



Romans

STUDY GUIDE

SPRING 2020

Contents

How to Use this Study Guide.....	3
Romans 1:1-17	5
Romans 1:18-2:11	9
Romans 2:12-29	13
Romans 3:1-4:12	17
Romans 4:13-5:21	21
Romans 6:1-23	25
Romans 7:1-25	29
Romans 8:1-39	33
Romans 9:1-10:21	37
Romans 11:1-36	41
Romans 12:1-21	45
Romans 13:1-14	49
Romans 14:1-23	53
Romans 15:1-33	57

How to Use this Study Guide

This guide was written as a companion to our Life Group study in Romans this spring, beginning in June and continuing through August. This guide should enable you to dig a little deeper into the biblical text, and prepare you well for engaging with others during your Life Group time on Sunday mornings at the Creek.

Each week's lesson is divided into two sections: **Overview and Context** and **Explore the Text**. Each week's **Explore the Text** section is divided into three "days" worth of study. You can divide those readings up into three days, as the guide suggests, or you can do the whole week's study in one sitting (or over two days, five days, or whatever). The study guide is designed to be flexible, so you can study at your own pace and be prepared for Sunday.

However you use this guide, our prayer is that it would continually drive you to make the study of God's Word a regular habit. May the Lord richly bless and sustain you as you meditate on His Word.

The Study Guide Team



Romans 1:1-17

by Mrs. Keri Bosch and Mrs. Faith Cross

Study for Life Group lesson on March 1

Overview and Context

The book of Romans is generally understood to be Paul's greatest epistle, a doctrinal masterpiece. Martin Luther wrote that it "is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest gospel." John Calvin proclaimed it to be "an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture."

Written by Paul around 57 AD in Corinth while on his third missionary journey, Romans plumbs the depths of such weighty doctrines as salvation, grace, faith, sin, justification, and sanctification to name a few. It is a letter written to the church in Rome, the majority of which were Gentile Christians, to whom Paul was called by God to minister (Acts 9:15; Rom 15:16). The first 17 verses contain typical elements found in letters of the time with an introduction and greeting (v. 1-7), thanksgiving (8-15) and thematic statement (16-17). This first section and the closing found in 15:14-16:27 are similar in language and serve as bookends that frame the body of the letter. Because Paul had not been to Rome yet, his introduction is longer than his other letters. Paul expresses his longing to come to Rome that they might be "mutually encouraged." The last two verses of this section contain the overarching theme of Romans as the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel through faith.

One can see in these first verses the course this letter will take. For example, the word gospel is used six times. The gospel, or good news, is in fact a term used in the Old Testament in Isaiah (40:9, 52:7, 61:1) and Nahum 1:15 to describe God's re-establishment of His reign on earth, bringing peace and restoration to His people. The word gospel would have been familiar to Roman Gentiles as well, as it was a term used to announce the beginning of the reign or victory of a Roman Emperor.

Notes

The gospel of Christ, though, is not just a proclamation of earthly glory. As used here and elsewhere in the Scripture, it proclaims that Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies as the ultimate King and Victor, the Prince of Peace and Restorer of all things. Paul takes the reader step by step on a journey declaring the righteousness of God found in the gospel as shown in His judgment of sin (1:18-3:20), the justification of sinners by faith (3:21-4:25), the hope we have through faith in Christ (5:1-8:39), His plan for both Jews and Gentiles (9-11) and our sanctification (12-15:13). May we grow in our knowledge of God and faith in Christ every step of the way through this magnificent unfolding of the gospel—“the power of God for salvation” in which “the righteousness of God is revealed.”

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: CALLING IN CHRIST

Read Romans 1:1-17, focusing on verses 1-7. Notice how Paul opens this letter to the Romans. How does he describe himself? How does he describe Jesus?

Paul begins his letter to the Romans as any of us would if we were writing to people with whom we were beginning a relationship. He gives them background on who he is, his mission, and how he views his relationship to them. He begins with three identifiers for himself: “servant of Christ Jesus,” “apostle,” and “set apart for the gospel.” This designation as servant would have the connotation of slave, or bondservant, to the Romans. Paul views himself as a man “owned” by Christ! In identifying himself as an “apostle,” Paul is credentialing himself as equal to the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus. His calling came *after* Christ’s ascension (Acts 9:1-9; 1 Cor 9:1-2), yet was a face-to-face encounter with the Savior. He then shares his purposes with them – he is charged by God to share the good news of Christ. Paul has made it clear in the opening sentence – he is *owned, appointed, and purposed for his life in Christ.*

After presenting his identity as one thoroughly submitted to Christ, Paul now gives a concise explanation of this “gospel of God.” The Son was always promised, was fully human as a descendant of the line of David, and was fully God, as evidenced by the power of His resurrection in the Holy Spirit. These verses echo the opening lines of Hebrews: “...God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.... He is the radiance of the glory of God. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Maker on high...” (Heb. 1:1-3). Paul’s mission, through the grace supplied in Jesus Christ, is to encourage the obedience of faith among the Gentiles. The Roman readers were also called, as Paul was, to belong to Christ. Paul desires them to understand the commonality they share – loved by God, enabled by grace, called to live in obedience and holiness as fellow

believers (saints). In these opening lines of greeting to the Romans, Paul has clearly explained Jesus' call on his life and the lives of the believers to whom he ministers.

How do you identify yourself when you meet new people? See 1 Cor 6:19-20. Do you live as one “owned” by Christ?

DAY TWO: THANKFUL AND PRAYERFUL

Read Romans 1:1-17, focusing on verses 8-15. Note what Paul does “first.” Why does Paul desire to see the Romans?

After establishing the common ground of the gospel with his Roman readers, Paul transitions to thanksgiving and prayer. This is a typical element in all of Paul's letters. He is a man thankful for the faith of other believers. He is a man who prays “without ceasing” for other believers. We learn from Romans 15:24-29 that Paul is on his way to Jerusalem to “bring aid to the saints” from Macedonia and Achaia. After completing his delivery, “Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome’” (Acts 19:21). This visit with the Romans is not just a friendly meet and greet. Paul “longs” to see them. This language expresses that he aches, desires, has a strong wish to see these fellow saints. Why this deep longing? He tells us – strengthening, mutual encouragement, and reaping a harvest. Paul is also “eager” to share the gospel. He is ready, prepared, willing. Having a gospel-centered visit with his readers will strengthen them, will encourage all who are present, and will produce good fruit. Paul wants them to be “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ...” (Phil 1:11).

Paul does eventually arrive in Rome, as we know from his story in the book of Acts. It is not in the way he planned, but he trusts it is “by God's will” (v. 10). Paul arrives as a prisoner after two years in prison, and a year-long perilous journey. He lives in Rome under house arrest “for two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness...” (Acts 28:30). What an encouragement this must have been to believers both near and far!

Are you thankful for and regularly pray for other believers? Is your time with them strengthening and mutually encouraging? Is it focused on the gospel of Christ?

DAY THREE: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Read Romans 1:1-17, and then reread and meditate on verses 16-17. How does the gospel reveal God's righteousness?

These two verses hold the key that unlocks the core message of Romans. Their exact meaning has and continues to be debated, yet in them we see the glorious beauty of the gospel. After meditating on the meaning of these verses,

Notes

Martin Luther wrote, “I felt myself straightway born again and to have entered through the open gates into paradise itself. From that moment the whole face of Scripture was changed...”

Verses 16 and 17 contain the “what” and the “how” of salvation. Salvation can be defined as rescue from God’s just wrath for our sin, renewal of spiritual life, and restoration of right relationship with God. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel, even though it is foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews (1 Cor 1:18, 23), because he is convinced that the power of the gospel is the very power of God. This is what saves us. The gospel message is the instrument of God’s power unto salvation. Paul mentions the Jews first because of their prominence in redemptive history as God’s chosen people through which all nations (Gentiles) would be blessed, ultimately in Christ (Gen 22:18; Acts 3:25; Rom 9:4-5).

The righteousness of God is a description of His character as morally perfect, manifested through His justice and holiness. God’s justice and righteousness are often used synonymously in the Bible. In order to be saved, God’s justice demands that we must be righteous; but as we will see in Romans, no one is righteous, nor can we earn it or obtain it on our own. Our only hope is that God would give us His own righteousness through His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the “how” of salvation. God has declared us righteous through the work of Jesus in His life, death, burial and resurrection.

In verse 17, the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel “from faith for faith” or “from faith to faith.” Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted at the end of the verse and in its Old Testament context is part of God’s response to Habakkuk as he complains against God’s use of the wicked Babylonians as a means of judgment upon Israel. God makes clear that those who have been made righteous by faith also must live by that same faith, trusting in Him and His Word, even in the darkest times. The same is true for us. When the gospel message is met with faith, a person is declared righteous, which then gives way to a life of faith that increases until the day when we see Christ, “the author and perfecter of faith” (Heb. 12:2).

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 3:8-9. Have you put your faith in Christ? If so, praise God for the gift of His righteousness! If not, will you do so today?



Romans 1:18-2:11

by Mr. Jamie O'Brien

Study for Life Group lesson on March 8

Overview and Context

Paul's epistle to the Romans is a hard-hitting and powerful book. Paul knew that a man cannot be saved unless he sees himself as a guilty, lost, condemned sinner before the Lord. So before he even talks about God saving lost sinners, he proves that all men are lost and need the gospel of Christ. So this portion of Romans deals with condemnation, and answers the question: "Is the world really lost?"

The theme of the entire letter to the Romans is the gospel of Christ. Verses 16-17 of chapter 1 are key verses to the entire book: Paul declares, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (verse 16). For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith' (verse 17). Here Paul pulls from the Hebrew Bible: "The just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4). The whole book of Romans is based on this text from the Old Testament. The word "just" means "righteous." Righteousness and life are inseparable. God is holy and He lives forever. An unrighteousness man cannot live, "for the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

With the introduction and salutation complete, and the theme of his epistle stated, Paul now turns to the heart of the doctrinal teachings in the book of Romans. He has good news, but first he has some bad news. The good news is that God has provided atonement for our sins through His Son Christ Jesus. The bad news which He addresses first, is that all people need atonement for their sins. Before you can appreciate the good news, you have to know the bad news. Before Paul tells us that the gift of God is eternal life, he tells us that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). In verse 18, Paul, like a good prosecutor, begins to lay the ground-

Notes

work for his case against the Gentiles self-righteous rebellion against God. Paul wanted to show that the whole world was morally bankrupt and unable to save themselves and desperately in need of divine mercy and forgiveness.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED

Read Romans 1:18-32, focusing on verses 18-25. Observe Paul's movement of thought as he begins to lay the groundwork for condemnation against the pagan Gentile world. Notice also the correlation between God's righteousness and His wrath. Both are represented and both are revealed.

God never condemns without just cause. Here are three reasons for God's judgment of the pagan world: for suppressing God's truth (verse 18); for ignoring God's revelation (verses 19-20); and for perverting God's glory (Verses 21-23).

Verse 18 sets the stage for this entire section. The verb in this verse is present tense. God's righteousness is a continuing revelation. "The wrath of God" is an expression of His personal righteousness, which is also "being revealed," and is in opposition to man's sinfulness. Therefore, people need a continuing revelation of the righteousness God provides. God's wrath is directed "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (wickedness) of men." God hates sin and He judges it but loves sinners and desires their salvation.

Here Paul presents two lines of argument that prove that the condemnation of sinners does not rest on the depth of their knowledge but on what they do with that knowledge. Available to every person born since the creation is a certain knowledge of God. This knowledge is attainable by observing the handiwork of God. Just as we learn much about a writer by studying his work, or a painter by his paintings, we can learn much about God from observing His creation. Who can look out across the sea or up at the stars and the moon in the night sky and not be struck by the power of the One who created them? The Psalmist writes, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge" (Psalm 19:1-2).

Paul's second line of argument is that the Gentiles are lost because they suppressed the knowledge of God (verse 18). In every human soul is a God-given awareness that there is something more than this transient world (Eccl. 3:11). Planted in the heart of every man and woman is the knowledge that there is a righteous God. "Even though they (the Gentiles) knew God" (verse 21) they willfully chose not to glorify Him and they refused to give Him the thanks He deserves. The result was a futile mind and a darkened heart.

What is the relationship between God's righteousness and His wrath? How are they represented and revealed in this passage? What does nature tell us about God's character?

