

GOOD WORD SCHEDULE

"Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans" October, November, December 2017

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In celebration of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of his revolutionary 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg and the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, the focus of this quarter's Good Word broadcast and study guide is salvation by faith in Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The Adult Bible Study Guide lessons that we follow are reusing the studies on Romans that were presented in the summer of 2010. Although the titles of the lessons have changed the content is nearly identical. In light of this, the Good Word is also using the radio broadcasts and lesson guides made in 2010. The host and study guide author is Carl P. Cosaert, professor of Biblical Studies in the School of Theology at Walla Walla University. Guests for the taping of this series of Good Word broadcasts are two much beloved and former members of the Walla Walla University School of Theology faculty: Bruce Johanson, retired professor of Biblical Studies, and Zdravko Stefanovic, now Professor at the Adventist University of Health Sciences in Orlando Florida. It is our hope that you will enjoy this material once again.

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The Apostle Paul in Rome

Lesson 1 – September 30 – October 6

What is it about Paul's letter to the Romans that has made it the source of spiritual revival and reformation in the church down through the centuries?

The Sabbath School lessons for this quarter focus on one of the most beloved documents in the New Testament—Paul's letter to the Romans. Throughout the history of the Christian Church, Romans has played a significant role in sparking spiritual revival and reformation. It was through reading Romans that Augustine, the famous 4th century church father, surrendered his heart to Christ and became a Christian. It was the study Romans that helped Martin Luther to first understand the gospel and thus sparked the Protestant Reformation. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism and the Great Awakening, also traced his conversion to understanding Romans. Paul's letter to the Romans even contributed to the spiritual reformation that occurred in the Seventh-day Adventist church with the preaching of A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner in the 1880s and 90s.

It is no wonder that Romans has been likened to "spiritual dynamite"! Martin Luther was so convinced that the message of Romans could change a person's life that he stated: "It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes" (Luther, *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans*).

While Martin Luther was certainly prone to rather bombastic statements, his comments do have some merit since Romans is unique in several ways from the rest of the New Testament Scriptures. Here a little historical background is beneficial.

Likely written in Corinth around A.D. 57 near the end of Paul's third missionary journey (See Rom. 16:1, 23), Romans is unique among Paul's letters in that it is written to a Christian community that was not founded by Paul nor is it a letter written in response to specific problems in the community (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:1; Gal. 1:6). Why then did Paul write Romans?

Having spread the gospel all across the eastern half of the Mediterranean, Paul wanted to take the gospel to the western Mediterranean, and especially to Spain (15:24). Whereas Antioch had been the home base for Paul's missionary activities in the east, he wrote to the mixed community of Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome in hopes that they might become the base for his new missionary activities in the west (15:24). One problem, however, stood in Paul's way. Many Jews opposed Paul's ministry. They feared that his message of justification by faith downplayed the importance of obedience to the law, and in some cases even led to sinful living (cf. 3:8; 6:1; Acts 21:20-23). In hopes of clearing up such misperceptions, in Romans Paul provides his fullest and most detailed explanation of the gospel. He systematically explains the problem of sin (1:18-3:20), God's solution for sin in Christ and how it is received only through faith (3:21 – 8:39), and finally how the Christian life should be lived in the Spirit.

Before turning our attention to Paul's detailed explanation of the Gospel, we first consider what we can learn about Paul and his gospel in the opening salutation of his letter (1:1-15).

Questions for Discussion:

1. What insights do we learn about Paul and his convictions Romans 1:1-15?
2. What if the only portion of Romans that survived to the present were the first fifteen verses. What could we learn about the gospel in these verses?
3. In verse 6, Paul says we are "called to belong to Jesus Christ." How does a person experience that sense of belonging?
4. While he wants to share his understanding of the gospel with the believers in Rome, Paul also hopes to be spiritual encouraged by their faith as well. Why is mutual encouragement valuable to Christians?

The Controversy

Lesson 2 – October 7 – 13

Why was circumcision such a controversial point in the early church? And why should believers even care about it today?

Outside of a few recent high profile court cases involving divorced couples fighting over whether their son should or should not be circumcised, circumcision is certainly a non-issue for most people in the western world. The situation was certainly different, however at the time of the early church. The question of circumcision in the New Testament was a hot issue. Certain Jewish believers argued that Gentiles had to be circumcised if they want to be saved, while Paul and others strongly disagreed (cf. Acts 15:1-2, 5; Gal. 5:2-3, 12). The argument became so contentious that the leaders of the church called a council in Jerusalem to come to an official decision on the issue (Acts 15:6-21).

While a council in Jerusalem to discuss the issue probably seems as odd as a modern court case on the issue, the topic under discussion was far more significant than merely the act of circumcision itself. Circumcision was merely the outward symbol of two far more reaching and extremely significant questions for the future of the church: 1) What is the defining mark of a Christian?; and 2) what aspects of the Jewish law are obligatory for Christians?

To understand the significance of circumcision, it will be helpful if we are acquainted with the historical context in which this controversy arose.

