jesus opened Paul's eyes to understand saving faith, Paul realized that outward expressions like circumcision and obedience to the law could not give anyone right standing with God. Some today rely on an upright lifestyle or external formalities, even God-given ceremonies such as baptism and the Lord's Supper, to help achieve salvation. However, salvation is an unearned gift. God owes us nothing, yet, through His Son, gave us everything. Even our purest attempts at being good do not allow God to declare us righteous. Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed His blood and died on the cross, brings salvation. From the very first moments of dawning faith, every believer receives God's gift of His righteousness and attains the full benefits of being God's child. **Faith is not earned; faith is God's personal gift to all who believe in Christ.** How does knowing this truth ignite your desire to worship and thank God for His unspeakably amazing grace?

Faith alone in Christ alone is Paul's echoing message as he explains the gospel. The good news that Paul taught, preached, and encouraged believers with in Rome inspires believers today. Like a blossoming flower, faith blooms ever so intricately within the lives of God's people. Jesus, the Son of God, left heaven's glory to walk among humans as a simple carpenter. He chose humility, surrender, suffering, and ultimately an excruciating death to gain life and victory for all who believe. Such incomprehensible grace creates awe and wonder at His amazing sacrificial love. Pause and ponder the love of the Savior. Bask in the glory of God's justification—bought with the price of His Son's blood. What is your response to Him? How will you offer Him praise and thanks? In what ways will you express your love to the One who not only covers your sin, but died to remove your sin forever?

31. Sin and sinner: Hebrews 9:28

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Peace with God

Lesson 8 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 7 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truths from the lecture helped clarify your understanding of God's justification of Abraham and all believers?

2. How did the notes encourage or challenge you as you consider Abraham's unwavering faith?

Second Day: Read Romans 5:1-2.

Justification brings believers peace with God.

3. a. Explain what peace with God means and how people receive this peace. (See also Romans 2:5; 4:5-7.)

   b. How do peaceful circumstances or feelings compare to the peace a believer has with God?

4. a. From verse 2, what do believers receive through Jesus? Which words stand out to you, and why?

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b. Read John 14:6; Ephesians 2:18; 3:12; and Hebrews 4:14-16. How do these verses describe the access believers enjoy, and how should this privilege impact your life?

5. a. Give practical ways to focus your hope on the glory of God.

b. How might the hope of God's glory offer you needed help today? (See also Psalm 17:15; Matthew 5:8; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:3-4; and other Bible passages you may know.)

Third Day: Read Romans 5:3-5.

Suffering produces fruit in the lives of believers.

6. a. What fruit does suffering produce in God's people? What might each of these look like in a believer's life?

b. How might believers glory in suffering? (See also Romans 8:17; Philippians 4:4-7; and other Bible passages you may know.)

c. In what ways has God worked to produce fruit in your times of suffering?

7. What is the hope that does "not put us to shame," and how has this helped you personally?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 5:6-8.

God demonstrates His love for sinners through Christ's death.

8. Give the words Paul used to describe those for whom Christ died, and explain why this is good news.

9. a. How do these words help clarify the role people play in their salvation? (See also Ephesians 2:1-9.)

   b. What is your experience of this truth?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 5:9-11.

Christ's life and death offer salvation to sinners.

10. List salvation's various aspects from these verses.

11. a. Define "reconciliation." Is God reconciled to us, or are we reconciled to God?

    b. What does God's gift of reconciliation reveal about Him?

12. How do Christ's death and life save us, and what does it mean to boast in Him? (See also Romans 4:25; 6:8-10; 8:34; Hebrews 7:24-25; or other Bible passages you may know.)

Sixth Day: Review Romans 5:1-11.

Believers have peace with God and hope in all circumstances.

13. In what ways will you glory, rejoice, or boast in God for His gift of reconciliation with Him?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 5:1-11

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 8 Notes

Romans 5:1-11

Focus Verse

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

Outline

- Reconciliation's Hope – Romans 5:1-5
- Reconciliation's Blessings – Romans 5:6-11

Engage

Mired in sin, our fallen world lacks security while complex questions abound. Where can we find lasting peace? Why do so many endure great suffering? In the blink of an eye, life's joys can turn to tragedy. A loved one's sudden heart attack, a satisfying career's surprise ending, the tragic onset of a natural disaster, or an outbreak of war can leave us without hope or peace. **Whatever situation we face—heartache, loss, physical illness, emotional pain, persecution, or even death—God enters our world with His heavenly solution—His Son, Jesus Christ.**

In Romans 5, Paul continues to unpack God's justification of sinners. Through Jesus Christ, believers are reconciled to God. No longer at war with God because of sin, His people receive and enjoy His remarkable gift of genuine peace. God holds no hostility against those He justifies. He sets believers free to live in settled security with Him forever. Even so, God's people are not exempt from dark days and difficult circumstances while on earth. Instead of crumbling beneath despair, believers can stand in God's grace through challenging situations and trying times. **Believers have peace with God and hope in all circumstances.**

Reconciliation's Hope – Romans 5:1-5

Having established God's gracious gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ in Romans 3–4, Paul opened chapter 5 by explaining a justified believer's position before God. An unstoppable future awaits believers—eternal life with God in glory. Paul's exposition of layered, interwoven, and compounding gospel truths in the book of Romans lays important groundwork for God's people. The gospel provides believers a way of salvation and a path of bright hope. Though daily ups and downs may cause stress and pain, God provides a firm foundation when life tosses us about. **Paul confirms that when God justifies a believer, future glory is assured.**

Firm Foundation – 5:1

Paul raises our thoughts to embrace the first great blessing of justification—peace with God. He has already thoroughly explained that God actively reveals and stores up His wrath for the wicked and unrepentant.[1] Despite people's objections to the truth of God's wrath and judgment, no one is at peace with God until He justifies them. Jesus presented two responsibilities for all humanity when He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "love your neighbor as yourself."[2] These all-encompassing commandments shatter the thin outer shell of human morality and reveal our basic inability to please God. Without a new heart, no one can keep these commands.[3]

Until God bestows His gift of new life in Christ to a justified believer, rebellious, sin-stained hearts refuse to love God or live for Him. By nature, even seemingly good people sin. While Jesus lived on earth, the most pious people opposed Him and sought His death. **Jesus's cross—so costly to God—satisfied God's wrath and leads straight to peace with Him.** Only God changes rebels into surrendered, loving children. When God justifies people through faith, their personal warfare with Him ceases forever and lasting peace results. God Himself accomplished this peace on behalf of sinners. And what God accomplishes, no one can undo.

Steadfast Security – 5:2

Paul unpacked the security God's justified people possess with four powerful words—"access," "faith," "grace," and "stand." He further promised the hope of God's glory for all believers. What an incredible, awe-inspiring gift! God's glory, lost to humanity when sin entered the world, will one day be fully restored for all eternity.

A Believer's Standing (Romans 5:2a) **– Let us grasp the wonder of a believer's security in Christ.** As we seek to comprehend and appreciate what God has done for us, we can explore Paul's statement in verse 2. He develops our understanding with these four words:

- "Access" means introduction to or the right or freedom to enter. Through Jesus, God's people access the depths of His grace. This access gained in the past also takes place in the present. Paul said, "we have gained access" to reveal that access to God is granted, not due to any human work. **Through God's work of justification, believers gain unhindered access to Him.** They can pray to God, find Him in His Word, and come near to Him in worship. Because of Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives within God's children, providing constant access to God, who is ever present with His people.[4]
- Responding in "faith" means believing God is who He says He is. Faith takes God at His word in demonstrable ways. As we serve God, we live out our faith in our actions. Most importantly, faith rests on whom we believe; God Himself is the object of our faith. In verse 2, Paul links faith to grace. **By grace through faith, justification is received as God's gift for a believer.**
- "Grace" is usually defined as God's unmerited favor to those deserving His wrath. **God's entire plan of salvation rests upon His grace.** In the context of Romans 5, this grace refers to the ongoing state of justification that believers exclusively enjoy. More specifically, standing in this grace means we formerly lived under the law's crushing condemnation but now live permanently under God's protective forgiveness.

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1. **Wrath present and future:** Romans 1:18-20; 2:5
2. **Greatest Commandment:** Matthew 22:34-40
3. **No one righteous:** Romans 3:10
4. **Holy Spirit:** Galatians 3:13-14; Ephesians 2:18

Peace that Endures

The Doctrine of Reconciliation

Through Jesus, God made complete peace between Himself and sinful humanity possible. Through faith in Christ, every believer is reconciled to God. In human terms, reconciliation takes place when people at odds are brought back together, settle their differences, or agree to peace. When applied to salvation, God's gift of reconciliation is first established on the fact that sin separates humanity from God and places all people under His just wrath. Apart from Christ, we face condemnation. But God made perfect peace possible for sinful humans. He does not merely meet us halfway. Holy God, in great mercy, took incomprehensible measures on behalf of all humanity to make full reconciliation with Him possible.

Jesus's work on the cross satisfied sin's deserved penalty of death. Those who believe in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice are delivered from God's wrath and judgment. No longer at odds with God, believers enjoy complete security and peace with Him. Through Jesus's sacrificial death, God abolished the estrangement from Him caused by our sin. Jesus won back personal fellowship with God for all who trust in Him—for all eternity.[1] Rescued from wrath and restored to God, believers become ambassadors of God's reconciliation and share the greatest news of all time with others as we embody it with our lives.[2]

Those who do not accept Christ through faith reject God's gift of reconciliation and live apart from God and the perfect peace only He can provide. Without peace with God, true or lasting peace in any other area of life remains out of reach now and forever. When life's trials come, God seems distant as fear or doubt arises. Persisting in unbelief brings the devastating eternal result of God's judgment and wrath. Knowing this, believers realize the urgency of sharing the gospel with those who do not know Christ.

Receiving God's gift of reconciliation brings peace with God that covers us like a warm blanket on a cold day. Trials still come, but God holds and guides us through hard times. Unmistakable peace can envelop our hearts even amid unspeakably horrible situations. How can this be? As God's reconciled people, we have direct access to Him. We may not understand the difficulties we face or escape challenges ahead. However, we know and trust the God who has proven His love for us. Knowing that we have been delivered from God's wrath and await eternal glory with Him gives us confidence in every situation. **God, who sacrificed His own Son to reconcile us to Himself, surely walks with us and works through every situation we face on earth.**

1. **Reconciled:** Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:19-20
2. **Embodying reconciliation:** 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 2:11-16

- "Stand" is the final key word Paul used. God did not leave us cowering alone before Him as children of wrath. **Through grace in Christ, justified believers stand before God as His eternally secure and beloved children.**

***A Believer's Destiny (Romans 5:2b)* – Paul offered further proof that salvation is secure for those who believe in Jesus.** He tells us that believers boast in the hope of the glory of God. How can this be? In chapter 3, Paul resolutely stated that every human falls short of God's glory.[5] How can any sinful human have hope of attaining God's glory?

When Moses asked to see God's glory, God replied that Moses could neither see His face nor His glory. No one could see God's glory and live. But as God's glory passed by, God lovingly covered Moses with His hand.[6] God equated Moses seeing His face with beholding His glory. **Paul points to the goal and climax of the Christian faith: to see God and His beautiful face.** God, who does not lie, guarantees that every believer will see Him in glory.[7]

Paul had previously discussed the foolishness of boasting.[8] For what can any person take credit? No one contributes anything to salvation except desperate need; no one merits God's grace. So, why does Paul now tell us to boast? Redeemed believers can readily boast in God and all that He has done. Through grace, God justified us, and through faith, He sanctifies us. God alone gives us a future with Him in heaven. **Because glory is our destiny, we boast in the hope of God's glory!**

Purpose in Suffering – 5:3-5

Peace with God incorporates more than pleasant thoughts. Because of Christ's work on their behalf, believers' sense of peace need not be dictated by circumstances. **God brings His children transforming peace and joy that transcends challenging situations and dreadful suffering.** Times of trial can become pathways to spiritual growth and maturity.

***Suffering's Value (5:3a)* –** Many wonder why a loving God allows people to suffer.[9] **Paul explained the value in suffering, especially for believers.** Paul's conclusion may feel startling. Not only do we boast, or put confidence, in our hope of God's glory, but we also glory, or rejoice, in our sufferings.[10] Rejoicing feels distant when we suffer. However, there is nowhere suffering can take us that God does not also go. Amid despair and devastation, God remains present with His children and makes Himself known. This is where God's glory lies.

***Suffering's Fruit (5:3b-5)* –** Paul argued that glory in suffering exists because believers know suffering is not futile or hopeless, but productive. We often cannot know God's hidden purpose in specific times of hardship.[11] But God's people know Him. God asks us to trust Him and His Word. **God works through the suffering in our lives to bear fruit of lasting value—perseverance, character, and hope.[12]**

- **Perseverance:** To persevere means to persist with continued effort despite difficulty, failure, or opposition. **Believers persevere, not in their own strength, but by trusting God and His strength.** Scripture warns that fiery trials should not surprise us.[13] Rather than seeking to avoid or escape difficulties through sin or disobedience, God calls us to simple trust in Him.[14] God promises to provide a way to endure through whatever temptation seeks to overtake us.[15]

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5. **All fall short:** Romans 3:23
6. **God's glory:** Exodus 33:18-23
7. **Seeing God:** Psalm 17:15; Matthew 5:8; John 17:24; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:3-4
8. **Boasting:** Romans 3:27; 4:2; Ephesians 2:8-9
9. **Suffering:** Psalms 10:1; 22:1; 42:9; 43:2; 44:23-24; 74:1, 11; 80:12; 88:14; Matthew 27:46
10. **Glory in suffering:** 2 Corinthians 4:7-18
11. **God's hidden purpose:** Deuteronomy 29:29
12. **Lasting value:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
13. **Trials:** 1 Peter 4:12
14. **Trusting the Father's care:** Psalms 56:3-4; 116:10; 143:8; Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 26:3; Matthew 6:25-33; 10:29-31; Romans 15:13
15. **Endure temptation:** 1 Corinthians 10:13

Why Believers Suffer

Believers suffer in every way—physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.[1] The suffering of Job, a blameless and upright man,[2] warns against assuming the reason for another's suffering. Job's friends mistakenly thought a secret sin had caused his deep suffering. They maligned God's character and only added to Job's misery.[3] We may inflict similar damage by concluding that someone who suffers is living outside of God's will.

The Bible gives many reasons why God's people suffer.

- Suffering is common to all in a sin-cursed world. (Job 5:7; Romans 5:12)
- Suffering brings correction. (Psalm 119:67; 2 Corinthians 1:9)
- Suffering offers an opportunity to bring Christ glory. (John 9:3)
- Suffering for Christ is a privilege for those who believe. (Acts 5:41; Philippians 1:29)
- Suffering shows angels and demons the rightness of God's ways. (Job 1–2)
- Suffering builds Christlike character in the Church. (Romans 5:3-4; 8:29; Acts 8:1-3)
- Suffering prepares believers to comfort others who suffer. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)
- Suffering refocuses our desires toward God and heaven. (Psalm 73:21-28; Acts 7:54-59)

1. **Believers suffer:** 2 Corinthians 11:16–12:10; Hebrews 5:8; 11:35-38
2. **Suffering of Job:** Job 1:8, 22; 2:3, 10
3. **Job's misery:** Job 11:1-5; 13:4-5; 16:1-5

- **Character:** The Greek word translated as "character," *dokime,* was used in the ancient marketplace to mean tested or approved. Because ancient coins had no standardized sizes, unscrupulous people could trim off bits of gold or silver for themselves. Wise merchants weighed coins before approving them for payment. Suffering and pain bring loss as grief seems to trim away at our wounded hearts.[16] **However, God adds weight to a believer's character through suffering.** Perseverance sets in and character results. God cannot learn anything He does not already know about us, but we find our growing faith tested and genuine as we walk with God through trials.[17]
- **Hope:** Paul spoke earlier of our sure hope of glory. **Suffering produces certain hope.** A believer's suffering is not without meaning because, in God's hands, suffering leads to perseverance and weighty character. And tested, proven character leads to steadfast hope. Believers often describe times of suffering that have drawn them closer to God. As we share in Christ's sufferings and endure as He did, our hope will not be put to shame[18] because God pours His love into our hearts through His Holy Spirit. What better evidence of God's love than that of Jesus, our Savior, who suffered on our behalf and now holds us securely in His nail-pierced hands?

16. **Loss and pain:** John 15:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:13; 1 Peter 1:6
17. **Tested and approved:** Job 23:10; 42:5; 1 Peter 1:7
18. **Share in Christ's sufferings:** Matthew 26:38-39, 42; John 18:11; Romans 8:17; Philippians 3:10; Hebrews 5:8-9; 1 Peter 4:13

Reconciliation's Blessings – Romans 5:6-11

Paul first mentioned God's great love in verse 5 and now expresses its extent. God's reach to save sinners goes further and deeper than the human mind can grasp. **God's immeasurable love brings great joy to sinners.**

God's Love for Sinners – 5:6-8

In these verses, Paul used three words to portray people God saves: "powerless," "ungodly," and "sinners." These words depict all of humanity apart from Christ.[19] Every person needs God's rescue from sin.

- **Powerless: Jesus died on our behalf when we were helpless to save ourselves.** With no strength of our own, we can do nothing to achieve our salvation. No change in circumstances will enable us to please God. We cannot see or enter God's kingdom and lack the capability to understand spiritual truths. We are born spiritually dead in our sin.[20] A dead body is entirely unresponsive. In this spiritually dead state, every human lacks the desire or ability to seek God. We need an entirely new heart and life.[21]
- **Ungodly:** Earlier in his letter, Paul ripped away every excuse for sin, revealing the ugly reality of human rebellion and ungodliness. God's wrath comes against all the wickedness of people who suppress the truth.[22] **Without God's intervention through Christ, all people are ungodly.** They oppose God's sovereignty, refuse to accept Him as Creator, reject His holiness, despise His perfect knowledge, and deny His unchangeable nature. They pursue self-centered desires, define their own identity, live in willful independence, and fiercely persist in their sinful ways.
- **Sinners: An outrage to God, sin defines humanity's inborn resistance to God's will.** Sin harms us in ways we cannot see or imagine. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory. All sin deserves God's unending wrath.[23] But God intervened. He sent Jesus, who took sin's deserved wrath upon Himself.[24] God frees all who believe in Christ to live under grace with a desire to live for God[25] and praise Him for their new identity in Christ.[26] Sin remains a perilous foe, but Christ sets His people free from sin's condemnation.[27] We can turn to Christ for mercy, grace, timely help, forgiveness, and power to live the life to which He calls us.[28]

Against the darkness of humanity's sin and helplessness, Paul reveals the brightness of God's love. **God demonstrates His great love for us in this—while we were still powerless sinners, Christ died for us, the ungodly.**

An Assured Future – 5:9-11

Having proclaimed humanity's helplessness and God's great love, Paul continued to prove our security in Christ. God justifies believers and has reconciled us to Himself through the blood of Christ, poured out on the cross. Jesus died for us while we lived as God's enemies, not as

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19. **Apart from Christ:** Titus 3:3-7
20. **Dead in sin:** John 3:3, 5; Romans 3:11; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1
21. **New life:** Ezekiel 36:26; John 5:24; 2 Corinthians 5:17
22. **Suppress truth:** Romans 1:18
23. **Sin's comprehensive impact:** 1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:9, 23; 7:18
24. **Savior:** Romans 3:24-26
25. **Living for God:** John 8:34-36; Romans 5:21–6:14; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:1-11
26. **New identity:** 1 Corinthians 6:9-11
27. **Battling sin in God's power:** Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5; 1 Peter 5:8-9
28. **Life in the Spirit:** Romans 8:1-17

promising people. No greater assurance can be given to any human. **God established eternal peace between sinful humanity and Himself by sending Christ to die on the cross.** He reconciled believers to Himself. Through Christ's death, believers receive certain salvation, based not on their contribution but solely on Christ's righteousness.

Powerless, ungodly sinners stand as God's enemies. Steeped in sin and opposed to God in every way,[29] we violated His law and lived at war with the only source of goodness, light, and life. Satan wants us to ignore God and refuse His rightful claim upon our lives—to banish God from His universe and take His place as ruler. God found us in our state of enmity with Him and made us His own. **Through Jesus, God reconciled believers to Himself.** What great love the Father has lavished on us![30]

> *In every circumstance, including challenges, struggles, or even outright suffering, God enables believers to rejoice and give Him glory.*

Sinners reconciled to God can boast only in Him—the one who brings us to glory. What could be better than rejoicing in God, who created all people to find their highest purpose in Him forever? In every circumstance, including challenges, struggles, or even outright suffering, God enables believers to rejoice[31] and give Him glory. **Believers have peace with God and hope in all circumstances.** One day, believers will live in God's presence forever, experiencing true glory without the hindrance of sin. We are great sinners, but we are deeply loved by our great God!

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul's words bring news of peace that sinful people long to hear. After dwelling on our sinfulness and great need for God's righteousness, Paul explained how—through Christ—our holy, righteous God established peace with unrighteous humans. Paul expounded upon the overflowing benefits of justification. God's reconciled people have lasting access to God and enjoy peace with Him. Neither suffering nor our sinful past can shake our security in Christ. We find rest for our souls in Him alone.

Because of Christ, we have certain hope in God's glory. Believers stand before God in complete peace because God has accomplished our salvation. What He has done cannot be undone. Against the deep darkness of human sin, God's love shines brightly. God's great, unchangeable love brings sweet peace and joy in life's every circumstance. God pours His love into our hearts through His Holy Spirit, giving us certain hope that we will not be put to shame. Because God justified us in Christ while we were His enemies, He will certainly see us through until we are safely home with Him in heaven. And there we will enjoy His perfect peace forever.

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29. Opposing God: Psalm 14:1-5
30. Amazing love: 1 John 3:1
31. Rejoice in the Lord always: Philippians 4:4-8

Apply It

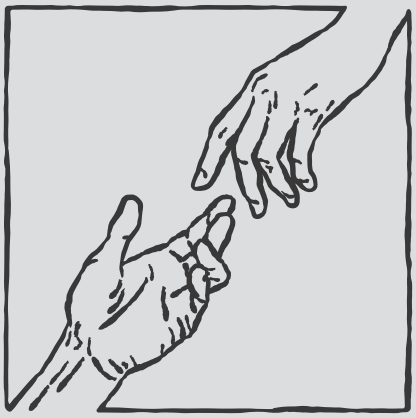
By grace through faith in Jesus Christ, believers have peace with God. Through Christ's blood shed on the cross, God made peace with us. He will never be at war with believers again. This foundational peace allows us to experience a new measure of personal peace that permeates our lives. Enduring peace with God envelops believers when they face turmoil on earth. Where do you look for peace? While another person, self-help books, or self-care may bring a fleeting feeling of peace, God's peace never leaves. What helps you recognize all that comes your way through peace with God? How might peace with God help you experience peace from God in your most trying circumstances? With our biggest battle won through Christ, we can relish the present and eternal benefits of true, unfading peace with God.

God's people are not exempt from suffering. Throughout Scripture, we find evidence of the ways people suffer. Suffering causes real pain—physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Perhaps you find yourself in a deep place of suffering today. Are you tempted to cry out against God? He begs you to turn toward Him instead. God loves you with an everlasting love and will never leave or forsake you.[32] As God meets us in our despair, we see His glory in specific and personal ways. God understands us better than we understand ourselves. Why would we waste the fruitfulness God intends through our suffering by failing to seek Him? **God makes a believer's suffering productive.** Suffering produces perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope—hope in God and His certain glory. God is ever present. He sees your suffering. Trust Him.

God's reconciliation with every believer offers peace and hope for today and eternity. What prevents enduring peace from flowing into your heart? What doubts cloud your certain hope in Christ? Peace on earth can feel elusive as we witness sin's prevalence and suffering's toll. We can feel hopeless and overwhelmed by grief, sorrow, fear, and dismay as we encounter this world's troubles. How can we combat inner turmoil? Start with prayer, thanksgiving, and pondering God's Word. Focus on specific ways you have experienced God's mercy and grace. In what situation will you ask for God's specific help? How will God's great love, evidenced by His gift of justification and reconciliation to Himself by faith alone, steady and uphold you? This very week, God may call you to purposely seek His peace and hope in a specific situation. **In Christ, lasting reconciliation, overpowering peace, and certain hope are available to every believer.**

32. God's love: Isaiah 43:4; Jeremiah 31:3; Hebrews 13:5

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God's Gift of Righteousness

Lesson 9 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 8 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you better understand or apply a believer's peace with and reconciliation to God?

2. What aspect of reconciliation given in the notes stood out to you and why?

Second Day: Read Romans 5:12-14.

Sin and death entered the world through one man.

3. a. Read Genesis 2:15–3:24. Who is the "one man" Paul spoke of in Romans 5:12?

   b. From Genesis 2:15–3:24, what command and warning did God give the man, and what harm did his breaking of God's command cause? (See also Romans 3:9-11, 23; 8:20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 2:1-3.)

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4. How does verse 12 challenge the misconception that people are born good or morally neutral?

5. a. Verses 13 and 14 reveal that death reigned before the law was given to Moses. What do these verses teach us about the relationship between sin and death?

   b. Who is "the one to come" mentioned in verse 14, and why do we need Him? (See also Romans 5:15-21.)

Third Day: Read Romans 5:15-19.

Paul contrasted God's gift and Adam's trespass.

6. List the different aspects of "the gift" and "the trespass." What do you learn about each?

7. a. How are all people impacted by Adam's trespass, and how can they access God's gift through Christ? (See also John 3:7-21; Romans 10:9-13; or other Bible passages.)

   b. Which reigns in your life: death from Adam or justification from Christ? How do you know?

Fourth Day: Reread Romans 5:15-19.

Paul explained the consequences of the gift and the trespass.

8. List ways Adam and Jesus are the same and how they differ. What stands out to you?

9. What do you learn about God's grace through His gift, and how does grace impact you?

10. Ponder the words "how much more." What do you think Paul meant? How would you describe what he meant to someone else?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 5:20-21.

Adam brought sin, but by grace Jesus brought life.

11. How does the law cause "the trespass" to increase, and how do you see this at work in your life? (See also Romans 5:13-14; 7:7-12; Galatians 3:24.)

12. What are the two "reigns" mentioned in verse 21? What happens to those in each kingdom? (See also Colossians 1:13-14.)

13. Share a recent example of how God's grace met you in your struggle with sin.

Sixth Day: Review Romans 5:12-21.

Christ's gift of righteousness triumphs over Adam's sin.

14. What are some ways that God spoke or revealed His amazing grace to you this week? How will you pray accordingly?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 5:12-21

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 9 Notes

Romans 5:12-21

Focus Verse

"Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people." (Romans 5:18)

Outline

- Adam's Ruin– Romans 5:12-14
- Christ's Superiority – Romans 5:15-19
- Grace's Reign – Romans 5:20-21

Engage

We navigate life alongside people with varying interests, deep beliefs, and embedded values. While we share certain commonalities, sharp differences can divide us when we follow our own agendas. Consider musicians who gather with their instruments. Separately, musicians each playing their own music on their own instruments at the same time is discordant. But when these instruments—wind, brass, string, and percussion—are played together, led by a master conductor, a symphony results. Without God's intervention and guidance, we walk this world in dissonance with God and one another due to our inherited sinful nature. **Our relationship with Christ brings us into sweet harmony with God.**

Paul addressed the chaos created by sin by contrasting one man—Adam—with one man—God's Son, Jesus Christ. Adam's fall into sin not only impacted his relationship with God but also brought dire consequences to all of humanity. In Adam, all people inherited sin and death. But God, in grace and love, promised a Savior to deliver humanity from sin's death grip.[1] Apart from Jesus, no escape from condemnation, sin, and death exists. Through Him came justification, salvation, and eternal life. **Christ's gift of righteousness triumphs over Adam's sin.**

1. **Promise of a Savior:** Genesis 3:15

Adam's Ruin – Romans 5:12-14

Sin—everything in thought, word, and deed that is contrary to the will of God—entered the world through Adam. As a result, death followed for all people. To help us understand humanity's peril and God's solution, Paul explained sin's entry into the world[1] and contrasted interesting parallels between Adam and Christ. His developing exposition helps clarify the difficult truth that all people sin.

1. **Sin's entry:** Genesis 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

Sin's Entry – 5:12

Secular thought rejects or minimizes the idea of sin. A common viewpoint says, "nobody's perfect" and defines sin as a flaw or imperfection that can be overcome with the right help. Scripture speaks differently, and rightfully, of sin. **Paul presented God's view: Sin afflicts all people and leads to the tragic consequence of death.**

Sin Entered Through Adam – The world God created was altogether good.[2] Still, even with the physical wonders we see in today's world, earth's original beauty is marred with the decay and destruction brought by sin.[3] Sin is described in verse 12 not as something created but as an intruder into God's good creation. **Sin entered the world through the one act of the first man, Adam,[4] resulting in immediate ruin.**

Death Entered Through Sin – Neither sin nor death are natural. God created Adam and Eve to live harmoniously with Him in pristine perfection. But He gave Adam free choice, and Adam chose sin. How is it that Adam's sin affects all people? At creation, God appointed Adam as humanity's representative. Adam's very name means "man" or "human." Adam's obedience or disobedience to God's command would count for all people. Similarly, government officials represent their districts; ambassadors negotiate for their nations; armies fight on behalf of citizens at home. The actions of these representatives determine the outcome for their entire nation. Adam's actions had consequences for all who would come after him. His obedience would have secured blessing and life; God judged his disobedience with spiritual and physical death,[5] just as He said He would.[6] **From Adam, sin and death passed to all his descendants—all of humanity throughout time.**[7]

Death Came to All People – Because Adam sinned, all people inherit a nature inclined toward sin and a world already broken by it. Death—both physical and spiritual—is the consequence. In this world, sin wages war against us, and death is our enemy.[8] Sin and death remain unyieldingly opposed to Jesus and the life He gives until He returns to destroy them forever.[9] Paul stated that when Adam sinned, "death came to all people, because all sinned." Adam's choice set the destiny of all his descendants. Sin has so pervaded human nature that "there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; no one who seeks God."[10] **All humanity not only shares Adam's sin and continues his legacy through continued sin but also shares sin's punishment—death.**

Death's Reign – 5:13-14

Paul expressed an essential truth in verse 12: "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." **Aware that the words "because all sinned" might cause confusion, Paul paused to explain.** Death is God's judgment for sin, which breaks God's law. However, even before God gave the law, people died.

2. **God's creation:** Genesis 1
3. **Decay in creation:** Romans 8:20-22
4. **First man's sin:** Genesis 3:1-10
5. **Death:** Genesis 3:11-24; Romans 3:9-11; Ephesians 2:1-3
6. **God's judgment:** Genesis 2:16-17
7. **Death follows Adam:** Genesis 5:5-31
8. **Sin and death:** 1 Corinthians 15:21-25; 1 Peter 2:11
9. **Defeat of sin:** John 10:10; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Revelation 20:14; 21:27–22:5
10. **No one righteous:** Romans 3:10-11

Paul presented a critical argument by discussing sin's impact "from the time of Adam to the time of Moses." The Jews in Paul's day defined sin as breaking the law's commands. Yet the question arises: What about the people who lived before Moses and did not yet know God's law? **From Adam to Moses, people still sinned and died.** Cain murdered.[11] Abraham lied.[12] Jacob deceived his father and stole his brother's blessing.[13] History records death's repeated drumbeat, with only two exceptions: Enoch and Elijah.[14] These men were taken by God without experiencing the usual process of death, in demonstrations of God's mighty power. Otherwise, death, sin's immediate and comprehensive consequence, reigned. Before God gave Israel's laws to Moses, all people died. This clarification would have helped Paul's readers in Rome but also helps us understand death's stranglehold on humanity—from Adam to Moses, to when Paul lived, and still today.

The end of verse 14 begins Paul's striking parallel between Adam and Christ. Adam is "a pattern of the one to come." One man, Adam, represented us in sin, and one Man, Christ, can represent us in righteousness. Because God imputed or attributed Adam's sin to his descendants, God may justly impute or credit Christ's righteousness to those He saves. **No one hates sin more than God, but no one loves people more than God.** He sent His Son, who lovingly began His earthly life in the womb, grew up as a man of sorrows, suffered, and died to make new, eternal life possible for an entire world of people.

Christ's Superiority – Romans 5:15-19

Paul next explained how God's gift in Christ is far superior to our original union with Adam. Untold harm came to all humanity through Adam's sin. **When Jesus became the representative of everyone who trusts Him, He brought infinitely more than Adam destroyed.**

Gift over Trespass – 5:15

In direct disobedience to God's command, Adam took the fruit from Eve and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Many died due to Adam's trespass, which brought judgment and condemnation for all.[15] **By Adam's trespass, people became sinners, and death reigned.** Sin's harmful impact, passed to all from Adam's trespass, touches every person. We experience sin's damage personally and universally.

As Paul contrasted Adam with Christ, he stated that "the gift is not like the trespass." What an understatement! Jesus brought a gift greater than death's reign—He brought righteousness. He lived the perfect life we could not and took sin's punishment of death upon Himself. God imputed our sins to Jesus and Jesus's perfect righteousness to us. **Because of Adam, we die physically, but because of Christ, we will live eternally with Him in glory in the new heaven and new earth.[16]** Jesus's promise of life brings comfort throughout generations. Sin remains a terrible enemy, but Jesus, our great Savior, defeated sin and brought us forgiveness. Jesus's greater gift comes by grace.

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11. **Cain and Abel:** Genesis 4:1-12
12. **Abraham's lies:** Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18
13. **Jacob and the blessing:** Genesis 26:34–27:40
14. **Enoch and Elijah:** Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:1-12
15. **Impact of Adam's trespass:** Genesis 3
16. **Eternal glory with Christ:** Romans 8

Justification over Condemnation – 5:16

God's incomparable gift of righteousness supersedes Adam's sin, which brought humanity condemnation and judgment. God's gift followed many trespasses by many people and brought justification. Once justified, believers are declared indisputably righteous, their sins forgiven and sin's power over their lives destroyed. **A believer lives free from God's condemnation by Jesus's saving sacrifice on the cross.** Sin's cost was great, but Christ's salvation is greater.

Life over Death – 5:17

Adam's trespass introduced sin's reign of death over all people. But Paul states how much more believers receive through God's abundant grace and His gift of righteousness. All who trust in Jesus will reign in life through Him. Out of great love for the world, God sent Jesus to pay sin's price in full—once, for all people. Jesus Christ, fully man and fully God and perfectly sinless, alone could represent humanity and defeat sin's hold over us forever. The price Jesus paid to redeem humanity brought Him great suffering. He not only brings life but much more. **Jesus brings abundant life on earth that overflows with blessings in eternal life with Him.**

Obedience over Disobedience – 5:18-19

Verse 18 opens with a reminder that one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people. Paul rejoined his thoughts from verse 12, which reveal our desperate need as sinners. In Adam, all sin and fall short of God's glory.[17] God could rightly have permitted all people to die without any hope of salvation. Instead, God's grace overflowed. God's grace lies beneath His gift of justification. **Paul emphasized God's resulting grace by saying, "Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people."**

God does not justify based upon any work other than that of Jesus Christ. **Justification is by grace alone received through faith alone by Christ's merit and perfect obedience alone.** Through justification, God, as judge, declares believers in right standing with Him. Christ's sacrifice perfectly satisfies His justice. In ourselves, we are not just. But God made a way for sinners to come to Him. Jesus Christ died for our sins. He paid the debt we owed by taking our punishment and then crediting His righteousness to us. God's gift comes through the channel of human faith but is entirely by His grace. We deserved wrath, but God's grace gives us life.

Paul compared the disobedience of one man, Adam, to the righteous and obedient act of Jesus, also one man. Jesus lived a perfect human life, actively and perfectly obeying the law of Moses. He willingly obeyed His Father and took the cross on our behalf. **Jesus's one act of obedience overrules Adam's one act of disobedience for all who trust Him for salvation.** Jesus's atoning death made many—those who believe—righteous because the Father credits Jesus's righteousness to every believer's account. Through this means, we are born anew into everlasting life.

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17. Fall short: Romans 3:9-11, 23

Overflowing Goodness to the Undeserving

The Doctrine of Grace

Paul presented the very bad news that every person throughout time shares in Adam's sin and deserves sin's condemnation—death. Rome's believers could certainly agree with Paul that all people sin. So can we. Not one of us has encountered a perfect person on this earth. None exists. Many of God's chosen people, the Jews, believed they had earned God's unique blessings through the law given to Moses. But keeping the law did not save anyone from physical death, for all died. Furthermore, no sinner can uphold God's righteous standards. **From this backdrop of doom, Paul illuminates God's saving grace.**

Grace is God's favor toward the undeserving. In His grace, God sent Jesus, whose perfect life and sacrificial death pour forth abounding grace to all undeserving, rebellious sinners who will believe.[1] Grace cannot be earned by any person in any way—only Jesus could die to save us.[2] Grace is costly to God but freely offered to people who deserve His wrath. Paul wove God's immeasurable grace throughout his presentation of justification through faith alone.[3] Grace makes God's gift of righteousness possible. Knowing that sin unites all people with Adam makes God's gift of grace even sweeter. Grace offers sinful people access to Jesus by faith apart from the law. Grace brings us from death to life everlasting. God's grace is truly amazing.

To disregard God's grace means continuing to strive for His acceptance and forgiveness through personal merit. **Regardless of good words, kind acts, a responsible work ethic, or charitable giving, we find ourselves greatly lacking before our holy God.** We fail to see what we need most—Jesus, His merit, and the ability to follow in God's ways.

Realizing the depth and extent of God's grace leaves us amazed by Him and His plan of salvation. Fully humbled, we offer praises to our holy God, who reaches from heaven to gather us into His forgiving arms. **God abundantly provides all that eternal life with Him requires through our faith in Jesus.** We live each day grateful for God's loving grace, which we cannot earn but only receive by believing in Him and trusting His promises.

1. **Grace poured forth:** Romans 4:1-8; 5:17
2. **Grace from only Jesus:** Ephesians 2:8-9
3. **Justification by grace:** Romans 3:21-24

Grace's Reign – Romans 5:20-21

After drawing out contrasts between Adam and Christ, Paul explained the relationship between the law and grace. He also highlighted the increase of grace throughout a believer's life and what that means to God's people. **God's grace supremely overcomes sin and death.** Grace brings righteousness and eternal life through Jesus.

Adam Versus Christ (Romans 5:15-21)

In Adam's Family by Birth	In Jesus Christ's Family by Rebirth
● The one man's trespass	● The gift of God in Christ's death
● A perfect world, broken	● A broken world, redeemed
● Adam's disobedience	● Christ's obedience
● All in Adam (everyone) condemned	● All who are in Christ (believers) justified
● Sin and death	● Righteousness and eternal life
● Made sinners	● Made righteous
● Law and more sin	● Grace and more grace

Increased Knowledge of Sin and Grace – 5:20

Paul stated that God gave the law so the trespass might increase. Our upcoming study in Romans 7 will help us better understand Paul's point.

- First, the law increases our knowledge of sin and its profound effects. In chapter 7, Paul says he would not have known what sin was apart from the law. He did not know coveting was a sin until the law said, "You shall not covet."[18] The law did not make Paul covet or even covet more frequently. Instead, the law made Paul aware that coveting is a sin and exposed Paul's covetousness. **The law defined sin, revealing sin's nature and exposing sin's power.**
- Second, through the Holy Spirit, the law convicts us of our sin. Apart from the Holy Spirit's work, the law can harden a person's heart. Through the Holy Spirit, the law teaches God's people to recoil from sin, repent, and look to God for grace. Paul upheld God's law and God's grace. **The Holy Spirit works in a person's heart to reveal our inability to keep God's law and leads us to repentance.**

Paul cast a brilliant light against the background of sin. Grace shines like a bright beacon on a stormy night that cuts through sin's doom over the world. Paul proclaimed that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more." Grace truly exceeds any single sin and all sin combined. **Though sin increases in our lives, grace abounds deeply and in a far more sweeping manner.**

Grace Gives Life – 5:21

Paul introduced a picture of two rival kingdom reigns to compare the power of sin and the power of grace. One kingdom is ruled by a tyrant who entered our world and established ruthless control over all people. The other kingdom is governed by a gracious ruler who came to save all people from the tyrant's control.[19] The tyrant, of course, is sin. **Grace is the ruler who came to save from sin and death.**

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18. Shall not covet: Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21; Romans 7:7
19. Saved from sin's kingdom: Colossians 1:13-14

We think of grace as tender, but grace exudes God's power. Grace powerfully takes the initiative to save. On the other hand, sin is a thief and a swindler. Sin promises pleasure and rewards by fostering the lie that God and His provisions leave us deprived. There is no more damaging deception. Sin promises what it cannot deliver and takes everything from us. **Sin reaches out to snatch our very lives and everything that is true and good.**

God's grace through Christ is so different! Jesus overcame our union with Adam and sin. At a cost we can scarcely describe, Jesus paid sin's debt, providing the only possible way for justification by God. With grace and mercy, God awakens people dead in sin and invites them to come to Him, repent, and believe. Without any merit of their own, those who believe in Christ are credited with His gift of righteousness. Believers are forever sealed by His Holy Spirit and will live in blessed glory with Him for eternity. The riches of the gospel can hardly be captured in human words. Yet, with grateful hearts, we can look to Jesus, our Savior, and live—really live! **Christ's gift of righteousness triumphs over Adam's sin.** Jesus truly is our mighty Savior, our heavenly friend, and our everything in between.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

When Adam exercised his will to choose sin, he did so for all people throughout time. Adam passed on to all of us the preference and propensity to rebel and sin. Sin's reign through Adam results in death for all people. Every person is born into sin, with a sinful nature that yields sinful thoughts, words, and actions. Every person needs a Savior to overcome sin in their lives. Paul contrasts Adam's sin with God's gift of righteousness. The sin of the first man enveloped humanity, but the obedience of one Man, God's own Son, brings life to all who turn to Him in faith. Jesus came from heaven and accomplished the unthinkable. He took our sin upon Himself and gave believers God's righteousness in exchange. We truly are saved by God's grace!

God bestowed His righteousness upon His people through His gift of grace. Born into sin, we were once without hope, in complete discord with the Creator of all life. Through God's grace, believers are credited with His righteousness and are restored to a harmonious relationship with Him. Jesus was born and lived entirely without sin. Because of Jesus, a believer's life is no longer controlled by sin. Instead, God extends amazing grace to all who believe. God's grace is our triumph, our gift, our everything.

Apply It

We live in a world rife with sin. Sin's curse casts the shadow of thorns and decay on the beauty and order of God's handiwork in creation. Adam's choice to sin was passed down to all people. Paul explained that even without the clear terms of God's law to define sin, the people who lived between Adam and Moses committed evil and died. While we can see the visible damage sin causes in our world and others, we easily ignore or excuse the sin that lurks within us. **Unless we acknowledge the universal impact and personal toll of sin and death that came through our ancestor Adam, we will not grasp the wonder of salvation that God offers through Christ.** We can easily agree we share humanity's general sinfulness, but how does God reveal your specific

sin? In what areas of your life has the Holy Spirit pointed to specific sinful attitudes or actions? Knowing God's righteous standards raises our awareness of personal sin and our need for God's grace. When we let go of sins that encumber us, we can experience forgiveness and grow in righteousness. Though sin wreaks havoc around us, God offers a steady flow of His grace to needy people. God did not leave us stuck in Adam's sin; He abundantly provided grace and righteousness through His Son.

Adam served as our human representative, passing along his choice to sin to all people. In an infinitely and eternally greater way, Jesus represented believers as God's sacrifice for sin. Jesus's death brings grace and more grace to all who believe in Him. **One man's sinful disobedience brought death, while one Man's fully obedient life defeated death.** People either live in union with Adam and die or embrace justification through Christ and live forever—there is no middle ground. Have you accepted God's gift of righteousness through Christ? If not, now is the time to turn to Him, repent, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your every step. If you have, how apparent is your relationship with Christ to the world around you? What might your attitude, actions, and responses to others reveal about your belief in Christ? Jesus gives us the gift of grace and righteousness, which is greater than our sin.

"Grace" is a word commonly spoken in Christian circles. However, our familiarity with the word can shrink our wonder at all it means. Do you realize that you do not deserve any or all of the grace God has given you? The truth of salvation in Christ should continue to inspire awe and amaze us. Why would God so love people who turned away from Him and ignored His good gifts? In abundant, overflowing grace, God not only felt compassion for a world of sinners, but sent His own perfect Son into that world to die a gruesome death to pay sin's penalty. God graciously declares redeemed sinners whole and perfect, covered in righteousness—not their own, but that of His Son. In grace, God generously gives spiritual riches to the poor and needy, strength to the weak, and rest to the weary. God's grace incorporates His perfect love, invincible power, and endless resources. In grace, God meets our needs, small and great. **God's grace brings victory and triumph into a believer's life.** How will you allow God's infinite grace to flood your heart with joyful worship and fresh wonder?

John Newton was a man who knew he deserved God's judgment, not His grace. Newton's role as a trader of enslaved people in the 18th century brought degradation to many. **However, when the gospel reached his sinful heart, Newton fervently preached the greatness of the grace he had received.** He helped William Wilberforce, the Christian who led the battle to end slavery in the British Empire, to found what is now commonly known as the Anti-Slavery Society, and he published personal confessions of his previous involvement in the trade. He also wrote many well-loved hymns. The best known of his hymns sings his own story:

> Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
> That saved a wretch like me!
> I once was lost, but now am found—
> Was blind, but now I see.[20]

We need to remember that without Christ, we remain lost, blind, and broken. But like John Newton, we can celebrate being found and given eyes to see. **We can celebrate God's grace.** How will you thank God for His grace to you?

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20. John Newton, "Amazing Grace" (public domain, 1779).

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Death to Sin

Lesson 10 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 9 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What helpful perspective of God's grace did you receive from the lecture?

2. From the notes, how do a believer's union with Christ and peace with God impact daily life?

Second Day: Read Romans 6:1-4.

Paul taught that believers no longer live in sin.

3. What thoughts in chapter 5 prompted Paul to ask the question in 6:1, and why? (See also Romans 3:5-8, 31.)

4. Who are "we" and "us" in these verses? If you are part of this group, rewrite verse 2 to describe you.

5. From your experience, what happens when Christians believe their sin does not matter? (See also Romans 1–3.)

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6. When have you allowed yourself to believe God's gracious forgiveness makes your sin excusable?

Third Day: Reread Romans 6:1-4.

Paul used baptism to illustrate a believer's death to sin.

7. Describe the spiritual reality to which water baptism points. (See also Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:5; 2:38; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26-27; Colossians 2:11-12.)

8. a. Specifically, how did Paul say believers have died to sin?

   b. If Christ is your Savior, how have you experienced this death, and in what ways are you living a new life? (See also Romans 5:12-21; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.)

   c. What power strengthens believers to live a new life? How does this impact your view of sin?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 6:5-10.

Believers are eternally united with Christ.

9. From these verses, name ways believers are united with Christ.

   Romans 6:5

   Romans 6:6-7

   Romans 6:8-9

   Romans 6:10

10. How do Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:5-10 help explain what Paul meant by “our old self”?

11. For which aspects of your union with Christ will you thank God, and where do you need His help to believe He has set you free from sin? (See also Colossians 2:11-15 or other verses you know.)

Fifth Day: Read Romans 6:9-11.

Believers should view themselves through their union with Christ.

12. a. From verses 9-11, list facts about Jesus and those who believe in Him.

    b. As you meditate on these facts about Jesus and His people, how do they impact your attitudes and beliefs? What do you learn and take to heart?

13. What would it look like for you to be dead to sin but alive to Christ in each of the following?

    Your home

    Your school, workplace, or community

    Your church, service, or worship

Sixth Day: Review Romans 6:1-11.

A believer’s new identity in Christ frees them from sin’s power.

14. How does Paul’s command for believers to consider themselves dead to sin challenge or encourage you? What truth will you pray to make a part of your life this week?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 6:1-11

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 10 Notes

Romans 6:1-11

Focus Verse

"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:11)

Outline

- New Identity – Romans 6:1-4
- New Power – Romans 6:5-10
- New Understanding – Romans 6:11

Engage

Who are you? How you define yourself when you first meet people often reveals who you believe yourself to be. Some people define themselves by their family name or position within the community. Others choose ethnicity or special interests to distinguish themselves and establish a connection with others. Many describe themselves by their work, family roles, or achievements. Unfortunately, people also define themselves and others in less favorable ways: failure, loser, disappointment, degenerate, hopeless. Almost without thinking, we strive to preserve what positively characterizes us and redefine what does not. Can people change who they are any more than a leopard can change its spots? **Perhaps our true identity rests on something deeper than observable characteristics and shifting circumstances.** Who or what decides our identity? Does a truly objective perspective exist?

As Romans 6 opens, Paul plunges into proclaiming the power of God's righteousness, which transforms a believer's identity. In Adam, sin dominates all people. However, faith in Christ and the justification He secures permanently redefine people. Paul taught that God alone decides who people are based on their relationship to Him. In Christ, sin no longer directs lives, perspectives, plans, and priorities. **A believer's new identity in Christ frees them from sin's power.** Having been freed from sin, we respond in love for God and gratitude for Jesus.

As Paul concluded his contrast of Adam's sin and Jesus's sacrifice in Romans 5, he introduced the complicated relationship between sin and grace. Mercifully, Paul offered further instructions to clarify salvation's implications for those who believe. **As we study Romans 6 and 7, we join Paul and the faithful Romans in wrestling with sin's role in a believer's life.** While God's moral standards remain central in the life of a flourishing believer, Paul explained that sin cannot be defeated by either ignoring or following the law.[1] Only Jesus's death and resurrection can defeat sin.

1. **Law's limitations:** Romans 6–7

New Identity – Romans 6:1-4

Believers live in the glorious reality of who they have become in Christ. Paul used baptism to illustrate how Christ's followers fully participate by faith in His death, burial, and resurrection. **A believer's union with Christ changes everything about their life today and forever.**

Changed Behavior – 6:1

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" Paul's opening questions reflect his rhetorical style from Romans 3.[2] **Paul's teaching that God saves by grace apart from works[3] may have led some Gentile believers to justify participation in the idolatrous Greco-Roman culture around them.** Meanwhile, Jewish believers, who had defined their identity by God's law, likely wondered if God's increasing grace would encourage increasing sin. Paul clearly declared that faith in Jesus upholds rather than nullifies the law.[4]

Dead to Sin – 6:2

Paul emphatically answered his proposed question with a literary shout: "By no means!" **His insistent tone reflected his belief in God's miraculous power to curb sinful appetites apart from the law.** He went on to say, "We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" Paul did not say, "Following God's commands keeps us from sinning," although that is true. Instead, Paul presented the gospel's radical power. While sin dominates and dictates the lives of unbelievers, Jesus defines and renews the lives of believers. Once believers were in Adam; now they are in Christ.[5] In Jesus, believers have a new destiny and identity apart from sin.

Paul's Grammar – Paul's repetition of the word "we" emphasizes the distinction he was drawing. Believers with a new identity in Christ are different than unbelievers, who are still in Adam—a believer's former state. Paul also used the word "died" to reveal a completed action. Paul did not say here, "We are dying to sin" or "We are continuing to die to sin." Nor did he say, "We shall die to sin." **The death to sin that defines believers was eternally accomplished when Jesus died more than two thousand years ago.**

Possible Views – In what sense have believers died to sin? Many have pondered this mystery since Paul originally penned his letter. **Thoughtfully considering various views helps us better understand why and how we live holy lives—dead to sin.** Each view listed below contains a basic idea with positive points and problems.

- *Christians no longer respond to sin.* The basic idea asserts that the dead are indeed dead. No matter how loud sin shouts, dead bodies do not respond. Sin does not appeal to the dead, so believers will not respond to temptation. This view agrees with Paul's past tense use of "died." However, this view contradicts God's Word about our sinfulness.[6] If sin could no longer tempt believers, Paul would not have needed to command believers to count themselves dead to sin and not let sin reign.[7]

2. **Rhetorical questions:** Romans 3:1, 3, 5, 7, 8
3. **Grace proclaimed:** Romans 5:20-21
4. **Faith upholds law:** Romans 3:31
5. **Adam's sin, Christ's gift:** Romans 5:12-21
6. **Our sinfulness:** 1 John 1:8–2:1
7. **Paul's commands:** Romans 6:11-13

- *Christians should die to sin.* The basic idea asserts that Christians are to die to sin or crucify the former self. This view aligns with passages about a believer's role in sanctification—growth and maturity into Christ's likeness.[8] The limitation of this idea is that God has already accomplished a believer's death to sin in Christ.[9] Instead of crucifying themselves, believers are instructed to put sin "to death."[10]
- *Christians are dying to sin day by day.* The basic idea asserts that union with Christ results in growing in holiness and increasingly dying to sin's call. This view positively recognizes that growth in Christ flows from union with Him. But a problem lies in the verb tense. Instead of "died," this view uses "are dying." While temptations change over a lifetime and believers must constantly depend on Christ's power to resist sin,[11] they have already died to sin in Christ.
- *Christians have renounced sin.* The basic idea asserts that believers died to sin when they renounced it. They renounced sin when they received Christ as Savior and asked Him to deliver them from sin. This view positively affirms "died" as a past action. The problem with this view arises from renunciation, an action people must accomplish for themselves to gain salvation. People are powerless to join themselves to Christ. Only God's power can rescue people from sin's reign in death and transfer them to life in His Son's kingdom.[12]
- *Christians have died to sin's guilt.* The basic idea asserts that because justification frees believers from sin's guilt, they have died to sin. Positively, God's declaration of righteous standing through faith in Christ does free believers from sin's guilt and future penalty. However, addressing only guilt does not explain why believers cannot live in sin any longer.

God's work in believers' hearts and lives remains a partial mystery. Our finite minds cannot grasp the vastness of His truth. **Our inability to fully capture a believer's complicated relationship with sin does not diminish the glorious truth that God plainly sees: Believers "are those who have died to sin."** We are called to consider ourselves dead to sin on an ongoing basis in thought, word, and deed. We are freed from sin's rule and guilt, empowered by the Spirit to live for Christ.

Baptized into Christ – 6:3-4

Paul referenced baptism, a familiar practice for all Jewish and Gentile believers, to help explain their new relationship to sin.[13] Water baptism originated in Israel's exodus from Egypt. In 1 Corinthians, Paul says that when God brought the Israelites through the Red Sea, "they were all baptized into Moses." This meant God joined them to Moses—their mediator before God, who led them to freedom.[14] Through Moses, God brought the Israelites out from slavery in Egypt.[15]

Although water is powerless to change people, in baptism it symbolizes the Holy Spirit's work uniting believers with Christ. When believers are "baptized into Christ Jesus" by faith, the Spirit permanently joins them to Christ—the Mediator reconciling believers to God.[16] Believers were once in Adam. Now, they have a new, permanent spiritual presence in Christ; where He is, they are.[17] Water baptism symbolizes a believer's inner spiritual "change of address." Believers may

8. **Sanctification:** 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Galatians 5:16-26
9. **Believers and sin:** Romans 6:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17
10. **Put sin to death:** Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5
11. **Resisting temptation:** 1 Corinthians 10:12-13
12. **Christ's reign:** Romans 5:12-21; Colossians 1:13
13. **Believers' baptism:** Matthew 28:18-20
14. **Joined to Moses:** 1 Corinthians 10:1-2
15. **Israel's deliverance:** Exodus 12–14
16. **Jesus, the Mediator:** 1 Timothy 2:5
17. **Adam versus Christ:** Romans 5:12-21

sin, but spiritually, believers do not and cannot live in Adam any longer. Christians have been delivered from slavery in sin's kingdom into Christ's kingdom, where grace reigns.

A believer's union with Christ blends heaven with earth. How could the one true God of the universe dare to stoop and become one with His people? But He did, and He does; all who believe are in Christ. Although we cannot fully comprehend this wonderful gift, the Bible offers helpful illustrations in addition to baptism. The vine and the branches show that believers bear fruit because Jesus works in and through them.[18] The Lord's Supper displays the spiritual reality that Jesus's life sustains us.[19] Paul helped early Christians understand that marriage between a man and a woman illustrates Jesus's loving, sacrificial, eternal bond with His Church.[20]

Paul deepened readers' grasp of this powerful, divine reality by explaining that through the Holy Spirit, God joins believers to Christ in every way. **Believers are identified with Christ in His life, death, burial, and resurrection.** Paul repeated his emphasis on death with these statements: "All of us who were baptized ... into his death ... were therefore buried with him through baptism into death." Baptism portrays a believer's death to sin through forgiveness, burial with Christ, and resurrection to new life in God-given righteousness.

What point was Paul trying to make for his readers? Until we bury a dead body, the decaying corpse remains part of our lives in some ways. Burial fully and permanently separates the dead from the living. While death and burial may seem negative, burial in this context means that the believer's death to sin is final. Believers are dead to sin and united to Christ. **To go back to sin would be like digging up a dead body.** A believer's absolute death to sin paves the way forward: "Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

New Power – Romans 6:5-10

Verses 5-10 unfold the truth that for Christians, resurrection and life follow death. In verse 5, Paul asserted that believers are united with Christ's death and resurrection. In verses 6-10, he further explained his assertion.

Living with Jesus Now – 6:5-7

Building on verse 4, Paul highlighted the cause-and-effect relationship of sharing in Christ's death. "If we have been united with him in a death like his," something miraculous results: "We will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his." Christ's resurrection and the power to live a new life transform a believer's reality. **Union with Christ in His death frees believers from sin's absolute control.**

Imagine this truth's impact on believers of Paul's day. Jewish believers would have been freed from battling sin through rule following. Gentile believers would have been freed from their culture's habitual rebellion against God. If Christ is your Savior, then you have died to sin in Him. **Your ultimate victory over sin is certain: "Our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."**

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18. Bearing fruit: John 15:1-16; Romans 11:17-21; Galatians 5:22-23
19. Lord's Supper: Matthew 26:26-28
20. Christ and His Church: Ephesians 5:22-32; Revelation 19:7-8; 21:9–22:5

Sin Rendered Powerless

The Doctrine of Salvation

Salvation in Jesus frees believers from sin,[1] securing an entirely new quality of life that begins now and extends forever. [2] Jesus saves believers from the penalty, or punishment, their sin deserves—erasing sin's guilt and shame. Jesus also saves believers from sin's power and control, which are often coated in fleeting and enticing pleasure. One day, Jesus's reign on the restored earth will save His children from every trace of sin's presence in His creation. In salvation by grace through faith, the Holy Spirit's power cancels sin's allure, exposes its destructiveness, and emancipates believers to reject sin's downward pull.

Paul's assertion that believers died to sin helps us understand God's heart in salvation. When God saves people, He does more than ensure their eternity in heaven. **God takes believers out of Adam and places them in Christ, demolishing our present bias toward sin.** He delivers us from sin's slave-like rule over our will, emotions, and behaviors. Through a believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection, the death-producing sinful life in Adam has ended. God's glorious power through Christ has brought believers into a new life of righteousness for eternity.

If we believe salvation only includes sin's punishment being satisfied on the cross, we forfeit the freedom Christ secured from sin's persistent and ravenous power. If Jesus did not defeat sin's power to rule us, then no hope exists for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit as part of God's spiritual kingdom today.[3] Without hope, people accept sin's temptations as an inevitable defeat rather than an opportunity to participate in Jesus's victory—already won on our behalf.

Believing the good news that Jesus has already won every believer's battle with sin—past, present, and future—ignites gratitude and increasing determination to shake off sin's grip. Believers will still sin, but sin's slavery and the old, sin-loving self are gone forever. To remain in sin is unthinkable when destined for an eternity without it. From the moment of salvation, sinless Jesus securely anchors believers' most authentic identity. If you believe in Jesus Christ, rejoice; His victory has changed your identity forever! The mighty Holy Spirit stands ready to enable you to resist sin and live in Christ.

1. **Jesus and sin:** Isaiah 53:10-12; Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 2:14-18
2. **New life:** John 10:10
3. **God's kingdom:** Romans 14:17

Once again, understanding Paul's terms highlights God's power at work. The "old self" is the old, unsaved life, the whole self that believers once were in Adam—their former identity. For all who are united to Christ, that old self is gone forever—dead and buried.[21] "The body ruled by sin" is different than the old self. This phrase likely refers to every Christian's continuing bias toward sin.[22] In this context, this phrase may also acknowledge that until the day our bodies die a natural

21. **Old self:** Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 2:11-15; 3:9-10
22. **Sinful nature:** Romans 8:12-14

death, they may behave sinfully as an "instrument of wickedness."[23] **Because a believer's former identity was crucified with Christ, their ongoing bias toward sin can be overcome through Christ's resurrection power.**

A Present Resurrection – 6:8-10

A believer's union with Christ guarantees a remarkable reality: "We will also live with him." **Paul's words include a believer's future resurrection into eternal life and a foretaste of resurrection life here and now.** Through His death and resurrection, Jesus passed forever from the world where death reigned. He lives and reigns in resurrection life, now and forever. Similarly, God has brought believers out from under death's reign and into the reign of grace—into a present resurrection in Christ.[24] In his letter to the Philippians, Paul expressed his desire for this present victory over sin: "I want to know Christ ... [and] the power of his resurrection." [25]

Sin's inescapable presence impacts all who live on earth. While still in Adam, people are powerless to resist sin's temptation.[26] While alive on earth, Jesus also lived in relationship to sin, but He was not powerless against it. He suffered sin's temptation for us without ever yielding to sin.[27] **When Jesus died for our sin and rose from the dead, He triumphed over sin and death forever—securing our victory over the same.** Paul wrote, "Since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him." Believers share this victory through union with Christ.

The words "died (or dead) to sin" occur three times in Romans 6; twice these words describe believers,[28] and once they point to Jesus.[29] Because Paul chose to repeat this phrase within the same flow of thought, we can compare a believer's death to sin with Christ's death to sin. In verse 10, Paul did not say Jesus died for sin, but He died to sin—the exact phrase used about believers. Jesus's relationship to sin is finished forever because "he died to sin once for all." **A believer's relationship to sin is finished in Christ.**

The writer John Stott compared the lives of Christians to a two-volume biography. He wrote, "Volume one is the story of ... the old self, of me before my conversion. Volume two is the story of ... the new self, of me after I was made a new creation in Christ. Volume one of my biography ended with the judicial death of the old self. I was a sinner. I deserved to die. I did die. I received my [just punishment] in my Substitute with whom I have become one. Volume two of my biography opened with my resurrection. My old life [has] finished, a new life to God has begun."[30]

New Understanding – Romans 6:11

The compounding truths of Paul's letter climax in his first command. While Paul later wrote about specific behaviors of those who have died to sin, verse 11 targets what Christians think and believe: "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." **With this verse, the tone and mood of Paul's letter shifts to explaining how believing people live day-by-day in response to the gospel's truth**.

