

ROMANS

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Description

Paul's letter to the Roman believers explained his mission and message. He explained the theology of the gospel in order to explain why everyone in the world needs it. This letter has had a great impact on the church throughout history. Many controversial doctrines are rooted there. This course examines the teachings of the book of Romans and applies them to Christian living.

Course Objectives

1. To see God's offer of salvation and his requirement of faith.
2. To discuss missiological issues about people who have not heard the gospel.
3. To understand the victory over sin that is possible and normal for a believer.
4. To study the relationship between Israel and the church in God's plan.
5. To understand the context of statements that have been the basis of doctrinal controversies in the church.
6. To gain a passion for the mission of the church to evangelize the world.

Lesson Design

The lessons are designed to be taught in one session each, but the time needed for each lesson might be two hours or more. If shorter sessions are necessary, lessons can be divided into smaller amounts of material.

Directions for the class leader in the lesson are in *italics*.

The class should frequently refer to the "Outline of Romans" that appears just before Lesson 1. As the class studies each passage, remind the students of how that passage fits into the context of that part of the book, and the context of the whole book.

Review questions are provided for each lesson. At the beginning of each class session, the class leader should ask the review questions for the previous lesson and a few questions from other past lessons. Make sure that all of the students help give answers. If someone is not participating, direct a question to him by name. This is a good time to correct misun-

derstandings of the material. The review questions are the same questions to use for the final test. Review and correct the answers as needed. Class leaders can access an answer key at shepherdsglobal.org.

Discussion questions and **in-class activities** are indicated by arrow bullet points. For discussion questions, the class leader should ask the question and allow several students to answer briefly. Sometimes the question reviews material that has just been studied. At those times, the students should be able to give the right answer. If there is confusion, the class leader should explain the material more thoroughly. At other times, the question introduces new material. Then, it is not necessary that the students answer accurately, and it is not necessary to come to a conclusion. The question only prepares them to learn the new material.

It is not necessary to look up every scripture reference in parentheses. References are provided to support the statements.

Sometimes a footnote will show where to find other material in the lesson or in another part of the course. It is not necessary to go to that material unless the class needs more explanation immediately.

The class leader could ask a student to explain quotations that are in boxes along the sides of the lessons.

Most lessons have a box with a picture and a historical note about Rome. The note is not related to the lesson. It is not necessary to include the historical note in the lesson presentation.

At the beginning of each class session, the class leader should collect the written assignments from the previous session and lead the group in a brief discussion of their writings.

Assignments for Students

This is a Bible class. Students should keep their Bibles open and look at the passage being studied.

A chart is provided for keeping a **record of completed assignments**. The chart is printed in the back of the course.

During the weeks of this course, the student should prepare three sermons or lessons based on a passage in Romans and present them to groups other than the class. After each presentation, he should ask some of the hearers to tell him how the presentation could be improved. He should give the class leader a copy of his presentation notes, a description of the group and event when he spoke, and his plans for improvement.

The student should prepare at least two conversations with believers from churches with doctrine different from his. He should ask them to explain why they hold their doctrine. He should explain passages from Romans that are relevant to the topic. He should write a description of the conversation and give it to the class leader. It is best if this assignment is completed after Lesson 9 is studied.

Except for Lesson 12, each lesson has a **writing assignment**. Each of these should be completed before the next class session. They should be given to the class leader at the beginning of class. The class leader should lead a short discussion of the students' writings.

At the end of the course is a **final test**. Students should complete the test individually without help and without looking at any written material. The list of questions is provided near the end of this course. The test can be scheduled for the same session when the last lesson is covered or at a different time. To shorten the time needed for taking the test, the teacher may select 20 questions to use. To write the answers for 20 questions may take an hour for some students. The students should not know which questions will be used and should study all of the review questions.

Students should be at every class session. If a student misses a session, he should study it, review it with the class leader, and write the assignment.

OUTLINE OF ROMANS

Part 1: Greetings and Introduction of the Theme (Romans 1:1-17)

Part 2: The Necessity of Justification by Faith (Romans 1:18-3:20)

Passage 1: The Gentile Error: Rejection of God for Idolatry (Romans 1:18-32)

Passage 2: The Israelite Error: Knowledge without Obedience (Romans 2:1-29)

Passage 3: The Justice of Universal Condemnation (Romans 3:1-20)

Part 3: The Means and Meaning of Justification (Romans 3:21-5:21)

Passage 1: Justification God's Way (Romans 3:21-31)

Passage 2: The Example of Abraham (Romans 4)

Passage 3: The Propitiation of Christ (Romans 5)

Part 4: Sanctification of the Justified (Romans 6-8)

Passage 1: Victory over Sin (Romans 6)

Passage 2: The Condition of the Convicted Sinner (Romans 7)

Passage 3: Life in the Spirit (Romans 8)

Part 5: God's Sovereignty in the Plan of Salvation (Romans 9-11)

Passage 1: God's Right to Determine the Means of Salvation (Romans 9)

Passage 2: The Response of Faith as the Condition of Acceptance (Romans 10)

Passage 3: Rejection of Unbelievers; Acceptance of Believers (Romans 11)

Part 6: Practical Instructions (Romans 12:1-15:7)

Passage 1: Humble and Holy Ministry in the Body (Romans 12:1-8)

Passage 2: Behavior toward Others (Romans 12:9-21)

Passage 3: Submission to Civil Authority (Romans 13:1-7)

Passage 4: The Fullness of Love (Romans 13:8-10)

Passage 5: Living in the Light (Romans 13:11-14)

Passage 6: Accepting Variations in Religious Practices (Romans 14:1-15:7)

Part 7: Conclusion: A Vision for Missions (Romans 15:8-33)

Part 8: Greetings (Romans 16)

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER

A BOOK OF DEBATED ISSUES

Many theological issues have been debated in the church through the centuries. The book of Romans deals with controversial issues of theology perhaps more than any other book of the Bible. Here are some examples of questions answered in this letter.

Theological Questions Answered in Romans

Note to class leader: Read each question and pause to let various members answer. The group should not spend much time on any question and should not try to come to conclusions. The purpose of the list is to show that there are many opinions about these questions.

1. What must a person believe in order to be saved by faith?
2. What does it mean that a Christian does not work for his salvation?
3. Did God decide to save some people and not to save others?
4. How does God choose who is saved and who is not?
5. What will happen to people who have never heard the gospel?
6. How can God be just if he forgives some sinners and punishes others?
7. Is a believer still a sinner?
8. What kind of spiritual victory is possible for real life?
9. Is it possible for a believer to lose his salvation?
10. Does God still have a plan for Israel?

THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER TO ROME

- » A student should read Romans 1:11-15 and 15:24 for the group. What reasons did Paul give for wanting to go to Rome?

The purpose of this letter was to introduce Paul and his theology of salvation to the Roman believers, so that

1. He could visit them to encourage the believers (1:11-12) and to preach the gospel in Rome (1:15).
2. He could start a new mission work with their support (15:24).

Paul had spent the years A.D. 47-57 evangelizing territories around the Aegean Sea. He wrote the letter to the Romans in about A.D. 57.¹ He planned to make a trip to Jerusalem, then to Rome. Paul wanted to use the church in Rome as a base for launching a missionary effort into Spain (15:24), which was the oldest Roman colony in the west and the center of Roman civilization in that part of the world.

Since Paul had never been to Rome, the letter served as a personal introduction and preparation for his visit. That is probably the reason for the extensive greetings in Romans 16.

Paul's visit to Rome did not happen the way he planned. He was arrested in Jerusalem. When it seemed to him that he would not get justice, he appealed to Caesar. After a dangerous journey, which included a shipwreck, he arrived in Rome as a prisoner in about A.D. 60. Though he was confined, he was free to receive visitors and minister to them and through them (Acts 28:30-31). Paul said that the events were working out for the advancement of the gospel (Philippians 1:12). There were converts even in Caesar's household.

Some historians believe that Paul was released after two years. Whether or not he made his trip to Spain is unknown. We know that he was eventually executed in Rome, but that may have been his second visit to the city.

By explaining the theology of salvation to show the basis of his missionary work, Paul showed the basis of missionary work in all places and times.

Several questions would naturally arise in response to Paul's request that they help launch his missionary trip. Someone might ask, "Why should you be the one to go?" So, Paul began the letter by mentioning his dedication to the work of evangelism (1:1). He later explained his special calling and success as apostle to the Gentiles (15:15-20).

Someone might ask, "Why does everyone need to hear the gospel? Maybe this message is not needed everywhere." But Paul explained the potential of the gospel for humankind worldwide (1:14, 16, 10:12) and the urgency of missionary work (10:14-15). He showed that the message applies to every person in the world, and that every person desperately needs to hear it.

"Paul's mind was to comprehend briefly in this epistle all the whole learning of Christ's gospel and to prepare an introduction unto all the Old Testament."

William Tyndale

"Prologue to Romans"

1 These dates are the opinions of scholars, and we do not know that they are perfectly accurate.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 1

Now let's look at the first passage – Paul's greetings and introduction.

- » A student should read Romans 1:1-17 for the group.

Note on Structure

1:1-17 describes Paul's call and motivation to spread the gospel. After that, 1:18-3:20 explains why the gospel is necessary, because sinners who have not repented are under the wrath of God. However, 1:15-19 forms the transition between these sections. It makes a point in itself, expressing the gospel concisely: that sinners are guilty because they know better and are, therefore, under wrath; but the believer is saved.

Main Point of 1:1-17

Paul was called and motivated to spread the gospel because it is the message of salvation for the one who believes.

Rome

The name of the city of Rome comes from the name Romulus. The legend is that twin sons of the god Mars, named Romulus and Remus, were abandoned as babies. They were raised by a wolf. As adults, they decided to build a city. They had an argument, and Romulus killed Remus.

Summary of 1:1-17

Everything in 1:1-14 leads up to the statement in 1:15. 1:16-18 explains concisely what the gospel is and why everyone needs it. The gospel is the message that God has provided forgiveness and people receive it by faith. The reason all people need this message is that they are under the wrath of God.

The whole book of Romans is explanation of the statements in 1:16-18.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(The numbers in parentheses are the chapters and verses being discussed.)

(1:1) Paul made three statements about himself.

- He was a slave of Jesus Christ.
- He was an apostle because God's call made him one.
- He was reserved for the work to which he was called.

Paul had been a Pharisee but was now devoted to the ministry of the gospel. Paul had Roman citizenship, but he did not mention that fact as part of his identification. It would not have helped to associate him with most of the Roman believers. Most of the people who lived in Rome did not have citizenship because they were foreigners or slaves. If Paul had mentioned his citizenship, that would have associated him with the higher class in Rome; it was more important to mention his spiritual role.

(1:2) The gospel was not entirely new but was contained in the message of the Old Testament prophets. Romans 4 especially shows that the gospel was understood by Abraham and David.

(1:3-4) In his natural life, God's Son was the descendant of David, born into the kingly line, which was predicted of the Messiah.

Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah*.

The term *Lord* refers to deity. The significance of the term *Lord* in the New Testament epistles can be seen by comparing Philippians 2:10-11 to Isaiah 45:23. It refers to the one who is supreme above all other authorities. (See also Acts 2:36.)

The term *Lord* does not necessarily mean the same in the New Testament Gospels, where people may have called Jesus "Lord" as a term of respect without really understanding that he was God.

In the New Testament epistles, the name "Jesus Christ our Lord" makes three statements of identity. It says that he is the historical man named Jesus, he is the Jewish Messiah, and he is God.

The resurrection proved Jesus' deity. In John 10:18, he claimed that he could take up his life again. He gave the resurrection as a sign for that generation, and the witnesses to the resurrection established it as a sign for all generations. A person who is not God could not raise himself from the dead; nor would God have raised a person who falsely claimed to be God, especially one who claimed that the resurrection would prove his identity.

- » Other people have been raised from the dead, but they were not God. How would you explain that the resurrection proved Jesus' identity?

(1:5) The call and spiritual gifts of apostleship were given for the purpose of bringing people of all nations to obedience to Christ. The only proper use of spiritual gifts is for the work of God. The only proper motive for ministerial work is for the glory of the name of Christ. Motives such as personal gain or personal credit are unworthy of a servant of God.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE APOSTOLIC CALLING

» Are there living apostles today?

The term *apostle* is sometimes used in the Bible with its general meaning of “one who is sent.” In Acts 14:14, Paul and Barnabas are called apostles, even though Barnabas was not one of the original twelve. In Galatians 1:19, Paul said that on a particular visit he had seen none of the apostles except Cephas (Peter) and James the Lord's brother. In that case, he referred to James as an apostle, even though he was not one of the original twelve.

However, the twelve apostles were normally considered a special group, to which nobody would be added. Matthew 10:2 says, “The names of the twelve apostles are these...” (See also Luke 6:13.) Jesus told the apostles that they would sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Luke 22:30). This promise seems to give a reward limited to 12 men. The names of the twelve apostles are on the 12 foundations of the city of God, which implies a unique group of 12 men (Revelation 21:14).

Jude the brother of Jesus did not call himself an apostle but referred to their authority (compare Jude 17 to 2 Peter 3:2). The apostles had a unique authority, and whatever they wrote to the churches was considered revelation (2 Peter 3:15-16).

The church chose Matthias to replace Judas, assuming that there should be twelve (Acts 1:26); but we do not find in history that the early church continued to replace the apostles when they died.

Paul was called by God to be an apostle (Romans 1:1). Paul implied that one of the qualifications of his apostleship was that he had seen Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:1). That would limit apostleship to the first generation of the church.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 1

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(1:6) “Called” refers to the call to be saved, to be holy people, as seen in the following verse. (See also 8:30.) Paul has said that the apostles have a ministry to all nations; he now points out that the Roman Christians are believers of the apostles' message. Thus he shows that they are obligated to take his apostolic authority seriously. This letter was not just from some missionary they had heard of. They owed attention and respect to him, even though he was not the founder of their church.²

2 See the note on 1:14-15.

(1:7) To be called to salvation is to be called to be holy. The statement is comparable to the statement in verse 1, where Paul said that he was an apostle because of being called to be an apostle. It does not mean that he was trying or hoping to be an apostle, but that he had been made an apostle by the call. The Roman believers had been made holy by the call to be holy. Just as the call to be an apostle came with the gifts and abilities for that ministry, the call to be holy comes with the power and cleansing that makes us holy. God's call is always accompanied by the grace to fulfill the call.

The holiness that begins at conversion is not complete in every way. The believer should progressively change his life to match God's truth as he learns it. Holiness is not complete at conversion; but holiness begins at conversion when the sinner repents, commits to obey God, and is made a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

(1:8) The term *world* was commonly used to refer to the civilized, known world rather than to the whole earth. The gospel had not yet gone everywhere on the earth.

(1:9) "The word *latreuo* [I serve] is in the New Testament always used of religious service.... This service may consist either in worship or in the performance of external duties of a religious nature."³ Paul served God not only with forms of religious activity, but with his spirit.

(1:10-12) Here Paul told them that he planned a visit to Rome. He wanted to strengthen them spiritually and he knew that they would be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Paul's statement tells us that believers benefit spiritually from fellowship with one another. The Holy Spirit accomplishes much of his work in believers through other believers. A person who neglects his relationship with other believers will lose the benefit of the establishing grace that comes through fellowship. (Paul spoke extensively of the need each member has of other members in 1 Corinthians 12.)

(1:13) Paul was hindered in his previous plan to visit them – not by problems, but by his priority of preaching the gospel where it had not been heard (see 15:20-22). Because the gospel had already been preached in Rome, Paul went to other places first. However, to come now was not contrary to his priority since his visit there would be a step toward reaching another unreached area (15:23-24).

(1:14) *Greeks* were those who were cultured and civilized by Greek influence. The word *barbarian* meant "foreigner," referring to a person from a more primitive culture that had been less affected by Greek culture. The Greeks considered the barbarians to be uncivilized and ignorant.

3 Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Romans, Ephesians and First Corinthians*,
<https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/hdg/romans-1.html#verse-9>

The term *wise* referred to people who were educated, especially by Greek philosophy; the *unwise* were people not highly educated. Paul showed that his ministry was not limited to certain kinds of people. This prepared for his ministry to them, as well as showing his role as a missionary.

Paul said that he was in debt to everyone who needed to hear the gospel. Paul did not owe a debt because sinners deserve to hear, but because he had received grace and the obligation to give it.

Illustration: If somebody gives John money to share with Thomas, John now owes Thomas even though Thomas may not have done anything to earn the money. Like this, we have a debt to those who have not heard the gospel, because God has given to us the responsibility to share it with them.

» Is every Christian in debt to share the gospel? Why?

(1:15) Paul had preached to the Greeks and the barbarians, and now he was eager to preach the gospel to the people in Rome as well.

He began his main theme by saying, “I am eager to preach the gospel to you,” then explained very briefly what the gospel is and why the world needs it. This brief explanation is expanded throughout the epistle.

1:14-15 again shows why Paul was qualified to come to them. He had a message that was for everyone in the world.⁴

(1:16) The gospel is for the Jew and the Greek, and this statement introduces the topic of Jews and Gentiles and their standing before God. This topic continues through Romans 3. Paul would not be ashamed of the gospel even in the center of the empire's power, for the gospel is the power of God.

God's power is at work in the gospel message, making it effective to save. God's commands are always accompanied by the power necessary to fulfill them. God's power is at work when his words are spoken.⁵ Messengers of the gospel depend on the power of the gospel because as they communicate the message, the Holy Spirit makes it convincing and empowering to the hearers.

For Paul, to stand for the gospel meant not only to defend it as objective truth, but also to preach it as transforming truth. He proclaimed it with confidence that it would change his hearers.

» Why should we have confidence when we preach the gospel?

4 See the note on 1:5-6.

5 See also 1 Peter 1:23 & 25, Romans 1:16, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Ezekiel 37:7-10, and Isaiah 55:11.

(1:17) **The person made righteous by faith will live.**⁶ This is the central and most important truth in the book of Romans.

The whole epistle of Romans deals with the subject of how a man can be justified; that is, made righteous (have God's righteousness). The urgency of the issue is shown in the next verse, for the wrath of God is ready for those who remain unrighteous.

The righteousness of God spoken of here is not "his attribute of righteousness... but righteousness flowing from and acceptable to him,"⁷ the righteousness of God worked in humanity through their faith. The same thought is in Philippians 3:9: "The righteousness from God that depends on faith." People are not only counted righteous because of forgiveness, but they begin to truly be righteous because God changes them.

Further in the letter (Romans 3:21-22), Paul said that the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus is for all who believe. In Romans 5:17-19 we read of the gift of righteousness that makes many righteous.

The phrase "from faith for faith" emphasizes that faith is the only means of righteousness. This is consistent with the Protestant emphasis on faith alone as the requirement for salvation.

In the book of Romans, the term *death* refers to the judgment of God. Only those who are made righteous by faith will live—that is, be spared judgment (see 1:18). God's wrath will be poured out on all except those who escape through faith.

- » What does it mean that a person becomes righteous by faith?
- » In this passage, what does it mean to live? What is death? What does it mean to live by means of faith?

"Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times."

Martin Luther

"The general intent of this epistle is to publish the eternal, unchangeable purpose or decree of God, which is, 'He that believes shall be saved: He that believes not shall be damned.'"

John Wesley

"Predestination Calmly Considered"

6 Paul was quoting Habakkuk 2:4.

7 Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary*, Romans 1:17
<https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/hac/romans-1.html>

THREE THEOLOGIAN WHO WERE CHANGED BY THE BOOK OF ROMANS

The epistle still serves its original purpose of providing a basis for missionary work. However, it does more. As Paul was explaining why everyone needed to hear the message, he explained thoroughly what the message is and why people can be saved only this way. He responded to some common objections. This explanation and defense of the message he preached takes up most of the book and controls its structure.

Romans is an explanation of the theology of salvation. Paul's theology of salvation provided an immediate defense against Judaizers,⁸ and it serves to correct modern errors about doctrines of salvation also.⁹

Through history, God has used the epistle to the Romans to restore the most important truths when they had been forgotten.

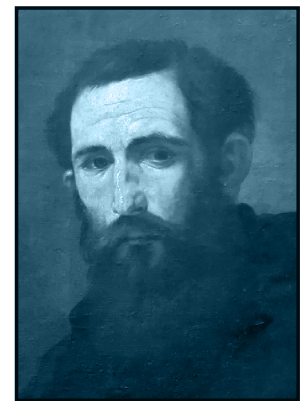
As a young man, Augustine looked for satisfaction in immoral relationships and philosophical and intellectual studies. He sought truth and found it in Christianity. Yet his love for sin held him captive. He saw himself described in Romans 7: He knew the truth but was completely unable to live a righteous life.

In A.D. 386, after reading Romans 13:13-14, Augustine, in his early thirties, committed to leave his life of sin. God freed him from the bondage of sin and enabled him to live a godly life in Christ Jesus.

In the remaining years of his life, Augustine¹⁰ was mightily used by God. His writings defended right doctrines against false philosophies. A popular idea at that time was the belief that people have a natural ability to do what is right and can therefore choose not to be sinners. From Romans 5, Augustine taught that people are born with a sinful nature that makes them want to disobey God. This nature makes it impossible to perfectly please God apart from grace. Augustine taught and testified to God's grace that makes people right with God.

“When anyone understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole scripture.”

John Calvin



Augustine

8 Judaizers are described later in this study.

9 Romans and Galatians are often studied together, because Galatians is a less comprehensive explanation of some of the same gospel themes.

10 Image: “Saint Augustin”, by Jusepe de Ribera, Goya Museum, uploaded by Aristoi, retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=72972944>, public domain.

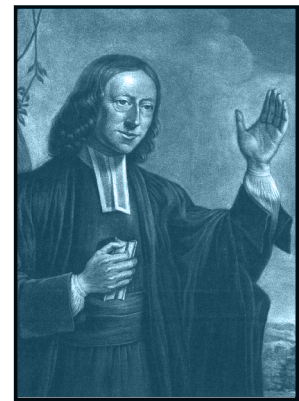


Martin Luther

In 1515, Martin Luther realized the meaning of Romans 1:17 after seeking for years for assurance of salvation.¹¹ Luther had tried to find spiritual peace by following the practices of monasticism with extra zeal. He fasted, practiced all the rituals of Catholicism, and even beat himself. It was while crawling on bloody knees up the steps of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome that he suddenly received from God an understanding of grace by faith.

He saw that the one who will be spared God's judgment is the one who believes God's promise to forgive. This assurance became the basis of his message that faith alone is the way we can be saved.

In 1738, John Wesley found the assurance of personal salvation that he had sought for years.¹² Wesley had been a zealous Bible scholar and lived a careful, religious life. He even went for two years as a missionary to the native Indians of America but did not yet clearly understand the gospel himself. On the ship during a storm, he saw Moravian families that were peacefully trusting God and did not fear death, and Wesley realized that he did not have that faith.



John Wesley

“Romans is the chief part of the New Testament and the purest gospel.”

Martin Luther

Wesley saw in scripture that conversion happens suddenly. He also met Moravian brothers who testified that they had personal assurance of salvation.

He began to realize that he needed to experience a definite conversion. His conversion happened while he was in a meeting in a home to study and pray. While someone was reading Luther's preface to the book of Romans, Wesley felt his heart “strangely warmed.” He said, “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation: and an assurance was given me that he had taken away **my** sins, even **mine**, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”¹³

For all three of these men, understanding the message was a motivation to zealous evangelism. The book still accomplishes its purpose of providing a basis for missions by explaining the theology of salvation.

» What effect can you imagine the book of Romans having on your life and ministry?

11 Image: “Martin Luther, 1529” by Lucas Cranach the Elder, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martin_Luther,_1529.jpg, public domain.

12 Image: “Bildnis des John Wesley”, by John Greenwood, retrieved from the Leipzig University Library <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ubleipzig/17059576182/>, public domain.

13 John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. I (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House), 103

LESSON 1 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Paul write the letter to the Roman believers?
2. Why did Paul plan to go to Rome?
3. What does the term *Jesus Christ our Lord* mean in the New Testament epistles?
4. How did the resurrection prove Jesus' deity?
5. Explain the term *barbarian* (Romans 1:14).
6. Why do we have a debt to those who have not heard the gospel?
7. What is the central and most important truth in the book of Romans?
8. What does *death* mean in the book of Romans?
9. According to Romans, who is spared from God's judgment?

LESSON 1 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Using the passage from this lesson, write a page about the ministry of the gospel. Explain the call to ministry, the debt the evangelist has to those who need to hear it, and the power that God gives to the message.
2. During the weeks of this course, you should prepare three sermons or lessons based on passages in Romans and present them to groups other than the class. After each presentation, you should ask some of the hearers to tell you how the presentation could be improved. You should give the class leader a copy of your presentation notes, a description of the group and event when you spoke, and your plans for improving your presentation.

LESSON 2

THE GENTILE ERROR

THE CHURCH AT ROME

The City

In Paul's time, Rome was the largest city in the world, with more than a million inhabitants.¹⁴ There was a mixture of ethnic groups, languages, and religions. Most people were slaves.

The First Missionaries to Rome

We do not know who was the very first to carry the gospel to Rome. On the day of Pentecost, Jews were present from Rome (Acts 2:10). Those who were converted surely took the message of the gospel back to Rome. Their announcement that the Messiah had come would have caused excitement and controversy. The gospel would have spread most rapidly among Gentiles who already respected Judaism.

A Gentile Church

Though Jews are addressed in parts of the letter, the church at Rome was mostly Gentile. Paul called them Gentiles (1:13-15) and said that since he was debtor to both Greeks and barbarians, he was ready to preach to the Romans. However, the Jewish influence in the Roman church was strong, since the first believers there were Jews. It is possible that the gospel had not been clearly explained in a way that showed believers their freedom from the rules of Judaism.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2

Since Paul's purpose was to promote missionary work, a question that would naturally arise is, "Does everyone really need justification by faith?" After all, there are some things that not everyone needs. People in the Arctic don't need anyone to bring them ice, and desert dwellers don't need sand.

Someone might think that maybe justification by faith is not something everyone in the world needs; maybe some people have lived a righteous life and are accepted by God already.