Approximately one hundred and seventy years before Jesus' birth, during a time of severe Jewish persecution, circumcision had become a prized symbol of national and religious identity. At the time, Palestine had fallen under the jurisdiction of Antiochus Epiphanies IV. In an attempt to unite his kingdom more closely together, Antiochus not only decreed that all his subjects should adopt the religious practices of the Greeks, but he banned, on the penalty of death, the practice of the most distinguishing external aspects of the Jewish faith: circumcision, Sabbath, food laws, and the cultic services at the temple. While many Jews were willing to compromise on these issues, others rose up in defense of their ancestral customs. The latter not only took up the sword against Antiochus, they also turned it against fellow Jews who were willing to play the turncoat. And of all the ancient laws, circumcision became the defining criterion of whether a person was seen as a faithful son of Abraham.

Why circumcision, and not some other law like the Sabbath? Because of all the Old Testament laws, circumcision was, so to speak, the most black and white. A man was either circumcised, or he wasn't. It was simple, and straightforward.

Circumcision continued to be a badge of identity long after the Jews defeated their Syrian rulers, gained their own independence, and eventually came under the rule of the Roman Empire. During the brief years of their independence, zealous Jews not only forced all uncircumcised Jews in Palestine to be circumcised, but they also required it of every man—whether he was Jewish or not—living in the surrounding nations who fell under Jewish jurisdiction. And among some Jews, the mere act of circumcision came to be seen as an automatic passport for salvation.

The question of identity was not an issue among the earliest Christians, since they were all Jewish. But as a growing number of Gentiles began to join the church the question of identity became a concern. How "Jewish" did a Gentile believer have to be a Christian? What aspects of the Jewish law did a Gentile believer need to follow? These are the two basic questions that concerned the council in Jerusalem.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why was circumcision such a focal point in the dispute between Paul and certain Jewish Christians? Read Gen 17:1-21, Gal. 2:3-5, 5:2, 6, Acts 15:1, 5.
2. Although the answer is only implicit in the summary of the council in Acts 15, what is the defining mark of a Christian (cf. Acts 15:11; Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:28)? Why is faith a better identifying mark of a Christian instead of some other outward action?
3. In Paul's day some Jews and Christians mistakenly placed too much importance and significance on the outward sign of circumcision instead of the inner quality of faith. What outward aspects of the Christian life might believers be tempted to over emphasize today as the "sign" of a genuine Christian? How can we avoid placing anything other than faith in Jesus at the center of the Christian life?
4. Of all the various Old Testament ceremonial laws, what four regulations did the council in Jerusalem find to be obligatory for Gentile believers? See Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25. What terminology did the early church see in these specific laws that indicated they were obligatory for Gentile and Jew alike? Read Lev. 17:7-15; 18:19-26.
5. Some Christians mistakenly assume that since the Sabbath is not mentioned in Acts 15 as a law to be kept, it is no longer obligatory for Gentile believers today. What evidence in the New Testament indicates that the moral law of Ten Commandments is still binding upon God's followers today? Consider Matt. 5:17; Heb. 4:9; Rev. 14:12.
6. How would you answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

The Human Condition

Lesson 3 – October 14 – 20

Are you ashamed of the Gospel?

While some people in Paul's day may have been ashamed of the gospel, Paul was not. The gospel for Paul was something to boast about? Why? Because the gospel is the power of God for salvation. But what is it about the gospel that makes it so powerful? In stating the reason in verse 17 Paul introduces us to a key phrase in Romans—the righteousness of God (1:17; 3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3).

When Martin Luther first came across this phrase in Romans, he became discouraged. He interpreted God's righteousness to mean that the gospel was the good news that God was a just and righteous God. While that might be good news for some, it was ultimately bad news for Luther because he knew he was a sinner. Knowing that God was righteousness simply meant that God would punish him for his sins. Romans did not become good news for Luther until he realized that he has misunderstood what God's righteousness was all about.

In the OT "righteousness" is a relational word that can apply to both the behavior of God and humans (cf. Ps. 97:2; Gen. 38:26). As a relational term it involves the assessment of an individual's behavior—whether that person has acted in an appropriate manner. Thus in the most basic sense of the term a "righteous" person is someone who does the "right" thing. What Luther finally realized, however, was that the dominant use of righteousness in the Old Testament is in connection to God's promise to restore the world from its fallen condition (cf. Gen. 3:15). God outlined his plan to bless the whole world most fully in the covenant he made with Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:5-6, 13-21; 17:7). Within this context, God's righteousness refers to his faithfulness to his covenantal promises. God acts "righteously" by keeping his word and bringing salvation and redemption to his people (Isa. 45:8; 46:12-13; 51:5-6, 8; Ps. 71:15; 98:2). Although Israel had failed to be faithful to God, God has acted righteously to his promise through sending Jesus, the one faithful Israelite, to overcome both Israel's unfaithfulness and to atone for the sins of the entire world.

Paul's statement, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," implies that some people were ashamed of the gospel. An indication of the ridicule Christians faced in response to their belief in Jesus can be seen in the earliest known drawing of the crucifixion of Jesus. The inscription was discovered in Rome and dates to the 1st or 2nd century A.D. It is referred to as the *Alexamenos graffito*. It depicts an individual being crucified on a cross. The victim, however, has the head of a donkey and the body of a man. Beside the cross is a young man kneeling in worship with the following phrase scratched in Greek: "Alexander worships [his] god." The point is obvious—Christians are foolish.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How, in Paul's day or today, might a person be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel? What reason does Paul give for why he is "not ashamed of the gospel"?
2. Paul says the gospel contains the "power of God for salvation." What power have you seen the gospel exercise in your life?