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23. **Instruments of wickedness:** Romans 6:13
24. **Reigning grace:** Romans 5:21; Colossians 1:12-13
25. **Power of resurrection:** Philippians 3:10-14
26. **All sinned:** Romans 5:12
27. **Jesus sinless:** Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 4:15; 5:8-9
28. **Believers died to sin:** Romans 6:2, 11
29. **Jesus died to sin:** Romans 6:10
30. John R. W. Stott, *Men Made New: An Exposition of Romans 5–8* (InterVarsity Press, 1966), 49.

New Reality – 6:11a

With the words "In the same way," Paul connected this first command with a believer's new reality in Christ. Jesus is believers' new spiritual address and identity. Where He is, they are; what He is, they are—dead to sin and alive to God. **While unable to fully grasp this incomprehensible truth, countless Christians have believed what God declares and enjoyed freedom from sin and a relationship with their loving God.**

Paul next addressed believers' thinking and beliefs with the Greek word *logizomai,* translated as "count," "credit," "consider," or "reckon." In mathematics, counting verifies concrete reality and has nothing to do with wishful thinking. Earthly bank balances confirm this reality. God demonstrates *logizomai* in action. In chapter 4, Paul used "count" or "credit" 11 times, explaining how God justifies the ungodly through faith.[31] God does not count believers' sins against them.[32] **Paul commanded the Roman Christians and believers today to accept what God declares as true.**

New Trajectory – 6:11b

Paul's command did not end with believers counting themselves dead to sin. He included another life-altering reality believers must reckon as true: "Count yourselves ... alive to God." In the gospel's great exchange, God has counted our sins against His beloved Son and punished them there.[33] God then credits Christ's perfect righteousness to believers.[34] **The trajectory of a believer's salvation remains secure because these facts are true: Jesus really died for our sin, suffering for our transgression.** God really does transfer His Son's perfect righteousness to all who believe.

Those whom God counts as righteous in Christ enjoy a new life and fellowship with Him—now alive to God. From this point forward, Paul discussed the characteristics of an abundant life lived to God. But first, God calls all believers to count as true what is in fact true. Believers' union with Christ undergirds God's loving and ongoing sanctification and growth as they walk on earth toward eternity. A completely new relationship to sin changes the way God's children think and live. **A believer's new identity in Christ frees them from sin's power.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul offered believers God's perspective on their new identity in Christ. Sin no longer characterizes or enslaves believers. **Through their union with Christ, believers have died to sin.** While temptations remain, the old self and sin's irresistible draw are buried with Christ. In Christ, believers can enjoy resurrection-empowered lives through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection overwrites a believer's past identity.

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31. **Justified through faith:** Romans 3:21-26; 4:5
32. **Sins not counted:** Psalms 32:2; 130:3-4; Isaiah 43:25; Acts 22:16
33. **Sin's punishment:** John 3:16; Romans 8:32
34. **Righteousness credited:** 2 Corinthians 5:21

With Jesus's invitation for believers to live in Him by faith, sin permanently loses its power to determine their destinies. Through Christ, believers are saved from sin's eternal death penalty and present power to destroy life. **A believer's new life begins with accepting what God has declared true of them.** With unrivaled authority, Creator God declares believers righteous, united to Christ, dead to sin, and alive to Him in Christ Jesus. These truths form sanctification's solid foundation.

Apply It

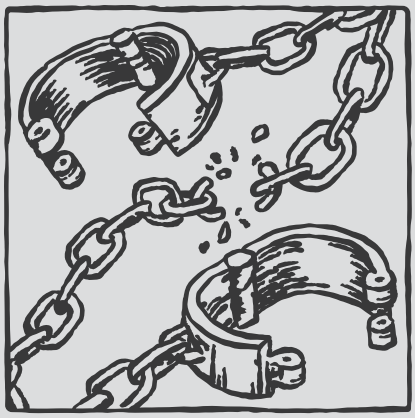
If you are a believer, Paul's command is for you: Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God. In Christ, you died to everything that defined you before your conversion. That former identity is buried and gone forever. However, we still live in a sin-driven world. Satan wields a perspective of our past, present, and future potential that seeks to define us. But God, your Creator, overrules every opinion and defines you through your relationship with His Son. Whether you view your old self fondly or with regret, rejoice that striving to measure up to God's righteous standard is over and your consistent failure to do so is erased from your record. What do you believe to be true about who you are? Does your identity come from yourself, others, or God? How can you nourish your identity in Christ with God's true Word this week?

What does your attitude toward sin show that you believe about the gospel? Do you look forward to a consequence-free eternity while embracing, excusing, or even cherishing sin today? Sin cannot destroy God's saving purpose to transform believers into the likeness of His Son.[35] However, God's Word warns that if we continue carelessly and unrepentantly in willful sin, it may be a sign our faith is not genuine.[36] Will you take this opportunity to examine yourself and your faith? **Why make excuses for sin that brings you guilt and shame when you could run to Jesus, whose grace overpowers sin's rule?** God restores the repentant and never crushes those who struggle.[37]

Because believers still feel temptation's pull, many doubt their new identity in Christ. At some point, most Christians ask, "What if I go back to sin?" If your weakness frightens you, know Christ is stronger than sin's hold on you. Your identity is now in Him, and you cannot return wholeheartedly to sin. **Every time you experience conviction over sin, your new identity in Christ is confirmed.** You can sin. You do sin. But sin now collides with who you are in Jesus. Where are you experiencing conflict between your new identity and sin's lingering allure? Rejoice in this evidence of your position in Christ! Be encouraged! How does the truth that you are united to Christ's death and resurrection power help you count yourself dead to that sin and alive to God?

35. Saving purpose: Romans 8:29; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 1 John 3:2
36. Warning: Matthew 7:21-23; 1 Corinthians 6:7-11
37. God restores: Matthew 11:28-30; 12:20

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Alive to God

Lesson 11 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 10 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What insights about salvation did you find meaningful in the lecture?

2. How did the notes impact your ability to explain a believer's death to sin and union with Christ?

Second Day: Read Romans 6:12-14.

Paul gave four commands and a promise.

3. What truths in earlier chapters of Romans lead up to the word "therefore" in verse 12? (See Lesson 10 along with Romans 4:22-25; 5:17, 20-21; 6:3-11 and any other verses you find.)

4. a. List the two negative and the two positive commands given in these verses, and explain why lasting change involves both negative and positive actions. (See also Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10.)

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b. In what ways are you tempted to offer any part of yourself to sin? How has union with Christ helped you to offer that aspect of yourself to Him instead?

5. How does the promise in verse 14 make it possible to obey the commands in verses 12-13? (See also question 3.)

Third Day: Read Romans 6:15-16.

Paul explained why believers under grace should not sin.

6. How do the questions in Romans 6:1 and 6:15 differ, and how are they alike? What truth do these questions reveal?

7. What does it mean to be "slaves to sin" or "to obedience"? What point is Paul making with this example?

8. What is your relationship to Jesus and His righteous reign of grace?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 6:17-18.

Paul thanked God for setting believers free from sin.

9. a. Compare and contrast obedience from the heart with following rules.

b. How might your life display both?

10. What is the pattern of teaching that claims the allegiance of believers? (See also Romans 3:21-26; 6:1-14 or other Scripture passages you find.)

11. If Christ has set you free from sin, what are some aspects of your freedom for which you can thank God?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 6:19-23.

Paul contrasted the results of serving sin with seeking God's righteousness.

12. What are the results of being a slave to sin versus being a slave to God?

13. a. How have you personally experienced sin's destructive impact, which leads to death?

    b. If you are a believer, what have you learned about God's grace and power to redeem the consequences of your sin for His glory and your good?

14. What attitudes and behaviors flow from meditating on God's extravagant gift of eternal life?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 6:12-23.

God's grace makes believers eternally right with Him and frees them to live holy lives.

15. What step of obedience could you take this week as an expression of gratitude for God's grace toward you?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 6:12-23

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 11 Notes

Romans 6:12-23

Focus Verse

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

Outline

- Know Your Condition – Romans 6:12-14
- Know Your Master – Romans 6:15-18
- Know Your Destiny – Romans 6:19-23

Engage

Why do you get up each morning? What thought first enters your mind most days? Each phase of adult life drives our focus in specific directions. You might be living to please a boss to get paid or promoted. Perhaps you live to serve your family, friends, or loved ones. Sometimes we work toward specific goals or events. Our choices and behaviors testify to our priorities, needs, and sense of purpose. The choices we make also demonstrate our character—how we view ourselves and others. Sometimes who we imagine ourselves to be does not align with how we spend our time and energy. What might your life's focus reveal about you? **Is it possible that the way we live reveals not just who we are but whose we are?**

In Romans 6 Paul answered that question with a resounding, "Yes!" Paul presented the shocking reality that how we live reveals not merely what we value and prioritize but to whom we belong. Belonging to a family, group, or culture charts a life's course, creating some opportunities and limiting others. But all people are born under sin's power—enslaved and unable to escape. In Christ, believers died to sin's mastery and now live for God. **God's grace makes believers eternally right with Him and frees them to live holy lives.** Believers belong to God, reaping the eternal rewards of living for righteousness.

So far in our study, we have joined Paul and first-century Christians in marveling at the majestic truths woven into God's multifaceted salvation plan. Through faith in Christ, sinners are justified—declared not guilty—and reconciled to God. By grace, believers enjoy union with Christ, peace with God, a new identity, and victory over sin's power. **Chapter 6 concludes with a call to action for all who are now eternally alive to God.**

Know Your Condition – Romans 6:12-14

Salvation's truths describe inspiring new conditions for living. Paul first commanded believers to count themselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.[1] Paul next offered all readers practical instruction about living for God.

Four Commands – 6:12-13

"Therefore" emphasizes Paul's transition as he exhorted believers to accept a new reality—being dead to sin and alive to God. He presented four commands that capture the reasonable responses of people now dead to sin. Through reliance on Christ's resurrection power and the Holy Spirit's enabling, believers can joyfully embrace these commands. **Two negative commands balance two positive commands to capture what the Holy Spirit empowers believers to stop doing and start doing.**

- Do not let sin reign in your mortal body.
- Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness.
- Offer yourself to God.
- Offer every part of your body to Him as an instrument of righteousness.

These commands marshal resistance against sin's tyrannical reign in our bodies. Paul's previous reference in Romans 6:6 to "the body ruled by sin" helps us understand the physical component of these four steps. Our natural bodies are biased toward sin and the temporary pleasure sin can provide. Before salvation, sinful patterns of behavior characterize life. After salvation, believers can offer every part of themselves to God. The term "offer" is like offering a sacrifice—an act of worship—an idea that will be proclaimed further in Romans 12. We can choose to stop (or "put off") sinful beliefs and behavior, then start (or "put on") Christ's character and actions.[2]

Paul expressed believers' responsibility to join their will with Christ's power to resist obeying sin's evil desires and live differently—as instruments of righteousness instead of wickedness. In chapter 3, Paul argued that under sin, no one understands or seeks God.[3] In Christ and alive to God, believers begin offering their minds and hearts to God. Thoughts of revenge, anger, and malice can be replaced with new thoughts about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy.[4] Love for God and others overcomes love for self, yielding to God-focused Bible study, worship, prayer, and prioritization of others.

Mind and heart transformation flows into expressions of faith with every part of a believer's body. The appropriate expression of faith for people "who have been brought from death to life" is to surrender their bodies as instruments placed in God's hands. **Rather than offer God their self-motivated good deeds, believers offer God their eyes, ears, mouths, hands, and feet to do His bidding.** Knowing that what we see and hear influences our lives, people alive to God choose to watch and listen to that which honors God and aligns with His truth.[5] Though the tongue is untamable by human effort, those in Christ surrender their mouths to Him, committing to speak

1. **Count yourselves:** Romans 6:11
2. **Stop and start:** Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10
3. **No one seeks God:** Romans 3:9-18
4. **New thoughts:** Philippians 4:8
5. **Influence of eyes, ears:** Matthew 6:22-23; Mark 4:23-24

praise, truth, encouragement, and the good news.[6] People belonging to God use their hands to work with integrity and generosity and their feet to carry the gospel wherever God leads.[7] In the world, God wields His people as pleasing instruments of His righteousness, goodness, justice, mercy, and love. This characterizes a new life united with Christ in a resurrection like His—fully alive to God.[8]

One Promise – 6:14

Gripped by the knowledge that believers are united to Christ, Paul declared, "Sin shall no longer be your master." Jesus's triumph gives grace the last word in every Christ-follower's life. Until God unites Christians to Jesus through faith, they are powerless to escape sin's relentless increase and constant condemnation. On the cross, Jesus died to sin and broke its power over us.[9] Now, believers live under the power of new life and grace forever. They no longer live under the law, where sin flourishes alongside human imperfection.[10] The law encourages behavior change but also reveals human inability to keep the law wholeheartedly apart from Christ.

A believer's union with Christ through faith in Him permanently transfers control from sin's power to God's unmatched grace through the Spirit.[11] Under grace, believers are free to serve God from the heart, fulfill His purpose, and live righteous lives.[12]

Two groups opposed Paul on this point. Jewish traditionalists were committed to law-keeping as a way to keep relating to God and attain or preserve salvation and righteousness. Meanwhile, antinomians (from the Greek for "against law") rejected the law for salvation or as a guide for moral conduct. One group advocated legalistic moralism and the other advocated complete freedom—even license—to sin. The gospel's glorious truth resolutely stands against both errors: Jesus delivered believers from the law's penalty and condemnation. In Him, they can freely obey God from the heart, empowered by the Holy Spirit. **Sin's mastery crumbles before God's grace toward sinners.**

Know Your Master – Romans 6:15-18

Paul had recently asked, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"[13] In other words, if we are justified by grace, does that mean we can live however we want? This question challenges any misunderstanding of the gospel that might excuse old yet ongoing sinful habits, lifestyles, or patterns. Most basically, Paul expressed curiosity about how much life change believers might experience in Christ. In response, Paul explained that a believer's identity and quality of life are completely new.

Now What? – 6:15

With a believer's new identity settled, commands given, and an encouraging promise shared, Paul asked a slightly different rhetorical question: "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Paul seems to shift from addressing how much a believer's life patterns

6. **Surrendered tongue:** Ephesians 4:29; James 3:1-12
7. **Feet bringing good news:** Romans 10:15
8. **New life:** Romans 6:4-8
9. **Sin's power broken:** Romans 6:3-10
10. **Sin flourishes:** Romans 5:20
11. **Abundant grace and life:** Romans 5:12-21
12. **Free to serve:** Revelation 1:5-6
13. **Go on sinning:** Romans 6:1

might change to wondering about even one sinful act. Should someone dead to sin and living as God's instrument of righteousness ever sin at all? His answer still resonates: "By no means!" Sin is not compatible with a life that Christ redeems. Mercifully, Paul continued helping believers understand their new lives, yielded to the control of grace rather than sin and external laws. **The transforming force of grace shapes new desires and empowers new life that excludes sin.**

Old Master – 6:16

Without exception, Paul declared, "You are slaves of the one you obey." **Apart from Christ, sin controls people, demanding they yield their bodies to wicked thoughts, words, and actions.** At their best, unbelievers can follow some moral standards, but they cannot obey God from the heart.[14] The unsaved obey sin and are powerless against it.[15] Without God's help, no one escapes the grasp of sin—an evil slave driver. Living under the reign of grace means choosing freedom and righteousness instead of returning to bondage.[16]

While the analogy of slavery may be uncomfortable for today's readers, slavery permeated Jewish history[17] and Roman culture; approximately one-third of those in the church of Rome were enslaved themselves. **For Paul's original readers, his example illustrated ownership and control.** Paul did not condone slavery; he put slave traders in the same category as parent killers and the sexually immoral.[18] He taught the equality of all believers, whether slaves or free, who belong to Christ.[19]

Slavery to sin always leads to death. Adam and Eve believed Satan's lie that minimized sin's consequences rather than God's truth that sin leads to death.[20] What happened when they ate the fruit that God forbade? They died. Their unbroken fellowship with God died, and they hid from Him. Their personalities and relationships began to die; they lied and shifted blame to one another. Eventually, their bodies died, for God said, "Dust you are and to dust you will return."[21]

Paul commanded believers not to offer their bodies to sin as instruments of wickedness because sin still leads to death. For believers and unbelievers alike, sin causes death in our relationships, bodies, and future opportunities, to name a few examples. Sin can also cause believers to lose sight of their hope in Christ, minimizing joy, freedom, and delight in God. **Enslaved to sin, unbelievers ultimately experience the second death—eternal, conscious torment and separation from God.[22]**

New Master – 6:17-18

"But thanks be to God," Paul exclaimed, "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." **Jesus has redeemed believers from sin's enslavement, tyranny, and eternal consequences.**

Paul rejoiced that the reign of grace gives believers new power to obey God wholeheartedly. Before they chose to sin, Adam and Eve obeyed God this way. After they sinned, they and all humanity lost that ability. On the cross, Jesus rescued believers from sin's deadly destruction.

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14. **Cannot obey:** Romans 8:7
15. **Powerless:** Romans 5:6, 8
16. **Reign of grace:** Romans 5:21; 6:14
17. **Jewish slavery:** Exodus 1:1-14; Judges 3:7-8, 12-14; 4:1-3; 6:1-6; 10:6-16; 13:1; Jeremiah 25:11-12; Daniel 1:1-4; 9:1-19
18. **Slave traders:** 1 Timothy 1:9-10
19. **Slave or free:** 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:11
20. **Satan's lie:** Genesis 2:15–3:6
21. **Death from sin:** Genesis 3:7-24
22. **Second death:** Revelation 20:12-15

Freed to Belong

The Doctrine of Redemption

"Redemption," a word borrowed from the commercial world, means to buy out of slavery. Redemption of sin-enslaved people carries a steep cost, which cannot be paid with currency like silver or gold.[1] On the cross, Jesus paid redemption's price with His shed blood. In Romans 3, when Paul used the term "redemption" to explain a shimmering facet of salvation, he linked Christ's eternally sufficient work with Old Testament accounts of God's redemptive relationship with Israel.[2] God has appointed Jesus as humanity's eternal Redeemer.[3]

Redeemed people do not belong to themselves. The one who pays the redemption price owns what has been redeemed. Jesus "purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation."[4] **Those who accept Jesus's redemption and liberation from sin's bondage receive the privilege of belonging to God.** The Holy Spirit of God indwells the redeemed, producing the most intimate relationship possible on earth and proving God's ownership.[5]

Sin deceptively leads people to believe that the benefits of personal autonomy exceed the joys of belonging to God. Those who accept this lie believe they are free to live as they please while their will remains sedated and enslaved to sin. Giving undue authority and priority to personal pleasure, they underestimate the cost of their sin. This repeats the sin of Adam in thinking one can be independent of God and not accountable to Him. The illusion of autonomy robs people of the joy and peace that Jesus offers through His blood-bought redemption from sin.

In contrast to autonomy, holiness characterizes everything and everyone belonging to God. Set apart for Him, holy people enjoy the Spirit's power, which enables them to honor God with their thoughts, choices, and behaviors. **Those who dedicate their lives to God as Redeemer and Master experience liberty from shame and regret today and will live with Him forever.** The momentary pleasure sin offers can never compare with God's gracious gifts for the redeemed—righteousness, holiness, and eternal life.

1. **Redemption's price:** 1 Peter 1:18-19
2. **Redemption in Old Testament:** Ruth 3:9-13; Hosea 3
3. **Jesus the Redeemer:** Romans 3:24; Ephesians 1:7
4. **People purchased:** Revelation 5:9
5. **Not your own:** 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Along with a new heart and life in Jesus Christ, God gives believers a new freedom to obey Him. Believers might not obey automatically, instantaneously, or flawlessly, but they live in loving dependence on His powerful grace and the Holy Spirit.

Paul thanked and exalted God for empowering believers through the Holy Spirit to increasingly resist and hate sin. Wholehearted obedience to God begins with belief in Jesus, the one He sent to redeem humanity through His death and resurrection.[23] **As people accept the truth of God's grace in Christ, God frees them to turn every desire and ability toward Him alone, anticipating the day when sin's destruction will end.**

23. **Obedient belief:** John 6:28-29

Jesus purchased believers for God; He is their new master.[24] Some might ask, "How can we be free if we become slaves of God?" Paul's slavery analogy highlights that no one is autonomous. **As created beings, we all serve someone or something—sin, the harsh taskmaster, or Jesus, who offers a light yoke to all the weary and burdened.**[25] He promises rest—real, lasting freedom.

True freedom means being who God has made us to be—people who bring Him glory by loving, enjoying, and freely obeying Him. Jesus described freedom in Him this way: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."[26] He went on to explain the same truth Paul conveyed: "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ... If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."[27] A righteous life—lived in the light of truth by the power of the Holy Spirit—leads to freedom. Anything less is slavery.

Know Your Destiny – Romans 6:19-23

As Romans 6 concludes, Paul reinforced his previous teaching with one final summary designed to strengthen the weak. He further explained the commands he offered in verses 11-13. **Believers alive to God live under the reign of grace, led and motivated by righteousness.** As they give their bodies to righteousness, they are transformed.

A Grace-Enabled Choice – 6:19

God's redeeming grace, available to believers through union with Christ and the Holy Spirit, enables even the weakest believers to love God and choose righteousness over wickedness. All people serve either sin or God. Not to serve God results in slavery to "ever-increasing wickedness." The myth of neutral ground gives way to the truth that people cannot contain or limit impurity when they offer themselves to sin. Sin promises freedom, but all who serve sin find themselves in chains. Conversely, believers who offer themselves "as slaves to righteousness" find themselves led to holiness.

Holiness characterizes God and His people. When saving faith dawns in a person's heart, God declares them holy, redeemed, and alive to Him. As believers live for God, He purifies them and increasingly draws their hearts away from wicked desires and habits that characterized their life in Adam.[28] **Paul exhorts all believers who have died to sin to allow righteousness to lead them toward the Lord who loves them.**

Slaves to Sin – 6:20-21

In Christ, God redirects a believer's destiny from death to abundant life.[29] Paul reminded his original readers what life was like when they were slaves to sin and free from righteousness. **Whether Gentiles with complete disregard for God's moral law or Jews seeking to prove their worth through works, all were shamefully unable to please God.**[30] Their behavior may have seemed reasonable for a time, but death is the ultimate fruit of life apart from Christ.

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24. **Purchased for God:** Revelation 5:9; 14:4
25. **Light yoke:** Matthew 11:28-30
26. **Jesus describes freedom:** John 8:31-32
27. **Slavery and freedom:** John 8:34, 36
28. **Holy living:** Romans 5:17
29. **Abundant life:** John 10:10
30. **All fall short:** Romans 3:23

Looking back on life before faith in Christ highlights the complete reversal of condition and destiny that the redeemed enjoy. From the flagrantly immoral to the pridefully self-righteous, all need to be saved from sin's rule. Apart from redemption and life in Christ, all who read Paul's letter can recall shameful experiences that resulted in guilt and condemnation. Sin is a cruel master that brings destruction rather than freedom and hope.

Slaves to God – 6:22-23

Paul quickly moved the believers in Rome from recalling their past slavery to sin to rejoicing over their present slavery to God: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." **God banishes sin's tyranny of guilt and shame for those who belong to Him.** With their eternal destiny secure, Christians grow in holiness from the inside out.

Paul triumphantly concluded, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Sin's slaves earn their wages—death—with their thoughts, attitudes, choices, and behaviors ruled by sin. God's slaves could never earn the benefits of salvation and life in Christ, so their reward—eternal life—is freely given by grace alone through faith alone. Paul is not writing to perfect believers; he is writing to believers living under the reign of God's perfect, loving grace. **God's grace makes believers eternally right with Him and frees them to live holy lives.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

After the command in Romans 6:11, Paul began to unfold the practical matter of sanctification, which will be explored further in the next lesson. Because believers are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ, they must stop living for sin and live for God. The way we live reveals not just who we are but whose we are. New identity in Christ includes a new spiritual condition as instruments of righteousness for God alone. God promises believers freedom from sin's mastery. The redeemed completely belong to God and enjoy the benefits of His reigning grace where sin once oppressed and controlled them. **The ongoing temptation to offer parts of their bodies to sin calls believers to active obedience to God.** Though every believer was once enslaved to sin, God secured their freedom, which they receive through wholehearted trust in Christ's death and resurrection on their behalf. In gratitude, Paul rejoiced over the privilege believers have of being freed to become slaves to righteousness.

Throughout Romans 6, Paul motivates believers to live for God rather than for sin. He presented all that Christ has done on their behalf and all that His redemption secures for their eternity. Paul met fumbling believers in their weakness, reminding them of their lives as sin's slaves compared to the holiness that comes from offering themselves as instruments of righteousness. Believers have been redeemed from sin's dominion, shame, condemnation, and death. They are freed—redeemed by Jesus—to belong to God, live under grace, and follow the path of righteousness into holiness and eternal life.

Apply It

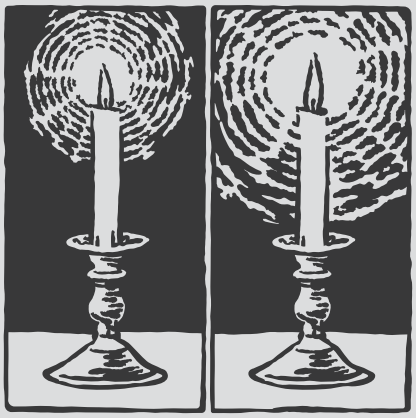
Paul's brief but powerful command for believers to offer themselves as slaves to God and His righteousness reverberates through every area of life. From the five senses to heart attitudes to choices and behaviors, God calls His children to surrender to Christ's reign of righteousness and grace, which leads to holiness and eternal life. Believers are to count themselves dead to the sin that continuously assaults their eyes and ears. Sin rises almost automatically and tempts believers toward selfishness and autonomy from God in every relationship, circumstance, and season of life. Infinite words cannot summarize all that surrender might involve or the extent of God's grace that makes obedience possible. Jesus makes obedience to God an option for those who believe. He also enables His children to live for God. Have you accepted faith in Jesus as the way to become alive to God? If so, how will you thank God for the ways He enables you to live for Him?

A practical question cuts to the heart of Paul's teaching: To what or whom do you offer your body? We navigate the world with our eyes, ears, and sense of touch. As we take in our surroundings, we see beauty and tragedy. We hear joy and anger. We feel gentle warmth and jarring discomfort. **We cannot stop seeing, hearing, and feeling any more than we can stop breathing, so how do we offer these open channels to God as slaves of righteousness?** In view of God's liberating love, consider the thoughts you entertain, encourage, and share with others. What benefits will you and others reap from the thinking that drives you? If you are dead to sin in Christ, consider your words and actions in response to the world around you. Are you living for God or for yourself? Offering ourselves to God is the first step and where Paul commands believers to begin. God's grace propels believers forward, as the Holy Spirit teaches each next step, often one at a time. We learn as we look to God's Word, listen to wise counsel, and extend hands of grace to those around us. How can you offer yourself to God today?

Does Paul's assertion that sin is more than a misstep or accident offend you? Paul called sin wickedness that increasingly rules over its slaves. Sin is everything in thought, word, and deed that is contrary to God's will. **We naturally resist the idea that sin could rule us; we want to believe we are stronger than that.** However, Paul's words reveal God's great love for us; He offered Jesus to redeem helpless sinners. What sins have ruled over you in the past or perhaps rule you today? Take heart! Because of His grace, God no longer evaluates believers based on their sin. God's grace sees believers through Christ's righteousness, which they share by faith. And even more, as believers become slaves to God, they reap benefits that lead to increasing holiness. If you have offered yourself to God and His righteousness, what stories can you tell of God's powerful grace capturing your heart and changing your desires and behavior? Offer God your thanks and share your stories of His redeeming power.

God expressed His love for humanity through His gracious gift of new life in Jesus and the indwelling Holy Spirit. This compelling force transforms believers to increasingly walk in holiness out of gratitude to God. As believers love God in return, He captures their attention, affection, and actions. **A believer's wholehearted obedience flows out of love for the One who loved us first.** How might the truth of God's never-failing love for you impact the consistency of your obedience? How might the Lord's mighty resurrection power He shares with believers impact your exclusive loyalty to Him? How might God's wisdom in salvation and redemption impact your willingness to obey without argument or resentment? Many vie for our attention and promise a better life. However, only one—Jesus Christ—loves us enough to redeem us and reign over us. Jesus leads us toward abundant life and fellowship with our creator God now and forever.

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The Law and the Believer

Lesson 12 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 11 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth or explanation from the lecture clarified a believer's position in Christ for you?

2. How did the notes help you understand God's grace or influence your desire to obey God?

Second Day: Read Romans 7:1-6.

Paul explained a believer's freedom from the law.

3. How does Paul's illustration of marriage illustrate a believer's death to sin and the law? (See also Romans 6:11-14, 18.)

4. a. From what does Christ's death free believers, and to whom do they now belong?

   b. From Romans 7:4, what is a believer's new purpose?

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5. If you are a believer, how has the Holy Spirit freed you from self-effort to bear fruit for God? (See also John 15:1-5; Galatians 5:16-23.)

Third Day: Read Romans 7:7-13.

Paul described how sin and the law work in the lives of people.

6. a. What does the law do for people?

   b. Describe Paul's example of how a restriction, guideline, or rule can arouse sinful desires. How have you experienced this?

7. From Romans 7:10-13, how did Paul describe the law and commandment positively? Why?

8. How do God's righteous commands reveal sin's damaging impact in your life?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 7:14-20.

Paul explained his own internal battle with sin.

9. How did Paul describe his battle with sin?

10. How might Paul's battle with sin relate to his teaching in Romans 6:11-14?

11. a. If you are a believer, how have you experienced a battle similar to Paul's?

b. How would you simply and clearly explain a believer's ongoing battle with sin to a new Christian?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 7:21-25.

Paul cried out for complete deliverance from his sinful nature.

12. a. How did Paul describe his internal desires in verses 21-23?

b. In what ways do your deepest longings reflect the Holy Spirit's transformation within you? (See also Galatians 5:16-18; Philippians 1:6.)

c. How do you experience the conflict between God's ways and the sin remaining in and around you?

13. What exclamation, question, and grateful answer did Paul express in verses 24-25?

14. Share about a time when distress over sin led you to desperate prayer, like Paul. How did God answer you?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 7.

Believers belong to Jesus even as they struggle against sin.

15. How did Romans 7 help you better understand the believer's battle to live for God in this life?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 7

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 12 Notes

Romans 7

Focus Verse

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25a)

Outline

- The Law and Our Savior – Romans 7:1-6
- The Law and Our Sin – Romans 7:7-13
- The Law and Our Struggle – Romans 7:14-25

Engage

Salvation in Christ unlocks deep truths that both amaze and confound us. Our best efforts to satisfy God's righteous standards are inadequate, but God's provision is indescribable. **As believers walk through life in faith, their understanding of the richness of God's grace and provision should only grow.** We come to Christ realizing we are sinners; we walk with Christ recognizing more and more the depth of our sinfulness and the heights of God's love. We hate our sin and desire to obey God. The Holy Spirit reveals what is true and right, yet sin still beckons us. Obedience seldom comes easily, despite God's perfect commands and the Holy Spirit's promptings. How can believers live in a way that aligns with who God declares them to be in Christ?

Paul explained the gospel's basic truths that God calls us to believe. But even as we trust what God has declared, we struggle. Though delivered from sin's control, we still fight sinful urges. The battle within seems to contradict the reality God has declared. God's laws and ways can still seem at odds with our natural inclinations. How does our identity in Christ reconcile with our daily battles? Paul helps us by explaining believers' relationship to God's law and sin. Ultimately, God provides all we need in Christ. **Believers belong to Jesus even as they struggle against sin.**

The Law and Our Savior – Romans 7:1-6

Up to this point in Romans, Paul has clearly explained our need for salvation in Christ and the victory over sin and death that comes through faith in Him. No longer mastered by sin or trying to earn God's favor, believers are freed from sin's vice grip and declared righteous in Christ. **Romans 7 further clarifies the truth summed up in Romans 6:14: "For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace."** Believers are to count themselves dead to sin but alive to God. Romans 6 explains the truth about a believer's position—free from sin's mastery. Romans 7 describes the practical reality of a believer's ongoing battle with indwelling sin.

Paul anticipated questions from his readers in Rome, particularly those from a Jewish background who greatly honored God's law. Does faith in Christ make the law worthless? Is God's law a burden or a blessing? Paul already proved that the law cannot justify us. Now, he declares the law also cannot sanctify or enable us to live rightly for God. **Life in Christ requires power beyond the limits of the law.** Christ sets believers free from the law to grow to be like Him.

The Law's Limits – 7:1-3

The Premise (7:1) – First, Paul asked a question to lay down an important truth: "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?" Paul raised a self-evident truth. **We are only subject to laws while we are alive; no one can require dead people to do anything.** Most essentially, Paul was referring to God's commands given to Israel through Moses, which incorporate the Ten Commandments[1] and more—God's righteous ways for humanity. God's righteous and holy commands reflect God, who is Himself righteous and holy, and His good plans for relationship with His people.

The Illustration (7:2-3) – Because Paul's opponents protested that the gospel negated the law, he gave a simple analogy from marriage to support his premise. A widow is no longer legally bound to her deceased husband but is free to remarry. The new marriage relationship does not violate but supports marriage laws. Similarly, the gospel fully upholds God's law. **Christians have died to the law to be united to Jesus Christ.** They are born anew in Christ. God freely justifies all who have faith in Jesus, who Himself died to the law for sinners.[2] Salvation in Christ satisfies the law's demands and at the same time releases believers from dependence upon the law for victory it cannot provide.

A New and Better Way – 7:4-6

Only a new relationship with Christ allows anyone to bear fruit for God. Marriage to the law, the "old husband," cannot produce the righteousness God requires. **Believers belong to Christ, who rose from the dead to deliver them from the realm of the flesh and sinful passions that lead only to death.** Dying to the law does not free the believer to practice what the law forbids. Rather, the law cannot condemn anyone who trusts in Christ for salvation.

Now, released from the law, believers no longer serve in the flesh. The powerful Greek word *sarx*, translated in verse 5 as "flesh," has several possible meanings:

- Physical life in a human body[3]
- All humanity[4]
- The sinful desires that oppose the Holy Spirit[5]

According to the third use of this word, the flesh seeks its own desires, while the Spirit wants what God wants. What does "flesh" mean in Romans 7:5? Paul seems to be referring to the sinful desires all humans inherited from Adam. **Unbelievers live in the realm of the flesh, but believers no longer live there.** Paul will explain this concept throughout Romans 7 and 8.[6]

1. **Ten Commandments:** Exodus 20:1-17
2. **Died to the law:** Galatians 2:19-21
3. **Flesh as physical life:** John 1:14; Galatians 2:20
4. **All people:** 1 Peter 1:24
5. **Flesh and the Spirit:** Galatians 5:17
6. **Inborn sinful desires:** Romans 7:14, 18, 24; 8:3-5, 8-9, 12-13

The Holy Spirit's Transforming Work

The Doctrine of Sanctification

Two important words, "justification" and "sanctification," frame a believer's experience in life and position before God. When sinners receive God's gift of salvation through faith in Christ, they are justified—declared not guilty or righteous before God. Believers' position in Christ is secured by His perfect righteousness, not their own. **Sanctification refers to the Holy Spirit's ongoing work within believers to make them more and more like Jesus.**[1] Through sanctification, justified believers' daily practices mature and more closely align with their God-given position in Christ. In this process, God forms His righteousness within us.

Set apart as God's children, believers are led and equipped by the Holy Spirit to live in a way that glorifies God.[2] A redeemed believer experiences a deep desire to please and obey God, rather than rebel against Him.[3] The Holy Spirit convicts the believer, not just of general sinfulness but of specific sin, leading to repentance. By God's power, not their own, believers' thoughts are taken captive to become obedient to Christ, and their actions follow.[4] Romans 7 describes Paul's own internal battle to overcome sin and yield to the Spirit. Believers surrender to the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work to lead them forward in obedient faith. Though delivered from sin's dominating control, growing believers battle sin's residual presence while they walk on earth. The process of sanctification and the ongoing battle with sin make God's people long for the full, eternal deliverance He has promised.[5]

Failing to understand or believe in the Holy Spirit's ongoing sanctification means missing God's purifying purposes woven into daily life. Difficult circumstances seem unexplainable rather than purposeful, prompting attempts to find escape or distraction. Even a believer saved by grace can wrongly rely on self-effort as a means to obedience, rather than depending on the Holy Spirit's power.

Sanctification is God's work. God does not leave the people He saves without resources to obey Him. Just as we cannot justify ourselves, neither can we sanctify ourselves. **God's own Spirit indwells His children, giving them the desire and power to walk faithfully with Him.** While life brings difficult seasons of struggle and pain, the direction a believer walks should be increasingly toward obedience and surrender to God. Maturing believers increasingly recognize and hate sin's presence in their motives, thoughts, appetites, and actions. By God's power alone, the Holy Spirit roots out sin, allowing God's children to love obeying Him. If your battle with sin discourages you, look for God's sanctifying work within you. As a believer delivered from sin's dominion, how will you yield to God's patient and loving work—molding you to reflect Him to the world?

1. **Conformed into image of Jesus:** Romans 8:29
2. **Living for God:** Romans 8:14; 12:1-2; Galatians 5:16
3. **Desire to obey God:** Psalm 119:32; Romans 6:17
4. **Obedience to Christ:** John 14:15; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:13-15
5. **Eternal deliverance:** Romans 7:24-25; 8:20-30; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 21:1-4

Verse 6 opens with two remarkable words: "But now." Released from serving the flesh, believers now serve in the new way of the Spirit. Paul masterfully used these deceptively simple words throughout his letter to highlight major changes for believers:

- "But now" God has provided righteousness apart from the law. (Romans 3:21)
- "But now" a believer is no longer bound by slavery to sin but willing slavery to God. (Romans 6:22)
- "But now" a believer has died to the law, the old way, to serve God in a new way. (Romans 7:6)

Believers are spiritually opposed to God before they are made alive in Christ.[7] Resenting God's law, rebellious and unredeemed hearts stir up sinful thoughts and actions. **Paul explained that Christ releases people to respond to the Spirit rather than trying to earn God's favor through a written code of behavior.** Believers are not what they once were. By God's grace, the Holy Spirit brings spiritual life to those who trust in Christ for salvation.

The Law and Our Sin – Romans 7:7-13

Paul laid out his case—the law can neither justify nor sanctify. The law condemns but cannot save, give new life, or impart holiness. No one can be delivered from sin's penalty by the law. Paul, sensitive to the objections his readers might raise, asked a rising question: "What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful?" Paul answered his own question by exclaiming, "Certainly not!" How then is God's law good? **With himself as an example, Paul explained three primary things the law accomplishes.**

Sin Revealed – 7:7

The law reveals or defines sin. Even when people realize they have done wrong, they do not label the wrong as "sin" or recognize their offense against God. The law teaches us the ways we violate God's righteous standards. Paul gave a personal example. He would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."[8] God's law made Paul realize he longed for things God had not intended for him. Apart from God's law, we too could not accurately assess our sinfulness.

Sin Provoked – 7:8

The law provokes the sinfulness already rooted in our hearts. Sin takes advantage of every opportunity. How often do you feel a surge of rebellion when you receive a command or restriction? From two-year-olds testing their parents' commands to adults who hate restrictions placed on their choices, rules and commands spark a desire to rebel. How can this be good? Paul's personal example helps us understand his point: "But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead." The law allows us to realize how weak and vulnerable we are—so easily gripped by sin's impulses. We learn that we desire the very things the law forbids. The law shows us sin's strength, even using God's good law to promote evil. Sin has wedged rebellion deep within the human heart.

7. **Opposed to God:** Romans 5:10; 8:7
8. **Do not covet:** Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21

Sinfulness Exposed – 7:9-13

By God's grace, the law also allows us to understand how truly sinful we are. We need to understand sin's embedded presence in our hearts. Paul, who had considered himself scrupulously obedient to the letter of the law, had wrongly assumed God's approval.[9] But a moment came when the commandment caused Paul's sin to spring to life, and he faced the reality of his evil desires. The commands God intended for flourishing life revealed the death at work within Paul. Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount explains the law's original and true intent—not external compliance to rules but hearts and motives that please God.[10] Paul stated that sin seized the opportunity God's commands presented and deceived him. Despite Paul's attentive external commitment to the law, he ultimately realized his inability to do what the law commanded, and he died to the law. Through his encounter with his Savior and the sanctifying work of Jesus in his new life—including a new, redeemed, and proper perspective of the law—Paul experienced God's grace.[11]

Despite the sin the law unveils, Paul declared God's law as holy, righteous, and good. God's standards help us realize that sin is indeed sinful—in opposition to God Himself. The law does not make us more sinful but, by God's grace, reveals how sinful we are. When we realize our hopelessly sinful condition, we seek refuge. We find rescue, not in greater effort to keep laws we cannot obey, but in confessing our sin to God and seeking salvation in our sinless Savior. Believers in Christ need constant exposure to God's righteous standards in His Word as they grow in their faith and obedience.

We find rescue, not in greater effort to keep laws we cannot obey, but in confessing our sin to God and seeking salvation in our sinless Savior.

The Law and Our Struggle – Romans 7:14-25

In the second half of Romans 7, Paul described a fierce internal struggle against sin. **He described a battle so intense that Christians have long debated what period in Paul's life this portrays.** The stark depiction here leads some to believe Paul spoke of himself before his conversion. This passage provokes challenging questions. Would a true believer describe himself as "unspiritual" or a "slave to sin"?[12] But Paul also stated that his failure to fulfill the law's demands distressed him. Do unbelievers really wrestle to obey God's law?

Another view sees this struggle as representing an immature or weak Christian striving to surrender to God. Does Paul's repeated use of personal pronouns "I," "me," "my," or "myself" suggest self-focus? **Certainly, there is no hope of obeying God apart from the Holy Spirit's power and new life in Christ.**

These notes interpret this passage as expressing the ongoing conflict with sin that any true believer experiences while living in this world. Paul used present tense verbs beginning in verse 14, rather than the past tense verbs in the previous verses, likely indicating a current struggle in

9. **Paul's resume:** 2 Corinthians 11:18-30; Philippians 3:3-11
10. **Sermon on the Mount:** Matthew 5:21-49
11. **Paul's new life, perspective:** Acts 9:1-31
12. **Slave to sin:** Romans 6:17-18

his life as he wrote. Before trusting in Christ, people are fatally ruled by sin. But now, in Christ, believers have been delivered from the control of the flesh—sin's death grip on their bodies and minds. Belonging to Him, they now fight a war they cannot lose, even as the flesh still rears its ugly head while they await the full consummation of their salvation. A love and desire for God and His ways bring joyful, faithful obedience. Because the old, sin-loving self is buried and gone forever, growing believers hate and battle sin.

Though dethroned, the inborn urge toward self-will and sin still pulls on a believer. While unbelievers must recognize their sinfulness to turn to Christ for salvation, believers mature as they yield to God and turn from sin. **Only through the Holy Spirit can any sinner live in Christ's victory over sin's power.** Paul's brutal honesty helps explain the internal war all believers face as they increasingly turn from sin and yield to the Holy Spirit.

Real Battle – 7:14-23

Paul offered a series of statements that reflected the reality in his heart as he measured himself against God's righteous standards. **In a series of laments that culminate in a heart-rending wail, Paul expressed his internal battle with sin and his need for deliverance.**

"I Am Unspiritual, Sold As a Slave to Sin" (7:14-17) – Paul had already declared that the law was good.[13] He could not blame the problem he faced on the law, which is spiritual. The law expresses divine standards that he desired but could not fully meet. **Deeply disturbed, Paul recognized a war within his own heart that he could not fully understand.** He hated the things he wanted to do and blamed the sin living with him for his tainted desires. Paul was not absolving himself of responsibility but recognizing sin's lingering and painful presence in his heart.

Wrestling Against Sin (7:15-23) – **Paul's sinful tendencies clashed against the holy desires within him.** In transparent honesty, Paul confessed that nothing good came from his sinful nature: "For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Certainly, Paul did some good things in obedience to God and in response to the Holy Spirit. He viewed remaining sin as abhorrent and loved righteousness. The more we know of God, the more clearly we recognize sin's deep roots within us. "And if I do what I do not want to do," Paul continued, "I agree that the law is good." In light of God's righteousness and perfect Word, we still commit sins we detest, even as our hearts long to obey God.

As a child of God through faith in Christ, Paul's new nature desired to please and surrender to God. His inner being delighted in the guidance and wisdom of God's law. Yet sin remained a relentless foe. "So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me," Paul said. "For in my inner being I delight in God's law." Only through God's power can a believer crucify their sinful nature and actively respond as a new creation in Christ. Positionally, a believer stands wholly redeemed and righteous in Christ. Yet, as saved people walk through life in this world and live in bodies that still desire sin, an internal battle rages. A lingering appetite for sin challenges our love for God and His ways. No one can live a righteous life in their own strength but only in the Holy Spirit's power. Indeed, the desire to wage war against sin offers evidence of salvation.

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13. The law is good: Romans 7:7, 12-13

Real Victory – 7:24-25

A Wail of Anguish (7:24) – Paul's vivid description of his fierce internal battle rises to an agonizing crescendo. Paul loved God passionately and mourned his sin deeply. **We can almost feel and hear the deep pain in his cry, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"** Believers long to be delivered from sin forever and anticipate that victory, yet the sins harbored within our hearts will not be fully overcome in this life. Our motives will never be entirely pure, and our thoughts stray into treacherous places. While we can see spiritual growth over sinful habits in our past, our appetite for sin is all too easily aroused. Sometimes, we are so used to sin's presence in and around us that we neglect to mourn its lingering footing in our hearts.

A Cry of Gratitude (7:25) – If reading Paul's honest laments leaves you troubled, allow his burst of thanksgiving to give you hope. Paul almost explodes with these glorious words: "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" The battle with sin rages, but God alone gives the victory we long for. Though dead to the law's condemnation, Paul continued to battle sin. **Believers belong to Jesus even as they struggle against sin.** God's children develop a healthy distrust of the sin remaining within them and an ever-deepening gratitude for God's power to deliver them from sin.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul explained that God's law, while good and righteous, can neither justify the sinner nor sanctify the believer. God declares believers new creations in Christ.[14] Romans 7 describes the power of sin and the limits of the law. God delivers sinners who come to faith in Christ from sin's dominion. They belong to Him. However, believers struggle against sin and will do so until they draw their last breath. And while God's children battle sin, Jesus has won the battle on their behalf!

> *The Holy Spirit's sanctifying work within believers exposes sin and empowers obedience, a daily battle ultimately won only in God's strength.*

Paul's description of his internal battle against sin has made some wonder if a redeemed believer could struggle as he described. However, maturing believers in Christ become increasingly aware of sin's lingering impulses and deeply desire to please and obey God. The Holy Spirit's sanctifying work within believers exposes sin and empowers obedience, a daily battle ultimately won only in God's strength. Paul's woeful cry about the sin that still enticed him led to a sincere gasp of thanksgiving that Christ had delivered him from sin's ultimate control. **God's children continue to war against sin but rejoice in the victory God promises.**

14. New in Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Apply It

Romans 7 heralds a believer's position—alive in Christ and dead to the law. God's moral law reflects His character and good plans for human flourishing but also defines righteous standards to which sinners cannot rise. Paul's explanation of the law's purpose helps us. How do God's righteous standards help you realize God's holiness, the depth of sin within you, and your utter need for a Savior? **When you trust in Christ for salvation, God sets you free from trying to earn His favor in your own strength.** For the first time, we are able not to sin! As we walk through life with faith in God and depend on the Holy Spirit, we grow increasingly aware that we need Christ's righteousness, which He has graciously provided for us. In fact, when we battle with sin's remaining pull within us, we join Paul in joyful thanksgiving for Jesus Christ and His saving work on our behalf. If you are a believer who grows weary of battling sin, how are you helped to know Christ has triumphed on your behalf?

The Christian life is glorious, but it is not easy. Sometimes new believers question their salvation as they awaken to a battle with sin they previously had not experienced. Faith in Christ calls us into a Spirit-empowered struggle against sin. The very fact we struggle reminds us to whom we belong. We triumph by God's grace and through His power, not our strength. Our war against sin is hard, but good. How else would we understand sin's foothold in our life and properly value Christ's sacrifice? As we seek to follow God and overcome sin's pull on our flesh, we lean into the Lord as the solution to our brokenness. What does your ongoing battle with sin reveal to you? How quickly do you turn to the Lord for rescue, power, and strength to stand against temptation?

The battle Paul described in Romans 7 prepares us for his declaration in Romans 8:1: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The battle we wage on earth anticipates a glorious outcome that is settled and secure. The fact that God increasingly reveals our sinfulness and how much we need Him offers further evidence of His boundless grace. How thankful are you when God reveals your sin? **A child of God will desire the things of God, even while sin still beckons.** How deeply do you love what God loves and hate what He hates? In what ways does victory over the flesh and active obedience to God give you joy? Does your ongoing battle with sin make you passionately long for eternity, when God fully completes what your position in Christ delivers? The depth and wonder of salvation in Christ cannot be reduced to a short conversation but will occupy our praise for all eternity! Christ's work in salvation means believers will never face sin that overturns their position in Christ. We are great sinners, but we have a great Savior!

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Life Through the Spirit

Lesson 13 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 12 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you notice God's work in your life this week?

2. What truth from the notes helped you better understand believers' ongoing battle with sin?

Second Day: Read Romans 8:1-4.

Paul proclaimed that believers are free from sin's condemnation.

3. a. How does Paul's heart cry in Romans 7:24-25 lay the groundwork for His triumphant declaration in Romans 8:1?

   b. Define the following words:

   Therefore

   Now

   No

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Condemnation

c. What makes the proclamation of verse 1 especially significant to you?

4. a. From verses 2-3, describe the work of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) to save sinners. (See also John 14:15-21; 16:8-15.)

b. Because those in Christ are no longer under the law, how and why do they fulfill the law's requirements?

5. What powerful truth from this passage impacts your life, and how will you express thanks to God?

Third Day: Read Romans 8:5-11.

Paul described two different mindsets.

6. Name the two different groups Paul described and contrast their minds and lives.

7. a. How do you recognize a mind set on the Spirit's desires? (See also Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:1-4; and other verses you know.)

b. What desires of your mind and heart demonstrate that the Spirit of God lives in you?

8. According to verses 9-11, what things are true of everyone in whom the Spirit of God (also called the Spirit of Christ) lives, and how do these truths encourage you today?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 8:12-13.

Paul exhorted believers regarding a new obligation.

9. To what is a believer no longer obligated? What is the believer's new obligation, and why?

10. a. What does the phrase “put to death” teach about the attitude people should have toward sin? (See also 2 Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 3:10-14.)

    b. How is it possible to “put to death the misdeeds of the body”? (See also Romans 6:11-14; Galatians 5:13-21; Colossians 3:5-17.)

11. What challenges do you face living life according to the Spirit? How do you need the Holy Spirit’s help, and how can your group pray for you?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 8:14-17.

Paul explained believers’ new status with God.

12. What is a believer’s new status with God, and why is this a cause for celebration?

13. a. Read Matthew 6:7-8; 10:29-31; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 12:7-11; and 1 John 3:1-3. What are additional benefits of being God’s child?

    b. If you are a believer, express how you have experienced these benefits.

14. How might these truths help you or others who doubt God’s fatherly love?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 8:1-17.

The Holy Spirit empowers God’s children to live holy lives.

15. What was most meaningful to you in this week’s passage, and why?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 8:1-17

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 13 Notes

Romans 8:1-17

Focus Verse

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

Outline

- Freedom in the Spirit – Romans 8:1-11
- Life in the Spirit – Romans 8:12-17

Engage

In the world today, people long for freedom they cannot secure for themselves. Some may suffer as actual prisoners of war or victims of human trafficking. Depression, physical limitations, illness, or emotional struggles hold others hostage. In the end, all people face a common challenge: sin's pull and condemnation. **God's people battle with sin, internally and externally, each day.** Paul lamented this reality in Romans 7:19: "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." Do you relate to Paul? As he turned his pen toward the next chapter, Paul celebrated a dramatic truth that radically transformed his struggle.

Paul's first words in Romans 8 proclaim no condemnation, and his final words promise no separation. Between these two life-altering pillars of truth, Paul unfolded a panorama of how the triune God powerfully and permanently works to save and secure His people.

Believers no longer suffer God's wrath because, through Christ, the Holy Spirit frees them from the law of sin and death. God propels His people of faith toward a new obligation—life according to the Spirit. No longer bound by fleshly desires, believers experience a whole new way of life opening before them. **The Holy Spirit empowers God's children to live holy lives.** How will you embrace this truth as God's gracious gift to you?

Freedom in the Spirit – Romans 8:1-11

Paul's use of the word "therefore" introduces a pivot within his letter. Up to this point, while introducing grace and salvation since the middle of chapter 3, Paul had stressed in chapter 7 that humanity's sin nature is harbored in every person's heart. How can we move forward in faith, knowing that we deserve God's punishment and wrath? On our own, we can do nothing. *Nothing.* **For those in Christ, the Holy Spirit brings freedom from the grip of sin and the power to live a transformed life.**

A Believer's Reality: No Condemnation – 8:1

Sin twists human lives upside down and inside out. The sin that resulted in Paul's despairing cries in Romans 7:24 could have left us in ruin. **Instead, God's amazing provision leads to a glorious shout: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Paul's exclamation reflects God's gracious heart and grand plan to redeem His people. Four great words in verse 1 proclaim God's gospel of grace to sinners:

- **"Therefore" connects Paul's explosive statement with all his previous teachings in Romans.** At the cross, God's sinless Son took sin's full weight of condemnation, deserved by every person. The Holy Spirit has applied God's work through Jesus Christ to all who believe the gospel. Therefore, Christians already experience the freedom of God's final verdict of no condemnation. Christ bore the full weight of sin's power, guilt, shame, and punishment to save all who would believe.
- **"Now" refers to a point in time and reflects the immediate change in relationship status that occurs upon belief in Christ.** Once, we stood condemned and separated from God. We deserved and awaited the wages our sin had earned: eternal death.[1] But now, because of Christ, God has declared believers righteous in Christ. By God's grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, all who believe enter a new life reconciled to God through Jesus's death and resurrection.
- **"No," translated as a simple negative in English, communicated a stronger exclamation in the Greek used by Paul.** Paul emphasized his point with a powerful "no." His shout of "no condemnation" would read as if bolded, underlined, capitalized, and italicized. No believers are condemned, nor can they ever be; condemnation of a believer is utterly impossible.
- **"Condemnation" is a legal term that can include a judge's verdict and the deserved punishment or sentencing of the person found guilty.** Apart from Christ, all people live under condemnation, unable to save themselves.[2] Many people suffer under a heavy burden of guilt and shame for past wrongdoings, cut off from God and rejected by those around them. Others believe they do not deserve condemnation, considering themselves basically good. The early chapters of Romans painstakingly proved that all people are guilty of sin, without excuse before God and rightly deserving of His wrath. Paul's declaration of a believer's freedom from deserved condemnation represents a shocking and amazing new reality for the believer. Sin has a powerful presence in this world and our lives, but God's grace has overcome its penalty and power. Believers are released from sin's crushing weight of guilt when they receive God's great gift of grace. With shame permanently removed, they belong to Him forever.

A Believer's Reality: God's Work Within – 8:2-4

Having proven moral standards and God's law are powerless to save, Paul reminded Rome's believers of the source of their true freedom: Only God can free sinners from sin's condemnation. Jesus's work on the cross and His indwelling Spirit within the hearts of His people are God's gracious gifts that transform their lives and eternal destiny.[3]

1. **Wages for sin:** John 3:18; Romans 5:12; 6:23
2. **Under sin:** Romans 3:9-21
3. **God's gift:** John 3:16-17

***The Trinity at Work (8:2-3)* – God's saving work involves each person of the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.**[4] God's triune nature is on full display in verses 2-3. There is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus [the Son], because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh."

God's triune divine nature is mysterious to us. He is one God in three eternal and equal persons who lovingly share one mind and will in all things, relating to one another in perfect unity and peace. **The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct yet indivisible, working together to free God's people from condemnation.** God the Father sent God the Son to save sinners. Jesus was born as a human while remaining fully God and living a sinless life. Jesus's work on the cross placed the full weight of condemnation on His shoulders, not ours. Resurrected and ascended, Jesus proved His victory over death and sin and justifies all who trust Him for salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells within the hearts of His saved people. The Spirit's powerful transforming work enables believers to live righteously. All praise, honor, and glory belong to our triune God!

God not only declares believers without condemnation, He also enables them to live as new creations in Christ.

Righteous Requirements Met (8:3-4) – Only Jesus's substitutionary work can save sinners. Jesus fully met the law's righteous requirements on behalf of every sinner, and God transfers His perfect righteousness to everyone who comes to Him in faith. With believers declared righteous by faith, God works within His people to set them free from sin's power. God sets believers apart to worship and serve Him and grow in holiness. God not only declares believers without condemnation, He also enables them to live as new creations in Christ.[5] As Paul taught in Chapter 7, sanctification is the process by which the Holy Spirit makes a believer more like Christ. **Through the Holy Spirit, believers can exercise their freedom not to sin.**

Holiness: Justification's Goal – Justification by grace through faith upholds the law's demands for justice. According to the law, sin's penalty is death. Jesus died not to leave us in our sin but to save us from our sins,[6] lift our shame, free us from fear, and enable us to live holy lives.[7] Paul explained God's saving work in verses 3-4, noting Jesus's full but sinless humanity.[8] God sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." Jesus stepped into death, becoming sin's offering on our behalf.[9] He made justification possible for believers. **God justifies believers so holiness can permeate their daily reality.**[10]

Holiness: The Law's Demands Satisfied – The English phrase translated "live according to the Spirit" is more literally "walk according to the Spirit" in the original Greek. **God's Spirit directs the Christian on a path to increasingly reflect God's character.**[11] God's commands set the path's boundaries. Jesus freed believers from sin's curse to follow Him on this path. God condemned sin in the flesh "in order that the righteous requirements of the law might fully be met in us."

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4. **The Trinity:** 1 Peter 1:2
5. **New life:** John 3:5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17
6. **Saved from sin:** Matthew 1:21
7. **Holy lives:** 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8
8. **Jesus's sinless humanity:** John 1:14; Hebrews 4:15
9. **Sin offering:** Romans 3:24-26
10. **Righteous requirements upheld:** Romans 3:31
11. **Reflect God's character:** Leviticus 19:2; Ephesians 4:24; 1 Peter 1:15-16

A Spirit-Led Life

The Doctrine of God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit makes a believer's sanctification possible. Before his conversion, Paul thought himself fully capable of keeping God's law. Following his conversion, Paul realized God's standards reached higher and his own sinfulness extended further than he ever imagined. In despair over his sin, Paul learned that he could only overcome sin through God's grace in Jesus[1] and the Holy Spirit's power.[2] **Only the Holy Spirit empowers believers to break free from sin's allure.**

The Holy Spirit's presence abounds wherever the Lord Jesus Christ is preached and glorified and when people come to Him in true faith.[3] The Holy Spirit immediately indwells every Christian when they receive salvation in Jesus.[4] In fact, the Holy Spirit's conviction and regenerating work makes belief possible. This true baptism with the Holy Spirit occurs only once and is permanent. The New Testament, especially the book of Acts, also speaks of a "filling" of the Holy Spirit, which may occur repeatedly after the indwelling.[5] Increased spiritual power in ministry and faithful verbal witness to Jesus as the Savior characterize the Spirit's "filling." The Holy Spirit constantly works to draw people to Christ.

To deny the Holy Spirit's presence is to deny the triune nature of God Himself. A life void of the Holy Spirit is a life without God and His presence. Common blessings from God exist, such as sunshine and nature's beauty, but living apart from God's indwelling presence leaves lingering emptiness that only He can fill. Seeking only this world's pleasures brings a deadly void, leading downward into sin's unsatisfying spiral. **Disregarding the Holy Spirit and His work ultimately brings tragic results because life in the flesh is death itself.**

The Holy Spirit dwells within everyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Unseen by the human eye, the Holy Spirit is believers' counselor, comforter, and advocate, who regenerates and transforms, grants assurance of salvation, and empowers them to serve and witness. Those who walk according to the Spirit experience life and peace. The Holy Spirit empowers God's people to resist sin's temptations. When their sin quenches or grieves the Holy Spirit, Christ offers forgiveness.[6] The Holy Spirit works to produce abundant life in believers through times of worship, prayer, and conviction of sin. The Holy Spirit grows Christ's followers in faith and deepens their love for God.[7]

1. **God's grace:** Romans 5:20-21; 7:25
2. **Power over sin:** Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:16
3. **Holy Spirit at work:** John 15:26; 16:7-15
4. **Indwelling Holy Spirit:** 1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:13
5. **Filling of the Holy Spirit:** Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; Ephesians 5:18
6. **Sin grieves the Spirit:** Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 1 John 1:9
7. **Growth through the Spirit:** John 14:15-21; Romans 8:10-11, 14-16; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 3:16-19; 5:18-21

How can the law's righteous requirements be met in any person? The Holy Spirit makes this possible. Jesus's death meets the law's demands for justice, and the Spirit directs a believer's life to meet the law's demands for righteousness. **By the Spirit's liberating power, believers experience freedom from sin's captivity with changed lives that honor Christ.**

A Believer's Mindset – 8:5-11

What differentiates God's people from the unsaved? In Romans 5, Paul explained death through Adam and life through Christ. **Romans 8 contrasts life in the flesh with life in the Spirit.** Paul began his explanation by addressing the mindset of unbelievers and believers.

***Flesh Versus Spirit (8:5-8)* – Paul stated that those who live according to the flesh have minds "set on what the flesh desires."** Flesh, in this case, means more than simply the sins of the body. Given over to every sinful whim, minds set on the flesh oppose and rebel against God.