DAY TWO: ABANDONED TO DEPRAVITY

Read Romans 1:18-32, focusing on verses 24-32. What are the consequences of man's continued suppression of God's truth?

In a real sense, the results of God's condemnation on man's sinful rebellion are nothing more than the natural consequence of suppressing the truth, ignoring revelation, and perverting God's glory. But God did more than simply let nature take its course. He "gave them over." He abandoned them to their corrupt lifestyle, which deserved God's wrath and the sentence of death (verse 32).

The place you don't want to be is abandoned by God. The term "God gave them over" is repeated three times in this passage (verses 24, 26, 28). It is the beginning of the working of God's wrath in the world. It is not the final judgment of the condemned; it is a present judicial action of God where He lets men go their own way. Because of their sin "God gave them up" (verses 24, 26) which means He permitted them go their own way in their sin and reap the consequences. They received "in their own persons the due penalty of their error" (verse 27). This is the meaning of Romans 1:18: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven" (literal translation). God has revealed His wrath, not by sending fire from heaven, but by abandoning sinful men to their lustful ways.

When man began to feel the tragic consequences of his sins, you might think he would repent and seek God; but just the opposite was true. Because he was abandoned by God, he could only become worse. Man did not even want to retain God in his knowledge, so "God gave them over" this time "to a depraved (reprobate) mind, to do those things which are not proper" (verse 28). The word "reprobate" means "tested and found to be no good." A reprobate mind cannot form right judgments. A person abandoned by God has abandoned themselves completely over to sin. Paul gives us a catalogue of sins, all of which are with us today (verses 29-31). Men not only committed these sins in open defiance of God, but encouraged others and applauded them when they sinned. Notice the final charge, "Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (verse 32).

List the sins that Paul names in verses 29-31 that men do when they reject God. Then prayerfully examine your own life in light of this list.

Notes

DAY THREE: THE IMPARTIAL JUDGMENT OF GOD

Read Romans 2:1-11. Think about how God demonstrates His kindness, forbearance, and patience to the lost world.

So, in this passage, to whom is Paul referring? In chapter 1, Paul drew a terrible picture of the pagan Gentile world and its frightening condemnation and punishment. There were certain men who would say, "Amen! They deserved it." Now Paul turns to those very men and says to them, "Therefore, you are without excuse, every man of you who passes **judgment**, you condemn yourself; for you who **judge** practice the same things. And we know that the **judgment** of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things" (verses 1-2). So then, to whom is he talking? Any man, it does not matter. Look at the close of the ninth and tenth verses. What two classes of men are mentioned in both? Jew and Gentile. So, this passage is addressed to any man who sits in judgment of others, whoever he may be, Jew or Gentile.

God's judgment is according to truth. He does not have one standard for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Each and every person, whether Jew or Gentile, is guilty of at least one of the sins listed in Romans 1:29-31. And the Bible says, "There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek (verse 9). 1 Peter 4:17 says, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and it begins with us first." In Rom. 2:6-11, Paul is not teaching salvation by good character or good deeds. He is explaining another principle of God's judgment. God judges according to deeds, just as He judges according to truth. Here Paul deals with the consistent actions of a person's life, the total impact of his character and conduct. True saving faith results in obedience and godly living, even though we may occasionally fall. When God measured the deeds of the Jews, he found them to be as wicked as the Gentiles. The fact that the Jews occasionally celebrated a feast or honored the Sabbath did not change the fact they consistently walked in disobedience to God. God's kindness did not lead them to repentance.

Why are lost people ignorant of God's kind intention (verse 4)? Why might someone show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, forbearance, and patience? How has Christ demonstrated the kindness, forbearance, and patience of God in your life? How would you explain it to an unbeliever?



Romans 2:12-29

by Pastor Dave Jones

Study for Life Group lesson on March 15

Overview and Context

As we've discussed over the past few weeks of our study, in the opening chapters of the book of Romans, Paul demonstrates that all men are condemned and in need of God's righteousness. In Rom. 1:1-3:30 Paul shows that, apart from Jesus Christ, all human beings are spiritually bankrupt before God, whether they be Jew or Gentile. While reading these chapters may be discouraging for some, we must keep in mind that this feeling is exactly what Paul was trying to accomplish. To elaborate, for his non-believing readers, Paul wanted them to feel the weight of their sin and the hopelessness of their predicament, so that they would be prepared to accept the gospel he explains in Rom. 3:21-5:21. For believing readers, Paul wanted them to feel the magnitude of God's forgiveness of their sin, as well as the joy of salvation made possible through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Naturally, some people feel that Paul's evaluation of mankind in Rom. 1:1-3:30 is a bit harsh. After all, there are nice unbelievers in the world, and surely even the vilest sinner occasionally does good things. However, we must keep in mind that God does not measure righteousness in a utilitarian manner, as we do. Indeed, man tends to evaluate his own goodness by way of comparison with others, or by measuring the outcome of actions and events. God, however, evaluates goodness by using Himself as the standard. Recall that when the rich, young ruler referred to Jesus as being a good teacher, Christ highlighted the nature of mankind as He rhetorically asked, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God" (Mark 10:18). Like Paul's argument in the opening chapters of Romans, Christ taught that only God is good; thus emphasizing mankind's need of the gospel.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: CONDEMNED BY CONSCIENCE

Read Romans 2:12–29 but focus especially on verses 12–16. As you read this passage, consider how your own conscience aided you in understanding your need for the gospel.

In Rom. 2:12–16 Paul is primarily addressing the spiritual state of Gentiles – that is, those “without law” (Rom. 2:12). Here Paul writes that those who sin without the law will perish without the law, just as those who sin with the law will be judged by the law. Paul’s point here is that all men will be judged for their sin, regardless of whether or not they have access to the moral law in Scripture. This is because mankind is not judged based upon his knowledge of the written law, or even based upon his ability (or lack thereof) to keep the law. Rather, mankind is judged based upon his breaking of the moral law, which we call sin. In Rom. 2:14–16 Paul explains that those without the written law know that they are law-breakers, or sinners. They know the moral law, for “the law [is] written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them” (Rom. 2:15).

The conscience is frequently mentioned in the New Testament. Indeed, Scripture speaks of having a “good conscience” (Acts 23:1), a “clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9), and a cleansed conscience (see Heb. 9:14). The New Testament also mentions the possibility of an “evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22), a defiled conscience (see Titus 1:15), a weak conscience (see 1 Cor. 8:7), as well as a seared conscience (see 1 Tim 4:2). Moreover, Paul writes about the testimony of his own conscience, which he observed was Spirit-led and without guilt (see Rom. 9:1). The apostle Paul also encourages believers to submit to their authorities “because of your conscience” (Rom. 13:5) and exhorts his readers to order their conduct aright in view of the consciences of others (see 1 Cor. 8:12). Indeed, it is clear that the conscience is a tool God uses to regulate and to reveal His moral standards to all mankind, even those without the Scriptures.

What objections do people typically raise today when confronted with the notion that they are spiritually bankrupt and in need of Jesus Christ?

DAY TWO: CONDEMNED BY LAW

Read Romans 2:12–29 but focus especially on verses 17–24. As you read this passage, consider how the written law of God aided you in understanding your need for the gospel.

In Rom. 2:17–24 Paul turns his attention to his Jewish readers. Whereas Paul’s Gentile readers may have argued that they were not condemned because they *did not* have access to the written law, Paul’s Jewish readers may have argued that they were not condemned because they *did* have access to the law! In

Rom. 2:12–16 Paul answered his Gentile readers by pointing out that their consciences condemned them as law-breakers. Here in Rom. 2:17–24 Paul answered his Jewish readers by pointing out that the written law condemned them as law-breakers. Indeed, mere possession of the law did not keep the Jews from sinning; thus, they were in need of the gospel. As Paul explains in more detail in the next chapter, “Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in God’s sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:19–20).

Later, in writing to the Galatian churches, Paul is very clear that the moral law cannot save those who possess and keep it. Paul wrote, “By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. . . . If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal. 2:16, 21). This is the same point Paul is making to his Jewish readers here in Rom. 2:17–24. Yet, just because the law cannot save does not mean that it ought to be discarded. On the contrary, as Paul will explain in more detail in Rom. 3:1–8, being those who possessed the written law, the Jews were in a privileged position, for they could more clearly see God’s righteousness, as well as their own contrasting unrighteousness. Indeed, of all people, given their access to Scripture, Paul’s Jewish readers should have been those who were most willing to receive the Messiah and His gospel message of justification by faith alone, apart from any idea of works-based righteousness.

Was salvation by good works or law-keeping ever a legitimate possibility for mankind, even hypothetically (see Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:21)?

DAY THREE: CONDEMNED BY CEREMONY

Read Romans 2:12–29 but focus especially on verses 25–29. As you read this passage, consider what types of good works unbelievers are prone to trust in for salvation.

Unbelievers are often tempted to place their trust in their good works for salvation. Indeed, a commonality among every world religion, except for Christianity, is the concept of earning one’s own salvation. World religions merely differ in what types of works are prescribed for salvation. In our modern context, people put their trust in the good works of giving, morality, participation, tradition, sacrificing, and the like. In Paul’s context, his Jewish readers, whom he is still addressing in Rom. 2:25–29, put their trust in the good work of physical circumcision. The act of circumcision, which was prescribed within the Jewish ceremonial law, was first introduced in Gen. 17:10–14. This act was designed to be an outward physical sign of an inward spiritual reality or promise. Yet, within the Jewish tradition, over time, the external sign of circumcision became conflated with the internal spiritual reality it was merely meant to represent.

In Rom. 2:25–29 Paul teaches that apart from salvation, the good work of cir-

Notes

cumcision is not profitable. Indeed, good works are not a means to salvation, but are a sign of salvation. In Rom. 4:9–12 Paul expands his teaching on the place of circumcision in regard to salvation. In this passage Paul observes that when circumcision was instituted by God at Gen. 17:10–14, it was not given to Abraham as a good work to lead to salvation. Rather, it was sign of the salvation that Abraham had already received by faith alone, decades earlier at Gen. 15:6. As we read Paul's corrective comments to his Jewish readers in this passage, we must be clear that Paul is not being anti-Semitic, for Paul himself was a Jew. Rather, what Paul is correcting in Rom. 2:17–25 is the tendency of all mankind, not just his Jewish readers, to rest upon their own efforts for salvation, rather than upon the substitutionary, atoning work of Jesus Christ.

As a believer, have you ever evaluated your standing before God based upon your performance as a Christian, rather than by your position in Christ?



Romans 3:1-4:12

by Pastor Dave Jones

Study for Life Group lesson on March 22

Overview and Context

In Rom. 1:1–3:20, Paul begins the book of Romans by showing that all mankind, whether Jew or Gentile, are condemned before God. The apostle’s end goal here is not to depress his readers by highlighting their doomed spiritual state; rather, Paul’s aim is to prepare his readers for the gospel that he presents in Rom. 3:21–5:21. It may be helpful to observe that Paul’s evangelistic methodology here is the same as that of Jesus. To elaborate, in the Gospels when Jesus is asked about the way of salvation, He often refers His inquirers to the law (see Matt. 19:16–17; Mark 10:17–19; Luke 10:25–26; 18:18–20). Of course, Jesus is not teaching that salvation is possible via law-keeping. Rather, when asked about salvation, Christ prepares His hearers for salvation by pointing them to the moral law, for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:21). Similarly, Paul prepares his readers for the gospel by highlighting their condemnation under the law.

As we’ve seen in our study thus far, Paul’s argument for condemnation in Romans 1–2 is both thorough and devastating. By way of review, after a brief personal greeting in Rom. 1:1–17, in Rom. 1:18–2:28 Paul demonstrates that God’s moral standards are evident to and broken by all of mankind. This is true of Gentiles, who know God’s natural law from the creation (see Rom. 1:20) and from their own consciences (see Rom. 1:18–19; 2:14–15). Likewise, this is true of Jews, who know God’s written law because they possess the Word of God (see Rom. 2:17–29). Within this week’s passage, in Rom. 3:1–20 Paul first concludes

Notes

his discussion of condemnation, as he anticipates and answers several objections to his prior doctrine. Then, in Rom. 3:21–4:12 Paul begins his teaching on justification by faith alone, which is the gospel message. Paul will continue to develop his explanation of justification by faith alone all the way through Rom. 5:21.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: CONDEMNATION OF THE LAW

Read Romans 3:1–4:12 but focus especially on 3:1–20. As you read this passage, consider ways in which possessing the Word of God was an advantage for Paul's Jewish readers.

