5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. 6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous act is one delivered; yet peradventure for a good work are even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. 11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

The Abundant Grace of Christ

Wherefore, as "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," (Romans 5:12) the Abundant Grace of Christ, based on "But the free gift is not of works, but of grace: (Romans 11:6), is the answer to man’s sin problem. It appeared through our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who He is, and how He lived and died, and ascended into heaven. Before the events of the Life of Christ and His death, man either lived as a sinner by nature or as a believer. It was not until Christ came in the flesh, the Son of Man, that man could be reconciled to God. For man is a sinner by nature, and being a sinner, is separated from God, and has no way, as it were, to come to God. Hence there was a need to come to man, a need to reconcile man to God.

The Apostle Paul in Romans 3:23-24 states, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God".

The Abundant Grace of Christ is the grace of God made known through the Lord Jesus Christ: the Son of God, who died for sinners; the Son of God, who was crucified, as the Lamb who taketh away the sins of the world; the Son of God, who is now living in heaven as the Lord Jesus, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings. Man’s sinner state is a separation from the Godhead, from the Holy Presence. Without the Blood of Christ, man is condemned, without Christ, man has no life. Without Christ, man has no way to come to God. The Blood of Christ is the atonement, the means by which man’s sins are forgiven, and reconciliation to God is obtained. The Blood of Christ is the gift of God, the freest gift ever given, and is the means by which man is reconciled to God.
The gospel is the power of God to change lives.

The word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the good news of what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus.

The good news of the gospel is rightly understood in light of the bad news of sin. Romans 3:23 tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Our sin separates us from God.

Nothing we can do will bridge the chasm between us and God. No amount of good deeds can earn our salvation. “No one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law” (Rom. 3:20).

“But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). That is good news! Because Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead, we can have “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1) and “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He is waiting for you now.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.

- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.

- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.
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*Evangelistic Emphasis
MEET THE WRITER

Bob Bunn wrote this study of Romans. Bob lives in Nashville, Tennessee and is an experienced writer and editor. He holds degrees from Liberty University, Ohio University, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.
Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

**Abba** [AH buh]—Abba is an Aramaic term of endearment for “father,” similar to our word for “daddy.” Jesus used the term to speak of His own intimate relationship with God (Mark 14:36); believers enter into a relationship with God as Father through faith (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

**Election**—A term used in the New Testament to refer to the gracious purpose of God in bringing salvation to people (Rom. 9:11; 11:28; 2 Pet. 1:10).

**Flesh**—used by Paul to designate the sinful nature that is incapable of conforming to God’s holy expectation; used also in contrast to anything godly or spiritual

**Gentiles**—The term refers to all people who are not Jews.

**Gospel**—The word gospel means “good news.” The good news is what God has done for us through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

**Illyricum** [ih LIHR ih kuhm]—Illyricum was a province in the Roman Empire, north of Macedonia, that represented the northeastern limits of Paul’s missionary work when he wrote Romans. It was about 1,000 miles from Jerusalem.

**Justified/justification**—To be justified carries the same meaning as being declared righteous. Justified is a legal term that describes one who has been declared not guilty of a crime. Justification brings a sinner into a right relationship with God. It is a work of God based on what Christ accomplished on the cross.

**Redemption**—This word refers to the act of freeing or releasing by paying a ransom price; Jesus gave Himself as a ransom to free sinners from slavery to sin.

**Righteousness/declared righteous**—The term righteous refers to the holy and just nature of God; God is righteous. It also is used in reference to the gracious action of God in declaring believers righteous. We are declared righteous by God, that is, acquitted of all guilt and given a right standing with Him, on the basis of our faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

**Saints**—A saint is a believer in Christ; the word is related to “holy” or “set apart.” All believers are saints because they belong to God and are set apart to live according to His purpose.

**Sanctified**—Sanctification is the experience that begins at conversion by which a believer is set apart by God for His purposes and enabled to grow into the likeness of Jesus by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in his or her life.

**Wrath**—God’s wrath is His hostility toward sin. God is holy and is opposed to sin because it is against His very nature.
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INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

We know Paul as a great missionary preacher, but we cannot forget that he was also a world-class thinker. The Book of Romans demonstrates not only Paul’s passion for the faith, but also his ability to build an airtight case for the gospel.

At the time of this letter, Paul had never visited the Christians in Rome. He wanted to introduce himself to them because he was planning a visit as soon as God allowed. As part of his introduction, he wanted them to know what he believed about important topics like sin and salvation and what it meant to live these doctrines out in practical ways.

It is not clear who established the church in Rome. It’s possible that Jews who had heard Peter’s sermon on Pentecost carried the gospel to Rome and started the church. Whatever the case, the church was a thriving, multi-ethnic congregation.

Paul likely wrote his letter to the Romans from Corinth around AD 56-57. During his time in Corinth, he may have learned about the church from Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:1-3). They had been expelled from Rome with other Christians by Claudius around AD 49 and later became ministry partners with Paul.

Paul wanted to build a relationship with the Romans and wanted to clear up any misunderstandings about his doctrine before his visit. Apparently, the Romans had heard a variety of reports about Paul, so he sought to assure them of his orthodoxy and his authority.

In the first section of the letter (chaps. 1–11), Paul presented a point-by-point apologetic for the gospel. He emphasized the insidious nature of sin and its universal impact on humanity. But he also shared that God provided salvation through His Son.

The second part of the letter (chaps. 12–16) primarily focuses on practical application. Because we belong to Christ, our relationships with those in the church and those outside the church should reflect Him. Above all, the hallmark quality of Christianity should be love.

Paul’s logical presentation of truth and his emphasis on daily living have stood the test of time. As a result, his letter to the Romans has been treasured through the centuries and has been used to share the gospel and disciple Christians.
COMPELLED

The transforming power of the gospel compels believers to share it with others.

ROMANS 1:1-7,13-17

Think about the milestones in our lives. We have parties on our birthdays. We send invitations to our weddings. We announce the births of our children. It’s natural to share life-changing moments. Celebrations are better when others join in. Our salvation changed our lives in ways no other milestone could. But let’s be honest; it’s tempting to keep it to ourselves. Paul didn’t want that for the Romans. He wanted them to embrace the gospel and share it with others.

What was the last major milestone you celebrated? How did you mark that event?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 1:1-17

Unlike the recipients of other Pauline letters, the apostle had not established the church in Rome and had not met the membership when he wrote the epistle. While he acknowledged a desire to meet them face-to-face, the connection had not happened (Rom. 1:9-12). Apparently, Paul was planning a new missionary journey to Spain and would stop by Rome in transit. Instead, Paul made his way to Rome in a much different way. Luke explained in the Book of Acts that Paul entered Rome as a prisoner and lived there under house arrest until his trial before Caesar (Acts 28:11-31).

In addition to being the longest of Paul’s letters, Romans also stands out as one of the most intensely theological letters. Throughout the first half of the letter (chaps. 1–8), Paul outlined an orderly, logical theology of salvation. He began by establishing the sinful nature of humanity and our need for a Savior. He then shared why Christ is the only hope for sinful people and ended the section with an assurance of God’s love and presence in the lives of believers.

After a section related to the salvation of Israel in chapters 9–11, the remainder of the letter addresses practical matters based on the theology presented earlier. Paul recognized that a new relationship with Christ required a new set of ethical standards. The individuals who make up the church must act differently from the world around them. Such behavior draws others to the Savior.

Romans 1:1-17 sets the stage for the teaching to come over the next few chapters. Paul wanted his readers to focus on the power of the gospel. Personally, he was not ashamed of what God had done in his life through the gospel, and he embraced his role as a messenger of the good news. By way of the gospel, unbelievers realize God’s righteousness and His offer of salvation.

Read Romans 1:1-7,13-17 in your Bible. Reflect on how Paul described Christ in these verses. How does that compare to how you tend to think of Jesus?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE GOSPEL DESCRIBED (ROM. 1:1-7)

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures — 3 concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was a descendant of David according to the flesh 4 and was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead. 5 Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles, 6 including you who are also called by Jesus Christ. 7 To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

VERSES 1-4

Paul identified himself as the writer and used three phrases to describe his credentials. First, he was a servant of Christ Jesus. The Greek term here can also be translated “slave.” Paul was completely surrendered to the will of his Master. This image would have made an impact on his readers, since a large portion of Rome’s population was made up of slaves.

Paul then identified himself as an apostle. The word apostle means “one who is sent.” It carried a sense of authority but also highlighted God’s mission for Paul. Finally, he wrote that he was set apart for the gospel. Paul recognized that he had been selected by God to share the message of hope and salvation around the world. This idea of being set apart also relates to the Christian concept of sanctification. In that sense, God has set every believer apart to represent Him in the world—not just those called to “vocational ministry.”

THE THEME OF ROMANS

The gospel is the power of God for salvation and radically changes the lives of all who put their faith in Christ Jesus (1:16). Paul’s passion for the gospel is seen from the opening verse to the closing of the letter. He had been set apart to proclaim the gospel to unbelievers (1:1); the same gospel would strengthen believers in Rome (16:25).
After sharing the nature of his ministry, Paul elaborated on the nature of the gospel itself. First, he noted that the gospel had been promised beforehand. Humanity’s need for a Savior did not catch God by surprise. The first promise of the Messiah came on the heels of Adam and Eve’s fall in Eden (Gen. 3:15). The apostle Peter wrote that God planned to send Jesus before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20). The gospel was not some kind of “Plan B.” It was rooted in the mind of God for eternity and fulfilled through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

The original promises came through the words of the ancient prophets in the Holy Scriptures. (See 2 Pet. 1:16-21.) Long before the birth of Jesus, God’s messengers told His people that the Messiah was coming. Paul was continuing that long line of faithful proclamation, and we are heirs of his legacy today. Like the prophets and apostles, we are called to participate in sharing the gospel with those who are nearby and those who are on the other side of the world.

The gospel finds its power in Jesus Christ. Paul made it clear that the prophetic promises pointed to Jesus and that Jesus was the only One who could fulfill those promises. Jesus alone holds the two main qualities that give anyone the right to be called the Christ. First, He is God’s Son. Jesus was God in flesh. This allowed Him to live a perfect, spotless life—which, in turn, allowed Him to become the perfect, sinless sacrifice. Second, Jesus was a physical descendant of David. God had promised David that the Messiah would come from his offspring. While retaining His divinity, Christ also became completely human and participated in a human family.

It also should be noted that Paul referred to Jesus as our Lord. Calling Jesus Savior relates to the forgiveness of sin. Calling Him Lord assumes the surrendering of a life. As believers, we are called to follow Christ, to be His disciples. Simply put, we are not in charge anymore.

The word appointed in verse 4 could cause some confusion for the casual reader. On the surface, it sounds like deity was bestowed on Jesus at a certain point in time. However, this would deny the deity of Christ. Instead, it is better to understand Jesus’ appointment as Son of God as a confirmation of Him as Savior. Through His life, preaching, and miracles, Jesus demonstrated to all who were paying attention that He really was the long-awaited Messiah. He did not become the Messiah, but He was the Messiah for eternity. The Holy Spirit’s presence in Him added further evidence of His unique relationship with the Father in heaven.
The greatest confirmation of Jesus’ position came through His resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead removed all doubt about who He was and what He had come to accomplish. Without the resurrection, Jesus was simply a good teacher who died for a cause. Because of the resurrection, He reigns as Savior and Lord over all creation.

VERSES 5-6
Believers experience two things as the resurrection power of Christ begins to transform their lives. First, we receive His grace. God’s grace can be defined as His undeserved favor. The second thing we receive is apostleship. While grace has to do with our redemption, apostleship has to do with our responsibility. As mentioned above, an apostle is one who is sent on a mission. Our relationship with Christ demands that we share His message with those around us. We are apostles in that we are sent out to be His hands and feet.

The result of God’s grace and our apostleship should be seeing others become obedient to the faith. Paul reminded the Romans that they were among the Gentiles who had received God’s gift of salvation. They had been called by Jesus Christ because Jesus’ redemption was not limited to a particular group. His offer is universal. We receive the same calling and privilege today. As heirs to this Gentile salvation, God also calls us to share the gospel.

VERSE 7
Paul offered his greetings to the Christians in Rome. But even as he identified the recipients of the letter, he continued to focus on Christ. He reminded them that they were loved by God. They are also saints, a term that emphasizes a call to holiness. God had set them apart, and they held a position in God’s eyes that reflected that reality.

Finally, Paul used a common formula as an initial blessing for the Romans: grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This formula appears in almost all of Paul’s letters. Genuine grace and peace are available only through a relationship with the Father through the Son.

How did Paul understand his purpose in life? How did that purpose relate to the way Paul described Jesus to the Roman believers?
THE GOSPEL DEBT (ROM. 1:13-15)

13 Now I don’t want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I often planned to come to you (but was prevented until now) in order that I might have a fruitful ministry among you, just as I have had among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am obligated both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

VERSE 13
Paul had friends who lived in Rome, but he had never spent time with the Roman congregation. Despite never seeing them face to face, he felt a special bond that led him to pray for them regularly and to plan a visit with them (Rom. 1:8-12).

Paul’s affection for the Roman believers is evident in the phrase brothers and sisters. He recognized the family connection they shared through Christ. Because he cared for them so much, Paul had a strong desire to spend time with them. He told the congregation that he had often planned to come to them but had been prevented.

The passage does not indicate what prevented Paul from coming. He mentioned in a letter to the Corinthians the demands of the churches he had planted (2 Cor. 11:28); perhaps that was what had prevented him from visiting Rome. That’s speculation, but we know his heart was with the Romans even if his body had not arrived yet.

Paul’s passion to visit Rome was rooted not only in the desire for fellowship but also in ministry. He believed Rome would be a fruitful ministry with God’s help.

VERSES 14-15
God called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul had remained faithful to that call. He mentioned two groups that demonstrated his willingness to preach to anyone who would listen. First were
the Greeks, which aligns with the wise. The term refers to individuals with education and pedigree.

Paul also reached out to the barbarians, who would be synonymous with those who are foolish. While we tend to think of barbarians as uncivilized marauders, in Paul’s day the term applied to anyone who was not educated or cultured. These were the commoners who often felt the disdain of the elite.

Paul cared about getting the gospel to as many people as possible. Every person is a sinner and in need of a Savior. Everyone suffers from the same spiritual problem. Paul understood he was obligated by his call and his commitment to the gospel. He never got over the remarkable love of God or the debt he owed Christ.

In Paul’s mind, there was a difference between an obligation and a burden. He was obligated to share the gospel, but it was not burdensome to him to do so. In a sense, Paul was probably never more alive and fulfilled than when he was living out his call to share the gospel. He understood the good work being done by the believers in Rome. He also knew that more work could be done—work he could help accomplish. That’s why he wanted to come to the Empire’s capital. He wanted to spend time with his brothers and sisters in Christ. But even more, he was eager to preach the gospel in Rome.

How would you describe Paul’s passion for sharing the gospel? By comparison, how would you describe your passion for sharing the gospel?

BIBLE SKILL: Use additional Scriptures to understand a passage.

Read the following references to various uses of the term gospel: Matthew 4:23; 26:13; Mark 1:1; 10:29; Luke 4:18; Acts 20:24. How would you define the gospel according to each passage? Now read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. How does Paul’s statement clarify the elements of the gospel?
THE GOSPEL DECLARED (ROM. 1:16-17)

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.

VERSES 16-17

Paul’s entire ministry gave evidence that he was not ashamed of the gospel. He was confident in the gospel’s power to change lives. He knew how Jesus had changed his own life, transforming him from an enemy of the cross to one of the foremost Christian leaders of his day. His conversion demonstrated that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. It doesn’t just contain God’s power; it is God’s power. The gospel does more than just provide salvation from sin; it transforms every area of life.

This power is available to anyone willing to come to Christ. The Jews had the initial opportunity to respond. Abraham had received the promise as part of his blessing from God (Gen. 12:1-3). Jesus had ministered primarily to the Jews, and the early church had focused initially on Jerusalem and other Jewish population centers. Paul and others had taken the gospel to the Greeks, especially after many Jews had rejected the message.

The gospel does more than just provide salvation from sin; it transforms every area of life.

Theologians typically recognize two main forms of divine revelation. The first is general revelation, which allows anyone to see God, particularly through the created world. The second is called special revelation. This involves God making Himself known in specific ways, primarily through the person of Jesus and the message of Scripture. The gospel falls under special revelation. It is God’s direct message to us. Holding up human unrighteousness to the light of God’s righteousness, we see our own sinfulness and our need for a Savior. The phrase from faith to faith emphasizes that the process of being declared righteous by God is by faith from start to finish.

How does the change that comes about through faith in Jesus produce boldness and confidence in sharing the gospel with others?
IN MY CONTEXT

• Truth is found in the gospel.
• Knowing the truth obligates believers to share with those yet to know.
• Truth produces conviction and boldness in those who believe.

What misunderstandings about Jesus have you encountered? How can you use the description of the gospel given by Paul to correct those misunderstandings?

Discuss ways your Bible study group can more effectively share the gospel. How can your group give greater support to the activities in your church designed to share the gospel?

How has the gospel transformed your life? With whom can you share about this change?

Prayer Needs
Guilty

Ignoring God leads to destruction.

ROMANS 1:18-28,32

Pick any destination in your town. How many ways can you get from your home to that spot? You can probably come up with dozens of possible routes, but some would be better than others. One might even be the best. Life is a lot like that. It’s a journey to find meaning. The world gives us plenty of options claiming to offer true peace and purpose. But when the time came for God to unveil His plan for the human race, He only provided one option. He only made one way—and His name is Jesus.

What might a person turn to in his or her search for meaning? How would you rank the items you listed from most tried to least?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 1:18–2:16

The Christians in Rome lived in the most powerful city in the most powerful empire the world had ever known. They were at the center of the action and were building a reputation for faithfulness that even made Paul take notice. But they were also on the brink of systematic persecution. Believers turned heads because they refused to worship the Roman pantheon of gods—including the emperor. In time, their choice to name only Jesus as Lord would turn the government against them. Within a decade of Paul’s letter, the persecution would steadily increase.

Paul wanted the Roman Christians to have a strong foundation for their faith. He challenged them to examine their faith and to make sure they were standing on the truth of the gospel—the gospel for which he had been named an apostle (1:13-15) and which held the only power for salvation (1:16-17).