On the other hand, a true believer's mind is "set on what the Spirit desires." While God's standards remain unattainable through human effort, God's people desire and pursue Christlike living. God sent His Son to the cross and gave His Spirit to His people so they might meet the law's demands through union with Christ and grow in righteous living. This is God's desire for every believer.[12]

In verses 6-8, Paul further defined what controls people's minds. The mind governed by the flesh is death itself. Hostile to God, this mind does not and cannot submit to God's law nor please God in any way. **The mind governed by the Spirit, however, gains life and peace.** People with this mindset humbly seek to follow God and please Him in all they say and do.

***The Realm of the Spirit (8:9-11)* – Paul moved from the mind set on the Spirit to living in the realm of the Spirit: "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."** Those who do not have the Spirit of God do not belong to Christ. Those who live in the Spirit's realm experience unity with Christ. For believers, the time when sin and the flesh exerted unopposed dominion has ended. God alone accomplishes this through Jesus.

Because of sin's lingering presence in the world, every believer remains subject to physical death. Sickness, scars, and physical ailments reveal the seeds of death remaining in our bodies. But "if Christ is in you ... the Spirit gives life because of righteousness." **Not only does the Holy Spirit make believers alive to God, but they also find life in God's Word and through the Spirit's work in their lives.**

Each Christian's life points forward to physical resurrection and eternal life. Although physical death looms, believers will rise again: "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 his Spirit who lives in you." **Because salvation is God's work and not our own, the new life a believer experiences now assures the resurrection life God has promised.**

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12. God's desire for believers: Philippians 3:7-14

Life in the Spirit – Romans 8:12-17

Paul moved forward with another "therefore" that shifts toward a new responsibility for believers. The Holy Spirit joins God's people to Christ. They are delivered from God's condemnation and wrath. Believers now live in the realm of the Spirit with a new nature. Because of their new life, they have a new obligation and a new family.

A Believer's Obligation – 8:12-13

Paul taught that believers' former obligation to sin has been abolished; they should not go back to their sinful lifestyles. No longer living according to the flesh, they are called to put the body's misdeeds to death and live by the Spirit. **The Holy Spirit saves, empowers, and unites believers to Christ.** A believer owes nothing to sin and the flesh. Instead, our obligation is to God in Christ—to live in the Holy Spirit's power.[13]

A Believer's Family – 8:14-17

Paul added depth and richness to a believer's identity when he stated that only "those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." Before, believers were "in Adam"; now, they are "in Christ."[14] Before, they were under condemnation; now, they are no longer condemned. Yet much more than a change of state, God considers every believer a part of His family—His own children. What an incomprehensible gift! How amazing that God would choose to call us His children! Being God's child involves living in dynamic relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives within every true child of God, leading them to be more like Christ.

The Holy Spirit brings about our adoption to sonship: God's children are those who love Him and listen to His Word. Jesus spoke clearly to His unbelieving opponents, saying, "The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."[15] He clearly stated that not everyone is a member of God's family. No one inherits godliness from their parents.[16] But through His Spirit, God adopts everyone who believes in Jesus into His family. Paul said, "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." Women and enslaved people in Rome had many reasons to fear neglect, abandonment, or mistreatment. Paul's use of "sonship" proclaims that all God's children can live without fear because they possess full rights and status as sons. Even more, believers become co-heirs with Christ and receive every good and perfect heavenly gift, including eternal life![17]

The Holy Spirit grants assurance that God is our "*Abba,* Father." The ability to call God our Father goes back to Jesus's teachings. When His disciples prayed, Jesus taught them to call on God as their Father.[18] The night before the cross, Jesus prayed, "*Abba,* Father ... take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."[19] God's people can expect an intimate relationship with God and His comforting care even in hardships and suffering.[20]

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13. **Live for God:** Romans 6:12-14
14. **In Adam, in Christ:** Romans 5:12-21
15. **Jesus's words to unbelievers:** John 8:47
16. **No godliness:** John 1:12-13
17. **Spiritual blessings:** Ephesians 1:3-14
18. **God our Father:** Matthew 6:8-15
19. **Take this cup:** Mark 14:36
20. **Hardship and suffering:** Matthew 10:29-31; Hebrews 12:3-11

The Holy Spirit testifies with our Spirit that we belong to God's family. The Holy Spirit taught believers in Rome and teaches God's children across the globe today. God not only adopts all believers as His children, He also takes an unimaginable next step to make us His heirs—co-heirs with Christ. Though this life overflows with God's many blessings, adoption does not promise believers earthly riches or freedom from suffering. Life's many challenges lead God's children to persevere as His heirs. We grow to be like Christ as we share in His sufferings. Christlikeness comes not through the suffering itself but as the Holy Spirit sanctifies us and leads us to trust God. All God's children will share Christ's glory and live as His holy people forever.[21] The Holy Spirit empowers God's children to live holy lives.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul's despairing wail in Chapter 7 bursts into his glorious declaration of complete freedom in Chapter 8: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." **Jesus took our condemnation to the cross and buried it in the tomb forever.** He rose in victory so that by His Spirit we might live free from sin's condemnation of death and experience life and peace. Jesus took on sinful flesh, lived without sin, and fulfilled the law's requirement on our behalf. As a result, all who believe in Christ find God's righteous requirements of the law fully satisfied and move forward living according to the Spirit, not in the deadness of sin. We celebrate Easter once a year, yet believers live in the freedom won by Jesus's resurrection each day.

An obligation comes with believers' newfound freedom: "Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it." A believer's obligation is to turn from the flesh and choose to live according to the Spirit. This obligation grows out of gratitude for what God's amazing grace has accomplished for us. It is not a response to the law but to a relationship that is rooted in appreciation for God's love toward us. Fleshly desires are put to death because Christ defeated sin on the cross. Any who choose to live by the flesh will die, but those who choose life in the Spirit will live. Not only do believers experience victory over sin and death, but they also receive an unimaginable gift. Those led by the Spirit become God's children—adopted into His family as co-heirs with Christ. Sharing in Christ's suffering means believers share in His glory for all eternity. What a gift indeed!

Apply It

How deeply have you pondered Paul's breathtaking exclamation of "no condemnation"? These two words communicate gifts we can scarcely describe. Your past and present sins bring no accusation, verdict of guilt, or sentence of shame. Instead, Christ sets believers free from condemnation, free from sin's captivity, and free from God's wrath that leads to death. **In Christ, believers are freed to live for God and empowered by His Spirit to do so.** What emotions stir in your heart as you meditate on Romans 8:1? Freely express your gratitude to Christ Jesus and embrace His Holy Spirit's transformational power. Have you taken the pivotal first step—faith in Jesus? If not, today is that day for you. Choose life in the Spirit!

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21. Christ's glory: Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:1-3

Once captive to sin and death, those who believe are slaves no more; they carry no obligation whatsoever to sin or their fleshly desires. Sin's appeal no longer controls us. Instead, our new obligation and devotion are to live according to the Spirit, who gives strength to say no to sin's deceit and manipulation. In God's strength, we can stand against sin's relentless beckoning. We can walk away from gossip. We can turn from anger or angry words. We can cry for help when temptation lures us. What sin still has a hold on your life? When will you take hold of the Holy Spirit's gift and fully embrace your freedom from condemnation, living a life of peace that God intends for you?

The Holy Spirit empowers believers to follow Christ and be led by Him.[22] We cannot do this in our own strength. The Holy Spirit creates godly desires within us and teaches us to rely on God's enabling, not our own fortitude.[23] For God's people, holiness is far more than a good idea or reasonable goal. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, holiness is your destiny.[24] God created you to live with Christ forever, indwelt by His Spirit. He set you apart and placed you on the path of holiness to glorify Him and enjoy His presence. As you grasp God's grace that has set you free from sin's power, He will multiply your joy as He works out His salvation in you. How will you respond to the Spirit's transforming work?

This passage describes God's beautiful path for His children that incorporates His gift of adoption. God welcomes believers as His children. Rather than a license to sin, freedom from condemnation extends God's open call to repentance. He longs for His children to turn to Him and receive forgiveness. He invites us to step into His family as His adopted heirs. Our Father welcomes us as we eagerly approach Him. Picture the reality of your holy Father looking upon you from heaven and declaring, "That's my child!" In what ways will you express your love to God, who lavishes His love upon you as your Father?[25] How can we adequately thank our God? All praise be to God our Father, Jesus our Savior, and the Holy Spirit our guide! May praise to Him ring out today and throughout all eternity!

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22. **Follow Jesus:** Hebrews 12:1-3
23. **Seeking God's will:** Philippians 2:13
24. **Holiness:** Romans 8:29
25. **God our Father:** Matthew 6:8-15

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Suffering and Glory

Lesson 14 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 13 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth from the lecture did you find most encouraging or uplifting?

2. Which application from the notes stood out to you, and why?

Second Day: Read Romans 8:18.

Paul compared suffering with glory.

3. What was Paul's experience with and attitude toward suffering, and how does this affect your understanding of suffering? (See also Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18; 6:4-10; 11:23-28.)

4. a. To what did Paul compare our suffering, and what was his conclusion?

   b. In your own words, define glory. Give various aspects of a believer's glory from the following verses: 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Hebrews 2:10-14; Revelation 19:1-8; 22:3.

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5. Describe the relationship between suffering and glory. (See also Romans 8:17.) What hope does this bring to you, your church, and God's people worldwide?

Third Day: Read Romans 8:19-22.

Creation groans in frustration and bondage.

6. To what did Paul refer when he spoke of creation? Who subjected creation to frustration, and how? (See also Genesis 3:17-19.)

7. How do you see creation frustrated and in decay today? (See also Genesis 1:27–2:3.)

8. When and how will creation be fully restored, and what longings does this stir up in you? (See also 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:11–21:1; and other verses you may know.)

9. According to Paul, how does creation groan? Why do you think he used this illustration?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 8:23-25.

God's people groan.

10. a. For what do God's people groan, and why?

    b. How are God's people to wait, and what might this groaning and waiting look like in a believer's life?

    c. For what do you wait and hope, and why?

11. When you groan in waiting, what biblical attitudes and actions might strengthen you and encourage other believers? (See also 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7; Revelation 21:1-5; and other Scriptures you may know.)

Fifth Day: Read Romans 8:26-27.

The Holy Spirit groans.

12. How are the Holy Spirit's groans different from the groans of creation and God's people? How are they similar?

13. a. What is meant by "the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God"?

    b. How does the Holy Spirit work in a believer's life? (See also Luke 12:11-12; Acts 1:8; 16:6-10; 20:22; Ephesians 4:3-4; 6:17; 1 Corinthians 2:12; and other Scriptures you may know.)

14. What does it mean to you that the Holy Spirit intercedes on your behalf, and how have you seen Him at work in your life?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 8:18-27.

Believers eagerly await God's promised eternal glory.

15. As you consider the groans of suffering and God's revealed glory, what hope do these verses offer that you can carry with you?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 8:18-27

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 14 Notes

Romans 8:18-27

Focus Verse

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)

Outline

- Creation Groans – Romans 8:18-22
- Believers Groan – Romans 8:23-25
- The Spirit Groans – Romans 8:26-27

Engage

When was the last time you experienced the truth of Jesus's words, "In this world you will have trouble"?[1] Everyone suffers. People disappoint us, illness strikes, and jobs are lost. Prejudice and injustice leave deep wounds. Not only do God's children experience physical pain, emotional heartache, and mental anguish, but persecution and spiritual attacks continually disrupt their lives. We groan under pain, poverty, and temptation. **Suffering is something we try to avoid but cannot escape.**

Paul's pastoral concern for God's people compelled him to explain the glorious future believers await, even while they suffer. Pain on this earth does not threaten a believer's secure salvation and position as God's child. Paul now deepened the assurances he had just proclaimed in Romans 8:14-17. This world's trouble cannot compare with something that remains unseen yet certain: God's glory revealed in His children. God's promise to believers of a glorious future brings resilient hope that steadies them through life's challenges. While creation groans in fervent expectancy, God's children inwardly groan as they anticipate God fulfilling His promises—their future adoption into God's family and the redemption of their bodies. **Believers eagerly await God's promised eternal glory.** Certain hope in what remains unseen propels God's children forward as they patiently wait for God to do what only He can.

1. **World's trouble:** John 16:33

Creation Groans – Romans 8:18-22

Paul continued from verse 17, where he stated the incredible reality for all believers: "We are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we might also share in His glory." Paul reminded his readers that sharing God's glory requires sharing Christ's suffering. Suffering afflicts not just people but all of creation. Nature also suffers the effects of sin: decay and death. Even so, creation's groans do not merely express a painful struggle but also anticipate future glory.

Glory Beyond Compare – 8:18

In verse 18, Paul compared believers' present sufferings with the glory they anticipate. The two do not come remotely close. **Paul explained that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."** This promise of future glory includes the following:

- Experiencing Jesus's glory and reflecting His image with increasing glory[1]
- Heavenly citizenship and bodies transformed to be like Jesus's glorified body[2]
- Being called through the gospel to share in Jesus's glory[3]
- Confidence that Christ's life and atoning death on the cross make us holy and part of His family[4]
- Joyous worship, union with Christ, and service to God for all eternity[5]

Every believer will know the joy of standing before God clothed in Christ, accepted as His child and welcomed into His presence. **As Christ's co-heirs, all who believe and receive His salvation by grace through faith will share in the splendor and radiance of His eternal glory.**[6] That God would choose to honor sinful people this way should bring us to our knees in gratitude

The weight of future glory in Christ surpasses the burden of current suffering in every possible way, making it light by comparison.

While Paul endured severe suffering,[7] he also glimpsed heaven's glory.[8] **Reflecting on all he had suffered, Paul concluded that "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."**[9] Our troubles seldom feel either light or momentary! Paul's perspective on suffering collides with the seemingly endless agony all around us. The perpetual weightiness of life's challenges feels heavy.

However, the intense suffering Paul experienced invites us to lean in and learn from him. Steeped in the Old Testament, Paul knew that "glory" in Hebrew denotes something weighty: the totality of God's perfect honor, beauty, and goodness. The weight of future glory in Christ surpasses the burden of current suffering in every possible way, making it light by comparison. Paul probably used the word "momentary" to underscore that believers' suffering belongs only to this present age—our time on earth. **While God does not insulate believers from suffering, He works through it to reveal His glory and will one day end suffering forever.**[10]

Creation's Hope – 8:19

Paul simultaneously linked God's children to and set them apart from creation in verse 19. He wrote: "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." Creation often refers to all God has made in the heavens and on the earth. Here, Paul likely

1. **God's glory:** 2 Corinthians 3:18
2. **Heavenly citizenship:** Philippians 3:20-21
3. **Sharing in Jesus's glory:** 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14
4. **Christ's family:** Hebrews 2:10-14
5. **Eternal worship:** Revelation 19:1-8; 22:3
6. **Grace through faith:** Romans 5:1-2
7. **Paul's hardships:** 2 Corinthians 11:23-28
8. **Heaven's glory:** 2 Corinthians 12:2-4
9. **Momentary troubles:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-17
10. **God's work in our suffering:** James 1:2-4

means nature—the world of animals, plants, and inanimate matter. Paul did not include God's angels in creation's anticipation. They already understand the future heavenly glory that believers await. Paul also did not speak of fallen angels—Satan and demons. They shrink from the future because God's children's glorious victory will bring their judgment and ruin.[11]

Though imperfect, fallen creation reveals visible evidence of God's eternal power and divine character.[12] All creation belongs to God, the Creator. Creation's beauty stuns us as we view towering mountains or magnificent oceans. Yet creation eagerly awaits a glorious fulfillment to come. "Waits in eager expectation" reminds us of a child anticipating their birthday. Paul speaks as if the entire universe stretches to see the "freedom and glory of the children of God." Why would the universe go through such lengths? Because creation will participate in the victory of the saints as it is redeemed to unspoiled perfection.

Creation's Awaited Fulfillment – 8:20-21

God's judgment on humanity impacted the perfect world He created for people.[13] Adam, not nature, had sinned. Even so, creation suffered under God's curse. Not by its own choice, creation was subjected to frustration—always striving but never able to reach its ultimate purpose. Creation exists in bondage to decay. Flowers bloom and wither. Fish lay eggs and die. Physical death comes to everything that has physical life.[14] Even mighty mountains erode.

Yet creation will not remain in bondage forever. **God's plan to redeem His people includes the glorious renewal of all creation.** At Jesus's return, believers will receive perfect, imperishable bodies. Like plants and the seeds from which they grow, our new, glorious bodies will be linked somehow with our present, imperfect bodies, yet will be so much better.[15] Creation will enjoy a similar experience—in continuity with what came before but altogether different and gloriously new.[16]

Creation's Pain – 8:22

Like an infant child groans and cries to communicate discomfort, creation expresses suffering through groans. Paul revealed that "the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." Paul's image of childbirth points to joyful fulfillment beyond the cause of grief. Birth pains are real but not endless; they last only for a time. A woman groaning in labor endures great pain but looks forward in hope, knowing her struggles will fade once her child is born. **Creation groans in suffering now but looks forward in hope to the day of God's fulfilled promise.**

Believers Groan – Romans 8:23-25

God's judgment of Adam and Eve's sin brought unavoidable consequences to all humanity today. No one is exempt. **Along with creation, God's people groan—but not without hope.**[17] Scripture promises renewed life in Christ that continues and gains momentum for all eternity.

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11. **Fallen angels and judgment:** Matthew 8:28-29; Revelation 12:12; 20:7-10
12. **Visible evidence:** Romans 1:20
13. **Creation cursed:** Genesis 3:17-19; Isaiah 24:4-6
14. **Physical death:** Genesis 3:19; Psalms 102:25-26; 104:27-30; Hebrews 9:27
15. **New bodies:** 1 Corinthians 15:42-54
16. **New creation:** Revelation 21:1-5; 22:1-5
17. **Not without hope:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Hope in Adoption – 8:23

Those "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies." Just as farmers eagerly distribute the first produce from the crops they planted and stewarded, the Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit within believers[18] as they await their future glory. God's tangible, transformative work offers a foretaste of the full glory His people anticipate in eternity. The Holy Spirit indwells believers,[19] producing God-honoring righteousness in their daily lives. As God's children experience the Spirit's redemptive work in practical ways, they inwardly groan for the full glorification God has promised.

Daily struggles can cause excruciating pain. A believer's ongoing battle with personal sin causes confusion and angst.[20] Outside forces beyond our control trigger anguish. Real suffering creates heartache. Though we groan in pain, we have a helper. The Holy Spirit works within believers and walks alongside them. He brings needed hope as He guarantees God's promised inheritance of redemption.[21] **In life's darkest moments, believers can look ahead to a joy-filled eternity in God's glorious presence forever.**

Earlier in this chapter, Paul proclaimed God's great promise of adoption.[22] Here, he reveals that adoption's full experience is yet to come—an event believers eagerly await. Adoption has both a present and future reality. In the present, believers live as God's adopted children—a part of His family. God immediately moves believers from Adam's family[23] into His own family when they are saved. He is their Father. Nothing and no one can ever change this relationship. At the same time, believers await a future adoption that comes with "the redemption of our bodies," which has not yet happened. **Believers anticipate the day they exchange their sin-tainted human bodies for new, glorified, heavenly bodies like Jesus's body.[24]**

Hope in the Unseen – 8:24-25

Paul continued his point regarding believers' hope for adoption and redemption, saying, "In this hope we were saved." Christian hope is not merely wishful thinking. **A believer's hope in Jesus and His return is sure and certain.** God keeps His promises, assuring our present hope and future expectations. Paul expressed his hopeful attitude this way: "If we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." Believers patiently await their bodily resurrection and their fulfilled adoption as God's children.

God, who cannot lie, promised great, yet future, realities.[25] Because hope rests on the sure Word of God, Paul encouraged believers to reject confidence in personal strength, emotional stability, or spiritual accomplishments. Instead, God provides a reasonable and safe place for His people's hope to rest—through faith in His Word and trust in His promises.

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18. **The fruit of the Spirit:** Galatians 5:22-23
19. **Indwelt by the Spirit:** Romans 8:9
20. **Ongoing battle with sin:** Romans 7:15-20
21. **Spirit's guarantee:** Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 1:6
22. **Promised adoption:** Romans 8:14-17
23. **Adam's family:** Romans 5:12-21
24. **Living in glory:** Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2
25. **God's truthfulness:** Titus 1:2

A Believer's Path to Glory

The Doctrine of Suffering

Paul knew suffering well. He had been shipwrecked, nearly beaten to death, imprisoned, and flogged, and lived in constant danger.[1] **Suffering is inevitable for all people, including Christians.** Jesus said that whoever wants to be His disciple "must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."[2] Jesus suffered intense temptation and endured the cross.[3] Paul recognized that God powerfully uses suffering to shape a believer's character. Suffering invites believers to know Christ, their suffering Savior, and the power of His resurrection through experience rather than only intellectual knowledge.[4]

Suffering entered the world through Adam and Eve's first sin. Sin opened the door to physical sickness, decay, and death. Directly or indirectly, sin causes pain through mental, emotional, and spiritual suffering. Some people suffer as a natural consequence of their own sins or those committed against them. Others suffer harmful persecution for their faith in Christ. In some circumstances, we can offer no visible or overt reason or explanation for the suffering we see or experience—famine, natural disasters, and accidents. **Regardless, we can be certain that no suffering is outside God's sovereign and protective rule.** In Isaiah 45:7, God says, "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things." God uses suffering for good in the lives of His people.[5]

To suffer apart from Christ is to suffer without enduring hope. Despite our every effort to avoid suffering, looming burdens and troubles come crashing in. We seek mere human solutions that provide momentary control but never really offer escape; struggles continually arise. When people refuse to turn to Christ in suffering, brokenness, and weakness, despair or empty resignation can set in. The world's disappointing solutions and suggestions leave us empty, bitter, fearful, and frustrated.

Christ's followers can expect to suffer as a part of life on earth. God provides a path to glory when hardships enter believers' lives. The Holy Spirit's comforting presence within the hearts of God's children helps them endure in ways they simply could not on their own. God's living Word proclaims His great and abiding love, reminding us we are not alone. He sees us and loves us with an everlasting love. Jesus reminds us to take heart because He has overcome this world.[6] Paul proclaimed something amazing—God's glory will be revealed in us! How can this be? Our God never ceases to do greater work than we can imagine—even in times of great suffering.

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1. **Paul's suffering:** Acts 14:19-20; 16:22-24; 21:30-32; 22:24-28; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28
2. **Take up cross:** Matthew 16:24
3. **Jesus suffered temptation:** Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 4:15
4. **Knowing Christ:** Philippians 3:10-11
5. **God's goodness:** Genesis 50:18-21; Romans 8:28
6. **Overcomer:** John 16:33

Eagerly awaiting Christ's return requires patience. Though eagerness and patience do not seem to pair well, patience grows as we share God's priorities and care for others. Believers receive the privilege of working with God to reach the lost and serve His people.[26] What a grand picture of what this waiting looks like! In his other letters, Paul wrote about our proper perspective as we live on earth. In Colossians 3:2, he said, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Second Corinthians 4:17-18 encourages us: "We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Filled with thanksgiving for God's deliverance from hell and sin's punishment, we face the future focused on life's next steps and opportunities. **This future focus enables heavenly minded people to make a real and lasting difference in the present world.**

The Spirit Groans – Romans 8:26-27

Suffering brings weariness. **While creation and believers groan in their sufferings, God does not leave them stranded or alone.** Instead, He comes alongside them through His Holy Spirit. God's abiding Holy Spirit not only groans with us, He also groans for us in prayer when we are not sure how to pray.

Help in Weakness – 8:26a

The Holy Spirit comes alongside believers in many ways. In addition to the Holy Spirit's powerful work we witnessed in Lesson 13,[27] Scripture shows us that He teaches God's people in challenging situations[28] and gives power to those who witness on Jesus's behalf.[29] Through the Holy Spirit, God's people grow in unity with one another.[30] God's Spirit speaks through God's Word and helps people understand truth.[31] In fact, Paul refers to God's Word as the "sword of the Spirit" in His letter to the Ephesians.[32]

Every person lives in a perpetual state of weakness—physically, spiritually, and emotionally—as we await glory. The Spirit's continual indwelling presence provides believers with ongoing help. **Paul taught that the Holy Spirit helps believers by joining in bearing our burdens.** Jesus taught this when He promised to ask His Father to send the Spirit to live within His people.[33] The Greek word *parakletos* means helper, counselor, advocate, or comforter. The Holy Spirit comes alongside God's children to offer exactly these functions and bring about an increasingly abundant life even while suffering remains.

According to God's Will – 8:26b-27

Prayer offers believers a ready channel to communicate with God. However, life's difficulties can make words of prayer challenging to voice. Our weakness often causes us to wrestle so deeply that we cannot begin to pray. Sometimes our limited insight skews our prayers toward our very narrow, time-oriented perspective. The Holy Spirit comes alongside believers to help shoulder

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26. **Good works:** Romans 12:1; Ephesians 2:10
27. **Holy Spirit's work:** Romans 8:1-17
28. **Holy Spirit teaches:** Luke 12:11-12
29. **Holy Spirit's power:** Acts 1:8
30. **Unity in the Spirit:** Ephesians 4:3-4
31. **Holy Spirit's help:** 1 Corinthians 2:12
32. **Spirit's sword:** Ephesians 6:17
33. **Spirit lives within:** John 14:16-17, 25-26

the load that can seem crushing. The Holy Spirit groans as a real burden-bearer who stands with and for God's children. What does God's Spirit do on behalf of His beloved children? **The Holy Spirit intercedes for us in lockstep with God's will, which we struggle to discern in seasons of suffering.** He needs no words to express our earthly burdens perfectly to our heavenly Father.

Our Father understands the Spirit's wordless groans. Our triune, omniscient God tenderly works with intimate understanding of our plight. **Being one with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit knows God's will and our hearts and intercedes accordingly with divine perfection.**[34] The Spirit's intercession on the Christian's behalf points to a day in eternity when there will be no barrier between God and believers. Uninterrupted fellowship awaits anyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ. Positioned at God's right hand, Jesus also continually intercedes for believers.[35]

The realities of life on earth present ongoing challenges for God's children. **Saved by God's grace, steadied by God's promises, and sustained by the Holy Spirit's help, we can face our daily struggles with a long-term perspective.** Temporary travail exists while certain triumph awaits. Believers eagerly await God's promised eternal glory.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Suffering and glory are major themes in this section of Romans 8. **From experience, Paul knew a believer's suffering can never outweigh the future glory God promises.** Yet for now, the two—suffering and glory—coexist. For now, creation groans, we groan, and the Holy Spirit groans. Creation's groans of frustration expectantly long for God's glory to be revealed in His people. Creation groans as in childbirth even today, while God's children groan inwardly. Pressed under the weight of this world's momentary sufferings, believers eagerly and patiently await the fullness of glory to be revealed through their eternal adoption and redemption. God's yet unseen fulfillment creates anticipation in creation and provides eager hope to His longing people.

The Holy Spirit helps God's people in their weakness. In our weakened state, there are times we cannot form words of prayer. The Holy Spirit intervenes with wordless groans and actively intercedes on behalf of God's people. One with God, the Spirit knows and prays in unity with the Father's wisdom and will. At the very same moment, His inexpressible intercession for those He indwells brings them immeasurable, needed, precisely aimed comfort. Paul spoke incomprehensible truth to Rome's believers that rings true today. **God chooses to reveal His glory through His people, and His indwelling Spirit continually groans in prayer on their behalf.**

Apply It

Though suffering's weight can feel unbearable, we can find comfort in our God, who understands suffering. He gave His one and only Son to die for us.[36] How comforting to know that the God who collects our tears is the same God who will permanently wipe all tears from our eyes.[37] Suffering, sometimes deep or severe, attacks our mortal bodies along our unavoidable

34. Spirit intercedes: Philippians 2:13
35. Jesus intercedes: Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25
36. God gave His only Son: John 3:16
37. Our tears: Psalm 56:8; Revelation 21:4

trek toward physical death. However, this sobering reality does not need to dictate how we view life. All suffering and pain will cease when God fulfills His eternal plan. His glory will be fully revealed in the everlasting age to come. And while we wait for that day, we cannot rightly compare eternity's glory with today's suffering. Even if suffering endures for a lifetime, God's purposes will prevail forever. What past or present suffering causes you pain? How is suffering's burden overwhelming you today? Cry out to the God who sees you. He knows you by name. He is near and ready to help. Will you seek God and receive His comfort?

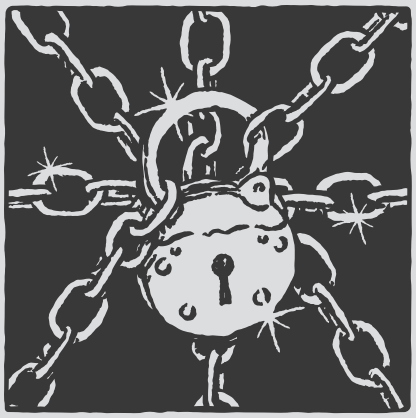
Groaning resonates throughout the passage we have considered. Difficulties can overwhelm us as we process life in a fallen world. Creation groans. Believers groan. The Holy Spirit groans. However, the groans Paul described are not fruitless, hopeless wails of agonizing despair. Creation longs for God's children to be revealed—and they will be revealed. Believers long for the glorification God has promised in their adoption into His family. With absolute certainty, that will indeed happen. And the Spirit groans in wordless cries on our behalf, perfectly harmonizing our pain with God's purposes. God hears the Spirit's powerful prayers and holds our hearts steady when our knees are shaking. **God invites us to rest in hope that cannot and will not bring disappointment.** When groaning escalates within you, how do you respond? How does your trouble draw you to God?

Eternal future glory puts temporary suffering into proper perspective. Every believer will receive a resurrection body, live forever, and see God in His full glory, face-to-face. Paul's explanation does not minimize suffering but instead elevates what lies ahead. The multimedia onslaught of heartbreaking news and empty promises can easily drown out God's certain promises. We can almost hear creation's groans in the ocean's stormy tempest, a tsunami's thundering cascade, and the sweeping devastation of hurricanes, tornadoes, or wildfires. How comforting to know that a time is coming when God will renew all things. What helps you focus on eternity's glories rather than today's grief? How will you allow your most pressing challenge to catapult you into God's presence, where He can expand your longing for Christ's return? God can be trusted even when we cannot fully understand His purposes.

The Holy Spirit actively groans in intercessory prayer for God's people. If you are a believer, God's Spirit is actively praying for you—continuous, deep, abiding prayer in perfect alignment with the Father's will. When you feel too weak or confused to pray, ask for the Spirit's help. He is always with you. Believers are commanded to pray, even continually.[38] A great spiritual discipline and privilege, prayer invites believers to experience God's constant attention, availability, and unlimited power. We may not always know what to pray for, but God gives us His Spirit to step in where we come up short. If you are feeling discouraged or empty, recall God's promise and pray a short prayer of thanksgiving for His presence, hope, and care. Our Father hears our prayers and responds to them consistently, perfectly, and wisely out of His inexhaustible abundance. Be encouraged! The Holy Spirit prepares us for the time we will pray in perfect unity with all those gathered around God's throne. As you patiently await the fulfillment of your salvation and God's glory in eternal resurrection, how and for what will you pray?

38. Pray continually: 1 Thessalonians 5:17

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Secure in God's Love

Lesson 15 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 14 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture impact how you view the suffering you face?

2. What points in the notes offered you hope for today and the future?

Second Day: Read Romans 8:28.

Paul revealed a great promise.

3. What did Paul say believers know, and what did he mean by "all things"?

4. a. Write verse 28 in your own words. Share any assurances that arise within you as you write.

   b. What attributes of God are revealed in this verse? How does this comfort or challenge you?

5. a. How have you seen God's truth in Romans 8:28 come to pass in life's struggles?

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b. When has God's good been different than the good you hoped for, and how might you pray when God's good feels hard to find?

Third Day: Read Romans 8:29-30.

Paul offered understanding regarding God's sovereign purpose for His people.

6. a. Briefly explain the following concepts. (For help, see Matthew 11:28-30; John 6:37, 44; 10:1-5; 11:25-44; Romans 1:6-7; 3:22-26; 8:17-21; Ephesians 1:4-5, 11; or other Bible passages.)

   Foreknew

   Predestined

   Called

   Justified

   Glorified

   b. What do verses 29-30 reveal about God, and why is this good news?

7. a. What are some ways God works to conform His people to the image of His Son? (See also Romans 5:3-5; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:12, 15-17; Hebrews 2:18; 5:7-8; 1 Peter 1:6-7; or other Bible passages.)

   b. What might stand in the way of professing believers exhibiting Christlikeness in their daily lives?

8. How do you know God is at work in your life, making you more like Jesus?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 8:31-35.

Paul offered questions and answers regarding the spiritual benefits God's people experience through faith.

9. a. List the questions and answers given in verses 31-35. (See also verses 36-39.)

   b. What conclusions can be made based on what Paul wrote?

10. How do Paul's questions and answers challenge or encourage you?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 8:35-39.

Paul proclaimed nothing could separate God's people from His love.

11. Why might Paul have quoted Psalm 44:22 in answer to the question in verse 35? (See also John 16:33.)

12. a. How do "all these things" listed in verses 35-37 relate to "all things" in verses 28 and 32?

    b. In verse 37, what words did Paul use to describe believers, and who makes this possible?

13. Of what was Paul convinced in verses 38-39, and why?

14. List troubles, concerns, opposition, and fears that are present in your life today. Rewrite verses 38-39 as your statement of certain confidence in God's love for you in Christ Jesus your Lord.

Sixth Day: Review Romans 8:28-39.

God's people rest securely in His good purposes, salvation, and love.

15. What have you learned from this passage about your security in Christ, and how will you thank Him?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 8:28-39

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 15 Notes

Romans 8:28-39

Focus Verse

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

Outline

- God's Promise – Romans 8:28
- God's Purpose – Romans 8:29-30
- God's Protection – Romans 8:31-39

Engage

Life's troubles can be unsettling. Relational challenges, health concerns, work problems, and financial difficulties surface and create uncertainties that threaten our peace. When life becomes unstable, external stresses and internal struggles can also affect our physical bodies. Where can we find rest and assurance? **Paul invited his readers to consider their ultimate security: God alone offers perfect peace.** His good character accomplishes eternal good in the lives of His people.

As Paul explained the depth and breadth of God's love, he revealed that God, in His goodness, works all things for the good of His people. God's grip upon His people is so strong that they cannot be separated from Him. Paul offered tremendous encouragement to believers who experienced life in ancient Rome's trenches of depravity. Paul's words pour forth the same encouragement to afflicted believers today. **God's people rest securely in His good purposes, salvation, and love.**

God's Promise – Romans 8:28

Experiences across generations show that God's people have never been exempt from life's difficulties. In Romans 8:18-27, Paul affirmed that believers' suffering can never outweigh the future glory God promises. Though circumstances often promise the worst, God's promise in Romans 8:28 offers resounding hope. **Paul declared, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."** This tremendous truth reaches to all believers in every situation—all for God's glory.

Pondering the Promise

Paul opened God's spectacular promise with the words, "And we know." What believers know and believe fuels how they live. God's promise remains certain, even when we do not feel or

see the good outcome He promises. God works in all things, even the worst evil, and will bring eternal good to His people through every suffering, tragedy, and joy. Paul suffered greatly,[1] yet his confidence in Scripture and faith in Christ assured him of God's work on his behalf.[2] The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this truth so we too can know God works for the good of His people.

God placed no boundaries on this promise; Paul declared God's work in all things. Sometimes we see God bring obvious victory. God also works through life's darkest moments and seemingly hopeless circumstances to accomplish His ultimate good. Our situation itself may not be good, but God's presence and comfort rise even when relief does not. At Christ's cross and grave, God worked through the worst evil to accomplish the greatest good.[3] Times of suffering offer opportunities to glorify God as we trust Him. Even death cannot leave lasting wounds.[4] God's promise lasts for eternity. In all things, God works for good.

What exactly did Paul mean by the word "good"? God's good does not guarantee health, wealth, or comfortable living. **God's greatest good for His people on earth is to make them more like Jesus Christ in this life[5] and in heaven's glory.[6]** God promises and secures His good for His children. While on earth, believers experience joy, peace, and the beauties of family and friendships. They also endure sin, sickness, and every other kind of suffering. Life in this world can involve one evil encounter and setback after another. We encounter betrayal, not faithfulness. Hating others is not love. Persecution is not protection. Death is not life. But God brings lasting good even through this world's fallenness. He uses all things to achieve His good for His people.

Paul made it clear Romans 8:28 only applies to those who love God—to believers in Jesus Christ. After all, how can all things work for good for those who reject God, who gives all things?[7] But for those who live in Christ by grace through faith, God works in every situation for their good. He called them according to His purpose, and His plan will be accomplished through them.

God's Purpose – Romans 8:29-30

The certainty of God's promise to make all things good rests with Him. In these verses, Paul spoke exclusively of God and His actions without mentioning human involvement. God Himself accomplishes His good purpose. Paul's continued explanation revealed that God will see each of His people safely through this life and into His presence for all eternity. Not one believer will be lost.[8]

Assurance for God's People – 8:29

In writing about God's secure hold on believers, Paul pointed to five timeless truths about God. God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified the saved. These truths flow from eternity past to eternity future. The words connect as an unbreakable chain, with five golden links describing God's wonder, beauty, and activity in salvation.

1. **Paul's suffering:** Acts 14:19-20; 16:22-24; 21:30-32; 22:22-28; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28
2. **God's purposes:** Genesis 50:20
3. **Greatest good:** Acts 2:23-24
4. **Beyond death:** Daniel 3:16-18; John 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15:54-55; Revelation 21:4
5. **Christlike character:** Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 2:1-8; Colossians 3:12-17
6. **Glory:** Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2-3
7. **Giver of all things:** James 1:17
8. **No believer lost:** John 10:27-30

What did Paul mean when he used the word "foreknew"? Some say that because God knows all things, He knows beforehand what people will do—who will and will not believe. In other words, God looks into the future and sees the eventual faith of those who believe. Others look to the Greek word *proginosko,* which can mean to choose something or someone beforehand. When foreknowledge involves people, the word can mean special favor granted to a special relationship. The Old Testament often speaks of God's foreknowledge in this intensely personal and loving way.[9] Recognizing God's foreknowledge turns our attention from ourselves to Him. Salvation begins with God,[10] who lovingly chose to conform sinful, undeserving people to be like Jesus. **God's foreknowledge demonstrates that every link in salvation's chain began by God's grace in eternity past.[11]**

The word "predestined" flows from God's deep and personal love. This differs greatly from fatalism, which is impersonal and excludes God, saying, "What will be, will be." Fatalism implies no human responsibility or dignity. Paul used the term "predestined" to express that God fixed His love on His people before the world began. Believers' destinies are wrapped in God's loving choice to make them like His Son so "that he [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." God predestines believers to accomplish His purpose.[12]

God's love in extending His call displays true grace for humanity, which Jesus proved with arms opened wide upon the cross.

Eternity Past, Present, and Future – 8:30

The next link in salvation's chain is the word "called." The Bible speaks of two different calls. First, a general call invites everyone everywhere to repent of sin, turn to Jesus, and be saved. Jesus gave this type of call when He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"[13] and "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink."[14] This call remains open to all people. But left to themselves, people do not come. Sinful pride and rebellion lead people to prefer their own way. This is why Jesus also said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them."[15]

The other type of call is the specific inward call from God, the third link in salvation's chain. Jesus demonstrated this call when He raised Lazarus.[16] Physically, Lazarus was what all people are spiritually by nature—dead and without the desire or ability to respond. Jesus called Lazarus specifically, by name. No one else in the tomb responded. Lazarus alone heard Jesus's call and supernaturally obeyed. With the same effective power, God calls people from death to life today. **Not one person deserves God's amazing grace, but He chose to ground His call in what He foreknew and predestined, which would cost the life of His sinless Son.** God's love in extending His call displays true grace for humanity, which Jesus proved with arms opened wide upon the cross.

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9. **God's foreknowledge:** Genesis 18:19; Jeremiah 1:5; Amos 3:2
10. **Salvation:** John 1:12-13
11. **Eternity past:** 1 Peter 1:20-21; Revelation 13:8
12. **Created for God's work:** Ephesians 2:10
13. **Rest:** Matthew 11:28
14. **Thirsty:** John 7:37
15. **Drawn by Father:** John 6:44
16. **Lazarus:** John 11:25-26, 38-44

God's calling connects what God determined beforehand with what passes over into time. God exists outside of time. His eternal knowledge and determination intersect with human experience. **God's call is the point where what He decreed in eternity about His loved ones becomes a fact in time-bound lives.** At a specific point in time, God personally and individually saves people through His call to faith.

Following "called" on salvation's chain is "justified." God, as judge, declared His people, though sinners, to be in right standing before Him.[17] This declaration cannot be based on human merit, which no one can offer. Rather, God justifies people on Jesus's all-sufficient merit. Jesus took sin's full penalty at the cross, and God credits His Son's perfect righteousness to all who believe in Him.[18]

Justification follows calling because God's call is what brings faith into being. Faith rises as the first true evidence of the spiritual life God's call produces. Without faith, there is no justification. God saves people by or through faith, not because of faith. Paul later explained that faith comes by hearing the Word of God.[19] God graciously uses His Word to create faith within believers' hearts to bring His gift of justification to them.

The final link in salvation's chain is "glorified," which means to be made to be like Jesus Christ.[20] Surprisingly, Paul referred to "glorified" in the past tense, as already accomplished. Yet we can easily see that glorification remains future. How could Paul refer to glorification as already completed? This is possible only because God's purpose is so certain that believers are already safe and secure for eternity in Him.[21] When turning our eyes from earthly living to Jesus seated at the Father's right hand, believers see themselves already glorified through identification with Him.[22] Paul's words exemplify how prophets spoke about certain future events as if they were already accomplished.[23] Paul deliberately assured his readers that God will glorify even the weakest believer. God never changes His mind. His Word remains certain and true.[24]

Because God initiated salvation, we can know He will continue His work until the day He makes believers fully like Jesus Christ.[25] **Believers can expect that they will be glorified—illumined with God's glory for God's glory.**

God's Protection – Romans 8:31-39

Romans 8 concludes with words that crest the highest peaks of scriptural truth with breathtaking beauty. The question, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" resonates with strength beyond compare. The truth that nothing can separate us from the love of God emanates enduring hope and hits a forceful crescendo that still rings today. **God's protection of His people on earth and in heaven remains undeniable, unstoppable, and astoundingly unbreakable.**

17. **Declared righteous:** Romans 3:21-31
18. **Perfect righteousness:** 2 Corinthians 5:21
19. **Faith by hearing:** Romans 10:17
20. **Made like Christ:** Romans 8:18-27; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:20-21
21. **Safe in eternity:** Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:3-4
22. **Already glorified:** Ephesians 1:3-4
23. **Prophetic past:** Isaiah 44:28; 52:14; 53:1-6
24. **Unchanging and true:** Numbers 23:19; Psalm 33:11; Malachi 3:6; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18
25. **Completed work:** Philippians 1:6

Safe and Secure

The Doctrine of Eternal Security

Believers are promised sure and certain security in Christ. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, condemnation has no hold over them. Paul said, "It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one." Having accomplished believers' salvation, Jesus is now at God's right hand, interceding for believers. **Salvation does not depend on human strength or faithfulness; salvation comes through Christ and His completed work on the cross.** By faith, the Holy Spirit seals and indwells for eternity everyone who believes.[1] Paul wrote, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."[2] Salvation is God's work from beginning until glorious, eternal consummation.

Paul later explained and celebrated that nothing can separate God's people from Him or His love. No person, principality, supernatural force, personal failure, or anything else can come between God and His people. Moses lacked trust and acted independently. David sinned grievously. Peter denied Jesus. Paul suffered greatly. Scripture includes many examples of human and supernatural forces attempting to separate God from His people. But God's immovable and unwavering strength means nothing can thwart Him. He keeps His every promise. So when His Word says, "Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God," He means it. Believers experience confidence, freedom, joy, and purpose in God's firm and loving grip—in this life and for eternity.

The supposed protection this world seeks, such as a financial safety net or a home security system, will never provide the eternal security Christ offers. In fact, those who reject faith in Christ will never find the refuge they crave. With their very lives in jeopardy, people are tragically lulled through wrong thinking into considering their sins insignificant and failing to understand they need a Savior. Missing out on God's great promise of eternal life and eternal security in Jesus, who gave His life on humanity's behalf, is a loss beyond description.

Those who believe in Christ, their Savior, are truly saved. They are immediately blessed as part of God's family and rest securely in their eternal salvation; enduring hope is theirs. While people saved from sin's penalty still struggle with sin, the Holy Spirit gives them a new nature and sanctifies them, leading them to grow to be more like Christ.[3] Clinging to God's Word, believers who realize that nothing and no one can ever snatch them from their Father's hands overflow with delight. They live freely, loving God, joyfully serving Him, and gladly sharing Christ and His good news with others.

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1. **Sealed:** John 10:27-30; Ephesians 1:13-14
2. **God's work completed:** Philippians 1:6
3. **Growing in Christlikeness:** Romans 5:1-5; 6:1-23; 7:4-6; 8:5-17

Paul's Questions – 8:31-34

Paul presented a series of questions that celebrate God's grand love for His people. Each question argues not only God's love but also His power and certain hold upon His people. Paul's journey of praise in these verses brings sweet assurance to the hearts of all believers.

Paul opened verse 31 with a precursory question, "What, then, shall we say in response to these things?" As Paul approached His triumphant exclamations, perhaps he intended to capture all he had written from Chapter 5 forward. Paul continued with, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" This question might at first seem confusing. Many people and things oppose God and His children. The world, our sinful flesh, and God's greatest enemy, Satan, create constant opposition in a believer's life.[26] While many are hostile toward God's people, the One who is for them is greater. No person, sin, or supernatural entity can get past the God who is for us.

Paul moved his argument of triumph forward in verse 32 by asking, "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?" God is the good Father of a forever family. God gave His greatest gift—Jesus, His only Son. He did not spare His Son from pain and death. A faithful promise-keeper, God sealed all of His promises in Jesus's blood, which secures every promise He has made. Paul used the Greek verb *paredoken,* translated as "gave over," to point to God's gracious purpose. God lovingly gave His sinless Son over to death to rescue sinners from their deserved judgment. Life and righteousness come to believers through Jesus.

A faithful promise-keeper, God sealed all of His promises in Jesus's blood, which secures every promise He has made.

Paul's third question moved into the legal realm of a court of law. Can believers' struggle with post-conversion sin undo salvation? Does any accusation exist that can cause God to condemn a believer in Christ? Many believers find it hard to understand what justification means to them personally. God has declared every believer eternally righteous in Christ through faith in Christ's once-for-all payment for sin. Believers stand before God not in their imperfect righteousness but as new creations clothed in Christ's righteousness, which never changes, fades, or fails.

The prophet Zechariah saw a vision demonstrating the meaning of standing justified before God.[27] Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest appear before the angel of the Lord in filthy clothes, depicting Joshua's sinfulness. Satan eagerly accused Joshua,[28] but the Lord rebuked him. He ordered Joshua's filthy clothes to be removed and replaced with fine, clean garments. He took away Joshua's sin. Who could accuse Joshua now? No one! God had already clothed Joshua in righteousness that securely covered his past, present, and future. Joshua's story becomes our story through faith in Christ. **Apart from Christ, many could successfully condemn us. But because believers are in Christ, they cannot[29] because "it is God who justifies."** No one can stand against God.

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26. Constant opposition: Galatians 5:17; James 4:4; 1 Peter 5:8
27. Justified: Zechariah 3:1-7
28. The accuser: Revelation 12:10
29. Condemnation: 1 John 3:20

Paul's next question logically follows. Because the highest court possible has declared believers righteous in Christ, "Who then is the one who condemns?" **No one can condemn believers because Jesus Himself, who died and was raised to life, sits at God's right hand, interceding on their behalf.** Jesus will judge the world at His return.[30] In other words, because the judge Himself intercedes for believers, no accusation will get past Him. Christ freed believers once and for all when He died in their place on the cross.

Paul's Confidence – 8:35-39

Paul expressed great confidence in God and His unbridled love when he asked, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" Having endured each of these trials, Paul could personally verify that none—not one—separated him from the Savior who loved him. Instead, Paul firmly testified to Jesus's love. In addition to personal experience, Paul offered God's Word as further proof. He quoted Psalm 44:22, which says, "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." The Bible makes it clear that believers face danger and death. They endure great afflictions that sometimes feel impossible to bear. Real suffering causes far-reaching and deeply abiding physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental pain. **How comforting to know that not even this world's worst attempts can separate us from Christ's love.** Paul eloquently argued that in all things "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Jesus is our certain comfort and sure strength in times of deep suffering.

As his personal testimony continued, Paul recorded his convictions with tenacious passion. Considering all creation, he confidently concluded, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul dismissed every possible source that could separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life, and died an excruciating death—all on behalf of sinful humanity. Now that He is raised from the dead, we await His promised return. Jesus will never give up on His people. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, and nothing can separate believers from God's love. Everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ remains secure forever in God's love. **God's people rest securely in His good purposes, salvation, and love.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God's great promise to work in all things "for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" extends from the past to eternity. Our plans may seem good, but God has something even better in mind—making us like Christ.[31] Nothing can defeat the plans of our sovereign and all-powerful God. He orders absolutely all things, places, and people for the good of those who love Him. God's people live in utmost security because in Him all things are inevitably and completely for their good forever.

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30. Judgment: Romans 2:16
31. God's plans: Proverbs 19:21

Paul offered evidence for this extraordinary promise. Paul set forth the great truths about God's work in His unbreakable chain of salvation, proving just how secure God's people are in this world and for all eternity. God's love is unchangeable, personal, purposeful, and all-powerful. **His love is the strongest, steadiest, firmest, most substantial, unbending, constant, steady, and dependable reality.** His love is so sure that nothing in heaven or on earth can separate God's people from His love that is ours in Christ.

Apply It

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." God's promises are easy to trust when work, health, and relationships are steady. But what about when tragedy strikes? We struggle greatly to find God's good in times of deep suffering. Paul knew this firsthand. Much to our surprise, God may exchange the ease we seek for something difficult. Christians must be careful not to wield Romans 8:28 as a quick-fix salve when trying to console someone who is suffering. Anguish should never be easily dismissed. While suffering is woven into God's sovereign plan of salvation, we need gentle care in our suffering and to comfort others likewise in theirs. **God calls His people to give a clear, authentic, and compelling testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of circumstances.** Whatever your current situation, God's purposes for you remain unchanged, and His glory is assured. What questions remain in your heart and mind regarding God's promise? Will you ask God to help you trust Him and obediently cling to Him, depending on His strength to get you through?

How willing are you to trust God with words like "foreknew" and "predestined"? God is sovereign, all-knowing, ever-present, and all-powerful. He knew you before you met Him. Maybe reading these notes is your first introduction to God. He knew you before today and planned that you would meet Him in His Word today. Whoever you are, right now, God speaks to you. Do you believe that God has known you from the beginning and predestined you for heaven? If your answer is yes, have you answered His call? If not, God beckons you to come to Him. How will you answer? Salvation's unbreakable chain is but one prayer away.

Who can stand against God? No one! Are you outnumbered by people who mock God's Word or your beliefs? Paul presented great and unwavering confidence in God. Will you pray for opportunities to gently and respectfully display quiet but firm confidence in God?[32] Will you work for peace by displaying the fruits of Christ's righteousness?[33] Nothing and no one can defeat believers because God Himself defends them. He reigns in victory over sin, death, and the devil. **God's people remain safe and secure eternally through faith in Christ Jesus.**

How does God's strong salvation chain compare to what you depend upon to secure identity, experiences, and possessions? We must live wisely in the world. The sovereign security God promises in this passage remains firm for all eternity. Paul's words challenge believers to answer God's call to live in confident, obedient faith. God works in our lives for eternal good. This promise frees us to step out in faith and follow Him without reservation. Further, this promise gives great hope: God is for you. God does not condemn you. **Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.** Nothing now. Nothing ever. The unbreakable chain of salvation links believers forever to God. What praise will you offer to God in return?

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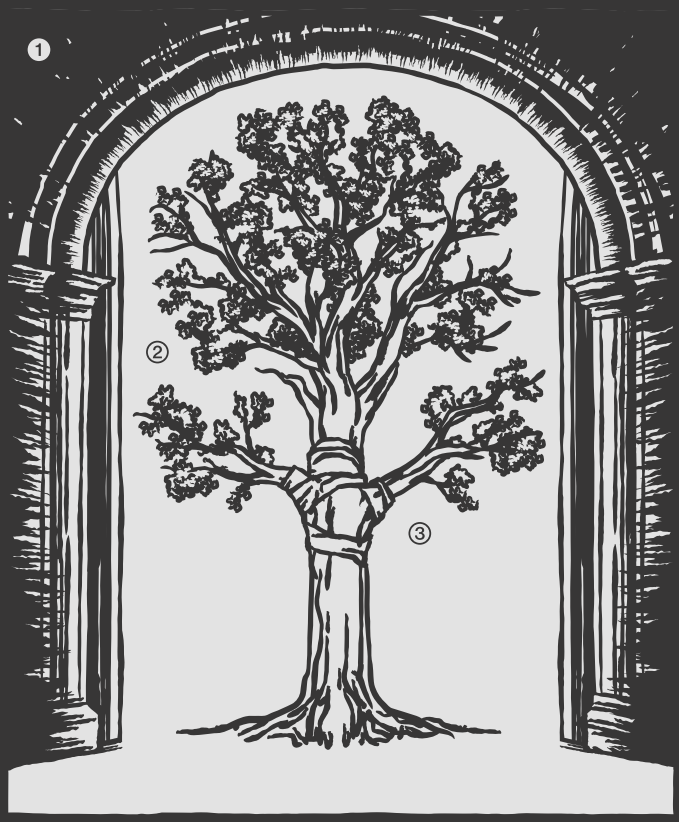
32. Confidence: 1 Peter 3:15
33. Fruitfulness: Galatians 5:22-23

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LESSONS 16-20

ROMANS 9–11

Proof of God's Righteousness in His Sovereign Plan



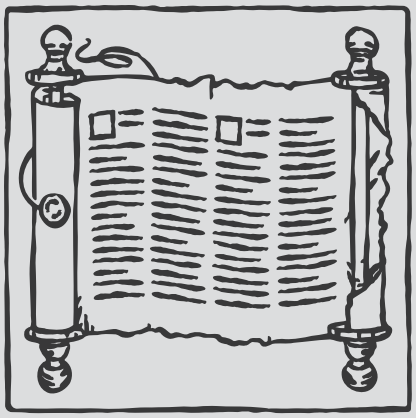
SYNPOSIS

Paul proves God's righteousness in His sovereign plan. Although Israel rejected Christ, God's promises remain, as "true Israel" is defined by God's sovereign choice and believers' sincere faith, not lineage or works. Israel's unbelief opened the door to salvation for the Gentiles, with redemption offered to both Jew and Gentile through faith in Christ.

Lessons 16-20 explain how in God's glorious salvation plan, Gentiles are grafted by grace into the family of God.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

① Open Door to Salvation
② The Tree of Israel
③ Grafted Branches



God's Sovereignty in Salvation

Lesson 16 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 15 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture deepen your understanding of your security in Christ?

2. How did studying God's unshakable love impact your beliefs or actions?

Second Day: Read Romans 9:1-5.

Paul grieved for unbelieving Israelites.

3. Why did Paul grieve for the people of Israel, and how was his deep concern like that of Moses and Jesus? (See also Exodus 32:30-32; Luke 19:41-44; John 10:11; Romans 11:7-10.)

4. a. According to Romans 8:1, 28-29, 35, 38-39, can any believer be "cursed and cut off from Christ"?

   b. What was Paul trying to express in verse 3?

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c. What do you learn from Paul's love for unbelieving people?

5. Keeping in mind Israel's advantages noted in verses 4-5, what spiritual advantages have you been given? (See also Luke 22:20; John 1:14; Romans 8:15; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Galatians 4:4-5; Hebrews 9:22-28). How have you benefited from or failed to appreciate each?

Third Day: Read Romans 9:6-13.

Paul affirmed that God's word to Israel had not failed.

6. a. What is God's word to Israel? (See also Genesis 12:2-3; 15:4-21; 17:1-22; 28:10-15.)

b. How does God remain faithful to His word despite unbelief? (See also Exodus 2:24; 6:2-8; 2 Samuel 7:8-16; Matthew 1:1-16.)

7. a. What examples did Paul give to prove that physical birth never automatically makes someone God's child? (See also Genesis 16:15; 25:1-2; Romans 2:28-29.)

b. How do these verses show salvation is by grace and not human effort?

8. What hope does salvation by grace offer you for your unsaved family, friends, or coworkers?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 9:14-21.

Paul addressed questions about God's sovereign election.

9. What do verses 14-19 reveal about God's character and how He works out His righteous and holy will? (See also Exodus 7:3, 13; 8:32; 14:4.)

10. a. From verses 20-21, explain in your own words the problem with people accusing God of injustice. (See also Isaiah 29:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 18:6; 2 Timothy 2:20.)

    b. Give examples of how people today, perhaps even you, use similar reasons to excuse sin or accuse God of injustice.

11. How has God shown you mercy when your heart has been hard, and how has His mercy impacted you?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 9:22-29.

Paul offered examples to illustrate God's sovereign purposes.

12. From verses 22-24, how and why does God demonstrate His power and glory?

13. Meditate on the revealed riches of God's glory. (See also Ephesians 1:7-8, 18-23; 2:1-10.) How will you respond?

14. What do you learn about God's mercy and grace to Gentiles and Jews from the quotations from Hosea and Isaiah? (See also Romans 11:3-6, 25-27.)

Sixth Day: Review Romans 9:1-29.

God is sovereign over His creation and faithfully keeps His promises.

15. How did this week's passage strengthen, challenge, or expand your understanding of God's faithfulness and sovereignty in salvation?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 9:1-29

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 16 Notes

Romans 9:1-29

Focus Verse

"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—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?" (Romans 9:23-24)

Outline

- Paul's Sorrow – Romans 9:1-5
- God's Faithfulness – Romans 9:6-13
- God's Sovereignty – Romans 9:14-29

Engage

What comes to mind when you think about promises? Promises can stir delight or offer hope, but they can also create disappointment when those we trust do not keep their word. We can all likely recall a time we broke a promise, damaging trust or a relationship. In a world where trust requires vows, contracts, agreements, appointments, civil law, and treaties, a broken promise can shake our sense of security or ability to live safely. **Is there anyone whose promises we can trust completely?**

Paul answered that question in Romans 9–11: Yes! God's promises can be trusted. Even better, Paul offered many proofs and explanations. Trusting God is not a risky leap of blind faith. **God is sovereign over His creation and faithfully keeps His promises.** He has not lost control. His plans have not been compromised by our sin. God's people can trust every word of the Bible and His glorious grace through Jesus Christ. God is working through history to accomplish His good plans for you and all of creation.

Paul's elated conclusion of Romans 8 drew his attention back to his beloved compatriots and ancestors—Israel. **Over the next five lessons, we will explore Paul's explanation of Israel's role in God's salvation plan.** The powerful truths of God's glorious character and plans climax in a doxology of God's incomprehensible wonder.[1]

- In Chapter 9, Paul pointed to Israel's past as the people God sovereignly chose—elected—to be His covenant people.
- In Chapter 10, Paul pointed to Israel's present willful rejection of Jesus the Messiah, showing how human responsibility and God's sovereignty work together in salvation.
- In Chapter 11, Paul pointed to "true Israel's" future as people saved by God's grace and unbreakable promise.[2]

1. **Doxology:** Romans 11:33-36
2. **God's promise:** Genesis 22:16-18; Hebrews 6:13-15

Paul's Sorrow – Romans 9:1-5

Paul's confidence in God's power, provision, and loving promises produced in him a deep longing for the unbelieving people of Israel to know Jesus as their Messiah.

Paul's Love – 9:1-3

Many of Paul's fellow Jews persecuted him for his faith in Jesus and gospel ministry.[3] Despite this hardship, Paul shared Jesus's love and compassion for his people.[4]

Paul's heartbreak over the judgment awaiting unbelievers led him to exclaim, "I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people." While only sinless Jesus could die to save people, Paul was willing to die and hypothetically be cut off from Christ if that could bring about Jewish belief. Moses once made a similar self-sacrificial appeal.[5] Paul knew that nothing could separate him from Christ—not his desires nor his enemies and their unbelief.[6] **Paul also knew that only God's grace brings about salvation, yet he grieved deeply over those who kept rejecting Jesus.**

Israel's Advantages – 9:4-5

Paul's intense sorrow flowed from his great love for God, who had done marvelous things for Israel. **The people of Israel had received unmatched spiritual advantages.** Yet they failed to receive Christ, to whom all their advantages pointed. How could Paul not grieve for fellow Jews? They rejected God's grace. Paul listed specific advantages God granted Israel:

- **Adoption**—God chose to adopt Israel as His covenant people through whom He would bring salvation to the world.[7] Adoption depends on God's grace.
- **Divine glory**—In the Old Testament, Israel visibly saw God's glory in a fiery pillar and cloud that guided them at the exodus, descended on Mount Sinai when God gave the law, filled the newly constructed tabernacle and later temple, and settled above the atonement cover of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies.[8]
- **Covenants**—Through covenants, God promised to be Israel's God, to never abandon them, and to send a Savior to reign forever on David's throne.[9]
- **Receiving the law**—The law revealed God's character, the way to live as God's people, and the need for the coming Savior, Jesus Christ.[10]
- **Temple worship**—Israel's worship included animal sacrifices that taught the seriousness of sin and God's greater grace.[11]
- **Promises**—In this context, "promises" probably refers to Old Testament promises of salvation through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

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3. **Jews persecuted Paul:** 2 Corinthians 11:24, 26
4. **Jesus's compassion:** Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44
5. **Moses's appeal:** Exodus 32:32
6. **No separation:** Romans 8:38-39
7. **God's choice:** Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 8:5; Hosea 11:1
8. **God's visible glory:** Exodus 13:21-22; 24:16-17; 40:34-38; 2 Chronicles 5:13–6:2
9. **Old Testament covenants:** Genesis 12:2-3; 15:4-21; 17:1-22; 22:15-18; 28:10-15; Exodus 2:24; 6:2-8; 24:1-18; 2 Samuel 7:4-16; 23:5
10. **Law's value:** Romans 3:1-2; 7:12; Galatians 3:19-24
11. **Sin's penalty:** Romans 6:23

- **Patriarchs**—God personally delivered, guided, and blessed the Jewish people through Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob, who was later called Israel. Occasionally, the Bible includes Jacob's 12 sons in this group.[12]
- **Christ's human ancestry**—God sovereignly moved through history and Abraham's lineage to bless the world through Jesus Christ.[13]

Paul trusted in these advantages[14] until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.[15] **Spiritual advantages point to Jesus but cannot replace salvation through faith.** God continues to bless believers by allowing them to share many of Israel's advantages.[16]

Paul ended this list of privileges with an extraordinary statement about Jesus, "the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen." **The fully human Messiah Jesus is, in fact, also fully God.** Since His divine conception, people have questioned Christ's deity. However, this verse expresses a strong statement of Jesus's deity alongside the mention of His human ancestry. He is one person forever in two natures: God and man. As with the Trinity, God's unique manifestation of His sovereign power and authority in Jesus's incarnation exceeds our comprehension. Thankfully, our understanding cannot limit God's truth and ability to be true to Himself!