14 Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, *Talk through the New Testament*, 375

Part 2 of the letter (1:18-3:20) is written to show that everyone needs justification by faith and, therefore, needs the message about it.

Main Point of 1:18-3:20

Everyone in the world has violated God's requirements and is under condemnation. No one can be saved on the basis of meeting God's requirements because every person has already violated them.

Summary of 1:18-3:20

First, Paul describes the condition of the pagan Gentiles who were without God's revealed Word and shows that they have rejected the knowledge of God that he showed them in creation. Then, he describes the condition of the Israelites, who had God's written Word but did not obey it. He concludes by describing the general sinfulness of the world. The conclusion is that all the world is guilty before God. The gospel is needed because nobody can be saved by his own merits.

For these lessons, Part 2 (1:18-3:20) will be divided into three passages. In this lesson, we will study the first passage (1:18-32).

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2, PASSAGE 1

1:18 is the transitional verse between this passage and the previous one.

Main Point of 1:18-32

The Gentiles had a basic knowledge of God, but rejected it and turned to idols, becoming thoroughly depraved.

- » A student should read 1:18-32 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(1:18) God has given them a basic knowledge of himself. They suppress the truth. This implies that they possessed some truth, as the next verse explains. Their condemnation is that they rejected the truth they had. “*Ungodliness* describes an offense in the religious realm and expresses itself as idolatry, the worship of the creature more than the Creator

(1:19-23). *Unrighteousness* means moral perversity and is illustrated by immorality and wickedness (1:24-32).”¹⁵

The truth they suppressed is specified in 1:20. It includes the knowledge of God's authority over them. Their lifestyle demonstrates that they deny God's authority. In contrast, a Christian's lifestyle demonstrates submission to God's authority, both in what he does and in what he does not do.

TYPES OF REVELATION - SPECIAL AND GENERAL

» What are some ways that God's truth is revealed to all people?

Because God has revealed truth many ways, we talk about two categories: General Revelation and Special Revelation. Paul refers to these in the book of Romans, though not with these terms.

General Revelation is what we can understand about God by looking at his creation. We see the amazing intelligence and power of God in the design of the universe.

We see significance about God in the way that man is designed. The fact that we can reason, appreciate beauty, and tell the difference between right and wrong (though not infallibly) shows us that our Creator must possess those abilities to a higher degree. We know that God can think and communicate because we have those abilities. (See Psalm 19:1-4 and 94:9.)

Because General Revelation shows us that God could speak, we realize that Special Revelation could happen. God is a person¹⁶ and able to speak to his rational creatures. That helps us to realize that there can be messages from God and even a book from God.

By General Revelation, even without scripture, people know that there is a God, that they should obey him, and that they have already disobeyed him (Romans 1:20). But General Revelation does not tell us how to come into a right relationship with God. General Revelation shows us the need for Special Revelation because it shows that people are sinful and without excuse before their Creator.

General Revelation shows us that humanity is fallen and guilty. Special Revelation explains why humanity is in that condition. Special Revelation is the truth revealed in the inspiration of the Bible and in the incarnation of Christ. Special Revelation describes the character of God, explains the Fall and sin, and shows how we can be reconciled to God.

15 Adapted from William Greathouse, "Romans", in *Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol VIII*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1968) 50.

16 We are not saying that God is a human; but that He is a person – able to think, will, and speak – instead of some impersonal force.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2, PASSAGE 1

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

- » What does Special Revelation tell us beyond what we know from General Revelation?

(1:19) By observing creation we see truth about God. Even the Greek philosophers acknowledged that there must be some kind of divine mind that controls the universe. An especially significant part of creation is the nature of man. We see truth about the existence and nature of God by observing that man has a moral consciousness of right and wrong. (See 1:32.)

- » What can we understand about God when we look at man?

(1:20) From creation people know that they are created, and that God has eternal power and authority over them. This is enough knowledge to make their rejection of God inexcusable. They will justly be judged for their sins. They know that they are guilty of rebellion.¹⁷ The fact that they know these things about God and themselves leaves them without excuse.

God's justice requires that sin be shown to be willful before it is punished. It is also necessary that the knowledge they had be sufficient for them to have chosen better. If it were impossible for them to choose to do differently, then they could not be without excuse. God is here explaining himself.¹⁸

Almost every culture in the world has the assumption that there is a supreme God who created the world. Usually they worship some other supernatural power instead of God because they know that they are separated from the supreme God. Paul did not try to prove the existence of God but pointed out that the existence and authority of God are known in every culture. This knowledge leads to the conviction of guilt.

There are limitations to General Revelation. Knowledge of Christ and the gospel are not revealed except by Special Revelation. Also, the created world does not accurately portray God, because it is under the curse of sin and does not completely show its original design. Creation is like a beautiful painting with a muddy footprint on it. It has been damaged, but some of its original beauty still remains, showing something about the artist.

(1:21-22) God deserves that man honor him as God (worship) and be thankful (praise). But they resented his authority rather than being thankful for what they received from him. They wanted to be gods themselves, taking the credit for all that they had. Claiming such independent godhood was foolish.

17 See the note on 1:32.

18 For more discussion of this concept, see the section in Lesson 9 entitled "God's Justice on Trial."

Their hearts became darkened. The heart represents the will and loyalty of the person. Light represents truth. Because they rejected the truth, they lost their ability to see it. They lost their understanding of spiritual and eternal things and, therefore, did not understand the material world accurately either.

(1:23, 25) Their focus on themselves and the material world and rejection of the Creator led to their making gods that commended their own fallen natures. They transferred to creatures the glory that belonged to God. To avoid the responsibility they had to the Creator, they denied his existence and honored the creature. This attitude is the basis of modern evolution and humanism. If people produced themselves, then they can also set their own purpose, values, and morality.

“If the root of man's sin is religious perversity, the fruit is moral corruption.”

William Greathouse

Commentary on Romans

The essence of idolatry is to serve and worship something God created. To serve something is to give it the first place in life and to order life according to that priority. To worship something is to give it reliance and honor that belongs only to God. Idolatry expects from created things the satisfaction that only the Creator can give. Modern materialism is idolatry. A person cannot honor material things without diminishing his worship to God.¹⁹

» How did the Gentiles respond to knowledge of God?

(1:24) This verse introduces the theme that is expanded in 1:26-27. Idolatrous love of the creature leads naturally to immorality, including sexual sin. Sexual sin makes physical desires the priority but dishonors the body because the body should be holy and devoted to God's service.

(1:26-27) Immorality was the natural result of glorifying self and letting selfish passions rule. When desires rule, they become distorted. One cannot love anyone properly or enjoy anything properly unless he loves and enjoys God supremely. 1:24 introduces this subject and shows the connection between immorality and rejection of God.

All sin is a perversion of something good God made; sexual perversion is just more obvious than some sins. The further man gets from God's way, the more brutal, cruel, and perverted he becomes. Some people think that there are simple cultures that live a better life because they are uncorrupted by civilization. The fact is that most people of uncivilized cultures live in fear of death and the supernatural, practice cruel customs, and suffer the results of a perverted, sinful lifestyle.

¹⁹ Image: “Athena Pallas austrian Parliament”, taken by Jebulon on Feb 20, 2012, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Athena_Pallas_austrian_Parliament.jpg, public domain.

Man was created to function as a man in relationship with God. If he is separated from God, he cannot really be what humanity was intended to be. He falls short of even his own ideals. The ideals of manhood and womanhood become unreachable for the person without God. Sexual perversion is the most obvious extreme, but every person is affected by the loss of true humanity in other ways also. **To reject God as God is to reject man as man. To refuse to worship God is to reject your own humanity.**

Ironically, those who worshipped created things ended up perverting even the creature, against what was natural. If people allow themselves to be ruled by their natural desires, those desires take extreme, unnatural forms.

It is ironic that if a person honors the desires of the body above God he will ultimately treat the body with disrespect. The parts of the body that people worship in sexual sin are the same parts they mention when they want to say something obscene and insulting.

Usually, women are not as quick as men to give themselves to sexual immorality and perversion. They instinctively want to protect the wholeness of the family. That the women were doing this great evil shows that the debauchery of their society was complete.

- » What are some forms of perversion that are common in your society?

The sinful condition they entered is what they justly deserved. The condition of sinfulness is an appropriate punishment for sin, causing suffering and shame in its growing, unsatisfied desires and the results of debauchery.



Roman Religion

Roman religion had great diversity. They believed in many gods. They kept much of the mythology of the Greek gods, changing some of the names. When they conquered territories, they often accepted the local gods into their religion. They believed that some gods were significant only for certain geographical areas. They did not believe in an all-powerful Creator like the God of Judaism and Christianity. Religion was involved in every part of life, including government. Christians were persecuted because they did not participate in public religious events.

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HOMOSEXUAL SIN

There is no evidence that the Bible recognizes the validity of “loving, committed homosexual (or lesbian) relationships.”²⁰ If this were the case, we would expect to find teaching throughout scripture just as is done with every other form of human relationship (e.g. husbands and wives, parents and children, citizens and government). Instead, there is not one verse indicating the possibility of such a relationship being acceptable in God’s eyes.

It is not temptation, feelings of love or attraction between two human beings, or the struggle in our souls that is prohibited in scripture. In fact, God tells us that he is close to the hurting, the confused, and the tempted. Sin occurs when lustful thoughts are welcomed (James 1:15) or we engage in behavior outside of God’s design.

The appropriate response from the church to homosexuality must include compassionate love, gentle truth, and authentic humility. Loving others means caring for them and extending the love of Christ whether or not they ever turn from their sin. Loving others means seeing them with the eyes of Christ, just as he viewed (and still views) us in our sin. Often, it’s our relationship with an individual that initially guides that person into a saving relationship with Christ. Subsequently, it’s the Holy Spirit’s job, usually working within a local church, to restore to wholeness.

Yet, loving someone also means speaking the truth, even if it’s met with hostility or indifference. Sharing God’s Word could save a man or woman from a lifetime of poor decisions, confusion, sin, and suffering. Not everyone is ready to accept biblical precepts. Patience and gentleness must guide our discussions concerning truth. We must listen with an open heart and use scripture with love and discernment. We must show our genuine care for the person, so that they will value our input.

Authentic humility is essential to the Christian message. Humility comes from conversation and time with God; acknowledging, confessing, and turning from our own sin; and embracing God’s deep love as expressed on the cross. We must let love and compassion be our motive rather than fear, anger, and hatred.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2, PASSAGE 1

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(1:28) Because they rejected God in their thinking as well as in their lifestyle, their thought patterns and philosophies became as distorted as their behavior. There is a play on words

20 This section is revised from the article “What Does the Bible Say about Homosexuality: Answering Revisionist Gay Theology” from Focus on the Family. For the full article, visit http://media.focusonthefamily.com/fotf/pdf/channels/social-issues/what-does-the-bible-say_final3.pdf

in the Greek which shows that since they rejected God, God left them to a mind which he rejected – that is, ceased to influence. God has given man a free will and allows it to operate. After some point, God allows those who totally reject him to be free from his influence. Their minds then follow the course of depravity unhindered by God.

The statement that God gave them up (1:24, 26, & 28) implies that these people were in a practically hopeless condition and had made choices that they could not reverse (compare to 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

People's minds and thinking are negatively affected by depravity. Depravity hinders people when they must make moral decisions. It causes people to defend their sinful desires and actions.

- » What are some examples of the unreasonable excuses people make for their sins?

(1:29-31) In these verses we find a list of terrible sins. Culture and government restrain these tendencies, but they exist in the heart of the sinful man. If cultural and governmental restraints were removed, many people would quickly turn into savages.

The sins and descriptions of sinners listed here are not all completely distinct from each other. Here are some of the main ideas implied by each.

Unrighteousness - a general term, perhaps containing all of the others.

Fornication – any kind of sexual immorality.²¹

Evil – also a general term for wrong actions and wrong character.

“It is hard to grasp the full damage sin causes to human personality. Beyond the weakness of a will that has yielded and the clamor of aroused emotions lies a mind that has been dulled and made a slave to desire. It has been taught to make excuses instead of to give reasons. It decides first, and thinks afterwards. It rationalizes, instead of reasons. It sometimes tells the truth but not consistently. It cannot be depended upon... it traded truth for a lie, God for idolatry, wisdom for folly...”

Wilbur Dayton

²¹ Some Greek manuscripts do not have this term in this list.

Covetousness – a term used much in Greek writings to refer to aggressive selfishness. It describes a person pursuing his own interests, willing to trample the interests of others. It includes the wrongful use of a position of authority for profit.

Malice – inner viciousness and tendency to evil.

Envy – desire for what others have, along with resentment of those who have desirable things.

Murder – the illegal, deliberate killing of another person which is an extreme result of hatred and resentment.

Strife – quarrelsomeness, perhaps from rivalry.

Deceit – fraud, can imply the offering of bait for entrapment.

Maliciousness – spiteful, ready to hurt others for no reason.

Gossips – secret slanderers.

Slanderers – Slanderers ruin others' reputations by saying evil or false things about them.

Haters of God – They see God as an enemy because his laws condemn them.

Insolent – This person is prideful and cruel. A weak person with this characteristic wants to insult others that he should respect. A powerful person with this characteristic is cruel to others and takes extreme revenge on those who fail to show the respect he wants.

Haughty – Pride is an exalted view of oneself. It is the root of all sin since it motivates the person to rule his own life in defiance of his Creator.

Boastful – exalting self. These people are self-centered. If considered with the other traits here, they exalt themselves deceptively, at the expense of others and to harm others.

Inventors of evil – They are creative in their development of evil and harmful things.

Disobedient to parents – destruction of the family is the result of sin and leads to the further disintegration of society. The sinful tendency finds early expression in the child who rebels against the first authority he knows.

Foolish – not conscious of moral values. This person is not persuaded by reasoning based on morality. It is not a lack of intelligence, but a crippled moral sense that is the result of a wicked heart.

Faithless – untrustworthy. Having left morality and authority, hating absolute truth that does not bend for them, and making self the priority, breaking their promises.

Heartless – the opposite of having protective and affectionate instincts. They can leave their families and follow their own desires. The most basic instincts of love can be twisted. They can abuse the people who depend on their protection.

Implacable – will not be pleased.²²

Ruthless – without pity. They can observe suffering without having compassion. They are not turned from a wicked direction by seeing the suffering to others that their actions will cause. They are not moved to remorse by seeing the suffering already caused by their own wrongdoing.

(1:32) They know that these things are wrong. Heathen people are not faithfully following even the truth that they have. They know that they are under condemnation. Yet they not only follow sin but approve sin in others. The morality of the society sinks so low that the new standard of conduct approves immorality.

A person who completely accepts sin approves himself as a sinner and approves others as sinners. He can be entertained by the sins of others. People applauded killing in the Roman arenas. Many people in modern times enjoy watching violence and immoral sexual acts. They admire people who excel in the amount of sin they can do.

IS EVERY UNCONVERTED SINNER LIKE THIS?

Not every person has actively committed all these sins. However, fallen humanity has a tendency toward all these sins, and every person might have committed any of these sins if they were in different circumstances.

Seneca was a Roman philosopher and government official who lived during the time of Paul. He was not a Christian and was not familiar with the Bible, but he observed that the potential of every sin is in every person. He said, “All vices exist in all men, though all vices do not stand out prominently in each man.”²³ We can observe that Paul's description of the unconverted sinner applies to every time period and every culture.

Government and standards of society restrain much of the evil tendency of individuals. Many people indulge in their hearts and minds sinful desires that they do not openly show because they want the approval of others. People have secret tendencies toward the sins listed in this passage and are guilty of these sins in the heart.

22 Many Greek manuscripts do not have this term in this list.

23 Quoted by F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans*, in *Tyndale Bible Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1963), 87.

APPLICATIONS OF THE PASSAGE

This passage is primarily a description of people in societies that have not heard the gospel. They rejected the knowledge of God that is revealed in creation and in their consciences. Then they found something else to worship that allowed them to indulge the desires of their sinful nature, and their desires became perverted. This passage explains why those people need the gospel.

The passage is important to everyone, because it lists many kinds of sin and shows that all sin is hated by God. It is also a warning that all sin has the tendency to take the sinner to further wickedness. People who hear the gospel and reject it are in danger of going through the same process of losing their understanding of right and wrong.

The passage explains the conditions we see in our own societies, though the gospel has been preached there. A culture finds a way to make certain sins acceptable, ignoring God's standard.

A TESTIMONY

Shmagi was born in the country of Georgia, in Eastern Europe. Shmagi's parents were atheists, and he did not attend church as a child. His name means "quick tempered," and the name fit his temperament. He frequently got into trouble as a young man. After being convicted of crimes, he was sent to prison in Russia for two years. He was released and returned to Georgia during Georgia's revolt against Russia.

Shmagi's liver had been badly damaged by alcohol, and a doctor told him that he would not live long. Shmagi was unhappy with his life and began to feel a desire to know God. He asked some Christian friends to take him to church. At first, they told him that church was not for him. Then they told him he could come to church, if he promised not to argue. He went and was saved at age 22. His life was completely changed.

Shmagi was healed of his liver disease. He had not expected to marry because of his disease, but God gave him a new future. Now he has a wife and three daughters. Shmagi serves as a pastor and ministry trainer.

LESSON 2 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. By what means do people receive General Revelation?
2. What do all people know about God even without scripture?
3. What is Special Revelation?
4. What is idolatry?
5. Name two ways depravity affects people's thinking.

LESSON 2 ASSIGNMENT

Write a page describing the condition of a society that has not heard the gospel but has rejected God. What knowledge of God did they have? What happened to their thinking? Describe their wickedness. Explain why not everyone shows the same kind of wickedness.

LESSON 3

THE ISRAELITE ERROR

INTRODUCTION TO APOCALYPTIC SCRIPTURE

Apocalyptic scripture deals with the problem of keeping faith in spite of the evil and injustice in the world. It describes a time when God will suddenly intervene in the world, punishing evil and helping his people.²⁴

A term that is often used for the time of God's final intervention is *day of the Lord*. Some of the Old Testament passages describe the day of the Lord as the time when Gentile nations are punished for their treatment of Israel.²⁵ Many Jews began to assume that as Jews they had nothing to fear from the judgment of God. The prophets tried to show them that they also would be judged if they were sinners (Zephaniah 1:12, Amos 5:18-27) and would not be spared simply because they were Jews; but the assumption remained.

It was difficult for Jews to accept the fact that they needed to be saved. For example, baptism was a ceremony that they used to bring Gentiles into Judaism. They did not baptize Jews. John the Baptist baptized Jews, and his practice offended some Jews who thought they did not need baptism or repentance. They thought they were favored by God because they were Abraham's children (Matthew 3:9).

In the book of Romans, Paul referred to the day of wrath (2:5) and the day when God judges (2:16). These references follow from his theme in 1:16-18, that the gospel is salvation from the wrath of God. In 2:2-3 he shocks self-righteous Jews with the fact that they also have reason to fear the day of the Lord. Even the Jews need salvation.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2, PASSAGE 2

In this lesson, we continue with the study of Part 2 of the book of Romans. In the last lesson, we studied the passage that describes the Gentile error. This passage (2:1-29) describes the Israelite error.

Part 2 is 1:18-3:20. The main point of Part 2 is that everyone in the world has violated God's requirements and is under condemnation. No one can be saved on the basis of meeting God's requirements because every person has already violated them.

24 Old Testament apocalyptic scripture includes Daniel, Zechariah, Joel, Ezekiel 37-39, and Isaiah 24-27. In the New Testament, we find Matthew 24, Luke 21, Mark 13, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation.

25 Some examples are Zechariah 12 and Joel 3.

First, Paul explains that the Gentiles have rejected the knowledge of God and turned to idols and sinful desires. Then, he describes the condition of the Israelites, who had God's law but did not obey it. We will now study the passage about the Israelites.

Here Paul changed from third person (they) to second person (you). He spoke to any people who thought the gospel did not apply to them because they already met a standard of righteousness. Most Jews were in that category, and this section does speak specifically to them (2:17); but Gentiles of high morals might also be in the same error. He shows that the person who thinks he is righteous without grace is hypocritical and guilty.

Main Point of Chapter 2

The Jews are guilty of the same sins the Gentiles commit and will be likewise judged by God.

Summary of Chapter 2

2:1, 11 make the main point. 2:1 states that Jews are equally guilty; 2:11 states that God is impartial. The rest of the chapter builds a case for the statements in those verses. They are inexcusable, just as the heathen are without excuse (1:20).

2:13, 17 show why the Jews expected to be favored – because they had received God's revelation and had religion based on it. In Romans 1, Paul established the fact that the Gentiles deserve judgment. Every Jew would agree with this. But in 2:1, Paul horrified the Jews by exposing their guilt. They had also broken the law and deserved the same judgment as the Gentiles! They had expected to be excused because they were Jews who acknowledged the law of God and had the right religion.

Millions of people today are in this category. They think that they are accepted by God because they believe in God and practice religious forms while they continue to sin.

- » Are there many people in your society who mistakenly think they are Christians? Why do they think so?
- » A student should read Romans 2:1-29 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(2:1) That the Jews had no excuse corresponds to the condition of the Gentiles who were without excuse (1:20). That idea would have been just as shocking to a self-righteous Jew as it would be to the modern person who thinks he is good enough.

By judging others, they condemned themselves, because they were guilty of the same sins. Their knowledge of truth increased their responsibility. Jesus said that some cities in Israel would be judged worse than Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 11:21-24).

This verse refers to a person who thinks that he can judge others and yet count himself innocent. The rest of the chapter puts God in the role of judge and shows how different his judgment is from those who judge in a way that favors themselves.

(2:2-3) God's judgment is according to an absolute standard. God does not judge by the changing and inaccurate standards of men.²⁶

(2:4) God had given special attention to the Jews, so they thought he would also bend justice in their favor. Actually, his goodness to them was intended to lead them to repentance, not to cancel justice. Many people despise the goodness of God by seeing it as mere generosity and tolerance. What the worldly man wants from God is material benefit along with tolerance of his sin. To view God's goodness in this way is to despise it. Those who know about God are more guilty because his goodness gives them the opportunity to repent.

(2:5) The delay of time when they continued to sin instead of repenting was storing up wrath. Because they knew the truth, they were more accountable, and, therefore, the wrath of God increased against their disobedience.

(The following section is important for understanding the remainder of this chapter.)



Nero

Nero was emperor in A.D. 54-68. He was in power when Paul went to Rome. He was extremely cruel and hated Jews and Christians. Early historians wrote that Nero sometimes burned Christians for light in his yard.

²⁶ Image: "Nero", uploaded by David Jones on Dec 24, 2011, retrieved from <https://flickr.com/photos/cloudsoup/6564103675/>, licensed under CC BY 2.0, desaturated and cropped from the original.

THE JUDGMENT OF WORKS

» When we come to the judgment, will the things we did on earth be important?

The final judgment will be an evaluation of works. God will punish and reward people according to their actions. There will be different levels of punishment and reward for different people (Hebrews 2:2, Hebrews 10:28-29, Matthew 10:42, Luke 12:47-48, 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The idea that sinners are condemned only for unbelief is not scriptural. In Revelation 20:12, people are judged according to the record of their works. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that we will all, including believers, be judged for our works. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 shows that Christians will receive varying rewards depending on their motives and diligence, and on the quality (gold, silver, precious stones; wood, hay, straw) of their workmanship. All Christians will be rewarded because all true Christians produce good works, but not all their works are equally valuable. Those works of believers which do not pass the test of quality will be consumed by fire.

Romans 2 implies that some people who have not heard the New Testament gospel will not be condemned for their works (see 2:7, 10, 13, 26-27). That does not mean that there are some people who never sinned and therefore can be accepted by works without grace; for 3:19-20 says that all have sinned. The people whose works are accepted are people who have an experience of grace called circumcision of the heart. Their works are approved by God (2:29).

This operation of grace in the heart was promised in the times of the Old Testament:

And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Therefore, we know that the ancient Jews were saved by grace, not by works.

This grace was available to Gentiles, whether or not they had received Special Revelation.

So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35).

Righteous works follow the change of heart, proving obedience to God. This proof is the basis of the final justification spoken of in Romans 2:13, 16, the justification at the final judgment.

The passage does not teach that a person can be saved by works, but that real obedience is what matters, not just possession of the law. This supports the point of the passage: that the Jews also need salvation because they have disobeyed.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2, PASSAGE 2

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(2:7) God gives eternal life to those who seek the honor that comes from God by persisting in the works that please God.

(2:9) Here we see that the Jews' privileges also bring greater accountability. Since the gospel came to the Jews first, they deserve the first judgment.

(2:11) This is a key verse of the chapter. Those who live in rebellion against God will be judged, with no favors given because they are religious.

A PERSPECTIVE FROM JAMES

James says that a man is justified not by faith alone, but also by works (James 2:24). But Paul said in Ephesians 2:8 that we are saved by grace and not by works. In Romans 3:28, he said that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

So, are we justified by works and faith together, or are we justified only by faith? Did James and Paul contradict each other? No, because they were not talking about the same thing.

Paul is talking about how a person is justified before God. **A person is made righteous by grace through faith.**

James is talking about how a person is justified before other people. **A person shows that he has saving faith by living faithfully.**

The main point of James' epistle is to prove that real faith is applied in everyday living. He says that Abraham was justified by his works. A person is shown to be righteous by faith and works together. We know that a person is a Christian if he professes to be and also lives like a Christian.

Paul also affirmed that good works follow faith. In Ephesians 2:10, right after his statement that we are saved by faith, Paul said that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works.

James and Paul do not contradict each other. They would both agree that saving faith makes a person acceptable to God, and that works follow conversion and demonstrate that a person has been saved.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2, PASSAGE 2

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(2:12) The written law will not be the standard of judgment for those who have never heard it. They will be condemned by the law that God revealed to them other ways. (See 1:20, 2:15.)

(2:13) That they will be justified points to the final judgment. Some people expected to be justified because they possessed the law. But knowledge of the law without obedience does not justify.

(2:14) The fact that they may do right by nature does not mean that they are naturally good without God. 2:15 shows that it is because of the law that God has written in their hearts and conscience that they can do what is right. “By nature” means that they do it by what God reveals in their nature without written scripture.