Paul began unpacking his theology by examining just how far humanity had strayed from God. Since Eden, people had continued to rebel against their Creator and placed themselves under His wrath and judgment (1:18). They had warped everything holy and made God into their image instead of celebrating His image in themselves (1:25-28). Those who insisted on rejecting Him would end up being rejected by Him (1:28).

The judgment unbelievers will experience at the hands of God is not based on some capricious whim. God will measure their actions by the truth of His perfect standard. God will play no favorites. Each person’s works will speak for themselves (2:1-11).

The condition of people’s hearts is reflected in their actions. Whether those individuals are Jews or Gentiles, what they do communicates more than what they say. While we are not saved by our works, those works speak volumes about whether we are surrendered to God or still in rebellion against Him.

Read Romans 1:18-28,32 in your Bible, underlining God’s response to humanity’s rejection of Him. How would you describe the basic relationship between God and humanity?
18 For God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, 19 since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse.

VERSEs 18-20
While God’s righteousness has been revealed through the gospel (1:17), His wrath is also being revealed. The two are closely connected since God’s righteousness is the basis for His wrath.

Paul used wrath to explain God’s intense anger toward godlessness and unrighteousness. While human wrath can be motivated by sin, God’s wrath is completely just. Since Eden, humans have rejected God’s authority. His holiness cannot allow sin to stand unpunished. As long as individuals live in rebellion, they live under God’s wrath.

Paul also noted that ungodly people suppress the truth. When they reject the truth, they also reject the origin of truth—God Himself. It would be one thing if God had never revealed Himself, but that is not the case. God has made Himself known to us. Paul told the Romans that everything we know—or can know—about God is possible because God has shown it to us.

Even God’s invisible attributes were obvious to those who looked for them. His existence and power are evident through the created world. As David wrote, nature itself proclaims God’s glory (Ps. 19:1). Because God is seen through what He has made, His highest creation—humanity—will be held accountable for its rebellion. Those who refuse to acknowledge God are without excuse.

Where do you see God’s presence and work through what He has created? What have you learned about Him by observing what He has made?
KEY DOCTRINE: Man

Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin (Gen. 3:1-10).

REPLACED BY NONSENSE (ROM. 1:21-23)

21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.

VERSES 21-23

Nature makes God’s existence and power clear. But Paul explained that knowing about Him was not enough. He described a progression of humanity spiraling from bad to worse. First, even though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God. This was an intellectual knowledge, not a saving knowledge. People refused to ascribe to Him the honor, position, and authority He deserved. Instead, they valued the creation more than the Creator. This led to decay in their minds and hearts. Because they rejected truth, their thinking became worthless. They weren’t even capable of thinking rational, realistic thoughts. At the same time, their hearts were darkened. They became more self-absorbed and alienated from their Creator.

Rebelling against God, humans claimed superior wisdom. This attitude reflected the nature of Satan. The devil had fallen from God’s presence because of his own arrogance. What’s more, he had promised Adam and Eve that the forbidden fruit would make them wise like God (Gen. 3:5).

Paul’s emphasis on wisdom may also refer to the rise of mystery religions in the first century. Many cults were built on belief in a special knowledge available only to privileged individuals. These twisted theologies only served to drive people deeper into their own arrogance and further from God’s truth.

People have been deceiving themselves since the fall. While we tend to overstate our wisdom, Paul noted that we are simply fools.
The depth of humanity’s foolishness is best demonstrated by what we allow to rule our lives. As spiritual beings, we naturally worship something or someone. If we don’t allow God to fill that role, our darkened hearts will find something else. In ancient days, people replaced God’s glory with a variety of images. Paul’s language points back to creation, when God created humans in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). But godless people tried to shape Him into their own image—mortal man—or into the image of birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. The prophet Jeremiah said the idols of his day were “like scarecrows in a cucumber patch” (Jer. 10:5). The false gods of the first century were no better—and neither are the ones we create today. Rejecting God’s truth leads to darkness and foolishness.

*With what false gods do people try to replace God today? How do our substitutes demonstrate our foolishness?*

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**BIBLE SKILL: Compare related passages.**

Read Romans 1:20-29 looking for opportunities for repentance that were ignored. Then read Exodus 6:6-7; Numbers 10:9-10; and Psalm 34:4 looking for opportunities for repentance that were heeded. How would you contrast these examples with the way God delivered His people when they repented? What does this comparison teach us about God’s holiness, mercy, and justice?

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**DELIVERED OVER (ROM. 1:24-28)**

24 Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women
exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error. 28 And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right.

**VERSES 24-25**

When ungodly people consistently reject God, He ultimately rejects them. When His correction is ignored, God allows humans to follow their path and experience the consequences of their choices. This does not mean that He will not take them back or that they have crossed into some kind of unforgivable sin. But it does mean that God lets them feel the full weight of their foolishness.

Paul noted that sinful humanity’s rebellion takes over more and more of their lives. What started as darkness in their hearts has a corrupting influence on their physical bodies as well—especially through sexual impurity. He used the word degraded to describe the systematic decline into ungodly behavior. The implication is that the cancer of sin moves swiftly throughout the body, poisoning everything as it goes.

Paul pointed out again that godless people have exchanged the truth of God for a lie. Their minds have grown so dark that they cannot discern the difference between right and wrong. Even worse, they begin to equate wrong with right in their minds.

Reinforcing his comments about the images of animals in verse 23, the apostle wrote that evil people choose to worship what has been created instead of the Creator. This is essentially because they have denied the existence and authority of a Creator.

*How does getting what we desire lead to greater problems?*

**VERSES 26-27**

Again Paul used the word exchanged. Not only did people exchange a false god for the true Lord (v. 25), these individuals rejected their God-designed sexuality for self-styled depravity. Women suffered
from *unnatural* relationships with one another. They exchanged normal sexual relations for an alternative that really was no alternative. Meanwhile, men had left their *natural relations with women* and began to *lust for one another.*

The Roman world generally accepted homosexuality and other forms of sexual immorality. Paul clearly labeled homosexuality a sin because it reverses God’s intended order and design. Believers, however, should remember that homosexuality is not an “unforgivable sin.” God’s grace can cover every confessed sin.

**VERSE 28**

Paul again emphasized how the darkened mind of humanity is blinded to God’s perfect plan. The idea that humans did not think it *worthwhile to acknowledge God* points to arrogance and ignorance. Again, Paul noted that God delivered them over to a *corrupt mind.* He allowed them to go their own way and to face the results of their choice. Ultimately, God longs for sinners to return to Him. However, rebels are held accountable for their rejection of Him.

**DESERVING DEATH** *(ROM. 1:32)*

32 Although they know God’s just sentence — that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.

**VERSE 32**

Throughout Romans 1, Paul painted a grim picture of humanity wandering aimlessly without Christ. To make matters worse, many who reject Christ think they will somehow escape His wrath. But Paul pointed out that God has pronounced a *just sentence* against the rebels — death. This judgment is based on His righteousness. The consequence of sin is death. Humanity died spiritually in Eden. Physical death and eternal death (separation from God) entered the world at that time. But with their actions and attitudes, rebellious sinners mock the Savior and proudly spread their infection of deception, sin, and death to those around them.

*Why is God justified in judging all sin?*
IN MY CONTEXT

• God reveals Himself in His creation.
• Rejecting God’s truth leads to darkness and foolishness.
• Rejecting God leads to devaluing life.
• Refusing to honor God justifies a sentence of death.

In what ways have you been blinded to sin? How did you realize your need for God? How can you help others realize their need for God?

Where is darkness at work in your community? How can you help bring God’s light to those places?

List some people you know living under God’s death sentence today. How can you and your Bible study reach those individuals with the gospel?

Prayer Needs
INSUFFICIENT

Since no one can keep the law perfectly, everyone needs a Savior.

ROMANS 2:17-29

We never make a sale every time we talk to a potential client. Athletes never hit every pitch, make every shot attempt, or complete every pass. Why? Because nobody’s perfect. And what’s true in these areas is also true in our spiritual lives. God’s standard is perfection, and none of us can reach that standard. That’s a problem. And that’s what makes Jesus’ work on the cross so important.

What are some things you’re really good at? How close are you to perfect in those areas? In what ways do you fall short?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 2:17–3:20

In his early years, Paul received religious training at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the leading Jewish theologians of the first century. That meant two things. First, Paul knew how to develop a logical argument. Second, Paul knew the law inside and out. He knew about God’s standard of perfection, and he knew that humanity could never live up to that high standard. His training taught him that the only way people could bridge that gap was to keep the law to the best of their ability—and hope that they had done enough when the time came to stand before God.

By his own testimony, the apostle had come about as close to keeping the law as a human could. He told the believers in Philippi that if anyone could be confident in their good works, it was him. He had the right qualifications and held the right credentials. When it came to keeping the law, he was “blameless” (Phil. 3:4-6). But that wasn’t enough—for him or any other person.

After spending most of chapter 1 detailing the sin and depravity of the Gentiles, Paul admitted that God’s chosen people fell short as well. If the law was the standard, then no one could escape God’s judgment (Rom. 2:1-16). The Jews had violated God’s law in many ways through the ages (2:17-29). Even though they knew a lot about God, they didn’t know His heart. They had disobeyed His commands. They had led other nations astray. They had relied on symbols like circumcision instead of trusting the Savior of the world.

When all was said and done, the Jews had no advantage over the Gentiles when it came to standing before God (3:1-8). All people find themselves in the same mess. They are sinful in God’s eyes and incapable of satisfying His demand for perfection (3:9-20). That’s why every person needs a Savior.

*Read Romans 2:17-29 in your Bible. How would you describe the Jews’ attitude toward the law and their relationship with God?*
The text from Romans 2:17-24 is as follows:

17 Now if you call yourself a Jew, and rely on the law, and boast in God, and know his will, and approve the things that are superior, being instructed from the law, and if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light to those in darkness, an instructor of the ignorant, a teacher of the immature, having the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law—

21 you then, who teach another, don’t you teach yourself? You who preach, “You must not steal”—do you steal? You who say, “You must not commit adultery”—do you commit adultery? You who detest idols, do you rob their temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? For, as it is written: The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

These verses provide insight into problems with the Jews. On the surface, these didn’t really look like problems. They looked like positive qualities that should be applauded. But Paul saw chinks in the armor of these “boasts.” What had once given the Jews strength had transformed into the fatal flaw of self-righteousness.

First, they were taking undue pride in their status as God’s chosen people. The phrase translated if you call yourself a Jew can also be rendered “since you call yourself a Jew.” In their eyes, being Jewish meant everything in terms of righteousness before God.

Next, they were relying on the law. Over time, the law God had given on Mount Sinai had become a god unto itself. Just as the Gentiles worshiped creation instead of the Creator, the Jews worshiped the law instead of the Lawgiver. Also, the Jews would boast in God. In truth, they were boasting in their special relationship with Him as the recipients of the law.

Finally, they claimed to know and follow God’s will. Throughout their history, God had revealed Himself to them in ways no other nation had seen. The law was a part of that revelation. Because they
embraced the law, the Jews embraced the superiority of God’s plan over any other belief system—at least in words.

**VERSES 19-20**

Paul again used the word *if* to make explicit the assumptions many Jews held in their minds. They saw themselves as lights to the world. While the rest of the world wandered in darkness, the Jews believed they held the truth that allowed people to see God for who He really is.

God had called Israel to teach other nations the difference between right and wrong. Most Gentiles were *ignorant* of God’s work in the world. It was the responsibility of the Jews to help them know God. But they had either assimilated to the pagan practices of their neighbors or completely withdrawn into a spiritual cocoon that protected their rituals. Neither approach fulfilled God’s plan.

When God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, the Lord said the blessing wasn’t just for the patriarch and his offspring. The blessing was also for others—with its ultimate fulfillment in Christ (Gen. 12). The prophet Isaiah confirmed that God expected Israel to be a light for the nations and to teach them about His salvation (Isa. 60:1-3).

**God’s people became self-centered and self-righteous, snubbing their noses at the very people they were commanded to help.**

The Jews had failed to accomplish this mission. Instead of leading the *blind*, they had become stumbling blocks. Likewise, their teaching fell flat because they did not apply it to their own lives. God’s people became self-centered and self-righteous, snubbing their noses at the very people they were commanded to help.

*How do you see self-righteousness expressed in the world today? How does today’s self-righteousness compare to what Paul was addressing?*
VERSES 21-22
After listing all the reasons why the Jews believed they were superior to the Gentiles, Paul turned the tables in a startling way. He pointed out the Israelites’ hypocrisy by showing that they did not practice what they preached. Just like an accountant lists debits and credits on opposite sides of a ledger, Paul demonstrated how the Jews’ spiritual liabilities revealed their true spiritual condition.

The Jews claimed to be teachers of God’s law, but Paul pointed out that they didn’t even follow their own teaching. He provided examples of the Jews’ hypocritical positions. The law clearly stated that they should not steal. But his question—*do you steal?*—implies a positive response. God’s people were guilty of breaking the very rules they demanded others keep.

In addition to stealing, Paul questioned the Jews’ integrity in two other areas: adultery and idolatry. The Ten Commandments leave no wiggle room for either practice. The Jews were forbidden to have sexual relationships outside of marriage. God strictly warned them against serving any deity aside from Him. Yet they were guilty of both. They were unfaithful to their spouses and to their God. On the outside, they despised idolatry. In their hearts, however, they longed for the treasures found in pagan temples. The walk did not back up the talk.

VERSES 23-24
After calling out specific examples, Paul made a general statement about the Jews’ lack of scruples. By violating even one of the commands God had provided, they were guilty of violating the entire law. James also emphasized this point in his letter (Jas. 2:8-12).

The Jews were no better than the Gentiles they judged. Both were guilty and needed a Savior. Sometimes, it’s tempting to write off some sins as too minor to worry about. We think God will somehow understand and let our sins slide because we’re generally good people. Paul stated this was not the case.

Referring to passages like Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:20-21, Paul wrote that the hypocrisy of the Jews pushed the nations farther away from God. Their lack of integrity and sincerity gave the name of God a black eye among the Gentiles, leading them to blaspheme Him. The name that the Jews would not speak because of its holiness was being abused and dragged through the mud due to their hypocrisy. The Jews claimed to worship God with whole
hearts. But by breaking the law, they diminished God in the eyes of their neighbors. The missionary purpose of Israel had suffered, and God held the Jews accountable for their actions.

**OBEEDIENCE REQUIRED** *(ROM. 2:25-27)*

25 Circumcision benefits you if you observe the law, but if you are a lawbreaker, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 So if an uncircumcised man keeps the law’s requirements, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27 A man who is physically uncircumcised, but who keeps the law, will judge you who are a lawbreaker in spite of having the letter of the law and circumcision.

**VERSES 25-27**

God gave the Israelites *circumcision* before He gave them the law. Abraham had every male in his family circumcised, along with his male servants. Other patriarchs followed suit. Circumcision was intended to be a physical reminder of Israel’s relationship with God and responsibility before God. Though it had become a source of pride for Israel, it was actually a reminder of the nation’s failure. Because they had transgressed other parts of the law, their circumcision was an empty practice.

To drive home his point even more deeply, Paul presented a case study of sorts. The apostle asked his Jewish audience to imagine an uncircumcised man—likely a Gentile—who trusted God and kept the law. In this scenario, the question was, “Who really pleased God?”

In the Gospels, Jesus startled His listeners by making a hated Samaritan the hero of a parable (Luke 10:25-37). Paul followed a similar tactic here, assuring the Jews that an obedient person honored God, even though he wasn’t circumcised. By obeying God’s commands, this individual would have shown more devotion to God than one who was circumcised but disconnected from God.

**A genuine relationship with God does not rest in outward ceremonies; it is a matter of the heart.**

Circumcision was useful only if an individual kept the whole law perfectly. That was not going to happen. Paul emphasized that a genuine relationship with God does not rest in outward ceremonies; it is a matter of the heart. (See 1 Cor. 7:19.)
Paul summarized his emphasis on obedience with one last zinger. Not only would an uncircumcised obedient man find favor with God, such a person’s actions would judge the Jews, providing evidence of their unfaithfulness. For centuries, the Jews had judged others. Paul turned the table on their faulty theology.

**Leaning on the law to find God’s favor only works if you keep the law perfectly.**

God desires obedience from the heart, and anyone with genuine faith has access to the Father. Paul wanted his readers to understand that leaning on the law to find God’s favor only works if you keep the law perfectly. The Jews had broken the law, and circumcision could not change that.

*What religious practices might a person point to today in an effort to prove righteousness?*

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**KEY DOCTRINE: Man**

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God (1 Cor. 1:21-31).

**HEART RECOGNIZED (ROM. 2:28-29)**

28 For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. 29 On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter. That person’s praise is not from people but from God.

**VERSES 28-29**

For centuries, the Jews had been known as God’s people, and circumcision had been the visible sign of that relationship. Paul understood that being God’s people was about more than
following rituals. Being a child of God never depended on physical signs or ceremonies; it depended on faith in Jesus Christ. The children of God were not those who had been physically circumcised but those who had devoted their hearts to God by putting their faith in the Savior He sent, Jesus Christ.

**God sees past the hypocritical masks and honors those who follow Him with all their hearts.**

Beyond the issue of circumcision, Paul used another contrast to describe the new paradigm of faith—*the letter* and *the Spirit*. The old way of doing things focused on keeping the law to maintain a right relationship with God. But the letter of the law had given way to the power of the Spirit to change the heart. Instead of cutting away flesh, the Spirit cuts away sin. God sees past the hypocritical masks and honors those who follow Him with all their hearts.

*How would you describe the Spirit’s work of circumcising a person’s heart? How might this be described today?*

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**BIBLE SKILL: Allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.**

Read Philippians 3:5-11, identifying the things Paul notes about his life prior to becoming a Christ follower. How did Paul’s life confirm what he wrote in Romans 2? How is what Paul wrote to the Romans another way of Paul sharing his life experience?
IN MY CONTEXT

- A person’s inability to keep the law cancels any claims of self-righteousness.
- The profit of the law is found only in full obedience to the law.
- God looks at the heart of humans, acknowledging those with a heart dedicated to Him.

In what areas do you try to compare yourself positively to other people? What actions do you need to take to safeguard against comparing yourself with others?

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How would you describe your level of obedience to God? Where are you just giving Him lip service? What will you do about it?

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How can you and the members of your Bible study encourage one another to have hearts for God? List actions the group needs to take.

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Prayer Needs
All who accept the gospel by faith are justified before the Father.