God's Faithfulness – Romans 9:6-13

Jewish unbelief raised questions among early Christians. Because God's privileges and promises were for Israel, did this mean God's word had failed? Was God powerless in the face of unbelief? Was God unfaithful to His promises to bless Abraham and his offspring? **Paul referenced Abraham's descendants to illustrate that God always keeps promises, often in unexpected ways.**[17] He sovereignly arranges unlikely people and circumstances to work out His purposes.[18] Despite generations of disobedience, God's promises to Israel remained unchanged—like His immutable character. Disobedience never causes God to forsake His beloved people or dishonor His word.

Faithful to Israel – 9:6

Paul declared that God's word had not failed. Jesus was a Jew from Abraham's line, and the first Christians were Jews. But this did not mean that all of Abraham's descendants faithfully followed God and their covenant with Him. Paul said, "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." In this verse, the first "Israel" refers to Jacob, Abraham's grandson, whom God renamed "Israel." The second "Israel"—"true Israel"—refers to believing Jews.

The true Israel of the Old Testament faithfully looked forward to the Messiah's coming. They believed in Him whom they did not yet know. The true Israel of the New Testament looks at Jesus, who came as promised to die in the place of sinners, paying the penalty for their sins. They believe in Jesus as the Son of God—resurrected, ascended to heaven, and returning again. **True Israel believes by God's grace through God-given faith in His promises revealed in His Word.**

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12. **Israel's patriarchs:** Acts 7:8-9
13. **Jesus from Abraham:** Matthew 1:1-17
14. **Paul's advantages:** Philippians 3:4-6
15. **Damascus encounter:** Acts 9
16. **Advantage believers share:** Luke 22:20; John 1:14; Romans 8:15; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Galatians 4:4-5; Hebrews 9:22-28
17. **God's promises:** Numbers 23:19
18. **God's purposes:** Genesis 45:1-8; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 33:10-11; Isaiah 6

Faithful to His Promise – 9:7-9

What did Paul mean when he wrote, "Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children"? **Physical descent never automatically means a person inherits God's promise of salvation.** Abraham and Sarah's son, Isaac, was God's chosen heir to His promise.[19] Isaac was born through their faith in God, when both Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children. Abraham also had an older son, Ishmael, born of Abraham's initiative, apart from faith.[20] As Paul stated, "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."

Abraham and Isaac could not have earned God's favor. They became Israel's fathers by God's grace alone. God sovereignly called Abraham out of the ancient, idolatrous city of Ur. Abraham did not know or seek God, but God selected him for His purposes. **God unconditionally promised Abraham that He would be Abraham's God, give him an heir, and give his descendants the land of promise.**[21] Abraham responded in faith, which God credited to him as righteousness.[22] God is completely just in His actions and fully loving in all His ways.

Faithful to His Purpose – 9:10-13

Responding to the question regarding whether all Abraham's descendants were saved, Paul continued his explanation by pointing to Isaac's children. Isaac and Rebekah conceived twin sons, Jacob and Esau. God sovereignly chose to continue His promises only through Jacob "before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls." **Election shows salvation is for God's purpose and by God's power and grace alone rather than achieved through human effort or merit.**[23]

Esau and Jacob were both born sinners. For reasons unknown to us, God made Jacob the channel of His messianic promises to bless the world, and Esau shared no part in this destiny. God can be trusted to keep His promises. Paul quoted an expression from the prophet Malachi, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,"[24] to underscore God's favorable choice of Jacob, not to accentuate God's negative emotion toward Esau or any person made in His image.[25] **God's loving choice of people always includes His purpose for them to be His instruments in the world.**

God's Sovereignty – Romans 9:14-29

God's sovereignty means that He possesses all power and authority to remain true to His character, His Word, and His will. In His sovereign authority, God chooses individuals and guides their destinies as He pleases. If you find this difficult, you are not alone. **In the next section, Paul spoke directly to questions about God's purposes in sovereign election.** He addressed two objections: Is God unjust to save some and not others? If God is sovereign, how can He hold people responsible for their evil deeds?

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19. **Isaac:** Genesis 21:12
20. **Ishmael:** Genesis 17:18-21
21. **God's promise:** Genesis 15
22. **Abraham's righteousness:** Genesis 15:6
23. **God's gracious choice:** John 1:12-13; Ephesians 2:8-9
24. **Jacob loved:** Malachi 1:2-3
25. **Image-bearers:** Genesis 1:27

God's Gracious Choice

The Doctrine of Election

With our limited human understanding, we can struggle over the doctrine of election, which is both necessary and gracious. How could it be otherwise when "there is no one righteous, not even one?"[1] **Before the world's creation and before anyone had done anything, God chose who would respond to Him in faith.**[2] God chose Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Jews and Gentiles each at His appointed time. If God had not graciously chosen to call out people to belong to Him by faith, no one would be saved.

Some people think God elects to send people to hell. But the Bible reveals hell as our starting point after Adam's choice to sin against God. All of Adam's descendants flee from God, our only hope of blessing. Sin infiltrates all our actions, natural understanding, and desires. **Left to ourselves, we would have no interest in God or His blessings; we would remain under sin and God's righteous wrath.**[3] If God chose hell for humanity, He would not have given us the Bible. He surely would never have sent His Son to be our Savior. God would have needed to do nothing.

Redemption, not judgment, is God's ultimate purpose in history. **God works in grace to elect and draw people to respond to Him and be saved.**[4] Today is the day of God's grace![5] However, each person remains responsible for their sin and response to God. In Romans 10, Paul will further explain God's sovereignty in election and how He works through individual faith.[6] Election is a divine mystery.

Believers who disregard or misunderstand God's grace in election seek security in their spiritual advantages and accomplishments rather than in God's work on their behalf through His risen Son. Continuing to battle against sin's remaining pull in their lives, people can be tempted to believe their salvation depends on their choices rather than God's election. They may doubt Christ's power to hold secure those the Father has given Him. **Those who trust God's justice, mercy, and grace in election rest assured that God will complete His good purposes in their salvation.**[7] They celebrate their sovereign God's loving care even as they grieve the unbelief of loved ones. Confidence in God's election frees believers to share the gospel and appreciate the riches of God's glorious patience with sinners. If you are saved, how can you express gratitude for God's grace in your election today?

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1. **No one righteous:** Romans 3:10-11
2. **Chosen by grace:** Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Timothy 1:9
3. **Under sin:** Romans 3:9-12
4. **God draws:** John 6:44
5. **Believe today:** 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:12-13
6. **Human responsibility:** Matthew 11:25-30; John 6:37-40; Romans 10:11-12
7. **Confident of completion:** Philippians 1:6; Jude 1:24-25

Is God Unjust? – 9:14-18

"What then shall we say?" If God's promises came to Isaac and Jacob, not Ishmael or Esau, is God unjust or unfair? Paul emphatically answered, "Not at all!" **As creator, God is entitled to choose whichever of His creatures He wills.** God's absolute holiness, impartiality, justice,

goodness, and love guarantee His choice always conforms to His character. God's election is always about His grace for our good. Paul gave two biblical examples: God's mercy to Moses and Israel and, after much patience, God's wrath poured out on Pharaoh.

***Moses: God's Right to Give Mercy (9:15-16)* – God offered Moses a glimpse of His sacred and sovereign identity when He said, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy."** By quoting Exodus 33:19, Paul evoked memories from Israel's exodus. While awaiting Moses's return from Mount Sinai, the people recklessly worshipped a golden calf idol.[26] Justice would have meant death for the nation because everyone participated except Moses and Joshua. Instead, God graciously responded to Moses's prayer and extended mercy to the majority of Israel. No one deserves or earns mercy, so God is never unjust in His choice to give it.

***Pharaoh: God's Right to Show Wrath (9:17-18)* –** Paul's next example recalled Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery to show God's just wrath.[27] Before striking Egypt with 10 plagues, God told Moses, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart."[28] But during the first five plagues, the Scriptures say, "Pharaoh hardened his heart" and his "heart became hard."[29] Later, after God patiently endured Pharaoh's hard heart, Scripture says, "the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart."[30] **To persistently refuse God's way is to risk the danger of an increasingly hard heart.** All of God's judgments are just.

Why Does God Hold Us Responsible? – 9:19-21

Paul quickly followed Pharaoh's example with another objection and a swift rebuke: "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?' But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?" **Paul did not attempt to dissolve the tension between God's sovereignty and humans' responsibility to surrender to Him.**[31] These accusations dishonor God, who is not our equal. God is holy, good, righteous, all-powerful, and all-knowing. His steadfast love endures forever. He never changes. This is not so with people.

As an illustration, Paul referenced Isaiah's picture of clay asking the potter, "Why did you make me like this?" The full reference from Isaiah carries a strong warning for today: "You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'You did not make me'? Can the pot say to the potter, 'You know nothing'?"[32] We are all born sinners from Adam's lump of clay. As the potter, God is free to use the clay as He wishes.[33] **God would not be unjust to leave the entire lump of clay in its natural, sinful condition.** Yet He graciously makes "some pottery for special purposes"—to know, love, and enjoy Him forever.

Sovereign Purposes – 9:22-24

Paul conveyed a fact about God through two rhetorical questions. **In saving some and not saving others, God makes known His mercy, compassion, power, and righteous wrath.** Paul carefully contrasted God's actions toward objects of wrath and objects of mercy. God is patient with "the objects of His wrath—prepared for destruction." People prepare themselves for destruction by failing to repent.[34] Conversely, God actively prepared the "objects of His mercy"—both Jew and

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26. Golden calf: Exodus 32
27. Pharaoh's example: Exodus 9:16
28. Pharaoh's heart: Exodus 4:21; 7:3
29. Hard heart: Exodus 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15
30. The Lord hardened Pharaoh: Exodus 9:12; 10:1, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17
31. Sovereignty and responsibility: Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 11:25-30; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 22:17
32. Potter and clay: Isaiah 29:16
33. Potter's prerogative: Isaiah 45:9; 64:6-8; Jeremiah 18
34. No repentance: Romans 2:4-5

Gentile—to enjoy "the riches of His glory." Therefore, if people are saved, credit belongs to God alone. Through faith, God is able and willing to change "objects of wrath" into "objects of mercy."

Without minimizing His immeasurable love for people, God reveals His ultimate purpose in salvation—to make His triune glory known. In salvation, God the Father exalts God the Son proclaimed by God the Holy Spirit. God displays His glory through the historical drama of creation, the Fall, election, redemption at the cross, and His coming restoration and renewal of everything. God's unshakable priority is to make His glory known to all people—Jews and non-Jews—from every nation.

Old Testament Proofs – 9:25-29

Paul concluded his defense of God's faithful promises and sovereign election with four additional Old Testament texts. God's purposes have not and will never fail. Two verses from the prophet Hosea show God always intended to include Gentiles in His salvation plans.[35] The two Isaiah passages explain that God's electing call never included every single Jew but instead a faithful remnant.[36]

The idea of the remnant runs throughout the Old Testament. Joseph's brothers meant to harm him, but God's purpose was "to preserve for you a remnant on earth."[37] Hundreds of years later, when Assyria besieged Jerusalem, Isaiah promised, "Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root."[38] The promise of the Messiah's coming proclaimed that the Lord would reach out to reclaim the remnant of His people from throughout the world.[39] The prophet Micah asked in wonder, "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgressions of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy."[40]

Like His purposes, God's promises to Israel have not failed. Only God is powerful enough to save Jews and Gentiles alike. In His mercy, God elects and saves all who come to Him by faith. **God is sovereign over His creation and faithfully keeps His promises.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul's sacrificial love toward his fellow Jews led him to grieve over Israel's refusal to believe in Jesus. God's lavish blessings pointed them toward their Messiah, yet many rejected Jesus as God the Son. **Even as he grieved, Paul affirmed God's faithfulness to His promises and purposes concerning Abraham and his descendants.** The Creator retains the sovereign right to show mercy and compassion to whomever He elects.

Our minds will never grasp why God elects some and leaves others in their sinful state. Still, His justice, mercy, and righteousness remain undiminished. God does nothing randomly. Although we may not fully understand the intersection of His will and human decision, we know He does all

35. **Gentiles and salvation:** Hosea 1:10; 2:23
36. **Faithful remnant:** Isaiah 1:9; 10:22-23
37. **Remnant on earth:** Genesis 45:7
38. **Remnant takes root:** 2 Kings 19:30-31
39. **Reclaim the remnant:** Isaiah 11:10-11
40. **Delight in mercy:** Micah 7:18

things well and perfectly. **God's sovereign actions in salvation display the riches of His glory to His creation.** Even in exercising His wrath, God shows patience toward those who will never repent and believe in Jesus. God's grace reaches toward sinners, drawing them to Himself and making them His own by His mighty power. By God's grace, a remnant of Israel will believe and be saved.

Apply It

How much loving compassion floods your heart for people who currently reject God? Perhaps instead of sorrow, you feel disapproval or disgust toward those who do not share your faith and new life in Christ. Paul's example may bring conviction as we consider how seldom we discard our comfort for the sake of others. The joy of salvation and the sorrow of judgment can transform our view of the lost, soften our hearts, and draw us toward them with the gospel. God longs to fill you with His love for enemies of the gospel in your workplace, family, school, community, and nation. Will you repent of any bitterness toward them? Will you ask God to help you love those who treat you the worst?

Christian parents, Bible knowledge, spiritual experiences, church membership, religious freedom, baptism, and Holy Communion provide great spiritual advantages but cannot save. Salvation comes by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Do you have confidence in God's promised power to save you today through faith, or are you hoping your spiritual advantages will be sufficient? If you are wondering whether God elected you to salvation, doubt no more, repent, and believe. God works through various spiritual blessings to draw people to Himself, but salvation only comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

If you are a believer, God mercifully chose you, a sinner, to be His child. Like Paul, we were all unbelievers once. Left to our own way, we would all walk the same path as Ishmael, Esau, and Pharaoh. Because we would not seek God, His mercy in Christ had to seek us. **How might pondering God's saving kindness, goodness, faithfulness, grace, and mercy toward you encourage you today?** You can trust God's certain promises, even while mysteries about Israel's salvation and election remain unclear. God is infinite and we are finite, so times will always arise when we cannot understand God's actions. In such times, honoring God's greatness as sovereign creator stabilizes our hearts and minds.

When did you last pray for God to show mercy when judgment seemed appropriate? If you are a believer, God has appointed you as an agent of His mercy in this fallen world. He has called you as an ambassador to make His glory known as you live for Him and tell others about God's saving grace. Those living apart from Christ often seek peace in wrong ideas, false religions, good works, or pleasurable activities, attempting to cover the condemnation only Christ can remove. They need to know that God loves them and mercifully saves sinners, offering a righteousness only Jesus can provide. God's mercy in Christ remains available today to all who surrender to Him in sincerity and truth. **God is just, and His promises never fail.** Today is the day of salvation for you, those you love, and all who will believe. God's sovereign election frees believers to share the gospel boldly with everyone. Trust His power and not your own for salvation.

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Our Responsibility in Salvation

Lesson 17 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 16 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture impact your understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation?

2. What stood out in the notes about God choosing you to belong to Him?

Second Day: Read Romans 9:30-33.

Paul highlighted the differences between how Jews and Gentiles pursued righteousness.

3. a. What was the difference in the way the Gentiles versus the people of Israel approached righteousness? What was the result?

   b. What do you share in common with each group?

4. a. How is a daily pursuit of righteous living different from striving for right standing with God?

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b. What role does faith play in obtaining righteousness and living righteously? (See also Romans 1:17; 3:22; 6:11-14.)

5. Who is "the stumbling stone"? What about Him causes people to stumble or fall? (See also Genesis 49:24; Deuteronomy 32:4, 15, 18; Psalms 19:14; 31:2-3; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; 1 Peter 2:7-8.)

Third Day: Read Romans 10:1-4.

Paul fervently prayed for the zealous Israelites who lacked knowledge.

6. a. Why did Paul so strongly desire that the Israelites would be saved?

b. How has God called you to pray for and minister to those you desire to be saved?

7. a. What knowledge did the Israelites lack that caused their zeal to be misdirected? (See also Romans 3:21-23.)

b. How does zealous behavior without true knowledge of Jesus look in today's world? (Focus on behaviors without naming individuals, groups, or nations.)

8. Explain Romans 10:4 in your own words. (Consider other Bible translations if needed.)

Fourth Day: Read Romans 10:5-9.

Paul quoted Moses to contrast righteousness by the law with righteousness by faith.

9. What conclusions did Paul make in these verses?

10. What must a person do to be saved?

11. How would you explain the meaning and importance of each phrase in verse 9 to an unbeliever?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 10:10-13.

Paul affirmed that there is only one way to saving righteousness.

12. a. Share various aspects of the word "heart" from Matthew 6:21; 12:34; Romans 1:21-22; Galatians 4:6.

    b. As you meditate on these verses, what is God showing you about your heart?

13. According to verses 11 and 13, to whom is salvation available?

14. Have you called on the name of the Lord for salvation? If not, what is holding you back?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 9:30–10:13.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

15. How does the simplicity of salvation through faith challenge or encourage you?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 9:30–10:13

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 17 Notes

Romans 9:30–10:13

Focus Verse

"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." (Romans 10:9)

Outline

- Christ Rejected – Romans 9:30–10:4
- Christ Received – Romans 10:5-9
- Christ Expressed – Romans 10:10-13

Engage

From birth, we live in a world full of expectations. For the sake of survival, we expect infants to learn to walk, talk, and eventually care for themselves. For the sake of reputation and success, we are expected to pass exams, meet employers' goals, and live up to the standards set by leaders, teachers, friends, family, and society. People are continuously evaluated based on their ability to meet expectations. Perhaps you have wondered whether you meet the standards others set for your life. Which expectation weighs heavily on you today? Standards drive performance in constructive and destructive ways. People can set goals to measure progress and prove success. **People can also become defined by earthly expectations, forgetting that only one standard will truly matter when they meet Jesus face-to-face.**

Jesus is the perfect standard setter and keeper. Paul grieved for Jews who had rejected Jesus. Paul's experience taught him that zealously keeping God's laws would not be enough to meet God's standard, which requires perfect righteousness. Without a perfect Savior to meet God's standard for us, all people face God's just wrath against their sin. God chooses people to be His own, and they must respond with faith in Christ to be declared "justified" or "not guilty." Confidence in salvation is secured only through faith in Christ and the righteousness He provides, not in our attempts to meet God's standard. **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

Paul's teaching on righteousness dominates the book of Romans. Our introductory lesson supplied the following simple outline:

- Romans 1:1–3:20—Humanity's unrighteousness and great need of true righteousness
- Romans 3:21–8:39—God's gracious gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ
- Romans 9–11—Proof of God's righteousness in His sovereign plan
- Romans 12–16—God's righteousness worked out in His people's lives

The central section of Romans challenges our limited understanding of God's perfect grace and sovereign purposes in salvation. God elects believers, *and yet* all people are still responsible to call on Jesus as Lord in faith. Only by faith can a sinful person receive Christ's righteousness and be declared justified by God.

In this week's passage, righteousness equates to salvation, or, more precisely, righteousness equates to justification. **From Romans 9:30 to the end of chapter 10, the apostle Paul carefully explained that Jewish unbelief is not God's fault.** Jewish unbelief results from a misunderstanding of righteousness and refusal to believe in Jesus as its source. All people need and can access Christ's righteousness to be justified and saved.

Christ Rejected – Romans 9:30–10:4

Paul helped the church in Rome understand how the gospel satisfies God's righteous requirement for both Jews and Gentiles. The gospel came first to the Jews, but most worked to attain righteousness, which saves no one.[1] Tragically, many Jews failed to see their need for Jesus's atoning sacrifice and, therefore, did not receive God's righteousness, which only Jesus provides.

Grace Versus Law – 9:30-31

After establishing that God is merciful in election, Paul went on to discuss God's fairness in granting righteousness to Gentiles, who did not pursue it. Gentiles of Paul's day and many people in our day live outside God's law, actively pursuing their own standards, not His. Yet Paul stated that many Gentiles had obtained righteousness. How could this be? The only possible answer is that, in grace, God sought them. **Gentile salvation apart from the law shows that righteousness comes by grace through faith in Christ.** The Gentiles had believed in Jesus as their Savior, and they received salvation.

Was it unfair that the Jews, who pursued righteousness by the law, had not attained it?[2] **The law could shape their outward behavior but not purify their hearts.**[3] A Pharisee before he encountered Jesus, Paul had worked hard to keep every detail of God's law. Like Paul, many Jews sincerely thought themselves able to achieve right standing before God this way. Despite their hard work, they failed to attain their goal.

The subtle difference in the words "obtained" and "attained" provides a clue to what went wrong. Though some translations use the word "attained" in both verses 30 and 31, in Greek, these are two different words. The Gentiles obtained righteousness—they received it as God's gift. **The Jews tried to earn their salvation but were unable to attain their goal.**

Solid Foundation or Stumbling Stone – 9:32-33

What went wrong? Verse 32 explains why the Jews failed: "Because they pursued it [righteousness] not by faith but as if it were by works." **Until God turns our minds and hearts to Jesus Christ, we all attempt to establish our own righteousness.** The Jews' pursuit of

1. **Jews first:** John 1:11; Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16
2. **Reliance on law:** Romans 2
3. **Law's purpose:** Hebrews 10:1-2, 19-22

righteousness through their own works caused them to miss Christ's righteousness as their only hope. To prove this point, Paul combined two verses from Isaiah:

- "For both Israel and Judah he [Yahweh] will be a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." (Isaiah 8:14)
- "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic." (Isaiah 28:16)

Paul used one verse to help us understand the other. The Old Testament frequently identifies God as the rock or the stone.[4] The stone in Isaiah 8:14 follows this pattern. However, in Isaiah 28:16, God laid a distinct stone—an individual—in Zion. Paul showed the believers in Rome how Isaiah spoke about Jesus, God the Son, the stumbling stone the Father sent into the world. **Those seeking to attain God's favor through self-effort will stumble over the same stone who becomes a solid foundation for all who seek righteousness through faith.**[5]

Zeal Without Knowledge – 10:1-2

The great sorrow Paul expressed in the beginning of chapter 9 gave rise to his heartfelt "prayer to God for the Israelites ... that they may be saved."[6] The Israelites' zeal for God only increased Paul's sorrow. **Zeal cannot substitute for truth.** They thought the righteousness God required was human righteousness—good character and good works that people can achieve. They did not know the righteousness God requires is entirely different—perfect, divine righteousness freely given by God through faith.[7] The people of Israel had closed their minds and hearts to the good news of God's grace in Christ.

God's Righteousness and Ours – 10:3-4

God is righteous in His own nature, just as God is love.[8] The Israelites failed to recognize important truth about what God requires.

***They Did Not Know the Righteousness That Comes from God (10:3a)* –** Human righteousness merely conforms to what society determines as good. When people do not know that their standards of righteousness differ from God's, self-deception fools them into believing self-saving methods are good enough. **Jesus's compassion, kindness, love, and good works—including His sacrifice—revealed His divine righteousness.**[9] Jesus, one in nature with God the Father, always exhibited perfect behavior motivated by a pure heart. Jesus's unattainable righteousness offended people who considered their own works worthy of commendation. Those offended by Jesus did not know or accept that He took on flesh and died to make God's perfection theirs through faith.

***They Sought to Establish Their Own Righteousness (10:3b)* – God gave the law to show that all people are sinners who need a Savior.** The law was not a way to be justified or earn God's favor, or for people to condemn one another.[10] Self-righteousness often results in belittling others to elevate ourselves. Self-righteousness also encourages us to point to our own achievements and reject God's true righteousness in Christ.

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4. **God the rock:** Genesis 49:24; Deuteronomy 32:4, 15, 18; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalms 18:2; 19:14; 31:2-3; 92:15; 95:1; Isaiah 44:8
5. **Stumbling stone:** 1 Peter 2:6-8
6. **Great sorrow:** Romans 9:2-4
7. **Righteousness from God:** Romans 3:21-23
8. **God is love:** 1 John 4:8
9. **Jesus's attributes:** 1 Corinthians 1:30; Hebrews 1:3
10. **All are sinners:** Romans 3:9-20

Our Need, Christ's Provision

The Doctrine of Righteousness

Righteousness includes upright moral conduct and right standing with God. **While a believer's right standing with God leads to ever-increasing moral behavior, upright moral behavior does not lead to right standing with God.** Paul offered this truth to the believers in Rome and everyone today. Following rules or measuring morality by human standards can never earn God's declaration of righteous, justified, or not guilty. God bases His standard of righteousness on His perfection. In this sin-infected world, no one can meet God's perfect standard by following rules.

Paul grieved for fellow Israelites who tried zealously to adhere to God's law without understanding that Jesus Christ perfectly kept the law and offered His righteousness to everyone by faith. Jesus was morally pure and upright. Jesus also satisfied the law's demand that sin be punished by offering His life in the place of sinners.[1] **Because Jesus was perfectly righteous before God, those who place their faith in Jesus, instead of in their own works, receive His righteousness.** God's declaration of righteousness stands firm while the Spirit works in believers to help them think, feel, and behave more and more like Jesus.

When we fail to recognize our need for righteousness, which can only be obtained through faith in Jesus, we suppose we can earn God's favor. **As we strive to prove our worth and value, our self-focus often draws us away from God rather than toward Him.** No matter how many good things we do or bad things we do not do, our works never add up to God's true righteousness or salvation.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, God credits His Son's righteousness to us and gives us new life by His Spirit. What good news! When we look to Christ alone for righteousness, we are drawn to prayer, worship, and fellowship with our Lord. **We can approach God boldly because we know Christ secures our right standing with God.** Our moral failures do not render us hopeless or unlovable in God's eyes. People need true righteousness. In Christ, God abundantly meets that need. Have you accepted God's gift of righteousness in Christ?

1. **Jesus fulfilled the law:** Matthew 5:17; Romans 8:3-4

When Jesus offered saving righteousness by faith alone, He exposed sin in those who saw themselves as righteous. This angered many religious leaders who worked their whole lives to earn what God intended to give freely.[11]

***They Did Not Submit to God's Righteousness (10:3c)* – Submitting to God's righteousness means acknowledging we need what only Christ can give.** People who do not submit to God's righteousness exalt themselves above God. Their measure of righteousness matters to them more than God's. Their evaluation of others matters more than God's. Humans are prone to condemn those who do not share their cultural values, economic status, or educational background. But God looks at people's hearts of faith to declare them righteous.[12]

11. **Righteousness for sinners:** Luke 5:29-32; 23:39-43
12. **God sees the heart:** 1 Samuel 16:7

God Provides His Righteousness for Everyone Who Believes (10:4) – We can only receive the righteousness we need in Christ, for He "is the culmination of the law." Jesus Christ fulfilled the law perfectly for us in our place, and the law points us to Him. **Through faith in Jesus, our efforts to earn righteousness end.** Christ's righteousness extends equally to every person, Jew and non-Jew, on the grounds of faith.

Christ Received – Romans 10:5-9

The Jews revered Moses, through whom God had given the law. Paul wisely used Moses's words to show that true righteousness had never come through heroic law-keeping. In fact, righteousness by works (law-keeping) and righteousness by faith have always been different paths with different destinations. All religions except biblical Christianity fall into righteousness by works. **Christianity uniquely offers an everlasting, personal relationship with the triune God by grace through faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.** People with true faith confess Jesus Christ as Lord from a transformed heart, honoring Him as the resurrected, returning Savior and King.

Futile Works – 10:5-7

Before the cross, Israel lived "under the law."[13] God's good law reveals His holy character, and God's people flourish when they obey His law from the heart. **However, the law condemns all who break it, even if only once.**[14] Because we cannot meet the law's demands with the perfection required, we are all condemned lawbreakers—"there is no one righteous."[15] God has always saved people the same way: by God's grace through faith in His promised Messiah.[16]

With Christ's cross in view, Paul quoted from Deuteronomy, where Moses prepared Israel for his death. Moses said, "What I am commanding you ... is not too difficult for you. ... It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ... ascend into heaven. ... Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ... cross the sea to get it. ... The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it."[17]

Some rabbinical texts claimed the messianic era would begin only through Israel's effort to bring the Messiah down from heaven.[18] How far from the truth! In Romans 4, Paul referenced Abraham and David to show what God required of Old Testament believers: to believe His promise and look forward in faith to the Messiah's coming. **All anyone needs to do to be saved is believe and receive the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel.**

The proverbial expressions "ascend into heaven" and "descend into the deep" refer to doing impossible things. Such efforts are unnecessary and fruitless. Great sacrifices and harrowing exploits add nothing to Jesus's finished work on the cross. **The gospel of Jesus Christ stands alone.** Whatever we attempt to add to faith in Christ for our salvation twists the gospel into a false religion of works. Jesus Christ plus anything equals a false gospel leading to death and hell. Nothing we do persuades God to save us. When we add to God's requirement of faith, we say Jesus's perfect life and substitutionary death are not enough.

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13. **Under law:** Romans 2:12; 6:14
14. **Law condemns:** Romans 7:7-13; Galatians 3:10-11; James 2:10
15. **No one righteous:** Romans 3:9-20
16. **Faith in God's promise:** Genesis 3:15; Romans 3:27–4:25
17. **Preparation for Moses's death:** Deuteronomy 30:11-14
18. Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9–11*, trans. Krister Stendahl (Fortress Press, 1967).

Saving Faith – 10:8-9

The "word" that Moses and Paul said was near Israel, in their mouths and hearts, was about God's plan for righteousness through faith. The gospel message was very near Israel. They did not need an additional word from God; they only needed to believe. As Paul taught elsewhere, God announced the gospel to Abraham.[19] Abraham and David's lives both taught Israel that God justifies people by faith.[20] **Much later, Paul explained the object of saving faith: "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."**

What does it mean to say, "Jesus is Lord"? Why are these words so important? These three words (only two words in Greek in this passage) were the starting point of early Christian preaching. **"Jesus is Lord" was the first Christian confession of faith.** Many first-century believers willingly died for their confession of these words, and many in our day have shared their fate. These three words testify to three essential truths:

1. The deity of Jesus Christ
2. His saving work
3. His ongoing, all-encompassing authority over His people

Jesus's Deity – Most New Testament writers quote from the Septuagint, an early Greek translation of the Old Testament, dating to the 3rd century BC. The Septuagint uses the word *kyrios* ("LORD" in the Old Testament) more than 6,000 times to refer to *Yahweh,* the Hebrew covenantal name for God. **Christ's disciples did not hesitate to call Jesus *kyrios*; they proclaimed that Jesus is the LORD, Yahweh.**[21] In the book of Romans, *kyrios* ("Lord" in the New Testament) occurs in 43 verses. The vast majority of the time, the references are used to identify Jesus Christ. More than a dozen other times, "Lord" appears to refer to God the Father, Jesus, or both. Because Paul proclaimed Jesus's absolute deity, he used "Lord" for Jesus and the Father.

***Jesus's Saving Work* – The title "Lord" also implies Jesus is the Savior.** On the cross, Jesus triumphed over all the rulers and powers of evil. He is Lord of Lords because He conquered death and sin. He is able and willing to rescue us from sin, Satan, fear, and death. Our salvation rests on His victory.[22]

***Jesus's Authority* – If Jesus is Lord, then He rules and reigns over His people.** If you are a believer, Jesus rightfully rules over you. Believers acknowledge Jesus's reign and their need for Him by setting their minds on what the Spirit desires[23] and giving up their right to rule their own lives. Jesus's authority declares that the righteous requirements of the law are fully met in believers, in whom His Spirit dwells.[24] Every believer, whether Jew or Gentile, is responsible to cooperate with His Spirit in the sanctification process.[25] As believers mature, they increasingly submit their emotions, passions, activities, and ethics to Christ's authority. More and more, they recognize the foolishness of elevating their ideas above God's revealed ways.

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19. **Gospel to Abraham:** Galatians 3:8-9
20. **Justified by faith:** Genesis 15:6; Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 4
21. **Jesus is *kyrios*:** Psalm 110:1; Luke 2:11; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; Philippians 2:5-11
22. **Jesus's victory:** Acts 2:36; Colossians 2:15
23. **Spirit's desires:** Romans 8:5
24. **Law's requirements met:** Romans 8:3-4
25. **Believers' obligation:** Romans 8:12-14

Christ Expressed – Romans 10:10-13

With Words – 10:10

Paul's words affirm the need for sincere confession of faith: "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." Belief in Jesus's humanity, deity, atoning death, and resurrection are crucial for salvation. However, Paul was clear that saving faith, which blossoms in our heart—the moral, emotional, and personal center of our being—is rooted in relational trust and produces external fruit.

Believers who consider themselves dead to sin[26] offer their bodies as instruments of righteousness.[27] **True belief, rooted in the heart, also leads to spoken words.** A person with saving faith cannot help but speak; he or she cannot stay silent. We are saved by God's power at work in us, not by the words we say. However, words that point to Jesus flow from the faith deeply established in believers' hearts.

For All – 10:11-13

In Romans 9:18, Paul flatly stated, "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."[28] In Romans 10:11, Paul returned to Isaiah 28:16. When Paul first referenced this verse in Romans 9:33, he maintained Isaiah's more general wording: "The one who believes in him." But in 10:11, Paul did not leave the verse in that form, adding the Greek word *pas*—"anyone." **Election does not negate or contradict the offer of the gospel to everyone!**

To ensure readers did not miss his new emphasis, Paul added, "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him." This explanation would have especially helped the Roman church, which was made up of believers of different ethnicities and diverse backgrounds. Paul repeated this critical point a second time by quoting Joel 2:32 in verse 13: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." The glorious, free offer of the gospel overcomes all human boundaries. If not for this offer, some might think the gospel is for other people, not themselves or others who appear beyond Christ's reach. Paul made it clear that salvation is for anyone who calls on Jesus.

Paul insisted that all who reject God's righteousness in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are responsible for their unbelief. Concerning salvation, Paul held God's sovereignty and human responsibility in deliberate tension.[29] We cannot dispel the mystery of God and His ways without somehow misrepresenting His infinite perfection in an attempt to fit our finite thinking. What explains the seeming contradiction? **All who seek saving righteousness may come to Jesus Christ if they will.** However, it is God's gift of faith that leads people to trust Christ's righteousness alone, so God receives all the glory.

These verses are not here simply to explain how God's sovereignty and human responsibility to believe fit together. The verses that follow this section exhort messengers to go and announce salvation to all, not knowing who will trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

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26. Dead to sin: Romans 6:11
27. Instruments of righteousness: Romans 6:13
28. God's prerogative: Romans 9:18
29. God's sovereignty: John 6:35-40; Romans 9:1-29

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Faith in Jesus Christ strikes at the root of all works-based righteousness and self-effort. The triune God established the Lord Jesus Christ as the solid rock on which God's people are to build their lives. Paul's teaching deeply offended many Jews of his day. They stumbled over Jesus and attempted to build on the shaky ground of their own righteousness. They did not grasp the sinfulness that all people share or their need for Jesus's righteousness. No one perfectly keeps God's law except God incarnate, Jesus Christ. No amount of self-effort makes anyone acceptable to God.

The powerful purity of Christ's righteousness fulfilled the law and is the only way to receive God's favor. Christ's saving righteousness is available to anyone who calls on His name. **As God draws sinners to Himself, they respond with faith in Jesus and the profession of His supreme lordship.** Because Jesus is eternally righteous and able to save, God's promise stands that anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.

Apply It

Are you wearing yourself out working for the righteousness that God makes available through faith in Jesus? Perhaps you stumble over obtaining saving righteousness through faith in Jesus alone because it seems too simple or ignores your contribution or spiritual accomplishments. The world seems to reinforce that we must work hard for anything worth having. But the most valuable thing a person can obtain—right standing with God—is received through faith rather than attained through effort. If rule following and self-justification entangle your faith, Paul offers the reminder that Jesus is near you, seeking your heart and lordship of your life. Will you trust His righteousness alone?

How often have you been zealous for a cause without understanding all the issues? Every one of us stumbles in ignorance at some point. We all begin at the same place—without knowledge of Christ. This truth should tenderize our hearts toward those currently living without Him, even those who blatantly reject Him. **Would you ask God to increase your love for the lost and your passion to pray and share the gospel?** Ask God to help you understand and grieve for the people around you who live deceived and lost. God works through prayer and your spoken words to drown out competing messages in the hearts and minds of those He seeks to save. God's offer of salvation stands, and He uses human lips and His powerful Word to dispel the darkness shrouding human hearts.

Have you proclaimed Jesus as your Savior, source of righteousness, and Lord? If you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, Romans 10:13 calls you to trust in His sacrificial death for your sins and receive a completely new life. Will you believe and proclaim Him today? **The Bible promises that if you will call on God, He will save you.** He will rescue you from the wrath that hangs over you because of your sin. Will you submit to God's gracious rule over your heart? Ask Jesus to show you how He wants to be Lord and ruler of your attitudes, ambitions, employment, money, leisure, status, and possessions. When we surrender to Jesus, He offers grace, peace, righteousness, acceptance, and love that we could never earn and can never lose—today and forever!

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Our Privilege in Salvation

Lesson 18 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 17 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. After hearing the lecture, how did you think about or apply the doctrine of righteousness differently?

2. In what way did the notes influence your view of Paul's statement that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"?

Second Day: Read Romans 10:14-15.

Paul unfolded faith's progression from belief to calling on Jesus.

3. a. How did Paul describe the steps to believing in Jesus Christ?

   b. Share your personal experience with the steps Paul described.

4. Summarize the good news about Jesus you have learned from your study of Romans.

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5. What is your role in sharing the good news with family, friends, and the world?

Third Day: Reread Romans 10:14-15.

Paul highlighted the privilege of sharing the truth about Christ.

6. Give at least one point about gospel proclamation from each of the following references:

   Matthew 28:18-20

   Acts 1:8

   Acts 13:45-47

   Romans 15:20

   2 Corinthians 2:14-15

7. a. Read Isaiah 52:3-10. Describe the original context of Isaiah 52:7, quoted here by Paul.

   b. To whom was Paul referring by quoting Isaiah 52:7? Why are their feet beautiful?

8. How could you take God's message of Christ's grace into places filled with despair?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 10:16-17.

Paul recognized that not everyone would respond to the gospel.

9. From verse 17, where does faith come from? What does this teach about the importance of studying the Bible?

10. Why might people not respond positively to the good news when they hear it? (See also Romans 1:17-23; 3:9-12.)

11. a. When has the good news of Jesus challenged you to change your course and turn to Him?

    b. Share a time a truth from the Bible increased or strengthened your faith.

Fifth Day: Read Romans 10:18-21.

Through Old Testament quotes, Paul proved that Israel had heard and understood the message about Jesus.

12. a. Use your own words to describe Paul's logic in verses 18-21.

    b. How would you explain the differences between hearing, understanding, and believing?

13. In verses 19-20, to whom were Moses and Isaiah referring as making Israel "envious," "angry," and being "found by those who did not seek me"?

14. Write a prayer asking God to give you His love for and patience with disobedient and obstinate people.

Sixth Day: Review Romans 10:14-21.

God faithfully sends His messengers to proclaim Christ to the world.

15. How have these verses impacted your view of Christian evangelism (spreading the gospel)?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 10:14-21

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 18 Notes

Romans 10:14-21

Focus Verse

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." (Romans 10:17)

Outline

- Our Feet – Romans 10:14-15
- Christ's Voice – Romans 10:16-17
- God's Open Arms – Romans 10:18-21

Engage

How did you end up with these BSF Notes? Someone told you about BSF and maybe even invited you to join a group. What prepared you to accept that invitation? Perhaps you declined previous invitations before finally accepting. Whether you came seeking or skeptical, spiritual curiosity and desire had grown in your heart and mind. But before curiosity about BSF grabbed you, someone—perhaps a family member, loved one, or trusted friend— planted seeds of curiosity about Jesus. **Once planted, seeds of spiritual curiosity require God's protection and the gospel's nourishing truth.** Whom do you have to thank for introducing you to Jesus? Who is helping you know Him better today?

Paul learned from experience that God saves people through a process that involves their minds, hearts, and wills. Since the beginning, God's saving truth has intersected with individual lives, one at a time. Through exposure to truth, God births faith in human hearts, and people respond in faith by calling on the Lord Jesus for saving righteousness. Salvation's process begins when people hear the Bible's truth about Jesus from someone like you and me. **God faithfully sends His messengers to proclaim Christ to the world.** God's children, saved by His grace, enjoy the privilege of sharing life-transforming truth about Jesus.

With Israel on his mind, Paul spent Romans 9–11 examining God's sovereignty in salvation and human responsibility in faith and unbelief.

- In Chapter 9, Paul pointed to God's faithfulness to Israel. He sovereignly chose His covenant people and preserved a believing remnant in Israel.
- In Romans 10:1-13, Paul pointed to God's fairness to Israel, offering His unearnable righteousness to all who would believe. God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together in salvation.
- In Romans 10:14-21, Paul highlighted God's goodness to Israel, sending messengers to make truth about Christ known and allowing people to respond in faith.

Our Feet – Romans 10:14-15

After declaring, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,"[1] Paul asked questions working backward from calling on Christ to faith's inception. People cannot call on Jesus Christ for salvation unless someone shares the gospel. **God gives every believer the privilege of sharing the good news about His Son.**

How Can They… – 10:14

***Believe In and Call on Christ? (10:14a)* – Paul distinguished between believing in and calling on Christ.** He asked, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?" Paul spent the first portion of his letter to the believers in Rome explaining profound salvation truths. We have spent the first portion of our Romans study deeply pondering those same truths. Belief in the gospel's facts—specific truths revealed by God—anchors saving faith. People must engage their minds to know who Jesus is and what He has done. However, merely learning truths and studying the Bible cannot save anyone from slavery to sin and the judgment their sin deserves.

Saving faith involves more than agreeing intellectually with certain truths about Jesus or acquiring biblical knowledge. Saving faith moves people forward to call on Jesus.[2] Before people call on Jesus, they need to believe He can and will save all who come to Him. **Calling on Christ results when faith bursts into action and people personally commit to Jesus alone as Lord and Savior.** God imparts saving righteousness to those prompted by truth to sincerely cry out, "Lord Jesus Christ, I am a sinner. I cannot save myself. You have done everything I need for my salvation. I trust you to save me from sin."

***Hear About Christ? (10:14b)* –** Paul asked a second question: "And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" As he opened his letter, Paul declared that he was not ashamed of the gospel, the good news about Christ.[3] No one can believe or receive good news they have not heard. **To believe in Christ, people must first hear the good news about Him.** Facts rather than speculation or emotion undergird faith in Jesus. A believer's witness includes a life that reflects Christ's transformative power and personal testimony about God's grace. However, people's understanding of the gospel remains incomplete until they hear the Bible's truths about Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and coming return.

***Preach Christ? (10:14c)* –** Paul followed his first two questions with yet another: "And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" **For people to hear about Christ, someone must tell them about Christ.** Living in the first century, Paul emphasized hearing because the spoken word dominated communication. Limited resources hindered access to written documents, and few people could read. Today, hearing does not exclude modern communication methods such as print or digital media. Still, speaking from the heart about life's most important truth remains valuable and necessary. The truth about Christ and our responsibility to respond to Him must be communicated.

Through their preaching and teaching, the apostles made Christ's message, heart, and voice known everywhere they went. The same can be said about people who preach, teach, and share the gospel today. **God chooses to work and speak through the words His people proclaim.** The results depend

1. **Will be saved:** Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13
2. **Calling on Jesus:** Romans 10:9-10
3. **Not ashamed:** Romans 1:16-17

not on the preacher's eloquence but the Holy Spirit's power. Where believers proclaim truth and exalt Jesus, God's Spirit convicts people of their need for a Savior and turns them to Him.[4]

Christ's Messengers Sent – 10:15

People must believe in Christ before they can call on Him for salvation. Before they can believe, they must hear about Christ. To hear about Christ, someone must preach and teach the gospel. But before these things happen, preachers must be sent to those who have not yet believed and called on Christ. **Paul's cascading logic climaxed with a quote from the prophet Isaiah: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"**[5] In this verse, the prophet foretold God's comfort and Israel's deliverance from the coming Babylonian captivity. Isaiah was describing a runner racing to announce freedom, peace, God's victory over Israel's enemies, and the Israelites' return home.

Isaiah went on to describe the Suffering Servant's triumphant victory.[6] Paul knew Isaiah's Suffering Servant was Jesus Christ, so he used Isaiah's picture to describe runners eagerly proclaiming the gospel of King Jesus. **Jesus defeated every enemy while bringing freedom from sin, peace with God, and unhindered access to His kingdom.** What form did His triumph take? According to Isaiah, "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."[7]

If God's deliverance from earthly enemies brought good news in Isaiah's day, how much better is the good news of eternal deliverance from sin and death through Jesus Christ? God appointed Paul as an apostle—a messenger sent to tell the best news ever heard. As Paul concluded his letter to the church in Rome, he asked them to support his missionary work in Spain.[8] Today, believers share Paul's mission to tell others about Jesus and support Christ's messengers as they preach the gospel throughout the world.[9]

Christ's Voice – Romans 10:16-17

Paul's missionary work followed the pattern he described in the previous verses: Paul preached where God sent him. **As Paul preached the gospel—"the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes"[10]—many heard, believed, and called on Christ.**[11] But Paul also experienced many who did not believe or commit their lives to Jesus Christ.[12]

Message Rejected – 10:16

Paul explained, "But not all the Israelites accepted the good news." Because Paul was addressing Jewish unbelief in Romans 9–11, the Greek text says, "But not all accepted the good news." The NIV includes "the Israelites" for clarity. Jesus promised to receive all who come to Him—principled or openly sinful, young or old, rich or poor, Jew or non-Jew. Despite a gospel

4. **Spirit at work:** John 15:26; 16:8, 13-14; Acts 1:8
5. **Beautiful feet:** Isaiah 52:7
6. **Suffering Servant:** Isaiah 53
7. **Pierced for us:** Isaiah 53:5; Romans 5:1-11
8. **Paul's missionary work:** Acts 13:45-47; Romans 15:20, 23-29; 2 Corinthians 10:15-16
9. **Sharing Christ:** Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 2:14-15; 5:20
10. **Gospel's power:** Romans 1:16-17
11. **Acceptance of the gospel:** Acts 13:48; 16:14; 17:34; 19:18
12. **Rejection of the gospel:** Acts 17:32-33; 28:24

messenger's Spirit-given power, persistence, or love, not everyone will accept the good news of Jesus Christ. Just as people rejected Jesus, people will reject His followers and their message.[13]

Many who rejected Paul's message also rejected not only Christ but Paul himself. They persecuted, beat, and imprisoned Paul,[14] yet he did not become bitter or hopeless.[15] Instead, Paul's grief over Jewish unbelief fueled passionate prayer for his people to turn to Christ as he continued to share God's message with them.[16] Paul joined Isaiah in enduring hardship and rejection. Again, Paul quoted Isaiah, saying, "Lord, who has believed our message?"[17] **Believers reflect God's gracious character when they grieve, pray, and persist in witnessing with humility and courage.**

Isaiah's rhetorical question introduced Isaiah 53, often considered the Old Testament's most important chapter on the Messiah's suffering. Paul used Isaiah's question to link unbelief with the gospel's content: The crucified Savior, Jesus, suffered and died in our place for sin. **Isaiah foretold that many would reject the Messiah, the salvation He gives, and His messengers.** Perhaps Isaiah bolstered Paul's hope, "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved."[18] God would save a chosen remnant of His people. Paul's call to share the gospel did not depend on people accepting his message. Some would believe and others would reject God's offer of salvation in Christ.

The Way Faith Comes – 10:17

Jesus Himself beckons those who hear about His life and death for sinners. Faith comes through hearing and responding to "the word about Christ." When Jesus called Himself the good shepherd, He explained that His sheep know and respond to His voice. He calls His own sheep by name and leads them. They follow because they know His voice. They will not follow a stranger because they do not recognize the stranger's voice. He said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."[19]

"The word about Christ" refers to the truth God declares as revealed in the Bible, not whatever truth people choose. **Jesus promised His presence when people preach the word about Him.** Jesus sent 72 disciples as His representatives to preach in His name and prepare people for His coming. He encouraged them, saying, "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me."[20] Though Paul's writing displays obvious intellect, he intentionally set aside persuasively eloquent arguments. The power of Paul's message depended not on clever words but the Spirit's power through the message Paul had received from God. Paul simply proclaimed Christ's death on the cross for sin, leading to new life.[21] When people faithfully teach the Bible, listeners encounter God's power in His Word and hear Christ's voice in their hearts.

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13. **Persistent unbelief:** John 6:35-37
14. **Paul persecuted:** Acts 14:5, 19; 16:19-24; 22:22; 23:10; 2 Corinthians 4:9; 11:16-33
15. **Paul's hope:** Romans 11:13-14, 25-32
16. **Paul's grief:** Romans 9:1-4a; 10:1
17. **God's message rejected:** Isaiah 53:1
18. **Remnant:** Isaiah 10:22; Romans 9:27
19. **Good shepherd:** John 10:2-5, 14-16
20. **Listen or reject:** Luke 10:16
21. **Proclaim Christ:** 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5

Responding to the Gospel

The Doctrine of Repentance

Paul taught that God intends His rich kindness and patience to lead people to repentance—a change of mind, heart, and life direction.[1] True repentance comes from the heart. Repentant people choose a restored relationship with God and freedom from sin's mastery instead of their old life apart from Christ.[2] Unbelieving Israel rejected the revealed truth about God's righteousness through Christ alone, refusing to repent. They rejected Christ's lordship over them.

We cannot separate saving faith and repentance. All who by faith believe and agree with the triumphant facts regarding Jesus's life, death, and resurrection must respond. Repentance—turning from sin to Jesus as Savior—results from hearing the powerful good news about God's saving righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. As people hear the gospel, God's Spirit works in their hearts, convincing them of the gospel's truth. The Spirit also reveals their sin and separation from God.[3] Genuine sorrow over personal sin before God, not mere sadness or regret about sin's consequences, leads people to turn to Jesus for the righteousness and reconciliation He alone can provide.[4]

Refusal to respond to the gospel through repentance brings tragic results—eternal separation from God. Moved by the truth of God's wrath against sin, Paul grieved for, prayed for, and preached about Jesus to unbelievers, especially his fellow Israelites.[5] Have you changed your direction and called on Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If not, God longs for you to repent and turn to Him today.[6]

People who repent turn from trying to rule their own lives and declare Christ as their Lord and risen Savior.[7] Repentant sinners receive Christ's righteousness by grace through faith and enjoy eternal reconciliation with their heavenly Father. **Repentance strengthens believers through a restful, quiet trust in the Lord instead of self.**[8] The delights of repentance and salvation are not secrets to keep but truths to proclaim to everyone who will believe the message.

1. **Leading to repentance:** Romans 2:4
2. **Alive to God:** Romans 6:11-14
3. **Holy Spirit's conviction:** John 16:8-11
4. **Godly sorrow:** 2 Corinthians 7:10
5. **Paul's grief:** Romans 9:1-3; 10:1
6. **God's desire for repentance:** 2 Peter 3:9-13
7. **Confessing Christ:** Romans 10:9-13
8. **Repentance and rest:** Isaiah 30:15

God's Open Arms – Romans 10:18-21

Throughout Romans 9–10, Paul maintained that people cannot blame God for Israel's failure to believe in Jesus as Messiah and Savior. Instead, the responsibility for their unbelief rests in their own hearts. **As chapter 10 closed, Paul addressed the question, "Is there any valid excuse for Jewish unbelief?"**

The First Excuse: They Did Not Hear – 10:18

Had the Jews of Paul's day not heard the message about Christ's cross and resurrection? **To establish that they had indeed heard, Paul quoted Psalm 19:4, "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."** Why would Paul quote a verse that praises God for revealing His existence and power through nature? In Romans 1, Paul established that God's general revelation through nature brings guilt on all who refuse to seek and worship God—they are without excuse.[22]

For salvation, people also need special revelation from God's Word. The Bible details God's redemption plan through Jesus Christ. **By quoting from a familiar psalm, Paul reinforced the worshipful submission that God's general and special revelation deserve.** Psalm 19 begins by describing God's revelation in nature. The heavens declare God's universal existence to the ends of the world. Creation continuously pours forth speech day and night, abundantly proclaiming God's glory.[23] The psalm then exalts the wonders of God's special revelation through His Word: His perfect law, trustworthy statues, and right precepts.[24] Finally, the psalm concludes with a repentant request for forgiveness and protection from sin.[25]

Paul's quote from Psalm 19 may have also pictured the gospel's rapid spread throughout the Roman world. **Paul confidently believed the message of salvation in Christ had reached Jews everywhere.** Today, God's special revelation continues to reach into the whole world. Like Paul, many believers earnestly preach, teach, and share the Bible's true message wherever God sends them.

Through missionary efforts and faithful witnesses, many people have heard that Jesus Christ is God's Son and the world's Savior. Among those who have heard, some affirm the Bible's truth. However, like the informed Jews Paul described, until people accept the good news and call on Jesus in personal trust and repentance, they are not truly Christians.[26] The faith Paul described has three parts. Faith begins with intellectual knowledge of gospel facts, is followed by personal agreement with the facts, and culminates in commitment to trust Jesus and His saving work. **The Bible insists that knowledge without personal commitment is not true faith.**[27]

The Second Excuse: They Did Not Understand – 10:19-20

What if the Jews of Paul's day heard the gospel but did not understand its content? Certainly their confusion or misunderstanding would then excuse unbelief. **However, Paul quoted Moses and Isaiah to prove the Jews understood that God's salvation plan included Gentiles.**[28] Because Paul's countrymen understood the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, God's Son and Messiah, they were accountable for choosing unbelief. If they had *not* understood, the Jews could have dismissed Gentile faith in Jesus as foolishness. Instead, grace given to sinful Gentiles apart from keeping the law made many Jews jealous and angry. As the gospel goes out today, people continue to reject God's grace in Jesus even when they hear and understand.

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22. **General revelation:** Romans 1:18-20
23. **Nature's declaration:** Psalm 19:1-6
24. **God's Word:** Psalm 19:7-11
25. **Forgiveness requested:** Psalm 19:12-14
26. **Declare and believe:** Romans 10:9-13
27. **True faith:** James 2:19
28. **God's plan includes Gentiles:** Deuteronomy 32:21; Isaiah 65:1-2

God's Untiring Grace – 10:21

Our finite minds struggle to resolve the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. If God is sovereign in salvation, how can He hold people responsible for their response to Him? And if people are responsible for turning to God, how can we claim salvation comes by grace, not works? But God's sovereignty and human responsibility do not contradict one another. We cannot and should not try to dispel this divine mystery; we must recognize that the Bible teaches that God's sovereignty and human responsibility are both true and go together. **People must respond and repent, but apart from God's grace, they will never choose God or His ways.** Therefore, God receives all the glory for salvation!

In Romans, Paul quoted from the Old Testament to conclude his logical explanations and support his teaching.[29] He included six Old Testament quotes in Romans 10:13-21:

- Joel 2:32 (Romans 10:13)
- Isaiah 52:7 (Romans 10:15)
- Isaiah 53:1 (Romans 10:16)
- Psalm 19:4 (Romans 10:18)
- Deuteronomy 32:21 (Romans 10:19)
- Isaiah 65:1-2 (Romans 10:20-21)

Verse 20 reflects God's grace to Gentiles, who found God without seeking Him. From the same passage in Isaiah, verse 21 describes God's continuous offer of salvation to Israel. Israel had every reason to love and obey God, but they refused to repent and turn to Him in faith. As Paul's sobering words hang in the air, hope remains. **God faithfully sends His messengers to proclaim Christ to the world.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul meticulously demonstrated that the first step toward saving faith involves hearing the good news preached. People desperately need to hear truth about Jesus. While God does not call everyone to a formal preaching role, He gives every Christian the beautiful privilege of telling others about His Son. **Hearing the gospel opens the door to belief, repentance, and calling on the name of the Lord.**

Paul's fellow Israelites stood accountable for their failure to believe in Jesus. Throughout the Old Testament, God repeatedly stretched out His saving hands to Israel. Through Israel's prophets, God foretold His plan to save all people through the Messiah's righteousness, not through human effort. God sent His perfect Son to suffer and die for sin. He also sent messengers such as Paul to preach the gospel of Christ and His victory over sin and death to everyone. **God's gracious promises to Israel have not failed, even as He makes Israel jealous by the faith of Gentiles.**

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29. Old Testament conclusions: Romans 3:10-18; 9:25-29

Apply It

Do you worry or complain about the response of the world around you to God's truth? **Do not underestimate your prayers and the powerful good news of Jesus Christ.** Ask God to send His messengers into the world.[30] When God sends messengers, He blesses and speaks through their message about Christ. Will you also ask God to show you how to support those He sends? How willing are you to speak about Christ where God sends you? Ask God to give unbelievers ears to hear, minds that understand, and hearts that call on Christ to save them. Ask God to bring healing to this sin-sick world as people surrender their hearts and lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. As James wrote, "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."[31]

God moves His people to take the good news of Jesus across the street and around the world. Through books, podcasts, radio, TV, and social media, believers implore people to abandon what destroys them and turn to Christ. If Jesus Christ has saved you, your feet are beautiful to those who receive your message about God's saving grace. Perhaps you feel hesitant to say Jesus's name and instead speak generally about your faith. How could the specific truth about your victorious Savior's life, death, and resurrection impact the people around you? When Christians quickly condemn unbelieving people without prayerfully and lovingly sharing the gospel, they withhold hope from a dying world. Where is God sending you to tell people about Jesus? Paul's words to Timothy are true for us today: "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."[32]

No one can convince others to believe the gospel. God alone makes His message effective. However, Jesus commissioned every believer to take His salvation message to others. Perhaps you feel unprepared to share about Jesus. **If you know enough to believe in and call on Christ, you know enough to share Him with others.** Practice explaining the gospel clearly and simply. Ground your message in the Bible and reflect it in how you live. Share the forgiveness and new life you enjoy in Christ. Trust Jesus, who goes with you when you go for Him. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."[33]

If you have not yet trusted Christ, do you have doubts about the gospel? **You do not have to remain in your unbelief, no matter your sin or situation.** Turn from your sin and self-effort and call on Jesus Christ now. Trust Him with your doubts. Thank Him for what He has made clear to you. Do not refuse to accept and respond to what you have heard. Ask God to help you, and He will. Joyfully receive forgiveness through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. You cannot save yourself. Will you look and see the hands of Jesus stretched out to welcome you as He died on the cross for your sin? God loves you and sent His Son to save you. Call on Jesus as your Lord today. Paul wrote, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."[34] Whether the gospel comes to you as new good news or good news that grows sweeter with each passing year, we can never underestimate the wonder of what God has done for sinners by sending His Son to save us.

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30. **Pray for messengers:** Matthew 9:37-38
31. **Powerful prayer:** James 5:16b
32. **Preach the word:** 2 Timothy 4:2
33. **Jesus is with messengers:** Matthew 28:18-20
34. **Believe today:** 2 Corinthians 6:2b

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Salvation for the Gentiles and for Israel

Lesson 19 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 18 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What points about repentance from the lecture did you apply this week?

2. How did the notes clarify the importance of sharing the gospel?

Second Day: Read Romans 11:1-6.

Paul reasoned that God has not rejected the Jewish people.

3. a. How does Paul's testimony further his point that God has not let go of Israel? (See also Acts 9:1-19.)

   b. How does Elijah's experience strengthen Paul's explanation? (See also 1 Kings 19:1-18.)

4. Define "remnant," using a dictionary if needed. How is God's remnant chosen?

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5. Describe the relationship between grace and God's choice. How does this impact your understanding of election? (See also Romans 9:15-16.)

Third Day: Read Romans 11:7-10.

Israel experienced hardened hearts in their disobedience.

6. From verse 7, what did Israel seek, and why could they not obtain it? (See also Romans 9:31-33.)

7. Read Isaiah 29:10-14; Matthew 13:12-15; John 12:37-43; Acts 28:24-28. How do these passages help you understand Romans 11:7-10?

8. What questions do you have after reading these verses, and for what will you pray as a result?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 11:11-24.

Paul expressed hope for Gentiles and Israel alike.

9. Explain Paul's reasoning in verses 11-15. What good has come from Israel's rejection?

10. a. What illustrations did Paul use in verses 16-24, and what point was he making?

    b. How does this passage address Gentile believers who might be tempted to boast?

11. Consider God's kindness and sternness in verses 22-24, along with Romans 2:4-5. Explain Paul's points in your own words. How have you seen this in your life?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 11:25-32.

Paul discussed Israel's promised restoration.

12. a. From verse 26, what could "all Israel" mean based upon what you know about God and His Word? (Several interpretations exist.)

    b. What will happen to Israel, and how can we be sure? (See also Isaiah 27:9; 59:20-21; Jeremiah 31:33-34; Zechariah 12:10; 13:1.)

13. What do these verses reveal about God's work and character?

14. How does God's plan show mercy to both Jews and Gentiles? Explain why all people, including you, need God's mercy. (Skim Romans 3 for help.)

Sixth Day: Review Romans 11:1-32.

God always works to accomplish His perfect plan for all people.

15. What challenged or offered you hope and encouragement regarding the ways God keeps His promises?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 11:1-32

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 19 Notes

Romans 11:1-32

Focus Verse

"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." (Romans 11:25)

Outline

- A Remnant of Believers – Romans 11:1-10
- Salvation of Gentiles – Romans 11:11-24
- Future Salvation for Israel – Romans 11:25-32

Engage

How can we be confident that God does not give up on His people? As we look around, we see people giving up on one another all the time. Friendships wane, marriages end in divorce, business partnerships fail, and even nations that were once allies turn on one another. How do we know who to trust when life becomes unsettled? Paul told the Romans in no uncertain terms that God can be trusted. He will never turn His back on His people. Ever. **Throughout history, God maintains a remnant of believers that He upholds and strengthens.** He certainly did not give up on Paul.

