



Faith
Connections
Bible Study Guide

Spring
21

Romans



Bible Study Guide

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Perspectives

The Value of Life

I recently watched a documentary on the Auschwitz concentration camp. Auschwitz was “a complex of over 40 concentration and extermination camps operated by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland (near the town of Oświęcim) during World War II and the Holocaust.”* It is estimated that between 1.1 and 1.5 million died in this camp, which included men and women, young and old. Among them: Jews (who made up 90% of the death toll), non-Jewish Poles, Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, and other Europeans. Those not gassed died of starvation, exhaustion, disease, executions, beatings, and medical experiments.

The beginning of the documentary focused on how the Jewish people were stripped of all their property and dignity, forced to live in poverty, and herded into train cars like cattle to be taken to the concentration camps. The cruelty was overwhelming. As I watched I couldn't help thinking, “How could people treat other people in such a horrific way?” One thought kept coming to me: *When we devalue human life or dehumanize others, we lose our capacity to care how we or others treat them. We no longer see them as God's creation (fellow humans), but apathetically view them as objects.*

Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God has shown and proven His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for “us.” The us includes everyone. God's love is not dependent on our actions, attitudes, zip code, ethnicity, economic status, and so on. He loves us! God values all human life so much that He “gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).”

Not only does God love all humankind, He calls us as believers to love all humankind. Romans 12:10-20 speaks of loving others, helping the needy, seeking peace with all, and showing love and compassion to those we might consider our enemies. When we value all human life, loving others through the power of the Holy Spirit, God gives us the capacity to treat others with Christlike love (which includes taking a stand when people are devalued and dehumanized by others).

God values life—all life. We, who are recipients of God's love and grace, are called to value all life too. During this focus on the message of Romans, pray that God would open your eyes to the ways you can value life by expressing His love to everyone.

May God bless you as you study His Word this quarter!

MIKE WONCH

Editor

*<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auschwitz_concentration_camp> Accessed January 28, 2020.

March

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PAUL AND THE CHURCH AT ROME

God calls all nations to the obedience that comes from faith.

THE WORD

ROMANS 1:1-15

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—²the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures³regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,⁴and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.⁵Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.⁶And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.⁹God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you¹⁰in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹²that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

KEY VERSE

¹⁴I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

**ROMANS
15:18-20**

¹⁸I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— ¹⁹by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

23-24

²³But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, ²⁴I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

ENGAGE THE WORD

As I walked into the conference room, the leader stood up and said, "Hi! Welcome to this first interview. Why don't you tell our committee a little bit about yourself?" How do you introduce yourself to a stranger? What do you say about yourself?

The apostle Paul had never yet been to Rome, but he was planning to visit the believers who lived there. Paul's letter to the Romans was his first contact with these fellow believers in Rome. In essence, Paul introduced himself to the Romans, telling them who he was and what it was he believed and preached. Paul could hardly have known the incredible impact this letter would have on Christian believers over the centuries, but this letter has informed and transformed more believers than perhaps any other letter written in history.

**PAUL, AN APOSTLE
TO THE GENTILES****Romans 1:1-7**

As Paul introduced himself to his readers, he used four significant words to describe himself: servant,

Did You Know?

Paul wanted to reach those who had never heard the gospel. Today, there are still 7000 people groups representing 1.5 billion people who have never heard the good news. Our work is not finished!

MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT BY FAITH

called, apostle, and set apart. Paul knew who he was and what God had called him to do. As a “servant of Christ Jesus,” Paul was completely at the disposal of Christ’s commands. As one “called to be an apostle,” he recognized that God had summoned him to be “sent out” as His special messenger. Namely, God had “set apart” Paul for the task of preaching the gospel (literally, “the good news”) of Jesus Christ.

Even though the news of Jesus’ death and resurrection was fairly recent, the prophets of Scripture had foretold God’s promise of salvation through a descendant of David for centuries. Paul declared that Jesus was not only a son of David, but He was also the Son of God as was revealed by the Spirit through Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. This Jesus, who is also Lord and Master, is the One who called Paul to preach the good news of salvation to the Gentiles.

But Paul was not the only one who was “called.” His readers who are loved by God (both then and now) are also called to belong to Jesus Christ and to be God’s holy people! Paul joyfully reminds his readers that when God calls, He also blesses with His grace and peace.

Romans 1:8-15

After his introduction and greeting, Paul prayed for the believers in Rome, thanking God for the great reports he has heard of their faith. It is inspiring to recognize how often Paul prayed for other believers in his letters. He told the Romans that he remembered them in his “prayers at all times.” Likewise, if we truly care about other people, we should pray for them often.

Paul had wanted to visit the Romans for quite some time, but he had been prevented from doing so until now. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul longed to visit them in order to give them a “spiritual gift to make them strong.” But Paul realized that these believers could also strengthen him as well. In fact, they could

Think About It

We call the message of salvation “the good news.” Why? Because the good news of God is that Jesus lived, died, and rose again so that people could be brought into a right relationship with God by placing their faith in Christ and living daily in obedience to Him. Salvation is not something we earn, but a free gift God offers for those who will accept it. This is the good news of the gospel!

PAUL'S PLAN FOR MINISTRY

both mutually encourage each other by their faith. Sometimes we incorrectly think that it is only the leader's responsibility to build up other believers. But God wants to use all of us to encourage and strengthen each other through our shared faith.

Paul realized that God's grace obligated him to share the good news with all people, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. It is easy to limit our focus to people who share a common background or upbringing with us. But as a faithful servant of Christ, Paul was eager to preach and share the good news to anyone who would listen.

Romans 15:18-20, 23-24

At the end of his letter, Paul wrote once again about his plans for preaching the gospel. In the past, the Spirit of God had used Paul to lead many Gentiles to faith in the Mediterranean regions between Greece and western Asia. Paul explained that it had always been his ambition to preach the gospel to people who had never heard the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul set his sights on preaching in Spain, a region that had not yet heard the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Along the way, he wanted to visit Rome to encourage them and also give them an opportunity to assist him on his journey to Spain.

Two thousand years later, there are still many people who have never heard nor accepted the message of salvation through faith in Jesus. Paul was never satisfied to live in the glory of past victories, but he continued to make plans to reach others for Christ. What kind of plans are we making?

REFLECT **W**hat is the mission God might be calling you to today . . . this week . . . this month?

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March

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GOOD NEWS AND NOT-SO-GOOD NEWS

God calls us to righteous living.

THE WORD

**ROMANS
1:16-32**

KEY VERSE

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with

women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³²Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Our Scripture passage today could be described with the often-used phrase, "I have some good news and some bad news." Paul explains that the good news, of course, is that the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals the power of God to save anyone who believes. The bad news, however, is that salvation is so drastically necessary. The silver lining of this dark cloud is the good news that God has provided the remedy to sin in Jesus Christ.

THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION

Romans 1:16-17

As Paul began to introduce the content of his preaching to the Romans, he started with the good news first. The gospel of Jesus is the power of God to save people from sin. Paul was not ashamed, embarrassed, or hesitant to boldly proclaim the news of salvation through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The reason for this is because the message of Jesus is powerful and life-transforming.

The key to salvation is faith. Virtually every religion in the world except for Christianity declares that a person must work to earn their way to achieve an eternal reward like heaven. Salvation is directly related to righteousness, which could be defined as "being and

Did You Know?

Literally, the quotation from Habakkuk reads, “The righteous by faith will live.” The word order implicitly emphasizes Paul’s point that righteousness is possible by faith alone.

doing right (or “right behavior”) in the sight of God.” But Paul declared that the unique and radical revelation of God in Christ is that salvation is not attained by works but by faith. Quoting the prophet Habakkuk (2:4), Paul declared that “the righteous will live by faith.” Only those who have been made righteous by faith will live (or “be saved”). This is not to suggest that right behavior is unimportant, because it is! But no one can earn salvation by virtue of their own works of righteousness. Salvation is by faith “from first to last.” This is the message that Paul adamantly and boldly proclaimed everywhere he preached.