**ROMANS 3:21–4:3**

Most of us want to avoid the embarrassment that comes with having our debit card denied or realizing we are a dollar short and unable to pay for the meal we just ordered. When those things happen, it feels like the eyes of everyone are suddenly on us. Paul reminded the Roman believers they all fell short when it came to God’s righteousness. He also explained that through faith in Jesus, we find God’s grace and His willingness to cover our shortcomings.

*Which would be a greater embarrassment: having your card denied at a restaurant or realizing you are a dollar short at a cash-only restaurant? Explain.*
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 3:21–4:25

Paul spent the first portion of his letter to the Romans explaining the dire spiritual situation of both Gentiles and Jews. The Gentiles ignored the truth of God by worshiping the creation instead of the Creator (Rom. 1:18–32). The Jews considered themselves superior to the Gentiles but were just as separated from God by their sin (2:17-29). No one—Jew or Gentile—could claim a righteous standing before God. It would seem the human race was trapped in a hopeless dilemma. We are all separated from God and incapable of restoring our relationship with Him on our own. Our actions could never be enough to pay for our offenses against Him.

Paul turned an important corner in Romans 3. While all have sinned and are separated from God, God has provided a way of salvation (3:21-31). The way is by acknowledging God’s grace and coming to Him through faith in Christ. Instead of relying on our own efforts, we need to look toward the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

This means two things. First, humans have no reason to brag about our own spirituality. Jesus is our only hope. Second, God’s offer is open to anyone who is willing to accept it by faith alone. If the Jews would look back at their history, this would be evident. Their patriarch Abraham was redeemed by faith long before Moses received the law on Mount Sinai (4:1-3).

David also recognized the importance of faith, as Paul emphasized with a quote from Psalms (Rom. 4:6–8). But Abraham understood what was truly needed. Instead of trusting in circumcision or some other legal restraint, faith remains the only option. His faith in God was what made him righteous, and it was what would make his descendants (and the Gentiles) righteous as well (4:13-24).

Read Romans 3:21–4:3 in your Bible, circling each time Paul used the word faith. How would you describe the importance of faith based on this passage?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

THROUGH FAITH (ROM. 3:21-24)

21 But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. 22 The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction. 23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. 24 They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

VERSES 21-23

People tend to be legalistic and compare themselves to others based on external standards and rules. But God has revealed His plan for salvation outside the law.

Paul introduced this passage with but now, one of his favorite transitional phrases. He used it to prepare readers for a coming contrast. While both Jews and Gentiles had a sin problem, God had a solution for both. Those who disputed Paul on this needed to take a closer look at the Scriptures. Both the Law and the Prophets affirmed this truth, pointing to God’s plan of salvation through faith alone.

The way to a right relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament pointed to God’s righteousness coming through faith. For Jews, this meant moving away from their spiritual scorecards. Meanwhile, Gentiles coming out of a pagan environment would have struggled with the idea of a personal, loving God.

God saw no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. They all have the same need. They all receive the same benefit. They all receive it the same way. They are all sinners granted salvation through the work of Jesus alone.

There is a universal need for a Savior because all have sinned. Paul made this same point earlier by quoting passages from the Psalms and Isaiah (Rom. 3:10-18).

KEY DOCTRINE: Man

By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race (1 John 1:8-10).
God’s standard of righteousness is His own perfection. Humanity cannot live up to that standard. Every person misses the mark. Some may come closer than others, but that’s a hollow claim—like measuring how close one comes to jumping the Grand Canyon. No one comes close to reaching the other side.

**VERSE 24**

Faith in Jesus does not require perfection; it only requires God’s grace. While God’s gift is free to us, it cost Him dearly. Because of Christ’s sacrifice, we can have a relationship with God we don’t deserve—and avoid His wrath that we do deserve. This is grace.

As Paul noted later in the passage, any attempt at earning salvation or taking credit for God’s work is futile. Anything we might bring to the equation—other than childlike faith—comes up lacking. We need Him.

Just as there is no distinction in who sins, there is no distinction in who can be justified. Anyone who places his or her trust in Christ can be saved. Paul’s wording may have reminded Roman readers of slaves being redeemed from captivity. Through the free gift of God’s grace, we are rescued from slavery to sin and restored to a right standing with God.

*What word or phrase in verse 24 stands out the most? How does that word or phrase counter the reality of verse 23?*

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**IN JESUS** (ROM. 3:25-26)

25 God presented him as an atoning sacrifice in his blood, received through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. 26 God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be righteous and declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.

**VERSES 25-26**

The Jews understood sacrifices. Even before the law, they slaughtered animals to make things right with God. Paul said that
God was actually the One who offered the ultimate sacrifice. God initiated our salvation.

Verses 25-26 emphasize God’s work through Christ. Jesus was the atoning sacrifice that makes all other sacrifices obsolete. Making atonement means paying the penalty that restores a relationship.

God’s motive for this incredible act was to demonstrate his righteousness and grace. Obviously, God owes us nothing. However, He loves us, and His gift of salvation proves that love.

God’s timing is always perfect. He had chosen the present time to reveal Jesus to the world. In a sense, Christ’s death was God’s announcement that redemption was now available. But the cross wasn’t just an announcement; it is also an invitation. God will •declare righteous anyone who accepts Jesus’ sacrifice in faith. His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

This salvation is not something added to what we were already doing. It is based on Jesus’ finished work alone. Our good works mean nothing; His death means everything. Through accepting His free gift through faith, we are made right with God.

How would you explain Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for our sins to a person who is not a believer? What illustrations or analogies could you use to explain unfamiliar words like sacrifice?

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary.

FOR ALL PEOPLE (ROM. 3:27-31)

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By one of works? No, on the contrary, by a law of faith. 28 For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 30 Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

VERSES 27-28

Jesus did everything necessary for our salvation. All that is left is to accept His gift by faith. Since He has done all the work, we have no room to brag about our own goodness.

Paul told the Romans that Jesus’ death and resurrection leaves no room for boasting. The wording points toward Israel’s pride as God’s chosen people. Paul used a series of rhetorical questions to show how such spiritual pride is empty. It is inappropriate to brag about a gift that is given, not earned. Plus, this gift is available to everyone. The law of faith—total dependence on Jesus—stands in contrast to works of the law—dependence on ourselves. Thus, bragging on Jesus and His free gift should replace boasting in our feeble efforts.

Justified is a legal term that describes one who has been declared not guilty of a crime. Despite being accused of violating a standard, a judge’s decision cleans the wrongdoer’s record and frees him or her from the consequences of guilt.

Spiritual justification works the same way. We stand accused before a perfect Judge. Because we put our faith in His Son, the Judge declares us not guilty. Our record is cleared, and we escape the sentence we deserve.

VERSES 29-30

Salvation by faith underscores the breadth of God’s offer. Under the law, it was easy to assume salvation was a “Jewish thing.” But this salvation offered to all required a fresh understanding of the wideness of God’s love and grace.

Again, Paul laid out the logic through rhetorical questions. Every Jew would have understood that God is the Creator of all people,
but Jews were basically trying to keep God to themselves. Instead, God is the Lord over all, and His Son came to be the Savior of all. So the invitation represented by the cross and the empty tomb is open to anyone who has faith.

God is not concerned whether an individual is a Jew or a Gentile. He doesn’t see people as circumcised or uncircumcised. Instead, He is interested in our faith.

The invitation represented by the cross and the empty tomb is open to anyone who has faith.

VERSE 31
A pious Jew would have considered Paul’s teaching scandalous. But he was already ahead of them. With one final rhetorical question Paul addressed the Jews’ primary objection—that faith makes the law worthless. In response, he stated that instead of diminishing the law, faith actually fulfills its purpose. The law focused on convicting people of sin, showing them how far short of God’s standard they were falling. But it never had the power to fix the problem.

As Paul would affirm later in the letter, faith in Jesus is able to accomplish what the law could not (Rom. 8:3-4). God offers salvation to anyone willing to believe.

How does salvation being offered to all impact how believers should relate to other people? How might it impact how believers pray?

INCLUDING ABRAHAM (ROM. 4:1-3)

1 What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about—but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness.
Paul’s next rhetorical question took Israelites back to the very origin of their identity. **Abraham** was the father of the Jewish nation. The patriarch’s name provided a clue to the direction Paul was heading. Abraham had been known as Abram, which meant “exalted father.” But God changed his name to Abraham, which meant “father of a multitude.” Physically, that certainly meant the Jewish nation. But God also promised that this multitude would include people from every corner of the world who would be blessed by Abraham’s life (Gen. 12:1-3).

Paul’s question was pretty simple: How was Abraham justified? The answer probably surprised many of Paul’s Jewish readers. Most devout Jews would have assumed that Abraham earned God’s favor by obeying God’s laws. This would have given him room to **boast about** his good works—which would have given them room to brag about their special standing with God. However, the historical timeline would not support their claim. Since Abraham lived hundreds of years before Moses, his obedience could not have been tied to observing the law.

**Abraham chose to believe what God said, even when it didn’t make sense to him.**

Paul affirmed that God justified Abraham by faith. To support that claim, he quoted Genesis 15:6. The apostle made it clear that Abraham chose to believe what God said, even when it didn’t make sense to him. That decision to believe—to live by faith—is what saved Abraham.

Using business terminology, Paul described the spiritual transaction that took place in Abraham’s heart. He deposited his trust in God’s words, as demonstrated by his willingness to obey. God recorded that faith as a credit to his account. Abraham’s debt was paid in full by his faith in God—just as ours is paid through our faith in Christ.

*How does the faith of Abraham compare to the faith required of believers today?*
IN MY CONTEXT

- God gives salvation freely to anyone who places their faith in Jesus.
- God declares those who place faith in Jesus to be righteous.
- Since all are saved through faith in Jesus, boasting is excluded.
- Faith is the only path to God.

What sins do you tend to categorize as requiring God’s immediate judgment? Based on this passage, what adjustments do you need to make in your attitude toward people who commit the sins you identified?

What can you and the members of your Bible study do to intentionally show love to people who are different from you? When will you start?

Write about how you accepted God’s offer of salvation through faith. Take time to thank Him for providing you salvation. If you haven’t made that choice, what’s holding you back? Who can you talk to about it?

Prayer Needs
ROMANS 5:1-11

We live with a basic understanding of “cause and effect.” With everything we see or experience we tend to look for some type of cause. Paul followed a similar line of logic as he walked his Roman readers through the reality of salvation and the Christian life. Sin has an effect and so does faith in Jesus.

Why is it important to find the primary cause behind some type of event? How might a person go about identifying the specific cause that created a specific event?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 5:1-21


In Romans 4, Paul revealed the other side of the coin. False gods offered no help to the pagans, and the law of Moses only revealed sin; it did not remove it or free the individual from its effects. But God made sure things didn’t stay that way. He shined a light in the darkness. That light was His Son.

Faith has always been God’s standard for justification. Abraham had believed and been justified by his faith centuries before the law. Later, David testified to the role of faith in salvation. The entire sacrificial system pointed to the Lamb of God who would come and provide the final sacrifice. Ultimately, the faith of the ancients became realized in Jesus Christ. Anyone who put his or her faith in Jesus and His work on the cross would be justified in God’s sight.

That was the cause of salvation; in Romans 5, Paul turned his attention to the effects of justification. Because God has declared us righteous, we now live in peace with God. The human race’s war with God can end. In addition, we now experience hope and purpose for this life and the next.

Paul pointed out that the chaos caused by the first Adam had been replaced by the peace produced by the second Adam—Jesus Christ. Because we are at peace with God, we can live at peace with one another.

Read Romans 5:1-11, identifying the things a believer gains through faith in Jesus Christ. How are these benefits of salvation connected?

KEY DOCTRINE: Salvation (Justification)

Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God (Gal. 3:13).
Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

VERSES 1-2

*Therefore* is a transitional word that indicates how one thing leads to another. The word appears in three significant places in Romans (5:1; 8:1; 12:1). Paul had already outlined the path to justification by faith. Now, he transitioned to the effects of justification.

Paul shifted from terms like “you” and “they” (which appear more than 70 times in the first four chapters) to the first-person pronoun *we*. Where Paul had previously addressed those outside the faith, he was now focusing on believers who had been justified and needed to understand how that changed their lives.

The first benefit of justification is *peace*. This includes the absence of conflict but goes farther by emphasizing completeness or unity. Those who trust Christ can experience peace with God.

As a result of peace with God, believers have *access* to God. Instead of being in a state of hostility toward God and separated from Him, they now can approach Him as Father.

Paul also reminded the Romans that this was all the result of God’s grace in their lives. They had no standing of their own, but they stood in the unmerited favor that God poured out on those who lived by faith. In addition, this grace—and the access it provides—gives individuals confidence in *the hope of the glory of God*. Previously, Paul had noted that the human race fell short of God’s glory (3:23). Now, however, those who have been justified reflect God’s glory and find hope for this life and the next.
What is the relationship between peace and hope? How do they complement each other?

VERSES 3-5
Justification will not remove all the afflictions in our lives. Paul used a Greek word that suggests suffering experienced for the sake of the gospel. In a sense, this is a specific category of suffering reserved for believers as God transforms them into His likeness.

Even when we suffer, our new relationship with God gives meaning to those challenges. James offered a similar encouragement (Jas. 1:2-4). Believers can rejoice in affliction because they recognize the hand of God at work in those hard times. This is not simply keeping a stiff upper lip and making lemonade out of lemons. Affliction, Paul noted, creates endurance.

Athletes put stress on their bodies through exercise and training. That work is hard but produces more strength and endurance for the competition to come. The same is true with our afflictions. The hard times we experience build spiritual muscle that helps us endure and move forward.

Endurance produces character. The Greek term translated character carries the idea of something being proven through a trial or hardship. Afflictions squeeze our lives and reveal ungodly actions and attitudes. As we endure, God refines those rough edges and we become more like the people God created us to be. Then our renewed character brings us full circle, back to the hope we have in Christ. This is not pie-in-the sky optimism. It is a deeper sense of peace and trust that God has a plan for our present and our future.

The world is filled with disappointments. Focusing on disappointments can mar our character and produce despair. But the hope God produces in our lives through affliction, endurance, and character does not fall into that category. It never disappoints. It always meets us right where we are with exactly what we need.

That’s because it is rooted in God’s love. When we come to Him in faith, we move from being the objects of His anger and wrath to being the recipients of His love. Paul wrote that God pours out His love on us, completely covering us. Our afflictions lead to hope, which gives us a keener sense of His love for us.
God’s love is poured out on us through the work of the Holy Spirit. In any circumstance, the Spirit will guide and direct us in the right way, helping us endure hard times and grow stronger in our faith.

**BIBLE SKILL: Compare similar passages by the same writer.**

Compare Galatians 2:15-17 and 3:10-14 with Romans 5:1-2. Identify common words, phrases, and themes in these passages. What insights do you gain about justification as a result of this comparison? Write a summary statement based on the comparison.

**JUSTIFIED THROUGH HIS DEATH (ROM. 5:6-8)**

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. 8 But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**VERSE 6**

Not only are humans in a perpetual state of war with God before being justified through Jesus, they are actually helpless to change their situation. No human can achieve a right relationship with God.

**God’s response to our helplessness was to send Jesus to die in our place.**

God’s response to our helplessness was to send Jesus to die in our place. He poured out His love on us, and the tangible proof of that lavish gift was the sacrifice of His Son.
Sin required the penalty of death. Without divine intervention, we would be forced to pay that price ourselves—both in this world and throughout eternity in hell. But as He did for Abraham in Moriah (Gen. 22:1-19), God provided a substitute at the right time. Paul made a similar comment in Galatians 4:4-5. The relative peace of the Roman Empire, combined with a common language (Greek) and a general curiosity about religious ideas, created a perfect historical environment for the Messiah’s arrival. But it was also the perfect time because humanity was helpless.

**VERSES 7-8**

God did what no one could have predicted. He sacrificed His Son to rescue individuals living in rebellion against Him. That’s unheard of in human logic. A few heroes might voluntarily suffer for someone they care about, but who would endure pain to help an enemy? That’s exactly what God did. God’s radical commitment to our salvation can be traced to one motivation: his own love for us. He demonstrated that when Jesus died on the cross.

Sometimes, people are tempted to think they have to “get right” before God will accept them. But Paul was clear: We don’t have to become good enough; we can’t become good enough. Instead, God took the first step while we were still at war with Him. Even though we were still sinners living under His wrath, Christ died for us.

The benefits of justification are great. But the cost was great as well. We must never forget that sacrifice. If we ever wonder about God’s love for us, the cross should be all the proof we need.

**JUSTIFIED EQUALS RECONCILIATION** (Rom. 5:9-11)

9 How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath. 10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. 11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.

**VERSES 9-11**

Because we know we have been justified by God through faith, we can know just as surely that we will avoid His wrath. Through the
death of Jesus on the cross, we have been saved from our sins. We also have been released from the condemnation that comes from living at war with God. Believers will never suffer the wrath of God because Jesus suffered as their substitute on the cross.

**What does this passage teach us about God and about ourselves?**

By its very nature, the term *reconciled* indicates something was broken. It might be a bank statement or it could be a relationship. But something needs to be fixed.

We have been given an opportunity to begin a new relationship with God through the death of Jesus. But reconciliation involves action on both sides. We must accept God’s offer by faith. If we refuse, the relationship remains hostile.

Paul reminded the Romans that Jesus’ death was only part of the story. Jesus also rose from the dead. Because He is alive, our lives can be different. Salvation has both “now” and “later” aspects that reach into eternity. We are saved from the consequences of our sins by His death. But we are saved to walk in holiness through His power working in us.

God’s work on our behalf through the death and resurrection of Christ is a lot to take in. He has done so much and provided so much. We can never repay His grace and love. But we can live differently. We can live out our right relationship with Him each day for the world to see.

Salvation does not make us perfect. Christians still sin and miss the mark of God’s design. But that does not change our standing. Christ is still our substitute, and we are still righteous in God’s eyes. That, Paul said, is reason to **rejoice**. As we demonstrate the genuine joy God has given us, unbelievers will take notice and be interested in learning more. Joy makes our witness to the world much more effective.

**Along with the benefits gained through faith in Jesus, what responsibilities are also now carried?**
IN MY CONTEXT

• Peace with God results from being declared just through faith in Jesus.
• God demonstrates His love to us through the sacrificial death of Jesus.
• Believers are saved through faith in Jesus, now and forever.

