

▼ Paul's Letter to the Roman Church

R O M A N S

For **I am**
NOT ASHAMED of the
Gospel, ^{for it is} _{the}
POWER OF GOD for
Salvation
to everyone who
BELIEVES...

the righteous man shall live by faith.

Santa Barbara Community Church ▼ Fall 2015

▼ R O M A N S

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Introduction

Paul's letter to the church in Rome is his affirmation of what he calls the *gospel of God*, that is, the good news of God (1:1).

The book of Romans is, indeed, good news. The letter comprises roughly 7100 words that explain our fundamental problem and God's loving, comprehensive solution to that problem. Romans is the most comprehensive, most linear, most leisurely and most systematic presentation of the Christian faith we find in any book of the Bible.

In Romans we have the heart of the New Testament. Essentially Paul answers the questions, *How is it that men and women can know God? On what basis can we approach the God of the universe?* Having answered these fundamental questions, Paul moves on to some of the specifics of the Christian life. Since we have fellowship with God, Paul asks, *What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? What are the implications of our fellowship with God?*

Romans is ultimately a book about God. Yes, this letter presents the great doctrines of the Christian faith. But Paul is preoccupied with God himself. The word *God* occurs 153 times in this letter which averages out to once every 46 words. This is more frequent than any other New Testament book. As New Testament commentator Leon Morris writes,

... in Romans the one great theme is God. Paul writes on a number of topics, but everything is related to God. He sees law, for example, not in the abstract but in relation to the way of God. He sees Christ as bringing about "the righteousness of God." He sees sin as sin against God. And so on. Romans may truly be described in a way that no other book can be, as a book about God. It is perhaps this that gives it its importance and appeal.

The approach of this study guide is exactly that: what follows is a *study guide*. The goal of these pages is to get us, the people of Santa Barbara Community Church, into the book of Romans. Let us dive in to Paul's letter and see for ourselves what God is saying through the man who wrote 13 of our New Testament letters.

The words of William Tyndale (d. 1536), the patriarch of English Bible translation, recommended that believers should memorize the book of Romans. *The more it is studied the easier it is, the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is.* If you haven't left the reading of this introduction to the last minute, find a forty-five minute time period before your first homegroup. Curl up on the couch and read Paul's letter to the Romans in a single sitting. Enjoy! May God bless the study of his Word.

This study is truly a group effort. Many thanks to Ruth Gross who wrote the study itself. Steve Jolley then took Ruth's study and added to it with some of the material from a previous SBCC Romans study that goes back to 1994. Finally, Vijay Jayaraman added some help on how we can use these Romans passages to lead us into prayer. Thanks, too, to Susi Lamoutte for helpful proofreading and additions and Carolee Peterson for her formatting prowess. May God bless us as we study his Word!

▼ I N T R O D U C T I O N

Notes

Study One

The Righteous Will Live By Faith

Romans 1:1-17

In each of our 12 studies in Romans you will find a brief tip on how to study the Bible more accurately. These simple and brief suggestions are intended to help us more easily understand and apply the Bible to our lives.

▼ **Bible Study Tool #1** – The Bible contains many kinds of literature or writings. The Psalms are poems or songs; Exodus is historical narrative; Isaiah is prophecy (preaching). Keep this in mind as you read.

Read Romans 1:1-17. What kind of literature is the book of Romans? Where do you see that in the text? Write down some of the supporting words or phrases that indicate what type of literature you are reading.

To familiarize yourself with what the text says, read and re-read Romans 1:1-17. Find repeated words, and either highlight them using different colors for different words or make a list of the repeated words.

The letter to the Christians at Rome contains the longest introduction (vv. 1-7) of the apostle Paul's 13 New Testament letters. List below what you learn about Paul and about Jesus in these verses. In verses 1-7 Paul introduces himself to his readers. What are the things Paul seems to want his readers to know about himself?

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How does Paul view himself? His commission? What is Paul's understanding of the Roman believers?

Who are the people to whom Paul is writing? How does Paul describe them and his relationship to them? List details you find in verses 1-17.

After considering the things Paul says about his readers in Rome, what are two or three other things you wish you knew about them?

Notice verse 5. Paul's mission is to call the Gentiles to the *obedience that comes from faith*. This could be translated more literally *the obedience of faith*. Faith, if it is genuine, leads to obedience. This is particularly intriguing in light of the teaching Paul will give on the Law of Moses in later chapters of Romans. Paul will insist repeatedly that righteousness never comes through works of the law, but those who are righteous by faith will persist in obedience.

Is *faith* itself an act of obedience? How do you see your faith interacting with your obedience to God? What would Paul say to someone who calls himself or herself a *believer* yet shows little or no obedience in life? What would you say?

Verses 11-12 talk about being *mutually encouraged by each other's faith*. How have you been encouraged by the faith of those in your homegroup?

We have begun to unweave Paul's somewhat complex first sentence (vv. 1-7). Paul states that he was *set apart for the gospel*. Continue to unweave this sentence by listing everything Paul tells his readers about the gospel in these verses. (If you have questions, write them down, also.)

Paul has more to say about the gospel in verses 16-17. How could God's righteousness be revealed by the gospel?

Is there anything Paul says about the gospel in these verses that you found surprising? What is hard to understand? What is totally confusing?