WICKEDNESS AND GOD’S WRATH

Romans 1:18-23

Sinfulness and wickedness are the defiant rejection of God. Testimonies of God’s creative and eternal power as well as God’s righteous and holy nature are visible in the world He has created. But the truth about God is rejected and suppressed by the wickedness of people. Despite the many opportunities to recognize and acknowledge God in the created world, humanity has defiantly refused to acknowledge God’s work or even God’s presence. In this sense, the self-acclaimed “wisdom” of those who ignore and reject God’s presence and activity in the world is reduced to futility and foolishness. In their foolish attempts to “suppress the truth” about God, sinful people have tried to replace the infinite and immortal God with self-created images and activities that are finite and short-lived.

The result of wickedness and unrighteousness is God’s wrath. Just as righteousness results in wholeness and life, sinfulness results in brokenness and destruction, both now and in the future. God’s wrath is visible in God’s refusal to spare sinners from the consequences of their own self-destructive and sinful choices. In this sense, God’s wrath is not an emotional explosion of divine fury; rather, it is the result of the sinner’s self-inflicted pain and punishment for reject-

Think About It

The violation of the created order in human sexuality is, as Paul understood it, an outgrowth of the violation of the created order, a violation whose roots lie in self-deception and idolatry [William M. Greathouse with George Lyons. *NBBC: Romans 1-8* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2008), 77.]

SIN'S SELF-DESTRUCTIVE COURSE

ing God and righteousness, and trying to substitute selfishness and sin in their place. God's wrath is a direct consequence of the sin choices made by people who know better.

Romans 1:24-32

A well-known slogan says, "Have it your way!" For patrons of a restaurant, this is good news. But when God looks at humanity's sinfulness and says, "Have it your way!" the results are disastrous.

In these verses, Paul repeated three different times that the people deliberately "exchanged" God's righteousness for their own wicked sinfulness and that God therefore "gave them over" to their sin (vv. 23-28). In each example, wicked people put their own "god" or sin in place of the truth God has revealed to them. As a result, God reacts by "handing them over" to the consequences of the sinful choices they have made. To make matters worse, wicked people do not only practice sin that leads to death, but they also approve and applaud others who follow the same destructive path.

Unnatural sexual relationships and sexual immorality are examples of what happens when God's Word is perverted, twisted, and ignored by people (vv. 24-27). But a wide variety of other destructive consequences, including greed, arrogance, infidelity, gossip, and envy, are also listed as examples of human sinfulness (vv. 29-31). We should refrain from thinking that sexual sins are worse than other sins. Sin is sin, and every sin separates us from God equally.

Paul's portrayal of sinfulness in the world is shocking and bleak. But the bad news does not disqualify the glorious truth of the gospel. Because of Christ, the righteous will live by faith.

REFLECT | In what ways can you share the good news of God this week?

March

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GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

God is the final and fair judge.

THE WORD

ROMANS
2:1-16

KEY VERSE

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. **2Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.** **3**So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? **4**Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

5But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. **6**God "will repay each person according to what they have done." **7**To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. **8**But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. **9**There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; **10**but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. **11**For God does not show favoritism.

12All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. **13**For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. **14**(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not

have the law. ¹⁵They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

28-29

²⁸A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

ENGAGE THE WORD

In the opening chapters of Romans, Paul explained that everyone is in need of a Savior because everyone has sinned. Some people try to deny their sin and need because they think they are better than other people. By pointing out and judging the sins of others, they seem to think God will overlook their own sins and they will avoid judgment themselves. Paul corrects this self-righteous misunderstanding in our passage this week.

DO NOT JUDGE

Romans 2:1-4

The definition of a hypocrite is a person who pretends to be what he/she is not. A hypocrite says one thing but does something completely different. Paul does not use the word "hypocrite" in these verses, but this is the kind of person he is describing. There is no excuse for us when we judge someone for doing something wrong, when we are actually guilty of doing the same thing. This is what happens when we self-righteously point out the sins of another and pass judgment on them. We ourselves are without excuse because we also have sinned. We cannot make God overlook our own sin by pointing out the sins of others. Unlike people whose judgments are biased, skewed, and self-seeking, God's judgment is based on truth. Only God has the authority to judge anyone.

Did You Know?

The word “conscience” means literally “co-knowledge” or “to know with.” It reflects the human ability to view our actions and character more or less objectively.

GOD’S IMPARTIAL JUDGMENT

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND OBEDIENCE

The Bible teaches that salvation is based upon God’s grace and mercy upon those who love and trust Him. But God’s grace is not a license for condemning and judging other people. It is God’s “kindness, forbearance, and patience” that enables us to repent and be forgiven of our sins. When we self-righteously judge and condemn others, we show contempt for God’s grace and kindness.

Romans 2:5-11

Since we, as believers, have been saved by God’s grace and mercy alone, there is no room for judging other people. Indeed, God “will repay each person according to what they have done” (see Psalm 62:12). This passage does not contradict Paul’s teaching that salvation is by faith alone and not by works. Rather, Paul warns against any kind of spiritual arrogance whereby believers can mistakenly think that God does not care about what they do because of His saving grace. Paul clearly expected good deeds to flow out of a person saved by grace. To those who by grace persist in doing good, God will give eternal life (2:7). But to those who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger (2:8). The fact, Paul says, is that God does not show favoritism. God’s grace does not mean a person can say and do whatever they want. A righteous and gracious God wants His people to live by grace, but also in righteousness.

Romans 2:12-16

It is not enough to merely know or to hear God’s law; we need to obey God’s law. Wrong-doing and sin will lead to judgment and death. The message of verse 13 echoes the words of James (James 1:22) and Jesus (Matthew 7:24-27). A person is not made righteous by hearing alone, but by doing. In this way, Paul repeated the message he has already declared; namely, we are saved by grace, but grace does not eliminate the importance of our behavior and actions.

Think About It

Circumcision of the heart reflects both an outward and an inward reality. True salvation affects both who we are (inward thoughts and attitudes) and what we do (outward behavior).

Verses 14-15 have been interpreted in different ways. They might refer to Gentile Christians or to Gentiles who have never heard the gospel. The references to the “conscience” and to “the law written on their heart” seem to explain how every person has an innate, God-given sense of what is right and wrong. But no one can be saved by obedience to the law alone because even non-Christians will sometimes do what is right and sometimes do what is wrong. In this sense, their thoughts will sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them. Ultimately, only God is able to judge every person’s secrets, and He will do this through Jesus Christ.

CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART**Romans 2:28-29**

The Jewish people of the first century often pointed to outward, physical circumcision as the sign of God’s favor and salvation for the Jews alone. But God looks upon the heart, not upon outward physical appearances like circumcision. Thus, Paul talked about the “circumcision of the heart” which is performed at the very center of a person’s being by the Holy Spirit. Salvation (or circumcision of the heart) is determined by what God has done inside a person’s heart, not by what a person has done outwardly or physically. Only those whose hearts are God-filled and whose actions reflect God’s righteousness will be praised by God.

Salvation is the result of God’s work of grace in the heart of believers who have repented of their sins and trust in Jesus alone for salvation. It can never be earned by good deeds. However, every believer should live with the clear understanding that our behavior and choices will ultimately reflect whether or not we are living under God’s wrath or by His righteousness.

REFLECT

Allow God to search your heart for any judgmental attitudes you might have toward another.

March
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BENEFITS OF CHRIST'S DEATH

By faith, we receive the salvation provided by Christ's death.