List adversities you are currently facing. How can you reflect the hope you have in Christ through these adversities?

Focus on Romans 5:8. Reflect on each word and phrase, noting how that word or phrase impacts you. With whom can you share what this verse means to you?

With your Bible study group, identify groups that may wonder about God loving them. What can you and the members of your Bible study do to intentionally share God’s love with the people you identified? What insights from this passage can be shared with them?

Prayer Needs
FREE

All who accept the gospel find freedom from the guilt of sin.

ROMANS 6:1-14

We usually think of freedom in terms of being free to do things. We like the idea of doing whatever we want, whenever we want. We appreciate being free to speak, free to work, free to worship, and free to disagree. But freedom has another side—the freedom not to act. Paul wanted the Romans to understand this side of freedom. Our freedom in Christ means we don’t have to live in guilt, and we don’t have to live in bondage to sin.

What are some things you can do because you’re a Christian? What are some things that you have the power to avoid because you’re a Christian?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 6:1–7:25

In Rome, Jews and Gentiles alike were tempted to think their forgiveness and eternal security gave them a license to live any way they pleased. Sin didn’t really matter because sins could be confessed and cleansed. But Paul emphasized a different path (Rom. 6:1-14).

He reminded the Romans that they weren’t just forgiven of their sins. They were dead to them. When they accepted Christ’s sacrifice, they died to sin because all their sins had been nailed to the cross. And just as Christ rose from the dead, He gave them a new power for living. They had to stop embracing the old ways and embrace their Savior instead of their sin (6:15-22).

In Romans 7, Paul noted that Jesus’ death broke the power of sin and the burden of law-keeping as the means to salvation. But while the law didn’t define their standing before God, it did provide some guidance in following the Messiah.

The law shines a light on things that break God’s heart. We know what to avoid because the law reveals it to us. And when we stray, the law reminds us that we’re going the wrong way. Paul emphasized that the law is holy and good when it fulfills these roles because it helps us become more like Him (7:12).

The truth is, we need help. We’re prone to stray from God’s plan. Paul lamented the battle between his old self (the flesh) and his new life in Christ. On one hand, he knew what he should be doing as a Christian. On the other hand, he consistently felt powerless to do it. Often, he voluntarily chose to sin, embracing the very things he had been called to hate (7:13-24). The answer for Christians, he said, was to fall at the feet of Christ and let Him live through us.

Read Romans 6:1-14 in your Bible, looking for motivations for living a God-honoring life. How are these motivations borne out of a person’s faith in Jesus?
DEAD TO SIN (ROM. 6:1-7)

1 What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? 2 Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, 7 since a person who has died is freed from sin.

VERSES 1-2
If all our sins have been forgiven, then why should we worry about doing what’s right? Apparently, that was a question circulating through the church in Rome. Paul had just said that God’s grace and mercy are magnified through His forgiveness of sin (Rom. 5:20). If more sin leads to more grace, why not sin as much as possible and magnify God’s grace as much as possible? It could be that some in Rome were trying to twist the doctrine of justification to explain their own worldly behavior. Paul knew the danger of letting this idea gain steam. He was ready to demolish their arguments.

Paul used the Greek phrase rendered Absolutely not! ten times in Romans (3:4,6,31; 6:2,15; 7:7,13; 9:14; 11:1,11). Each time, he distinguished orthodox teaching from heresy. While the English translation here feels strong, it really doesn’t reflect the degree of Paul’s dismay. (“God forbid” in the King James Version may come closest in English.) The reason was simple: No one who claims the power of the gospel should intentionally go looking for chances to sin.

When we accept Christ’s death as the sacrifice for our sins, we don’t just disavow sin; we die to it.

We understand that a corpse no longer participates in the things of this world. Dead people can’t eat or drink or go out with friends.
They no longer respond to the stimuli that excite the rest of us. It’s impossible to live while dead. That was Paul’s point about Christians and sin. When we accept Christ’s death as the sacrifice for our sins, we don’t just disavow sin; we die to it. We become a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). While sin might continue its attempt to have influence, believers no longer should respond to the old stimuli that led us down that path.

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a concordance and Bible dictionary to learn more about a feature of Israel’s religious life.*

Use a Bible concordance to find references in Scripture to “baptize” and “baptism.” Make a list of when baptism was administered and under what circumstances. What can you learn about the purpose and practice of baptism from your list? How do your findings help you interpret Romans 6:3-4?

**VERSES 3-4**

To illustrate his point, Paul turned to the ordinance of baptism. When new believers go under the water, Paul said, they are associating themselves with the death of Jesus. Today, a pastor might say, “buried with Him in baptism” to emphasize this connection. The act serves as a confession that Jesus died in our place and that our sins have been buried with Him. Burial is the ultimate proof of physical death, and being buried with him is the ultimate confession of our death to sin.

Burial is only one part of the picture of baptism. Just as Jesus did not stay in the tomb, believers do not stay under the water. God raised Jesus by His glory, and He raises believers to live for His glory as well. No longer under the domination of sin, Christians are telling the world that they intend to walk in the resurrection power
of Jesus. They leave the old ways behind. As pastors often say, they are “raised to walk in newness of life.”

While it’s easy to interpret baptism as a public confession of our salvation, it really means much more. It’s also a public confession of our faith moving forward. Baptism acknowledges that we have died to our past and that we intend to live for Christ in the future. That future should not include a desire to go back into the bondage of sin.

**How does the act of baptism demonstrate what has happened in the believer’s life?**

**VERSES 5-7**

Jesus’ death paid the penalty for sin. His resurrection sealed the deal because it defeated the power of death once and for all. Like two sides of the same coin, neither is complete without the other.

Paul told the Christians in Rome that salvation worked the same way. In coming to Christ, they didn’t confess only His death and burial. They also confessed the power of His resurrection. They were _united with him_ in both His _death_ and His _resurrection._

**We didn’t just receive forgiveness of our sins. We also received a new power to live differently.**

In practical terms, we didn’t just receive forgiveness of our sins. We also received a new power to live differently. Baptism serves as a tangible reminder that the Christian life involves both dying and living. Paul wasn’t sharing anything his readers didn’t already know. The Roman believers knew that their _old self was crucified_ with Christ on the cross and that His death freed them to live a new life under a new Master.

Our hope rests on the foundation of our death to sin—that our sin was nailed to the cross with Jesus. The Greek phrase translated _rendered powerless_ refers to something that has lost all power and influence. Sin has been rendered lifeless and impotent through Christ’s work on the cross. His resurrection makes it possible for us to live differently—in the power of Christ.
Based on that, it makes no sense to believe that sin could provide any benefit for our lives. As believers, we can remember what life was like before coming to Jesus. We know what slavery to sin involved. We should never forget the high price Jesus paid to break those chains of sin.

When we fail to focus on everything God has done, our logic—our spiritual vision—gets a little fuzzy. It’s easier to fall for the lies of the enemy and wander back into our old habits. That’s what Paul challenged the Romans to avoid. They needed to live like they were dead to sin, and so do we.

**KEY DOCTRINE: Baptism**

Baptism is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus (Col. 3:12).

**ALIVE IN CHRIST (ROM. 6:8-11)**

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, 9 because we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again. Death no longer rules over him. 10 For the death he died, he died to sin once for all time; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**VERSES 8-11**

Paul had reminded the Romans that following Christ meant identifying with His death. As a teacher, he repeated his primary teaching in order to reinforce the truth. He wanted to make sure his readers understood what it means to be one with Christ’s death.

Paul also wanted them to know that Jesus’ death was only one part of the story. His crucifixion reflects our death to sin, but His resurrection means life for us. Because we died with Him, we will also live with Him. Paul saw this as an established fact. As in verse 5, *if* in verse 8 might be better rendered “since.”
The resurrection sets Christ apart from any other would-be messiahs. Jesus died on the cross, but the Father raised Him. Unlike other religious leaders, Jesus didn’t stay in the grave, and He will never die again. Several biblical figures were raised from the dead. For example, Jesus raised Lazarus in John 11. But Lazarus died a second time. Paul made it clear that once Christ rose, He would never taste death again.

As a result of His resurrection, we are free from sin in this life and the next. We are justified (declared righteous), but we are also sanctified (set apart for God’s purposes) in God’s sight. We live in the power and presence of Jesus each day.

In verse 11 Paul mentioned the responsibility of believers to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Jesus lives in intimate fellowship with the Father, and we share that relationship through Him.

We cannot earn salvation, but we can choose how to live out our salvation. The Greek term for consider carries the challenge to accept God’s words as true. We believe in what He has done for us, but we also believe what He says about who we now are in Him.

How will considering ourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ affect our daily lives? What might a person considering themselves “dead to sin” look like today?

TOOLS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (ROM. 6:12-14)

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. 13 And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness. 14 For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under the law but under grace.

VERSES 12-13

Salvation is not only about eternity. It has implications for the here and now. It calls for a particular lifestyle—a lifestyle based on righteousness. Paul’s teaching shifted from the theological union of believers with Christ to the ways they should live it out each day.
When they accepted Christ, the Romans surrendered to a different King. Previously, sin had been in charge. They had little choice but to obey its demands.

Sin is always a cruel taskmaster. It dominates and enslaves those who fall under its authority. But Paul emphatically reminded the Romans that God has changed everything through Christ. The phrase *do not let sin reign* is an imperative command in the Greek, challenging readers to reject their old lives and honor God during their short stint in these human bodies.

Spiritual warfare is taking place all around us. Before we came to Christ, we were weapons for unrighteousness. The enemy owned us and used us in his battle against God.

The idea behind *offer yourselves* pointed back to the old sacrificial system. Now we offer ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2) to a loving Father who also knows our potential in spiritual battle. God calls us to devote our entire beings—including our bodies—to lead others into the kingdom by living righteously.

*In what practical ways can you offer yourself as a weapon in the fight for righteousness?*

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Christ freely offered Himself on our behalf so that we might freely offer ourselves to God.

**VERSE 14**

Paul ended this section with the declaration that sin will not rule over you. In summarizing his point, Paul returned to a theme from earlier in the letter: the law versus grace. Since sin no longer reigns in our lives, we no longer need to worry about satisfying the demands of the law or being condemned by it. Instead, we live under grace, which places us squarely within the loving embrace of our heavenly Father. Christ freely offered Himself on our behalf so that we might freely offer ourselves to God.


**IN MY CONTEXT**

- Jesus’ death frees the believer from the slavery of sin.
- Jesus’ resurrection secures eternal life for the believer.
- Believers demonstrate their salvation through righteous living.

*Examine your life for sinful attitudes and actions. What steps do you need to take to be free from that sin?*

*Discuss as a group ways of encouraging one another to die to sin and live for Christ. What actions might the group need to take in light of this discussion?*

*How does your everyday life point others toward Christ? What needs to change in your words, actions, and attitudes to more effectively point others to Christ?*

**Prayer Needs**
RAISED!

Salvation comes through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

LUKE 24:1-12

Think about the most awe-inspiring sight you’ve ever witnessed. Now, imagine walking through the darkness of a Sunday morning and finding something even more amazing: an empty tomb. The women who came to anoint Jesus’ body expected to find a stone that needed to be removed. Instead, they found a doorway to eternity. The world had been changed forever. We’re still experiencing the benefits of that change today.

List and rank awe-inspiring sights you have seen. What caused the feelings of awe?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 24:1-53

Throughout the first half of his letter to the Romans, Paul explained sin and salvation. He wrote about dying to sin, being buried with Christ, and rising again. That imagery was familiar to his audience because their newfound faith was rooted in the truth of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

As a historian, Luke paid attention to details. He told his audience—including his friend Theophilus—that he had researched Jesus’ life (Luke 1:1-4). But Luke was also a doctor. He understood the agony of Jesus’ death. He recognized the stress that resulted in sweating blood (22:44), and he knew the awful truth behind the simple sentence, “they crucified him there” (23:33).

Luke’s medical training and historical mind helped him explain what happened on Calvary. What happened next, though, defied human explanation. After His death, Jesus’ body had been hastily prepared for burial. Following the required Sabbath rest, a group of women set out for the tomb to finish the job of anointing His corpse with spices and fragrances. But instead of Jesus’ dead body, they found an empty tomb and a pair of heavenly messengers who said He was alive again (24:1-8).

Jesus had told His followers this would happen, but His words never connected. As a result, the women were staggered by this new development. They reported the morning’s events to the disciples, but even they found it hard to believe (24:9-12).

Later that evening, Jesus appeared to two other disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Keeping His identity hidden, Jesus reminded them that the Messiah needed to suffer, die, and rise. Once they realized they had been talking to Jesus, they ran back to Jerusalem—only to find that Jesus had appeared to Peter (24:13-35).

A few days later, Jesus appeared to His disciples. Despite a locked door, He entered the room and shared a meal and His mission for them (24:36-49). He continued teaching them until He ascended to the Father (24:50-53).

Read Luke 24:1-12 in your Bible noting the emotions expressed. What do these emotions reveal about that first Easter?
**EXPLORE THE TEXT**

**DISCOVERED** *(LUKE 24:1-3)*

1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. 3 They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

**VERSE 1**
Sabbath law had kept Jesus’ followers from completely preparing His body before burial. They had to wait through Saturday before returning to the tomb Sunday morning. (See Luke 23:54,56.) Once the day of rest had passed, a small group of His followers got up early on Sunday—the first day of the week—to finish the job. While Luke is not specific until later in the account, these disciples were all women.

The women carried spices that would be spread between the layers of the grave clothes. The process may have temporarily hidden the unpleasant odor created by decomposition. It also would have provided some sense of closure to His followers.

**VERSES 2-3**

*The tomb* was a cave with a large *stone* rolled across its entrance. The stone would have rested in a ditch, making it more difficult to move. It may have had individual shelves so multiple bodies could be kept; it was not unusual for bodies to share space.

In his Gospel, Mark noted that the women were worried about moving the stone (Mark 16:3). It would have taken several men—possibly using animals—to get the large rock into place. It was not a job that a small group of women could accomplish alone. When they arrived at the tomb, they discovered their first big surprise. The stone had already been *rolled away*.

Some have noted that the stone was not moved for Jesus to get out. He later proved that He could walk through closed doors. Instead, it was moved so His followers could come in—which is what the women did. But when they entered, they discovered their second surprise. Jesus’ body was gone. Even though Jesus had talked about rising from the dead on more than one occasion (Luke 9:21-27,44-45; 18:31-34), the idea of a resurrection apparently didn’t cross their minds.
The same is true for many today, as individuals deny a supernatural explanation for the empty tomb. For example, some believe Jesus really was not dead when He was buried and revived in the cool tomb. But that does not explain the stone. Others believe that the women went to the wrong tomb, but His enemies could have corrected that error easily enough. Some say His disciples stole the body, but that does not explain why they maintained the ruse for decades at the risk of their own lives. The only explanation for the empty tomb is that Jesus rose from the dead.

How does a person’s explanation of the empty tomb expose his or her biases and values?

**KEY DOCTRINE: Jesus**

Jesus was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion (1 Cor. 15:1-8).

**REPORTED** (LUKE 24:4-9)

4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. 5 So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground. “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” asked the men. 6 “He is not here, but he has risen! Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, 7 saying, ‘It is necessary that the Son of Man be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day’?” 8 And they remembered his words. 9 Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest.

**VERSES 4-5**

The women were *perplexed*. They knew something had happened but had no explanation at this point. It could have been that the
empty tomb added to their grief. They had lost Jesus to death; now they had “lost” His body.

In the midst of their confusion, they faced another startling event. Suddenly, two individuals appeared in their midst. Luke called them men, but that reflects the women’s perspective. These beings were angels. Just as angels announced Jesus’ birth to terrified shepherds (Luke 2:8-14), angels now came to announce the resurrection—bookends to Luke’s Gospel.

Luke highlighted the women’s reactions to the angels. First, they were terrified. This probably included a sense of awe and wonder. Second, the women bowed down to the ground. This was a common response of humans who encountered angels in Scripture.

The angels introduced their message with a question—“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” This again emphasizes that the women—and really all of Jesus’ followers—had missed the point of His teaching about His death and resurrection. None of them showed up to see the risen Lord, and those who did come to the tomb came for the wrong reason.

**What are some ways people seek life among the dead today?**

**VERSES 6-9**

The angels answered their own question with the announcement of Jesus’ resurrection. They reminded the women that this should not have been a surprise at all. Jesus had told them on multiple occasions this would happen. They either did not understand His message because it made no sense to them at the time, or they had failed to recall it in the midst of their grief.

Jesus’ death paid the price for our sins; His resurrection defeated death and guaranteed eternal life. Jesus conquered humanity’s two greatest enemies—sin and death.

Once the women heard the angels’ reminder, Jesus’ teachings came back to them—they remembered his words. Ironically, while Jesus’ closest followers had forgotten His words, His enemies had not. In his Gospel, Matthew noted that the religious leaders who had pushed for Jesus’ crucifixion told Pilate about His claims of a resurrection after three days (Matt. 27:62-66). That’s why the
heavy stone was put in front of the tomb and Roman soldiers were charged with guarding it.

Now that things were starting to make sense, the women were given a mission. Matthew recorded that the women were commanded to share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection with His disciples (Matt. 28:5-8). Luke also noted that they reported what they had seen to the disciples.

It is worth noting that these first witnesses were an unlikely group. In the first century, women held no real social standing outside of their families. They had no power and no prestige. Yet, because they came to the tomb, they were given the privilege of being the first to learn of Jesus’ resurrection and to tell others about it.

CONFIRMED (LUKE 24:10-12)

10 Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things. 11 But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. So he went away, amazed at what had happened.
VERSES 10-12

Luke identified some of the women who visited the tomb. He named three: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James—probably because they were still well known in the church when he wrote his Gospel. Also, as a historian, he likely relied on these women for their eyewitness accounts.

Mary Magdalene had followed Jesus after He drove out seven demons from her (Luke 8:2). Joanna (Luke 8:3) and the other Mary were also known as supporters of Jesus. Luke also noted that other women were with them. It is impossible to know for sure how many women actually went to the grave that morning. But each of them had a story to tell and was sharing it with the apostles.

At first, the disciples refused to believe the women. Their skepticism serves as proof that Jesus really did rise. These men were not initially eager to believe reports of the resurrection. Only after they experienced Him themselves were they ready to believe—much less die for—this truth.

