ROMANS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



The gospel from start to finish: guilty, justified, set free, and never separated from the love of God

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TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Romans Bible Study

A Verse-by-Verse Study

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Trinfinity Enterprises

Romans Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study

First Edition

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of Paul's letter to the Romans. My purpose in writing this study is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

I was baptized on October 19, 1995, as a public step of faith in Jesus Christ. Neither my baptism, my church service nor my years of Bible study could earn me a place in heaven. Romans lays it out plainly: we are justified by faith, not by works. Everything depends on what Jesus finished on the cross.

There are many books available on Romans, and some of them make it harder than it needs to be. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Romans. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand what He has done for me. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

Paul gave Timothy this charge:

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters in Romans more than almost anywhere else. Romans is a letter, and Paul builds his case one step at a time. Chapter 3 depends on chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 8 depends on chapters 5, 6, and 7. Pull one verse out and you can make Paul say almost anything. Read it in order and the whole thing hangs together.

When we don't understand the context of a verse, we can easily get it wrong. Many of us have heard a passage taken out of context and misused. It is up to each of us to gently correct those who

quote God's Word out of context, doing so with love and understanding, since not everyone realizes how important context is.

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, exegesis or eisegesis. Sometimes people use both to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. A third word, hermeneutics, names the rules we use to interpret. The short definitions below are adapted from Merriam-Webster (www.merriam-webster.com); the explanations that follow them are mine.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

Exegesis means an explanation or critical interpretation of a text, such as a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means interpreting a text, such as the Bible, by reading your own ideas into it. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the methods and principles of interpretation, such as interpreting the Bible. I believe that in biblical hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that Scripture is inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. That includes the letter we are about to study. Paul wrote Romans with his own background, his own experiences, and his own pen, but the words are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible by exegesis, drawing out what the text actually says.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, which is widely credited to Dr. David L. Cooper of the Biblical Research Society:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word, at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(Quoted from http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written: literally, in its plain, ordinary sense, based on the context of the passage. Romans is not a book of symbols and visions like Revelation. It is a carefully reasoned letter, so the plain reading is almost always the right one. When Paul uses a picture, such as the olive tree in chapter 11, he tells us what it stands for.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. Each chapter follows the same pattern as my Revelation study. First you will read the whole chapter of Scripture. Then a short preview tells you what to watch for. Then we walk through the chapter verse by verse. Each chapter closes with a summary and a set of study questions you can work through on your own or with a group.

Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

Where godly, Bible-believing Christians have honestly disagreed about a passage, I lay out the main views as fairly as I can. You will see that most in chapters 7 through 11. I encourage you to do your own research and come to your own conclusion, using Scripture as your guide.

Using This Study in a Group

You can work through this study on your own or with a group. If you lead a group, here are a few suggestions.

- Plan on one chapter a week, sixteen weeks in all. Chapters 8, 9, and 11 are long, so you may want to give each of them two weeks.
- Ask everyone to read the chapter before you meet. Open your time together by reading the Scripture aloud, then the Preview.
- You will not have time for every question in one meeting. Pick the four to six that fit your group best.
- Some questions are personal. Anyone may pass or answer them privately.
- Where the study lays out different views, aim for understanding, not winning. We can disagree on those points and still love one another.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Romans. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Romans

Romans is the sixth book of the New Testament and the first of the apostle Paul's letters in our Bibles. It is placed first, not because it was written first, but because it is his longest and fullest explanation of the gospel. If you want to know what the good news of Jesus Christ is, why we need it, and how it changes a life, Romans is the place to go.

When this study uses the word "man," it means all of mankind (men, women, and children), not just one gender, unless stated otherwise.

Who Wrote It, and When?

Paul tells us in the very first verse that he wrote it (1:1). He dictated the letter to a helper named Tertius, who adds his own greeting near the end (16:22). Paul most likely wrote from the city of Corinth, in Greece, near the end of his third missionary journey, around A.D. 56 or 57 (Acts 20:2-3). He was about to carry a gift of money from the Gentile churches to the poor believers in Jerusalem (15:25-26), and after that he hoped to visit Rome on his way to Spain (15:24, 28). A woman named Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchrea near Corinth, most likely carried the letter to Rome (16:1-2).

Who Was It Written To?

Paul wrote "to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called saints" (1:7). He had not started this church and had never visited it. The church was made up of both Jewish and Gentile (non-Jewish) believers, and that mix explains a lot of what Paul says. The Jewish believers needed to hear that keeping the Law of Moses could never make them right with God. The Gentile believers needed to hear that God had not thrown away His people Israel, and that they had no reason to look down on their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Why Did Paul Write It?

Paul gives us several reasons. He wanted the Roman believers to understand the gospel clearly and be strengthened in it (1:11-15). He wanted to prepare them for his visit and gain their support for his mission to Spain (15:22-24). And he wanted Jews and Gentiles in that church to accept one another, because Christ had accepted them both (15:7).

The Theme of Romans

If I had to boil Romans down to two verses, it would be these:

Romans 1:16-17 (SLB)

"16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is ***the*** power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to ***the*** Jew first and to ***the*** Greek. 17 For in it ***the*** righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, even as it has been written, 'And the righteous ***one*** by faith will live.'"

The gospel is God's power to save. It is for everyone who believes, Jew and Gentile alike. And in it, God shows us a righteousness that comes from Him, not from us, and is received by faith from start to finish.

Romans has 16 chapters and 433 verses. Here is its structure:

Introduction (1:1-17)

- Paul's greeting and his plans to visit Rome
- The theme: the gospel is the power of God for salvation (1:16-17)

Sin: The Whole World Is Guilty (1:18-3:20)

- The guilt of the Gentile world (1:18-32)
- The guilt of the moral and religious person, including the Jew (2:1-3:8)
- All have sinned (3:9-20)

Salvation: Made Right with God by Faith (3:21-5:21)

- Righteousness from God through faith in Christ (3:21-31)
- Abraham, our example of faith (chapter 4)
- Peace with God, and Christ the last Adam (chapter 5)

Sanctification: Growing in Holiness (chapters 6-8)

- Dead to sin, alive to God (chapter 6)
- The Law and the struggle with sin (chapter 7)
- Life in the Spirit and the security of the believer (chapter 8)

Sovereignty: God's Plan for Israel (chapters 9-11)

- God's choice in the past (chapter 9)
- Israel's rejection in the present (chapter 10)
- Israel's restoration in the future (chapter 11)

Service: Living Out the Gospel (12:1-15:13)

- A living sacrifice and life in the body of Christ (chapter 12)
- Government, love, and the coming day (chapter 13)
- The weak and the strong (14:1-15:13)

Conclusion (15:14-16:27)

- Paul's ministry and travel plans (15:14-33)
- Greetings, warnings, and a closing hymn of praise (chapter 16)

You can see the flow. Paul starts with the bad news, because you will never want a Savior until you know you need one. Then he gives the good news. Then he shows how the good news changes the way we live. It is the same order the Holy Spirit still uses in a person's heart today.

Key Words in Romans

Paul uses some big words in this letter. They are worth learning, because once you understand them, Romans opens up. Here are the ones you will see most often, in plain language.

Gospel: The "good news." The message that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and that everyone who believes in Him is saved (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Righteousness: Being right with God, measuring up to His standard. Paul talks about two kinds: the righteousness we try to build ourselves, which always falls short, and "the righteousness of God," which God gives as a gift to those who believe (3:21-22).

Justification (justified): God's legal verdict that declares a guilty sinner "not guilty" and right in His sight. It does not mean we stop sinning overnight. It means our standing before God changes the moment we believe, because Christ's righteousness is credited to our account (3:24; 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Impute (credit, reckon): To put something on someone's account. Paul says Abraham's faith "was reckoned to him for righteousness" (4:3). Our sin was charged to Christ, and His righteousness is credited to us.

Grace: God's undeserved favor. A gift we did not earn and could never earn (3:24, 11:6).

Faith: Trusting God and taking Him at His word. In Romans, faith is the empty hand that receives the gift; it is never a work that earns it (4:5).

Propitiation: A sacrifice that turns away God's righteous anger against sin by fully satisfying it. Paul says God "set forth" Jesus "as a propitiation through faith in His blood" (3:25).

Christ / Messiah: Not a last name. "Messiah" (Hebrew) and "Christ" (Greek) both mean "Anointed One," the King God promised to send from David's family (1:3).

Covenant: A binding promise or agreement God makes with His people, such as His covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17) or the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Redemption: Buying back, setting free by paying a price, like buying a slave out of slavery (3:24).

Reconciliation: Bringing two enemies back together in peace. Through Christ we who were God's enemies are made His friends (5:10-11).

Sanctification: The process of being made holy, set apart for God. Justification happens once; sanctification goes on our whole life as the Holy Spirit changes us (6:19, 22).

Glorification: The final step, when believers receive resurrection bodies and are completely free from sin forever (8:17-18, 30).

The Law: Usually the Law God gave Israel through Moses. The Law is holy and good (7:12), but it was never able to save anyone. It shows us our sin (3:20).

Flesh: Sometimes Paul means our physical body. More often he means our fallen human nature, the part of us that wants to go its own way instead of God's (8:5-8).

Gentiles: Everyone who is not Jewish. Most of us reading this book are Gentiles.

Election: God's choosing of people for salvation and for His purposes (8:33, 11:5). Christians have understood this word in different ways, which I explain in the section "Election and Free Will."

The Roman Road

Many believers have learned to share their faith using a handful of verses from this letter. People call it "The Roman Road," because it walks a person step by step from the problem to the answer. I include it here near the front of the book because it is the heart of Romans in a few short verses. If you have never been sure of your own salvation, start here.

Step 1: Everyone has sinned.

Romans 3:23 (SLB)

"for all sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

None of us is good enough. Not the worst person you know, and not the best person you know. We all fall short.

Step 2: Sin has a price, but God offers a gift.

Romans 6:23 (SLB)

"For the wages of sin ***is*** death, but the gift of God ***is*** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"Wages" are what we earn. What our sin earns is death, separation from God forever. But eternal life is not a wage; it is a free gift.

Step 3: Christ paid the price for us.

Romans 5:8 (SLB)

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

God did not wait for us to clean ourselves up. Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

Step 4: We receive the gift by believing and confessing Jesus as Lord.

Romans 10:9-10 (SLB)

"9 that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of ***the*** dead, you will be saved; 10 for with ***the*** heart it is believed for righteousness, and with ***the*** mouth it is confessed for salvation."

Step 5: Anyone who calls on Him will be saved.

Romans 10:13 (SLB)

"For 'everyone who calls on the name of ***the*** Lord will be saved.'"

Step 6: There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Romans 8:1 (SLB)

"***There is*** therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to ***the*** flesh but according to ***the*** Spirit."

That last step is the one many believers forget. Once you belong to Christ, God's verdict over you is settled. You can stop living in fear and start living in thankfulness.

If you would like to receive this gift today, turn to the prayer in the Conclusion at the end of this book, then come back and begin chapter 1.

Election and Free Will

(Romans 8:28-30; 9:6-24; 10:9-13)

No part of Romans has caused more friendly arguments among Christians than the questions of election and free will. Who chooses whom? Did God choose me, did I choose God, or is it some of both? Godly, Bible-believing Christians have landed in different places on this for hundreds of years, and they still do. Here are the two most common views among evangelical Christians, in plain words.

The Reformed (Calvinist) view: This view is named after the reformer John Calvin (1509-1564). It holds that because of sin, no one will turn to God on their own (3:10-11). Before the creation of the world, God chose certain people to be saved, not because of anything He saw in them, but purely by His grace and for His own good purpose (9:11, 9:16). Those God chose, He calls, and His call always brings them to faith. "Foreknew" in 8:29 is understood to mean God set His love on them ahead of time. Supporters point to the unbroken chain of 8:29-30 and to the potter and clay in 9:20-21.

The Arminian view: This view is named after the Dutch teacher Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). It holds that God's grace goes out to everyone and enables any person to respond to the gospel (Titus 2:11). God chose to save those He knew ahead of time would believe. "Foreknew" in 8:29 is understood as God knowing in advance who would freely trust Him. Supporters point to the open invitation of 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," and to Paul's warnings to keep continuing in the faith (11:22). Many in this view read Romans 9 as being about God's choice of nations and roles in His plan, such as Jacob over Esau, more than about individual eternal salvation.

There are also many believers who sit somewhere between these two views, or who simply hold both truths side by side without trying to fit them together. Here is what every one of these views agrees on, and it matters far more than where you land:

- God is completely sovereign. Nothing takes Him by surprise, and His plan cannot fail (8:28, 11:33-36).
- Every person is truly responsible to repent and believe (10:9-13).
- Salvation is all of grace from start to finish. No one will stand before God and brag that they earned it (3:27, 11:6).
- The gospel must be preached to everyone, because "How then will they call on Him in whom they did not believe?" (10:14).

Paul himself does not end his discussion of this subject with a debate. He ends it on his knees in worship: "O depth of riches and of wisdom and of knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and untraceable His ways!" (11:33). That is a good place for us to end up too. I recommend you do your own research and come to your own conclusion. Whatever view you hold, and whether or not it matches your pastor's view, nothing will ever stop God's love for you, or my love for you.

Israel and the Church

(Romans 9-11)

In my study of Revelation, I said that God still has a plan for the nation of Israel. Romans 9 through 11 is where Paul explains that plan most clearly. It is also a passage where Christians have held different views, so here are the main ones. We will look at them again, verse by verse, in chapter 11.

Replacement (supersessionist) view: The church has taken Israel's place in God's plan. The promises God made to Israel are now fulfilled spiritually in the church, and the nation of Israel no longer has a special place in God's plan.

"All the elect" view: When Paul says "all Israel will be saved" (11:26), he means the whole people of God, Jewish and Gentile believers together, saved over the course of history.

"Jewish remnant" view: "All Israel" means all the believing Jews across history, the remnant "according to the election of grace" (11:5).

Future restoration (national turning) view: God has not rejected His people (11:1-2). Right now a part of Israel has been hardened, "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (11:25). At the end of the age, there will be a large-scale turning of the Jewish people to Jesus as their Messiah, and "The One who delivers will come out of Zion" (11:26).

I hold the future restoration view. Paul says plainly that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (11:29). God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He keeps His promises. As I explained in my Revelation study, I believe this turning of Israel to Christ is tied to the Second Coming, when the Deliverer comes from Zion and every eye sees Him, "and those who pierced Him" (Revelation 1:7; Zechariah 12:10).

This matters for us as Gentile believers. Paul warns us not to be arrogant toward the natural branches (11:18-20). We were grafted into a tree that has Jewish roots. We worship a Jewish Messiah, read a Bible written almost entirely by Jewish authors, and share in promises first made to Israel. That should make us humble, grateful, and loving toward the Jewish people.

Chapter 1: The Gospel and a Guilty World

Scripture: Paul's Greeting, His Theme, and God's Wrath Against Sin

1:1-7 Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, a called apostle, set apart for ***the*** gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who came from ***the*** seed of David according to ***the*** flesh, who was declared Son of God in power according to ***the*** Spirit of holiness by ***the*** resurrection of ***the*** dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we received grace and apostleship for obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of His name, among whom you also are, called of Jesus Christ; to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ.

1:8-15 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being proclaimed in the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers, imploring, if somehow now at last I will be prospered by the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, for you to be established; and that is, to be encouraged together among you through the faith among one another, both yours and mine. Now I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that many times I purposed to come to you, and was hindered until the present, so that I might have some fruit among you also, even as also among the other Gentiles. Both to Greeks and to non-Greeks, both to wise and to foolish, I am a debtor; so ***there is*** eagerness on my part to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is ***the*** power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to ***the*** Jew first and to ***the*** Greek. For in it ***the*** righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, even as it has been written, "And the righteous by faith will live."

1:18-25 For ***the*** wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested ***it*** to them. For His invisible ***things***, from ***the*** creation of ***the*** world, being understood by the things made, are clearly seen, both His eternal power and divinity, for them to be without excuse; because, having known God, they did not glorify ***Him*** as God or give thanks, but were made futile in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened. Claiming to be wise, they were made foolish, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into a likeness of an image of corruptible man and of birds and of four-footed ***animals*** and of creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up in the desires of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creation rather than the ***One*** who created ***it***, who is blessed to the ages. Amen.

1:26-32 Because of this God gave them up to passions of dishonor; for even their females exchanged the natural use for the ***use*** contrary to nature, and likewise also the males, having left the natural use of the female, were inflamed in their desire toward one another, males with males committing the indecency, and receiving in themselves the recompense of their error which was fitting. And even as they did not approve of having God in ***their*** knowledge, God gave them up to

an unapproved mind, to do the things that are not proper, having been filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, senseless, untrustworthy, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful; who, having known the righteous decree of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do them but also approve of those who practice ***them***.

Chapter 1 Preview

Paul opens his letter to the church in Rome by telling them who he is, what he has been called to do, and why he wants so badly to visit them. Then, in two short verses, he gives us the theme of the whole book: the gospel is the power of God to save everyone who believes, because in it God shows us a righteousness that comes by faith.

Before Paul explains how that good news works, he shows us why we need it. The rest of the chapter describes a world that knew God was there and turned away from Him anyway. Step by step, people traded the truth for a lie, and God let them have what they wanted. It is a hard passage to read. But remember where it is going. Paul is not writing to make anyone feel hopeless. He is clearing the ground so that the good news can be built on solid footing.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 *Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, a called apostle, set apart for* ***the*** *gospel of God,*

Paul introduces himself three ways. He is a slave of Christ Jesus (the Greek word means a bond-servant), someone who belongs completely to his master. He is an apostle, sent by Jesus with His authority. And he is set apart for the gospel, which means his whole life has been given to one message.

This is the same man who once hunted down Christians (Acts 9:1-2). When Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, everything changed. If God could take Saul the persecutor and turn him into Paul the apostle, there is no one He cannot reach.

The word "gospel" means good news. Keep that in mind as you read Romans. Everything in this letter, even the hard parts, serves the good news.

1:2 *which He promised beforehand through His prophets in holy Scriptures,*

The gospel was not a new idea Paul came up with. God promised it long before, through the prophets of the Old Testament. Isaiah 53, for example, describes a servant who would suffer for the sins of others. Paul will quote the Old Testament again and again in Romans to show that God has been working one plan from the beginning. He usually quotes the Greek translation his readers used, so his words can read a little differently from the same verse in the Old Testament.

1:3-4 *concerning His Son, who came from* ***the*** *seed of David according to* ***the*** *flesh, who was declared Son of God in power according to* ***the*** *Spirit of holiness by* ***the*** *resurrection of* ***the*** *dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,*

Here Paul tells us what the gospel is about. It is about a Person, God's Son. Jesus is fully human, born from the family line of David, just as God promised David a descendant who would reign forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). He is also fully God, shown to be the Son of God with power when He rose from the dead.

The resurrection did not make Jesus the Son of God. He always was. The resurrection declared it openly, for everyone to see. God put His stamp of approval on everything Jesus said and did by raising Him from the grave.

Old Testament links: 2 Samuel 7:12-13 (alluded to)

1:5-6 *through whom we received grace and apostleship for obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of His name, among whom you also are, called of Jesus Christ;*

Paul received grace and a calling, and the goal of that calling was "obedience of faith" among all nations. Paul joins the two together, and obedience grows out of real faith. Real faith is never just a set of facts we agree with. It changes how we live. Paul will spend the first half of Romans showing that we are saved by faith, and the second half showing how that faith works itself out in obedience.

The believers in Rome were "called of Jesus Christ." So are you, if you belong to Him. God's call is personal.

1:7 *to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and* ***the*** *Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul calls them "beloved of God" and "saints." A saint is not a super-Christian with a halo in a stained-glass window. In the Bible, every believer is a saint, someone set apart for God. You might ask, "How can Paul call ordinary people saints?" The word describes who they are in Christ, not how perfect they are. Paul always puts grace before peace in his greetings, and that is a good reminder. We cannot have peace with God until we have received His grace.

1:8 *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being proclaimed in the whole world.*

Paul begins by giving thanks. The church in Rome was known far and wide for its faith. Rome was the capital of the empire, and news traveled from there to everywhere else. What a testimony, to have your faith talked about across the world for the right reasons.

1:9-10 *For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers, imploring, if somehow now at last I will be prospered by the will of God to come to you.*

Paul calls God as his witness that he prays for these believers all the time. He had never met most of them, yet he carried them in prayer. That is a good example for us. We can pray faithfully for missionaries and churches we may never visit.

Paul asked God to let him come to Rome "by the will of God." He did eventually get there, but not the way he expected. He arrived as a prisoner in chains (Acts 28:16, 20). God answered his prayer, just not on Paul's terms. Sometimes God says yes in a way we would never have chosen.

1:11-12 *For I long to see you, that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, for you to be established; and that is, to be encouraged together among you through the faith among one another, both yours and mine.*

Paul wanted to share some spiritual gift with them so they would be strengthened. Then, in the very next breath, he says he wants to be encouraged by them too. This is the humility of a great apostle. He did not see himself as the expert coming to fix everyone. He knew that believers build each other up. Every Christian has something to give, and every Christian has something to receive.

1:13 *Now I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that many times I purposed to come to you, and was hindered until the present, so that I might have some fruit among you also, even as also among the other Gentiles.*

Paul had planned many times to come and had been stopped. Later in the letter he explains that his work in other places kept him away (Romans 15:22). He wanted to see "fruit" in Rome, meaning people coming to faith and growing in it.

1:14-15 *Both to Greeks and to non-Greeks, both to wise and to foolish, I am a debtor; so* ***there is*** *eagerness on my part to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.*

Paul says he is a debtor, under obligation to everyone. Greeks and non-Greeks, the educated and the uneducated. Why would he owe them anything? Because Jesus had given him the gospel to pass on. When someone hands you a treasure that is meant for others, you owe it to them. Every believer carries that same debt. We have good news that is not meant to stay with us.

1:16-17 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is* ***the*** *power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to* ***the*** *Jew first and to* ***the*** *Greek. For in it* ***the*** *righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, even as it has been written, "And the righteous by faith will live."*

These two verses are the theme of the whole letter. If you remember nothing else from Romans 1, remember these.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel."

Rome was a city of power, wealth, and philosophy. A message about a crucified Jewish teacher would have sounded weak and foolish there (1 Corinthians 1:23). Paul was not embarrassed by it. He says the gospel is the power of God itself, the power that saves.

Salvation is offered "to everyone who believes." It is not limited to one nation or one class of people. "To the Jew first" reminds us that God made His promises to Israel first, and Jesus came first to the Jewish people. But the door is open to the Greek, meaning every non-Jew, as well.

*"For in it **the** righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith."*

What is "the righteousness of God"? It is the right standing with God that God Himself gives. We could never earn it. God provides it, and we receive it by faith. "From faith to faith" means it is by faith from start to finish. We begin by faith, we continue by faith, and we will finish by faith.

Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4: "And the righteous by faith will live." The righteous person, the one God declares to be in right standing with Him, lives by trusting God. This verse changed history. Martin Luther studied it for years. When he finally understood that God's righteousness is a gift received by faith, and not a standard we have to reach by our own effort, he later wrote that he felt he had been born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates (Preface to his Latin Writings, 1545). That understanding helped spark the Protestant Reformation.

Old Testament links: Habakkuk 2:4 (quoted)

1:18 *For **the** wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,*

Now Paul turns a hard corner. Before he can explain the good news, he has to show us the bad news. The word "for" connects this verse to the last one. The gospel is necessary because God's wrath is real.

God's wrath is not like a person losing his temper. It is His steady, holy opposition to everything evil. A God who loves what is good must be against what destroys it. If He were not angry at sin, He would not be good.

Look at what people do with the truth. They "suppress" it. They hold it down, like someone holding a beach ball underwater. It keeps trying to come up, and they keep pushing it back down.

1:19-20 *because what is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested **it** to them. For His invisible **things**, from **the** creation of **the** world, being understood by the things made, are clearly seen, both His eternal power and divinity, for them to be without excuse;*

How do people know about God? Paul says God made it evident. Creation itself points to its Creator. When you look at the stars, the ocean, a newborn baby, or the design of a single cell, you are seeing God's "eternal power and divinity" (1:20; see also Psalm 19:1).

This means no one can stand before God and say, "I never had a clue." They are "without excuse." Creation does not tell us everything about God. It does not tell us about Jesus or the cross. But it tells us enough to know He exists and that we owe Him honor. The problem is not that people lack evidence. The problem is that they do not want what the evidence points to.

1:21 *because, having known God, they did not glorify **Him** as God or give thanks, but were made futile in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened.*

This verse shows us where the slide begins. People knew God, but they did not honor Him or thank Him. That is the root of it all: refusing to give God His place and refusing to be thankful.

Ingratitude may seem like a small sin, but Paul puts it right at the start of humanity's downward spiral. A thankless heart is a heart that has made itself the center. When we stop thanking God, our thinking becomes "futile," empty and useless, and our hearts grow dark.

1:22-23 *Claiming to be wise, they were made foolish, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into a likeness of an image of corruptible man and of birds and of four-footed **animals** and of creeping things.*

People claimed to be wise and became fools. They traded the glory of the eternal God for idols shaped like people and animals. It sounds strange to us that anyone would bow down to a statue of a bird. But idolatry is still everywhere today. It just looks different. Anything we put in God's place, whether money, success, pleasure, a relationship, or even ourselves, is an idol. We are made to worship. If we will not worship God, we will worship something else.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 4:16-18 (alluded to); Psalm 106:20 (alluded to)

1:24 *Therefore God also gave them up in the desires of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,*

"Therefore God also gave them up." This phrase appears three times in this chapter (verses 24, 26, and 28). It shows us a frightening form of God's wrath. God stepped back and let people have what they wanted. He removed His restraining hand and allowed sin to run its course.

We often think of God's judgment as fire falling from heaven. Sometimes His judgment is simply letting us go our own way and live with the results.

1:25 *who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creation rather than the **One** who created **it**, who is blessed to the ages. Amen.*

This is the heart of the matter. People "exchanged the truth of God for the lie." Every sin begins as a lie we choose to believe, that something other than God will satisfy us, or that God is holding out on us. That was the lie in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:4-5), and it is the same lie today.

Even while describing this sad exchange, Paul cannot help but break into praise. The Creator "is blessed to the ages. Amen." No matter how much people turn away from God, He is still worthy.

1:26-27 *Because of this God gave them up to passions of dishonor; for even their females exchanged the natural use for the **use** contrary to nature, and likewise also the males, having left the natural use of the female, were inflamed in their desire toward one another, males with males committing the indecency, and receiving in themselves the recompense of their error which was fitting.*

The second "God gave them up" leads into a description of homosexual behavior. Paul calls it "contrary to nature" and speaks of "the indecency," against the way God designed men and women from the beginning (Genesis 1:27; 2:24). This includes women as well as men.

I want to handle this passage carefully, the way Paul does. Paul is not singling out one group of people as worse than everyone else. He uses this as one clear example of what happens when people reject the Creator's design. In verses 29-31 he goes right on to list gossip, arrogance, greed,

and disobedience to parents in the very same breath. Every one of us is somewhere on that list. Romans 3:23 will say that all have sinned.

So we hold to what God's Word says, plainly, without softening it. And we speak it with compassion, because we were all lost and in need of grace. The gospel is good news for every sinner who turns to Christ, including those who struggle with same-sex desire. Paul himself wrote to believers in Corinth who had come out of many of these same sins, and he told them they had been washed, set apart, and declared righteous in the name of Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

"Receiving in themselves the recompense of their error" means that sin carries consequences built into it. When we go against God's design, we hurt ourselves.

1:28 *And even as they did not approve of having God in **their** knowledge, God gave them up to an unapproved mind, to do the things that are not proper,*

The third "God gave them up" is the deepest. People did not think God was worth knowing, so God gave them up to an "unapproved mind." The Greek contains a play on words. They "did not approve" of having God in their knowledge, so He gave them a mind that is itself unapproved. When we keep refusing the truth, eventually we lose the ability to think straight about right and wrong.

1:29-31 *having been filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, senseless, untrustworthy, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful;*

Paul gives a long list of sins. Read it slowly, and be honest with yourself. Greed. Envy. Strife. Deceit. Gossip. Slander. Arrogance. Boasting. Disobedience to parents. Being unloving and unmerciful.

This list is the great equalizer. Some of these sins we would call shocking, like murder. Others we excuse every day, like gossip and pride. God puts them side by side. The person who would never commit murder may still be a gossip. The person who looks down on others may be guilty of arrogance. None of us can read this list and say, "That's them, not me."

1:32 *who, having known the righteous decree of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do them but also approve of those who practice **them**.*

The chapter ends at the bottom of the slide. People know in their hearts that these things are wrong and deserve God's judgment. Yet they not only keep doing them, they cheer on others who do them.

This describes our world in a very real way. It is one thing to fall into sin and feel ashamed. It is another thing to celebrate sin and applaud others for it. When a culture reaches that point, it has suppressed the truth so long that wrong is called right.

But don't stop here. Romans 1 is not the end of the story. Paul is building toward Romans 3:21-26, where the light of God's grace breaks through. The darker the background, the brighter the good news shines.

Chapter 1 Summary

Paul introduces himself as a slave of Christ Jesus, called to carry the gospel to all nations. He states his theme: the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, because in it God reveals a righteousness that comes by faith from start to finish.

Then Paul begins to show why the world needs this good news. God has made Himself known through creation, so no one has an excuse. But people refused to honor or thank Him. They traded the truth for a lie and worshiped created things instead of the Creator. Three times God "gave them up" to what they wanted, and the result was a world filled with every kind of sin. In the next chapter Paul will turn to those who think they are better than the people described here, and he will show that they are guilty too.

Paul calls himself a slave of Christ Jesus, and elsewhere the worst of sinners. That humility is what strikes me. He never forgot where God found him. I do not want to forget where God found me either.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. How does Paul describe himself in the opening verse, and what does each title tell you about him? (1:1)

2. What does Paul say about Jesus' human family line and His resurrection? (1:3-4)

3. Why did Paul want to visit the believers in Rome, and what did he expect to receive from them? (1:11-12)

4. Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel? (1:16)

5. What does it mean to you that the righteous "by faith will live"? (1:17)

6. What can every person know about God just by looking at creation? (1:19-20)

7. Where does the downward slide begin, according to verse 21? How can you guard your heart against ingratitude this week? (1:21)

8. What does Paul mean when he says people "exchanged the truth of God for the lie"? What lies is our culture believing today? (1:25)

9. Look at the list of sins in verses 29-31. Which ones do you tend to excuse in your own life? (1:29-31)

Chapter 2: God's Righteous Judgment

Scripture: The Judge, the Moral Person, and the Religious Person

2:1-5 Therefore you are without excuse, O man, everyone who judges; for in that in which you judge the other, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth upon those who practice such things. And do you suppose this, O man, you who judge those who practice such things and do them, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But according to your hardness and unrepentant heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in ***the*** day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

2:6-11 who will render to each according to his works: to those who by endurance in good work seek glory and honor and incorruptibility, eternal life; but to those ***who are*** of selfish ambition and who disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness, fury and wrath, tribulation and distress upon every soul of man who carries out the evil, both of ***the*** Jew first and of ***the*** Greek; but glory and honor and peace to everyone who works the good, both to ***the*** Jew first and to ***the*** Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

2:12-16 For as many as sinned without law will also perish without law; and as many as sinned in law will be judged through law; for not the hearers of the law ***are*** righteous with God, but the doers of the law will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have law by nature do the things of the law, these, not having law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness with ***them***, and the thoughts between one another accusing or even defending ***them***, in ***the*** day when God will judge the secrets of men according to my gospel through Jesus Christ.