THE WORD

**ROMANS
3:21-31**

KEY VERSES

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵**God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—** ²⁶**he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.**

²⁷Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. ²⁸For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ²⁹Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Nearly two thousand years ago, the streets of Jerusalem were lined with people who cried out, “Hosanna in the highest!” “Hosanna” is a Hebrew expression of joyful praise (see Mark 11:9-10), but literally it reflects a

call upon God to “Save!” In the coming of Jesus, God did indeed lay the groundwork to “save.” Through Christ’s death and resurrection, God made it possible for anyone to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

RIGHTEOUS THROUGH FAITH

Romans 3:21-24

The opening words “but now” indicate the significant contrast from the way things used to be “under the law” and the way things are now because of Christ. Since the time of Moses, Jewish people had worked diligently to obey the law in order to be righteous. But, as Paul convincingly explained in the last two chapters, no one is righteous. In fact, all people, including both Jews and Gentiles, “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v. 23). The law is very effective at identifying and condemning sin, but it is powerless to provide effective relief or forgiveness for sin. “But now,” Paul wrote, because of Christ, things are different. Whereas the law has determined every person to be a sinner who deserves judgment, God’s grace through Jesus Christ has determined that every person who believes can be redeemed.

We should not overlook Paul’s significant usage of the word “all” in these verses. Just as the law has declared that “all” have sinned, so has God declared through Christ that “all” are justified freely by His grace. If taken out of context, verses 23 and 24 could be incorrectly interpreted to mean that God will save all people. But verse 22 identifies the condition for salvation: this righteousness (or salvation) “is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Faith in Christ is the condition for salvation. Before Christ, only Jews had any hope of salvation by perfectly obeying the law. But Paul pointed out that this path to righteousness is a dead end, for “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10). But now, through Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile because “all who believe” can be saved. This is a foundational element of the good news of the gospel!

Did You Know?

Hilasterion (translated in the NIV as “sacrifice of atonement”) is the word used in the Greek Old Testament to identify the covering of the ark of the covenant where sacrifices for atonement were made.

CHRIST OUR ATONEMENT

God provides the grace so that all of us, by placing our faith in Jesus, can be saved.

Romans 3:25-26

The word “atonement” has been defined as “at-one-ment” with God. In other words, the word “atonement” describes the reconciliation and peace that believers can have with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

The phrase “sacrifice of atonement” is the NIV’s translation of a single Greek word (*hilasterion*). Other translations have used the words “propitiation” or “expiation” to define this one Greek word. Propitiation emphasizes the appeasing or satisfying of God’s wrath through Christ’s death, while expiation stresses more of the forgiveness of sin through Christ’s death. The reality, however, is that God has done all of these things “through the shedding of his [Jesus’] blood.” In other words, the death (and resurrection) of Jesus Christ has become the means by which God takes care of people’s sins.

It is sometimes easy for believers to overlook or forget the costly extent to which God went to reconcile us to himself. To radically wipe out all sin immediately would result in the full eradication of the entire human race, which would violate God’s nature of love. To simply ignore human sin contradicts God’s essential holy nature and leaves humanity alienated from God. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, God has demonstrated the awful seriousness of sin and His gracious willingness to give humanity a fresh start all at the same time. In this way, Christ atoned for our sins (1 John 2:2), redeemed humanity (Romans 3:24), and reconciled humanity to God (Romans 5:10-11). He is indeed a God of an amazing and costly grace!

GOD’S LAW UPHELD BY FAITH

Romans 3:27-31

Since God’s grace is the basis of salvation instead of human works, there is no room for boasting. And

Think About It

Before Christ, Jews lived in hope of salvation based on the things that they did. Because of Christ, believers live in hope of salvation based on the things that Christ has done on our behalf.

since salvation is the result of God's grace through faith, salvation is available to both Jew and Gentile alike. This is the reason why Paul can boldly declare that "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile" (Romans 3:22). God does not have a different standard for Jews than He has for Gentiles. Paul declared that all people—whether Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, male, female—are saved in the same way. We are all saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

Refocusing our attention on faith in Jesus instead of on the law for salvation does not mean that our behavior is unimportant. Indeed, when we choose to place our faith in Jesus alone for salvation, our choice is reflected in everything we do, including our attitudes, our actions, and even our reactions. But the basis for our salvation is not measured by what we do, but by whom we trust and follow: Jesus Christ.

It is popular in recent times to think that there are many gods and many different ways to get into heaven. But this is not what the Bible teaches. Paul proclaimed clearly that "there is only one God," and there is only one solution to the problem of sin. God's way of salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ. All people have sinned and all people deserve a judgment of condemnation for their own sin. But God's offer of grace and redemption is given to every person in the entire world. But each person must decide individually to put their faith in the sacrifice of Christ or not. By placing their faith in Christ, believers do not nullify the law. Instead, they uphold and fulfill the law through their faithful obedience to Christ.

REFLECT **T**ake time to thank God for His love and grace.

DANIEL G. POWERS

April

4

ALIVE IN CHRIST!

Christ's resurrection provides victory over sin and spiritual death.

THE WORD

ROMANS 6:1-14

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰**The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.**

KEY VERSES

¹¹**In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.** ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

ENGAGE THE WORD

On this Easter Sunday, we join with Christians around the world in reciting the centuries-old confession about Jesus Christ: “He is risen! He is risen indeed!” On Friday we commemorated Jesus’ death, but today we celebrate the reality of His glorious resurrection. It is the resurrection of Jesus that has broken the stranglehold of the power of sin and death over humanity. Jesus died, but He was also victoriously raised by God to new life. It is this victory that we celebrate together each year on this Easter Sunday.

In our passage today, Paul explains how every believer participates in the Easter victory of Christ by dying to sin and rising with Him to new life.

DEAD TO SIN

Romans 6:1-4

At the end of chapter 5, Paul explained the importance of Christ’s grace by writing, “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (5:20). In the beginning verses of chapter 6, Paul took care to ensure that no misunderstanding of this statement would take place. Does this mean that believers should go on sinning so that grace may increase? Paul answered adamantly, “By no means! Absolutely not!”

Paul envisioned believers and Jesus as participating in each other’s fate. Even though Christ never sinned, He shared in the fate of all sinful people by giving His life as the one true sacrifice for the sin of the world. In the same way, by believing in Christ alone for salvation, believers share the fate of Christ by dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ.

The illustration Paul used to explain this kind of solidarity with Christ is the believer’s baptism. What unites a believer with Christ is faith, not baptism. But symbolically, baptism is a visible demonstration of the believers’ faith in the saving benefits of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The immersion into the water illustrates the believer’s death and burial with Christ. In the same way, the rising out of the waters of baptism

Did You Know?

Living “under grace” does not imply permission to sin without consequences. Rather, living “under grace” is the power of God that frees believers from the mastery of sin.

DYING AND RISING WITH CHRIST

illustrates the believer’s rising to new life with Christ.

Since believers are “baptized into Christ Jesus,” they have been baptized into His death. Likewise, believers have also been raised with Christ so that “we too may live a new life.” The believers’ identity and solidarity with Christ means they share in Jesus’ victory over sin and death. In this way, Paul argued, believers are no longer captive to sin.

Romans 6:5-10

Christ and believers are united by faith. The idea of the believer’s solidarity and union with Christ permeates Paul’s words throughout these verses. As illustrated in baptism, Christians are not only united with Christ in His death, but they are also united with Christ in His resurrection.

The purpose of the believers’ union with Christ is so that they will no longer be slaves to sin. However, the fact that Christ died for our sins does not mean that believers do not need to die to their sins. The reality is that believers must die to their “old self.” Through repentance and faith in Jesus, the believers’ old pattern of living in sin “dies”; it comes to an end. This is because, in and through Christ, our old sinful self has been crucified with Christ. Since we have symbolically died with Christ through faith in Him, we are no longer doomed to be slaves to sin.

On Easter, though, we do not only commemorate the fact of Jesus’ death, but we also celebrate His new resurrected life. Likewise, the believers’ union with Christ means that we have not only died with Christ, but we will also live with Him in victory.

Christ overcame sin and death through His resurrection from the dead. Since Jesus died and was raised, death no longer has any control over Him. But since Christ voluntarily carried the sin of all humanity upon himself to His death, He has also “died to sin once for all.” Now, in the victory of His resurrected life, Christ has broken the chains of sin and death, and He lives

Think About It

Every person is free to choose who will reign as master (literally, “Lord”) of their life: either sin or Christ will reign. But it can’t be both!

