

ROMANS

CHARLES A. GIESCHEN



GOD'S ABIDING WORD

Romans

Righteous by Faith

Charles A. Gieschen



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The editor

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Getting Started

Because St. Paul's letter to the Romans presents extensive teaching on central issues of the Christian faith, it has played an important role in the life of the Christian church. Over the centuries various controversies have arisen about the interpretation of Romans, such as the Reformation teaching that sinners are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. To clarify the issues and explain the apostle's teaching, this study guide walks you through Romans sentence-by-sentence.

As you work through this study with your particular Bible translation, remember that these notes are based on St. Paul's original Greek text. Unless otherwise noted, the English translations are those of the study guide author. The divisions and outline stem from the apostle's sentence structure and train of thought. This study also places special emphasis on Paul's use of questions throughout Romans. Fully one-fourth of his sentences end with a question mark. Paul's questions appear as quotations throughout this Bible study, followed by references to guide you to Paul's answers. By working through the apostle's own questions, you will gain deep insights into his letter.

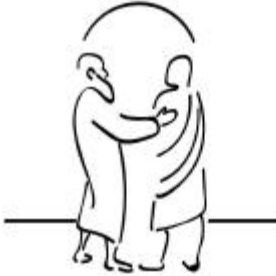
A Personal Letter

When the leaders of the house-churches in Rome broke the clay seal and unwrapped Paul's epistle, or letter, they would not have read a sentence here or a portion there. They would have sat down and read the entire letter at once, the same way you read a letter from a dear friend. When these same leaders presented Paul's epistle to their congregations, they would not have read portions during a worship service, but rather the entire epistle.

The point is this: to get the most out of this study of Paul's epistle to the Romans, find a quiet place and read the entire letter from start to finish. (This will take from one to one-and-a-half hours.) Don't pause and ponder details. Get the big picture, like those who first read the letter. Then start the careful sentence-by-sentence study of this profound epistle with this study guide.

The chart on the following page will introduce you to the history and challenges surrounding this great epistle. Carefully study the historical events and reflect on their importance for Paul and the first believers in Rome.

Historic Events	Dates	Paul's Life and Work
Resurrection of Jesus	c. A.D. 30	Student of Rabbi Gamaliel
Roman Jews forced to eat pork	35	Martyrdom of Stephen; Conversion of Paul
Emperor Caligula	37	
Emperor Claudius	41	
	46	First mission trip
Jews expelled from Rome	51/52	1 & 2 Thessalonians
	53	Galatians
Emperor Nero	54	
	55	1 & 2 Corinthians
Jewish High Priest assassinated	57	<i>Romans</i>
	60	Prison letters: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians
Fire in Rome	c. 64	1 Timothy & Titus
Jewish Revolt in Palestine	66	
Paul executed	67/68	2 Timothy
Jerusalem destroyed	70	



Romans 1–4

The Righteous *by Faith* in Jesus Christ Shall Live: Since Jesus died for your sins, God's Law no longer condemns you.

Romans 5–8

Alive to God: Though the sinful nature still tempts you, Christ gives you His Holy Spirit and victory.

Romans 9–11

Life for All Israel: God calls both Jews and Gentiles into His church, the new Israel.

Romans 12–16

Living Sacrifices: Since Christ has freed you from conformity to the pattern of this world, you offer yourself in service to Him and others.

1

The Purpose of Romans

In A.D. 50 the Roman Emperor Claudius issued an edict that deeply affected the new Christians in Rome. The historian Suetonius explains that a certain “Chrestus” (Christ?) had stirred up the Jews in the city. As a result, Emperor Claudius banished all Jews from Rome. Since most early Christians were Jewish or converts to Judaism, Claudius’s edict would have greatly disturbed the life of these first congregations (e.g., Aquila and Priscilla, Acts 18:2).

Just four years later, Claudius died. Many Jews, including Jewish Christians, returned to the city (Romans 16:3–4). This must have caused turmoil in Rome’s congregations: when Claudius forced the Jewish Christians out of Rome, Gentile believers would have assumed leadership. A few years later, former congregational leaders would have returned. Although Jewish and Gentile believers probably greeted one another warmly, these changes in leadership probably caused tensions.

1. How do Paul’s opening words (1:1–7) seek to ease any tension between Jewish and Gentile believers?

2. How might this effort by Paul influence your efforts for peaceful work in your congregation?

Paul and the Romans

In A.D. 56–58, before heading to Jerusalem with a special offering for the impoverished Christians in Judea (15:25–26), Paul wrote his letter to the “house congregations” in Rome (Gaius, mentioned in 16:23, is a “host” for a house congregation). Paul wrote from Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey (see map, p. 81).

Since Paul had never visited the congregations of Rome, most interpreters regard Romans as Paul’s most “objective” letter, even as a textbook of Christian doctrine. In other words, Paul addressed the Romans as an outsider, someone not caught up in the particular issues of their congregations, unlike his role in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Although Romans has a more objective tone, several passages show that Paul was aware of what was happening in Rome.

3. Quickly scan chapter 16. How does this portion of the letter demonstrate Paul’s insight into the congregational life of the Romans?

The many questions in Romans highlighted the doctrinal and practical challenges that the church faced (e.g., 3:8; also note 16:17–18). These questions were the foundation of Paul’s teaching method in Romans. He asked tough questions and then provided clear answers. Paul knew that his message about God’s grace for the Gentiles had received harsh questioning in various places. Therefore, Paul used this

letter to carefully and clearly proclaim his message, while he also corrected common falsehoods (see chart, p. 35).

Paul's Mission

The motive for Paul's letter came from his plan to visit Rome and use the city as a center for his mission effort to the West and North (Spain), much as he used Antioch for his mission to Asia Minor and Macedonia (see map, p. 81). Paul desired "to be sent forth" for the journey to Spain (15:24). This may have been a technical term for missionary support through funds, supplies, and manpower.

4. Reflect on the relationship between Paul's teaching about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and his teaching about mission in 1:1–7, 16. How do these opening verses connect these two aspects of Christian life?

5. List three terms Paul uses to describe his commitment to mission work in 1:1–7.

6. Reflect on Paul's mission appeal to the Romans. How has God called you to support His mission?

As you study Romans, view this epistle as a defense of a fundamental teaching of the Christian faith that was vital to Paul's mission: God declares all sinners righteous in Christ. Paul saw that a solid understanding of Christian teaching in Rome was important because the city would serve as the link back to the East and forward to the West.

To fulfill God's mission, your congregation needs an equally solid theological foundation. Martin Luther wrote:

This epistle [to the Romans] is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest Gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes. (Helmut T. Lehmann ed., *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960], 365)

7. As you have begun this study of Romans, how has the "bread" of the Gospel satisfied the hunger of your soul?

8. In a brief paragraph, summarize the purpose of Romans.

Words to Remember

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Romans 1:16 NIV

To prepare for “I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel,” read Romans 1:1–17.

2

I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Since the end of the eighteenth century, archaeologists and natives of Egypt have discovered thousands of ancient letters. These garbage piles of papyrus or reed-paper letters have taught scholars a great deal about letters in St. Paul's day. Letters typically began with a short greeting at the top of the scroll; this greeting included much of the same information we find on an envelope of our mail or at the top of an e-mail.

9. Using the following outline, divide up Paul's letter into verses according to the typical style of that time:

Name of sender—

Name of addressee—

Greetings—

Thanksgiving—

Body of letter—1:18–15:33

Closing greetings—

Paul's opening greeting is much more elaborate in describing himself and his addressees than most private letters. He spends more words on greeting here than in most of his other letters recorded in the New Testament.

10. Based on your knowledge of the Roman Christians thus far, why do you think Paul places so great an emphasis on the greeting?

11. How might Paul's emphasis on greeting affect your practice as a Christian individual and as a congregation?

Paul's Calling

In his first sentence, three phrases modify or define Paul: "slave of Christ Jesus," "called to be an apostle," and "set apart for the Gospel of God." Don't assume you know what these common words mean.

First, Paul is "a servant/slave of Jesus Christ," in the long tradition of those who are servants of the Lord (Hebrew: *ebed YHWH*, as applied to Moses, Joshua, Elijah, David, Nehemiah).

Second, he is a "called apostle." Paul does not appoint himself. Like the other 12 apostles, Paul has seen the risen Christ and is called by Him (see Galatians 1:1). His authority is no less than theirs.

Third, he is "one who has been appointed for the Gospel of God" (Galatians 1:15). Paul's wording emphasizes a past action (appointed) that has a continuing result (he remains appointed for the Gospel). His servanthood and apostleship are based on the Gospel that originates from God.

Paul explains the Gospel by first anchoring it in the Old Testament; it does not originate with Jesus and Paul, but has been promised beforehand (Acts 13:23). The Gospel is about a person: the Son of God whom Paul serves. Both the human and divine natures of the Son are brought out in the parallel structure of 1:3–4:

Jesus is *begotten* of the family of David *according to the flesh*.

Jesus is *declared* the Son of God on the basis of the resurrection *according to the Spirit*.

This Jesus Christ is Lord and is the source of the grace and apostleship Paul has received in order to bring about the "obedience of faith" mentioned in 1:5.

12. Contrast the way people typically use "servant/slave," "called," and "Gospel" with the way Paul uses them here.

13. How do these terms apply to your pastor as one who faithfully continues this apostolic ministry?

The central purpose of Paul's mission is to bring about "the obedience of faith" (1:5). This is usually understood by translators as "the obedience that springs from faith," but should be understood as "obedience that consists of faith" in light of Paul's emphasis throughout this epistle on salvation by faith alone apart from the works of the Law.

14. Read 10:16. What does it mean "to obey the Gospel" ("to accept the good news," NIV)? What is the relationship between faith and good works? Is Paul's primary purpose to bring about faith or the good works that spring from faith?

Roman Christians

The "called apostle" addresses the Roman Christians as "called ones of Jesus Christ" (1:6) and "called saints" (1:7). This refers to the call to faith, especially in Baptism. Paul transforms the typical Greco-Roman greeting, with the words "grace and peace" reflecting his Jewish background. *Shalom*, or "peace," remains a common Jewish greeting today.

The greeting of the typical Greco-Roman letter would be followed by a short thanksgiving to the gods for the health and well-being of the addressee(s). Paul usually includes a thanksgiving section in his letters (except in Galatians), but uses it to offer thanks to the one true God for His work in nurturing the faith and life of the congregation. His prayer here includes a request to see the Roman church in person (1:11) because he desires to impart some “spiritual gift.” Paul is not planning to give some specialized spiritual gift, similar to those in dispute among the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12) or the kind listed on modern spiritual-gift inventories. Instead, he plans to preach the Gospel, which will in itself give spiritual blessings to the congregation according to their need. The purpose of his gift is “in order to strengthen you.”

15. What strength does the Gospel give? How is this a “gift” in your life?

16. In verses 14–15, how does Paul describe his work of preaching the Gospel?

The Power of the Gospel Is Christ

Romans 1:16–17 introduces the central theme of the letter. Paul’s choice of verbs may reflect the fact that the Gospel was under some attack in Rome. He boldly preaches that God Himself bears the punishment of all sins in the crucifixion and death of Christ; he emphasizes this “foolishness” as the center and heart of his proclamation (1 Corinthians 1:17–2:16).

We should not understand the Gospel as an abstract message that is disconnected from the reality of Christ. It is not mere positive thinking or just any “good news.” In the Gospel, Christ presents Himself to us. C. B. Cranfield expresses the relationship between Christ and the power of the Gospel: “The gospel is . . . its subject, Jesus Christ. It is He Himself who is its effectiveness” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 [Edinburgh: Clark, 1975–9], 89).

17. Compare how Paul uses the expression “power of God” in Romans 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:24. How does this support Cranfield’s definition of the Gospel?

18. What power does the Gospel have? Give examples from your life and congregation.

Words to Remember

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” Romans 1:17 NIV

To prepare for “God’s Righteousness,” read Isaiah 45:22–25; 46:12–13; and 51:5–6.

3

God's Righteousness

After meditating on the words “God’s righteousness,” Dr. Martin Luther came to a life-changing conclusion:

[T]he righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteousness shall live.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the word of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word ‘righteousness of God.’ Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. (Helmut T. Lehman ed., *Luther’s Works*, vol. 34 [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960], 337)

19. Before studying what Paul means by “righteous,” discuss how people commonly use this word today. What does it mean to them and to you? Who is a righteous person?

Paul presents God’s righteousness as the most important truth in this thematic verse (1:17) and throughout the letter to the Romans. He uses the word “righteousness” and related terms about 60 times.

20. To understand what Paul means by God’s righteousness, study and summarize three key verses:

1:17

3:21

10:3

There are four primary ways that “righteousness of God” is understood by interpreters: (1) as an attribute of God (i.e., the faithfulness that belongs to God), (2) as a status given by God (i.e., the alien righteousness from God given by judicial declaration, similar to a judge declaring someone not guilty), (3) as an activity of God (i.e., the saving action of God), or (4) as a combination of the above. Martin Luther certainly championed the second option and had a profound impact on Lutheran interpretation of Romans 1:17. But there is also merit to the notion that a combination of options 2 and 3 can give us a fuller understanding of what Paul means by God’s righteousness.

At this point in studying Romans, you need to learn a distinction used by many interpreters. At first this distinction may be confusing, but be patient. Your understanding of Paul’s letter and the central teaching of Christianity depends on this point. Begin by reading about universal justification and individual justification in the glossary (p. 80).

Interpreters have long debated what Paul means by “God’s righteousness,” or the doctrine of justification (in Greek “righteousness” and “justification” come from the same root, *dikaiosune*). This debate has continued especially since Martin Luther and the Reformation lifted up justification as the central teaching of the Scriptures. Many interpreters focus exclusively on the teaching in Romans concerning individual justification. When interpreters make justification a conditional offer from God, they teach that God doesn’t declare people righteous until they believe. In other words, teaching individual justification alone can imply that (1) man must offer something to God for His salvation, (2) sinful humans are spiritually capable of working with God to justify themselves, and (3) faith is not God’s gift through the Word. Focusing exclusively on individual justification runs the risk of making people into their own saviors.

Paul’s emphasis on faith certainly brings attention to individual justification in Romans, already apparent in chapter 1: “through faith, for faith . . . the one who is righteous by faith.” However, Paul’s understanding of the universal character of the “righteousness of God” needs more attention from interpreters.

21. The background for Paul’s understanding of God’s righteousness is surely to be found in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah. Look up the following verses in Isaiah and note how they use the word “righteousness,” especially in relation to salvation:

46:12–13

51:5–6

45:22–25

The Bible does not describe the “righteousness of God” as an abstract concept or attribute of God. Instead, these words identify God’s saving action that will be revealed in the latter days in His Servant. Furthermore, Isaiah 45 demonstrates that the coming of this “righteousness of God” will result in a changed status for the seed of Israel: God will declare them righteous.

Paul uses “God’s righteousness” in a very similar manner to Isaiah. The “righteousness of God” is God’s saving action in Christ that has resulted in a changed status: God declares all sinners righteous based on the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus (universal justification). This changed status is a forensic or legal status grounded in God’s action in Christ; it is not a moral status that is grounded in human goodness (as in Roman Catholicism). In other words, you cannot make yourself righteous. God alone declares a person righteous.

This “righteousness of God,” this saving action in Christ that has resulted in the changed status of sinners, is being revealed in the Gospel. The Gospel reveals Christ in action to save the world. The Gospel is the power of God because in it the saving action in Christ has changed the legal status of sinners before God. The Gospel creates and sustains faith that receives the benefits of this action and status (individual justification). Therefore, justification is not only a *consequence* of the Gospel (individual justification), but is also the *content* of the Gospel (universal justification).

For example, imagine yourself standing before a judge. He has heard your case. He is about to pronounce the verdict. When the judge declares, “I find you not guilty,” his words do three things: (1) they proclaim a message of not guilty, (2) they perform an action of releasing you from guilt, and (3) they bestow a new status of freedom from condemnation.

22. Think of other words or phrases that have power to do what they say (hint: marriages, installations, oaths).

23. Read Romans 3:21–26. When and why did God declare all sinners righteous? Through what means are the benefits of this declaration offered to you?

The judge illustration demonstrates how foolish it is to view the “righteousness of God” and the “Gospel” as abstract ideas or concepts. Righteousness and the Gospel are realities that are physical and personal in Jesus Christ. God demonstrates the real, tangible, and personal character of His righteousness through acts of mercy. The central acts of this righteousness are the real, physical, and personal life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins by which God declares you and all sinners “not guilty.” Paul calls this righteous, saving action of God the “Gospel” (see 1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

The verb used with “righteousness of God” is significant: *apokalupetai* (“is being revealed”). The apocalyptic, end-time deliverance has come in Christ and is NOW being revealed and offered in the Gospel. That deliverance expected at the end of time has come in time and is now present.