Despite his initial skepticism, Peter got up and ran to the tomb. John wrote that he (“the one Jesus loved”) went with Peter and actually got there ahead of him. John also pointed out that this first disciple stopped at the tomb’s entrance, while Peter actually went in (John 20:1-10).

At the scene, Peter found things just as the women had described. Jesus’ body was gone, but the grave clothes were still there. Again, this indicates a physical resurrection, not just the rising of a spirit.

Like the women, Peter left the tomb amazed. It is not clear if he believed the resurrection at that point, but the experience had an impact on him. Later in his Gospel, Luke explained that Jesus appeared to Peter alone—even before He appeared before all the other disciples. This certainly convinced him that the reports were true—Jesus was alive!

How does God’s Word validate the resurrection of Jesus? How does the Bible help a person understand Jesus’ resurrection?
IN MY CONTEXT

• Jesus’ tomb remains empty.
• Jesus was resurrected from the dead.
• Eyewitnesses confirmed the resurrection of Jesus.

What impact does the empty tomb have on your life? How are you living out Jesus’ resurrection each day?

Discuss ways people today are guilty of forgetting the words of Jesus. How can you and the members of your Bible study hold one another accountable for remembering and obeying Jesus’ words?

With whom can you share about the resurrection of Jesus? Write their initials and begin to pray each day for the opportunity to share.

Prayer Needs
SECURED

All who accept the gospel have a sure hope for a future as children of God.

ROMANS 8:12-25

When a buyer borrows money from an institution, he signs a contract. At that point, the buyer is under obligation to the lender. If he does not keep the terms of the contract, a penalty will be assessed. Unable to fulfill the law of sin and death, we were under its penalty. However, Jesus died on the cross as our sin offering, releasing us from the penalty of sin and death. Paul reminded us that we have no obligation to live according to the flesh. We are free to be guided by the Spirit.

How would you describe the emotions that come with signing a loan agreement? How does paying off a loan free you?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 8:1-39

In the first four chapters of Romans, Paul built an argument for the sinfulness of all humanity. In chapters 5–7 he underscored the merciful work of Jesus in providing salvation for sinners. He showed how Christ provides a new way of life through His death and resurrection. Those who die to sin through Him are raised to walk in a completely new—and better—way. Because of that transformation, we serve a new Master. Sin no longer calls the shots in our lives. But we don’t just flip a switch and turn off all the evil in our lives. Even the strongest believers face temptation. Paul mourned how he so easily gave in to what he shouldn’t do and failed to do the things he should. Christians should understand that the flesh will always be a problem on this side of eternity, but we have overcome sin through Jesus. He gives us the power to live for His honor and glory each day.

Because we are God’s children, we no longer live under His condemnation (Rom. 8:1-2). We might fall at times, but we don’t fear the penalty that hangs over those who have not accepted His grace. What’s more, God has given us His Spirit to help us live according to His desires (8:3-4).

Paul contrasted the life of the flesh (which leads to death) and the life of the Spirit (which produces life). The former has no hope of pleasing God, but those who live in the power of the Spirit have confidence that God is actively working in their lives (8:5-11). They can be sure that God has a plan for their lives—a plan that includes a future beyond comprehension. Our relationship with our heavenly Father guarantees our hope—not just for this life, but also for the next (8:12-25). Nothing can possibly separate us from the love our Father has for us. We are secure in Him, which means we win in this life and in eternity (8:31-39).

Read Romans 8:12-25 in your Bible, underlining words and phrases that describe a believer’s future. Why was it so important for Paul to remind his readers of the believer’s future?
ETERNAL FUTURE (ROM. 8:12-13)

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, 13 because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

VERSES 12-13

So then builds on what came before. Paul had just contrasted the condemnation of the flesh and the freedom of the Spirit. Those who live by the flesh cannot please God, while those who live in the Spirit have died to sin and rely on Christ (Rom. 8:1-11).

The apostle called his readers brothers and sisters, indicating the relationship they shared as children of God. He also reminded them that this relationship meant they no longer had to live according to the flesh. Sin wasn’t their master anymore.

Those who live according to the flesh are going to die. Because they are trusting in their own abilities to reach God, they will inevitably fall short. As a result, they will not only die physically—like everyone does—but they will also experience spiritual and eternal death.

By contrast, those who are empowered by the Spirit have a much different existence now and in eternity—you will live. The Greek wording of put to death the deeds of the body indicates a continual action, a choice made to kill sin each and every day.

What does living by the Spirit look like? How is living by the Spirit connected to living in eternity?

KEY DOCTRINE: Last Things

The unrighteous will be consigned to hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord (2 Thess. 1:7-12).
ETERNAL INHERITANCE (ROM. 8:14-18)

14 For all those led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons. 15 You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father!” 16 The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

VERSES 14-15
Paul reminded the Romans that they were not free to live as they pleased. Believers are led by God’s Spirit. We follow His direction and His guidance. Following the Spirit isn’t simply a matter of obedience. It’s also a matter of identification. We—and the world around us—know we are God’s sons because we walk with the Spirit. Jews saw themselves as God’s children because of their history with Him. Paul redefined the term by emphasizing a relationship with God through the Spirit.

Following the Spirit isn’t just a matter of obedience. It’s also a matter of identification.

Paul had a deep appreciation for comparisons and contrasts. He provided another example in this passage—distinguishing between two spirits. The spirit of slavery is marked by fear. Those living in slavery are accountable to the law and are subject to its judgments. By comparison, the Spirit of adoption does not deal in fear. The Holy Spirit is the means of our adoption into God’s family. (See also Eph. 1:3-12; Gal. 4:1-7.) By the work of the Spirit, old relationships are severed and new family connections are established.

•Abba, Father is a tender Aramaic phrase akin to “daddy” in English. It is the language of a child running into the arms of a loving and protective father. The One we once ran away from out of fear and guilt is now the One we run to.

VERSES 16-18
The parent-child relationship believers have with God produces great benefits for this life. The guidance of the Spirit and the
peace of the Father give believers purpose and meaning. But those blessings are only the tip of the iceberg. Paul wrote that the Spirit *himself testifies* to the eternal relationship Christ followers have with God. This testimony guarantees benefits both in this life and in the next.

**At times we may struggle with doubt, wondering if our relationship with God is real.**

At times we may struggle with doubt, wondering if our relationship with God is real. But the Spirit’s testimony affirms our status as *God’s children*, so there is no reason to doubt.

Most parents want to provide a suitable inheritance for their children. Paul noted that Christians are *heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ*. Through Jesus’ death on the cross, we have full membership in God’s family—including a brotherhood with Christ. As a result, believers have access to all of God’s riches. Of course, these riches should not be reduced to mere financial blessings. Paul was not preaching a prosperity, name-it-claim-it gospel. Instead, he was stating that God’s resources were enough to meet every need we can imagine.

But this intimate relationship with God is not an easy road. Christ suffered, and His followers will *suffer with him*. Jesus said as much when He told His followers that students are not greater than their teachers (Luke 6:40). Hardship is a reality Christians must expect.

The Romans probably understood suffering for their faith. Some had seen it firsthand. Paul reminded them that such suffering was not in vain. Those who suffered with Him would *also be glorified with him*. The struggles of this life cannot begin to hold a candle to the blessings of eternity. The glory that will be revealed in heaven will surpass anything we can imagine in this lifetime.

*If you had to describe being a child of God in one word, what would it be? What single word would you use to describe being separated from Him?*
CREATION RESTORED (ROM. 8:19-22)

19 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God’s sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility — not willingly, but because of him who subjected it — in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.

VERSE 19
God’s glory (v. 18) won’t change people only; God will restore all creation. Paul wrote that creation eagerly waits for the day when God will make all things new. Prophets spoke about a new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22), and the apostle John saw it in his revelation (Rev. 21:1-2).

When God created the world, He declared it “very good” (Gen. 1:31). But sin marred creation (Gen. 3:17). This was not the fault of nature but of humans, who turned their backs on God. Unfortunately, humans have continued to make the problems worse by failing to be good stewards of God’s creation.

The created order was cursed at the Fall (Gen. 3:17-19) but will again be restored to its former state. Just as people will forget death and tears, nature will be rescued from its blights and flaws. Creation will again reflect God’s glory in a way that hasn’t been seen since Eden.

VERSES 20-22
While humans rebelled against God of their own volition, nature was a victim of sin. It became collateral damage in the war between good and evil. Both people and nature are trapped in bondage to decay. There is a cycle of birth, life, death, and deterioration. We have the promise that this cycle will be broken. Things will change—not just for ourselves, but also for every part of creation. God will leave no stone unturned in His work of restoring His handiwork to its original state.

In verse 22, Paul used another human image to illustrate his point about the impact of sin on nature: childbirth. Creation has long been groaning under the weight of sin. Natural disasters and diseases may seem commonplace, but they are not part of God’s initial plan for nature. These pains are not the result of fatal
wounds that won’t heal. Instead, they are more like a woman’s labor pains as she draws closer to the point of delivering the baby. Such pains are incredibly intense and difficult but lead to a blessed event. Likewise, the stress and strain that marks creation right now point to an incredible new birth within creation. Once the time of groaning has passed, nature will be renewed and restored.

Where do you see the impact of sin on nature? What can you do to be a better steward of God’s creation?

BIBLE SKILL: Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.

Focus on the phrase “redemption of our bodies” in Romans 8:23. Compare the phrase in several trusted Bible translations. Jot down the various renderings of the term that you find. Using a Bible dictionary, review articles on our future hope. Scan passages listed and make notes of any findings that help you better understand the meaning.

HUMANITY RESTORED (ROM. 8:23-25)

23 Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits — we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.
SESSION 8: SECURED

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VERSE 23

Firstfruits were the initial crops taken in a harvest and were often used for offerings to God. Paul said the Spirit served as firstfruits—a guarantee of our future. The Greek word used has a meaning similar to a pledge or down payment.

Because we have this promise from God, we also have confidence that our groaning and waiting won’t be in vain. While we currently enjoy the benefits of spiritual adoption, our relationship with God will find its ultimate fulfillment in the redemption of our bodies.

VERSE 24-25

We once lived in a state of absolute hopelessness apart from God. But through our adoption, God gives us hope for the future. Hope, like faith, is based on what can’t be experienced through human senses. It is real but unseen. In fact, Paul noted that hope that is seen is not hope. We don’t need faith or trust for something we can see right in front of us. But faith in Christ energizes our hope and reminds us that one day our groanings will be replaced by glory.

Hope also requires patience. Though it’s part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), patience does not come easily for anyone—including believers. Waiting is something most of us do poorly, so we must rely on the supernatural strength of the Spirit. As Paul told the Romans earlier in the letter, endurance (an element of patience) leads to character and hope (Rom. 5:3-5).

To calm the noise of the world, we focus on the Spirit who leads us.

Such hope was an important theme for Paul. Just as creation awaits its restoration, God calls Christians to eagerly wait for the fulfillment of our hope. As we wait, we live as His children now, but we anticipate the completion of our adoption in the life to come. To calm the noise of the world, we focus on the Spirit who leads us.

How does the groaning of creation compare to our groaning for renewal?
IN MY CONTEXT

- God provides eternal life to His children.
- God promises an eternal inheritance to His children.
- God will one day restore His creation, fully reflecting His glory.
- God will one day restore humanity so that humans can function fully as His children.

*What are some things you can do daily to live by the Spirit instead of the flesh? How can you incorporate these actions into your daily routine?*

*How would you describe your relationship with God? What steps do you need to take to improve your relationship with Him?*

*Discuss as a group the connection between our hope and our witness. How can you and the members of your Bible study learn to more effectively share His hope with others?*

Prayer Needs
People try all kinds of things to be right with God. In some cultures, sacrifices are offered to appease the gods. People bathe in sacred rivers and meditate on sacred mountains. Others bow down before statues and burn incense. Paul answered this age-old question. Salvation is available only to those who call upon Jesus. Our salvation is rooted in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus and available only through His completed work on the cross.

**What are some ways people try to gain God’s favor? Why do people try to gain His favor?**
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 9:1–10:21

The first eight chapters of Romans represent the theological framework of our salvation. Paul emphasized human depravity and our inability to save ourselves (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). He then focused on the solution to that problem—the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. God demonstrated His immense love by sending His Son as a sacrifice (5:8), and that sacrifice transforms life as we know it.

This new way of life is not something we achieve on our own. Instead, we depend on the power of the Spirit. The Spirit plays a vital role in the lives of believers. He guarantees our relationship with God (8:1-11) and reminds us that nothing can separate us from His love (8:31-39).

This progression provided the theological framework for Paul to address practical issues, starting in chapter 12. But first, he included an extended section on the role of the Jews under the new covenant (chaps. 9–11). Jesus’ death had ushered in a new era, but God was not done with Israel. His chosen people still had a role to play in His kingdom—alongside His children who came to Him under the new covenant.

The new way of doing things wasn’t really new, though. Faith, Paul said, had always been God’s way for a relationship with Him. The symbolism behind the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

In a sense, while things had changed, they really had stayed the same. What the Old Testament saints observed in expectation, New Testament believers saw fulfilled in Christ. Even though many Jewish hearts were hardened, Paul emphasized the power of grace and faith to provide redemption to all who believe.

Read Romans 10:5-15 in your Bible, circling the action verbs. How do these action verbs help you understand what is required for salvation?

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CONFESS AND BELIEVE (ROM. 10:5-10)

5 since Moses writes about the righteousness that is from the law: The one who does these things will live by them. 6 But the righteousness that comes from faith speaks like this: Do not say in your heart, “Who will go up to heaven?” that is, to bring Christ down or, “Who will go down into the abyss?” that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. 8 On the contrary, what does it say? The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. This is the message of faith that we proclaim: 9 If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.

VERSE 5

Moses spoke of righteousness that is from the law. However, that righteousness was reserved for the one who does these things, meaning the one who obeys the law. Quoting Leviticus 18:5, Paul pointed out that obedience to God’s rules and regulations is required for righteousness. Anything less than complete obedience falls short. In other words, perfect righteousness through the law takes perfect obedience. Of course, no one has attained perfection except Jesus. Paul wrote earlier that none of us are righteous (3:10). The law might point us in the right direction, but it cannot provide salvation.

How might the idea of gaining righteousness from the law be expressed today? What is the appeal of earning salvation when we can have it for free?

VERSES 6-7

In contrast to the impossible standard of the law, faith has nothing to do with works. When faith speaks, it doesn’t talk about perfection. It talks about grace. God gave Israel the law, but He also
made a way for them to experience forgiveness when they failed. He did not put righteousness out of their reach.

Paul took a passage related to the law (Deut. 30:12-14, with additional language from Ps. 107:26) and applied it to the work of Christ. Just as God did not expect the Israelites to move heaven and earth to discover His expectations, He also does not expect New Testament believers to work their way to heaven so they can bring Christ down. Instead, Jesus came down to us and lived in human flesh (John 1:14). Likewise, believers don’t have to worry about descending into the abyss to bring Christ up from the dead. Jesus did not need our help coming back from the dead because He was raised through the power of God.

VERSES 8-10

Giving faith a voice, Paul wrote that it proclaims a gospel of hope. Even more important, the message is near for all who are willing to listen. They can testify to it through the words of their mouths and rest in the peace that fills their hearts. That is the message of faith Paul had proclaimed since his conversion.

Sometimes we’re tempted to think of salvation as some kind of prize at the end of a rainbow or a reward for completing a spiritual obstacle course. Nothing could be further from the truth. Salvation is right in front of us. We just need to see it and accept it from God’s hand.

In verses 9-10, Paul dug deeper into the message of faith and its role in righteousness. In verse 9, he defined the message of faith (that is, the gospel). Then he explained its importance in verse 10. The primary point is that salvation is not the result of our own efforts. As Paul boiled down the message of the gospel, he noted that we need to take two key steps. The first step is to confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord.” The Greek word translated Lord (kurios) is the same word used for the personal name of God (Yahweh) more than 6,000 times in the Greek version of the Old Testament. Confessing Jesus as Lord is the same as acknowledging that He is God.

This would have been difficult for a devout Jew to swallow. In fact, the Jewish leaders crucified Jesus because He claimed equality with God. This would have been a huge sticking point and a primary reason Jews were rejecting Jesus. But salvation is not possible without confessing “Jesus is Lord.”
While confession is an external sign of one’s agreement that Jesus is God, it goes beyond simple lip service. Paul said faith also demands you **believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.** The resurrection was a foundational element in the apostles’ teaching. It remains the key proof of Jesus’ identity as Messiah and distinguishes Him from other would-be saviors.

Ultimately, this two-fold demonstration of faith through confession and belief represent two sides of the same coin. You can’t have one without the other. In verse 10, Paul returned to the importance of the **heart** and the **mouth.** While he flipped the order of confession and belief, the message remains the same. The one who **believes** with the heart will inherit the **righteousness** of Christ—based on His work, not their own. And the one who **confesses with the mouth** this foundational belief will experience salvation.

Salvation is not a mere intellectual exercise of knowing stuff about Jesus. It goes beyond a set of facts about His death and resurrection. Belief and confession are expressions of personal trust in Christ. To believe in Him is to trust Him as the only way to God.

**BIBLE SKILL:** Use a Bible dictionary to help understand a Bible passage.

Look up “confession of faith” in a Bible dictionary. Review some of the passages identified in the article. Note how a confession of faith is portrayed in the Old and New Testaments. What insights did you gain from the comparison? Which passage identified in the article gives you the greatest insight into Paul’s use of “confess” in Romans 10? Explain.
**VERSES 11-12**

Paul did not base his teaching on his own opinions or thoughts. He relied on what Scripture says. For him, God’s Word was the ultimate authority for truth. In this case, the Scripture says, *Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame.* Centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah had given that message of hope to a nation of Jews who were prone to wander (Isa. 28:16). Here, Paul applied it to a new group of faithful believers—with no regard to ethnicity or heritage.

**Believers—whether Jew or Gentile—never have to wonder about God’s faithfulness.**

The term *shame* could also mean “disappointed.” The idea is that believers—whether Jew or Gentile—never have to wonder about God’s faithfulness. He will always keep His promises and never let His people down.

Paul’s use of prophetic texts is significant. The Jews honored the words of the prophets as God’s own words. So, by using them as evidence for this new paradigm of faith, Paul was proving that Israel had misinterpreted and misapplied God’s plan for salvation. *Everyone* included Gentiles and always had.

Paul said there was *no distinction between Jew and Greek,* though most Jews would have disagreed. The apostle made it clear that God created every person, so He is *the same Lord of all.* He doesn’t have one plan for Jews and another for Gentiles. Faith in Christ is the only path to Him—for any people group.