Verses 16-17 summarize the book of Romans. It was these two verses that led the 16th-century Augustinian monk Martin Luther to faith in Christ. Verse 17 became for Luther a gateway to heaven. For years he had been trying to please God through his own good works. During a pilgrimage to Rome (ironically) the words of Habakkuk 2:4 as quoted here by Paul came to mind. Luther was repeating his prayers on the stairs of St. John Lateran's basilica. When Romans 1:17 came to mind, Luther was released from his bondage to earning his salvation through the law and returned to Wittenberg (his home town in Germany) a changed man. His experience of the grace of God led to the Protestant Reformation.

What has your experience of grace been like? Did you live like Luther before coming to Christ? Have you ever been attracted to a legalistic gospel, that is, a gospel proclaiming that one's good works will somehow please God and lead to our acceptance in his kingdom?

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What is Paul trying to tell us about faith in each of the following verses?

(Two helpful notes: The word *believes* in verse 15, is basically the same Greek word that is translated as *faith* three times in verse 17. This is because in English our word *faith* can't be used as a verb. We can have faith, but we cannot say ...*everyone who faiths*, therefore we switch to *believes* for the verb. Also, in verse 17 *from faith for faith* may also be translated *from faith to faith*.)

Verse 5

Verse 8

Verse 12

Verse 17

Try to summarize what Paul says about faith and the gospel in verses 1-17. Write down at least a few ideas, and your questions, for discussion at homegroup.

What are a few things that Paul brings out in these first 17 verses of Romans that challenge or comfort you? What are one or two things that may have caused you confusion or frustration?

Challenge

Comfort

Confusion

If we were to pray for our church similarly to how Paul prayed about the Romans, what would you pray?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Praise God that we live in a time and place where we have heard this majestic gospel: the gospel that was promised beforehand through the prophets in the Scriptures (v. 2) and anticipated for generations, the gospel that is centered on the long-awaited Son of David in the person of Jesus (v. 3-4), the gospel that has been offered to us and offered to all nations (vv. 5-6), and the gospel that is marked by a righteousness that is by faith (v. 17).
- Thank God for individuals and people groups worldwide who have embraced the gospel, as demonstrated by their *obedience that comes from faith* (v. 5), just as Paul thanked God for the faith of the saints in Rome. Consider people you know and people groups whom our missionaries serve! Pray for mutually supportive and encouraging relationships between SBCC and the churches in which our missionaries serve (vv. 11-12).
- Pray that this gospel of righteousness from God and by faith may be preached among both Jews and Gentiles (vv. 16-17). Pray for great boldness among your homegroup to share this gospel with friends and neighbors (v. 16), and for those friends and neighbors to believe.

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Notes

Study Two

What is a Person?

Romans 1:18-32

▼ **Bible Study Tool #2 – Context.** Always consider how the passage you are reading relates to the previous verses or chapters. Sometimes it is immediately obvious. Sometimes it is not. Sometimes it becomes more obvious the further you read. Look for: repeated words or ideas; contrasting ideas; examples; cause and effect; or parallel ideas.

One of the questions all human beings must ask is, what is a person? Who is man? Is he or she essentially a good creature? An evil creature? What are the distinguishing marks of personhood?

G. K. Chesterton simplifies the options we have in understanding man when he writes, *Man is an exception, whatever else he is. If he is not the image of God, then he is a disease of the dust.* (*All Things Considered*, p. 170)

Read Romans 1:18-32. What is Paul's understanding of humankind in this section of his letter? Look for Paul's assumptions in these paragraphs.

What is your first reaction to verses 18-32? Write your thoughts and questions.

To become more familiar with this passage, look for repeated words or phrases in verses 18-32, and either highlight them in different colors, or list them here. How does this list compare to your list on page 3 from verses 1-17?

The first word of verse 18 is *For*. What connections, if any, do you see between verses 16-17 and verse 18? You might also think back to your study and discussion about the gospel, faith, and salvation in verses 1-17 (Study One).

In verse 18 Paul is writing about certain people who *suppress the truth*. According to verses 18-23, what does *suppressing the truth* entail?

Why would Paul begin his letter on such a negative note? Does this offend you? Do you think it offended the Romans when they read the letter?

If the gospel of Christ is such *good news*, why does this letter start off so negatively?

What claims does Paul make about the truth of God's existence? What about this troubles you or encourages you? Do you think it is right to say *they are without excuse*?

In verses 18-23 how does Paul describe the lives of *those who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*? Another way to ask this question is, how does unbelief come about in a person's life, and then what are the practical results of this unbelief in their lives?

The phrase *God gave them up...* is repeated three times in our passage. Do these appear to be a single truth repeated in three variations? A sequence? Contrasting ideas? What in the text supports your answer?

What does Paul have in mind when he speaks of God's wrath? Compare the verses below.

John 3:36

Ephesians 5:6

Colossians 3:5-6

1 Thessalonians 1:10

What do these verses teach about God's wrath? Do believers endure God's wrath?

Does this teaching about God's wrath bother you? If so, why?

How does this passage help you to better understand yourself and people in general?

In verses 28-32 we see the shocking results of what happens when people ignore God. What stands out to you in this list? What surprises you?