(2:15) Those who are without the written law still have the law in their moral nature and can make specific choices. This does not mean that the conscience is totally reliable. The conscience is not accurate in every detail, being influenced by environment and education; but it is a guide that is right in general. However, all people are sinners, even by that standard, because they have not always done what they know is right.

2:15, 16 show that judgment will not be just for outward deeds, but also for motives. (These verses speak of hearts, thoughts, conscience, and secrets.)

(2:16) The justification discussed in this passage (mentioned in 2:13) is not some alternative to being justified by faith. It is final justification, to be declared righteous at the last judgment.

These principles of judgment are essential to the gospel Paul preached. The gospel's good news of forgiveness is not significant without an understanding of God's judgment that will come on the unforgiven. Any error that undermines the proper view of God's justice will also undermine the gospel.

HOPE FOR THE UNREACHED HEATHEN

- » What will happen to the heathen who have not heard the gospel? How can they deserve judgment for sin if they know no better?

Romans 2:14-16 implies that there are some who choose to do right and, therefore, will not be condemned. However, we know that no person will be saved by works. Everyone has broken the law and deserves judgment (3:9-10, 19-20). No person can be saved by the merit of his works. Therefore, if an unevangelized person is saved, it must be by grace through the atonement, even if he has not heard the gospel.

If a person reverences God, God will show him the way to come into relationship with him. Psalm 25:14 says, “The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.” God’s covenant shows us what is required for relationship with him. A relationship with God requires grace because all people have sinned.

There were people such as Job, Balaam, and Noah who knew God though they had no scripture. There was Melchizedek, who was a priest of God, though he had no connection with what God later did through Israel. God can reveal himself in any culture and time. (See also Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 10:18.) The idolaters in Romans 1 were not in a depraved condition because they never knew about God, but because they rejected what they did know.

Can a heathen man be saved without ever hearing the gospel? If a person follows the truth he has, God will lead him to understand enough to seek and find forgiveness. That is salvation by grace and not by works. This is in contrast to the salvation by works which most religions offer.

So, if a person can be saved without hearing the gospel, why is it urgent for us to spread the gospel? That question will be answered further on.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2, PASSAGE 2

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(2:17-20) The Jews were hypocrites because they taught the law while breaking it. They enjoyed their role as possessors of the law, discerners of right, and teachers of the ignorant. There is a note of sarcasm here as Paul lists their high claims.

The Bible can be a bestselling book even in a society that is becoming more ungodly. It shows that people see value in possessing God's law even if they are not obeying it.

People often maintain a form of religion as a cover for sin after they lose the spiritual reality of relationship with God.

(2:21-24) The Jews enjoyed condemning the Gentiles with the law, but they did not obey it fully themselves. They dishonored God by living in sin while claiming high spiritual status. Likewise, the most common objection to Christianity is that Christians are not good examples of what they claim to believe.

(2:25) They could not claim to be righteous before God on the basis of circumcision unless they were keeping the whole law. If they were breaking the law, they were the same as uncircumcised.

THE TERM *CIRCUMCISION*

» What did circumcision signify?

The Jews saw two classes of people in the world: those who qualified to be in the covenant with God and those who did not. Circumcision was given as a sign of the covenant between Israel and God, but eventually came to represent the whole set of requirements for the covenant. Therefore, the Jews called the two classes of people in the world the *circumcised* and the *uncircumcised*. To be circumcised, in Paul's terms, usually means to follow the whole system of Judaism as a means of being in the covenant. (See Galatians 5:2-3 for an example of this use of the term.) To be circumcised in that sense was an attempt to be saved by works rather than by grace.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2, PASSAGE 2

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(2:26) If an uncircumcised person fulfills the real intentions of the law, God will not condemn him for his lack of circumcision.

(2:27) The contrast between a righteous Gentile and a sinful Jew shows that the Jew is the guilty one, even though he has the forms of Judaism. In the same sense, Noah condemned the world by his righteousness because he showed what real obedience is (Hebrews 11:7).

(2:28-29) Circumcision was a mark of identity for a Jew, proof that he was one of the people of God. In Deuteronomy 30:6 and in several places in the New Testament circumcision symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit when he changes the heart of the sinner to be able to love and obey God.²⁷ This is the significance of circumcision for a Christian.

» A student should read Deuteronomy 30:6 for the group.

God promised the ancient Israelites that he would do an operation of grace in their hearts. This was not just for their descendants, but for the people hearing the message at that time.

The person described in this chapter who does righteous works without knowing scripture is a person who has received grace through faith, by accepting the truth he has.

27 Deuteronomy 30:6, Philippians 3:3, Colossians 2:11-12

A PERSPECTIVE FROM ISAIAH

God always wanted obedience from the heart, rather than formalism and legalism, and offered grace to the people of every nation. Notice these verses from Isaiah 56:6-7.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

LESSON 3 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does apocalyptic scripture describe?
2. Why did the Jews expect to be favored?
3. How is a person made righteous?
4. How does a person show that he has saving faith?
5. What did circumcision signify for a Jew, and what did it symbolize for a Christian?

LESSON 3 ASSIGNMENT

Write a page describing the misunderstanding of Jews who wrongly thought they should be accepted by God. Describe people who have a similar misunderstanding today.

LESSON 4

UNIVERSAL CONDITIONS

THE GRACE THAT LEADS TO SALVATION

Even with a sacrifice provided, a sinner would be hopeless without God's grace working in his heart. The sinner is spiritually dead in his sin, controlled by wrong desires, and under the rule of Satan (Ephesians 2:1-3). He is powerless to change his behavior (Romans 7:18-19). How can he respond to the gospel with repentance and faith?

Theologians have tried to explain how the grace of God responds to man's condition.



John Calvin

John Calvin believed that because man is totally depraved, he cannot choose to respond to God.²⁸ Therefore, God is the one who chooses who will be saved and who will not. Because God chose only some people to be saved, the atonement is provided only for them and not for all people. These people are not able to choose. With a grace that cannot be resisted, God causes them to repent and believe. They can never fall away from salvation because their will is under the control of God. This was Calvin's concept of the sovereignty of God.

Calvin did not believe that saving grace is available to everyone. He believed that nobody could repent and believe without special grace, and he believed that this grace was not given to most people.

Calvin believed that a person cannot do anything good, such as keeping a promise or loving his family, without help from God. He believed that God gives all people grace that enables them to do good things. He called this grace "common grace." He did not believe that common grace could bring a person to salvation.

John Wesley had a different view of God's grace. He saw that the Bible constantly calls people to respond to God. Because of that, he believed that man's choices are real. Like Calvin, he believed that man is depraved and cannot respond to the gospel without help from God, but he believed that God gives that help to everyone. He believed that God gives people the desire and ability to respond but does not irresistibly save them. God makes human choice possible. This is the first grace that comes to every person. Theologians have called this "prevenient grace," which means "the grace that comes before."

28 Image: "Portretten van Johannes Calvijn...", from the Rijksmuseum, retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=85920383>, public domain.

God's grace reaches into the heart of the sinner, convicting him of his sins and showing him that he is to blame for his separation from God. God's grace causes him to desire forgiveness and gives him the ability to respond to God.

Without grace, a sinner couldn't even come to God. Grace comes to every person before he begins to seek for God, even though he hasn't done anything to deserve it.

Remember Ephesians 2:1-3, what a hopeless description it gives? But look at the two verses that come after that description.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-5).

If a person is not saved, it is not because he never had grace, but because he would not respond to the grace that he had.

- » Which comes first, man's search for God or God's work within man? How would you describe it?

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 2, PASSAGE 3

In this lesson, we finish Part 2 of Romans. We have seen how the Gentiles rejected the knowledge of God and turned to idols. The Jews had the law of God but did not obey it. Now, the apostle summarizes the condition of the people of the world.

Main Point of 3:1-20

Everyone in the world is a sinner and stands condemned in God's courtroom.

Summary of 3:1-20

This passage summarizes the larger passage of 1:18-3:20. 3:19-20 summarizes the smaller passage, as well as the larger passage. The law shows that all the world is guilty; therefore, nobody can be justified on the basis of his actions.

The reason for making this point is so that every mouth may be stopped (3:19), which means that no one has an excuse or basis for justifying himself. 3:9 shows Paul's line of logic: he has shown both Jews and Gentiles under sin. Since nobody has an excuse, God is just in dealing with all people as sinners.

- » A student should read Romans 3:1-20 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(3:1-2) Paul has shown that the Jews will not be saved just because they are Jews; they will be judged for their works just like the Gentiles will be. A natural question then would be, “Is there really any benefit for the Jew?” The great benefit is that they were the ones to receive the scripture. Almost the whole Bible was written by Jews whom God inspired. (Other benefits are listed in 9:4-5.)

The same question could be asked about any form of religion or means of grace, such as baptism, church membership, communion, or other religious customs. They cannot give assurance of salvation, so a person might ask, “Then what good are they?” The answer is that forms of worship are given to assist our faith. When we practice them in faith, we receive grace. But, if we practice them without faith and as a substitute for obedience, they are worthless.²⁹

(3:3) What if some were unfaithful? Does their unfaithfulness make God's faithfulness worthless? The questioner is implying that if God did not save the Jews who disobeyed, God's promise was not fulfilled.

They thought God's favor should be unconditional to the Jews. They thought they could accuse God of unfaithfulness even though they failed to meet the requirements.

(3:4) The scene is as though God and man were opposite in a courtroom. God's faithfulness in contrast to man's unfaithfulness will be proved. The apostle does not say that we should not examine God's justice. He says that when we examine God's actions, we will see that he is just and righteous in all that he has done.³⁰

Later in the letter, we see that because salvation is conditional, God's justice is demonstrated both when he saves and when he condemns.

(3:5) The apostle raises the question that someone might ask: “If our sin shows that God is just, then it accomplishes something good. Then, is it wrong for God to punish us for it?”

Pax Romana

The *Pax Romana* was approximately from 27 B.C. to A.D. 180. The words meant “Roman Peace.” Because the Romans took control of many small nations, wars between those nations ended. This made it possible for business to prosper, and people could travel more easily across national borders.

29 Recommended reading: Sermon by John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” available from <https://holypoys.org/the-means-of-grace/>

30 See the section “God's Justice on Trial” in Lesson 9.

» How would you answer the question in 3:5?

(3:6) No, because if human sin should be excused because it shows God's righteousness, no sin could be judged. This would deny the final judgment, which is an essential doctrine to anyone who believes in a just God. Furthermore, God's justice is demonstrated in the clearest light when he punishes sin, but he could not punish sin if sin is justified on the basis that it shows his justice. The objection refutes itself.

(3:7) Again the idea is proposed that since even our sin will be used to glorify God, the sinner should not be punished. This is an attempt to evaluate actions according to their ultimate outcome. However, that is contrary to the fact that judgment will be according to motives (2:15-16). Also, the credit for bringing good results from wrong actions belongs entirely to God. The sinner did not accomplish good by his sin. Sin brings only bad results except where God intervenes.

(3:8) Paul simply says that sinners and those who excuse sin deserve their condemnation. He also denies the false accusation that Christians teach that because our sin may accomplish good through God's grace, we should just admit it and remain sinners. To acknowledge your sinfulness is not enough. A person must repent; but in order to truly repent, he must see his sin as truly evil.

(3:9) "We" refers to the Jews. They do not automatically have spiritual status. All are under sin; they have committed sin and are under its condemnation.

(3:10-18) These verses quote from the Psalms and Old Testament prophets.³¹ Some people quote 3:10 and say it means that nobody is righteous, even a Christian. However, 3:10-18 could not possibly describe a Christian. If anyone thinks this describes a Christian, imagine putting the name of a Christian you know into these sentences. For example, "Pastor Aaron's mouth is full of cursing, his feet are quick to murder, and he has no fear of God."

These verses describe the general condition of those who have not been converted. It is similar to the description in 1:29-31. Paul's purpose is to show that nobody can merit salvation by his works. Romans 3:10-18 shows that nobody is righteous without having received God's righteousness.

» How would you respond to this statement: "Nobody should claim that he is living in victory over temptation because the Bible says that nobody is righteous"?

3:19-20 summarizes not only 3:1-20, but 1:18-3:20.

(3:19-20) The law was not given to show people how to be justified, but to show that everyone is already guilty. The law is not a means of justification, but condemnation. "That every

31 Psalm 14:1-3, Psalm 53:1-3, Psalm 5:9, Psalm 140:3, Psalm 10:7, Isaiah 59:7-8, Proverbs 1:16, Psalm 36:1

mouth may be stopped” means that no one has an excuse or basis for justifying himself. He cannot defend himself in the divine courtroom.

A person who thinks he must keep the law to be accepted by God is under the law. Being under the law does not refer to the historical period of the Old Testament. Any person is under the law if he has not received saving grace; because if he were to go to God’s judgment, he would be judged for breaking the law. A person is no longer under the law if he is saved because he is accepted by God on the basis of grace.

» What does it mean to be under the law?

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

It is necessary for every person to understand how a sinner may be justified before God. There can be no true peace or secure joy while we are enemies of God, either in time or in eternity.³²

People were made in the image of God and were holy, just as God their creator is holy. As God is love, so man and woman, living in love, lived in God, and God in them. They were pure, as God is pure, from every spot of sin. They knew no evil but were inwardly and outwardly sinless. They loved the Lord their God with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength.

God gave Adam, an upright and perfect man, a perfect law. God required perfect obedience, which was completely possible. Yet Adam and Eve disobeyed God (Genesis 3:6).

Immediately Adam was condemned by the righteous judgment of God. God had warned Adam that the penalty for disobedience would be death (Genesis 2:17). The moment Adam tasted the forbidden fruit, he died. His soul died because he was separated from God. (Without God the soul has no life.) Likewise, his body became mortal. Since he was dead in spirit, dead to God, and dead in sin, he rushed on toward eternal death; to the punishment of both body and soul in hell’s fire, which is never to be quenched.

“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). Sin came through Adam, who was the father and representative of us all. Because of this, all people are dead—dead to God, dead in sin, living in mortal bodies that will soon disintegrate, and under the penalty of eternal death. By one man’s disobedience all were made sinners (Romans 5:19) and “...one trespass led to condemnation for all men...” (Romans 5:18).

All people were in this condition—sinful and condemned—when God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that we might not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). God’s

32 This section is adapted from Wesley’s sermon, “Justification by Faith,” available from <https://holypojoys.org/justification-by-faith/>

Son became Man, a second head of the human family, a second representative of the whole human race. As such he bore our griefs (Isaiah 53:4), and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5). He made his soul an offering for guilt (Isaiah 53:10). He poured out his blood for sinners. He made a completely satisfactory sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Because the Son of God has tasted death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9), God has now reconciled the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them (2 Corinthians 5:19). "...As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (Romans 5:18). Because of his Son's suffering for us, God now guarantees to cancel the punishment we deserve for our sins, to put us back in his favor, and to restore our dead souls to spiritual life, giving us the assurance of eternal life. This promise has only one condition, which he enables us to meet.

- » What is the one condition mentioned in the last paragraph?

GRACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- » What grace and spiritual experience were available to the people who lived in Old Testament times? Why is this question important?

Some people believe that people in the Old Testament could not be converted and experience the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they do not see the importance of the Old Testament for believers today. They think that salvation by grace through faith started with the New Testament. They think that people in the Old Testament could be saved by the law and sacrifices.

The fact is that nobody was ever saved either by keeping the law or by making sacrifices (Hebrews 10:4). Then how were they saved? By grace through faith.

1. The New Testament says that the gospel is in the Old Testament.

- The Old Testament teaches salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:15).
- Abraham had the gospel and was justified by faith (Romans 4:1-3; Galatians 3:6, 8).
- David described justification by faith (Romans 4:6-8).
- The gospel was first; the law was later (Galatians 3:17).
- Old Testament people had the gospel preached to them just as we have (Hebrews 4:2).
- Jesus implied that Nicodemus should already know about the new birth from his study of the Old Testament (John 3:10).

- Righteousness given because of faith (Romans 1:17) is witnessed to by the law and prophets (Romans 3:21)

2. Not much knowledge is necessary to receive grace by faith.

Jesus preached repentance for forgiveness but did not explain the atonement. People were saved by believing his message (for example, the Samaritan woman at the well, John 4:39-42).

The Old Testament believers did not understand the atonement, but they only needed to believe that God was providing a basis for forgiveness. They could then be saved by grace through faith, not by their works or sacrifices. Their sacrifices and obedience were a demonstration of their faith, just as with us.

If a person reverences God, God will show him the way to come into relationship with him. Psalm 25:14 says, “The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.”

3. God’s commands make grace necessary.

Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40 that the most important commands are to love God with all that you are (Deuteronomy 6:5) and love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). These commands cannot be obeyed without grace. Did God command the impossible for Old Testament people, or did he enable obedience by grace?

Do not return evil (Proverbs 24:28-29). Do good to those who do evil to you (Proverbs 25:21-22). Return an enemy’s ox when you see it wandering away (Exodus 23:4-5). Do not rejoice when your enemy falls (Proverbs 24:17).

4. God expected Old Testament people to live in obedience.

Deuteronomy 27 and 28 list blessings on the obedient and curses upon the disobedient. These curses cover everything imaginable. If there was not grace to make obedience possible, these people were doomed to receive all of the curses and lose all of the blessings.

5. God provided a work of grace to change their hearts.

Deuteronomy 30:6 says that both they and their descendants could be circumcised in heart, so they could obey and live. In Deuteronomy 30:11-20 we see the following points. They were not to say it was impossible to receive, because it was in their mouths and hearts – a statement quoted by Paul in Romans 10:6-8 to refer to grace received by faith. The issue would be decided in their hearts (Deuteronomy 30:17). Love for God would lead to obedience (Deuteronomy 30:20).

(See also Deuteronomy 10:12, 16.) What God required was total love and consecration of the heart. Circumcision of the heart would make it possible.

6. The real people of God in any time are those who love and serve him.

Romans 2:28-29, Colossians 2:11-12, and Philippians 3:3 all say that a true Jew is a spiritual one. The prophets said the same. Salvation depended upon the heart's obedience, and sacrifices did not justify a wicked heart. Stephen accused the Jews of his time of being like their Old Testament ancestors who were uncircumcised in heart and ears (Acts 7:51). There was never a time when forms of worship were all God required.

David prayed, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable" (Psalm 19:14).

7. There are many Old Testament examples of grace.

- Job feared God and rejected evil (Job 1:1).
- Noah was righteous and blameless in his generation (Genesis 6:9).
- Isaiah experienced a heart cleansing (Isaiah 6).
- David prayed for complete cleansing of his sinful nature (Psalm 51).

The evidence shows that salvation and a pure heart by faith were available in the Old Testament. That means that the Old Testament is important to us. God's directions for righteous living in the Old Testament were directions from a holy God to people who were supposed to live in grace. Obviously, many commands were special for that time and situation and do not apply to us the same way. In Lesson 7 is a section that explains how we should apply Old Testament scripture to our lives.

LESSON 4 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain Calvin's concept of "common grace."
2. Explain Wesley's concept of "the grace that comes before."
3. In Romans 3:19, what does it mean for every mouth to "be stopped"?
4. What great benefit of the Jews is mentioned in Romans 3?
5. How do forms of worship benefit us?
6. What does Romans 3:10-18 show?
7. Who is under the law? (Romans 3:19-20)

LESSON 4 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a page about one of the following topics:

- Prevenient grace
- Grace in the Old Testament
- The reason that sinners need to be justified by faith

You can use a variety of scriptures besides Romans if needed.

2. Remember that you need to preach three sermons or teach three sessions for other groups during the time of this course.

LESSON 5

THE MEANS AND MEANING OF JUSTIFICATION

DEFINING SAVING FAITH

» What is saving faith? If a person has saving faith, what does that mean that he believes?

What does the believer believe?

1. He believes that he can do nothing to justify himself.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

He realizes that nothing he can do (works) will make him deserve to be saved, even partially.

2. He believes that the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for his forgiveness.

“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

Propitiation means the sacrifice that makes our forgiveness possible.

3. He believes that God forgives him on the condition of faith alone.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

If he thinks there are other conditions, he expects to be saved partly by works instead of completely by grace.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 3

Part 3 has three passages. The first (3:21-31) shows that man must be justified by a way that God devises, since man cannot be justified on the basis of what he has done. The second passage (Romans 4) uses Abraham and David as illustrations of justifying faith, showing that the doctrine is not new. The third passage (Romans 5) explains how Christ's sacrifice makes this kind of justification possible. In this lesson we will study all three of these passages.

Main Point of 3:21-5:21

God's provision for man's salvation is the sacrifice of Christ, which provides justification by grace through faith.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 3, PASSAGE 1

Main Point of 3:21-31

God's means of justification is by grace through faith, and justification by works is impossible.

Summary of 3:21-31

Since nobody is righteous on the basis of having always kept all the law, some other means of justification must be found. **The dilemma (presented in 3:26) is for God to justify the sinner and yet be a righteous judge.** The dilemma is solved by the atonement; God provided a sacrifice as the basis for forgiveness. He can forgive the one who believes, but the sacrifice shows that God considered sin serious.

- » A student should read Romans 3:21-31 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(3:21) The righteousness that is acceptable to God is accomplished apart from the law. The apostle says that this idea is not new but was taught by the law and prophets. “But now” refers to the time of the full revelation of the gospel in Christ, as the next verse says. (See also 3:25.)

(3:22-23) There is no difference between the way Jews and Gentiles are saved since they are equally condemned. Even in ancient Israel, when they followed the rituals God gave them, nobody was ever saved by the sacrifices and rituals. Anyone who was saved was saved by receiving grace by faith. (See 3:30.)

Salvation for anyone is by faith. The term *all* is used several times here. Just as all have sinned, all who believe may be saved. The phrase “for all who believe” is an emphasis of the openness of the offer, just as the phrase “from faith for faith” emphasizes the condition of faith (1:17).

(3:24) Grace is free for us because Jesus paid the price of redemption.

(3:25) The former sins are the sins committed before the coming of Christ. They were not atoned for by ceremonial observance, but by the death of Christ, even though when the sins

were committed his death was still in the future. God forgave them on the basis of Christ's atonement before it happened, because it was planned from the beginning. (See 3:21.)

The atonement showed that God was righteous even though his justice was not immediate. It showed that God takes sin seriously.

(3:26) This verse shows the resolution of the great dilemma: How can God be just and yet justify a sinner? The atonement provided the way. God provided a sacrifice as the basis for forgiveness. He can forgive the one who believes, but the sacrifice shows that God considered sin serious.

» What problem would result if God forgave people without the atonement?

God is the righteous judge of the universe. He has declared that sin is so serious that it has an eternal penalty. People are separated from God because of sin. God is responsible for ultimate justice for the universe, the reward of people who do good and punishment for those who do wrong.

Forgiveness without a basis would conflict with the very identity of God. It would dishonor him by making him appear inconsistent in his response to sin. He would seem unjust if he punished some people and forgave others. This is not a small problem, because the whole universe exists to glorify God. How can people sincerely glorify God if they do not think he is just?

The solution had to be something that showed sin to be serious, provided a reason for forgiveness, and demonstrated God's nature; so that people could continue to honor God as holy and just.

The atonement fits that need. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross showed that sin is serious. The necessity of repentance makes the sinner acknowledge the evil of his sin. The free offer of salvation for all makes the choice individual, so that it is fair for God to forgive the ones who accept it and not forgive the ones who reject it.

Why does he not forgive those who do not repent? To forgive someone who continues in sin without repentance would defeat the purpose of the atonement: to provide forgiveness while showing the justice of God.

(3:27) There is no basis for self-commendation for having achieved salvation. There have been some people that believed a person is proud if he claims to know that he is saved. But a person who knows that he is forgiven because of grace has reason to be humble, not proud.

(3:28) Justification does not depend on previous righteousness. **Justification means that the sinner who repents and believes is counted righteous as if he had not sinned.** A life of obedience to God begins at justification, and not before. A person cannot change his

own life with the purpose of making himself acceptable to God. He is already acceptable to God through the atonement of Christ, and no other way.

(3:29-30) These verses connect the passage to the theme of the book. The message is for the whole world. This universal application of the gospel is based on monotheism. Because there is only one God, his purposes apply to all humanity, unlike a local god who might be interested only in one nation or clan. God always intended that Israel share the knowledge of God with the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6, Isaiah 43:21, Isaiah 49:6).

- » The apostle said that justification by faith does not destroy the law, but instead upholds it. How is that?

(3:31) When someone repents of his sin and begins to live in obedience, he is upholding the law as the standard of righteousness. Any theory of the atonement and justification that makes the law irrelevant for the Christian is not consistent with this verse.³³ If a person asks for forgiveness but does not intend to begin obeying God, it shows that he does not understand the evil of sin and the real reason he needs forgiveness. He is trying to receive the benefits of salvation by merely pretending to respect the law.

**“No one so fully
establishes the law as
those who repent and
turn away from sin and
trust Jesus for salvation.”**

George McLaughlin

Commentary on Romans

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 3, PASSAGE 2

Main Point of Chapter 4

Abraham, the one who was selected by God to be the father of the people of God, was justified by faith.

Summary of Chapter 4

The doctrine of justification by grace through faith is established in the Old Testament. Abraham, the one who was selected by God to be the father of the people of God, was justified by faith. King David also understood justification by grace. Circumcision was not the means of salvation but was given later as a sign of faith that Abraham already had. Abraham became the father and example of all those who would later be saved by faith.

33 John Wesley's two sermons entitled "The Law Established by Faith" explain these concepts well. (See the Recommended Reading section at the end of this course.)

- » A student should read Romans 4 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(4:1) Abraham was the biological father of the Jews. The question is, “Exactly what did Abraham receive?” This question will be answered in order to answer the questions, “Who can inherit it?” and “How can we inherit it?”

(4:2) A theory of salvation by works naturally leads to pride.

- » What faith did Abraham have that was counted as saving faith?