24. Look up the word “apocalyptic” in the glossary (p. 80). How does this special word demonstrate the dynamic and urgent nature of the Gospel?

Through Faith

Three times in 1:16–17, Paul reveals the crucial role of faith in receiving salvation.

First, in 1:16 he writes that salvation is “for everyone who believes.” Believing is the way of receiving salvation, even for the Jew: “to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Second, Paul stresses this role of faith through an odd phrase in 1:17: “through faith, for faith.” The righteousness of God can be “seen” only with faith (through faith), and this same righteousness of God creates and nurtures faith (for faith).

Think back to the earlier example of the man standing before the judge. Before the judge makes his pronouncement, the man can only experience doubt and anticipation. He may imagine himself not guilty and even declare himself not guilty. But his imagination and words have no power. He can't trust them. The moment the judge pronounces “not guilty,” these words enable the man to believe. The judge's words have the power to create faith. By himself, the man is utterly powerless. The judge's powerful words cause him to believe!

Third, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 and understands it in the following manner: “The one who is righteous by faith will live.” “By faith” describes “righteous” and not how one “will live.” In other words, this verse emphasizes that righteousness comes from God through faith. Having received righteousness by faith, we live free from condemnation.

25. In view of Paul's teaching about the power of the Gospel, where has *your* faith come from?

26. How might Paul's teaching affect the way you share the Gospel with others?

Romans 1:17b serves as an outline for chapters 1–8 of the epistle. Chapters 1–4 tell us that the only righteous person is the one who is *righteous by faith*, and chapters 5–8 describe the life that the one who is righteous by faith *actually lives*.

Words to Remember

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

To prepare for "God's Wrath Revealed in Creation," read Romans 1:18–32.

4

God's Wrath Revealed in Creation

In the weeks following the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the U.S. stock market lost 3 trillion dollars in value. Thousands of people lost their jobs. Fear and panic paralyzed still more. Though the sins of the terrorists became evident in a matter of moments, only days, weeks, and months could reveal the full effect of their sins and the nation's response.

The continuing effects of the sins of the terrorists and the continuing response by the nations of the world can help explain Paul's view of sin and God's wrath in Romans. From 1:18–3:20, the central point that Paul drives home is this: there is no one who is righteous; therefore, all need God's righteousness. Beginning in 1:18, Paul describes humanity's destructive and paralyzing sin and the unfolding revelation of God's response. Paul establishes a parallel between the revelation of the *righteousness* of God and the revelation of the *wrath* of God: both use the present-tense verb "reveal" (note 1:17 and 1:18). In other words, both continue to be revealed in the present day.

27. God's wrath or anger is a significant topic in Romans and Paul's other epistles. Examine these texts from Romans and summarize their meaning: Romans 2:5–11; 3:5–6; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4.

28. Give specific examples of how the effects of sin reveal themselves today in your community.

The Day of the Lord

God has promised and shown His wrath to sinners since the fall, yet He has also promised and shown His mercy in abundance. We can conclude that God has never shown human beings the full extent of His wrath, which we deserve due to our sin.

The Old Testament speaks of the "Day of the Lord," when God will abundantly show forth His wrath over sin. This Day of the Lord dawned with Christ. All God's wrath against sin—from the first sin of Adam and Eve to the last sin committed at the end of time—was poured out on Jesus at the cross. The Old Testament and the Gospels illustrate this truth with the image of a person drinking a bitter cup of wine from its frothy top down to its gritty sludge at the bottom (Isaiah 51:17–23; Matthew 26:36–44). Jesus swallowed and absorbed every drop of God's anger so that God could bear with us and patiently await our repentance.

But as people continue to despise God's mercy, He continues to show limited evidence of His wrath against those who reject Him. Even as the righteousness of God is now being revealed in the Gospel (1:17), Paul warns that the wrath of God is now being revealed in the chaos of sin (1:18). At the Last Day, those who are not righteous by faith in Christ will experience the full, end-time wrath of God over sin—not because their sin was not forgiven in Christ, but because they rejected the mercy shown by the Creator in Christ.

In summary, there are three clear aspects to the wrath of God in Paul's writings: (1) we have been saved from the damning wrath of God against our sin through Christ, (2) the wrath of God that was

visited upon Christ continues to be visible and is functioning as the Law in our world, and (3) the revelation of the wrath of God will climax on the Last Day, when sinners without faith in Christ will experience God's anger.

29. Compare the patient anger of a parent or friend with the anger of an enemy. How does God use yet hold back His wrath?

30. Why does God allow His wrath against sin to be revealed but still hold back its full force?

The Knowledge of God through Creation

Romans teaches that people can and should know God, even if their knowledge is limited to *natural* revelation through creation and does not include *special* revelation (i.e., God's deeds and words such as in Holy Scripture; see glossary entries, p. 80). Paul does not argue for another way of salvation based upon natural revelation; there is no other way that people can be saved except through faith in Christ (10:9; cf. Acts 4:12). However, Paul emphasizes in 1:19 that God holds all people accountable because they all know Him through creation: "the knowledge of God *is manifest* [evident] among them, since God *manifested* it to them." Notice the timing of the verbs in this verse: God showed His existence in His creation (past) with the result that knowledge of Him is evident (present).

Paul describes further "the knowledge of God that is manifest" in 1:20: "His invisible attributes . . . are clearly seen, namely His eternal power and deity." Paul uses an apparent contradiction when he writes that invisible things are seen. This brings home the point that people can know about God even if He has not communicated with them in a visible or audible way (as He did with ancient Israel).

The existence of God and His power are clearly witnessed in the created world. Just as people know that invisible air exists because of the effects of wind and pressure, everyone knows that God exists because of His creation and care for the universe. The witness of creation should lead people to acknowledge God, causing them to see where He further and more clearly reveals Himself: His deeds and words throughout history, especially in Jesus Christ.

The key point that Paul wants to make in these verses is that God makes Himself known in this real—if limited—manner through creation "in order that they are without excuses." "Without excuse" is a forensic or legal term that fits with the argument Paul is building about the utter unrighteousness of all people.

31. What evidence can you give that people continue to deny the obvious works of God revealed in creation?

32. How might you respond to someone who doubts the existence of God?

33. What might you say to someone who asks, "How can God judge people who have never been taught about Him?"

Our Rebellion and God's Response

Paul gets at the heart of the problem in 1:21: "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God nor give Him thanks." The human response to the Creator is not neutral. Not only do people fail to honor and thank the Creator, but they rebel against Him by actually worshiping the creation instead.

Paul expresses this with his use of the verb "exchange" (1:23, 25, 26). People *exchange* the glory of God for the likeness of men (1:21–24). They *exchange* the truth of God for a lie (1:25–26a). They *exchange* natural sexual practices for unnatural ones (1:26b–31). Although one can see the sin of Adam and Eve (exchanged truth of God for a lie) or Israel worshiping the golden calf (exchanged glory of God for the likeness of an animal), these verses are primarily speaking of the rebellion of the wider Gentile world (e.g., homosexuality was widely practiced in the Greco-Roman world).

The result of humanity's rebellion is that God "hands them over" to their sinful rebellion (1:24, 26, 28). This "handing over" should not be seen as God giving up on them. God allows sinful indulgence so that man's rebellion against the Creator becomes even more apparent, with the result that people see the absurdity of their sin and repent.

34. Give specific examples of how people exchange truth for a lie. Describe a time when you were deceived or confused by false teaching.

Paul drives his point home by heaping up the nouns in 1:29–30. He concludes in 1:32: "Even though they [rebellious people] know the decree of God, namely that those who do such things deserve death, yet they not only do them, but also approve those who practice them."

35. List different words for "sinner" that Paul uses in 1:29–30.

As you read Paul's description of God's wrath, don't become discouraged. Recall that God uses and limits His wrath in order to lead more people to repentance! Just as the anger of a loving parent leads a child to say, "I'm sorry," God's wrath is meant to lead us to repent. His wrath serves His mercy so that He may save you, your family, your neighbors, and all sinners through His beloved Son, Jesus.

Words to Remember

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being under-stood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Romans 1:20 NIV

To prepare for "God's Wrath Revealed in the Law," read Romans 2:1–3:20.

5

God's Wrath Revealed in the Law

By the beginning of chapter 2, Paul has his readers identifying themselves as definitely more righteous than the rebellious sinners under the wrath of God in 1:18–32. Confident that the reader has taken this self-righteous posture, Paul abruptly addresses the reader in 2:1 as one who is also under God's judgment: "Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, everyone who judges; for in that you judge the other person, you are condemning yourself, because you, the one who judges, are doing the same things."

Paul's use of "O man" makes this address very personal and yet very universal. His use of "no excuse" ties this legal accusation against the reader with the accusation leveled against the rebellious sinners in 1:20; both groups of sinners are under God's judgment.

Teaching through Diatribe

Scholars have noted that Paul frequently uses the ancient rhetorical style of *diatribe* in Romans. Diatribe is asking a question and then providing an answer. For example, Romans 3:1: "What, therefore, is the advantage of the Jew, or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way!" As most teachers know, questioning is a good teaching tool. Paul anticipates the questions of his readers and provides a response.

This study of Romans places special emphasis on Paul's diatribe. Look for questions surrounded by quotation marks below. Carefully consider Paul's questions and write down his answers.

36. Carefully read 2:1 and list three examples of Paul's courtroom language.

37. How do Paul's words undermine your ability to pass judgment on other people?

Paul becomes even more pointed in 2:3: "Do you reckon this, O man, the one who is judging those who do such things even while you are doing the same things, that you yourself will escape the judgment of God?" Another forensic term, "reckon," is used here and much more in chapter 4 due to its presence in the Greek translation of Genesis 15:6. Paul makes it clear that we should not misuse God's grace; God's kind forbearance is meant to lead us to repentance (2:4). Those who refuse to repent will face wrath (2:5).

38. "When you, a mere man, pass judgment on them [sinners] and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?" (2:3 NIV; read Exodus 32:1–14).

39. "Do you show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, . . . not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (2:4 NIV; read Judges 2:16–23).

40. Recall a time when another person took you for granted. How did that affect your relationship with that person?

41. How might taking God's love for granted affect your relationship with Him?

42. "You [Jewish believers], . . . who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" (2:21 NIV; read Psalm 1:2).

Romans 2:7–9, as well as 2:13, may appear to teach righteousness through works. One should see, however, that "obedience to the truth" (2:8) is faith-born and nurtured by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul sets up a very important point for all his readers, especially Jewish Christians, when he states: "For not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be declared righteous" (2:13). Many Jews of the first century considered themselves part of the righteous people of God simply because they possessed and heard God's Law. Paul points out that in spite of the value of having and hearing the Law, the only people God declares righteous according to the Law are those who keep the Law *perfectly*.

43. Can you or anyone keep God's Law perfectly? Explain your answer.

In 2:17–21, Paul directs his focus on Jewish Christians who take comfort in possessing and hearing the Law as the cornerstone of their righteous status before God. Paul uses the term *nomos* (Law) in several different ways, but most often as the Mosaic Law that makes ethical demands. He accuses the Jews of transgressing the same commandments as the pagan Gentiles (2:21–23). He climaxes his argument by quoting the Old Testament as the authority for his teaching.

44. "You [Jewish believers] who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?" (2:21–22 NIV; read 2:24).

Along with pride in the Law, Jewish people also took pride in circumcision as an indicator of their righteous status before God. Paul debunks such an understanding in 2:25–29. He emphasizes that circumcision in and of itself does a Jew no good if he does not keep the Law perfectly or have faith in the promise.

God gave circumcision to the Israelites as a witness that the Messiah would be born among them. But some Jewish groups of the first century gave circumcision a new meaning. Paul emphasizes the “circumcision of the heart” as more important than the outward sign (2:29).

45. “If those who are not circumcised keep the Law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?” (2:26 NIV; read 2:28–29).

46. The physical act of circumcision involves painful cutting. Read Deuteronomy 30:1–6 and Romans 2:29. Reflect on Paul’s use of “circumcision of the heart.” How has your heart been circumcised?

Accountable to God

In the opening verses of chapter 3, Paul defends the value of being a Jew, defends God from the criticism of being unjust, and defends himself from the criticism of encouraging evil in order that good may come (3:1–8). His discussion of the unrighteousness of all humanity climaxes in 3:9–18, which weaves Old Testament quotations into one seamless, vivid, and powerful testimony to universal unrighteousness. Remember, Paul is a Jew who now draws on the Old Testament as the ultimate authority that affirms this key biblical truth of 3:9: “Jews and Greeks ALL are under [subject to] sin.” Notice the inclusive statements in 3:10–18 (e.g., “no righteous one, not even one”; “no one who understands, no one who seeks God”; “all turned away”; “no one does good, not so much as one”). Scripture has spoken: no one is righteous!

47. “What advantage . . . is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?” (3:1 NIV; read 3:2; 9:4–5).

48. “What if some [Jewish people] did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness?” (3:3 NIV; read 3:4; 11:26–29).

49. “If our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing His wrath on us? . . . If that were so, how could God judge the world?” (3:5–6a NIV; read 2:6b).

50. "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness . . . , why am I still condemned as a sinner?" (3:7 NIV; read 3:8a; 9:18–21).

51. "What shall we conclude then? Are we [Jewish people] any better?" (3:9 NIV; read 5:12; 11:32).

Can you imagine a new pastor preaching this message as his initial sermon to your congregation? This is what Paul is doing! Although many preachers shy away from such condemning Law, Paul knows that if the Roman Christians do not fully comprehend their unrighteousness, they will never fully comprehend their complete need for Christ's righteousness and trust fully in Him for what they do not have. Paul makes God's purpose for the Law clear in 3:19: "in order that every mouth is stopped and all the world is held accountable to God."

Romans 3:20 summarizes Paul's position on the relationship between works of the Law and our righteous status before God: "By the works of the Law no man will be declared righteous before Him, since through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

Paul addresses the basic problem with Judaism and the religious views of most people: an optimistic anthropology. In other words, most religions teach that human beings are basically good and can use that goodness to win favor with their gods. Jews did not deny grace or faith as vital to a person's righteous status, but they emphasized that works played a role in a person's righteous status. They denied that our righteousness is an alien righteousness that is received by God's grace alone through faith alone. That's how God takes away your sin and declares you righteous: by grace through faith in Christ alone!

Words to Remember

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. Romans 3:20 NIV

6

The Law in Romans

Paul's teaching about the Law not only divided people in the first century and later during the Protestant Reformation; it remains a hotly debated subject in modern scholarship. Many modern scholars, following the work of E. P. Sanders in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress, 1977), hold that the apostle Paul did not understand Judaism, even though he was trained as a rabbi. They argue that first-century Judaism was not the works-righteous religion that Paul describes. They emphasize Judaism's teaching about the role of grace and faith in the covenant.

Because of their corrective emphasis on grace and faith as central to entrance into the covenant, these scholars downplay evidence of the significant role that works of the Law played for many Jews. Paul was not only concerned about a few Jewish laws that were preventing Gentiles from being included in the people of God, but he was also concerned about Jews and some Jewish Christians who viewed their obedience to the Law, or at least their intent to obey, as a vital part of their righteous status before God.

After the crucified Christ confronted Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul realized the huge problem people encounter when they view their works as playing any role in salvation. Possessing, hearing, and intending to obey the Law are not enough. Paul saw that the need for perfect obedience was not being acknowledged in Judaism.

52. Reflect briefly on the importance of human law for your personal and national well-being. What service does the law provide? How might appreciation for the benefits of the law confuse people about the use of the law?

When studying Romans, we must carefully distinguish the different ways Paul uses the word *nomos* or "law." The meaning of law in Paul's letters depends on the context. The various possible meanings include the following: a rule or authority in the broad and general sense (similar to the way we speak of the law of gravity); the Torah (i.e., the Pentateuch or all of the Old Testament); and the Mosaic Law given at Sinai (especially the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments).

53. Look up the following passages. What use of the word "law" does Paul have in view?
3:10–20

3:27

8:2

54. Why can't the Law make *you* righteous? See 2:13; 3:19–20, 23.

Contrary to popular opinion, the primary purpose of the Law is not to promote moral behavior. In fact, our sinful nature actually rebels against the Law as a moral guide: "Sin, finding opportunity in the command, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness" (7:8).

55. Recall an example when a command or rule only provoked rebellion. How does this reaction illustrate the weakness of the Law? How does it illustrate the weakness of human beings?

Paul states repeatedly that the primary purpose of the Law is to bring the knowledge of sin to light: "through the Law comes knowledge of sin" (3:20b); "for the Law brings wrath, but where there is no Law, neither is there transgression" (4:15); and "the Law entered in order that the transgression increase" (5:20). The Law actually condemns and crushes every illusion that we can attain righteousness before God through obedience to the Law.