The letter to the Romans starts out with a vivid and shocking contrast between the gift of *salvation to everyone who believes*, and the life of those who *by their unrighteousness suppress the truth and experience God's wrath*. What are some of the implications of these statements for how we talk to our friends and neighbors about the gospel? How does this inform our evangelism?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage:

- Acknowledge the ways in which God has left himself with abundant witness in this world through creation (v. 19). Name and praise him for specific portions of his creation that point to His existence, glory, and character. Consider for example heavenly bodies, the predictability of natural laws, and the overwhelmingly beautiful and complex world of living things. Note that Paul's indictment of humanity in verse 21 arises from our failure to thank and glorify God for what He has made!
- Confess the ways in which we have both, in the past and present, suppress the knowledge of God for the sake of man's glory or created glory (v. 23), and for gratifying our own sinful desires and impulses. Consider idolatry (vv. 23-25), sexual impurity (v. 24), homosexual acts (vv. 26-27), and the continued list of sins in verses 29-31, many of which persist in the church.
- Pray for a spirit of repentance and holiness in the church, as we throw off the old life. Pray for those who don't know Christ to have their eyes opened to the gravity of sin and the greatness of God's mercy.

Study Three

Why Religious People Need the Gospel (1)

Romans 2:1-16

▼ **Bible Study Tool #3** – Allow the tension to build. This is another way to acknowledge that verses and even chapters do not stand on their own. Paul’s letter to the Romans is 16 chapters long. It makes sense that focusing on the first half of the second chapter may leave you with unresolved issues and questions. Paul just may be leading up to something! If an author is letting the tension build, it is okay for you to do the same!

In our last study we found Paul acting as the prosecuting attorney. He declared, in an imagined courtroom, that all mankind stands guilty before God due to willful sin. Paul has not finished his case. In Romans 2, he specifically turns his attention upon both Jews (who possess God’s law) and Gentiles (who don’t know the law of God as revealed to Moses).

Commentators are divided when they outline Chapter 2. Some see the whole chapter as an indictment against Jews. Others see Paul’s argument as more comprehensive. In verses 1-12 Paul is showing that Gentiles without the law are culpable before God. Then in verse 13 Paul singles out the Jews to show their guilt before God.

Read Romans 2:1-16. What is your hunch? Is Paul speaking of Jews or Gentiles here?

In 1:1-17 Paul’s writing was full of references to himself (*I, me, my*) and references to the saints at Rome (*you, your*). Romans 1:18-32 was full of references to *other* men and women (*they, them, their*). What various pronouns does Paul use throughout 2:1-16? At first impression, whose attention do you think Paul is trying to get?

Who did Paul say *has no excuse* in chapter 1? Who does Paul say *has no excuse* in chapter 2? For each of these *excuseless* groups, what would their attempt at an excuse sound like? How do you tend to make spiritual excuses in your relationship with God? How do you see something of yourself in these excuse-making groups?

Using only the text in verses 1-5, write down all the things stated or taught about God (such as who he is, what he does, and why he does it).

Explain the relationship between repentance, judgment and the kindness of God as stated in verses 1-5. What does it tell us about the relationships between God and man, and man and man? What is it that Paul says *is meant to lead you to repentance*? How has this been true in your relationship with God?

Verse 7 is somewhat perplexing. It sounds, on the surface, that Paul is saying we can earn our salvation by *trying really hard* to be good. Everette F. Harrison explains,

What can the apostle mean by his breathtaking assertion about attaining eternal life? At the very least, it is safe to say that he is not contradicting what he says later about the impossibility of having salvation by means of the works of the law (3:20). Far from teaching a system of salvation by works, the statement of verse 7, rightly understood, teaches the opposite. (Harrison, *Romans*, 1976, p. 29)

C. K. Barrett adds,

The reward of eternal life...is promised to those who do not regard their good works as an end in themselves, but see them as marks not of human achievement but of hope in God. Their trust is not in their good works, but in God, the only source of glory, honour, and incorruption. (Barrett, *Romans*, 1957 pp. 46-47)

Verse 13 might again lead us to think that Paul is teaching a salvation based on works. But when we read this verse in context, we realize the opposite is the case. *Those who obey the law will be declared righteous*. It just so happens that none of us obey the law. We are all law-breakers. This is the heart of Paul's indictment.

Looking at verses 6-11, how might you summarize what Paul is saying? Is there any way in which these verses stress you out? What questions do these verses raise in your mind?

In verses 12-16 the law is mentioned 11 times! Paul is setting up a *compare and contrast* scenario. What is the point of these verses? What does the *law* have to do with God's judgment?

Now look at verse 16. Paul makes a brief mention of the gospel in this verse. (Remember, these brief comments are made in the context of Paul's teaching in 1:16-17!) What resolution does this verse bring, if any, to the issues and tensions of verses 1-15? According to verse 16, what does the gospel have to do with judgment? Keep in mind, we are only halfway through the second chapter!

In chapter 1, Paul said that he is *eager to preach the gospel* to the Roman believers. Look over 2:1-16. What aspects of the gospel do you now understand that you need to preach to yourself? How do, or will you do, this? How is our church doing at preaching the gospel?