(4:3) Abraham did not know the whole plan of salvation and, therefore, could not put his faith in the atonement of Christ. However, he believed God's promise as far as it was revealed. The part of the promise mentioned in this chapter is that Abraham would be the father of many nations (4:17-18), but the rest of the promise was that all people of the earth would be blessed through his descendants (Genesis 12:2-3, Genesis 22:17-18). The promise was repeated to Jacob (Genesis 28:14). Through Abraham's descendants the favor of God would be offered to all people of the earth. This was God's promise of grace to Abraham. It was a promise of grace offered to all.

Abraham was justified because he believed God's promise of grace. His justification was the same as ours, though our faith has more content.

(4:4) If a person is working for his salvation, salvation is not a gift. Instead, he owes an account that he is trying to pay off (see Romans 11:6).

(4:5) The one who does not work is not a person who does not care about obeying God, but a person who is not working as a means of being saved. Instead of depending on his works to gain him entrance into heaven, he believes God's promise to save him.

(4:6-8) David also referred to justification by faith when he described an acceptance by God that depends on forgiveness of sins. God will not impute guilt for past sin to the believer. The apostle Paul is showing that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is not a new idea – even King David understood it.

How do we know this refers to past sin and not continued sin? Romans 6:2 says that since we are dead to sin, therefore we do not live any longer in it. The whole message of Romans 6 refutes the idea that we can live in sin while being justified by faith. (See also Romans 5:6-8: “While we were still weak,” and “While we were still sinners,” which imply that we now have strength and are not sinners as before—we are justified and changed.)

(4:9) This question introduces the topic of how a person can get into this position of being justified by faith. Does this blessing come only to people who are circumcised?

- » Which came first: the law or grace?

(4:10-12) Abraham was not circumcised when he received grace. Circumcision came later. Therefore, it is possible for an uncircumcised person to receive grace by faith. Abraham is the spiritual father of those who follow his example (walk in the footsteps) of faith, even if they are not circumcised. The people who have saving faith are the spiritual children of Abraham. Israelites are not his spiritual children unless they believe, even though they are descended from him biologically.

(4:13-14) Who inherits Abraham's blessing? If it is those who keep the law, then it is not by faith in the promise.

(4:15) The law is the means of judgment, for it reveals sin. It is not the means of receiving grace. If there were no law, there would be no violations of it. Paul is not talking specifically about the law from Moses, but about God's requirements for humanity in general. There is no place where God's requirements are completely unknown (1:20).

(4:16-17) Abraham had many biological descendants who formed different nations. However, here the apostle says that Abraham was the father of many because he is the father of all who have faith.

Salvation is received by faith so that it can be given by grace. If any actions were required to qualify the recipient, it would not be completely by grace. Because it is by grace, it must be received by faith only. A person who tries to earn it does not understand salvation.

- » What was God's promise to Abraham? How was it similar to the promise of salvation that we receive?

(4:18-19) Abraham believed God even when there was nothing in his circumstances to give him hope. His body was the same as dead regarding his ability to father a child. Sarah was also past the time when she was physically able to bear a child. But true faith does not depend on circumstances.

This faith is opposite to confidence in works. This explains why Ishmael, the son of Hagar, is a type of salvation by works (Galatians 4:22-31). The birth of Ishmael was physically accomplished, instead of by faith. **Salvation is by promise, then faith, then miracle.**

(4:20-21) God is glorified more by man's trust than by man's ability.

(4:22) See the notes on verse 3.

- » Do we receive the same salvation that Abraham received?

(4:23-25) Abraham's faith is an example for us. He did not know the whole plan of salvation but believed the part that was revealed to him. We must believe the revealed details of the plan of salvation which Abraham did not know: the death and resurrection of Christ. These verses show that we receive the same justification that Abraham received, because it says that righteousness was attributed to him and will be attributed to us on the same basis.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 3, PASSAGE 3

Main Point of Chapter 5

Christ in his death and resurrection reversed the results of sin, bringing reconciliation, righteousness, and life.

Summary of Chapter 5

Now that we are justified by faith, we are reconciled to God through Christ (5:1). The phrase “through our Lord Jesus Christ” introduces the topic of the chapter: the effectiveness of the atoning work of Christ. Adam's sin brought the world under sin and death, and every person after him has committed sin. Christ's atonement reversed the effects of sin.

- » A student should read Romans 5 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(5:1-2a) This verse connects the previous section to this section. The subject of the chapter is the effectiveness of the work of Christ. Peace refers to reconciliation with God – the enmity being removed and wrath being turned away.

Jesus said that he is the door (John 10:9). This verse says something similar, because by him we have access to enter grace by faith. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

**God's love
is causeless,
measureless,
and ceaseless.**

(5:2b-5) These verses describe the believer's experience as he lives in grace.

Paul said that our rejoicing is because of hope that we will experience the glory of God. He said that we can rejoice even in tribulations.

The Christian can enjoy and endure the little things (circumstances of life) because the big things are secure. The unbeliever tries to take joy from the things of life. But things are never good enough to satisfy; they pass quickly. Life's conditions are not too bad if life is a journey, but life's conditions seem miserable if there is nothing else.

Faithful endurance of tribulation accomplishes a process for the believer. (See also James 1:2-4.) As we endure tribulation by faith, we develop patience. Patience is not just willingness to wait; it is the ability to endure by faith. As we exercise this patient faith, we continue to experience and observe the work of God that gives us hope. We know that God's purposes are being accomplished even when circumstances seem bad.

» How do you encourage yourself when you are in bad circumstances?

We know that our hope will not be disappointed, because we already experience the love of God in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul said that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee that God will fulfill everything else he has promised. The Spirit is like the deposit for a contract.

5:6-10 emphasizes that at the time of our justification we did not deserve it and could do nothing to accomplish it. We were without strength, still sinners, and enemies.

(5:6) To be weak means to be unable to save ourselves, especially by fulfilling the requirements of the law. We were powerless to fulfill God's requirements or deliver ourselves from sin.

(5:7-8) It is rare that someone would die even for a good man, but Christ died for us while we were sinners.

(5:9-10) Christ lives as our mediator and advocate. Paul reasons that if God were ready to forgive when we were sinners, then we can be confident even more of his favor now that we are justified in Christ. We were reconciled by his death for us and continue to be acceptable to God by being connected to the living Christ.

(The following section is important for 5:12-19.)

ARE WE GUILTY OF ADAM'S SIN?

» Are we guilty of Adam's sin? Explain your answer.

Romans 5:12-19 says that all humankind was brought under sin and death because of Adam's sin. Are we personally guilty of Adam's sin? Will sinners be punished for Adam's sin?

Paul did not say that sinners will be punished for Adam's sin. In 5:12 he said that death passed upon all men because all have sinned. Every person is individually guilty of his own sin. Romans 1-2 already emphasized that people need justification because they are sinners who have broken God's law. People are not condemned for the condition they are born in, but for their choice to sin. The judgment is according to works (Revelation 20:12, Romans 2:6-16, 2 Corinthians 5:10).

However, by Adam sin entered into the world. As the father of all humanity which was yet unborn, he separated humankind from God. All people afterward would be born already separated from God and, therefore, depraved. Because of Adam's sin, all people are born with a tendency toward sin and all of them have followed it by committing acts of sin.

The following statements can be interpreted with that understanding:

- Many died through one man's trespass (5:15)
- Judgment following one trespass brought condemnation (5:16)
- Because of one man's trespass, death reigned (5:17)
- One trespass led to condemnation for all men (5:18)
- By his disobedience many were made sinners (5:19)

Paul did not say that we are guilty of Adam's sin; but that Adam brought in sin, and everyone followed. Sinners need to be forgiven of their many trespasses (5:16), not of Adam's sin.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 3, PASSAGE 3

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(5:12) The reason death spread to all men is not that Adam's guilt was imputed to them, but that all sinned. Adam was the one who brought sin into the world and brought its influence over his descendants.

(5:13-14) Sin is not revealed and clearly condemned without the law. However, even up until Moses received the law, death ruled. People knew that they were guilty of sin, even without the clarity the law provides (see 1:20). The real extent of sin is shown by the law. Sin like Adam's sin refers to deliberate disobedience of a revealed law. Those without any revelation did not have a choice that clear, yet they still did not fully follow their consciences (1:21).

(5:15) The act of Adam brought death to many, and the work of Christ brought life to many. The term *many* refers to everyone in general. The emphasis is that Christ's atonement was farther reaching in its effects than Adam's sin. This verse says that **just as the sin of Adam caused everyone to become sinners, the atonement of Christ offers grace to everyone**. God offers grace to every person who was made a sinner by Adam's fall.

- » From verse 15, how would you answer a person who thinks that God provided salvation only for a small percentage of humanity?

(5:16) The original sin was one act, but grace is now needed for many sins. The grace must be far greater than the original sin.

(5:17-19) Many were made sinners because of the effects of Adam's sin. They will be made righteous by Christ. The implication is that they are transformed.

(5:20) The law multiplies sin in the sense that it makes a long list of offenses where before only a few sins were recognized. It also increases sin in the sense that after a person knows the law and chooses to reject it, he becomes a worse sinner than before. This is the condition described in 7:5-24. But grace is multiplied beyond all sin.

AMAZING GRACE

John Newton had a Christian mother but became a sailor and ship's captain who went into deep sin. He suffered hard circumstances in his life. He was betrayed by friends and, for a period of time, became a slave. When his situation improved, he continued in sin and helped to destroy the lives of many by slave trading. He was captain of a slave ship for years. He was once shipwrecked and stranded on an island but was rescued by a captain who had been a friend of his father. He felt that God had been merciful to him even though he had been wicked. Later, the ship was in a severe storm; and he called to God for mercy. The ship survived the storm, and Newton continued to depend on God for mercy. He eventually left the sea and became a pastor. One of the hymns he wrote is the most sung and most recorded hymn ever written.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see."

In his testimony, Newton said, "God has mercifully brought me up out of the deep miry clay and set my feet upon the Rock, Christ Jesus. He has saved my soul. And now, it is my heart's desire to extol and honor his matchless, free, sovereign, and distinguishing grace because 'By the grace of God I am what I am' (1 Corinthians 15:10). It is my heart's great joy to ascribe my salvation entirely to the grace of God."³⁴

34 "John Newton's Conversion," from <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2001/john-newtons-conversion/> (Accessed December 29, 2022).

LESSON 5 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does a person believe who has saving faith?
2. What is the dilemma solved by the atonement?
3. How did the atonement solve the dilemma?
4. What does *justification* mean?
5. How does someone uphold the law as the standard of righteousness? (Romans 3:31)
6. What was God's promise of grace to Abraham?
7. What did David say about justification by faith?
8. Who are the spiritual children of Abraham?
9. How do we know from Romans 5:15 that salvation is offered to everyone?

LESSON 5 ASSIGNMENT

Write a page about justification including answers to the following questions:
What is the dilemma solved by the atonement? Why could the sinner not be saved by obedience? How did Abraham demonstrate justification by faith? How do we know that salvation is available for everyone?

LESSON 6

VICTORY OVER SIN

SIN

Romans 6 is about deliverance from the power of sin. To understand repentance and victory, we must understand what sin is.

» What is sin?

The Bible usually speaks of sinful actions as willful (1 John 3:4-9, James 4:17). When a person purposely and knowingly chooses to disobey God, that is willful sin.

There are unconscious or accidental violations of God's absolute law that do not affect our relationship with God as deliberate sin does. As we walk in the light (live according to the truth we know), we are cleansed from all sin (1 John 1:7) and do not need to be in fear that unknown violations will separate us from God.

This passage is speaking primarily of willful sin, which destroys faith and harms one's relationship with God.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 4, PASSAGE 1

Part 4 of Romans (Romans 6-8) is about the sanctification of those who have been justified.

Up to this point, Paul has been talking about *imputed* righteousness. This is righteousness that is credited to the believer in place of his past sins. Now he begins to describe *imparted* righteousness. Imparted righteousness is also given by grace at the moment of justification and means that the believer becomes actually righteous by being freed from sin's power and assisted by the Holy Spirit to live a holy life. Therefore, the believer is not only counted holy, but he is made holy; this is called sanctification.

In this lesson we will study Romans 6, which is about victory over sin.

Main Point of Chapter 6

The believer is free from the bondage of sin and must choose to live victoriously over sin and in obedience to God, lest he come back under sin's control.

Summary of Chapter 6

Romans 6 is Paul's response to a wrong idea many people have: The wrong idea is that because of grace, believers do not need to live in obedience to God's laws. This error is based on a wrong understanding of grace. Paul responds to this error by asking and answering two hypothetical questions (6:1, 15).

When some people read 5:20, they reason that we should continue in sin, so that we can have more grace (6:1). They seem to think that since our record of sin is replaced by imputed righteousness, it does not matter if we keep sinning.

There is another reason some people think that believers do not need to live in obedience to God's laws. We are accepted by grace and not by our actions. That is the reason they mistakenly think it does not matter what we do (6:15).

Paul strongly rejected the reasoning of both hypothetical questions. He responded with an explanation of why victory over sin is so important.

- » A student should read Romans 6 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(6:1) Here the apostle asked a question that someone might ask after hearing that grace has abounded more than sin. Someone might think that sin is actually good in its results because it makes a way for more grace. This idea would be that we are free to live carelessly in sin.

(6:2) The apostle reacted to the question as outrageous. He then explained that it is not possible for us to continue living in sin, because we are dead to sin.

(6:3-5) We do not continue in sin because we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. As Romans 5:15-19 explains, Jesus accomplished the work of salvation for all of us. By faith we connect with him, so that the favor of God is extended to us as it is to Christ.

Jesus died to sin once, and then lives for God. Jesus' death was for our sin and not for his own, but the point is that the issue of sin was finished. By faith, we have died and have risen with him; so that we also are finished with sin.

Baptism is a reenactment of Jesus' death and resurrection, symbolizing our participation.

(6:6) The old self represents the sinful life before conversion. (A later section in this lesson explains the concept of the old self.) The life of sin is ended completely, so that we are not servants of sin any longer.

Notice the terms used in this passage about what has happened to sin: it is dead, crucified, and destroyed. The terms communicate total victory over sin.

(6:7-11) The emphasis of these verses is that the control of sin ends for the believer. The illustration is death. A person who is dead is free from sin, and we are to have a spiritual experience that is like death.

After the resurrection, Jesus did not die again and does not continue to die. He finished with death. We are to die completely to sin and be finished with it and free from it. Death to sin is to be finished, then we live for God.

The union of the Christian with Christ's death to sin, his burial, and subsequent resurrection which Paul described in Romans 6:1-23 sets the Christian free from the power and slavery of sin. He is declared to be dead to sin (Romans 6:2) and freed from it (Romans 6:7). To be dead to sin is to no longer be under sin's power or control. By faith, a believer must consider himself to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:11). This means the Christian is to put into personal experience that which God declares is true about him. He is not to let sin reign any longer in his body (Romans 6:12), nor is he to use the members of his body as instruments of unrighteousness (Romans 6:13a). Rather, he is to present himself as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God (Romans 12:1), and to use the members of his body as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13, 19).³⁵

In Romans 6:11, *consider* is an accounting term. It is to affirm what is true. It is not a statement of pretense. The apostle is not telling believers to say something that is not true. A believer should realize that he is completely delivered from sin as if he is dead, and he should choose to live in complete freedom from the power of sin.

» What does it mean to consider yourself dead to sin?

The remainder of this chapter explains another reason that victory over sin is important. We are not slaves to sin, but slaves of God. You cannot serve both. When you were the slave of sin, you did no righteousness (6:20). Now you are free from sin and the slave of God; therefore, you live in holiness (6:22).

(6:12-13) Here we see a contrast. If we do not have victory over sin, sin will rule us. Believers are not controlled by sinful desires. To use your body for wrong actions is yielding it to sin's authority. Instead, your body belongs to God and should be used for him.

(6:14) **To be under the law means to be depending on obedience to the law for God's acceptance.** That person is without saving grace and, therefore, is judged on the basis of works. Because nobody without grace can be victorious over sin, to be under the law means to be condemned and under the power of sin. **To be under grace means to be depending**

35 This paragraph was written by Dr. Allan Brown.

on grace for God's acceptance. The person under grace is not under the power of sin. To be either under the law or under grace does not refer to being either in the Old Testament or the New Testament.

- » Ask students to explain again in their own words what it means to be under the law.

(6:15) Here the apostle asked a question that someone might ask after hearing that we are not under the law: “Can we sin, because we are not under the law?” The person is thinking that if our acceptance before God is not accomplished by our obedience, then obedience is not necessary. Paul reacts to the question strongly.³⁶

Paul did not directly explain why grace does not automatically cover continued sin. Instead, he explained that a person cannot be the servant of God if he is under the power of sin.

(6:16) It is impossible to serve both God and sin because you are a slave to the one you obey. If you obey sin, sin is your master, which means that God is not your master. As the Apostle Peter said that whatever overcomes a person brings him into bondage (2 Peter 2:19). You cannot yield to sin without becoming a slave to sin.

(6:17-18) Believers have been delivered from the power of sin and now serve righteousness. They experienced this deliverance by obeying the gospel. Again, it is stated that to serve righteousness it was necessary for them to be delivered from sin.

The whole chapter presents a total contrast between being bound by sin and living in victory. There is never any implication that it is possible for a believer to be under the power of sin or for a sinner to be righteous while continuing to sin. It would be difficult to find a way that Paul could have said it more definitely.

(6:19) He said that he is explaining it in human terms so that they can understand it. They previously yielded to sin, which led them deeper into sin. Now, they are to be righteous in their actions, which is necessary for holiness. A person does not become holy by doing right things, but he is not holy if he is not doing right.



Roman Military

The Roman military was superior to others in its training, discipline, and equipment. In Ephesians 6:13-17, Paul used the Roman armor as an illustration for spiritual warfare.

36 Image from Pexels, retrieved from <https://www.pexels.com/en/public-domain-photo-sriuc>.

- » How would you explain the impossibility of serving God and living in sin at the same time?

(6:21-23) Sin produces no good but ends naturally in death. The sinner earns death; death is the wages of sin. The believer does not earn eternal life, because he cannot possibly earn it; he receives it as a gift of grace.

THE BASIS OF PERSONAL ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Some think that once an individual has accepted Christ his salvation is secure even when his lifestyle completely contradicts the claim.³⁷ Even when the claim of salvation hasn't translated into life transformation; even when no fruit of repentance and conversion can be seen; and even when the person refuses to become a true disciple of Jesus, he may falsely claim salvation. This is a deadly deception and is contradicted by many scriptures.

Let us draw near with **a true heart in full assurance of faith**, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22).

Who by God's power are being **guarded through faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5).

From these passages we learn that biblical assurance of salvation is dependent on **faith**:

- **Assurance of salvation is dependent on faith which understands – “full assurance.”** Assurance begins with a clear understanding of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This is the “full assurance of understanding” also spoken of in Colossians 2:2. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith in the substitutionary death of Christ on our behalf (Ephesians 2:8-9). The requirement for salvation is not sinless perfection (none would qualify) or feeling saved all the time, but rather constant trust in Christ's merit and completed work of redemption even when we fail. A passion for faithfulness will follow genuine saving faith.
- **Assurance of salvation is dependent on sincere faith – “a true heart.”** A sincere convert is one whose heart has been “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” (Hebrews 10:22). The guilt and shame have been removed and replaced with peace and love. A sincere convert is also one whose body has been “washed with pure water”, for old things have passed away and all things have been made new (2 Corinthians 5:17). A sincere convert is also one who acknowledges and confesses his faults and sins in order to be forgiven and freed from them (Matthew 6:12, James 5:16).

37 This section was written by Tim Keep.

- **Assurance is conditioned on living faith** – “**by God's power are being guarded through faith**” The idea is the same as the defense of a castle or fortress. God's divine power defends, preserves, and will ultimately lead us to triumph. It is the power of Christ's cleansing blood and the power of his resurrection which we appropriate by faith that preserves our souls unto eternal life. The only real saving faith is faith which perseveres; faith which constantly trusts in Christ and in his finished work on the cross. Faith is not a work, but it is a condition for salvation. The Hebrew writer put it like this: “Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Many people believe that to attach any requirements to salvation is legalism, but Jesus and every New Testament writer plainly taught the necessity of continuing faith.

If you abide in my word, you are **truly my disciples** (John 8:31).

If ... you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, **not shifting** from the hope of the gospel that you heard (Colossians 1:23).

My **righteous one shall live by faith**, and **if he shrinks back**, my soul has no pleasure in him (Hebrews 10:38).

Holding **faith** and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have **made shipwreck of their faith** (1 Timothy 1:19).

Describing the assurance of salvation, John Wesley said,

My comfort stands, not on any opinion, either that a believer can, or cannot fall away, not on the remembrance of anything wrought in me yesterday; but on what is today, on my present knowledge of God in Christ, reconciling me to himself; on my now beholding the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; walking in the light as he is in the light, and having fellowship with the Father and with the Son. My comfort is that through grace I can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Spirit doth bear witness with my Spirit that I am a child of God.³⁸

- » From the concepts in the preceding section, how would you explain that a Christian can have an assurance of salvation based on a living faith?

THE OLD SELF

The term *old self* occurs three times in the Epistles. All three times it was used by Paul. By comparing these three occurrences in their contexts we can see what the term means.

38 John Wesley, “Serious Thoughts Upon the Perseverance of the Saints”, in *The Works of John Wesley: Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses Vol. X*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan) 295. Also available online at: <https://archive.org/details/worksofjohnwesle0010wesl/>

Colossians 3:9

Colossians 3:9-10a says, “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self” Paul said that these believers had already put off the old self. He did not mean that they were already completely holy, because much of Colossians 3 is calling them to holiness.

Previously he said to the Colossian believers, “Seek the things that are above... Set your minds on things that are above... For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3). He went on to say, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion...” (3:5). 3:6 says such sins will bring about the judgment of God, and 3:7 says that these believers formerly did these things. Paul demanded that they not tolerate such things in their lives at all. This is implied by the statement that they should put to death all such things.

He then called them to put off some things: anger, malice, filthy talk, and others (3:8). These are incompatible with life in Christ.

Then we come to the statement that they should do all of this because they had already put off the old self with his deeds.

He called them to advance in their Christian faith by describing holy traits (3:12), then by urging Christlikeness in relationships (3:13), then by telling them to put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (3:14).

It seems evident that in this context the old self was the old life that had been put off at conversion. Because they had done that, Paul believed they could advance into complete holiness.

Ephesians 4:22

This verse comes in a passage that is parallel with the one in Colossians. In 4:17-19, he described the lifestyle of the heathen; then in 4:20 he contrasted it with the life of a believer. 4:21-24 describes what it means to have “learned Christ” (4:20) and to have heard him and been taught by him (4:21). These things include putting off the old self and putting on the new self. This was part of what had happened when they were converted.

This passage in Ephesians follows a pattern similar to Colossians 4. After the statement that putting off the old self is part of the gospel they have already learned, Paul's first command is that they put away lying. He went on to mention anger, corrupt talk, and malice. He told them to be kind and forgiving. All of these things were also mentioned in Colossians after the statement that the old self was already put off.

The old self is not something that the believer still needs to get rid of, but something that was put off at conversion. They were not yet completely holy, and Paul called them to complete holiness in their lives that would be consistent with the start they had made when they got rid of the old self.

Romans 6:6

In this passage Paul drew a great contrast between the unbeliever and the believer. The main point of the chapter is to assure the follower of Jesus that he has victory over sin. One reason he gave to prove that the believer can live victoriously over sin is that the old self is crucified. “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” He is obviously saying that the believer can be free from sin because of something that has already happened at conversion.

Conclusion

So what does the term *old self* mean? The old self is the self-centered life of sin that a person leaves when he is converted.

The newly converted person still has behaviors and attitudes that are more consistent with the old self than with the new. That is why Paul told believers to make further corrections in their lives which would be consistent with their rejection of the old self. He was saying, “Because you left the old life of sin, you need to stop any behavior that does not fit with the new life of righteousness.”

JESUS’ PROVISION FOR OUR SANCTIFICATION

In Romans 6:1-10 we are told about Jesus’ provisions for our personal sanctification.³⁹ When we were born again, we were placed into Christ. All that he died and rose again to accomplish becomes ours in him. This means that in Christ we have the resources for total victory over sin.

Because of our union with Christ, whatever happened to him has happened to me. When he died, I died. When he arose, I arose in him. Because of this living union with Christ, the believer has a totally new relationship to sin. We are now dead to sin. We are dead to both the acts of sin as well as the principle of sin. This is our positional relationship to sin.

Due to our union with Christ, we now walk in newness of life because we share his resurrected life.

39 This section was written by Dr. Allan Brown.

Due to our union with Christ, his crucifixion becomes my crucifixion. Because his death defeated the power of sin, we are no longer held by its grip on our life.

What is the meaning of *consider*? (Romans 6:11). In this case, it is a bookkeeping term. It means to take account of what is. The Greek word is used 11 times in the New Testament, though in different passages, it is translated into different words. Here it refers to “the appropriation by faith of the freedom from sin and union with God provided in the atonement and resurrection of Christ.”⁴⁰ The verb implies that we are to believe what is already true: we are dead to sin.

What must I do to account for the truth that I am dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus? By faith I receive the Word of God as truth for my heart. I declare on the authority of God’s infallible and inerrant Word that I am set free from all sin and made fully alive to God in Christ Jesus my Lord.

As a voluntary love slave to Jesus Christ, I willingly abandon those attitudes and actions that were characteristic of the old life. A full surrender to Jesus is a joy! And as a result of my relationship with Christ, I have everlasting life.

Conclusion

We have seen it is our blood bought privilege to have complete freedom from the controlling power of sin. But more than that, it is God’s command that we be victorious.

Perhaps you have never realized this truth before. God has saved you and you are walking in newness of life; but you find that sin still keeps appearing in your life. You don’t want it to! But there is something inside that wants to do things its own way. If this be the case, follow Paul’s commands to consider yourself to be dead indeed unto sin (6:11) and to *yield* yourself to God (6:13).

Give him complete control! If you do this, he promises to enable you to live a life free from sin’s controlling power. Believe what God says and claim by faith your liberty from sin.

“As we study Romans 6-8 we shall discover that the conditions of living the normal Christian life are fourfold. They are (1) knowing, (2) reckoning, (3) presenting ourselves to God, and (4) walking in the Spirit, and they are set forth in that order.”