God is eternally faithful. He will keep every promise and fulfill every prophecy in Scripture. God weaves His purposes into every detail of history. When His people rejected Jesus as Messiah, God made salvation available to the Gentiles with a plan to motivate the Jews to belief. Though God seldom works the way we would, His perfect plans accomplish His greater purposes. In the end, God will fulfill His promises and Israel will be saved. As we examine God's faithfulness to Israel, He opens our eyes to recognize His faithfulness in our lives today. **God always works to accomplish His perfect plan for all people.**

Romans 9 and 10 express Paul's burden for Israel. Paul heralded God's unfailing Word and call to faith as His people proclaim Christ. Throughout these chapters, election and human responsibility arise as mysterious partners in God's glorious plan of redemption. **Chapter 11 continues Paul's revelation of God's grace that brings future hope and promises Israel's future restoration.**

A Remnant of Believers – Romans 11:1-10

Proof of God's Faithfulness – 11:1-6

Paul defended God's faithfulness by answering his question, "Did God reject his people?" Paul exclaimed, "By no means!" and immediately provided facts supporting his argument. **A descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin, Paul presented himself as proof that God had not abandoned Israel.** In the past and present, the world has seen many Jewish Christians. No claim can maintain that God has rejected the Jewish people. Paul believed and the Old Testament affirms God's disciplinary actions toward Israel, His covenant people. Even so, a believing remnant will remain within Israel. God never breaks His promises.[1]

Paul recalled an Old Testament event involving the prophet Elijah as further proof that God had not rejected Israel. Elijah challenged 450 prophets of Baal to sacrifice a bull to their false god, Baal, while Elijah sacrificed the same to the Lord. Neither side lit an altar fire, and both sides agreed that "the god who answers by fire—he is God."[2] Baal's altar remained unlit. But God answered Elijah's prayer with unquestionable power—fire consumed Elijah's sacrifice. Baal's prophets were put to death. Israel's enraged queen, Jezebel, then sought Elijah's demise. Seized with great fear, Elijah fled to the wilderness. God met fleeing Elijah and revealed that He had reserved "seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Elijah was not the only faithful Israelite left! God's grace extended beyond one lone prophet. God had preserved a believing remnant.

A remnant is a small part remaining after the main portion is gone, such as a piece of fabric left unsold. In the Old Testament, the "remnant" often refers to believing Jews who survived the prophesied invasion and exile of Israel's Northern and Southern Kingdoms.[3] Though Elijah lived prior to Israel's captivity and exile, Paul rightly referred to the seven thousand as a remnant who had remained faithful to God. Many Israelites would be saved, but not all. **Paul's recollection of the remnant in Elijah's time prompted him to speak of God's grace to the church in Rome.** Why? Perhaps God's grace constantly amazed Paul. Once so proud of his works and abilities, Paul now cherished God's grace and wanted his readers to do the same.

Israel's Hardening – 11:7-10

Paul summarized chapters 9 and 10 in these four verses of chapter 11. Verse 7 reviews election and why Israel rejected the gospel: "What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened." Back in chapter 9, Paul included four passages from Old Testament prophets to prove God's restorative plan always included Gentile salvation and Israel's rejection of Jesus.[4] Here, in chapter 11, Paul further explained Israel's rejection of Jesus in verse 8: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day."[5]

Paul's summary not only looked back but also carried his argument forward. Chapter 9 discussed Pharaoh's hardening,[6] and Chapter 11 revealed Israel's hardening. Paul seems to be explaining how Israel trusted in their God-given customs rather than in God Himself. Tragically,

1. **God keeps His promises:** Psalms 89:28, 34; 105:8-10; Jeremiah 31:33-37
2. **Elijah:** 1 Kings 18:16–19:18
3. **Remnant:** 2 Kings 19:4, 30-31; Ezra 9:8, 13; Isaiah 11:11, 16; 37:31-32; Jeremiah 23:3; 42:2; Micah 7:18
4. **God's plan:** Hosea 1:10; 2:23; Isaiah 1:9; 10:22-23
5. **Paul's proof:** Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 29:10
6. **Pharaoh's hardening:** Romans 9:17-18

The Promise-Keeping God

The Doctrine of Fulfillment of Prophecy

God faithfully kept His covenant promises to Israel, and He continues to keep those promises today. His promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, came and accomplished salvation for all who believe. God's Old Testament prophets foretold events that came to pass in the lives of Israel's enemies, kings, and people. Believers today confidently anticipate God's future fulfillment of prophecies regarding Jesus's return and the new heaven and earth.

Hundreds of biblical prophecies have been fulfilled, while many more await fulfillment. Fulfilled prophecy proves the God of the Bible is the true God and that the Bible is God's Word. Prophecy can only be repeatedly and accurately fulfilled if God, who reveals future events, also makes certain those promises come to pass.[1] Throughout history, many have attempted in vain to predict the future. **Only God can see and determine what lies ahead.[2]**

God knows all things past, present, and future. Biblical prophecy reveals God's unique character and power. **God alone holds the power to guide history to accomplish His good plan.** God's perfect, unchanging character and power stand behind every promise He makes, and all His promises and prophecies remain certain.

Lack of trust in God's unchanging Word can bring uncertainty in an ever-changing world. Without God's Word as our foundation, we seek security in inadequate human resources, which leaves us ultimately lacking what we need most. **Unless we believe in and stand on the firm foundation of God's Word, we forfeit the comfort of God's fulfilled prophecies and hope for the future.**

Belief in God's past fulfillment of prophecy brings great hope that He will fulfill every remaining prophecy in His Word. We can stand on the rock-solid foundation of God's Word while we live in a world that swirls with circumstances beyond our control. Fear, anxiety, and desperation loom when violence or unexpected tragedy strikes. However, God and His unchanging power, wisdom, and strength provide every comfort we need. **God keeps His every promise and fulfills His every prophecy.**

1. **God's accurate revelation:** Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Isaiah 44:24-26
2. **Omniscient God:** Isaiah 46:9-10; 2 Peter 1:21

their lack of faith turned God's gifts and blessings into a stumbling block. The same thing happens today when God's people trust religious heritage, rituals, and ceremony rather than believe in Jesus and trust in His sacrificial death on the cross.

Salvation of Gentiles – Romans 11:11-24

Our inability to fully understand God's ways does not mean He acts without purpose. Though God's ways may confound us, He is good and wise. His plan is perfect, and He does not owe us an explanation for our life circumstances. Yet He graciously invites us to seek Him in prayer and cry out to Him in times of trouble. He also reveals some of His purposes in salvation. Election

shows us God's patience, wrath, power, glory, and mercy.[7] **God has a distinct purpose in setting aside Israel for a period of time.** Paul unfolded important truths about Israel throughout the remainder of chapter 11.

Israel's Fall – 11:11-12

Israel indeed stumbled badly but not beyond recovery. Though the nation rejected Jesus as Savior and Messiah, they will rise again in faith. God's purpose for Israel's stumbling, like all His purposes, brought good. Israel's rejection of Jesus resulted in opening salvation to the Gentiles. **Two points remain historical facts: 1) Israel rejected Jesus, and 2) the gospel spread to the Gentiles.**

Paul pressed forward and articulated how God would use the Gentiles to bring Israel back to Himself. **Gentile salvation would stir envy among the Jews, opening their eyes to what matters in God's eyes: living by faith.** As Israel desires God's good gifts that believing Gentiles enjoy, they will one day turn to seek God when they turn away from unbelief. Currently, Israel's sinful unbelief means spiritual riches for Gentiles. But Israel's future faith will lead to even greater blessing for both Gentiles and Jews. Though spiritual blindness settled over the majority,[8] individual Jews continue to come to faith in Jesus even today.

Paul's Hope – 11:13-24

Ultimately, Paul longed for his ministry among the Gentiles to bring the Jews to saving faith. Their future belief will mean spiritual resurrection—a true "life from the dead." Paul drew upon two Old Testament pictures to further emphasize that God has not forgotten Israel, His chosen people. The "dough offered as firstfruits" refers to Israel's harvest festival. As the people looked forward to the full harvest, they offered the first portion to God.[9] As the first of two illustrations, the "holy dough" probably speaks of the same reality illustrated by the "holy root" of the olive tree.

To be holy means to be set apart to God. God set apart the patriarchs for Himself. They are the "holy root" within Israel. The spiritual foundation of holiness and consecration to God they laid within the nation brought inescapable consequences for their unbelieving descendants, the natural branches that were broken off. The broken-off branches are not individuals whom God has saved, for true believers cannot lose their salvation.[10] The broken branches are also not whole nations. Gentiles do not replace Israel. Instead, God grafts believing Gentiles into the one people of God.[11] The olive tree's branches seem to include many Jews and many Gentiles. Paul's point is that unbelief cuts Israel off from the spiritual blessings that belong to them as Abraham's descendants. Many Gentiles, with no claim on Israel's spiritual blessings, have entered those blessings by faith in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.[12]

Future Salvation for Israel – Romans 11:25-32

The Bible identifies Israel as God's elect people, and He is not finished with them. His plan to bless Israel will unfold in the last days. Many biblical prophecies were recorded long before they

7. **Election:** Romans 9
8. **Spiritual blindness:** 2 Corinthians 3:14-16
9. **First portion:** Exodus 34:22; Leviticus 2:12, 14; Numbers 15:20-21; 18:12; 28:26-31
10. **Secure salvation:** John 10:27-30; Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 1:6
11. **Grafting of Gentiles:** Ephesians 2:11-22
12. **Spiritual blessings:** Romans 4:11-12; Ephesians 2:11-22

Covenant Promises in Scripture

God's covenant stands at the heart of Scripture, God's revealed Word. "Covenant" is a legal term that describes at least three types of Old Testament relationships:

- A voluntary, two-sided relationship, such as Jonathan's and David's friendship[1]
- A one-sided relationship that a superior imposes on inferiors, such as a victor over a defeated nation[2]
- God's self-imposed obligation to reconcile sinners to Himself[3]

A covenant is a foundational arrangement God has established with an individual or group of people. Some of God's covenants are *unconditional*, such as His covenant with Abraham, in which God's actions do not depend on human actions. God's unconditional covenant becomes clear in Romans 11:27. God promised to make Abraham into a great nation and bless all people through His promised Messiah. Abraham had no required work to complete before receiving God's promise—he simply received God's promised blessing by faith. In addition, some of God's covenants are *conditional*, such as His covenant with Israel. God promised to bless the people if they obeyed His commandments and to judge them for disobedience.[4] God sets the unchangeable terms to His covenants. As well as His covenants with Abraham and Moses, God established covenants with others in the Old and New Testaments. The number of covenants in Scripture is a subject of ongoing scholarly discussion. However, all viewpoints recognize key events in the scriptural narrative where God establishes foundational arrangements with people that include promises and obligations.

- **God's Covenant with Adam** (Genesis 1:28-30; 2:16-17; Romans 5:12-19): While the word "covenant" does not appear, Genesis spells out God's covenant terms. Adam would enjoy God's blessing if he obeyed God's command and did not eat fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam failed, bringing judgment and death.
- **God's Covenant with Noah** (Genesis 6:18; 9:9-17): The Noahic covenant applied to every living creature. God promised never again to destroy the world by flood. He confirmed His covenant with a sign—a rainbow.
- **God's Covenant with David** (2 Samuel 7:4-16; 1 Chronicles 17:3-15): God promised David He would establish His throne and kingdom forever. David recognized God's promise of the Messiah.
- **The New Covenant** (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:40-41; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25): Israel had repeatedly broken God's covenant, but God promised a future new covenant. The old covenant required obedience, but sinful people repeatedly disobeyed. Jesus accomplished the new covenant by His death. Every believer receives the tremendous blessing of the Holy Spirit and a changed heart with a new desire to obey.[5] Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ share in the grace of the new covenant. Through this same new covenant, God will bring the Jews to faith in the last days. God's character, power, and justice stand behind every covenant He has made.

1. **Jonathan and David:** 1 Samuel 18:3-4
2. **Defeated nation:** Ezekiel 17:13-14
3. **Reconcile sinners:** Deuteronomy 7:6-8
4. **Mosaic covenant:** Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 28:1–30:20
5. **Changed heart:** Romans 6; 8:9-17; Philippians 2:13

were fulfilled and validate the Bible as God's Word.[13] God alone knows and controls the future. His prophecies and promises regarding the Jews have yet to be fulfilled. Even so, God can be trusted. Unchanging and trustworthy, God remains true to Himself, His will, and His Word.

God's Irrevocable Call – 11:25-29

In the Bible, a mystery is something hidden in the past that God has now revealed. The mystery disclosed in these verses is God's plan to save Gentiles and Jews through Israel's partial hardening. God's ultimate purpose to lead Jews to find Jesus as their Savior continues as Gentiles come to faith in Christ even today. **God's gracious plan has always included Jews and Gentiles.**

God will save all Israel when the full number of Gentiles, which only God knows, comes to faith. What did Paul mean by "all Israel"? Faithful Christians hold a variety of views.

- Some dismiss a future day of national Jewish conversions and view "all Israel" as a true spiritual Israel, not just a national identity.[14]
- Others believe that "all Israel" and "the full number" of Gentiles refer to all who come to faith and righteousness in Jesus Christ—Jews and Gentiles together. However, the fact that Gentiles and Jews are distinct groups throughout this chapter suggests that "all" may mean Jews as a distinct group.
- Some understand "all Israel" to mean the nation as a whole, not every individual therein, while others highlight an intended contrast of a larger entity to the small remnant of believing Jews during the time of Gentile blessing.
- **What we know is that Israel's state of unbelief is not final.** BSF's view is that there will be a day at Jesus's second coming when God's blessing returns to the Jews as it has currently turned to the Gentiles. At this time, many Jews will repent and put their trust in Christ.[15] BSF humbly holds this view while acknowledging differing views held by faithful Christians.

Paul continued his pattern of proving his argument by quoting from the Old Testament.[16] He loosely quoted Isaiah 59:20-21 but weaved in thoughts from other passages.[17] Isaiah wrote centuries before Jesus's birth, so his words could refer to Jesus's first or second coming. However, writing after the cross, Paul said, "The deliverer will come." **Repeating the future tense in Isaiah's words, Paul looked to a time of future faith and blessing for Israel at Jesus's second coming.** God's unconditional covenant becomes clear in verse 27. Israel will turn from sin to Jesus in earth's final days. Paul tied Israel's future salvation to God's covenant: "And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

God is sovereign, good, and wise in all He does. He rules over all circumstances. **God's purposes at the end remain exactly as they were at the beginning.** God has promised to "take away their sins." Most Jews have rejected Jesus, yet our faithful God will not forsake Israel. God can be trusted to keep all of his promises to Israel through the work of His Son, Jesus, the Messiah.

Paul shifted from God's covenant to His irrevocable call: "As far as election is concerned, they [the Jews] are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gift and his call are irrevocable." **Though the Jews have rejected Jesus the Messiah at the present time, God's covenantal love for Israel**

13. Promised beforehand: Romans 1:2
14. All Israel: Romans 9:6-8
15. Future blessing: Zechariah 12:10; 13:1
16. Paul's pattern: Romans 3:10-18; 4:1-22; 9:25-27, 33; 10:18-21
17. Future faith: Psalm 14:7; Isaiah 27:9; Jeremiah 31:33-34

remains. What led Paul to this conclusion? Paul had witnessed Israel's rejection of the gospel. He saw how, through the Jews' hardening, God included the Gentiles in His salvation plan. So why wouldn't Paul assume God would revoke His covenant and His call? Paul confidently grasped eternal truth that exceeded his circumstances; Paul understood God's character.

Because God does not change, neither do His promises or plans. God's call, which puts His plans into action, is irrevocable. God chose Israel to be His special people. Nothing that has happened, is happening now, or will happen can change God's choice regarding His relationship with Israel. Like God's covenant, His gifts and call help us understand the nature of His faithfulness. The gifts Paul mentioned in chapter 11 are not aptitudes for science, art, carpentry, or commerce; nor are they moral or spiritual abilities. Instead, he was referring to gifts God gave His people as part of that covenant relationship, including adoption, law, temple worship, and Christ's ancestry.[18]

Because verse 28 mentions election, "call" probably refers to God's choice of Israel as His people. God chose Israel as a special nation for His purposes. God will not and cannot abandon that choice. **God's sovereign purposes and promises for Israel remain.** Though most Jews have rejected the Messiah, Jesus, many will turn from unbelief to Him in the final days.

Mercy for All – 11:30-32

Paul briefly reviewed the major truths of chapter 11 as he concluded his letter's third main section. **Through Israel's disobedience, God has shown mercy to the Gentiles that will ultimately lead to Israel's lasting blessing.** Paul's lesson is clear: God's mercy shines brilliantly against the dark background of sin and the grief it causes.[19] God's great mercy, along with His plan for saving Gentiles and restoring Israel, led Paul to a doxology of praise in the remaining verses of this chapter.

Recalling God's amazing mercy takes us back to Paul's explanation of the way God's sovereignty directs the exercise of His mercy: "Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy."[20] Paul's words stretch our understanding of God's mercy, stating, "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all." Paul did not teach universal salvation. To do so would contradict his prior teachings,[21] Jesus's words,[22] and the Bible as a whole.[23] Rather, God's past work and the future blessings He promises continually prove He will show mercy to Jews and Gentiles alike. **God's mercy remains inclusive, not exclusive.** God simply asks us to respond to His initiative with faith to be a part of His blessing.

Paul spoke about Jews and Gentiles as groups of people, not individuals. Disobedience characterizes both groups. Neither Gentiles nor Jews deserve mercy, but God pours out mercy on both. This truth led Paul, formerly a self-righteous and proud Pharisee, to regard all people as equally needy before God.[24] **God always works to accomplish His perfect plan for all people.**

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18. **Israel's gifts:** Romans 9:4-5
19. **Sin abounds:** Romans 5:20-21
20. **God's mercy:** Romans 9:14-16
21. **All people sin:** Romans 2:5-12; 3:10-18; 6:23; 9:1-3, 22
22. **Born again:** John 3:3
23. **Bible's authority:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17
24. **All people equal:** Romans 3:9-12, 22, 29-30

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

The Bible reveals Israel's past, present, and future. Most Jews have not believed in Jesus, but God's Word has not failed. **Even in their unbelief, God has not rejected His chosen people.** God's preservation of the Jews despite centuries of hardship demonstrates His care and faithfulness. Though not every individual Jewish person believes and is saved, God is still fulfilling His covenant. God is saving a remnant of Jews and Gentiles who belong to the one people of God. Jewish people are not on a separate salvation track. All come to God one way: through faith in Jesus Christ.

Only Jesus's death removes sin's penalty. As long as Israel rejects Jesus, they exclude themselves from the salvation God provides. God will keep His promises to the Jewish people. He will not reject Israel. At last, as prophesied, our faithful God will bring the masses of Israel to faith in Jesus Christ, who died to save them from their sin. In the last days, the Gentiles' salvation will lead many Jews to faith in Jesus the Messiah.

Apply It

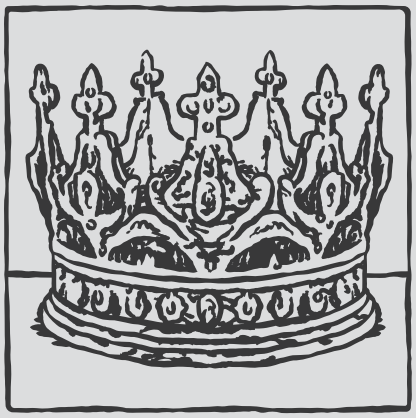
God keeps His promises and fulfills His every prophecy. How does knowing He is fully trustworthy help you personally? Though life often feels uncertain, God remains unchanging. What makes it difficult for you to trust Him? Jesus came, suffered, died, and rose again on your behalf. How might God's fulfilled prophecies about His Son and faithfulness to keep His promises to Israel encourage you? How will you find strength, comfort, and hope in your time of need?

Have you felt isolated in your faith, cast aside, or persecuted because of your relationship with Christ? Co-workers, neighbors, or family members may resist any talk of Jesus or ridicule your faith. Perhaps deep struggles leave you feeling weary and discouraged. Remember, you are never alone. God keeps His watchful eye on His faithful people. **When we feel alone, God draws near.** As you study God's Word, do you recognize your vital role as part of His people? Cry out to Him in prayer and seek Him for comfort and direction. How will you encourage fellow believers as they walk with God through difficult circumstances? How could you speak to an unbelieving friend or into a family member's struggle by sharing Christ and His gospel?

God allowed the Gentiles who came to saving faith in Paul's time to create jealousy within His people, the Jews. How might He use you to help others see Him? God calls His people to shine His light into dark places in this world. He strategically positions believers to impact their workplaces, neighborhoods, and schools. How does your daily attitude illuminate hope or spread joy to those around you? In what ways is God calling you to share the wonder of Jesus's love and make a difference in someone's life today? **The Holy Spirit empowers all who know Jesus to live and love like Him.** Pray your life will show Jesus's grace and truth to any who oppose the gospel.

God's mercy in Jesus Christ remains an unshakable foundation. We cannot save ourselves. Our sinful state reveals our absolute need for God's mercy. A harsh word spoken, an unkind action, even a critical thought about someone demonstrates our need for mercy. Do you look down on anyone in any way? Doing so demonstrates how little we understand about our own sinful nature and how desperately we need God's mercy. God never turns away any who truly seek Him. Do you believe that? Have you experienced God's mercy? If so, will you tell others of God and His great mercy? God is exactly who Paul declares Him to be—the God who saves all who will come to Christ.

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All Glory to God Forever

Lesson 20 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 19 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What thoughts from the lecture instilled confidence in God's ability to keep His promises and fulfill His prophecies?

2. How did the notes help you further apply the truth of God's grace and mercy to your life?

Second Day: Read Romans 11:33.

Paul broke forth into a doxology of praise to God.

3. Skim Romans 9:1–11:32. What do you think led up to Paul's exclamation of praise in 11:33-36?

4. For which specific attributes did Paul praise God in verse 33?

5. How does God receive similar praise in other Bible passages? (See also 1 Kings 8:39; Job 9:4; 28:12-28; Psalm 147:4; Proverbs 3:19; and any other relevant verses.)

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6. a. What are some examples of God's unsearchable judgment or untraceable ways? How do these inspire praise within your heart?

   b. Give an expression of praise for God's wisdom and knowledge in your life.

Third Day: Read Romans 11:34.

Paul asked two questions regarding God.

7. What questions did Paul ask, and what is the answer to both?

8. a. Read Job 38:1-7; 42:1-6; Psalm 8:1-9; and Isaiah 40:14-28. What do these passages reveal about God, and how does our human perspective differ?

   b. How do these verses comfort or challenge you?

9. In what area of your life do you need to embrace God's greatness or remember His sovereign nature?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 11:35.

Paul asked a third question about God.

10. a. What has God given to all people? (See also Genesis 1:27-30; John 3:16; Acts 17:24-28.)

    b. What has God given to you specifically, and how will you respond?

11. What can people offer to God? (See also Job 41:11; Romans 12:1; or other Scriptures you know to guide various thoughts around this question.)

12. How might people knowingly or unknowingly try to place God under obligation to repay them for obedience?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 11:36.

Paul praised God for who He is.

13. Give ways all things are:

    from God

    through God

    for God

14. For what reason did God create the universe? (See also Isaiah 43:7; Ephesians 1:5-10; Revelation 4:11.)

15. How have you seen God's glory (the total of His attributes), and how could you more intentionally glorify Him in your thoughts, conversations, and choices today?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 11:33-36.

God's absolute superiority calls for unending praise.

16. How does Paul's doxology deepen your understanding of God or affect your praise of Him?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 11:33-36

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 20 Notes

Romans 11:33-36

Focus Verse

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen." (Romans 11:36)

Outline

- God's Infinite Character– Romans 11:33
- God's Immeasurable Greatness – Romans: 11:34-35
- God's Supreme Glory – Romans 11:36

Engage

How do we make sense of life's greatest mysteries? Some mysteries puzzle and challenge us. Others, like a surprising medical diagnosis or a missing family member, create great concern. Tragic circumstances and painful loss often bring the question, "Where is God, and why would He allow this?" As we read in Romans 9–11, Paul knew the reality of great, inexplicable sorrow. **Paul grieved deeply over Israel's rejection of Jesus as he unpacked God's plan to bring Gentiles to salvation and restore Israel to Himself.** How can God accomplish this? Only through His infinite wisdom and power, which is unlike our own in every way.

Over three chapters, Paul traced God's ways and His goal in history, proving God's righteousness in His glorious plan. Thinking about God's mercy, grace, and wisdom filled Paul with awe. As he considered God's great mercies to Israel and the world, Paul found himself lost in wonder, love, and praise. God's greatness and sovereignty seemed to overwhelm Paul as he closed this section of Romans with a doxology. Paul's powerful hymn praised God for His beautiful character and wonderful ways. We, too, can ask God to fill our hearts with worship as we marvel at who He is. **God's absolute superiority calls for unending praise.**

God's Infinite Character – Romans 11:33

Paul's doxology begins with an exclamation of "Oh"—almost as if Paul needed to gasp for air before describing the beauty and depth of God's character. Pause and think about the infinite truth Paul pondered. God's magnificent nature and character exceed the capacity of human minds and language. Such words as "holy," "true," "faithful," and "merciful" can scarcely capture all that God is and does. His wisdom, power, glory, and limitless love are greater than anything we might imagine. **As Paul sought to praise God for all He is, he could not help but bask in the infinite riches and glory of God.**

People often seek to understand God by comparing Him to someone or something else, beginning with the phrase, "God is like ..." **God's Word describes Him in hundreds of helpful ways, including as the rock, light, shepherd, gate, branch, and cornerstone.** Like Paul, as we ponder who God is, His Holy Spirit helps us better understand Him. And yet, no comparison can fully capture His inexpressible nature. God is indescribable in the sense that no human description can encompass who He is. For this reason, God prohibits crafting or using any object to worship in place of Himself.[1]

Earlier in Romans, Paul warned of humanity's tendency to worship created things in place of the Creator.[2] God, the Creator, can never be represented by any created thing. Jesus told the woman at the well, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."[3] **Only Jesus can show what the Father is like.[4]**

God the Father has revealed Himself to us personally and perfectly through His Son, Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews wrote, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."[5] Compared to eternity, Jesus's earthly ministry was brief. Yet all of Scripture testifies of Jesus.[6] God the Father chose to reveal Himself through His Word, both incarnate (Jesus) and written.[7] The Bible tells us everything we need to know about God.

Perfect Wisdom and Infinite Knowledge – 11:33a

The depth of God's riches includes His wisdom and knowledge, which again helps us understand Paul's intake of breath and exhale with the word "Oh" as he began his doxology. The word "doxology" in Greek means "a glorious saying"—*doxa* is "glory"; *logos* is "saying." God's wisdom includes far more than knowledge. Wisdom is practical. Wisdom is also good; without goodness, a person is cunning but not wise. A wise person recognizes and loves everything true, noble, pure, lovely, and admirable.[8] **Wisdom applies true knowledge in the holiest way to achieve the highest purpose and best result.**

People can access knowledge more easily today than in any other time in history. Has this accessibility made people wiser? We need only search social media to see that people remain resoundingly foolish even with access to a great amount of information. **Romans reveals God's wisdom to us in His justification,[9] His sanctification,[10] His salvation,[11] and His Church.[12]**

How do we begin to describe God's knowledge? God is omniscient; He is all-knowing. **While human knowledge is imperfect and partial, God knows all things perfectly and completely.**

- He knows everything that has happened in the past and present.[13]
- He knows what the future holds—whether on earth or in a distant galaxy, in heaven or hell.[14]

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1. **No other gods:** Exodus 20:3-6
2. **Worship creation:** Romans 1:25
3. **Spirit and truth:** John 4:24
4. **Son of God:** John 1:18
5. **The Son:** Hebrews 1:3
6. **Scripture's testimony of Jesus:** Luke 24:27; John 5:39
7. **The Word:** John 1:1-5
8. **Perfect wisdom:** Philippians 4:8
9. **Justification:** Romans 1–4
10. **Sanctification:** Romans 5–8
11. **Salvation:** Romans 9–11
12. **The Church:** Romans 12–16
13. **Past and present:** Isaiah 46:9-10
14. **Knowledge of future:** Psalm 139:4, 16

- He knows all things about every person, being, situation, circumstance, and event.[15]
- He knows every cause, effect, attitude, action, thought, word, and deed.[16]
- He knows those who do evil and those who do right.[17]
- He knows things done and left undone.[18]
- He knows every excuse and every motive, including what people would have done in different circumstances or with different opportunities.[19]
- He knows every need and desire of every living thing.[20]

God has no need to discover anything, for, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before [His] eyes."[21] **All life flows from God's infinite knowledge and love.** He knows everything about you personally—the DNA in your chromosomes,[22] the hairs on your head,[23] every tear you have shed,[24] and the number of days you will live.[25] God is never surprised. Even in eternity God's great knowledge will never be exhausted.

Unsearchable Judgments and Untraceable Paths – 11:33b

God's judgments flow from His infinite knowledge and perfect wisdom. The Greek word for judgment that is used here*, krima,* is defined as God's judicial or divine decision. We usually interpret God's judgment as His dealings with the wicked.[26] In his doxology, Paul used the word "judgments" to refer to God's divine and eternal decisions.[27] Some of God's unsearchable judgments have been revealed but remain inaccessible to human minds.

Like His judgments, God's untraceable paths exceed human comprehension. However, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and His Word, His ways begin to become clearer to us. God does not work exactly the same way in all people He calls to faith in Christ. Some travel a straight and narrow road directly to Jesus's work on the cross. Others crisscross hills, valleys, and rocky roads before yielding to Christ. God's sovereign work among human hearts, minds, and lives cannot be traced or tracked by mere human understanding.

God's Immeasurable Greatness – Romans 11:34-35

Paul's contemplation of God moved him to ask three rhetorical questions about God's greatness. No human can begin to know all that God knows. His knowledge infinitely exceeds ours. He owes us nothing. All things great and small belong to Him.[28] God spoke the universe into being and is infinitely superior to us in every way.

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15. **Eyes on mortals:** Job 34:21
16. **Words and deeds:** 2 Chronicles 16:9; Luke 8:17
17. **Evil and righteous:** Proverbs 15:3
18. **Done and undone:** James 4:17
19. **Motives and opportunities:** 1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 11:21
20. **Needs and desires:** Matthew 6:8
21. **Laid bare:** Hebrews 4:13
22. **God's intentional design:** Psalm 139:13-15
23. **Hairs on head:** Luke 12:7
24. **Tears shed:** Psalm 56:8
25. **Numbered days:** Psalm 139:16
26. **God's judgments:** Acts 17:31; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 16:5-7; 19:2; 20:12
27. **Eternal decisions:** Psalm 33:10-11; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:11-12
28. **God's ownership:** Job 41:11

Who Knows God's Mind? – 11:34

When we glimpse God's grandeur, we realize how small and lowly we are before Him. The unsearchable depth of God's wisdom prompted Paul to ask two questions: "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" **The highest human intellect cannot compare to God's divine wisdom.** His wisdom hung the moon, stars, and galaxies and holds them in place.[29]

Apart from God, mere human knowledge is foolishness and folly.[30] Even so, God imparts knowledge and wisdom to people so we do not remain ignorant. God invites us to trust Him, live obediently, develop our minds, and seek true wisdom from Him.[31]

When people sincerely seek wisdom from God, they realize that there is no true wisdom without God. We read in Proverbs, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."[32] Because God knows, we can know. Because God is wise, we can acquire wisdom. But even the godliest person will never fully grasp God's person, character, or ways. God said, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."[33] Our plans may fail, but God's never do. His wisdom and knowledge direct His actions. Therefore, His purpose always prevails.[34] True wisdom consists of learning to trust and follow God. Proverbs tells us: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."[35] God gives His people the wisdom they need exactly when they need it and just as He has promised.[36] When life is uncertain, we can rest in the truth that our wise God keeps his commitments.

What Does God Owe People? – 11:35

Paul's last question is, "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?" The answer is clear: no one. God made this point to Job, asking, "Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me."[37] **God's people serve their self-sufficient, sovereign God with willing but empty hands.** When we give to God, we merely give back what He has first given us. Our families, churches, jobs, circumstances, abilities, capability to love, and even our very lives come from God.[38] The worship and praise we bring to God flows from and through Him. God deserves but does not need our love and worship; perfect fellowship and love have always existed within the Trinity.[39] God is completely sufficient in Himself—everywhere and always. Romans has shown that we come to our great God with empty hands in three major areas:

- **Justification** (Romans 1–4): **God justifies us by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.** Without Christ, all people are dead in sin and can do nothing to make themselves righteous.[40] But God reaches out in Jesus Christ to save sinful people apart from any good in us.[41] Even faith is God's gift.[42] No one will boast[43] on the day all people stand before the Lord.[44]

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29. **Creator:** Genesis 1:16; Psalms 8:3-4; 136:5-9; Colossians 1:16-17
30. **Foolish knowledge:** 1 Corinthians 1:20
31. **True wisdom:** Psalm 90:12; Proverbs 3:13-14; 4:4-7
32. **Fear of the Lord:** Proverbs 9:10
33. **God's ways:** Isaiah 55:8
34. **Prevailing purpose:** Proverbs 19:21; Acts 2:22-24
35. **Trust God:** Proverbs 3:5-6
36. **Ask for wisdom:** James 1:5
37. **Under heaven:** Job 41:11
38. **Received from God:** John 1:16; James 1:17
39. **The Trinity:** John 1:1-3
40. **Dead in sin:** Romans 1:18–3:20; Ephesians 2:1-3
41. **Jesus saves:** Romans 3:21–4:25
42. **Gift of faith:** Ephesians 2:8-9
43. **Boasting excluded:** Romans 3:27-30; 4:2; 5:2, 11
44. **Final judgment:** Romans 2:8-9, 12, 16; 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:4-6, 11-15

- **Sanctification** (Romans 5–8): **The Holy Spirit sanctifies.**[45] We offer good works in grateful response to what God has done,[46] but God works in us to make our work effective.[47] God removes us out of Adam and places us in Christ.[48] He gives us a new nature with new desires and new power to live for Him.[49] Chapter 8's final verses summarize how God orchestrates salvation from first to last: God is for us, gave His Son for us, justified us, intercedes for us, and holds us so tightly that nothing can separate us from His love in Christ Jesus.[50]
- **God's plan for all history** (Romans 9–11): **God designed history to reveal Himself: His love, grace, mercy, power, justice, wrath, and glory.** God is the central focal point of His work in the world. God does not exist for us; we exist for Him and His glory.[51] When God saves us by His grace, He also commits Himself to us with the faithfulness of His promise. We come to Him with nothing, but He gave His own Son for our redemption. Lasting joy can only be found in Him.

God's Supreme Glory – Romans 11:36

Paul's doxology shifts to praise God for His limitless nature. Incomparable glory belongs to God. All things are from Him, come through Him, and exist for His glory alone. Paul's chorus of praise to the triune God could be an early Christian worship song. God's glory abounds in creation and in His plan for salvation.

Glory in Creation

Paul placed no limits on God's glory. The term "all things" expresses the truth that God's glory knows no bounds. All creation, whether visible or invisible, physical or spiritual, brings God glory. Every minuscule atom or molecule in the universe comes from God. All things came into existence at God's command. His creative power sustains His creation, which exists for His glory. Paul further amplified God's glory with the words "from," "through," and "for." These words examine the depth and breadth of God's glory.

All Things from God – Before time began and even space came into being, God majestically and gloriously existed in His triune nature—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Before He spoke the heavens and earth into being, God lived in unapproachable light.[52] **Before He formed the earth, God's throne stood firm in heaven.** All that exists, whether visible or invisible, came from God Himself. His ideas, His plans, and His Word brought all things into being. No one but God could create as He did. He is the source of everything good. No one is like our God.

All Things Through God – God not only planned all things but accomplished His plan through His initiative and power. In other words, God is the creator but also the sustainer of the universe. God needed no help; no one could possibly help Him. God did not form the world from existing matter. **God created everything out of nothing with His commands and His hands.**[53] By His existence and through His work, everything in all creation came to be and points straight to Him—God, the uncaused First Cause—who created and sustains His creation.

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45. **Spirit sanctifies:** 1 Corinthians 6:11
46. **Good works:** John 15:1-5, 15; Ephesians 2:10; James 2:14-26
47. **Effective work:** Philippians 2:12-13
48. **In Christ:** Romans 5:12-21
49. **New nature:** Romans 6:1-14; 8:1-17
50. **God is for us:** Romans 8:31-39
51. **God's glory:** Isaiah 43:7; John 17:22-24; 1 Corinthians 10:31
52. **Unapproachable light:** 1 Timothy 6:15-16
53. **Commands and hands:** Genesis 1; Psalm 19

God's Supreme Nature

The Doctrine of God the Father

Paul's explanation of God's plan for salvation caused him to burst into a song of praise. God alone is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise. There is one God, who exists in three persons. **The first person of the Trinity is God the Father, who created and sustains all things.** He reigns supreme over all people. God loves those He created, despite their sin against Him. God the Father so loves the world that He made a way for all who will believe to know Him through His Son, Jesus.[1]

God is eternal, infinite, and different from us in every way. He seeks His children as a good Father who cares for them.[2] He exists in perfect, inseparable communion with Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. While Jesus was on earth, He prayed to the Father to send the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, to comfort His people. To know God the Father is also to know the Son and the Holy Spirit, who mysteriously yet certainly exist together as the one true God. Through Jesus, all who believe will one day see the Father and abide with Him forever in heaven.

Not believing in God the Father means rejecting God as He revealed Himself in the Bible. God is living and life-giving. Depending on ourselves or worshipping anything else leaves us empty and unfulfilled. Almighty God created the universe: all that we can see and everything human senses can neither see, hear, nor comprehend. To ignore God as our creator and sustainer is to reject Him and all He is. We forfeit knowing and loving our heavenly Father and replace Him with an insufficient substitute. The love of a human, such as the love of a good father, cannot compare to the love of God the Father.

When we believe in God the Father, like Paul, we stand in awe of Him. **Placing our faith in our faithful, sovereign God brings great hope.** In times of grief, we can turn to Him for comfort and strength. In times of uncertainty, we can depend on Him for guidance and trust His sovereign control over every situation. In times of great joy, we can celebrate Him for who He is—our God who graciously bestows every blessing. We praise His marvelous plan of salvation and rest in His grace, mercy, and love. God is worthy of all our praise.

1. **God's love through Christ:** John 3:16; Ephesians 1:3-10
2. **God our Father:** Psalm 103:13; Isaiah 64:8; 1 John 3:1

All Things for God's Glory – Why did God create the heavens, the earth, and every living thing? Some people think the universe exists only for them. Others view the universe as purposeless and impersonal. Still others call out to the universe for help instead of praying to God. But all creation, every element of the entire universe, is for God personally.[54] **Before any of us existed, God planned the universe for His entirely wise and noble purposes.** God's highest purpose was not His creatures' needs because nothing existed before He created. God's motive for creation was and is wholly in Himself. Creation exists for God and His glory.

54. For God: Colossians 1:16

Glory in Salvation

The gospel of salvation by grace is the great theme of Romans. **God's way of salvation, like His work of creation, comes from and through God and for His glory.**

***Salvation Is from God* – Only a faithful God could accomplish a plan of salvation that upholds His perfect holiness and justifies sinners.** God's plan of salvation reveals His unending grace. Only God's plan excludes human merit and good works as a way to gain righteousness. God's plan thoroughly transforms the saved. Ultimately, God's grace empowers people to demonstrate true righteousness as their lives reflect great love for God and lasting service to Him.[55] God orchestrated the precise time in history for Jesus's birth in Bethlehem, the moment John the Baptist identified Him, His years of teaching and healing, and His betrayal, arrest, trials, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven.[56] God also directs the timing and circumstances surrounding each believer's salvation.

***Salvation Is Through God* – That is, Jesus's saving work on the cross made salvation possible.** Salvation also comes through the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. The Holy Spirit works in human hearts to lead God's children to repentance, faith, and sanctification. Nothing we do accomplishes or sustains our salvation. In fact, apart from God's work, people are unable to slow their rush toward judgment. Salvation is entirely God's work.

***Salvation Is for God's Glory* –** All believers, saved by God's mercy and grace, will praise Him forever. We belong to God and live for His glory. Every aspect of salvation comes from God, through His work, and for His glory. God's vast, infinite nature and character call us, like Paul, to worship Him. Our present and eternal privilege is to glorify God in all we say and do. **God's absolute superiority calls for unending praise.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Throughout Romans 9–11, Paul explained the decrees of God that govern human history. Beneath these challenging truths, Paul continuously upheld God's mercy, goodness, grace, faithfulness, and desire to bless His people, Israel, and the entire world with salvation. No wonder Paul burst forth in stunning praise for God. Paul's high view of God exalted the depths and riches of God's wisdom and knowledge. **God, whose wisdom and knowledge are richly and incomprehensibly deep, carries out His sovereign judgment and perfect will with boundless love.**

Only God could design salvation's path for both Jews and Gentiles, and the mystery of election, without compromising His holy and just character. Amazingly, God had a plan to bring estranged people together and make them family; salvation not only saves us individually to bring us to God but brings formerly separated people together. **God's infinite mind surpasses our finite minds to depths we will never reach on this earth but will celebrate for eternity.** We cannot fully know God's mind. He needs no human counsel. We cannot outgive our generously gracious God, but our hearts can join Paul in praising Him. All things that exist come from, through, and for Him. He is the One worthy of all glory forever and ever! Amen.

55. True righteousness: Romans 9:30-32
56. Salvation's timing: Galatians 4:4

Apply It

People today settle for knowledge gleaned from computers and smartphones. Artificial intelligence offers quick access to sometimes questionable data. **God's knowledge is far greater than anything people can create; His wisdom is beyond compare.** What do you need to know? In what situation do you need wisdom? God stands ready to help; He is only a prayer away. With His Word at your fingertips and His Spirit to instruct you, seek God as you navigate life's challenges. When did you last seek God and His wisdom for everyday life decisions? God loves His people dearly. He knows the number of hairs on your head. He cares about the intimate details of your life and has the power to help you. Will you turn to God for wisdom and seek His guidance in every decision you face? How will you seek knowledge and wisdom in His Word?

God's unsearchable judgments and imperceivable ways both inspire and confuse our finite human minds. He sees and knows all things past, present, and future. His perfect plan of salvation, completed through Christ, continues to unfold daily as people turn to Christ in faith. God's ultimate concern is for sinners to turn to His Son for salvation. God's generosity in salvation proves His overwhelming desire to bless people, individually and collectively. God gave His only Son as our sin-sacrifice. Jesus gave His life in place of ours, so we might live with Him for all eternity. We cannot outgive God. We owe Him everything and will never repay our debt to Him. In grace, He gives us faith, and by faith we are saved. Will you come to God with a humble heart and yield yourself to Him? God, who is beyond you in every way, calls you to trust Him.

God's untraceable paths lead us to Him. We sometimes question God's ways or wish for something different when walking a difficult path. Paul asked, "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" The infinite God, whose wisdom we cannot fathom, cannot be placed in a box that we create. He is beyond all we can comprehend. God's Word contains truths that make us aware of His thinking and help us know Him better. However, His mind is deeper and higher and vastly beyond all that we can imagine. God's question to Job sums this up: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?"[57] With our limited, time-locked perspective, not one of us can offer God advice. With humility and gratitude, we can fully trust our faithful God. How will you trust Him today, wherever His path leads?

How should we respond to Paul's words of praise? **As we comprehend God's incomprehensible nature, we revere His holiness with wonder and worship.** God is worthy of praise. The depth of God's infinite character stirs our hearts, minds, and souls to magnify and praise Him. Paul's doxology connects heaven with earth as we ponder and celebrate God's glory. With a fresh gasp of awe we can say, "Oh!" along with Paul. For from God, through God, and for God are all things in heaven and on earth. Through His wisdom, God pulls broken creation, including estranged people, back together into His family. To God be all the glory forever and ever. Amen!

57. God the creator: Job 38:4

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LESSONS 21-28

ROMANS 12–16

God's Righteousness Worked Out in His People's Lives



SYNPOSIS

Romans 12–16 calls believers to live as transformed, humble servants, united in Christ. Paul urges submission to authority, harmony, patience, and respect for differing views on disputable matters. He ends his letter with greetings, a warning against division, and praise of God's wisdom.

Lessons 21-28 celebrate the Church as a new global community centered around Christ.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

① Light of Grace
② United Global Community
③ Transforming Cross



Christian Worship and Service

Lesson 21 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 20 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture impact your understanding or practice of worshipping God?

2. What truth from the notes encouraged you or strengthened your relationship with God?

Second Day: Read Romans 12:1-2.

Paul urged believers to offer God their bodies as living sacrifices.

3. What do you learn about God and His mercy from the following verses?

   Romans 9:15

   Romans 9:23

   Ephesians 2:4-5

   1 Peter 1:3

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4. Reflect on your study of Romans 1–8. How have you personally experienced God's mercy?

5. a. Compare and contrast the Old Testament animal sacrifices with the kind of sacrifice Paul urged Christians to offer. (See also Leviticus 16; Romans 6:3-4, 11-13; Hebrews 10:1-10.)

   b. How have you observed others offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God?

   c. In what way is God calling you to sacrificial living, and how are you responding?

Third Day: Reread Romans 12:1-2.

Paul called believers to be transformed by renewing their minds.

6. a. From Romans 12:2, what are believers to stop doing?

   b. Describe the pattern of this world. (See also Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 2:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17.)

7. a. From Romans 12:2, what are believers to do?

   b. How is a person transformed? (See also Romans 8:5-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:13.)

8. If you are a believer, how is God transforming you or proving that His will is good and pleasing? (See also 1 Peter 2:15; 3:17; 4:1-11.)

Fourth Day: Read Romans 12:3-5.

Paul described the unity and diversity of Christ's body, the Church.

9. What warning did Paul give, and why is it important?

10. a. To what did Paul compare Christians?

b. How does this illustration help you understand the way Christians are to relate to one another as the Church? (See also Ephesians 4:1-6.)

11. What is God revealing to you about how you view yourself and others?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 12:6-8.

Paul exhorted believers to serve God and others with their unique gifts.

12. Share truths concerning God's gifts to Christians from the following verses:

    1 Corinthians 7:7

    1 Corinthians 12:4-6

    Ephesians 4:11-13

    1 Peter 4:10-11

13. List the seven gifts in Romans 12:6-8 and how each should be exercised.

14. Which of the gifts has God given you? What opportunity has He given you to use His gifts in a local church?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 12:1-8.

God transforms and equips surrendered believers for the good of Christ's body.

15. How does humbly surrendering your life to the Lord impact your ability to live for Him and serve others?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 12:1-8

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 21 Notes

Romans 12:1-8

Focus Verse

"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." (Romans 12:1)

Outline

- Wholehearted Worship – Romans 12:1-2
- Wholehearted Service – Romans 12:3-8

Engage

"The world exists to give me what I want." While few people openly state this view aloud, selfishness resides and hides in all people. Across cultures, this attitude takes different forms. Our schedules, jobs, families, successes, and pleasures drive us to justify such thoughts as, "Whatever satisfies me and my priorities matters most. Whatever I want to do is acceptable as long as my family's influence increases. I should prioritize my group's security and protection above all." Does the world exist to serve us and meet our needs? Are seemingly harmless choices ours to make? **The systems of this world are designed to provide people with what they feel they deserve.**

In contrast, Paul taught that God's will anchors all things. As Savior, Jesus rules all creation. Believers should live for God's priorities. God desires believers to live as Jesus did—for God's glory and the good of others. **God transforms and equips surrendered believers for the good of Christ's body.** People willing to wholeheartedly worship God and serve others discover that God's will for them brings personal satisfaction and eternal pleasure this fading world cannot offer.

In Romans 1–11, Paul laid the doctrinal foundation of God's saving righteousness. Then in Romans 12–16, Paul presented faith's transformative impact on our relationship with God and others. **God's righteousness is revealed as believers apply truths from Romans 1–11 to their daily lives.** These practices align with God's will in practical areas, which we will study over the next several lessons:

- Christian Worship and Service—12:1-8 (Lesson 21)
- Christian Love—12:9-21 (Lesson 22)
- Christian Submission to Authority—13:1-7 (Lesson 23)
- Christian Living—13:8-14 (Lesson 24)
- Christian Liberty—14 (Lesson 25)
- Christian Unity—15:1-13 (Lesson 26)
- Paul's Ministry and Plans—15:14-33 (Lesson 27)
- The Gospel's Impact in Rome and Corinth—16 (Lesson 28)

Wholehearted Worship – Romans 12:1-2

With the opening word "Therefore," Paul pointed back to his explanation about how God mercifully redeems sinners through Christ's death and resurrection. Secured through faith and eternal union with Christ, believers begin the journey of godly living. **Paul urged believers, who are indwelt by Christ's Spirit, to live differently than they did before their salvation.** Worship of the Lord should consume and propel believers' lives, "for from him and through him and for him are all things."[1]

Living Sacrifices – 12:1

***In View of God's Mercy* – Paul assumed that God's merciful salvation would inspire those He saved to live for Him.** God mercifully offers fallen humanity His righteousness, which they could never earn.[2] God also mercifully maintains a righteous plan for Israel's salvation through faith in their Messiah, Jesus.[3] Paul summarized God's mercy: "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all."[4] Though God gave people over to their sinful desires,[5] His mercy makes salvation available by faith in Jesus.[6]

***Offer Your Bodies* –** Jesus has forever broken sin's power over believers. Paul previously commanded, "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body ... but rather offer yourselves to God."[7] **Sin still seeks to dominate believers through their bodies, but it cannot control people living for God's righteousness.**

***As Living Sacrifices* –** In the Old Testament, sacrificial animals[8] pointed toward Christ's once-for-all death for sin.[9] **Now, believers share in Jesus's death and resurrection by faith, living for Him and not themselves.[10]**

***Holy and Pleasing to God* – Paul described a believer's living sacrifice as holy, consecrated entirely to God.** Jesus held nothing back when He sacrificed himself for our redemption.[11] Consequently, Paul called believers to hold nothing back when they offer themselves to God. Holiness—a life set apart, reserved, and spent for God's glory—is a believer's identity and privilege.[12] Believers please God when they wholeheartedly offer themselves to Him.[13]

***Your True and Proper Worship* –** While Paul understood worship through Jewish laws and sacrificial customs, today's Christians might picture worship as an event or gathering for prayer, singing, and teaching. The New International Version (NIV) translates the Greek word *latreia* as "worship." This word conveys active service to God, who has reset our minds to think correctly and our hearts to worship rightly. The result? We glorify Him rather than His created things. The phrase "true and proper" traces back to a single Greek word, *logikos*, with meanings of spiritual, rational, or right reasoning. **Taken together, the words translated as "true and proper worship" explain that wholehearted Christian worship is service, which is reformed completely in our lives, spiritually and practically.**

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1. **Lord above all:** Romans 11:36a
2. **Mercy to humanity:** Romans 1–8
3. **Mercy to Israel:** Romans 9–11
4. **Mercy summarized:** Romans 11:32
5. **Gave them over:** Romans 1:18-32
6. **Salvation available:** Romans 10:13
7. **Bodies for God:** Romans 6:11-13
8. **Old Testament sacrifices:** Leviticus 16; Hebrews 10:1-10
9. **Once for all:** 1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 9:28
10. **Living for Christ:** Romans 6:3-13; 2 Corinthians 5:15
11. **Jesus's sacrifice:** 1 Peter 1:18-19
12. **Holy people:** 1 Peter 2:9
13. **God's pleasure:** Matthew 25:21-23

Renewed Minds – 12:2

Negative Command – Living sacrifices that belong to God live for God alone. Paul wisely spoke truth to people of his day and ours: Do not let the time or age you live in mold your thinking and behavior to its schemes, standards, or values. **Paul called believers to think and act like Jesus Christ, rather than imitate the people in the world around them.**[14]

What worldly patterns might Paul have had in mind? Romans 1–11 reveals some patterns that concerned Paul: suppressing God's truth,[15] judgmentalism, self-righteousness,[16] misusing God's grace to excuse sin,[17] living to please the flesh,[18] works-based righteousness,[19] and rejecting the gospel.[20] **Each worldly pattern mentioned in Romans underscores our desperate need for righteousness only God can provide.**

The patterns of today's world still stem from humanity's fallen nature and inherited rebellion against God.[21] Many modern philosophies explain life apart from God:

- Secularism elevates the physical world as the center of all things.
- Humanism asserts that everything exists to please and glorify people.
- Relativism claims that there is no absolute truth, goodness, or beauty; each person must find their own truth.
- Materialism seeks meaning and value in wealth, health, and fame.
- Syncretism assumes that all religions are equally true, valuable, and valid.

Even without knowing the name or details of each philosophy, these ideas impact our families, economies, education, and social values.

Positive Command – Paul offered an alternative to conforming to the world's pattern—a renewed mind, which leads to transformed living. Paul called believers to a new worldview. People who think biblically live differently. **God makes believers increasingly like Jesus as they actively surrender their lives to Him.**[22]

A biblical worldview echoes Paul's doxology in Romans 11:33-36. **Renewed minds recognize God is eternally above and supremely beyond everything He created.** With God at the center, worship and surrender replace self-fulfillment and put all other allegiances in their rightful place. God determines the truths by which His creation operates. God has graciously revealed Himself to all people through creation,[23] the Scriptures,[24] and "his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe."[25] In Jesus Christ, God illustrated goodness and beauty—humility, sacrificial love, and holiness.[26] In His wisdom, God ordained faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the only way to receive His righteousness.[27] We can trust God's absolute truth.[28]

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14. **Like Christ:** Philippians 2:1-8
15. **Suppressing truth:** Romans 1
16. **Self-righteousness:** Romans 2
17. **Misusing grace:** Romans 6
18. **Pleasing flesh:** Romans 8
19. **Works-based righteousness:** Romans 9
20. **Rejecting Christ:** Romans 10
21. **World's pattern:** Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 2:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17
22. **God's work:** Matthew 11:29; John 3:30; Romans 8:5-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:17-24; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 3:1-17
23. **Creation's witness:** Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:18-20
24. **God revealed in Scripture:** Romans 15:4; Hebrews 1:1
25. **God revealed in Christ:** Hebrews 1:2-3
26. **Christ's humility and sacrifice:** Isaiah 53
27. **Jesus the way:** John 14:6
28. **God is trustworthy:** Numbers 23:19; John 14:6, 16-17; 16:13; 17:17

The Result – God transforms believers by renewing their minds. People cannot transform themselves; however, Christian transformation is not a passive process. God provides daily opportunities for believers to apply His wisdom and prove His way and will are good and perfect. Saving faith believes God and acts on that belief. **When believers consciously and deliberately obey God, they experience that His will is best.**[29] Paul offered this encouragement to believers learning to live for God: "The mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace."[30]

Wholehearted Service – Romans 12:3-8

As God renews believers' minds, their views of God, self, and others are transformed. After urging believers to surrender their bodies and minds to the Lord, Paul addressed how God calls believers to think and live in relationship with one another. **Surrendered believers serve for God's glory and to benefit His redeemed family.** Paul also taught that transformed believers impact the world outside the Christian community. As part of their true and proper worship, they look outward toward God and others and not to themselves. We will study this in detail in future lessons.

Unified Body – 12:3-5

New life in Christ reconciles believers with God and His family, which includes relationships with all God's children.[31] **Christ unites believers as members of His body.**

Thinking of Yourself (12:3) – Paul demonstrated for his readers the importance of sober self-assessment as he stated, "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you." **Paul did not think of himself more highly than appropriate; God's grace alone validated Paul's message.** In his letter to Timothy, Paul called himself the worst of sinners.[32] He understood who he was apart from God's mercy in Christ Jesus.[33] Paul also knew that through Jesus and for Christ's sake, he "received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."[34] Paul humbly exercised his God-given authority, calling, and gifting as he served and taught God's people.

Building on his example, Paul exhorted believers to behave as new creations in Christ,[35] thinking of themselves with "sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed." Sober thinking is faith-filled thinking grounded in truth. **Knowing that new life in Christ is God's gracious gift helps Christians avoid proudly elevating themselves or being trapped in shame.** While no one is righteous apart from God, God also made people in His image, blessed them, and entrusted His creation to their care.[36] Believers are God's handiwork.[37] In Christ, God's eternal spiritual blessings are theirs.[38]

Therefore, rather than think of themselves too highly or too often, believers are called to think "in accordance with the faith God has distributed." How should we understand faith in this phrase?

- Faith may refer to confidence in God. We align our view of self with our knowledge of God and trust in Him. Scripture teaches us how to view God, ourselves, and others.

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29. **God's will:** 1 Peter 2:15; 3:17; 4:11
30. **Life and peace:** Romans 8:6
31. **God's family:** Romans 8:12-17
32. **Worst sinner:** 1 Timothy 1:15-16
33. **All under sin:** Romans 3:9
34. **Paul's apostleship:** Romans 1:5
35. **New creations:** 2 Corinthians 5:17
36. **God's image:** Genesis 1:26-28
37. **God's handiwork:** Ephesians 2:10
38. **Spiritual blessings:** Ephesians 1:3-10

- Faith may refer to believing God has entrusted people with gifts, talents, and opportunities intended for His glory. Because Paul's letter goes on to discuss spiritual gifts, this meaning, though unusual, may fit best with Paul's intent.

***Thinking of Others (12:4-5)* – Paul explained how believers should think about and relate to one another by comparing the Church to a human body: "one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function."** Paul's powerful word picture establishes the basis for Christian unity. A human body cannot function without diverse parts. In the same way, believers with different functions together make up Christ's body. This image helps believers understand that each one has a unique and essential function within the body of Christ. How believers connect to one another in the body and contribute to the body matters.

Continuing with the theme of unity, Paul taught, "So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." The book of Acts unfolds the story of how God united believing Jews and Gentiles into one faith community. The two groups learned how to find unity in Christ's cross rather than in religious laws and traditions.[39] Jews and Gentiles, former enemies united by Christ, had to learn to think differently about one another.[40] **Paul asserted that diverse believers do more than tolerate one another's differences; Christian belonging involves mutual acceptance and humble service.** God unites believers to Jesus and one another through the Holy Spirit. Every person who places their faith in Christ experiences an invisible but real spiritual union with Jesus[41] and fellow believers.[42]

Chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Ephesians parallels Romans 12. In both passages, Paul referred to the body of Christ as he applied doctrinal teaching to Christian living. In Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul said of the Church, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."[43] **This passage highlights several ways believers are united.** First, all Christians are joined by the Holy Spirit into one body, sharing the same hope for eternity. Next, they share one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, working together to serve Christ and spread the gospel. Finally, the Church belongs to one God—the Father—who created it and brings people together to live for His glory and purpose.

Diverse Gifts – 12:6-8

Paul's illustration of the body points to diversity within the Church's unity. God saves individuals from various cultures and backgrounds, then gives them unique gifts to exercise in diverse settings. Each believer assumes responsibility for the gifts God has given them, not for the gifts God has given others. While the world promotes competing to surpass one another, God calls His people to receive and exercise His gracious gifts to wholeheartedly serve and bless others.

***Prophesying (12:6)* –** Paul stated, "We have different gifts." The Greek word *charismata*, meaning "gifts," relates to *charis,* meaning "grace." Grace is God's unmerited favor, so *charismata* are undeserved gifts of God's grace. **Believers' gifts differ because God gives spiritual gifts according to His purpose and pleasure.[44]** Five New Testament passages list 20 different gifts.[45] Each believer has at least one gift and honors God when exercising His gifts for the well-being of the whole body.[46]

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39. **Early Church unity:** Acts 10:44–11:18; 15:1-31
40. **Jew and Gentile:** Romans 11:17-24
41. **Union with Jesus:** Romans 6:3-10
42. **Christian unity:** John 17:23; Romans 15:5-6
43. **One body:** Ephesians 4:1-6
44. **Different gifts:** 1 Corinthians 12:4-6
45. **Gifts listed:** Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11
46. **Each gifted:** 1 Corinthians 7:7

Christ's Unified Body

The Doctrine of the Church

Paul taught that in Jesus diverse believers form one body. This helps us understand that there is one Church, the Church universal or invisible. **Christ's Church, present in local congregations, includes every born-again believer.** Being a part of Christ's Church is defined by internal union with Christ Himself rather than external association with an organization. The individual believers who comprise the worldwide community of Christ's body represent the diverse nature of God's creation and the gospel's global reach. The Church's diverse languages, cultures, spiritual gifts, and organizational structures punctuate Paul's teaching that God's saving grace is available to all who call on Jesus as Lord.

When God poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christ's Church was born.[1] **Christ reigns as the head of the Church—His body.**[2] Born-again believers demonstrate Christ's love and saving power. His saving grace merits loving surrender and wholehearted worship from His Church. Jesus promised to build His Church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it.[3] Jesus fulfills this promise as the gospel spreads and believers express loving unity and sacrificial service.

Paul's emphatic call to Christian unity and interdependence underscores the importance of the Church. When we do not believe that Christ's Church is a global, diverse body of believers, we live isolated from the spiritual gifts God gives the Church for the good of all. We might be tempted to exchange the global wonder of God's saving work for familiar traditions. We miss opportunities to be enriched by diversity today while we await Christ's return.[4]

When we embrace the worldwide community of believers in Christ's Church, God's multifaceted beauty becomes visible in each unique member of Christ's body. Fellowship with believers becomes essential to our growth, faith, and steadfast walk in the Lord. **People worship Christ when they use their gifts to strengthen His Church, both around the world and in their own local communities.** The Holy Spirit unites believers around the world to worship the Lord and serve His family.