God *richly blesses* those who accept His offer of salvation. These blessings include benefits in this life (though not always the way we might think) and in the life to come.
VERSE 13
To drive his point home, Paul again turned to the prophets. Quoting Joel 2:32, he emphasized that everyone is welcome at the cross. No one must stand on the outside looking in. Through this, Paul provided a clear and authoritative statement of our universal need for salvation and God’s gracious offer to provide it.

God worked out His plan by bringing the Messiah through a chosen nation. But He extends the benefits of that plan to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord. Ironically, Paul’s teaching that the Gentiles were entitled to what the Jews had long considered only theirs revealed a deeper truth. The Jews who rejected Jesus needed the salvation that so many Gentiles had found in Christ.

**What makes salvation through faith in Jesus being offered to all so wonderful and so difficult at the same time?**

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KEY DOCTRINE: Salvation

There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord (John 14:6).

**TELL ALL** (ROM. 10:14-15)

14 How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

VERSE 14

Questions are effective teaching tools, and Paul used a series of rhetorical questions to explain God’s plan for sharing the gospel message with all people. These questions created a logical flow for
readers to follow. Anyone can call on God for salvation but not unless they believe in Him.

Paul had already established these basics of salvation, but he took them a step further. People can’t believe in Jesus without hearing about him. They need someone to share the message with them in a way that they can understand. They need to grasp the truth so they can respond to the truth. For that, they need a preacher—someone willing to speak to others on behalf of God. The responsibility of reaching all the world is given to all believers, not just a handful of pastors, evangelists, and missionaries.

**Gospel witnesses are sent into the world. They don’t wait for people to come find them in sanctuaries on Sunday.**

**VERSE 15**

Paul’s final question emphasizes our commission from God to reach the world. Gospel witnesses are sent into the world. They don’t wait for people to come find them in sanctuaries on Sunday or by the water cooler on Monday. Proclaimers are to actively move out into the world to share the message of the gospel.

Paul quoted Isaiah 52:7 to emphasize God’s favor on those who share His truth. Their feet are beautiful—both to the Father and to those who need to hear the message. For Isaiah, that meant reminding Israel that their upcoming captivity would not last forever. For Paul (and us), it means sharing that God will eagerly respond to anyone who calls on Him for salvation.

God has given us this privilege. From the moment we accept Christ as Savior, we become evangelists and missionaries. Whether we circle the globe or walk next door, we must spread the gospel every chance we get.

*What makes the feet of a person who shares the gospel beautiful?*
IN MY CONTEXT

• God promises to save all who place their faith in His resurrected Son.
• Salvation through faith in Jesus is available to all people.
• Believers must actively tell others the gospel and willingly send out missionaries throughout the entire world.

How would you describe your confession and belief about Jesus? How did that confession and belief change your life? How does it change your life today?

Who are the “Gentiles” in our culture these days—not just ethnically, but maybe socially or economically? How can you and your Bible study members intentionally reach out to those groups this week?

Believers can support missions through praying, giving, and going. How can you participate more actively in each of those areas? What obstacles do you need to overcome?

Prayer Needs
Mercy

The gospel continues to be offered to all people, Jews and Gentiles.

Romans 11:17-32

Think back to when you were a kid. When the time came to choose players for kickball, how quickly were you picked? Were you one of the first or were you one of the last to be picked? All of us want to be included. The good news is God includes all who come to Him in faith. Paul reminded his readers that salvation through faith in Jesus is available to everyone.

When was the last time you felt like you were on the outside looking in? What emotions does that stir up in your heart and mind?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 11:1-29

It was Paul’s habit on his missionary journeys to share the gospel with the Jews first. Then, after they had a chance to respond, he would move to the Gentiles. That’s the same heart he revealed in this section of Romans.

In chapters 9–10, Paul emphasized salvation through faith. The Jews who refused to accept Christ believed that keeping rules and regulations was the way of salvation. But Paul demonstrated that salvation is the result of confessing Christ as Savior and believing that His sacrifice was all one needed to be made right with God (Rom. 10:9-10).

Paul also emphasized the universal nature of God’s offer of salvation. He pointed out that God would accept anyone who called out to Him (10:13). That was good news for the Gentiles, but it stirred up more controversy with Jews who viewed themselves as God’s chosen people.

Despite their stubbornness, Paul knew that God had not given up on the Jews. He said that a remnant of faithful Israelites would embrace grace (11:5–6). What’s more, their initial rejection of the gospel opened the door for the Gentiles. In time, God’s work among the Gentiles would convince Israel to come back to God on His terms, not their own (11:11-16). Ultimately, Paul foresaw a new “tree” rising up with both natural (Jewish) and wild (Gentile) branches.

Paul would turn to practical matters in chapter 12. In the final section of his letter, he challenged the Romans to live out the principles he had outlined earlier. He called them to surrender their lives to Christ and to show the world what it truly means to be a follower of Christ.

Read Romans 11:17-32 in your Bible. Notice the ways that Gentiles are in the same position as the Jews. How should that impact how a person views others?
BE HUMBLE (ROM. 11:17-21)

17 Now if some of the branches were broken off, and you, though a wild olive branch, were grafted in among them and have come to share in the rich root of the cultivated olive tree, 18 do not boast that you are better than those branches. But if you do boast — you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains you. 19 Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”

20 True enough; they were broken off because of unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but beware, 21 because if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

VERSES 17-21

Paul had been teaching the Gentiles about the difficulty many Jews were having accepting Jesus as the Messiah. They were entrenched in the law and struggled to see Him for who He really was. To illustrate his point, Paul used the image of an olive tree. Normally, a farmer would graft cultivated branches into a wild tree. But Paul reversed the order to describe what had happened in the church. In this tree, some of the branches had broken off, but God did not destroy the whole tree. Instead, He grafted wild branches into the trunk.

Here, the broken branches represented the Jews who had rejected Christ. The wild branches represented the Gentiles. God had included Gentile believers. Even though they were not part of the tree originally, they still grew into healthy branches.

Paul feared that this grafting process could leave the Gentiles with a superiority complex. After all, the Jews had rejected God’s plan for salvation, while Gentiles had embraced Christ. Some could have thought God now loved the Gentiles more than the Jews. Paul was clear that God was not finished with the Jews yet.

Paul warned them not to boast, because their salvation fully depended on God’s kindness and grace. With the olive tree, the branches do not sustain the root. Instead, the root sustains the branches. The same was true with the Gentiles. They had been blessed by God’s work among the Jews, and they received their spiritual nourishment from Him.

The only standing the Gentiles had was by grace through faith. Without that, they would be as lost as the rebellious Israelites. So
to believing Gentiles Paul wrote, *Do not be arrogant, but beware.* Because salvation comes through faith in Jesus alone, there is no room for arrogance expressed toward unbelievers.

*What makes religious pride so crippling and dangerous?*

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**BIBLE SKILL:** Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about a practice.

Look up “graft” in a Bible dictionary. In what ways does Paul’s use of the illustration of grafting differ from the ancient practice of grafting? In what ways is Paul’s description similar? What points do you think Paul was making with this illustration?

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**BE THANKFUL** (ROM. 11:22-24)

22 Therefore, consider God’s kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen but God’s kindness toward you—if you remain in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. 23 And even they, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, because God has the power to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from your native wild olive tree and against nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these—the natural branches—be grafted into their own olive tree?

**VERSES 22-24**

To help the Romans avoid the trap of pride, Paul challenged them to examine God’s perfect balance between *kindness and severity.* God is not so kind that He overlooks evil, and not so harsh that He condemns
without cause. Instead, He shows a stern but righteous attitude toward those who have fallen. He loves all, but those who reject His offer of salvation will face the consequences of their decision.

At the same time, God can be immeasurably kind. The Romans had experienced that firsthand when He welcomed them into His family. Faith was all they had—and all He required. In response, Paul challenged them to remain in his kindness.

This didn’t mean that the Romans could lose their salvation. Paul had already squashed that idea (Rom. 8:37-39). But they could leave the protection of God’s umbrella and feel the sting of His correction. They needed to stay loyal—and grateful—to the One who had called them.

Despite their stubbornness and rebellion, Paul reminded his Gentile readers that the unbelieving Jews were not hopeless. God will restore anyone who comes to Him in faith (Rom. 10:17). This was true for the Gentiles who had accepted Christ, and it was true for Jews who repented of their unbelief and turned back to God. They would be grafted in as quickly and as easily as any Gentile.

For Paul, this wasn’t just theoretical; it was his testimony. He had rejected Christ and persecuted His followers. He had dedicated his life to protecting the law and eliminating those he considered heretics. But God had been gracious to him. When Paul came to Christ in faith, he was grafted back into the tree. This was personal to him.

God’s plan has always been based on faith. Since He has all authority, He can graft anyone who believes. He had done it for the Gentiles, and He would do it for the Jews. The only obstacle that kept Israelites from being grafted was their own lack of faith.

In nature, it makes no sense to graft a wild branch into a cultivated tree. As noted earlier, most farmers did it the other way around. But God turned conventional wisdom on its ear. He did what no one else would have (or could have) done. He cut off the wild branches from their previous tree and placed them into His tree.

As a result, Paul saw no reason why God couldn’t (or wouldn’t) bring the natural branches back to their own olive tree. If faith can move mountains, it certainly can restore a branch. While the Gentiles were like adopted children, the Jews would be like prodigals who found their way home.
How would you describe the balance between God’s severity and His kindness?

KEY DOCTRINE: God’s Purpose of Grace

Election is the glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility (Phil. 2:5-7).

BE AWARE (ROM. 11:25-32)

25 I don’t want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you will not be conceited: A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins. 28 Regarding the gospel, they are enemies for your advantage, but regarding election, they are loved because of the patriarchs, 29 since God’s gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable. 30 As you once disobeyed God but now have received mercy through their disobedience, 31 so they too have now disobeyed, resulting in mercy to you, so that they also may now receive mercy. 32 For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may have mercy on all.

VERSES 25-27

Paul saw God’s work among the Jews as a mystery—a previously unknown truth that needed to be revealed. Since the Romans were brothers and sisters, he didn’t want them to be ignorant of God’s plan. By resolving their ignorance, Paul would also protect them from conceit.

In His sovereignty, God had allowed Israel to harden its heart against Him. This opened the door for the Gentiles to accept the gospel. But this was only a partial hardening—meaning some
Jews (like Paul) would acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. Eventually, the hardening would disappear and Israel would have a chance to respond—just like the Gentiles had. God had blessed Israel so that the entire world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). For Jews and Gentiles alike, citizenship in heaven is based on faith—nothing more, nothing less.

*How does a person’s relationship with Jesus affect the way they view others? How could nurturing a heart of gratitude to God change how a person views others?*

Again, the hardening was temporary. At some point, a faithful remnant of Jews will open their hearts to Jesus and be grafted into the family. So, God is still at work among the Jews and will be until His plan is complete.

To illustrate his point, Paul quoted two Old Testament prophecies. Hundreds of years before Jesus came, Isaiah had predicted that a Deliverer (the Messiah) would come and turn godlessness away from the Jews (Isa. 59:20). When they returned to God, the prophet Jeremiah said He would be faithful to take away their sins (Jer. 31:31-34). He had made a covenant with them and would honor it when the time was right.

Interpreters understand verse 26 in different ways. Part of the difficulty is interpreting the verse in light of the “remnant” in 9:27 and 11:5. What we can affirm by Scripture is that God will not save everyone, only those who put their trust in Jesus (Rom. 10:9,13).

**VERSES 28-32**

Paul noted that God saw Israel from a “now, but not yet” perspective. On one hand, they were currently enemies of the gospel. God was sovereignly using that rebellion to bless the Gentiles. It was an example of God’s bringing things together for good and His glory (Rom. 8:28).

But God still held a special place for the Jews in His heart. Through His election—His choice to make them His people—they were blessed. Because the patriarchs accepted His promises in faith, the nation was still beloved by God. God had a history with the Jews, and He would not reject them.
God loves the whole world (John 3:16) and gives everyone a chance to be saved. Paul knew that the Jews’ rebellion had raised questions. Some might have wondered if they had crossed a point of no return. Paul’s answer was the same as God’s answer: Not at all! That’s because salvation is not based on demographics like culture or ethnicity. Instead, redemption is rooted in His gracious gifts and calling. He has promised salvation as a free gift to anyone who will receive it, and He will keep that promise as He keeps all His promises.

Paul said these promises are irrevocable. They cannot change or be altered—even by a nation steeped in rebellion. When God’s grace is combined with faith, it always produces eternal results. That will never change for Jews or Gentiles.

What does God’s plans being irrevocable tell us about His character?

Like the Jews, the Romans had disobeyed God. They had rejected Him and lived in rebellion against Him. They had been His enemies. But they had accepted the gospel in faith. When that happened, God had accepted them into His family. He had been gracious and given them a seat at His table.

The Jews would enjoy the same patience from God. Despite their disobedience—which had benefited the Gentiles—the Jews could still return to God. If they would humble themselves and respond to God’s offer of salvation in faith, they would also receive mercy. God’s door is always open to anyone.

When everything is said and done, we all need to be grafted into God’s tree. None of us are good enough to earn our salvation. We all approach Him in faith, trusting Him for salvation.

Paul used the image of a prison to explain our need and God’s provision. Because of sin, we are in prison. When we repent of our disobedience in faith, everything changes. God sets us free and shows us mercy we never deserved.

God demonstrates this kindness and grace to all. Not everyone will be redeemed because many will continue to reject Christ. But everyone has the opportunity.
IN MY CONTEXT

• Because salvation comes through faith in Jesus alone, there is no room for arrogance expressed toward unbelievers.

• All believers need to be aware that God’s mercy demonstrated in Christ remains open to the Jews.

• God is merciful to everyone, giving salvation to all who place their faith in His Son.

Who around you has rejected Christ? What is your attitude toward them? How can you and your Bible study group continue to minister to them in a loving and respectful way?

How would you rate your awareness that God’s offer of salvation is made to all people? To what evidence can you point to justify your answer? What adjustments do you need to make?

Prayer Needs
SACRIFICES

Believers are to demonstrate Christlike character, living as sacrifices in all they do.

ROMANS 12:1-2,9-18

In 1940, a Polish military officer named Witold Pilecki let himself get arrested by the Nazis so he could be sent to Auschwitz. At the time, the world didn’t realize the horrors of the concentration camps, but Pilecki’s reports eventually revealed it all. He spent nearly three years as a spy in the camp before escaping. People like Pilecki are celebrated because they willingly sacrificed for a greater cause. Paul told the Roman believers that Christians were also called to live as sacrifices.

*When have you sacrificed something important to you for a higher cause? What mental and emotional hurdles did you have to get over to make that sacrifice?*
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 12:1-21

In the first half of Romans, Paul had taken his readers on a journey through the theology of sin and salvation. He had shown them the historic roots of depravity and emphasized that everyone—regardless of background or ethnicity—stood guilty before God (Rom. 1–4). But the situation was not completely hopeless. God had provided an escape from sin through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 5). Those who chose to follow Christ could no longer live as they pleased. They had died and been buried with Christ (Rom. 6). God raised them by His power to live for His glory through His Spirit (Rom. 7–8).

In chapters 9–11, Paul took a slight detour to discuss the history and fate of the Jewish nation in particular. Because his Roman audience was likely a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, it was important that both groups understood that God was not finished with His chosen people. Many Jews had denied the Messiah, but their rejection was not complete. Some—like Paul—had accepted Christ. One day the blinders would be lifted, and all would see Jesus as He is—and many more will choose to receive His gift of salvation.

Paul also noted that the Jewish rejection had opened the door for the Gentiles to hear the gospel. Regardless of nationality or ethnic background, Paul emphasized that salvation is the result of faith in Christ. That may have been a sticking point for many Jews committed to the law, but it had always been God’s way of bringing people to Himself.

The last few chapters of Romans—including chapter 12—focus on the practical side of salvation. With the theological foundation firmly set, Paul challenged his readers to live out their faith. This would give them the chance to share the gospel with the world around them.

Read Romans 12:1-2,9-18, underlining commands given. How would you summarize Paul’s main point in this section of his letter to the Romans?
Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

VERSE 1

Paul began with a therefore. He had done this in 5:1 and 8:1 to identify the connection of what he had been teaching to what he was about to teach. Here, Paul shifted from explaining the theological doctrines of sin, salvation, and sanctification to encouraging practical application.

He addressed the Romans as brothers and sisters, again emphasizing both his affection for them and their connection to one another. That relationship, centered in Christ, surpassed any ethnic or demographic backgrounds. As believers, they were all part of God’s family.

Paul’s challenge to his readers—rooted in the mercies God had shown them—was to become a living sacrifice. This was similar to his challenge in 6:13 where he had contrasted offering our bodies to sin with dedicating our bodies to God. From a human perspective, our bodies represent all we are. Paul was urging the Romans to surrender their entire being to Christ.

In the Old Testament, sacrifices were to be holy and without blemish. Likewise, living sacrifices are set apart to Him and completely dedicated to His purposes. Each day, believers are called to die to their own desires and give themselves to Christ. The ancient animals had no choice. People do. And, in truth, no spiritual growth happens until a believer consciously chooses to become a living sacrifice.

He also noted that sacrifices were an act of true worship. The Greek wording indicates a moral obligation—something God expects from us because of the mercy He has shown us. Even today, worship is not a place to go on Sundays. It’s an active, consistent state of living under God’s authority.
BIBLE SKILL: Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.

Read Romans 12:1-2 aloud several times. Each time, emphasize different words or phrases as you read. For example, in one reading emphasize the word “you” or “your” each time it appears. Then read the verse again, emphasizing all the action words. Take note of your thoughts. How does the verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?

VERSE 2

The alternative to becoming a living sacrifice is being conformed to this age. The idea is that people take the shape of the culture around them—the way dough is shaped by a cookie cutter. The present age is evil (Gal. 1:4) and tries to squeeze people into its mold. But God expects more of His people.

Instead of being conformed, God expects His people to be transformed. The Greek word used here is related to the English word “metamorphosis,” which indicates a transformation from one thing to another. Mark used it to describe Jesus’ transfiguration (Mark 9:2).

While being conformed starts on the outside and infects the inner person, being transformed begins inside and affects our actions, words, and attitudes. It is a change in who we are. This change happens as the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus each day.