Watchman Nee

The Normal Christian Life

- » What does union with Christ mean? What should you expect of your life because you are united with Christ?

HOW TO LIVE THE LIFE OF VICTORY

Did you ever wonder if it is really possible to live in victory over sin? God has promised enabling grace that more than compensates for our weakness in temptation:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

This verse tells us several important things.

1. **Every temptation is common to humanity.** It comes because of our humanity and aims at some human weakness. That means that your struggles are not really unique to you.
2. **God knows our limits.** He understands how much we can endure. We don't really know how much we can endure, but he does.
3. **God limits the temptations that come to us because he wants us to live in victory.** Some people assume that temptation will often be beyond our capacity because we are human. They assume that consistent victory is impossible, but according to this verse it is not.
4. **God provides what we need to live in victory.** He provides a way to escape.

So a conclusion we can draw from this verse is that God intends for us to live in victory. Grace for victorious living is given in response to faith.

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith (1 John 5:4).

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12).

If we understand how it has happened that believers have been defeated by temptation, maybe we can understand how to prevent it. A person who falls to temptation has usually allowed himself to go through a certain process.

The process is described in James 1:14-15: “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin...”

John Wesley observed that the steps to willful sin usually occur as follows.

1. A temptation arises (from the world, the flesh, or the devil).
2. The Spirit warns the believer to be watchful.
3. The person gives attention to the temptation and its attraction increases. (This is where the person makes his first mistake in this process.)
4. The Spirit is grieved, the person's faith is weakened, and his love for God grows cold.
5. The Spirit reproves sharply.
6. The person turns from the painful voice of the Spirit and listens to the attractive voice of the tempter.
7. Evil desire begins and fills his heart; faith and love vanish; he is ready to commit outward sin.

We should not assume that every person's experience always matches this pattern. Sometimes people yield to a temptation suddenly, without seeming to go through any process.

Since temptation increases its power while holding our attention, the believer who is serious about maintaining victory over sin must have his heart established so that he can reject temptation immediately. The person who recognizes the temptation to sin but hesitates to resist it puts himself in greater danger. By hesitating, he demonstrates that his heart is not fully determined to please God.

Temptation is a challenge to our faith, for temptation gives us the opportunity to doubt that obedience to God is the best way at that moment.

- » If a believer seems unable to live in victory over sin, what is the reason for that?

It is probably because of one or more of the following problems.

1. He doesn't see that God requires obedience.
2. He doesn't see or believe God's promise of enabling grace.
3. He doesn't depend on God's enabling grace instead of personal strength.
4. He serves God with selective obedience, instead of complete, unconditional obedience.
5. He hasn't sought by grace to have a single motive to do the will of God (Philippians 3:13-15).

6. He doesn't maintain spiritual disciplines that keep strong his faith-building relationship with God.
7. He does not maintain spiritual accountability in a local church.
8. He does not regularly meditate on the Word of God.
9. He has not developed a sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Three men applied for a job as chauffeur. The first one, wanting to impress the prospective employer, said, "I'm such a skilled driver that if I drove at high speed within a few feet of a cliff you wouldn't have to worry." The second didn't want to be outdone, so he said, "I could drive at high speed within a few inches of a cliff without going over it." The third applicant hesitated, then said to the employer, "I wouldn't risk your life by going near the cliff." Which one do you think got hired?

We shouldn't be trying to see how close we can get to temptation. God wants to give us personal guidelines that will guard us from our areas of weakness. We should learn what is dangerous, such as certain entertainments, and stay away from those things.

If a believer has not maintained his relationship with God, he should repent immediately and be restored through our advocate, Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1-2). He should not wait for any future time that he thinks would be more convenient. If he wants to be restored, the Holy Spirit is giving him that desire and drawing him back to his relationship with God. If his repentance is real, he can be restored immediately.

God has already made the supreme investment for our salvation, in the sacrifice of Jesus. He is not going to let that investment be wasted by failing to give us the grace we need to continue.

FIVE TRUTHS TO KNOW AND CLAIM

Victory over acts of sin is the normal experience of a Christian because he has been set free from the enslavement of sin by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.⁴¹ Continued sin results from ignorance of God's grace, the failure to remain in union with Christ, the failure to continually consider oneself dead to sin and alive to God, and the failure to fully and decisively present one's body to God as an instrument of righteousness.

Every true believer desires to experience victory over sin. This is so because of the awful price Jesus paid to save us from sin. This is so because of the destructive nature of sin. Paul's answer to those who would argue that "since grace abounds for sin, why not keep sinning?" is very strong. "Certainly not!" he declares (Romans 6:1-2). For one to adopt a

41 This section was written by Tim Keep.

careless attitude toward the disease of sin just because God has provided a cure for it would be like becoming careless about HIV/AIDS, or cancer simply because a medical cure had been discovered. The cure wouldn't spare one from the period of pain and sickness. Neither would it spare one from the scars. No one in his right mind would say, "Let's get sick so that we can receive the cure." No one who has been awakened to sin's horror, sin's offensiveness to a holy God, and the awful price paid for sin's cure will say, "Let's sin since grace will cover it!"

A Christian's experience of freedom from sin depends on his knowledge (Romans 6:3, 6, 9) and use of these truths:

1. As a sinful person I died.

The old self, the old sinful person we used to be, spiritually died with Jesus on the cross and was buried with him in his tomb. Since a dead person can no longer serve as a slave, sin's mastery over us has been broken. This death has *already* happened. The death of our old sinful life happened the moment we believed in Christ's death for us, repented of our sins, and received his gift of eternal life.

Notice these statements from Romans 6:

- "...How can **we who died** to sin still live in it?" (6:2).
- "...All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus **were baptized into his death**" (6:3).
- "We were **buried** therefore **with him** by baptism into death..." (6:4).
- "For if we have been united with him in a **death like his...**" (6:5).
- "We know that our old self **was crucified** with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." (6:6).
- "For one who **has died** has been set free from sin" (6:7).

The problem with too many believers today is that they live below their potential. Many believers have been conditioned to accept failure as normal. They think that a victorious Christian life is not possible and that continued sin must be expected. Other believers think there is no tolerance of human failure. This teaching is also devastating to faith and has led many to either despair or hypocrisy. Paul makes it clear that victory is ours through sharing in Christ's victory at the cross.

2. God resurrected me with Jesus to be a new person.

Jesus overcame all sin by his resurrection. It is this resurrected life that we have come to share by faith. By faith, sin no longer has the power to weigh us down, humiliate, wound, or kill us. We have been spiritually raised with Christ to a new victorious life.

- “...Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might **walk in newness of life.**” (6:4).
- “...We shall certainly be united with him in a **resurrection like his.**” (6:5).
- “We know that Christ, **being raised from the dead, will never die again;** death no longer has dominion over him.” (6:9).
- “For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but **the life he lives** he lives to God.” (6:10).
- “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and **alive to God** in Christ Jesus.” (6:11).
- “...Present yourselves to God **as those who have been brought from death to life...**” (6:13).

3. I am spiritually united with Jesus.

Not only has my old life been crucified with him, and not only have I received a new life like his; but I am dwelling in him, and he in me! (See also Galatians 2:20 and John 14-16.) This is promised by Jesus to every disciple: that God has chosen to indwell believers by the Holy Spirit. This union and indwelling is what makes victory over sin and holy living possible. This is what makes it possible for believers to receive and live the pure, loving, merciful, kind, forgiving and holy life of Jesus.

- “For if we have been **united with him** in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (6:5).
- “...Our old self was crucified **with him...**” (6:6).
- “Now if we have **died with Christ**, we believe that we will also **live with him.**” (6:8).

Jesus taught his disciples of this union in John 15. Spiritual union with Christ is necessary to our success in the Christian life!

4. I must possess by faith the victory God has given me.

So you also must **consider** yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (6:11).

To *consider* is to count this as true so that we can experience it in our own lives.

Here is an illustration from the Old Testament that will be helpful. We remember that God had not only promised the Israelites the Promised Land, but had given it to them long before they actually possessed it. For 40 years they wandered in the wilderness, living below their potential, because they gave into fear and failed to believe God. But God loved them and led them into their inheritance.

Joshua 1:3 reads, “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon **I have given** to you, just as I promised to Moses.” A few verses later God commands, “Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, ‘Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in **to take possession of the land** that the Lord your God **is giving you to possess**’” (Joshua 1:11).

God’s people had to, by faith, possess the land God had given. While victory over Canaan’s inhabitants was provided for, and in a very real sense already completed, Israel would only experience this victory through obedient faith. New Testament believers overcome in just the same way; by considering, by faith, the victory Christ Jesus has wrought for us and possessing the promises.

5. I must present my body to God.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not **present** your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but **present** yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness (Romans 6:12-13).

REVIEW

- » Various students should explain the significance of the five truths in the preceding article.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32).

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25).

LESSON 6 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to understand what sin is?
2. What is the definition of willful sin?
3. What wrong idea is Paul responding to in Romans 6?
4. What does it mean to be dead to sin?
5. What does it mean to be under grace?
6. What does it mean to be under the law?
7. Why is it impossible to serve both God and sin?
8. What does the term *old self* mean?

LESSON 6 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a page explaining what victory over sin is possible for the believer. Include a definition of willful sin and explain why the definition of sin is important. Respond to objections people make to the possibility of victory over sin.
2. You need to finish your three presentations of sermons or lessons.

LESSON 7

THE CONVICTED SINNER

WHAT LAW ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Many of the commands of the Old Testament seem like they could not apply to people today. Here are some examples:

- Do not allow a witch to live (Exodus 22:18).
- Forgive all debts the seventh year (Deuteronomy 15:1-2).
- Celebrate the Passover for seven days in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:1-6).

Some scholars divide the Old Testament laws into three categories: ceremonial laws, civil laws, and moral laws.

Ceremonial laws were about the sacrifices, the design for place of worship, and worship practices. Christians today do not follow the ceremonial laws because that system was made obsolete by the work of Christ (Colossians 2:17, Hebrews 10:1).

Civil laws were for Israel as a nation. They provided regulations for business, protected human rights, gave policies for law enforcement, and protected the religious identity of Israel. It is not possible for Christians today to follow the civil laws because those laws are not the laws of their nation. For example, in Old Testament times, when someone was supposed to be killed for idol worship, that was not done by someone's individual decision. A judge would hear the case, then the judgment was supported by the people (Deuteronomy 17:6-12).

- » Why is it not possible for a Christian to keep the civil laws of ancient Israel in the original way?

Moral laws identified certain actions as right or wrong for all times. For example, the Ten Commandments forbid idolatry, blasphemy, adultery, and stealing (Exodus 20:4-5, 7, 14, 15).

Christians do not do the original, specific actions commanded by the ceremonial laws and civil laws. However, those laws are still important because they reveal God's nature, which does not change. Although we do not kill idolaters and adulterers, those laws show us that those sins are abominations to God. Though we do not leave grain in the field for the poor, we know that we should care about the poor in practical ways. Though we do not take animals to the place of worship before we kill them, we know that everything belongs to God, and we should give offerings from what we have. So though we do not do the original actions, we should find new actions that fulfill the principles.

Another reason the civil and ceremonial laws are important, is that they provide principles of morality to be applied in specific ways. To reject those principles would be the same as rejecting the moral laws. For example, we do not need a railing around the roof of our house if our house is not designed to have people on the roof (Deuteronomy 22:8). But this ancient law tells us that we are supposed to make our houses and land safe for people.

- » What is an example of a modern practice that we should do to fulfill the principle in Deuteronomy 22:8?

So what is the law of God that Paul talks about in the book of Romans? It is the will of God for man, expressed in his commandments (Old Testament and New Testament). Though some commands are not to be fulfilled the original way, God's will for man is essentially the same. Violation of God's law is sin (1 John 3:4).

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 4, PASSAGE 2

In this lesson we continue with Part 4 of the book of Romans. In the last lesson we studied Romans 6, about victory over sin.

In this lesson we will study Romans 7, about the convicted sinner. Romans 6 and 8 describe the victorious life of the believer. Romans 7 makes a great contrast, showing the life of the sinner who knows he is guilty but cannot change himself.

Main Point of Chapter 7

A person who knows God's law but has not been transformed by grace is helpless to escape the power of sin and the condemnation of the law.

Summary of Chapter 7

This chapter describes the condition of a person who is under the law. To be under the law means to be standing before God waiting to be judged on the basis of one's obedience to the law. Since all have sinned, to be under the law means to be under condemnation. The person who is under the law has not yet received justification.

7:1-6 explains how the believer is dead to the law. The rest of the chapter shows why this is necessary (see the "for while" in 7:5 and the "but now" in 7:6). 7:7-13 shows how the law is good but makes sin worse. 7:14-25 shows the helplessness of the convicted, unregenerated sinner.

- » A student should read Romans 7 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(7:1-3) These three verses are an illustration preparing for the point made in the next three verses. Marriage illustrates the original bondage to the law. A woman was not allowed to leave her husband and marry another, but if the husband dies, she was free from his authority. This obligation to the law does not apply only to Jews under the law of Moses, but to every person, because all of us would be judged by the law of God if we were not saved by grace.⁴²

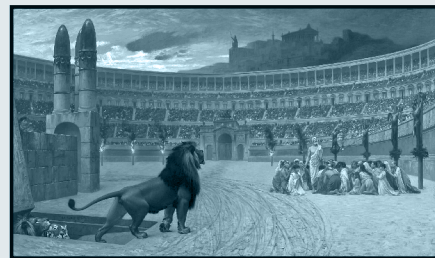
The main point of Paul's illustration of marriage is that death changes the relationship. We died to our old life when we were united with Christ. The Law is not nullified or abolished. However, the claims of the Law on us as a law-breaker are now paid in full by Jesus' substitutionary atonement. We are now "married" to Christ. This does not make us lawless. We do not have the right to be a law breaker now that we are Christians. Instead, we are empowered, through the Holy Spirit, to live in the spirit of the Law.⁴³

(7:4) Violation of the law has the penalty of death. Christ has died in our place. We identify with him, so that it can be said that we have died to the law through the body of Christ. Since the requirement of the law has been fulfilled, we are free from its bondage. We do not have to fulfill the law out of fear of the penalty. **To be dead to the law means that we do not need to fulfill it as a means of justification, because we are justified by grace.**



The Colosseum

Construction of the Colosseum began in A.D. 72, a few years after Paul's visit to Rome. It could hold more than 50,000 spectators. The shows included battles between professional fighters, fights between people and animals (including lions, tigers, elephants, bears, and many others), and execution of people by fighters or animals. Sometimes hundreds of people died there in a day. Many Christians were sent to die in the Colosseum.



42 Image: "Colosseum - Rome - Italy" taken by Sam valadi, uploaded on March 31, 2015, retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/132084522@N05/16800139540/>, licensed under CC BY 2.0, desaturated from the original.

Image: "The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer", by Jean-Léon Gérôme, from the Walters Art Museum, retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18824108>, public domain.

43 This paragraph was written by Dr. Allan Brown.

(7:5) Sin is caused by the law in the sense that the law writes the record of sin and in the sense that once a person knows the law and rebels against it, he becomes a worse sinner.

DEFINING FLESH/CARNAL

- » Look up many of the references in this section, so that you can understand the concepts.

The scripture refers to various people as being “in the flesh.” To be in the flesh can have at least two different meanings, depending on the context.

One basic meaning is simply to be in human, mortal form. In this sense, Jesus was in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16, 1 Peter 3:18). Even a person living a holy life can be said to be in the flesh in this sense (2 Corinthians 10:3; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:22, 24). The flesh is considered morally neutral when the term is used this way, as when Paul told the Galatians that they could not by the flesh (human efforts) perfect what grace had begun.

A second sense in which a person may be in the flesh is to be controlled by a fallen, sinful nature. This condition is typical of the unregenerate person (Ephesians 2:3). The natural works of the fallen nature are listed in Galatians 5:19-21. In Romans 8:1-13, being in the flesh is contrasted with being saved. Fleshliness is death (8:6) and enmity against God (8:7). The person in the flesh cannot please God (8:8) and shall die (8:13). The description of the flesh here is the same condition described in Romans 7 (see 7:5, 14, 18, 25). The person in the flesh in this sense is doing works of sin for which he will receive the penalty of spiritual and eternal death (Romans 7:5). He is not yet saved.

A person may yet be influenced by the fallen nature even after conversion, though not controlled by it. The Corinthians were called carnal after their regeneration (1 Corinthians 3:1). Paul implied in 3:1 that carnality is usual for babies in Christ, but it is not a condition where a believer should remain. He criticized the Corinthians for remaining babies.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 4, PASSAGE 2

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(7:6) Since we have died to the law in Christ, the law is as dead to us. Freedom does not mean that we no longer serve; but now we serve with our spirit, rather than trying to fulfill requirements without fulfilling their intention.

(7:7) Paul previously said that the law multiplies sin (5:20). In this passage he has said that sin worked by the law to bring forth death (7:5). Therefore, it is natural that the question should arise, “Is the law sin?” He shows that the law is not sin by showing that the law is what condemns sin.

(7:8) God's law shows the sinner that his actions are condemned. In a sense, the law makes sin worse. When the sinner knows he is guilty, his continued sin (disobedience to God's law) becomes conscious rebellion.

(7:9) Before he saw what the law required, he did not know he was condemned to death. But sin does lead to death even for those who sin without knowing the details of God's law (see 2:12 and 5:14).

In Romans 7:7-25 Paul relates his experience as an unsaved Pharisee and explains how he finally came to see his need for Christ. In Romans 7 he tells us that before the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to the covetousness he had in his heart, he thought he perfectly kept the law. See his testimony in Philippians 3:6 when he says, "as to righteousness under the law, blameless." Like he said in Philippians 3:9, as a Pharisee he thought he had a righteousness that was derived from the law. After the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to the covetousness of his heart, he said that he felt he died spiritually (Romans 7:9). This is obviously a comparative statement: he once thought he was spiritually alive by keeping the law; when he saw he was guilty of covetousness and not keeping the law, he realized he was actually dead. Paul continues giving his own history in Romans 7:14-25. He tried to stop being covetous, but he could not. The entire testimony is one of utter defeat and slavery to sin. He tells us in Romans 7:25 that deliverance comes only through Jesus Christ.⁴⁴

(7:10) The law was intended to show the way of life. The law never was a means of salvation, but it was to be the direction for living for those who knew God. But because fallen, natural man cannot follow it, it becomes a means of death instead of a direction for life.

(7:11) Sin deceives by appearing beneficial, pleasurable, and harmless. When a person yields to temptation to sin, he is condemned, even if he succeeds in limiting the results of his sin; because God's judgment is according to the law, not according to the results of sin.⁴⁵

(7:12) The law reveals the nature of God – the law is holy, righteous, and good, just as he is.

(7:13) The law is not evil, but evil results came when sin reacted against the law. Sin used the law to bring each person under the penalty of death. By the law sin is shown to be truly evil.

NOT A PICTURE OF A BELIEVER

Many people think that Romans 7:14-25 describes a normal believer, but consider the description.

He is sold under sin, like a slave, which means that he is not redeemed (7:14). He knows what is right but cannot do it (7:18). He is a prisoner not delivered (7:23). He is wretched and crying for deliverance (7:24).

⁴⁴ This paragraph was written by Dr. Allan Brown.

⁴⁵ See the notes on 3:5-7.

In 7:5-24, starting with the phrase “while we were living in the flesh” (7:5) and ending with the question “Who will deliver me” (7:24), there is no reference to Christ, the Holy Spirit, grace, life, or victory; but there are 52 references to the first person (I, my, me), 16 references to the law, and 15 to sin.

This cannot be a person who has the deliverance described in Romans 6. That chapter repeatedly says that the believer is no longer a servant to sin. The person Paul describes in Romans 7 is under the law, as introduced in the beginning of this chapter (7:1, 5-6). 7:14 is the connection showing that the remainder of the chapter is describing the same condition as is described in 7:1, 5-6.

Romans 8:1 says that the person who is not condemned is the person who is in Christ Jesus. 8:4-5 say that this person does not follow the flesh. The person who does follow the flesh (as in 7:25 and 7:5) is condemned. A condemned person is not a true believer. The person in Romans 7 is helpless and controlled by the flesh.

8:3 says that the condition of weakness under the law is ended; therefore, the helpless condition described in Romans 7 must not be the state of a believer.

8:6-7 says that to be carnally minded is death, and that the carnal mind is an enemy to God. But 7:14 begins describing the carnal person. The carnal person, as meant in this context, is not a genuine follower of Jesus.⁴⁶

Then why does Paul put himself in this description? From 7:7 on, he describes a sinner who comes under the conviction of the law. The rest of the chapter describes his past experience—his genuine struggle to please God by following the law. It did not give him eternal life and it did not give him any kind of satisfaction. In Romans 8 he begins describing the life of victory. It is impossible that the person described in 8:1-4 can still be in the condition of Romans 7.

Therefore, it is evident that Romans 7 describes an unregenerate man who knows that he is condemned by God's law but is unable to live in obedience to it.

- » In your own words summarize what was explained in this section. It is not necessary to fully debate the issue at this time because more evidence will be given in this lesson.

⁴⁶ For other uses of the word *carnal*, see the section above “Defining *Flesh/Carnal*.”

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 4, PASSAGE 2

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(7:15) Most people wish they were doing better. That wish does not mean they are Christians. The wish without the reality shows that they are still not delivered from the power of sin.

(7:16) Their wish that they did better shows that they know that the law is good, even though they don't obey it.

(7:17-23) Sin is spoken of as if it were a thing that overrules the will of man. Fallen man does not by nature have the free will that God originally created in man. The will of man is so weakened that a sinner cannot choose God unless God, by his grace, restores his will.

Prevenient grace is the action of God reaching out to those who have not yet responded to him. The grace that is extended to every person includes restoration of free will and desire for God, so that every person can truly choose whether or not to be saved.

God begins the work of salvation for every person (John 6:44; Ephesians 2:4-5, 12-13, 17; Titus 2:11, Titus 3:3-5), but a person is not saved unless he responds to God.

(7:24) This is a cry of despair and frustration that comes after a person sees his total inability to save himself. This is not the cry of a saved person.

(7:25) A statement of praise is interjected here as light in the darkness of the life of the despairing sinner.

Then comes a sentence that summarizes the passage. The unconverted person gives mental agreement that the law is right, and he pretends to be better than he is; but his sinful desires keep him in sin. A person is condemned for serving sin with his mind and body (7:5, 8:3).

UNDERSTANDING THE PERSON IN ROMANS 7:14-25

In this passage Paul speaks of the power of inherited depravity (the law of sin) in the life of the unbeliever. Paul, when he was an awakened sinner, had conflict within himself.⁴⁷

The law of sin in Paul's members produces the following results:

- He does what he hates (7:15).
- He does what he doesn't want to do (7:16).
- There is a desire to do right, but no power to do it (7:18).
- The law of sin is resisting the law of his mind (7:23).

47 This section was written by Dr. Allan Brown.

- He is a captive of the law of sin (7:23).
- He is a divided person: his mind serves God, but his flesh serves the law of sin (7:25).

A person cannot serve two masters. A man cannot be free from sin and a slave of sin. A man cannot be God's slave and sin's slave. The language of Romans 7:14-25 is directly opposite to the statements of Romans 6 about the believer's deliverance from slavery to sin. Therefore, 7:14-25 is a continuation of the description of an unbeliever's relation to sin and the law begun in 7:1-13.

Romans 6 explains the believer's relationship to sin resulting from his crucifixion and resurrection with Christ. Romans 7 serves as a description of:

- The relationship of a sinner to the law.
- The interaction of indwelling sin and the law.
- The struggle of a sinner awakened to the demands of God's law, but unable to do on his own what the law demands because of his slavery to indwelling sin.

Interpretations of Romans 7:14-25 Vary

View 1: Some scholars wrote that Paul is describing the **normal Christian life**. They point out that the tenses are present, not past; and they insist that in Paul's view, the Christian life has unresolved issues.

View 2: Many other scholars believe that Paul is describing **a man's condition before conversion** because phrases like "sold under sin" and "wretched man that I am" are not in harmony with the description of a believer in Romans 6 and Romans 8. According to Romans 6, the believer is dead to sin, freed from sin, and is to claim by faith and a full surrender to God the freedom available in Christ for victory over sin. According to Romans 8, the person who is walking in the flesh cannot please God and does not have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him.

It is the opinion of the writers of this curriculum that the second view fits the flow of Paul's argument in Romans and is most consistent with his overall teaching.

Questions That Are Frequently Asked about the Person in Romans 7:14-25

Here are some questions that frequently arise from people who think Paul is describing his own Christian life in Romans 7:14-25.

Question 1: What about Paul's statements that he delighted in the law of God in his inner being (Romans 7:22)? Could an unbelieving Pharisee delight in the law of God?

Answer: Any Pharisee would have said that he delighted in the law of God in his heart. They devoted their life to the study of God's Law and daily spent hours studying it. Paul had dedicated himself to the Law and sincerely desired to obey it. But when the Holy Spirit showed Paul the covetous nature of his heart, awakening him to his true spiritual condition, Paul found that he continued to do wrong despite the desire of his mind to do right. The Law showed Paul how to live, but the Law did not give him the ability to do it.

Question 2: What about the present tenses in Romans 7:14-25? Paul writes, "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but **I am** of the flesh, sold under sin" (Romans 7:14).

Answer: The shift of verb tense from past tenses in Romans 7:7-13 to present tenses in Romans 7:14-25 in no way affects the autobiographical character of his testimony. Nor must the present tenses in 7:14-24 necessarily indicate Paul's present experience at the time he is writing Romans as a mature Christian apostle and missionary. The "historical" or "dramatic" present tense is a well-known use of the present tense in Greek when the writer wished to make a past event or experience clear to his readers. Therefore, the use of the present tense to make clear what was true in Paul's past before he was converted does not demand the interpretation that Paul is still struggling with the bondage of sin in the present. Paul has clearly indicated in Romans 6 and Romans 8 that a Christian is not sold into bondage to sin (Romans 7:14).

Question 3: What about the parallel between this passage and the struggle many Christians find in their life?