2:17-24 Look, you are called a Jew, and you rely on the law, and you boast in God, and you know the will, and you approve the things that excel, being instructed out of the law, and you are confident that you yourself are a guide of ***the*** blind, a light of those in darkness, an instructor of ***the*** foolish, a teacher of infants, having the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law; you then who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach not to steal, do you steal? You who say not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in law, through the transgression of the law do you dishonor God? For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," even as it has been written.

2:25-29 For circumcision indeed profits if you practice ***the*** law; but if you are a transgressor of ***the*** law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. If therefore the uncircumcision keeps the righteous decrees of the law, will not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision? And the uncircumcision by nature, fulfilling the law, will judge you who, through letter and circumcision, ***are*** a transgressor of law. For he is not a Jew who ***is one*** outwardly, nor is circumcision that which ***is*** outward in flesh; but he ***is*** a Jew who ***is one*** inwardly, and circumcision ***is*** of ***the*** heart, in spirit, not in letter; whose praise ***is*** not from men but from God.

Chapter 2 Preview

Picture someone reading Romans 1 out loud in the church at Rome. As Paul describes idolatry and immorality, some listeners are nodding along. "Yes, those people out there are terrible." Then chapter 2 begins, and Paul turns and points the finger right back at them.

In this chapter Paul speaks to the moral, respectable person, and then to the religious Jewish person who had God's Law. Both might think they are safe from the judgment described in chapter 1. Paul shows that they are not. God judges fairly, without favorites, according to the truth. Knowing what is right is not the same as doing it, and outward religion cannot take the place of a changed heart.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *Therefore you are without excuse, O man, everyone who judges; for in that in which you judge the other, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.*

"Therefore you are without excuse." Paul used the same word about the pagan world in 1:20 ("without excuse"). Now he applies it to the person who judges others. Why? Because the judge is guilty of the same kinds of things.

This is not saying Christians can never call sin what it is. Paul just did that for a whole chapter. The problem here is the person who condemns others while excusing himself. Jesus said the same thing when He warned about seeing the speck in your brother's eye and missing the log in your own (Matthew 7:3-5). When we judge others, we prove that we know right from wrong, and that knowledge condemns us when we do wrong too.

Have you ever noticed how quickly we spot our own faults in other people? The sins that bother us most in others are often the ones we struggle with ourselves.

2:2-3 *And we know that the judgment of God is according to truth upon those who practice such things. And do you suppose this, O man, you who judge those who practice such things and do them, that you will escape the judgment of God?*

God's judgment is "according to truth." It is based on what really happened, not on appearances. Paul asks the moral person a pointed question: do you really think you will escape, just because you are good at spotting sin in others? Being a critic of sin does not make anyone innocent of it.

2:4 *Or do you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?*

Some people take God's patience for granted. Because judgment has not fallen yet, they assume it never will. Paul says God's kindness, forbearance, and patience have a purpose. They are meant to lead us to repentance.

Repentance means a real turning. It is a change of mind about sin and about God that shows up in a change of direction. It is not just feeling sorry. It is turning away from sin and turning toward God.

If you are breathing today, God's kindness is still giving you time. Don't waste it. Peter says the Lord is patient because He does not want anyone to perish but wants all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

2:5 *But according to your hardness and unrepentant heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in **the** day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,*

Here is the other side. A hard heart that refuses to repent is "treasuring up" wrath. It is like making deposits into an account that will one day be paid out in full. The "day of wrath" is the coming day of judgment, when God's righteous verdict will be made known to everyone. Revelation describes that day at the Great White Throne, the final judgment of the unsaved (Revelation 20:11-15).

2:6 *who will render to each according to his works:*

Paul quotes from the Old Testament (Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12). God "will render to each according to his works." Jesus said the same in Revelation 22:12: "My reward is with Me, to give to each one as his work will be."

Old Testament links: Psalm 62:12 (quoted); Proverbs 24:12 (alluded to)

2:7-8 *to those who by endurance in good work seek glory and honor and incorruptibility, eternal life; but to those **who are** of selfish ambition and who disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness, fury and wrath,*

These verses raise a question. You might ask, "Isn't Paul saying that people can earn eternal life by doing good?" No. Paul is about to prove in chapter 3 that no one is justified by works. So what is he saying here?

Paul is describing two directions a life can take. One person, by patiently doing good, seeks glory, honor, and incorruptibility, things that only God can give. That person is looking to God. The other person is "of selfish ambition" and does not obey the truth. That person is living for himself.

Our deeds show which direction we are really going. Good works do not save us, but they are the evidence of a heart that God has changed. On judgment day, what we have done will reveal what we truly believed.

There is another way to read these verses that many good teachers hold. Some say Paul is stating the standard of the Law in theory: if anyone did persevere in doing good perfectly, they would receive eternal life. But since no one does (3:10-12), everyone needs grace. Either way, the result is the same. No one stands before God on his own record.

2:9-10 *tribulation and distress upon every soul of man who carries out the evil, both of **the** Jew first and of **the** Greek; but glory and honor and peace to everyone who works the good, both to **the** Jew first and to **the** Greek.*

"The Jew first" appeared in 1:16 about salvation. Now it appears about judgment too. Greater privilege brings greater responsibility. The Jewish people had received God's Word, so they would be held to account first. The same is true for anyone today who has grown up hearing the gospel. Knowing more means answering for more.

2:11 *For there is no partiality with God.*

"There is no partiality with God." He does not play favorites. Your family background, your church membership, your reputation, your money, none of it changes how God judges. This is good news and sobering news at the same time. No one can buy their way in, and no one is shut out because of who they are.

2:12 *For as many as sinned without law will also perish without law; and as many as sinned in law will be judged through law;*

Paul now explains how God judges people who have different amounts of knowledge. Those who sinned without the Law of Moses will perish without the Law. They will not be judged by a standard they never had. Those who sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law. God judges each person fairly, according to the light they had.

People often ask, "What about someone who never heard about Jesus?" I don't claim to know every detail of how God will deal with each person. What I do know is what this passage says. God will be perfectly fair, and no one will be condemned for something they could not have known. But Paul also says that everyone has sinned against the light they did have, which is why he was so eager to preach the gospel everywhere (1:14-15). The best answer we can give to that question is to go and tell them, and to support those who do.

2:13 *for not the hearers of the law **are** righteous with God, but the doers of the law will be justified.*

Hearing the Law read every Sabbath did not make anyone right with God. Only doing it would. And that is exactly the problem, as Paul will show. No one does it perfectly. James makes a similar point when he tells us to be doers of the word and not merely hearers (James 1:22).

2:14-15 *For when Gentiles who do not have law by nature do the things of the law, these, not having law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness with **them**, and the thoughts between one another accusing or even defending **them**,*

What about people who have never heard of the Bible? Paul says that even Gentiles without the Law show that God's moral standard is written on their hearts. Every culture knows that murder, stealing, and betrayal are wrong. We call this the conscience.

The conscience is like an inner witness. Sometimes our thoughts accuse us, and sometimes they defend us. But here is the hard truth: no one has fully lived up even to their own conscience. Everyone has done what they knew was wrong. So the conscience does not save anyone. It shows that everyone knows enough to be guilty.

This is not saying that people are saved by following their conscience. It is saying that everyone has a law to answer to, whether written on stone or written on the heart.

2:16 *in **the** day when God will judge the secrets of men according to my gospel through Jesus Christ.*

That judgment day will reveal "the secrets of men." Not just what people saw us do, but our thoughts and motives (1 Corinthians 4:5). And the Judge will be Christ Jesus Himself (John 5:22). That should make us tremble, and it should also comfort us. The One who will judge us is the One who died for us.

2:17-20 *Look, you are called a Jew, and you rely on the law, and you boast in God, and you know the will, and you approve the things that excel, being instructed out of the law, and you are confident that you yourself are a guide of **the** blind, a light of those in darkness, an instructor of **the** foolish, a teacher of infants, having the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law;*

Now Paul speaks directly to his own people, the Jews. He lists all the things they were proud of. They had God's name. They had the Law. They knew His will. They believed they were a guide to the blind and a light to those in darkness.

Much of this was true and good. God did give Israel His Law, and He did call them to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6). The problem was not the privilege. The problem was trusting in the privilege instead of in God, and assuming that having the Law was the same as keeping it.

We need to read this as a mirror. Many of us have Bibles on our shelves, sit under good teaching, and know the right answers. Paul is asking us the same question: does what you know match how you live?

2:21-23 *you then who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach not to steal, do you steal? You who say not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in law, through the transgression of the law do you dishonor God?*

Paul asks a series of sharp questions. You teach others, but do you teach yourself? You preach against stealing, but do you steal? You say not to commit adultery, but do you? You hate idols, but do you rob temples?

"Rob temples" may mean that some Jews, who would never worship an idol, were happy to profit from stolen idols or temple goods. Their outward hatred of idolatry did not stop their greed. Whatever the exact practice was, the point is clear. They broke the very Law they bragged about.

It is easy to teach what we do not practice. Every parent, pastor, and Bible study leader should feel the weight of these verses. People are watching how we live, not just listening to what we say.

2:24 *For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," even as it has been written.*

Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5 from the Greek translation of the Old Testament his readers used (see also Ezekiel 36:20-22). When God's people live like hypocrites, the watching world mocks God. This was true of Israel, and it is still true of the church. When Christians are caught in scandal, unbelievers do not just criticize the person. They blame God. Our lives either bring honor to His name or bring shame on it.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 52:5 (quoted); Ezekiel 36:22 (alluded to)

2:25 *For circumcision indeed profits if you practice **the** law; but if you are a transgressor of **the** law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.*

Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11). Every Jewish boy was circumcised on the eighth day. Some Jews of Paul's day seem to have believed that circumcision itself guaranteed their place with God.

Paul says circumcision has value if you keep the Law. But if you break the Law, the outward sign means nothing. It is like wearing a wedding ring while living unfaithfully. The ring is real, but it does not make the marriage real.

2:26-27 *If therefore the uncircumcision keeps the righteous decrees of the law, will not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision? And the uncircumcision by nature, fulfilling the law, will judge you who, through letter and circumcision, **are** a transgressor of law.*

Then Paul turns the argument around. If a Gentile who was never circumcised keeps what the Law truly requires, God will count him as one of His own. Many understand Paul to mean Gentile believers whose hearts the Spirit has changed (2:29). Others take it as a hypothetical, as in 2:7. Either way, no one is saved by his own record. That person will even stand as a witness against the Jew who had every advantage and still broke the Law. What matters to God is not the outward mark but the obedience of the heart.

2:28-29 *For he is not a Jew who **is one** outwardly, nor is circumcision that which **is** outward in flesh; but he **is** a Jew who **is one** inwardly, and circumcision **is** of **the** heart, in spirit, not in letter; whose praise **is** not from men but from God.*

These verses are the high point of the chapter. A true Jew, in God's eyes, is not just someone who is one outwardly. True circumcision is "of the heart, in spirit, not in letter." This idea is not new. Moses told Israel to circumcise their hearts (Deuteronomy 10:16), and God promised that one day He would circumcise their hearts so they would love Him (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Paul is not saying that the Jewish people no longer matter to God, or that the church has simply taken Israel's place. In the very next verse he asks what advantage the Jew has, and he answers, "Much in every way" (3:2). Later in chapters 9 through 11 he will show that God still has a plan for Israel. His point here is that outward religion alone cannot make anyone right with God, whether Jew or Gentile. God wants a heart that has been changed by His Spirit.

The same is true for us. Baptism, church attendance, and taking communion are good gifts. But none of them can replace a heart that truly belongs to God. "Whose praise is not from men but from God." People look at the outside. God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 30:6 (alluded to); Deuteronomy 10:16 (alluded to)

Chapter 2 Summary

In chapter 1, Paul showed that the pagan world is guilty before God. In chapter 2, he shows that the moral person and the religious person are guilty too. Those who judge others do the same things. God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance, but a hard heart stores up wrath for the day of judgment. God judges without favoritism, according to the truth, according to our deeds, and according to the light each person had.

The Jewish people had great privileges: the Law, the covenant, and circumcision. But having the Law is not the same as keeping it. What God looks for is a heart changed by His Spirit. With that, Paul has nearly closed every escape route. In chapter 3 he will bring the whole world before God's courtroom and show that we all need the same Savior.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. Why does Paul say that the person who judges others has no excuse? (2:1-3)

2. What is God's purpose in showing kindness and patience to sinners? (2:4)

3. Has there been a time when you took God's patience for granted? What did it take to turn you around? (2:4-5)

4. What does it mean that there is "no partiality with God"? (2:11)

5. How does Paul say God judges people who never had the written Law? (2:12-15)

6. What does Paul say will be revealed on the day of judgment? (2:16)

7. What questions does Paul ask the person who teaches others? Which question hits closest to home for you? (2:21-23)

8. According to Paul, what makes someone a true Jew, and what is true circumcision? (2:28-29)

9. What outward religious practices are you tempted to trust in instead of a changed heart? (2:28-29)

Chapter 3: All Have Sinned

Scripture: All Guilty, and Righteousness Through Faith

3:1-8 What then ***is*** the advantage of the Jew? Or what ***is*** the profit of circumcision? Much in every way. For first, indeed, ***it is*** that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. For what if some disbelieved? Will their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God? May it not be! But let God be true, and every man a liar, even as it has been written, "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged." But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what will we say? Is God unrighteous who inflicts the wrath? I speak according to man. May it not be! Otherwise how will God judge the world? For if the truth of God abounded in my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And ***why*** not, even as we are slandered and even as some affirm that we say, "Let us do the evil things that the good things may come"? Their judgment is just.

3:9-18 What then? Are we better? Not at all; for we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that all are under sin, even as it has been written, "There is not a righteous ***one***, not even one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks out God; all turned aside; together they were made worthless; there is none who practices kindness; there is not so much as one; their throat ***is*** an opened grave; with their tongues they were practicing deceit; ***the*** venom of asps ***is*** under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet ***are*** swift to shed blood; ruin and misery ***are*** in their ways; and a way of peace they did not know; there is no fear of God before their eyes."

3:19-20 Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those in the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become accountable to God. Because by works of law no flesh will be justified before Him; for through law ***is*** knowledge of sin.

3:21-26 But now apart from law ***the*** righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, and ***the*** righteousness of God through faith of Jesus Christ ***is*** to all and upon all who believe; for there is no distinction; for all sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that ***is*** in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth ***as*** a propitiation through faith in His blood, for a demonstration of His righteousness because of the passing over of the sins that had previously occurred, in the forbearance of God; for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, for Him to be righteous and the ***One*** justifying the ***one who is*** of faith of Jesus.

3:27-31 Where then ***is*** the boasting? It was excluded. Through what law? Of works? No, but through ***the*** law of faith. Therefore we reckon a man to be justified by faith apart from works of law. Or ***is*** God of Jews only? And ***is He*** not also of Gentiles? Yes, also of Gentiles, since indeed God ***is*** one, who will justify ***the*** circumcision by faith and ***the*** uncircumcision through the faith. Do we then nullify law through the faith? May it not be! But we establish law.

Chapter 3 Preview

Paul has been building a case like a lawyer in a courtroom. In chapter 1 he showed that the pagan world is guilty. In chapter 2 he showed that the moral person and the religious Jew are guilty too. Now, in chapter 3, he answers some objections, brings every person before God, and reaches his verdict: "all sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Then, just when it seems there is no hope at all, two words change everything: "But now." In verses 21-26 Paul explains how God can declare guilty sinners righteous without lowering His standards. He does it through the death of Jesus Christ, received by faith. Many believe these verses are the heart of the whole Bible. They are certainly the heart of Romans.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1-2 *What then **is** the advantage of the Jew? Or what **is** the profit of circumcision? Much in every way. For first, indeed, **it is** that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

Paul knew his readers would push back. If being Jewish and circumcised does not guarantee anyone a place with God, then what was the point? Paul answers that the advantage is great. First of all, God entrusted the Jewish people with His "oracles," His very words.

Think about that. The Old Testament came to us through Israel. God spoke through Moses, David, Isaiah, and the other prophets, and the Jewish people carefully preserved those words for centuries. Every Christian who reads the Bible owes a debt to them. Paul will list more of Israel's privileges in Romans 9:4-5.

3:3-4 *For what if some disbelieved? Will their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God? May it not be! But let God be true, and every man a liar, even as it has been written, "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged."*

"What then?" If some Jews did not believe, does their unbelief cancel God's faithfulness? Paul's answer is the strongest "no" he can give: "May it not be!" He will use this phrase many times in Romans when he wants to reject a wrong idea completely.

God keeps His promises even when His people do not keep theirs. People fail. God never does. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Those words echo Psalm 116:11, "Every man is a liar." Then Paul quotes Psalm 51:4, from David's prayer after his sin with Bathsheba. David admitted that God was right to judge him. When God judges sin, He is always in the right.

This is a comfort for every believer. Our faithfulness rises and falls. His does not (2 Timothy 2:13).

Old Testament links: Psalm 51:4 (quoted); Psalm 116:11 (quoted)

3:5-6 *But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what will we say? Is God unrighteous who inflicts the wrath? I speak according to man. May it not be! Otherwise how will God judge the world?*

Here is another objection. Someone might argue, "If my sin makes God's goodness look even better by contrast, then isn't God unfair to punish me for it?" Paul admits he speaks "according to man," repeating the kind of twisted reasoning people use.

His answer is short. "May it not be!" If God could not punish sin, how could He judge the world at all? Everyone agrees, even the person raising the objection, that God will judge the world. So the argument falls apart.

3:7-8 *For if the truth of God abounded in my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And **why** not, even as we are slandered and even as some affirm that we say, "Let us do the evil things that the good things may come"? Their judgment is just.*

The objection gets worse. "If my lie makes God's truth shine brighter, why am I still judged as a sinner?" Take that idea to its end, and you get, "Let us do the evil things that the good things may come."

Paul says some people were actually accusing him of teaching this. Why? Because he preached that we are saved by grace and not by keeping the Law. Some heard that and thought he was saying sin does not matter. Paul will answer that charge fully in Romans 6:1-2. For now he simply says that anyone who reasons this way deserves condemnation.

This tells us something. If you preach grace the way Paul did, someone will accuse you of making sin cheap. If no one ever raises that question, you may not be preaching grace as freely as Paul did. Paul will show in chapter 6 that grace was never a license to sin.

3:9 *What then? Are we better? Not at all; for we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that all are under sin,*

Now Paul brings everyone together. Are the Jews better off than the Gentiles when it comes to standing before God? "Not at all." Both Jews and Greeks "are under sin." To be under sin means to be under its power and under its penalty, like a prisoner under the control of a guard.

3:10-12 *even as it has been written, "There is not a righteous **one**, not even one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks out God; all turned aside; together they were made worthless; there is none who practices kindness; there is not so much as one;*

To prove his point, Paul gathers a string of Old Testament verses, mostly from the Psalms (Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3). Look at how complete the verdict is.

*"There is not a righteous **one**, not even one."*

Not one person is righteous on their own. No one truly understands God or seeks Him on their own. Everyone has turned aside. Everyone has been "made worthless," like fruit that has gone bad. No one "practices kindness," not even one.

You might ask, "But I know people who do good things all the time." It's true, people can do kind and generous things. But Paul is talking about goodness in God's eyes, a life that comes from a heart fully devoted to Him and lives for His glory. By that standard, no one measures up.

Paul also says, "there is none who seeks out God." That means when anyone does seek God, it is because God was seeking them first. Jesus said no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him (John 6:44).

Old Testament links: Psalm 53:1-3 (quoted); Psalm 14:1-3 (quoted)

3:13-14 *their throat **is** an opened grave; with their tongues they were practicing deceit; **the** venom of asps **is** under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness;*

Paul moves from the heart to the body, starting with the mouth. Throat like an open grave, tongues that deceive, lips with poison under them, mouths full of cursing and bitterness (Psalm 5:9; 140:3; 10:7). Our words show what is in our hearts. Jesus said that the mouth speaks out of what fills the heart (Matthew 12:34). How many of us have said things we wish we could take back?

Old Testament links: Psalm 5:9 (quoted); Psalm 140:3 (quoted); Psalm 10:7 (quoted)

3:15-17 *their feet **are** swift to shed blood; ruin and misery **are** in their ways; and a way of peace they did not know;*

Next come the feet. People rush to violence. They leave destruction and misery behind them. They have never known the way of peace (Isaiah 59:7-8). Read the news on any day of the week and you will see these verses played out across the world.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 59:7-8 (quoted); Proverbs 1:16 (alluded to)

3:18 *there is no fear of God before their eyes."*

"There is no fear of God before their eyes" (3:18, quoting Psalm 36:1). This is the root of all the rest. When people stop fearing God, meaning a deep respect and awe of Him as holy Judge, there is nothing left to hold back sin. Everything Paul just described grows out of this one problem.

Old Testament links: Psalm 36:1 (quoted)

3:19 *Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those in the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become accountable to God.*

The verdict is in. The Law speaks to those under it, and its purpose is to close every mouth. Picture a courtroom where the defendant has run out of arguments and simply stands silent. That is where the whole world stands before God. No excuses left. "All the world may become accountable to God."

3:20 *Because by works of law no flesh will be justified before Him; for through law **is** knowledge of sin.*

Why can't keeping the Law save us? Because no one keeps it perfectly. "By works of law no flesh will be justified before Him."

We met the word "justified" briefly in 2:13. Now Paul puts it at the center of his argument. To be justified means to be declared righteous by God, like a judge announcing a verdict of "not guilty" in a court of law. It is a legal word. It is not about God making us feel better or slowly making us better people. It is about our standing before Him.

So what does the Law do? It shows us our sin. The Law is like a mirror. A mirror can show you that your face is dirty, but you cannot wash your face with the mirror. The Law can show us our need, but only Christ can meet it.

Old Testament links: Psalm 143:2 (alluded to)

3:21 *But now apart from law **the** righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets,*

"But now." These may be two of the most beautiful words in the Bible. After three chapters of bad news, the good news breaks through.

Now, apart from the Law, God has shown us a righteousness that comes from Him. It is not a new plan. The Law and the Prophets pointed to it all along (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4). But now it has been made fully known in Jesus.

3:22 *and **the** righteousness of God through faith of Jesus Christ **is** to all and upon all who believe; for there is no distinction;*

How do we receive this righteousness? It comes "through faith of Jesus Christ." Faith doesn't earn anything; it simply receives what God gives. And it is "to all and upon all who believe." No one is too far gone.

"There is no distinction." Paul says this twice in Romans. Here it means there is no difference between Jew and Gentile in our need. In 10:12 it means there is no difference in God's offer. The same Lord is rich toward all who call on Him.

The SLB keeps the Greek wording here, "faith of Jesus Christ," and the phrase can be read two ways. Many translations read it as faith in Jesus Christ, our trust in Him. Some translations and scholars read it as the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, pointing to Jesus' own faithful obedience. Both ideas are true in Scripture. Jesus was perfectly faithful, and we must put our faith in Him.

3:23 *for all sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

"For all sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

This is one of the best-known verses in the Bible, and it levels every one of us. The pastor and the prisoner. The church member and the atheist. The kind neighbor and the criminal. All have sinned.

"Fall short" is in the present tense in Greek. Paul is describing our ongoing condition. Think of a group of people trying to jump across a canyon. Some jump farther than others, but no one makes it to the other side. Some sinners look better than others to us, but no one reaches God's standard.

God's glory is the measure. We were created to reflect His glory, His goodness and character (Genesis 1:27). Sin has smeared that image in every one of us.

3:24 *being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that **is** in Christ Jesus,*

"Justified freely by His grace." Here is the answer to verse 23. The same "all" who have sinned can be declared righteous, freely, as a gift.

Grace is God's undeserved favor. A gift you earn is not a gift; it is a paycheck. Salvation cannot be bought, worked for, or deserved. It can only be received.

How does God do it? "Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Redemption means buying back, like paying the price to set a slave free. The word would remind Paul's readers of a slave being bought free, and of God redeeming Israel out of Egypt. We were slaves to sin, and Jesus paid the price to set us free with His own blood (1 Peter 1:18-19).

3:25 *whom God set forth **as** a propitiation through faith in His blood, for a demonstration of His righteousness because of the passing over of the sins that had previously occurred, in the forbearance of God;*

"Whom God set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood."

Propitiation is a big word with a simple meaning. It is a sacrifice that satisfies God's righteous anger against sin and turns it away. The Greek word is the same word used for the "mercy seat," the lid of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (Hebrews 9:5). Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat to cover the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:14-15). Jesus is our mercy seat. His blood was not sprinkled in a hidden room. God "set forth" Jesus on the cross for the whole world to see.

Remember 1:18? "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven." Here is where that wrath went for everyone who believes. It fell on Jesus. He took what we deserved.

"The passing over of the sins that had previously occurred, in the forbearance of God." Before the cross, God did not immediately punish every sin. The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament could never truly take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). So why did God let those sins go? Because He was looking ahead to the cross. Abraham, Moses, and David were forgiven on credit, you could say, and Jesus paid the bill.

3:26 *for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, for Him to be righteous and the **One** justifying the **one who is** of faith of Jesus.*

This verse answers the biggest question in the Bible: how can a holy God forgive guilty people and still be just?

If a human judge let a guilty criminal walk free, we would call that judge corrupt. God cannot simply look the other way. Sin must be paid for. At the cross God did both things at once. He punished sin fully, so He is "righteous." And He offers forgiveness freely, so He is "the One justifying the one who is of faith of Jesus," declaring that person righteous.

This is the great exchange. Jesus took our sin, and we receive His righteousness. God credits, or counts, Christ's perfect righteousness to our account when we believe (2 Corinthians 5:21). Theologians call this imputation, and Paul will explain it more fully in chapter 4 with the example of Abraham.

3:27-28 *Where then **is** the boasting? It was excluded. Through what law? Of works? No, but through **the** law of faith. Therefore we reckon a man to be justified by faith apart from works of law.*

"Where then is the boasting? It was excluded." If salvation is a gift received by faith, no one can brag about it. We did not earn it. We cannot take credit for it. In heaven no one will say, "I made it because I was better than the rest." Every voice will praise Jesus.

"We reckon a man to be justified by faith apart from works of law." This is the great truth that the Reformers recovered: justification by faith alone. Our good works do not add to what Christ did. They come afterward, as the fruit of a saved life (Ephesians 2:8-10). James 2:24 says that "a man is justified by works and not by faith only." James is answering a "faith" that never shows itself in how a person lives. Paul is saying that works can never earn our standing with God. Both agree that saving faith is never alone.

3:29-30 *Or **is** God of Jews only? And **is He** not also of Gentiles? Yes, also of Gentiles, since indeed God **is** one, who will justify **the** circumcision by faith and **the** uncircumcision through the faith.*

If salvation came through the Law of Moses, it would belong mostly to the Jews. But because it comes through faith, it is open to everyone. There is only one God, and He is the God of Jews and Gentiles alike. He saves both the same way, by faith. In a church in Rome where Jewish and Gentile believers were learning to live together, this mattered a great deal. It still matters today. At the foot of the cross, the ground is level.

3:31 *Do we then nullify law through the faith? May it not be! But we establish law.*

One last objection. "If we are saved by faith and not by keeping the Law, then does the Law not matter anymore?" Again Paul says, "May it not be!" Faith does not cancel the Law. It establishes it.

How? The gospel takes the Law seriously. The Law said sin must be punished, and at the cross sin was punished. The Law pointed forward to a Savior, and Jesus came. And by the Spirit, believers begin to live out what the Law was always about: loving God and loving others (Romans 8:4; 13:8-10). Faith does not throw out God's standard. It honors it.

Chapter 3 Summary

Paul answers several objections and then brings in his verdict. The Jews had great advantages, especially God's own Word, and God remains faithful even when people are not. But both Jews and Gentiles are under sin. Using a chain of Old Testament verses, Paul shows that no one is righteous, not even one. The Law cannot save us. It closes every mouth and shows us our sin.

Then come the words "But now." God has made known a righteousness that comes apart from the Law, received through faith in Jesus Christ. All have sinned, and all who believe are justified freely by His grace through the redemption in Christ. Jesus' death was the propitiation that satisfied God's justice, so that God is both just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Boasting is shut out, and Jew and Gentile come to God the same way. In chapter 4 Paul will show that this is how God has always saved people, starting with Abraham.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. What advantage does Paul say the Jewish people had? (3:1-2)

2. How does Paul answer the claim that people's unfaithfulness cancels God's faithfulness? How does that encourage you? (3:3-4)

3. What false teaching was Paul accused of, and why do you think people accused him of it? (3:8)

4. Which phrases in Paul's list of Old Testament quotations stand out to you most, and why? (3:10-18)

5. According to Paul, what is the purpose of the Law? (3:19-20)

6. What does it mean to be "justified"? Put it in your own words. (3:24)

7. What is a propitiation, and how does the Old Testament mercy seat help us understand it? (3:25)

8. How can God be both just and the justifier of sinners? (3:26)

9. Why is boasting excluded? How should that truth shape the way you treat other people? (3:27-28)

Chapter 4: Abraham, Justified by Faith

Scripture: Faith Credited as Righteousness

4:1-8 What then will we say that Abraham our father has found according to ***the*** flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has a boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness." Now to the one who works, the wage is not reckoned according to grace but according to debt; but to the one who does not work but believes on the ***One*** who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: "Blessed ***are those*** whose lawless deeds were forgiven, and whose sins were covered; blessed ***is the*** man to whom ***the*** Lord will by no means reckon sin."

4:9-12 ***Is*** this blessedness then upon the circumcision, or also upon the uncircumcision? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received a sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which ***he had*** in the uncircumcision, for him to be father of all who believe through uncircumcision, for the righteousness to be reckoned to them also, and father of circumcision to those who are not of circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham ***had*** in the uncircumcision.

4:13-17 For the promise to Abraham or to his seed, that he would be heir of the world, ***was*** not through law, but through ***the*** righteousness of faith. For if those of law ***are*** heirs, faith has been made empty and the promise has been nullified. For the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law, neither ***is there*** transgression. Because of this ***it is*** of faith, so that ***it may be*** according to grace, for the promise to be sure to all the seed, not to that ***which is*** of the law only, but also to that ***which is*** of the faith of Abraham, who is father of us all, even as it has been written, "A father of many nations I have made you," before God whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls the things that are not as ***though they*** are;

4:18-25 who against hope believed in hope, for him to become father of many nations according to what had been spoken, "So will your seed be." And not having become weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already having become dead, being about a hundred years old, and the deadness of the womb of Sarah; yet with respect to the promise of God he did not waver in unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, having given glory to God, and having been fully convinced that what He has promised He is able also to do. Therefore also it was reckoned to him for righteousness. Now it was not written on account of him alone that it was reckoned to him, but also on account of us, to whom it is about to be reckoned, to those who believe on the ***One*** who raised Jesus our Lord from ***the*** dead, who was delivered over because of our trespasses, and was raised because of our justification.

Chapter 4 Preview

At the end of chapter 3, Paul made a bold claim: a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law (3:28). A Jewish reader in Rome would have stopped right there and asked, "What about Abraham?" Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. If anyone could be held up as a man made right with God by what he did, surely it was Abraham.

So Paul takes his readers back to Genesis. He shows that Abraham was declared righteous because he believed God, not because he earned it. He shows that it happened before Abraham was circumcised, so circumcision could not have been the reason. And he shows that the same way of salvation is open to us today. Abraham is not only the father of the Jews; he is the father of everyone who believes.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1 *What then will we say that Abraham our father has found according to **the** flesh?*

Paul starts with a question, the way a good teacher does. He calls Abraham "our father," speaking as a Jew to Jewish readers. The question is simple: what has Abraham "found according to the flesh" when it came to being right with God? Did he earn it, or did he receive it?