CHRIST’S INSTRUMENTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

to God alone. Through faith and obedience in Christ, believers participate in the victory of Christ over sin and death. But, as Paul explained in verses 1 and 2, believers cannot simultaneously live in sin while they also enjoy this new life in Christ. Since we died with Christ to sin, Christ’s power within us enables us to no longer continue in a life of sin (Galatians 2:19-20).

Romans 6:11-14

After having explained the believers’ identity and solidarity with Christ, Paul now outlines the implications. Instead of continuing in sin, believers should “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Since we are united to Christ, we should not let sin reign in our life by obeying evil desires. Putting away sinful habits and patterns is not something that will happen automatically through our faith in Jesus Christ. Counting ourselves dead to sin but alive to God demands our determined cooperation with God’s grace.

Using imperative verbs of command, Paul strongly urged his readers to take decisive spiritual action to realize and actualize their victory over sin. In Christ, believers have been brought from death back to life. Thus, in Christ, we can live victoriously over sin and temptation by not offering any part of ourselves to sin as instruments of wickedness and choosing to offer every part of ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. This is only possible because the grace of God has freed Christians from sin as their master.

The victory of Easter is shared by believers who have united themselves with Christ through faith. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead has broken the chains of sin and death. Through Christ, we can participate in the victory over sin today. Christ is risen indeed!

REFLECT Think of ways you can share the Easter message with others this week.

April

11

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

God calls us to life in the Spirit.

THE WORD

**ROMANS
8:1-17**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

KEY VERSE

⁵Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the

flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Last week we celebrated the resurrection power of Jesus Christ that definitively broke the chains of sin and death. Through our faith in Jesus, believers can share in Christ’s victory over sin and death.

In this week’s session, Paul focuses on the victorious life a believer can experience in Christ. The key to a life of holiness and victory is the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. By living in obedience to the Spirit, believers do not only experience forgiveness of sins, but they are also empowered to live lives of holiness and victory as co-heirs with Christ.

SPIRIT VERSUS FLESH

Romans 8:1-8

Because of Jesus, believers are no longer condemned by the law of sin and death. Before Jesus’ victory over the cross, every person was enslaved to a life of sin and rebellion against God. There was no choice. The law could identify and point out sin, but it was powerless to help people obey the law. What the law and humanity were unable to do, God did by sending Jesus in the flesh in order to break the power of sin over the flesh. It is important to note that sin resides in the flesh, but flesh itself is not inherently sinful. Like Paul, Wesleyans believe that Christians can live a holy and pleasing life to God that begins even now in this life. Because of Jesus’ victory, the strangle-

Did You Know?

Sometimes, flesh refers to the bodily tissues (Romans 2:28). Sometimes, it is a synonym for body (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:3 and Colossians 2:5). Flesh is also used to speak of the source or origin of human beings (Romans 1:3 and 9:3). The other usage is commonly called the ethical usage. It refers to those who are unregenerate, those who trust in their own strength to earn salvation. (Romans 8:8-9, where “in the flesh” is the complete contrast to “in the Spirit.”)

hold that sin has exercised over humanity since the time of Adam has been broken. Freedom from sin is the necessary preparation for believers to live lives of obedience to God now.

As a result, because of Jesus, there is now a choice to be made between life according to the flesh and life according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on selfish and destructive desires. By contrast, those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on what the Holy Spirit of God desires. Ultimately, a mindset focused on the flesh draws a person back into the old life that is dominated by sin. Such a mindset not only rejects Christ's offer of forgiveness and victory, but it also becomes hostile to God and refuses to submit to God's law of righteousness. Tragically, those who choose to live according to the flesh cannot please God. Whereas a mindset governed by the Spirit leads to life and peace, a mindset governed by selfishness and evil desires leads to death.

Romans 8:9-13

Those who have repented and believe in Jesus for salvation belong to Christ. As a result, the Spirit lives in them, enabling them to live according to the Spirit. Life in the Spirit is a life that puts to death the rebellion and misdeeds of our humanity so that we can live Christlike lives, both now and for eternity.

No one can live a righteous, Christlike life in their own power because the law has decisively declared that all have sinned and deserve death. But in Christ, believers are raised to a new life of righteousness and holiness by the same Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead. Filled and empowered by the life-giving Spirit, believers belong to Christ and are enabled to live holy lives that are pleasing to God. This is the foundation and essence of the sanctified life. Eternal life begins at the moment when we receive God's saving grace, not when our body finally dies. Indeed, our

Think About It

John Wesley saw salvation as comprised of “two grand branches”: justification and sanctification. Both elements of salvation are enabled and mediated through Christ by the Holy Spirit.

**ADOPTED AS
CO-HEIRS**

mortal bodies are empowered and enabled through the Spirit’s sanctifying and cleansing grace to “put to death the misdeeds of the body” and to live a Christ-like life now and forever.

Romans 8:14-17

Apart from Christ, people are slaves to sin and death. But when we live by the Spirit, we enjoy a spiritual adoption by God as His children. Thus, fear is banished because the Spirit draws us to God, not as those who have previously sinned, but as Christ followers who have been adopted as children of God. Apart from Christ, God’s presence elicits a fearful response of “Woe is me for I have sinned!” But in Christ, God’s presence elicits the passionate exclamation of “Abba, Father.” Indeed, the Spirit himself testifies and affirms that we are God’s children.

Once again, salvation is described as union and solidarity with Christ. Paul proclaimed that, as God’s adopted children, believers are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. God’s adopted children can enjoy all the privileges of being God’s co-heirs with Christ. However, as Christ’s road to resurrection and glory took Him through obedient suffering, so also Christ followers are reminded that their path of obedience may lead through valleys of pain and suffering. Christ never promised His followers that the road would be easy. But Christ promises His grace, His presence, and a share in His glory if we will persist in our Spirit-enabled obedience.

REFLECT

Is there an area of your life that you need to give the Holy Spirit full control?

DANIEL G. POWERS

April
18

SAVED IN HOPE

In every difficulty, God works toward the good.

THE WORD

ROMANS 8:18-32

consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

KEY VERSE

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is

for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

ENGAGE THE WORD

Hope is one of the most powerful actions of the human heart. Hope enables people to endure indescribable pain. Hope expects positive outcomes where circumstances are completely negative. Hope motivates people to great efforts and to achievements far beyond what others would expect of them. But hope also requires some reason for that hope that things can and will change. Hope lies at the heart of the Christian faith because God provides the reason for hope.

CREATION WAITS EXPECTANTLY

Romans 8:18-22

We think of hope as a human activity. So it is surprising that Paul links hope with creation itself. In Romans 8:17 the apostle described believers as heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. But to be co-heirs with Christ believers must share in Christ's sufferings if they hope to share in His glory. Suffering is always unpleasant, but Paul declared in verse 18 that suffering experienced now cannot compare with the glory that is coming.

Human life and the marvelous world of creation are linked inseparably in Genesis 1—3. Genesis 3 notes that creation suffered significant loss as a result of human sin. Verse 20 alludes to this and Paul concludes that since human sin brought painful consequences to creation, the deliverance of human beings from sin will be accompanied by a liberation of creation also. For the apostle, creation is more than simply a clump of matter and energy. He personifies creation as capable of observation and hope. Simply put, for Paul creation has a vested interest in human salvation.

Like humankind creation rests on the decisions of God. It was God who determined according to Genesis 3 that the consequences of human sin would be visited on creation as well as on humankind. But Paul saw

Did You Know?

The Greek word translated “helps” in verse 26 means “to take hold of with [someone] on the other side.” The Holy Spirit takes hold of our burdens on the other side, carrying those burdens with us.

WE HOPE PATIENTLY

more than tragedy for creation. According to verses 20-21 God subjected creation to these consequences with a plan for a glorious restoration of both human-kind and creation. The freedom from sin and sharing the glory of the risen Christ that God envisioned through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus will be shared by humanity and creation alike. As a result creation waits eagerly, hopes, and groans with all the expectation of a mother about to give birth.