Answer: The struggle of a believer is quite different from the struggle of the wretched man. The wretched man of Romans 7:14-25 cannot stop sinning. He is a slave of sin. This is not the case of a true believer. A Christian may have periodic struggles and failures, but his life is not one of slavery to the law of sin and death. The Christian is united with Christ and is set free from the power of indwelling sin (Romans 6:1-10).

Conclusion: The wretched man of Romans 7:14-25 appears to be a sincere Pharisee struggling to please God. A person cannot be free from sin while he is still a slave of sin. A person cannot be God's slave and sin's slave, for as Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). Romans 7:14-25 is a continuation of the description of an unregenerate person's relation to sin and to the law of Moses that was begun in Romans 7:7-13.

- » Discuss the issue of the identity of the person in Romans 7, carefully considering the details and explanations provided.

USING THE LAW IN EVANGELISM

The apostle tells us in Romans 7:7 that the law exposes sin. The law is useful for evangelism because a person sees his need of salvation when he realizes that he is condemned by God's

law. Through the history of the church, the most effective evangelists have used the law of God to cause unbelievers to desire salvation.

The following quotations show what evangelists have said about using the law.

- » Take turns reading the quotations and explaining them with help from other members of the group.

From Charles Spurgeon⁴⁸

By removing the law you have done away with sin, for sin is the transgression of the law; and where there is no law, there is no transgression. When you have done away with sin you may as well have done away with the Savior and with salvation, for they are by no means needful. When you have reduced sin to a minimum, what need is there of that great and glorious salvation which Jesus Christ has come to bring into the world?

They will never accept grace till they tremble before a just and holy law; therefore, the law serves a most necessary and blessed purpose.⁴⁹

From Charles Finney⁵⁰

One cannot intelligently and heartily ask or accept a pardon until he sees and feels the fact and justice of his condemnation.

The spirituality of the law should be unsparingly applied to the conscience until the sinner's self-righteousness is annihilated, and he stands speechless and self-condemned before a holy God.

Evermore the law must prepare the way for the gospel. To overlook this in instructing souls is almost certain to result in false hope, the introduction of a false standard of Christian experience, and to fill the church with spurious converts.⁵¹

48 Spurgeon was the greatest evangelistic preacher in England in the 1800s.

49 Charles Spurgeon, "The Perpetuity of the Law of God"

50 Finney was an evangelist in America in the 1800s. He was responsible for more conversions than any other preacher in that century.

51 Charles Finney, "How to Win Souls"

From Martin Luther⁵²

But Satan... has raised up a sect of such as teach that the Ten Commandments ought to be taken out of the church, and that men should not be terrified with the law, but gently exhorted by the preaching of the grace of Christ.⁵³

From John Bunyan⁵⁴

So long as people are ignorant of the nature of the law and of their being under it – that is, under the curse and condemning power of it, by reason of their sin against it – so long they will be careless, and negligent as to the inquiring after the true knowledge of the gospel.

The man that does not know the law does not know in deed and in truth that he is a sinner, does not know savingly that there is a Savior.⁵⁵

From Jonathan Edwards⁵⁶

The only way we can know whether we are sinning is by knowing his moral law.⁵⁷

From the song “At Calvary”⁵⁸ by William Newell

By God’s Word at last my sin I learned;
Then I trembled at the law I’d spurned,
Till my guilty soul imploring turned to Calvary.

From John Wesley⁵⁹

To kill the sinner is, then, the first use of the law; that is, to destroy the life and strength in which he trusts, and convince him that he is not only under the sentence of death, but actually dead to God, having no spiritual life, dead in trespasses and

52 Martin Luther was the reformer in Germany who rediscovered the biblical gospel, resulting in thousands of conversions.

53 Martin Luther, in the preface to his *Commentary on Galatians*.

54 Bunyan was the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, the most-published book about the Christian’s journey to heaven.

55 John Bunyan, *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded*

56 Edwards was a theologian and preacher of the First Great Awakening in America, responsible for thousands of conversions.

57 Jonathan Edwards, “Christian Cautions: The Necessity of Self-Examination”

58 This is one of the most-used Christian hymns around the world.

59 Wesley evangelized and organized his converts, and the converts of the preachers who helped him. Before he died, their membership totaled 79,000 in England and 40,000 in America.

sins (Ephesians 2:1). The second use of it is to bring him to life, to Christ, so that he may live.

Never think or speak lightly of [the law] this blessed instrument of the grace of God. Instead, love and value it for the sake of him from whom it came and of him to whom it leads.⁶⁰

- » What problem would result if preachers talked only about the love and forgiveness of God to people who did not consider their sin to be serious?

LESSON 7 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name two reasons the ceremonial laws and civil laws of the Old Testament are still important.
2. What does it mean to be dead to the law?
3. What are two uses of the term *in the flesh*?
4. How does the law make sin worse?
5. Why is the law useful for evangelism?

LESSON 7 ASSIGNMENT

Write a page giving examples of Old Testament laws other than those mentioned in this lesson. Explain whether they are ceremonial, civil, or moral; explain how the Christian should apply them today.

60 Paraphrased from John Wesley, "The Origin, Properties, and Use of God's Law"

LESSON 8

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 4, PASSAGE 3

In this lesson we continue with Part 4 of the book of Romans. We have studied Romans 6 (about victory over sin) and Romans 7 (about the convicted sinner). In this lesson we will study Romans 8, which describes the life of a Christian in the difficult circumstances of the world.

Main Point of Chapter 8

Though a believer lives in a fallen world, suffering from its conditions and from his own weakness, the Holy Spirit gives him victory over sin and all circumstances.

Summary of Chapter 8

This chapter refers to each of the three persons of the Trinity several times. All three are closely involved in our present and ultimate salvation. We can live in victory over the flesh, enjoy personal assurance of salvation, endure circumstances in the fallen creation, pray with spiritual help beyond our own perceptions, and persist in our saving relationship with God.

8:1-13 forms a passage that could be titled “No Longer in the Flesh.”

Introduction to 8:1-13

Those who are not condemned are those who no longer follow the flesh. To be in the flesh does not merely mean to be human, but to be under the control of the fallen nature.⁶¹

To be *in the flesh* is contrasted with being saved. Fleshliness is death (8:6) and enmity against God (8:7). The person in the flesh cannot please God (8:8) and shall die (8:13). To be *in the flesh* is the same condition described in 7:7-25 (see 7:14, 18, 25).

8:12-13 is the conclusion. We must not live after the flesh, since the person who lives after the flesh will die, which means to receive the judgment of God (see 1:17). We must kill the sinful deeds of the body. Since a person who is controlled by the flesh is not a follower of Jesus, sin must be ended by the power of the Spirit.

61 The section in Lesson 7, “Defining *Flesh/Carnal*” is very important to understanding this passage.

- » A student should read Romans 8:1-13 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(8:1) The person who follows the Spirit is not condemned. The person who follows the flesh is condemned and not in Christ.

(8:2) The law of the Spirit of life is that the person who is forgiven is accepted by grace and has spiritual life. The law of sin and death is that the person who will be judged by the law will be condemned to death.

(8:3) The law provided the requirements; it did not provide power. The unbeliever was not able to keep the law; therefore, it was impossible for the law to be a means of salvation. God sent his Son as the deliverer.

(8:4) We do not forget the law of God but obey it by the power of the Spirit.

(8:5) Each person follows his own nature. If he has not received spiritual life, he is controlled by the flesh.

(8:6) To be controlled by the sinful nature is to be under condemnation. The alternative is to be walking in the Spirit, obeying God. There is not an option of being forgiven while continuing to follow sin.

(8:7-8) The person with the fleshly nature is naturally an enemy of God, because as long as he is controlled by the sinful nature he cannot submit to God. He is not acceptable to God in that condition.

- » List some of the details of the description of the person who is in the flesh.

(8:9) To be *in the flesh* means to be under the control of a fallen, sinful nature. The believer is no longer in the flesh. He will still have temptations from the flesh, but he is not under its control, and has power to resist temptation. This verse tells us that this power is there because the Spirit of God is there. A person should not claim to be guided and anointed by the Spirit if he does not have victory over sin.

(8:10-11) The human body is still affected by Adam's sin and our own sins of the past. Therefore, its desires can go the wrong direction. We cannot trust the desires of our body

“Human beings are comfortable with what is outward, visible, material and superficial. What matters to God is a deep, inward, secret work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.”

John R.W. Stott

*The Message of Romans:
God's Good News for the World*

to guide us. But the same power that raised Jesus back to life works in us and gives us life so that our bodies are brought to obedience to God. The weakness of the body is not an excuse for sin, because the power of God is greater.

(8:12-13) Following the flesh leads to spiritual death. By the Spirit we kill the sinful actions of the body, putting them to an end. Only the people who do that are the people who live – who escape God’s judgment. There is no concept here of a person who is forgiven and accepted by God while choosing to continue committing sin.

THE LAW OF GOD FOR THE CHRISTIAN

Some people say that the law of God has no relevance to Christian living. They say such things as, “God cares nothing about your works,” and “When you get to heaven your works will be worth nothing.” In their thinking, grace takes the place of obedience. But Paul said, “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Romans 3:31). If we teach a gospel that makes the law nothing, it is not the gospel that Paul preached.

The law Paul spoke of is not simply the set of laws God gave to Israel through Moses. The law of Moses was an application of God’s will to a particular time and place. Many of its details do not apply to all places and times in the same way, especially the ceremonies and the laws given to Israel as a nation. But the principles or eternal truths of the law of Moses still apply because God’s character does not change.

In general, the law of God is what he requires of man. The law is holy, just, and good (7:12) because it comes from the nature of God. The law is spiritual (7:14).

The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit instead of according to the flesh (8:4) because they live in obedience to God.

The Bible makes the following statements about God’s law:

1. Obedience to the law should be a demonstration of complete love in the heart (Matthew 22:37-40).
2. The purpose of God’s specific commandments is to show the need for love from a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5). It is impossible for a

“A good appetite, under control, promotes health and usefulness. The same appetite, enslaving the whole person and ruling the life, brings bondage and sin.”

Wilbur Dayton

person to truly fulfill God's requirements except by the motive of love, so disobedience shows a lack of love.

3. The person with this love fulfills the whole law; that is, he fully meets what God requires of man (Romans 13:8-10). Therefore, to have complete love is to be in complete obedience.
4. Love is expressed in obedience (1 John 5:2-3). Love is not simply a feeling or professed loyalty to God. Love does not replace obedience but motivates obedience.
5. Jesus did not come to abolish the law, and he said that if a person teaches others to break the law, he will be called least in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20).

A proper understanding of the law is necessary to the gospel because people are eternally condemned for breaking God's law. A person cannot repent unless he agrees with God about sin and the law. Some people realize that a sinner deserves hell for breaking God's law, yet they have the strange idea that God no longer cares about the law after a person becomes a believer.

The law is not the basis of our acceptance by God, but the law directs the life of a Christian by showing how God wants us to live.

- » For the believer, what is the relationship between loving God and the law of God?

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 4, PASSAGE 3

Introduction to 8:14-27

8:14 connects the previous verses to the important theme of assurance of salvation in the next verses. The identification of the children of God is that they follow the Spirit and live in victory instead of following the flesh and living in sin.

8:14-27 is a passage that could be titled "The Help of the Holy Spirit in a Fallen World."

- » A student should read Romans 8:14-27 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(8:14) The identification of the child of God is that he follows the Spirit and lives in victory instead of following the flesh and living in sin.

8:14-17 describes personal assurance of salvation given by the Holy Spirit.

(8:15) As believers, we should not come back under the fear of the law. Instead, we live with the assurance of salvation by grace. We are adopted as children of God. Christian obedience is not a matter of coming back under the law as a means of salvation but is a matter of relationship with God.

(8:16) This verse describes something that evangelistic believers call “the witness of the Spirit.” God’s Spirit confirms to us that we are in a loving, obedient relationship with God and witnesses to us that we are saved. Our own spirit is conscious of that reality. This agreement of God’s Spirit and our spirit is the basis of assurance so that we do not have to live in uncertainty, wondering if we are true believers.

Religions and cults that do not teach assurance of salvation keep their people in fear. People fear that they have not done enough to be saved. The gospel brings deliverance from fear because we know we are forgiven. Our obedience is based on following the Spirit to please God who has already accepted us, rather than keeping requirements as a means of gaining his acceptance.

We can know that we are saved because we are living in an obedient relationship with God and have the witness of the Spirit that it is true. (See 1 John 2:3, 29; 1 John 3:14, 18-21, 24 for a scriptural basis for assurance of salvation.)⁶²

» What advice would you give to a person who is not sure that he is saved?

(8:17-18) We will inherit with Christ the glory and kingdom of God. His glory will be revealed within us by the great things he has done in us, changing our nature to what he planned it to be. We will inherit eternal life, which means to live the life of God. We will rule with Christ. However, not all of our privileges are received now. The glorification mentioned here is still future. The suffering is now, and the ruling is later. However, the future glory is so great that our present circumstances are not important compared to our future.



Roman Roads

The Romans built many roads for main routes through the countries they ruled. The construction design made them smooth and long-lasting. The roads were part of a network with Rome at the center, which led to the saying, “All roads lead to Rome.”

⁶² Image: “roman road to arch” taken by Steven Damron on January 5, 2010, retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/97719890@N00/4249691365>, licensed under CC BY 2.0, desaturated from the original.

8:19-25 describes enduring by faith while we wait for God to completely restore his creation.

(8:19) Everything that is created is still waiting for the time when God will fully glorify his children. Apostle John said that we do not yet see the form we will have in heaven (1 John 3:2).

(8:20-21) Every created thing is still suffering results of sin. God has allowed the curse to remain in hope that sinners will repent because of seeing the results of sin. Created things will eventually be restored and brought to fulfill God's ultimate plan. This does not include people who ultimately reject God's will, refusing to repent.

(8:22) The curse of sin affected all creation (Genesis 3:17-19). Work is difficult. The land does not respond to man the same as it did before the Fall. Sickness, aging, and death come to all living creatures.

(8:23) Even believers still physically suffer the results of sin because their bodies have not been restored to the conditions before the Fall. We have the Holy Spirit as the first part, a sample, and the evidence of God's ultimate restoration. The ultimate, complete restoration of creation is final salvation. We can say that we are already saved, and yet are still waiting for final salvation.

» What are some things you see that are signs that creation is under the curse of sin?

Satan's policy with sinners is to give the best he can at first, then worse and worse, luring them on with promises he cannot fulfill and ending with hell. God gives us a sample of heaven now and reserves the best for us later.

(8:24-25) These verses make the point that we are waiting for things we have not yet seen or received.

The resurrection of the body is an essential Christian doctrine, and denial of it leads to sinful living. Some in the Corinthian church denied the resurrection, and two opposite extremes resulted:

1. Extreme suppression of physical desires as if they are evil
2. Careless indulgence of physical desires as if they are harmless

Some thought that if the body is going to be discarded as worthless and evil, then all physical desires were sinful. Following this reasoning, they recommended celibacy. Others decided that since the body will be discarded, it can now be indulged in all sinful desires. Both extremes are unchristian. These heresies and others come when people deny the resurrection of the body.

8:26-27 describes the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's prayer.

(8:26-27) Our fallen condition affects our mental and spiritual perceptions. We cannot completely understand spiritual realities. We cannot completely understand what God wants to do in the world. When we pray, the Holy Spirit compensates for our weakness by praying with us with words that we cannot say. He knows how to pray according to the will of God.

These verses do not imply praying in an unknown language. The statement is that the Holy Spirit says the prayer for us because we cannot say it. It does not say that we pray it in some incomprehensible way.

Introduction to 8:28-39

This passage explains that believers are in God's plan, and he intends to give them the grace to finish the Christian journey and be transformed into the image of Christ. No conditions that exist in the world can separate us from God because his grace and power are greater.

This passage could be titled "The Spiritual Security of the Believer."

- » A student should read Romans 8:28-39 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(8:28) The phrase "all things" includes all things that we suffer. It does not mean that God has decreed all things that happen, including sin. It does mean that God brings good results from all things for the sake of believers. In 8:37, after listing all kinds of suffering, he said that in all these things we are more than conquerors. God uses them for his purposes and develops us through them.

God does not decree everything that happens. He allows free will to operate, allows true risks to be taken which are subject to chance, and permits even sin. Yet for the believer, God brings good results from all events – even from the sins of others committed with harmful intentions.

(8:29) We know that not everyone in the world is saved. Therefore, those whom he foreknew are those about whom he knew something specific. We know from the context of Romans that God selects those who believe. He knew who would respond to his offer of salvation with faith. (See also 11:2 and comments.) It is significant that his foreknowledge comes before predestination in this sequence. God planned to save believers. (See Psalm 1:6, 1 Corinthians 8:3, Galatians 4:9, and 2 Timothy 2:19 for examples of God's "knowing.")

He planned for them to become like Christ. To become as he is means that we will be made Christlike in character.

(8:30) It is the work of God that brings us all the way into an eternal salvation. Nothing is needed from us except our willingness.

(8:31-32) No circumstances can be too difficult for God. He already made the supreme sacrifice, so now he will give us everything needed for our victory.

(8:33) Nobody can count us guilty of the sins on our record because they are erased by the justification God provided.

(8:35-39) This is a passage that offers great hope and comfort to those who follow Jesus. Nothing can separate us from God. Paul is saying that we are spiritually protected from everything that we may face in this world. **The security of the believer is the promise that God will never fail to provide him the strength to persevere in his faith and no other power can take him away from God.**

- » How would you describe the way God helps a believer face all circumstances with faith?

LESSON 8 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why was it impossible for the law to be a means of salvation?
2. What does it mean that a believer is no longer in the flesh?
3. How does the law direct the life of a Christian?
4. What is the witness of the Spirit?
5. What is final salvation?
6. Denial of the doctrine of bodily resurrection leads to what two opposite extremes?
7. What is the security of the believer?

LESSON 8 ASSIGNMENT

Write a page describing the difficulties of living as a Christian in a fallen world and also describe what the Holy Spirit does for the Christian.

LESSON 9

GOD'S SELECTION

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 5

The letter to the Romans explains how a person comes into relationship with God to receive salvation and blessing. The relationship with God is based on grace received by faith. This message caused questions to arise about the people of Israel. What happened to the special relationship between God and Israel? How can a Jewish person be saved? Does God still have a plan for Israel? These chapters answer those questions as Paul continues to explain the message of the gospel.

GOD'S JUSTICE ON TRIAL

“But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” (Romans 9:20). Some people have used this verse to rebuke any person who tries to examine the justice of God. They say that God's justice is so much higher than ours that we cannot understand it.

Is there some high level of justice at which black becomes white and evil is actually good? If a human judge condemned infants, judged mistakes and willful crimes alike, and punished people for doing what they could not prevent, we would not say that he was judging according to a higher level of justice, but that he was unjust.

God's justice is higher but not opposite to ours. Our sense of justice comes from his and is based on his standard. He commands us to be holy in the same sense that he is holy. If his action sometimes seems unjust to us, that is because we do not see all of the facts, because our values are too temporal, and because our perceptions are distorted by our own desires.

**“To be the God of eternity,
he must be able to stand
above accusation before
all devils, all angels, and
all men. No one must be
able to [rightly] accuse
him of unfairness.”**

R.G. Flexon

Rudiments of Romans

God does not simply profess to be just and refuse to explain his ways to his creatures. Instead, the book of Romans emphasizes that the justice of God is visible. Those who reject God are without excuse (1:20) because of what they know of God. Sinners know that they deserve

judgment (1:32). Romans 2 is entirely on the impartiality and consistency of God's judgments. The work of atonement is so that God can be just even though He justifies sinners (3:26).

It is obvious that God wants us to see that he is just. For this reason, God has explained his policies of salvation, explaining why they are just. It would not be possible for us to truly worship God unless we see that he is just. If we do not believe that God is just, our obedience to him would be like obedience to a tyrant or robber.

Therefore, God allows himself to be put on trial, or even puts himself there (3:4). He is confident that his actions are consistent with true justice. An honest trial of God's actions will show him to be righteous and the sinner guilty.

- » Why is it important for us to understand the justice of God's actions? How do we know that God wants us to understand his justice?



Roman Fort

This fort has stood in Rome since ancient times.

A biblical view of God's sovereignty:

- God has chosen to allow people to make real choices with consequences.
- God responds to the choices people make (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).
- God is powerful and wise enough to accomplish his ultimate plan in spite of what any person does.

Every person decides whether or not to accept the gospel and is saved or rejected on that basis. God offers salvation, gives people a realization of their guilt, gives them desire for grace, and gives them the ability to believe. He sends messengers to persuade unbelievers to repent. But the individual person makes his own decision about salvation.⁶³

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 5, PASSAGE 1

Main Point of Chapter 9

God has chosen the way of salvation, and nobody can be saved any other way.

⁶³ Image: "Porta San Paolo front", by Joris, March 1, 2005, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Porta_San_Paolo_front.JPG, public domain.

Summary of Chapter 9

This chapter is often interpreted to mean that God chooses who will be saved and who will be lost on a basis that we cannot know. Actually, the point is that God has chosen the way of salvation, and nobody can be saved any other way. His sovereignty is not demonstrated by choosing some people and rejecting others without any criteria. His sovereignty is demonstrated by his setting the criteria – the design of the way of salvation.

- » A student should read Romans 9:1-5 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(9:1-3) Paul expressed agonizing grief for Israel because they were spiritually lost. He mentioned that he was their brother. Paul had excelled in the religion of the Jews. He respected their scholars. He was grieved to realize that most of the teachers and leaders and most of the people they served had rejected Christ.

(9:4-5) Israel was a nation with great spiritual privileges.

- They first had God as Father.
- They first saw the glory of God revealed.
- They had
 - The covenants as terms of his blessing.
 - The law.
 - The forms of worship.
 - The promises of ultimate salvation.
- The patriarchs were Jews.
- Jesus was born as a Jew.

Paul previously said in 3:1-2 that the Jews had great advantages.

JUDAISM, THE ROOT OF CHRISTIANITY

Judaism could be said to be the root of Christianity. Even now Judaism has more in common with Christianity than any other religion. Judaism did not become a false religion until it rejected Christ.

Listed here are some connections between Christianity and Judaism.

1. Christians and followers of Judaism worship the same God and have received clear revelation from God.

2. Judaism provided the theological and philosophical foundation of Christianity. Israel was monotheistic and believed in a God that was eternal, uncaused, and holy. God created everything good, but evil and suffering came because of sin. Man is a special creation in the image of God, with a glorious destiny after he is redeemed. We assume these truths, but they contrasted with all of the religions around ancient Israel. These truths were first revealed to Israel.
3. Christians and followers of Judaism accept the Old Testament as scripture, but followers of Judaism do not accept the New Testament.
4. Jesus, the founder of Christianity, was a Jew and affirmed the religion of his people. He stated its true priorities and condemned the distortions of the Pharisees. He did not claim to be starting a new religion but fulfilling the old one.
5. The heart of Judaism was the Messianic hope. The first Christians were Jews who believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 5, PASSAGE 1

- » A student should read Romans 9:6-16 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(9:6-9) Some of them have been saved; the Word of God has had effect. The people of God are not simply those who are biological descendants of Abraham. They are the people who are saved by believing God's promise.

From the time that God chose Abraham, salvation was planned this way. God's salvation plan, which was to continue through Isaac, was a work of God in response to faith. God's pattern for salvation is promise, then faith, then miracle. Isaac's birth was a miracle.

Ishmael was born by natural means, not by miracle, and God did not use him for the plan of salvation. By the same principle, God does not accept works for salvation. Jews who wanted to be saved by works were rejected by God just as Ishmael was rejected from being the promised son.

- » What about the case of Jacob and Esau? Some people think that these verses say that before they were born, God chose which one he would save. What do these verses really say?

(9:10-13) When God chose Jacob instead of Esau, he was not choosing which one he would save. He chose the one he would use to fulfill the plan of salvation. This is the theme of the chapter: God's right to determine the means of salvation. The record of Esau's life in the Old

Testament shows that he actually had a change of heart and may have been saved. He was not rejected from salvation but rejected from being the one to be the father of the chosen nation and the Messiah. The term *hated* simply means “rejected in favor of another,” like it meant when Jesus said that we must hate our father and mother in comparison to our loyalty to him (Luke 14:26).

God did not choose Jacob because of his qualities or reject Esau because of faults. The passage emphasizes that they had not yet done any good or evil when God made his choice. Of course, God knew their futures. The point is that God chose according to his own plan.

- » Some people say that 9:14-16 proves that God chooses whom he will save with reasons that we do not know. They say that our actions and choices do not determine whether or not we will be saved. What are these verses really saying?

(9:14-16) God chooses to whom he will show mercy. That does not mean that he does it without any basis or on a basis that we cannot know. God has shown the basis of his mercy: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

He clearly tells us that we are chosen for salvation if we believe and rejected if we do not. Therefore, it is not according to the will of the person to decide how he can be saved. Salvation must be by the mercy of God, received in the way he has decreed.

- » A student should read Romans 9:17-23 for the group. Did God create Pharaoh to be a wicked man and control him so that he would do evil?

(9:17-18) Pharaoh was not born to be condemned, but God put him into his position of authority because God knew what he would do. The term *raised up* does not refer to his creation, but to his installation as ruler. God has mercy on those who believe and hardens those who will not. Hardening does not mean that God changed a good person into a bad one. God gave Pharaoh the resolve to carry out what he already wanted to do.

Those with hardened hearts are considered guilty for their condition. Therefore, according to justice, their choices are real. Earlier, in 2:4-5, the Gentiles are condemned for hardness of heart which is connected to their willful rejection of truth. (See also Jeremiah 19:15, Nehemiah 9:25-29, Mark 16:14, and Hebrews 3:7-13.) Pharaoh would not have had a hard heart if he had not rejected God first.

(9:19) Here someone raises an objection: “If God can control people, like he did Pharaoh, how can anyone be judged? Nobody has successfully resisted his will.” The objector speaks as if a person should be excused for resisting God if he ultimately is forced to do what God

wants. But God is able to distinguish between those who respond to him willingly and those who do not.⁶⁴

(9:20-23) God is able to select some for judgment and some for mercy, even though he will ultimately be glorified by all (because he is glorified both for his judgment and for his mercy). He has a basis for selection and has the right to select. God sets his criterion for acceptance, and it is unchangeable.