4:2 *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has a boast, but not before God.*

If Abraham had been justified by works, he would have had something to brag about. People might have admired him. But Paul adds, "but not before God." No one stands before a holy God and boasts. Whatever good Abraham did, it was never enough to put God in his debt.

Remember what *justified* means from chapter 3. It is a legal word, like a judge's verdict in a courtroom. God, as Judge, declares that we are in right standing with Him. Keep that in mind, because Paul uses the word all through this chapter.

4:3 *For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness."*

Paul answers his own question with Scripture, quoting Genesis 15:6. God had promised Abraham, an old man with no children, that his descendants would be as many as the stars. Abraham believed Him. And God credited that faith to him as righteousness.

"It was reckoned to him for righteousness."

The word "reckoned" is an accounting word. It means to put something on someone's account. Abraham did not have righteousness of his own to offer. God placed righteousness on his account when he trusted Him. This is the *imputation* we met in 3:26: God counts something as belonging to us that we did not produce. For the believer, the righteousness credited to us is the righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Notice when this happened. Abraham had not yet offered Isaac on the altar. He had not yet been circumcised. He had not yet done most of the things he is remembered for. He believed God, and God declared him righteous right then.

Old Testament links: Genesis 15:6 (quoted)

4:4 *Now to the one who works, the wage is not reckoned according to grace but according to debt;*

Here Paul gives a picture from everyday life. When you work a job, your paycheck is not a gift. Your boss doesn't hand it to you as a favor. You earned it, and he owes it to you. If salvation worked that way, God would owe us. But God owes no one anything.

4:5 *but to the one who does not work but believes on the **One** who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness,*

Look at who God justifies: "the ungodly." That should set every one of us free. Not the people who cleaned themselves up first. Not the people who tried hard enough. The ungodly.

You might ask, "Does that mean God doesn't care how we live?" Not at all. Paul will answer that question in chapter 6. But we have to get the order right. We don't work so that God will accept us. God accepts us by grace when we trust Him, and then we work because we have been accepted. Works are the fruit of salvation, not the root.

Notice the phrase "the one who does not work but believes." Faith is not another kind of work that earns a reward. Faith is simply trusting the One who does the work. It is the empty hand that receives the gift (Ephesians 2:8-9).

4:6 *just as David also speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:*

Paul brings in a second witness. Under the Law, a matter was settled by two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). Abraham lived before the Law was given. David lived under the Law, as king of Israel. Both of them tell the same story: God credits righteousness to people apart from works.

4:7-8 *"Blessed **are those** whose lawless deeds were forgiven, and whose sins were covered; blessed **is the** man to whom **the** Lord will by no means reckon sin."*

Paul quotes Psalm 32:1-2. David wrote this psalm, many believe, after his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11-12). David was not a man with a clean record. He was guilty of adultery and murder. And yet he could write the words Paul quotes here: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will by no means reckon sin."

David uses three pictures here. His lawless deeds are forgiven, meaning the debt is canceled. His sins are covered, meaning they are hidden from God's sight. And the Lord will not take his sin into account, meaning it is not charged to him. That is the other side of justification. God does not only credit righteousness to us; He also refuses to count our sin against us.

If God could forgive David, He can forgive you. There is no sin so great that the blood of Jesus cannot cover it.

Old Testament links: Psalm 32:1-2 (quoted)

4:9-10 ***Is*** *this blessedness then upon the circumcision, or also upon the uncircumcision? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.*

Now Paul asks the next question a Jewish reader would ask. Is this blessing only for the circumcised, the Jewish people? Or is it for Gentiles too?

Paul answers by looking at the timeline in Genesis. Abraham was declared righteous in Genesis 15. He was circumcised in Genesis 17. Genesis shows at least thirteen or fourteen years between the two events. Abraham was about 85 when he took Hagar (Genesis 16:3), 86 when Ishmael was born (16:16), and 99 when he was circumcised (17:24). So when God declared Abraham righteous, Abraham was, for all practical purposes, a Gentile. He was an uncircumcised man from Ur who believed God.

4:11-12 *And he received a sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which* ***he had*** *in the uncircumcision, for him to be father of all who believe through uncircumcision, for the righteousness to be reckoned to them also, and father of circumcision to those who are not of circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham* ***had*** *in the uncircumcision.*

Circumcision came afterward as a "sign" and a "seal." A sign points to something. A seal confirms something. Circumcision did not make Abraham righteous. It marked and confirmed a righteousness he already had by faith.

Because of this, Abraham is the father of two groups who are really one family. He is the father of uncircumcised Gentiles who believe, and he is the father of circumcised Jews who believe and "walk in the steps of the faith" Abraham had. Being born Jewish was never enough by itself. What counts is walking in Abraham's faith.

This is a good word for us today. Many people trust in an outward sign. Some trust in the fact that they were baptized as a child, or that they grew up in church, or that they take communion. These are good things that God gave us, but they are signs. They point to faith. They cannot take its place.

Old Testament links: Genesis 17:11 (alluded to)

4:13 *For the promise to Abraham or to his seed, that he would be heir of the world,* ***was*** *not through law, but through* ***the*** *righteousness of faith.*

God promised Abraham that he would be "heir of the world." In Genesis, God promised Abraham the land of Canaan, a great nation, and that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-3). Paul sees the full size of that promise: in the end, Abraham and his true

children will inherit the whole earth. Jesus said the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5), and Revelation shows us the new earth where God's people will live forever (Revelation 21:1-7).

That promise did not come through the Law. The Law of Moses came about 430 years after the promise (Galatians 3:17). It came "through the righteousness of faith."

4:14-15 *For if those of law **are** heirs, faith has been made empty and the promise has been nullified. For the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law, neither **is there** transgression.*

If the inheritance depended on keeping the Law, faith would be pointless and the promise would be worthless. Why? Because no one keeps the Law perfectly. The Law shows us God's holy standard, and when we break it, it brings wrath, God's righteous anger against sin.

"Where there is no law, neither is there transgression." Paul doesn't mean people without the Law have no sin. He has already shown in chapters 1 and 2 that all people are guilty. He means that the written Law turns sin into clear, open lawbreaking. It makes our guilt plain. The Law is good, but it can only point out the problem. It cannot fix it.

4:16 *Because of this **it is** of faith, so that **it may be** according to grace, for the promise to be sure to all the seed, not to that **which is** of the law only, but also to that **which is** of the faith of Abraham, who is father of us all,*

"Because of this it is of faith, so that it may be according to grace." This is why God chose faith as the way. Grace means God's undeserved favor, His kindness given to people who have not earned it. Faith and grace go together. If salvation depended on us, it would never be secure. Because it depends on God's grace received by faith, the promise is "sure to all the seed," all of Abraham's children.

That is a word of real comfort. Your salvation does not rest on how well you performed this week. It rests on what God promised and what Christ did.

4:17 *even as it has been written, "A father of many nations I have made you," before God whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls the things that are not as **though they** are;*

Paul quotes Genesis 17:5, where God changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means "father of many." God said "I have made you," in the past tense, at a time when Abraham had only one son, Ishmael, and Isaac had not yet been born. God speaks of things that do not yet exist as if they already do, because when God says it, it is as good as done.

Look at how Paul describes the God Abraham believed: the God "who gives life to the dead and calls the things that are not as though they are." This is the God who created the world out of nothing. This is the God who raised Jesus from the grave. Abraham's faith was not faith in his own ability. It was faith in a God who can do the impossible.

Old Testament links: Genesis 17:5 (quoted)

4:18 *who against hope believed in hope, for him to become father of many nations according to what had been spoken, "So will your seed be."*

Abraham "against hope believed in hope." Every natural reason for hope was gone. Abraham was too old. Sarah was too old. Humanly speaking, there was nothing left to hope for. But Abraham put his hope in God's word anyway. God had said, "So will your seed be" (Genesis 15:5), pointing to the stars, and Abraham held on to that.

Old Testament links: Genesis 15:5 (quoted)

4:19 *And not having become weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already having become dead, being about a hundred years old, and the deadness of the womb of Sarah;*

Abraham knew the facts. He was about a hundred years old. Sarah was past the age of having children. Yet Paul says "he did not consider his own body, already having become dead." He did not fix his eyes on what he could see; he fixed them on God's promise. Many Greek copies leave out the word "not," and many Bibles read that Abraham did face the facts of his body. Both readings make the same point. Faith is not ignoring reality. Faith is looking reality straight in the eye and trusting that God is bigger than it.

Some people read Genesis and point out that Abraham laughed (Genesis 17:17), and that he tried to help God out by having a child with Hagar (Genesis 16). Abraham was not a perfect man, but over the long run of his life his trust in God held, and that is what God counted.

Old Testament links: Genesis 17:17 (alluded to); Genesis 18:11 (alluded to)

4:20-21 *yet with respect to the promise of God he did not waver in unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, having given glory to God, and having been fully convinced that what He has promised He is able also to do.*

Abraham "was strengthened in faith." Faith can grow. It gets stronger as we keep looking at the One who made the promise rather than at our circumstances. And notice what came with Abraham's faith: he gave glory to God. Faith honors God, because it says, "You are trustworthy. You will do what You said."

"Having been fully convinced that what He has promised He is able also to do." That is a good definition of faith. It is being fully convinced that God can and will do what He said.

4:22 *Therefore also it was reckoned to him for righteousness.*

"Therefore." Because Abraham trusted God this way, God credited it to him as righteousness. Paul repeats the quote from Genesis 15:6 to tie his whole argument together.

Old Testament links: Genesis 15:6 (quoted)

4:23-24 *Now it was not written on account of him alone that it was reckoned to him, but also on account of us, to whom it is about to be reckoned, to those who believe on the **One** who raised Jesus our Lord from **the** dead,*

Here Paul turns the story toward us. The words "it was reckoned to him" were not written in Genesis just for Abraham's sake. They were written for ours. God put them in Scripture so that we would know how He saves people.

Abraham believed God could bring life out of a body that was as good as dead. We believe in the God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. It is the same faith pointed at the same God. Abraham looked forward to the promise; we look back at its fulfillment in Christ. And righteousness will be credited to us just as it was to him.

Old Testament links: Genesis 15:6 (quoted)

4:25 *who was delivered over because of our trespasses, and was raised because of our justification.*

Paul closes the chapter with what may have been an early statement of faith, two lines that sum up the gospel.

"Who was delivered over because of our trespasses, and was raised because of our justification."

Jesus was handed over to death because of our sins. He took the punishment we deserved. Then God raised Him from the dead, and that resurrection is God's announcement that the payment was accepted. If Jesus had stayed in the grave, we would have no proof that our sins were paid for. The empty tomb is that proof.

Some see the second line as "raised to bring about our justification," and others as "raised because our justification had been secured." Both are true to the rest of Scripture. Jesus' death and resurrection belong together. You cannot have one without the other.

Chapter 4 Summary

Romans 4 answers the question every Jewish reader in Rome would have asked: what about Abraham? Paul shows from Genesis that Abraham was declared righteous because he believed God, not because of his works. David says the same thing in Psalm 32, rejoicing that God forgives sin and does not count it against us.

Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised, so circumcision was a sign and seal of his faith, not the cause of his salvation. That makes Abraham the father of all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike. The promise that he would inherit the world came through faith, so that it would rest on grace and be guaranteed.

Abraham's faith looked at impossible facts and trusted the God who gives life to the dead. Our faith is the same: we trust the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus was delivered over for our sins and raised for our justification. Righteousness is credited to everyone who believes.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. Why do you think Paul chose Abraham as his main example? (4:1-3)

2. What is the difference between a wage and a gift, and how does that picture salvation? (4:4-5)

3. What three pictures does David use to describe forgiveness? (4:7-8)

4. Why does it matter that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised? (4:9-11)

5. What outward signs or religious habits are people tempted to trust in today instead of faith? (4:11-12)

6. How does knowing your salvation is "sure" by grace change the way you approach God? (4:16)

7. How does Paul describe the God Abraham believed in? (4:17)

8. Abraham knew the facts but still trusted God (4:19-21). What situation in your life calls for that kind of faith right now?

9. Why was the resurrection of Jesus necessary for our justification? (4:25)

Chapter 5: Peace with God

Scripture: Peace with God, and Adam and Christ

5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have had access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. And not only ***this***, but we also boast in the tribulations, knowing that the tribulation produces endurance, and the endurance, proven character; and the proven character, hope; and the hope does not put ***us*** to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through ***the*** Holy Spirit who was given to us.

5:6-11 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for ***the*** ungodly. For scarcely will anyone die for a righteous ***man***; for perhaps for the good ***man*** someone even dares to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we will be saved from the wrath through Him. For if, being enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we will be saved by His life. And not only ***this***, but also ***we are*** boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

5:12-14 Because of this, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed to all men, because all sinned; for until law sin was in the world, but sin is not charged ***to account*** when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the ***One*** to come.

5:15-21 But not as the trespass, so also ***is*** the gift. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more the grace of God and the free gift in grace, which ***is*** of the one man Jesus Christ, abounded to the many. And the bestowal ***is*** not as through one who sinned; for the judgment ***came*** from one to condemnation, but the gift ***came*** from many trespasses to a righteous verdict. For if by the trespass of the one death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the free gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. So then, as through one trespass ***it came*** to all men for condemnation, so also through one righteous act ***it came*** to all men for justification of life. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the one the many will be constituted righteous. Now law came in alongside, so that the trespass might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Chapter 5 Preview

For four chapters Paul has been building his case. All people are guilty before God. No one can be made right by keeping the Law. God declares sinners righteous by faith in Jesus Christ, just as He did with Abraham. Now, in chapter 5, Paul stops to show us what that means for our lives.

The first half of the chapter is full of blessings: peace with God, access to His grace, hope, joy even in hard times, and the love of God poured into our hearts. The second half steps back and looks at all of human history through two men, Adam and Christ. Through Adam, sin and death came to everyone. Through Christ, grace and life came to all who receive Him.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1 *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

"Therefore" points back to everything Paul said in chapters 3 and 4. Because we have been justified by faith, declared righteous by God, we have peace with God.

Paul does not say we have the peace of God here, though that is also true (Philippians 4:7). He says we have peace with God. Before we came to Christ, we were at war with God, whether we knew it or not. Our sin made us His enemies (5:10). Peace with God means the war is over. The verdict is in. God is no longer against us; He is for us.

This peace is not a feeling that comes and goes. It is a fact about where we stand with God. Some days you may not feel peaceful at all. But if you are in Christ, your peace with God is settled, and it comes "through our Lord Jesus Christ," not through how well you are doing.

5:2 *through whom also we have had access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God.*

Through Jesus we have "had access by faith into this grace in which we stand." The word for "access" carries the idea of being brought into the presence of a king. In the ancient world, you could not just walk into the throne room. Someone had to bring you in. Jesus brings us in to God, and we don't just visit; we "stand" there. We live in grace.

"We boast in hope of the glory of God." The word means to boast, to rejoice with great joy. The Christian's hope is not wishful thinking like "I hope it doesn't rain." Biblical hope is a confident expectation of something God has promised. One day we will share in God's glory, when Jesus returns and we are made like Him (1 John 3:2).

5:3-4 *And not only **this**, but we also boast in the tribulations, knowing that the tribulation produces endurance, and the endurance, proven character; and the proven character, hope;*

Here Paul says something surprising. We also "boast in the tribulations." Tribulations are troubles, pressures, hardships. Paul is not saying we enjoy suffering or go looking for it. He is saying we can rejoice even in it, because we know what God is doing through it.

Paul lays out a chain. Tribulation produces endurance, the ability to keep going under a heavy load. Endurance produces proven character, the kind of faith that has been tested and found real, like metal that has gone through the fire. And proven character produces hope, because each time we see God carry us through, our confidence in Him grows.

I don't claim that suffering is easy, or that every hard thing makes sense at the time. But I have seen in my own life, and in the lives of many believers, that the hard seasons are often the ones where we grow the most. James says the same thing (James 1:2-4).

5:5 *and the hope does not put **us** to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through **the** Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

"The hope does not put us to shame." Our hope will not leave us ashamed or let down in the end. Why? Because "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

This is the first time in Romans that Paul plainly says the Holy Spirit has been given to believers. He will say much more in chapter 8. Here the point is simple. God did not just tell us He loves us. He poured His love into our hearts, the way you pour water until it overflows. Every believer has been given the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit makes God's love real to us from the inside.

5:6 *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for **the** ungodly.*

Now Paul shows us how great that love is. "While we were still weak." We could not save ourselves. We had no strength to fix our condition. And "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

God's timing is perfect. Galatians 4:4 says that when the fullness of time came, God sent His Son. Jesus did not come too early or too late. He came exactly when God planned, and He died for people who did not deserve it.

5:7-8 *For scarcely will anyone die for a righteous **man**; for perhaps for the good **man** someone even dares to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Paul compares human love with God's love. It is rare for someone to die even for a righteous person, someone who does what is right. Maybe, for a really good person, someone might dare to give his life. We honor soldiers, police officers, and firefighters who give their lives to save others, and we should. But even that kind of sacrifice is usually made for people we see as worth saving.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

God did not wait for us to get better. He did not wait for us to love Him first. While we were still sinners, still in rebellion, Christ died for us. That is the proof of His love. If you ever wonder whether God really loves you, don't look at your circumstances. Look at the cross.

5:9 *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we will be saved from the wrath through Him.*

Paul now argues from the greater to the lesser. If God already did the hardest thing, sending His Son to die for us while we were sinners, then He will certainly finish the job. Having been justified by His blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through Him.

"The wrath of God" is God's holy anger against sin, which will be poured out fully on the day of judgment. The book of Revelation shows us that coming wrath in detail (Revelation 6:16-17; 14:10; 19:15). The believer does not need to fear that day. Jesus took God's wrath in our place, so there is none left for us.

5:10 *For if, being enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we will be saved by His life.*

Paul says it again in different words. We were God's enemies. That is a hard word, but it is true. Yet we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son. To be *reconciled* means a broken relationship has been restored. Enemies have become friends, even family.

"Much more, having been reconciled, we will be saved by His life." If Christ's death brought us to God, His resurrection life will surely keep us. Jesus is alive today, and He always lives to intercede for those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25).

5:11 *And not only **this**, but also **we are** boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

"And not only this." Paul cannot stop. We don't only rejoice in hope and in our troubles; we rejoice in God Himself. The greatest gift of salvation is not just escaping punishment, or even going to heaven. It is God. We get to know Him, enjoy Him, and be with Him forever. And all of it comes through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the reconciliation.

5:12 *Because of this, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed to all men, because all sinned;*

Now Paul steps back and gives us the big picture of human history. He goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

"Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin."

That one man is Adam. God told Adam that if he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die (Genesis 2:17). Adam disobeyed, and sin entered the world. Death came right behind it, both spiritual death, separation from God, and physical death. And "so death passed to all men, because all sinned."

What does Paul mean by "all sinned"? Godly Christians have understood it in different ways. I believe the best reading of verses 12-19 is that when Adam sinned, all of humanity sinned in him. Adam stood as the head and representative of the whole human race, and his sin brought guilt and death to all who came from him. Verse 19 says, "through the disobedience of the one man the many were constituted sinners." Because of that, every one of us is born with a sinful nature, a

heart that leans toward sin from the very start (Psalm 51:5). We don't become sinners when we first sin; we sin because we are sinners.

Others read "all sinned" to mean that every person follows Adam's example and sins personally. That is certainly true as well; no one but Jesus has ever lived without sin (3:23). But Paul's argument in the verses that follow points beyond our own personal sins to the effect of Adam's one sin on all of us.

The sentence in verse 12 breaks off. Paul starts a comparison, "just as," and then stops to explain something before he finishes it in verse 18.

Old Testament links: Genesis 3:6 (alluded to)

5:13-14 *for until law sin was in the world, but sin is not charged **to account** when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the **One** to come.*

Paul explains himself here. Someone might object, "If sin is breaking the Law, how could people sin before Moses gave the Law?" Paul answers that sin was in the world before the Law. Without a written law, sin was not "charged to account," or counted as specific lawbreaking, in the same way. And yet people still died, all the way from Adam to Moses.

Why did they die? They had not broken a direct command the way Adam did. They "had not sinned in the likeness of the transgression of Adam." They died because of Adam's sin and the sinful nature they inherited. Death reigned like a king over everyone, even infants who never made a choice to sin. Death proves that all humanity is caught up in Adam's fall.

Then Paul says something wonderful: Adam "is a type of the One to come." A *type* is a person or event in the Old Testament that points ahead to something greater. Adam points to Christ. Each man is the head of a race. What one did affects everyone connected to him. That is why Paul calls Jesus "the last Adam" in 1 Corinthians 15:45.

Old Testament links: Genesis 5:5 (alluded to)

5:15 *But not as the trespass, so also **is** the gift. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more the grace of God and the free gift in grace, which **is** of the one man Jesus Christ, abounded to the many.*

But Adam and Christ are not equal opposites. "But not as the trespass, so also is the gift." Adam's one sin brought death to many. But God's grace, and the gift that came through the one Man, Jesus Christ, overflowed "much more" to the many. Grace is not just strong enough to cancel what Adam did. It is far stronger.

5:16 *And the bestowal **is** not as through one who sinned; for the judgment **came** from one to condemnation, but the gift **came** from many trespasses to a righteous verdict.*

Here is another difference. Judgment came from one sin, Adam's, and led to condemnation. Condemnation is the opposite of justification; it is the guilty verdict. But the free gift came in after

many sins, all the sins of every generation, and resulted in justification. One sin brought ruin. Christ's work answered millions of sins and brought a verdict of "righteous."

5:17 *For if by the trespass of the one death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the free gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.*

Through Adam, death reigned like a cruel king. But through Christ something even better happens. It is not just that life reigns; those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness "reign in life." Believers will reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 20:6; 22:5). We go from being subjects of death to being kings with Christ.

The gift must be "received." Grace is offered to all, but it becomes ours when we take it by faith.

5:18 *So then, as through one trespass **it came** to all men for condemnation, so also through one righteous act **it came** to all men for justification of life.*

Now Paul finishes the sentence he started in verse 12. One transgression, Adam's, brought condemnation to all men. One act of righteousness, Christ's obedience to the point of death on the cross, came "to all men for justification of life."

Does "all men" mean every person will be saved in the end? No. The rest of Romans, and the rest of the Bible, makes it clear that people must believe to be saved (1:16; 3:22; 10:9-13). Verse 17 has just told us that it is "those who receive" who reign in life. I understand "all men" here to mean that Christ's work is for all people, Jew and Gentile alike, and that all who are in Christ are justified, just as all who are in Adam are condemned. The gift is offered to everyone, but not everyone receives it.

5:19 *For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the one the many will be constituted righteous.*

This verse puts the whole comparison in a few words. Adam disobeyed, and the many were made sinners. Christ obeyed, and the many will be made righteous. Jesus lived the perfect life of obedience that Adam failed to live and that we have failed to live. He obeyed the Father in everything, all the way to the cross (Philippians 2:8). His obedience is counted as ours when we trust in Him.

Every person on earth is "in" one of these two men. By birth, we are all in Adam. By new birth, through faith, we can be in Christ. The question for each of us is simple: which man are you connected to?

Old Testament links: Isaiah 53:11 (alluded to)

5:20 *Now law came in alongside, so that the trespass might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,*

So why did God give the Law? "Law came in alongside, so that the trespass might increase." The Law did not create sin, but it exposed it and made it clear. When you put up a sign that says "Wet

Paint, Do Not Touch," it shows how much people want to touch. The Law showed how deep our sin really goes.

"Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

However deep sin goes, grace goes deeper. However much sin piles up, grace overflows it. No one has sinned too much for God's grace.

5:21 *so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Paul ends with two kings. Sin reigned, and its kingdom ended in death. But now grace reigns "through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Grace does not ignore sin. It reigns through righteousness, because Jesus paid in full. And it leads to eternal life.

Of course, someone hearing all this might ask, "If grace abounds where sin increases, should we keep on sinning?" Paul knew that question was coming. He answers it in chapter 6.

Chapter 5 Summary

Romans 5 shows us what justification by faith means for our lives. We have peace with God. We stand in His grace. We rejoice in the hope of His glory, and we can even rejoice in our troubles, because God uses them to build endurance, proven character, and hope. God has poured His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

God proved His love by sending Christ to die for us while we were still helpless sinners and enemies. If He did that, He will surely save us from the coming wrath and keep us by Christ's life.

Then Paul compares Adam and Christ. Through Adam's one sin, sin and death spread to the whole human race; I understand this to mean we all sinned in him and inherited a sinful nature. Through Christ's one act of righteousness, grace and life come to all who receive the gift. The Law exposed how great our sin is, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. Every person is in Adam or in Christ.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. What is the difference between having peace with God and feeling peaceful? (5:1)

2. What chain does Paul describe that begins with tribulation? (5:3-4)

3. Think of a hard season in your life. Where have you seen God at work in it, or where are you still waiting to see? (5:3-5)

4. How did God demonstrate His love for us? (5:8)

5. Why can a believer be confident of being saved from the wrath of God? (5:9-10)

6. How did sin and death enter the world, and how did they spread to all people? (5:12)

7. In what ways is Adam a "type" of Christ, and in what ways is Christ greater? (5:14-17)

8. Are you in Adam or in Christ? How do you know? (5:18-19)

9. What does it mean to you that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more"? (5:20)

Chapter 6: Dead to Sin, Alive to God

Scripture: Buried with Christ, Raised to New Life

6:1-7 What then will we say? Will we continue in sin so that grace may abound? May it not be! We who died to sin, how will we still live in it? Or are you unaware that as many ***of us*** as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised out of ***the*** dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with the likeness of His death, certainly we will also be ***united with the likeness*** of the resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with ***Him***, so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we no longer be enslaved to sin. For the one who has died has been justified from sin.

6:8-14 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised out of ***the*** dead, no longer dies; death no longer rules over Him. For ***the death*** that He died, He died to sin once for all; but ***the life*** that He lives, He lives to God. So you also, consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore let sin not reign in your mortal body, so that you obey it in its desires; nor present your members ***as*** instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as ***those*** living out of ***the*** dead, and your members ***as*** instruments of righteousness to God. For sin will not rule over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

6:15-19 What then? Will we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it not be! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves ***as*** slaves for obedience, you are slaves ***of the one*** whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But thanks ***be*** to God that you were slaves of sin, but you obeyed from ***the*** heart the form of teaching to which you were handed over. And having been set free from sin, you were enslaved to righteousness. I speak in human ***terms*** because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members ***as*** slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to lawlessness, so now present your members ***as*** slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification.

6:20-23 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free ***in regard*** to righteousness. What fruit therefore were you having then in the ***things*** of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those ***things is*** death. But now, having been set free from sin and having been enslaved to God, you have your fruit leading to sanctification, and the end, eternal life. For the wages of sin ***is*** death, but the gift of God ***is*** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Chapter 6 Preview

Paul ended chapter 5 with a beautiful truth: where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. But he knew how some people would hear that. "If grace gets bigger when sin gets bigger, why not keep sinning?" Chapter 6 is Paul's answer, and his answer is a strong "No."

In chapters 3 through 5, Paul explained *justification*, God declaring us righteous. In chapter 6 he turns to *sanctification*, the lifelong process of being made holy in how we actually live. Paul shows

that a person who has truly been saved has been joined to Christ in His death and resurrection. The old self died. A new life has begun. The believer has a new Master. Grace does not give us permission to sin; it gives us the power to stop.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1 *What then will we say? Will we continue in sin so that grace may abound?*

Paul raises the objection himself. Should we keep on sinning so that grace may abound? This was not just a debate in a classroom. Some people in Paul's day were accusing him of teaching that very thing (3:8). And there have always been people who treat grace as a license to live however they want.

6:2 *May it not be! We who died to sin, how will we still live in it?*

"May it not be!" This is the strongest way Paul could say no. Some translations put it, "God forbid!"

Then he asks, "We who died to sin, how will we still live in it?" Paul says believers "died to sin." He does not say sin died, or that we no longer feel its pull. He says we died to it. Our relationship to sin has changed at the root. A dead man does not answer when his old boss calls. Sin still calls, but we are no longer under its rule.

6:3 *Or are you unaware that as many **of us** as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*

"Do you not know?" Paul points to something every believer in Rome would have experienced: baptism. In the early church, people were baptized soon after they came to faith (Acts 2:41; 8:36-38; 16:33). Everyone reading this letter would remember the day they went into the water.

To be "baptized into Christ Jesus" means to be joined to Him. And to be joined to Christ means to be joined to His death. When Jesus died, the believer died with Him.

I believe the baptism Paul has in mind is water baptism, the outward act that pictures what happened inwardly when we believed. Some teachers believe Paul is speaking only of Spirit baptism, the Holy Spirit placing us into Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The two belong together. Water baptism is the visible picture; union with Christ by the Spirit through faith is the reality.

Does baptism itself save us? I don't believe it does. Paul has spent three chapters showing that we are justified by faith, apart from works and outward rituals. In chapter 4 he showed that circumcision was a sign and seal of a faith Abraham already had. Baptism works the same way. It follows faith. It is an act of obedience and a public testimony, and every believer should be baptized (Matthew 28:19). But it is the picture, not the power. We have no record that the thief on the cross was baptized, and Jesus promised him Paradise that very day (Luke 23:43).

6:4 *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised out of **the** dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.*

Baptism is a picture of a funeral and a resurrection. Going down into the water pictures being buried with Christ. Coming up out of the water pictures being raised with Him. Christ was raised from the dead "through the glory of the Father," and just as He walked out of the tomb into a new life, we too are raised to "walk in newness of life."

This is why many churches practice baptism by immersion, because it shows the burial and rising so clearly. Whatever your church's practice, the meaning is the same. The old life is over. A new one has started. As Paul wrote elsewhere, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17).

6:5 *For if we have become united with the likeness of His death, certainly we will also be* ***united with the likeness*** *of the resurrection,*

"United with the likeness of His death" gives the picture of two things growing together, like a branch grafted into a tree. If we have been joined with Christ in His death, we will also share in His resurrection. That is true now, as we walk in new life, and it will be true fully on the day our bodies are raised when Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

6:6 *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with* ***Him****, so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we no longer be enslaved to sin.*

Paul tells us what we need to know: "our old man was crucified with Him." The old man is who we were in Adam, the person we were before we came to Christ, ruled by sin. That person was put to death on the cross with Jesus. Paul said it personally in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ."

"So that the body of sin might be rendered powerless." The phrase "rendered powerless" means to be put out of business. Paul doesn't mean our physical body is evil or will disappear. He means the body as a tool ruled by sin has lost its power over us. The purpose is clear: "that we no longer be enslaved to sin."

Before Christ, we had no choice. We were slaves to sin. Now, in Christ, the chains are broken. We still can sin, and we still do, but we no longer have to.

6:7 *For the one who has died has been justified from sin.*

"The one who has died has been justified from sin." Paul uses the same legal word, "justified," that he used in chapters 3 to 5, though many Bibles put it "freed" here. A dead person can't be arrested, taxed, or ordered around. Death ends all claims. Because we died with Christ, sin has no legal claim on us anymore. We have been set free.

6:8 *Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him,*

Dying with Christ is only half of it. If we died with Him, we will also live with Him. Our union with Christ goes both ways: in His death and in His life, both now and forever.

6:9 *knowing that Christ, having been raised out of **the** dead, no longer dies; death no longer rules over Him.*

Christ was raised, and He will never die again. Lazarus was raised from the dead (John 11), but he died again later. Jesus' resurrection was different. He rose with a glorified body, and death has no more power over Him. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus tells John, "I was dead, and look, I am living to the ages of the ages. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death." Death no longer is master over Him, and because we are in Him, death will not have the last word over us either.