Romans 8:23-27

Creation’s groaning in eager expectation reflects our own groaning “inwardly as we wait eagerly” the final consummation of our salvation (v. 23). But believers have an advantage not available to creation. We have “the firstfruits of the Spirit.” The word “firstfruits” comes from Israel’s practice of offering the first portion of the annual harvest to God at the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) (Leviticus 23:15-18). Giving the firstfruits symbolized Israel’s faith that all the harvest belonged to God who in return promised all the rest of the harvest for their use. Paul understood God’s gift of the Holy Spirit to the church as the promise or guarantee that all the glory of final salvation would eventually come to them. Thus the Spirit is God’s down payment assuring us that we will share in Christ’s final glory.

Because we have received the Holy Spirit we live in confident expectation that God will fulfill all the promises of the full salvation that He has planned. This means Christians live in hope that is fully confident in God’s promises. After all He has already given the Spirit. As a pastor many years ago described it, the gift of the Spirit is “a little bit of heaven to go to heaven in.” Because God has given the Spirit believers do not wait with anxiety or fear. Rather, we wait patiently because we know God’s Word is reliable; He has given us the Spirit as guarantee.

However, the Spirit is not a passive deposit sitting on the shelf guaranteeing God’s promises. The Spirit

Think About It

We sometimes use the word “hope” as if it meant wishful thinking. Hoping in God is not wishful thinking; it is certain and confident trust in the God who makes all things new.

is active in the lives of believers helping us in our weakness (v. 26). One of the ways the Spirit helps us is when life is so overwhelming we can't even find the words with which to cry out to God. In those times the Spirit intercedes with God the Father on our behalf. The Spirit's interceding is not with words we could articulate or perhaps even understand. But God, who searches human hearts, knows the mind of the Spirit and understands the message the Spirit conveys to Him on our behalf. As a result we can live in patient expectation, fully confident that the Spirit is communicating with the Father all that matters to us even when we cannot find the words to call out to God.

GOD WORKS PURPOSEFULLY

Romans 8:28-32

Ultimately the reason we can hope with confidence is because God is at work accomplishing His purposes. Though He never overrides our freewill, God is always working toward His ultimate goal of the restoration of all creation, including us, to the purposes for which He created us. Verse 28 tells us that God is continually working “for the good.” The Greek preposition translated “for” can mean “toward” or “for the purpose of.” God works all things for the purpose of good. All things are not good and some things will never be good, but God is always working those things toward the best possible outcome.

Predestined:
God's intention for all humanity, not just a preselected group.

One of the purposes toward which God works is to bring us into His family. Verse 29 tells us that God has predestined all believers to Christlikeness. The glorious purpose is that Jesus be the firstborn in a large family of brothers and sisters. That is God's plan for us and our hope is secure in Him.

REFLECT

In what areas of weakness or difficult circumstances do you need the Holy Spirit's help today?

ROGER HAHN is retired professor of New Testament at Nazarene Theological Seminary.

April

25

GOD IS ALWAYS FAITHFUL

God's faithfulness does not fail.

THE WORD

ROMANS 3:1-8

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? ²Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

³What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? ⁴Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written:

"So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

⁵But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) ⁶Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? ⁷Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" ⁸Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!

ROMANS 9:1-8

¹I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— ²I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, ⁴the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

⁶It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸**In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.**

KEY VERSE**ENGAGE THE WORD****GOD IS FAITHFUL
REGARDLESS OF
WHAT WE DO****Romans 3:1-4**

Paul had begun his treatment of the "righteousness of God" in Romans by arguing that God rightly revealed His wrath against all unrighteous people. His argument in Romans 1:18-33 focused on the sinful behavior typical of the Gentile world. But in Romans 2 he pointed toward the sins of Jewish people and declared that circumcision (the symbol of Judaism) was a matter of the heart rather than a matter of the flesh.

This raised the question of whether Jews had any advantage or any special place with God. While Paul states that they did, he does not get around to describing those advantages until Romans 9. His first question is whether the sins of the Jewish people (unfaithfulness) will nullify God's faithfulness. God's covenant relationship with Israel had obligations for both God and Israel. Did Israel's breaking of the covenant mean the covenant no longer held and God was free to not follow through on His obligations?

Paul's answer is that God is always faithful regardless of what Israel did or did not do. The same is true today; God is faithful regardless of what we do. This does mean that God's blessings in our lives will be the same whether we are obedient or disobedient. A broken relationship always has painful consequences.

**GOD IS RIGHTEOUS
WHEN HE JUDGES****Romans 3:5-8**

God is always faithful because God is always righteous. Thus God must judge sin, but that is evidence

Did You Know?

At least some Jewish rabbis believed God spoke the Torah on Mt. Sinai in all human languages for all peoples, but only Moses was there to hear it in Hebrew and to write it down.

GOD HAS FAITHFULLY BLESSED ISRAEL

of His faithfulness not unfaithfulness. The judgment of God is always right because He is always faithful.

A perverted kind of logic might ask the question, “If our sin demonstrates God’s righteousness when He punishes us, shouldn’t He cut us a little bit of slack? After all, our sin makes Him look better by punishing us.” Paul rightly rejects such an idea. Lessening punishment erodes the justice of God rather than enhancing it.

Because God is always faithful and always righteous, God consistently pursues His will in our lives. If we refuse to participate in God’s will both for ourselves and for all humankind, God must judge us accordingly. But He will not be deterred in seeking to accomplish His will in other ways through other people.

Romans 9:1-5

When Paul returns to the faithfulness of God to Israel (a subject he raised in Romans 3:1-2) he is still wrestling with how God’s judgment of Israel impacted His faithfulness to Israel. In chapter 9 the apostle is deeply concerned about whether Israel has so broken the covenant that God has abandoned them. He will ask this question throughout Romans 9—11 before finally answering that God’s promises to Israel still hold (Romans 11:26).

The advantages God has given Israel are many and significant. They were God’s children, they experienced the glory of Mt. Sinai, God had made several covenants with them, God had given them the Torah, the temple worship, and many promises. The patriarchs with their stories of God’s faithfulness was Israel’s heritage. Most of all, God had sent the Messiah to Israel. Such wonderful blessings were evidence of God’s faithfulness to Israel over the centuries.

Our great heritage of the faith is also a blessing showing God’s faithfulness to us. The stories of the Old and New Testaments, the great saints and leaders

Think About It

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was willing to be cursed and cut off from Christ if that could save his unbelieving Jewish friends and family. How much do we care for our friends and family?

GOD BLESSES ALL WHOM HE CHOOSES

of church history, the existence and translations of the Bible, ministries like Sunday School, youth and childrens' ministries, the heritage of revivals, camps, and camp meetings, and the gift of Christ and the Holy Spirit are part of our heritage. They show that God has been faithful in blessing us through the past centuries.

Romans 9:6-8

God's faithfulness to Israel often raises the question of whether God has played favorites with Israel. If this is true, then God can rightly be charged with being unfair (and thus unrighteous). Paul appeals to Israel's founding story to argue that God's faithfulness to Israel never kept God from being gracious to other peoples.

God chose Abraham to be the vehicle through which all peoples would be blessed. But Abraham had many descendants whom God blessed even though not all of them became the ancestors of the Jewish people. God blessed Ishmael and Esau, but not in the same way he blessed Isaac and Jacob.

The final portion of John 21 illustrates this. Jesus had restored Peter to leadership in the church and told him suffering and a cross were in his future. Peter then saw the disciple whom Jesus loved and asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus' reply was, "What is that to you?" "You must follow me."

God blesses each person in different ways and calls each of us to different tasks. No follower of Christ is left out. But our responsibility is not to compare our blessings and callings with those of others. Our responsibility is to be faithful to the God who is always faithful.

REFLECT

Take time this week to think about God's faithfulness.

May

2

HOW CAN THEY BELIEVE?

We are called to bring the good news to everyone.