1. **Pentecost:** Acts 2:1-11, 36-41
2. **Jesus the head:** Colossians 1:18
3. **Build His Church:** Matthew 16:18
4. **Heaven's diversity:** Revelation 5:9-10; 21:24-26

Paul mentioned prophesying first in his list of gifts in Romans 12. To prophesy means to proclaim, or "forthtell," a message. In both the Old and New Testaments, true prophets spoke God's words. Some prophets spoke about the future (foretelling). Paul also taught about prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14. He described prophets speaking under the Holy Spirit's influence to communicate God's revealed truth, remind people of a duty, or give a warning.[47] In the sense of new revelation from God—words to be included in the Word of God, the biblical canon—the gift of prophecy is no

47. Prophecy's use: Acts 21:10-14; 1 Corinthians 14:1-5

longer with the Church. **Today, the completed Old and New Testaments comprise God's perfect, inspired, living revelation, offering the only complete and authoritative guide for faith, doctrine, and life.** With the phrase, "prophesy in accordance with your faith," Paul may have been exhorting prophets to speak in alignment with the gospel of Jesus Christ.[48] Faithful Christians have varied views about how to understand the operation of prophecy in the Church today. Regardless of perspective, any prophetic message should be carefully weighed and tested against Scripture.[49]

Serving and Teaching (12:7) – The Greek word translated as "serving" is *diakonia*. While this word might refer to the specific office of deacon or diaconal (service) ministry,[50] God calls all of us to serve others in the Church. Some receive this gift in special measure to lead others in serving. **Jesus expressed His heart for serving: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."[51]** Paul instructed believers to follow Jesus's example.

The teaching gift appears in all five New Testament lists of spiritual gifts. God often equips pastors with a strong teaching gift. However, everyone who knows Jesus and the gospel can teach others. **Believers can teach what they know of Christ through conversations and personal testimony.** Paul called for action. Be faithful in teaching, if that is your gift, but remember that every Christian has opportunities to share truth with others.

Encouraging, Giving, Leading, and Showing Mercy (12:8) – The Bible strongly associates encouragement with the ministry of the Holy Spirit—the believer's advocate.[52] English translations of the Greek word, *parakletos*, include helper, advocate, lawyer, encourager, consoler, intercessor, and mediator. **Encouraging expresses the idea of coming alongside someone to advise and support.** Paul called the encourager to offer more than upbeat expressions like "Good job!" or "Cheer up!" but to build others up with fortifying truth.

The gift of giving extends beyond an official church offering. Paul urged people with this gift to give "generously." **God calls all believers to give generously from the funds and resources entrusted to them.** Paul would have likely instructed church officers to give wisely or prayerfully, considering they handle the money of others.

Leadership includes management, government, and administration. Church elders especially need to manage and take care of God's church.[53] **Those called into church leadership need the essential spiritual gift of leadership in order to seek and protect the well-being of God's people.**

Finally, Paul listed the gift of showing mercy. Through the Holy Spirit, God gifts believers to show His mercy "cheerfully," not resentfully or judgmentally. **Believers show mercy to others in grateful, humble response to the mercy they have received from God.**

By His grace, God equips all believers with compassion, forgiveness, and diverse gifts to serve the needs of others in His Church. **God transforms and equips surrendered believers for the good of Christ's body.**

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48. Prophets and truth: Jude 1:3
49. Weigh and test: 1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21
50. Deacons: Acts 6:1-6
51. Jesus served: Matthew 20:28
52. Advocate: John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7
53. Church elders: 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

With God's mercy in view, Paul urged believers to let the gospel change every part of their lives. **God's merciful salvation calls for wholehearted surrender to Him and His ways.** True worship means living for the Lord, rejecting this world's patterns, being transformed from within by God, and looking outward to the flourishing of other people. Transformation begins with a renewed mind and active surrender to God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.

As believers renew their minds, they think differently about God, His creation, self, and others. Paul challenged believers to view relationships with one another as essential to living a new life in Christ. **Believers live for God and others in the interconnected community of Christ's body—the Church.** Each member of Christ's Church has gifts that God intends for the good of the whole body. Paul called believers to embrace their gifts and serve others wholeheartedly.

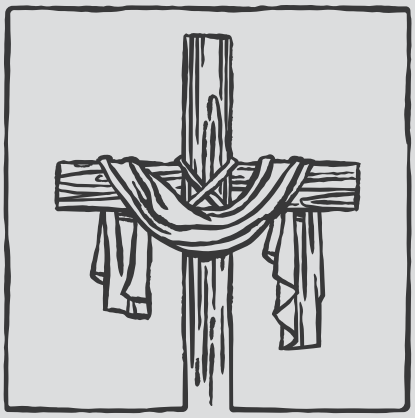
Apply It

What would your life be like apart from God's mercy? Some people are flooded with gratitude for God's mercy as they consider sin's devastating impact in their lives. Perhaps those saved at a young age or long ago struggle to imagine life apart from God's mercy. Without understanding God's mercy, we lack motivation for sacrificial living that opposes the world's pattern. **How we view God and His mercy impacts our perspective on everything else.** If God's mercy toward you in Christ has not yet gripped your heart, look back at Romans 1–11. Will you ask God for a fresh understanding of your desperate need for a Savior and His powerful provision of Jesus? Through faith in Jesus, God mercifully provides righteousness we do not deserve, could never earn, and can never lose.

What might be lost if you began to think and live differently than the world? **Do you fear alienation from friends and loved ones if you no longer conform to the patterns that drive their lives?** God's will for people is always good. He desires people to know Him and flourish in relationship with Christ's Church. If you have not placed your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and death, God's will is for you to turn to Him. Trust Him today. If you are already saved by faith, consider how God's transforming work in you can shine His light and love to others. As you renew your mind and live for Christ, God will change you. As a growing gospel ambassador, you can offer suffering people hope in God's love and Christ's saving power.

When have you forgotten God's grace and taken credit for your gifts? When a skill or talent comes easily, pride tempts us to rely on our own efforts and believe we are better than others. If we think our spiritual gifts depend on us, we become discouraged when our gifts do not measure up to other people's gifts. **Unlike human merit, status, or achievement, our salvation and spiritual gifts come by God's grace.** Our loving heavenly Father freely gives spiritual gifts to all His children. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, gratefully rejoice in God's gracious gifts to you. Look for and celebrate the diverse gifts He has given to your fellow believers. If you haven't yet trusted Jesus as your Savior, will you trust Him today? Salvation is yours for the asking. The Lord loves showering His spiritual gifts upon His children. The world cannot compete with the delight of watching God's creative work through the members of Christ's body.

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Christian Love

Lesson 22 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 21 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture impact your thinking about a believer's life as a living sacrifice?

2. What did the notes teach you about serving the Church with spiritual gifts?

Second Day: Read Romans 12:9.

Paul called believers to love sincerely and hate evil.

3. Looking back to Romans 12:1-2, what context did Paul give for the commands of 12:9? How might the truths of 12:1-2 impact your obedience to the commands of 12:9?

4. What do you learn about hating evil and clinging to good from the following verses:

   Proverbs 8:13

   Proverbs 13:5

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Ecclesiastes 3:8

Isaiah 61:8

Amos 5:15

5. How does hating evil and clinging to good help you understand what sincere love might look like in your culture?

Third Day: Read Romans 12:10-13.

Paul called believers to selfless, persevering, generous love.

6. List Paul's commands in your own words.

7. a. Which of Paul's commands in Romans 12:9-13 is hardest for you to obey? Why?

   b. Which individuals or groups are difficult for you to honor above yourself? Why?

8. What do these commands reveal about your dependence on God for righteousness and a transformed life? (See also Romans 3:21-23; 7:21-25; 8:1, 9-14.)

Fourth Day: Read Romans 12:14-16.

Paul taught God's loving strategies for healthy relationships.

9. What strategies for healthy relationships did Paul list in these verses?

10. a. How does a person bless persecutors? (See also Matthew 5:44; 7:12; Luke 6:27-28; or any other relevant verses.)

    b. Who might God be calling you to bless?

11. How did Jesus demonstrate the love Paul described in Romans 12:14-16? (See also Mark 2:15-17; 10:45; Luke 23:34; John 2:1-2; Romans 5:6-8; Philippians 2:7-8; Hebrews 4:15; or any other verses.)

Fifth Day: Read Romans 12:17-21.

Paul explained Christians' responsibility to all people, including their enemies.

12. a. What responsibility do believers have regarding their enemies?

    b. What does Romans 12:19 promise God will do? (See also Deuteronomy 32:35.)

13. Give an example from Scripture of someone who did not repay evil for evil. What were the results? (Consider Genesis 45:1-5; Daniel 6; Matthew 26–28; or any other passages.)

14. How can a person live the life Paul commanded in Romans 12:9-21? (See also Romans 8 or any other Scriptures.)

Sixth Day: Review Romans 12:9-21.

God calls His people to love like He does.

15. Write a prayer that expresses gratitude for God's merciful love toward you and requests the specific help you need to love as He loves.

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 12:9-21

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 22 Notes

Romans 12:9-21

Focus Verse

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." (Romans 12:9)

Outline

- Love's Expression – Romans 12:9-13
- Love's Objects – Romans 12:14-16
- Love's Results – Romans 12:17-21

Engage

What is love? Who gets to define it? Movies and media portray love as stirring sentimentality. Some cultural narratives define it as unthinking emotion that embraces all and requires nothing in return. Social norms commonly associate love with likes on social media and warm feelings. Yet these versions of love fail to satisfy our deepest longings. We desire love that perseveres when difficult circumstances arise. We applaud love that rescues the helpless from crisis, like a parent pulling a child from a burning building. We quickly label love that remains aloof in danger or distress as hypocritical. **Human hearts crave more than sentiment, tolerance, and social grace.**

As Paul explained the impact of God's mercy on believers, he turned his attention to love. Ultimately, God's character and actions define love. Jesus's life, death, and resurrection display what real love looks like. Love led Jesus to come down from heaven and become human like us, yet without sin. He did this so believers could know Him, receive His love, and become more like Him in how they love others. Jesus demonstrates and offers God's love to all people: love that is righteous, outward, devoted to others, serving, enduring, and forgiving. In this week's passage, Paul describes the type of love Jesus commands from those transformed through faith in His death and resurrection. With Jews and Gentiles now brought together in the body of Christ, Romans 12:9-21 pictures how this new community of people who have tasted the mercies of God can demonstrate sincere love in their relationships. **God calls His people to love like He does.**

Love's Expression – Romans 12:9-13

In Romans 12, Paul taught that God's mercy should lead believers to transformed lives that differ from the world's patterns. As believers surrender to the Lord and renew their minds, they become more like Jesus, reflecting His righteousness in their relationships.[1] God's love, expressed most clearly in Jesus, contradicted the pattern of the Roman world and continues to clash with our

1. **Conformed to Christ:** Romans 8:28-29

world today. **After teaching about spiritual gifts, Paul taught believers to reflect God's love in their motives and actions.**[2] Through union with Christ[3] and the Holy Spirit's enabling,[4] believers can experience a renewed quality of service and love.

Motives – 12:9-10

Sincere Love (12:9) – **Sincere love does not pretend.** *Anypokritos,* the Greek word translated as "sincere," means "to act without hypocrisy." Like those who wear masks to hide their true identity, hypocrites disguise themselves and pretend to be someone they are not. However, Paul began chapter 12 by calling believers to "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God."[5] Living to please God and benefit others opposes self-focus and hypocrisy.

God models and offers sincere love to fallen, sinful people. Through the costly sacrifice of His Son, God proves His love is not half-hearted or earned by good behavior. God's love is always whole, pure, and genuine in every way. **God calls and equips believers to love others with His sincerity.** As imperfect people who still battle sin, believers cannot love this way on their own. Sincere love grows as a fruit of God's Holy Spirit.[6] As believers become instruments of righteousness and renew their minds, the Holy Spirit develops God's love in them.

After calling for sincerity, Paul went on to say, "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." Why did Paul include the word "hate" when describing sincere Christian love? **Christian love reflects God's pure love, which cannot tolerate evil.**[7] God hates sin and the damage caused by "haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community."[8] God's genuine love distinguishes sincerity from hypocrisy and good from evil. God sees the heart and despises insincere, superficial religion.[9]

Devotion to Others (12:10) – Paul instructed, "Be devoted to one another in love." Genuine love begins with God and flows from Him. Believers love because God first loved them.[10] God chose and adopted believers into His family by grace through faith.[11] **In view of God's undeserved mercy, members of His family put others' needs above their own.** Mutually supportive family members do not seek praise for themselves. Instead, they seek to honor others without regard for earthly status, wealth, position, education, or ancestry. Believers' devotion to and honor for one another contrast with the world's pattern of flattery and selfish ambition.[12]

Actions – 12:11-13

Serve the Lord Fervently (12:11) – With God's wondrous saving mercy in view, Paul continued describing what sincere, others-focused love looks like in action. Paul commanded believers, "Never be lacking in zeal." The fervor Paul called for comes from a word meaning "to boil." How can a believer maintain zeal and bubble over with spiritual fervor? Only through the Holy Spirit's

2. **Gifts and love:** 1 Corinthians 12–14; Ephesians 4:1-16
3. **Union with Christ:** Romans 6
4. **Enabling Holy Spirit:** Romans 8
5. **Living sacrifice:** Romans 12:1
6. **Fruit of the Spirit:** Galatians 5:22-23
7. **God hates evil:** Psalm 45:7; Isaiah 61:8
8. **God hates sin:** Proverbs 6:16-19
9. **Superficial religion:** Isaiah 1:12-15; Amos 5:21
10. **God loved first:** 1 John 4:19
11. **God's family:** Romans 8:14-17; 12:5
12. **Known by love:** John 13:35

power. Believers cannot love and serve as God commands without the Spirit's transforming work. **The Spirit leads believers to serve the Lord and love others as Jesus did.**[13]

Be Joyful, Patient, and Keep Praying (12:12) – Paul described how living sacrifices can show love amid hardship. The joyful hope Paul described is not naive optimism but steadfast assurance based on eternal reconciliation to God through Christ's saving work. **God's love and certain promises anchor a believer's hope.** God's children joyfully anticipate their blessed hope—the glorious appearing of their great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.[14]

Paul added patience in affliction because believers experience both joy and suffering as they await God's promised glory.[15] God does not call His children to a fatalistic attitude toward suffering. **Believers can patiently persevere through suffering, knowing that God will reward good, punish evil, and bring His plans to pass in His own time.** God will work all things together for His glory and the good of His children.[16]

What did Paul mean when he instructed faithfulness in prayer? This command issues a call to continue constantly in prayer. Jesus taught His followers to pray and never give up.[17] Paul also encouraged believers to pray continually, assuring them that God's Holy Spirit would help them to pray for God's will.[18] **Prayer deepens a believer's trust in God and love for others.**

Share and Be Hospitable (12:13) – At first glance, Paul's instruction to "share with the Lord's people who are in need" and "practice hospitality" might seem like two separate commands. Since Paul had already discussed the spiritual gift of financial giving,[19] perhaps sharing and hospitality involve more than giving money. Members of Christ's body are to practically care for one another, whatever their needs. **Hospitality involves seeking opportunities to meet the needs of others.** Jesus addressed humanity's needs throughout His earthly ministry. Christian love generously invests in sharing time, resources, and knowledge that help people thrive. The gospel opens our hearts to love, our hands to give, and our homes to welcome with abundant hospitality.

Love's Objects – Romans 12:14-16

Paul's instructions on sincere love transitioned from relationships among Christians to love for people who hate or persecute believers. As God mercifully loved by sending Jesus to die for sinners,[20] Paul called believers to show God's love to people who are not yet Christians. Paul also taught believers to think of themselves with sober judgment and live humbly with everyone, just as Jesus did.[21]

Enemies – 12:14

Paul clearly instructed, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Paul's teaching echoes Jesus's words: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be

13. **Led by the Spirit:** Romans 8:9, 14; Galatians 5:18, 25
14. **Blessed hope:** Titus 2:13-14
15. **Promised glory:** Romans 5:3-5; 8:17-21
16. **For the good:** Romans 8:28-29
17. **Never give up:** Luke 18:1
18. **Help in prayer:** Romans 8:26-27; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
19. **Gift of giving:** Romans 12:8
20. **Love for sinners:** Romans 5:6-8
21. **Christ's humility:** Philippians 2:6-8

children of your Father in heaven."[22] This kind of love should distinguish Christians. The world's pattern tempts believers to strike back spitefully when they are persecuted for their faith. However, Jesus showed God's love for the lost when He asked God to forgive the soldiers at His cross.[23]

Believers can answer God's call to bless their enemies in various ways. They can ask God to do good to their enemies rather than harm or curse them. **God's children can actively do good for their enemies as Jesus did for all people suffering under sin's control.** Even without warm feelings toward persecutors, Christians can extend God's sincere love to them through Jesus.

Jesus taught His followers, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."[24] Many world religions express a negative version of Jesus's teaching: "Do not do anything to others that you do not want them to do to you." In other words, the world's pattern says, "Do not hit someone unless you want them to hit you." **In contrast, Jesus taught His followers to reflect their heavenly Father's mercy and actively seek the good of their enemies.** God actively seeks the good of His whole creation.

Everyone – 12:15-16

In verses 14 and 17, Paul referred to those who persecute believers. The verses form an *inclusio,* a literary form in which a repeated idea frames an important theme. Therefore, the commands in verses 15-16 are to be exercised toward everyone, including believers' enemies. Believers need God to transform their attitudes toward their enemies. As God's Spirit renews their minds, He helps them discern and desire God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.[25] **Jesus followed God's will when He died for His enemies.[26]** Now risen and glorified on high, He leads us to carry our cross and refuse any thought, word, or deed contrary to God's person, words, and will.

Rejoice and Mourn (12:15) – Paul commanded believers to love by making the joys and sorrows of others their own. **When God's children identify with other people closely enough to be touched by their experiences, they demonstrate God's costly compassion.** The Lord Jesus graciously took on human likeness, including the weaknesses and suffering of a human body, so that He could identify with us, live the sinless life we could not, and die in our place.[27]

Harmony and Humility (12:16) – Paul encouraged believers to live in harmony with all people. Christians should not seek conflict. Believers live out and call for truth. However, they win even their enemies to Christ through His love, not their natural affections. **Pride and conceit corrupt Christian love.** Whatever believers' worldly positions or statuses, they are not to think of themselves more highly than they ought and are to actively honor others above themselves.[28] We cannot remain proud or hostile when we understand our sin and the price Jesus paid to save us,[29] "for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."[30] Jesus died for people from all social, economic, educational, and vocational backgrounds and from every generation, nation, tribe, people, and language.[31]

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22. **Love your enemies:** Matthew 5:43-45; Luke 6:28
23. **Prayer for forgiveness:** Luke 23:34
24. **Do to others:** Matthew 7:12
25. **Renewed minds:** Romans 12:2
26. **Jesus died for enemies:** Romans 5:10
27. **Jesus identified with people:** Philippians 2:7-8; Hebrews 4:15
28. **Believer's humble attitude:** Romans 12:3, 10
29. **Humbled by sin's cost:** 1 Corinthians 1:28-31; Titus 3:5
30. **Jesus's humility:** Mark 10:45
31. **Died for a multitude:** Revelation 7:9

The Believer's Cross and Christian Love

The Doctrine of the Cross for a Believer

Jesus gave us the greatest expression of God's love at the cross. Because God loved the world, Jesus willingly laid down His life to provide God's enemies the way to escape God's wrath.[1] **Jesus calls everyone who follows Him in faith to take up their own cross, crucifying selfishness and fleshly desires.**[2] Following Jesus includes renouncing plans and priorities that distract from full obedience to His will. As believers carry their cross, the light of loving self-sacrifice shines into this world's darkness.[3] God intends for believers to demonstrate the beauty and transforming power of the gospel by denying their own interests to follow Jesus and reach out to the world.

Paul explained that sincere love leads to selflessness. His teaching aligned with Jesus's declaration that "whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."[4] Believers willingly take up their cross in response to Christ's loving sacrifice for them. Jesus calls believers to love Him more than their lives in this world.[5] Following Jesus and loving as He loves does not come easy for us. **By the Holy Spirit's power, believers crucify their old nature, which is enslaved by the world's sinful patterns and destined for judgment.**[6] The believer's cross brings death to self-rule but freedom from sin's bondage.

When believers refuse to take up their cross and sacrificially love like Jesus, they cease to shine the gospel's light into the world. Lives lived selfishly are not living sacrifices and instruments of righteousness for the Lord. **Believers who refuse to die to self hinder the Holy Spirit's transforming power in their lives.**[7] Patterns of living for self will result in sin's natural consequences, stealing the peace and joy that God desires His children to experience.

Believers who die to themselves and carry their cross invite the Holy Spirit to reprogram destructive thought patterns and habits. Through believers' transformed lives, the watching world witnesses God's love and power at work in His people.[8] As believers express selfless love for others, they experience deep fellowship with Jesus and fellow Christians.[9] **The cross for the believer kills selfish desires and ambition and unites believers with Christ in a resurrection like His.**[10] How is Christ calling you to die to yourself, take up your cross, and live and love like Him?

1. **God so loved:** John 3:16
2. **Take up your cross:** Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23
3. **Believer's light:** Matthew 5:14-16
4. **Cross necessary:** Luke 14:27
5. **Love Jesus more:** John 12:24-26
6. **Crucify misdeeds of the body:** Romans 8:13
7. **Grieve God's Spirit:** Ephesians 4:29-30
8. **Known by love:** John 13:35
9. **Fellowship with Christ:** John 17:20-21
10. **Resurrection life:** Romans 6:5-7

Love's Results – Romans 12:17-21

Paul's letter to the church in Rome contains treasured teaching on how God's love, mercy, and grace allow sinful people to have peace with Him.[32] The wonder of salvation in Christ[33] propelled Paul's commands about transformed living, including peace among people. **Through union with**

32. **Peace with God:** Romans 1:7; 5:1; 8:6
33. **Paul's wonder:** Romans 11:33-36

Christ and the Holy Spirit's transforming power, believers can avoid many unnecessary conflicts and divisions in their churches and communities. Paul offered practical teaching to renew believers' minds and direct their steps toward love's peaceful results.

Right Living – 12:17

Paul further described how to bless and not curse enemies: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone." *Kalos,* the Greek word translated as "right," can also mean good, honorable, true, and beautiful. **When a believer's inner transformation produces beautiful outward behavior, the world witnesses the results of God's love.**

Pursue Peace – 12:18

Paul challenged believers to live in peace with others. Believers have a God-given part to play in pursuing peace. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."[34] Jesus's brother James encouraged believers to "be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."[35] The book of Proverbs also has much to say about Christian conduct that fosters peace.

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you" warns that peace does not depend only on the believer. Others may choose to destroy peace. A believer's rejection of the world's patterns may make peace impossible. **Christians cannot exchange truth, violate purity, or condone injustice for the sake of peace.** James said, "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving."[36] God's wisdom calls believers to maintain true love with purity, honesty, and justice. These essential commitments may make peace unattainable even when we sincerely pursue it. Nonetheless, as far as we are able, our goal is to live peaceably with others, even amid vast differences.

God calls His children to resist evil, sometimes even to the point of armed conflict.[37] Paul taught that Christians may contribute to their countries' defense.[38] God calls Christians to forgive and love, but hating evil means they cannot always extend trust. **Believers can trust God's generous wisdom to help them choose a path that ultimately leads to God's peace.[39]**

No Revenge – 12:19

Paul also instructed believers to give up their right to personal revenge: "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,' says the Lord." The world's pattern rejects ideas of God, eternity, and judgment. **The thought of leaving vengeance to God seems foolish to the world.**

God's love transforms how believers respond to mistreatment. Believers can express their desire for justice by prioritizing Christ's righteousness over their personal desire to get even.[40] They are called to defend the dignity of all people made in God's image, but never by sinful means. God's love, which hates evil, provides trustworthy, eternal justice.[41]

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34. **Peacemakers blessed:** Matthew 5:9
35. **Slow to anger:** James 1:19
36. **Peace-loving wisdom:** James 3:17
37. **Armed conflict:** Deuteronomy 20:1-4; Romans 13:4
38. **Government as God's agent:** Romans 13:1-5
39. **God's wisdom:** James 1:5
40. **Prioritizing Christ:** Matthew 5:38-39; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:8-10
41. **Final justice:** Revelation 20:11–22:21

Keeping Peace: Wise Words from Proverbs

- "Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs." (Proverbs 10:12)
- "Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult." (Proverbs 12:16)
- "Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright." (Proverbs 14:9)
- "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1)
- "Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends." (Proverbs 17:9)
- "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out." (Proverbs 17:14)

Active Goodness – 12:20

Following the passive command, "Do not take revenge," Paul gave an active command: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." Believers become God's instruments of righteousness when they do good rather than evil. Paul was quoting Proverbs 25:21-22, which says, "In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." What does it mean to "heap burning coals" on our enemy's head? There are several interpretations. One thought is kindness can win over an enemy. Imagine yourself at a village fire pit with people who have come to seek warmth but have mistreated you. Rather than share only a few coals with them, you give them a full bucket of glowing coals to stoke their comfort. **As God makes you more like Jesus, His Spirit enables you to choose to bless rather than to retaliate for previous wrongs.**

The Triumph of Good – 12:21

Finally, Paul said, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Evil overcomes believers when they respond selfishly and sinfully. Not only are God's children not to return evil for evil, but neutrality is not an option. They are to respond to evil with love. Jesus won us to Himself though His love. When we were God's enemies—powerless and ungodly—Christ died for us.[42] Jesus enables those who trust Him to overcome evil with good. Believers are more than conquerors through Jesus's love.[43] **God calls His people to love like He does.**[44]

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul gave believers a picture of God's love expressed through their lives. A believer's life of love does not conform to the patterns of this world. Paul called believers to express love motivated by sincerity and devotion to others. Love that prioritizes the good of others relies on the Holy Spirit's help to serve fervently, remain steadfast in difficulty, and seek ways to meet the needs of others.

42. Overcoming love: John 3:16; Romans 5:6, 8
43. Conquerors: Romans 8:37-39
44. Love as God loves: 1 John 3:11, 14, 16-18, 23

Expressing God's love includes pursuing peace with believers who view things differently than we do, loving our enemies, and welcoming the undeserving just like Jesus did. Recalling how God loved us when we were His enemies helps us to stay humble.

Sacrificial love gives up the selfish desire to seek revenge. Believers' enemies need to know Jesus. Just as Jesus's own cross produces lasting transformation in believers, sacrificial love like His impacts others. Old ways of living die, and new Spirit-led life takes their place. **Paul invited believers to embrace their identity as overcomers and overcome evil with good.**

Apply It

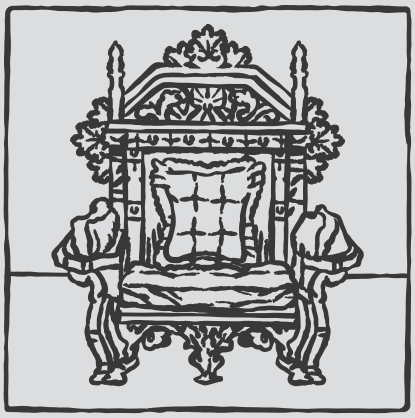
Love sincerely. Honor others. Serve fervently. Practice hospitality. Bless your enemies. Live in harmony. Humble yourself. Associate with the lowly. Do what is right. Leave wrath to God. Overcome evil with good. We can read Paul's list as worthy but unachievable goals. What happens when we read these commands in view of God's love and mercy toward us through Jesus? **Jesus calls believers to express their love for Him by living like Him.** Paul was not giving believers a list of rules they must follow to keep their salvation or earn God's love. God's righteousness comes through faith in Christ, not works. God loved believers before they loved Him. When believers surrender their lives to the Lord, God's Spirit transforms their thoughts, beliefs, values, and desires. How might this list prompt you to rejoice in God's generosity, kindness, and love toward you through Jesus?

Honoring others above yourself, especially within the Christian community, demands intentional compassion, humility, and patience. How do you respond when honoring others is inconvenient or when you strongly disagree with them? Noticing the needs of others requires taking our eyes off ourselves. Honoring others means humbly taking the lowest place. Joyfully opening our lives to others derails personal plans and priorities. Whom are you willing to love this way? Whom is God calling you to love as He does? Ask God for the desire and power to love others. Then begin to obey Him. God will help you root out and replace your selfish desires with His selfless love.

The commands to do good to those who persecute, oppose, and hurt us clash against our natural habits. Do you feel pleasure when your enemies suffer? Unlike us, Christ actively sought His enemies' good through humble service, passionate teaching, and death on the cross. How could you seek the good of those who oppose you today? Which enemies have you stopped trying to love? While the world applauds retaliation, will you ask God to make you a peacemaker? If you are struggling to trust God's delayed justice, consider how His love and delayed justice have impacted you. **God perfectly hates evil and clings to what is good.** He calls us to do likewise.

How does Paul's message reveal reliance on your own self-effort to be like Jesus? Self-reliance tempts believers in a world dominated by merit-based rewards. Perhaps you feel defeated because you have tried and failed to live like Paul described. If Paul's list frustrates rather than inspires you, you might be trying to be good and reflect Jesus in your own strength. People cannot work to achieve God's righteous standard. Only when the Holy Spirit transforms us by renewing our minds and establishing our path will we live the righteous lives God intends for us. Paul is not commanding believers, who are saved by faith, to make themselves like Jesus by discipline or will power. **Instead, Paul described the life believers access through faith in Christ, loving fellowship with God, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit.** Will you ask God to renew your mind and transform your life?

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Christian Submission to Authority

Lesson 23 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 22 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What from the lecture stood out to you regarding Christian love for all people, including our enemies?

2. How did the notes bring clarity to the doctrine of the cross for a believer?

Second Day: Read Romans 13:1.

Paul issued a demand regarding governing authorities.

3. Define "be subject to" or "submit."

4. a. Who is to submit to governing authorities, and why?

   b. Give reasons people struggle with submitting to authority. What is your greatest struggle?

5. When might it be acceptable in God's eyes to refuse to submit to authority? (See also Daniel 3; 6; Acts 5:29; or any other Scriptures you know.)

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Third Day: Read Romans 13:2-4.

Paul explained the consequence of refusal to submit to authority.

6. When people refuse to submit to lawful authority, against whom do they actually rebel, and what consequences do they face?

7. a. How can people be free from fear of those in authority?

   b. Give examples of how authorities can be God's servants for good, even if they are unbelievers. How could this bring a believer comfort?

8. Write a prayer to God regarding your submission to authority or lack thereof.

Fourth Day: Read Romans 13:5-7.

Paul gave reasons for the Roman believers to submit to authority.

9. a. What reasons did Paul give for submitting to authorities? What other reasons can you think of?

   b. What do you think Paul meant by the phrase "a matter of conscience"?

10. a. From verses 5 and 6, what are the purposes for paying taxes?

    b. Read Luke 20:22-25. What did Jesus say about paying taxes?

    c. How do these instructions guide your attitude about paying taxes?

Fifth Day: Reread Romans 13:1-7.

Paul exhorted believers to live rightly before God and others.

11. a. From the following verses, list those to whom we are to give respect and honor:

    Exodus 20:12

    Leviticus 19:32

    1 Timothy 5:17

    1 Timothy 6:15b-16

    1 Peter 2:13-17

    b. What are some specific ways you can show respect and honor to these people in your life?

12. How is it possible to show honor and respect to someone whose decisions and character differ from yours?

13. How might your attitudes and actions set a God-honoring example as you respond to governing authorities?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 13:1-7.

God sovereignly places people in positions of authority.

14. How did this week's lesson challenge how you have viewed submission to authority? What will you do in response, and why?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 13:1-7

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 23 Notes

Romans 13:1-7

Focus Verse

"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." (Romans 13:1)

Outline

- God Establishes Governance – Romans 13:1-4
- God Establishes Honor – Romans 13:5-7

Engage

How do you respond when you hear the word "submit"? This term often evokes strong and varied reactions. When the words "be subject to the governing authorities" appear, challenging questions arise. What if the person to whom we are supposed to submit is disrespectful, rude, overdemanding, or downright oppressive? Does God really mean for everyone to be subject to governing authorities? Paul wrote his letter to Roman believers during the reign of the evil emperor Nero, who was known for his immoral and tyrannical behavior. **Yet, Paul's proclamation remains: Every person is responsible to submit to those in authority, without exception.** Even to leaders like Nero. How could Paul expect this, and why would God command it?

Chapter 13 continues right where Paul left off in chapter 12, taking even deeper his call to transformed living. People with renewed minds and changed hearts live counter to culture. They show mercy, love well, and put feet to their faith as they serve God and others. Transformed living extends to how believers relate to all authority. Paul does not state what he expects but rather what God requires: obedient submission to those in charge. Why? **God sovereignly places people in positions of authority.** Our submission to those authorities honors God. When we do not submit, we rebel, not only against the person over us but against God Himself. God sees and knows all things. We can trust that God is in control of every circumstance as He places people in positions of authority.

God Establishes Governance – Romans 13:1-4

In chapter 12, Paul exhorted believers to live with transformed hearts and minds—quite different from worldly patterns. **God's admonition to love well carries through to all aspects of life, including submission to authority.** God's sovereignty over all things includes those in authority within our families, workplaces, and governments.

Authority From God – 13:1

Throughout history, God has established governments. He positions officials for His ultimate glory and for our good. When godly leaders govern well, we easily praise God for His control over the nations. However, when rulers or leaders disappoint us, we can easily doubt God and His sovereign choice. Paul penned Romans and several other New Testament letters while under the evil rule of Nero. Jewish believers had endured mistreatment under the Roman Empire, including the recent expulsion from Rome by Emperor Claudius in AD 49. Though they were later permitted to return, Jewish Christians would have wrestled with viewing their leaders as worthy of submission. Their reintegration into the Roman church likely raised questions about how a minority group should live under Roman rule. Only a few years after Paul penned his letter, Nero would launch a brutal wave of persecution against Christians. Meanwhile, taxes were also a contentious topic in Rome, prompting debate about appropriate loyalty and obedience.

Many ruthless rulers have left grievous scars on nations in the centuries that followed Nero, and tyrants will continue to rise. Are we subject even to these rulers? Even democratically elected officials regularly disappoint us. What are we to do? **Because God has established these authorities, we have the responsibility to submit to them.** However, their authority has limits set by God.

Human powers may be lawful or unlawful. Christians are under no obligation to obey unlawful powers or immoral laws. For example, the power of a robber with a gun is both an unlawful and immoral power. Following the prophets' example, God's people are also free to speak out against governmental injustices. Good citizens can be faithful in keeping laws and also in critiquing government where appropriate, regardless of who is in power.[1] In just societies, lawful powers intervene to protect citizens from the unlawful. Jesus justly exerts His power to intervene on behalf of Christians when Satan uses his power to bring them harm. The power of death reigns on earth, but Jesus's power reigns supreme and for eternity. **One future day, Jesus, our rightful ruler, will return and reign without rival forever.[2]**

Every earthly nation's power originates with God, whether that nation acknowledges God or not. Paul repeatedly used the word "authority" (*exousia* in Greek), meaning power that is delegated, not inherent. Delegated power implies accountability and limits. To understand these limits, we need to recognize the nature of the authority God grants to human governments.

Government's Responsibility – 13:2-4

Knowing that God gives rulers their authority compels Christians to honor God by obeying the law. To disobey human rulers expresses rebellion against God and what He has instituted. Paul further challenged his readers with the truth that rebellion brings judgment. Those who do right by their government have no need to fear but will be commended. Those who do wrong, however, should fear the consequences their government will bring.[3] Does this mean Christians must obey human government in every situation? If not, when may we rightly refuse the government's demands?

1. **Speaking out against injustice:** Exodus 5:1-2; 2 Samuel 12:7-9; 1 Kings 18:18; 21:20-21; Isaiah 1:23; 10:1-2; Jeremiah 22:13; Ezekiel 22:27-29; Daniel 5:22-23; Micah 3:1-3, 9-11
2. **Power of death:** John 10:10; Hebrews 2:14-15
3. **Accountability for wrongdoing:** Acts 25:11

God's Sovereignty over Wicked Rulers

God is sovereign over all things; His power knows no limits. Some human rulers choose to follow Him while others defy Him. **God holds all history in His strong grip.** Even wicked rulers are subject to God and His sovereignty. We will consider this truth by examining three biblical examples.

Pharaoh – The pharaoh in Exodus brutally enslaved the Israelites. He refused God's demand through Moses to let God's people go. Sovereign and powerful God used Pharaoh to accomplish His own purposes—to proclaim His name in all the earth.[1] **God displayed His glory when He protected and provided for His people and unleashed His powerful wrath against Pharaoh.** The proud king suffered the consequences of his rebellion against God.

***Nebuchadnezzar* – Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar learned painfully that God controls all things.** The Babylonian army had conquered Jerusalem. They had looted, defiled, and destroyed God's temple.[2] Nebuchadnezzar imagined himself to be superior to Israel's God. Such pride equates with insanity. Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind and lived like an animal until he repented. He then confessed that God's "dominion is an eternal dominion. ... He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth."[3]

Pontius Pilate – Pilate, the Roman governor who presided over Jesus's trial before His crucifixion, quickly discovered that Jesus and His kingdom posed no imminent threat to Rome.[4] However, fearing the Jewish leaders who plotted Jesus's arrest, Pilate attempted to help Jesus without risking his position. He asked Jesus, "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"[5] Jesus's reply perfectly expressed the relationship between God's sovereignty and the authority of civil government. Jesus said, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."[6] The word Pilate and Jesus used for power is the exact same Greek word translated in Romans 13 as "authority." As governor, Pilate was given by God the right to judge. Yet, God held Pilate accountable for his actions and the authority delegated to him. Peter later explained that wicked men put Jesus to death, but God had full knowledge and control of the situation.[7] **God held Pilate and the Jewish leaders responsible for Jesus's death even while their chosen evil actions fulfilled God's deliberate plan.**

1. **God's sovereignty and Pharaoh:** Exodus 1–14; Romans 9:16-18
2. **Temple destroyed:** 2 Kings 25:8-9; Daniel 1:2
3. **Eternal dominion:** Daniel 4:34-35
4. **Pilate's discovery:** John 18:36-37
5. **Pilate's power:** John 19:10
6. **God's power:** John 19:11
7. **God's plan:** Acts 2:23

Government's Extent and Limits – God institutes government. So how far does its power extend? Jesus answered this question when the Pharisees tried to entrap Him by asking if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. They posed the question so that either way Jesus answered, He would offend someone. If He said yes, He would be accused of favoring Rome. Had Jesus answered no, the Roman authorities would have arrested Him. But Jesus did neither. He took a coin used for paying taxes and asked, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" The Pharisees responded, "Caesar's." Jesus replied, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what

is God's."[4] Jesus both honored Caesar's authority and established limits on him. **Though every government—whether God-fearing, tyrannical, or oppressive—has legitimate authority, God's authority is greater.** Therefore, we are responsible to obey God even if doing so means facing the consequences of disobeying "Caesar."

When should Christians disobey their governments? In what situations does responsibility to God matter more than human laws? To answer these questions, consider three areas of importance: evangelism, morality, and the nature of government.

- **Evangelism—If governing authorities outlaw spreading the gospel or talking about Jesus, believers must faithfully depend on God's sovereign power.** When Jewish leaders jailed Peter and John for proclaiming Jesus's resurrection, the apostles asked, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? ... As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."[5] Again arrested and commanded to keep silent, the apostles refused and persisted, saying, "We must obey God rather than human beings!"[6] Throughout the centuries, Christians have been threatened, beaten, imprisoned, persecuted, and killed. Believers in the early Church rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ and boldly shared the gospel.[7]
- **Morality—No government has the right to command people to sin, which includes not only doing wrong but also failing to do what is right.** When God's people obey Him rather than sinful laws, they follow in the footsteps of believers such as the Hebrew midwives who defied Pharaoh to save the lives of baby boys.[8] Esther risked her royal position and even her life to plead for her people.[9] Daniel and his friends followed Jeremiah's advice and worked for peace and prosperity in Babylon.[10] They also chose to face death rather than obey Babylonian commands to disregard God and stop worshipping Him.[11] Many in the early Church faithfully refused Rome's demand and stood for God, choosing to die rather than proclaim Caesar as Lord. These and countless others join the great cloud of witnesses whose costly obedience encourages all believers to follow Jesus at any cost.[12] At times, governments not only pressure people to act immorally but also participate in immoral activity. When leaders or rulers consistently ignore righteous actions or act unjustly, believers may need to do more than speak out. Corrie ten Boom and her family acted against their government on behalf of Jews in the Netherlands during World War II. In the 1950s and 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. led the civil rights movement in the United States. God led these believers to pursue righteousness and justice in their countries.
- **Nature of Government—God grants governments the right and the power to enforce their laws and decrees.** Paul stated, "If you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason." The sword, in this case, means force. Governments worldwide exercise their God-given authority using force. Whether through democracy or dictatorship, military might or pacifism, all human governments exert force of some kind. Even so, these verses do not say that any government holds the right to misuse power—to starve or oppress people, forbid worship, or promote evil.

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4. **Caesar and God:** Matthew 22:15-22
5. **Seen and heard:** Acts 4:1-20
6. **Obey God:** Acts 5:17-29
7. **Early Church and the gospel:** Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 4:12-14
8. **Hebrew midwives:** Exodus 1:15-21
9. **Esther:** Esther 4
10. **Peace and prosperity:** Jeremiah 29:4-9; Daniel 1
11. **Babylonian commands:** Daniel 3; 6
12. **Cloud of witnesses:** Hebrews 12:1

Governments rely on "the sword" for external and internal defense. **Externally, governments use their power to defend their people from other nations.** Nations hold the power to wage war and exert power in warfare. They may use their God-given authority to compel people into military service or to pay taxes to support war efforts. They may redirect the nation's economy for wartime. Only a need for common defense justifies these legitimate powers. Any action that goes beyond defending those entrusted to their care misuses the authority God grants those leaders.

In anarchy, no one is safe. **Therefore, internally, the state has power to protect people from wrongdoing.** God has given governments the power and responsibility to establish, exercise, and maintain justice and social order to safeguard citizens. Without government, evil freely damages and destroys everything in its path.

> *God has given governments the power and responsibility to establish, exercise, and maintain justice and social order to safeguard citizens.*

Both Peter and Paul wrote letters during a time when Christians were increasingly seen as internal enemies by Roman authorities. The apostles repeated God's wisdom that Christians are not to act subversively in their communities but transform society through the gospel's message of peace. **Speaking to believers in Rome, Paul wrote, "For the one in authority is God's servant for your good."** He continued by explaining that rulers bear the sword as God's servants, entrusted to bring punishment upon wrongdoers. Peter similarly exhorted God's people to submit to every human authority for the Lord's sake and that God desires believers to silence the talk of foolish people by doing good. Peter called God's people to show respect to all people, love fellow believers, fear God, and honor the emperor.[13] When God's people behave this way, God is honored and glorified.

God Establishes Honor – Romans 13:5-7

Paul offered reasons for Christian submission to lawful authority. **God establishes human governments.** Both God and governing authorities will enact judgment on disobedience. Even so, laws cannot make people good or morally right. While laws may exist that enforce morality, no governmental power or effort can truly transform a wrongdoer without God's intervention and the Holy Spirit's work.

Conscience and Taxes – 13:5-6

Paul continued with a clarifying addition: "Submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience." Conscience involves our internal sense of right and wrong and personal awareness that we should do what is right. In other words, conscience leads us to obey because obedience is right. Because human conscience is fallible, God guides believers through the Holy Spirit, our divine helper who supplies the desire to please God and the power to obey Him. Walking with God in the power of His Spirit creates fresh renewal in the hearts of believers every day.

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13. Do good: Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17

God's Sovereign Power

The Doctrine of the Sovereignty of God

Paul called believers to trust God's firm control over all human leaders and governments. He also made it clear that anyone who rebels against human leaders actually rebels against God and will face judgment. Governing authorities are God's servants. We live in a world where mighty people seem almost invincible. We can easily forget that God rises above as the ruler of all rulers—the King of all kings. No human ruler has power that God has not allowed.[1] Every leader throughout time is established and used by God to accomplish His purposes and advance His plan. We can trust God's sovereignty over all governing authorities.

God is sovereign; He has absolute authority and rule over His creation.[2] By His wise purpose, God determines the outcome of all things. Because God knows all things, nothing surprises Him. God knows every thought that motivates each person who holds a position of authority. God does not adjust His plans in response to historical events nor does He wait to see what people will do before He acts. God's sovereign decrees govern history.[3]

Failure to believe in God's sovereignty undermines trust in God. We tend to depend on our own knowledge or opinions or those of others, which lack God's wisdom. We often see injustice and feel helpless. Without trusting God and His sovereign rule, we resist His command to submit to authority. This can create strife in our family relationships, workplaces, and even within ourselves. Ultimately, those in authority over us receive their authority from God. Tragically, our failure to submit to authority brings God's judgment upon us.

Trusting God's sovereign nature brings peace to a believer's heart. Firm belief in God's wisdom and knowledge allows us to submit to those in authority. Certainly, submission to authority brings challenges in this fallen world. Knowing who God is and how He works, we can turn to Him in prayer and trust His sovereign purposes. Though difficulties may persist, the Holy Spirit brings help and comfort in times of trouble and temptation. Above all else, we seek to obey God as we give honor and respect to those in authority over us, even when doing so is difficult. God is on His throne; no human ruler can overrule the King of eternity. God is worthy of our trust.[4]

1. **God's sovereignty over leaders:** Proverbs 21:1-2; Daniel 2:20-23; Romans 13:1b
2. **God's authority over creation:** 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalm 47:7; Ephesians 1:11
3. **God's decrees:** Acts 17:24-27
4. **Security in God:** Romans 8:31-39

Like Jesus, Paul did not leave room for excuses or special circumstances regarding obedience to God, including paying taxes. In Jesus's time, few honest tax collectors existed, and the people were oppressed through taxation.[14] Most people today also do not enjoy paying taxes. But Paul explicitly said in the next verse, "If you owe taxes, pay taxes." Government is expensive, and some governments are corrupt. However, all governments benefit their people in some ways. Taxes often support education, libraries, highways, roads, ports, firefighters, police, and national security. Taxes

14. Tax collectors: Matthew 5:46; 18:17; Luke 3:12-13; 19:1-10

may also fund garbage collection, food inspectors, and public health programs. Regardless of how much or little the government provides, Jesus's followers are called to thank God for these services and pay taxes.

Respect and Honor – 13:7

Christian responsibility to governing authorities extends to offering honor and respect to all those in authority over us. This applies to not just our national government but also local governments, families, workplaces, and churches. The Bible tells us to honor kings,[15] church officers,[16] parents,[17] and older people.[18] **God sovereignly places people in positions of authority.** When we submit to God, we will seek His help to honor and respect even flawed leaders. Therefore, "If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor." Ultimately, we honor our God, who deserves our allegiance above all else.[19]

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

In Romans 13, Paul continued his explanation of Christian service and love that he began in chapter 12. **Paul left no stone unturned as he presented the challenge of submitting to human authority.** Our inborn desire for autonomy and control makes submitting to other people difficult. However, God's sovereignty over all in authority grounds a believer's response to human leaders in all realms, whether just or unjust. Because God rules every believer's heart and establishes every ruler, those in authority have some rightful claim on our submission. However, our obedience and allegiance to God set boundaries for our obedience to human leaders. When human laws, policies, or leaders conflict with God's commands, God calls us to obey Him.

Believers honor God when they extend respect and honor to those in authority over them. God calls His people to live rightly by paying taxes and living conscientiously with the Holy Spirit's help. Submission to authority can deepen our trust in God, whom we can trust in all things. God wants His children to be good citizens. Trusting God and His sovereignty places our eyes and hearts on Him in life's challenges—even when submitting to those in authority proves difficult. God alone can enable us to give honor to those who deserve honor and respect to those who deserve respect. Through His power, God can make this a reality in the hearts and lives of every believer.

Apply It

Paul did not provide a list of exceptions when discussing submission to governing authorities. Everyone must submit. Even tyrannical, oppressive leaders receive their authority from God. However, God sets boundaries for their delegated power. We struggle living in world systems that often defy God's commands and our convictions. How do we know when we should risk refusing to submit to human leaders? **In a sinful world, believers honor their leaders and obey human laws when doing so does not violate the standards God reveals in His Word.** The Bible provides

15. **Kings:** 1 Peter 2:13-17
16. **Church elders:** 1 Timothy 5:17
17. **Parents:** Exodus 20:12
18. **Older people:** Leviticus 19:32
19. **Honoring God:** 1 Timothy 6:15-16

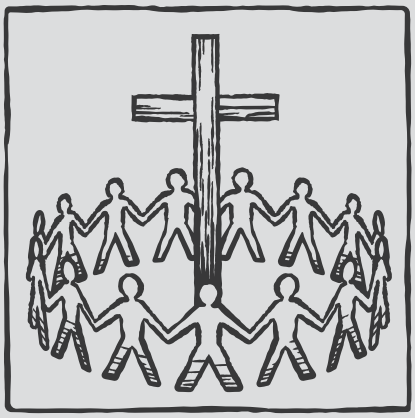
examples, such as Daniel and his friends, of people who willingly chose to defy human rulers and face death rather than dishonor God. Obeying God may cost us a job, a promotion, or a position of leadership. We may face arrest or even death for speaking out or standing against injustice. But God alone is worthy of our devotion, worship, and praise. His Word acts as our supreme guide. What troubling situation is leading you to seek God's wisdom and trust His sovereignty?

What does submission to governing authorities look like? Simply avoiding controversy or punishment does not constitute submission to authority. What we think and do matters. We are responsible to God for how we respond to those He has placed in authority over us. He cares about our motives and attitudes, not just our actions. With renewed minds that love God and others more than ourselves, we are led by God to reflect Him as we live in this world. What do your attitudes and actions reflect to others? **Faithfully submitting to God's sovereign authority by submitting to those in authority over us expresses our love and honor to Him.** We can trust that God knows what is best and has all power and authority to perfectly carry out His will. God desires not just external conformity but complete renewal of our minds and hearts.

Paul exhorted believers to pay their taxes and offer honor and respect where they are due. What workplace policies, city regulations, or national laws do you ignore or resist? What fuels your resistance—obedience to God or a desire for your own way? We live in a world that often elevates personal opinions and supposed rights at the expense of others. What fuels your passion—being "right" about your political views or telling others about Jesus? **Believers have the grand opportunity to reveal Jesus's love, power, and purity by respecting and honoring those in authority.** How often do your words to and about your boss, pastor, or political leaders show respect and honor?

God calls His people to see government as ordained by Him to keep peace, protect people, and stop wrongdoers. **We can trust God's sovereignty over all human leaders and governments.** When injustice reigns, how might you choose to trust God to fulfill His purpose and His plan? Our humility, faithfulness, and trust in challenging times may also serve to build the Church and bring God great glory. God is sovereign over all circumstances and all people. Christians are responsible to God for how they respond to those He has placed in authority over them. How will you trust God to use every authority He has placed in your life for His good purposes?

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Christian Living

Lesson 24 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 23 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What from the lecture offered clarity regarding God's command to submit to governing authorities?

2. How did the notes impact your understanding of God's sovereignty over all things, including governing authorities?

Second Day: Read Romans 13:8-10.

Paul explained the believer's debt of love.

3. a. How did Paul describe a believer's debt of love to others? Why is this so?

   b. Who is "one another" and "others" referring to in this passage? (See also Matthew 5:43-44; Luke 10:25-37; Galatians 6:10.)

4. a. Explain the difference between legal obedience and loving obedience to the commands in verse 9.

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b. Do you lean toward legal obedience or loving obedience? Why?

5. What do you think Paul meant by "love is the fulfillment of the law"? (See also Leviticus 19:18; Galatians 5:14.)

6. a. When do you find fulfilling the law through love difficult?

b. What helps you express love in challenging situations? (See also Matthew 5:44; John 13:34; 15:13; 1 Corinthians 8:1; Galatians 6:2; or any other verses that come to mind.)

Third Day: Read Romans 13:11.

Paul called believers to wake up from slumber.

7. How does the Bible describe or define this present time as the Lord's return draws close? (See also Matthew 4:17; Galatians 1:3-4.)

8. Why might Paul have reminded believers that salvation is nearer than when they first believed?

9. a. List ways people slumber, and tell why believers need to wake up.

b. From what slumber might you need to awaken?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 13:12-13.

Paul urged believers to step out of the darkness.

10. a. What did Paul say to "put aside" and "put on" in verse 12? What does this mean? (See also 1 John 1:5-7.)

b. How does Jesus's light impact believers? (See also Matthew 5:16.)

11. In what ways does your culture normalize behaviors that Paul declared indecent?

12. How might the lifestyle Paul encouraged serve as a challenge, warning, or victory in your life, and why?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 13:14.

Paul told believers to clothe themselves in Christ.

13. What do you think Paul meant by "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ"? (See also Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:17-24.)

14. How does God "clothe" or enable believers to live for Him? (See also Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 6:10-18; Philippians 2:13.)

15. How might being clothed with Christ lead you to stop gratifying sinful desires and think more like God does?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 13:8-14.

Jesus's promised return calls believers to live holy lives of love.

16. In what ways will you apply Paul's command to love others in light of Jesus's imminent return?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 13:8-14

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 24 Notes

Romans 13:8-14

Focus Verse

"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh." (Romans 13:14)

Outline

- Indebted to Love – Romans 13:8-10
- Understanding the Times – Romans 13:11
- Clothed in Christ – Romans 13:12-14

Engage

In every nation and every age, God calls His people to show His love to the world. God's radical call to love is not optional[1] but can be difficult to carry out. People do not always behave in loving ways. In fact, some are downright unloving. But Jesus calls us to love beyond those who love us, even our enemies.[2] Living out God's command to love fulfills the law and identifies people who live for God. How can Christians do this? This task is impossible without God's help. He alone can enable people to love others sincerely, personally, deliberately, and consistently.

Paul issued the command to love in the light of Jesus's return. Because Christians do not know the day or time Jesus will come again, they should live each day as though His return is imminent. Paul implored believers to wake up, clothe themselves in Christ, come out of the darkness into the light, and cast aside deeds that take place in the dark. Because of Christ's love and the Spirit's power, believers can shine God's light even in difficult or discouraging situations.[3] **Jesus's promised return calls believers to live holy lives of love.**

1. **Call to love:** Luke 10:26-28; John 13:34; 2 Corinthians 5:14
2. **Love enemies:** Luke 6:27-36
3. **Light of the world:** Matthew 5:16

Paul's exhortation to the Roman believers centers on love. In Chapter 12, Paul offered tools to love sincerely. The first verses in Chapter 13 challenge believers to love through submission to governing authorities. Thereafter, Paul urged believers to live out love in Christ's power. **God's people—Jew and Gentile alike—are obligated to love because love fulfills the law.** Paul understood that Christ's love motivates His people to love others.

Indebted to Love – Romans 13:8-10

An Obligation – 13:8

Sincerely loving God and others represents the ultimate fulfillment of God's moral law. Therefore, the call to love remains permanent in God's eyes. Love never fails; love never ends.[1] Christians have a continuing debt to love one another—we can never satisfy our obligation to love. **As Christ's ambassadors until His return,[2] the obligation to extend Jesus's love in the Holy Spirit's power offers daily opportunities to impact the lives of others for eternity.[3]**

Christians have a continuing debt to love one another—we can never satisfy our obligation to love.

In Paul's writings, "one another" usually refers to other Christians. But in this case, Paul broadened the obligation to include everyone, adding, "whoever loves others has fulfilled the law."[4] Here Paul echoed Jesus's teaching. A law expert once asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life. Jesus referred to God's moral law, which commands God's people to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your and mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself."[5] Jesus then told the parable of the good Samaritan to identify every person, regardless of status or nation, as a neighbor.[6] The Samaritan, a despised outsider, tended to a severely wounded Jewish man while others passed him by. The Samaritan's mercy demonstrated how to extend neighborly care. **Jesus calls His disciples to reject prejudice and personal preferences as they extend love to everyone.** For Paul's fellow believing Jews, who were concerned about the law's ongoing importance, Paul emphasized that the real point of the Torah is not merely external behavior modification but fulfilling the law by loving God and others.

Fulfilling the Law – 13:9-10

Paul listed four of the Ten Commandments to demonstrate how love fulfills the law. These four commands that prohibit unloving behavior toward others—adultery, murder, theft, and coveting—speak directly to every global culture.

You Shall Not Commit Adultery (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18) – Love will not commit adultery because love will neither dishonor God nor harm others to satisfy sinful thoughts and desires. Eyes used for lust, hearts and minds that enjoy immorality, or bodies engaged in sinful physical contact all violate God's marriage covenant.[7] Adultery is a sin against husbands, wives, families, societies, and ultimately God. **Adultery violates a sacred union declared holy by God.[8]** Joseph set a righteous example when Potiphar's wife tempted him to sin. Joseph replied to his temptress, "My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"[9] In Joseph's case, love for God fulfilled the law against adultery.

1. **Love never fails:** 1 Corinthians 13:8, 13
2. **Christ's ambassadors:** 2 Corinthians 5:20
3. **Extend love:** Romans 5:5
4. **Love everyone:** Galatians 6:10
5. **Moral law:** Luke 10:25-28
6. **Good Samaritan:** Luke 10:29-37
7. **Lust:** Matthew 5:27-28
8. **Sacred union:** Mark 10:6-8; Hebrews 13:4
9. **Potiphar's wife:** Genesis 39:8-9

You Shall Not Murder (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17) – Love does not allow the murder of another person, whether through physical violence, with immoral words, or in angry thoughts.[10] Instead, love overcomes fear to subdue evil wherever it is found. People often capitalize on the dramatic effect of murder. Murder is used to generate media ratings, reinforce prejudices, divide people, or entertain customers in books, movies, video games, and television. How can Christians engage with what seeks to rob God of His valuable and loved image-bearers? **Love protects life and preserves reputations.** Love thinks of others above self and uses words to build others up. Scripture says, "Knowledge puffs up while love builds up."[11] Salvation frees us to experience the powerful truth that "greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."[12]

***You Shall Not Steal (Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19)* – Love does not take; love gives.** We steal when we refuse to give back to God or offer His best to others. As Christians, our vocations provide opportunities to engage with unbelievers and unbiblical cultural standards. The Holy Spirit frees God's people to show others love, grace, integrity, and contentment. Stealing takes many forms we may not recognize but stems from a lack of love for others, regardless of what might be culturally acceptable:

- We steal from employers when we do not give our best efforts and from employees when we underpay.
- We steal when we take illegal, exploitive, or unethical profits, or when we offer inferior products to customers.
- We steal when we mismanage funds or when we borrow but do not repay.
- We steal when we do not credit others for their ideas or work.

If we love other people, we will not take advantage of them to get money. **We depend on one another as we work with abundant excellence and share with those who are in need.**[13] Where do you need God's gracious help to resist stealing and to love others well?

You Shall Not Covet (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21) – The last of the Ten Commandments strikes every heart. The command not to covet showed Paul his sinfulness.[14] Our materialistic cultures tempt us to always want more and more, even when we need nothing. Coveting can cause debt that entraps many in our day. But we covet more than things. We also want others' beauty, popularity, wealth, jobs, families, and successes. Anything someone has, another person may covet. **Covetousness breeds within us discontentment, dissatisfaction, and insensitivity.** We do not see what others need, only what they have—and what we want for ourselves. Covetousness destroys the usefulness of many Christians. If we love others, we want God to give them good things. Only through Christ and His gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit can we love the way God requires. Are you satisfied to enjoy all God's good gifts to you?

When Jesus encountered a law expert who questioned which was the greatest command,[15] He cited Leviticus 19:18: "Love your neighbor as yourself." **Paul revealed Jesus's teaching that showing love involves more than not violating God's commands.** Love actively seeks purposeful ways to bless other people.

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10. **Anger:** Matthew 5:21-22
11. **Love builds up:** 1 Corinthians 8:1
12. **Greater love:** John 13:34; 15:13
13. **Sharing with others:** Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12
14. **Paul's sinfulness:** Romans 7:7
15. **Jesus and the law expert:** Matthew 22:35-41

Understanding the Times – Romans 13:11

In Chapter 12, Paul encouraged believers to consider the past when viewing the present.[16] The first part of Romans 13:11 challenges us to live and understand the present time with the future in view. Paul went on to say, "Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." Some apply this verse to the timing of the end times or Jesus's return. The New International Version (NIV) includes the word "present" in regard to time, which seems to indicate Paul's intent to encourage believers to express mindfulness of Jesus's return in their present attitudes and actions. This certain future hope impacts daily living. **God's Word promotes urgency to follow Christ as we prepare for His return.**

What does "understanding the present time" mean? Consider two different groups of people in the Bible with varying levels of understanding:

- First, Jewish officials asked Jesus for a sign but instead received this warning: "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky [to tell the weather], but you cannot interpret the signs of the times."[17] The officials sought to test Jesus rather than seek God. They did not understand the times.
- Consider also the warriors who joined David in battle. Those who determined to make David king over all Israel included men of Issachar, who "understood the times and knew what Israel should do."[18] These men were able to discern the political and social dynamics of their day. They saw that the time was right to back David over Saul and provided guidance for the nation of Israel.

This kind of spiritual insight into current times comes from God Himself through His Word, the Holy Spirit, and prayerfulness. As we walk with God and grow in faith, He grants a certain level of understanding. **While we are here on earth, we should seek to understand the present time in which we live, though we can only know in part.** As understanding grows, we discern what to do with the time God has given us and can live wisely in anticipation of the Lord's second coming.

Stay Awake and Sound the Alarm

Paul wrote to believers—Jews and Gentiles in Rome who had placed their faith in Jesus Christ. But some were "asleep," or spiritually and morally complacent. **God calls believers to behave in a Christlike way to all people and live out the law of love.** When we fail to live a life motivated by love, we live like those who do not believe—people who are spiritually dead.

Paul urged his friends to wake up, saying, "The hour has already come for you to wake from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." Here, Paul was speaking of the present age, the "hour" that will continue until the Lord's return. The imminent return of Jesus Christ strongly motivated the early Church to live for Him.[19] The Roman believers certainly lived nearer to Jesus's glorious appearing than when they first believed. We can also declare that Jesus's second coming is nearer now than when Paul wrote this letter around two millennia ago.

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16. **In view of mercy:** Romans 12:1
17. **Signs of the times:** Matthew 16:2-3
18. **Issachar's men:** 1 Chronicles 12:32
19. **Jesus's imminent return:** 1 John 3:2-3

The Day Is Near

The Doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ

Paul led believers to understand the present time and coaxed them to awaken from slumber. He said, "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here." **The day Paul spoke of is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** He urged his readers to wake up and live expectantly, as though Jesus's return was moments away.