56. Look up Romans 3:31; 7:7; 7:12–13 and summarize Paul's attitude toward the Law.

57. According to Paul, what's the most important use of the Law?

As you study these passages about God's Law, remember that Jesus fulfilled God's Law for you. Jesus took the suffering you deserve so that you might receive righteousness, peace, and joy in Him. That's the real point that Paul drives toward in this first part of Romans: your salvation through Christ.

Words to Remember

Through the law we become conscious of sin. Romans 3:20b NIV

To prepare for "Righteousness Revealed in Christ," read Romans 3:21–31.

7

Righteousness Revealed in Christ

In recent years translators have debated whether “faith of Jesus Christ” should be translated as “faith (fulness) *of* Jesus Christ” (subjective genitive) or “faith *in* Jesus Christ” (objective genitive; 3:22). Martin Luther—who tended to emphasize faith early in the Reformation—understood it as the latter and influenced interpretation in this direction. Although both translations of the Greek are possible, the context slightly favors the subjective genitive rendering “faith(fulness) of Jesus Christ.”

58. Briefly reflect on the difference between these two translations. What does each translation mean? What difference does this make?

Paul is stating that the righteousness of God is manifested in Christ's faithful obedience and actions (His incarnation, birth, life, death, and resurrection). This Christ-centered interpretation does not ignore the role of faith in receiving this righteousness. Paul goes on in this same verse to emphasize the role of faith by stating that this “righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ [is] for all the ones who have faith.” Notice that Paul would be a bit redundant and more human-centered if he described this righteousness as “the righteousness of God through [*our*] *faith in Jesus Christ* for all *the ones who have faith*.” The faith that Paul refers to in 3:22 is Jesus' faith, His faithfulness to you that makes you righteous.

The important role of faith apart from works in receiving this righteousness is introduced in 1:17 and is now developed here and throughout Roman 4 with the discussion of Abraham as the example of righteousness by faith.

59. In your own words, describe how the translation “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” provides comfort for you.

60. How might you use this passage to counsel people who struggle with doubts about the strength of their faith?

Romans 3:21–31 is without doubt the heart and center of this epistle. Here Paul brings his argument, introduced in 1:16–17, to a head as he finally returns to the theme of the righteousness of God. He has shown that no one is righteous, not even those who know the Law and are circumcised. God is the only righteous One, and He has revealed His righteousness in the person of Christ, the righteousness that was promised in the Old Testament and that everyone desperately needs. This righteousness is His (“of God”) and alien to us. The tense of the verb—“has been revealed”—indicates that this revelation has already happened (in Christ) and has a continuing result (as the Gospel is preached).

Paul emphasizes the universal scope of both human sin and the work of Christ in Romans 3:23–24: “For there is no distinction, since everyone sinned and lacks the glory of God, [everyone is] declared righteous by His grace as a gift through the ransom in Christ Jesus.” “Glory of God” here is a reference to the image or likeness of God that Adam and Eve had at creation and lost in the fall (cf. 1:23).

This text is an important example of universal justification—namely that God has declared righteous *all* sinners in Jesus Christ. This declaration is accomplished in Christ and completely apart from us. The universal nature of this action by God and apart from us is vital to the proclamation of the Gospel. If God has declared the whole world righteous for the sake of Christ, then you can be certain that He has declared you righteous.

61. Why does Paul describe the fall into sin as a loss of the “glory of God”?

Paul bases his declaration on God's grace (undeserved love) given to the world through the ransom (payment for sin) in Christ Jesus (3:24). Here the Gospel, the Good News, radiates forth. The righteousness of God is not merely an attribute of God; it is the reality of God in Christ who has graciously acted to save the whole world. The focus on God the Father's role is emphasized in 3:25: “whom God put forth over as a mercy seat sacrifice, [a gift appropriated] through faith in His blood, in order to show His righteousness.” Although you will see the Greek word *hilastarion* translated in a variety of ways, “mercy seat sacrifice” captures the technical meaning of this term as a rendering of the Hebrew *kapporet*, the lid of the ark of the covenant where blood was poured on the Day of Atonement (cf. Hebrews 9:5 and Leviticus 16).

62. Some Christians today are uncomfortable talking about the “blood of Christ.” Why does Paul emphasize Christ's blood?

63. How do the worship services of your congregation also emphasize the blood of Christ?

Individual justification—personally receiving the benefits of God's universal declaration—is emphasized again in 3:26: “in order to be righteous Himself and to declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.” The righteousness that we need, which is present in Jesus Christ, is received through faith in Christ apart from anything that we do. This means we have nothing to boast about; God accomplished our salvation through His past action in Christ and then through His present action in the Gospel as He brings us to faith in Christ.

64. “Where . . . is boasting [in personal righteousness]?” (3:27 NIV; read 2:23–24; 11:17–21).

65. “On what principle is it [boasting] excluded? On that of observing the Law?” (3:27; read 3:27b–28; 3:20–21).

Romans 3:28 makes monergism (rather than synergism; see glossary, p. 80) very clear: “For we reckon that a man is declared righteous by faith without the works of the Law.” Notice the form of the verb “is declared righteous” (see “righteousness of God” in glossary, p. 80). Righteousness is not something we declare about ourselves or achieve for ourselves. God declares us righteous. Whether Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, we become righteous and live in this righteousness that comes through Spirit-worked faith (3:30).

66. “Is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles too?” (3:29 NIV; read 3:29b–30).

67. “Do we [Christians] . . . nullify the law by this faith?” (3:31 NIV; read 3:31b; 7:12, 22).

Universal and Individual Justification

This study earlier described a tendency of some interpreters to focus exclusively on justification *by faith*, or individual justification. Romans certainly teaches this individual side of the doctrine with its repeated emphasis on faith, but Romans also teaches universal justification. For example, 3:24 states that “everyone is being declared righteous by His grace.” Romans 4:5 states that God declares righteous the ungodly (not only those who come to faith; cf. 5:7–8, which states that according to our powerless time, while we were still sinners, Christ died on behalf of the ungodly).

In Romans 5, Paul again trumpets forth universal justification. Romans 5:10 speaks of this same reality with the language of reconciliation: “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son [universal], how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by His life [individual].” Notice this same idea in 2 Corinthians 5:19–20: “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting trespasses against them [universal]. . . . We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God [individual].”

68. Read 5:15, 18–19. How do these verses also show the pattern of universal and individual justification?

Some interpreters dismiss universal justification as legal fiction, stating that such a declaration is not real if it is not received by faith. It is, however, real and present in Jesus Christ. Jesus took on the sin of all humanity in His flesh. God poured out upon Christ at the cross His wrath against every sin and sinner. On the basis of Christ’s perfect life, atoning sacrifice, and victorious resurrection, God looks at every sinner in Christ and declares everyone righteous. This objective declaration of the world’s righteous status before God is present in the flesh-and-blood Jesus. The benefits of this universal declaration are totally and fully appropriated by you and others when the Holy Spirit creates faith in Christ through the Gospel, either through Baptism or the spoken Word.

Words to Remember

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8 NIV

To prepare for "Righteous Abraham," read Romans 4:1–25.

8

Righteous Abraham

The Prayer of Mannaseh, written around 300 B.C., describes Abraham as a man who never sinned. Apparently some Jewish people looked upon Abraham as a person who was justified by his perfect life. First-century rabbis often pointed to Abraham as the shining example of works righteousness and the need for circumcision. In Romans 4, Paul completely overturns their arguments.

Paul uses the story of Genesis over and against such false Jewish tradition in order to teach that Abraham, too, was justified by faith. You will notice a significant shift in the vocabulary and content of Romans at this point. The argument becomes much simpler and easier to follow. Paul illustrates the point he made in 3:21–31 by putting forth the example of Abraham, the one declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the Law.

69. Read Genesis 12:10–20; 20:8–13. What evidence do you see that Abraham was a sinner who needed God's righteousness?

We could ask, "Why pick Abraham? Why not Jacob or Moses or Peter?" There are several reasons that Paul chooses Abraham.

First, Genesis 15:6 gives Paul the perfect "proof passage" for justification by faith: "He [Abram] believed Yahweh [the LORD] and it was credited to him as righteousness." In this Old Testament text and Habakkuk 2:4, Paul finds bedrock for his teaching about justification.

Second, the covenant of circumcision comes after the statement in Genesis 15:6 (see Genesis 17:9–14). It is very helpful for Paul's Gentile mission to be able to point to Abraham as a man who was declared righteous by faith *before* he was circumcised.

Third, Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel and highly revered by first-century Jews. If his righteousness was founded upon faith alone, this would provide compelling evidence for those Jewish Christians who considered themselves to be children of Abraham by the flesh.

Fourth, also helpful for the Gentile mission is the fact that Abraham lived before the Mosaic Law was given. Like the Gentiles, Abraham never learned the Law given to Moses and had no opportunity to use it for his justification.

70. Most people you meet today are not Jewish. How do the people you know try to justify themselves? How is this similar to the arguments of the Jewish people in Paul's day?

71. "What did Abraham discover in this matter [of righteousness]? . . . What does the Scripture say?" (4:1, 3a; read 4:3, 13).

The Importance of Genesis 15:6

Paul looks to the Old Testament as the authority in his teaching: “For what does Scripture say?” (4:3). In fact, Romans uses the Old Testament more than any other New Testament book (54 quotations, 27 references). Jews and Jewish Christians had a very strong respect for the authority of the Old Testament; Gentile Christians very quickly learned to respect the testimony of the Old Testament. For these reasons, Scripture plays the chief role in Paul’s argument.

As noted above, Genesis 15:6 is a wonderful text for Paul’s teaching because it describes a time when Abraham had not been circumcised and had not received the Law. Paul probably sees this text as a gift from God to prove a central point in his proclamation.

72. Romans 4:3 provides Paul with two key words: “Abraham *believed* God, and it was *reckoned* to him as righteousness.” How would you describe the way these words work together?

We should also note the importance of *righteousness*. Certainly the presence of this noun is what draws Paul to this text. The righteousness that is revealed in the Gospel (Romans 1:16–17) was present and given as the Gospel already in the Old Testament. The promise given to Abraham was the Gospel that spoke of Christ, who is the righteousness of God.

The saints of the Old Testament did not receive salvation in a different manner from us; they also believed and individually received the righteousness that resulted from God’s universal declaration pronounced for the sake of Christ. Righteousness and salvation have *always* been received by grace through faith.

Romans 4:4–8 makes it very clear that this righteousness is by faith alone, not faith *and* works. Here Paul points out the difference between *wages* reckoned as an *obligation* for work and *righteousness* reckoned by *grace* in light of faith. This point is especially driven home by the description of God as “the one who declares righteous the ungodly.” This phrase describes God as the one who declares righteous all the ungodly in light of Christ’s work of atonement (universal justification). The one who believes in this God then receives the benefits of this declaration (individual justification).

73. How does the word “wicked” in 4:5 emphasize that salvation is not earned, but given by God?

Righteous Status Does Not Depend on Circumcision

Circumcision was one of the most widely practiced operations in the ancient world. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, only Caucasian, Mongol, Finnish, and Hungarian people were unfamiliar with the practice. Although most cultures practiced circumcision when boys reached 10 to 12 years of age, the Hebrews circumcised their sons only eight days after birth. The early age of circumcision among the Hebrews marked them as different from other nations (Genesis 17).

In other passages, Paul compares circumcision with Baptism (Colossians 2:11–14). Note that just as circumcision is always passive (no one circumcises himself!), Baptism is always passive, emphasizing that God’s blessings come by grace through faith and not through an individual’s good deeds.

74. Read Genesis 17:10–14. What role did circumcision play in the Old Testament?

Paul's letter to the Galatians illustrates the challenge that circumcision posed in the Jewish Christian churches as they expanded their mission to Gentiles. Some Jewish Christians insisted that all Christians (Jewish and Gentile) be circumcised in obedience to the Law. If circumcision posed a problem in Galatia, it probably also challenged many other congregations where there was a Jewish Christian element, including some of the house-churches in Rome.

Paul carefully points out that Abraham was *not* circumcised when the biblical text states that God reckoned righteousness to him. Therefore, "the blessed one" who is righteous is not limited to the person who is circumcised, but includes the uncircumcised. Faith in the promise—not circumcision—is the key to righteous status.

75. "Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?" (4:9 NIV; read 4:11, 16).

Paul states that Abraham received circumcision as a "seal" of the righteousness given through faith. Sealing refers to the closing of a letter with the personal insignia of a ruler. The seal testifies that the contents of the letter belong to the ruler. The seal sets apart the letter as the ruler's personal property.

Paul connects the imagery of "sealing" with the use of God's name in Baptism (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30; Revelation 7:3–8). This analogy with Baptism can help us understand the relationship between faith and circumcision. Baptism creates or nurtures faith that receives the righteousness of God. One should never disconnect the sacramental act from faith. This is also true for circumcision. Paul warns against disconnecting faith from circumcision, which he describes as "a seal of the righteousness of faith."

76. "Under what circumstances was it [righteousness] credited? Was it after he [Abraham] was circumcised, or before?" (4:10 NIV; read 4:10b–11).

The Promise Comes before the Law

At the end of chapter 4, Paul emphasizes "the promise." The promise should be understood as the Old Testament equivalent of the Gospel. Here's why. In Genesis 15:5, God promises: "So shall your descendents be [as innumerable as the stars]" (cf. Romans 4:18). This promise proclaimed the Gospel because it assured Abraham of the birth of the Messiah (who would bless all nations). God promised that the Messiah would come through Abraham, even though Abraham did not yet have a son (Genesis 12:3).

Paul notes that God's promise to Abraham emphasized what God would do, not what we should do or have to do. Note the parallel structure in 4:13, which emphasizes that the promise came to Abraham through faith and not through the Law. Paul emphasizes that if you teach righteousness through the Law, you cancel the promise that came before the Law and gave righteousness to those who believed (4:14).

"According to grace," emphasized previously in 3:24, becomes prominent again in 4:16. The universal nature of God's promise to Abraham also is clear: he is to be the father of all nations, not only Israel.

77. How has this universal aspect of God's promise to Abraham come true in our times?

At this point in the study you may ask yourself: “Why does Paul continue to emphasize this particular point?” Take note! If you misunderstand what the Bible teaches about angels, Old Testament events, or practical wisdom, that would be a shame. But if you misunderstand what the Bible teaches about justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ, the results could be damning! The doctrine of justification is the chief doctrine of Holy Scripture. Persist in studying Paul’s arguments, and see every other teaching of Scripture in light of this chief doctrine. This will enlighten your understanding of the Christian faith and life.

Not only does Paul put forth Abraham as an example of faith, but he also describes the nature of the faith of Abraham. In spite of his body—which had already “died”—and the “deadness” of Sarah’s womb, Abraham trusted God’s promise. Abraham’s faith clung to the promise, even though it defied logic.

Paul states in 4:24 that this truth in Genesis is also written for his readers, who believe in the same God who defies all logic: the God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. Just as Abraham believed that God would bring life out of his own dying body and the dead womb of Sarah, so also we believe that God brought life again into the dead body of Jesus and raised Him from His tomb. Just as Abraham believed in God’s promise, we have faith in the fulfillment of God’s promise.

78. Many Christians understand that Jesus died for the forgiveness of their sins. But what role does the resurrection play in our salvation? Read 4:25.

Words to Remember

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:25 NIV

To prepare for “Peace with God,” read Romans 5:1–11.