Why do *religious people* need the gospel?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage:

- Consider that God *does not show favoritism* (v. 11), but will *judge the secrets of all men* (v. 16). Acknowledge him as a righteous judge to whom we must all give account, regardless of whether we have a religious pedigree or not.
- Confess ways in which we may rest on our Christian heritage and, or, sit in judgment on those outside the church and our Christian culture. Acknowledge the image of God and law on the hearts (v. 15) of many non-Christian people. Consider qualities like respect for authority (Luke 7:8-9), unusual kindness (Acts 28:2), perseverance in searching for and willingness to worship God (Matthew 2:1-2), or generosity to the poor and fear of God (Acts 10:1-2).
- Pray that the law on the hearts of non-Christian people would lead them to the gospel! Pray for a revival of humility and gratitude within the church for the privilege of having the Scriptures, and for a renewed urgency in spreading this gospel to all nations.

Study Four

Why Religious People Need the Gospel (2)

Romans 2:17-29

▼ **Bible Study Tool #4** – Historical background is important! In order to understand what a passage has to do with the Church and the world today, you need to understand how the original readers would have understood the passage. When you need to look up a word, or an historical reference, do so! For example, in our passage for this study the practice of *circumcision* comes up often. Pick up either a study Bible or Bible dictionary, or do an internet search, to learn about the historical background of *circumcision* in the Bible.

Read Romans 2:17-29. What stands out to you? What words or concepts are confusing?

Verses 17-29 are definitely directed at the Jews. In Paul's day, Jews practiced a comfortable version of legalism. They believed that Israel was seeking to do the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures and that God was impressed with this effort. Over time the nation of Israel came to believe they were saved from God's judgment simply because they were Jews. Tradition held that everyone would be judged except the nation of Israel. Some Jews held to the belief that Abraham himself sat at the entrance of Hell and stopped his descendants from entering.

In our passage, what does Paul say to the Jew who is confident that either legalistic righteousness or national heritage will make him exempt from the judgment of God? Why are the Jews indicted by Paul?

Is the temptation to *rely on the law* only an issue for Jews? In what way was it unique to the Jews? In what way might it be seen as a universal temptation? Is there anything in this passage that causes you to think, *Oh dear, that sounds like me!?*

In verses 21-24 the apostle's argument gets very personal. Paul is not mincing any words and seems bent on offending. List the ways that these four verses criticize.

Read Genesis 17:1-14. Why did God institute circumcision for his people? In Romans 2:25-29, what does Paul say about the practice of circumcision and how people view it?

There have been five mentions of *the heart* in the first two chapters, 1:21, 1:24, 2:5, 2:15, and 2:29. What do those verses tell us about the law, the gospel, and the heart?

According to verses 28-29, what makes a person a Jew?

How do the verses below help you to understand Romans 2?

Galatians 6:15-16

Deuteronomy 30:6

What is *circumcision of the heart*? How would you know if *your* heart is circumcised?

Thinking back over chapters 1-2, what unresolved or unanswered questions do you have? What issues do you hope Paul will clear up in the coming chapters?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Acknowledge once again the great privilege of having the Scriptures in our language and in our homes. Thank God for the truths revealed in the Scriptures and how they have informed and transformed you.
- Confess for yourself and for the wider church the sin of hypocrisy. Consider the ways in which we commend scriptural truths but fail to obey them.
- Pray for outward and inward obedience in the church, for hearts that are truly circumcised (vv. 28-29). Pray for yourself and for the next generation—children and youth growing up in our body.

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Notes

Study Five

Everyone Needs the Gospel

Romans 3:1-20

▼ **Bible Study Tool #5** – Aren't rhetorical questions great? Paul uses them often in Romans. He asked several in chapter 2, and in the first 20 verses of chapter 3 he poses many more. Sometimes rhetorical questions are simply meant to elicit an expected answer, often to set up an explanation. Sometimes they are meant to push the reader to admit the unvoiced questions or frustrations they have. They are usually an indication that the reader is familiar with the issues being raised.

Read Romans 3:1-20. Take a few notes as to what stands out to you. What in the passage do you find vexing?

Focus on verses 1-10 and look for all the rhetorical questions. Do you think Paul's readers were struggling with these issues? Consider each one: is it a question you shared? For instance, given everything in chapter 2, were *you* beginning to wonder if there was any advantage to being a Jew?

What do you think of Paul's Old Testament quotations? Are they a bit negative? Are we really that bad?

Modern psychology seems to have a deep aversion to guilt and sin, insisting that we should purge guilt from our psyche in order to function as human beings. Paul seems to be trying to create in us a sense of guilt in these early chapters of Romans. What would Paul say about the modern view of guilt? Are there such things as *good guilt* and *bad guilt*?

Did the Jews' being *entrusted with the oracles of God* lead to their faithfulness? (For background, see Romans 1:1-3 and the promise to Abraham in Genesis 17.)

What does Paul say about God's righteousness in relation to our unrighteousness?

In verse 4 Paul is quoting a small portion of Psalm 51:4. Read the Psalm to get the larger context. Why does Paul quote this Psalm here in Romans 3? What does the unfaithfulness of God's people say about God's judgment?

What are the puzzling issues with righteousness and condemnation that Paul is addressing in verses 3-6? Why do people sometimes complain that *God is unjust or unrighteous to inflict wrath on us*? Have you ever thought God is unjust? If so, why?

In verses 9-20 who is Paul talking about? List the groups and categories of people he is including. How do you see yourself in Paul's description?

What does the law accomplish, and what does the law not accomplish? What are the *works of the law* Paul refers to in verse 20?