THE WORD

ROMANS 10:1-15

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ²For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

⁵Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." ⁶But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷or "Who will descend into the deep?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

KEY VERSES

¹⁴How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it

is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

ENGAGE THE WORD

The verb “believe” has a variety of definitions. It may mean to think that something is true in the sense of being a fact. Most people believe that the earth is round (or nearly so). The word also can refer to a person’s opinion, as when one’s states, “I believe the pumpkin pie is delicious.” It can also refer to a hope as when one believes that his or her favorite sports team will win the championship. The word “believe” has a special place in Christian theology in that Christians are called believers. They are people whose faith may reflect any of the definitions above. But the New Testament calls for a deeper meaning—a meaning of trusting and entrusting oneself to the reality of what God has done in Christ.

ESTABLISHING OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans 10:1-5

In Romans 9—11 Paul writes about his desire that all Israel be saved. As he reflects on this issue, he addresses the question of how God desires people to be in right relationship with himself versus how we often try to gain right relationship with God on our own. The apostle was confident that his Jewish kinfolk were “zealous for God.” He had no question about their passion for their religious faith. His question was whether their passion was misdirected or reliable.

Paul states in Romans 10:2 that the Jews’ passion for God was “not based on knowledge.” The reason for this is that they had no personal experience (knowledge) of the righteousness that God desired. As a result they were hard at work attempting “to establish their own” righteousness. He states in verse 5 that the kind of righteousness of their own that his kinfolk were seeking had to do with obeying [all] the things written in the law. The attempt to establish one’s own

Did You Know?

In Romans 10:1-15 Paul appealed to Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 30:11-14; Isaiah 28:16; Joel 2:32; and Isaiah 52:7 to make his argument. His methods of interpretation follow standard Jewish practices of interpreting Scripture.

RECEIVING GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH

righteousness also meant a failure to submit to the righteousness that God provides.

Failing to submit to God's righteousness implies the existence of a way of being righteous that is not defined by total obedience to the law. Paul did not disregard the law. In fact, he states in verse 4 that "Christ is the culmination of the law." This means that Christ was the goal or the logical outcome of the law. Thus Christ would not be opposed to the law, but the law would be insufficient for the salvation that is available in Christ. Further, Paul declares that this righteousness that God provides is available to everyone who believes.

Romans 10:6-11

In verse 6 Paul will call this righteousness of God (God's righteousness) "the righteousness that is by faith." The Greek word for "faith" is the noun root for the Greek word for "believing." Thus the apostle was promoting a righteousness that is by believing.

A righteousness by faith, or by believing, means first believing that such a right relationship with God is possible and accessible. Paul alludes to Deuteronomy 30:11-14 which responds to the typical human complaint that what God asks of people is too hard; it is not accessible to ordinary people. Quite the contrary says the apostle. This relationship with God is near you, on your lips, and in your heart. The question is what we are to do with our lips and our hearts.

Romans 10:9-10 declares that with our lips we are to declare that "Jesus is Lord," and so profess our faith. With our hearts we are to believe that God raised Him from the dead." The result of our believing in our hearts and our confessing with our lips is that we can be saved. This brings the matter back to righteousness. Believing in our hearts that God raised Christ from the dead and confessing our faith with our lips is the way we receive the righteousness that is by faith.

Think About It

Whether we refuse to send missionaries overseas or refuse to relate to a new generation at home, the result is the same. People do not hear the gospel and so have little opportunity to believe and be saved.

BELIEVING TO CALL ON GOD**Romans 10:12-15**

Paul connects believing and calling on the name of the Lord. In the biblical world to call on someone was much more than simply crying out their name. It was more than speaking to the other. To call on someone in the biblical world was to acknowledge one's own hopelessness and inability to help oneself. It was to throw oneself desperately on the mercies of the other. This means believing was much more than thinking doctrines about God are true. It was much more than having an opinion about God or even hoping that God would save you. To believe was to entrust your whole life and future to what God had done through Christ.

Such believing is available to everyone. Paul notes that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile which was the most significant dividing line between peoples of his world. There is no difference between rich and poor, between the powerful and the weak, between nations or races or genders. Everyone who comes to the end of themselves and throws themselves fully on the mercy and grace of God will be saved.

But obstacles to calling on God and believing in Christ still exist. It is hard to believe in and call on God if one has never heard the gospel. It is hard to hear the gospel if no one preaches/proclaims the gospel. So the most beautiful thing in the world is the most unassuming part of a person—his or her feet. Those feet bring the (preacher) proclaimer to (preach) proclaim so people can hear and believe and throw themselves on God. Then the door is open for anyone to believe.

REFLECT **W**here can your feet take you to share the good news this week?

ROGER HAHN

May

9

A LIVING SACRIFICE

God's mercies call for a whole life response.

THE WORD

ROMANS 11:25-36

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ²⁶and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

²⁷And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

²⁸As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³²For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

³³Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

³⁴"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

³⁵"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?"

³⁶For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

ROMANS 12:1-2

KEY VERSE

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleas-

ing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

ENGAGE THE WORD

THE MERCY GOD EXTENDS

Romans 11:25-32

In Romans 9—11 Paul dealt with the puzzle of God's promises to Israel, the failure of most of his Jewish kinfolk to accept Christ, and the mystery of God's continuing promises and love for Israel. As he came to the conclusion of that section he seemed to be overwhelmed by his awareness of God's mercy.

The apostle had clearly identified Israel's failure to believe in Christ, their disobedience to the plan to redeem the world that God had provided in Christ. But he could not get past the faithfulness of God who had made promises throughout Israel's history. He concluded that God's gifts and call were irrevocable (v. 29). Amazingly, Israel's disobedience had called forth God's mercy (v. 31). Israel would yet have a chance to repent, believe, and be saved.

Paul also noted (Romans 11:11-12) that Israel's disobedience opened a door of evangelism to the Gentiles. He notes in verse 30 that his Gentile readers (you) had been disobedient, but had received mercy. He concludes in verse 32 that everyone has disobeyed and the result is that God may have mercy on everyone.

Disobedience is never a good thing. But human disobedience stands in sharp contrast to the mercy of God. God's mercy extends to everyone. If God would be merciful to both Jews and Gentiles, Paul could not imagine anyone to whom God would not show mercy. God's mercy extends to different kinds of disobedience. Paul's Jewish compatriots had willfully violated the covenant conditions into which God had brought them. His Gentile readers had never known relationship with God so that their sins were often done in

Did You Know?

The Greek word translated “transformed” in Romans 12:2 provides our English word “metamorphosis.” The change that turns caterpillars into butterflies and coal into diamonds is the kind of change God desires to make in our lives.

THE WISDOM GOD DEMONSTRATES

THE SACRIFICE GOD DESIRES

ignorance rather than rebellion. But in either case, God extends mercy.

Romans 11:33-36

The final section of Romans 9—11 is a poetic outburst of praise to God for His great wisdom. With phrases drawn from Isaiah and Job Paul extols God for the depth of the riches of His wisdom and understanding. One of the areas in which God demonstrates wisdom is in His judgments. God knows our hearts and understands our motivations. As a result His judgments are right and just whereas we judge without adequate knowledge.

God also demonstrates His wisdom in the ways He guides His people to find and do His will. The stories of the many and varied pathways God has led any group of people into relationship with Him are inspiring and instructive. Any church or small group within the church would be benefitted by taking time to share the stories of God’s leading in each person’s life.

Finally, God demonstrated His wisdom in creation (v. 36). As science advances our understanding of the tiniest atoms and of the immensity of the universe, we discover the amazing wisdom of God in creation. At one level it is amazing to simply name the intricate parts of atoms, cells, and solar systems. But even more amazing is the perfectly balanced interrelationships which God has built into the systems of every part of creation. No wonder the apostle concluded “To him (God) be the glory forever! Amen.”

Romans 12:1-2

The mercies God extended to both Jews and Gentiles, according to Romans 11:30-32, become the basis in Romans 12:1 for Paul’s appeal for us to offer our whole beings to God as living sacrifices. The idea of responding to God with sacrifices was well known from the Old Testament, but the central concept of such sacrifices was the death of the sacrifice. Paul

Think About It

If God desires to completely transform us and if God desires to continue that transformation for all of our lives, why should we resist it? It is the best thing that could ever happen to us.

calls for us to respond to God's mercy and wisdom by making a sacrifice of our whole lives. This is not just a one-time surrender of ourselves to God, but a lifetime of giving our lives back to God.