Controversies	False Understanding	True Understanding
Universalism	Romans never mentions hell. Therefore, God won't send anyone to hell or punish anyone eternally. Eventually all people will be saved. (A variation holds that perhaps some people will be annihilated, but they won't suffer eternally.)	Though Paul never mentions hell in Romans, he mentions it in his other letters (Galatians 1:8-9 and 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). Romans frequently describes God's wrath against sin (e.g., 2:5-10).
Individual Justification Alone	No one is declared righteous until they believe in Christ.	God declared all sinners righteous in Christ at His crucifixion and resurrection. We appropriate the benefits of this universal declaration when we are individually brought to Christ.
Antinomianism	Because God has forgiven Christians, the Law no longer applies to them (6:14). There is no "third use" of the Law that guides Christians in doing good works.	Paul teaches that the Law still applies to anyone who commits sin. Because a Christian is justified by grace, he does not live under the Law's condemnation. However, because a Christian continues to sin, the Law still speaks to him and calls him to repent (6:1-2).
Law-based Sanctification	Now that Christ has forgiven us, we have the ability to progressively grow more holy. Christ saved us so that we could fulfill the Law (13:8-10).	Christians cannot fulfill the Law by their own strength. The Spirit of Christ sanctifies us and fulfills the Law in us (8:3-4, 9a).
Double Predestination	Before the creation, God chose to save some people by grace but damn others to eternal punishment (9:22-24).	Note that 9:22-24 provides questions, not statements of fact. Paul doesn't answer these questions by writing that God predestined people for eternal punishment. He affirms the salvation of the Gentiles and the remnant of Israel.
Dispensationalism	God divides up history into different dispensations during which different rules, even different means of salvation, apply. At the end of time God will grant the Jews an era of grace during which all Israelites will be saved (11:26).	Note that "all Israel" includes both Jews and Gentiles. In other words, "Israel" in this passage refers to the church, not a particular nation or ethnic group. See Galatians 6:15-16. God saves all people through Christ alone.
Law Motivation	Preachers should use the Law to make Christians feel guilty, to prod and motivate them so that they do good works. That's what Paul does in chapters 12-15.	Paul bases motivation for good works on God's mercy rather than the Law (8:3-4; 12:1; 15:7). The first 11 chapters of Romans lay out the Gospel motivation for the Christian life! The Gospel is the foundation for both justification and sanctification.
Open Fellowship	God loves and accepts everybody, no matter what they do or teach. Therefore, the church should openly accept and work with all people despite their beliefs or actions (15:7).	Paul bases acceptance of one another on the means by which Christ accepts us: repentance and faith (15:7). In other words, Christians call one another to repentance. Paul ends his letter by warning against false teachers who undermine this doctrine (16:17-18).
Ordination of Women	Junias was a woman apostle in the early church (16:7), but male clergy covered up her legacy and the legacy of other women ministers. Since Junias was a woman apostle, all churches should ordain women as pastors.	Junias can be a male or female name. Grammatically, "outstanding among the apostles" likely means "well-known by the apostles." Throughout his other letters, Paul clearly distinguishes between the roles of men and women (1 Corinthians 14:33-35; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Historically, women apostles were unknown among early Christians.

9

Peace with God

Chapter 5 marks a significant shift in Paul's presentation. Up to this point he has been focusing on the topic of righteousness (who is righteous? and how does one become righteous?). Romans 5–8 changes focus to the life that results from being righteous by faith. Paul now emphasizes the benefits that justification through faith in Christ gives (peace, hope, victory over death, love of God, etc.). In other words, Paul describes here how the reception of God's righteousness by faith leads to a new and eternal life.

Paul begins by writing: "Because we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This declaration has many tangible and wonderful results in the life of the Christian. Paul first highlights "peace with God." Note that the Greek noun *eirene* draws on the rich Old Testament and Jewish emphasis on the Hebrew word of greeting, *shalom*. We are no longer enemies of God who face His wrath (cf. Romans 1:18–3:20), but are reconciled with God and are at peace. This is a present reality, not merely something that we look forward to at the end of time. This peace was not accomplished through our negotiation or as part of the spoils from our victory, but is a peace accomplished through Christ.

79. What does Paul's phrase "peace with God" bring to mind for you as a believer? Describe the difference this makes for you each day.

Second, Paul also stresses the present results of justification: "through whom also we *have obtained* access by faith into the grace in which we stand" (5:2). The phrase implies ritual access to God's gracious presence as occurs in worship through God's Word and Sacraments (think also of the Old Testament temple). Once again, the undeserved and unmerited aspect of this status before God is emphasized with the mention of grace.

80. How do the blessings of worship services contribute to "peace with God" in your life?

81. What memorable places in the worship service of your congregation highlight God's peace and open access to His grace?

Third, the *present* results of justification continue to be expressed in 5:2b–5 with the verb form "we are boasting" and the noun "hope." Our future glorified state (restoration of "the glory of God") is so certain in Christ that we "are boasting" already now in anticipation and are already filled with "hope." Moreover, we not only boast in the certain hope of the wonderful glory ahead, but—unlike the world—we boast even in our present struggles and suffering (5:3–5).

Here Paul exhibits the “theology of the cross.” Suffering not only shaped Christ’s life, but it also shapes the lives of all His faithful followers. Although suffering results from sin in this world, God uses suffering for good in our lives; it leads to endurance, character, and hope (5:4). Therefore, we not only accept the suffering that comes because of our faithfulness to Christ, but we even “boast” in it.

82. When you hear someone talking about their suffering, how can you tell whether they are boasting in suffering or whining because of it?

83. Recall an occasion when you whined when instead you could have boasted like Paul. How might this attitude toward suffering change the life of your congregation?

Romans 5:5 shows how the “hope of the glory of God” comes to us: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” The words “has been poured” paint an image that calls to mind Holy Baptism. Although Baptism is not the only way that God pours His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, it is the most probable source of this image. This connection is supported by the prominence that Paul gives to Baptism in Romans 6:1–4.

Reconciled While Still Sinners

Verses 6–11 are the clearest and most abundant testimony to universal justification in this epistle. Notice the repeated emphasis on God’s action in Christ taking place *before* we received the righteousness of God by faith. This emphasis is especially clear in 5:6: “Yet Christ, while we were without strength, according to that [powerless] time, died for the ones who are ungodly.” There was no righteousness in us, no godliness that merited God’s action on our behalf.

84. Read 5:8–9. Explain how these verses comfort you in the midst of your sins.

As is clear from the parallelism between 5:9 and 5:10, the reality of justification can also be communicated with the language of reconciliation. The direct correspondence between justification and reconciliation helps us to understand how justification is often proclaimed in Scripture without using the words “righteousness” or “justification” (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:16–21).

Words to Remember

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8 NIV

To prepare for “The Pattern of Death and Life,” read Romans 5:12–21.

10

The Pattern of Death and Life

A popular expression among some counselors encourages people to “make their peace with death.” The sick and the elderly are counseled to think of death as a friend and not an enemy. In contrast, Paul describes death as the opposite of life as God created it. It is—and always will be—an enemy to be conquered. Paul wants to demonstrate that one who is righteous by faith lives a life that is victorious over sin and death.

In order to demonstrate this truth, Paul sets forth how sin and death came into this world and how they were overcome by Christ. This portion of Romans is the *sedes doctrinae* for original sin: the sinful condition that all humankind inherits as the result of Adam's disobedience.

Even though Eve was also involved with the first sin, Paul focuses on Adam here to help shape the “one man Adam” and the “one man Christ” pattern. He begins in 5:12 by clearly and unambiguously anchoring the origin of sin and death in Adam's disobedience: “Even as sin entered the world through one man and through sin death [also entered], therefore death came to all men, because all men sinned.”

Some scholars debate about how this sentence should be understood, as is visible from the six options discussed by C. E. B. Cranfield: (1) “because of which [death] all people sinned,” (2) “in whom [Adam] all people sinned,” (3) “because of whom [Adam] all people sinned,” (4) “because all people sinned,” (5) “because all people sinned [after Adam's example],” and (6) “because all people sinned [because of Adam]” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 [Edinburgh: Clark, 1975–9], 274–9).

Though many options have been suggested over the years, this phrase in 5:12 clearly grounds our sin and resulting death in Adam's disobedience. We must avoid any interpretation that emphasizes that sin is only wrong action or inaction and not an inherited condition.

An illustration may reveal why this is important. For some interpreters, sin works like a skin disease. It appears on the surface of a person and, when quickly detected, is easily treated. In contrast, Paul wants us to understand the thoroughly corrupting power of sin. Like a genetic illness that infects every cell in the body, sin dwells in every aspect of a person. Romans 5:12 states that we begin life with sin because we inherit it from our parents. We carry within us the cause of our own demise.

85. How might the different pictures of sin described above affect the way people look at newborn children and their spiritual needs?

In Romans 5:14 Paul calls Adam a “type of the one who is to come.” The basic sense of the word “type” is “pattern.” Paul uses this term for interpreting the Old Testament both here and in 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 10:11. He views Old Testament events as important patterns for understanding how God works with His church.

Already within the Old Testament, the prophets saw “patterns” in earlier biblical writings, which they used to describe past, present, or future actions of God. New Testament writers follow this example in seeing various people, institutions, and events in biblical history as types or patterns of a later person, institution, or event.

86. Based on your knowledge of the Old Testament, give an example of a type or pattern. For help, see Romans 4:3, 6.

The question arises: How is Adam, who is so different from Christ, a “type” of Christ? Paul highlights the pattern by noting that both Adam and Christ did one thing that had amazing consequences: Adam disobeyed and brought the chaos of sin into all creation, but Christ obeyed and ended the dominion of sin over creation. Therefore, Adam’s negative act with its far-reaching consequences serves as a pattern to help us understand Christ’s positive act with its even more amazing consequences.

Think of the vast difference between a photo negative and a photo print. Looking at both, you can easily detect a similarity in pattern. But while the negative appears drab and strange, the print appears lively, colorful, and natural. In a similar way, Paul points out the common pattern between the negative role of Adam and the positive role of Christ.

This is as far as the typology or pattern goes. Paul is very careful to contrast the actions of Adam and Christ in 5:15: “For if the masses died by the trespass of the one, how much more did God’s grace and the gift by [that] grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflow to the masses.” Notice the expression “how much more” here and in 5:17. The one action of Adam brought death to all; God’s grace in Christ overcame not only Adam’s sin, but the sin Adam passed to all humanity. This contrast continues to be emphasized in 5:16: “Namely, the gift is not like the one man’s sinning: for on the one hand judgment came after the one sin that led to condemnation, but on the other hand grace after many trespasses led to a righteous status.” The contrast is also very pointed in 5:19: Adam disobeyed, but Christ obeyed.

87. Just as Paul draws a comparison between Adam and Christ, draw a comparison between Christ and you. For help, read 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Jewish Views about the Origin of Evil and Free Will

Many readers of Romans 5 assume that Paul is affirming a traditional Jewish understanding of the fall of Adam and its consequences for creation. This is not the case. Jewish people of the first century gave various explanations of how sin came into the world: some blamed the fallen angels (e.g., 1 Enoch 6–11), some blamed Eve (Life of Adam and Eve 18:1 and Sirach 25:24), and some blamed an evil inclination in Adam created by God (4 Ezra 3:20–30).

88. How might the above views about evil affect a person’s understanding of salvation?

Also in contrast to Paul, many first-century Jews affirmed that humans living after the sin of Adam continue to have a free will to choose between good and evil (for example, the late first-century Jewish document 2 Baruch; Philo, writing about A.D. 40 in *Quod deus sit immutabilis* 10:47; and Josephus in *Jewish Wars* 2:165).

89. How might the above views about the power of the human will affect a person’s understanding of salvation and sanctification?

90. Revisit Romans 3:10–18. What picture of the human will has Paul compiled here from the Psalms?

Hugo Odeberg, in his valuable book *Pharisaism and Christianity*, describes this denial of original sin within first-century Judaism:

Inasmuch as this [soul] . . . is indestructible, Pharisaic Judaism is unable to comprehend the fall of man and even less the idea of original sin. The story of the Fall in Genesis is therefore regarded by the Pharisaic teachers merely as a typical example of the disobedience against God of which man under certain circumstances is guilty. They speak of evil impulses in man, which oppose the good impulse during his earthly sojourn. These evil impulses, however, are able only for a time to obscure the purity of the soul, the divine spark in man, but they can never extinguish it. (trans. J. M. Moe [St. Louis: CPH, 1964], 75)

91. How was the fall of Adam certainly *not* typical of our daily sins?

Romans 5 demonstrates the universal nature of God's grace and justification, especially 5:18: "Therefore, just as through the one trespass condemnation [came] to all men, so also through the one righteous act the declared-righteous life [came] to all men." The resulting life of the one who is righteous by faith—which is the emphasis of this chapter—is made clear in 5:21: "with the result that just as sin reigned unto death, so also grace reigns through righteousness [i.e., grace that gives a righteous status reigns] unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Words to Remember

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Romans 5:15 NIV

To prepare for "Dead to Sin, Alive to God," read Romans 6:1–23.

11

Dead to Sin, Alive to God

As you study Romans 6, remember that this chapter continues the discussion begun in chapter 5 concerning how one who is righteous by faith truly “lives.” Much of Paul’s discussion concerning justification up to now has focused on Christ and His action (i.e., “Christ for us”). Here Paul unpacks his understanding of what happens in a person when the miracle of faith is created, which receives Christ and His righteousness (i.e., “Christ in us”). This chapter, therefore, is very important for our understanding of daily life in Christ and the sanctification that results as Christ lives out His life in us. It helps us to understand individual justification and the blessed life that results.

In light of the repeated emphasis on grace in Romans 5, Paul asks a pointed question in 6:1. This question is probably posed in response to critics who accused Paul of preaching “cheap grace” (i.e., “forgiveness is abundant, so do not worry about keeping the Law”).

92. “What shall we [Christians] say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” (6:1 NIV; read 6:2; 3:8).

93. “How can we [Christians] live in [sin] any longer?” (6:2 NIV; read 7:17–20).

94. “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (6:3 NIV; read 6:4–5).

As in chapter 5, Paul continues to describe the life that God gives in Christ by contrasting it with death. The key theological point of 6:1–11 is the fact that a Christian has died to sin through his union with Christ in Baptism. Even though a Christian continues to sin due to the sinful nature, a Christian no longer lives under the bondage or dominating control of sin.

95. Read the first few words of Romans 6:3 in view of parent-to-child discussions you’ve experienced over the years. What is Paul emphasizing by asking, “Don’t you know?”

This portion of Romans testifies to the mysterious and powerful things accomplished in Baptism. Some falsely believe that Baptism is a mere symbolic action. They emphasize that faith must come first and then Christians must show their obedience to God by being baptized. Such an understanding takes that which is pure Gospel and turns it into Law; it takes God’s gracious action and turns it into an action of man.

The mysterious work of God in Baptism unites us with the death and resurrection of Christ: "For if we have been united with the likeness of His death, then certainly we will also be united in the [likeness of His] resurrection." Once again Paul is establishing a "pattern" to make his point.

96. Describe Paul's pattern between the following: Christ's death and a Christian's death to sin, and Christ's resurrection and a Christian's resurrection.

97. Reflect on your own Baptism. When were you baptized, and what happened in this sacred act of God?

These verses assert three significant points about what happens when we are united with Christ in Baptism. First, as the key theological point of 6:1–11 states, our sinful nature (old man) is executed so that it no longer enslaves us to sin, as we read in 6:6: "For this [truth] we know: that our old man was crucified in order that the body of sin be destroyed, with the result that it no longer enslaves us to sin." Through Baptism we are united to the reality of Christ's crucifixion, when He took upon Himself our sin, was executed, and then triumphed over sin and death.

Second, individual justification is accomplished in Baptism, as we read in 6:7: "For the one who died has been [is] justified from sin." The perfect-passive verb in this context indicates more than a forensic declaration (as stressed with universal justification). Through union with Christ we actually possess God's righteousness. This is called "imputed righteousness." Our sinful "old man" is crucified in Christ, and a righteous "new man" comes alive (i.e., Christ in us). In other words, our righteousness before God consists of more than a legal declaration; it is now the righteousness of Christ that is "imputed" or credited to us through our union with Christ. In Baptism the dominion of our sinful nature is defeated by Christ, and through our union with Him we are clothed in His righteousness, with the result that we are now righteous like Him before the Father.

Third, we now truly and eternally "live to God," as Paul states in 6:11: "Thus also you, consider yourselves on one hand dead to sin, but on the other hand living to God in Christ Jesus." When we arise out of the waters of Baptism, we rise to live a new and eternal life in Christ.

98. Paul's description of what Baptism accomplishes is amazing. What often makes us lose sight of the blessing of our Baptism? How can we increase our appreciation for this sacrament and its benefits?

99. "Shall we [Christians] sin because we are not under law but under grace?" (6:15a NIV; read 6:15b; 6:13).

100. "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey?" (6:16 NIV; read 6:17–20).

101. “What benefit did you reap at that time [when slaves to sin] from the things you are now ashamed of?” (6:21 NIV; read 6:23).

This portion of Romans gives us a foundation for our understanding of individual justification through faith. It anchors our understanding of individual justification in Baptism. This sacrament continually assures us that we are united with Christ. Death no longer rules us. We will share in the resurrection.

102. In view of Paul's teaching about sin and the human will, why do so many Christians receive Baptism as babies?

Romans 6 provides an excellent foundation for our understanding of sanctification or holiness. We see our death to sin and our new life through union with Christ in Baptism as a daily source of power in the struggle against sin (see Luther's Small Catechism on Holy Baptism).

Christians sometimes talk a lot about eternal life at funerals and much too little about the reality of the resurrection as an important aspect of our eternal life after the Last Day. Christ redeemed His creation, including our bodies. A vital part of our eternal life is the resurrection of these bodies (cf. 1 Corinthians 15).