In Rom. 3:1 Paul posited a logical question that his Jewish readers would have been asking, namely, “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?” By way of response, Paul teaches that there is a great advantage in being a Jew in that Jews possessed the Word of God. So, while being ethnically Jewish did not entail automatic salvation, as some may have errantly assumed, it did provide access to the Scriptures, which contain the gospel message, in elementary form, even in the Old Testament (see Hab. 2:4; John 8:56; Gal. 3:8; Heb. 4:2). It is true that access to special revelation meant that the Jews would experience the condemnation of the written law, but it also exposed them to God's plan of salvation, which led many Jews to faith in the Messiah (see Heb. 11:1–40). In contrast, the Gentiles only had access to general revelation, which led to their condemnation, but not to their salvation (see Rom. 1:21–32).

In Rom. 3:3–4, Paul explains that God's justice is not impugned by the injustices of some of those who possessed the written law, for God does not promise to redeem everyone who has access to the Word of God. Next, in Rom. 3:5–8, Paul addresses the following argument: If mankind's attempts at law-keeping only lead to sin, which highlights man's need of salvation from God, then it would seem that (1) God is unjust in judging mankind, as by doing so God is condemning man for that which increases His own glory (see Rom. 3:5–6); and (2) mankind ought to focus on sinning more, for sin emphasizes God's holiness (see Rom. 3:7–8). Paul's response to such foolish thinking (see Rom. 1:21–22) is, “Certainly not!” (Rom. 3:6) and, “Their condemnation is just” (Rom. 3:8). In Rom. 3:9–20, by quoting from six different psalms and the book of Isaiah, Paul reinforces his earlier teaching that all mankind is condemned before God.

While Paul makes it clear that mankind's good works do not earn merit from God, do good works have any place in the outworking of salvation (see Jas. 2:17)?

DAY TWO: SALVATION BY FAITH

Read Romans 3:1–4:12 but focus especially on 3:21–31. As you read this passage, consider if your manner of sharing the gospel is similar to Paul’s expression of the gospel in this passage.

Paul begins his teaching on salvation with the phrase “But now” (Rom. 3:21). This conjunction is meant to contrast all that Paul had previously said in Rom. 1:18–3:20 about condemnation with what he will say in Rom. 3:21–5:21 about justification. Note, however, that Paul does not completely discard the law, as he teaches that the gospel is “witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets” (Rom. 3:21). Rom. 3:22 is an important verse, for this is the first time in this epistle that Paul teaches that righteousness is “through faith in Jesus Christ.” Paul explains that Jesus made “propitiation by His blood” (Rom. 3:25). Propitiation is a theological term that refers to bearing the wrath of God. The idea here is that Jesus’ death on the cross not only atoned for man’s sin, but also it satisfied the wrath of God (see Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5). So, through His substitutionary atonement Christ paid man’s sin debt *and* restored man’s relationship with God.

In Rom. 3:21–26 Paul teaches that salvation, which comes by faith alone, is available to “all who believe” (Rom. 3:22) and that salvation is a divine work, as God is both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). In Rom. 3:27–31 Paul teaches one natural conclusion of this doctrine is that “boasting . . . is excluded” (Rom. 3:27). In other words, since it is impossible to earn salvation through law-keeping, neither Jews nor Gentiles can boast, for God “will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” (Rom. 3:30). Indeed, the doctrine of justification is the great equalizer of mankind. Paul would later explain to the Galatian churches, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Lest he be misread, in Rom. 3:31 Paul explains that the law and gospel are not at odds but work together toward salvation.

How would you respond to someone who objected to the teaching of salvation by faith alone on the basis that faith is a work (see Eph. 2:8–9)?

DAY THREE: ILLUSTRATION OF ABRAHAM AND DAVID

Read Romans 3:1–4:12 but focus especially on 4:1–12. As you read this passage, consider the proper place of family heritage and religious tradition within Christianity.

In Rom. 4:1–12 Paul anticipates that some of his Jewish readers would object to his teaching of justification by faith alone. By way of response, Paul appeals to two respected Old Testament figures to confirm his doctrine of salvation: Abraham (see Rom. 4:1–4; 9–12) and David (see Rom. 4:5–8). Note that Paul would mention Abraham nine times in this letter and cite David three times.

Notes

In appealing to Abraham in Rom. 4:1–4 Paul readily admits that “if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about” (Rom. 4:2). Yet, in quoting Gen. 15:6, Paul observes Scripture says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). In other words, Abraham did not save himself by law-keeping, nor did he boast. Rather, Abraham was justified by believing in God concerning His promises about a coming Messiah who would bless the world. Scripture is clear: Abraham was saved by faith alone.

In Rom. 4:5–8 Paul appeals to the example and teaching of David. First, in Rom. 4:5, Paul reiterates his teaching that justification is by faith alone. Then, in Rom. 4:6–8, Paul notes that David believed “God imputes righteousness apart from works” (Rom. 4:6). He then quotes David’s claim in Ps. 32:1–2, “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.” This citation is important for Paul’s argument, as his Jewish readers would have been aware that David penned this Psalm after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. While David was a man after God’s own heart and was a good king, like all mankind, he was clearly guilty of breaking many moral laws. Yet, in Psalm 32 David celebrated the forgiveness he had been afforded, not because of his own good works, but because God freely chose to forgive him.

Have you ever been part of a church that places more weight upon family heritage and religious tradition than upon Scripture?



Romans 4:13-5:21

by Pastor Jason Hall

Study for Life Group lesson on March 29

Overview and Context

Let's briefly review some of the basic assertions Paul has made so far in his letter to the Romans. First, all people everywhere are sinners, captive to unrighteousness and deserving of the wrath of God. Second, righteousness is not even attainable by the law of God, because no one – Jew or Gentile – is able to keep the law. Third, God in his mercy and grace bestows righteousness on those who have faith, and particularly faith in the Messiah, Jesus.

In the opening of chapter four, we saw Paul uphold Abraham as an example of justification – being declared righteous – by faith rather than works, for it was in his belief in God's promise to send a Messiah that he was justified. Paul argued that the visible signs of his belief, particularly circumcision, were not the cause of his righteousness, but rather simply the outward evidence of his belief.

Now, in the balance of chapter four and in chapter five, Paul will extend his argument on justification by faith from Abraham to others. I encourage you, as you read through the seven paragraphs that make up our text this week, to follow carefully Paul's argument, as he begins with the promise to Abraham and ends with the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Along the way, look for these high points:

The promise made to Abraham, that his offspring would be numerous and bless the world, was always intended to come true through faith, and not by adherence to law.

Notes

Because of this, all of those who share Abraham's faith in God's promised Messiah will share in his relationship with the God of promise.

The suffering of God's people in the present age is not evidence of abandonment, but evidence of God's grace and goodness toward us, as He molds His people into who He wants them to be.

The suffering and death that came into the world through the sin of Adam, and then subsequently spread to everyone, was reversed by the obedience and sacrifice of Christ. So now, instead of death, we can choose life through the grace of God in Jesus.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: THE PROMISE MADE REAL THROUGH FAITH

Read Romans 4:13-25. What is the promise made to Abraham, and how will it come true?

To understand the promise made to Abraham that is referenced in verse 13, we need to travel back to Genesis 12. In that text God chooses a man named Abram (later Abraham), and calls him to leave his home and family and travel to a new land, where God will give him a new family. The purpose of this promise was so that, through this family, God could bless all the families of the earth. We should note two things in the background of this promise. First, it was made in the context of a planet full of rebellious people, very few of whom, it seems, were seeking God. Second, Abram did nothing to deserve this promise. Abram was not a worshiper of God before this time. God chose Abram because of God's grace, not because Abram did something to deserve it.

As we return to Romans 4, we see Paul assert that the fulfillment of this promise (the blessing of the world) was not dependent on Abraham keeping a set of laws, or performing any set of rituals. Rather, it was Abraham's belief that God would keep His promise that led to him being declared righteous before God. How do we know this is true? Because Abraham, like us, was a law-breaker. If God's promise was dependent on Abraham keeping the law, or his descendants keeping the law, then God's promise would never come true. "That is why," Paul argues in verse 16, "it depends on faith" (ESV). God's promise of salvation – for that is what the blessing was, deliverance from sin – was fulfilled through faith, both for Abraham and all who would come after him and share his faith.

As we read in verses 18 and following in particular, though, we see Paul giving evidence that Abraham had faith. Paul proceeds to encourage us by telling us that we can see proof of Abraham's faith by how he lived. Abraham believed that God would give him a son, despite two key facts: He was an old man and

Sarah couldn't have children. He believed, and it was enough.

Was Abraham's faith a perfect faith? Not really (see Genesis 16 for a prime example). But even though he faltered, he never fell away, and even gained confidence as he grew older. If you have ever wondered, "Is my faith enough?" then read verses 23-24 to yourself a few times. Your salvation is not founded on the relative strength of your faith, but on the power of Christ to redeem and restore.

In what ways was Abraham a faithful example and encouragement to us?

DAY TWO: PEACE WITH GOD

Read Romans 5:1-11. What are the benefits of justification?

To be justified is to be considered by God as righteous, as if we had never sinned. The ground, or foundation, of our justification is the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The instrumental cause of our justification is complete faith in Christ's work on our behalf. Here in the opening paragraph of Romans 5, Paul considers all the incredible benefits of being righteous before God.

The first is peace. Our sin caused us to be God's enemies, to be objects of His wrath, as we saw in Romans 1-2. But now, because we have been justified, God is not our enemy but our friend. In fact, He is our close friend, because verse 2 tells us that we have access to God.

Another benefit is hope. Our justification means that we can look forward to all that God's glory will mean to us. Paul meditates on what brings us this hope, noting that this hope is a result of suffering leading to endurance, endurance leading to character, and our renewed character producing hope within us. We don't rejoice in suffering because we enjoy suffering; we rejoice in our suffering because we know that the ultimate purpose of the suffering – the revelation of God's love in us through His Spirit – makes the suffering worth it.

Beginning in verse 6, Paul underscores the notion that none of us have earned our righteousness, but it was freely given us by a loving God, on account of His grace. Verse 8 reminds us of this truth succinctly: "...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God's wrath has been removed from us not because we showed even an ounce of worthiness or righteousness, but because Jesus Christ, very God of very God, died an atoning death in our place.

Paul, then, in verses 9-11, articulates for us the further benefits of this gracious salvation. While this atoning sacrifice has removed from us the sentence of death, it has also granted us the rewards of Christ's righteousness. You see, Christ's perfect righteous life, lived in obedience to the law and for God's glory, has been imputed to us. In short, it means that instead of receiving what we deserve – God's wrath – we receive what He deserves – a beautiful relationship with God.

Read 2 Cor. 5:16-21. What is the responsibility that comes with receiving this glorious reconciliation?

Notes

DAY THREE: DEATH GIVES WAY TO LIFE

Read Romans 5:12-21. Make a list, in your notes, of the contrasts Paul makes in these paragraphs.

Reconciliation with God through faith in Christ, based on His atoning sacrifice, is a settled fact and great cause for rejoicing. As Paul transitions in his argument from the foundation of our justification to its outworking in our lives (that will be the theme of Romans 6), he sets up a series of comparisons and contrasts that give a bird's-eye view of the sweep of redemptive history, and God's glorious purpose in salvation.

First, we can note that Paul says both sin and redemption started with individuals, before spreading to others. The trespass began with Adam, who bears responsibility for that first sin. Adam's one sin, then, brought condemnation to him and by extension to all those who would come after him. This is true even though the moral law of Scripture, as particularly explicated by the Ten Commandments, would only come much later. Sin was present ever since Adam's transgression, and thus all were condemned to death.

Like Adam's one sin led to death for others, so Jesus' act of righteousness led to life for others. Put simply, in verse 18: Adam's sin had dire and widespread consequences, leading to death. Jesus' obedience had wonderful and widespread consequences, leading to life. This is a way in which Adam and Jesus are alike: Their actions affected those who came after them, and follow them. But there is also a huge difference between them, as Paul notes in verse 14. For those who come after Adam, death; for those who come after Jesus, life.