3. In Romans 1:17, Paul says, "The righteousness shall live by faith." In practical terms, what does it mean "to live by faith"? Since this passage is a quotation of Habakkuk 2:4, how might the historical event associated with Habakkuk inform our understanding of this phrase?

The subject of God's wrath for many people is a troubling topic. For some it conjures up the image of a vindictive God dangling sinners above the fiery pits of hell—similar to the picture painted by Jonathan Edwards in his notoriously famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Others go to the opposite extreme claiming that claim God has no wrath at all.

4. How does Paul describe God's wrath in Romans 1:18-28? How is this view different from the two views expressed above? How do Paul's comments in 1:20 and 2:4 demonstrate that God's wrath is not vindictive?

5. According to Paul, on the basis of what kinds of sin are Gentiles and Jews condemned? Are these sins still a problem today?

6. In Romans 3:9 Paul states that "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin." To prove his point, Paul then cites a collection of Old Testament Scriptures. How do these texts indicate the problem of human sinfulness is not isolated to an occasional mistake, but is universal and pervasive in its extent? Here's a hint: What phrase is repeated four times and how many different parts of the body are mentioned.

Justification by Faith

Lesson 4 – October 21 – 27

What does it mean to be justified by faith?

Of all the passages in Paul's writings, no single passage is packed with more theologically significant terms than Romans 3:21-31: Justification, redemption, propitiation, grace, justification by faith, and the list goes on and on. Commenting on this, Leon Morris suggests that this passage is "possibly the most important single paragraph ever written" (Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 1988, p. 173). While each of these terms play a significant role in Paul's description of the gospel, unfortunately many of these terms have simply become clichés today—special church terminology that we hear sung or preached about, but have little real meaning for the average person. Today's lesson gives us the opportunity to look at several of these terms in more detail.

Justification is a legal term associated with the judicial proceedings in a court of law. It refers to the positive verdict that a judge pronounces when a person is determined to be innocent of any charge of wrongdoing (e.g., Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15). As such justification is the opposite of condemnation. It involves more than pardon, or even the forgiveness of sins. Justification is the positive declaration that a person is legally declared and counted as "just" or "righteous." Paul declares that sinners are righteous in God's sight not because they are righteous in their experience, but because God counts them as righteous on the basis of what was done for them in Christ.

Redemption was primarily a secular word commonly used in the Greco-Roman world to refer to the loosening of prisoners or to the manumission of slaves. It always involved the paying of a price to obtain a prisoner or a slave's freedom. The concept of freedom costing something is also present in the OT Scriptures (e.g., Lev. 25:26, 48; Ex. 30:12) and is even associated with God's redemption of his people (Ex. 6:6; 20:2). Redemption is one of the key metaphors Paul uses to describe salvation (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:20; 7:23; Rom. 8:23).

Propitiation (Gk. *hilastērion*) carries the basic idea of appeasement. For pagans it involved the idea of appeasing the wrath of the gods through sacrificial offerings. In the OT this same word also could refer to the mercy seat that covered the ark of the covenant (Lev. 16:15, 16; Heb. 9:5). Of these two possible meanings, the context and terminology suggest that Paul likely has the basic meaning of appeasement in mind. Paul's use of propitiation is, however, vastly different than its use in paganism. While God's holy wrath does rest on all evil, Paul describes God as the one who does the propitiating, and it is also God who provides the sacrifice—his own Son (cf. 1Jn 2:2). This is another example of how Paul takes events common in the ancient world and infuses them with a distinctly Christian application.

In spite of the powerful terminology in this section of Romans, the little phrase "**but now**" in verse 21 became one of Martin Luther's favorite phrases. What made this phrase so important for Luther was not the actual words themselves, but the practical spiritual application he found in them for his own spiritual life. Romans 3:20 ends on a strongly negative note. The whole world is condemned in the sight of a holy God on the basis of their sinfulness. The evidence against every human is so convincing that we are left speechless. In the midst of what appears to be a hopeless situation, Luther realized the words

"but now" offered a ray of hope. While the law demands a righteousness that we simply don't have, God offers his own righteousness as a free gift. As such "now" does not merely represent a logical transition in Paul's argument, but more importantly it has a temporal sense pointing to the present time in human history in which God has acted decisively in Christ to overcome the problem of human sinfulness. When Luther felt condemned by his conscience and harassed by the devil, he would repeat this phrase again and again. Yes, I am a sinner, "BUT NOW" the righteousness of God.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Romans 3:21-31 is packed full of important theological terms—some you have certainly heard before and others that might not be that familiar. Make a list of all the key terms you find and write a definition of what each term means. Can you think of any modern synonyms that might make these terms more easily understood today? Of the theological terms Paul employs, which one is most meaningful to you? Why?
2. Paul says that we have redemption in Christ Jesus. What is it that Christians have been redeemed from? See Heb. 2:14,15; 1Cor. 15: 56, 57; Rom. 6:22; and Rom. 3:24.
3. Why does Paul say that we have no reason to boast in Romans 3:27?
4. What do these verses teach us about God's law? How is it related to faith? To salvation? Would you describe Paul's view of the law here as negative or positive—or something else?
5. How does Jesus' death in our place prove that God is both just and merciful? See Rom. 3:26.
6. What does Romans 3:21-31 tell us about God, about Christ, and about ourselves?