One of the most frequent doctrines discussed in the New Testament is the second coming of Christ—Jesus's return to earth. According to Scripture, the second coming of Christ is imminent and will be visible. Jesus will return physically, suddenly, and unexpectedly. At Jesus's triumphant return, He will gather all who are alive and resurrect all who have previously died to face final judgment.[1] We do not know when this will happen, but we can be sure He will come again as promised. Knowing that Jesus will return should impact our witness, including the way we love others.[2]

To not believe Jesus will return is to remain asleep–to sleepwalk through life and toward eternity. The charms of this world can distract us from our certain accountability to Christ when He returns. Rather than focusing on loving others, we become self-absorbed and complacent in our relationships with God and others. Oblivious to the desperate spiritual needs of those around us, we lose our ability to shed God's light on a world filled with darkness and desperately in need of the hope that only Christ can bring.

Those who believe God's promises eagerly anticipate Jesus's second coming. Firm faith in Jesus's promised return awakens us with an urgency to live for Christ and share His love with those around us. We rise from slumber, throw off darkness, and expectantly pursue the light of Christ while we wait. Knowing Jesus will return changes our perspective on life's temporary comforts and difficulties. With Christ's imminent return in view, we are motivated to honor God and live holy lives.

1. **Jesus's second coming:** Mark 13:26; Luke 12:40; Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 20:1-15
2. **Awaiting and preparing for Jesus's return:** Luke 12:40; Acts 1:6-8

The time to wake up is now. Jesus said, "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. ... About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come."[20] Jesus Christ is coming soon. "'Look, he is coming with the clouds,' and 'every eye will see him, even those who pierced him'; and all peoples on earth 'will mourn because of him.' So shall it be! Amen."[21] The certainty of Jesus's second coming provides motivation and hope for all who trust Him for salvation.

20. **Be alert:** Mark 13:26-27, 32-33
21. **Jesus comes in the clouds:** Revelation 1:7

Clothed in Christ – Romans 13:12-14

Moral and spiritual darkness characterized the Roman Empire in Paul's day. Like our own times, the environment was often hostile to the gospel. **If we understand the times in which we live, we will take to heart Paul's challenge to the Roman church.** He wrote, "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. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh."

God's Spirit works from within, pouring out Christ's love so believers may freely please God, resist temptation, and reject sin.

In one sense, believers are clothed in Christ from the moment they trust Him for salvation. In Christ, God declares sinners righteous. A believer's life is hidden in Christ.[22] Their record of sin, along with its penalties, is gone.[23] **God not only saves believers from judgment but also from sin's power while they live on earth.** God's Spirit works from within, pouring out Christ's love so believers may freely please God, resist temptation, and reject sin. Sin no longer controls those whom Christ sets free. The Spirit transforms believers' appetites and priorities, creating new desires and enabling growing obedience.[24] Through the Holy Spirit's power, believers become more like Jesus, which is God's will for them.[25]

Paul told God's people to put aside acts of darkness and put on the armor of light. Jesus, God's Son, is the light of the world. He also describes His people as the light of the world.[26] **Therefore, people who are clothed with Christ are people who renounce darkness and wear His armor of light.** The armor that God provides against darkness yields the fruit of the Spirit.[27]

Paul often used darkness as a symbol for ignorance and evil deeds.[28] **Believers are to put off the dark behavior tied to their old, unbelieving lives.** Instead, they freely choose to put on their new nature, expressing the reality of who they are in Jesus Christ.[29]

Paul encouraged believers to behave decently, as in the daytime. He listed temptations from his culture that continue to confront us today. Believers are not to live as if the night will hide sinful actions. Instead, believers are called to live life in open daylight, trusting God to give strength and grace to resist sin. God forgives and restores sinners in times of failure. When believers live in the light of God's presence, they need not fear shame. Jesus welcomes repentant hearts.

Finally, Paul instructed believers to clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. We put on clothes primarily for protection. Clothing such as a work, sport, or school uniform can also provide identification. A wedding dress envelops a bride in beauty. In a similar way, believers are to put on the protection, identity, and beauty of the Lord Jesus every day. Jesus sets us apart for

22. **Hidden in Christ:** Galatians 3:27; Colossians 3:3-4
23. **No record of sin:** Colossians 2:13-15
24. **New desires and abilities:** Romans 6:1-23; 8:1-17; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 1:13-14
25. **More like Jesus:** Romans 8:29
26. **Light of the world:** John 1:4; 8:12; 1 John 1:5-7
27. **Armor and fruit:** Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 6:10-18
28. **Deeds of darkness:** Romans 1:21; 2:19; 11:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 4:18; 5:8, 11; 6:12; Colossians 1:13
29. **New nature:** Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:1-17

special service to God. He gives us all we need to follow Him and stand against darkness. We are to represent Him through the power of the Spirit. As we follow and answer to our divine captain and king, we show unbelievers the freedom and joy of belonging to God and His people.

Jesus guards and guides our minds now to "not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh." Paul reminded believers of the power God gives them to say no to sin and yes to God when tempted by fleshly desires. Paul called the believers in Rome to love and live in anticipation of Christ's return. God extends that same call to His people today. **Jesus's promised return calls believers to live holy lives of love.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul continued and extended his teaching on sincere love by addressing believers' obligation to love everyone. **Believers have an outstanding debt that can never be fully paid—the debt to love others.** God's law is fulfilled by love. In other words, we put the law into practice when we love. This world brings strife, dissension, and debate, but love undergirds and directs God's people as they wait for Jesus to return. Loving others despite our differences expresses Christ's love and may be the only exposure someone has to the light of Christ.

Paul urged believers to understand the times and live holy lives that honor God. His warning to wake from slumber revealed that the hour for Jesus's return is near. Ever practical, Paul commanded Christlike behavior as we live in the present time awaiting Christ's return. He exhorted believers to clothe themselves with Christ and guard their minds. Sincere love takes believers out of the darkness and covers them with Christ's armor of light.

Apply It

Paul repeated the command to "love your neighbor as yourself." He explained that love does not harm a neighbor and fulfills the law. This command comes with a challenge. Every person is our neighbor. We find neighbors at our workplace, at the grocery store, at home, and in our churches. Everywhere we turn, we see someone we are obliged to love—at varying degrees of ease. Not everyone we meet seems easy to love. How will you look for ways to show love to the neighbors in your life? Who needs you to listen or show that you care? Who needs encouragement or help? Because God loves us with an everlasting love, He is the source of the love we extend to those around us. By His Spirit, He will help you extend love to others and will bless you as you do. Who in your life urgently needs to hear about the God who loves and saves sinners?

Sincere love for others demands actions that flow from a heart filled with love and the attitude of a servant. Outward actions alone are not enough. An angry, unloving attitude or self-centered, insincere thoughts do not express sincere love. We can only love as God intends, in attitude and action, through the Holy Spirit's power. What do your attitude and actions reveal about the sincerity of your love for others? Jesus's love shines through believers clothed in Christ and brings glory to Him.

Paul sounded an alarm to wake up! Believers need to wake from slumber because their salvation is nearer than ever before. We are to be alert for opportunities and reflect God as we live out a life of love. No matter when someone comes to faith in Christ, every sunrise and sunset means less time remains to serve Him. Every person's time on earth is limited—time is truly short. In what ways is God calling you to wake up? Ask God to help you shake off complacency and slumber. How might you live for Jesus with urgency now? This world's comforts cannot provide the fulfillment and joy that come from serving Christ, sharing the gospel, and furthering His kingdom. Are you awake and alert to the specific opportunities the Lord has given you at this unique time in your life?

Jesus's second coming is near. Do you eagerly await our Lord's return to earth? If not, why not? What does it look like to live expecting Jesus to return? Paul listed specific behaviors that tempt people and urged God's people to cast aside the deeds of darkness. In what ways have you compromised or become complacent about sin? What practical steps will you take to turn from sin, repent, and put on the armor of light—clothed in Christ and empowered by His Spirit? When we neglect or ignore the power of Christ, we forfeit countless blessings. God does not lead His people to float aimlessly through life but to live wisely and love others freely. God calls His children to live like who they actually are: His children—clothed in Christ and empowered by His Spirit. We can trust His help, follow His call to serve, and share His gospel with urgency. In what ways will you depend on Jesus to shine His love through your life as you await His return?

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Christian Liberty

Lesson 25 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 24 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture impact your view of holy living?

2. From the notes, what stood out to you about Christ's second coming?

Second Day: Read Romans 14:1-8.

Paul taught believers how to treat others when they hold different views about disputable issues.

3. How did Paul encourage weaker and stronger believers to respond to one another?

4. a. What types of disputable practices did Paul mention?

   b. Compare disputable practices with matters the Bible says are not disputable. (See also Exodus 20:1-17; Acts 4:11-12; Romans 3:21-26; 6:1-2; 13:9-10; or other verses you know.)

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5. a. What standards and convictions do both weaker and stronger believers share?

   b. How might you reflect these convictions in your life?

Third Day: Read Romans 14:9-12.

Paul reminded believers that Jesus is the risen Lord and judge of all.

6. Why should believers not judge or look down on one another? (See also Acts 10:42; 17:30-31; Romans 2:16.)

7. What will happen at God's judgment seat?

8. a. When are you tempted to judge or look down on others regarding disputable matters?

   b. How might your personal accountability to God help you stop judging others?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 14:13-18.

Paul encouraged believers not to create obstacles for others with their lifestyle practices.

9. From these verses, list several responsibilities Christians have toward fellow believers.

10. a. How did Paul describe the kingdom of God?

b. How does this description support Paul's teaching about not causing others to stumble?

11. How does a believer cause another Christian to stumble today? How have you experienced this?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 14:19-23.

Paul pointed believers toward lives that promote peace and mutual edification.

12. a. What best practices did Paul offer for dealing with other believers on disputable matters?

b. How might overly zealous focus on disputable matters destroy the work of God? (See also Romans 12:1-8.)

13. In verses 21-22, what did Paul conclude for stronger and weaker believers in disputable matters?

14. What personal preferences might the Lord be prompting you to set aside or keep to yourself for the good of others?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 14.

God calls believers to love one another even when they disagree on disputable matters.

15. Write a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to help you apply Paul's teaching to your relationships with others.

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 14

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 25 Notes

Romans 14

Focus Verse

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17)

Outline

- Accepted by God – Romans 14:1-12
- Accommodating One Another – Romans 14:13-23

Engage

People from diverse cultures, traditions, and generations express their faith in Jesus in various ways. Are some right and others wrong? Perhaps you have heard disagreements and strong opinions about the best way to honor Jesus in this life. People who share a common love for Jesus might disagree about music, hobbies, art, social circles, fashion, vocations, diets, or religious practices. **Disagreement among diverse Christians seems inevitable.** So, when is disagreement acceptable? How can Christians disagree without treating one another with suspicion, prejudice, and injustice?

Paul offered practical help to the diverse believers in the church of Rome. He explained the value of following personal convictions and adapting preferences for the good of others. When cultural differences, backgrounds, and convictions clash, believers should honor and support one another as God's precious servants. God sees the hearts of His children beyond the clothes they wear, languages they speak, music they listen to, and education they receive. **God calls believers to love one another even when they disagree on disputable matters.** God's love, shared among His people, offers belonging to everyone saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

In the final chapters of Romans, Paul applied God's righteousness to believers' lives in important yet practical ways.

- Two verses are dedicated to believers' transformed minds.[1]
- Six verses address sober self-assessment and service to the Church.[2]
- Paul's call to love receives 13 verses.[3]
- Seven verses clarify believers' submission to authority.[4]
- Right conduct anticipating Jesus's return unfolds in another seven verses.[5]

1. **Transformed mind:** Romans 12:1-2
2. **Assessment and service:** Romans 12:3-8
3. **Call to love:** Romans 12:9-21
4. **Submission to authority:** Romans 13:1-7
5. **Anticipating Jesus:** Romans 13:8-14

- **Finally, Paul dedicated more than 30 verses to practical advice about accepting believers with diverse practices.**

The issues related to love and unity addressed over this and next week's lessons in Romans 14 and 15 seem to be mission-critical for the believers in Rome. Paul wanted Jews and Gentiles to get along. Believers today can also learn much from Paul's wise teaching.

Accepted by God – Romans 14:1-12

Paul opened Romans 14 with an unqualified command: "Accept the one whose faith is weak." Two verses later, he explained why: "For God has accepted them." **Christians have no right to reject believers God has accepted in Jesus.**[6]

Disputable Matters – 14:1

Paul emphatically told believers not to quarrel over disputable matters. Faithful Christians may disagree about matters that do not involve salvation or sin. Disagreement is permitted regarding disputable matters that do not undermine the truth of God's grace in Christ through faith or deny God's commands.[7] Paul offered the Roman believers two relevant examples. He also gave them principles and guidelines that remain helpful for believers today.

First Example: Special Diets – 14:2-4

Paul used special diets as his first example. **In this and other examples, believers with "weak" faith prefer restrictions to protect their consciences.** The weak may lack understanding of justification by faith alone, while believers with "strong" faith have trained and matured their consciences through God's Word. Paul may have had several cultural issues in mind: Jewish food laws, Gentile self-denial for spiritual reasons, or food previously offered to Roman idols.

In Paul's day, the Old Testament continued to influence Jewish dietary convictions. Nothing in the Old Testament required vegetarianism. However, Jews who lived among Gentiles sometimes chose to avoid meat[8] to maintain kosher standards.[9] **Faith in Jesus did not negate a lifetime of eating patterns for believing Jews.**

Some Gentiles practiced asceticism, adopting a severely self-disciplined lifestyle. The excesses of Roman life pushed them to the opposite extreme. Ascetics ate only vegetables and drank no wine. **When these Gentiles became Christians, their dietary restrictions remained important to them.**

Many ancient religions commonly sacrificed animals to idols. In Paul's day, the markets sold the meat of these sacrificed animals. What were Christians to do if friends or loved ones served them such meat? **Would eating meat sacrificed to idols encourage idolatry or defile believers?** Paul specifically addressed this concern in a letter to the church in Corinth.[10]

Paul taught the Corinthians, "An idol is nothing at all in the world."[11] **Believers who felt free to eat the meat were not free to impose their practices on other Christians who thought eating the meat was wrong.** If someone informed them, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then they

6. **God's acceptance:** Acts 10:45-48; 15:8-11
7. **Indisputable matters:** Exodus 20:1-17; Romans 3:21-26; 6:1-2; 13:9-10
8. **Avoiding meat:** Daniel 1:8-16
9. **Dietary restrictions:** Leviticus 11; 17
10. **Special diets:** 1 Corinthians 8; 10:23-33
11. **Idols are nothing:** 1 Corinthians 8:4

should abstain for the sake of the one who told them.[12] They were to consider the consciences of other believers when making decisions. Paul promised, "If what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall."[13] Paul was prepared to sacrifice his freedom for the benefit of believers who disagreed with him.

Paul focused on loving concern for fellow believers, not being right or giving a one-size-fits-all rule. The attitudes of the strong toward the weak and the weak toward the strong matter in the Church. Believers are not to look down on or condemn other Christians. Instead, God calls believers to "be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."[14] **Paul called believers not to allow unimportant matters to undermine Christian fellowship and unity.** Paul offered three helpful principles for prioritizing relationships over rules in disputable matters.

Principle 1: God Accepts Believers (14:3b) – Paul expressed confidence in God's acceptance of all believers. Christians receive God's approval based on Jesus's righteousness, not their own. **Because God has accepted believers, they cannot reject one another.** How could a mere human overrule what God has declared as true? "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."[15]

Principle 2: Believers Answer to God (14:4a) – Paul exposed weak believers' condemnation of the strong, who did not follow their stricter practices. While the strong looked down on the weak, who did not enjoy their freedoms, Paul asked both strong and weak, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" **Christians all serve one master, the Lord Jesus Christ, and will answer to the Lord.** Everyone is ultimately accountable to God, who is always the best and perfect judge.

Principle 3: Jesus Makes Believers Stand (14:4b) – Paul continued, "To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand." Believers' good Master will uphold all His servants. **Jesus's death and resurrection justify every believer before God**. He also enables believers to live for Him through the Holy Spirit.

Second Example: Special Days – 14:5-8

Paul offered a second example: Christians who observed certain days as special and holy. These believers looked down on anyone who did not share their practices. In the churches of Galatia and Colossae, Paul strongly taught that special-day observances were not necessary for salvation.[16] The issue in Rome appears unrelated to gaining salvation. However, the weak seemed to think that diet and special day observances were necessary to please God after salvation. Paul addressed the believers' wrong attitudes toward one another with three helpful guidelines that remain relevant today.

Guideline 1: Personal Conviction (14:5) – Paul did not say people were convinced of whether it was right to keep special days. He said people "should be" fully convinced. The words "in their own minds" point back to Paul's earlier command to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind."[17] Believers are not to conform to this world's pattern. **Believers study, think, and pray to discern their convictions about disputable matters for their own lives.** Convictions may change as the Holy Spirit helps believers apply growing knowledge of God and His Word.

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12. **Food offered to idols:** 1 Corinthians 10:27-29
13. **Concern for conscience:** 1 Corinthians 8:13
14. **Devotion and honor:** Romans 12:10
15. **Accepted by faith:** Ephesians 2:8-9
16. **Special days:** Galatians 4:8-11; Colossians 2:16-17
17. **Renewing your mind:** Romans 12:2

Guideline 2: Thank God (14:6) – Paul wrote twice in this verse about giving "thanks to God." The ability to give thanks helps believers discern God's will. **Believers can address doubts about their actions by asking, "Is this a gift from God for which I can give thanks?"**[18] Believers enjoy such activities in good conscience. When believers embrace the truth that God sovereignly works through each of His children as He sees fit, they can more joyfully accept one another.

Guideline 3: Serve the Lord (14:7-8) – Paul wrote, "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." Whatever believers do, they are to live as people who belong to the Lord. Paul repeated the vital call to honor God through deeds eight ways in just three verses. **Wholehearted love for God frees believers to honor Him in various ways, including through food and holy days.** Paul's teaching challenges every believer to honor and serve God in everything they do, whatever their convictions and practices.

Accountable to God – 14:9-12

Because all who believe in Jesus belong to Him, "Christ died and returned to life so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living." Paul commanded believers not to judge one another because all believers belong to the Lord. One day, every person who ever lived will stand before God's judgment seat, and the Lord Jesus Christ will judge them with perfect justice. **God will judge "people's secrets through Jesus Christ" on the last day.**[19]

Paul concluded his argument with a solemn reminder drawn from the Old Testament book of Isaiah: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'"[20] **On that awesome day, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.**[21]

Accommodating One Another – Romans 14:13-23

After establishing that God accepts both the strong and weak in faith, Paul encouraged believers to accept one another, wholeheartedly live for Jesus, and follow the Holy Spirit. **Then Paul called strong believers to set aside liberties that would distress, confuse, or tempt weaker believers to sin.** Love for Jesus and care for others motivate believers to prioritize people over personal preferences in disputable matters.

Without Judgment – 14:13-16

Judgment of humanity belongs to God alone. However, in Paul's day and ours, judgment saturates social conversations, political discourse, and religious gatherings. **God calls believers not to use their Christian liberties and freedoms to criticize or condemn others.**

Basic Principle (14:13) – Paul paired a negative and positive command in this verse, and the Greek text uses the word for "judge" in each command. The negative command: Stop judging other Christians. The positive command: Start judging your own behavior. **Jesus freed weak and strong Christians to love one another, not to judge matters God leaves up to personal conscience.** The weak are not to call the strong unspiritual, nor are the strong to call the weak immature.

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18. **God's gifts:** James 1:17
19. **Last day:** Acts 10:42; 17:30-31; Romans 2:16
20. **Every knee:** Isaiah 45:23
21. **Give an account:** Matthew 12:36-37

Final Judgment

The Doctrine of Judgment of Believers and Unbelievers

In Romans 1–3, Paul focused on God's judgment of unbelievers who suppress His truth and reject His righteousness in Christ. In Romans 14, Paul revisited God's judgment—this time focused on believers. **As the sinless risen Lord, Jesus Christ will judge every person.**[1] Unbelievers will receive their deserved, dreadful, and everlasting punishment for sin.[2] Believers will stand on Jesus's promise: "Whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."[3]

When Jesus judges humanity, He will consider what opportunities each person had to turn to Him.[4] **He will expose every secret, every hidden motive, and every pretense of faith, word, and action.**[5] No one will be able to blame others, make excuses, or steal credit for another's good work.[6] Unbelievers will be judged according to the light they received and for willfully rejecting the gospel. Greater knowledge brings greater accountability.[7]

God has already justified believers and proclaimed, "No condemnation!"[8] God judged believers' sin at Christ's cross.[9] Jesus fully satisfied God's wrath against believers' sin.[10] The God who knows all things will remember their sins no more.[11] However, God's holiness will test believers' perceived good works. All deeds accomplished in human strength for personal glory will burn up and turn to ashes.[12] **But Jesus will remember and reward even the smallest deed, long forgotten, done through Him and for Him.**[13] The Lord will fully reward believers who longed for Him and His righteousness[14] and will share His happiness with them forever.[15]

Failure to recognize the certain and comprehensive judgment Jesus will bring leaves people wrongly judging themselves and others with authority that belongs only to God. The truth of God's just judgment invites believers to stop judging one another. Each time Christians face temptation to judge others, they can instead live for the Lord, focused on their own moment of personal accountability.[16] Rewards for living for Jesus make every moment of a believer's life matter. God's grace in believers' judgment prompts gratitude and humility before God and other people. **How joyful to know that believers will not receive what their sins deserve.** If you do not yet believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, will you embrace the truth of His judgment and turn to Him in faith? Will you repent of living for yourself and trust Him for forgiveness and the gift of His Holy Spirit today?

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1. **Jesus as sinless judge:** Acts 17:31; Hebrews 4:15
2. **Perfect justice:** Romans 1:18-20; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Revelation 20:11-15
3. **Death to life:** John 5:24
4. **Opportunities:** Matthew 11:21-24
5. **Secrets exposed:** Matthew 10:26; Mark 4:22; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Hebrews 4:13
6. **Excuses silenced:** Romans 3:19
7. **Unbelievers' accountability:** Luke 12:47-48; John 12:48; Romans 2:12
8. **No condemnation:** Romans 8:1
9. **Sin and the cross:** Colossians 2:14-15
10. **Wrath satisfied:** Romans 3:24-26
11. **Remembered no more:** Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34
12. **Deeds revealed:** 1 Corinthians 3:10-15
13. **For Christ:** Matthew 25:31-40
14. **Full reward:** Matthew 5:3-12; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 John 3:2-3
15. **Sharing happiness:** Matthew 25:21, 23; Revelation 21:4
16. **Evaluative verdict:** 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

Words to the Strong (14:14-16) – As he continued, Paul spoke exclusively to believers who think they are strong. Why would Paul shift his focus to the strong? It could be that the weak can only abstain from what they believe is wrong. Meanwhile, the strong can discern when to abstain or not abstain. **Paul called the strong to accommodate the weak when the weak cannot accommodate the strong.**

Paul insisted that dietary freedom was not sinful. After all, Jesus Himself taught that no food is unclean in itself,[22] and Paul followed Jesus's teaching.[23] Nevertheless, love for others should override personal freedoms and desires. **Paul warned that the dietary freedom of the strong might "destroy someone for whom Christ died."** Paul was not teaching that one believer's permissible behaviors can cause another to lose their salvation. However, he did clarify that Christian love does not willingly distress others by doing what they believe is sinful. In love, Jesus Christ did not cling to His freedom. He died for weak and powerless people.[24]

Paul was also not teaching a new form of legalism—that stronger Christians should live by weaker believers' standards. The strong do not have to forgo everything about which some weaker believers might object. Instead, Paul cautioned the strong against harming weaker Christians over matters inconsequential to salvation through faith in Christ. **One believer's freedom should never become an excuse for another believer to sin against their conscience and Spirit-led convictions.**

With Kingdom Priorities – 14:17

Paul taught that Christian love includes protecting and serving others, especially fellow believers.[25] **All believers belong to God's kingdom.** Paul offered a timeless definition of God's kingdom that explains why believers should not impose their preferences on others regarding disputable matters. He wrote, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

God's kingdom is the realm in which God rules. God rules the entire universe! God rules everything. At the same time, the kingdom of God also describes God's relationship to people who actively acknowledge His rule—those indwelt by His Holy Spirit through faith in Christ. **In a personal sense, God's kingdom reigns whenever individuals acknowledge His rule and reflect His character.**

What believers do or do not eat, drink, or celebrate does not define God's kingdom. Therefore, believers should not focus on these things except to guard their conduct from harming others. God's kingdom is present in Christians. God's Spirit bestows righteousness, grants peace, and produces joy. **Believers prioritize God's kingdom when they submit to His purposes, enjoy His presence, and promote His glory by sharing the gospel and serving others in love.**

***Righteousness* – Christ's righteousness characterizes God's kingdom.** The word "righteous" occurs more than 30 times in Romans, highlighting God as the judge between right and wrong. Righteousness sums up believers' salvation. God's perfect righteousness comes to unrighteous, needy people through faith in the work of Jesus Christ. Among other things, the kingdom of God establishes His righteous reign in believers. In God's kingdom, the gift of righteousness in Christ transforms hearts and overflows into believers' lives.

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22. **Unclean food:** Mark 7:1-18
23. **Paul's belief on food:** 1 Corinthians 8:4, 8; 1 Timothy 4:4
24. **Jesus died for the weak:** Romans 5:6-8
25. **Christian love:** Romans 12–14

***Peace* – God poured His wrath on Jesus[26] so people might enjoy peace with Him and one another.[27]** Through faith in Jesus, the barrier between people and God disappears. Believers have peace with God—an objective reality established by God. As believers lay their cares before God, they also experience the promised peace of God.[28] Peace with God and from God enables believers to pursue peace with one another.

***Joy* – The joy of the Holy Spirit flows to believers who receive God's gifts of righteousness and peace.** The night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed for His disciples to possess "the full measure" of His joy.[29] When God brings His enemies into relationship with Himself, He offers them unbreakable peace after relentless warfare, and the joy of the Holy Spirit abounds.

To Please God – 14:18-23

After defining God's kingdom, Paul encouraged believers that living a life focused on "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"[30] pleases God and other people. Paul echoed Luke's words about the boy Jesus, who "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."[31] A life dominated by rules and regulations leads to pride and self-focus. However, when people understand that God only accepts them through faith in Christ's work, they can humbly accept and accommodate everyone for whom Jesus died.

Paul called believers to "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." Believers glorify God when they live in peace and serve one another in love.[32] Today, "edify" often means "to instruct," but it once meant "to build." Jesus Christ is building His kingdom through His Church, and He invites believers to be His coworkers.[33] Believers build up one another on the foundation of King Jesus.[34]

For believers saved by faith, the question is not, "Can I do it if it is not wrong?" Being right was not the heart of Paul's teaching. Paul expressed his primary concern, "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall." We should not lead others to compromise their convictions. Instead, we are called to accommodate one another so every believer can serve God with a clear conscience and a heart full of faith. **God calls believers to love one another even when they disagree on disputable matters.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul laid an indisputable foundation of Jesus Christ and God's plan for salvation by grace through faith. Then he called believers to mutual acceptance regarding disputable matters. Every believer serves the Lord, belongs to the Lord, and ultimately answers to the Lord. Because God has accepted each believer in Christ, believers should lovingly accept one another. God graciously

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26. God gave Jesus: Romans 8:32
27. Peace with God: Romans 1:7; 5:1-11; Ephesians 2:11-19
28. Promised peace: Philippians 4:6-7
29. Christ's joy: John 17:13
30. God's kingdom: Romans 14:17
31. Grew in favor: Luke 2:52
32. Be one: John 17:20-22
33. Coworkers: 1 Corinthians 3:9
34. Jesus the foundation: 1 Corinthians 3:11

saves people from various cultures, backgrounds, and demographics. He calls each one to honor Him through their various convictions about behavior and conduct.

Paul taught believers to surrender their lives to the Lord and follow the Holy Spirit's conviction. Instead of judging the way others live for the Lord, believers are called to build up and support one another as they grow to be more like Jesus. **When believers focus on God's kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, they remove the barriers that inconsequential preferences might create.** Wise words often attributed to Augustine remain a vital principle today: "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love."

Apply It

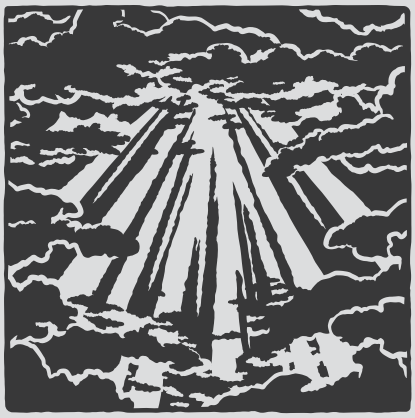
Each week in BSF, you have the privilege of practicing loving acceptance among Christians who hold a variety of personal preferences on disputable matters. What might this lesson on Christian liberties reveal about your thoughts, words, conduct, and prayers for one another? You can choose to extend the gospel of righteousness by grace, not works, in your interactions with others. How you relate to other Christians builds up or tears down Christ's body, the Church. Ask God to help you welcome believers with different views as beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Create an environment of belonging by accepting others the way God has accepted you.

What disputable matters have you mistakenly elevated as necessary for salvation and pleasing God? Ask yourself why these matter so much to you. Have you considered why they may not be as important to others? God permits disagreement on disputable matters that do not undermine the truth of God's grace in Christ through faith or deny God's commands. God accepts and judges people on one basis only—the infinite righteousness of His Son. Has God accepted you through faith in Christ? If not, come to Him through faith in Christ today.

If you are a believer, do you judge or criticize other believers? We dare not look down on believers who approach Jesus's service differently than we do. **Acceptance pushes us past neutrality to lovingly embrace and encourage others.** How much time and prayer could you invest in helping others succeed as faithful Christians? God is building His kingdom through every believer who obediently follows and serves Him.

What do you do when your freedom in Christ clashes with another Christian's conscience? Are you even aware of when this might be occurring? Unless you prioritize people over personal preferences, you might not notice when your freedom causes others to stumble. Ask God to help you see ways you hinder other believers. What liberty might God be calling you to give up out of love for another believer? God may want to work through your sacrifice to help a Christian brother or sister grow and mature in their faith. As you lay aside your preferences, God will help you lovingly bear with the convictions of the weak. God is a good and trustworthy father to His children. **In His time, by His Spirit, and through His Word, God matures each of His children.** He frees their consciences from man-made regulations to love Him wholeheartedly and joyfully obey His commands.

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Christian Unity

Lesson 26 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 25 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you understand God's judgment of believers and unbelievers?

2. What did you find meaningful from the notes regarding disputable matters among believers?

Second Day: Read Romans 15:1-3.

Paul assigned responsibilities to strong believers.

3. What responsibilities did Paul assign to strong believers, and why?

4. a. How is Paul's description of pleasing one's neighbors different from how we might think about people-pleasing today?

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b. In verse 3, Paul quoted a prophecy about Jesus from Psalm 69. Read Psalm 69. How did Jesus model not living to please Himself?

5. Describe situations in which you find it difficult to build others up or put them first.

Third Day: Read Romans 15:4-6.

Paul spoke to Scripture's important role in Christian unity.

6. a. From verse 4, what benefits come from studying Scripture?

b. How have you experienced these or other benefits as you have studied Romans?

7. What did Paul ask God to give to his readers, and what might the result be?

8. a. How does a spirit of unity differ from uniformity, and how does Christian unity glorify God? (See also Romans 14:13-18.)

b. What impact does Christian unity have on you, your church, or your relationships with other believers?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 15:7-12.

Paul spoke about acceptance of other believers.

9. What did Paul command the Romans to do, and why?

10. What did Jesus do on behalf of God's truth, and why is this important?

11. a. List the Old Testament passages Paul quoted in verses 9-12. (Check your Bible's footnotes or cross-references to locate the Scripture references.) What do the passages have in common?

    b. Why would Paul use Old Testament passages to illustrate unity between Jews and Gentiles in Christ?

12. How might Paul's words help when you struggle to find unity with other believers?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 15:13.

Paul spoke words of hope to His readers.

13. a. What is the relationship between trust and hope? (See also 1 Timothy 1:1; Hebrews 6:18-19; 11:1; or any other verses for help.)

    b. In what specific ways have you found God to be your source of hope?

14. How is it possible for believers to overflow with hope?

15. Using Romans 15:13, write a prayer for yourself or someone you know who needs hope.

Sixth Day: Review Romans 15:1-13.

God empowers believers to live in unity and hope as they follow Christ.

16. What challenged or encouraged you regarding Christian unity and Christ's example as you studied this passage, and how can your group pray for you?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 15:1-13

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 26 Notes

Romans 15:1-13

Focus Verse

"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." (Romans 15:13)

Outline

- Unity Through Christlikeness – Romans 15:1-4
- Unity for God's Glory – Romans 15:5-12
- Unity by the Spirit's Power – Romans 15:13

Engage

Today's world overflows with strife and division. Conflict runs so deep that countries, cities, and even families often seem at odds with no apparent hope of reconciliation. **How are God's people to remain unified when they disagree to the point of discord?** Division among people is not new; in fact, the world was in many ways more divided when the good news of Jesus's resurrection burst upon the scene. Many Greeks hated the Romans, who had overpowered and dominated them. Romans considered every country they conquered as inferior. Those in power ruthlessly mistreated and enslaved the poor and weak. The marginalized despised those who mistreated them. During this time, one of the most persistent and possibly even the deepest of all divisions existed between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews).

Paul's continued emphasis on unity in chapters 14 and 15 indicates that discord had likely entered the church in Rome. The groups could not see eye to eye on disputable matters that ran deeply in each culture. Many Romans and Greeks considered all who lacked appreciation for their philosophy, sports, and idols as barbarians. Gentile Christians may have viewed Jewish believers as overly focused on ritual and law. All the while, some Jews looked down on those who lacked their God-given spiritual privileges. Yet Paul reminded them that the Church includes all—Jew and Gentile alike—who trust Jesus for salvation and worship the one true God. How can believers from such diverse backgrounds unite to worship God as one cross-cultural community? The answer remains the same today: The power of the Holy Spirit of God makes unity possible. Only with God are all things possible.[1] **God empowers believers to live in unity and hope as they follow Christ.**

1. **All things possible:** Matthew 19:26

Unity Through Christlikeness – Romans 15:1-4

Paul did not allow for indifference toward fellow Christians. Instead, he urged believers to live purposefully by first considering others.[1] Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus intentionally served others. **Jesus's life on earth shines as our perfect example.**

Picking up from chapter 14, Paul continued to address strong believers, saying, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves." Being considerate of those who prefer restrictions to protect their conscience is part of God's call to accept those He has accepted.[2] Paul expanded this thought by saying believers "should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up." Jesus made this perfectly clear when He commanded, "Love your neighbor as yourself."[3] He humbly served others to the point of death on a cross.[4] Jesus offers salvation from sin and new life empowered by the Holy Spirit. **As believers walk with Christ and follow His ways, they are conformed into His likeness.**

Living like Jesus includes a willingness to endure a lifetime of insults and offense for His sake and the sake of others—a heavy burden that we cannot bear on our own.

Paul quoted Psalm 69:9 to underscore Jesus Christ as our example. One of the Old Testament's most profound messianic passages, Psalm 69 highlights Jesus's humble servant nature: "For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.'" Christ bore our every insult and cause of pain when He took the cross on our behalf. Paul issued a call to Rome's believers to endure similar mistreatment for God and for others. Zeal for His Father's house consumed Jesus.[5] The insults meant for God fell upon Jesus. In every way, Jesus bore pain and suffering on our behalf. Paul may have sought to inspire his readers to live like Jesus while asking the strong believers in Rome to endure the insults that befell the weak. Jesus is our example, yet living like Him requires more than mere human effort or will. Living like Jesus includes a willingness to endure a lifetime of insults and offense for His sake and the sake of others—a heavy burden that we cannot bear on our own.[6]

Scripture's Hope – 15:4

Believers can find encouragement and power to follow Jesus's example by His Spirit and in His Word. The Bible is God's gift to every generation and overflows with hope. Every word contained in Scripture is useful. Paul opened verse 4 by saying, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us." God inspired His servants, including Moses, David, Solomon, and all the Old Testament prophets, to speak and write to people in their own times and for the world today.[7] Paul wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."[8] The Bible's message exceeds all other words ever spoken or penned and

1. **Consider others:** Matthew 16:24; 1 Corinthians 13:5
2. **Accepted by God:** Romans 14:3
3. **Love neighbors:** Luke 10:25-28
4. **Christ's example:** Philippians 2:1-11
5. **Zeal consumed Jesus:** John 2:17
6. **Persecution of believers:** Matthew 5:10-12
7. **Scripture teaches:** 1 Peter 1:10-12
8. **Scripture is useful:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

calls God's people to live by His design. **Scripture contains God's timeless and true Word and proclaims the only source of enduring hope.**

Here in Romans 15, Paul showed how Scripture is an incredible source of hope for people experiencing relational struggles and persecution for their faith. The Bible teaches both patient and active endurance. Although pain is unavoidable and can seem unbearable and unending, God calls believers to trust Him and endure patiently in all circumstances. Active endurance occurs every time a believer resolves to obey God, even when obedience comes with great cost. Loving others and spreading the gospel also involve active endurance. **Those who patiently endure and actively persevere while placing their trust in Christ become more like Christ.** James wrote about perseverance and blessing, saying, "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."[9] God can bring immeasurable victory out of unspeakable tragedy and division.

The Holy Spirit works through Scripture to encourage God's people. In Greek, the word encouragement, *paraklesis*, is closely related to the word Jesus used, *parakletos*, to describe the Holy Spirit's work of teaching, comforting, and guiding His followers.[10] As our Advocate, the Holy Spirit comes alongside believers to help them understand and apply Scripture. He provides comfort and counsel, helping them follow Jesus's example of selfless, persevering love and unifying them into one body that glorifies God together.[11]

Unity for God's Glory – Romans 15:5-12

Paul continued his exhortations with Jesus as his example. Paul called upon God, who gives endurance and encouragement, to make His people like-minded, and he encouraged believers to accept one another. **Paul revealed the ultimate purpose for Christian unity: God's glory.**

Prayer for Unity – 15:5-6

The night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed for six important characteristics to mark the Church: joy, holiness, truth, mission, love, and unity.[12] Jesus prayed at great length for the unity of His disciples and every future believer, asking "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."[13] **The triune God exists in perfect unity, a unity believers are called to reflect in their communities.** What unifies us in Christ is more important than anything else, including politics, music preference, worship styles, and denominations.

Aware of possible reasons for disunity, Paul wrote Romans 14–15 to guide the Church through potentially explosive differences. Paul asked God to give the Roman believers "the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The ultimate purpose of Christian unity is to bring God glory, not just to create a friendly community. **Believers glorify God before a watching world by loving and appreciating one another, rather than allowing differences to create discord.**[14]

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9. **Perseverance and blessing:** James 5:10-11
10. **Holy Spirit, our Advocate:** John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7
11. **Unity of the Spirit:** 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:3-4
12. **Prayer for Church:** John 17:13-18, 26
13. **Prayer for believers:** John 17:20-23
14. **Unity in Christ:** Ephesians 2:11-22

Command for Unity – 15:7

Paul commanded Rome's believers to "accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." The key word "accept" means to welcome or receive, not simply tolerate. Earlier, Paul commanded that believers "accept the one whose faith is weak ... for God has accepted them."[15] Unity calls believers to die to individual rights or opinions and accept all who come to faith, based on Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus has accepted the believer with whom we have differences. **Jesus welcomes all who believe.** Believers should follow His example and do the same.

Remarkably, cultural differences did not divide the early Church for long. When Greek-speaking Jews complained of unfair treatment, the church in Jerusalem called the first deacons to ensure fairness and preserve unity.[16] Soon, the Church included Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, slaves and free—all races, classes, and groups.[17] Men from diverse backgrounds and cultures led the church in Antioch.[18] Despite the potential for conflict, the church in Antioch thrived and became a strong missionary church. With confidence that Christ had accepted them, they accepted one another.

Unity in Christ – 15:8-9

Throughout his letter, Paul proclaimed how Jesus had overcome the great divide between Jews and Gentiles. God had chosen the Jews as His people. Knowing God, His ways, and His Word brought many blessings to the Jews. Gentiles formerly lived as foreigners and strangers to God's covenants and promises. However, Jesus brought radical change. Paul explained, "Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy." Jesus's example applies to all who would follow Him: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."[19] **Jesus Christ reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God and one another.**[20]

Initially, some Jewish Christians looked down on Gentile believers.[21] But God had promised to bless all people through Abraham.[22] In his letter to the Galatians, Paul explained that Christ redeemed Jews so God's blessing to Abraham could come to the Gentiles through Jesus. **By faith, all—Jews and Gentiles alike—can receive God's promised Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.**[23] Paul challenged his fellow Jewish believers to realize that God accepted the Gentiles in Christ and so should they.

Unity in Hope – 15:9-12

Earlier in his letter, Paul listed many advantages the Jews had received. They had been entrusted with the very words of God.[24] In addition, "Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are

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15. **Accept the weak:** Romans 14:1, 3
16. **First deacons:** Acts 6:1-7
17. **Church includes all:** Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11
18. **Leaders at Antioch:** Acts 13:1
19. **Servant of all:** Mark 9:35
20. **Promises and reconciliation:** Ephesians 2:11-23
21. **Jewish Christians:** Acts 15:1-11; Galatians 2:11-13
22. **Bless all people:** Genesis 12:3; 18:17-18; 22:18; 28:14
23. **All can receive:** Galatians 3:14
24. **Jews entrusted:** Romans 3:2

the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah."[25] Without these advantages, the Gentiles lived "without hope and without God in the world."[26] Hopelessness is never God's final word to His people! In Romans 9–11, Paul cited many Old Testament passages proving that God had promised Gentile salvation[27] while remaining faithful in His promises to the Jews.[28]

In Romans 15, Paul referred to four Old Testament texts to support this crucial truth. Jesus fulfilled God's promises to the patriarchs so the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.

Psalm 18:49 (echoes 2 Samuel 22:50) – David's thanksgiving song praises God for how He intervened on David's behalf. Toward the end of the psalm, David said, "I will praise you, LORD, among the nations," which implies that the Gentiles will praise God along with David. **This psalm looked forward to when Gentiles and Jews would know and praise the true God together.**

Deuteronomy 32:43 – Shortly before his death, Moses composed a song that reminded the Israelites of God's goodness to them and warned them of terrible consequences if they departed from true worship of God. **Moses's song included the Gentiles, saying God gives each nation its portion of the earth's land as an inheritance.[29]**

Quoting Deuteronomy, Paul called on Gentiles to rejoice with Jews, for God "will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people." The mention of atonement draws the hearts of New Testament believers to the cross. **Christ's atoning death reveals the gospel as the power of God to everyone who believes, both Jews and Gentiles.[30]**

Psalm 117:1 – This quotation adds one more building block to Paul's argument. In Psalm 18, David praised God among the Gentiles. In Deuteronomy 32, Gentiles praised God along with Jews. **In Psalm 117, Gentiles praised God on their own.** All the world's peoples are to praise Yahweh for His great love and faithfulness, which endure forever.

Isaiah 11:10 – Isaiah portrayed the Messiah as both the root and shoot of Jesse, David's father.[31] God promised that David's descendant would bring in the messianic age.[32] Now Christ has come! **The Gentiles have hope because Jesus is the Savior not only of the Jewish people but of the world.[33]**

Unity by the Spirit's Power – Romans 15:13

Verse 13 introduces the first of three benedictions in the final chapters of Romans. Paul transitioned toward his letter's conclusion with personal remarks that include two more benedictions.[34] His letter concludes with a doxology.[35]

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25. **Jewish advantages:** Romans 9:4-5
26. **Without hope:** Ephesians 2:12
27. **Old Testament proof:** Deuteronomy 32:21; Isaiah 1:9; 8:14; 10:22-23; 28:16; 65:1; Hosea 1:10; 2:23; Joel 2:32; Romans 9:25-26
28. **God's promise and faithfulness:** Romans 11:17-32
29. **Moses's song:** Deuteronomy 31:30–32:43
30. **God's power:** Romans 1:16
31. **Father of David:** Isaiah 11:1-10
32. **David's descendant:** 2 Samuel 7:11-29; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Luke 1:32-33
33. **Jesus, Savior of the world:** John 3:16; 4:42
34. **Benedictions:** Romans 15:33; 16:20
35. **Final doxology:** Romans 16:25-27

God's Enduring Work Through His Son

The Doctrine of God the Son

Jesus is the Son of God and the second person of the eternal, divine Trinity. Jesus has always existed along with God the Father and God the Spirit. At a specific time in history, Jesus became a man.[1] He walked the earth and endured every human temptation—yet without sin. Scripture repeatedly encourages God's people to be more like Christ.[2] In His humanity, Jesus lived perfectly, which makes Him the ultimate, matchless example for Christian living. However, no matter how hard we try, we will always fall short. Jesus remains the unique God-Man forever.

Written long before Jesus walked this earth, Psalm 69 prophesied His great suffering. Jesus's enemies denied, slandered, and sought to destroy Him.[3] He endured undeserved suffering for God's sake.[4] His own brothers did not believe in Him.[5] Rulers and the people He came to save mocked Him.[6] Never wavering from God's purpose, Jesus depended on God to deliver Him.[7] Jesus suffered as a man, dying a brutal death on the cross. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, where He now sits at God's right hand. Jesus fulfilled many prophecies as God's chosen Messiah. This proves that one day, Jesus will indeed return to earth and take His people home to heaven with Him.[8]

To fail to believe in Jesus as God's own Son is an outright rejection of God Himself. Without a turn from unbelief, this terrible rebellion yields tragic results. A sinner who refuses to repent from sin and turn to Christ lives without true peace, joy, or hope in this life and for eternity. Despite a desperate search to satisfy the vast void only Jesus can fill, an unbeliever misses what matters most. Depending on the world's flawed options means surviving each new day without enduring answers to life's most haunting questions. Those who do not grasp their need for God are not prepared when tragedy strikes or death approaches. Eventually, all who reject Christ will find themselves utterly alone. Even worse, they face a future and eternity entirely without God.

Those who believe and receive Jesus as God the Son and their Savior are never alone. Jesus promises He will never leave nor forsake those who turn to Him for salvation. Even in times of great turmoil, they live in peace knowing they have unhindered access to God. Joy-filled songs of praise live in their hearts and rise from their lips. Indwelt by the Holy Spirit, believers find strength as they depend on God. Life on earth still contains challenges and heartaches. Even so, trust in Jesus lifts hearts, minds, and eyes heavenward. Believers take comfort in knowing this world is not their final destination. A believer's forever home is in heaven with Jesus.

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1. **Only Son:** John 1:14
2. **Conformed to Christ's image:** Romans 8:29
3. **Opposed by enemies:** Psalm 69:4
4. **Undeserved suffering:** Psalm 69:7
5. **Unbelieving brothers:** Psalm 69:8
6. **Mocked by rulers and people:** Psalm 69:11-12
7. **Jesus's dependence and God's deliverance:** Psalm 69:1, 13-18, 29-30
8. **Jesus will return:** Matthew 16:27; 26:64; Acts 1:4-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11; Titus 2:11-14

God of Hope

Hope rises as a key theme in the first half of chapter 15. God is the source of true hope and every good thing,[36] including supernatural joy and peace. God is also the object and source of genuine hope. **Believers hope in God, whose love and power never fail.** Those who leave God out of their thinking forfeit enduring hope as they look only to this world to supply what they need.[37] With God factored into life's challenges, hope reigns even in the most trying circumstances. Believers can have hope because God Himself is our hope. He sustains us.

People of Hope

The gifts of joy and peace flow into believers through the Holy Spirit as they trust in God. Faith is not a blind leap into the dark or a brave decision to trust what makes no sense. **Faith steps out and stands on firm ground when believers trust God.** He will continue to do everything He has promised for His people. Those who build their lives on God will never be put to shame.[38]

Believers need the power of Jesus Christ within their hearts to believe, live in unity, and follow God.[39] When faced with this world's temptations, mere human willpower fails to provide faith, joy, hope, and peace.[40] Without Christ, peace,[41] joy,[42] and hope[43] depend on life's shifting circumstances alone. But God! Only God can make the impossible possible by His power.[44] **God empowers believers to live in unity and hope as they follow Christ.**[45] Believers can overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul exhorted Rome's strong believers to bear with the failings of the weak. He called them to avoid pleasing themselves and instead to please others and build them up. By doing so, believers can follow the example of Jesus, who did not live to please Himself but bore insults for the sake of His followers. **Paul reminded believers of Scripture's value in teaching, encouraging, and helping them endure.** He encouraged them to live in unity—with one mind and one voice—to bring glory to God.

As division among believing Jews and Gentiles grew, Paul again turned to Scripture and Jesus's example for counsel and help. Unity emerges not as a suggestion but as a command for believers, despite their differences. Christ became a servant to fulfill God's promises to the patriarchs, unify the Jews and Gentiles, and glorify God. Jesus demonstrated ways to accept others with love—all to bring praise and glory to God. **Whether Jew or Gentile, God's people's ultimate purpose in salvation is to glorify God for His mercy.**

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36. **Every good thing:** James 1:17
37. **Without hope:** 1 Corinthians 15:12, 19, 32; Ephesians 2:12
38. **No shame:** Romans 9:33
39. **Jesus's power:** Ezekiel 36:25-27; John 6:44; Ephesians 2:8
40. **Temptation:** 1 Corinthians 10:12-13
41. **Peace:** Philippians 4:6-7
42. **Joy:** Galatians 5:22
43. **Hope:** Ephesians 4:4
44. **Impossible is possible:** Numbers 11:23; Jeremiah 32:17, 27; Matthew 19:26; Philippians 4:13
45. **Life in faith:** 1 Peter 3:15-16

Paul's closing benediction asked the God of hope to bring peace and joy as Rome's believers trusted Him and pursued unity. His prayer confidently overflowed with hope for God's people—prevailing hope received through the Holy Spirit's power.

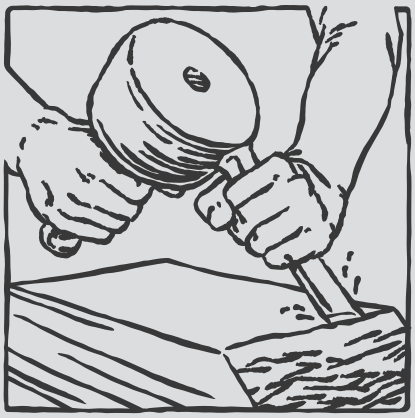
Apply It

Paul did not merely suggest unity but commanded believers to accept one another as Christ had accepted them. Jesus welcomed all who came to Him—no matter their position, accomplishments, or lack thereof. He spoke with the powerful and interacted with the peasants. Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners and repeatedly presented truth to religious leaders. He grieved deeply over Jerusalem. What determines your attitudes and actions toward other people? How willingly do you bear with those with less biblical knowledge or exposure to God's truth? **Believers who follow Jesus's example and grow in faith learn to please others rather than themselves.** God makes us more like His Son as we trust in His Word and walk in His Spirit. Believers cannot overcome the domination of self-interest on their own. Only through God's power can a believer dethrone self and put others first. How might God's Word and the Holy Spirit transform your thinking regarding your interactions with others? Is there a difficult situation or sharp opinion that divides you from another believer? Do you focus more on what you share with someone in Christ or on your differences? If so, how might you follow Jesus's example and seek unity?

God desires that His people in every generation will develop endurance and hope found only in Him. In what situation might you feel hopeless or that you can persevere no longer? **God graciously provides endurance and encouragement for His people.** He hears the anguished cries of believers' prayers and speaks through His steadfast and true Word, giving needed strength. His Spirit equips and enables believers in times of weakness. He blesses us with fellow believers. Believers need one another—not only those with whom they agree on everything but also those whose differences point them to Jesus. What circumstance has God allowed in your life that causes you to depend on Him, His Word, and His people? Hold fast to the truth that God is for you and no earthly power can separate you from Him.

How can hope exist in today's divided world? To whom or what do you look for hope? Where can true hope be found? In a world with a cacophony of loud voices and opinions, God calls us to seek Him. Paul called upon the God of hope to "fill you with joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." **Hope in Christ provides encouragement to endure and persevere when life feels hopeless.** Through Christ, believers stand firm in even the most challenging times. Believers who trust God's promises have true hope—not mere optimism or wishful thinking. Hope in God is never a risk because of who He is. True hope brings confident joy and supernatural peace into a believer's life. Lift your eyes to God and take the long-term view. Our hope is not in this world. Our hope is in Christ.

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Paul's Ministry and Plans

Lesson 27 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 26 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What specific guidance did the notes offer regarding unity among believers in light of the example of God's Son, Jesus Christ?

2. How did the lecture encourage or challenge you in a practical way this week?

Second Day: Read Romans 15:14-16.

Paul commended the Roman believers.

3. a. For what three things did Paul commend his readers?

   b. How do Paul's commendations reflect his teaching and practical instructions in this letter?

   c. In what ways has the teaching in the book of Romans brought similar fruit in your relationships with other believers and commitment to reach others with the gospel?

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4. a. How did Paul describe his ministry, and what were the results?

   b. To what specific and unique purpose is God calling you in this season? (See also Ephesians 2:8-10.)

Third Day: Read Romans 15:17-22.

Paul explained his God-given ministry.

5. In what did Paul glory (exult or rejoice in)? How is this different from what the world around you values?

6. a. What do these verses reveal about Paul's focus in ministry? (See also Acts 9:15-18.)

   b. How can you determine where God has called you to serve Him and others?

7. How would you express the truths of the gospel to someone you know?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 15:23-29.

Paul desired to visit Rome.

8. a. Why might Paul have wanted to go to Spain? (Review verses 20-22 for possible reasons.)

   b. What were Paul's goals as he considered visiting the Christians in Rome? (See also Romans 15:32.)

9. a. What trip did Paul intend to make before going to Rome or Spain?

b. Why was this trip important?

10. Paul made plans but also experienced God redirecting him. He did reach Rome, but as a prisoner. What helps you trust God when your plans seem disrupted, redirected, or seemingly dashed?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 15:30-33.

Paul urged the Roman believers to pray for his ministry.

11. a. From verse 30, what motivation did Paul include in his invitation for the Romans to pray for him?

b. What do Paul's words reveal about the high calling of prayer?

12. a. What specific prayer requests did Paul present? How do those requests represent his ministry goals?

b. In what specific way might you pray for your pastor and other Christian leaders?

13. Think about Paul's blessing in verse 33. What truth or encouragement speaks to you?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 15:14-33.

God invites His people to join in His gospel work.

14. How does Paul's heart for ministry challenge you to serve God where He has placed you? If you want greater passion to share the gospel, ask God to deepen your desire to tell others about Jesus.

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 15:14-33

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 27 Notes

Romans 15:14-33

Focus Verse

"Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God." (Romans 15:17)

Outline

- Paul's Passion – Romans 15:14-22
- Paul's Plans – Romans 15:23-33

Engage

How do God's plans mesh with yours? Can you know if where or how you live pleases God? The world offers a vast menu of options. We find ourselves in neighborhoods, workplaces, and daily conversations that can appear random or inconsequential. God's people, however, recognize God's intentional, sovereign design that orchestrates their lives. When our focus rises beyond our own pleasure to pursue God's higher purpose, we find true significance and hope. God intends more for us than surviving the daily grind. **God lovingly positions His people in unique places of influence.** He gives His people ample opportunities to serve Him and others in divinely crafted ways.

God called Paul to work for His cause. Paul traveled the known world, keenly aware of God's intention for his ministry. God compelled Paul to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles and in unreached places. Paul sought God's wisdom to guide his steps and prioritize people. God intends every believer, like Paul, to recognize that His blessings are to be shared, not squandered. **God invites His people to join in His gospel work.** Nothing matters more than living with a heart for God and others, investing in eternity during our brief time on earth.

Paul's Passion – Romans 15:14-22

The book of Romans presents Paul's doctrinal treatise wrapped up in a letter. His personal letter began in the first 17 verses of chapter 1. After explaining rich doctrine and declaring how believers should apply that truth in their lives, Paul resumed in chapter 15 the personal letter format for the remainder of the book. He clearly cared about more than delivering information. **Paul's concluding words reveal his love for the people God sent him to serve and his passion for the gospel.**

The People – 15:14-16

Grateful Commendation (15:14) – Paul was convinced that the believers in Rome were faithfully following Christ. In Romans 1:8, Paul noted their faith was reported all over the world. The depth and strength of the teaching in his letter recognized them as people who took their faith seriously,

not as people lacking maturity. **Paul expressed confidence in his brothers and sisters in Rome by pointing to three specific ways the gospel had borne fruit in their lives.**

- **Paul recognized that the believers in Rome were "full of goodness."** They reflected God's nature in the way they lived.
- **Paul commended that they were "filled with knowledge."** Paul's letter instructed the church in Rome and continues to teach us today regarding the deep teachings of the gospel. He taught them and us many important things.
- **Paul confirmed their competence "to instruct one another."** Believers never outgrow the need for others to speak truth into their lives.

Bold Reminders (15:15) – Paul recognized the boldness of his letter—he developed his doctrinal arguments fully and forcefully. He intended to remind his readers of important points that upheld the grace of God given to him. God calls His people beyond mere rote understanding of spiritual truths. As they incorporate sound doctrine into their minds, those truths impact how they think and live. God's truth enters the mind to penetrate the heart. However, we are prone to forget what we already know. Ongoing exposure to infinite truth deepens understanding. **Constant and deliberate reminders of sound doctrine contribute to spiritual growth.**

Distinct Duty (15:16) – **Paul clearly understood God's call on his life; he knew God sent him as "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles."** Throughout his letter, Paul widened the understanding of Jewish believers to embrace God's inclusion of Gentiles in the gospel's outpouring. He knew God had prepared and sent him specifically to take the good news of Christ to people outside the Jewish faith.

Paul further referred to his "priestly duty" to proclaim the gospel so Gentiles might become acceptable to God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, priests stood between God and people, offering sacrifices. In Paul's case, his priestly duty on behalf of others points to his gospel teaching. Paul may have had in mind Israel's calling to be a kingdom of priests that would bless the world.[1] As Paul fulfilled his priestly duty, God called individual Gentiles to saving faith and right standing before Him. Paul trusted God to sanctify or set people apart by the Holy Spirit's redeeming power. Paul offered saved Gentiles to God as an offering to Him. If we trust the gospel is the "power of God that brings salvation," we will preach it and rely on God to do the needed work.[2]

The Gospel – 15:17-22

Ministry to the Gentiles (15:17-19) – **Paul recognized that his unique ministry served Christ and gave glory to God.** A witness in a court of law promises to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Likewise, Paul committed to proclaim the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel. Paul's undeterred focus on the gospel in his ministry helps us understand the impact God wrought through this dedicated servant.

1. **Kingdom of priests:** Exodus 19; 1 Peter 2
2. **Gospel's power:** Romans 1:16

The gospel is good news for today and eternity. What is the nature of this good news? God has provided a way for us to be saved from sin through the work of Jesus Christ. Why is that necessary? Sin, a lack of conformity to God's perfectly righteous standards, puts all people in line for God's just judgment. This essential tenet of Christian theology should be proclaimed not only with tact but also with boldness. Paul had done this thoroughly in his letter to the Romans.[3] Only by receiving Christ's willing sacrifice on our behalf can we be declared righteous, or justified, before God.[4] We need to be reminded of these truths for these reasons:

- They confirm and establish our faith.[5]
- They compel us to mirror Christ's heart by reaching out to others.[6]
- They call us to love and live as we were designed to when we were created in God's image.[7]

Paul did not offer his ministry to God in his own strength but rather as a living sacrifice, through the Holy Spirit's power.[8] Paul sought to lead Gentiles to obey God and turn to Christ through all he had said and done. Paul reflected on his years of ministry from a spiritual perspective. He had certainly faced hardship, threats, beatings, dangers, and rejection.[9] Yet through it all, he did not waver from fully proclaiming the good news of Jesus.

> *God has provided a way for us to be saved from sin through the work of Jesus Christ.*

Paul stated facts about his ministry not to boast in his efforts but to recognize God's faithfulness in carrying His purposes forward. God had validated Paul's authority in ministry through miraculous signs. Paul stated he had preached the gospel "from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum." While Paul visited Jerusalem several times, there is no definite record that he evangelized in Illyricum (the Roman province that broadly encompassed the country of former Yugoslavia and modern Albania). Acts does not record Paul's visit, but perhaps he visited there during one of his trips to Macedonia. This description could also emphasize the widespread range of his missionary work.

Ministry in Unreached Places (15:20-22) – Verse 20 states the unique nature of Paul's work—"to preach the gospel where Christ was not known." God called Paul as a pioneer, sending Him to establish sound churches in unreached areas rather than building on someone else's work. **Paul faithfully fulfilled his assigned role within the Great Commission.** He supported his claim by quoting Isaiah 52:15, "Rather, as it is written: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.'" Paul's ministry reflected God's heart for people who do not know Him. Paul had traveled and faithfully preached in all the places where God had directed him. Paul had not yet visited the Christians in Rome but trusted that God's providence had not yet sent him there.

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3. **Sin's universal impact:** Romans 3:10-18
4. **Justified in Christ:** Romans 5:1-2; 8:1-2
5. **Remember key truths:** 1 Peter 1:10-15
6. **Share the gospel:** Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15
7. **Love as God loves:** 1 John 4:11
8. **Living sacrifice:** Romans 12:1-2
9. **Paul's hardships:** 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 4:8-12; 6:3-10; 11:23-29

What God Accomplishes Through His Children

The Doctrine of Works

Paul celebrated all God had accomplished through his ministry. He had witnessed the gospel at work in the lives of real people—by God's Spirit and for His glory. Paul confidently commended the spiritual steadfastness of the believers in Rome and the foundation of faith around the world reflected through his ministry. **Believers do not earn God's favor by their own efforts or works.**[1] Salvation in Christ grants believers His righteousness, which is utterly different from their best, yet flawed, efforts. However, God called Paul and calls all believers to join in His work on earth. God so transforms people's hearts and minds that they delight to serve God and others out of gratitude to Him. In fact, God ordains specific works for believers—those He calls and empowers to work for His cause.[2]

Saving faith, secured through faith alone in Christ alone, never remains dormant. **Someone saved by God's grace desires to reflect God's heart and obey Him.** Mere profession does not prove a person's salvation without corresponding evidence of the Holy Spirit's transforming work.[3] Believers serve God in His power, in gratitude for His grace, and as an act of worship.[4]

Anyone who trusts human efforts to earn God's favor denies or ignores their unrelenting internal struggle with selfish thoughts and motives. Comparing ourselves to someone we deem worse than us may bring a momentary sense of accomplishment, but it measures goodness by a fatally flawed standard.[5] God will not weigh the works we consider as good against our worst moments to see if we are somewhat acceptable. Our best human efforts can never meet God's requirement of righteous perfection. Based only on our performance, we never know if we have done enough to satisfy God.