Romans 3:20 is the devastating climax to the argument of these opening chapters in Romans. Summarize verse 20 in your own words. What is the conclusion the reader is left with at this point in Romans?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Once again, thank God for our privileged access to the Scriptures (vv. 1-2), and acknowledge that God's judgments are right and true (v. 4).
- Confess the comprehensive nature of sin, touching every aspect of our lives and every human being (vv. 10-18). Name things God has delivered you from and areas in which deliverance is still a work in progress.
- Pray for consciousness of sin (v. 20), in friends, family, and people groups, and that repentance might follow.

Notes

Study Six

Salvation by Faith

Romans 3:21-31

▼ **Bible Study Tool #6** – Little connector words have great value. If a paragraph begins with *But now, Therefore, So then,* or other similar transitional words, make sure you look back to find out why.

Read Romans 3:21-30. List repeated words or phrases below. What is your initial reaction to these verses? Write down any questions you have.

Romans 3:21-31 are among the most important verses in the entire Bible. Paul is transformed from the prosecutor to the defender. The marvelous adversative *but* (v. 21) rescues the reader from his or her despair. *But now a righteousness from God is available to all who believe!* Here Paul explains how it is that we can stand in a right relationship with the holy God of the universe.

List all the things in verses 21-26 that Paul says about God's righteousness. What does our redemption have to do with God's righteousness? Is it fair to say that we are more apt to think of the gospel as being about our salvation rather than being about God's righteousness? How does Paul explain these two aspects of the gospel?

List everything this passage says about Jesus Christ.

Look at verses 24-25 and list the different terms or word pictures Paul uses to describe what takes place through faith in Jesus Christ. Why doesn't he simply say *God forgave our sins*? What more does Paul want us to grasp with the use of this rich terminology?

In verse 24, Paul declares the good news. While our sin condemns us, God *justifies* us by his grace. Justification refers to God's acquittal of the guilty. In the Bible, justification is a legal, forensic term that means *to declare righteous or to consider righteous*. Paul uses the verb 27 times in his letters (out of 39 New Testament occurrences). Fifteen of these occur in Romans.

Justification is the basic problem of every religion. How can sinful men and women stand before a holy and righteous God? Some religions deny the reality of sin and evil (Hinduism, New Age religions, Christian Science) while others deny the reality of personal sin (classical liberalism, post-modernism). Romans claims that we are justified before a holy God based upon what Jesus did on the cross. This brings us to the heart of Romans 3.

What comes to mind when you read the word *redemption* (v. 24)?

To *propitiate* means to appease someone's wrath or turn away wrath by an offering. Why is Paul talking about God's wrath again? Whose anger does the cross of Christ *propitiate*?

Using this passage and these word pictures, explain how it is that a woman or a man can be saved by Christ's death on the cross. Put into your own words what he did on the cross.

How should these verses affect our self-image? What is your emotional response to this section of Romans?

What does it mean to place your faith in Jesus (v. 22)? Is this merely an assent to the *fact* that Jesus is God and Lord? Does it involve a lifestyle? How has this affected your life?

Do you, at times, feel unclean or unworthy before God? Based on what Christ did, should you feel this way? What can you do to appropriate the work of Christ on the cross in your heart? How can these verses help you to *feel* forgiven? Has this look at Romans helped?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Praise God that righteousness comes from him through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 22), even as we recognize that we cannot produce it on our own! Praise him for the atoning work of Christ (v. 25).
- Praise God that he left our sins unpunished (v. 25). Name some sins that he has not punished us for, and ways in which we have not received what we have deserved.
- Pray that this message would be preached to Jews and Gentiles alike (vv. 28-29) and that it would bear fruit, being believed in the world (1 Timothy 3:16).

Notes

Study Seven

Salvation by Faith Illustrated

Romans 4:1-25

▼ **Bible Study Tool #7** – Start with what the text offers, even when you want historical background. It is good to approach the text as if you expect it to be clear and well written. God’s written Word will often surprise you with its clarity if you will pour over it before looking to outside sources or even other passages in Scripture. When possible, use cross references and commentator’s notes only after you have done your prayerful study.

Read Romans 4:1-25. Clearly, this passage focuses a lot on Abraham. Whether you know next to nothing about Abraham, or you are well acquainted with this Old Testament patriarch, start by listing everything that can be learned about him and the promise he received in verses 1-25. (We will go back to Genesis to read about him after doing this, but for now, let’s see how good a job Paul does!)

How does Paul describe Abraham’s relationship to Christians? How does the description in verse 1 differ from the description in verses 11-17?

Now turn to Genesis 12-17. At a minimum read 12:1-9, 15:1-6, and 17:1-14. How do these passages enhance your perspective? Why does Paul spend so much time focusing on Abraham?

Genesis 12:1-9

Genesis 15:1-6

Genesis 17:1-14

List repeated words or phrases in verses 1-25. What words or ideas are new? What words or ideas are carried over from the first three chapters?

Paul uses the terminology of accounting (*wages, gifts, counted*). What is he trying to convey? What *is counted*, and what *is not counted* according to Paul? How would you describe this accounting method?

Paul lifts a quotation from Genesis 15:6, *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness*, and uses it to support his doctrine of salvation by faith in God's grace.

Paul challenges the rabbis of his day with a single Old Testament quotation. Salvation has always been by grace through faith. Abraham was saved apart from any *work* he performed for the Lord. Abraham *believed* God, and it was *counted* to him as *righteousness*. Abraham's faith places him on the credit side of God's ledger.