The Faith of Abraham

Lesson 5 – October 28 – November 3

Was Abraham justified by obedience or by faith?

Having provided a technical definition and explanation of justification by faith in Romans 3:21-31, Paul now turns his attention in Romans 4 to the experience of Abraham. Paul specifically refers to Abraham seven times in the course of the chapter—a rather large number considering Abraham is only mentioned nine times in the entire book and only eighteen times in all of Paul's letters. For Paul, Abraham becomes a key example of what it means to live by faith. But this leads to an interesting question:

1. Besides Abraham, what other individuals in the Old Testament illustrate that salvation is by faith and not works? And if Abraham is not the only example, why does Paul spend so much time on Abraham in Romans 4?

Abraham was a pivotal figure in Judaism. He was the father of the Jewish race, and also an example to Jews of what it meant to be really Jewish. In fact, Jews living in the first century B.C. and A.D. not only saw in Abraham an ideal example of the importance of obedience, but an example of justification by works. This can be seen in a Jewish book written in the second century B.C. called Jubilees. The book claims to be a story told by an angel to Moses during the forty days he was on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:18), and focuses specifically on the experience of Abraham. The stories, however, are not exactly like the ones in the Old Testament. In the case of Abraham, the author also introduces a number of apocryphal stories about Abraham's childhood to illustrate that God chose Abraham because he was obedient. The author also whitewashes some of the more sordid tales from Abraham's life. For example, in the story of how Pharaoh took Abraham's wife Sarah, the author conveniently omits the part about Abraham lying about her identity as his wife.

The book of Jubilees also gives additional insight into the importance some Jews placed on circumcision. In Jubilees the angel tells Moses that in the future the sons of Israel will turn away from obeying the law of circumcision. As a result, "Great wrath from the Lord will be upon the sons of Israel...because they have made themselves like the gentiles.... There is therefore for them no forgiveness or pardon so that they might be pardoned and forgiven from all the sins of this eternal error" (Jub. 15:33). This sounds like something Paul's opponents would have agreed with themselves.

Seen from this perspective, Paul's focus on Abraham appears to be a deliberate attempt on his part to counteract the skewed picture of Abraham being advocated by other Jews.

2. Obedience was certainly an important part of Abraham's life. What examples in Abraham life indicate that "faith" not "works" was the basis of Abraham's acceptance with God? See Gen. 12:1-5; Gen. 15:1-6.

In both Romans and Galatians, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Paul specifically focuses on the word "counted" or "reckoned." It is used a total of eleven times in connection to Abraham in Romans 4 (Rom. 4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22,

23, 24). Drawn from the business world, this term means to "credit" or "to place something to an individual's account." According to Paul's metaphor what is placed to our account is righteousness—the very thing we lack in ourselves. God does not count us righteous because of our obedience, as Paul's opponents claimed. Scripture clearly says that it was because of Abraham's faith that God counted him as righteous. Abraham's obedience was not the ground of his justification; it was the result of it!

The basis of God's covenant with Abraham centered on God's promise to him. In the span of three short verses in Genesis 12:1-3, God says to Abraham four times, "I will." "I will show you a land." "I will make you a great nation." "I will bless you." And finally, "I will bless those who bless you." God's promises to Abraham are amazing because they are completely one-sided. Notice how God does all the promising and requires Abraham to promise nothing in return. This is the opposite of how most people try to relate to God. We usually promise God that we will serve him, if he will do something for us in return. But that is legalism. God did not ask Abraham to promise anything. Instead, God asks Abraham to accept his promises by faith. Of course, that was no easy task. Abraham had to learn to trust completely in God and not in himself, something that goes against all worldly wisdom.

3. In his discussion of the experience of Abraham, Paul says Abraham "did not weaken in faith" (4:19) and that "no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God" (4:20). Is this entirely true? What struggles did Abraham have in trusting God's promise? Is there any value in recounting Abraham's struggles? What hope might we find for our own less-than-perfect history with the "rose-colored" version Paul tells?

4. Paul says that circumcision was a sign and seal of righteousness by faith (4:11)? Isn't the act of circumcision all about behavior? In what sense can Paul say circumcision is connected to faith.

5. The law does not appear to have played a significant role in Abraham's experience with God—at least not like it did with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. What role then does the law play in our salvation today? See Rom. 4:15; 5:20; Gal. 3:19

6. Although we might believe in the "idea" of justification by faith, in ways might we still be trying to earn God's favor in the things we do or the way we act?

Adam and Jesus

Lesson 6 – November 4 – 10

What difference does justification by faith really make in a person's life?