In the closing sentences of this chapter (verses 20-21), Paul summarizes the contrast between law and grace, and how they operate leading to salvation. Both law and grace originate with God, and are sent by Him to accomplish His purposes. The law came in to "increase the trespass" (verse 20, ESV); that is, to highlight God's holy perfection and expose our attempts at works righteousness as utter futility. The law shows us our sin with crystal clarity. But God's grace, as displayed in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, outshines even the depth of our sin. As terrible as sin's reign, in death, is for us, the reign of grace in life is that much more wonderful and everlasting.

If you put your trust in your own efforts, you are following in the footsteps of Adam and will be condemned. If you put your trust in Christ, you receive His righteousness and will be forgiven. Where is your trust?



Romans 6:1-23

by Pastor Jason Hall

Study for Life Group lesson on April 5

Overview and Context

The closing paragraph of Romans 5 is almost too good to be true. “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...” (5:20). Christ’s selfless act of righteousness on the cross has undone the wrath of God on my disobedience, so despite all of the sins I have ever committed or will commit, I have eternal life through Christ Jesus my Lord.

If one were skeptical about the credibility of this incredible claim, one might be tempted to counter the amazement of Paul’s claims with cynicism about the reality of human nature. The cynic might be tempted to say, “Hold on a minute, Paul. You’re telling me that ALL of my sins are paid for on the cross? That I am completely free from God’s wrath if I believe in Christ? Well then, maybe I should just keep on sinning and doing exactly what I want!”

It is exactly this line of thinking that Paul counters in Romans 6, anticipating such an objection to the radical availability of the grace of God in Christ. Paul’s counter, in a nutshell, is this: Those who have truly experienced redemption through Christ, with its forgiveness of sin, have simultaneously experienced a spiritual awakening to the awfulness of sin and the joy of obedience to Jesus. Far from seeing God’s grace as a “get out of jail free” card, they see the infinite worth of Jesus’ sacrifice, and their desires begin to change.

This transformation is not immediate, mind you, and Paul will spend much of Romans 6 and 7 discussing the reality of believers’ present struggle with sin. But the change is real, and

Notes

it is tangible. The major theme that we will explore this week, as we study this chapter, is how we use our identity as Christ's followers – raised and renewed – to provide the fuel for our obedience in the everyday struggle with sin.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: DEATH, LIFE AND BAPTISM

Read Romans 6:1-23, focusing especially on verses 1-4. What is the effect of our baptism on everyday life?

Paul opens the chapter with a resounding answer to the rhetorical question that he anticipates as an objection to the abundance of grace he described in Rom. 5:20. The answer is not just, “no,” but more forcefully, “No way!” or “Absolutely not!” For Paul, the mere idea that grace encourages sin is foolish and antithetical to the gospel. In fact, grace encourages righteousness. How does it do this? We note that for Paul, God's grace in the gospel has not just changed our circumstances, it has changed who we are. We have, in the language of verse 1, “died to sin.” To illustrate what he means by this, Paul encourages the Romans to consider their baptism. Baptism is an outward act of being immersed in water. As an ordinance, or sacrament, of the church, baptism is an outward, physical symbol, or picture, of an inward, spiritual reality. In this case, baptism is a picture of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ. When I am baptized, it's not as if that act of baptism has saving significance in and of itself. Rather, that act expresses, in a physical action, that by His death Christ “buried” the curse of sin on my life.

We must realize that for Paul, we are not becoming dead to sin; we already are, by virtue of Christ's work, dead to sin. This means that sin, in the here and now, has no power over me. The reason Paul wants the Roman believers to remember their water baptism is that in the remembering, they can recall the power of Christ's sacrifice and the death of sin in their lives. Not only that, they can recall that just as Christ did not stay dead but was resurrected, so too they came out of the water, picturing their renewed lives. The upshot is this: Our lives, in Christ, can be seen to parallel His own. He died, so we die (to sin, that is). He was raised, so we are raised.

At this point, you may raise an objection. While we can claim that sin has no power over us, we often feel as if it still does have power over us. We can, and should, say that we are already delivered from the curse of sin. But we also feel that we are not yet who we are created to be, because we still struggle with a sin nature. This is a tension, apparent throughout the New Testament teaching on our sanctification: Already, but not yet. We are already saved, sanctified, even glorified (Rom. 8:29-30). But we have not yet arrived, and we still struggle.

Winning that daily battle is the theme of the rest of Romans 6.

What habits of mind and heart can you cultivate to remind yourself, on a daily basis, that you are dead to sin and raised to walk in newness of life?

DAY TWO: NO LONGER A SLAVE TO SIN

Read Romans 6:1-23, focusing especially on verses 5-14. What are the implications for Christ's death in our present lives?

Paul in this paragraph uses some language that we, as redeemed children of God and Christ-followers, must know and understand. This is the language, in verse 5, of being “united with Him,” that is, with Christ. All of the benefits of our salvation – redemption and justification, cleansing, sanctification, and the reward of eternal life – come to us as we are in Christ. As we have already seen, this means in essence that what happened to Christ was credited to us, and the reward of Christ is offered to us. If He died to destroy the power of sin, Paul reasons, then we died to sin. If He was raised, then we are raised. And if we are dead to sin, then that must mean we are free from its power, not just for a moment but forever, since Christ's atonement is an everlasting atonement.

The key phrase comes in verse 11: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (ESV). Paul is here commanding us to remember, all the time, and act as though sin has no power over us, because in reality it does not. Paul is asking us to do something here that is terribly difficult, because we often feel that sin has power over us. We feel the overwhelming temptation to lie to make ourselves look good, to dwell on sensual pleasure, to be angry at others for hurting us. These sins seem so powerful, so insurmountable, that surely they are irresistible, right? Wrong. The idea that sin is irresistible to one who is in Christ is a lie of the devil, one of his most effective.

By living a life of righteousness, we are acting in complete agreement with what Paul says is true of us. The truth is that sin has no power over us, so we can choose to obey God rather than our passions and our flesh. It is a conscious choice, but this choice takes effort and faithfulness.

Read John 15:5-11. In light of what we have seen in Romans 6, what do you think Jesus means by “abide”? How can you discipline yourself to abide?

DAY THREE: SLAVES TO OBEDIENCE

Read Romans 6:1-23, focusing especially on verses 15-23. Do we get to choose whether or not to be slaves, or simply get to choose who is our master?

Since we are free, what now? As Paul concludes his line of reasoning regarding the power of sin in our lives, he returns again to some of the themes that opened the chapter. Since we are free from the power of sin, does that mean we

Notes

can continue in it? Again, he says, absolutely not! To live life in this way would be to consider ourselves the master, rather than the slave. Paul is quick to point out that just because we are free from sin, does not mean we are suddenly our own masters. Rather, we are always a slave to something, Paul argues. We used to be a slave to sin, and were under its curse of death. Now that we have been freed from that slavery, we can choose to become slaves of righteousness which is, in truth, what we were created to be.

Why should we choose to live a life of obedience to Christ? Because, in truth, that is who we are. It is who we were created to be, and it is who we have been declared to be in Christ. To do so otherwise is unnatural and foolish. But here's the thing: Slavery to sinfulness often does not feel unnatural. Often, sinful habits feel comfortable and easy. Like the Israelites in the desert, claiming that it was better to be back in slavery in Egypt, we find ourselves lapsing back into old patterns of thinking. This is why we must, as a daily habit of Bible study and prayer, remind ourselves of the reality of who we are in Christ. By submitting ourselves to this reality, we gain the fruit of our sanctification, eternal life.

If a casual, unbiased observer watched your life for a day, what would they conclude that you are a slave to: Sin or righteousness?



Romans 7:1-25

by Mr. Chuck Bounds

Study for Life Group lesson on April 12

Overview and Context

In our previous study of Deuteronomy, Pastor David Jones pointed out that God's law reveals His character. When God gave the law to his people, Israel, He was giving them the opportunity to live the covenant life as His treasured possession in the promised land. God's law was to be a guide for Israel to pattern their lives after the character of God. They could not enjoy the blessings of a personal relationship with the one true, living, and holy God without living holy lives. But because of their sinful and rebellious hearts, the law served a different purpose. It revealed their sins and judge them guilty, which separated them from the holy and righteous God who loved them.

In Acts 13:22 we have testimony of King David, who was passionate about loving God with all his heart, soul, and strength. God himself said of David that he was "a man after My own heart who would do all My will." King David said, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). David could say that he loved God's law because he loved God and desired to live in obedience to the one he loved. To David the law was a guide for loving and living in harmony with his Lord. We know that David wasn't perfect. God's law said that David sinned, yet he was called "a man after God's own heart." How does this work? So we have the same law for Israel and David. Israel went so far as to reject God's son Jesus.

Notes

David sinned, but had great faith in God and was “a man after God’s own heart.” In God’s redemptive plan, His law serves several purposes, which brings us to this week’s study of the apostle Paul’s teaching on the subject of the law and the believer.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: FREEDOM FROM THE POWER OF THE LAW

Read Romans 7:1-6. We can neither be justified or sanctified (made to be holy) by keeping the law. Being in Christ is liberating! Note how many times is the word “law” is mentioned in these verses. How do we die to the law?

Here in chapter 7 Paul continues the discussion from chapter 6. In 6:15 Paul wrote, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” To which he answered with an emphatic, “Certainly not!” The Jews highly disagreed with the idea that anyone was not under the law. They accused Paul of teaching that being under grace meant that one could ignore the law and sin recklessly without consequence. In 7:1 Paul agrees that the law has power over a man while he is alive (in the flesh). The Jews’ focus was on living under the authority of the law in the here and now. Paul was speaking in terms of spiritual life. His teaching was from an eternal perspective. Those who are not in Christ are in the flesh and under the law. A Christian is “in Christ” and is no longer under the authority, or power, of the law.

Paul uses an illustration from marriage laws that both believing and non-believing Jews could understand. The law has power over a wife in that she is legally bound to her husband, to be faithful to only him as long as he lives. The marriage law has no more authority over the wife when her husband dies. He no longer exists as a husband to which the wife should be faithful. She is now free to marry another man. In all of this Paul is saying that once we are in Christ we have been freed from the authority or power of the law. Before we were in Christ, the law convicts us of sin and pronounces judgment with a penalty of death, which is separation from God. But when we are in Christ our sins have been forgiven and our sin debt has been paid. We have died to self (the flesh) and are now alive spiritually because we are in Christ. The law no longer has the purpose of condemning us or the power to put to us to death because we have died to the flesh.

As Christians we have the power of the Holy Spirit within us, enabling us to serve God. While we remain in our mortal bodies, we will struggle with our old flesh. We can still see sin and we recognize it as sin because of the law, and it is often very tempting. But thanks be to God we have the power to keep from sin.

How does the law apply to Jesus Christ? As a Christian are you a slave to the law, or does the law serve to describe your character?

DAY TWO: SIN AND THE LAW

Read Romans 7:7-13. What is sin and what is not sin? Tragically, we live in a world where many have no idea how to answer this question. In these verses note how the law functions in God's plan for your salvation.

The next accusation Paul addressed is that he is teaching that the law was sin, and his emphatic reply is, "Certainly not!" Paul considered it a blessing of God's grace that the law spelled out what is sin and revealed to him that he was a sinner. The law did not produce sin; it defined sin which already existed in the hearts of men. It is interesting that Paul illustrated his point by mentioning the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet." The other nine commandments pertain primarily to actions, but covetousness is manifested as an attitude which, if left unchecked, can move one to violate any of the other commandments."

In Paul's discussion of this facet of the law, he said that the law produced all kinds of sinful desires within him. In the flesh we naturally gravitate toward doing what is prohibited. Have you ever touched an object which had a sign that read, "wet paint - do not touch"? Before Paul was converted he was driven by the rules and regulations of religion - the law. When he became a follower of Christ, he realized that the law contributed to his evil desires and could never save him from sin. Again, his main point is that the law works to make us see our sin and know that we are sinners. Paul once saw the law as a highlighter of sin, but now he sees that the law is holy, and just, and good, revealing the character of God.

Are you developing a Christian worldview? On what basis do you decide what is right and what is wrong?

DAY THREE: WHAT THE LAW CANNOT DO

Read Romans 7:14-25. We know that God's law is good and right because He is good and right. Being in Christ, our new spiritual nature wants to do what is good and right. As you read these final verses of this chapter think about your struggles between the good that you want to do and what you actually do.

Here Paul makes the distinction between the spiritual and the carnal. He just said that the law is holy, just, and good, and now he admits that the law brings out the worst in him. Paul called himself a "wretched man." What? This is the greatest missionary/church planter the world has ever known. Paul acknowledges his struggle with the flesh.