6:10 *For **the death** that He died, He died to sin once for all; but **the life** that He lives, He lives to God.*

"He died to sin once for all." Jesus never sinned, so He did not die to His own sin. He died to deal with sin, to pay its penalty and break its power. He did it once, and it never needs to be repeated (Hebrews 9:26-28; 10:10). Now "the life that He lives, He lives to God."

6:11 *So you also, consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

This is the first command Paul gives his readers in Romans. Up to this point, Paul has been telling us what God has done. Now he tells us what to do about it.

"So you also, consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The word "consider" is the same accounting word used in chapter 4 for "reckoned." It means to count something as true because it is true. Paul is not asking us to pretend. He is asking us to believe what God says about us and live like it.

Here is how that looks day to day. When temptation comes, you can say, "That is not who I am anymore. My old self died with Christ. I belong to God now." The feeling of temptation may still be strong. But what God says is more real than what you feel.

6:12 *Therefore let sin not reign in your mortal body, so that you obey it in its desires;*

"Therefore let sin not reign." Sin is pictured as a king who wants his throne back. It no longer has the right to rule, but it will try. Our "mortal body," the body that can still die and still feels the pull of sin, is where this fight takes place. We must not let sin take charge and make us obey its desires.

There is a balance here. Paul says we died to sin (6:2), and then he tells us not to let sin reign. Both are true. What God has done for us is complete. Living it out takes daily choices.

6:13 *nor present your members **as** instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as **those** living out of **the** dead, and your members **as** instruments of righteousness to God.*

Paul gets practical. "Members" means the parts of the body: eyes, hands, feet, tongue, mind. Every part can be used as an instrument, a tool or even a weapon. We can hand these parts over to sin, or we can present ourselves to God.

Think about your eyes. You can use them to look at things that pull you into sin, or to read God's Word. Think about your tongue. You can use it to gossip and tear down, or to encourage and build up. Every day we decide whose tools our bodies will be. Paul says, "Present yourselves to God as those living out of the dead." You were dead. Now you're alive. Live like it.

6:14 *For sin will not rule over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*

"Sin will not rule over you." This is a promise. Why? "For you are not under law but under grace." The Law told people what to do, but it could not give them the power to do it. Grace does what the Law could not. Grace forgives us, and grace changes us. Being "under grace" doesn't mean we have no moral standard. It means we live under a new rule, the rule of God's favor and His Spirit working in us, not under a system of trying to earn God's approval.

6:15 *What then? Will we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it not be!*

Now Paul raises the objection a second time, but in a slightly different form. In verse 1, the question was, "Should we keep living in sin?" Here it is, "Since we're not under the Law, is it okay to sin now and then?" Again the answer is, "May it not be!"

6:16 *Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves **as** slaves for obedience, you are slaves **of the one** whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*

Paul uses a picture everyone in Rome understood. Many people in the Roman Empire were slaves. Some historians estimate a large part of the city's population was enslaved. Paul says that whoever you obey, you are that person's slave.

There are only two masters. You can serve sin, which leads to death, or you can serve obedience, which leads to righteousness. No one is free of a master. That is exactly Paul's point. The world tells us that freedom means doing whatever we want. The Bible says that doing whatever we want makes us slaves of sin.

6:17-18 *But thanks **be** to God that you were slaves of sin, but you obeyed from **the** heart the form of teaching to which you were handed over. And having been set free from sin, you were enslaved to righteousness.*

"But thanks be to God." Paul is thankful because the Roman believers had changed masters. They used to be slaves of sin. But they "obeyed from the heart the form of teaching," the gospel and the teaching of the apostles. This was not outward rule-keeping. It came from the heart.

Notice the wording: "to which you were handed over." It doesn't say the teaching was handed to them. It says they were handed over to the teaching, the way a slave was handed over to a new master. God put them under the shaping influence of His truth.

And so, "having been set free from sin, you were enslaved to righteousness." This is real freedom: not freedom from all masters, but freedom to serve the right One.

6:19 *I speak in human **terms** because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members **as** slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to lawlessness, so now present your members **as** slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification.*

"I speak in human terms." Paul knows the picture of slavery has its limits. Serving God is not harsh or cruel the way human slavery often was. But he uses the picture because it helps us understand.

Before Christ, the Romans used their bodies for impurity and lawlessness, and it was "leading to lawlessness." Sin always grows. It never stays the same size. Now Paul calls them to put the same energy into righteousness, which results in *sanctification*. Sanctification means being set apart for God and made holy, more and more like Jesus. Justification happens in a moment; sanctification is a lifelong process. Holiness grows the same way sin does, one choice at a time.

6:20 *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free **in regard** to righteousness.*

When we were slaves of sin, we were "free in regard to righteousness." In other words, righteousness had no hold on us. We did not care about it and could not produce it.

6:21 *What fruit therefore were you having then in the **things** of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those **things is** death.*

Paul asks an honest question. What did you get out of the old life? What fruit came from the things you are now ashamed of? Many of us can look back and see the damage sin did: broken relationships, guilt, addiction, wasted years. Sin promises a lot and pays very little. And in the end, "the end of those things is death."

6:22 *But now, having been set free from sin and having been enslaved to God, you have your fruit leading to sanctification, and the end, eternal life.*

"But now." Paul uses these words again, just as he did in 3:21. Now we have been freed from sin and enslaved to God. The fruit is sanctification, a holy and changed life. And the end is eternal life.

6:23 *For the wages of sin **is** death, but the gift of God **is** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul closes the chapter with one of the best-known verses in the Bible.

*"For the wages of sin **is** death, but the gift of God **is** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Look at the two words Paul sets against each other: wages and gift. A wage is something you earn. A gift is something you receive. Sin pays its workers, and the paycheck is death, both physical death and eternal separation from God. Every person who serves sin will be paid in full.

But eternal life is not a wage. You can't earn it. It is a free gift from God, and it is found only "in Christ Jesus our Lord." That brings us right back to chapter 4: to the one who works, his wage is what is due; but to the one who believes, God gives righteousness as a gift.

If you have never received this gift, it is offered to you today. Turn from your sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ, who died for you and rose again. And if you have received it, live as someone who has been set free: dead to sin, and alive to God.

Chapter 6 Summary

In Romans 6, Paul answers the question, "Should we keep sinning so that grace may abound?" His answer is a strong no. Believers have been joined to Christ in His death and resurrection. Baptism pictures this: buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life. Baptism does not save us, but it is a public picture of a real union with Christ that happens when we believe.

Our old self was crucified with Christ so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. Paul calls us to count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, to refuse to let sin reign in our bodies, and to present every part of ourselves to God as tools for righteousness. Sin will not be our master, because we are under grace.

Everyone serves a master. Sin pays wages, and its wage is death. God gives a free gift, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Those who have been freed from sin now serve God, and the result is a holy life that ends in eternal life.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. How does Paul answer the question of whether we should keep sinning so that grace may increase? (6:1-2)

2. What does baptism picture in the believer's life? (6:3-4)

3. Why does Paul's teaching in Romans 4 help us understand that baptism follows faith rather than saving us by itself? (4:11; 6:3-4)

4. What does it mean that our "old man was crucified with Him"? (6:6)

5. What does it look like in your daily life to "consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but living to God"? (6:11)

6. Which "members" of your body are hardest for you to present to God as instruments of righteousness? (6:13)

7. According to Paul, what two masters can a person serve, and where does each lead? (6:16)

8. What is the difference between justification and sanctification? (6:19, 6:22)

9. What is the difference between a wage and a gift in Romans 6:23, and which one are you living by? (6:23)

Chapter 7: The Law and the Struggle with Sin

Scripture: Released from the Law

7:1-6 Or are you unaware, brothers (for I speak to those who know law), that the law rules over the man for as long a time as he lives? For the married woman has been bound by law to the living husband; but if the husband dies, she has been released from the law of the husband. So then, while the husband lives, she will be called an adulteress if she becomes another man's; but if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, having become another man's. So, my brothers, you also were put to death to the law through the body of Christ, for you to become another's, the One who was raised out of ***the*** dead, so that we may bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins, which ***were*** through the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been released from the law, that having died in which we were held fast, so that we serve in newness of ***the*** Spirit and not in oldness of ***the*** letter.

7:7-13 What then will we say? ***Is*** the law sin? May it not be! But I did not know sin except through law; for I also had not known covetousness except that the law was saying, "You shall not covet." But sin, having taken an occasion through the commandment, worked out in me all covetousness; for apart from law sin ***is*** dead. And I was once alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; and the commandment, which ***was*** for life, this was found by me ***to be*** for death; for sin, having taken an occasion through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed ***me***. So the law indeed ***is*** holy, and the commandment ***is*** holy and righteous and good. Then has that which ***is*** good become death to me? May it not be! But sin, so that it might be shown ***to be*** sin, through that which ***is*** good ***was*** working out death to me, so that sin through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

7:14-25 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, sold under sin. For what I work out, I do not understand; for what I want, this I do not practice, but what I hate, this I do. But if what I do not want, this I do, I agree with the law that ***it is*** good. But now ***it is*** no longer I ***who*** work it out, but the sin dwelling in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for to want is present with me, but to work out the good I do not find. For the good that I want, I do not do; but the evil that I do not want, this I practice. But if what I do not want, this I do, ***it is*** no longer I ***who*** work it out, but the sin dwelling in me. I find then the law, that for me, the one wanting to do the good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man, but I see another law in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man I ***am***! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then I myself with the mind indeed serve ***the*** law of God, but with the flesh ***the*** law of sin.

Chapter 7 Preview

In chapter 6, Paul told us that believers have died to sin and are alive to God. Now he turns to a question his Jewish readers would have been asking: what about the Law of Moses? If we are not saved by keeping it, what is it for, and what is our relationship to it now?

Paul answers in three steps. First, he uses the picture of a marriage to show that the believer has been set free from the Law by dying with Christ. Second, he defends the Law. The Law is not the problem; sin is the problem, and the Law exposes it. Third, he opens his heart and describes a painful inner battle, wanting to do good and finding himself doing what he hates. Many of us have read that last section and thought, "That's me." This chapter ends with a cry for help and a shout of thanks, and the answer to that cry fills chapter 8.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1 *Or are you unaware, brothers (for I speak to those who know law), that the law rules over the man for as long a time as he lives?*

Paul is speaking to people who know the Law, most likely the Jewish believers in Rome, though many Gentile believers in the early church also knew the Old Testament well. He starts with a simple legal principle everyone would accept: a law only has authority over a person while that person is alive. Once someone dies, the law has nothing more to say to them.

7:2-3 *For the married woman has been bound by law to the living husband; but if the husband dies, she has been released from the law of the husband. So then, while the husband lives, she will be called an adulteress if she becomes another man's; but if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, having become another man's.*

Paul gives an example from marriage. A married woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If she joins herself to another man while her husband is living, she is guilty of adultery. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry again with a clear conscience. Death changes the whole legal situation.

Paul is not giving a full teaching on marriage and divorce here. He is using a picture his readers would understand to make one point: death ends a legal obligation.

7:4 *So, my brothers, you also were put to death to the law through the body of Christ, for you to become another's, the One who was raised out of **the** dead, so that we may bear fruit to God.*

Here is the point of the picture. "You also were put to death to the law through the body of Christ." When Jesus died on the cross, everyone who belongs to Him died with Him (Romans 6:3-6). That death set us free from the Law as a way of being made right with God. The Law can no longer condemn us, because in Christ we have already died.

But Paul does not stop at being set free. We are set free so that we would become "another's, the One who was raised out of the dead." The old relationship ended so a new one could begin. We now belong to the risen Jesus, like a bride to her husband, and the purpose of this new union is that we "may bear fruit to God." Freedom from the Law is never freedom to live however we want. It is freedom to belong to Christ and to live a fruitful life for Him.

7:5 *For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins, which **were** through the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.*

"In the flesh" describes our life before we knew Christ, when our old sinful nature was in control. Paul says something surprising here: "the passions of sins, which were through the law, were at work in our members." The Law did not create our sin, but it stirred it up. The only fruit that old life could produce was death.

7:6 *But now we have been released from the law, that having died in which we were held fast, so that we serve in newness of **the** Spirit and not in oldness of **the** letter.*

"But now." As in 3:21 and 6:22, everything turns on these two words. Now we have been released. We still serve God, but in a completely different way: "in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." The "letter" is the written code, rules on stone that told us what to do but gave us no power to do it. The "Spirit" is the Holy Spirit living inside the believer, changing us from the inside out. God promised this very thing through the prophets, that He would write His law on our hearts and put His Spirit within us (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26-27).

7:7 *What then will we say? **Is** the law sin? May it not be! But I did not know sin except through law; for I also had not known covetousness except that the law was saying, "You shall not covet."*

After everything Paul has said, someone might conclude that the Law itself is evil. You might ask, "If the Law stirred up sin, isn't the Law the bad guy?" Paul's answer is strong: "May it not be!" The Law is not sin. It is what showed us our sin.

Paul uses the tenth commandment as his example (Exodus 20:17). It's interesting that he picks coveting. Most of the commandments deal with outward actions, like murder, stealing, and adultery. Coveting happens in the heart. A person could keep every outward rule and still be full of wrong desire. When Paul faced that commandment, he realized that sin went all the way down into his thoughts and wants.

Old Testament links: Exodus 20:17 (quoted)

7:8 *But sin, having taken an occasion through the commandment, worked out in me all covetousness; for apart from law sin **is** dead.*

Sin is pictured almost like an enemy soldier. It used the commandment as a base of operations, a place to launch its attack. Have you ever noticed that when someone tells you not to do something, you suddenly want to do it more? That's what Paul is describing. The command was good, but sin twisted it and used it to produce "all covetousness." "Apart from law sin is dead" does not mean sin does not exist without the Law. It means sin lies quiet and unrecognized until the Law comes and exposes it.

7:9-10 *And I was once alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; and the commandment, which **was** for life, this was found by me **to be** for death;*

Paul speaks of a time when he was "alive apart from law." Scholars have different ideas about what he means. He may be thinking of his childhood, before he understood the commandments for himself. He may be speaking for Israel as a whole, before the Law was given at Sinai. Either

way, the point is the same: when the commandment came home to him, "sin revived," and he "died." He saw that he stood guilty before God.

The sad irony is that the commandment "was for life." God gave the Law as a good path to walk in (Leviticus 18:5). But because of sin, the very thing meant to lead to life showed Paul that he was spiritually dead.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 18:5 (alluded to)

7:11 *for sin, having taken an occasion through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed **me**.*

Sin deceived him. That's how sin always works. It promised Eve that she would be like God (Genesis 3:4-5), and it promises us satisfaction, freedom, and happiness. Instead it delivers death. Sin used the commandment as its weapon, and the weapon pointed straight at Paul.

7:12 *So the law indeed **is** holy, and the commandment **is** holy and righteous and good.*

Paul makes his verdict clear: "the law indeed is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." The Law came from God and reflects His character. We should never speak badly of God's Law. The problem was never the Law. The problem is us.

7:13 *Then has that which **is** good become death to me? May it not be! But sin, so that it might be shown **to be** sin, through that which **is** good **was** working out death to me, so that sin through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

Did something good kill Paul? Again, "May it not be!" It was sin that killed him. But God used even this. By working through the good commandment to bring death, sin was exposed for what it really is, "sinful beyond measure." Think of an X-ray. The X-ray does not cause the broken bone, but it shows the break clearly so it can be treated. The Law is like that. It shows us how badly broken we are so that we will run to the only One who can heal us.

7:14 *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am fleshly, sold under sin.*

Now Paul changes from the past tense to the present tense, and he begins to describe a battle going on inside him. "The law is spiritual," meaning it comes from God's Spirit. "But I am fleshly, sold under sin."

This is where we come to one of the most debated passages in all of Romans. Who is the "I" in verses 14-25? Godly, Bible-believing scholars have disagreed about this for centuries, so I want to lay out the two main views fairly.

Paul before he was saved: Some believe Paul is describing his life as a Jewish man under the Law before he met Christ, or describing any person who tries to please God by the Law without the power of the Holy Spirit. They point to strong phrases like "sold under sin" (7:14) and "making me captive to the law of sin" (7:23). How could Paul say that about a believer, when he just said in chapter 6 that believers have been freed from sin (6:18)? They also note that the Holy Spirit is not mentioned once in 7:14-25, but appears again and again in chapter 8.

Paul as a believer: Others believe Paul is describing his own life as a mature Christian. They point out that he switches to the present tense here and keeps using it to the end of the chapter. They also note that the person in these verses loves God's Law and hates sin. He can say, "I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (7:22). An unbeliever does not delight in God's Law that way; Paul says in 8:7 that the mind set on the flesh does not even submit to it. And before he was saved, Paul did not see himself as a struggling sinner at all. He saw himself as blameless (Philippians 3:6). To the phrase "sold under sin," those who hold this view answer that Paul is speaking of his flesh (7:18, 25), not his whole self.

I lean toward the second view. I believe Paul is describing the ongoing struggle every believer has with the flesh, the leftover pull of our sinful nature that we will not be fully free of until Jesus returns and our bodies are redeemed (8:23). Paul is not saying that sin wins every battle, or that believers are helpless. He is being honest about the war. Galatians 5:17 describes the same fight between the flesh and the Spirit inside the believer. And John tells us that if we claim we have no sin, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8).

I don't claim to have this all figured out, and I respect believers who hold the other view. Whichever view you take, the answer is the same: Romans 7 is not the end of the story. Romans 8 is.

7:15 *For what I work out, I do not understand; for what I want, this I do not practice, but what I hate, this I do.*

"For what I work out, I do not understand." Paul is being very honest with us here. He wants to do what is right, but he finds himself doing the very thing he hates. If you have ever promised God that you would never do something again, and then done it, you know exactly what Paul means.

7:16 *But if what I do not want, this I do, I agree with the law that **it is** good.*

The struggle itself shows something good. When Paul does wrong and hates it, that hatred shows he agrees with God's Law. His heart is on God's side even when his actions fall short.

7:17 *But now **it is** no longer I **who** work it out, but the sin dwelling in me.*

"It is no longer I who work it out, but the sin dwelling in me." Paul is not making excuses or shifting blame; he has already admitted that he is the one doing it (7:15). He is saying that his truest self, the person who loves God, is not the one who wants to sin. Sin is like an unwelcome tenant still living in the house. It has been evicted from the throne, but it has not yet moved out of the building.

7:18 *For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for to want is present with me, but to work out the good I do not find.*

"Good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh." On the view I hold, Paul is careful here. He does not say there is nothing good in him at all; the Holy Spirit lives in every believer. He says nothing good lives in his flesh, his fallen human nature. He wants to do good, but in his own strength he can't carry it out.

7:19-20 *For the good that I want, I do not do; but the evil that I do not want, this I practice. But if what I do not want, this I do,* ***it is*** *no longer I* ***who*** *work it out, but the sin dwelling in me.*

Paul repeats himself, and I think that's on purpose. When we are in the middle of a struggle, we tend to go around and around in circles. Paul wants good and does evil. He hates the evil and does it anyway. And again he concludes that sin living in him is the cause.

7:21 *I find then the law, that for me, the one wanting to do the good, evil is present with me.*

Paul sums up what he has found. It works almost like a rule, a principle he can count on: whenever he wants to do good, evil is right there with him. Many believers know this experience. Some of the hardest temptations come right when we are trying hardest to serve God.

7:22-23 *For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man, but I see another law in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which is in my members.*

In his "inward man," the deepest part of who he is, Paul joyfully agrees with God's Law. He loves it. But he sees another "law," another power, at work in the members of his body, fighting against his mind and trying to drag him back into sin's prison.

The words "waging war" tell us this is not a small disagreement. It is a real battle, and Paul tells us elsewhere to put on the full armor of God because we are in a fight (Ephesians 6:10-18).

7:24 *Wretched man I* ***am****! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death?*

"Wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death?" This is a cry of despair, but it is also the right question. Paul does not ask, "What will set me free?" He does not look for a better plan, a stronger will, or another set of rules. He asks "Who?" The answer is a Person.

Some believe "the body of this death" may recall a cruel ancient punishment where a dead body was tied to a living prisoner. I can't say for sure that Paul had that in mind, but the picture fits. The flesh clings to us like something dead that we cannot shake loose by ourselves.

7:25 *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then I myself with the mind indeed serve* ***the*** *law of God, but with the flesh* ***the*** *law of sin.*

And here is the answer: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Jesus is the One who sets us free. He has already freed us from the penalty of sin through His death, He frees us more and more from the power of sin through His Spirit, and one day, when He returns, He will free us from the very presence of sin.

Then Paul gives one more honest summary. Until that day, the battle goes on. With his mind he serves God's Law, while his flesh still pulls toward sin. Paul does not pretend the struggle is over. But he has already given thanks for the victory, and in the very next verse he will tell us there is "now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (8:1).

If you are in the middle of this struggle today, take heart. The fact that you hate your sin and long to do what's right is a sign that God is at work in you. Don't give up, and don't try to win this war in your own strength. Look to Jesus.

Chapter 7 Summary

Paul teaches that believers have died to the Law through Christ's death and now belong to the risen Jesus, serving God by the Spirit instead of the old written code. The Law is holy and good, but sin used it to bring death, and the Law exposed sin for what it is. Paul then describes the painful battle between wanting to do good and the pull of sin in the flesh, a battle many believe every Christian faces. He cries out for rescue and finds his answer in Jesus Christ, which leads straight into the victory of chapter 8.

I know the struggle of Romans 7. I drifted from God more than once through my own bad choices, even after my baptism, in 2000 and again in 2013. I did what I did not want to do. Like Paul, I found the answer is not more willpower. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What picture does Paul use to explain how believers are released from the Law? (7:1-4)

2. According to Paul, what is the purpose of our being joined to Christ? (7:4)

3. What is the difference between serving "in newness of the Spirit" and "in oldness of the letter"? (7:6)

4. If the Law is not sin, what does the Law do? (7:7-13)

5. Why do you think Paul chose the commandment "You shall not covet" as his example? (7:7)

6. Which view of Romans 7:14-25 do you find more convincing, and why? (7:14-25)

7. Have you ever experienced the struggle Paul describes in verses 15-20? How did you handle it? (7:15-20)

8. Paul asks "Who will deliver me?" instead of "What will deliver me?" Why does that matter? (7:24-25)

9. What is one area of your life where you need to stop fighting in your own strength and lean on Jesus this week? (7:24-25)

Chapter 8: Life in the Spirit

Scripture: No Condemnation

8:1-11 ***There is*** therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to ***the*** flesh but according to ***the*** Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death. For the inability of the law, in that it was weak through the flesh: God, having sent His own Son in ***the*** likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to ***the*** flesh but according to ***the*** Spirit. For those who are according to ***the*** flesh set ***their*** minds on the things of the flesh, but those ***who are*** according to ***the*** Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mindset of the flesh ***is*** death, but the mindset of the Spirit ***is*** life and peace, because the mindset of the flesh ***is*** hostility toward God; for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither can it ***be***. And those who are in ***the*** flesh are not able to please God. But you are not in ***the*** flesh but in ***the*** Spirit, if indeed ***the*** Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have ***the*** Spirit of Christ, this one is not His. And if Christ ***is*** in you, the body indeed ***is*** dead because of sin, but the Spirit ***is*** life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus out of ***the*** dead dwells in you, the One who raised Christ out of ***the*** dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit dwelling in you.

8:12-17 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to ***the*** flesh; for if you live according to ***the*** flesh, you are about to die; but if by ***the*** Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by ***the*** Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again to fear, but you received ***the*** Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, also heirs: heirs indeed of God, and fellow heirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer with ***Him*** so that we may also be glorified with ***Him***.

8:18-25 For I consider that the sufferings of the present time ***are*** not worthy ***to be compared*** with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the eager expectation of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of the One who subjected ***it***, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans together and suffers birth pains together until now. And not only ***this***, but also we ourselves, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, we ourselves also groan within ourselves, eagerly awaiting ***the*** adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we were saved; but hope that is seen is not hope; for what anyone sees, why does he also hope for ***it***? But if we hope for what we do not see, through perseverance we eagerly await ***it***.

8:26-30 And likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses; for what we should pray as is necessary, we do not know, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with inexpressible groanings. And the One who searches the hearts knows what the mindset of the Spirit ***is***, because He intercedes for ***the*** saints according to God. And we know that to those who love God all things work together for good, to those who are called according to ***His*** purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined ***to be*** conformed to the image of His Son, for Him to be ***the***

firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He predestined, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified.

8:31-39 What then will we say to these things? If God ***is*** for us, who ***is*** against us? He who indeed did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against ***the*** elect of God? God ***is*** the One who justifies; who ***is*** the one who condemns? Christ ***is*** the One who died, and rather also was raised, who is also at ***the*** right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Just as it has been written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all the day; we were regarded as sheep of slaughter." But in all these ***things*** we more than conquer through the One who loved us. For I have been persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God which ***is*** in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Chapter 8 Preview

Many people call Romans 8 the high point of the whole Bible, and I understand why. Chapter 7 ended with Paul crying out, "Who will deliver me?" Chapter 8 is the answer. It begins with "no condemnation" and ends with the promise that nothing can separate us from God's love, and everything in between is good news for the believer.

In chapter 7 the Holy Spirit is hardly mentioned. In chapter 8 He is named again and again. Paul also lifts our eyes to the future, when creation itself will be set free and our bodies will be raised.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 ***There is*** *therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to* ***the*** *flesh but according to* ***the*** *Spirit.*

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." If you remember only one verse from Romans, this would be a good one. Many Greek copies end the verse at "Christ Jesus," but the same words appear again in verse 4. The last line does not make our safety depend on our walk. It describes the people who are in Christ.

"Condemnation" is a courtroom word. It means a guilty verdict and the sentence that goes with it. Every one of us deserved that verdict (Romans 3:23; 6:23). But for those who are "in Christ Jesus," joined to Him by faith, the verdict has been reversed. This is what Paul has been teaching since chapter 3: justification, God declaring the believer righteous because Christ's righteousness has been credited to us.

Paul says "now," not someday and not after we have cleaned up our lives. When Satan reminds you of your past, this verse is your answer.

8:2 *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death.*

Paul uses the word "law" here to mean a ruling power or principle. "The law of sin and of death" is the power that held us captive in chapter 7. "The law of the Spirit of life" is the greater power of the Holy Spirit, who brings the life of Christ into the believer. Think of an airplane. Gravity is still real, but the power of the engines carries the plane above it.

8:3 *For the inability of the law, in that it was weak through the flesh: God, having sent His own Son in **the** likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,*

The Law could not save us. That was not because the Law was bad; Paul made that clear in chapter 7. It was "weak through the flesh." The Law could tell us what was right, but it could not give us the power to do it. So God did what the Law could not do. He sent His own Son.

Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He was fully human, with a real human body, but He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21). He came "for sin," to deal with it once for all, and on the cross God "condemned sin in the flesh." The condemnation we deserved fell on Jesus instead. That is why there is no condemnation left for us.

8:4 *so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to **the** flesh but according to **the** Spirit.*

The goal of all this is that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us." The righteous standard of the Law is met first because Christ's perfect righteousness is credited to us. But it is also worked out in us, as we walk "according to the Spirit." (See Romans 13:8-10.)

8:5 *For those who are according to **the** flesh set **their** minds on the things of the flesh, but those **who are** according to **the** Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*

Paul now draws a contrast between two kinds of people. Those who live "according to the flesh" set their minds on the things of the flesh. Those who live "according to the Spirit" set their minds on the things of the Spirit. This describes two directions of life, not one bad day or one good day.

8:6 *For the mindset of the flesh **is** death, but the mindset of the Spirit **is** life and peace,*

The flesh-set mind leads to death. The Spirit-set mind leads to "life and peace." Many people today search for peace in all the wrong places. Paul tells us where real peace is found.

8:7-8 *because the mindset of the flesh **is** hostility toward God; for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither can it **be**. And those who are in **the** flesh are not able to please God.*

The mindset of the flesh is "hostility toward God." It does not submit to God's Law, and it cannot. Without the Spirit, a person is at war with God. That's why "those who are in the flesh are not able to please God." No amount of religious effort can please God when it comes from a heart that has not been made new.

8:9 *But you are not in **the** flesh but in **the** Spirit, if indeed **the** Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have **the** Spirit of Christ, this one is not His.*

"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit." Paul turns to the believers in Rome and reminds them who they are. If the Spirit of God lives in you, you belong to the Spirit, not to the flesh.

Then he gives a clear test: "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this one is not His." Every true believer has the Holy Spirit.

8:10 *And if Christ **is** in you, the body indeed **is** dead because of sin, but the Spirit **is** life because of righteousness.*

Our bodies are still "dead because of sin." But if Christ is in you, your spirit is alive, made alive by God because of the righteousness He has given you.

8:11 *And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus out of **the** dead dwells in you, the One who raised Christ out of **the** dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit dwelling in you.*

And our bodies will not stay dead. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in every believer, and He will one day "give life to your mortal bodies." This points to the resurrection at Christ's return (1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

8:12-13 *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to **the** flesh; for if you live according to **the** flesh, you are about to die; but if by **the** Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

We owe the flesh nothing. Instead we are called to put "to death the deeds of the body" by the power of the Spirit.

This is an important balance. Paul does not say, "Try harder and you will beat sin," and he does not say, "Sit back and do nothing." He says "by the Spirit you put to death." We do the fighting, but we fight in the Spirit's strength. It is a daily choice to say no to what we know is wrong and ask God for help, again and again.

8:14 *For as many as are led by **the** Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

Being "led by the Spirit" is the mark of a child of God. In context, the Spirit's leading here is first about leading us away from sin and toward holiness.

8:15 *For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again to fear, but you received **the** Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!"*

"You did not receive a spirit of slavery again to fear." The old life under sin was ruled by fear. But we have received "the Spirit of adoption as sons."

In the Roman world, adoption gave a person a brand-new legal standing. The adopted son received full rights to his new father's inheritance.

"Abba" is the Aramaic word for "father," used in the family by children and grown children alike. It carries closeness and trust. Jesus Himself prayed this way in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark

14:36). Because of what Jesus did, we can come to the holy God of the universe and call Him our Father.

8:16 *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." This is one of the ways God gives us assurance. Deep inside, the Holy Spirit confirms to the believer, "You belong to God." It is not just a passing feeling; it rests on God's promises in His Word.

8:17 *and if children, also heirs: heirs indeed of God, and fellow heirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer with* ***Him*** *so that we may also be glorified with* ***Him****.*

Children are heirs. We are "heirs indeed of God, and fellow heirs of Christ." Everything that belongs to Jesus, we will share with Him. (See Revelation 21:7.)

But Paul adds, "if indeed we suffer with Him." The path to glory runs through suffering. Jesus suffered before He was glorified, and those who follow Him will face hardship too.

8:18 *For I consider that the sufferings of the present time* ***are*** *not worthy* ***to be compared*** *with the glory about to be revealed to us.*

"The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory about to be revealed to us." Paul was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and imprisoned (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Yet he says it is not even worth comparing to what is coming.

If you are suffering right now, your pain is real, and God sees it. But this verse invites us to look past today.

8:19 *For the eager expectation of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God.*

Paul now pictures creation itself standing on tiptoe, looking eagerly for "the revelation of the sons of God." Right now believers look like everyone else, but when Jesus returns His people will be revealed in glory.

8:20-21 *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of the One who subjected* ***it****, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

Why is creation waiting? Because "the creation was subjected to futility." When Adam sinned, God placed a curse on the ground (Genesis 3:17-19). Since then, nature has been marked by decay and death. Creation did not choose this. God subjected it, but He did it "in hope."