Although Paul has explained the details of what it means to be justified by faith and has illustrated that experience in the life of Abraham, so far Romans has offered a largely dismal picture for the human race. This is not to say that God has acted to turn the tide of sin, he has. Paul has simply not yet explained what practical benefit that makes to the human race—and more importantly how passionately God loves every descendant of Adam. All that changes, however, in Romans 5. In Romans 5 Paul outlines the practical difference that justification by faith makes in the life of a believer, how great is God's love for us, and how we have far more in Christ than we ever lost in Adam.

This week's study guide will be divided into the three sections that make up the chapter.

The Fruits of Justification by Faith: (5:1-11)

1. List the key terms Paul uses in Romans 5:1-5 that describe the "benefits" that follow being justified by faith? What kind of picture comes to your mind when you consider these terms?
2. What does it mean to experience God's peace and his grace, according to Rom. 5:1-2?

While the word "peace" can refer to the absence of hostilities between individuals or nations (e.g., Deut. 20:12; 1 Sam. 7:14, 1 Kgs. 2:5), the Hebrew word for peace (Heb. *šālôm*) also conveys the idea of wholeness, prosperity, and completeness (e.g., Ps. 72:3, 7; Zech. 8:12). This is significant. It indicates that justification by faith involves far more than simply a truce with God. It brings peace in all its fullness—a fully restored and harmonious relationship with God.

Paul also says that the peace we have with God also provides "access" and "grace" (favor) with God. The word "access" refers to the privilege given to someone to enter in the presence of a royal dignitary. Entering into the presence of a king was not a trivial matter; in some cases it might even result in an unfavorable reception. Paul states, however, that believers not only have access into God's presence (cf. Eph. 2:18), but that they "stand" in his favor. "Standing" indicates that access to God's favor is a constant reality, not simply an occasional experience (Rom. 11:20; 1 Cor. 7:37; 15:1; Eph. 6:14).

3. In what ways have we or do we act like God's enemies (5:1, 10)?
4. Why can we rejoice in our sufferings? Can you provide an example of this?
5. Does suffering always produce endurance? If not, why not? What role does faith play in our attitude toward suffering?
6. In what tangible way has "God's love has been poured into our hearts"? What does it look like? And how can we make sure we are receiving that love?

In Romans 5:10, Paul introduces a new term to describe our relationship with God. That term is "reconciliation." The word occurs four times in Romans, three of which occur in verses 10-11. It is interesting to note that reconciliation is an accomplished reality on God's part. God does not need to be reconciled to us. We are the ones who need to be willing to be reconciled to God.

7. Why is reconciliation an important metaphor to describe the gift of salvation? Would justification be as meaningful without it?

Our Situation "In Christ": (5:12-21)

The mention of "reconciliation" in Romans 5:12 leads into the next section of Paul's argument in Romans 5. How is reconciliation possible? How can Christ atone for Adam's failure as well as the sins of all humanity? Paul answers this question by comparing and contrasting Adam with Jesus Christ. As the representative or head of the human race, Adam's actions had significant implications for all humanity. His decision to disregard God's specific instructions to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil involved much more than a bad example (Gen. 2:16-17). In the same way that the actions of the President of the United States can affect every citizen in the country, so Adam's decision affected the entire human race. Adam's disobedience brought sin, death and condemnation upon the entire human race (5:18).

The good news is that Christ came to undo the consequences of Adam's disobedience. He did this by becoming the representative of a new humanity (5:14). So while Adam's action brought sin and death to all, Christ's obedience and substitutionary death opened up the way to justification and life for all who will receive it as a gift.

8. Read Romans 5:15-21 carefully. In two columns, list the contrasting impact that Adam and Christ have on the human race?

9. Paul repeatedly refers to the salvation we find in Christ as a "free gift" (5:15, 16, 17). By definition, gifts are free. Why does Paul then refer to salvation as a "free" gift?

10. Notice the repeated use of the word "reign" in Romans 5:17, 21. What is it that reigns in the life of the person who is "in Adam" versus the person who chooses to be "in Christ"?

11. How does grace increase when sin increases? See Rom. 5:20.

Overcoming Sin

Lesson 7 – November 11 – 17

Is freedom from sin a reality in your life?

Paul's insistence that a person is saved by faith apart from works of the law (Rom. 3:28) was troubling for some Christians—particularly those who were Jewish (Acts 21:20-21). These Christians feared that Paul's emphasis on the centrality of faith in Christ would not only undermine the importance of living a life of obedience to God's commandments, but that it might also become a license for sinful living (cf. Rom. 3:7-8). Concerned that his comments about grace abounding whenever sin increases might be interpreted along these same lines, Paul not only denies this type of reasoning in Romans 6, he does much more. Paul explains why a true understanding of righteousness by faith should not lead to "renewed" sinning but to freedom from the power of sin itself and a life of obedience.

1. How many different reasons does Paul give in Romans 6 for why a believer should not sin? Which of these reasons resonates with you most? Why?
2. Although Paul is not primarily concerned with the act of baptism itself, what do these verses teach about the proper manner and meaning of baptism? How does this support and illustrate Paul's larger argument in Romans 6?