The potter can decide what he will do with the clay. He can turn part of it into a vase for flowers and another part into a garbage container. The same way, God decides that some people are fit only for judgment and other people are fit for mercy. The Greek verb does not specify who did the action. It could mean that the people prepared themselves for judgment. That would be consistent with the statement that God endures their rebellion until the time for judgment comes. God did not create them for judgment or make them into sinners. Their judgment will be for their own choices. The fact that God is sovereign in his choosing does not mean that he chooses indiscriminately but that he chooses by his own standard. He chooses the wicked for judgment and the believers for salvation.

The question “Why have you made me like this?” does not mean “Why did you create me for condemnation,” but “Why did you decide that I was fit for judgment?” But God has the right to determine and reveal his justice.

The illustration of the potter is from Jeremiah 18:1-18. The key verses are 18:7-10. 18:8 says, “If that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.”

- » How would you explain the illustration of the potter and the clay? Did God make some people for the purpose of showing his wrath? What does it mean that he makes different kinds of things out of the clay?

THE APOSTLE’S OWN CONCLUSION

Some people have concluded from this chapter that God creates some people for the purpose of judgment and others for mercy. However, Paul himself states his main point in the conclusion of this chapter (9:30-33). It is important that we let the author make his own point from his own illustration. We must not argue an application of the author’s story that is contrary to the one he himself states. Paul’s main point is this: God will judge an individual on the basis of whether that person believes or not. As the potter, he has the right to decide the basis of acceptance.

64 See the notes on a similar passage in 3:5-8.

We can rejoice in God's sovereignty because he is always wise, good, loving, and just in everything he does. Though he has absolute authority, he does not do anything unjust. His actions are always consistent with his own nature.

The point of the chapter is not that God chooses whatever individual he wants without any criterion. The main point of Romans 9 is that God sets the criterion that determines whom he will choose for salvation. The criterion is saving faith.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 5, PASSAGE 1

- » A student should read Romans 9:24-33 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(9:24-26) Many Gentiles became part of the people of God, though they are not called the people of God on the basis of nationality. This connects to the great missionary theme of this epistle: the gospel can be offered to everyone in the world.

(9:27-29) Many Jews will be rejected, and only a remnant will be saved. Jews will not automatically be saved just because they are Jews. If God had acted according to justice without mercy, they would have been destroyed completely like Sodom.

(9:30-33) Here is the conclusion of the chapter. The author must be permitted to write his own conclusion. The theme of the chapter is that God has set the means of salvation. The ones who tried to establish their own righteousness on the basis of the law failed. Those who seek righteousness by faith succeed. The person who tries to establish his own righteousness stumbles over the foundation stone God has laid, but the one who believes will not be ashamed.

LESSON 9 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do we know that God wants us to understand his justice?
2. Why is it important for us to see that God is just?
3. What is a biblical view of God's sovereignty?
4. What is the main point of Romans 9?
5. What were the spiritual privileges of Israel?
6. What are five connections between Christianity and Judaism?
7. What does Romans 9 say about God's choice of Jacob?
8. Why can we rejoice in God's sovereignty?

LESSON 9 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a page explaining how God is sovereign and yet responds to man's choices. Use Romans 9, but also use other scriptures.
2. You should prepare at least two conversations with believers from other churches. You should ask them to explain what they think about the sovereignty of God. You should explain passages from Romans that are relevant to the topic. You should write a description of the conversation and give it to the class leader.

LESSON 10

THE URGENT MESSAGE

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 5, PASSAGES 2-3

Romans 10 is a climax in the book of Romans. The apostle has already explained that salvation is by grace through faith and that everyone in the world needs it. Because faith is necessary, the message of the gospel is important: People need to hear the message so they can believe it. This chapter is important to the purpose of the book because the whole book gives the basis of missionary work.

Romans 11 deals with the relationship between Israel and the church. Most Jews rejected the gospel. Paul explained that God's plan was for the whole world and that Jews could also be saved. Israel as a whole will someday accept Christ.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 5, PASSAGE 2

Main Point of Chapter 10

Righteousness must be found by faith, and the necessity of faith makes the gospel message urgently important.

Summary of Chapter 10

It is a mistake to try to achieve justification through personal righteousness. The righteousness God accepts from man, he first gives to man in response to faith. The gospel message provides an opportunity for faith.

- » A student should read Romans 10 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(10:1-5) The Jews still needed to be saved because they did not understand what righteousness they needed. They tried to justify themselves by establishing a perfect record of personal righteousness, not realizing that it was impossible. The righteousness that God accepts is that which he works in a person in response to the believer's faith.

The purpose of the law is to bring us to Christ by condemning sin and showing the need for a Savior. When a person comes to Christ, the law is no longer the basis of his acceptance with God, so Christ is the end of that use of the law (10:4). That does not mean that the law no longer shows us how to obey God, but that our acceptance by God does not depend on our having a perfect, lifelong record of obedience.

The theory that people who lived before Christ came were saved by works is thoroughly refuted by this passage. Paul states clearly that those who tried to establish their own righteousness by works were misguided and lost. They should have believed the gospel truth that Paul quoted in 10:6-8 from Deuteronomy.⁶⁵

(10:6-11) This is a quotation of Deuteronomy 30:11-14. Moses told the Israelites that keeping the commandments of God did not depend on some heroic or superhuman effort, such as ascending to heaven or crossing the sea. Instead, it would be accomplished in them by God through their faith.⁶⁶

Paul adapted the statement to refer to the feats of ascending to heaven or into the earth and showed that Christ has fulfilled all that is necessary.

Salvation by grace is so near that it is in our hearts and mouths. This means that we receive it by faith (in our hearts) and confession (with our mouths).

(10:12-13) Here is another emphasis that the same means of salvation is available to every person. Jesus is Lord over all, and any person anywhere in the world can call to him.

(10:14-15, 17) This is a call for missionary work. The missionary's message is urgent—since people are saved by faith, they need to hear the message so they can believe. These verses are central to the purpose of the book.



The Vatican

After persecution ended in 313, Rome soon became the capital city for the church, just as it was for the empire. It still is the capital for the Roman Catholic Church. The picture shows the Vatican, the headquarters of Catholicism.

⁶⁵ See the following section.

⁶⁶ Image: "St Peters. Rome" taken by Brian Dillon on December 12, 2010, retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/28805679@N03/6375448359/>, licensed under CC BY 2.0, desaturated and cropped from the original.

Paul expresses great passion for missionary work and describes the tragedy of those who have not heard the gospel. They can be saved by believing; but how can they believe unless they hear, and how will they hear unless a missionary goes?

- » Paul spoke of the need to send missionaries, which means to help equip and support them. What should you be doing to help send the gospel to people who are not near you?

(10:16, 18-21) Inserted into the missionary call is the reminder that not all will respond. People are not saved by the gospel information alone. The Gentiles had some knowledge by General Revelation (discussed in 1:18-20), but that did not save them since they rejected it (10:18 is a quote from Psalm 19:4). Israel had much more revelation, yet even they were not saved simply by having it. Isaiah predicted Israel's rejection of the Messiah (Isaiah 53:1, 3).

The apostle responds to objections. First, about the Gentiles, someone might say, "But do they really not know?" Paul answers, "Yes, knowledge of God is everywhere," as he described in 1:20. Then, the objector asks about the Jews: "Did Israel not know?" He answers that God continually reached out to the Israelites, but they refused to obey. The objector is doubting the effectiveness of the gospel message because many heard it and were not saved.

Paul explained that most Israelites did not respond with faith.⁶⁷ People are not saved by the message unless they respond.

Preaching does not save the person who refuses – God's grace is not irresistible. However, it offers the opportunity of salvation. Though everyone knows something about God, the gospel comes with greater light and with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

"Paul's evangelism, his letters suggest, has two great motivations: a sense of obligation derived from what God has done for him and commissioned him to do for others, and a desire that God will be glorified by as great a number of people as possible. We are to imitate Paul by extending God's grace in the gospel just as he did."

Douglas J. Moo

Romans

⁶⁷ See the section in Lesson 4 entitled "Grace in the Old Testament."

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 5, PASSAGE 3

Main Point of Chapter 11

Nobody can be saved without accepting salvation on God's terms.

Summary of Chapter 11

Israel in general was not saved because they refused to be saved God's way. Many Gentiles were being saved, but any who fall from faith lose salvation. Jews could be saved if they chose, and Israel as a whole will someday accept the gospel. God will keep the promises he made to their ancestors.

- » A student should read Romans 11:1-15 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(11:1) The question is, "Has God rejected the Jews?" Paul answers, "No, I also am a Jew." Some Jews were saved.

(11:2-5) Those whom God foreknew are not rejected. Of course, God foreknew everyone in the sense that he is omniscient, but those whom he foreknew in the sense of this verse cannot be everyone because the verse is talking about specific people of Israel. The verse refers to those whom God knew would respond to his grace.⁶⁸ Paul provides an example of people whom God foreknew in this sense and accepted – the 7,000 who did not bow to Baal.

The remnant who are chosen by God (11:5) were not chosen arbitrarily or randomly. They are the people that God knew would believe in him.

(11:6) Works and grace always go together in the Christian life, but they completely exclude each other as a basis for salvation. They cannot be added together as a basis for our acceptance by God, as some false religions teach.

(11:7-10) 11:8, which is a quote from Isaiah 29:10, shows that the insincerity of the people made them spiritually blind. Their hearts became hard because they continued to reject truth. Isaiah 6:9-10 also says that people become blind when they continue to hear and reject the offer of mercy. These verses in Romans do not mean that God refused to offer mercy to some people. David's curse (Psalm 69:22, 23), which Paul quoted in Romans 11:9-10, was not that repenting people would be rejected, but that wicked people would be punished.

⁶⁸ See the notes on 8:29.

(11:11) Has God allowed them to fall beyond all hope? No. Israel's rejection of Christ resulted in his crucifixion, which was God's means of salvation. In this sense, their rejection resulted in the acceptance of the Gentiles. When the Jews see Gentiles getting saved, they will understand that they could be saved the same way.

(11:12-15) The Gentiles will be benefited even more if Israel returns to God. It is not necessary for God to choose between Jews and Gentiles. He wants to save all.

- » Some theologians believe that because God chose not to save some people, he withheld his grace from them, making it impossible for them to be saved. How would you answer that idea from 11:12-15?
- » A student should read Romans 11:16-24 for the group.

(11:16-24) These verses use the illustration of the practice of taking branches from a tree and putting them on another tree. Israel was like branches broken off from God's tree, and Gentiles were branches added in. The Jews were broken off because of their unbelief. Anyone who has been brought in will also be broken off if he does not continue in faith. Those already broken off can be restored.

Paul did not say that God decides who will be on the tree and that His decision is unchangeable. He said that God takes off those who are unbelievers, but they will be added again if they believe. Believing Gentiles are added, but they will be broken off if they fall into unbelief. God responds to man's choices.

- » From these verses, how would you explain the illustration of branches being added or removed?

THE DANGER OF LEAVING SALVATION

It is important to understand what the Bible teaches about the security of the believer. The Bible has many serious warnings for believers.

In John 15:2-10 is the famous metaphor of the vine and branches. It answers some important questions.

How do we abide in Christ? "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love" (15:10). To stop abiding in Christ would mean that a person stopped obeying him. What happens then?

"If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (15:6). If a person stops obeying, and thereby stops abiding in Christ, he is rejected. The illustration of branches falling off the vine and being gathered for the fire shows the most complete rejection that we can imagine.

“Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me” (15:4). “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away” (15:2). To bear fruit is to live a life that is changed, blessed, and guided by the grace of God. If we don't abide in Christ by obedience, we can't bear fruit. The person not bearing fruit is rejected.

The Bible nowhere tells us that we will possess salvation no matter what we do. Continual grace for Christian living comes through our relationship with God through Christ. Christ is like a vine from which we must continually draw life. The metaphor of the vine shows that the gift of salvation is possessed by means of relationship. To be separated from him is to be separated from salvation. We maintain this saving relationship by obeying God.

A modern illustration could be a light bulb and electricity. The bulb has light while the power of electricity is flowing into it. The bulb cannot keep its light if it is detached from its power source. Likewise, we have eternal life by our relationship with Christ. His life flows into us. We do not retain that life if we disconnect from him.

Scripture warns us that a person once saved can lose salvation by being ultimately defeated by sin. “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life” (Revelation 3:5). These were saved people, yet their salvation would be lost if they were overcome by sin.

At one time, Paul was worried that his converts in Thessalonica might have given up their faith. He said that if that had happened, his labor of evangelizing them would be wasted (1 Thessalonians 3:5). This shows that it is possible for a believer to fall from his faith so completely that his original conversion is worthless.

In 2 Peter 2:18-21 we find that there are false teachers who deceive some believers who have “escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” These former believers had known the way of righteousness but left it. This text says that they would have been better off never to have known the way than to return to a sinful lifestyle. This shows that it is possible for a person to lose his salvation by going back into sin. If it were not possible for a person to lose his salvation, a person could never be worse off than before he was saved.

God does want believers to feel secure, but not by basing their feelings on a false assurance that makes them put themselves in real spiritual danger. We must not promise believers something God has not promised. He does not promise that we will be safe from losing our salvation no matter what we do.

God promises to be with us, guide us, and empower us to live in victory over sin. He promises that we receive spiritual life from our relationship with him. The believer can live without fear in God's promise of continual grace that the believer receives in relationship with God.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 5, PASSAGE 3

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(11:25-29) Israel as a nation (all Israel) will be saved. That does not mean that every individual Jew will be saved, but at some future time the remnant of the nation will turn to God. The fullness of the Gentiles is mentioned in Luke 21:24. (Other information about Israel's salvation as a nation is in Isaiah 2:2-5, Isaiah 60:1-22; Zechariah 12:7-13:9.)

(11:30-31) See the note on 11:11.

(11:32) God has categorized them (grouped them) all as unbelievers in the same condition. God has condemned all and pronounced sentence on them, so that all are equally candidates for mercy. The term *all* is used twice in this verse. Just as all are sinners, God wants to have mercy on all. Just as he condemned all, he offered mercy to all.

All people are put into the same category so that they can receive the same salvation. (See 3:19-23.) The point is that he has put all under condemnation so that He can offer mercy to all the same way.

(11:33-36) These verses are an exclamation of praise for the wisdom of God. The great salvation plan is above what our imagination could have devised. We must accept it the way he wants to give it, for he owes us nothing (11:35). Some are offended by God's plan of salvation, as if it is a rock of stumbling; but it is the foundational rock of mercy.

DISPENSATIONALISM VERSUS COVENANT THEOLOGY

Theologians have tried to understand the relationship between Israel and the church.

Questions include these: Were people in the Old Testament saved a different way from the people of the New Testament? Do God's promises to Israel apply to the church also? Is Israel still special in God's plan?

One explanation of the relationship between Israel and the church has been called "dispensationalism." Other theologians have disagreed with dispensationalism and have developed an explanation that has sometimes been called "covenant theology."

Dispensationalism

The term *dispensation* comes from the concept that there are different periods of human history where God deals differently with people, providing salvation through different means. A period of time when God uses a specific plan of salvation is called a dispensation.

Some dispensationalists divided human history into many dispensations. The two periods that most affect biblical interpretation are based on a distinction between Israel and the church. These theologians believe that Old Testament Israelites were saved by following the law of Moses and system of sacrifices; and that New Testament believers are saved by grace through faith. The church is completely distinct from Israel, and God deals with them differently.

Although there are many variations of dispensational theology, a typical version of dispensationalism teaches that all of God's promises to Israel about land and the kingdom will be literally fulfilled.

Dispensationalists think that both plans could not go on simultaneously on earth; therefore, they believe that the church will be removed from the earth for a period of seven years. During that time Israel will accept Jesus as their Messiah. After that period will be a period of 1,000 years when Jesus will rule in Jerusalem.

Dispensationalists make the Old Testament less useful for Christians because they believe it was addressed to Israel under a different dispensation. They use the stories of the Old Testament to illustrate truths, but they often reject doctrinal proof from the Old Testament and try to follow only the New Testament.

Many people who do not know the term *dispensationalism* have been influenced by its ideas. Often people refuse to accept the authority of the Old Testament, though the New Testament writers obviously considered it to be their authority.

Covenant Theology

According to covenant theology, the people of God are those who love and serve him, whatever historical period they live in. The people who are saved, whether in Old Testament or New Testament times, are the people who repent and trust God for salvation.

The church is now the people of God and receives the promises given to the people of God, including the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament. The nation of Israel has no special importance now.

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God (Romans 2:28-29).

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:7-9).

So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14).

There is neither Jew nor Greek... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:28-29).

According to covenant theology, these promises will be fulfilled for the church instead of Israel:

- The throne of Christ established in Jerusalem
- Peace
- Israel as leader of the world
- All nations being taught by Israel
- Eternal possession of the promised land, and tameness of wild animals.

The promises all are interpreted to have spiritual meaning, instead of literal meaning. These promises must all be fulfilled by spiritual benefits in order to be fulfilled in the church.

Most people who believe covenant theology do not believe in a literal rule of Christ on the earth for a 1,000-year period. They believe that Christ and the saints rule now spiritually, through the influence of the gospel. They believe that the promise to Abraham that his descendants would possess Canaan forever is fulfilled by present believers possessing salvation.

According to covenant theology, there is no present significance to the nation of Israel now, because they rejected Christ. Jews can be part of the people of God by receiving individual salvation, just like any Gentile.

An Alternative View

Many theologians today have tried to come to a scriptural balance between dispensationalism and covenant theology.

There are problems with dispensationalism. The Apostle Paul told Timothy that the scriptures (the Old Testament) taught salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). Jesus said that Nicodemus should already know about the new birth because he was a teacher of the Old Testament (John 3:10). The New Testament says that a believer is now the true Israelite and child of Abraham (Romans 2:28-29, Galatians 3:28-29). It also says that the Old Testament sacrifices did not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). These scriptures show that God has not provided different ways of salvation in different periods of history.

There are also problems with covenant theology. To say that the Old Testament promises are fulfilled spiritually is to allow imaginary interpretations that cannot be tested. Also, this

interpretation loses the original meaning. It would have been impossible for Abraham or others to understand the promises, even though they thought they did. For example, God promised Abraham that his children would possess certain land forever; can that really mean that Gentiles will be saved?

Covenant theology denies that Israel is still significant in God's plan, but the Apostle Paul said that Israel as a nation would someday be saved (Romans 11:26).

A balanced view of Israel and the church will include an understanding of the various promises in the Old Testament.

1. **Promises of salvation.** Salvation is by grace and is obtained by repentance and faith by Jew and Gentile in any period of history. The basis of God's acceptance of an individual was always the same (Romans 4:3, Ephesians 2:8). There is no need for Israel and the church to have separate turns on the earth because the plan of salvation is the same for both.
 2. **Promises of God's care for his people.** Many promises describe God's usual way of taking care of his people, with whomever is in obedient relationship with him. An example is Psalm 23. These promises show the nature of God revealed in relationship. These principles have applications in any time and place, with Israel or the church.
 3. **Promises to Israel as a nation.** Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews. Someday Israel as a nation will turn to Christ (Romans 11:26). Promises that God made to Israel as a nation will be literally fulfilled for the remnant of believing Jews.
- » What statements in the alternative view match dispensationalism, and which statements differ from it? What statements match covenant theology and which ones differ?

LESSON 10 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the main point of Romans 10?
2. How did the Jews try to justify themselves?
3. How do we know that people who lived before Christ came were not saved by works?
4. What does it mean that salvation is in our hearts and mouths?
5. Why is the missionary's message urgent?
6. Explain the illustration of tree branches in Romans 11.
7. List three kinds of promises in the Old Testament.

LESSON 10 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a page explaining why the Old Testament is important for Christians today. Give examples of Old Testament scriptures that are especially valuable.
2. Remember to report on conversations with at least two members from other churches.

LESSON 11

MINISTRY AND RELATIONSHIPS

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 6

Part 6 of Romans (12:1–15:7) contains many practical instructions for life in the church, ministry, Christian relationships, and relationship with the government.

12:1-2 introduces Part 6, telling us that we are to be totally dedicated to the service of God. This follows from Paul's statements in the preceding chapter: We owe everything to God (11:35); and God's ways are absolutely wise (11:33).

Paul uses the illustration of a living sacrifice (12:1). Like a sacrifice that is to be killed, we are given up totally; but instead of dying, we live for God. That means the commitment must be maintained. Day by day we must refuse to allow any shift of our loyalty. The illustration of a living sacrifice emphasizes the totality of our offering. We cannot reserve a part of our life for ourselves apart from the will of God. We cannot protect certain desires or ambitions from the demands of total commitment to God.

This offering of self as a holy sacrifice is a spiritual worship, in contrast to merely formal religion.⁶⁹

Totally devoted service is not possible without the transformation described in 12:2. We must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are not to be conformed to the world in its values, behaviors, or opinions. The person who considers every question from the perspective of the perfect will of God will contrast to the world. He does not make allowance for any sinful desires; he does not tolerate them as normal.

Notice that the body is to be holy. Sin is not an essential aspect of the body that cannot be cleansed by God. The body is not sinful in itself and does not sin without the will but can be used for sin.

The verses from 12:1-15:7 describe how to live the devoted, transformed life.

- » A student should read Romans 12 for the group.

⁶⁹ See the note on 1:9.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 6, PASSAGE 1

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(12:3) The grace given to Paul refers to his apostolic authority and gift of revelation.

We should be humble because everything we have has been given to us by God. A person with spiritual gifts should be humble realizing that the gifts come from God unearned and are for the purpose of serving others.

(12:4-5) As members of the body, we need others and are obligated to serve others. The metaphor of the body is described in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

(12:6-8) These verses name several ministries. Each believer is to follow the ministry he is called to and gifted for. If a person does not have grace-based humility, he may spend his effort the wrong way, (perhaps seeking human approval), and fail in his real calling.

The possessors of gifts are warned to use them properly. For example, the giver should give simply, not with the purpose of honoring himself. The administrator must be diligent – attentive to details and dependable all the time. The person who helps those in need should not do it with an arrogant or grudging attitude which humiliates the recipient.⁷⁰

- » How do Christians use their spiritual gifts differently from the way people of the world use their abilities?

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 6, PASSAGE 2

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(12:9) Love should be genuine and sincere. Reject the evil and hold to what is good. The increase of love is connected to improved discernment about what is good (Philippians 1:9-10).



Roman Money

Roman money was used throughout the empire, even in Jerusalem. It provided economic stability and a standard of value that helped businesses to prosper. Jesus gave an illustration using a coin with the emperor's image (Luke 20:24).

⁷⁰ Image: "Roman coin hoard: 1 Gold solidus of Valentinian I", retrieved from The Portable Antiquities Scheme/The Trustees of the British Museum, <https://finds.org.uk/database/images/image/id/1023830/recordtype/artefacts>, licensed under CC BY 2.0, desaturated and cropped from the original.

(12:10) The church is the family of God, with many brothers and sisters. We should be willing for honor to go to others instead of ourselves.

(12:11) Don't be lazy in responsibilities. A Christian should be a model of good work ethics. He does not have much time to waste if he is living with God's purpose. He should work as if he is working for God (Ephesians 6:6-7).

(12:12) Our joy does not depend on our circumstances, because we have hope for eternity. To be patient means to endure by faith. A person should have a constant attitude of dependence on God, ready to pray at any time.

(12:13) Help other believers with their material needs. Hospitality means meeting the needs of others for food and shelter.

(12:14) Don't treat people as they deserve, but as Christ would treat them. To give people what you think they deserve is literally judging, which is a role reserved to God.

(12:15) Be ready to share in the sorrow or rejoicing of others.

(12:16) Don't be conscious of status symbols. Don't favor people of higher classes. Be respectful even to the poor. Don't look for ways to put yourself above others.

(12:17) It is never right to harm someone because he has harmed you. We are not called to give people punishment, but to forgive.

Demonstrate honesty. If you want to be respected, it is not enough for you and God to know that you are honest; maintain policies that demonstrate honesty for everyone to see. It is easier to maintain a good reputation than to rebuild it after it is damaged.

(12:18) As much as it depends on you, live in peace with everyone. Peace at its best is a harmonious relationship. Sometimes peace requires an apology, even for unintentional offense. Sometimes it requires kind confrontation of a wrongdoer, so that an offense that hinders your relationship can be resolved. If you refuse either to apologize or to confront when it is needed, you are not doing what you can to maintain peace.

(12:19) Don't take revenge; instead, leave room for the wrath of God. If a person wants to be the punisher, he shows that he does not believe that God is doing his job right.

(12:20) Do good to others, rather than trying to give them what they deserve. To heap coals of fire does not mean to get revenge in a more subtle way, for that would contradict the main point of the verse. It could be a symbol of melting the hardness of a person's attitude.

(12:21) Don't let evil change you and defeat you spiritually. However, do not oppose it with evil, but with good. To become bitter and oppose it wrongly is to be spiritually defeated, even if you win the conflict.

- » Think about how a person would not do well with these instructions if he is not completely committed to God. What is something in your life that should change because of these instructions?

INTERPRETING THE APOSTLE'S LETTERS

The letters of Paul were written in response to specific situations: “Usually the occasion was some kind of behavior that needed correcting, or a doctrinal error that needed setting right, or a misunderstanding that needed further light.”⁷¹ The letters are not in the form of systematic theology, but theology formed in response to a need. This theology is practical from the start. It was not developed in isolation from real life.

The New Testament epistles were not literary productions for the general public, but they were intended for more than a single recipient and immediate application. Paul told the Colossians that they should exchange with the Laodiceans the letters each church had received from him (Colossians 4:16). The church very early began to collect Paul's epistles and circulate them together. Therefore, we know that they saw the epistles as applicable to the church in all places and all times.

Even though a time and culture gap exists between us and the original recipients, the epistles were written to New Testament Christians facing problems very similar to ours. Therefore, the epistles of Paul are easier to apply to the modern church than some forms of literature found in scripture. They are not written specifically to the Jewish nation, nor are they addressing people under the Old Testament law.