Paul describes this sacrifice God desires from us in several ways. It is a sacrifice of our bodies. This does not mean simply giving God our outward beings while our spirits or minds or hearts or souls remain ours. Our bodies represent the totality of who we are and how we live life in this world. All of it—all of us—must be given to God.

The sacrifice of our bodies requires that we be holy and pleasing to God. This is only one of dozens of passages that make it clear that God desires that we live holy lives. Paul understood well from Leviticus 19:2 that we are to be holy just as God is holy. Such a life of holiness pleases God. It is impossible to imagine living in genuine relationship with God but not desiring to please Him.

This sacrifice of ourselves is also an act of authentic worship. The God who extends mercy to everyone and who demonstrates His great wisdom is worthy of our worship. Worship that is contrived and superficial, worship that just goes through the motions rather than flowing from our hearts, is not worthy of God. True worship requires us to sacrifice comfort and ease to give God our best.

The ability to offer ourselves as living sacrifices is beyond our natural abilities. Only when God transforms us by the renewal of our minds are we able to offer ourselves as sacrifices of true worship to Him. When that happens we discover that God's will (and way) is good, pleasing, and perfect.

REFLECT

In what ways can you offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God this week?

May
16

LOVE IS A VERB

Love guides life in the body of Christ.

THE WORD

**ROMANS
12:3-21**

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

KEY VERSE

⁹**Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.** ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹²Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge;

I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

ENGAGE THE WORD

The balance between caring for individuals and preserving the good of societies is always difficult. Christianity has always been interested in this balance as it applies to caring for individual believers and seekers and preserving the health and strength of the church as a community. At least from the time of Jesus on, Christian faith has seen love as the key to this balance.

SERVICE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Romans 12:3-8

Life in the church is always challenging. Paul wrote Romans to a church with significant conflict between Jewish and Gentile believers. Each group had circled the wagons to defend their group. As is often the case each group attempted to defend their rights by putting down members of the other group. Paul’s first instruction to each person in the church was, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.” In the heat of conflict tempers rise and statements become more extreme than accurate. Each person needed to discipline himself or herself to think about himself or herself with sober, level-headed judgment.

The church as a whole is more important than any group within the church. Paul used a common metaphor in the ancient world to describe communities when he described the church as the body of Christ. The image of a body provides several helpful ways to think about the church. The whole matters, but so do the individual members and the groups that make up the whole body. The metaphors also help us think of inter-dependence rather than independence. When we have become too individualistic, we think too much in terms of independence. When we think in a

Did You Know?

Romans 12:9-21 more closely resembles the proverbs of the Old Testament than any other section of Paul's canonical letters. Romans 12:20 contains the only direct quotation by Paul from the book of Proverbs (25:21-22).

LOVE IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULTIES

level-headed way about the church, we think in terms of each one depending on each other.

The church as the body of Christ leads Paul to think of spiritual gifts by which God equips individuals to serve the whole body. His list of spiritual gifts is different here than other gift lists in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. Here Paul mentions prophecy, service, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. Each of these gifts contribute to the health of the body rather than providing an opportunity to show off.

Romans 12:9-16

Verses 9-16 primarily consist of brief, concise statements focusing on how-to-live in community. The overarching theme is love. Love must be without hypocrisy. Fake love is eventually detected, and it destroys the mutual care and support necessary for a community to thrive. Genuine love values everyone in the community and so shares with those in need and is hospitable to those outside who do not yet belong to the community.

Love for the community recognizes the need for spiritual passion and faithful service to God. Commitment to these two virtues sustains joy in times of difficulty. Times of pressure always tempt some people to run and to leave the church when it struggles. Paul notes that love stays put, patient in pressure and faithful in prayer.

Love is also active. It reaches out to bless even the persecutors. It joins with others who rejoice as well as others who grieve. Sharing this whole range of feeling validates the joys and sorrows of others and helps create a community of shared feelings. Such a community will be harmonious and willing to mingle and fellowship with everyone in the church regardless of their status. Whatever the difficulties a church faces, love finds a way to overcome them.

Think About It

In a healthy body all the parts work together in harmony. If the members of the body of Christ bicker, disagree, and pull in different directions, the health of the church is harmed.

PEACE IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT**Romans 12:17-21**

Relationships are hard. It is easy to feel mistreated by someone else in the community. Then it is easy to want to be retaliatory and conflict grows while love declines. Paul called on the church at Rome to live at peace with everyone. Though he wrote in Greek his brain probably still worked in Hebrew. The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, was more than absence of conflict. It included absence of conflict, but it also envisioned the total well-being of everyone in the community. When love guides a community, it seeks the best for everyone involved rather than just nervously avoiding conflict and full-fledged fights.

When love seeks a *shalom* type of peace no one repays evil with evil. Vengeance is left to the Lord with the confidence that He will accomplish retribution in a right and just way. The desire of peace means the community lives in the center of rather than on the margins of right relationships. That is why Paul instructed the Romans to “be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.” Abraham Lincoln is attributed to have said, “You can’t please all the people all the time.” However, you can make sure you do what is right consistently.

The apostle concludes this section very positively. Feed hungry enemies. Give thirsty enemies a drink. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,” as he writes in verse 21. People of peace take the initiative in making sure relationships in the community are loving, right, and characterized by service to the group as a whole.

REFLECT **T**hink about your faith community. In what ways are you contributing to its spiritual health?

ROGER HAHN

May

23

THE WEAK AND THE STRONG

*The Holy Spirit offers guidance for
difficult relationships.*

THE WORD

ROMANS 14:1-18

Acept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ²One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'"

¹²So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

¹³Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the

way of a brother or sister. ¹⁴I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. ¹⁵If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. **¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,** ¹⁸because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

KEY VERSE

ENGAGE THE WORD

One of the common myths about the Christian church is that it was one, big, happy family until the rise of denominations. Denominations have their advantages and disadvantages, but they did not create division in the church. They gave formal structure to some divisions in the church, but divisions have always been present. Even the New Testament churches were marked and marred by divisions. Paul's letter to the Romans addresses several divisions, including differences of opinion about what we might call convictions.

ACCEPT THOSE WITH DIFFERENT CONVICTIONS

Romans 14:1-6

One of the differences creating division in the church at Rome was a difference of opinion about what some Christians now call convictions. Paul uses the words "weak" and "strong" to describe the two parties that disagreed. In Romans 15:1 he called on the strong "to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please" themselves. In the same verse he identified his position with the word "strong."

The areas of disagreement were dietary and holy days. The "strong" had no convictions about what they could eat while the weak would only eat vegetables. This does not appear to be an ancient version of the present day disagreements between vegetarians, vegans, and meat-eaters. It is possible the issue was meat

Did You Know?

Many people in the world of the New Testament believed that [evil] spirits of idol gods entered into meat offered in sacrifice to that deity. People thought eating meat offered to an idol were in danger of being possessed by that spirit.

offered to idols as discussed in 1 Corinthians 8—10. It is more likely that the weak were Jewish believers in Christ whose Jewish training taught them to abstain from meat and wine. Judaism had no general rules against meat and wine, but many Jews living in pagan contexts abstained as an expression of their devotion to God.

The other issue was the question of holy days. Some people identified certain days as sacred while others made no religious distinction between various days. This also was likely an issue for Jewish believers who had been trained to observe sabbaths, new moons, and the five annual religious festivals. Many Jews also had fixed days each week for fasting. For Gentiles holy days tended to be local celebrations associated with the gods of the region. Gentiles would not hold strong convictions about holy days.

Paul's instruction was that believers with convictions about food and holy days should accept as fellow-believers people with different convictions on these subjects. He pointed out that people of each side of these issues offered their lives and their convictions as an offering to the Lord. He concluded that the Lord should be the one who evaluates whether one is right and the other wrong. For us to judge is to usurp the prerogative of God.