Alonzo T. Jones appears to have had Romans 6 in mind when he was baptized as a Seventh-day Adventist in Walla Walla, Washington Territory on August 8, 1874. According to George Knight, when young Alonzo rose up out of the water he raised his hands to God and proclaimed, "Dead to the world, and alive to thee, O my God!" (Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy*, 1987, p.15). Most individuals today are certainly not that boisterous when they are baptized.

3. When you were baptized what did it mean for you? Should a person be baptized again if he or she did not fully understand the theological meaning behind their original baptism?

In addition to our union with Christ in his baptism, Paul says that believers have also been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). Here Paul is not emphasizing Christ being crucified for us, but our crucifixion with him.

4. Why is our crucifixion with Christ important for Paul's argument? As you consider this question, carefully read Romans 6:6 noticing the following terminology Paul uses: 1) the conjunction "in order that" (indicating purpose); and 2) the word "nothing" (indicating the result. This word in Greek literally means "powerless").
5. Whether crucifixion, baptism, or resurrection, why is our union with Christ so important? Would it be just as effective to talk solely about our own personal experience? Explain?

In Romans chapter 3, Paul pictures sin as an act of disobedience against God's law (Rom. 3:23). Paul's description of sin in Romans 6 is different, however. Instead of a broken law, sin is personified as a cosmic power that acts like an evil tyrant that has enslaved the human race under its lordship. The only hope of escaping from sin's deadly grip is to accept the lordship of Christ.

6. How is sin typically spoken about in the church today? What value is there in seeing sin as something other than a broken commandment, or even a broken relationship? What other definitions and descriptions of sin are depicted in the Bible? Consider Gen. 3, 4; 1 John 5:17; Rom. 14:23.
7. Based on Paul's counsel in Romans 6, what advice would you give someone who wanted to know how to overcome a besetting sin in his or her life?
8. Paul contrasts slavery and freedom in Romans 6. What different forms of slavery and freedom do you see?
9. Paul's comments about Christians no longer being "under the law" are often interpreted to mean that Christians need no longer follow the law today. What evidence is there in Romans 6 that contradicts this kind of an interpretation?
10. Paul says we should use our bodies as "instruments of righteousness." What would this look like in reality? What steps can we take to make this invitation a reality in our lives?

Who is the Man of Romans 7

Lesson 8 – November 18 – 24

Who is the man in Romans 7?

Today's lesson deals with one of the most controversial passages in Paul's epistle: the identity of the man in Romans 7 struggling ineffectively against the power sin in his life. Since Paul uses the pronoun "I" is Paul describing his own personal experience? And if he is, is he describing his experience before or after his conversion? Before we can tackle this theological conundrum, it is important that we first examine the argument that Paul develops in the first half of the chapter. While this might seem like a distraction from the real issue, it will actually help in answering the question about the identity of the man Paul describes later in the chapter.

Having already explained how Christ has broken the **power of sin** (6:1-23), Paul turns his attention in Romans 7 to how Christ has released humanity from the **condemnation of God's law**. Paul's focus on the law is demonstrated by his use of the word "law" or "commandment" in each of the first fourteen verses in chapter seven, and a total of thirty-three times from 7:1 to 8:4.

To explain how Christ has released humans from the law's condemnation, Paul makes use of a marriage metaphor. According to the laws of marriage and divorce in the Old Testament, a woman is bound to her husband for as long as he lives. The only legal way she could marry someone else would be if her husband had died. Paul's concern is not marital law. His real concern is how sinners can be freed from the law's condemnation and joined to Christ. To explain this aspect of salvation Paul likens the law of God to the husband in the marriage. Since the law will not pass away (Matt. 5:17), the only way humans can be freed from its condemnation is through death. By dying with Christ believers are released from the law's jurisdiction, and can legally be joined to Christ. And just as a wife bears children for her husband, so union with Christ results in a life of fruitful service to God (7:4).

1. The purpose of any law is to define what sin is and to condemn it whenever it occurs. Although this aspect of the law is important, it does not bode well for anyone who has broken the law. It is not the nature or duty of the law to let anyone off the hook. Since we are sinners, why is being "under Jesus" better than being "under the law"? Consider the following verses: Heb 4:15; 2:18; Rom 8:1.
2. How does being free from the law's condemnation enable us to "bear fruit for God" (7:4)? To follow Paul's marriage metaphor, you might contrast the different way love is manifested in a "good" marriage compared to a "bad" marriage.
3. What does it mean in practical every day life to serve God "in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code" (7:6)? Give an example to illustrate this point.

Realizing again that his comments about the law might be misunderstood, Paul clearly states that the problem is not the law, but humans. In fact, the role of the law is actually a positive one. It points out human sinfulness. Many Jews, however, believed that by studying God's law sin could be overcome. Paul disagrees. As important as moral truth is, by itself it is incapable of overcoming sin. All the law can tell humans is where they don't measure up (7:7-12); it cannot make them into what they should be (7:13-24). So while the law is "holy and just and good" (7:12), it brings death to sinners (7:11).

4. List all the positive qualities of the law described in Romans 7:7-13?
5. In contrast to its positive qualities, what limitations does the law have in Rom. 7:7-13?
6. Why do you think Paul specifically mentions the tenth commandment against coveting as the one commandment that pointed out his sinfulness rather than a different commandment? It might be helpful to consider how the sin of coveting is different from the other types of behavior forbidden in the Ten Commandments—particularly for someone like Paul (Phil. 3:3-6).