That hope is that "the creation itself also will be set free from the slavery of corruption." In Revelation 21 John sees a new heaven and a new earth, and God says, "Look, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). In Revelation 22:3 we read that there will no longer be any curse. What Paul hopes for in Romans 8, John sees fulfilled in Revelation 21 and 22. God is not going to throw away His creation. He is going to rescue it and restore it.

Old Testament links: Genesis 3:17 (alluded to)

8:22 *For we know that the whole creation groans together and suffers birth pains together until now.*

Creation "groans together and suffers birth pains together." This is a hopeful picture. Labor pains are real pain, but they are not pointless pain. They mean new life is on the way, and Jesus used the same picture (Matthew 24:8).

8:23 *And not only **this**, but also we ourselves, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, we ourselves also groan within ourselves, eagerly awaiting **the** adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.*

It's not only creation that groans. We groan too. We have "the firstfruits of the Spirit." The first fruits were the first part of the harvest, a promise that the rest was coming (Leviticus 23:10). The Holy Spirit in us now is God's guarantee of everything else He has promised.

What are we waiting for? "Adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." In one sense we are already adopted (8:15). But the full adoption will come when our bodies are raised and made new at Christ's return. We are already God's children, but we have not yet received all that comes with it.

8:24-25 *For in hope we were saved; but hope that is seen is not hope; for what anyone sees, why does he also hope for **it**? But if we hope for what we do not see, through perseverance we eagerly await **it**.*

"In hope we were saved." Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It is a confident expectation based on God's promise, so we wait for it "through perseverance," not giving up when things get hard.

8:26 *And likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses; for what we should pray as is necessary, we do not know, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with inexpressible groanings.*

"Likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses." Have you ever been so burdened that you didn't know what to pray? Paul admits that "what we should pray as is necessary, we do not know."

When we don't have the words, the Holy Spirit "makes intercession for us with inexpressible groanings."

8:27 *And the One who searches the hearts knows what the mindset of the Spirit **is**, because He intercedes for **the** saints according to God.*

God the Father, "the One who searches the hearts," knows exactly what the Spirit is praying. And the Spirit always intercedes "according to God," that is, according to His will. So even when our prayers are weak or confused, the prayers that reach the Father on our behalf are perfect.

8:28 *And we know that to those who love God all things work together for good, to those who are called according to **His** purpose.*

"And we know that to those who love God all things work together for good, to those who are called according to His purpose."

This is one of the most loved verses in the Bible, and also one of the most misunderstood. It does not say that all things are good. Cancer is not good. Betrayal is not good. It says that "all things work together for good" for those who love God, because God is at work in every one of them. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, but years later Joseph could tell them, "you planned evil against me; God planned it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

We also have to read the verse in context. The "good" is defined in the next verse: being "conformed to the image of His Son." God's good goal for us is not always our comfort. It is that we become more like Jesus.

8:29-30 *For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined **to be** conformed to the image of His Son, for Him to be **the** firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He predestined, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

These two verses are often called "the golden chain" of salvation. Paul lists five links: God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Not one link breaks. Notice that "glorified" is in the past tense, even though our glorification is still in the future. It is so certain in God's mind that Paul speaks of it as already done.

To "predestine" means to decide the destination ahead of time; here the destination is "to be conformed to the image of His Son." To be "glorified" means to receive our final, resurrected, sinless state when Jesus returns.

These verses raise a question believers have discussed for centuries. What does it mean that God "foreknew" and "predestined"? Bible-believing Christians hold several views; the two most common among evangelicals are these.

The Reformed (Calvinist) view: "Foreknew" means more than God knowing facts ahead of time. In the Bible, "know" often means a personal, loving relationship. In Amos 3:2 God tells Israel, "Only you have I known from all the clans of the ground," and some translations render "known" there as "chosen." So God "foreknew" means He set His love on certain people before the world began. He chose them, not because of anything in them, but by His grace alone. Those He chose He then predestined, called, justified, and glorified.

The Arminian view: "Foreknew" means God knew ahead of time who would freely believe in Christ. He predestined those believers to become like His Son. God's choice is based on His

foreknowledge of their faith. God gives grace to all people, enabling them to respond, and each person is truly free to receive or reject Christ.

Both views are held by faithful Christians who love the Bible, and both agree on far more than they disagree on. I list those shared truths in the section "Election and Free Will" at the front of this book, and we will come back to these questions in chapter 9.

Whatever view you hold, don't miss the point Paul is making. He gave us this chain for comfort, not for argument. If you belong to Christ, God has been at work in your life from before time began, and He will finish what He started (Philippians 1:6).

8:31 *What then will we say to these things? If God **is** for us, who **is** against us?*

"What then will we say to these things?" Paul steps back and looks at everything he has written. And he asks a question that every believer should hold on to: "If God is for us, who is against us?" Plenty of things are against us, but none of them can win against a God who is for us.

8:32 *He who indeed did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*

This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. God already gave the greatest gift possible, His own Son. If He did not hold back Jesus, will He hold back anything else we truly need? Of course not.

8:33 *Who will bring a charge against **the** elect of God? God **is** the One who justifies;*

We are back in the courtroom. "Who will bring a charge against the elect of God?" Satan is called "the accuser of our brothers" (Revelation 12:10), and he does bring charges. But the Judge Himself has already declared us righteous. "God is the One who justifies."

Old Testament links: Isaiah 50:8 (alluded to)

8:34 *who **is** the one who condemns? Christ **is** the One who died, and rather also was raised, who is also at **the** right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.*

"Who is the one who condemns?" The only One with the right to condemn us is Jesus Himself, the Judge of all. But look at what He has done. He died for us. He was raised. He sits at the right hand of God, the place of authority. And right now He is "always living to intercede" for those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). The One who could condemn us is the One praying for us.

8:35 *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?*

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul lists the hardest things a believer could face: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword. Paul faced most of these himself (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). None of them can cut a believer off from Christ's love.

8:36 *Just as it has been written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all the day; we were regarded as sheep of slaughter."*

Paul quotes Psalm 44:22. God's people have always suffered. Suffering is not a sign that God has stopped loving us.

Old Testament links: Psalm 44:22 (quoted)

8:37 *But in all these **things** we more than conquer through the One who loved us.*

"But in all these things we more than conquer." Paul says "in" all these things, not "away from" them. God doesn't always remove the trouble, but He makes us more than conquerors right in the middle of it. The victory is His, and He shares it with us.

8:38-39 *For I have been persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God which **is** in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul ends the chapter with a shout of confidence: "I have been persuaded." Then he names everything he can think of, in life and death, in time and space, in the spiritual world, and just in case he missed something, "nor any other created thing." Nothing in all creation "will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Jesus said the same thing about His sheep: "no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

Here too, sincere Christians have discussed how this fits with the warnings in Scripture, such as Romans 11:20-22 and Hebrews 6:4-6. Those who hold to eternal security believe a true believer can never lose salvation, because God keeps those He saves; when someone falls away completely, it shows they never truly belonged to Christ. Those who hold to conditional security believe that nothing outside of us can separate us from God's love, but that a believer can, by persistent unbelief, turn away from Christ. Both sides agree that God is faithful, that our security rests on Him and not on our own strength, and that the warnings are meant to be taken seriously. We will look at this again in chapter 11.

If you are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation for you, and nothing can separate you from His love. That is a firm place to stand.

Chapter 8 Summary

Romans 8 answers the cry of chapter 7. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because God condemned sin in the flesh of His own Son. The Holy Spirit lives in every believer, giving life, leading us to put sin to death, and assuring us that we are God's adopted children and heirs. Our present sufferings cannot compare to the coming glory, when creation will be set free and our bodies redeemed. God works all things for good for those who love Him, and His plan of salvation will not fail. Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. Why is there "no condemnation" for those who are in Christ Jesus? (8:1-3)

2. What is the difference between setting your mind on the flesh and setting your mind on the Spirit? (8:5-8)

3. What does it mean to put to death the deeds of the body "by the Spirit"? (8:13)

4. What does it mean to you that you can call God "Abba, Father!"? (8:15-16)

5. How does Paul describe creation's future, and how does it connect to Revelation 21-22? (8:19-23)

6. How does the Holy Spirit help us when we don't know how to pray? (8:26-27)

7. What does Romans 8:28 promise, and what does it not promise? (8:28-29)

8. What do the Reformed and Arminian views of election have in common? (8:29-30)

9. Which item on Paul's list in verses 35-39 do you most need to hear cannot separate you from God's love? (8:35-39)

Chapter 9: God's Sovereign Choice

Scripture: Has God's Word Failed?

9:1-5 I speak ***the*** truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing witness with me in ***the*** Holy Spirit, that I have great grief and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I myself was wishing to be accursed from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to ***the*** flesh, who are Israelites, whose ***is*** the adoption as sons, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service, and the promises; whose ***are*** the fathers, and from whom ***is*** the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed to the ages. Amen.

9:6-13 But ***it is*** not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who ***are*** of Israel, these ***are*** Israel; nor because they are seed of Abraham ***are they*** all children, but, "In Isaac seed will be called for you." That is, the children of the flesh, these ***are*** not children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as seed. For this ***is*** the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and there will be a son to Sarah." And not only ***this***, but also Rebekah, having conceived by one, Isaac our father; for ***the children*** not yet having been born, nor having done anything good or evil, so that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of the ***One*** calling, it was said to her, "The greater will serve the lesser." Just as it has been written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

9:14-24 What then will we say? ***Is there*** unrighteousness with God? May it not be! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I have compassion." So then ***it is*** not of the one who wants nor of the one who runs, but of God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very ***purpose*** I raised you up, so that I might show My power in you, and so that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then He has mercy on whom He wants, and He hardens whom He wants. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" Rather, O man, who are you, the one answering back to God? Will the thing formed say to the One who formed ***it***, "Why did You make me like this?" Or does the potter not have authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? And if God, wanting to show the wrath and to make known His power, endured with much patience vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, and so that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, whom He also called, ***even*** us, not only out of ***the*** Jews but also out of ***the*** Gentiles?

9:25-29 As He also says in Hosea, "I will call that which ***was*** not My people 'My people,' and her who ***was*** not loved 'loved.' And it will be ***that*** in the place where it was said to them, 'You ***are*** not My people,' there they will be called sons of ***the*** living God." And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved; for ***He is*** completing a word and cutting ***it*** short in righteousness, because the Lord will perform a word cut short upon the earth." And just as Isaiah has foretold: "Unless ***the*** Lord of armies had left us a seed, we would have become as Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah."

9:30-33 What then will we say? That Gentiles, who were not pursuing righteousness, laid hold of righteousness, but a righteousness which ***is*** by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not attain to ***the*** law of righteousness. Why? Because ***they pursued it*** not by faith, but as by works of law; for they stumbled over the stone of stumbling, just as it has been written, "Look, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Chapter 9 Preview

Chapter 8 ended on the highest note in the whole letter: nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But a careful reader in Rome might have stopped right there and asked a hard question. God made wonderful promises to Israel too. Yet most of the Jewish people of Paul's day had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. If God's promises to Israel seem to have fallen through, how can we be sure His promises to us will hold?

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 answer that question. They belong together, and we should read them as one argument. Chapter 9 looks at God's side: He has always been free to choose and to show mercy, and His word has not failed. Chapter 10 looks at man's side: Israel is responsible for refusing the good news, and anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved. Chapter 11 looks at the future: God is not finished with Israel.

This chapter contains some of the most debated verses in the Bible. Godly, Bible-loving Christians have read them differently for centuries. I will lay out the main views as fairly as I can, the same way I laid out the different views of the millennium (the thousand-year reign of Christ, Revelation 20) in my study of Revelation. Before we start, I want you to see that Paul does not write this chapter like a cold professor. He writes it with tears.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-2 *I speak **the** truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing witness with me in **the** Holy Spirit, that I have great grief and unceasing anguish in my heart.*

Paul uses three witnesses to make sure his readers believe him: he speaks "in Christ," he is not lying, and his own conscience, guided by the Holy Spirit, agrees. Why so much effort? Because some people accused Paul of turning his back on his own people. He wants them to know the truth. When he thinks about Israel, he carries "great grief and unceasing anguish."

That is a good model for us. When we talk about people who reject the gospel, we should never sound proud or careless. We should sound like Paul, heartbroken.

9:3 *For I myself was wishing to be accursed from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to **the** flesh,*

This is an amazing statement. Paul says he could wish to be "accursed from Christ" if it would save his fellow Jews. The word for accursed is *anathema*, meaning devoted to destruction. Paul knew this could not happen; he had just said nothing can separate us from Christ's love. But it

shows the depth of his love. Moses prayed something very similar after the golden calf, asking God to blot him out of His book rather than destroy the people (Exodus 32:32). Both men reflect the heart of Jesus, who actually did become a curse for us (Galatians 3:13).

Do you love lost people this much? I have to be honest and say I fall short here. But I want to grow in it.

9:4-5 *who are Israelites, whose **is** the adoption as sons, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service, and the promises; whose **are** the fathers, and from whom **is** the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed to the ages. Amen.*

Paul lists the great privileges God gave Israel. "The adoption as sons" means God called Israel His son (Exodus 4:22). "The glory" is God's visible presence that filled the tabernacle and the temple. They received "the covenants," the binding promises God made with Abraham, Moses, and David. They received the Law, the system of worship, and the promises of a coming Messiah. "The fathers" are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The greatest privilege of all comes last: "from whom is the Christ according to the flesh." Jesus was born a Jew. Then Paul says something about Jesus that we should not miss. He is the One "who is over all, God blessed to the ages." The most natural way to read this sentence is that Paul is calling Jesus God. Some translations punctuate it differently, but the SLB follows the plain flow of the Greek. Jesus is fully man, born of Israel, and fully God, over all.

Old Testament links: Exodus 4:22 (alluded to)

9:6 *But **it is** not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who **are** of Israel, these **are** Israel;*

Here is the main point of the chapter: "it is not as though the word of God has failed." You might ask, "But how can that be, when so many Israelites rejected their Messiah?" Paul answers: "not all who are of Israel, these are Israel." Being born into the nation of Israel never automatically made someone part of the true, believing Israel. Within the nation there has always been a faithful remnant, people who trusted God. God's promise was never to save every person with Jewish blood regardless of faith. So His word has not failed.

This does not mean the church replaced Israel. Paul is not talking about Gentiles here. He is drawing a line inside Israel itself, between Jewish people who believe and Jewish people who do not.

9:7-9 *nor because they are seed of Abraham **are they** all children, but, "In Isaac seed will be called for you." That is, the children of the flesh, these **are** not children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as seed. For this **is** the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and there will be a son to Sarah."*

Paul proves his point from Israel's own history. Abraham had more than one son. Ishmael was born first, to Hagar, but God said the promised line would come through Isaac (Genesis 21:12). Isaac was the child of a promise, born to Sarah when she was far too old to have children (Genesis

18:10). "The children of the promise are counted as seed." From the very beginning, God's family was built on His promise, not just on physical birth.

God repeated the promise of Isaac's birth in Genesis 18:14: "At the appointed time I will return to you, when the time revives, and Sarah will have a son."

Old Testament links: Genesis 21:12 (quoted); Genesis 18:10 (quoted); Genesis 18:14 (quoted)

9:10-13 *And not only **this**, but also Rebekah, having conceived by one, Isaac our father; for **the children** not yet having been born, nor having done anything good or evil, so that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of the **One** calling, it was said to her, "The greater will serve the lesser." Just as it has been written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

Someone might object, "Ishmael's mother was a servant girl. Of course Isaac was chosen." So Paul gives a stronger example. Rebekah had twins, Jacob and Esau, same mother, same father, same pregnancy. Before they were born, before either had done "anything good or evil," God said, "The greater will serve the lesser" (9:12, quoting Genesis 25:23). God chose Jacob, the younger, to carry the promise. Paul tells us why God did it this way: "so that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of the One calling."

Then Paul quotes Malachi 1:2-3: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." That sounds harsh to our ears. In Hebrew speech, "love" and "hate" placed side by side often mean "choose" and "not choose," or "prefer" and "put second." Jesus spoke the same way when He said that anyone who comes to Him must "hate" his own family (Luke 14:26). He did not mean feel hostility toward them. He meant love Him far more. Malachi was also speaking of the nations that came from these two men, Israel and Edom.

This is where the debate begins. Christians read verses 10-13 in two main ways, and I want to lay both out plainly.

The Reformed (Calvinist) view: God chose certain individuals for salvation before they were born, based only on His own good pleasure and not on anything He saw in them, including their future faith. Jacob and Esau are examples of how God deals with individuals. Election is unconditional. This view points to the phrase "not of works but of the One calling."

The Arminian view: Paul is talking mainly about God's choice of people for a role in His plan, which line would carry the promise, and about nations (Israel and Edom), not about who goes to heaven. Where election to salvation is in view, God chose those He foreknew would believe (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:1-2). This view points out that the prophecy that the greater would serve the lesser was about two nations (Genesis 25:23), and that Esau himself was blessed in his life.

Both views hold that salvation is all of grace. Both agree God is not unfair. We'll keep reading, because Paul answers the obvious objection next.

Old Testament links: Malachi 1:2-3 (quoted); Genesis 25:23 (quoted); Genesis 25:21 (alluded to)

9:14 *What then will we say? **Is there** unrighteousness with God? May it not be!*

"Is there unrighteousness with God? May it not be!" Paul knows exactly what his readers are thinking: if God chooses, isn't He being unfair? His answer is a strong no. Whatever we conclude about this chapter, we must start here. God is never unjust.

9:15-16 *For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I have compassion." So then **it is** not of the one who wants nor of the one who runs, but of God who has mercy.*

Paul quotes what God told Moses: "I will have mercy on whomever I have mercy" (9:15, quoting Exodus 33:19). The key word is mercy. Mercy, by definition, is not something anyone deserves. If God owed it to us, it would be payment, not mercy. Justice would be God giving every one of us what our sin deserves. Mercy is God freely holding back what we deserve and giving what we don't.

"So then it is not of the one who wants nor of the one who runs, but of God who has mercy." Salvation does not start with our wanting or our running. It starts with God. Every believer, whatever view they hold on election, should be able to say, "I am saved because God was merciful to me."

Old Testament links: Exodus 33:19 (quoted)

9:17-18 *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very **purpose** I raised you up, so that I might show My power in you, and so that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then He has mercy on whom He wants, and He hardens whom He wants.*

Pharaoh is Paul's next example. God told him, "For this very purpose I raised you up" (9:17, quoting Exodus 9:16). God put Pharaoh on the throne of Egypt at that moment in history so that His power and His name would be known through the whole earth. And it worked. Forty years later, people in Canaan were still talking about what God did to Egypt (Joshua 2:9-10), and centuries later the Philistines still remembered it (1 Samuel 4:8).

"He hardens whom He wants." In Exodus, God announces ahead of time that He will harden Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:3), and we also read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15, 32). Both are true. Pharaoh was a proud, cruel man who chose to resist God again and again. Calvinists stress that God hardened Pharaoh as an act of His sovereign will. Arminians stress that God's hardening confirmed the path Pharaoh had already chosen and gave him over to it. Both agree Pharaoh was guilty and God was right.

Old Testament links: Exodus 9:16 (quoted); Exodus 4:21 (alluded to)

9:19 *You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"*

Paul anticipates the next protest: "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" In other words, if God is in control, how can He blame anyone? This is a question people still ask today. It is a fair question, and Paul takes it seriously.

9:20-21 *Rather, O man, who are you, the one answering back to God? Will the thing formed say to the One who formed **it**, "Why did You make me like this?" Or does the potter not have authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor?*

Paul's first answer is not a long explanation. It is a reminder of who we are talking to. "O man, who are you, the one answering back to God?" The clay does not argue with the potter. This picture comes straight from the prophets (Isaiah 29:16; 45:9; Jeremiah 18:1-6). Arminians point to Jeremiah 18, where the potter responds to what the nation does and turns from judgment when a nation repents. Calvinists answer that Paul's wording echoes Isaiah 29:16 and 45:9, where the stress is on the potter's right.

Paul is not telling us we can never ask God hard questions. The Psalms are full of honest questions. He is warning us against putting God on trial, as if we were the judge and He had to answer to us. There is a difference between a child asking his father "why?" and a child telling his father he has no right to be in charge.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 29:16 (alluded to); Isaiah 45:9 (alluded to); Jeremiah 18:4 (alluded to); Jeremiah 18:6 (alluded to)

9:22-24 *And if God, wanting to show the wrath and to make known His power, endured with much patience vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, and so that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, whom He also called, **even** us, not only out of **the** Jews but also out of **the** Gentiles?*

Paul says God "endured with much patience vessels of wrath fitted for destruction." Look at God's patience. He put up with Pharaoh, with rebellious Israel, and with a sinful world, for a long time. That patience was meant to lead people to repentance (Romans 2:4). Some readers notice that Paul says the vessels of mercy were prepared "beforehand" by God, but he does not say who fitted the vessels of wrath for destruction. Calvinists see God's active choice in both. Arminians see a careful difference here, suggesting those vessels prepared themselves for destruction by their own sin.

The goal of all this is mercy: "so that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy." And who are these vessels of mercy? "Whom He also called, even us, not only out of the Jews but also out of the Gentiles." This is a turning point. God's people now include believing Jews and believing Gentiles together.

I don't claim to have this all figured out. Here is what I can say with confidence, and what believers on both sides agree on. God is completely sovereign. He rules over all things and owes nobody anything. People are truly responsible for their choices, and chapter 10 will make that very clear. Salvation is all grace from beginning to end; no one earns it. And God's invitation is real: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). If you are worried about whether you are chosen, the answer is simple. Call on Him. Anyone who comes to Jesus will never be turned away (John 6:37).

Old Testament links: Exodus 9:16 (alluded to)

9:25-26 *As He also says in Hosea, "I will call that which **was** not My people 'My people,' and her who **was** not loved 'loved.' And it will be **that** in the place where it was said to them, 'You **are** not My people,' there they will be called sons of **the** living God."*

Paul now shows that the Old Testament predicted God would call people who were "not My people." He quotes Hosea 2:23 and 1:10. In Hosea, those words first described the northern tribes of Israel, who had turned away from God and been rejected, yet God promised to bring them back. Paul applies the same principle to the Gentiles. The God who could restore rebellious Israel can also call people from the nations who were never His people and make them "sons of the living God."

Some teachers read these verses to mean that the church has become the Israel Hosea spoke about, so his promise is now fulfilled in the church. I read it plainly. Hosea's promise still belongs to Israel, and God will keep it when He gathers Judah and Israel together again in the future (Hosea 1:11). Paul borrows Hosea's words to show how God works, but he does not move the promise from Israel to the church.

Old Testament links: Hosea 2:23 (quoted); Hosea 1:10 (quoted)

9:27-28 *And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved; for **He is** completing a word and cutting **it** short in righteousness, because the Lord will perform a word cut short upon the earth."*

Then Paul turns to Isaiah, who spoke about Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved" (9:27, quoting Isaiah 10:22-23). A remnant is a small part left over from a larger whole. Even in Isaiah's day, most of the nation was unfaithful, but God always kept a believing remnant. What was happening in Paul's day was not something new. It was the same pattern Israel's prophets had described.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 10:22-23 (quoted); Hosea 1:10 (alluded to)

9:29 *And just as Isaiah has foretold: "Unless **the** Lord of armies had left us a seed, we would have become as Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah."*

"Unless the Lord of armies had left us a seed, we would have become as Sodom" (9:29, quoting Isaiah 1:9). Paul uses the Hebrew word *Sabaoth* here, which means armies; the Lord of armies is the Lord who commands the armies of heaven. Sodom and Gomorrah were wiped out completely (Genesis 19). The only reason Israel was not wiped out the same way was God's mercy in keeping a remnant. That remnant is a sign of His grace, not of anyone's merit.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 1:9 (quoted)

9:30 *What then will we say? That Gentiles, who were not pursuing righteousness, laid hold of righteousness, but a righteousness which **is** by faith;*

"What then will we say?" Paul pulls things together, and here the emphasis shifts from God's choice to human response. Gentiles, who were not even trying to be righteous, found

righteousness, "a righteousness which is by faith." They heard the good news, believed, and God declared them right with Him.

9:31-32 *but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not attain to **the** law of righteousness. Why? Because **they pursued it** not by faith, but as by works of law; for they stumbled over the stone of stumbling,*

Israel, on the other hand, chased after "a law of righteousness" and never reached it. Why? "Because they pursued it not by faith, but as by works of law." Here Paul puts the emphasis on how Israel pursued God. They tried to earn a right standing through their own law-keeping. Many of them were sincere and devoted, but they were running down the wrong road.

That is a warning for us too. It is possible to be very religious, attend every service, follow every rule, and still miss God because we are trusting in what we do instead of in what Christ has done.

9:33 *just as it has been written, "Look, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame."*

They "stumbled over the stone of stumbling." Paul combines Isaiah 28:16 and Isaiah 8:14. The stone is Jesus Christ. God laid Him in Zion, in Jerusalem, as the foundation for His people. For those who trust Him, He is a sure foundation: "Everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame." For those who refuse Him, He becomes a stone they trip over. Peter uses the same verses to describe Jesus (1 Peter 2:6-8).

So the chapter that began with God's sovereign choice ends with a call to believe. Both truths sit side by side in Paul's mind, and they should sit side by side in ours.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 28:16 (quoted); Isaiah 8:14 (quoted)

Chapter 9 Summary

Paul grieves deeply over Israel's unbelief, but he insists that God's word has not failed. God's promises were never made to every physical descendant of Abraham regardless of faith; they were made to the children of promise, as the stories of Isaac and Jacob show. God is free to show mercy as He chooses, and He is never unjust. Christians understand His choosing in different ways, but all agree that God is sovereign, that salvation is pure grace, and that people are responsible. God has called a people from both Jews and Gentiles, just as the prophets said He would, and He has always kept a remnant in Israel. Israel stumbled because they pursued righteousness by works rather than by faith, and they tripped over Jesus, the stone God laid in Zion. Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. Have you ever felt real grief for someone who does not know Jesus? What did you do with that feeling? (9:1-3)

2. What privileges does Paul say belong to Israel? (9:4-5)

3. How does Paul show that God's word has not failed, even though many Israelites rejected Christ? (9:6-8)

4. What do the examples of Isaac and Jacob teach about how God builds His family? (9:7-13)

5. How do the Reformed and Arminian views read God's choice of Jacob over Esau? What do both views agree on? (9:10-13)

6. What is the difference between justice and mercy? Why does that difference matter in this chapter? (9:14-16)

7. What is the difference between asking God an honest question and "answering back to God"? (9:20-21)

8. Why did Israel fail to reach righteousness, while many Gentiles found it? (9:30-32)

9. Is there any area of your life where you are trusting in your own effort instead of in Christ, the stone God laid in Zion? (9:33)

Chapter 10: Salvation for All Who Call

Scripture: The Word Is Near You

10:1-4 Brothers, the desire of my heart and the supplication to God on behalf of Israel is for salvation. For I bear witness about them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For being unaware of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God. For Christ ***is the*** end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

10:5-13 For Moses writes ***of*** the righteousness which ***is*** of the law, that "The man who has done these things will live in them." But the righteousness of faith speaks thus: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" that is, to bring Christ down; or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" that is, to bring Christ up out of ***the*** dead. But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"; that is, the word of faith which we proclaim: that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of ***the*** dead, you will be saved; for with ***the*** heart it is believed for righteousness, and with ***the*** mouth it is confessed for salvation. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord of all ***is*** rich toward all who call on Him. For "everyone who calls on the name of ***the*** Lord will be saved."

10:14-17 How then will they call on ***Him*** in whom they did not believe? And how will they believe ***in Him*** of whom they did not hear? And how will they hear without one proclaiming? And how will they proclaim unless they are sent? Just as it has been written, "How beautiful ***are*** the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, of those who preach the gospel of good things!" But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So faith ***is*** from report, and report through ***the*** word of God.

10:18-21 But I say, did they not hear? Rather, "Their sound has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the inhabited world." But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says, "I will provoke you to jealousy by ***what is*** not a nation; by a nation without understanding I will anger you." And Isaiah is very bold and says, "I was found by those not seeking Me; I became manifest to those not inquiring after Me." But to Israel He says, "All the day I stretched out My hands to a people disobeying and contradicting."

Chapter 10 Preview

In chapter 9, Paul showed us God's side of salvation: God is sovereign, He shows mercy freely, and His word to Israel has not failed. Chapter 10 shows us the human side. If Israel is outside of God's blessing, it is not because God slammed the door. It is because they refused to walk through the door He held open.

This chapter is one of the clearest explanations of how a person is saved anywhere in the Bible. It tells us that salvation is not far away or hard to reach. It is as close as your own mouth and heart.

It also gives every believer a job: the good news has to be carried to people, because no one can believe a message they have never heard.

So if chapter 9 left you with heavy questions, chapter 10 is good news. Whatever else is true, this is true: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Chapter 10 Study

10:1 *Brothers, the desire of my heart and the supplication to God on behalf of Israel is for salvation.*

Paul has just written some of the hardest words in the Bible about Israel's unbelief. Now he opens his heart again. His deepest desire and his constant prayer is that his people would be saved.

Paul's belief in God's sovereignty did not stop him from praying. It drove him to pray. Whatever you believe about election, it should never make you stop praying for lost people or stop sharing the gospel with them. Paul did both, and he did them with his whole heart.

10:2 *For I bear witness about them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*

Paul gives his fellow Jews credit. They have "a zeal for God." They were passionate and devoted. Paul knew this from personal experience; before he met Jesus, he was so zealous that he persecuted the church (Philippians 3:6; Acts 22:3-4). But zeal is not enough. Their zeal was "not according to knowledge." They were sincere, but sincerely wrong.

That is a sobering thought. You can be very passionate about God and still miss Him. Sincerity does not save. Truth matters.

10:3 *For being unaware of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God.*

What were they unaware of? "The righteousness of God." They did not understand that God offers His own righteousness as a gift. Instead, they tried "to establish their own," building a right standing with God by their own law-keeping. And in doing that, "they did not submit to the righteousness of God."

Receiving God's righteousness requires humility. It means admitting we have nothing to offer and that our best efforts fall short (Romans 3:23). Pride would rather earn it. Faith is willing to receive it.

10:4 *For Christ **is the** end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

"For Christ is the end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes." The word "end" can mean two things, and both fit here. It can mean the goal, the place the Law was always pointing. The sacrifices, the priesthood, and the whole system of the Law pointed forward to Jesus. It can also mean the finish, the stopping point. For anyone who believes, the Law is finished as a way of trying to become right with God. Christ has done what the Law could never do.

Look at who this is for: "everyone who believes." Not everyone who is Jewish, not everyone who is good, but everyone who believes. That phrase will keep coming up in this chapter.

10:5 *For Moses writes **of** the righteousness which **is** of the law, that "The man who has done these things will live in them."*

Paul now compares two ways of seeking righteousness. The first is the way of the Law. Moses wrote that the person who keeps the Law "will live in them" (10:5, quoting Leviticus 18:5). On paper, that is true. If someone could keep God's Law perfectly, every day, in every thought and action, they would live. The problem is that no one ever has, except Jesus. James tells us that whoever stumbles in one point is guilty of all (James 2:10). The way of the Law demands perfection, and none of us can deliver it. Paul could call himself "blameless" by the Law's outward standard (Philippians 3:6), but no one has kept it from the heart, which is what God looks at.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 18:5 (quoted)

10:6-7 *But the righteousness of faith speaks thus: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" that is, to bring Christ down; or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" that is, to bring Christ up out of **the** dead.*

The second way is "the righteousness of faith," and Paul lets it speak. He draws on Moses' words in Deuteronomy 30:11-14, where Moses told Israel that God's word was not too hard for them or too far away, not up in heaven or across the sea.