Freed to Be Slaves of Righteousness

In the rest of Romans 6, Paul uses a surprising paradox to describe the Christian life: freed slaves going on to a new slavery. He explains the new life that is lived to God as a life in which we are free to be enslaved to righteousness.

103. To understand Paul's argument, read Exodus 21:2–6. Under what conditions might a slave return to slavery?

After the foundation laid in 6:1–11, Paul commands the Roman Christians to stop letting sin rule and to be who they are in Christ: “Therefore, stop letting sin reign in your mortal bodies in order that you obey its desires, also stop offering your parts as instruments of evil, but offer yourselves to God as living ones from the dead and [offer] your parts as instruments of righteousness to God.”

Paul makes it clear that grace is not used by the Christian as an excuse to continue in sin or to sin abundantly (6:15). The “obedience that leads to righteousness” mentioned in 6:16 is the “obedience that consists of faith”: “you obeyed from the heart in the pattern of teaching with which you were entrusted” (6:17). The righteousness of Christ that is ours by faith leads us to become slaves to righteousness (6:18).

104. How do verses 22–23 emphasize God's role in this move to slavery in righteousness?

Words to Remember

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. Romans 6:14
NIV

To prepare for “War with the ‘Flesh,’” read 7:1–25.

12

War with the "Flesh"

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, President George W. Bush urged Americans to remain steadfast in their resolve. He warned that the approaching war would not be an easy one. It would require constant commitment.

In a similar way, Paul warns us in Romans 7 about the ongoing struggle against the sinful nature. He makes it clear, from personal experience, that sin is still present in a Christian and is the cause of a serious ongoing war in each of us. The Law is not responsible for this struggle, but sin that rebels against the Law is at the heart of this war (7:8–12).

Romans 6 and 7 must always be taught in light of each other. Our death to sin and rising to life in Christ are real, but so is our sinful nature that continues to exist in us. Even though sin no longer dominates us as it did before, it harasses us like a bitter terrorist lurking in the shadows.

105. "Do you not know . . . that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?" (7:1 NIV; read 7:2–3; 6:14; 7:6).

106. "Is the law sin?" (7:7 NIV; read 7:7b, 12, 14, 22).

This chapter is considered to be one of the most difficult in Romans, largely because of questions surrounding the identity and situation of the first person ("I") references.

Although there are several possible referents for the "I" of this chapter, the best solution is to understand "I" as Paul's reference to himself as a Christian (note the present-tense verbs!). Paul speaks for every Christian's struggle against the sinful nature in sanctification when he writes, "For what I do is not what I desire, but the evil that I do not desire, this I do" (7:19).

107. "Did that which is good . . . become death to me [Paul]?" (7:13 NIV; read 7:13b; 5:12–14; 8:3–4).

108. "Who will rescue me [Paul] from this body of death?" (7:24 NIV; read 7:25).

The struggle of the inner new man (Christ) against the fleshly old man (sinful nature) is expressed well in 7:22–23: "For I delight in the Law of God according to the inner man, but I see another Law at work in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner to the law of sin

that is at work in my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me out of this body of death?"

Paul spends much of this chapter describing this very depressing situation, but puts everything into perspective in 7:25: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." We cannot maintain our righteousness through obedience, but through faith in Christ we continue to have the victory.

109. What are the "members" to which Paul refers (7:23)?

An excellent book for a detailed study of Romans 7 is Michael Middendorf, *The "I" in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997). Middendorf draws the following poignant conclusion about the argument of Romans 7:

In Romans 7 Paul decisively proves that his and our righteous standing before God cannot be either earned *or maintained* by obedience to the Law's command. Thankfully (7:25), it is not a matter of works "I" do or am able to refrain from doing. Rather, our righteousness must be and, in fact, has already been accomplished solely by God's action in Jesus Christ. Paul reveals this when he draws his conclusion regarding the Law in the initial verses of Chapter 8: "For what was impossible for the Law in that it was weakened through the flesh, God [accomplished] by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (8:3a). Faith in Jesus Christ alone establishes and maintains a righteous standing before God. (264; emphasis added)

Words to Remember

For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.
Romans 7:19 NIV

To prepare for "Life in the Spirit," read 8:1–39.

13

Life in the Spirit

In the *Odyssey* the ancient Greek poet Homer observes that death destroys the flesh, but the will and soul escape. For the ancient Greeks there was always something pure about the spiritual aspect of man and something evil about the body. They sharply distinguished between flesh and spirit. In contrast, the ancient Hebrews observed that the corruption of sin affected not only the flesh but also the spirit. Though God had created man pure in body and soul, sin corrupted every aspect of man and not just his flesh.

In Romans chapter 8, Paul uses the words “flesh” and “Spirit” to describe the Christian life. He begins by restating the wonderful Gospel message in 8:3: “For what the law was not able to do in that it was habitually weak through the flesh [i.e., sinful nature], God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin; He condemned sin in the flesh [of His son], in order that the justice of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not according to flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

One has to be careful of the meaning of *sarx* (“flesh”) in these verses and elsewhere in the New Testament. Flesh in and of itself is part of God’s good creation that Christ redeemed. Yet Paul often uses this word in contrast to “Spirit” as a synonym for “sinful nature.”

“The likeness of sinful flesh” here means that Christ had real human flesh but was without sin. God condemned sin in the perfect flesh of Jesus, who took all sin into Himself: “For our sake He [God] made Him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin in order that in Him we become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

110. Why might Paul continue to use the word “flesh” to describe a spiritual condition?

Romans reveals that, along with the heavenly Father and Jesus, the Holy Spirit receives special emphasis in Paul’s teaching. In fact, Romans chapter 8 mentions the Holy Spirit more often than any other chapter in the Bible! To understand how the Holy Spirit works in your life and the lives of fellow believers, carefully study the chart on the next page.

Work of the Holy Spirit	Meaning for You
Hallowing or sanctifying 1:4; 8:13	Holiness, like salvation, is not something you attain by your own efforts. Holiness is God's gift to you begun and completed through the work of the Holy Spirit. As you struggle to overcome sin, pray to the "Spirit of holiness" for strength and comfort.
Leading 8:1-5, 14	Every moment of your life as a Christian is intimately tied up in the work of the Spirit. Through the Word and witness of other believers, the Spirit leads you to greater faith and certainty.
Renewing 7:6	When you condemn yourself for your failures by beating yourself up with the Law, remember that God wants to renew your life with His Holy Spirit. The Law of God is good, but it has no power to renew. Certainly repent of your sins when you recognize them. In view of the Gospel, joyfully confess your sins and live in the new life God gives.
Life-giving 8:2, 10	Life, whether physical or spiritual, always comes as a gift. Begin each day like a newborn child resting in its Father's care, for He gives you life by His Spirit.
Indwelling 8:9	The Holy Spirit of God is with us always. Imagine, God actually makes our hearts His home!
Bearing witness 8:15-16	When you have moments of doubt, the Holy Spirit will bring God's Word to your mind and comfort you with the enduring promise of your heavenly Father's love.
Interceding 8:26-27	The Spirit of God prays for you! When you don't know what to pray, depend on the Holy Spirit to express your heart's deepest needs and burdens before the throne of heaven.
Working miracles 15:19	The Spirit of God is no passive passenger in the life of a believer. He works miracles in accordance with God's mercy.
Fostering love 15:30	Many new believers (and not a few mature ones!) are overwhelmed by the love expressed between Christians. This is the Spirit's work among God's people.

Romans 8:5-13 is also an important follow-up to the struggle discussed in Romans 7 and presents a strong contrast between life according to the flesh and life in the Spirit. Sometimes we distinguish persons of the Trinity to the point where teaching about their unity may suffer. Note the complex unity within the Godhead expressed in 8:9-11, especially through the relationship between teaching about Christ and the Spirit: "But you are not in the flesh, you are *in the Spirit*, if in fact *the Spirit of God* dwells in you. Any one who does not have *the Spirit of Christ* does not belong to Him. But if *Christ* is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If *the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus* from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through *His Spirit* that dwells in you."

Do we receive both Christ and the Holy Spirit at Baptism? Yes, we receive Christ via the Spirit to dwell in us as His temple even as we are also brought into Christ as a member of His body.

At one place "spirit" *pneuma* is often not translated as "the [Holy] Spirit." In 8:16 Paul writes: "*The Spirit Himself* bears witness with *our spirit* that we are children of God." What is "our spirit"? In light of what Paul says in the preceding verses, this "spirit" should be understood as our "new man" who is none other than Christ dwelling in us via the Spirit. In other words, "The Spirit Himself [the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments] bears witness with my Spirit [the 'inner man' Christ who dwells in us via the Holy Spirit] that we are children of God." Thus, we receive the testimony of the Spirit from outside ourselves as well as inside ourselves.

111. Reflect on the fact that God dwells with His people. What are the implications for your life?
at home

at work

at worship

Romans 8:15 preserves an ancient prayer: “You received the Spirit of sonship in which we cry ‘Abba Father!’” Both the Aramaic (*abba*) and Greek (*pater*) forms for “father” are found here (cf. Mark 14:36). This address to God in Aramaic probably goes back to Jesus and continued to be used in prayer by early Christians even when they spoke Greek. It reflects the profound truth that through the one true Son we are now sons of God who can address our Creator as “Father.”

112. How do Christians express this truth in prayer today?

We are not only children of God now, but we are also heirs of more to come in the future (8:17). We can help people who are suffering by both assuring them of their present blessings as children of God and by pointing them to the future blessings of resurrected and eternal glory that they will certainly inherit on the Last Day.

The Redemption of All Creation

In Romans 8:18–25, Paul puts his discussion of the glory that awaits us on the Last Day in the broader context of what is in store for all creation. These verses give a broader understanding of what is meant when we say “God so loved *the world* . . .” (John 3:16). God created all things visible and invisible; after creating them, He saw that they were good. Creation is not evil, but sin has corrupted this good gift of God.

Christ came to redeem all of His creation from sin. Our eternal life in heaven will not be a “spiritual” existence in fluffy clouds, but will include a restored creation much like Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden before the fall. The universal effects of the redemption that Christ accomplished are wonderfully expressed here: the creation groans as in childbirth, awaiting the Last Day when it will be set free from its bondage to decay!

113. In light of Romans 8, read John 3:16. What exactly does John mean by “world” in this verse?

Romans 8:23 notes that we have the “firstfruit of the Spirit.” We should not understand this to say that we have a portion of the Spirit and there is more to come or that it refers in some way to the “fruit of the Spirit” (love, joy, peace, etc.). The Spirit is the fruit or harvest of the blessings of justification through Christ. The Spirit is God’s first blessing to us in salvation. Romans 8:24–25 make it clear that a vital part of our life now is the hope of this certain future.

114. "Who hopes for what he already has?" (8:24 NIV; read 8:23; 5:2–5; 15:4, 13).

115. How does the Spirit sustain your hope in the midst of the discouraging events of life?

Never Separated from God's Love in Christ

Romans 8:28–39 is an apt and powerful conclusion to the discussion of the life that is lived by the one who is righteous by faith. We live each day knowing that no condemnation will be spoken against us due to our sin. Paul assures his readers that Christ, the one who died and was raised, is now in the position of authority ("right hand of God") before the Father, interceding for us (8:34). This is forensic language; Jesus is our defense attorney who points out the evidence that we are righteous through Him. As John states: "If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1).

Paul begins this section with the teaching of predestination. This teaching about God's foreknowledge and predestination is not meant to answer the unanswerable question, "Why are some saved and not others?" John Calvin, a reformer who lived in the decades after Luther, tried to answer that question by falsely teaching that God predestined some to be saved and others to be damned (double predestination; see chart, p. 35). Holy Scripture clearly teaches that God desires ALL to be saved. Election, as taught by Paul here, is to be a comforting teaching that assures believers that God has always desired our salvation and will also bring it to completion (note the sequence of God's work in 8:29–30: foreknew, foredetermined, called, justified by faith, and will glorify).

116. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (8:31 NIV; read 12:20; 16:20).

117. "How will He [the Father] not also, along with Him [Christ], graciously give us all things?" (8:32 NIV).

118. "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? . . . Who is he that condemns?" (8:33–34 NIV; read 2:1; 14:10–13).

119. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" (8:35 NIV; read 8:38; 5:8).

The conclusion to chapter 8 speaks for itself. These verses are great comfort to those who are suffering and dying. Paul does not belittle the real and painful struggles of life that come from our sinful condition and world: "We are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered" (8:36). Such struggle, however, does not lead us to despair; rather, we are "hyper-conquering" through the Christ who loved us, since NOTHING can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

120. As later Roman Christians read Paul's letter, they sat within view of Rome's massive stadium, the *circus maximus*, where many Christians were slaughtered in persecutions. What other sights in Rome today might encourage them of victory in Christ?

Words to Remember

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. Romans 8:10 NIV

To prepare for "Adoption as Sons," read Romans 9–11.

14

Adoption as Sons

Rebellion formed the attitude of the “sons of Abraham” spread throughout the Roman Empire. Their relationship with the Romans continually worsened throughout the first century. For example, in A.D. 19 and again in 50 or 51, the Emperors Tiberius and Claudius expelled Jews from Rome. In A.D. 35 Emperor Tiberius humiliated Roman Jews by forcing them to eat pork. When a Jewish delegation from Alexandria visited Rome to plead for relief from persecution, Emperor Caligula taunted them because they would not worship him as a god. In A.D. 66 the Jews of Jerusalem revolted. By A.D. 70 the Roman general Titus had crushed them and destroyed the temple (see history chart, p. 8).

In view of these tensions, Paul placed special emphasis on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. As noted in the outline of Romans, a very major shift occurs after Romans 8. Paul discusses the position of the Jews in God's plan and stresses the importance of continuing a mission to them.

Perhaps some people had interpreted Paul's emphasis on the Gentile mission as a license to close the door to future outreach to Jews. Many Jews were now rejecting Christ. Jewish relations with Gentiles grew more tense. But Paul did not lose hope for his ancestral people, nor did he halt his missionary practice “to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles.”

Earlier we noted that Paul made patterns of comparison between figures or events in the Old Testament and what God was doing in the New Testament. Paul argues in these chapters that just as God adopted Abraham and His descendants under the Old Testament, He now adopts the Gentiles through Christ.

121. Reflect on the joys and heartaches of adopting a child. Compare these thoughts with Paul's description of Old Testament Israel in Romans 9:1–5.

122. In contrast to the New Testament, the Old Testament does not often refer to God as “Father.” When it does, the passages are filled with passion. In Deuteronomy, Moses sings a prophetic song about God's fatherhood. Read Deuteronomy 32:10–12, 16–21. How are these verses fulfilled by the tensions between Jews and Gentiles in Paul's day?

123. Note the end of 9:5. What specific truth about Jesus had the Jewish people not understood?

All “Israel”?

Romans 9–11 are key chapters that are frequently cited as the biblical foundation for dispensationalism: the conviction that God will grant a special time of repentance to His old covenant people, the Jews, whereby they will be saved apart from faith in Christ because they are God's special

people. The problem arises from understanding Romans 11:26 (“all Israel will be saved”) as a reference to a Jewish religious and/or political entity (such as the modern nation of Israel). This interpretation grows from a false understanding of Old Testament prophecy that looks for a literal fulfillment of prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel. Key texts within these chapters discuss the identity of the “Israel” about which Paul is talking.

124. Read the following passages and identify who “Israel” is in each text.

Romans 9:6–8

Romans 10:8–12

Romans 11:25–36

As you can see from your study, 9:6–8 states that Israel is made up of all believers, whether Jew or Gentile. 10:8–11 affirms that salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ. 11:25–36 affirms that Israel is the church. The reason Paul is addressing this topic is because he does not want the mission outreach to the Jews to cease as the church moves on to the Gentile mission.

A second issue in this part of Romans is the doctrine of election, or predestination. Carefully read Paul's arguments about what God actually *does* and what God *could do*. Like Paul, contemplate this topic with reverence, remembering that you are exploring a mystery.

125. “Is God unjust [with His people]?” (9:14a NIV; read 9:14b; 3:25–26).

126. “Why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?” (9:19 NIV; read 3:10–18; 2:18, 23–24).

127. “Who are you . . . to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?” (9:20–21 NIV; read Psalm 80:4–6).

128. “What if God . . . bore with great patience the objects of His wrath [unbelievers]—prepared for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy [believers]?” (9:22–23 NIV; read 2:4–5; 11:11–12, 33).