Did the Old Testament ever teach *salvation by works*? Read Hebrews 11.

Compare verses 12 and 16. What does Paul mean by *walking in the footsteps of the faith* in verse 12? In verse 16, what sense is Abraham the *father of us all*?

How would you define *faith*? Is it blind trust? Believing what you know isn't true? Is faith a lifestyle? Is it an assent to a set of teachings? What might Paul say to someone who says that the only thing that matters is *sincerity*?

How is it with your *faith*? Describe your *faith* in God as you reflect inwardly. Is it like Abraham's? How might you grow or develop your *faith*?

Whose *righteousness* was the focus of 3:21-26, and what was the significance of Jesus in that righteousness? Now compare the righteousness that is the focus of 4:20-25. What was the significance of Jesus in this *righteousness*?

Have you ever thought much about this *righteousness*? What does this mean to you? What are your responses—thoughts or feelings—as you consider this?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Marvel that salvation is a simple matter of putting our trust and faith in God, just as Abraham and David did. Praise God that he did it all (v. 25), and for our spiritual forefathers who led us in the way of faith. Consider saying the Apostles' Creed together to confess to God and each other the great truths of our faith. Consider expanding on this by telling God in your own words why you believe in him.
- Ponder the ways in which faith was demonstrated in the lives of Abraham, David, Daniel, and others. Name these and pray that you may likewise live a life of faith.
- Continue to ponder the notion that we are not only saved by faith but also live by faith (Hebrews 11)! Pray for each other to have increased faith to believe all the promises of God. Name some of those promises and pray them into each other's lives!

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

Amen

Study Eight**What Is So Great About Justification?****Romans 5:1-11**

▼ **Bible Study Tool #8** – Focus on tense. What was done in the past? What is being done now? What will be done in the future?

Read Romans 5:1-11. Take note of repeated words and ideas. What stands out to you? What questions do you have?

What do verses 1-2 tell us about God? What has he done in the past? What is he doing now? What will he do in the future? How is it helpful to look at the passage this way?

What do verses 1-5 tell us about our relationship to God?

Are there things that Paul says in verses 1-5 that you tend to think of as theoretically true but not a reality in your own life? What are they? Why do you think that is? Or, how do you see them as a reality?

Verses 9-10 use harsh language to tell us that we were *enemies* of God and deserving of his *wrath*. Have you ever thought of yourself as being an *enemy* of God? How does this concept give you a new appreciation for the gravity of your sin?

Respond to the following statement by John Stott:

The essential background to the cross, therefore, is a balanced understanding of the gravity of sin and the majesty of God. If we diminish either, we thereby diminish the cross. If we reinterpret sin as a lapse instead of a rebellion, and God as indulgent instead of indignant, then naturally the cross appears superfluous. But to dethrone God and enthrone ourselves not only dispenses with the cross; it also degrades both God and man. A biblical view of God and ourselves, however, that is, of our sin and of God's wrath, honours both. It honours human beings by affirming them as responsible for their own actions. It honours God by affirming him as having moral character. (Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 110)

What implications do verses 9-10 have on your choices, habits, and lifestyle? Salvation is by faith, and through Christ comes righteousness, but is there still gravity to our ongoing sin? What are areas in your behavior that you can change as a response to the act of God's great love and reconciliation?

Paul has used the words *salvation/saved*, *reconciliation/reconciled*, and *justification/justified* in these verses, and he previously used *redemption/redeemed* and *propitiation/propitiated*, as well. Which of these expressions or word pictures of Christ's work on the cross is hardest for you to grasp or appreciate, and which is the easiest for you? Why do you think that is?

According to verses 6-8, how can we be sure that God actually loves us? What would you say to someone who said they didn't think God could love them?

What are some of the practical consequences of being reconciled and at peace with God (v. 1) in your life?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Thank God for the ultimate peace he gives in reconciliation with Him. Consider what incredible hope this gives in life and in death!
- Once again, acknowledge the high price of this hope in the blood of Christ (v. 9). Rejoice in the power of Christ's death and also in the ongoing power of his life at the right hand of the Father in heaven (v. 11).
- Pray about one another's sufferings. Pray for each other by name that your present sufferings would produce perseverance, character, and overflowing hope!

Notes

Study Nine

The Two Most Influential People in History

Romans 5:12-21

▼ **Bible Study Tool #9** – Let Scripture interpret Scripture. This means that when in doubt about the meaning of a word, figure of speech, or passage, think about how it fits with other sections of the Bible that are clear.

Read Romans 5:12-21. What is clear? What is unclear? What questions do you have?

In the first half of chapter 5, the focus is on our justification and the resulting peace and reconciliation we have with God through Jesus. Why do you think Paul is now talking about *Adam*, *sin*, and *death*?

What do verses 12-14 teach about sin and death? What do they teach about Adam? What questions are you left with?

Considering verses 12-17, in what ways are Adam and Jesus similar, and in what ways are they different?

In what sense do people *sin* who have never heard of the God of the Bible or of God's law? (You may want to review Romans 1:18-21, 2:12, and 14-15.)

Why did people die from the time of Adam until the giving of the law? Why do they die today after the work of Christ on the cross?