Only God can generate truly righteous works within us. His Spirit changes believers' desires and empowers their steps of obedience. Only in God's power can people bear lasting fruit that gives God glory. So when like Paul we remember amazing things God has done on our journey with Him, all the glory belongs to God. How amazing that God desires to do eternally significant work through His children when they yield to Him! May we join in the work of heaven while we live on earth.

1. **Not by works:** Romans 11:5-6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8
2. **Believers' works:** Ephesians 2:8-10
3. **Saving faith and God-honoring works:** James 2:14-18
4. **Saved and enabled:** Romans 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4-8; 2 Peter 1:5-11
5. **False comparisons:** Romans 2:1-3; 3:23

Paul's Plans – Romans 15:23-33

Paul spelled out his missionary plans and desires for the future. His concern for the spiritual well-being of the church in Rome resonated deeply within him. However, he had not yet met these believers face-to-face and desired to do so.

Surrendered to the Lord – 15:23-29

Paul's Desire: Rome and Spain (15:23-24) – Feeling like his work in other remote places was complete, Paul expressed his long-term yearning to visit Rome. He planned to do so on the way to Spain—another place he had determined to preach the gospel. **Paul desired to spend a profitable time with the Roman church but did not plan to settle there permanently.** Perhaps he anticipated Rome as a stopping-off place or home base for an anticipated fourth missionary journey. Paul trusted that when one assignment from God ended, he would move on to new places with the same gospel message. He sought to take the gospel westward to Spain.

Did Paul ever get to Spain? The answer to this question depends on whether Paul experienced one or two Roman imprisonments. If only one, he was martyred in Rome without being set free. If two, Paul might have gone to Spain and returned to Rome and then been arrested and martyred in Rome. **No historical evidence conclusively confirms that Paul made it to Spain.** Paul's steadfast commitment to the gospel eventually cost him his earthly life but reaped eternal fruit for God's kingdom.

Paul did indeed make it to Rome but not likely in the way he anticipated. Who would have thought that God would bring Paul to Rome through his arrest in Jerusalem, a two-year imprisonment at Caesarea, and an appeal to Caesar?[10] God often accomplishes His will in ways that appear strange to us. Paul came to Rome as a prisoner and departed earth's borders for heaven while there. However, God maximized His work through Paul, even during his imprisonment. While in Rome, Paul most likely penned the epistles Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, which continue to bless Christ's Church to this day. Though Paul was humanly bound by his enemies, the gospel continued to echo throughout his earthly ministry.

Paul's Destination: Jerusalem (15:25-29) – As much as Paul wanted to get to Rome, he followed the Spirit's leading to return to Jerusalem. God directs and redirects the paths of His servants. **Paul determined to take a financial gift from the believers in Macedonia and Achaia to the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem.** He recognized that this gift from the Gentiles reflected their indebtedness to the Jewish believers in gratitude for the many spiritual blessings they had received. Fostering unity between Jews and Gentiles, Paul recognized how much God's people need one another.

Paul always preferred to work with co-laborers.[11] Perhaps Paul desired to recruit members of the church in Rome to support his ministry. **Whatever his intentions, Paul knew he would come to Rome with the full measure of blessing in Christ.**

Dependent on Prayer – 15:30-33

Paul's Plea (15:30) – Paul often asked for prayer.[12] His request for the believers in Rome to join him in prayer incorporates a strong sense of urgency. His needs were great, his vision was large, and his enemies were many. Paul understood that God's work must be done in God's power, which he did not take for granted. **He asked believers, whom he called his brothers and sisters, to join in his struggle by praying for him, motivated by the Lord Jesus Christ and love of the Spirit.**

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10. **Paul to Rome:** Acts 21–26; 28
11. **Paul's co-laborers:** Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 1:3-5
12. **Paul and prayer:** 2 Corinthians 1:10-11; Ephesians 6:19-20; Philippians 1:19; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

For the word translated as "struggle," Paul used *sunagonizomai* in Greek, which conveys an intensified form of the word often rendered in English as "agony." He invited these believers into an intense battle of exhausting combat, fought in prayer. **Prayer for God's work to prevail in a hostile world involves more than casual words.** Paul asked these believers to join in his passionate fight for the gospel through their prayers.

Paul's Requests (15:31-32) – Paul offered specific prayer requests. When we pray specifically, we can notice and give God glory for His specific answers. **Paul asked the believers in Rome to pray that he be kept safe from unbelievers in Judea.** Paul knew that Jews who rejected Jesus intensely hated him and considered him a heretic who undermined Judaism. God answered this prayer. When Paul went to the Jerusalem temple, a riot erupted, and his enemies tried to kill him.[13] Paul was rescued by soldiers in Jerusalem and ushered into incarceration that took him to Rome. God's answers to our prayers often defy our expectations.

Paul also asked the believers in Rome to pray that the Jerusalem church would favorably receive the financial gift he was bringing. God answered this prayer as well. When Paul presented the gift, the church leaders thanked him and praised God for his ministry. They reminded Paul that God was at work, bringing many Jews to salvation and blessing Jewish Christians.[14] Surely this offering and its positive reception helped bridge the gap between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Paul again added that he desired to come to Rome with joy and by God's will. **He sought prayer that their time together would bring refreshment to all.** Paul's zeal reflects the beauty of true Christian fellowship and the unity and peace it brings to believers. Paul knew that both he and the believers in Rome would be blessed as they stood for and with one another.

God hears and answers the prayers of His people. Through prayer, we take hold of God's willingness to bless us spiritually.

- **Paul's fervent requests for prayer and the way God answered demonstrate that prayer is *effective.*** Prayer is not an arbitrary exercise but a practice that invokes the power of Almighty God on behalf of His people.
- **Prayer is *necessary* as the channel God has established to accomplish spiritual work.** God's sovereign purposes include prayer. God appoints the result and the means to attain that result. Paul knew he needed God's power to accomplish God's work.
- **Prayer can also be *difficult* work.** Prayer takes believers to a spiritual battleground and a struggle with Satan for the souls of others. Paul recognized the need for other believers to struggle with him in prayer.

Paul's Blessing (15:33) – Paul ended all his letters with a benediction or blessing, but in Romans he gave at least three. Chapter 11 ends with a doxology that can be considered a benediction. Chapters 15–16 contain a series of benedictions as Paul approached the end of his letter.[15] **Paul made every word count as he simply said, "The God of peace be with you all. Amen."** God, the only true source of peace, remains present with His children. Paul's life brought anything but tranquility and ease. However, Paul found peace in God's character and prayed for the believers in Rome to experience God's nearness.

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13. Paul in Jerusalem: Acts 21:27–22:22
14. Jewish Christians: Acts 21:17-20; 2 Corinthians 8–9
15. Benedictions: Romans 15:13, 33; 16:20, 25-27

Paul's ministry reflected sensitivity to God's leading. He knew God had called him to take the gospel to the Gentiles and unreached people. His passionate labor and heartfelt investment in the church in Rome offer an example for Christians today. **God invites His people to join in His gospel work.** Nothing this world offers compares to God's gift of salvation in Christ.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Through the book of Romans, Paul unfolded God's plan of salvation in Christ. **After teaching deep doctrinal truths and layering practical application, Paul returned to a specific message for the church in Rome.** Commending the gospel's fruit in the lives of these believers, Paul again expressed his desire to visit them in person. He recounted the fruit borne by his call from God to take the gospel to the Gentiles and unreached lands.

Paul made plans for his ministry yet yielded when God changed the direction and timing of his work. Paul felt led to deliver a financial gift to struggling believers in Jerusalem but still hoped to stop at Rome on his way to Spain. **We know that God's plans for Paul unfolded differently than he imagined, but Paul's vision and commitment to God's call bore great fruit.** Paul asked the Roman church to join in his struggle through the hard work of prayer. He asked them to pray for his safety and a positive response to the gift he planned to deliver to Jerusalem. Paul spoke blessing to these people he had never met but carried deeply in his heart.

> *Like the believers in Rome, we need a constant infusion of God's truth and reminders that keep our minds set on what God has declared.*

Apply It

Paul wrote a long letter to the church in Rome filled with key teachings about faith in Christ. However, the depth and intensity of his letter did not mean Paul thought that the Christians in Rome were spiritually immature or did not know these things. Instead, Paul sought to remind them of what is true. Believers grow as they increasingly grasp the things of God. To do so, we must study God's Word intently and regularly. Knowing a lot about the Bible is not enough. **Because our knowledge of truth grows faster than our conformity to that truth, we require the Spirit's continual help to hear and yield ourselves to what the Bible teaches.** Like the believers in Rome, we need a constant infusion of God's truth and reminders that keep our minds set on what God has declared. How do you approach your lesson each week? When you read something you already know, do you trust God to drive that truth more firmly into your mind and heart? How will you ask God to work in your life so that you are "full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another"? The gospel saves sinners and teaches saints. The foundational truths of the Christian faith bear repeating and pondering.

Paul clearly understood his ministry for the cause of Christ. He fervently pursued God's call and sought His direction over each step. What has God uniquely positioned, gifted, and suited you to do for Him? God intends far more for every believer than merely living a happy life. In His sovereignty, God selects the workers and assigns the work to accomplish His eternal plan. The transforming work that the Holy Spirit births within believers is not only meant for their personal benefit. God intends believers to invest in others. He gives His servants specific burdens and calls them to invest their time on earth in work that matters for eternity. We cannot rightly evaluate the impact of work that may seem small or insignificant to us. How willing are you to step up when God calls you out of your comfort zone? **When we surrender ourselves to God and allow Him to direct and redirect our steps, He leads us where He wants us to go.** Serving God and sharing the gospel is not easy, but no other pursuit matters more. Are you willing to go where God is leading you?

Paul's natural intellect and gifts are obvious. Before his conversion, Paul wholeheartedly committed himself to crushing Christianity and approving the murder of Christians. Yet God transformed this well-educated and zealous man into a missionary who risked everything for the gospel. Paul's effectiveness, however, did not depend on his natural gifts. Paul worked in utter dependence upon God's power, presence, and protection as he journeyed over the known world with the gospel of Christ. Paul invited the Christians in Rome to be co-laborers who supported him on the battleground of prayer. Do you think your work for God rests on your shoulders alone? How heavily do you rely on your own thoughts and natural abilities in life? Think about your pastor or missionaries who serve God around the world. How willing are you to struggle in prayer on their behalf? God's work can only be accomplished in His power. How might God move among His people if all believers humbled themselves before Him in fervent prayer? What if we went to battle more in prayer than on social media? Believers stand united in Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. **When God's people deeply absorb His Word, passionately pray, humbly surrender, and stand together, God will do more than we can ask or imagine.** What are you asking God to do?

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The Gospel's Impact in Rome and Corinth

Lesson 28 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 27 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help clarify the role of works in a Christian's life?

2. How did the notes encourage you to join God in His gospel work?

Second Day: Read Romans 16:1-16.

Paul greeted beloved believers in Rome.

3. What repeated phrases did Paul use to describe the people he greeted? Why is this significant?

4. What principles for Christian ministry does Paul's list of greetings reveal?

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5. a. According to these verses, what were some ways people loved and supported Paul?

   b. How has God supported or provided for you through others? How have you expressed gratitude?

Third Day: Read Romans 16:17-20.

Paul offered a warning to the believers in Rome.

6. a. What warning did Paul offer?

   b. According to this passage, how can believers recognize divisive and deceptive people?

   c. How did Paul advise believers to respond to divisive and deceptive people?

7. Give examples of what it could look like to be "wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil." (See also Matthew 10:16; Romans 12:21; and other Scriptures you know.)

8. What assurances does Paul offer in verse 20? How do his assurances apply to a situation in your life?

Fourth Day: Read Romans 16:21-23.

Believers in Corinth greeted the believers in Rome.

9. Who were the people with Paul, and what do you learn about them in these verses?

10. What does this list teach you about the value of relationships in life and Christian ministry?

11. How might God be prompting you to support your church with your gifts, resources, or position of influence?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 16:24-27.

Paul gave glory to God forever through Jesus Christ.

12. In your own words, summarize the gospel message Paul proclaimed about Jesus Christ in the book of Romans.

13. What is the mystery Paul referred to in verse 25? (See also Ephesians 3:2-6; Colossians 1:27.)

14. Give glory to God by writing down what you learned about His character and plans through this study.

Sixth Day: Review Romans 16.

Godly relationships reflect the transformative power of the gospel.

15. How have the truths of the gospel in Romans impacted your relationships with others and with the Lord?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 16

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 28 Notes

Romans 16

Focus Verse

"To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen." (Romans 16:27)

Outline

- God's Loving People – Romans 16:1-16
- God's Wise Plan – Romans 16:17-27

Engage

When you look at Christians around you, what do you see? Perhaps you see groups divided by denomination, ethnicity, or social agendas. If you look more closely, can you also glimpse Christ's sacrificial love for the world expressed in a smile, a kind word, and the gospel? Every believer receives new life in Christ. However, daily tasks, pressing burdens, and unexpected difficulties might obscure that new life from our view. We can lose sight of God's wisdom and Christ's beauty progressively growing in others. Insecurity often tempts people, Christian and non-Christian, to look for flaws, failings, and weaknesses in the people around them. **What if everyone could see believers as God sees them—in Christ?**

Paul saw his fellow believers as new creations in Christ. He greeted them with love and gratitude for their gospel partnership. He highlighted the gifts God had given them and the work God had done in and through their lives. He exalted God as the wise and glorious source of the miraculously transformative gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul saw himself as united in Christ with all believers, no matter their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. People matter. **Godly relationships reflect the transformative power of the gospel.**

Paul opened his letter by telling believers in Rome how he constantly prayed for them.[1] Though he had never visited Rome, Paul knew there were no strangers in Christ nor boundaries to separate His people. Before meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul persecuted Christ's Church. But immediately after Paul's conversion, Jesus sent Ananias to greet, pray for, and help Paul as a brother in Christ.[2] As Paul closed his letter, he extended that same warmth to the believers in Rome. **God inspired Romans 16, making it as important as Paul's doctrinal and devotional passages.[3]**

God's Loving People – Romans 16:1-16

Paul expressed deep love for fellow believers and offered appreciation for their roles in advancing the gospel. We can learn much from Paul's godly relationships in Corinth and Rome.

1. **Paul's prayers:** Romans 1:8-10
2. **Paul's conversion:** Acts 9:1-19
3. **God's inspired Word:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

A Messenger from Corinth – 16:1-2

Paul began his personal greetings by giving Phoebe, "our sister," his commendation. He urged the believers in Rome to receive, honor, and help her as an accepted servant of Christ.[4] Although her name is associated with the Greek goddess Artemis, Phoebe had become a Christian. Paul's description seems to indicate that she served the church at Cenchreae, a port of Corinth, as a deacon. She may have been a wealthy widow or businesswoman, like Lydia.[5] Paul trusted Phoebe to deliver his letter to the believers in Rome. Phoebe carried a wonderful treasure—the inspired Word of God! **In safeguarding Paul's letter, Phoebe continues to serve the Church today.**

The Church in Rome – 16:3-16

In verses 3-16, Paul sent his warm greetings to beloved members of Christ's Church.

Priscilla and Aquila (16:3-5a) – From Acts 18, we learn that Aquila was a Jewish tentmaker from the Black Sea province of Pontus. He and his wife, Priscilla (Prisca), lived in Rome until Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from the capital. The couple resettled in Corinth, where they met Paul, a fellow tentmaker. When Paul left Corinth for Syria, he took them with him. We next encounter **Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, where they hosted a house church.[6]** God used this faithful couple to explain the gospel to another influential evangelist, Apollos. Priscilla and Aquila seem to have worked as a team, thus paired together with Priscilla noted first.

When Paul wrote this letter, Priscilla and Aquila had returned to Rome. Paul called them "co-workers in Christ Jesus" who had "risked their lives" for him. Possibly they protected Paul when idol makers in Ephesus rioted.[7] **Paul said that "all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them."** It seems that Priscilla and Aquila welcomed diverse believers to worship in their home in Rome. Paul also greeted these believers.

***Epenetus (16:5b*) – Paul called Epenetus his "dear friend" and "the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia."** The Roman province of Asia is modern-day western Turkey. Perhaps Epenetus came to faith through Paul's evangelism there. His faith endeared him to Paul's heart.

Mary (16:6) – Because Mary was a common name, this Mary is likely unique from the other New Testament women with the same name. Aquila and Priscilla may have told Paul how hard Mary had worked for the church in Rome. Perhaps she labored in starting or growing the church. **Paul honored her for using her gifts to help others.[8]** God recognizes and rewards those who help His people.

Andronicus and Junia (16:7) – Paul greeted Andronicus and Junia, Jewish believers who many scholars believe were husband and wife. They had endured prison for their faith in Christ. **"Outstanding among the apostles" probably means that the apostles thought highly of them.** If Paul meant that Andronicus and Junia were themselves apostles, he might have been speaking of them generally as messengers for Jesus Christ.[9] Paul highlighted that they believed in Christ during the Church's early days, even before he did.[10]

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4. **Accept Christ's servant:** Romans 14:4
5. **Lydia:** Acts 16:12-15
6. **Home church:** 1 Corinthians 16:19
7. **Riot in Ephesus:** Acts 19:23-41
8. **Gift of helping:** 1 Corinthians 12:28
9. **Apostles beyond the Twelve:** Acts 14:14
10. **Before Paul's conversion:** Acts 8:1; 9:1-30

Ampliatus (16:8) – Paul esteemed Ampliatus as a "dear friend in the Lord." In the cemetery of Domitilla, an early Christian catacomb, a tomb honors a person named "Ampliatus." The single name suggests this man was likely enslaved, but the tomb's elaborate style points to significant status in the Church. We cannot be certain this was the same Ampliatus, but it illustrates a powerful reality: Unlike any institution before or since, in Christ's Church Jews and Gentiles, the oppressed and the privileged, and male and female live, worship, and die together as family. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul declared, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[11] **The Church's gospel mission to proclaim humanity's dignity as God's image-bearers remains an unfinished task in this world where violence, prejudice, marginalization, and human exploitation persist.**

Urbanus, Stachys, and Apelles (16:9-10a) – Paul called Urbanus his "co-worker in Christ" and Stachys his "dear friend." Urbanus means "city-dweller," and Stachys means "ear of corn," which may point to a rural background. **Their names tell us they had different experiences, but Paul's greeting demonstrated love, honor, and loyalty among the church's diverse members.**

Apelles means "called." Paul honored him because his "fidelity to Christ has stood the test." Apelles had been called, tested, and proven faithful in Christ. **His life bears witness of Christ's power to make His servants, the members of His body, able to stand.**[12] Jesus never abandons His bride, the Church, when tests and trials come.

The Households of Aristobulus and Narcissus (16:10b-11) **– Paul did not greet Aristobulus or Narcissus personally but instead greeted their households.** Roman households included enslaved people as well as family. Herod the Great's grandson, Aristobulus, had lived in Rome. When Aristobulus died, the emperor would have inherited his slaves, who would have continued to be known as "the household of Aristobulus." Paul may have been greeting these servants associated with Aristobulus. Paul's mention of Herodian, a Jew and a name connected to Herod, adds strength to this theory.

History mentions a wealthy freedman named Narcissus who exerted great influence over Emperor Claudius. However, when Nero became emperor, he executed Narcissus. The household of Narcissus may have been this man's family and servants. **Whether they were rich or poor, Paul had the members of these households in his heart.**

Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (16:12) – The names Tryphena and Tryphosa come from the same word, which means "to live delicately or daintily." The women were probably sisters. Paul praised "Delicate" and "Dainty" for their ongoing, hard work in the Lord. Paul added that his "dear friend" Persis, a name that has Persian origin, "has worked very hard in the Lord." **Paul highly valued and honored the work of women in the Church.**

Rufus and His Mother (16:13) – Mark's gospel, likely written especially for the Gentile believers in Rome, mentions Rufus and his brother Alexander as sons of Simon from Cyrene—the man who carried Jesus's cross.[13] It seems quite possible the Rufus whom Paul greeted was the son of the man forced to carry Christ's cross. Simon would have told his wife and sons about Jesus and all that he witnessed during that Passover in Jerusalem. Could Simon have been one of the Jews from Cyrene who first preached the gospel to the Gentiles?[14] Whatever the case, Paul dearly loved Rufus and his mother. **Paul said Rufus was "chosen in the Lord," and his mother "has been a mother to me."**

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11. **One in Christ Jesus:** Galatians 3:28
12. **Christ's servants stand:** Romans 14:4
13. **Rufus and Simon:** Mark 15:21
14. **Jews preach the gospel:** Acts 11:20

Christ's Beloved Bride

The Doctrine of the Church

Like Phoebe and Paul's other dear friends, every person in Christ's body, the Church, honors Jesus and advances God's redemptive plan through eternally significant tasks.[1] But believers, who together make up the Church invisible, are not only servants. The Church is also the beloved bride of Christ, for whom He died.[2] The Church was the joy God set before Christ at the cross.[3] **The Church will one day be united with Christ for eternity at the wedding supper of the Lamb.[4]** The good news of salvation by grace through faith transforms God's enemies into Christ's beloved.

Paul's overwhelming expression of love for fellow believers reflected Christ's own love for His Church. Paul saw and accepted each believer as a treasured new creation in Christ.[5] He expressed gratitude for the unique contributions of the diverse believers in Rome and Corinth. All of God's redeemed people comprise the Church. No believer is more valuable than any other because all belong to Christ.[6] Rather than seek special treatment or position, Paul applied his own teaching. He loved sincerely and honored other believers above himself.[7]

When we don't view believers as Christ's beloved bride and united members of His body, we may compete with others for position and influence within our churches. Lack of love for others may lead us to dishonor, disregard, or divide those for whom Christ died. **When we cannot view Christians as Jesus does, we miss the blessing of God's transformational work in and through their lives.** We miss the wonder of believers working side by side in service to God and others.

The truth about the Church invites believers to rejoice in their unity with Christ and one another as His beloved bride. Christ's loving work through His Church welcomes unbelievers to become a part of His body through faith. Believers who love Christ will love, help, and honor those He loves. They will seek, foster, and celebrate Christ's life in the people His blood has redeemed. And, like Paul, they will protect Christ's bride, every member of the Church, from deception, harm, and division—all for God's glory. How can you openly express love for Christ's bride?

1. **Valuable tasks:** Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 2:10
2. **Christ loved the Church:** Ephesians 5:25
3. **Joy set before Christ:** Hebrews 12:2
4. **Lamb's wedding supper:** Revelation 19:6-9
5. **Accepted in Christ:** Romans 14:3; 15:7; 2 Corinthians 5:17
6. **Equal value:** Galatians 3:26-29
7. **Paul's teaching:** Romans 12:9-10

***Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, and Hermas (16:14)* – We know nothing about these dear believers except that Paul warmly greeted them.** Perhaps they lived or worked together in a common trade or household. Were they enslaved, free, rich, or poor? Paul mentioned "other brothers and sisters with them," so this group may have been a house church. God knew the details of their lives and loved them. They were people for whom Christ died.

Philologus, Julia, Nereus, Olympas, and the Lord's People with Them (16:15) – Perhaps this group comprised another house church. History records that a Christian named Nereus was the chief officer in the household of the Romans aristocrats, Flavius Clemens and his wife, Domitilla. Through Nereus, the gospel of God's grace entered this prominent household. In AD 95, Domitilla's uncle, Emperor Domitian, executed Flavius and exiled Domitilla because of their faith in Christ. **Church tradition records Nereus as one of the countless faithful believers who died under Domitian's bloodthirsty rule.**

A Holy Kiss (16:16) – "Greet one another with a holy kiss." **More than simply greeting others politely, according to cultural custom, Paul exhorted believers to overflow with love for others from the fullness of their love for Christ.** Because Christ loved them first,[15] they could love Him and other believers.[16] One Spirit unites believers,[17] making them one body. Believers who belong to Jesus belong to one another.[18]

God's Wise Plan – Romans 16:17-27

After his greetings, Paul offered a strong warning that expressed his love for the Church and his confidence in God's mighty power. Paul wanted nothing to harm the people he cherished—the Church for whom Jesus died. True love naturally seeks the spiritual safety of others, who flourish by God's grace.

Unified Believers – 16:17-19

Paul urgently warned about people who "cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned." Unfortunately, when Paul finally reached Rome, he encountered false teaching and division. From prison, he wrote to the Philippians about the problems in Rome.[19] Some teachers displayed good will and supported Paul because he was imprisoned for the gospel. But others preached about Christ out of envy and rivalry. Their selfish ambition led them to stir up trouble for Paul while he was in prison. These people were "not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites."

Paul did not tell believers to harm or debate false teachers. He simply warns believers then and now to "watch out for" them and "keep away from them." When Paul said, "Be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil," he echoed what Jesus told His disciples.[20] **To avoid division and deception, believers can dwell on Jesus Christ, God's promises, and the gospel's unifying hope.[21]** Believers overcome evil with good.[22]

Victory and Blessing – 16:20

Victory Promised (16:20a) – Satan, "the father of lies," incites those who try to divide and deceive God's people.[23] In the beginning, when Adam and Eve believed Satan's lies and disobeyed God, sin

15. **Christ loved first:** 1 John 4:19
16. **Love others:** 1 John 3:10-18; 4:7-12
17. **One Spirit:** Ephesians 4:3-6
18. **Belonging:** Romans 12:5
19. **Paul's report on Rome:** Philippians 1:15-17
20. **Jesus warned His disciples:** Matthew 10:16
21. **Dwell on Christ:** Romans 15:5-6; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:16
22. **Overcome evil:** Romans 12:21
23. **Father of lies:** John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

corrupted them and their descendants. Before Adam and Eve felt sin's full consequences, God promised to send the Redeemer to defeat Satan. God promised that the Lord Jesus Christ, the woman's offspring, would crush Satan's head.[24] Jesus kept this promise at the cross. **As believers place their faith in Jesus and live for Him, God crushes Satan under their feet.** Satan remains the fierce enemy of God and His people, but Jesus is the ultimate victor.

Blessing Proclaimed (16:20b) – Paul normally ended his letters with a benediction, pronouncing God's blessing on the letter's recipients. In Romans, Paul announced one blessing after another. Two previous benedictions spoke of hope, joy, peace, and trust in God.[25] Paul added to those here: "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you." In Romans, Paul exalted God's gracious gift of righteousness to unrighteous people through Christ. **We will never exhaust the profound blessings of God's limitless grace in Jesus.** God's boundless grace sets Christianity apart from every other religion.

Unified Churches – 16:21-23

Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome while he was in Corinth. **The letter's final greetings reveal that the church in Corinth partnered with Paul and his team to support the church in Rome.** Gaius, a Roman nobleman and Christian, opened his home to Paul. It appears that members of the churches in Corinth and surrounding areas gathered in Gaius's home to hear Paul dictate the letter. The believers with Paul greeted their fellow believers in the distant Roman capital.

Timothy, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater (16:21) – The first of these final greetings were from Paul's ministry team: "Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my fellow Jews." Paul met young Timothy in Lystra during his second missionary journey. Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a godly Jewish mother.[26] Typically, after establishing a Gentile church, Paul moved on to preach the gospel somewhere else. Timothy often stayed behind, entrusted to strengthen the young churches.[27] **Paul trusted Timothy because of his genuine love for Christ's bride, the Church.[28]**

Paul ministered alongside believers from many areas and churches. Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater probably joined Paul in Corinth to help him take a financial gift from Gentile believers to Jerusalem. Although Luke the physician accompanied Paul at times, Lucius is a distinct and unrelated name. Perhaps he was a leader from the church in Antioch or another believer who shared Paul's mission. Jason was the name of Paul's host in Thessalonica.[29] Sosipater was most likely the Berean believer Sopater, a version of the same name.[30] If so, Sopater persevered with Paul through Greece on the way to Jerusalem.

Tertius (16:22) – Paul seems to have dictated many of his letters to a secretary, adding a handwritten greeting at the end.[31] On this occasion, Tertius captured Paul's words. Tertius's name means "three," a common name for a third son. Tertius added a greeting of his own: "I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord." **Tertius united with believers in Rome through their common identity in Christ.**

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24. **Satan's defeat promised:** Genesis 3:15
25. **Benedictions:** Romans 15:13, 33
26. **Timothy and family:** Acts 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15
27. **Strengthen young churches:** 1 Timothy 1:3
28. **Paul trusted Timothy:** Philippians 2:20-22
29. **Lucius and Jason:** Acts 13:1; 17:1-7
30. **Accompanied by Sopater:** Acts 20:4
31. **Handwritten greeting:** 1 Corinthians 16:21; 2 Thessalonians 3:17

Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus (16:23) – Paul traveled with someone named Gaius from Derbe.[32] However, the Gaius of Romans 16 is most likely not the same person. This Gaius appears to be a wealthy host of "the whole church" in Corinth. **Paul baptized Gaius, making him one of the earliest believers in Corinth.[33]** Acts speaks of an early believer and prominent Corinthian named Titius Justus, who welcomed Paul after the synagogue forced the apostle out.[34] Because Roman citizens had three names, Gaius may be Gaius Titius Justus. He seems to have supported Paul and the local church while people around him resolutely rejected the gospel.

Erastus served his community through public office. Archaeologists have uncovered an inscription near a first-century sidewalk in Corinth: "Erastus in return for his *aedileship* laid [this pavement] at his own expense." Officials regularly paid for public projects. Erastus seems to have held multiple positions. In Romans 16, Paul called him "the city's director of public works" or treasurer. An *aedile* could have been a director, but Erastus would not have served as treasurer at the same time. **Through these various offices, Erastus may have broadly influenced Corinth for many years.**

Quartus's name means "fourth." **Quartus may have been a servant or an enslaved person, but he mattered to God and Paul.**

In the early Church, all were brothers and sisters in Christ—each one important. They determined to live together for the glory of God, strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

Life-transforming Gospel – 16:24-27

Paul ended his letter to the Romans with a doxology—worshipful praise to God: "To him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ." Some manuscripts of Romans place this doxology at the end of chapter 14 or even 15 rather than at the end of chapter 16. In those manuscripts, the greetings from verses 21-23 end the chapter and verse 20's benediction is repeated as verse 24. The repeated benediction in verse 24 does not appear in modern translations. The doxology of verses 25-27 fits here, at the conclusion of this powerful letter, prompting every believing heart to worship God.

> *The gospel clearly explains God's timeless plan to rescue sinners from His wrath through a Savior, His Son Jesus Christ.*

No human discovery or insight matches the gospel's transformational power. The gospel's origin and power come from God, declaring what God has done. Paul said the gospel is the message proclaimed about Jesus Christ, "in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God." The gospel clearly explains God's timeless plan to rescue sinners from His wrath through a Savior, His Son Jesus Christ. God makes His plan known so the world "might come to the obedience that comes from faith." Obedience from faith in Christ unites every believer with Christ and one another. **Godly relationships reflect the transformative power of the gospel.** How can we conclude, except as Paul does? "To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."

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32. Gaius from Derbe: Acts 20:4
33. Gaius baptized: 1 Corinthians 1:14
34. Titius Justus: Acts 18:7

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Paul greeted believers in Rome as dear friends, trusted coworkers, and beloved members of Christ's Church. Throughout his letter, Paul explained the new life and righteousness that Jews and Gentiles shared through faith in Christ. In Romans 16, Paul demonstrated what gospel-transformed relationships could look like. **Jesus unites believers in Himself across culture's widest divides—slaves and masters, rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, men and women.** Christ's love and God's righteousness given by grace through faith guarantee the value and beauty of each believer.

What could threaten the unity Jesus makes possible for believers? People cause divisions in the Church through selfish ambition and false teaching. Paul strongly cautioned believers to avoid anyone who divides Christ's body. One day, Jesus will restore all creation, but today He restores relationships—between God and people and between believers. Satan opposes God's restoration plan, which was revealed in Jesus Christ and is proclaimed by Christ's Church. **As God draws people from every nation to believe in and obey Him, He will crush Satan under their feet and receive all glory forever through Jesus Christ!**

Apply It

Do you ever feel unseen, unloved, or misunderstood? Maybe you feel like no one knows your name or appreciates your contributions. God sees you and loves you. God's purpose has always been to live in loving fellowship with people. **All are invited to enjoy relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.** If you have not yet chosen to live in fellowship with God and His people forever through faith in Christ, will you do so today? Ask your Group Leader about the BSF resource called *Finding Hope.*

If you are a believer, how does the quality of your Christian relationships reflect your loving union with Christ? Paul showed us what it looks like to build others up in love and Christlikeness. If you are struggling to love others sincerely, begin by asking God to help you see people as He does. **Every person bears God's image, and every believer is your dearly loved brother or sister in Christ.** While we seek relationships based on common interests or shared life experiences, Paul showed us that faith in Jesus and passion to spread the gospel provide a solid foundation for Christian relationships. Build on that foundation with prayer for others. Ask God to bless fellow believers, work in their circumstances, and meet their needs. Like Paul, do you appreciate those who serve your church well? As you carry their burdens and celebrate their victories, you display Christ's love for His bride.

Through His prophets, God announced His predetermined plan to establish peace, which is now revealed through Jesus's atoning death in our place. At the cross, Jesus triumphed over Satan. When believers choose to obey God and love others, they anticipate Satan's final defeat. God receives glory as believers live for Him, no matter the consequences. God has established Christ's Church by the gospel. How could Christian unity and fellowship strengthen you to withstand Satan's opposition? Where do you, your family, or your church need to embrace good and shun evil? Will you ask God to help you see loving obedience as a way to overcome evil? **The God of peace will crush Satan under the Church's feet as believers live by the truth of God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

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Responding to the World's Most Influential Letter

Lesson 29 Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 28 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture impact your perspective on the Church?

2. What portion of the notes encouraged or challenged you to consider how you show love to believers?

Note: The following questions offer the opportunity to think about all you have learned in Romans. Walk back through the book, recalling what Paul wrote and reflecting on the Holy Spirit's work in your life through this study.

Second Day: Review Romans 1:1–3:20.

Paul greeted believers in Rome and reminded them of humanity's need for God's righteousness.

3. a. From Romans 1:1-17, how did Paul describe himself and the believers in Rome?

   b. From Romans 1:18–3:20, how did Paul describe humanity and sin?

4. What do you learn about God from His responses to sin in these opening chapters?

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5. Which of Paul's descriptions describe you? Why is it difficult but important to accept the truth about your sin?

Third Day: Review Romans 3:21–8:39.

Paul explained how God accomplished salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

6. Review Romans 3:21-31 for the following questions.
    a. How did Paul explain God's role in saving sinners? (See also Romans 6:23; 7:24-25; 8:32; and other relevant verses from Romans 3:21–8:39.)

    b. How did Paul describe Jesus Christ's part in God's salvation plan? (See also Romans 5:11, 18; 6:4-5, 7; 8:1; and other relevant verses from Romans 3:21–8:39.)

    c. How do people access the righteousness God makes available through Jesus Christ? (See also Romans 4:18-22; 5:1; 6:11; and other relevant verses from Romans 3:21–8:39.)

7. From Romans 8, how does the Holy Spirit empower a believer's new life in Christ? (See also Ephesians 1:13-14.)

8. What is your response to God's righteousness displayed in His multifaceted plan to save sinners by faith?

Fourth Day: Review Romans 9:1–11:36.

Paul worshipped God after explaining His sovereign plan to save both Jews and Gentiles.

9. a. From Romans 3:9-20, who deserves to be saved?

    b. From Romans 9:14-16, what motivates God to save people? How does this impact you or prompt you to worship God? (See also Romans 11:33-36.)

10. Review Romans 9:25-29; 10:17-21; 11:7-11, 25-27. In your own words, explain the plan God revealed for saving both Jews and Gentiles.

11. a. Read John 15:26-27 with Romans 10:1, 14-17. How does God awaken hearts to call on the name of the Lord for salvation?

    b. Whom will you tell about Jesus this week?

Fifth Day: Review Romans 12:1–16:27.

Paul concluded his letter by calling believers to love and live holy lives.

12. a. From Romans 12 and 13, what did Paul say should characterize a believer's new life in Christ?

    b. How does God make this type of life possible? (Skim Romans 5 and 8.)

13. a. In Romans 14–16, what instructions did Paul give and what personal example did he offer?

    b. What do you find most challenging or compelling about Paul's instructions or example?

14. How would you like the gospel of God's righteousness to transform your thinking, affections, behavior, and relationships?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 1–16.

The Holy Spirit grows believers in holiness as they reflect on and rightly respond to the gospel.

15. How has reflecting on and responding to the gospel impacted your love for God this week?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.

Lecture Notes

Lesson 29 Notes

Summary

Focus Verse

"I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me." (Romans 15:14-15)

Outline

- What Paul's Letter to the Romans Reveals
- What Paul's Letter to the Romans Requires

Engage

What helps you remember and understand what is most important? We can easily forget or disregard essential facts, priorities, or obligations when information constantly bombards our lives. Reminders such as church bells, checklists, changing seasons, and sunsets and sunrises help keep us mindful of important rhythms and responsibilities. However, people often resent or ignore reminders that feel irrelevant and unnecessary. **An intentional focus on what matters most helps us navigate life well.** What truth is truly worthy of our regular, thoughtful attention?

Paul wrote his letter to believers in Rome to remind them of God's powerful gospel of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. Like us, Roman Christians were not immune to struggles such as external persecution and internal division. Paul's carefully delivered reminders present essential truths that offer help for daily life and hope for eternity. Paul masterfully explained why we need God's righteousness, how God provides it, and its comprehensive impact on believers today and forever. A lifetime of study cannot exhaust the depth and wonder of the gospel's timeless truths. The Holy Spirit continuously works through them to sanctify and fortify believers. **The Holy Spirit grows believers in holiness as they reflect on and rightly respond to the gospel.** An ongoing focus on the gospel yields fresh wonder, worship, and surrender in a believer's life.

What Paul's Letter to the Romans Reveals

About Humanity – 1:1–3:20

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God."[1] **As Paul laid the foundation of his letter, he confronted believers in Rome with a transformative truth: They were sinners called by God to belong to Jesus Christ.**

1. **No one righteous:** Romans 3:10-11

Called to Belong (1:1-17) – By grace, God called, emboldened, and motivated Paul to declare the gospel to Jews and then Gentiles. Through faith in the gospel, the believers in Rome became God's holy people. **Paul hoped they might help him spread the gospel "because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."**[2]

***Condemned by Sin (1:18–3:20)* –** Paul reminded his letter's recipients of their sin and need for Christ's righteousness. God created people in His image to recognize Him in the world He created and respond to His kindness with repentance. Nothing is more important than how we respond to God. When people suppress knowledge of God, sin deceives, ensnares, and destroys them. They worship created things instead of their Creator. **Paul pointed out that even people who try to be good apart from God's saving grace remain blind to their sin and under God's wrath.** All people break God's moral law. In the end, people have absolutely no excuse for sin.

About God – 3:21–11:36

After discussing the truth about humanity's sin, Paul pronounced the totality of God's triumph over sin through Jesus Christ. He wrote, "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile."[3]

***Justified by Faith (3:21–5:11)* – The gospel Paul proclaimed powerfully displays God's power to save sinners.** By offering Jesus to die in their place, God makes His righteousness known and accessible to anyone—Jew and non-Jew—through faith.[4] Gentiles did not have God's law, and the Jews, who had it, could not keep it. As God of both Jew and Gentile, He compassionately made faith the only path for all people to be justified—declared "not guilty"—and released from sin's penalty. God has always justified people through faith in Him and His promises.[5] Today, believers trust in the completed work of Jesus Christ, which fulfills the "Law and the Prophets." Christ's resurrection secures believers' justification and confirms sin's penalty has been fully paid: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."[6]

***Triumphed over Sin's Power (5:12-8:39)* – Through union with Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit, God shatters sin's power to enslave believers.** "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"[7]; Christ's gift of righteousness triumphs over the inherited effects of Adam's sin. By grace through faith, God unites believers with Jesus so they can share in His death to sin and live new resurrection lives in, through, and for Him.[8] Jesus's blood reconciles people to God and redeems them from sin's grip. Believers permanently belong to the Lord: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."[9] Even as believers struggle against sin's ongoing temptation, the Holy Spirit helps them.[10] Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede for believers, giving them strength and hope to eagerly await God's promised eternal glory.[11] If you are a believer, God has justified you and lovingly holds you. You can rest securely in your salvation, your adoption, and God's glorious purposes amidst suffering.

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2. **Powerful gospel:** Romans 1:16
3. **Righteousness given:** Romans 3:21-23
4. **Righteousness by faith:** Romans 3:28
5. **Old Testament faith:** Romans 4
6. **Peace with God:** Romans 5:1
7. **No condemnation:** Romans 8:1
8. **New lives:** Romans 6:4-7, 11-14
9. **Gift of life:** Romans 6:23
10. **Holy Spirit's help:** Romans 7:24–8:17
11. **Jesus intercedes:** Romans 8:26-27, 34

***Sovereign in Salvation (9:1–11:36)* – In mercy and wisdom, God sovereignly reigns over every person's eternal destiny.** God's plan of salvation proves He is righteous and faithful to His promises. Through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Paul illustrated that God calls people to salvation according to His plan and gracious purposes, not because of their high moral standards, nationality, or accomplishments. No one meets God's righteous standard. In mercy, God calls some to belong to Him through faith from every nation on earth.[12]

While God sovereignly chooses His children, He does not create unbelief. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,"[13] but people who fail to call on the Lord in faith remain responsible for rejecting the gospel.[14] God foretold that He would work through Israel's partial hardening and unbelief to reach the Gentiles. Then through Gentile faith, God would provoke Israel to jealousy.[15] Paul proclaimed, "In this way all Israel will be saved."[16] **The mystery of God's sovereignty and human responsibility working together in salvation led Paul to praise God's wisdom, knowledge, unsearchable judgments, and complete control.[17]**

About the Church – 12:1–16:27

Paul boldly reminded believers that God displays His righteousness in and through His people's lives. All who put their faith in Jesus become part of Christ's body, the Church universal, which includes all believers: "In Christ we, though many, form one body and each member belongs to all the others."[18]

***United in Christ (12:1-21)* – Paul reminded the local church in Rome that, as part of Christ's body and united in Him, believers come together as the Church to offer their bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."[19]** As believers surrender to God, He renews their minds and conforms them to the image of Jesus.[20] God's Spirit unifies believers with various personalities and gifts, calling them to humbly serve one another and work together to overcome evil with good.

***Ambassadors for Christ (13:1-14)* –** After telling believers, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world,"[21] Paul reminded them that it matters how they live while awaiting Christ's promised return. Believers share a gospel mission, displaying God's righteousness. The hope of Christ's second coming compels believers to honor earthly authorities that God Himself has positioned. Selfishness has no place among believers, who owe one another and Christ an endless debt of love. **Christian love fulfills God's law, offering a life-giving witness of God's transforming power to a rebellious world.**

***Diverse by Design (14:1–16:27)* –** Paul's message of unity, honor, and love addressed the daily challenges of believers in Rome's diverse Christian community, which was filled with varying traditions and preferences. God accepts all believers in Christ. God brings Himself glory by saving many different people. He empowers believers to trust Him and live in unity and mutual acceptance without judgment. Paul encouraged his audience, "May the God of hope fill you with

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12. **God's mercy:** Romans 9:14-16
13. **Call and be saved:** Romans 10:13
14. **Responsible for rejection:** John 12:48; Hebrews 3:12
15. **God's plan foretold:** Romans 9:25-29; 10:17-21; 11:7-11, 25-27
16. **All Israel saved:** Romans 11:26
17. **Paul's praise:** Romans 11:33-36
18. **Christ's body:** Romans 12:5
19. **Living sacrifices:** Romans 12:1
20. **Conformed to Jesus:** Romans 8:29
21. **Not conformed:** Romans 12:2

all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."[22] **Diversity within Christ's body is essential to the gospel mission, as it extends the reach of God's righteousness beyond what one person, language, or method could accomplish alone.**

What Paul's Letter to the Romans Requires

Submission to God – 1:1–3:20

Paul's words implore all people to recognize sin's destructive impact and submit their lives to God, who sent Jesus to defeat sin. He asked, "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?"[23]

God's Call (1:1-32) – God actively calls people to live for Him, not themselves. Paul responded by unashamedly proclaiming the gospel and seeking to strengthen other believers. In submission to God, Paul patiently waited to visit Rome according to God's time and plan—as a prisoner for Christ.[24] In contrast, Romans 1 also describes people who saw "God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature"—displayed through creation's splendor and suppressed the truth about God.[25] **Through creation and gospel messengers, God continues to call people to seek and obey Him.**

God's Judgment (2:1-29) – As the perfect judge, only God's assessment of our righteousness determines our eternity. God knows every person's heart, mind, actions, and opportunities. Acknowledging our sinful condition and personal need for God's righteousness turns our attention to God rather than the sins of others. God rewards believers who persistently seek Him with eternal life in His presence. Unbelievers, who reject God's kindness and deny their need of His grace, will spend eternity separated from Him. **When people surrender to God as the righteous judge and confess their need for His saving grace, His Holy Spirit purifies their hearts.[26]**

God's Faithfulness (3:1-20) – In Paul's concluding statements about sin, he asserted that all people are condemned for their sins and accountable to God. Because of our fallen nature, we quickly excuse sinful behavior. We might even claim that our sin resulted from God's unfaithfulness to us, or that His judgment is unjust because we cannot help ourselves. However, Paul proved God faithfully offers people His Word and His witnesses, calling us to acknowledge sin and turn from it. **God's perfect law reveals our sin and demands that we abandon our excuses and submit to Him as Lord of all.**

Faith Not Works – 3:21–8:39

Next, Paul reminded believers that "the righteous will live by faith."[27] **From beginning to end, they live in faithful response to God's saving work, union with Christ, and the enlivening Holy Spirit.**

Believe God (3:21–5:11) – Paul offered Abraham as proof of God's compassionate choice to save all people by faith. Abraham "did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power

22. **Joy, peace, hope:** Romans 15:13
23. **Call to repentance:** Romans 2:4
24. **Prisoner for Christ:** Ephesians 3:1; 4:1
25. **God's qualities:** Romans 1:20
26. **Circumcised hearts:** Romans 2:28-29
27. **Live by faith:** Romans 1:17

to do what he had promised."[28] God loves you so much that He made a way to judge your sin and spare you from its consequences. He provided Jesus to take your place and give you access to Christ's righteousness as your own by faith. **Trust what God has done and rejoice in the peace and hope that salvation through Jesus secures.**

Follow Christ (5:12–7:25) – Union with Christ liberates believers from sin's destructive reign in their lives.[29] **God frees believers from guilt, shame, and condemnation to submit to Christ's reign of grace.** He empowers them to live for Him, not sin. Sin's temptations persist while this world remains, but temptations do not determine a believer's destiny. Paul commanded believers to fully embrace their sanctification through new life in Christ: "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."[30] The law shows believers their need for Christ's saving power, even as they have died to the law's power to condemn them.

Live by the Spirit (8:1-39) – Believers grow in holiness through surrender to the Holy Spirit's life-giving leadership rather than through obligation to the law.[31] The Holy Spirit regenerates believers, giving them peaceful minds, confidence in Christ's return, adoption to sonship, assurance of salvation, and hopeful perseverance in trials.[32] Paul asked, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" The answer is no one! "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him us for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"[33] In every hardship and struggle, Paul called believers "more than conquerors through him who loved us."[34] **God calls His people to pursue holiness boldly and rest securely in His purposes, salvation, and never-ending love.**

Humble Service – 9:1–11:36

God's promise to save both Jews and Gentiles by faith moved Paul to action and worship. He exclaimed, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"[35]

Selfless Concern (9:1–10:21) – The believer's secure life in Christ so astounded Paul that he grieved for fellow Jews who were pursing righteousness by works rather than faith. How is a believer to regard unbelievers? With intense concern and prayer.[36] How is a believer to help the lost? Motivated by selfless concern, we can share the good news about salvation through faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ.[37] **Paul's concern for others motivated him to share the gospel unashamedly.[38]**

Humble Worship (11:1-36) – Paul called believing Gentiles to humbly thank God for saving them by faith.[39] In his doxology, Paul offered worship as an alternative to prideful arguments with God[40] or arrogant boasting about self-worth. **Humble worship is the appropriate response to God's glory and unsearchable wisdom.** Though God does not owe people an explanation for how He rules His creation, He lovingly shows us His mercy, compassion, sovereignty, wisdom, and power so we can live in right relationship with Him. God invites humanity to exalt Him above themselves, marveling at the portions of His nature He has graciously revealed.

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28. **Faith in God:** Romans 4:20-21
29. **Sin's mastery:** Romans 5:21; 6:14
30. **Dead to sin:** Romans 6:11
31. **Holy Spirit's help:** Romans 8:4-14, 26-27
32. **Assurance:** Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 1:13-14
33. **God's provision:** Romans 8:31b-32
34. **More than conquerors:** Romans 8:37
35. **God's deep wisdom:** Romans 11:33
36. **Concern and prayer:** Romans 9:1-4; 10:1
37. **Message about Christ:** Romans 10:14-17
38. **Paul's gospel work:** Romans 1:1, 16-17; 11:13-16; 15:17-20
39. **Be humble:** Romans 11:17-21
40. **Arguing with God:** Romans 9:19-21

Made for God

The Doctrine of Humanity: Creation and Purpose

In his doxology, Paul declared about God, "For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."[1] **God made people in His image to bring Him glory and enjoy relationship with Him.**[2] However, sin tarnished God's reflection in humanity and robbed people of right standing with Him. Paul proclaimed that a right relationship with God could be restored only one way: by God's powerful grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the new life of the Spirit. Restored relationship with God opens the door for believers to enjoy God and increasingly reflect Jesus to a broken world.[3]

Because God made all people in His image,[4] He impartially offers saving righteousness, reconciliation, and redemption to all people the same way: by faith. Once alive to God in Christ, believers of every generation and nationality belong to God as beloved children.[5] The Holy Spirit enables believers to have fellowship with God and one another. New life in the Spirit enables believers to glorify God here on earth as they await their final glorification when Christ returns.

When people do not believe that their purpose is to glorify their Creator and enjoy a relationship with Him, they seek their purpose within themselves, exalting themselves as lord of their own lives. They also look for purpose in the world around them through pleasure, pleasing people, and idolized earthly priorities. **Those who refuse to live for God remain enslaved to sin and death.**[6]

But when we accept that we were made for God, His offer of restored relationship through faith in Jesus Christ draws us into His loving embrace. We find rest from trusting self-righteous works and living under sin's dominion. We discover who God made us to be. **The Spirit's presence in us and union with Christ soften us to the Lord's sanctifying work in our lives, and we progressively find more delight in God's glory than our own.** How has the gospel Paul proclaimed called you to embrace and rejoice in your God-given purpose to live for the one who made you, loves you, and died to save you?

1. **Doxology:** Romans 11:36
2. **God's glory:** Isaiah 43:7
3. **Like Him:** 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10
4. **Image-bearers:** Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1
5. **God's children:** Romans 8:14-16; 1 John 3:2
6. **Enslaved to sin:** Romans 6:19-21

Sacrificial Living – 12:1–16:27

In view of God's mercy and love, Paul boldly called believers to allow God's righteousness and love to pervade every area of their lives. He said, "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."[41]

41. **Living sacrifices:** Romans 12:1

Unity and Love (12:1-21) – The powerful gospel Paul preached resulted in believers belonging to Christ and one another. Unified believers bring glory to Jesus and demonstrate God's love to the world. But before unity, Paul commanded surrender to God and right thinking about self. Why? Because believers cannot manufacture unity or sincere love in their own power. However, saved sinners who ponder their reconciliation to God through His grace, mercy, and lavish love grow in gratitude, humility, and love for God and others.[42] **As the Holy Spirit renews believer's minds, they no longer live to please their sinful nature but instead to please God and lovingly serve His people.[43]**

Honor and Love (13:1-14) – Paul described believers' proper behavior: "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh."[44] In the world's political and social spheres, Christian love looks like honor, respect, and loving your neighbor as yourself. Even when they do not trust or agree with governing authorities, Christians can trust God's love and promises of Christ's return. God establishes earthly authority for His good purposes. **As believers clothe themselves with Christ, He shows them how to live out His love, which does not harm a neighbor but instead shines forth His light.**

Acceptance and Love (14:1–16:27) – Paul urged believers to accept and love one another even when they disagree about disputable matters because "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."[45] Every believer comes to faith after being shaped by their family, culture, and experiences. On their own, strong and weak believers alike struggle to experience unity without uniformity. **Paul strengthened all believers by reminding them that God will rightly judge His own servants, who already stand accepted in Christ Jesus.** Every believer can overflow with gratitude at this good news and reject the temptation to judge others.

Paul elevated God's kingdom priorities and the glory of Jesus Christ over every personal liberty, preference, or ambition that causes needless division and discord among believers. **The Holy Spirit grows believers in holiness as they reflect on and rightly respond to the gospel.** By example, Paul called believers from across the Roman Empire to remember the good news they had believed and pray, serve, and love with him so that all nations might believe.[46]

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Whether you came to BSF's study of Romans as an unbeliever, new believer, or mature believer, the gospel's truths remain timelessly life changing. Like the church in Rome, the Church around the world today needs gospel reminders to renew our minds, deepen our love, and call us to new life in Christ. Believers, along with all people, were once condemned by their sin. **Now, through faith in Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, they enjoy justification, redemption, reconciliation, and sanctification.** God's grace reigns over believers' destinies.

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42. Lavish love: Romans 5:5-8
43. Spiritual renewal: Romans 8:5-9
44. Clothed with Christ: Romans 13:14
45. God's kingdom: Romans 14:17
46. All nations: Romans 16:26

God's Spirit enables believers to be transformed into Christlikeness. As believers offer themselves to God, the world's patterns of individualism, selfishness, pride, defensiveness, rebellion, and judgment increasingly give way to unity, generosity, humility, grace, submission, and acceptance. Secured by Christ's saving work on their behalf, believers enjoy a new life of fellowship with their Creator forever. Nothing can separate a believer from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus their Lord.[47] Believers accept one another because they have been accepted and welcomed by God forever.

Apply It

God calls all people to agree with what His Word says about their sin. Paul did not portray sin's grim reality to crush the hearts or discourage the faith of believers in Rome. Instead, recognizing the magnitude of personal sin and humanity's fallen condition positions believers to comprehend the magnitude of God's saving power and grace. No one could accomplish salvation from God's wrath except God. **Will you let the truth of your sinful condition and God's saving power draw you to Him in faith and joy for your salvation?** Will you praise Him for His kindness and grace to sinners and tell everyone about it?

Have you accepted God's gifts of righteousness, reconciliation, justification, and new life through faith in Jesus? If not, God has been calling you throughout this study. Accept God's righteousness through faith in Jesus today. Why did believers in Rome need such bold, detailed reminders of truth they already professed to believe? Why do we? A lifetime of pain and difficulty can dull a believer's grasp of God's triumph over sin and death. Conversely, a lifetime of success and achievement can dampen a believer's sense of total dependence on Christ alone for salvation. **Will you allow the truths of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to deepen your love for God, your desire to live for His glory, and your passion to reach others with the gospel?**

People face a timeless temptation to argue with God about how we think He ought to rule His universe and work in people. What if, instead of arguing with Him, we assume a posture of awe and gratitude for His mercy? **What if, instead of demanding to know God's unsearchable judgments and untraceable paths, we grieve over and pray for the lost, while also eagerly sharing with them the good news about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?** Ask God for humble gratitude to flood your heart and mind today.

Minds renewed by God lead to hearts filled with wonder, worship, and love for God. But a believer's transformation does not stop with a renewed mind and filled heart. The Holy Spirit constantly works in believers to sanctify them and transform their priorities, practices, words, and relationships. Christianity is not a self-help method. The Holy Spirit moves every believer toward holiness—Christlikeness and humble unity with God's people. What attitudes, behaviors, or relationships does God want to transform in your life? Through faith in Christ, believers are raised from spiritual death to eternal life with God. **If God can raise the dead to life, His power can restore and sanctify you.** Will you let Him? What holds you back from offering every part of your life to God? 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."[48] We proclaim with Paul, "To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."[49]

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47. No separation: Romans 8:39b
48. Conformed to Christ: Romans 8:29
49. Benediction: Romans 16:27

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Reflections on This Year's Study

Study Review Questions

First Day: Read the Lesson 29 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. In what way did the lecture encourage or challenge you to apply what you have learned over the last 30 weeks?

2. How did the notes remind you of the impact of the Romans study on your life this year?

Second Day: Magnifying God

3. How has this study deepened your appreciation of the Bible, especially the New Testament letters?

4. In what ways has your view of God's character, will, and work expanded?

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5. What have you learned about God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ that you want to share with others?

Third Day: Studying the Bible in Community

6. How were you impacted by fellowship within your group?

7. How did you see God work as your group supported one another in prayer?

Fourth Day: Reaching the Next Generation

8. How did your personal study this year equip you to share biblical truth with children or teenagers in your life?

9. a. If you brought someone to BSF Kids or BSF Students, what benefits did you personally experience?

   b. How have the children or students you brought benefited from their participation?

10. If you volunteered with BSF Kids or BSF Students this year, how were you blessed or challenged?

Fifth Day: Facing Forward

11. In what ways did the blessings of this study overflow into your family, neighborhood, church, school, or workplace?

12. a. How did God challenge you regarding your relationships with Him and others?

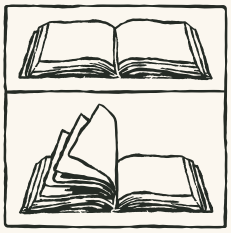
    b. How did God challenge you regarding your attitude or actions toward believers?

Sixth Day: Maturing His People

13. Pick one word that best describes your experience with the Lord and His Word this year.

14. Spiritual growth involves recognizing personal sin and yielding to God. What was the most convicting message God spoke to you this year, and how did you respond?

15. Write a short prayer expressing your gratitude to God for salvation by grace through faith and asking Him to deepen your wonder at His love displayed in the gospel.



THE BIBLE



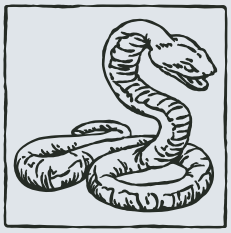
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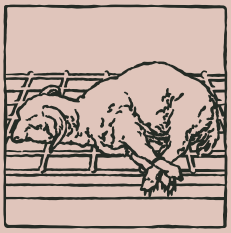
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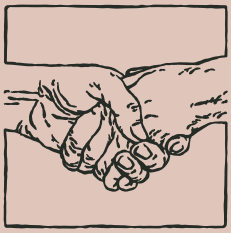
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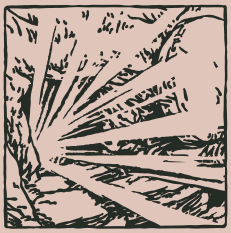
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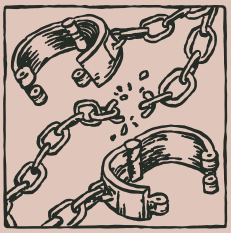
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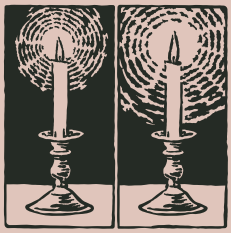
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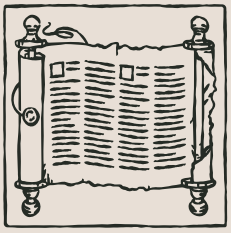
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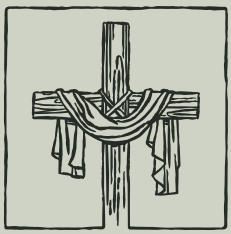
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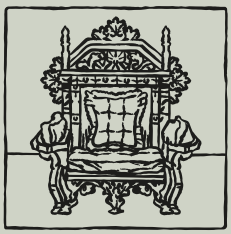
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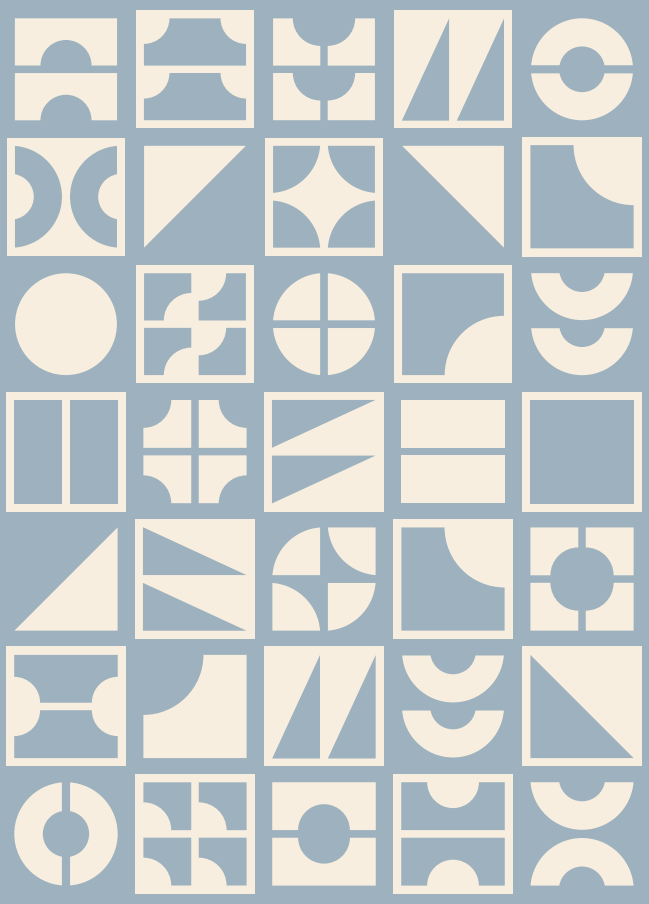
THE CHURCH



HUMANITY: CREATION AND PURPOSE

“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.”

ROMANS 1:16





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