Converted or unconverted? So who is the person struggling against sin in Romans 7:14-25?

It must be the unconverted Paul! How could the converted Paul say he was "sold as a slave to sin" (7:14)? That would contradict everything Paul just said about the freedom from sin in Romans 6. Could the converted Paul really say he was powerless to do what he wanted? And finally, how could Paul cry out in anguish, "O wretched man that I am" when he has talked earlier about the blessing of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God? So goes this argument.

It must be the converted Paul! An unconverted person, so goes this argument, would never acknowledge that fact that "nothing good dwells within my flesh" (7:18), call the law holy, righteous, and good, claim to delight in God's law (7:22), and bemoan their condition and long for deliverance (7:23-24). The internal conflict experienced in Romans 7 is only possible in the experience of a person in whom the Holy Spirit is active!

While both of these arguments certainly have their strengths, I'm personally convinced the most likely answer is that Paul has **neither** individual in mind. In light of the almost complete absence of the "Spirit" in Romans 7, and its frequent mention in chapter 8 to describe the Christian life, Paul is most likely referring to the struggle that every human faces—whether converted or not—who tries to live a moral life without the presence of God's enabling Spirit.

7. In spite of the conflict in Romans 7:13-24, on what basis can Paul be thankful (7:24-25)?
8. In what ways have you discovered God ability to deliver or rescue you from "this body of death"?

No Condemnation

Lesson 9 – November 25 – December 1

What role does the Holy Spirit play in the Christian life?

In contrast to the discouraging picture painted in Romans 7 of the person struggling to overcome sin, but failing miserably, Romans 8 offers a much more encouraging situation. Romans eight describes a different option for how the Christian life can be lived—live in the Spirit. In fact, whereas Romans 7 repeatedly mentioned the law, Romans 8 refers to the Spirit twenty-two times! This is no accident. Paul obviously wants the believers in Rome to realize that the fullness of the Christian life cannot be lived without the active presence of God's Spirit. But before we jump to the heart of Romans 8, let's start with how Paul develops his argument beginning with verse 1.

It is important to remember that the chapter divisions that divide our modern Bibles were not part of Paul's original letter. In fact, they didn't develop for several hundred years. This means that the opening verses of our chapter 8 of Romans are really the answer to the discouraging situation in chapter seven—what hope is there for the person whose life is beset by moral failure? The answer is two-fold.

In the first answer Paul soothes the guilty conscience of every sinner. In Christ there is no condemnation. Through Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, God has freed us from the penalty of sin. This is indeed good news! All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). In spite of our best efforts and intentions, we don't always live the life we want to live. The gospel contains the good news that God has forgiven our sins and does not hold them against us.

Unfortunately, for many Christians Romans 8:1 is the *entire* gospel: The good news of no condemnation. But that, according to Paul, is only half of the gospel. While forgiveness does ease a guilty conscience, what we really need is the power to not have to continually live a life dominated by sin. We need freedom from *both* the penalty of sin and the power of sin.

Thankfully, Paul does not just share half of the gospel with the Romans. In verse 2, he tells them that God has also provided a solution to the power of sin in a person's life.

1. According to Romans 8:2-4, how has God freed sinners from the power of sin? As you consider your answer, it will be helpful to note that the phrase "the law of sin and death" in verse 2 is a reference to the power of sin that is described at work in the life of the person in Romans 7 (cf. 7:21-23). Therefore when Paul refers to sin as a "law", he does not mean law as in one of the commandments, but as a general principle of life like the way we refer to the "law" of gravity.
2. In practical terms, how has Christ's incarnation delivered us from the power of sin? And what is a believer "freed" to do? Compare Romans 7:4 and 8:4.

Paul classifies all humans into one of two categories: those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them and those who do not. He uses the metaphor of the flesh to represent the life opposed to God and lived outside of the Spirit. Thus the "Spirit" and the "flesh" represent two totally different ways of living. Those living in the Spirit live to please God, while those living according to the flesh ultimately live to please themselves.

Many ancient philosophers dealt with the question of how to live a virtuous life. The main problem, as they saw it, was a lack of knowledge. For Paul the problem is far more serious. The real difficulty is not a lack of information; it is the power of sin that manifests itself in every aspect of human life through self-centeredness. For this reason, the only solution to living a truly virtuous life is to be filled with the power of the Spirit of God. For only the Spirit is powerful enough to work in the life of the believer to overcome the power of sin.

3. Sometime individuals like to say that once we come to God we will "automatically" begin to live the life God wants us to live. Some interpret this to mean that the Christian life is more passive than active. How does this compare with Paul's counsel in Romans 8:5-14? What obligation does Paul imply that we have in living the Christian life?
4. In practical terms, how does a person "set their mind on the things of the Spirit and not on the "things of the flesh"?"
5. How does the life of a person who sets his or her "mind on the things of the flesh" (8:5) differ from the individual who sets his or her mind on the "Spirit"? Give a modern example?
6. What aspects of the flesh do you struggle with today? Ask God to focus your mind on the things of the Spirit instead.
7. Describe the work of the Spirit based on Romans 8:9-17? What encourages you most from this description?