In his commentary on Romans, K. G. Stoeckhardt offers wise counsel for anyone who studies the doctrine of election:

If ever any doubt as to our salvation wants to rise in our hearts, then we should remember and cling to the knowledge that God from eternity has taken the matter of our salvation and all that pertains to it into His merciful and powerful hand. In the midst of all crosses and trials, when it would seem that God has abandoned us entirely, we should rest our faith upon His Word, which tells us that all the tribulations of this present time are but incidents along the way to heaven, and can in no way compare with the glory which shall be revealed in us on the day of our final redemption. If we thus adhere strictly to the argumentation of Scriptures and apply the comfort of Scriptures to our hearts, then our thoughts will not revert to others, then we shall not yield to the temptation of speculating about this doctrine in its so-called reasonable conclusions, and will thus be spared the dangers into which such speculations lead. If we thus hold fast the truth that the election of grace is not an absolute election, that it was not an arbitrary act of God's sovereign pleasure, but flows from the eternal counsel of love, that it is based alone upon His grace and mercy, and that its object is to keep us safe in His Word and faith unto our end, then all thoughts of doubt will be removed from our hearts, and our faith will be most firmly established. (cited by P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament*, vol. 2 [St. Louis: CPH, 1922], 47)

Faith Obtains Righteousness

Earlier in Romans, Paul emphasizes that the call of God and the adoption as sons have always been based on God's righteousness received by faith. He returns to this theme again to illustrate God's frustration with the Jewish people and their misunderstanding of the Law.

129. "What then shall we say [about the Gentiles and Israel]?" (9:30a NIV; read 9:30b–31).

130. "Why [did Israel] not [attain righteousness]?" (9:32 NIV; read 9:32b; 3:19).

131. "What does Scripture say [about God's promise of righteousness through faith]?" (10:8a NIV; read 10:8b, 11).

132. "How . . . can they [the nations] call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (10:14 NIV; read 15:20–22; 16:25–26).

133. "How can they [evangelists] preach unless they are sent?" (10:15 NIV; read 15:23–24, 30).

134. "Did they [the Israelites] not hear [God's Word]?" (10:18a NIV; read 10:18b).

135. "Did Israel not understand [God's Word]?" (10:19 NIV; read 10:19b–21).

Chosen by Grace

Paul emphasizes that Jews are loved by God and some are among those chosen by grace, even though many are rejecting Jesus. Even as many Gentiles were in rebellion before being called by the Gospel, so also many Jews in rebellion will be mercifully called by the same power of Jesus Christ.

136. "Did God reject His people [Israel]?" (11:1 NIV; read 11:1b–2; 11:29).

137. "Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah? What was God's answer to him?" (11:2, 4a NIV; read 11:4b–6).

138. "What then [should we think about the nation of Israel]?" (11:7 NIV; read 11:7–10, 25).

139. "Did they [the Israelites] stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?" (11:11 NIV; read 15:8–12).

Chapters 9–11, therefore, stress the importance of ongoing outreach to Jews, with the hope of more coming to faith in Christ and becoming part of the true "Israel."

Words to Remember

For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all. Romans 11:32 NIV

To prepare for "Living Sacrifices," read 12:1–15:30.

15

Living Sacrifices

Now that Paul has thoroughly discussed the relationship of Jews and Gentiles with God, he turns to the practical issues of how Jewish believers and Gentile believers relate to one another. Once again he introduces a pattern from the Old Testament with a New Testament application: sacrifice.

At the time of the patriarchs, people offered sacrifices to thank God for His blessings or to participate in a fellowship meal with God and His people. Later sacrifices focused on “atonement.” They were offered to “cover up” the sins of the people.

140. Read Romans 7:7–11, which describes the effects of the Mosaic Law. See also Galatians 3:18; Romans 4:9–16; and Hebrews 11:4. Based on Paul’s response to the Law, what drove the Old Testament sacrificial system of atonement?

141. According to Romans 12:1, how is Paul’s call to sacrifice vastly different from what was practiced in the Old Testament?

142. Scan chapters 9–11. What “mercies” does Paul have in view in 12:1?

The Roman Christians would have immediately recognized “mercies” (*oiktirmon*) from the Psalms, which they sang when they gathered for worship. The Psalms of the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) use this word repeatedly to describe the surpassing loving-kindness and grace of God. The Roman Christians most likely followed the Jewish prayer custom of requesting God’s mercies. When the Romans gathered for prayer and Paul’s new letter was read to them, they would have heard Romans 12:1 in this context. After asking God for His mercies, the apostle’s letter would encourage them—on the basis of those mercies—to sacrifice their lives to the Lord.

Paul sets the tone in 12:1–2 for understanding our daily vocation or calling as a vital part of our worship of God. Our Christian worship is by no means confined to the time spent receiving God’s gracious gifts in His sanctuary, but continues as we live out these gifts in daily activities. The background for these verses is unquestionably the temple worship of Israel that enumerated the presentation of various sacrifices, especially slaughtered animals. Now that Christ has offered himself as the once-for-all-time sacrifice, we are freed from the old covenant to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God.

143. How does the word “mercies” describe God’s work in your life? How does the word “sacrifice” describe your life as a Christian?

Measure of Faith

Based on the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, Romans 1–8 lays the theological foundation for Paul's teaching about sanctification in Romans 12:1–15:13. Here he illustrates in detail the sacrificial life of a person who is righteous by faith and lives in Christ and in the Spirit.

We may think that these Roman Christians would not need to hear the exhortations of these verses since they should know how a Christian acts. They, however, unlike many of us, did not have the benefit of being raised in the church with all of the Old Testament and New Testament in their hands. Thus, the exhortations help these converted pagans in distinguishing their new life from their old one.

144. How does Paul connect grace and faith to sanctification in 12:3? According to this verse, where does faith come from?

At first it may appear that Paul describes different “graces” or “faiths” for each Christian calling. But note that Paul has in view “*the* grace” and “*the* faith” (not “his faith,” as in some translations; “his” does not appear in the Greek). Paul's comparison with the body (v. 4) may help us understand the passage. Just as each part of a body partakes of the same food and breathes the same air, so the church partakes of the same grace and faith. Just as the different functions of the parts of a body are sustained by the same food and breath, the different callings of the church are sustained by the same grace and faith. Each person, living by grace through faith, fulfills his or her particular calling instead of meddling in that of another (note the admonition in verse 3).

145. How do faith and grace guide the sacrificial activities of the Christian life?

146. As you read 12:9–21, consider how these words describe the life of Jesus. Write down specific parallels.

147. How did Jesus “overcome evil with good” and extend that victory to you?

Live Subject to the Governing Authorities

Romans 13 defines the relationship of Christians with the authorities that govern them. As you read this passage, keep in mind the social tensions surrounding the early Roman Christians, the persecution they would suffer under Nero only 6 to 10 years after receiving Paul's letter, and the apostle's execution in A.D. 67 or 68.

148. Modern citizens often complain about the abuses of power by their government. How do such complaints compare with the situation faced by the early Christians?

Paul addresses four topics, revealing basic questions with which the early Christians must have struggled. First, God is the source of authority that is exercised by human government (13:2). This is a further expression of the truth found in the commandment “Honor your father and your mother.” By respecting our parents and others in authority, we show our respect for God, who has placed these people and institutions over us for our own good.

149. In what God-pleasing ways can you honor your government?

Second, such authorities are God's servants for your good (13:3). God has given authority to government for the good of citizens. Obviously, such authority can be and has been abused throughout history; in such cases, a government is not acting as God's servant.

150. How might thinking of government leaders and institutions as God's “servants” affect your attitude toward them? How should this teaching affect Christians serving in government?

Third, as God's servant, a government—not individual vigilantes—can punish evildoers (13:4). This text supports a criminal justice system that includes capital punishment, although there have been many Christians who have argued otherwise.

151. Read Genesis 9:5–6. What basis does God give for capital punishment in this passage?

Fourth, we are to be subject or obedient to governing authorities, including the payment of our taxes (13:2–7). Human authority never trumps God, who gives such authority. Acts 5:29 guides us in those situations where obedience to government conflicts with our obedience to God: “We must obey God rather than men.”

152. In view of these passages, discuss specific instances when Christians should disobey governmental authorities.

Clothed with Christ

Like 12:9–21, chapter 13:8–14 describes the sacrificial life to which God calls believers. Although Paul demonstrated earlier that “you [Christians] are not under law, but under grace” (6:14 NIV), he does not hesitate to proclaim the Law to them. He specifically tells the Romans what to do with their lives.

153. How does Paul summarize the Law in 13:8–10? How does this description of the Law contrast with Paul's earlier descriptions (e.g., 7:7–11)?

154. As you read 13:11–14, picture a Roman centurion walking through a military encampment before sunrise, rousing his men. How does this imagery reflect the sacrificial life to which the apostle calls you as a believer?

155. What armor covers these troops? (Note verses 12 and 14.) What comfort does this imagery offer you?

Words to Remember

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1 NIV

To prepare for “The Strong and the Weak,” read 14:1–15:33.

16

The Strong and the Weak

According to authors Alan and Cheryl Klaas, nearly 100,000 ministers in the United States are experiencing career “burnout.” Constant battles and bad attitudes among church members have contributed greatly to this problem. Many congregations have trouble calling or retaining a pastor because they cannot be at peace.

Romans 14–15 shows Paul dealing with practical issues that were causing serious problems among the house-churches at Rome. These matters involved dietary practices and worship days observed by Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul’s wisdom and insights provide practical guidelines for embattled congregations today.

156. Why is Paul, an outsider, able to speak so directly about this matter? Read 15:15–16.

Having laid the doctrinal basis for the Christian life, Paul directly addresses and describes the problem in 14:1–8.

157. “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?” (14:4 NIV; read 2:1; 14:13).

158. In your own words, summarize Paul’s point in 14:7–8.

159. “Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother?” (14:10 NIV; read 14:1–3).

160. How does the title Paul uses to describe a congregational member (14:10, 15, 21) ease tensions and emphasize the need to resolve the dispute?

Romans 14:17 gets to the heart of the matter and borrows words from Paul’s earlier teaching. The kingdom of God or God’s rule stands in sharp contrast to the rules of men and their results. Though Paul wants members of the congregation to be sensitive to one another (14:15, 20–21), he also points out the truth that Christians are free because Christ has set them free and filled them with peace and joy.

Paul encourages peace and mutual edification in light of such problems: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak . . . live in harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus" (15:1–6).

161. How can one distinguish between a "disputable matter" (14:1) and a genuine threat to congregational life? Read 15:4.

162. Without reopening controversy, briefly reflect on issues that have troubled your congregation. How might you "make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification" in the future? What unifying activities does Paul describe in 15:6, 9–11?

Ministry to the Gentiles

Paul rounds out his "reminder" to the Romans with a mission appeal. God calls His people not only to faith and sanctification but also to mission, so that others might receive the benefits of the Gospel. Once again, the pattern of living sacrifice appears.

163. What expressions of sacrifice does Paul use in 15:16?

164. Describe Paul's "boasting" and "ambition" in verses 15:17–22. Where does Paul say these things come from?

165. As an apostle, Paul's preaching of the Gospel was accompanied by what power? Read also 2 Corinthians 12:12.

166. How does Paul describe prayer in 15:30? What implication might this have for your practice as a congregation?

Words to Remember

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17 NIV

To prepare for "Closing," read Romans 16:1–27.

17

Closing

Paul's closing words to the Romans have stirred significant controversy in recent years. That's because he mentions two issues that modern Christians continue to debate: the role of women in the church and the boundaries of Christian fellowship.

The Role of Women in Roman Society

Like the Palestinian Jews, the Gentile Romans had clearly defined roles for women. For example, Roman women could not vote or hold public office. However, unlike Palestinian Jewish women, they could choose to marry and divorce much like men. They held property rights, and Roman leaders believed that women should be educated.

In Romans 16 Paul calls women his fellow workers. Again and again he lauds women for their service to the Lord and His people. Three times he describes women as "working hard in the Lord," an expression that literally means to wear oneself out.

167. Briefly reflect on the role women play in your congregation. What tasks might not get done without the efforts of women?

During the 1970s, as part of the women's liberation movement, some Bible interpreters asserted that Junias was a female apostle (16:7). These interpreters argued that no one had heard of the apostle Junias because the male clergy in the early church suppressed her legacy and the legacy of other female ministers.

The term "apostle" literally means "sent one" and carries a special mission emphasis. Jesus is "the Apostle," sent from the Father (Hebrews 3:1), who sends out His apostles (John 20:21). In the New Testament, "apostle" usually referred to one of the famous "Twelve" followers of Jesus and Paul. This title was a reminder that these men were sent by Christ and authoritatively spoke His words, even as He was sent by the Father and spoke the Father's words. These apostles are the first examples of how Jesus established the pastoral office in order to continue and extend His shepherding of His flock, the church. However, there are a few examples of pastors called apostles who were not numbered with the Twelve (Acts 14:4, 15; 1 Thessalonians 2:7).

When Paul says that Junias is "outstanding among the apostles," he most likely means that her work is well-known among them. Grammatically, "among the apostles" does not have to mean that Junias or Andronicus stands in the rank of apostolic leadership. They never appear in any list of apostles. We never hear of other women serving such a calling. Paul certainly values the service of Junias, but in his other letters he continues to distinguish roles for men and women (e.g., 1 Corinthians 14:33–35; Ephesians 5:21–33; 1 Timothy 2:11–12). We should not interpret the apostle's comments about Junias against the rest of his writings.

Women in Romans 16	Further Information
Priscilla (Prisca), 16:3–5; Paul's fellow worker in Christ Jesus; she risked her life for Paul; all Gentile churches are grateful for her	Priscilla's husband, Aquila, was a tent maker of Jewish background; they were among the Jews expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49; moved to Corinth, where they met Paul (Acts 18:1–3); later established a house-church at Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19) and clarified the Gospel for the great preacher Apollos (Acts 18:18–28); in A.D. 55 or 56 they moved back to Rome and hosted a church at their home; Priscilla is often listed before her husband (e.g., 2 Timothy 4:19), which may reflect a higher social status.
Mary , 16:6; A hard worker for the Roman Christians	Half a dozen women in the New Testament go by this name, which could be from the Hebrew <i>Miryam</i> or Latin family <i>Marius</i> ; there are no other references to this particular Mary.
Junias , 16:7; Partner of Andronicus; called Paul's "relative"; imprisoned with Paul; outstanding among the apostles; converted to Christ before Paul	This Roman name is most likely feminine, but may be masculine (church fathers agree that she was a woman); when Paul calls her a "relative," he likely means that she is Jewish; there are no other references to her.
Tryphena and Tryphosa , 16:12; Hard workers "in the Lord"	Greek names meaning "dainty" and "delicate"; since mentioned together, they may be sisters or close relatives; the Roman Emperor Claudius had slaves by these names; Paul may greet them in Philippians 4:22 as the "saints . . . belonging to Caesar's household."
Persis , 16:12; A dear friend; a hard worker "in the Lord"	Her name means "Persian"; she probably had been brought to Rome as a slave.
Mother of Rufus , 16:13; Acted as a mother to Paul, which probably means that Paul stayed with the family during missionary trips	Rufus was a common Roman name; Mark 15:21 mentions a Rufus in Judea, but he may be a different person; Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna mentions a Rufus who served as an example to the church at Philippi (Epistle of Polycarp IX).
Julia , 16:15; Greeted	A common Roman name; there are no other references to her.
Sister of Nereus , 16:15; Greeted	There are no other references to her.

The Warning against False Doctrine

As he concludes, Paul reinforces the importance of being faithful to what he has taught us in this epistle!

168. Earlier Paul admonished the congregation to accept one another. How is the situation referenced in 16:17–18 different? What implications does this verse have for our fellowship with Christians who deny biblical truths?

169. How does 16:25–27 serve as a summary of everything Paul has proclaimed in this epistle? What comfort and encouragement do these verses offer you?

Words to Remember

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. Romans 16:17

Leader Notes

Leaders, please note the different abilities of your class members. Some will easily find the Bible passages listed in this study. Others will struggle. To make participation easier, team up members of the class. For example, if a question asks you to look up several passages, assign one passage to one group, the second to another, and so on. Divide up the work! Let participants present the different answers they discover.

Work through this study guide at the pace of your class. Don't feel that you must complete one study per hour.