These verses are powerful and vital to our understanding of living for Christ. If Paul struggled with carnality, certainly we all do. Paul pointed out that it is hard to keep our flesh in check! Sometimes we don't even understand why we

Notes

failed to live in accordance with God's will. In our minds we resolved to obey and do the right things, but before we know it we have sinned. The law doesn't change us, or make us do right. The law does not save us and set us free from sin. Paul is teaching us that while we are still here in our earthly flesh, we must contend with our old carnal nature. There is a spiritual battle between our old carnal nature and our new spiritual nature.

But take heart! God has delivered us through Jesus Christ our Lord. We have His power to say no to our flesh. We often hear people say they know that they need to get right with God. Then they list some of their bad habits which they are going to quit. Can you get right with God by obeying the Ten Commandments? Certainly not! As we grow toward being like Christ in character we grow in obedience. His law is easier to keep when we realize that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ. The law then becomes our delight.

Can you say, like King David, "Oh, how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day?" God's grace is truly amazing! As followers of Christ, we know that it is by grace that we have salvation and eternal life. But have you ever considered that God's grace also gave us the Law which revealed our sin and showed us that we were lost and in need of a Savior? God's grace gave us the law so that we might obey and please Him.

Do you use God's law as a guide, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you into sanctification and intimacy with God the Father?



Romans 8:1-39

by Mrs. Nicole Caldwell and Mrs. Robin Hall

Study for Life Group lesson on April 19

Overview and Context

As we continue on in our study of Romans we move away from looking at the power of the law and our own powerlessness in sin. Paul carries us toward a celebration of the new life of the Spirit that Christians enjoy as a result of Christ's saving work. John Piper calls Romans 8 "the greatest chapter in the Bible." Assurance and hope abound as Paul presents in the text what it means to have life in the Spirit, to be an heir with Christ, and the future glory and everlasting love of the Father for those He has predestined.

In Chapter 6 Paul described the newness a life in Christ brings, with sin having no dominion. In chapter 7 we explored the law and sin. We were reminded there that the law reveals sin in all its hideousness with us powerless against it in our own strength. At the same time Paul reflected on the goodness of the law and reminded us that the living presence of Jesus Christ is the answer to the sin problem we all face. Paul begins Chapter 8 with what some have noted is the greatest "therefore" in Scripture. From there flows a beautifully written account of the Trinity, as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit work in unity to keep us for Himself. What a sense of joy and hope to be found in the sustained list of privileges, securities, and assurance we find in Christ and in the kept love of God for those of us who are called "more than conquerors."

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Read Romans 8:1-13. How does Paul contrast the differences between walking by the Spirit and walking in the flesh?

In chapter 6, Paul explained that sin no longer has dominion over us because we are no longer under law but under grace. Why was the law ineffective in conquering mankind's monumental sin problem? Why was being under law such a bad thing? Was the law sinful (7:7)? Absolutely not! The law was, and is, good. But the law defined sin and in so doing brought sin to life (7:9). Was it the law, then, that brought death to us? No! Again, the problem was our sin. In the last few paragraphs of chapter 7, Paul described in detail what happens when a person attempts to obey the law in the flesh, in his own natural strength. Even though people may read and delight in God's law with their mind, in their flesh, their natural person, they still disobey. No matter how badly they want to obey the law, they simply cannot. How, then, can we possibly be delivered from this helpless state?

The answer comes in chapter 8. "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do" (8:3). God sent His Son, Jesus, who took on our sin-prone human nature. While Jesus did not Himself sin, He did bear our sin when He died on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21). It was there on the cross that God condemned our sin, fully pouring out His just wrath until the full payment for sin was paid. "There is therefore now no condemnation" for those who have trusted in Christ! Jesus took the punishment. Now, God looks at us and sees the righteous life of Jesus! The old way of things – sin, condemnation from the law, death – no longer has dominion over us. There is a new law, or way of things, and this law, the law of the Spirit, brings freedom and life.

What is the expectation now that we are set free from sin? Paul returns to a theme that he began in chapter 6. Freedom does not mean a return to sin. We are free not only from the condemnation of sin, but also from its power over us. Sin is still a danger to be avoided, but now we have the power to avoid it. A mind set on sin and the flesh is hostile to God. Sin belongs in the past, back with our old nature. What good did sin ever do for us? We owe sin nothing. However, the Spirit has given us everything! Life, freedom, peace, righteousness. Therefore, we must walk in the Spirit, set our minds on the Spirit, and allow the Spirit "of him who raised Jesus from the dead" to empower us to walk in a way that pleases our God and Savior.

Read Galatians 5:16-23 to see some examples of what it looks like to walk in the flesh and to walk in the Spirit. What sin do you need to put away?

DAY TWO: IDENTITY, GROANINGS, AND GLORY

Notes

Read Romans 8:14-30. What does this passage teach us about what it means to be a child of God? How does this identity affect our present and determine our future?

We learn in chapter 8 that the Spirit of life does more than change our behavior (our walk, verse 4) and our thinking (our minds, verse 5). This new life changes our identity. We are no longer indwelt by sin (7:17 and 23) but by Christ (8:10) and the Holy Spirit (8:9, 11). We are no longer slaves of sin, but sons of God! As God's children we share in Christ's inheritance. We also share both in His sufferings and His glory.

I can't think of a better word to encapsulate the pain of suffering than the word Paul uses here: "groaning." We see three things groaning in chapter 8: Creation, us, and the Spirit. The groaning of creation is pretty obvious. The howling of hurricanes and tornadoes, the cracking of drought-thirsty land, the crumbling of the earth as it quakes. Our own groaning is painfully obvious as well. From the mild grunts of old age to the suffocating cries of physical or emotional pain, we've seen it or experienced it ourselves. But what of the groanings of the Spirit? The groanings of the Spirit are evidence that God sees our suffering, is present in it, and is actively working and interceding for us through it. When our minds are too numb from the pain to know what to think or how to articulate anything, the Spirit is our helper. He is the perfect companion. He knows intimately our suffering and He also knows perfectly God's will for us in and through the suffering. His resultant prayers are, therefore, perfect.

Paul also comforts us with the reminder that these sufferings of our present reality, though very real and very felt by God, are not permanent. And their weightiness is not worth comparing with the worth of the glory that is to come. What do you think of when you think of glory or things that are glorious? A sunrise? A sports championship? A king's victory? Roll all of the glory of this present world together and it will not hold a candle to the glory that will be revealed when Christ comes again and the sons of God are revealed in their/our fullness. The world cannot see that glory now. And even though we have the miraculous foretaste of the Spirit within, we also cannot see, taste, or touch that kind of glory yet. But we can hope for it, even while we groan through suffering. We wait for it eagerly (verse 23) and patiently (verse 25). God has begun the work of salvation in us, and He will surely complete it. And it will be glorious because our God is glorious!

How has God been present in your suffering? Are you hoping and waiting eagerly, patiently for His return?

Notes

DAY THREE: EVERLASTING LOVE

Read Romans 8:31-39. What do we learn in this passage about trusting in our identity in Christ? How do we live in light of the love God has for us?

Following his bold declaration that despite the sufferings of this world, we are called, justified, and glorified, Paul pours out with an overflow of praise in the form of five questions. We begin in verse 31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Do not read this particular verse and assume that we will not experience opposition. What we must understand from Paul’s teaching is that as a child of God, no opposition will ever overcome us. While the struggles may seem like giants, the God behind those giants is even bigger. This brings us to the second question of the text, in verse 32: “How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” You’ve been purchased with the universe’s highest price. A God who put that kind of investment in you will certainly give you all that is needed to accomplish His will.

In verses 33 and 34 we find our next two questions. Who condemns? Who separates us from God? The answer to both is no one; Jesus was judged in our place. God has accepted His payment in our place. There is no approval to seek and no disapproval to fear. Scripture tells us God has committed all judgment to the Son and that work was finished on the cross.

Finally the fifth question. In verse 35 Paul writes, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger or sword?” This is answered in verses 37 through 39 with some of the most awe-inspiring and encouraging words of the passage. Paul describes those in Christ as conquerors and follows it with a whole list of foes that will not separate us from the love of our God. None of these things can get in the way of God’s love, or the completion of that love’s purpose. John Piper explains it best, “A conqueror defeats his enemy, but one who is more than a conqueror subjugates his enemy. A conqueror nullifies the purpose of his enemy; one who is more than a conqueror makes the enemy serve his own purposes. A conqueror strikes down his foe; one who is more than a conqueror makes his foe his slave.”

Do you live as a conqueror? Do you walk in the confidence of one secured by the blood of Christ?



Romans 9:1-10:21

by Pastor Jason Hall

Study for Life Group lesson on April 26

Overview and Context

Romans 8 is a mountaintop of biblical theology, and from its heights we have been able to appreciate the beauty and majesty of God's sovereignty, His goodness, His glory, and our future hope. The thundering doxology with which it climaxes – "(nothing)... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" – is surely the last word in meditating on God's eternal purpose.

Yet for Paul, there's more, because he is anticipating at this point in his letter a very real, and personal, objection that someone may raise to the limitless love of God. That potential objection is the continued obstinacy of the Jewish people, God's chosen and covenant people. In the first century, many Jews, and especially Jewish leaders, rejected the message of Jesus the Messiah. If faith in Jesus is the only way to salvation and the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, as Paul has argued, then why wouldn't more Jewish people trust in the Savior who was sent first to them? It is a perplexing question, and an emotional one for Paul, who is of course a Jew himself.

To defend the goodness of God, Paul will appeal to the reality of the Abrahamic covenant and to God's character as completely righteous and just. With that as his foundation, Paul will argue that God's purpose has never faltered and His plan has never failed – not for the

Notes

Jews in the first century, and not for anyone else either.

There is more theological ground to cover in these two chapters than we can do thoroughly in one week, but we will nevertheless walk through these arguments to appreciate the beauty of God's sovereign hand, as well as, in chapter 10, our place in bringing the salvation of the nations to pass.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY ON DISPLAY

Read Romans 9:1-29. Pay special attention to how many times you see Paul reference God's purpose, or His will.

The language of the opening paragraph of Romans 9 is almost as filled with sorrow and distress as the last paragraph of Romans 8 was filled with joy and courage. Paul has "great sorrow" and "unceasing anguish" (ESV) on account of his Jewish brothers and sisters who have rejected the Gospel. He even says, somewhat hyperbolically, that he would wish that he was lost, if it meant their salvation. He even lists all the advantages they have of being God's chosen people, having been given God's law, had a front row seat to His faithfulness, and the ultimate joy of seeing the Messiah born into their midst.

But it is in the second paragraph, beginning in verse 6, that Paul launches into the meat of his theological argument: "it is not as though the Word of God has failed." By using the phrase "Word of God" here Paul is referring to the promise God made to Abraham, referenced specifically back in chapter 4, to bless Abraham and his descendants and particularly to bless the world through them. The objection Paul is anticipating is this: If God made a promise to Abraham that was supposed to be fulfilled in his descendants, and his descendants (or at least many of them) have not received that blessing, does that mean that God broke His promise? For Paul, the answer is no. His reasoning, as we see in verses 6 and 7, depends on how he defines the words "Israel" and "children of Abraham." For Paul, those are not words that simply refer to physical descendants, but also have spiritual meaning as well.

The descendants of Abraham who fulfill the purposes of God are children of promise, not just children of progeny. The patriarchs of the Old Testament are the prime example, Paul argues. First Isaac, and then his son Jacob, are those through whom God chose to continue His promise. It was not simply bloodline – for in both cases, there were other sons – but God's sovereign choice, that made the promise effective.

The next two paragraphs present a solid case for why the promises of God are true because of God's character, and are not dependent on human beings believing in them. God's promise to Abraham did not come true because the Is-

raelites believed, since many didn't. God's promise came true because He chose a remnant, who by His grace would be saved through their faith. The presence of this remnant, some Jews and many Gentiles, proves the faithfulness of God.

Where is your hope? Is it placed in people, or in a sovereign God?

DAY TWO: RIGHTEOUSNESS BASED ON FAITH

Read Romans 9:30-10:4. What is the contrast that Paul is presenting to us?

If only a remnant of Jews were saved in Paul's day, then how does one account for so many of the Gentiles who were coming to faith in Christ, many of them through Paul's own ministry? It is because of how they are pursuing righteousness, as Paul argues in this paragraph.