FOCUS ON BELONGING TO THE LORD

Romans 14:7-12

Paul tries to turn the focus from disagreement to what was central and shared by all believers. He pointed to the death and resurrection of Christ (v. 9) as the most important matter of faith. Christ's death made Him Lord of the dead and the living. His death and resurrection created a claim by Christ on all believers.

Each of the positions on food and days was held as an expression of devotion to the Lord. Paul concluded from this that believers neither live nor die for themselves alone. Rather, they live for the Lord and when they die, they die for the Lord. The most important thing is that all belong to the Lord. Everyone sees

Think About It

Learning to keep proper focus is the key to dealing with differences within the body of Christ. Christians are called to live supremely God-oriented, God-focused lives. When they do, God promises to guide them into His will—which is good, pleasing, and perfect in His sight.

**HELP EACH OTHER
SERVE CHRIST**

Christ as their Lord and Master because of His death and resurrection.

Because everyone on all sides of the debates at Rome belonged to the Lord, no one should be judging a brother or sister. Certainly no one should treat a fellow believer with contempt. Judgment on these matters belongs to the Lord and each one will eventually give an account of themselves to God at the judgment day.

Romans 14:13-18

The first step Paul calls for in the disagreement over convictions is that believers stop passing judgment on each other. Judgment is God's business, not ours. This warning against judging each other echoes the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 7:1-5. However, the issue at stake was not the central teaching of Christian faith—the death and resurrection of Jesus. The issue at stake was convictions about food and days. Paul is clear that these matters are not central to the faith.

The second step Paul calls for is to not put any stumbling block or obstacle in the path of another believer. The strong are not to ignore the convictions of the weak. The strong are to always act in love toward the weak. No conviction is worth destroying the faith of a brother or sister. Rather, all believers are to help each other serve the Lord.

Helping each other serve Christ is pleasing to God because the kingdom of God is not a matter of rule keeping. The kingdom is a matter of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Keeping our focus on these important theological and spiritual truths helps each other by keeping the main thing the main thing.

REFLECT Shared convictions are important for us as we live in Christian community. How do we keep central truths central and be gracious to each other in the matter of convictions?

May

30

ENEMIES TO FRIENDS

Christ's death demonstrates God's great love for us.

THE WORD

**ROMANS
5:1-11**

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

KEY VERSE ⁸**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

ENGAGE THE WORD

Broken relationships are some of the most painful experiences we have. One of the ways the Bible describes sin is as a broken relationship between God and humankind. God's greatest pain comes from

people who have become hateful and hostile against Him. His hope—and theirs—is reconciliation.

THE BENEFITS OF JUSTIFICATION

Romans 5:1-5

A key theme in the first part of Romans is justification by faith. This concept became one of the central teachings of the Protestant Reformation, though many find it hard to understand and even harder to live by. The word justification describes the way in which God makes us right with Him. A much less technical term for it is forgiveness. Romans 3—4 focused on how faith is related to God's forgiveness of us as sinners.

Romans 5 turns from the discussion of justification by faith to blessings in the Christian life that arise from being forgiven or justified. Romans 5:1 identifies peace with God as one of the benefits of justification. Romans 5:2-5 describe hope as a benefit of being justified.

To describe peace with God as a benefit of justification implies that sin is a relationship of hostility against God. Though few would describe God as their enemy, many people live in conflict with God and God's expectations on their lives. Such people resent God as their rival in the quest for control of their lives. Although people may not be fully aware of their conflict with God, conflict of any kind takes energy and tranquility from a person. Peace with God brings great relief to us.

A benefit of peace with God is free access to God (v. 2). It is hard to approach a God who is your enemy. The ability to come into God's presence without a negotiator or buffer is a wonderful blessing. It is a benefit of justification.

Hope is another valuable benefit of justification. Hope in the New Testament is not wishful thinking; it is confident future certainty. Paul begins in verse 2 with our hope of the glory of God. But he quickly turns to the role of suffering in relationship to hope

Did You Know?

Many Greek manuscripts support the statement in Romans 5:1, “we have peace with God.” Other manuscripts suggest a translation of “let us have peace with God.” The logic of the verse causes translators to choose “we have peace.”

THE AMAZING CHARACTER OF JESUS' DEATH

(vv. 3-4). He identifies perseverance as the product of suffering. Then character is the product of perseverance and hope is the product of character. Thus, he sees hope as the final product of a process that moves from suffering to perseverance to character.

Such hope does not let us down because the ultimate source of hope is God's love for us. Paul knew that God's love had been poured out into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit. Since all Christians received the Holy Spirit when they are forgiven, the apostle was confident that God's love was poured into our hearts also. That means we can live in confident hope.

Romans 5:6-8

It is hard to imagine how such wonderful blessings as peace with God and hope could become realities. To explain those possibilities Paul turned to the death of Christ. His first observation (v. 6) is that Christ died for the ungodly. This is utterly amazing because it is very rare for anyone to die (willfully) for the benefit of another person, not even a righteous person. It is even more difficult to imagine someone dying for an ungodly sinner.

Further, this death of Christ that brought us the benefits of salvation was completely by God's initiative. We had nothing to do with it. In fact, we were powerless to change our broken relationship with God. Even more amazing, this death of Christ for our benefit happened “at just the right time.” Whether Paul realized it or not, the death and resurrection of Christ came at an extremely strategic time in human history. The opportunities and resources for the spreading of the gospel were at a maximum in the first century compared to centuries before and after Christ's life.

Paul's final observation is that Christ's death demonstrates God's love for us (v. 8). This observation connects Christ's death with the pouring out of God's

Think About It

Knowing Christ Jesus as Savior brings more than just forgiveness. Thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, we can enjoy a new relationship with God. In fact, the grace of God not only saves but sanctifies, making us both holy and whole.

THE HOPE OF RECONCILIATION

love into our hearts mentioned in verse 5. Christ's death was an objective demonstration of God's love. Our ability to actually experience God's love personally (in our hearts) is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 5:9-11

Paul brings this section of Romans 5 to a conclusion by referring to reconciliation. In one way he is connecting the whole passage together because reconciliation with God and peace with God (mentioned in verse 1) are simply two ways of saying the same thing. Reconciliation brings an end to hostility and conflict. It is a great benefit of justification.

Paul discusses reconciliation using the phrase, "how much more." Verse 9—because we have been justified, how much more will we be saved from God's wrath. Justification is great, but the greater benefit is being saved from God's wrath. Then in verse 10 he contrasts our present reconciliation with our future salvation. Reconciliation accomplished by the death of Christ is great, but how much more is the reconciliation with God through Christ's death which opens the door for our future and final salvation based on Christ's resurrection. In a real sense Christ's death is great; how much more is Christ's resurrection which creates our final hope of salvation.

All this allows us to boast in God through Christ. Paul does not mean we brag about God; he means we exult and rejoice in God through Christ because we have been reconciled. We are no longer enemies; we are friends of God.

REFLECT

If Paul is correct in verses 3-4 that hope is an ultimate product of suffering, should we be more willing to embrace suffering than we usually are?

Key Verse Memory

Committing God's Word to memory is an important goal for Christians of every age. To assist you in this worthy objective, we have suggested three key verses for memorization. Select one to memorize each month or memorize one of your choosing for the quarter.

Key verses for Spring 2021:

Romans 1:16

Romans 8:28

Romans 12:1

COMING NEXT QUARTER

SUMMER 2021

Unit 1: 1 and 2 Thessalonians

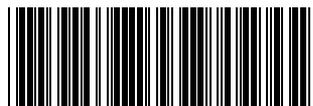
During this study we will delve into Paul's message to the church at Thessalonica. His message to those early believers is as relevant to us today as it was then.

Unit 2: Timeless Messages for the Journey

During this study we will focus our attention on passages that exalt Almighty God and inspire us, regardless of our surrounding circumstances, to praise Him for who He is and what He has done.



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