Paul applies those words to Christ. Faith does not say, "Who will ascend into heaven?" that is, to bring Christ down. Christ has already come down. He became a man and lived among us. Faith does not say, "Who will descend into the abyss?" that is, to bring Christ up out of the dead. Christ has already risen. We don't have to make some great journey or perform some great work to reach God. God has already done the reaching. The work is finished.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 30:12-13 (quoted)

10:8 *But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"; that is, the word of faith which we proclaim:*

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." Salvation is not far away. It is right here. Paul calls it "the word of faith which we proclaim," the gospel message about Jesus. Anyone, anywhere, at any time, can respond to it.

These words come from Deuteronomy 30:14, where Moses told Israel, "the word is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart." Paul shows what that nearness means for us: we believe in our heart and confess with our mouth (10:9).

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 30:14 (quoted)

10:9 *that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of **the** dead, you will be saved;*

This is one of the most important verses in the Bible for understanding how to be saved.

*"If you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of **the** dead, you will be saved."*

To "confess" means to say the same thing as, to agree openly. Confessing "Lord Jesus" is much more than saying words. In the Roman world, Caesar was honored as "lord," and within a few generations Christians were pressured to say "Caesar is Lord." To say "Jesus is Lord" meant that Jesus, not Caesar and not yourself, held the highest place in your life. For a Jew, the word "Lord" was the word used in the Greek Old Testament for God Himself. So this confession declares that Jesus is God and that He is my Master.

To "believe in your heart that God raised Him out of the dead" means more than agreeing with a historical fact. It means trusting in the risen Jesus with your whole self. The resurrection is the proof that God accepted Christ's sacrifice for our sins (Romans 4:25). Without it, our faith would be useless (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Paul is not giving a magic formula, as if saying the right words in the right order saves you. He is describing what real faith looks like. It is believed on the inside and spoken on the outside. And when someone truly turns to Jesus this way, the promise is certain: "you will be saved."

10:10 *for with **the** heart it is believed for righteousness, and with **the** mouth it is confessed for salvation.*

Paul explains the heart and mouth in reverse order. With the heart a person believes, and God declares that person righteous. This is justification, God's legal verdict that we are right with Him because Christ's righteousness has been credited to us. With the mouth a person confesses, and that confession is the outward expression of salvation. The two go together. Real faith in the heart will show itself in open confession. A faith that is never willing to name Jesus in front of others should make us stop and examine ourselves (Matthew 10:32-33).

10:11 *For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame."*

Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16 again, the same verse he used at the end of chapter 9, and he puts the weight on one word: "Everyone." "Everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame." Your past does not disqualify you. Your background does not disqualify you. Whoever believes will not be put to shame.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 28:16 (quoted)

10:12 *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord of all **is** rich toward all who call on Him.*

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek." Earlier, Paul said there is no distinction because all have sinned (Romans 3:22-23). Now he says there is no distinction because the same Lord of all is "rich toward all who call on Him." We are all equally lost, and we are all equally

welcome. God does not have one way of salvation for Jews and another for Gentiles. He is generous to everyone who calls.

10:13 *For "everyone who calls on the name of **the** Lord will be saved."*

*"Everyone who calls on the name of **the** Lord will be saved."*

Paul quotes Joel 2:32. Peter quoted the same verse on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:21). In Joel, "the LORD" refers to the God of Israel. Paul applies it directly to Jesus. That is another strong statement that Jesus is God.

I love the word "everyone." It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done. If you call on the name of the Lord Jesus, trusting Him to save you, He will save you. That is a promise, and God does not break His promises. If you have never called on Him, you can do it today, right where you are.

In Joel these words belong to the day of the Lord, when God rescues a remnant of Israel on Mount Zion at the end of the Tribulation. Some teachers believe Pentecost fulfilled all of Joel's prophecy. I believe Pentecost was a first fulfillment, and the full fulfillment, including this rescue of Israel, is still future, so God's promise to Israel in Joel still stands. Paul uses Joel's words here because the way to be saved has never changed.

Old Testament links: Joel 2:32 (quoted)

10:14-15 *How then will they call on **Him** in whom they did not believe? And how will they believe **in Him** of whom they did not hear? And how will they hear without one proclaiming? And how will they proclaim unless they are sent? Just as it has been written, "How beautiful **are** the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, of those who preach the gospel of good things!"*

Now Paul asks a chain of questions, and each one leads back to the one before it. How will people call on someone they have not believed in? How will they believe in someone they have never heard of? How will they hear without someone telling them? And how will someone tell them unless they are sent?

This is the reason missions and evangelism exist. God's normal way of bringing people to faith is through people telling people. The "one proclaiming" here does not only mean a pastor in a pulpit. It means anyone who announces the message. Every believer is sent to someone.

Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, of those who preach the gospel of good things!" In Isaiah, the picture is of a messenger running across the mountains to tell Jerusalem that God has won and the exile is over. Dusty, tired feet are not usually called beautiful. But to those waiting for good news, those feet were the most beautiful sight in the world. When you share Jesus with someone, God sees your feet as beautiful too.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 52:7 (quoted)

10:16 *But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"*

"But not all obeyed the gospel." Hearing the message is not the same as accepting it. Isaiah saw this long ago: "Lord, who has believed our report?" (10:16, quoting Isaiah 53:1). That question opens the great chapter about the Suffering Servant, which describes Jesus' death for our sins hundreds of years before it happened. Even then, Isaiah knew many would not believe.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 53:1 (quoted)

10:17 *So faith **is** from report, and report through **the** word of God.*

"So faith is from report, and report through the word of God." Faith does not come out of thin air. It comes from hearing the message God has spoken, the good news about Christ. That is why reading Scripture, hearing it preached, and sharing it with others matters so much. If you want your faith to grow, spend time in God's Word. If you want someone else to come to faith, they need to hear God's Word.

10:18 *But I say, did they not hear? Rather, "Their sound has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the inhabited world."*

Someone might say, "Maybe Israel never had a chance to hear." Paul answers that they did: "Their sound has gone out into all the earth." He quotes Psalm 19:4, which describes how creation itself speaks of God to the whole world. Paul uses those words to show that the gospel message had spread widely by his time. Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire had heard about Jesus, often in their own synagogues (the book of Acts shows Paul going to the synagogue first in city after city). Israel's problem was not a lack of information.

Old Testament links: Psalm 19:4 (quoted)

10:19 *But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says, "I will provoke you to jealousy by **what is** not a nation; by a nation without understanding I will anger you."*

"Did Israel not know?" Did they fail to understand? Paul quotes Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21, where God said He would make Israel jealous by "what is not a nation," by "a nation without understanding." That describes the Gentiles, who did not have the Law, the prophets, or the covenants. God warned long ago that He would use outsiders to provoke Israel to jealousy. Paul will come back to this idea of jealousy in chapter 11, and there it becomes a word of hope.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 32:21 (quoted)

10:20 *And Isaiah is very bold and says, "I was found by those not seeking Me; I became manifest to those not inquiring after Me."*

Isaiah "is very bold and says" it even more plainly: "I was found by those not seeking Me" (10:20, quoting Isaiah 65:1). The Gentiles were not looking for the God of Israel. Many of them worshiped idols. Yet God revealed Himself to them. That is grace. God came looking for people who were not looking for Him. If you are a believer today, that is your story too.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 65:1 (quoted)

10:21 *But to Israel He says, "All the day I stretched out My hands to a people disobeying and contradicting."*

The chapter ends with a tender picture. God says, "All the day I stretched out My hands to a people disobeying and contradicting" (10:21, quoting Isaiah 65:2). Picture a father standing with his arms open wide, all day, waiting for his children to come home. That is how God has dealt with Israel. Their rejection was not because God was unwilling. It was because they were unwilling.

Jesus showed this same heart when He wept over Jerusalem and said He had often wanted to gather her children together like a hen gathers her chicks, but they were unwilling (Matthew 23:37). God's arms are still open, to Israel and to every person reading this.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 65:2 (quoted)

Chapter 10 Summary

Paul prays for Israel's salvation. They are zealous for God, but they tried to establish their own righteousness instead of receiving God's. Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Salvation is not far off; it is as near as our mouth and heart. Whoever confesses Jesus as Lord and believes God raised Him from the dead will be saved, whether Jew or Gentile, because the same Lord is Lord of all. People cannot call on a Lord they have not heard of, so God sends messengers with the good news, and faith comes from hearing the word of God. Israel heard, but many did not believe, while Gentiles who were not even looking found God. Through it all, God has held out His hands to Israel all day long.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. What does Paul pray for, and what does that teach us about how we should treat people who reject the gospel? (10:1)

2. How can someone have "a zeal for God" and still be wrong? Have you ever seen this? (10:2-3)

3. What does it mean that Christ is "the end of law for righteousness"? (10:4)

4. Why is salvation not far away or hard to reach? (10:6-8)

5. What does Paul say true faith looks like on the inside and on the outside? (10:9-10)

6. Why is the word "everyone" such good news? (10:11-13)

7. Who has God sent you to? Name one person you could share the good news with this week. (10:14-15)

8. Where does faith come from, and how can you help your own faith grow? (10:17)

9. What does the picture of God holding out His hands all day long tell you about His heart? (10:21)

Chapter 11: The Future of Israel

Scripture: All Israel Will Be Saved

11:1-10 I say then, did God reject His people? May it not be! For I also am an Israelite, of ***the*** seed of Abraham, of ***the*** tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "Lord, they have killed Your prophets, and they have torn down Your altars, and I alone was left, and they are seeking my life"? But what does the divine answer say to him? "I have left for Myself seven thousand men who did not bow ***the*** knee to Baal." So then also in the present time there has come to be a remnant according to ***the*** election of grace. And if by grace, ***it is*** no longer from works; otherwise grace no longer becomes grace. But if from works, it is no longer grace; otherwise the work is no longer work. What then? What Israel is seeking after, this it did not obtain, but the election obtained ***it***, and the rest were hardened, just as it has been written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes not to see and ears not to hear, until this day." And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap and an offense and a retribution to them; let their eyes be darkened so as not to see, and bend their back continually."

11:11-16 I say then, did they stumble so that they might fall? May it not be! But by their trespass salvation ***has come*** to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy. But if their trespass ***is the*** riches of ***the*** world, and their failure ***the*** riches of ***the*** Gentiles, how much more their fullness? For I am speaking to you, the Gentiles. Inasmuch indeed as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I glorify my ministry, if somehow I might provoke to jealousy my flesh and save some of them. For if their rejection ***is the*** reconciliation of ***the*** world, what ***will*** the acceptance ***be*** but life out of ***the*** dead? And if the firstfruit ***is*** holy, also the lump; and if the root ***is*** holy, also the branches.

11:17-24 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them and became a fellow partaker of the root and of the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. But if you boast, ***it is*** not you ***who*** support the root, but the root ***supports*** you. You will say then, "The branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Well ***said***. By unbelief they were broken off, but you stand by faith. Do not think high ***things***, but fear. For if God did not spare the branches according to nature, ***take heed*** lest perhaps He may not spare you either. Look then ***at the*** kindness and severity of God: toward those who fell, severity; but toward you, kindness, if you continue in the kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they ***do*** not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree ***that is*** wild according to nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who ***are*** according to nature, be grafted into ***their*** own olive tree?

11:25-32 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of this mystery, so that you may not be wise in yourselves, that a hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved, just as it has been written, "The One who delivers will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; and this ***is*** the covenant from Me to them, when I take away their sins." As regards the gospel, ***they are*** enemies on account of you; but as regards the election, ***they are*** beloved on account of the fathers. For the

gifts and the calling of God ***are*** irrevocable. For just as you also once were disobedient to God, but now were shown mercy by the disobedience of these, so these also now were disobedient, so that by your mercy they also may be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience, so that He may have mercy on all.

11:33-36 O depth of riches and of wisdom and of knowledge of God! How unsearchable ***are*** His judgments and untraceable His ways! For who has known ***the*** mind of ***the*** Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him, and it will be repaid to him? For from Him and through Him and to Him ***are*** all things. To Him ***be*** the glory to the ages. Amen.

Chapter 11 Preview

After chapters 9 and 10, a reader could easily walk away thinking God is finished with the Jewish people. Most of Israel rejected Jesus, and the gospel was spreading among the Gentiles. Paul now asks the question directly: has God rejected His people? His answer is a firm no.

Paul gives three reasons. First, God has not rejected Israel completely; there is a believing remnant right now, and Paul himself is part of it. Second, Israel's rejection is not final; their stumbling opened the door for the Gentiles, and one day Israel will be grafted back in. Third, God's promises cannot be canceled: "all Israel will be saved."

This chapter matters a great deal for how we understand the end times. As I explain in my study of Revelation, God still has a plan for the nation of Israel, and it is tied to the return of Jesus. Romans 11 is one of the clearest places in the New Testament where Paul spells out that plan.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *I say then, did God reject His people? May it not be! For I also am an Israelite, of **the** seed of Abraham, of **the** tribe of Benjamin.*

"Did God reject His people? May it not be!" Paul points to himself as his first piece of evidence. He is an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. If God had thrown away the Jewish people, Paul himself would be lost. But here he is, a Jew who believes in Jesus as Messiah and an apostle of Christ.

The church has not replaced Israel, and Paul will spend the whole chapter showing that God's promises to the Jewish people still stand.

11:2-4 *God did not reject His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "Lord, they have killed Your prophets, and they have torn down Your altars, and I alone was left, and they are seeking my life"? But what does the divine answer say to him? "I have left for Myself seven thousand men who did not bow **the** knee to Baal."*

"God did not reject His people whom He foreknew." God chose Israel knowing exactly what they would be like, stubbornness and all. He did not choose them by mistake, and He will not drop them now.

Paul then reminds his readers of Elijah (1 Kings 19). After his great victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah ran for his life from Queen Jezebel. He was discouraged and alone, and he told God, "I alone was left." He thought he was the last faithful person in Israel. But God answered that He had kept for Himself seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal.

Have you ever felt like Elijah? Like you are the only one at work, at school, or in your family who is trying to follow God? Elijah could not see the seven thousand, but God could. You are probably not as alone as you feel.

Old Testament links: 1 Kings 19:18 (quoted); 1 Kings 19:10 (quoted); 1 Kings 19:14 (quoted)

11:5-6 *So then also in the present time there has come to be a remnant according to **the** election of grace. And if by grace, **it is** no longer from works; otherwise grace no longer becomes grace. But if from works, it is no longer grace; otherwise the work is no longer work.*

"So then also in the present time there has come to be a remnant according to the election of grace." In Paul's day, thousands of Jewish people had believed in Jesus. The first church in Jerusalem was Jewish (Acts 2:41; 21:20). That remnant exists because of grace.

Paul makes a simple point about grace in verse 6: "if by grace, it is no longer from works; otherwise grace no longer becomes grace." Grace and earning cannot be mixed. The moment you add something we must do to earn it, it stops being a gift. Grace means undeserved favor. That is true for the remnant of Israel, and it is true for every one of us.

11:7-10 *What then? What Israel is seeking after, this it did not obtain, but the election obtained **it**, and the rest were hardened, just as it has been written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes not to see and ears not to hear, until this day." And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap and an offense and a retribution to them; let their eyes be darkened so as not to see, and bend their back continually."*

"What Israel is seeking after, this it did not obtain." The nation as a whole sought righteousness by works and did not find it. But "the election obtained it, and the rest were hardened." To be hardened means to become unresponsive, unable to see or feel the truth.

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10: God gave them "a spirit of stupor," eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear. Then he quotes David in Psalm 69:22-23, where the very table, the place of blessing and fellowship, becomes a trap. The good things God gave Israel, the Law, the temple, and their religious heritage, became the things they trusted in instead of trusting God.

This hardening is serious. Paul presents it as a judgment, and Israel is held responsible for their unbelief (10:21). And as we will see in the next verse, it is not the end of the story.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 29:4 (quoted); Isaiah 29:10 (quoted); Psalm 69:22-23 (quoted)

11:11 *I say then, did they stumble so that they might fall? May it not be! But by their trespass salvation **has come** to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy.*

"Did they stumble so that they might fall? May it not be!" There is a difference between stumbling and falling flat for good. Israel stumbled, but they are not down forever.

God has used even their stumbling for good. "By their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles." We see this in the book of Acts over and over. When the Jewish leaders rejected the message, Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:28). And God's purpose in that was "to provoke them to jealousy." God wants Israel to look at believing Gentiles enjoying the blessings of Israel's own Messiah and say, "That belongs to us. We want that."

Here is a question every Gentile believer should ask: does my life make Jewish people jealous for Jesus? Or have Christians too often made them want nothing to do with Him? Sadly, church history includes many shameful acts against Jewish people done in the name of Christ. That is the very opposite of what Paul describes here.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 32:21 (alluded to)

11:12 *But if their trespass **is the** riches of **the** world, and their failure **the** riches of **the** Gentiles, how much more their fullness?*

If Israel's trespass brought "riches of the world," then "how much more their fullness?" Paul looks ahead to a time when Israel's failure will be reversed. If God brought so much blessing to the world through Israel's stumbling, imagine what He will do when they turn back to Him.

11:13-14 *For I am speaking to you, the Gentiles. Inasmuch indeed as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I glorify my ministry, if somehow I might provoke to jealousy my flesh and save some of them.*

Paul speaks directly to the Gentile believers in Rome. He is "an apostle of Gentiles," the calling the Lord gave him at his conversion (Acts 9:15), and he takes that ministry seriously. But even his work among the Gentiles has a Jewish goal. He hopes that as Gentiles come to faith, some of his own countrymen will be moved to jealousy and be saved. Paul never stopped loving his people.

11:15 *For if their rejection **is the** reconciliation of **the** world, what **will** the acceptance **be** but life out of **the** dead?*

"For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will the acceptance be but life out of the dead?" Israel's rejection of Jesus opened the way for the gospel to reach the whole world. Their acceptance of Him will be something even greater.

What does "life out of the dead" mean? Some take it as a picture of a great spiritual revival in the world. Others take it to point to the resurrection of the dead that comes when Jesus returns in glory (Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:4). As I explain in my Revelation study, I believe the church will be caught up to meet the Lord before the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), so this would be the raising of Old Testament believers and Tribulation saints at His Second Coming. I lean toward the second view, because verses 25-27 connect Israel's salvation with the coming of the Deliverer. When Israel as a nation turns to her Messiah, it will be connected to the resurrection of the dead and the return of Christ.

11:16 *And if the firstfruit **is** holy, also the lump; and if the root **is** holy, also the branches.*

Paul uses two pictures. The first comes from the Law. When Israel made bread, they offered the first piece of dough to God, and that offering made the whole batch holy (Numbers 15:17-21). The second is a tree: if the root is holy, the branches are too. The "firstfruit" and the "root" most likely refer to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom God made His covenant. Because the root is holy, God still has a claim on the nation that came from it.

Old Testament links: Numbers 15:20-21 (alluded to)

11:17-18 *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them and became a fellow partaker of the root and of the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. But if you boast, **it is** not you **who** support the root, but the root **supports** you.*

Now Paul develops the picture of an olive tree. The olive tree was a well-known symbol of Israel (Jeremiah 11:16). Some of the natural branches, unbelieving Israelites, were broken off. Gentile believers, branches from a "wild olive," have been grafted in among the remaining branches. Now they are fellow partakers "of the root and of the richness of the olive tree," the blessings God promised to Abraham.

The Gentiles are grafted into Israel's tree. They do not get a new tree of their own. The church is not a replacement for Israel. Gentile believers are brought into the family of promise that God started with Abraham.

So Paul warns: "do not boast over the branches." Gentile believers have no reason to look down on the Jewish people. "It is not you who support the root, but the root supports you." Our salvation rests on promises God made to Israel. Our Bible came through Israel. Our Savior is a Jew.

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 11:16 (alluded to)

11:19-21 *You will say then, "The branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Well **said**. By unbelief they were broken off, but you stand by faith. Do not think high **things**, but fear. For if God did not spare the branches according to nature, **take heed** lest perhaps He may not spare you either.*

Paul imagines a Gentile believer saying, "The branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Paul says, in effect, "True, but be careful." The branches were broken off "by unbelief," and Gentiles stand "by faith." Nobody stands by their birth or their goodness. Everyone stands by faith alone.

"Do not think high things, but fear." This is a healthy fear, a humble respect for God. If God did not spare the natural branches when they turned away in unbelief, He will not spare wild branches that do the same.

11:22 *Look then **at the** kindness and severity of God: toward those who fell, severity; but toward you, kindness, if you continue in the kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.*

"Look then at the kindness and severity of God." We need to see both sides of God's character. His kindness is real; He saved us when we did not deserve it. His severity is also real; He judges unbelief. A God with only kindness would not be holy. A God with only severity would leave us without hope. The God of the Bible is both.

Then comes a serious condition: "if you continue in the kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off." How do we read this? Christians have answered in two main ways.

Eternal security: Those who are truly saved will continue in the faith, because God keeps them (John 10:28-29; Philippians 1:6). This warning is one of the means God uses to keep them. Someone who falls away completely shows that their faith was never real (1 John 2:19).

Conditional security: A true believer can, by persistent and deliberate unbelief, turn away from Christ and be lost. Warnings like this one, and the warnings in Hebrews (Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29), are real warnings to real believers.

Both views agree on what matters most here. The warning is real and should be taken seriously, and no one should ever treat God's grace as a license for pride or careless living. Both agree that the answer is to keep trusting Christ, and both agree that the God who saved us is faithful.

11:23-24 *And they also, if they **do** not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree **that is** wild according to nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who **are** according to nature, be grafted into **their** own olive tree?*

Here is great hope for the Jewish people. "And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again." The door is not shut. Any Jewish person who turns to Jesus is grafted back into his own tree.

Paul even says this is the more natural thing. In farming, people graft a cultivated branch onto a wild root, not the other way around. God did something "contrary to nature" when He grafted wild Gentile branches into Israel's cultivated tree. If He could do that, it is far easier for Him to put the natural branches back where they belong.

11:25 *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of this mystery, so that you may not be wise in yourselves, that a hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;*

Now Paul reveals "this mystery." In the Bible, a mystery is not a puzzle to solve. It is a truth God once kept hidden and has now made known. Paul tells the Gentile believers this "so that you may not be wise in yourselves," thinking they have figured everything out or that God has moved on from Israel.

Here is the mystery: "a hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Three things stand out. The hardening is partial; there has always been a believing remnant. The hardening is temporary; it lasts "until." And it has a set end point: "the fullness of the Gentiles," when every Gentile God intends to save has come into the family of faith. Jesus said

something similar when He said Jerusalem would be trampled by the nations "until the times of the nations are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

11:26-27 *and so all Israel will be saved, just as it has been written, "The One who delivers will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; and this **is** the covenant from Me to them, when I take away their sins."*

"And so all Israel will be saved."

What does Paul mean by "all Israel"? There are three main views of this verse.

A future national turning (future restoration): Near the end of this age, there will be a large-scale turning of the Jewish people to Jesus as their Messiah. "All Israel" means the nation as a whole at that time, not every single Jewish person who has ever lived.

All the elect: "All Israel" means the full number of God's chosen people, Jews and Gentiles together, which is the church.

The Jewish remnant through history: "All Israel" means the total of all believing Jews across the centuries.

Some also hold the replacement view, that the church has taken Israel's place. I explained in "Israel and the Church" at the front of this book why I don't hold it.

I believe the first view fits the passage best. In chapters 9-11 Paul almost always uses "Israel" for the Jewish people, the nation. Even in 9:6, where he distinguishes believing Israel within Israel, he is speaking of Jews, not Gentiles. In verse 25 he has just contrasted Israel with the Gentiles. It would be strange for "Israel" to suddenly mean Gentiles too in the very next sentence. And the word "until" in verse 25 points to a change in Israel's condition in the future.

Paul then quotes Isaiah 59:20-21 and Isaiah 27:9: "The One who delivers will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob." I understand the One who delivers to be Jesus at His Second Coming. I explain this more fully in my Revelation study. When Jesus returns in glory after the Tribulation (the time of great trouble on the earth just before His return, Revelation 6-19), the Jewish people will see Him, recognize Him as the One they pierced, and turn to Him. The prophet Zechariah describes this very moment, when God pours out a spirit of grace and the people of Jerusalem look on the One they pierced and mourn for Him (Zechariah 12:10; Revelation 1:7). God will keep His covenant: "when I take away their sins." This is the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34, where God promises to forgive Israel's sin and remember it no more.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 59:20 (quoted); Isaiah 27:9 (quoted); Isaiah 59:21 (quoted); Jeremiah 31:33-34 (alluded to)

11:28-29 *As regards the gospel, **they are** enemies on account of you; but as regards the election, **they are** beloved on account of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God **are** irrevocable.*

Paul holds two truths together. "As regards the gospel," many Jewish people are enemies; they oppose the message, and their unbelief opened the door for Gentiles. But "as regards the election,

they are beloved on account of the fathers." God made unbreakable promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He still loves their descendants because of those promises.

"For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." Irrevocable means they cannot be taken back. God does not change His mind about His promises. This is good news for Israel, and it is good news for us. If God could cancel His promises to Israel, how could we trust His promises to us? Because He keeps His word to Israel, we can know He will keep His word to us. That answers the question that started this whole section in chapter 9.

11:30-31 *For just as you also once were disobedient to God, but now were shown mercy by the disobedience of these, so these also now were disobedient, so that by your mercy they also may be shown mercy.*

Paul shows the pattern of God's mercy. Gentiles were once disobedient, but they received mercy because of Israel's disobedience. Now Israel is disobedient, but because of the mercy shown to Gentiles, Israel will also receive mercy. God weaves even rebellion into His plan to show mercy to both.

11:32 *For God has shut up all in disobedience, so that He may have mercy on all.*

"For God has shut up all in disobedience, so that He may have mercy on all." Jew and Gentile alike have been shown to be sinners. Nobody can boast. This does not mean every person will be saved; Paul has been clear that salvation comes through faith. It means that God has put Jews and Gentiles on the same level, so that both groups receive salvation the same way, as a gift of mercy.

11:33 *O depth of riches and of wisdom and of knowledge of God! How unsearchable **are** His judgments and untraceable His ways!*

After eleven chapters of careful teaching, Paul bursts into praise.

"O depth of riches and of wisdom and of knowledge of God!"

His judgments are "unsearchable" and His ways "untraceable." We cannot get to the bottom of them. After all his explaining, Paul admits that God is greater than his explanations. That is a good lesson for us after working through chapters 9-11. We will not answer every question, and that's okay. We can rest in a God who is wiser than we are.

11:34-35 *For who has known **the** mind of **the** Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him, and it will be repaid to him?*

Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11. No one has ever been God's advisor. No one has ever given God something that put Him in debt. God owes nobody anything. Everything we have, including our salvation, is a gift.

Old Testament links: Job 41:11 (quoted); Isaiah 40:13 (quoted)

11:36 *For from Him and through Him and to Him **are** all things. To Him **be** the glory to the ages. Amen.*

"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things." All things come from God as their source. All things exist through Him and are held together by Him. All things are headed toward Him as their goal.

"To Him be the glory to the ages. Amen." The right response to God's plan is not argument. It is worship.

Chapter 11 Summary

God has not rejected His people. There is a believing remnant of Israel chosen by grace, just as in Elijah's day, while the rest of the nation has been hardened. But Israel's stumbling is not final. Their rejection brought salvation to the Gentiles, and their future acceptance will be even greater. Gentile believers have been grafted into Israel's olive tree and must not be arrogant, but must continue in faith, remembering God's kindness and His severity. A partial hardening has come on Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and so all Israel will be saved when the Deliverer comes from Zion. God's gifts and calling cannot be revoked. Paul closes by praising the wisdom of God, from whom and through whom and to whom are all things.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. What evidence does Paul give that God has not rejected His people? (11:1-5)

2. Have you ever felt like Elijah, as if you were the only one following God? What does God's answer to Elijah mean for you? (11:2-4)

3. Why can't grace and works be mixed? (11:6)

4. How did Israel's stumbling bring blessing to the Gentiles? (11:11-12)

5. What does the olive tree picture teach Gentile believers about their relationship to Israel? (11:17-21)

6. What does it mean to see both "the kindness and severity of God"? How should that shape the way you live? (11:22)

7. What is the "mystery" Paul reveals, and what do you believe "all Israel will be saved" means? (11:25-27)

8. Why is it good news for every believer that God's gifts and calling are irrevocable? (11:29)

9. After working through Romans 9-11, what is one thing about God that moves you to worship Him? (11:33-36)

Chapter 12: A Living Sacrifice

Scripture: Transformed Lives and Genuine Love

12:1-2 Therefore I exhort you, brothers, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies ***as*** a living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God, your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God ***is***, the good and well-pleasing and perfect ***will***.

12:3-8 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to be high-minded beyond what it is necessary to think, but to think so as to be sober-minded, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, and each one members of one another. And having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: whether prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith; or ministry, in the ministry; or the one who teaches, in the teaching; or the one who exhorts, in the exhortation; the one who gives, in generosity; the one who leads, in diligence; the one who shows mercy, in cheerfulness.

12:9-13 ***Let*** love ***be*** without hypocrisy. Abhorring the evil, clinging to the good; in brotherly love devoted to one another, in honor preferring one another; in diligence not lazy, in spirit fervent, serving the Lord; in hope rejoicing, in tribulation enduring, in prayer continuing steadfastly; sharing in the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality.

12:14-21 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep, thinking the same ***thing*** toward one another, not thinking high ***things***, but going along with the lowly. Do not be wise in yourselves. Repaying no one evil for evil, taking thought beforehand for good ***things*** before all men; if possible, so far as ***it is*** from you, being at peace with all men; not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath; for it has been written, "Vengeance ***is*** Mine, I will repay," says ***the*** Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for in doing this you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by the evil, but overcome the evil with the good.

Chapter 12 Preview

For eleven chapters Paul has been teaching what God has done. We are all guilty. We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. We have peace with God, freedom from sin's rule, life in the Spirit, and a God who keeps His promises to Israel and to the nations. Chapter 11 ended in worship: "To Him be the glory to the ages."

Now Paul turns a corner. The rest of the letter answers a very practical question: since God has done all of this for us, how should we live? Chapter 12 starts with our whole life handed over to God, then moves to how we serve one another in the church, and ends with how we treat people who mistreat us. Doctrine comes first, and living comes out of it. That order matters. We do not obey to earn God's mercy. We obey because we have already received it.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *Therefore I exhort you, brothers, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies **as** a living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God, your reasonable service.*

"Therefore" points back to everything Paul has written so far. When you see a "therefore" in the Bible, it's worth asking what it is there for. Here it is there for all eleven chapters. Paul exhorts us "through the compassions of God." He doesn't threaten us into obedience. He reminds us how much mercy we have been shown, and asks us to respond.

"A living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

In the Old Testament, a sacrifice was killed and placed on the altar. That was the end of it. Paul asks for something different: a sacrifice that stays alive. We give God our bodies, our hands, our eyes, our time, our energy, every day, and we keep on giving them. An old saying goes that the trouble with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar. That is true of all of us. That is why this is a daily choice and not a one-time event.

Paul calls this our "reasonable service." The Greek word can mean reasonable or spiritual. After all God has done for us, giving Him ourselves is the only response that makes sense, and it is worship. Worship is not only what happens on Sunday when the music plays. Worship is a life given over to God. The way you do your job, treat your family, and spend your money on Monday is part of your worship too.