Paul anticipates this question: Is it really fair that so many Jews, who were so zealous in their pursuit of righteousness, could not attain it, and so many pagan and lawless Gentiles could attain God's righteousness? This is appropriate, Paul says, because of how each of these groups went about pursuing righteousness. It's probably more accurate to say that the Gentiles did not pursue righteousness at all. When they heard the Word of the gospel – that is, the opportunity to attain righteousness based on faith in the finished work of Christ – they took it for what it was, and believed.

Unbelieving Jews, meanwhile, were different. They became obsessed, zealous even, for the law. But instead of letting the law lead them to faith in Christ, they dedicated themselves to being able to keep the law on their own. In 10:3 we see their fatal error: "For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." When Christ appeared, they rejected Him, because He represented a challenge to their works-based righteousness program.

Paul's hope for the Jews is that their zeal will turn in the opposite direction. He knows what it is like to pursue something wholeheartedly, only to find that it was an illusion. Paul had an experience like that on the Damascus road, when Jesus Himself appeared to Paul to turn him from the works-based righteousness he was pursuing. From that point forward, Paul regarded all of his previous attempts at works righteousness as rubbish (Phil. 3:7-8). He desires the Jews to come to the same conclusion, that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (verse 4, ESV). When Paul says "end of the law" here, he does not mean the law itself has no meaning anymore. Rather in this instance "end" is probably best understood as "goal," or perhaps most clearly, "fulfillment." Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law, thus demonstrating His own inherent righteousness. For those who believe in Jesus, God credits Christ's righteousness to them.

Even if you have believed in Jesus for salvation, do you find yourself still trying to "earn" God's favor by your behavior? Such a thing is inconsistent with the Gospel! We don't obey in order to be accepted; we obey because we already are accepted in Christ.

Notes

DAY THREE: ALL WHO CALL ON THE LORD ARE SAVED

Read Romans 10:5-21. Look for words and phrases that tell you to whom salvation is offered.

Paul knew that works righteousness was a dead-end street. Jesus Himself told Paul this on the road to Damascus, when Paul was blinded by the light of Christ and called to be God's spokesman. But for most people, it doesn't work that way. Most people won't get saved after seeing a blinding vision of the resurrected Jesus. Most people will be saved by hearing the truth of the Gospel spoken to them, and believing in that truth.

Surely it cannot be as simple as hearing the Word of truth and believing? Paul argues that it certainly is. In verses 5-8 he uses the example of Moses talking to the people of Israel, from Deuteronomy 30 to contrast the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith. The righteousness of the law is unattainable for sinners, because if you want to keep any of the commandments, you have to keep all of them. But Moses even reminded the Israelites, as they were about to enter the promised land, that they don't have to ascend to heaven or descend to the grave to understand the promise of righteousness. The promise is as close as God's Word, and belief in that Word. Even though Paul talks about both confession and belief in verses 9 and 10, in reality they are one and the same thing. Saving belief, in biblical terms, is to believe something so seriously that you can't help but proclaim it.

This Word of God, the chance to believe, is available to all, as Paul argues in verses 12-13. But how can pagan Gentiles, people who have never even heard of Jesus, possibly believe? The answer, for Paul, is simple: Us. Disciples of Christ must go, and be used by God as His instrument to spread the message of the Gospel by preaching. By using the word "preaching" Paul isn't just talking about what pastors do on Sunday morning. This is the responsibility of every believer, everywhere, to tell the story of Jesus' life, death, burial and resurrection to others. We might use the term "evangelism," or "witness." Whatever you call it, this much is clear: Our job is to tell the Gospel. God's job is to awaken faith in those who hear.

Do you take seriously your responsibility to "preach the good news" wherever you go? If you don't, what is causing you to disobey? How can you be equipped to share your faith?



Romans 11:1-36

by Pastor John Nyota

Study for Life Group lesson on May 3

Overview and Context

Romans chapters 9-11 deal with the question of whether God will fulfill the promises He made with the ethnic Jews. God promised to send the Messiah to Israel; yet now the church is predominantly made up of Gentile Christians. Will His promises be fulfilled and how? Paul argues through these chapters that God's work through the gospel is perfectly in line with the promises He made to the Jews in the Old Testament.

Paul argues that God's word never promised salvation to all the biological descendants of Abraham. Salvation is not a birthright, but a gift to whom God chooses to give it. But as Jews reject the gospel, Paul argues, they are moved aside as Gentiles respond in a big way. Chapter 11 looks at Israel's present and future response to the Messiah. At the present God is continuing His faithfulness to Israel by saving a remnant (11:1-10); and it will culminate with a significant number of Jews being saved in the future (11:11-32). Paul also warns the Gentile Christians not to be arrogant but to humbly rely on God's grace. Paul concludes the chapter with a doxology (11:33-36) that praises God for His marvelous salvation plan for both Jews and Gentiles.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: THE REMNANT OF ISRAEL

Read Romans 11:1-10. Why did God reject the majority of Israel?

Paul begins the new section with a rhetorical question, “Has God rejected His people?” This is Paul’s follow up to the conclusion in the previous chapter that Israel are “a disobedient and contrary people” (10:21). Since the majority of people refused to believe, does this mean that God has rejected His people? Of course He has not! Paul starts by presenting himself as an example of a Jewish believer. He is one of the remnant who is saved and a recipient of the blessings God promised to His people in the Old Testament.

To illustrate his point about the remnant, Paul gives the example of Elijah from the Old Testament (1 Kings 19:1-18). After learning of the prophets killed by King Ahab, Elijah fled to the desert and he moaned before the Lord that he was the only one left. But God assured him that He had preserved a remnant (7,000) who had not worshiped Baal. Paul concludes that even now, there is a remnant chosen by grace. And this remnant (Jewish Christians) exists not because of works they have done, but because God chose them on the basis of His own grace (verse 6). Grace means that God is entirely free to lavish His blessings on whomever He chooses.

With the rhetorical question, “What then?”, Paul sums the conclusion on the discussion about the remnant. The majority of the Jews, in Paul’s day, failed to obtain what they were seeking – right standing with God through the law. However, the elect (among the Jewish people) obtained it; that is, individual Jews responded to the gospel. God hardened the hearts of those who rejected the gospel. By refusing to believe, they became insensitive to the Holy Spirit’s prompting. This is a great reminder that obedience will draw us closer to the Lord. Disobedience will not only take us further away, but will make us insensitive to the Spirit’s leading.

How obedient are you to God’s commands and teachings that you already know? What are you doing about any unconfessed sins that might be hindering your fellowship with God?

DAY TWO: WARNING AGAINST ARROGANCE

Read Romans 11:11-24. Why does Paul warn the Gentile Christians not to be proud?

Paul starts this section with another rhetorical question, “Has Israel stumbled beyond recovery?” And the answer is, “By no means!” Actually, because of their rejection of the gospel, salvation has come to the Gentiles. This will provoke the Jews to jealousy when they see Gentiles enjoying a relationship with

Yahweh. Now if Israel's trespass has resulted in salvation for the Gentiles, just imagine how great their restoration will be (verse 12).

Paul now addresses the Gentile Christians in the church at Rome (from verse 13). He warns them not to be arrogant toward the Jews since it is God's grace, and not their own good works, that saved them. He uses the picture of grafting olive trees as an illustration of how the Gentiles have come to share God's in saving promises. He reminds them that branches were broken off from the olive tree (Jews) so that they (Gentiles) could be grafted in. And these branches were broken off because of unbelief. This should result in fear and awe; therefore, they should be on guard. For if God did not spare the natural branches (Israel), what about the branches that were grafted in?

The Gentile believers must consider both God's kindness and severity. God's severity is demonstrated in His dealing with the unbelieving Israel – He cut them off. But His kindness is seen in His inclusion of Gentiles into His own family. They must persevere in faith. Otherwise this will lead to them being cut off. Israel also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, would be grafted back into the olive tree (verse 23). God has the power to do it. For it is certainly easier to graft natural branches back in, than what God has already done, that is, graft in a wild olive shoot.

How can we guard against arrogance toward others?

DAY THREE: THE MYSTERY OF ISRAEL'S SALVATION

Read Romans 11:25-36. How does Paul describe the mystery of Israel's salvation?

In today's passage Paul brings the argument of this chapter to its climax. He discloses a mystery to the Gentiles to prevent them from being proud. The word "mystery" means something that was formerly hidden, but is now revealed by God, so that everyone may understand.

Paul describes the mystery in three clauses (verses 25b-26a). First, a partial hardening has come upon Israel. In other words, the majority of Israel has rejected the gospel. Second, this hardening is temporary until the fullness of the Gentile believers have come to Christ. Third, in this way Israel will be saved. Many have taken this to mean that sometime in the future a large number of ethnic Jews will be saved, and their salvation will be on the same basis as Gentiles – responding in faith to the gospel.

Paul concludes his argument by quoting from the Old Testament. Isaiah prophesied that a deliverer would come to those who repented of their sins (Isa. 59:20). Paul applies this prophecy to the coming of Christ (see 1 Thess. 1:10). He will banish ungodliness from Jacob. And this will be the covenant when He takes away their sins (Isa. 59:21). Paul is teaching that a time is coming when Jews will place their faith in the Messiah. Salvation for the Jews will be a fulfillment of God's covenantal promises to save His people and to forgive their sins.

Notes

In verses 28-32 Paul wraps up chapters 9-11 by repeating some of the arguments he has been making. Regarding the gospel, Israel's unbelief has made them an enemy of God. Israel's failure to believe the gospel has cut her off from God's salvation (Romans 9). That worked to the advantage of the Gentiles. As a result of the Jews rejecting the gospel, this opened the way for it to be preached to the Gentiles. Although most of the Jews have rejected the gospel, they are still His chosen people because of God's promise to their forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). As we have seen in this chapter, God is now saving some Jews (the remnants, verses 1-10), but He will save a large number in the future (verses 11-27).

Verses 30-32 compare Gentiles and Jews in terms of their disobedience and God's mercy. God saved the Gentiles, when one would expect mainly the Jews to be saved. But in the future He will save the Jews to the amazement of all. Paul reminds us that all (both Jews and Gentiles) are sinners (Rom. 3:23) and therefore God is able to show mercy to all alike. No one can lay claim on the mercy of God. It is a free gift for all who believe – both Jews and Gentiles.

How should we respond to this detailed discussion of God's plan and revelation regarding salvation? Paul shows us how in the final verses (33-36) of this chapter. He breaks out into a doxology of praise and awe. God's wisdom and ways are far beyond our understanding. Only God could have conceived a plan that would turn disobedience into an occasion for mercy, providing salvation to all (both Jews and Gentiles) who would believe. No one knows the mind of the Lord apart from God's revelation; no one could ever serve as His counselor. Everything we have, including life, is a gift from God. He is the source, the agent, and the goal of everything that exists. Through Him everything that exists is sustained. Therefore, He deserves all the glory. To Him be glory forever.

What is your response to God's revelation? Does it lead you to worship and praise?



Romans 12:1-21

by Mrs. Dawn Jones and Mrs. Eleanor Waterman

Study for Life Group lesson on May 10

Overview and Context

The book of Romans is often said to be divided into two parts, a theological part and a practical part. The theological, or doctrinal, section is found in chapters 1–11; the practical, or applicational section is found in chapters 12–16. Paul wonderfully mixes theology and practice together. All his theology is practical, and all his practical living is based on good theology.

After graciously laying out, in the first 11 chapters, the foundational truths pertaining to salvation – condemnation, justification, and sanctification of mankind – the apostle Paul now begins in chapter 12 to apply these truths to everyday living for the believer. In fact, this “doctrinal leading to practical” framework is one Paul uses often in his letters to churches. The reason Paul does this is that it is the way he views his life in Christ. What we do, or our obedience to God, is based on the prior work that God has done in us. Put another way, the imperatives (commands) of Scripture are rooted in the indicatives (who the Bible says we are, based on Christ’s work).

In the gospel God has graciously extended to Christians so much (see Romans 1–11, what we’ve spent the last 10 weeks studying). Therefore, Paul can do nothing but plead with his readers to respond to God’s goodness with lives of obedience (see Romans 12–16, what we’ll spend the next four weeks studying). Chapter 12 begins Paul’s declaration to live rightly in light of all God has done.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: A LIVING SACRIFICE

Read all of Romans 12, focusing on verses 1-2. Think on the instructions for application that Paul provides for the Roman Christians of their new life in Christ and how this can also apply to us today. How are we to be a living sacrifice?