OUTLINE OF ROMANS

- I. Introduction to the Epistle (1.1–15)
- II. The Theme of the Epistle: The One Who Is Righteous by Faith Will Live (1.16–17)
- III. Who Is Righteous? The Wrath of God Revealed against All (1.8–3.20)
 - A. Wrath against Unrighteousness without the Law (1.18–32)
 - B. Wrath against the So-called Righteousness by the Law (2.1–3.20)
- IV. God Is Righteous! The Righteousness of God Revealed for All (3.21–4.25)
 - A. Revealed in Christ and by Faith (3.21–31)
 - B. Example: Abraham Is Declared Righteous by Faith before Circumcision and the Law (4.1–25)
- V. The One Who Is Righteous by Faith Truly Lives (5.1–8.39)
 - A. Lives at Peace with God: Reconciliation through Christ (5.1–21)
 - B. Lives Dead to Sin and Alive to God: Baptism and Sanctification (6.1–23)
 - C. Lives at War with the Sinful “Flesh” (7.1–25)
 - D. Lives Victoriously in the Spirit for Eternity (8.1–39)
- VI. Righteousness by Faith That Leads to Life Is for “All Israel” (9.1–11.36)
 - A. The Promise Is Only to Believers (9.1–29)
 - B. Jewish Rejection Is Not God’s Fault (9.30–10.21)
 - C. Jewish Rejection Is Not Final (11.1–36)
- VII. The Life Lived by the One Who Is Righteous by Faith (12.1–15.13)
 - A. Live as Living Sacrifices (12.1–2)
 - B. Live as the Body of Christ (12.3–8)
 - C. Love One Another (12.9–21)
 - D. Live Subject to Authorities (13.1–7)
 - E. Love Your Neighbor (13.8–10)
 - F. Cast Off Evil and Put On the Lord Jesus Christ (13.11–14)
 - G. Live Sensitive to the Weak in Faith (14.1–15.13)
- VIII. Conclusion (15.14–16.27)
 - A. Paul’s Travel Plans (15.14–33)
 - B. Greetings and Salutation (16.1–27)

1. The Purpose of Romans

Note for first visual, p. 7. A sinner points to the wounds of Christ in wonder. He sees and believes that Jesus' death was for him and his salvation. Romans 1–4 emphasizes this foundational truth of the Christian message. God declares us righteous by faith in Jesus' sacrifice for our sins.

Law/Gospel Focus

In Romans, Paul explains the Gospel in order to sustain and increase missionary efforts among Jews and Gentiles in the Mediterranean region.

1. Paul specifically mentions Jesus' descent from David, an Israelite. He also emphasizes that Christ has called him for the mission to the Gentiles. He greets the groups in Rome with "grace and peace."

2. Paul addresses the concerns of the different groups in Rome and seeks to unite them. The Lord would lead us to do the same in our congregations.

3. Paul greets many people that he already knows. No doubt these fellow workers in the Gospel correspond with Paul and let him know how things are going.

4. Paul roots his call and mission effort in the Gospel of God. His greeting proclaims distinctive doctrinal truths. He describes his mission as calling people to the obedience that consists of faith by means of the Gospel.

5. "Servant," "apostle," "set apart."

6. Answers will vary. In Baptism, Christ calls each of us to proclaim His Gospel and confess His name before the world. He also calls us to support missionaries with our prayers and offerings.

7. Answers will vary.

8. Paul wrote Romans to encourage the congregation, unite them behind his mission effort to the West, and address doctrinal issues.

Close with prayer.

2. I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Law/Gospel Focus

Paul greets the Romans by reminding them of his call as an apostle and their call to faith through the Gospel.

9. Name of sender: 1:1–6; Name of addressee: 1:7a; Greetings: 1:7b; Thanksgiving: 1:8ff; Body of letter: 1:18–15:33; Closing greetings: 16:1–27.

10. The Romans suffer some divisions. Paul thoughtfully greets them in order to strengthen their bond to the Lord and one another.

11. Greeting continues to play an important role in congregations today. Some congregations have even organized greeters for their services and to visit new members at their homes.

12. Answers may vary. "Servant/slave" seems negative to people today. Paul joyously affirmed this aspect of his calling. The term "called" is rarely used outside of a religious setting. People think of

themselves as “employed,” not called. Outside of church, we hear the word “gospel” associated with a particular style of music. For Paul, the Gospel is God’s power for salvation.

13. Pastors are called servants of the Lord and His congregations. Their chief service is to proclaim the Gospel.

14. “To obey the Gospel” means to believe the Gospel. Obedience follows faith. God hasn’t called you to one but not the other. Both are part of your life in Christ. However, saving faith is the goal of the Gospel. A better translation is “obedience that consists of faith” (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8). As Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29).

15. The Gospel takes away my sins and gives me confidence that I belong to God. This makes me bold to serve my Savior.

16. Paul is obligated to preach to Jews and Gentiles. He feels anxious to get started in Rome.

17. Christ is the power of God, and so is the Gospel. Christ and the Gospel are inseparable.

18. The Gospel gives salvation by taking away sins. It grants life and peace to individuals and congregations.

Close with prayer.

3. God’s Righteousness

Law/Gospel Focus

God’s righteousness is His power to save us from our sins.

19. Answers will vary. In popular culture a righteous person is someone who lives a good life.

20. Romans 1:17—Righteousness comes by faith. Romans 3:21—Righteousness doesn’t come from the Law. Romans 10:3—People don’t submit to God’s righteousness, but try to create their own.

21. Isaiah 46:12–13—Righteousness is used together with salvation. Isaiah 51:5–6—God brings righteousness/salvation to the people. Isaiah 45:22–25—Only God is righteous, but Israel is found righteous in Him.

22. Words like “I do,” “I do so intend with the help of God,” “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you,” and “I swear” do more than communicate information. They perform actions.

23. Answers will vary.

24. The Gospel reveals and bestows a heavenly mystery that the world does not understand, but that daily helps us in the struggles caused by sin: God’s end-time judgment against our sin in Christ.

25. God created your faith through the Gospel.

26. People can’t come to faith in the Gospel until it is proclaimed. God grant us boldness to speak His truth!

Close with prayer.

4. God's Wrath Revealed in Creation

Law/Gospel Focus

Just as God reveals His righteous salvation through Jesus Christ, He also reveals His wrath in creation.

27. God exercises His wrath toward the wicked now through institutions like government. He will judge all people on the Last Day and punish them as they deserve. See also Ephesians 2:3; 5:6; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 2:14–16; 5:9.

28. Answers will vary.

29. God actively and presently exercises His wrath against sin, but we won't witness the fullness of His wrath until the Last Day.

30. God's present revelation of wrath powerfully proclaims His Law. God's purpose is to drive people to repentance. He holds back so that people may have the opportunity to repent.

31. Answers will vary. Excellent examples include nature worship, animism, and scientific naturalism (evolution).

32. Answers will vary. The existence of an orderly world is an excellent place to start the conversation (e.g., Acts 17:22–31). Remember that people who deny God's existence often do so because of pain or disappointment in their lives. Patiently point to God's goodness as evidenced in the created order. Use comparisons (such as parenthood) to help participants understand God's nature.

33. All people know about God and His Law through the creation. God will judge them according to this revelation.

34. Answers will vary. One can see that Paul's depiction of sinful rebellion in the first century remains very applicable in our day (idolatry, lying, homosexuality, etc.). Paul's attack on the idolatry of paganism may be drawing on a similar attack in Wisdom of Solomon 12:23–13:1.

35. Gossips, slanderers, God-haters. Paul also gives detailed lists of sinful behavior.

Close with prayer.

5. God's Wrath Revealed in the Law

Law/Gospel Focus

The Law cannot justify us because we are sinners; therefore, we need Jesus as our Savior.

36. "Pass judgment," "judge," "condemning." Each of these examples comes from the same Greek root word, which Paul uses frequently in Romans.

37. Paul points out that each of us sins. Based on our own righteousness, we have no basis for passing judgment.

38. God punished the Egyptians for their cruelty and idolatry. The Israelites rejoiced in Egypt's defeat. However, they almost immediately adopted Egypt's idolatrous ways.

39. The Lord repeatedly sent judges to lead Israel to repentance. They repeatedly violated His covenant and His kindness.

40. Answers will vary, but no doubt such an event caused great pain and perhaps anger.

41. Terribly! Israel frequently took God's love for granted, with the result that many suffered God's wrath.

42. The rabbis, like the psalmist, delighted in and meditated on the Word of God. Yet such learned men failed to meet the Law's requirements.

43. This statement is only a theory, which is never realized by any fallen human being because "no human being will be declared righteous before Him by works of the Law" (3:20). Only Jesus kept God's Law perfectly.

44. Paul reminds the Jewish believers of Israel's failure to fulfill the Law, to which their own Scripture testifies.

45. Yes. They should be regarded as circumcised in heart by the Spirit. See Galatians 5:2–6.

46. The Spirit uses the Law to drive the heart to repentance. This is often a painful experience, as one's self-righteousness gets cut away by the sharpening of the Law.

47. There was great value in being Jewish. They had the Word of God and numerous valuable resources from the Lord.

48. One of Paul's frequent and terse responses to the questions he poses in Romans is *me genoito* (3:4; 3:6; 3:31; 6:2; 6:15; 7:13; 9:14; 11:1; 11:11). This use of the optative mood expresses the possibility of action taking place in the future, but makes it very emphatic that this is not what Paul affirms. It can be translated rather literally: "May it not be!" (i.e., to paraphrase, "Absolutely not!"). God faithfully and persistently calls Jews to repentance.

49. Paul asks a hypothetical question that he dismisses with a second question. God will judge us according to our deeds. Therefore, we should make no excuses for sin.

50. The questions here and in chapter 9 may reflect actual excuses people were making for their sin. Sins committed by the creature never honors the goodness of the Creator.

51. No. God judges them along with all people.

This portion of Romans is vital to use in catechesis when we are teaching others about the sinful state of fallen humankind.

Close with prayer.

6. The Law in Romans

Law/Gospel Focus

Paul uses the term "Law" in a variety of ways in Romans, but chiefly to describe the old covenant, which Christ has fulfilled for us.

52. Answers will vary. Human law helps to maintain order and peace between citizens. Without law, things would be chaotic.

53. 3:10–20—the Old Testament. 3:27—moral law. 8:2—a basic principle.

Paul's theology of the Law in Romans comes to a head at the end of chapter 3, as he turns his attention back to the righteousness of God revealed in Christ and received by faith. Although he will continue to touch on this important topic through chapter 7, it is appropriate to present a unified summary of his theology of the Law here in order that it is clearly understood before we move on to the righteousness of God in Christ.

In Romans 3:10–18, Paul quotes from several texts in Psalms, Proverbs, and Isaiah, then states in 3:19 that this is what "the Law says." In 3:21 he states that "the Law and the Prophets" testify to the righteousness of God. Elsewhere he uses *nomos* to refer to an authority, rule, or principle. He states in

3:27 that the grounds for the lack of boasting is through the law/authority/rule/principle of faith; see also the “law” of the Spirit in 8:2. The reason why *nomos* is used in this way is to set up the verbal contrast in 3:27–28 between “through the law of faith” and “works of the law.” This meaning also appears to be what Paul intends with his use of *nomos* in Romans 7:21, 23, 25. However, its most frequent meaning in Romans is clearly the Mosaic Law that makes ethical demands.

54. I'm supposed to obey the Law. But the Law can't make me righteous, because I won't do what it says. The use of *nomos* in Romans is important to the forensic nature of Paul's argument. Obedience to the Law is a theoretical way to become righteous before God: “For it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law will be declared righteous” (2:13). The problem is that no one can be declared righteous by doing the Law since no human being can obey it perfectly: “For no human being will be declared righteous before Him by works of the Law” (3:20), and “For all have sinned and lost the glory of God, being declared righteous by His grace as a gift” (3:23).

55. Answers will vary. Instead of stopping sin, the Law can provoke sin! We are so weak and reactionary that we can't perceive the Law rightly.

56. The Law is holy and righteous. It should help us, but instead it shows us our sin. Preachers of God's Word uphold the Law. Paul does not degrade the Law or throw it out; it serves the important and valuable function of bringing us to the knowledge of sin. Furthermore, because Christ has fulfilled the Law for us and has freed us from the condemnation of the Law (8:1), we can again delight in the Law.

57. To show us our sin.

Close with prayer.

7. Righteousness Revealed in Christ

Law/Gospel Focus

God has condemned the entire world in order that He may have mercy on the entire world through the righteousness revealed in Christ.

58. “Faithfulness” emphasizes Jesus' role in salvation. “Faith” emphasizes a human role in response to the Gospel.

59. This translation emphasizes that Jesus has faithfully saved me. It points me toward Christ rather than myself.

60. Point out to them that even though they struggle and stumble, Christ is their faithful Savior. He will take care of them.

61. Humans were originally created righteous and innocent. Humankind had characteristics of goodness in common with God. However, sin destroyed that “glory” in humankind.

62. Jesus shed His blood for our salvation. There is no salvation without the shed blood of Jesus.

63. The Lord's Supper especially mentions and emphasizes the blood of Jesus given for the forgiveness of our sins. Show examples of hymns and liturgies that also emphasize the importance of Christ's blood.

64. We can't boast in personal righteousness because our righteousness consists solely of Christ's righteousness.

65. Faith excludes personal righteousness because it trusts in the righteousness of another person: Jesus. The Law can only show us our unrighteousness. It has no power to save.

66. Yes. He's the God of everyone who has faith in salvation through Christ.

67. No. We uphold the Law because it is holy, righteous, and good. God's people delight in the Law.

68. Christ died for all men (universal). As this truth of salvation is proclaimed, we believe (individual).

Close with prayer.

8. Righteous Abraham

Law/Gospel Focus

God declared Abraham righteous through faith, which looked forward to the promised salvation in Jesus Christ.

Note that *pisteuo* in 4:3 takes its direct object in the dative case (instead of the normal accusative). "Abraham believed [the promise of] God" is the sole basis provided for the resulting action that follows ("it was reckoned to him as righteousness"). The verb here is passive (emphasizing God's actions) and a forensic term that dominates this chapter.

The verbal act of believing is directly linked to the verbal action of reckoning or counting.

In order that readers not accuse Paul of using only one selective text to make his point, he draws in David as additional support for what he has taught (Romans 4:7–8; cf. Psalm 31:1 LXX). David obviously knew the Mosaic Law, but he had transgressed grievously (lust, coveting, adultery, and murder in the Bathsheba incident alone). Notice the passive verbs in 4:7. Here the righteous status of the individual is clearly dependent on God's actions rather than ours.

69. Abraham acted fearfully and dishonestly with Pharaoh and Abimelech.

70. Answers will vary. People naturally want to justify themselves by arguing that they have good lives, they aren't worse than anyone else, and so on.

71. Abraham was justified by faith in God's promise.

72. The act of believing is directly connected with God's reckoning. This emphasizes that the relationship of righteousness is based on faith alone.

73. If we are wicked, then certainly we cannot earn righteousness for ourselves. It has to come as God's gift!

74. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant, showing that this person belonged to God.

75. The blessedness applies to all who believe.

76. God credited righteousness to Abraham before he was circumcised.

77. People of all races have believed in Jesus (Abraham's offspring) for their salvation.

78. Jesus was raised to life for our justification. The Gospel does not finish with Good Friday. It proclaims the death *and* resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

Close with prayer.

9. Peace with God

Note for second visual, p. 7. Romans 5–8 teaches that through Baptism God gives us new birth in the Holy Spirit. We now share in Christ's victory over the sinful nature. Sin cannot dominate and destroy us.

Law/Gospel Focus

Because God has declared us righteous through Christ, we now live at peace with Him.

79. Answers will vary. Because forgiveness through Christ takes away guilt, we no longer fear God's wrath.

80. We receive the comfort of God's loving-kindness as proclaimed in the service and received in the Sacraments.

81. Participants may highlight particular hymns or parts of the service such as the Agnus Dei and the Benediction.

82. Those boasting in their suffering will focus on the cause of Christ, not themselves.

83. Answers will vary.

84. Long before we ever believed, God called us righteous because of Christ's sacrifice. He declares this of every sinner. See also J. A. O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis: CPH, 2000).

Notice 5:8: "While we were sinners, Christ died on our behalf." Paul's timing stresses that Christ's death is the source of universal justification. This conclusion is confirmed in 5:9: "Therefore, all the more because we have now been declared righteous in His blood, we will be saved by Him from the wrath." See also the testimony to universal justification in 5:18–19 as discussed below.

The language in 5:10 shifts to the "reconciliation" word group. Notice the similar construction of these three statements:

While we were without strength, [Christ] died for the ones who are ungodly (5:6).

While we were sinners, Christ died on our behalf (5:8).

While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son (5:10)

These statements make it clear that Christ's death has brought about a changed status for all sinners (note that faith is not mentioned in these verses). The fact that these three statements are directly related to justification is made explicit in 5:9 and its parallel structure to 5:10:

Because we have now been declared righteous in His blood, we will be saved by Him from the wrath (5:9).

Because we have been reconciled, we will be saved by His life (5:10).

The truth is clear: because of the justification/reconciliation that took place at the cross, those who believe in Christ can be certain of salvation from His wrath.

Close with prayer.

10. The Pattern of Death and Life

Law/Gospel Focus

All people die because of Adam, but God grants life to all people because of Christ.