The transformation starts renewing our minds since that is where thoughts and actions are born. The Spirit literally changes the way we think, emphasizing God’s perspective instead of our natural inclinations. The renewal process produces wisdom, which gives us the discernment to recognize and fulfill God’s will for our lives.

Our transformation and renewal has a direct impact on how we live. What begins inside us will become apparent to the culture around us, pointing others to our Savior.
How does salvation change the way a person thinks? What impact does salvation have on what a person values?

LIVE AUTHENTICALLY (ROM. 12:9-13)

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. 10 Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. 13 Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.

VERSES 9-13

After emphasizing that believers make up a single body (vv. 3-8), Paul returned to explaining how this new life on the inside should change the way believers live on the outside. It begins with genuine love. The love we have for God is reflected in the love we have for others. These five verses include thirteen imperatives or implied imperatives.

Paul began with a challenge to love without hypocrisy. Love doesn't wear a mask or have ulterior motives. Just as believers are secure in God's love (Rom. 8:37-39), they should also be secure in one another's love.

Like our spiritual transformation, genuine love starts internally. Paul said loving others happens when we learn to detest evil and cling to what is good. The idea is to see evil as repulsive and horrifying. If our hearts reject what God rejects—and embrace what He embraces—we will walk in true love.

Believers who love genuinely put the needs of others above their own.

Paul challenged the Romans to love one another deeply. Loving deeply means loving like family. Just like most would sacrifice for their siblings or children, believers who love genuinely put the needs of others above their own. One way to live that out in a practical way is to honor one another. Paul encouraged the Romans to outdo one another in showing such respect. They were to delight in showing honor to others.
Paul next challenged his readers to not lack diligence in zeal. This indicates a sold out commitment to the glory of God (Col. 3:23). We must never lose our passion for Christ.

The apostle also called the Romans to be fervent in the Spirit. The Spirit produces a fire inside the heart of Christians and gives them the strength they need each day. He is the Source that ensures we aren’t getting lazy or operating in our own strength.

From there, the Roman believers needed to serve the Lord. Good works do not save anyone, but they demonstrate our salvation to others. Plus, service is closely related to love. There is no better way to love others—inside or outside the church—than to serve them in Jesus’ name.

Our assurance that God is in control—and that all things will be made new—produces joy.

The Christian life is marked by joy, regardless of circumstances. So Paul urged the Romans to rejoice in hope. In the New Testament, hope represents confidence in God’s work now and in the future. Christians will struggle in this world, but our assurance that God is in control—and that all things will be made new—produces joy.

Hope also allows believers to be patient in affliction. Humans aren’t naturally patient. We need the Spirit’s assistance (Gal. 5:22-23). When we embrace patience, we can endure any difficulty, convinced that God remains in control.

Paul also challenged the Romans to be persistent in prayer. For many, prayer is a mystery; they don’t invest much time or energy into it. This leads to a powerless faith. To feel prayer’s impact, we have to be consistent. Remembering that God answers prayer encourages such persistence.

God’s internal work in us leads to external actions. For example, as God works through believers, He challenges them to share with the saints in their needs. In truth, all we own belongs to God (Ps. 24:1), and He allows us to use some of His resources for
His glory. Realizing that we are stewards and not owners makes it easier to be generous, following the example set by the early church.

Along with giving money, we also can give comfort. Paul wanted Romans to pursue hospitality. In the first century, lodging options were limited, so believers needed to open their homes to Christian travelers. The challenge was to actively seek such opportunities and not wait for people to come looking for help.

**BE AT PEACE (ROM. 12:14-18)**

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

**VERSES 14-15**

Paul also challenged the Romans to love those outside the church—including those who would oppose them. The challenge was to bless those who persecute you. Jesus gave the same instructions to His disciples (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:28) and had modeled it while on the cross (Luke 23:34). While it would be much easier for the Romans to curse those who caused them pain, Paul commanded his readers to respond with love. Put another way, he encouraged them to respond the way Jesus responded.

Empathy is an incredible trait that Christians should develop. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and also weep with those who weep, thus carrying part of their burden (Gal. 6:2). We are called to do life together as the body of Christ. Believers can rejoice with one another because a victory for one is a victory for all. Likewise, a stunning loss for one member should be felt throughout the family. This is how love demonstrates itself in a genuine community.

**VERSES 16-18**

Paul continued to provide bite-sized challenges to his readers. He told them to live in harmony. It is possible that fractures were starting to develop among the various demographics in the congregation—both ethnic (Jews and Gentiles) and
economic (slave and free). Everyone was equally sinful, and everyone equally needed a Savior. So Paul encouraged the Christians to be on the same page and to work together to transform the culture.

Instead of being proud, believers needed to associate with the humble. James also addressed the issue of showing favoritism in his letter (Jas. 2:1-9).

Paul urged the Romans to avoid repaying evil for evil. At that time, the Roman government under Nero was already turning up the heat on Christians. Within a few years, extreme persecution would erupt against the church. Whether the conflict was rooted in the church or in the culture, revenge could not be part of the Christian response. Jesus talked about turning the other cheek, and Paul warned his readers not to repay evil for evil. Vengeance is still God’s department.

Instead, the apostle said to do what is honorable. In one sense, this means to uphold the laws of the land as much as possible. It also means to show respect even in the face of injustice and persecution.

Finally, Paul urged the Romans, if possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. While some individuals might be hard to get along with, believers can live at peace more often than we sometimes think. If we are showing proper honor and not thinking too highly of ourselves, the task becomes easier.

But Paul knew that persecution was real—and intensifying. When faced with the choice between obeying the emperor and obeying God, the Roman believers’ path was clear. They could live at peace as best as they could, yet they had to stand for the faith even if it caused conflict.

What can believers do to foster peace with others? How does the phrase “as far as it depends on you” change the limits believers should go to foster peace?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Christian and Social Order

Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Col. 3:12-17).
IN MY CONTEXT

- Salvation changes how believers think and what they value.
- Salvation changes how we relate to other believers.
- Salvation changes how we relate to all people, including those who seek to harm us.

What would becoming a living sacrifice look like in your life? What would you need to give up? What would you need to add?

Review the commands given, identifying the actions you do well and the ones you struggle to follow. How can you improve in carrying out each action commanded?

As a group, identify people who suffer for the gospel. How can your Bible study group support those individuals? What can your group learn from their example?

Prayer Needs
Believers should seek to represent Christ well in their communities and world.

ROMANS 13:1-14

Our view of the government often depends on our current circumstances. At tax season, some may feel the government is too intrusive. When a police officer stops someone for speeding, the complaint may be, “Don’t they have anything better to do?” In Romans 13, Paul dealt with the believer’s relationship to governing authorities. He called for submission to authority, balancing government’s God-given right to rule with our submission to God, who alone holds absolute authority.

How would you describe your relationship with local government?
What do you value the most in your local government?
After highlighting behavior within the church in chapter 12, Paul turned his attention to how believers should interact with those outside the church. While we are citizens of heaven, we also live as citizens of earth (Rom. 13:1-14). As such, we have a responsibility to respect our leaders and to make our community a better place. If we abdicate our duty to be a light to the world, the darkness will dominate with no one to blame but ourselves.

This challenge to live as upright citizens on earth is rooted in the truth that Christ will return. We do not know the day, so we live each day as if that is the day He is coming back. Such an attitude will protect us from straying too far from His commands, in addition to showing the world what it means to truly live for Him. As Paul noted, we should live as children of the day, not as agents of darkness (13:11-14).

Read Romans 13:1-14 in your Bible, circling the actions Paul identified believers were to take. How are the actions circled a means of representing Christ well?
avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God’s servants, continually attending to these tasks. Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.

VERSES 1-2
Paul addressed Christian citizenship with a command and a rationale. First, he said to submit to the governing authorities. The Greek phrase is an imperative. As Paul would explain later, obeying authorities is tied to obeying God.

The authorities in Rome were pagans. But Paul did not distinguish between evil leaders and righteous leaders. Christians are called to honor all leaders—as long as it doesn’t compromise the faith.

The rationale for submission to governing authorities is God’s sovereignty over human affairs. Whether leaders acknowledge it or not, none of them hold their position except from God. Jesus reminded Pilate of this truth while standing trial (John 19:11). Likewise, all of their authority has been instituted by God.

Since God places individuals in authority, rejecting their authority amounts to opposing God’s command. While many leaders don’t claim allegiance to God, the majority of society’s laws still serve the greater good. We may not agree with every decision, but we are still called to live in a way that honors God.

Those who disobey human law will face the consequences—probably at the hands of the authorities they have snubbed. Paul said that such individuals will bring judgment on themselves. Our faith as believers does not give us the freedom to flaunt the legal system.

Of course, at some point, we may be forced to choose between the rules of society and the principles of God. For example, God may lead us to take a stand against injustice in some form. In those cases, we still are subject to the law and must endure the repercussions of our choices. Paul and the Romans certainly understood this truth, having suffered for faith on numerous occasions.
VERSES 3-4
The best way to avoid the consequences of breaking the law is to avoid breaking the law. It seems simple, but that is the gist of Paul’s message. In general, leaders are **not a terror to good conduct**.

In Acts, John and Peter did take a stand against the authorities in Jerusalem. They twice confessed allegiance to God over the unjust laws of their culture (Acts 4:19; 5:29). However, this represents the exception rather than the rule. In most cases, individuals have no reason to fear authority.

**Our first loyalty should be to God, and our primary aim should be to please Him.**

Our first loyalty should be to God, and our primary aim should be to please Him. In most cases, that does not keep us from doing what’s right according to earthly laws. So Paul instructed his readers to **do what is good**.

God has established leaders for the **good** of those who do what is right—including believers. In His grand scheme, they are God’s servants to dispense justice in the world.

The **sword** was a symbol of power and judgment. Under God’s authority, governments carry a sword to punish those who create chaos—when appropriate force is necessary. Where injustice exists, God expects the governing authority to be an avenger that defends the weak and moves quickly to make things right. Christians support such efforts. Of course, this does not work perfectly in every setting. History reveals many leaders who were more of a problem than a solution. But ideally, good government protects the innocent and punishes the guilty.

*How might a believer show respect to government leaders even when they disagree with government leaders?*

VERSES 5-7
There is more to honoring government than simply avoiding punishment. While that may be a genuine deterrent, Christians also need to consider their **conscience**. Disobedience creates guilt, and believers are called to walk in freedom from guilt. So, honoring
the laws of society allows us to sleep soundly at night in addition to escaping judgment. Doing right comes with such rewards.

Paul made it clear that paying taxes was not up for debate. Christians show respect for the government by paying all taxes that are due. Jesus taught the same thing. When a group of leaders tried to trick Him with a question about taxes, He pointed out the image of Caesar on the coin used to pay those taxes. He famously told listeners to give Caesar what he was due and to give God what He deserved (Matt. 22:15-22).

**KEY DOCTRINE: Religious Liberty**

Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God (1 Pet. 3:11-17).

**LOVE (ROM. 13:8-10)**

8 Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet; and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.

**VERSES 8-10**

Beyond taxes owed to government, Paul pointed to a larger debt believers owe—to love one another. Unlike financial debts, the debt of love never expires. We are always under an obligation to others. Like honoring the authorities, loving others nurtures a spirit of peace and protects the church’s larger mission.

Paul used the Ten Commandments to illustrate the relationship between love and the law. Sins like adultery, murder, theft, and coveting are caused by selfishness, which is the opposite of sacrificial love. What God expects can be summed up in a single principle: Love your neighbor as yourself. (See also Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:34-40; Gal. 5:13-15; and Jas. 2:8.)
Those who practice love well place their own desires on hold for the benefit of others. Our natural tendency is to advance our own agendas, even if it hurts others in the process. Paul emphasized that love does no wrong to others. By doing no wrong, we put others first. This represents the ultimate fulfillment of the law.

Jesus taught the same truth with the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). As He noted, neighbors are not defined by geography or ethnicity. Instead, our neighbors are anyone we can help. As a result, our love should extend as far as God’s love—to the entire world (John 3:16). We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19), and we reflect Him to the world through our love.

Loving others is a common theme in the New Testament. In John’s Gospel, Jesus said His followers would be known by their love (John 13:34-35), and the early church members worked to live that out in practical ways (Acts 4:32-35). Later, Paul told the Corinthians that love treats others well (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Likewise, John (1 John 3:18) and Peter (1 Pet. 4:8) each encouraged genuine love among early Christians. We must learn to love others well.

How does keeping the commandments listed by Paul demonstrate love for others?

**ANTICIPATE** (Rom. 13:11-14)

11 Besides this, since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don’t make plans to gratify the desires of the flesh.

**VERSES 11-14**

Paul often filtered his teaching through the second coming of Christ. He did the same when it came to citizenship. How we
act as citizens of earth should be determined by our citizenship in heaven.

Paul didn’t know when Jesus would return, but he was confident that the time was coming. Because Jesus is coming back, the Romans needed to wake up and act like it. Biblical reminders of Christ’s return typically include accompanying challenges for moral purity and spiritual awareness.

**We are on the clock, and we will give an account for our time.**

While two thousand years have passed, each day moves us closer to His return. As Paul wrote, the completion of our salvation is **nearer than when we first believed.** We are on the clock, and we will give an account for our time.

*How does thinking about Jesus’ return serve as motivation for believers to make a difference today?*

Paul used **night** and **day** to contrast the **darkness** of the world and the **light** of faith. (See also 1 Thess. 5:4-11; Eph. 5:1-20.) Here, he reminded his readers that the dark culture was on borrowed time. Before long, the sun would rise, and a new day would dawn.

In the midst of darkness, Paul challenged the Romans to serve as lights to their community. The first step in this process was to **discard the deeds of darkness.** Christ had already redeemed them from that lifestyle; they didn’t need to go back to it. The alternative was to **put on the armor of light.** Armor equips warriors for battle, and God’s armor of light equips believers to illuminate darkness while we wait for Jesus’ return. Paul expanded on the benefits of God’s armor in his Letter to the Ephesians. (See Eph. 6:10-18.)

As believers put on God’s armor, they are empowered to live in purity and beyond reproach. Paul compared the way we live to a **walk.** It’s an appropriate comparison, since life really is a journey that moves each of us closer to eternity. We must walk **with decency.** This means our lives can stand up to the most intense scrutiny of those around us. We may stumble, but our hearts should also be set on what is good (Phil. 4:8).
Such a lifestyle stands in stark contrast to the world’s standard of living. Paul gave some examples of how culture lives without a moral compass. People often use carousing and drunkenness to deaden their pain, while they rely on sexual impurity and promiscuity to substitute for genuine intimacy. While Christians are identified by love, the world tears itself apart with quarreling and jealousy.

The only cure for this cycle of emptiness is Jesus. Those who put on the Lord Jesus Christ discover healing, community, and hope. Instead of becoming slaves to the desires of the flesh, Christ frees them to be all they were created to be.

The issue comes back to submission. By submitting all we are to God, we will be in fellowship with Him and be a light to those around us.

*How can a believer shed light in a dark world and do so with love? Are there inappropriate ways of being light in a dark world? Explain.*

**BIBLE SKILL: Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.**

Paul used the phrase “put on” to describe the activity of Christians (Rom. 13:12,14). Read the following passages to gain deeper insight into what Paul was telling Christians to do: Ephesians 6:11-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10. How do these passages help us understand Paul’s commands in Romans 13? Read 1 Corinthians 15:53-54. How does it differ from the other passages you have read?
IN MY CONTEXT

• Believers should honor their government and its leaders by being model citizens.
• Believers should demonstrate Christlike love to all people, especially other Christians.
• Believers should live holy lives in anticipation of the return of Christ.

What are some things you and the members of your Bible study group do to make your community a better place? How can you be a light by ministering to your leaders?

Who are some people you struggle to love? How can you learn to love them better? What are some practical ways you can show God’s love this week to the people you listed?

Identify some dark places around you that need Christ’s light. How can you represent Christ in those areas? What holds you back? How can you overcome those barriers?

Prayer Needs
Accepting

Believers should accept and encourage other believers to facilitate unity.

**ROMANS 14:1-12**

The human body is an amazing creation. A series of systems—such as the circulatory system, the digestive system, the skeletal system, and the nervous system—all work together to keep things moving and growing. Any problem in one system can create problems in another. The body of Christ works the same way. To keep the body healthy and effective, believers must live in unity.

*When have you seen a breakdown in one area create another problem in a different area of your body? How might that same type of cause and effect happen in a church?*
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 14:1–15:13

Starting in Romans 12, Paul began focusing on how we live out our new faith. We are called to be living sacrifices, to use our gifts to bring Him glory, and to build up the church (Rom. 12:1-8). We no longer exist only to please ourselves. Instead, we live in relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ (12:9-21). We also demonstrate the reality of the gospel by our attitudes toward authority—including government officials with whom we may disagree (13:1-7). While we may need to choose between God’s laws and human laws in the most extreme cases, those officials deserve our respect. In fact, rebelling against our laws and leaders is tantamount to rebelling against the God who put them in place.

Returning to the theme of relationships between believers, Paul called on the Romans to demonstrate unity within the church body. Instead of judging others, Christians should protect one another. When disagreements arise, they should use the law of liberty and the law of love as guides for their attitudes and behavior (14:1-23). Christians have a responsibility to encourage others, even if it means putting their own desires on the back burner. This honors God and points the watching world toward Christ (15:1-13).

Read Romans 14:1-12 in your Bible, circling preferences and underlining commands. How does confusing preferences with commands create strife?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

STOP JUDGING (ROM. 14:1-4)

1 Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don’t argue about disputed matters. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge
another’s household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand.

VERSES 1-3

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenged His listeners to avoid judging others (Matt. 7:1-2). He was teaching against the religious hypocrisy that was common in that day. Those hypocrites held others to a standard they refused to keep themselves—and still judged others for falling short.

Paul applied Jesus’ teachings to the life of the church by encouraging the Romans to accept anyone who is weak in faith. Another way to say it is to “welcome” or “receive” the weak into the fellowship. In this, he drew a distinction between doctrine (truth that never changes) and practice (methods that can be adapted). He also emphasized that “weakness” is likely a matter of personal opinion and should not become a litmus test for righteousness.

We have a tendency to elevate our personal preferences to the level of non-negotiable doctrines.

The apostle understood that we have a tendency to elevate our personal preferences to the level of non-negotiable doctrines. Instead, he encouraged believers to avoid arguments over disputed matters. The Greek word used here indicates things that don’t really matter or have any genuine substance. These debates only create fractures in the church’s fellowship and distract it from fulfilling the commission given by Jesus.