Paul spent the first eight chapters of Romans sharing the message that faith is in Christ alone and not by works of the law. Here we see Paul giving instruction and application on what the life of a believer should look like.

Paul makes a serious and urgent request to the Roman Christians. Notice the word “therefore” that Paul uses. By using this word, Paul is saying that because of everything that our merciful, loving and kind God has done for you, be obedient in offering **your entire lives** as living sacrifices. We are to offer all of ourselves, not just some of ourselves. We are to be entirely devoted to God in all that we think, say, and do. Paul says that this is our spiritual worship.

In the Old Testament, every sacrifice had to be holy and acceptable to God. Leviticus 1:10 reads, “If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall bring a male without blemish.” And Deuteronomy 15:21 states, “But if it has any blemish, if it is lame or blind or has any serious blemish whatever, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God.” It was unacceptable to bring a defective offering to the Lord.

In the New Testament, the standard is the same, but we are to be a living sacrifice to God by not being conformed to the world. As believers, the Holy Spirit sanctifies us and empowers us to live a holy life, pleasing to God. Rather than conforming to the world we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. By being transformed, a true change occurs where we put off our old self and the patterns and behaviors we once had, and put on our new self in pursuit of righteousness and holiness. This is our living testimony to the world around us as well.

How can we be transformed? Through the consistent study of God’s Word, an active prayer life, meditating on Scripture and fellowship and accountability with other believers.

Are you actively pursuing what it means to be a living sacrifice to God? Pray to God, asking Him to transform you so that His ways are your ways.

DAY TWO: GIFTS OF GRACE

Read all of Romans 12, focusing on verses 3-8. Paul now moves into introducing some spiritual gifts. All believers are given spiritual gifts at salvation. While not an exhaustive list, think on what your spiritual gifts are and how we are called to use those gifts within and for the church body.

Starting with verse three, Paul first reminds the Roman Christians once again that what he is about to say is because of the grace given to him by God, just as he said in Rom 1:5: “Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.” Paul can say these things because of who God is and what He has done. Remember that Paul was not physically present with these believers; yet he still exercised his own spiritual giftedness through obedience by teaching on this matter. Paul’s words also apply to us as believers today. We can know this because he didn’t address one specific group, but rather all believers. Paul said, “I say to *everyone* among you.”

In the previous verses, Paul stated that believers are to have renewed, transformed minds. Paul then moves into greater detail of what the renewed mind of a believer should look like by instructing the Christians to not think too highly of themselves. No longer conformed to the world, believers are to replace high self-regard with high regard for Christ. Our prayer should be for God to increase, that we may decrease. The unmerited grace God has demonstrated towards us should lead us to humility in our giftedness. All that we are is solely by the grace of God, not of ourselves.

Paul paints a beautiful picture of the church and how though we are one body, there are many different parts. God’s design for His church is on display as believers utilize and share their gifts. Our individual uniqueness in how God created us should be celebrated and exercised within the church body. Just like the human body, members of the church rely on one another not only for strengths but also in their weaknesses, to build one another up. 1 Peter 4:10 states, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” How beautiful and wonderful is it that God has imparted giftedness to His children to edify and build up the church!

How can you know what my spiritual gifting is? You can learn what your spiritual gifts are through the study of God’s Word. In addition to studying God’s Word, you can begin serving and see how God uses you. It is also helpful to ask other believers around you how they see your spiritual gifting.

Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? Are you exercising your spiritual gifts within the church? Ask the Lord to help you to know your spiritual gifts and for opportunities to exercise those gifts within the church body.

DAY 3: BEHAVE LIKE A CHRISTIAN

Read all of Romans 12, looking particularly at verses 9–21. Notice how the apostle Paul becomes increasingly practical with his encouragement to live godly lives.

In verses 9–21 Paul addresses every believer with a list of exhortations that are loosely connected. He is going to explain how believers are to serve by faith now that we have been saved by faith and are living by faith. The apostle is attempting in these verses to show us what God’s righteousness looks like in

Notes

everyday life.

First, he addresses a command to love sincerely, without hypocrisy. Love is a great way to begin a list of exhortations and actually summarizes all that follows in chapter 12. Love detests evil and clings to good (verse 9). Love puts others first as though they were members of the same family – in fact, we are God’s family. This includes serving with diligence, showing patience, being devoted to prayer, showing hospitality, rejoicing and weeping with one another (verses 11–15). Paul is simply calling the church to be other-centered, to think of others first. Love never acts like the world, repaying “evil with evil.” Rather, love acts with overwhelming kindness to try to make enemies into friends (verses 17–18).

The phrase “devoted to prayer” is worthy of some attention in light of our Sunday morning sermon series through Acts. In Acts, we read of the church being devoted to prayer. Repeatedly Luke writes that the early church was in one accord in prayer, unified in prayer. Scholar Matthew Henry once said, “Those who live without prayer live without God in this world.” John Calvin believed that prayer was the summary evidence of everything in the Christian life. The apostle Paul is here calling us to be faithful and persistent in our prayers as a necessary part of the Christian life.

Most of Paul’s applications of theology are not hard to understand. The difficult part is in obeying them. Many times we simply walk around in the flesh, not remembering that we are Spirit-led. Paul also wrote in Gal. 5:16, “I say then, ‘Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.’”

Paul declares that the flesh is contrary to the Spirit and that if we are led by the Spirit, we are not in bondage to our earthly desires. In other words, we can choose to do what is godly. We can live by the standards found in Romans 12:9–21. Do you find it hard to daily walk in the Spirit? Go to the Lord in prayer and confess like Paul, “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:22–25).

Ask the Lord for help to understand what true love looks like and then the grace to love in the face of all the world’s disappointments that come our way. We may love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).



Romans 13:1-14

by Pastor Jason Hall

Study for Life Group lesson on May 17

Overview and Context

If we were attempting to sum up the themes of Romans 13 in one word, that word might be submission. Paul teaches that Christians should submit to secular authorities, based primarily on the theological fact that God is sovereign over all world affairs, including human governments. He teaches that Christians should love each other, in essence calling us to submit our own wants and needs to others'. And finally, he calls all Christians to submit to the Lord by being dedicated to holiness.

Paul assumes, in this part of his letter to the Romans, that Christians will be living in a world that is often hostile to our faith in general and hostile to the kindness of Christianity in particular. In the last paragraph of chapter 12, we saw statements designed to equip believers to minister to those who would persecute them, to avoid vengeance (presumably for wrongs done), to serve their enemies and, in general, "overcome evil with good" (12:21, ESV). As we move through chapter 13 this week, we'll notice how this assumed cultural context affects the commands Paul gives to believers.

It's also true, though, that a believer's attitude should be to bless all people, friend and enemy alike. As we finish chapter 13 we'll notice how arming ourselves to walk in holiness equips us to not only bless our enemies, but also to deal with potential problems we might have with other believers as well.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: SUBMISSION TO GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

Read Romans 13:1-7. Where do authorities come from and what is their purpose?

Paul's main command in this paragraph is in the very first line, and it is all-encompassing: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities" (ESV). There is no one outside of this authority, and everyone is to obey – put simply, do what the authorities tell you. Why? Because all authority ultimately comes from God; therefore, to disobey the governing authorities is ultimately to disobey God.

Notice several reasons Paul doesn't give for obeying the governing authorities (or, if we take verse 7 seriously, respecting and honoring as well). We don't obey authorities because they're good, effective, efficient, or morally pure. The list of reasons we might not want to submit to government is virtually endless, but the reason we should is fairly straightforward – because God says so.

Verses 3-5 offer some reasons why God instituted government in the first place, and the generally positive effect some form of government has on society. Governing authorities generally curb evil behavior, providing a stable society. Governing authorities punish those who break the laws, and in so doing are acting as instruments of justice. Note that these things are not true of every government, every time, everywhere, but are true in general, and that is the sense in which Paul is giving these commands.

Governing authorities are an example of the common grace of God. What that means is that there are certain things from which all people benefit, which come from God Himself. For example, God causes the rain to fall and the sun to shine, which in turn grows food which all people, not just God's people, can eat and enjoy. Government is just such a thing.

Please note that Paul teaches us here that governmental authority is a derived authority – that is, it comes from God and is based on His authority. This means that governmental authority does not trump God's authority, and when any government commands us to do something that is contrary to God's Word, we are not bound to that. Perhaps the clearest example of this principle in Scripture is Acts 5:29, when the disciples are told to stop preaching in Jesus' name, and refuse.

Do you struggle with obeying, respecting or honoring the governing authorities? What does that say about your heart toward God?

DAY TWO: THE LAW FULFILLED THROUGH LOVE

Notes

Read Romans 13:8-10. In what ways is love a fulfillment of the law?

Romans 13:8 actually uses some of the language of 13:7, but Paul turns it on its head as he moves to a different theme: Love. Paul has, in verse 7, encouraged believers to pay what they owe. But here in verse 8 he says that we are all constantly indebted to one another, and we can never pay off this “debt of love.”

At the end of verse 8, Paul notes that to love is to “fulfill the law.” This phrase does not mean the same thing as when we say that Jesus fulfilled the law. Rather, in this case Paul is speaking of obedience – to love is to keep the law, specifically in regard to our fellow human beings. To illustrate his point, Paul lists several of the commands from the Ten Commandments. Note that all of these commands come from the second half of the Ten Commandments, what theologians and Bible students in the past have called the “Second Table” of the law – those which apply primarily to our relationship with each other, in distinction from the commandments at the top of the list which have to do mainly with our relationship with God.

Paul says that all of these “Second Table” commands can be summed up in a quote from Lev. 19:18: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Of course, Paul here is following in the teachings of our Lord. In Matt. 22:36-40, Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees with the question, what is the greatest command in the law? The Pharisees were hoping to trick Jesus into picking one particular law, which would then give them a chance to call him a hypocrite. But Jesus wisely quotes Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19, noting that the whole law can be summed up like this: Love God and love others.

Are there ways in which you put your own needs ahead of others? How can you love your neighbor as yourself?

DAY THREE: PUT ON THE ARMOR OF LIGHT

Read Romans 13:11-14. What is the primary metaphor Paul uses in these verses to describe the difference between Christians and non-Christians?

The command to love others, in verses 8-10, is urgent for Paul because the end is drawing near. Paul in this paragraph is calling Christians to active obedience, to love and obey not just with words but in real life. That seems to be the force of the call to action in verse 11, when he says to “wake from sleep.” This is a call to do away with a mundane, lackadaisical attitude toward obedience and purity, and pursue God with our whole hearts, right now.

Why? Because the time is near for Jesus to return. The “salvation” referenced at the end of verse 11 is probably not talking about salvation from sin, but about the second coming of Christ, when He will restore His kingdom on earth and rescue, or save, His people for all eternity. Paul’s point is obvious: Every pass-

Notes

ing day brings us one step closer to Jesus' return, so let's expend all our energy living for His kingdom and not our own.

In the next couple of verses Paul uses the metaphor of light and darkness to more urgently call us to holy living. The "day is at hand," verse 12 says, meaning that the Gospel is now available to all people who would believe. We are to "cast off the works of darkness" and "walk properly as in the daytime," a reference to obedience rather than resistance to God's Word. Light is commonly used in the Scriptures, as here, to represent God's truth.

Paul concludes in verse 14 with "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," which is practically speaking a parallel phrase with what he says in verse 12, "put on the armor of light." In short this means that as believers we must make daily choices to equip ourselves to fight the good fight of the faith by knowing the truth and walking in obedience to it. We must practice basic disciplines of the faith, training our minds to dwell on God's Word and not on worldly matters. We must be in prayer, for others and ourselves, since prayer is our lifeline to our Father in the midst of spiritual warfare. And finally, we must deny ourselves ("make no provision for the flesh," verse 14), take up our crosses, and follow the Lord.

How are you doing in the daily fight to "put on the armor of light"? What practices or habits do you need to change to put off the flesh more fully?