85. People who think of sin as a skin disease will naturally think children's spiritual needs are not that great. However, people who think of sin as a genetic illness will see children in dire spiritual need. The heresy that sin is not an inherited condition is still alive in many denominations (e.g., the age of accountability). This heresy has led to false teaching about infant Baptism or outright rejection of it. The denial of original sin is called Pelagianism, a false teaching originating in the fifth century with Pelagius that Augustine battled on the basis of Romans 5.

86. As demonstrated earlier, Abraham and David are patterns of those who are justified by God's grace through faith, namely, us.

87. Answers will vary, but should focus on our unrighteousness in contrast to Christ's righteousness. However, Christ became sin (took our sin) so that we might become the righteousness of God.

88. This blame-shifting confuses the doctrine of salvation, since it makes Adam appear as a victim instead of emphasizing his willing participation in sin.

89. If the human will is truly free, then people can choose to do good as well as evil. They should be able to fulfill the Law by their own efforts and sanctify themselves. Paul teaches that both justification and sanctification are works of God. Although we must carefully distinguish justification and sanctification in order that people not doubt their salvation because of their struggles with sanctification, it is also important that we not separate justification from sanctification since the former leads to the latter.

90. The human will is corrupt and self-destructive. People can't do what's right even when they want to.

91. According to Paul, Adam's fall infected and condemned us all.

Close with prayer.

11. Dead to Sin, Alive to God

Law/Gospel Focus

In Baptism we die to sin and God raises us to new life, according to the pattern of Christ's death and resurrection.

92. By no means! We died to sin.

93. The sinful nature continues to tempt us and causes us to sin. But Christ has changed our hearts. We want to do what is good in the midst of this struggle.

94. The early Christians understood Baptism as more than a symbolic act. It was an act of God, connecting the baptized person to the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection.

95. Just as children often know what's right but need affirmation, the Romans know what Paul is telling them. Paul's question anticipates a "yes." The form of the question points back to their earlier teaching in the faith.

96. A very important term here is "likeness." Paul uses it here to emphasize that we share in the reality of Christ's death and resurrection through Baptism, even though we were not literally crucified on Calvary's cross with Jesus in A.D. 30 or raised from His tomb (cf. "likeness of sinful flesh" in Romans 8:3). This text testifies that in Baptism we are united with Christ, especially His death, so that His victory over sin becomes ours. Furthermore, His victory over death in His resurrection also becomes ours.

Although it is proper to say that this dominion of sin is overcome when we are brought to faith by the Holy Spirit working through the Word, Paul purposefully points to Baptism (the Word joined with

water) as the place and time when this death to sin occurred: “Therefore we were buried with him [Christ] through Baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we walk in newness of life” (6:4). Although there are many and varied situations in which the Holy Spirit works through the Word to bring people to faith, many Christians first experience forgiveness and life through Baptism, and all Christians can look to their Baptism for the certainty of their salvation.

Romans 6:4 is the source of Martin Luther's expression “the Old Adam.” The “robe of righteousness” imagery may be helpful in this discussion (Isaiah 61:10). Notice how Paul links Baptism and justification in Titus 3:5–7: “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (NIV).

Too often justification is viewed as *God's* work while sanctification is viewed as *our* work done in thankful response. As we see here and as we confess in the Third Article, sanctification is also God's work that is the natural result of justification. When we are united with Christ and we nurture that union, Christ will live to God in and through us. Christ is the “New Man” in us who radically changes our identity and who daily lives to God.

97. Answers will vary.

98. Answers will vary. Christian salvation and life are simple. But we complicate things by our own reason and sinful longing.

99. By no means. Christ lives in us. We do not have to return to our previous life of willful sin.

100. Yes, the Romans know this. They live in a slave society. Paul uses the example to say that if you follow someone's orders, you're his slave/servant. Now, who are you following?

101. The benefits of sin are illusionary. What seems a benefit in the moment of pleasure becomes a liability through God's judgment. Compare with James 5:1–3.

102. Paul's teaching makes clear that every person begins life corrupted by sin (Psalm 51:5). Our spiritual need demands a spiritual remedy, which the Lord applies in Baptism (see Colossians 2:11–15).

103. Love for master and family may bind a slave's heart in service. Slavery was not always the oppressive institution we think of today. Many people chose slavery as a means of escaping debt and enjoying the security of a good master.

104. The goodness and generosity of God compel us to abide with Him. He blesses us with holiness and eternal life—there is no better benefits package!

The verb used repeatedly here (verses 13, 16, 19) implies that our lives are now offered or presented to God; no longer do we offer animals or other things as specified in the Old Testament (cf. Romans 12:1). Paul is exhorting these Christians, many of whom were pagans, to now *live* who they are in Christ.

Close with prayer.

12. War with the “Flesh”

Law/Gospel Focus

The sinful nature remains active in Christians, but cannot overthrow Christ's victory.

105. Paul appeals to the common legal principle that death ends contracts and obligations (you can't sue a dead man!). The Christian's new status before the Law begins with the death of Baptism.

106. Certainly not! God's Law is holy and should lead to holiness, except that human nature constantly rebels against the Law.

107. Once again Paul defends the goodness of God's Law and its wholesome purpose in the Christian life. Just as many people fear visiting a doctor or dentist because they fear their diagnosis, people also fear the diagnosis of the Law.

108. In the daily struggle against sin, Christ alone can win the victory. Although Baptism transforms the Christian into a new man who loves God and respects the Law, one still fully depends on Christ for salvation and sanctification.

109. The parts of the body.

Close with prayer.

13. Life in the Spirit

Law/Gospel Focus

The Spirit of Christ nurtures and guides our lives in opposition to the sinful nature and persecution.

110. Paul uses the word "flesh" and its meaning that was common to the people of his day. However, instead of contrasting human flesh with the human spirit, he transforms the message by contrasting "flesh" with the "Spirit" of Christ who dwells within believers.

111. Answers will vary. God has made us His temple. As a result, everywhere we go is "holy ground" and sanctuary. Every step we take and word we speak becomes an act of worship.

112. We continue to use the other fatherhood prayer of Jesus, the Lord's Prayer, as found in Matthew 6 and Luke 11.

113. Although the term "world" often describes corrupt and rebellious people, here John has in mind the corrupt, the saints, and the natural order—all creation. These verses, no doubt, are the theological foundation behind the familiar words of the second and third stanzas of "Joy to the World."

114. Paul's point is that we have hope because we do not yet have all the blessings God has promised. The God of hope has so much more to give. In this respect the Christian life is one of intense longing.

115. Answers will vary. The Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are God's children. He continually comforts us with our Father's promise.

116. Paul doesn't mean that our enemies simply go away. We shall always struggle against false teachers and persecutors. But doubtless God shall give us the victory.

117. He *will* graciously give us all things. See 1 Corinthians 3:21–23.

118. Our enemies and Satan constantly condemn us. Christians even attack one another! But alongside God and defended by Christ, such attacks and arguments have no force.

119. No sword is sharp enough to divide us from our Lord who dwells in us.

120. Today, visitors to Rome can see numerous churches raising crosses above the Roman skyline. Let the crosses you see today proclaim the Lord's victory for you.

Close with prayer.

14. Adoption as Sons

Note for third visual, p. 7. The first Christians, being Jewish, struggled with the idea that God would accept the Gentiles, since the Jewish people considered Gentiles unclean. Romans 9–11 emphasizes that the church, the new Israel, includes both Jewish people and Gentiles.

Law/Gospel Focus

The heavenly Father has chosen and saved both Jews and Gentiles by grace through faith in Christ.

121. Answers will vary. Paul passionately expresses his frustration over the people of Israel. His longing reflects God's desire.

122. The Israelites had rejected God and angered Him. In verse 21 God promises to make them envious by adopting the Gentiles as His people.

123. He is God over all.

124. Romans 9:6–8—The first “Israel” refers to the physical descendants of Isaac. The second refers to the children of the promise, those who believed (cf. the depiction of the church militant as Israel in Revelation 7:1–8). Romans 10:8–12—Both Jews and Gentiles who believe. Romans 11:25–36—The first “Israel” refers to the physical descendants of the Old Testament nation. “All Israel” refers to all Jewish and Gentile believers—the church. 11:25–36, like 9:6–8, affirms that “Israel” refers to the church, since it mentions that Gentiles are part of this “Israel.” The “partial hardening” is the rejection of Jesus by many Jews. The reason Paul is addressing this topic is because he does not want the mission outreach to the Jews to cease as the church moves on to the Gentile mission. Paul is still hopeful that more Jews will come to faith in the future and be part of “all Israel” (the total number of the church) that will be saved.

Therefore, these verses stress the importance of ongoing outreach to Jews, with the hope of more coming to faith in Christ and becoming part of the true “Israel.”

125. God is just, declaring His people justified through Christ.

126. Everyone resists His will! Therefore, the whole world stands condemned.

127. Both believers and unbelievers question the justice of God. As the Creator, God certainly has the right to do with us as He wills. But He does not desire to condemn us. He sent His Son to save us.

128. God could prepare people for destruction, but throughout Scripture He shows that this is not His desire. He created all people for life. He does not predestine anyone to destruction, but does condemn those who refuse to repent.

129. The Gentiles received righteousness by faith, but the Israelites could not attain righteousness through the Law.

130. They sought to justify themselves by the works of the Law.

131. The Word of faith is near—the Word proclaimed by the prophets and apostles, including your pastor: trust in the Lord for your righteousness!

132. Although the nations know God as Creator (1:19–20), they do not know Him as Savior. They need to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

133. No one should make himself a preacher. God calls preachers and sends them forth through His church (note Paul's own experience in Acts 9:15–20; 13:1–3). Although Paul has the personal call of Jesus to be an apostle, he looks forward to the support of the Romans for his work in Spain.

134. Of course, but they did not believe.

135. Paul does not directly answer this question. The Israelites certainly had the Word, but they rejected it.

136. No. Many descendants of Israel trusted in Christ. The church in Paul's day was still largely Jewish. Even today many Jews convert to Christianity each year.

137. God always preserves a remnant of believers to carry on the proclamation of His grace in Christ.

138. Israel, the physical descendants, did not attain God's righteousness, because God chose to give it freely to people of every nation who believed by His grace.

139. No. God is fulfilling His purpose for them and continues to call them to repentance.

Close with prayer.

15. Living Sacrifices

Note for fourth visual, p. 7. The last chapters of Romans describe the life that God's people live in contrast to the ways of the world. The people in the background walk in conformity to the pattern of this world. The Christian in the foreground lives at peace with God and others, offering his life in service.

Law/Gospel Focus

In view of God's mercies, Christians offer their lives in service.

140. Guilt drove the sacrificial system, which began with the Mosaic Law. Before this system of sacrifice began, the patriarchs lived by faith in the promise and offered sacrifices of thanks.

141. In the Old Testament, people offered animals by slaughtering them. Paul calls the Romans to offer themselves alive.

142. The adoption of Israel, the covenants, the Law, the temple, the promises, the presentation of the remnant, the inclusion of the Gentiles, and His patience with Israel.

143. Answers will vary.

144. Paul describes himself living the Christian life according to the grace given him, and he appeals to the Romans to live according to the faith given them. The grace and faith of justification are the basis of sanctification. Both grace and faith are gifts from God.

145. When we offer ourselves in service to God and others, we trust that God works through us. Even when our sacrifices are overlooked or despised, we know that our Father in heaven rejoices in our service.

146. For example, "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" could parallel Jesus chasing the money changers out of the temple without condemning the sacrificial system. Show how Jesus fulfills this pattern of life.

147. He overcame the evil of sin by shedding His good, pure, innocent blood. He extends that victory to you by grace through faith in His Word.

148. Certainly we should not allow our government to abuse its authority. However, our complaints often sound like whining when we consider just how many freedoms we enjoy.

149. Answers may vary. Certainly pay your taxes and pray for your leaders.

150. Remembering that God instituted government causes us to show proper respect. A Christian serving in government should view this work as a holy calling—and act accordingly!

151. God created man in His image. To murder another person is an affront to that person's Maker. God grants the authority to exercise capital punishment.

152. Answers will vary.

153. Love summarizes the Law. Earlier Paul focused on the accusatory and condemnatory actions of the Law against those who disobeyed it.

154. Paul calls you—sober and well-equipped—to battle evil. Every soldier knows that such a battle could make him a sacrifice for his cause.

155. Christ is our armor and covers us in the battle. On the cross, He took the point of the spear and the blows of the enemy to protect us.

Close with prayer.

16. The Strong and the Weak

Law/Gospel Focus

God sustains the work of His kingdom among us despite differences in culture and opinion.

156. Paul speaks from His calling as a minister of Christ. He bases His authority in God and God's mission.

157. I'm a brother with a bad attitude and have no basis in myself for condemning someone else!

158. We belong to the Lord; therefore, we belong to one another.

159. They're fighting about vegetables, but also matters of conscience.

160. Paul describes the members as "brothers," emphasizing their family relationship with the heavenly Father.

161. Paul refers the Romans to Scripture, which provides endurance and encouragement for their life together.

162. Answers will vary. Activities include united confession of faith, praise, and singing together.

163. Paul describes his mission as a priestly duty. He will "sacrifice" the Gentiles to the Lord.

164. Paul boasts about the success of the mission to the Gentiles, attributing all glory to Christ.

165. The power of signs and miracles was evidence of apostolic calling and authority.

166. By praying, the congregation joined Paul in his struggle. This highlights the importance of prayer for the mission of the Gospel. Those who are infirm or isolated in their homes or nursing homes should take special note of this passage and their mission opportunity.

Close with prayer.

17. Closing

Law/Gospel Focus

Paul warns the Romans against false teachers and encourages them to remain steadfast in their mission through the Gospel.

167. Answers will vary.

168. These people are not simply arguing over "disputable matters." They preach a false Gospel with the intent of deceiving God's people.

169. Paul began by explaining the Gospel and its revelation as the fulfillment of the prophetic writings. He concludes with an appeal to support his mission to all nations.

Close with prayer.

Glossary

- alien righteousness.** “Alien” is Latin for “what belongs to someone else.” In theology this means God’s people receive the righteousness that belongs to Christ. He gives us His righteousness.
- apocalyptic.** Greek for “reveal.” Apocalyptic literature describes visions of heavenly mysteries, often about the latter days and the end-time judgment, in order to offer hope of victory for God’s people.
- apostle.** Greek for “sent one.” One of the Twelve or St. Paul, who was chosen by Jesus to guide the mission of the early church.
- dikaiousune.** Greek for “righteousness.” Having a right relationship with another person.
- dispensationalism.** The doctrine that God deals differently with humankind at different points in history, e.g., saving Israelites by the Law of Moses but serving the church through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The elaborate system of present-day dispensationalism was invented by J. N. Darby in the 1830s.
- epistle.** Greek for “letter.” Phoebe of Cenchraea probably delivered the letter titled “Romans” for Paul (16:1).
- forensic.** From the Latin word for “forum,” where legal proceedings or public debates would take place. Legal evidence.
- Gospel.** The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.
- grace.** God’s attitude of loving-kindness or favor toward humankind. Some interpreters misunderstand grace as a power that God bestows on people so that they can save themselves.
- impute.** To credit or attribute the property of one person to another person.
- individual justification.** The individual application of justification for a person when he or she comes to faith through the Gospel or through Baptism. This is sometimes called “subjective justification.”
- house-church.** A small gathering of early Christians (usually 50 individuals or less) in a person’s home. Most early Christian gatherings were in this setting.
- Law.** Biblical teaching that reveals God’s will, shows how man ought to live in order to please God, and threatens God’s wrath against sin.
- monergism.** God by His grace alone saves sinners. Humankind does not contribute to its salvation by offering faith or good works to complete the work of God.
- nomos.** Greek for “law” or “principle.”
- ransom.** Literally, “to buy back at a price.” In doctrine, Christ paid the price for our salvation.
- revelation.** What God makes known about Himself and His will. Natural revelation is what man can learn about God through His creation. Special revelation is what God has made known through Christ, the prophets, and the apostles (the Scripture).
- righteousness of God.** God’s end-times saving action in Christ that has resulted in a changed status: God declares all sinners righteous based on the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus.
- sanctification.** The spiritual growth that follows justification. This is wrought by God only through the means of grace (the Gospel and the Sacraments).
- sedes doctrinae.** Literally, “the seat of doctrine,” meaning an exemplary passage that supports a particular teaching.
- synergism.** The false teaching that humankind cooperates with God in salvation by offering good works or faith to God.
- Torah.** Hebrew for “teaching,” often translated “Law.” The first five books of the Bible, which contain the teaching and Law that God gave to Moses.
- universal justification.** Because of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, God declares all sinners righteous. Universal justification is not the same as universalism (the false teaching that all will be “saved” no matter what they believe). Universal justification is sometimes called “objective justification.”