To illustrate his point, Paul provided what was likely a real-life example in the Roman congregation. Christians from a Gentile background had embraced their spiritual liberty and were able to eat anything with a clear conscience. But weak believers, likely those from a Jewish heritage, struggled with their new freedom. Because they still worried about consuming food the law considered unclean, they would eat only vegetables.

Paul addressed a similar rift in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 8:1-13). In that congregation, the question related to eating meat that had been offered to idols before being sold in the marketplace. As in Rome, some Corinthians ate freely, while others abstained. And, as in Rome, the “strong” and the “weak” were at odds with one another.

The problem in Rome was not so much their food preferences but their attitudes. The “weaker” Christians sometimes felt superior
and would judge those who ate anything. Likewise, those who ate freely tended to look down on those who abstained. Neither position was correct. Christians have a responsibility to love each other, not belittle or judge one another over matters of conscience.

**VERSE 4**

Certainly, there are non-negotiable doctrines of the faith. The key to reconciling differences surrounding the negotiables requires a commitment to unity and grace. Paul noted that every believer is a servant of God. Each servant stands or falls based on his or her master’s standard—not some standard created by fellow servants.

**We need to focus on being transformed into His likeness and spend less time trying to mold everyone else into our likeness.**

Ultimately, everyone—including Christians—will give an account for their actions. But we won’t be answering to one another. We will answer to the Lord for what we have done—or haven’t done. We need to focus on being transformed into His likeness and spend less time trying to mold everyone else into our likeness.

**BIBLE SKILL:** Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:25-33. What problem was Paul addressing in these verses? How is the problem Paul addressed in Romans 14 similar to the problem in Corinth? How is it different? What insights about the problem in Corinth apply to the situation in Rome?
**HONOR GOD** (ROM. 14:5-8)

5 One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord. Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, and he gives thanks to God.

7 For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself. 8 If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

**VERSES 5-6**

In addition to questions about food, there were also divisions in Rome over holy days. Some members observed some days as more important than others. Most likely, Jews in Rome were observing the Sabbath along with other important feast days. Others in the church considered *every day to be the same*. This group did not feel any obligation to a religious calendar and saw no need to consecrate certain days.

Again, Paul called both groups to carefully examine their motives and convictions. The question of days was not the point. Not everyone had to believe the same thing on this matter, but everyone had a responsibility to honor God with a clear conscience.

Paul did not condemn those who observed certain days as holy days, as long as they did so as an act of worship. Likewise, he refused to chastise anyone over food preferences if they were seeking to honor God. God’s church is big enough to include people who differ on negotiable practices.

For Paul, God’s glory was the primary motivation for the Christian life. He challenged the Corinthians to filter their actions through the test of God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31).
VERSES 7-8

The foundation of Paul’s logic boiled down to one principle: ownership. No one who has accepted Jesus as Savior and claims to be a child of God lives for himself, and no one dies for himself. Once we surrender our lives to Him, we give up control. Our salvation means we died to our old lives of sin and were raised with Christ (Rom. 6:1-11). Every believer now lives and dies for the Lord. To put it another way, we belong to the Lord.

Once we surrender our lives to Him, we give up control.

When writing to the Corinthians, Paul stated that Jesus’ ownership is directly tied to His death and resurrection (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Speaking in the context of sexual purity, Paul told the Corinthians that they had responsibility to remain pure because their bodies belonged to God. They belonged to God because Christ had paid the price for their lives through His death.

Paul had already explained to the Romans that all people are born into sin and have no ability to please God in their own strength. Thankfully, Christ paid a price that we could not pay. But His death also demands that we live to honor God.

One way to do that in practical terms is to recognize the sincere efforts of others who are also striving to please God—albeit in different ways. We can enjoy freedom to serve God as He leads us, but we also must allow others the same privilege. Our rights do not extend so far as to trample the convictions of others.

How should viewing God as owner change a person’s perspective on worship practices? How should it impact how believers treat one another?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Church

Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes, with each member being responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord (Col. 1:18).
REMOVE OBSTACLES (ROM. 14:9-12)

9 Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living. 10 But you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God. 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

VERSES 9-10
Whether the Roman Christians were “weak” or “strong,” they all shared one thing in common. They claimed Jesus as their Lord and Savior. What they shared was infinitely more significant than any differences that might separate them.

It is wrong for any believer to attempt to put a brother or sister in Christ back under any form of bondage.

Jesus’ death and resurrection unifies believers. He lived a perfect life, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and has authority over all things—both dead and living. His authority has no boundaries. Because He is Lord of all, He is also Judge of all. We are not. What’s more, Jesus died to free people from judgment and contempt. So, it is wrong for any believer to attempt to put a brother or sister in Christ back under any form of bondage.

For emphasis, Paul asked two rhetorical questions. First, he asked why a “weaker” believer would judge your brother or sister. Second, he asked why a “stronger” Christian would despise your brother or sister.

In truth, neither judgment nor contempt is appropriate in the body of Christ. Both groups were in the wrong. More important, Paul reminded them that one day each of them would stand before the judgment seat of God. This will not be a judgment of salvation but of works—an evaluation of how we used the life God has given us.

VERSE 11
To drive home his point, Paul rooted his argument in the Old Testament. Quoting Isaiah 45:23, he reminded his readers that God said every knee will bow before Him eventually. And every tongue
will give praise to God. This was a reminder to believers that He is Lord—and ultimate Judge—over everyone and everything. In his Letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote that Jesus humbled Himself on the cross, God raised Him above all else, every knee would bow before Him, and every mouth would confess His authority (Phil. 2:5-11). The Philippians had also been struggling with a lack of unity and judgmental attitudes (Phil. 2:1-4). For them, the answer was the same as what Paul gave the Romans—and gives us today. We are called to nurture unity in the church, not to create division in the church. While we should stand for the unchangeable doctrines of the faith, those conversations should be rooted in love and truth, not judgment or contempt.

We are called to nurture unity in the church, not to create division in the church.

VERSE 12

Again, Paul stated that our appearance before Jesus was not just about praising Him. It will also include being judged by Him. The idea behind the phrase give an account is a financial term. First-century stewards—what we might call “asset managers”—were responsible for overseeing their employer’s property. Their job was to handle those resources for the benefit of the owner. To make sure this was happening, stewards were regularly called to account for what was under their care.

Each of us will be called before God to give an account of ourselves. No one will be exempt. We will each answer to God for our actions and decisions. The Lord will serve as our Judge. Because of this, we should be managing our own lives for His glory. Let us also be supporting and encouraging other believers in their desire to live for His glory.

Which action do you consider to be more divisive: judging others or looking down on others? Explain.
IN MY CONTEXT

- Christians are to avoid being judgmental toward other believers’ spiritual understanding and religious practices.
- Believers are to honor God regardless of what doing so may require.
- Believers are to express understanding toward other believers and their God-honoring practices.

*Are you more likely to judge others or look down on others? Give an example. What adjustments do you need to make based on today’s study?*

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*What are some practical ways you and the members of your Bible study group can demonstrate God’s ownership of your lives? How can you honor Him by honoring someone who is different?*

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*Examine your life for areas in which you need to be more understanding toward other believers and their worship practices. How can you demonstrate greater understanding and grace toward them?*

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Prayer Needs
Believers must make every effort to share the gospel with everyone.

**ROMANS 15:14-21,30-33**

John Reid—the name of the masked man known as “The Lone Ranger”—was rarely alone. He was “lone” in that he was the sole survivor of an ambush by outlaws, but he was far from alone because he had a companion. Sometimes we may think of Paul as a lone ranger, but his mission required him to depend on others. The sharing of the gospel requires a team effort, and Paul reminded the Roman believers of this in the closing section of the letter.

*Why might a believer take a lone ranger approach to sharing the gospel with others? What are the dangers of failing to invite others to be part of sharing the gospel?*
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 15:14–16:27

As Paul closed his Letter to the Romans, he returned to the topic of salvation—but in a different context. While he had used the first part of the epistle to show that everyone needs a Savior, he now emphasized the responsibility Christians have to share that Savior with others.

Paul had a passionate desire to extend the reach of the gospel beyond Rome to areas outside the Empire. Instead of building on someone else’s foundation, he wanted to reach those who had never heard the name of Jesus (Rom. 15:20-29). Of course, the Great Commission included familiar places like Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but it also pointed believers to wider regions—the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8). The residents of those areas were heaviest on Paul’s heart as he wrote this letter to the church in Rome.

The apostle knew that he could not succeed on his own, so he asked the believers in Rome for help (Rom. 15:30-33). This help might have included financial offerings, but Paul primarily requested their prayers on his behalf. He had other issues to resolve before he could realize his dream, and he asked that they pray for him in those matters.

Paul closed his letter with a long list of fellow believers who had been faithful partners with him through the years (16:1-16). While the apostle had not yet visited Rome, he apparently had met some members of the Roman church during his travels. He wanted them to know how much he appreciated them before he added one final warning (16:17-18) and one final blessing (16:19-27).

Read Romans 15:14-21,30-33 in your Bible, noting the number of times Paul pointed to Christ. What does the frequency of references reveal about Paul’s view of Christ?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

FULFILL YOUR CALLING (Rom. 15:14-16)

14 My brothers and sisters, I myself am convinced about you that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. 15 Nevertheless, I have written to remind you more boldly on some points because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of the gospel of God. My purpose is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

VERSE 14
Paul called the Romans brothers and sisters, even though he had never met many of them. He considered them family, both in his affection for them and in his partnership with them.

Paul shared some kind words for the Romans—not as flattery, but because he was convinced they were spiritually healthy. Morally, they demonstrated goodness. They understood the difference between right and wrong, and they did their best to choose what was right.

Intellectually, they were filled with all knowledge. They had been taught well and had held firm to those teachings. Their doctrinal integrity meant they could instruct one another. They could encourage each other, but they also could hold each other accountable when necessary. All in all, the Romans were solid Christ followers.

VERSES 15-16
Nevertheless, Paul also knew that the Romans still had things to learn. No one had it all together spiritually, but all of them had the potential to become more like Christ. He wrote them to fill in some gaps and to remind them of things they needed to remember.

Paul confessed that he wrote more boldly to a church he did not plant than one might expect, but his authority as an apostle made it possible. In addition, the grace of God—the unmerited gift he had received through Christ—pushed him to be as clear as possible about these important matters.

Whether he was sharing a doctrine that was new to them or simply restating an important truth they had forgotten, it was all
part of drawing them closer to Jesus. And it was all part of his goal of helping them to become more like Jesus.

God had called Paul to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. While Peter and others were working among the Jews, Paul had a heart and passion for non-Jewish people. Many Roman Christians were Gentiles, and Paul felt a special urgency toward them.

He also saw himself as a priest of the gospel. In the Old Testament, priests spoke on God’s behalf. They shared His words with His people. Paul saw his responsibility in a similar way. He proclaimed God’s truths to others.

But priests also presented offerings, and Paul embraced that metaphor. He wanted to present as many Gentile believers as possible to God as an acceptable offering.

How did Paul’s understanding of his ministry follow Jesus’ commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8?

BOAST ABOUT JESUS (ROM. 15:17-19)

17 Therefore I have reason to boast in Christ Jesus regarding what pertains to God. 18 For I would not dare say anything except what Christ has accomplished through me by word and deed for the obedience of the Gentiles, 19 by the power of miraculous signs and wonders, and by the power of God’s Spirit. As a result, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum.

VERSES 17-19

Paul had suffered much, preached a great deal, and established churches all over the map. But he never bragged about his accomplishments. He was too busy bragging about Jesus.

Paul had reason to boast in Christ. The fact is, he knew he had no power of his own. Anything that had been done for God and His kingdom was accomplished through him by Christ. Paul wanted the Romans to know that if they chose to support him, they would be supporting Christ’s work. Paul was doing God’s work, not promoting his own agenda.
After two thousand years, we recognize the great impact of Paul’s life. The Romans perhaps understood it as well, even in the first century. But Paul demonstrated incredible humility and a keen understanding of what the Christian life is all about. He knew it would be foolish to dare say anything about his own achievements. Paul realized that Christ alone accomplished this work through him.

Paul could say, I have full proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum. This didn’t mean that everyone had heard about Jesus, but that he had completely fulfilled his calling to that point. Jerusalem represents the birthplace of Christianity, while Illyricum was a Roman province between Greece and Italy. Christ’s ministry through Paul had reached from the heart of Judaism to the proverbial outskirts of Rome.

How can a believer overcome the temptation of taking the credit instead of pointing to Christ?

SEEK THE LOST (ROM. 15:20-21)

20 My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else’s foundation, 21 but, as it is written, Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.

VERSES 20-21

In Acts 1:8, Jesus outlined the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Paul recognized that God was using him to fulfill that mission. His aim was to evangelize areas where Christ had not been preached. This motivated Paul and gave him a sense of urgency.

Paul’s strategy was to preach the gospel where Jesus was unknown rather than to preach where someone else’s foundation had been laid. Paul typically would visit one of the Empire’s population centers and establish a church. Then, once those believers were healthy enough to continue the mission on their
own, he would move to another city. He knew that, just like today, the world still had plenty of unreached people groups who needed to hear about the Savior.

As he often did, Paul quoted the Old Testament to underscore the logic—and importance—of his plan. Turning to Isaiah, he noted that individuals who didn’t know God will see and those who had never heard will understand (Isa. 52:15). Many would respond to the gospel if given the opportunity, and Paul wanted to be God’s instrument for giving them that opportunity.

Paul had spent his ministry breaking new ground for the gospel. In fact, one reason he had not yet visited Rome was that he was busy planting churches where none had existed before. So, this was the next reasonable step for him. While we should never downplay the importance of discipling believers, we also should never shy away from proclaiming Him to those who have never heard.

What are the dangers of preaching the gospel only to the people who have already heard it? What are the dangers of going only to places where people have never heard Jesus’ name? Where is the balance?

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

Usually when a New Testament author quoted an Old Testament passage, he had in mind not just the portion quoted but also the larger Old Testament context in which the verse was found. In Romans 15:21, Paul quoted the second half of Isaiah 52:15, which was part of Isaiah’s fourth Servant Song (52:13–53:12). Read and outline the entire passage. Notice the tone set at the beginning of the passage (52:13-14): exaltation in the midst of humiliation. In what ways does understanding this Old Testament passage help you understand Paul’s church planting strategy?
PARTNER WITH OTHERS (ROM. 15:30-33)

30 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in fervent prayers to God on my behalf. 31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 and that, by God’s will, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed together with you. 33 May the God of peace be with all of you. Amen.

VERSES 30-32

For the second time in this passage, Paul addressed his readers as brothers and sisters. It is impossible to escape the importance of relationships within the body of Christ. Paul understood that he did not minister in isolation.

Because they shared this common bond, Paul appealed to the Roman believers for help. The word appeal indicates a strong request. But this request wasn’t based only on Paul’s needs. It related to our Lord Jesus Christ—the One who established their relationship and gave it meaning. It also related to the love of the Spirit—that is, the deep love that the Spirit gives believers for one another that should motivate them to pray for him.

Instead of asking for financial support, Paul requested the Romans’ fervent prayers. His wording—strive together—paints the picture of an intense athletic struggle that requires great effort and coordinated teamwork. Paul’s experience told him that difficult times lay ahead, and he would need partners willing to pray with him and for him.

Paul specifically asked the Romans to pray about three challenges he knew he would be facing. First, he asked them to pray that he would be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. Many Jews in Jerusalem considered him a traitor to their faith, which could have put his life in danger.

Second, he asked the Romans to pray that the financial gift he was bringing on behalf of Gentile believers for hurting Christians in Judea would be acceptable to the saints. His ministry to the Gentiles could raise questions and concerns among a primarily Jewish audience. So, he asked that their hearts would be warmed toward the mission God had given him.

Finally, he asked them to pray that he would soon be able to visit them personally. Paul had been delayed in the past by
other obligations, but he sincerely wanted to connect with the Romans and to be refreshed together with them. He longed for an opportunity to encourage them and be encouraged by them face-to-face.

The Book of Acts reveals that Paul’s prayers were answered, though maybe not as he expected. The Jewish Christians did welcome him (Acts 21:17-20a). He was protected from his enemies—by being arrested by the Romans (Acts 21:31-34). And he did make it to Rome—as a prisoner to stand trial before Caesar (Acts 25:9-12; 28:11-31).

**What do Paul’s prayer requests reveal about his priorities? How are his requests consistent with the rest of the letter to the Romans?**

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**VERSE 33**

After requesting a partnership of prayer from the believers in Rome, Paul offered a brief prayer on their behalf. He asked that they would experience the presence of the **God of peace**.

The leaders of the Roman Empire took great pride in what was known as the Pax Romana, the “Roman peace.” But while this peace brought a degree of security to the Empire, it was maintained through an iron fist of military might. It drew its power from fear and intimidation. The Roman Christians could draw from a deeper peace, a peace Paul told the Philippians goes beyond all understanding (Phil. 4:7).

Paul’s *Amen* concluded his primary teaching in this letter. Chapter 16 essentially includes a long list of Romans who had blessed him and others who wanted to bless the Romans. Again, he focused on the power of partnerships, which should encourage us to follow that example today.

**KEY DOCTRINE: Cooperation**

Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ’s Kingdom (1 Cor. 1:10-17).
IN MY CONTEXT

- God calls believers to share the gospel with others.
- Believers are to be careful to point others to Jesus.
- Believers are to intentionally go and engage with people who have not heard the gospel message.
- Believers must partner with others to more effectively share the gospel.

*Who has God placed in your life who needs to hear the gospel? What do you need to do to make sure they hear it?*

*How can you and the members of your Bible study group point others to Jesus? What will you need to change to get the spotlight off yourselves and on to Him?*

*Along with prayers, what are some other ways you and the members of your Bible study can partner with other believers? What steps do you need to take to build those partnerships?*

Prayer Needs
Romans

Paul’s Letter to the Romans is the very heart of the gospel and is worthy of our careful study. Martin Luther, in the preface to his commentary on Romans, called this letter “the chief part of the New Testament.” He declared every Christian should “occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.” The gospel—“the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16)—is the theme of Romans. This gospel not only saves us from the penalty of sin but also breaks the power of sin over us. Feed on this letter and taste for yourself God’s life-changing power. The more you study Romans, the more precious the gospel will become to you.