The original situation of the writing provides the interpreter with a starting place for modern application. A principle of interpretation is that we can understand a writing better if we know who wrote it, who received it, and why it was written. The epistles provide the interpreter the advantage of knowing the identities of the author and recipients.

The book of Romans is the most formal of Paul's writings. It follows a planned structure. It is almost in the form of a theological treatise. Paul did not mention specific errors in the Roman church. He did not talk about specific situations, like he did in his letters to the churches he had founded and visited.

71 Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993) 48.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 6, PASSAGE 3

Main Point of 13:1-7

Believers should submit to civil government because government is instituted by God.

Note to class leader: There will probably be much discussion and disagreement as the group studies the next passage. You should try to get the members to let the passage correct their opinions.

- » A student should read Romans 13:1-7 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(13:1-2) God has established government. That does not mean that every ruler is righteous, but that God wants human authority to be established. To refuse to be under human authority is to rebel against God. Just as we do not truly love God if we do not love the brother who is visible, neither can we claim to be under God's authority while refusing to submit to visible human authority. A Christian should not treat officers of the law with disrespect.

(13:3-4) One of the purposes of government is to punish evildoers. When government is functioning properly, evildoers fear it. Under normal circumstances Christians will not conflict with government because Christian qualities make the Christian a good citizen. However, many times in history rulers have tried to demand loyalty that belongs only to God, and then they become persecutors of Christians.

Government that functions properly is consistent with the authority of God. Verse 4 tells us that government has authority from God to enforce laws even by killing evildoers.

Christians in some nations believe it is wrong to serve in a government position, especially a position that might require them to use violence. Many Christians with that belief live in countries where the government has persecuted Christians and is extremely corrupt. However, if government is functioning properly, it is not wrong for a Christian to serve in a government position because government is authorized by God.

(13:5) The Christian is supposed to submit to authority, not only for fear of governmental punishment, but for a clear conscience. To rebel against government or to refuse to obey laws is to deny the role of government. Not all decisions can be made by individuals if there is to be any government. Individual freedom has to be submitted to the authority that protects individual rights, even if we do not always agree with the way the protection is done.

(13:6-7) A Christian should pay the legitimate taxes of government. Follow customary ways of showing respect.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 6, PASSAGE 4

Main Point of 13:8-10

Love fulfills the law because it motivates the believer to do what is right toward others.

These verses prove that the law does not become irrelevant to the believer. The believer does fulfill the law, since by grace he can have the love described here. Grace is not merely a covering for violations of the law. Grace includes the work of God in us to fulfill his will for us.

- » A student should read Romans 13:8-10 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(13:8) To owe in this sense means to fail to give what is due to someone. Some types of obligations are listed in the previous verse. It is not wrong to borrow and repay on a schedule, if that is the agreed way to meet our obligations. We are commanded, as in verse 7, to give every person what is due to him from us.

- » What are the results when a Christian does not pay what he has borrowed?

(13:9-10) If you truly love someone as yourself, you will not steal from him, lie to him, covet what he has, or violate his marriage. Mere friendship and love, such as are common in the world, do not always prevent these wrongs; but the love of Christ in us will prevent us from doing wrong even to strangers, to those who offend us, or to those who can afford it.

Most cultures and religions teach that we owe such love to some people, perhaps to family members and tribal members. But they think that to the rest of mankind, no such love is owed. They may consider it permissible to steal from foreigners or employers and to be rude to strangers. Christ commands us to extend love to every person we are in contact with. In Luke 10:25-37, to illustrate the command of loving your neighbor, Jesus told the story of a Samaritan who helped an injured Jew.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 6, PASSAGE 5

- » A student should read Romans 13:11-14 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(13:11) Salvation in this verse refers to ultimate salvation at the return of Christ. We are not to live as though this world will last forever. We should live as people who are expecting things to quickly pass.

(13:12) Night is a figure of speech that refers to the time leading up to the coming of the Lord. (See also 2 Peter 1:19.) Darkness in the New Testament is often associated with sinful actions. (See also 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8 and Ephesians 5:11-14.)

(13:13) Here the life of the careless sinner is described. This is the person who does not care about the future, and especially does not think about eternity. He lives for pleasure without concern for morality. The life of a Christian is completely opposite to this.

(13:14) Don't make any allowance for sinful desires. Don't use human nature as an excuse for sin. Live in the light and have nothing in your life that you should be ashamed of.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 6, PASSAGE 5

There will always be issues about which sincere believers disagree. Romans 14 gives instructions about how Christians who differ in some beliefs and practices can still love and respect one another and worship and serve together.

» A student should read Romans 14:1-23 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(14:1) The weak brother is one who feels guilty for an action that is not really forbidden by God (see 1 Corinthians 8:7-12). A strong brother is one who can do an action without guilt because he knows the action is not really disobedience to God.

(14:2-3) The Jewish law had rules about food. There were many Jewish Christians in the church and Gentiles who had studied the Jewish laws. A person who feels free from any restrictions about food might be tempted to despise the one who feels restricted. The one who tries to follow rules about food might be tempted to judge others as sinners.

(14:4) God will judge his own servants and give them the grace they need. Do not judge others about things that are not clear in scripture.

Around the world there is diversity among believers regarding such things as methods of baptism, ways of serving the Lord's Supper, choice of Bible translation, dress, and entertainment. We should maintain Christian unity but not expect uniformity within the body of Christ. Our motto should be: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; but in all things, love!"

(14:5-6) There were many Jewish feast days, with special customs for each. The Sabbath day was also controversial. The church began to meet and worship on the Lord's Day instead (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10) and later Sunday became something like a Christian Sabbath. The principle of rest on the seventh day still has benefits that we should

keep, since it is a creation principle and not just a custom instituted at the time that the law of Moses was given.

“...Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (14:5) shows that definite opinions are necessary. A person should not be vague in what he believes about issues. Tolerance of other opinions does not mean that we do not know what our own opinion is or that we ignore evidence and reasoning.

(14:7-9) We do not own ourselves. Each life should honor Christ. Christ’s death and resurrection redeems us, and we belong to him.

(14:10-12) Every person shall report to God at the judgment. Therefore, our opinions about each other are less important.

(14:13-15) It is important for us to try not to cause another believer to stumble. For the Christian, things are not unclean because everything belongs to God. But if a person thinks something is wrong and does it anyway, he has committed sin because he chose to do wrong. We cause someone to stumble if we influence him to do something he thinks is wrong. (Another scripture passage about this issue is 1 Corinthians 8.)

(14:16) A person may have right doctrine and yet do harm because of not caring about his influence on others.

(14:17) Christianity does not consist either in rules about lifestyle or in freedom. It is spiritual victory and life in the Spirit.

(14:18-19) God is pleased when we submit everything we do to Christ and do our best to build up others.

(14:20-23) All things belong to God, and the person who remembers that can have liberty. However, if a person does something he thinks is wrong, he is sinning by that choice. The brother who feels free should limit his freedom to avoid causing others to fall.

No directions are given to the weaker brother, except that he should not judge the one who has more liberty. The weaker one is bound by his conscience and cannot change his conduct, but the stronger brother has options.

There will probably be much discussion while covering the preceding passage, but some questions to consider are:

- What kinds of issues does our church leave to the members to decide individually?
- What differences do we see in other believers about which we should be more tolerant?
- How can we be faithful to apply the principles of this passage in our opinions of and interactions with other people?

IDENTIFYING THE JUDAIZERS

The Judaizers were not simply followers of Judaism, the religion of the Jews. The Judaizers were Jews who claimed to be Christians but thought that Christians must fulfill the requirements of Judaism. It was not a problem for converted Jews to continue to practice Judaism. Many did, especially during the first generation of the New Testament church. The problem was when Jews who claimed to be converted did not understand the gospel of grace.

Judaizers thought that it was necessary for a Gentile convert to accept all of the rules of Judaism, including circumcision, in order to be saved. They did not preach the gospel to the unbelievers. Instead, they preached to the converts of others, bringing confusion and division. Their greatest recorded victory was in Galatia, where they led the whole church astray. Paul's letter to the Galatians is intended to bring them back to the true gospel.

The issue of Jewish requirements was brought to a church council, recorded in Acts 15. The apostles realized that to follow the way of the Judaizers would be to deny the gospel of grace and to deny that the gospel was equally offered to Gentiles. The council's decision corrected true believers who were sincerely misguided but did not stop those who had wrong motives. Paul considered the Judaizers to be enemies to the gospel.

Romans 14:1-15:12 applies the gospel truth that Paul had explained throughout the letter to the question of Jewish requirements. Believers were not to judge one another on their observance of Jewish religious scruples. The section ends with an emphasis that the gospel is for the whole world.

Other passages on this subject include Romans 4; Acts 15; Galatians 2, 3, 5; and Colossians 2:11-23.

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 6, PASSAGE 6

Notes Verse-by-Verse continued

(15:1-4) The strong in faith, those who feel free, should be willing to give up some privileges to help those who are weak in faith and do not feel free of extra restrictions.

(15:5-7) These verses conclude the passage. The goal is Christian unity. The love of Christ is our example.

A STORY OF UNITY, REVIVAL, AND MISSIONS

In 1722 a German landowner named Zinzendorf invited persecuted Moravian believers to move to his property and build a colony. Eventually several hundred people were in the community. They struggled with divisions about various doctrines and worship practices;

but in 1727 they developed “The Brotherly Agreement” (now called “The Moravian Covenant for Christian Living”) to help establish unity.

In that same year, they began to experience revival. They had an all-night prayer meeting and several long worship services with an unusual sense of God’s presence, including one in which the speaker sank to the ground in awe of God. During a communion service, the Holy Spirit moved upon the people in such a way that Zinzendorf later viewed that day as the Pentecost of the Renewed Moravian Church. Those who had been divided were reconciled with great feeling, and Zinzendorf led a prayer of confession for the schisms in the congregation. They began a prayer vigil, with various members taking turns, and continued it for 100 years.

The Moravian community became one of the greatest missionary-sending congregations of all time. From 1733-1742, 70 missionaries went out from the community of 600. Many died young from persecution and difficult conditions. By 1760, after 28 years, 226 missionaries had been sent out; and the Moravians worldwide numbered in the thousands.

LESSON 11 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain the illustration of a living sacrifice.
2. What must happen to us so we can be totally devoted to God?
3. Why should we be humble?
4. Explain the terms *weaker brother* and *stronger brother*.
5. Who were the Judaizers?

LESSON 11 ASSIGNMENT

1. Write a page applying some of the practical directions found in Romans 12:1–15:7 to Christians today.
2. Prepare for the final test by studying the list of questions provided in the Appendix of this course. You must take the test without help from anyone else and without looking at any written material.

LESSON 12

A VISION FOR MISSIONS

NOTE TO CLASS LEADER

Schedule the final test and make sure the group is prepared for it.

THREE GREAT CULTURES

Three cultures shaped the world that received the gospel in the first century. God prepared the world to be in a condition for the gospel to be most effective.

Greek Culture

Alexander the Great conquered the civilized world and formed his empire. He purposely spread Greek culture, because he believed it was superior to all others and because it would help to unite his empire. He wanted everyone to speak Greek and practice Greek customs. This prepared for the gospel because missionaries could preach the gospel in Greek throughout the empire.

Greek thinking caused people to see themselves primarily as individuals instead of members of a tribe and family. Therefore, they became more open to making individual religious choices. People realized that it was possible to change their religion.

Greeks saw themselves as citizens of the world, instead of just citizens of their own small state. They realized that there is truth that applies to all people, instead of each people group having their own truth. This made them realize that truth might come to them from somewhere else, and not only from their own tradition.

Greek philosophers tried to answer questions about the meaning of life and the universe. They believed that answers exist that would explain life for everyone.

Greek philosophers used reason to show that the old religions were wrong. They also caused people to be dissatisfied with the legends of the gods. The gods were exaggerations of humanity with human faults, guilty of immoral and evil actions.

Greek philosophers proposed new explanations for life and reality. Each new philosophy was debated, and no philosophy succeeded in answering the questions completely. They discovered and discussed the important questions but could not answer them.

Philosophy could not satisfy the spiritual need of humanity.

Christianity answered the questions asked by philosophy and also satisfied the spiritual need.

- » How did Greek culture change the world and prepare for the spread of the gospel?

Roman Culture

The Roman Empire developed after the Greek empire had broken into various territories. The Romans conquered and united many nations, but much of the common culture was still Greek.

Roman conquests caused people to lose faith in their local gods who were unable to help them. People became more willing to hear about an omnipotent, universal God.

The Romans believed in many gods and had legends like Greek mythology. Many educated Romans did not really believe in the gods but practiced religion as part of their culture.

Roman law brought clearer concepts of justice. The Roman courts considered evidence in a reasonable way. This helped lay the foundation for the doctrines of man's guilt and justification.

The Roman domination ended the small wars between nations, bringing what is called the *Pax Romana*, the Roman Peace. This made travel safer, and missionaries could cross national borders without trouble.

- » How did Roman culture change the world and prepare for the spread of the gospel?

Jewish Culture

Jews were scattered throughout the civilized world, and everywhere they established synagogues and taught their faith. The apostles observed that Moses was taught in every city (Acts 15:21). Jews faithful to the religion of Israel had influence in Rome.

Judaism's concept of a sovereign, holy God was more respectable than mythology with its fallible, immoral gods. The high ethics of Judaism were attractive in a world of moral chaos. Christianity shared these ethics, raised them, and preached the potential of grace to transform a sinner and enable holy living.

Judaism's concept of God's purpose in history and expectation of a Messiah gave hope for the future. The hope was in an intervention of God, not human solutions. Christianity announced that the Messiah had arrived and that a new age had begun.

- » How did Jewish culture change the world and prepare for the spread of the gospel?

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 7

In this passage, the apostle explains why he is writing the letter. He wants to visit them, then receive their help to begin missionary work in Spain. This purpose of the letter guided its structure because Paul explained what the gospel is, why everyone needs it, why messengers are important, and why he was qualified to go. He showed that worldwide missions were always the plan of God.

- » A student should read Romans 15:8-33 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(15:8) Jesus fulfilled the messianic promises given to the Jewish patriarchs and came through the Jewish nation and religion.

(15:9-12) Through several Old Testament quotations, the apostle shows that God always planned for the gospel to go to the Gentiles. In the scriptures Paul quotes, the prophets had predicted that:

- Gentiles would become worshippers of God
- The Messiah will rule over the Gentiles
- Gentiles will trust in the Messiah

(15:13-14) The Apostle gives a prayer of blessing for the Roman church and says that he believes they are spiritually strong. In the following verses, he will call them to have a vision for mission work. Even a blessed church that is spiritually strong is not complete without a vision and involvement with missionary work.

- » What happens if a church does not have a desire to support missionary work in distant places?

(15:15-16) He tells them about the special call he has to take the gospel to the Gentiles. God has given him special spiritual gifts for this work. His desire is that the Gentile churches be holy and genuine, pleasing to God.

(15:17-19) God has given success to his ministry. Many Gentiles have become obedient to the Word of God. The most important result of ministry is that people repent and live in obedience to God. No other sign of success is so important. He says that his ministry is also marked by miracles by God. He spread the gospel throughout great regions.

(15:20-22) His practice was to preach in places where the gospel had not been preached before. He systematically covered regions. That priority was the reason he had not made the trip to Rome, because the gospel had already been preached there.

(15:23-24) He had preached the gospel in every area near him. He wanted the Roman church to help him make a missionary trip beyond them into Spain. The trip would give him the opportunity to preach and fellowship in Rome, and also help him to reach a region that had not been reached yet.

- » Explain how every Christian and every church has a debt to support the spread of the gospel. (If needed, see the note on 1:15, in the first lesson.)

(15:25-29) First, he would make a trip to Jerusalem to carry an offering from the Gentile church to the Jewish church. This offering was very important. By sending the offering, the Gentiles were acknowledging their debt to the Jews, because Jewish Christians brought them the gospel. By receiving the offering, the Jews acknowledged that the Gentiles were in the same church. There would not be separate Christian religions. That is why Paul asked them to pray that the Jewish believers would accept the offering.

(15:30-33) He asked them to pray that he would be delivered from danger from the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, so that he would be able to come to Rome. This prayer was answered, though not the way he would have chosen. Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner after he was arrested in Jerusalem by Jewish rulers, taken by the Roman governor, and sent to Rome for trial. (The story is in the book of Acts, starting at Acts 21:26 and going to the end of the book of Acts.) We do not know if Paul ever made the trip to Spain.

- » How do we see the providence of God in the events of Paul's life, even if the trip to Spain did not happen as he planned?

PASSAGE STUDY – ROMANS PART 8

Summary of Chapter 16

There are more greetings by name in this epistle than in any other of Paul's. It may be that since he had not been to Rome, he mentioned all of his acquaintances who were there in order to help begin his relationship with the church.

- » A student should read Romans 16 for the group.

Notes Verse-by-Verse

(16:1-2) Phoebe was probably with those who carried this letter. Paul told them to help her in her ministry because she met the needs of many people. The best person to help is the person who is already a blessing to others.

(16:3-4) Aquila and Priscilla had risked their lives for Paul. (See Acts 18:1-3, 24-26 for more history about them.)

(16:7, 11, 21) Relatives of Paul are named in these verses.

(16:13) The woman mentioned is probably not literally Paul's mother. Rufus may have been the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross, because in Mark 15:21 his name is mentioned as if he were known to the church later.

(16:17-18) There are people who try to separate others from the foundational truths of the church in order to build their own followings. They are not serving Christ, but their own desires. Their message is contrary to right doctrines of salvation. (See 3 John 1:9-10 and 2 Peter 2:1-3.)

(16:19) We need to learn as much as we can about truth. We do not need to know much about evil. People who study evil things face the danger of an unhealthy attraction and distortion of their thinking.

(16:20) The church will ultimately triumph over Satan through the work of Christ (Genesis 3:15).

(16:22) Tertius was not the author, but the person who wrote as Paul spoke the letter to him.

(16:25-27) These verses refer to the main themes of the letter. Notice the phrases "my gospel" and "preaching of Jesus Christ." He again states that the gospel is both a fresh revelation and the old message of the prophets. He ends with a final reference to missions, reminding them that the message is for all nations. The goal of mission work is the same as Jesus stated in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20): to bring people into obedience to Christ. This concludes the letter as it began, as 1:5 says: that the reason for ministry is to bring people of all nations into obedience to God.

A GOSPEL PRESENTATION FROM ROMANS

The gospel can be explained using verses only from the book of Romans. This presentation of the gospel is sometimes called the "Roman Road."

The first sentence of explanation for each reference is the most important one to remember.

Romans 3:23

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Every person has sinned by doing things they know are wrong. This verse shows the real problem that people have. They have not obeyed God; they have deliberately disobeyed God. No person is an exception. No person can be accepted by God on the basis of having always done what is right.

For further emphasis of this point, you can use 3:10 ("None is righteous, no, not one") and 5:12 ("Death spread to all men because all sinned").

Romans 6:23

“The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Sinners have earned eternal death, but God offers eternal life as a gift through Jesus.

This verse shows why sin is so serious. Because of sin, the penalty of death is passed to every person. It is eternal death, the judgment of God which every sinner deserves.

In contrast to the death we have earned, God offers the gift of life, something we have not earned.

Romans 5:8

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

The gift of God was provided by the death of Christ for us.

God was not willing to let us receive the judgment we deserved. Because he loves us, he provided a way for us to receive mercy. Jesus died as the sacrifice so that we can be forgiven. God did not wait for us to do something to deserve salvation – it comes to us while we are still sinners. Salvation is offered not to good people, but to sinners.

Romans 10:9

“If you confess... and believe... you will be saved.”

The only requirement for salvation is for the sinner to admit he is a sinner and believe God’s promise of forgiveness.

What about repentance? If a person admits that he has done wrong and wants to be forgiven, he implies that he is willing to quit his sins.

Romans 10:13

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The offer of salvation is to every person. Nobody is excluded. No other qualifications exist.

Romans 5:1

“Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God”

Believing God’s promise makes us a friend of God, no longer counted guilty.

To have peace with God means that we are no longer his enemies; we are reconciled. The sin that separated us from God is taken out of the way. To be justified means to be counted as not guilty. To be justified by faith means that believing God’s promise is all that is necessary for our forgiveness.

Romans 8:1

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Because we are connected to Christ, we are no longer condemned for the sins we committed.

Christ lived a sinless life and fulfilled the requirement of justice with his death on the cross. By faith we identify with him and with him are accepted by God the Father. God treats us as though we have never sinned.

Conclusion

Explain that an unbeliever can be saved by praying to God, confessing that he is a sinner, and asking for forgiveness on the basis of Jesus’ sacrifice for him.

For Learning and Practice

The best way to learn and practice this method is to first mark each verse to be used in Romans by circling or underlining it in your Bible. Then, put a number beside each one showing the order of its use. For example, beside the verse to be used first, write the number 1.

Practice presenting the gospel. Read each verse and give the explanation that goes with it. Be sure to include the concepts that are in the first sentence after each verse (above). Then, add whatever explanation is needed, using the other sentences if they are helpful. It is not necessary to use the exact words that are provided in this lesson.

Practice until you can do it without looking at anything except the Bible.

LESSON 12 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain how three great cultures prepared the world for the spread of the gospel in the first century.
2. How did the apostle show that God always planned for the gospel to go to the Gentiles?
3. Why was the offering for the church in Jerusalem so important?
4. How did Paul arrive in Rome?

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND FINAL TEST

LESSON 1

1. Why did Paul write the letter to the Roman believers?
2. Why did Paul plan to go to Rome?
3. What does the term *Jesus Christ our Lord* mean in the New Testament epistles?
4. How did the resurrection prove Jesus' deity?
5. Explain the term *barbarian* (Romans 1:14).
6. Why do we have a debt to those who have not heard the gospel?
7. What is the central and most important truth in the book of Romans?
8. What does *death* mean in the book of Romans?
9. According to Romans, who is spared from God's judgment?

LESSON 2

10. By what means do people receive General Revelation?
11. What do all people know about God even without scripture?
12. What is Special Revelation?
13. What is idolatry?
14. Name two ways depravity affects people's thinking.

LESSON 3

15. What does apocalyptic scripture describe?
16. Why did the Jews expect to be favored?
17. How is a person made righteous?
18. How does a person show that he has saving faith?
19. What did circumcision signify for a Jew, and what did it symbolize for a Christian?

LESSON 4

20. Explain Calvin's concept of "common grace."
21. Explain Wesley's concept of "the grace that comes before."
22. In Romans 3:19, what does it mean for every mouth to "be stopped"?
23. What great benefit of the Jews is mentioned in Romans 3?
24. How do forms of worship benefit us?
25. What does Romans 3:10-18 show?
26. Who is under the law? (Romans 3:19-20)

LESSON 5

27. What does a person believe who has saving faith?
28. What is the dilemma solved by the atonement?
29. How did the atonement solve the dilemma?
30. What does *justification* mean?
31. How does someone uphold the law as the standard of righteousness? (Romans 3:31)
32. What was God's promise of grace to Abraham?
33. What did David say about justification by faith?
34. Who are the spiritual children of Abraham?
35. How do we know from Romans 5:15 that salvation is offered to everyone?

LESSON 6

- 36. Why is it important to understand what sin is?
- 37. What is the definition of willful sin?
- 38. What wrong idea is Paul responding to in Romans 6?
- 39. What does it mean to be dead to sin?
- 40. What does it mean to be under grace?
- 41. What does it mean to be under the law?
- 42. Why is it impossible to serve both God and sin?
- 43. What does the term *old self* mean?

LESSON 7

- 44. Name two reasons the ceremonial and civil laws of the Old Testament are still important.
- 45. What does it mean to be dead to the law?
- 46. What are two uses of the term *in the flesh*?
- 47. How does the law make sin worse?
- 48. Why is the law useful for evangelism?

LESSON 8

- 49. Why was it impossible for the law to be a means of salvation?
- 50. What does it mean that a believer is no longer in the flesh?
- 51. How does the law direct the life of a Christian?
- 52. What is the witness of the Spirit?
- 53. What is final salvation?
- 54. Denial of the doctrine of bodily resurrection leads to what two opposite extremes?
- 55. What is the security of the believer?

LESSON 9

- 56. How do we know that God wants us to understand his justice?
- 57. Why is it important for us to see that God is just?
- 58. What is a biblical view of God's sovereignty?
- 59. What is the main point of Romans 9?
- 60. What were the spiritual privileges of Israel?
- 61. What are five connections between Christianity and Judaism?
- 62. What does Romans 9 say about God's choice of Jacob?
- 63. Why can we rejoice in God's sovereignty?

LESSON 10

- 64. What is the main point of Romans 10?
- 65. How did the Jews try to justify themselves?
- 66. How do we know that people who lived before Christ came were not saved by works?
- 67. What does it mean that salvation is in our hearts and mouths?
- 68. Why is the missionary's message urgent?
- 69. Explain the illustration of tree branches in Romans 11.
- 70. List three kinds of promises in the Old Testament.

LESSON 11

- 71. Explain the illustration of a living sacrifice.
- 72. What must happen to us so we can be totally devoted to God?
- 73. Why should we be humble?
- 74. Explain the terms *weaker brother* and *stronger brother*.
- 75. Who were the Judaizers?

LESSON 12

76. Explain how three great cultures prepared the world for the spread of the gospel in the first century.
77. How did the apostle show that God always planned for the gospel to go to the Gentiles?
78. Why was the offering for the church in Jerusalem so important?
79. How did Paul arrive in Rome?

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- "Dialogue between a Predestinarian and His Friend" <https://holyjoys.org/john-wesleys-dialogue-between-a-predestinarian-and-his-friend/>
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- "The Law Established by Faith: Discourse I" <https://holyjoys.org/the-law-established-through-faith-discourse-1/>
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RECORD OF ASSIGNMENTS

STUDENT NAME _____

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SERMON/LESSON PRACTICE	
Date	Type of Group
LESSON 9 CONVERSATION ASSIGNMENT	
FINAL TEST GRADE	

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This is a systematic theology course, describing the Christian doctrines about the Bible, God, man, sin, Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and last things.

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