Romans 14:1-23

by Mr. Daniel Brooker

Study for Life Group lesson on May 24

Overview and Context

Paul has been putting the righteousness of God on display. He's walked the church in Rome (and us!) through the righteousness of God found in the great gospel of faith. Paul sobered us with a reminder of God's righteousness revealed in His judgement and wrath towards sinners. He's reminded us of God's saving righteousness and our way of escape through faith in Jesus. It's by faith in Christ that we are credited God's righteousness and given a sweet assurance of hope as a result. We have learned that this righteousness isn't just for Jewish people, or just for Gentiles, but part of God's plan to display His mercy to all who would believe. We have this great gospel and faith! But...now what?

How is it that we are to live in light of these truths? How are we to display God's righteousness in our everyday relationships, responsibilities, and lives? Until Jesus' establishment of the New Testament Church, Jewish people and Gentile people lived very different lives. Now God has thrust them together. We can expect there to be growing pains. Paul has been spending time instructing these believers (and us!) on how to get along with one another. This week we will dive further into specific examples of issues with unity. We will find that these issues weren't just ones the first century church would deal with, but ones that impact us even today.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: OPINIONS – EVERYONE’S GOT ‘EM

Read Romans 14:1-23. Concentrate on verses 1-4. What has become the focus of the believer’s quarrels in Rome?

Paul has just finished taking a breath after instructing the church to love one another in Rom. 13:8. He jumps right into a specific situation where they were tempted to do the opposite; that is, food. Today you might think that issues of what to eat are more related to the next fad diet. Remember that in the context of Paul’s original audience, Jewish people have lived for centuries with specific dietary laws and restrictions. Gentiles wouldn’t give it a second thought to dig into that juicy steak. However, others might have an almost knee-jerk reflexive reaction of asking many questions before even considering it. Was it prepared kosher or sacrificed to idols? This division in the church on what is okay to eat is something that we might want Paul to respond with by giving a menu, or checklist, of foods that were permitted and foods that weren’t.

But, Paul doesn’t do that. Instead of focusing on a checklist, Paul moves the matter away from a list of do’s and don’ts to a matter of the heart. Both sides are challenged. When matters of opinion (not doctrine) are at hand, if we are to love one another, we should start with acceptance and grace. Refusal to argue and an adjustment away from an “I’m right and you’re wrong” attitude to one of care and concern for each other is the bigger issue at hand. Paul points to a sensible reminder that we are all weak and saved by a strong Redeemer. Matters of conscience and personal conviction will one day be accounted for. Not by us, but by God.

Have you ever deemed a personal opinion of yours to be something worth judging other believers over? Pray that God will give you a spirit of wisdom and love when handling matters of opinion.

DAY TWO: BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SABBATH?

Read Romans 14:1-23. Focus on verses 5-12. What issue does Paul highlight that has become a point of division for the church?

Back in 2017, I went to Israel on a mission trip with others from Richland Creek. One thing that stands out in my memories of that trip was the drastic difference in activity during *Shabbat*, or the weekly observance of the Sabbath. At sundown Friday, everything shuts down and stays that way until sundown on Saturday. Most streets are totally empty as people stay home to observe *Shabbat*.

As the New Testament church is forming during the writing of the book of Romans, the observance (or lack thereof) of the Sabbath had become a sticking

point for many. This issue apparently had become such a problem there was division occurring among the believers in Rome. Paul writes here (and elsewhere – Gal. 4:9-11 and 2 Cor. 2:16-17) that if Sabbath observance becomes a matter of legal minutia instead of a celebration of the gift of the gospel of grace, we've missed the point. We are reminded by these Scriptures that ultimately these were written to show a future reality of their fulfillment in Jesus. No longer do we have to worry about being good enough or earning our way into heaven. We can't! We don't have to wonder if God will cast out all those who couldn't get to worship on Sunday because they were stuck working instead. Praise God that He sent His Son to keep the law perfectly for us and to credit to us righteousness through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus! Certainly, as believers we are called not to forsake the assembling of ourselves. We are to worship God, serve Him, and stir each other up unto good works (Heb. 10:24-25). However, it's not by these external observances of days that we attain our righteousness. Choices to observe special days or diets should be done with the purpose of honoring the Lord and giving Him thanks for the righteousness He's given us.

“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” – Rupertus Meldenius

Have you been tempted to come to church just because it's expected of you? How do these Scriptures point to a bigger heart issue behind worshipping and serving God besides just showing up on a particular day at a particular building?

DAY THREE: FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

Read Romans 14:1-23. Focus on verses 13-23. Look for ways Paul asks the members of the Church to be more concerned about others than themselves.

Compassion. Nobody in today's world would argue the need for more of it. However, more often than not, we like to be recipients of compassion rather than givers of it.

Jesus is a caring Savior. He wept over Lazarus (John 11:35). He gave of Himself continually for others because He felt their need for a shepherd (Matt. 9:36). He calls out to us that we may come to Him and find rest (Matt. 11:28). Jesus goes so far as to say that the watching world will know His true disciples by our love for one another (John 13:35). Paul is writing to believers in Rome and reminding them that to be a follower of Christ is to take up His mantle of compassion and concern for others. In light of this, we are to take great care for what we judge others about.

Clearly verse 13 here can't mean we are not called to admonish or rebuke others when they are walking in willful, sinful, disobedience to God. Instead, Paul is talking about matters of opinion and non-essentials of the faith. When it comes to gray matters not so clearly laid out in Scripture, we should ensure

Notes

that we not hold others to a standard we would not want to have applied to ourselves. We cause harm to our brothers and sisters by viewing our opinions as higher than theirs. We should never use our liberty in Christ as an excuse to hinder or harm our brothers and sisters.

Imagine someone comes to faith in Christ and is a recovering alcoholic. It would be unwise to place a stumbling block before them by meeting with them at a bar to catch up and pray together. Our intention might be to just enjoy some food and drink water. Technically, we're free to do that. However, this only invites temptation to someone who struggles with something that we may not view as any problem at all for us. And therein lies the problem – focusing on ourselves instead of others. God's Kingdom is to be marked by the wonderful abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. This will be evident in how we concern ourselves with the needs of others.

Based on this study, would you pray that God would convict and reveal what changes you need to make in order to have more care and concern for others? Would you pray that God would grip your heart with His Holy Spirit and give you eyes to see the struggles of others?



Romans 15:1-33

by Mr. Mike Greene

Study for Life Group lesson on May 31

Overview and Context

How does one bring a theological masterpiece to an end? It's like skipping a rock that keeps on bouncing on the water with each splash shouting out the glory of God and displaying the magnificence of the gospel. In this chapter, Paul carries on the arguments that he started in chapter 14; and then he begins his lengthy concluding remarks which make up much of this chapter and the next.

Within the church, there will always be a spectrum of believers ranging from those who are mature in their faith to those who are just beginning their journey. There will be a wide variety of responses to matters of conscience such as those mentioned in chapter 14. When it comes to Christian liberty, Paul exhorts the readers who are strong to bear the weaknesses of those who are weak; not just to put up with them, but to show concern for their good and their growth. All followers of Christ, whether they are weak or strong, are to live in harmony with each other. Paul makes the case that humility and self-denial have a purpose outside of ourselves. Following the example of Christ Himself, believers are not to look down on others nor cause them to stumble.

Although Paul had not yet been to Rome, he expresses great confidence in the church there. His confidence lies in the impact that the gospel has had on them. As he begins a lengthy

Notes

series of concluding statements, the first readers are reminded of their spiritual heritage. Paul also reminds them that the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God has equipped them to live in harmony and to be partners in spreading the gospel.

Explore the Text

DAY ONE: PARTNERS IN UNITY

Read Romans 15:1-13. What does Paul exhort believers in Rome to do? What does it mean for the strong and the weak to “bear” with one another? What reasons does the text give for why they should do this? How were the readers expected to accomplish these things?

Paul shifted gears back in chapter 12 and began moving toward practical applications – how we should live in light of the deep, rich and comprehensive truths of God that he has been explaining throughout the letter to the church in Rome. In chapter 14, he explained how believers ought to deal with matters of conscience or Christian liberties. What one believer might be able to do with a clear conscience while giving thanks to God, might cause another believer to stumble. It is not loving to hinder the growth of a new or a weak believer, nor is it loving for the strong believer to ignore the weak. Likewise, it is not loving for either to condemn the other. Paul continues this train of thought as chapter 15 opens with the admonition that “the strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength... .” Notice that he says “bear” and not “bear with.” The idea of helping is implied.

The commands to “bear the weaknesses” in verse 1 and to “accept one another” in verse 7 complete the series of exhortations that began in chapter 14. These summary commands are the transition into why this is so important. The first reason is that bearing the weakness of another is for his good. The term edification implies ‘instruction meant to improve’ or building up. To humble ourselves and deny ourselves has a greater purpose outside of ourselves.

The second reason is that Christ is our example and our motivation. Verse 3 quotes Psalm 69:9 to remind the reader of the selfless attitude of Christ, a concept that Paul expounded on beautifully in the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians. We are to have the mind of Christ who came as a servant (verses 3, 5, 8). Jesus referred to Himself that way, saying, “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” (Mark 10:45).

A third reason is that God instructs and empowers us to do what He has commanded. While we are to persevere and be encouraged on the basis of Scripture (verse 4), the very next verse reminds us that it is God who gives us

perseverance and encouragement. Finally, verse 13 credits the power of the Holy Spirit for enabling us to believe and to live in hope. God never requires anything of us that He has not already provided for.

Do you have a brother or a sister in Christ who could use your love and help to be strengthened in their faith? Is there someone you have judged or ignored because of matters of conscience? We are called and empowered as believers to live in harmony regardless of our current level of spiritual maturity.

DAY TWO: PARTNERS IN PERSONAL MINISTRY

Read Romans 15:14-21. What does the text say about Paul's confidence that the gospel has truly impacted lives in the church at Rome? What does it say about Paul's confidence in the gospel itself?

Paul expresses his confidence that his first readers have what they need to live and grow together in the Lord. Having the goodness of Christ and the knowledge of Christ, they are fully capable to “admonish one another.” This is one of many “one another” ministries that we see in the New Testament. To admonish in this context means to instruct or counsel one another. While not everyone is called to a formal counseling ministry, all believers are expected to counsel one another as they go about daily life. This is our personal ministry of the Word.

Paul has counseled the Roman church by letter because his missionary work has not yet allowed him to go to Rome. By the grace of God, Paul was a missionary to the Gentiles; yet, he makes much of Jesus rather than himself as he introduces himself and his ministry. Paul is also setting up his request that they be partners in taking the gospel further than it had ever been up until then. Whereas Paul was writing to people that he had never met, he is careful to focus on the grace and power and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If Paul were writing to you today, would he be confident in your ability to admonish or counsel one another? If not, what have you gathered from Romans so far that you will need?

DAY THREE: PARTNERS IN PUBLIC MINISTRY

Read Romans 15:22-33. What are Paul's desires going forward? What are his plans? What motivated Paul?

Paul desired to go to Rome and then on to Spain to take the gospel to the western edge of the Roman Empire. Paul had not yet been to Rome because he was busy taking the gospel to other places, and that job was about done. It is not likely that Paul meant that he had been to every place, but he had been everywhere that God had told him to go. Now he desired to take the gospel to new places. This is nothing new as it was always Paul's desire to take the gospel to places where it was not known. However, there was still a task to be completed

Notes

before moving on to new places. He demonstrated servanthood by taking the financial contributions of some predominately Gentile churches to the church in Jerusalem. See Acts 19:21 along with Acts 21 and following for the record of Paul's journey back to Jerusalem. While the offering to the suffering saints in Jerusalem was a service of love, Paul also recognized it as a debt. God had used the Jews to reveal Himself to the world, and He used the church in Jerusalem as the launching pad to take the gospel to the Gentile world. The Gentiles had received spiritual blessings from the Jewish believers.

The trip to Jerusalem resulted in Paul being betrayed by his own people. He was arrested and eventually shipped to Rome for trial. When Paul said in verse 29 that he would come to Rome "in the fullness of the blessing of Christ," he was absolutely correct, even though it was a different plan than he imagined. While Paul made his plans, the Lord directed his steps (Prov. 16:9) and Paul was good with that.

Paul knew that the power to live the Christian life and to obey God's calling is unleashed in prayer. He called upon the Roman church to "strive together" in prayer; literally, to 'contend along with' him in prayer. We can participate in the ministries of others by interceding for them in prayer. Paul knew the power of prayer, and he also recognized the hard work of prayer.

Do you have specific plans to take the gospel to others? Do you trust the Lord when He redirects your steps? The key is for us to "strive together" in prayer as partners in the gospel.