These verses might sound like everyone is saved by the work of Christ. Is this what Paul is teaching? (Look carefully at verse 17.)

In verses 14, 17 and 21 the word *reign/reigned* is used five times. List some synonyms for *reign*. What does it mean for one person to reign over others? Discuss some of the facets of the relationship between a king and his subject.

Are you more apt to think of sin *reigning*, or of sin *influencing*? How about grace and righteousness? Are you more apt to think of grace and righteousness as being *offered to us*, or of *reigning over us*?

Romans 5:9 says, *we have been justified by his blood...* What more does Paul say about justification in verses 12-21?

What does Paul mean when he says, *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more* (v. 20)? Compare 7:7-12. How have you experienced this truth in your life?

What difference does this *stuff* make in your life right now? Paul affirms that you have solidarity with Christ. His righteousness is your righteousness. How does this affect your outlook on life? How does it practically affect your daily life? Look back at your response to a similar question regarding verses 9-10 on page 34. What is different in your thoughts or answers from then to now?

Compare and contrast the difference between living under the law and living under grace. How are these two ways of living different?

Reflect for a moment on your own life. Do you feel like you are living under the law or under grace? Looking at this passage as a believer, regardless of how you *feel*, which does it say you live under?

When someone receives a very special gift that has great significance, they have a reaction (think engagement ring). Think about the various kinds of reactions, good or bad, that people have toward gifts and gift givers. Describe them. What are some fitting, or some not so fitting, responses for condemned sinners who have received the free gift of grace that brings justification and eternal life? Think and pray about your own reactions.

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Ponder that sin entered you through one man: Adam. Acknowledge before God our desperate plight—that without his intervention we would remain under condemnation.
- Praise God that the gift is greater than the trespass (v. 15)! Pray that each of you may experience the abundant life that comes from God's abundant provision of grace (v. 17)!
- Pray that this message of death through Adam and even greater life through Christ may be preached to friends, family, and nations. Pray for those who still live under Adam's death to hear of the life that is in Christ.

Study Ten

Dead or Alive?

Romans 6:1-14

▼ **Bible Study Tool #10** – Notice the use of words that are pictures. These word pictures enhance the meaning of a passage. In Romans 6:1-14 pay attention to the word pictures of *baptism, dead, life, and alive*.

Read Romans 6:1-14. What stands out to you? What questions are you left with?

In chapter 6, Paul answers the possible objection of his critics to God's free gift of grace. *If my sin allows God to be more gracious (5:20), then perhaps I should persist in sin so that God might have opportunity to be even more gracious!* How does Paul begin to answer this objection?

In verse 1, Paul uses a double negative, which in Greek intensifies a single negative. Various translations of the Greek are fun to compare: *May it never be* (NASB); *Of course not!* (TLB); *God forbid!* (KJV); *What a ghastly thought!* (Phillips); *No, no!* (NEB), *By no means!* (ESV), *I should hope not!* (Message). Now that you have the idea, have fun and do your own translation.

Think about the four rhetorical questions Paul asks in verses 1-3. Rephrase these verses using commands or statements instead of Paul's rhetorical questions. What advantage are these questions in contrast to statements or commands?

Baptism. In verses 1-4, *baptism* is used as a word picture that helps us understand the Christian life and our relationship to sin. To what does Paul compare baptism? How does it compare? How does that stretch or expand your previous understanding of baptism?

Be ready to share with your homegroup when you were baptized and how that external act helped you understand your Christian life better.

The Christian's relationship to sin is difficult for some believers to understand. What does Paul mean when he says you *must consider yourself dead to sin*? How does Paul explain this?

What would it, or does it, look like in your life to *consider yourself dead to sin*? Do you think of this? Is it a gut reaction? A new concept to ponder? Consider your answers together as a homegroup.

Notice that Paul does not leave this teaching of imputation as a comfortable legal fact. He pushes his readers to apply this reality in verses 11-14. Note the role that *members* play in our obedience. We are to practice our *death* to sin by offering the *parts of our body* to God (Paul develops this thought further in 12:1-2). This offering has both a negative and a positive dimension.

Negative: *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*

Positive: *But present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

Think about the positive and negative side of your death to sin. In what ways are you seeking to obey each of these commands? How could you improve in this?

Consider verse 14. Why is it that the reality of God's grace in our lives means that *sin will have no dominion over you*? Has this been your experience? What does it mean for sin to have dominion?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Celebrate that you have died to sin! Tell God in the presence of each other what you have died to. Ponder your own baptism, thank God for it, and consider that it is a public witness of your death to sin.
- Pray for one another and the wider body of Christ to no longer let sin reign in our mortal bodies (v. 12), but instead to offer our bodies to God (v. 13). Pray for repentance, holiness, and revival.
- Pray the hope of the resurrection (v. 5) into each other's lives and others in the body of Christ. Consider those who suffer and those near death.

Notes

Study Eleven

A New Kind of Slavery

Romans 6:15—7:6

▼ **Bible Study Tool #11** – Take note of illustrations. Just like a preacher in a sermon, the writers of the New Testament will often use an illustration to help tease out the theological meaning of their writings. As we all know, some illustrations resonate better than others. In our passage for this study, Paul uses the illustration of marriage in 7:2-3 to help make his point.

Read Romans 6:15—7:6. What stands out? What questions do you have? Make a note of any verses that speak to you personally. What do they say to you?