12:2 *And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God **is**, the good and well-pleasing and perfect **will**.*

Paul gives two commands here, one negative and one positive. Do not be "conformed" to this age, which means do not let the world around you press you into its mold. Instead, be "transformed." The Greek word is *metamorphoo*, the word we get "metamorphosis" from. It's the change from a caterpillar to a butterfly, a change from the inside out. It is the same word used of Jesus at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2).

How does this happen? "By the renewing of your mind." What we put into our minds shapes who we become. This is why time in God's Word matters so much. The world is teaching us all day long, through screens, music, and conversations. If we want to think God's way, we need to fill our minds with God's truth.

Then comes the result: we will "prove" the will of God, which means test it and find it to be what it is, "the good and well-pleasing and perfect." Many believers worry about finding God's will. Paul's answer is that a life given to God and a mind being renewed by God will recognize His will. God is not hiding it from us.

12:3 *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to be high-minded beyond what it is necessary to think, but to think so as to be sober-minded, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.*

Paul speaks "through the grace given to me," meaning his calling as an apostle. His first word about life in the church is about pride. Don't think more highly of yourself than you should. That does not mean thinking poorly of yourself. It means thinking so as to be "sober-minded," seeing yourself honestly.

"As God has allotted to each a measure of faith." Whatever gifts and faith we have, God gave them. That leaves no room for boasting (1 Corinthians 4:7).

12:4-5 *For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, and each one members of one another.*

Paul uses the picture of a human body, as he does in 1 Corinthians 12. A body has many parts, and they don't all do the same job. The eye does not try to be the hand. In the same way, believers are "one body in Christ, and each one members of one another." We belong to Christ, and we belong to each other. No Christian was meant to live the faith alone.

12:6-8 *And having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: whether prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith; or ministry, in the ministry; or the one who teaches, in the teaching; or the one who exhorts, in the exhortation; the one who gives, in generosity; the one who leads, in diligence; the one who shows mercy, in cheerfulness.*

God has given different gifts to different people, and Paul tells us to use them. He names seven here: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation (encouraging and urging people on), giving, leading, and showing mercy. This is not a complete list. Other lists appear in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. The point is that every believer has something to offer.

Paul attaches an attitude to some of them. The giver gives "in generosity," with a sincere heart. The leader leads "in diligence," not lazily. The one who shows mercy does it "in cheerfulness," not with a sigh. How we serve matters as much as whether we serve.

You might ask, "What if I don't know my gift?" Start serving. Many people discover their gifts by doing what needs to be done and watching where God blesses it. Others in the church can often see your gifts before you do.

12:9 ***Let*** *love* ***be*** *without hypocrisy. Abhorring the evil, clinging to the good;*

Now Paul gives a string of short commands, and he begins with love. "Let love be without hypocrisy." Hypocrisy comes from a word for an actor on a stage, someone wearing a mask. Christian love should be real, not an act.

Real love also has a backbone. "Abhorring the evil, clinging to the good." Love does not mean approving of everything. To abhor means to hate something with strong feeling. Love hates whatever harms the people it loves, and it holds tightly to what is good.

12:10 *in brotherly love devoted to one another, in honor preferring one another;*

"Brotherly love" is family love. The church is a family, and we are to be "devoted" to each other the way family members are. "In honor preferring one another" means trying to outdo each other in showing respect. Imagine a church where everyone was competing to honor someone else instead of looking for honor for themselves.

12:11 *in diligence not lazy, in spirit fervent, serving the Lord;*

Be "in diligence not lazy," and be "in spirit fervent." The word fervent means boiling, on fire. Some believe "spirit" here points to the Holy Spirit, and others to our own spirit. Either way the meaning is a heart that is warm toward God, not lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-16). And all of it is done "serving the Lord."

12:12 *in hope rejoicing, in tribulation enduring, in prayer continuing steadfastly;*

Here are three short phrases that belong together. We rejoice in hope because we know how the story ends. We persevere in tribulation because hard times will come. And we stay devoted to prayer because we can't do the first two in our own strength.

12:13 *sharing in the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality.*

Love gets practical. Christians help other believers who are in need, and they practice hospitality, opening their homes and their tables. In Paul's day, traveling believers depended on this. Today a meal, a spare room, or a ride can be one of the clearest ways to show Christ's love.

12:14 *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

This verse sounds like Jesus' own teaching (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28). When someone persecutes you, bless them. Ask God to do them good. Do not call down curses on them. This goes against everything in our nature. It is only possible by the power of the Spirit.

12:15 *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep,*

Share people's joys and share their sorrows. Sometimes it is easier to weep with someone than to rejoice with them, because envy creeps in when someone else is blessed. Love is glad when others are glad. And when someone is hurting, the best thing we can do is often to sit with them and weep, not explain their pain away.

12:16 *thinking the same **thing** toward one another, not thinking high **things**, but going along with the lowly. Do not be wise in yourselves.*

"Thinking the same thing toward one another" doesn't mean we all have to agree on everything. It means living in harmony. Do not be proud. Spend time with "the lowly," people who are overlooked. Jesus did this all the time. And "Do not be wise in yourselves" (see Proverbs 3:7). The person who thinks he knows it all has stopped learning.

Old Testament links: Proverbs 3:7 (alluded to)

12:17 *Repaying no one evil for evil, taking thought beforehand for good **things** before all men;*

Never pay back evil for evil. That word "never" leaves no exceptions. "Taking thought beforehand for good things before all men" means living so that even unbelievers can see our conduct is honorable.

12:18 *if possible, so far as **it is** from you, being at peace with all men;*

Paul is realistic. "If possible, so far as it is from you." Some people will not be at peace with you no matter what you do. You can't control them. You can only control your part. Make sure the problem is not on your side. Living at peace never means staying in danger or keeping silent about abuse. You can bless someone from a safe distance, and reporting a crime is not revenge (13:4).

12:19 *not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath; for it has been written, "Vengeance **is** Mine, I will repay," says **the** Lord.*

"Not avenging yourselves." When someone wrongs us, we want to get even. Paul tells us to step back and "give place to the wrath," leaving room for God to act. He backs it up by quoting the Lord in Deuteronomy 32:35: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay."

This is not saying that evil doesn't matter. It matters so much that God Himself will deal with it, and He will do it perfectly. We can let go of revenge because we trust the Judge. Revelation shows us that day of justice is coming (Revelation 19:2; 20:12). We do not have to carry that weight.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 32:35 (quoted)

12:20 *Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for in doing this you will heap coals of fire on his head.*

Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22. Feed your enemy. Give him a drink. Meet his real needs.

"You will heap coals of fire on his head."

What does that mean? There are two main views. Some believe it means your kindness will bring God's judgment on him more heavily if he refuses to repent. Most believe it means your kindness will make him burn with shame, and that shame may lead him to repentance. Some also point to an old Egyptian custom where a person showed sorrow for wrongdoing by carrying a pan of hot coals on his head. The second view fits the next verse best. The goal is to win the enemy, not to punish him.

Old Testament links: Proverbs 25:21-22 (quoted)

12:21 *Do not be overcome by the evil, but overcome the evil with the good.*

This verse sums up the whole section. When we pay back evil with evil, evil has won, because it has made us just like the person who hurt us. When we answer evil with good, we overcome it. That is exactly what Jesus did on the cross. He met the worst evil the world could do with the greatest good the world has ever seen.

Chapter 12 Summary

Romans 12 turns from what God has done to how we should respond. Because of God's compassions, we offer our whole selves to Him as living sacrifices, refuse to be squeezed into the world's mold, and are changed from the inside as our minds are renewed.

In the church, we think of ourselves honestly, remember that we are one body with many parts, and use the gifts God has given us with the right attitude. Our love is to be real, warm, generous, and humble.

Toward those who hurt us, we bless instead of curse, leave revenge to God, and meet our enemies' needs. We are not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. Why do you think Paul waits until chapter 12 to give these commands? What does "therefore" point back to? (12:1)

2. What does it mean to you to be "a living, holy sacrifice"? What part of your life is hardest to keep on the altar? (12:1)

3. What is the difference between being conformed and being transformed, and how does a renewed mind come about? (12:2)

4. What picture does Paul use to describe the church, and what does it teach about how we need each other? (12:4-5)

5. Which of the gifts listed in 12:6-8 do you see in yourself? How are you using it? (12:6-8)

6. Which command in 12:9-13 is hardest for you to live out this week? (12:9-13)

7. Which is harder for you: rejoicing with those who rejoice, or weeping with those who weep? Why? (12:15)

8. Why can a believer let go of revenge? (12:19)

9. Think of someone who has hurt you. What would it look like, safely and wisely, to "overcome the evil with the good" with that person? (12:20-21)

Chapter 13: Government, Love, and the Coming Day

Scripture: Submission, Love, and Waking Up

13:1-7 Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist have been appointed by God. So the one who sets himself against the authority has resisted the ordinance of God; and those who have resisted will receive judgment on themselves. For the rulers are not a terror to the good works, but to the evil. And do you want not to fear the authority? Do the good, and you will have praise from it; for he is a servant of God to you for the good. But if you do the evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to the one who practices the evil. Therefore ***it is*** necessary to be subject, not only because of the wrath, but also because of the conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes; for they are ministers of God, continuing steadfastly in this very thing. Therefore render to all ***what is*** owed: the tax to whom the tax ***is owed***, the revenue to whom the revenue, the fear to whom the fear, the honor to whom the honor.

13:8-10 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves the other has fulfilled ***the*** law. For the ***commandments***, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet," and if ***there is*** any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, in the ***saying***, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does not work evil to the neighbor; therefore love ***is the*** fulfillment of ***the*** law.

13:11-14 And this, knowing the time, that ***it is*** already ***the*** hour for us to be awakened out of sleep; for now our salvation ***is*** nearer than when we believed. The night has advanced, and the day has drawn near. Therefore let us cast off the works of the darkness, and let us put on the armor of the light. Let us walk properly, as in ***the*** day, not in revelings and drunkennesses, not in sexual immoralities and sensualities, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, for ***its*** desires.

Chapter 13 Preview

At the end of chapter 12, Paul told us not to take revenge but to leave room for God's wrath. Now he shows one of the ways God carries out justice in this present age: through governing authorities. Paul tells believers to submit to the government, pay their taxes, and give honor where it is due.

Then he comes back to love, the one debt we can never finish paying. Love sums up all the commandments. Finally, Paul lifts our eyes to the horizon. The night is almost over, and the day of Christ's return is near. So we should wake up, throw off the deeds of darkness, and live like people who belong to the day.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1 *Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist have been appointed by God.*

"Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities." Paul does not leave anyone out. Christians are not above the law of the land.

Why? Because "there is no authority except from God." Government is God's idea. He set it up to keep order in a fallen world. This doesn't mean every ruler is good or that God approves of everything rulers do. It means no one holds power unless God allows it (Daniel 2:21; John 19:11).

Think about who was ruling when Paul wrote this. The emperor was Nero. A few years later Nero would turn on the Christians in Rome, and church tradition tells us Paul himself was executed under him. Paul was not writing about a friendly government. He was writing about Rome. That makes his words even stronger.

13:2 *So the one who sets himself against the authority has resisted the ordinance of God; and those who have resisted will receive judgment on themselves.*

Since God established authority, resisting it is resisting God's arrangement. Those who do so "will receive judgment on themselves." This most likely means the penalty the government itself hands out, though it is also displeasing to God.

You might ask, "Does this mean we must obey the government no matter what?" No. The Bible shows us a clear limit. When a government commands us to sin, or forbids what God commands, we must obey God. When the apostles were told to stop preaching about Jesus, Peter answered, "It is necessary to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Daniel kept praying when the law said not to (Daniel 6:10). The Hebrew midwives refused to kill the baby boys (Exodus 1:17), and God honored them for fearing Him rather than the king (Exodus 1:20-21). Even then, these believers did not riot or take up arms. Peter and Daniel disobeyed openly and were willing to accept the consequences.

So the rule is submission, and the exception is when obedience to the state would mean disobedience to God. That exception is narrow. Disliking a law or a leader is not the same thing as being commanded to sin.

13:3-4 *For the rulers are not a terror to the good works, but to the evil. And do you want not to fear the authority? Do the good, and you will have praise from it; for he is a servant of God to you for the good. But if you do the evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to the one who practices the evil.*

Here Paul explains what government is for. Rulers are meant to be a terror to evil, not to good. If you do what is right, you usually have nothing to fear from the authorities. The government is "a servant of God to you for the good."

"He does not bear the sword in vain." The sword was a symbol of the power to punish, even with death. God has given government the right to use force to restrain evil and protect the innocent. The government is called "a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to the one who practices the evil." Remember 12:19. We are not to take revenge as individuals. But God has given the state the job of punishing crime. These two passages fit together. A Christian forgives personally, and the courts still carry out justice.

13:5 *Therefore **it is** necessary to be subject, not only because of the wrath, but also because of the conscience.*

We submit for two reasons. One is "because of the wrath," meaning we do not want to be punished. The better reason is "because of the conscience." A believer obeys the law because he knows God set up authority, even when no police officer is watching.

13:6 *For because of this you also pay taxes; for they are ministers of God, continuing steadfastly in this very thing.*

Paying taxes is part of this. Rulers are "ministers of God," and taxes support the work they do. Jesus taught the same thing when He said to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar (Matthew 22:21). Nobody enjoys paying taxes, but a Christian pays them honestly.

13:7 *Therefore render to all **what is** owed: the tax to whom the tax **is owed**, the revenue to whom the revenue, the fear to whom the fear, the honor to whom the honor.*

"Render to all what is owed." Paul names four things. Tax was a direct tax on people and land. Revenue was a tax on goods. Fear means respect for those with authority. Honor means showing esteem to those in office.

This is a good word for us. In our day it's easy to speak about leaders with contempt, especially ones we did not vote for. We can disagree with a leader's policies and still speak of him or her with respect (1 Peter 2:17).

13:8 *Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves the other has fulfilled **the** law.*

"Owe no one anything, except to love one another." Some have used this verse to say a Christian should never borrow money. The point is broader than that. Pay what you owe. Don't leave debts hanging. But there is one debt that is never paid off: love. No matter how much we have loved someone, we still owe them more.

"The one who loves the other has fulfilled the law." Love is not a way around the Law. Love is what the Law was aiming at all along.

13:9 *For the **commandments**, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet," and if **there is** any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, in the **saying**, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

Paul quotes five of the Ten Commandments, the ones about how we treat other people (Exodus 20:13-17). Then he says every commandment is "summed up" in one saying from Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said the same thing (Matthew 22:39-40).

Think about it. If you love your neighbor, you will not sleep with his wife. You won't kill him. You will not steal from him. You won't lie about him. You won't want what belongs to him. Love keeps the commandments without needing a list.

Moses repeated these same commandments when he restated the Law for the next generation (Deuteronomy 5:17-21).

Old Testament links: Leviticus 19:18 (quoted); Exodus 20:13-17 (quoted); Deuteronomy 5:17-21 (quoted)

13:10 *Love does not work evil to the neighbor; therefore love **is the** fulfillment of **the** law.*

"Love does not work evil to the neighbor." Love never harms. That is why "love is the fulfillment of the law." This is the kind of love the Holy Spirit produces in us (Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22).

13:11 *And this, knowing the time, that **it is** already **the** hour for us to be awakened out of sleep; for now our salvation **is** nearer than when we believed.*

"And this, knowing the time." Paul gives another reason to love and live rightly: time is moving. It is the hour to wake up.

*"Now our salvation **is** nearer than when we believed."*

In what sense is our salvation still coming? We were saved the moment we believed. That's the past. We are being made holy day by day. That is the present. And one day we will be fully saved, body and all, when Jesus returns (Romans 8:23). That's the future. Paul is speaking of that last part. Every day that passes brings us one day closer to the return of Christ.

13:12 *The night has advanced, and the day has drawn near. Therefore let us cast off the works of the darkness, and let us put on the armor of the light.*

"The night has advanced, and the day has drawn near." The night is this present evil age. The day is the day of the Lord, when Christ returns in glory. In my study of Revelation, I spent many pages on that day: Jesus coming with the clouds, every eye seeing Him (Revelation 1:7), and His closing promise, "I am coming quickly" (Revelation 22:20). Paul wanted the Romans to live with that same expectation, and so should we.

You might ask, "If the night was almost gone in Paul's day, why are we still waiting almost two thousand years later?" The answer Scripture gives is that God's timing is not ours. To the Lord, a thousand years is like a day, and He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:8-9). Each generation is meant to live as if He could come in its lifetime.

So what do we do? "Let us cast off the works of the darkness." Take them off like dirty clothes. "Let us put on the armor of the light." The Christian life is a battle, and we need to be dressed for it (Ephesians 6:11-17).

13:13 *Let us walk properly, as in **the** day, not in revelings and drunkennesses, not in sexual immoralities and sensualities, not in strife and jealousy.*

"Let us walk properly, as in the day." People tend to do their worst things in the dark, hoping no one will see. Paul names three pairs of sins. Revelings and drunkennesses are wild partying. Sexual immoralities and sensualities are sexual sin and a lack of self-control. Strife and jealousy are fighting and envy.

Strife and jealousy are in the same list as drunkenness and immorality. We sometimes treat the "respectable" sins as less serious. God does not.

13:14 *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, for **its** desires.*

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is the positive side. We don't just take off the old clothes; we put on Christ Himself. We did this in a once-for-all way when we came to faith (Galatians 3:27). Now we do it every day, choosing to live like Him and draw on His strength.

"Make no provision for the flesh, for its desires." To make provision means to plan ahead for something. Do not make it easy to sin. If you know something tempts you, don't keep it within reach. Do not plan your weekend around it. Don't leave the door open.

This verse has a famous place in church history. Augustine, who would become one of the most important teachers in the early church, was a young man in A.D. 386 struggling with lust and despair. He heard a child's voice from a nearby house chanting, "Take up and read." He opened a copy of Paul's letters, and his eyes fell on Romans 13:13-14. He later wrote that it was as if a light of certainty flooded his heart, and all the darkness of doubt vanished (Confessions, Book 8, chapter 12). God's Word still does that today.

Chapter 13 Summary

Romans 13 teaches believers to submit to governing authorities, because God set up authority to reward good and punish evil. Christians pay taxes, give respect and honor, and obey the law out of conscience. The one limit is when a government commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands; then we obey God, respectfully and accepting the cost.

Love is the debt we never finish paying, and it fulfills the whole Law. And because the night is almost over and the day of Christ's return is near, we wake up, take off the deeds of darkness, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no room for the flesh.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. Why does Paul say believers should be in subjection to the governing authorities? (13:1-2)

2. Who was ruling Rome when Paul wrote this? How does that affect the way you read these verses? (13:1)

3. When is it right for a Christian to disobey the government? Give examples from Scripture. (13:2; Acts 5:29)

4. What purpose does God give to government? (13:3-4)

5. How can you show honor to leaders you disagree with? (13:7)

6. Why is love called a debt that we keep owing, and how does love fulfill the Law? (13:8-10)

7. In what sense is our salvation "nearer than when we believed"? (13:11)

8. How would your week look different if you truly believed the day of Christ's return was near? (13:12)

9. What "provision for the flesh" do you need to remove from your life? (13:14)

Chapter 14: The Weak and the Strong

Scripture: Accept One Another

14:1-4 Now receive the one who is weak in the faith, not for disputes over reasonings. One believes ***he may*** eat all things, but the one who is weak eats vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who does not eat, and let not the one who does not eat judge the one who eats; for God has received him. Who are you, the one judging another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

14:5-12 One judges ***one*** day above ***another*** day, but another judges every day ***alike***. Let each be fully assured in his own mind. The one who regards the day regards ***it*** to ***the*** Lord, and the one who does not regard the day does not regard ***it*** to ***the*** Lord. The one who eats eats to ***the*** Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and the one who does not eat does not eat to ***the*** Lord, and he gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's. For to this ***end*** Christ both died and rose up and lived again, so that He might rule over both ***the*** dead and ***the*** living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you also, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it has been written, "***As*** I live, says ***the*** Lord, every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue will confess to God." So then each of us will give an account concerning himself to God.

14:13-18 Therefore let us no longer judge one another, but rather judge this: not to put a stumbling block or an offense before the brother. I know and have been persuaded in ***the*** Lord Jesus that nothing ***is*** unclean of itself, except to the one who counts anything to be unclean, to that one ***it is*** unclean. And if your brother is grieved because of food, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food that one for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let your good be slandered. For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in ***the*** Holy Spirit. For the one who serves Christ in these things ***is*** well-pleasing to God and approved by men.

14:19-23 So then let us pursue the things of peace and the things of building up one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed ***are*** clean, but ***it is*** evil for the man who eats with stumbling. ***It is*** good not to eat meat nor to drink wine nor ***to do anything*** by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is weak. Do you have faith? Have ***it*** to yourself before God. Blessed ***is*** the one who does not judge himself in what he approves. But the one who doubts has been condemned if he eats, because ***it is*** not of faith; and everything that ***is*** not of faith is sin.

Chapter 14 Preview

The church in Rome was made up of Jewish and Gentile believers, and they did not always see eye to eye. Some ate any kind of food, while others would only eat vegetables. Some kept special holy days, while others treated every day the same. These were not small matters to them. They touched deep habits, family history, and conscience.

Paul calls one group "weak in the faith" and the other "strong." But he does not take one side and tell the other side to get in line. He tells both sides to stop judging each other. Each believer belongs to the Lord and will answer to Him. And the strong should be willing to give up their freedom rather than cause a brother or sister to stumble. This chapter gives some of the Bible's most practical help for keeping peace in a church.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1 *Now receive the one who is weak in the faith, not for disputes over reasonings.*

"Receive the one who is weak in the faith." Who is the weak person? Not someone who doubts that Jesus saves. Paul means a believer whose conscience is not yet free in certain areas, someone who feels he must avoid things that God does not actually forbid.

Paul says to welcome him, "not for disputes over reasonings." Don't bring him into the fellowship just so you can argue him out of his convictions. Look at the word "reasonings." Paul is not talking about the core truths of the gospel. He did not tell the Galatians to accept false teachers on salvation (Galatians 1:8-9). He's talking about matters of opinion, things where sincere believers can come to different conclusions.

14:2 *One believes **he may** eat all things, but the one who is weak eats vegetables.*

Here is the first example. One person believes he can eat anything. Another eats only vegetables. Why would a believer eat only vegetables? Meat sold in the markets of Rome had often been offered to idols first, and it was not prepared according to Jewish food laws. Some believers, especially Jewish believers, avoided meat altogether to be safe (compare Daniel 1:8, 12).

14:3 *Let not the one who eats despise the one who does not eat, and let not the one who does not eat judge the one who eats; for God has received him.*

Now Paul speaks to both sides. The one who eats is not to "despise" the one who does not. The strong are tempted to look down on the weak as narrow and immature. The one who doesn't eat is not to "judge" the one who eats. The weak are tempted to see the strong as worldly and careless.

Then Paul gives the reason: "for God has received him." If God has welcomed someone, who are we to reject them?

14:4 *Who are you, the one judging another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.*

"Who are you, the one judging another's servant?" In Paul's day, a servant answered to his own master, not to the neighbors. Every believer is the Lord's servant. He stands or falls before the Lord, not before us. And Paul adds a word of hope: "he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." God is able to keep His people.

14:5 *One judges **one** day above **another** day, but another judges every day **alike**. Let each be fully assured in his own mind.*

The second example is about days. Some regard one day above another. Others treat every day alike. The background here is most likely the Jewish Sabbath and the feast days of the Law. Some believers felt they should keep them, and others did not. Paul does not settle the question. Instead he says, "Let each be fully assured in his own mind."

For Gentile believers, whether to observe the Sabbath is a matter of conscience. Paul says the same thing in Colossians 2:16-17, where he tells believers not to let anyone judge them over a festival, a new moon, or a Sabbath day, because those things were a shadow and the substance belongs to Christ. Christians have different convictions about Sunday as the Lord's Day, about the Saturday Sabbath, and about holidays like Christmas and Easter. Romans 14 tells us these convictions should not divide us. What matters is that we honor the Lord with whatever we do.

14:6 *The one who regards the day regards **it** to **the** Lord, and the one who does not regard the day does not regard **it** to **the** Lord. The one who eats eats to **the** Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and the one who does not eat does not eat to **the** Lord, and he gives thanks to God.*

Here is the heart of it. The one who regards the day regards it "to the Lord." The one who eats does it for the Lord and thanks God for the food. The one who doesn't eat also abstains for the Lord and gives thanks too. Both are trying to please God. When we see that, it is much harder to look down on each other.

14:7-8 *For none of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's.*

"None of us lives to himself." Our lives belong to the Lord. Whether we live or die, "we are the Lord's." This is a beautiful comfort. A believer never leaves the Lord's hands, not even in death. But in this context it's also a reminder: since each believer belongs to the Lord, it is the Lord's job to evaluate him, not mine.

14:9 *For to this **end** Christ both died and rose up and lived again, so that He might rule over both **the** dead and **the** living.*

Christ died and rose again "so that He might rule over both the dead and the living." Through His death and resurrection, Jesus earned the right to rule over all of His people, those still alive on earth and those who have already died. He is Lord of all.

14:10 *But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you also, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*

Paul asks both groups a pointed question. To the weak: "why do you judge your brother?" To the strong: "why do you despise your brother?" Then he gives the reason to stop: "we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

This is not the judgment of whether a believer is saved. That was settled at the cross (Romans 8:1). This is the day when believers give an account of how they lived, and are rewarded (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15). We will be too busy giving our own account that day to give anyone else's.

14:11 *For it has been written, "**As** I live, says **the** Lord, every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue will confess to God."*

Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23, where God swears that every knee will bow to Him. Paul applies these words to Jesus in Philippians 2:10-11. In my Revelation study, I connected this verse to the day when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus is Lord. Every person will one day bow before Him. The only question is whether we bow now in faith or later in judgment.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 45:23 (quoted)

14:12 *So then each of us will give an account concerning himself to God.*

"Each of us will give an account concerning himself to God." Concerning himself, not his brother. I will answer for my life. You will answer for yours.

14:13 *Therefore let us no longer judge one another, but rather judge this: not to put a stumbling block or an offense before the brother.*

"Let us no longer judge one another." Instead, let us make a different kind of judgment, a decision about ourselves: never to put an obstacle or stumbling block in a brother's way. A stumbling block is something that trips someone up and causes him to fall. The question shifts from "Am I free to do this?" to "Will this hurt my brother?"

14:14 *I know and have been persuaded in **the** Lord Jesus that nothing **is** unclean of itself, except to the one who counts anything to be unclean, to that one **it is** unclean.*

Paul is clear on the facts. "Nothing is unclean of itself." Jesus taught that food going into a person cannot make him unclean, "cleansing all the foods" (Mark 7:19), and Peter learned the same lesson in a vision (Acts 10:15). Paul himself stands with the strong on this question.

But he adds, "to the one who counts anything to be unclean, to that one it is unclean." If a person believes something is wrong and does it anyway, he is going against his conscience, and that is sin for him. The food hasn't changed, but his heart has done something it believes is disobedient to God.

14:15 *And if your brother is grieved because of food, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food that one for whom Christ died.*

Love limits liberty. If your brother is hurt because of what you eat, "you are no longer walking according to love." Paul uses strong language: "Do not destroy with your food that one for whom Christ died." Think about that. Christ gave His life for that brother. Can't I give up a meal for him?

To "destroy" here likely means doing serious damage to his faith, leading him to act against his conscience and drift from the Lord. It's a sobering warning about how much our example affects others.

14:16 *Therefore do not let your good be slandered.*

Your freedom is a good thing. But if you use it carelessly, people may end up speaking of it as evil, and it can bring reproach on the gospel.

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

"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in ***the*** *Holy Spirit."*

This verse puts everything in its place. Food is not what the kingdom is about. The kingdom is about right living before God, peace with God and with each other, and the joy the Spirit gives. When we fight over side issues, we lose sight of the main thing.

14:18 *For the one who serves Christ in these things* ***is*** *well-pleasing to God and approved by men.*

The person who serves Christ this way, focused on righteousness, peace, and joy, "is well-pleasing to God and approved by men." Even unbelievers respect a Christian who is gracious and not argumentative.

14:19 *So then let us pursue the things of peace and the things of building up one another.*

"So then let us pursue the things of peace and the things of building up one another." Peace does not happen by accident. We have to chase it. Before you speak or act in a disagreement, ask yourself, "Will this build my brother up, or tear him down?"

14:20 *Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed* ***are*** *clean, but* ***it is*** *evil for the man who eats with stumbling.*

"Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food." The "work of God" here is your fellow believer, someone God is building. It makes no sense to knock down something God is building over a plate of food.

Paul repeats his view: "All things indeed are clean." But "it is evil for the man who eats with stumbling," that is, whose eating trips up another believer.

14:21 ***It is*** *good not to eat meat nor to drink wine nor* ***to do anything*** *by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is weak.*

Paul gives the principle in plain words. It is good to give up meat, wine, or anything else that causes your brother to stumble. A mature believer is not the one who exercises every freedom he has. He is the one who can give up a freedom out of love.

14:22 *Do you have faith? Have* ***it*** *to yourself before God. Blessed* ***is*** *the one who does not judge himself in what he approves.*

"Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God." If you are free in your conscience, enjoy that freedom privately before God. You don't need to parade it in front of others who will be hurt by it.

"Blessed is the one who does not judge himself in what he approves." Blessed is the person whose conscience is clear about what he does.

14:23 *But the one who doubts has been condemned if he eats, because **it is** not of faith; and everything that **is** not of faith is sin.*

On the other hand, the person who doubts and eats anyway "has been condemned." Not condemned to hell, but condemned by his own conscience, because he acted against what he believed.

*"Everything that **is** not of faith is sin."*

This is a principle for all of life. If you are not sure something is right, and you do it anyway, you're sinning, even if the thing itself is not wrong. God wants us to act from faith, trusting that what we do pleases Him. When in doubt, do not.

Chapter 14 Summary

Romans 14 teaches believers how to live together when they disagree over matters of conscience, such as food and special days. The weak, whose consciences are more restrictive, must not judge the strong. The strong, who feel free, must not look down on the weak. God has accepted both, each belongs to the Lord, and each will give an account of himself at the judgment seat of Christ.

Paul agrees with the strong that nothing is unclean in itself, but he says love must limit liberty. We should never cause a brother for whom Christ died to stumble. The kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, not food and drink. We pursue peace, build each other up, and act only from faith.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. Who does Paul mean by the one who is "weak in the faith"? (14:1-2)

2. What temptation does the strong believer face, and what temptation does the weak believer face? (14:3)

3. What are some matters of opinion (14:1), where sincere believers disagree, that divide Christians today?

4. How does Paul handle the question of special days? What does that teach us about the Sabbath for Gentile believers? (14:5-6)

5. Why should the thought of the judgment seat of Christ keep us from judging one another? (14:10-12)

6. What does Paul mean when he says, "Do not destroy with your food that one for whom Christ died"? (14:15)

7. What is the kingdom of God about? (14:17)

8. Is there a freedom you enjoy that you should set aside for the sake of another believer? (14:21)

9. What does "everything that is not of faith is sin" mean for the decisions you make? (14:23)

Chapter 15: Christ, Our Example

Scripture: Christ's Example and Paul's Plans

15:1-6 Now we who ***are*** strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak, and not to please ourselves. For let each of us please ***his*** neighbor for ***his*** good, toward edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but just as it has been written, "The reproaches of those reproaching You fell on Me." For whatever things were written beforehand were written beforehand for our instruction, so that through the endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we may have the hope. Now may the God of endurance and encouragement give you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord, with one mouth, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15:7-13 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to ***the*** glory of God. Now I say ***that*** Jesus Christ has become a servant of ***the*** circumcision on behalf of ***the*** truth of God, in order to confirm the promises of the fathers, and ***that*** the Gentiles glorify God for ***His*** mercy; just as it has been written, "Because of this I will praise You among ***the*** Gentiles, and I will sing praise to Your name." And again it says, "Rejoice, Gentiles, with His people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all the Gentiles, and extol Him, all the peoples." And again Isaiah says, "There will be the root of Jesse, and the ***One*** rising to rule Gentiles; on Him Gentiles will hope." Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you abound in the hope in ***the*** power of ***the*** Holy Spirit.

15:14-21 Now I myself also have been persuaded concerning you, my brothers, that you yourselves also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. But I wrote to you more boldly, brothers, in part, as reminding you, because of the grace that was given to me by God, for me to be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, serving the gospel of God as a priest, so that the offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified in ***the*** Holy Spirit. Therefore I have boasting in Christ Jesus ***in*** the things pertaining to God. For I will not dare to speak anything of what Christ did not accomplish through me for ***the*** obedience of ***the*** Gentiles, by word and deed, in ***the*** power of signs and wonders, in ***the*** power of ***the*** Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem and around as far as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ; and so, aspiring to preach the gospel not where Christ was named, so that I may not build on another's foundation, but just as it has been written, "Those to whom it was not announced concerning Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

15:22-33 Therefore I also was being hindered many ***times*** from coming to you. But now, no longer having a place in these regions, and having a longing to come to you for many years, whenever I go to Spain, I will come to you. For I hope, while passing through, to see you, and to be sent forward there by you, if first I am filled with you in part. But now I am going to Jerusalem, ministering to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a certain contribution for the poor of the saints who ***are*** in Jerusalem. For they were pleased, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles shared in their spiritual ***things***, they ought also to minister to them in the fleshly ***things***. Therefore, having finished this and having sealed this fruit to them, I will go away through you into Spain. And I know that, coming to you, I will come in ***the*** fullness of ***the*** blessing

of the gospel of Christ. Now I exhort you, brothers, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in the prayers for me to God, so that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service which ***is*** for Jerusalem may become acceptable to the saints, so that I may come to you in joy through ***the*** will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace ***be*** with you all. Amen.

Chapter 15 Preview

Paul finishes the teaching he began in chapter 14 about the weak and the strong. The strong should bear with the weak and not just please themselves, because that is exactly what Christ did. He did not please Himself. Then Paul widens the picture: Christ came to serve the Jewish people and to bring the Gentiles in, so that Jews and Gentiles together would glorify God with one voice. He backs this up with four Old Testament passages.

In the second half of the chapter, Paul opens his heart about his ministry and his travel plans. He has preached the gospel from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum. Now he is carrying a gift to the poor believers in Jerusalem, and after that he hopes to visit Rome on his way to Spain. He asks the Romans to pray for him, and we get a glimpse of the man behind the letter.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1 *Now we who **are** strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*

"We who are strong." Paul counts himself among the strong, those who are free in conscience about food and days. But strength is not for showing off. Strength is for carrying others. The strong "ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak." To bear means to carry a load, the way you'd help someone carry something too heavy for them. We are "not to please ourselves."

15:2 *For let each of us please **his** neighbor for **his** good, toward edification.*

Instead, each of us should please his neighbor "for his good, toward edification." Edification means building someone up. This isn't people-pleasing. It's seeking what is truly good for the other person.

15:3 *For even Christ did not please Himself; but just as it has been written, "The reproaches of those reproaching You fell on Me."*

Why should we live this way? "For even Christ did not please Himself." Paul quotes Psalm 69:9, a psalm of David that the New Testament often applies to Jesus. "The reproaches of those reproaching You fell on Me." The insults people threw at God landed on Jesus. He took the shame and abuse of sinners on Himself. If the Son of God gave up so much for us, we can give up a little for our brother.

Old Testament links: Psalm 69:9 (quoted)

15:4 *For whatever things were written beforehand were written beforehand for our instruction, so that through the endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we may have the hope.*

This verse tells us why the Old Testament still matters. "Whatever things were written beforehand were written beforehand for our instruction." Paul has just quoted a psalm written a thousand years earlier and applied it to Christ and to us. The Old Testament is not a dusty history book. It was written for us.

And the purpose is hope. Through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we find hope. The God who kept His promises then keeps them now.

15:5-6 *Now may the God of endurance and encouragement give you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord, with one mouth, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul turns his teaching into a prayer. He calls God "the God of endurance and encouragement," the same two words from verse 4. God gives us these through the Scriptures. Paul prays that the Romans would be "of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus." Unity doesn't mean we all think alike on every question. It means we share the mind of Christ and follow Him together.

The goal is that "with one accord, with one mouth, you may glorify" God. Picture a choir: many voices, one song.

15:7 *Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to **the** glory of God.*

"Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us." This sums up the whole discussion that began in 14:1. How did Christ accept us? While we were still sinners (Romans 5:8), with all our faults and weaknesses. If He accepted us like that, we should accept each other. And when we do, it brings glory to God.

15:8 *Now I say **that** Jesus Christ has become a servant of **the** circumcision on behalf of **the** truth of God, in order to confirm the promises of the fathers,*

Paul now explains how Christ accepted both Jews and Gentiles. First, Christ "has become a servant of the circumcision," meaning the Jewish people. Jesus was born a Jew, lived under the Law, and ministered mainly to Israel (Matthew 15:24). He did this "on behalf of the truth of God," to prove God true to His word, and "to confirm the promises of the fathers," Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God promised, and in Christ, God delivered.

15:9 *and **that** the Gentiles glorify God for **His** mercy; just as it has been written, "Because of this I will praise You among **the** Gentiles, and I will sing praise to Your name."*

Second, Christ came so that "the Gentiles" would "glorify God for His mercy." There is a difference. For Israel, Christ confirmed promises. For the Gentiles, it was pure mercy. Gentiles had no covenant claim on God (Ephesians 2:12). They were brought in by grace alone.

Paul then strings together Old Testament verses to show this was always God's plan. The first is from Psalm 18:49. David says he will praise God among the Gentiles.

David sang the same words in 2 Samuel 22:50, after God rescued him from all his enemies, so this verse appears twice in the Old Testament.

Old Testament links: Psalm 18:49 (quoted); 2 Samuel 22:50 (quoted)

15:10 *And again it says, "Rejoice, Gentiles, with His people."*

The second is from Deuteronomy 32:43, from the Song of Moses. In the words Paul quotes, the Gentiles are told to rejoice with God's people. Not instead of Israel, but with Israel. This fits what Paul taught in chapter 11. The Gentiles have been grafted in alongside Israel. They have not replaced Israel.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 32:43 (quoted)

15:11 *And again, "Praise the Lord, all the Gentiles, and extol Him, all the peoples."*

The third is from Psalm 117:1, the shortest psalm in the Bible. All the Gentiles and all the peoples are called to praise the Lord.

Old Testament links: Psalm 117:1 (quoted)

15:12 *And again Isaiah says, "There will be the root of Jesse, and the **One** rising to rule Gentiles; on Him Gentiles will hope."*

The fourth is from Isaiah 11:10. "The root of Jesse" is the Messiah. Jesse was King David's father, so this points to the promised Son of David. He is the One "rising to rule Gentiles," and the Gentiles will put their hope in Him. In Revelation, Jesus calls Himself "the root and the offspring of David" (Revelation 22:16). Isaiah's promise is fulfilled in Him.

Paul's four quotations come from the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. The whole Old Testament agrees that God always meant to bring the nations to Himself.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 11:10 (quoted)

15:13 *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you abound in the hope in **the** power of **the** Holy Spirit.*

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing."

This is one of the most loved blessings in the Bible. God is "the God of hope." He is the source of hope. He fills us with joy and peace "in believing," as we keep trusting Him. And the result is that we "abound in the hope in the power of the Holy Spirit." Hope isn't something we work up. The Spirit gives it, and He gives it in overflowing measure.

If you are discouraged today, pray this verse for yourself. Ask the God of hope to fill you.

15:14 *Now I myself also have been persuaded concerning you, my brothers, that you yourselves also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*

Paul now begins to wrap up the letter. He is gracious toward the Romans. He is convinced they are "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." To admonish means to warn or correct with care. Paul is not writing because he thinks they are a weak church. He sees that they can help each other grow.

15:15-16 *But I wrote to you more boldly, brothers, in part, as reminding you, because of the grace that was given to me by God, for me to be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, serving the gospel of God as a priest, so that the offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified in* ***the*** *Holy Spirit.*

Even so, Paul admits, "I wrote to you more boldly." He did it to remind them, because of the grace God gave him to be "a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles,"

Paul uses the language of the temple here. He describes his work as "serving the gospel of God as a priest." In the Old Testament, priests brought offerings to God. Paul's offering is the Gentiles themselves, people who have come to faith through his preaching. He wants that offering to be "acceptable, sanctified in the Holy Spirit." Sanctified means set apart as holy. The Gentiles didn't need to become Jews to be acceptable to God. The Holy Spirit made them holy.

15:17-18 *Therefore I have boasting in Christ Jesus* ***in*** *the things pertaining to God. For I will not dare to speak anything of what Christ did not accomplish through me for* ***the*** *obedience of* ***the*** *Gentiles, by word and deed,*

Paul has reason to boast, but only "in Christ Jesus" and only "in the things pertaining to God." He will "not dare to speak anything of what Christ did not accomplish through me." In other words, he speaks only of what Christ did through him. The result was "the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed," that is, Gentiles coming to faith and living it out.

15:19 *in* ***the*** *power of signs and wonders, in* ***the*** *power of* ***the*** *Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem and around as far as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ;*

Christ worked through Paul "in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit of God." The book of Acts records many of these (Acts 14:3; 19:11-12). Paul had preached "from Jerusalem and around as far as Illyricum," a region on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, roughly where Albania and the former Yugoslavia are today.

"I have fully proclaimed the gospel." Paul doesn't mean every person in that region had heard. He means he had planted churches in the key cities, and those churches could now reach their own areas.

15:20-21 *and so, aspiring to preach the gospel not where Christ was named, so that I may not build on another's foundation, but just as it has been written, "Those to whom it was not announced concerning Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."*

Paul's goal was to preach the gospel "not where Christ was named." He was a pioneer. He quotes Isaiah 52:15, from the passage about the Suffering Servant: those who had never heard of Him will see and understand. That's why Paul kept pressing on to new places. Today there are still people groups who have never heard the name of Jesus. Paul's passion should still be ours.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 52:15 (quoted)

15:22 *Therefore I also was being hindered many **times** from coming to you.*

This is why Paul had not yet visited Rome. There was already a church there, and he was busy breaking new ground.

15:23-24 *But now, no longer having a place in these regions, and having a longing to come to you for many years, whenever I go to Spain, I will come to you. For I hope, while passing through, to see you, and to be sent forward there by you, if first I am filled with you in part.*

Now his work in the eastern Mediterranean was done. He had longed for years to visit Rome, and he planned to stop there on his way to Spain. Spain was at the western edge of the known world, and Paul hoped Rome would help send him there.

15:25-26 *But now I am going to Jerusalem, ministering to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a certain contribution for the poor of the saints who **are** in Jerusalem.*

But first Paul had to go to Jerusalem. The believers in Macedonia and Achaia, in northern and southern Greece, had collected a gift "for the poor of the saints who are in Jerusalem." The Jerusalem church had suffered from famine and persecution. Paul spent years gathering this offering (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9).

15:27 *For they were pleased, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles shared in their spiritual **things**, they ought also to minister to them in the fleshly **things**.*

The Greek churches were glad to give, and Paul says they owed it. Why? The gospel came to the Gentiles through the Jewish people. If the Gentiles have shared in Israel's spiritual blessings, it is right for them to share material blessings in return. This gift was a way to show that Jewish and Gentile believers really are one family.

15:28-29 *Therefore, having finished this and having sealed this fruit to them, I will go away through you into Spain. And I know that, coming to you, I will come in **the** fullness of **the** blessing of the gospel of Christ.*

Once Paul had "sealed this fruit to them," that is, safely delivered the gift, he would go to Spain by way of Rome. He was confident that when he came, he would come "in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

Did Paul ever make it? He did reach Rome, but not the way he planned. He was arrested in Jerusalem, held for two years, and sent to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 21-28). Whether he ever reached Spain, we don't know for sure. Some early church writers suggest he did, after being

released from his first imprisonment. God answered Paul's desire to see Rome, but in His own way. Sometimes He does the same with us.

15:30 *Now I exhort you, brothers, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in the prayers for me to God,*

Paul asks for prayer, and he asks them "to strive together with me." The word means to struggle or wrestle, like an athlete. Prayer is real work. Even the great apostle needed other people's prayers.

15:31 *so that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service which **is** for Jerusalem may become acceptable to the saints,*

He gives two specific requests. First, that he be "delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea," the unbelieving Jews who saw him as a traitor. Second, that his service would be "acceptable to the saints" in Jerusalem, because some Jewish believers were still suspicious of Paul and his Gentile churches.

How did God answer? Paul was nearly killed by a mob in Jerusalem, but Roman soldiers rescued him (Acts 21:30-32). The brothers in Jerusalem welcomed him (Acts 21:17), though many there were still suspicious of him (Acts 21:20-21), and Acts never tells us how the gift was received. God answered, though not in the way anyone expected.

15:32 *so that I may come to you in joy through **the** will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.*

Paul longed to come to them "in joy through the will of God," and to "be refreshed together with" them.

15:33 *Now the God of peace **be** with you all. Amen.*

Paul closes the chapter with a blessing. He has called God the God of endurance and encouragement (15:5) and the God of hope (15:13). Now He is "the God of peace." In a church with tension between the weak and the strong, between Jews and Gentiles, that is exactly the God they needed.

Chapter 15 Summary

Romans 15 completes Paul's teaching on the weak and the strong. The strong should carry the weaknesses of others and not just please themselves, following the example of Christ, who did not please Himself. The Scriptures were written to give us hope, and God wants Jew and Gentile to glorify Him together with one voice. Christ came to confirm God's promises to Israel and to show mercy to the Gentiles, just as the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets foretold.

Paul then shares about his ministry as a priest of the gospel to the Gentiles, his pioneering work from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and his plans to take an offering to Jerusalem before visiting Rome

on the way to Spain. He asks the Romans to strive with him in prayer, and closes with a blessing from the God of peace.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What responsibility do the "strong" have toward the "weak"? (15:1-2)

2. How does Jesus' example shape the way we treat other believers? (15:3, 7)

3. Why was the Old Testament written, according to Paul? How has it given you hope? (15:4)

4. What four Old Testament passages does Paul use, and what do they show about God's plan for the Gentiles? (15:9-12)

5. Pray 15:13 for yourself. What would it look like for you to "abound in the hope"? (15:13)

6. How does Paul describe his ministry to the Gentiles? (15:16)

7. Why did Paul want to preach where Christ had not been named? How could you share in that passion today? (15:20-21)

8. Why did Paul say the Gentile churches owed a gift to the believers in Jerusalem? (15:27)

9. Paul's plans worked out very differently than he expected. How have you seen God answer your prayers in ways you didn't plan? (15:30-32)

Chapter 16: Greetings and Final Words

Scripture: Greetings, Warnings, and Praise

16:1-2 Now I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church that ***is*** in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in ***the*** Lord worthily of the saints, and may stand by her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself also has been a patroness of many, and of me myself.

16:3-16 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who laid down their own neck for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; and the church at their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is a firstfruit of Achaia for Christ. Greet Mary, who toiled much for us. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. Greet Amplias, my beloved in ***the*** Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles, the approved ***one*** in Christ. Greet those of the ***household*** of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the ***household*** of Narcissus who are in ***the*** Lord. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who toil in ***the*** Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who toiled much in ***the*** Lord. Greet Rufus, the chosen ***one*** in ***the*** Lord, and his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brothers with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

16:17-20 Now I exhort you, brothers, to watch out for those causing the divisions and the stumbling blocks contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such ***men*** do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and through smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the guileless. For your obedience has reached to all; therefore I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise indeed toward the good, and innocent toward the evil. Now the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet quickly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ***be*** with you. Amen.

16:21-24 Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen, greet you. I, Tertius, who wrote the letter, greet you in ***the*** Lord. Gaius, my host and ***host*** of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the steward of the city, greets you, and Quartus the brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ***be*** with you all. Amen.

16:25-27 Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to ***the*** revelation of ***the*** mystery kept secret in eternal times, but now made manifest, and through prophetic Scriptures, according to ***the*** commandment of the eternal God, made known to all the Gentiles for obedience of faith, to ***the*** only wise God, through Jesus Christ, ***be*** the glory to the ages. Amen.

Chapter 16 Preview

Many people skip Romans 16. It looks like a list of hard names. But these are real people, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, who loved Jesus and served Him in the church at Rome.

Paul commends Phoebe, who most likely carried this letter, greets his friends in Rome, gives one last warning about people who cause division, and closes with a great song of praise to God.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1 *Now I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church that **is** in Cenchrea,*

Phoebe is the first name in the list, and she had an important job. Cenchrea was the port just east of Corinth, where Paul most likely wrote Romans, and most scholars believe Phoebe carried this letter to Rome.

Paul calls her "a servant of the church." The Greek word is *diakonos*. It can mean servant in a general sense, and it is also the word translated "deacon" elsewhere (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8). Some believe Phoebe held the office of deacon in the church at Cenchrea, and others believe Paul is simply describing her faithful service. Either way, Paul honors her.

16:2 *that you may receive her in **the** Lord worthily of the saints, and may stand by her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself also has been a patroness of many, and of me myself.*

Paul asks the Romans to receive her "worthily of the saints" and to "stand by her" in whatever she needs. Why? Because "she herself also has been a patroness of many, and of me myself." A patroness was someone who used her means to support others.

16:3-4 *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who laid down their own neck for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles;*

Prisca, also called Priscilla, and her husband Aquila were among Paul's closest friends. They were Jewish believers who had been forced to leave Rome when the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews (Acts 18:2). Paul met them in Corinth and made tents with them. By the time Paul wrote Romans, they were back in Rome.

They "laid down their own neck" for Paul, risking their lives, perhaps during the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19). We don't know the details, but all the Gentile churches were thankful.

16:5 *and the church at their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is a firstfruit of Achaia for Christ.*

Paul also greets "the church at their house." The early church had no church buildings. Believers met in homes.

Epaenetus was "a firstfruit of Achaia for Christ," one of the first believers in Achaia, the Roman province of southern Greece. Paul never forgot him.

16:6 *Greet Mary, who toiled much for us.*

Mary "toiled much for us." That's all we know about her. Paul noticed her labor, and so did God (Hebrews 6:10).

16:7 *Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*

Andronicus and Junia were Paul's "kinsmen," meaning fellow Jews, and "fellow prisoners," jailed for Christ at some point. They were believers before Paul, among the earliest Christians.

"Who are of note among the apostles."

This phrase has been debated. Some scholars believe it means they were well known to the apostles, respected by the Twelve and by Paul. Others believe it means they were counted among the apostles in a broader sense, as traveling missionaries sent out by the church, not as members of the Twelve. There is also a question about the second name. The SLB reads "Junia," a common woman's name, as many scholars and other translations do, which would make the two of them most likely a husband-and-wife team. Some translations read "Junias," a man's name, though no ancient example of that man's name has been found. Godly scholars land in different places on both questions, and I'll leave it there. What is clear is that Paul held them in high regard.

16:8-9 *Greet Amplias, my beloved in **the** Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved.*

Amplias, Urbanus, and Stachys were common names among slaves and freed slaves in Rome. In the church, a slave could be called "my beloved" by an apostle (Galatians 3:28).

16:10 *Greet Apelles, the approved **one** in Christ. Greet those of the **household** of Aristobulus.*

Apelles is "the approved one in Christ," a man whose faith had been tested and proven true. "The household of Aristobulus" probably refers to the servants or slaves of a man named Aristobulus.

16:11 *Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the **household** of Narcissus who are in **the** Lord.*

Herodion was another Jewish kinsman. "The household of Narcissus" may have been the servants of a powerful freedman who served the emperor Claudius. The gospel had reached into the homes of the powerful.

16:12 *Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who toil in **the** Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who toiled much in **the** Lord.*

Tryphena and Tryphosa may have been sisters, possibly twins. They and Persis are praised for hard work in the Lord. Women were deeply involved in the ministry of the early church.

16:13 *Greet Rufus, the chosen **one** in **the** Lord, and his mother and mine.*

Rufus is "the chosen one in the Lord." Mark's Gospel, which many believe was written for the church in Rome, mentions that Simon of Cyrene, the man forced to carry Jesus' cross, was "the father of Alexander and Rufus" (Mark 15:21). Mark names Rufus as if his readers knew him, so this may be the same man. If so, the man who carried Jesus' cross raised a son who served Jesus in Rome.

Paul adds, "and his mother and mine." Rufus' mother had cared for Paul like a mother at some point.

16:14-15 *Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brothers with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints with them.*

Paul greets two more groups, probably two more house churches, each with "the brothers" or "all the saints" who are with them.

16:16 *Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.*

"Greet one another with a holy kiss." A kiss on the cheek was a family greeting in that culture. Today it might be a handshake or a hug. The point is real affection between believers.

16:17 *Now I exhort you, brothers, to watch out for those causing the divisions and the stumbling blocks contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.*

After all the warm greetings, Paul gives a sudden, serious warning. Paul exhorts them "to watch out for those causing the divisions and the stumbling blocks contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them."

This is different from chapter 14. There, Paul told believers to accept each other over disputable matters. Here he warns about people who teach against the gospel itself. On secondary matters, we show grace. On the gospel itself, we stand firm.

16:18 *For such **men** do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and through smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the guileless.*

These teachers don't serve Christ but "their own belly," their own appetites. And they use "smooth talk and flattery" to deceive "the hearts of the guileless." False teaching rarely sounds false. That's why we need to know God's Word well.

16:19 *For your obedience has reached to all; therefore I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise indeed toward the good, and innocent toward the evil.*

Paul rejoiced over the Romans' obedience, but he wanted them to be "wise indeed toward the good, and innocent toward the evil." Become an expert in what is good, and stay a beginner when it comes to evil.

16:20 *Now the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet quickly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ **be** with you. Amen.*

"Now the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet quickly."

This echoes Genesis 3:15, the first promise of the gospel, where God said the woman's seed would bruise the serpent's head. And one day Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire forever (Revelation 20:10). Paul says believers share in that victory: Satan will be crushed under "your feet."

Old Testament links: Genesis 3:15 (alluded to)

16:21 *Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen, greet you.*

Timothy, his "fellow worker," was like a son to him (Philippians 2:22). Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater were fellow Jews. Jason may be the man who hosted Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-9).

16:22 *I, Tertius, who wrote the letter, greet you in **the** Lord.*

Paul dictated Romans, and Tertius wrote it down, adding his own greeting.

16:23 *Gaius, my host and **host** of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the steward of the city, greets you, and Quartus the brother.*

Gaius was Paul's host in Corinth, and the whole church met in his home. Erastus was "the steward of the city." A stone inscription found in Corinth names an Erastus who paid for paving a public square in return for his office as a city official, and many believe it is the same man.

16:24 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ **be** with you all. Amen.*

Verse 24 repeats the blessing of verse 20. Most modern Bibles put it in a footnote because it is missing from the earliest manuscripts of Romans, but the SLB follows the Received Text, which includes it. It is a fitting prayer either way: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

16:25-26 *Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to **the** revelation of **the** mystery kept secret in eternal times, but now made manifest, and through prophetic Scriptures, according to **the** commandment of the eternal God, made known to all the Gentiles for obedience of faith,*

Paul ends with a doxology, a song of praise to God. God is able to "strengthen" you, to make you firm and keep you standing (compare 14:4).

Paul's gospel is "the revelation of the mystery kept secret in eternal times." In the Bible, a mystery is not a puzzle. It is a truth God kept hidden until the right time and has now revealed. The mystery here is God's plan to save Jews and Gentiles alike through faith in Christ, and to make them one people (Ephesians 3:4-6).

It was hinted at by the prophets and is now made known to all the nations. The goal is "obedience of faith," the same phrase Paul used at the very beginning of the letter (1:5). Faith that is real leads to obedience. Paul has come full circle.

16:27 *to **the** only wise God, through Jesus Christ, **be** the glory to the ages. Amen.*

*"To **the** only wise God, through Jesus Christ, **be** the glory to the ages. Amen."*

Sixteen chapters about sin, grace, faith, the Spirit, Israel, and Christian living all lead here: glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ.

Chapter 16 Summary

Romans 16 shows us the real people behind the letter. Paul commends Phoebe, who most likely carried the letter to Rome, and greets more than two dozen friends, from Prisca and Aquila to Rufus and his mother. Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free, they were one family in Christ.

Paul warns the church to watch out for those who cause division through false teaching and flattering words, and promises that the God of peace will soon crush Satan under their feet. The letter ends with praise to the only wise God, who is able to strengthen His people through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. Why do you think Paul took so much space to greet people by name? (16:3-16)

2. What do we learn about Phoebe, and why did Paul ask the Romans to help her? (16:1-2)

3. What did Prisca and Aquila do for Paul? (16:3-4; Acts 18:1-3, 26)

4. What does this chapter show about the role of women in the early church? (16:1-7, 12)

5. Who has been like a "mother" or a "brother" to you in the faith? How could you thank them this week? (16:13)

6. What warning does Paul give in 16:17-18, and how is it different from his teaching in chapter 14?

7. What does it mean to be "wise indeed toward the good, and innocent toward the evil"? (16:19)

8. How does 16:20 connect to Genesis 3:15 and to the end of Satan in Revelation 20:10?

9. Looking back over the whole letter, what truth from Romans has meant the most to you, and why does it lead you to give glory to God? (16:25-27)

Conclusion

We have now walked through all sixteen chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans. As I said at the start, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, in context, and let Scripture explain Scripture.

Look back at the road we traveled. Paul started with the bad news: every one of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Then he gave us the best news there is: God declares the ungodly righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, as a free gift of His grace. He showed us that we have died to sin and been raised to walk in newness of life. He showed us the Holy Spirit living in us, helping us in our weakness, and he promised that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He showed us that God keeps His promises, to Israel and to us. And he showed us what a life looks like when it is offered back to God as a living sacrifice.

I hope this study has done what I set out for it to do: bring you closer to our Creator, help you grow in your walk with Him, and give you a clearer understanding of the gospel to share with others.

If you take only one thing from this book, let it be this: you cannot earn God's love, and you never have to. It is a gift. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior. Jesus is our mediator, the one and only way to be with God forever.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are Savior of mankind and the forgiver of all. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross to provide me this opportunity to be atoned and forgiven. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer for the first time, tell a Christian you trust, find a Bible-teaching church, ask about being baptized (6:3-4), and keep reading God's Word. I would love to hear from you at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

Old and New Testament Links in Romans

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
1:3-4	2 Samuel 7:12-13	alluded to
1:16-17	Habakkuk 2:4	quoted
1:22-23	Deuteronomy 4:16-18	alluded to
1:22-23	Psalm 106:20	alluded to
2:6	Psalm 62:12	quoted
2:6	Proverbs 24:12	alluded to
2:24	Isaiah 52:5	quoted
2:24	Ezekiel 36:22	alluded to
2:28-29	Deuteronomy 30:6	alluded to
2:28-29	Deuteronomy 10:16	alluded to
3:3-4	Psalm 51:4	quoted
3:3-4	Psalm 116:11	quoted
3:10-12	Psalm 53:1-3	quoted
3:10-12	Psalm 14:1-3	quoted
3:13-14	Psalm 5:9	quoted
3:13-14	Psalm 140:3	quoted
3:13-14	Psalm 10:7	quoted
3:15-17	Isaiah 59:7-8	quoted
3:15-17	Proverbs 1:16	alluded to
3:18	Psalm 36:1	quoted
3:20	Psalm 143:2	alluded to
4:3	Genesis 15:6	quoted
4:7-8	Psalm 32:1-2	quoted
4:11-12	Genesis 17:11	alluded to
4:17	Genesis 17:5	quoted
4:18	Genesis 15:5	quoted
4:19	Genesis 17:17	alluded to
4:19	Genesis 18:11	alluded to
4:22	Genesis 15:6	quoted
4:23-24	Genesis 15:6	quoted
5:12	Genesis 3:6	alluded to
5:13-14	Genesis 5:5	alluded to
5:19	Isaiah 53:11	alluded to
7:7	Exodus 20:17	quoted
7:9-10	Leviticus 18:5	alluded to
8:20-21	Genesis 3:17	alluded to
8:33	Isaiah 50:8	alluded to
8:36	Psalm 44:22	quoted
9:4-5	Exodus 4:22	alluded to
9:7-9	Genesis 21:12	quoted

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
9:7-9	Genesis 18:10	quoted
9:7-9	Genesis 18:14	quoted
9:10-13	Malachi 1:2-3	quoted
9:10-13	Genesis 25:23	quoted
9:10-13	Genesis 25:21	alluded to
9:15-16	Exodus 33:19	quoted
9:17-18	Exodus 9:16	quoted
9:17-18	Exodus 4:21	alluded to
9:20-21	Isaiah 29:16	alluded to
9:20-21	Isaiah 45:9	alluded to
9:20-21	Jeremiah 18:4	alluded to
9:20-21	Jeremiah 18:6	alluded to
9:22-24	Exodus 9:16	alluded to
9:25-26	Hosea 2:23	quoted
9:25-26	Hosea 1:10	quoted
9:27-28	Isaiah 10:22-23	quoted
9:27-28	Hosea 1:10	alluded to
9:29	Isaiah 1:9	quoted
9:33	Isaiah 28:16	quoted
9:33	Isaiah 8:14	quoted
10:5	Leviticus 18:5	quoted
10:6-7	Deuteronomy 30:12-13	quoted
10:8	Deuteronomy 30:14	quoted
10:11	Isaiah 28:16	quoted
10:13	Joel 2:32	quoted
10:14-15	Isaiah 52:7	quoted
10:16	Isaiah 53:1	quoted
10:18	Psalm 19:4	quoted
10:19	Deuteronomy 32:21	quoted
10:20	Isaiah 65:1	quoted
10:21	Isaiah 65:2	quoted
11:2-4	1 Kings 19:18	quoted
11:2-4	1 Kings 19:10	quoted
11:2-4	1 Kings 19:14	quoted
11:7-10	Deuteronomy 29:4	quoted
11:7-10	Isaiah 29:10	quoted
11:7-10	Psalm 69:22-23	quoted
11:11	Deuteronomy 32:21	alluded to
11:16	Numbers 15:20-21	alluded to
11:17-18	Jeremiah 11:16	alluded to
11:26-27	Isaiah 59:20	quoted
11:26-27	Isaiah 27:9	quoted
11:26-27	Isaiah 59:21	quoted
11:26-27	Jeremiah 31:33-34	alluded to
11:34-35	Job 41:11	quoted
11:34-35	Isaiah 40:13	quoted
12:16	Proverbs 3:7	alluded to
12:19	Deuteronomy 32:35	quoted

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
12:20	Proverbs 25:21-22	quoted
13:9	Leviticus 19:18	quoted
13:9	Exodus 20:13-17	quoted
13:9	Deuteronomy 5:17-21	quoted
14:11	Isaiah 45:23	quoted
15:3	Psalm 69:9	quoted
15:9	Psalm 18:49	quoted
15:9	2 Samuel 22:50	quoted
15:10	Deuteronomy 32:43	quoted
15:11	Psalm 117:1	quoted
15:12	Isaiah 11:10	quoted
15:20-21	Isaiah 52:15	quoted
16:20	Genesis 3:15	alluded to

Bibliography

The teaching and convictions in this study are my own. Any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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