The very word *slavery* in the North American mind conjures up a dark chapter of our history. Slavery in the first century was different than the slavery that existed in America. In the Roman world, slavery was widely practiced. Roughly a third of the Roman world consisted of slaves. Since many slaves regained their freedom, up to half of the Roman church either were or had been slaves. Slavery in the Roman world, while severe, did not have the harsh connotations it has in our mindset.

Paul introduces in these verses a dramatic thought. Those who have come to Christ are subjected to a new kind of slavery! Compare and contrast the two types of slavery Paul outlines in verses 15-23. Who is the master in each type of slavery? What is the end result of each slavery?

Slavery to Sin

Slavery to Righteousness

What struggles do you have with being categorized as either a *slave of sin* or a *slave of righteousness*?

Verse 16 assumes that all people are a slave to something. The contrast is between slavery to *sin*, or to *obedience, which leads to righteousness*. How would you respond to a person who says that they are free and not a slave to anything?

How is the Christian's *slavery to righteousness* actually the ultimate freedom? How has this been true in your life? What might be areas of your life you would consider to be impinging this freedom? What would Paul say about that based on this passage?

In verse 17, Paul talks about becoming *obedient from the heart*. Look up the other references to the *heart* from the previous chapters in Romans. How do they help you understand the gospel?

Romans 1:21

Romans 2:5

Romans 2:15

Romans 2:29

Romans 5:5

Romans 6:23 is one of the more well-known verses in the Bible and a wonderful, brief summary of the gospel message. What does this verse mean to you? How does it lead to thankfulness in your life?

Paul's marriage illustration in 7:1-3 is a bit tangled. New Testament commentator William Barclay writes, *Seldom did Paul write so difficult and so complicated a passage as this.*

In 7:2-3, what does Paul say the legal effect of a husband's death is on a wife? Is this passage primarily meant to teach us the law on marriage? Why or why not? How does this illustration help, or not help, you to understand the spiritual truth in verses 4-6?

Our passage for this study ends with Romans 7:6 mentioning that we are to live in the *new way of the Spirit*. As a believer, how have you experienced this new way of Holy Spirit living? Contrast your old life with your new life. How are things different for you now?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Praise God that we are no longer slaves in captivity to sin or to the law! Consider that this great event was anticipated numerous times in the Old Testament, such as through Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, or through the prophets (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 61:1). Once again, thank God specifically for what you are no longer enslaved to.
- Pray for one another to offer the parts of your body in slavery to righteousness (6:19), not by your own efforts, or in the old way of the written code, but in the new way of the Spirit (7:7). Pray for a fullness of the Holy Spirit in each other that would move you to offer your bodies to righteousness.

Notes

Study Twelve

No Condemnation!

Romans 7:7—8:2

▼ **Bible Study Tool #12** – Make note of the difference between personal and propositional statements. In Romans 7:7- 8:2 the apostle Paul makes many very personal statements. He also makes many propositional statements. It will enhance your Bible reading to notice the difference.

Read Romans 7:7—8:2. Make notes as to what stands out. What is puzzling? What speaks to you?

As we have already seen, Paul is very fond of rhetorical questions. What are the rhetorical questions Paul poses in our passage? Write down the question, and then briefly summarize his answers.

Verse 7

Q.

A.

Verse 13

Q.

A.

Verse 24

Q.

A.

Paul's repeated use of first person singular pronouns indicates that he is sharing something of his own spiritual pilgrimage. Find these personal pronouns. How many can you come up with? What do these verses add to your understanding of his message?

How does Paul describe his struggle in verses 15-24? What was it that so distressed him? How does his struggle compare to what you have experienced in your spiritual life?

Paul asks two questions in our passage. The first question is about the law. *Is the law sin? (7:7-12)*. What is Paul's answer? What is the value of the law? Why does Paul choose the law against coveting (the Tenth Commandment) to make his point?

The second question is, *Did the law bring death (7:13-25)*? How does Paul answer his second question? What is the purpose of the law in these verses? Can you think of other purposes of the law?

Think about these verses personally. Explain how they compare to your experience.

In verse 24, Paul calls himself a *wretched man*. Do you think this would be an unpopular admission today? Why? Paul understood his own sinfulness and thus was ready for the grace of God. How do you resonate with this?

What is your response to the following statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer?

The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is. Worldly wisdom knows what distress and weakness and failure are, but it does not know that man is destroyed only by his sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this. In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother I can dare to be a sinner. (*Life Together*, Bonhoeffer, p. 119)

In 8:1-2, we read of Paul's final summary to the dilemma of sin. How does this chapter lend comfort to those of us who fail? How would you encourage a brother or sister who had a difficult time getting over his or her own guilt?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. What are a few practical lessons from this passage that you can apply to your life this week? Be ready to share these with your homegroup.

Praying the Passage

- Acknowledge that God's laws are good and holy! Name some of his commandments, and acknowledge the blessing that results when we live in accordance with them. Acknowledge where we have failed to do so.
- Pray for one another in this struggle against sin (7:14-24). Pray that we might look to God and experience victory (7:25).
- Rejoice that your very struggle is evidence that you are in Christ Jesus, and that you are therefore no longer under condemnation (8:1-2). Pray for one another to experience this freedom in Christ, and for other individuals and people groups to find this freedom for the first time.

Notes