Adoption: Paul is the only New Testament author to use the metaphor of adoption (cf. 8:23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). Although adoption was not unknown in Israel, it was a far more common procedure in the Greco-Roman world. Adoption brought with it a number of legal rights. In addition to becoming the "true" son and heir of his adopted father, an adopted son received all the necessities of life and was guaranteed that his father would never reject him or reduce him to slavery. Building on his imagery, Paul remains his hearers that God has also chosen them to become his legal heirs.

8. How is this metaphor different than justification, redemption, and reconciliation? Which of these metaphors do you find most meaningful? Could we actually describe God's gift of salvation without one of these terms?
9. It is easy to become discouraged in the Christian life when we fall short of the life of faith we would like to live. Make a list of the promises in Roman 8 that can encourage you in your walk with God.

Children of the Promise

Lesson 10 – December 2 – 8

What qualities is God looking for in the lives of his followers today?

I suspect that Romans 9-11 is probably the least liked section in Romans. The first eight chapters of Romans provide a stunning description of how God has provided for the salvation of the human race in Christ. While the last five chapters of Romans are well liked since they offer some concrete, practical examples of how the gospel should be lived in the life of the believer. So who needs Romans 9-11? Don't we already have the whole gospel in the rest of Romans?

From our perspective the answer might be yes, but not from Paul's point of view. Romans 9-11 are indispensable. They form an integral part in Paul's presentation of the gospel. In the previous chapters, Paul has demonstrated that the gospel is available free of charge for all people—Jew and Gentile alike. In fact, the proclamation of the gospel has already resulted in a new community of Jews and Gentiles united in Christ in one body (1:7). The inclusiveness of the gospel, however, also raises a difficult problem. What about Israel? Did they get shortchanged? Was God faithful to his promises to Israel? And if he was, why has Israel not been more receptive to the message of the gospel? Paul addresses these questions in Romans 9-11 in an attempt to show that God has been faithful to his covenant with Abraham, and that he is working to bring about the ultimate inclusion of Israel within the gospel. These chapters of Romans are important for they have much to tell us about the character of the God we serve.

1. Paul had a great burden for the salvation of his fellow Jews. What phrases in Romans 9:1-3 indicate the intensity of Paul's burden?
2. Paul says he was willing to be "accursed" by God, if it might bring about the salvation of his fellow Jews? What other individuals in the Old Testament were willing to suffer personal loss if it would result in the salvation of God's people? As believers, how can we develop this same type of attitude for those who are spiritually lost today?
3. What special advantages had God given to the Jewish nation? See 9:4-5. In the end, why did these advantages not benefit every Jew? As Christians do we have similar advantages today? What can we do to make sure we do not miss out on these advantages?
4. Review the story of Abraham's two sons Isaac and Jacob and the story of Jacob and Esau. How do these two stories illustrate that the failure of all of Israel to accept Jesus as the Messiah was not an indication that God's promises had somehow failed?

The stories of Moses and Pharaoh (9:15-17), and the freedom of a potter to make a wide variety of vessels for different functions (9:21) illustrate that God is free to choose whomever he wills (9:18, 21). It is important to remember that in these verses Paul is not dealing with the issue of salvation, but God's freedom to use any one he wants to bring his promises to fulfillment.

5. What characteristics might God desire in a person he wants to use in his service today? And how might a person know if his or her heart is hardened to God's influence? And spiritually speaking, what might we do to avoid such "cardiovascular" problems in the future?

The Elect

Lesson 11 – December 9 – 15

Did God reject the Jewish nation?

Today's lesson focuses on Romans 10 and 11 and is a continuation of Paul's discussion in chapter 9 dealing with fact that so many Jews failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Why was this the case? Was God not faithful to his promises? Had he rejected his people? Paul's ultimate conclusion to this question is that the fault was not on God's part, but Israel's unwillingness to accept God's invitation. All was not hopeless, however, Paul believed that God's plan would one day result in the salvation of all Israel.

1. What strengths and weaknesses did Paul see in the Judaism of his day? In what ways might we as Christians be susceptible to these same weaknesses? What can we do to avoid making the same mistakes as ancient Israel?

2. Paul speaks rather disparagingly about "zeal" without "knowledge" (10:2-3). Is it any better to have knowledge without zeal? How can we as Christians strike the right balance between these two aspects of the spiritual life?

Paul says that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes (10:4). The word "end" has a double sense in Greek. It can either mean end as in "termination" or end as in "goal" or "purpose." Some have interpreted this verse to mean that Christ abolished the law so it is no longer binding on Christians. In light of Paul's positive statements about the law elsewhere (e.g. 3:31; 7:12, 8:4), that interpretation seems unlikely. Christ is the goal of the law in the sense that it was always God's purpose that the law would point and lead to Jesus.

God's plan of salvation. While Romans 10:14-21 is frequently used to outline the basic steps of individual salvation, the passage served a somewhat different purpose for Paul. In these verses Paul deals with two potential excuses for why the Jews had not more readily accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Was it due to the fact that somehow Israel had not "heard" the gospel? No. That cannot be the case for in the same way that the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:4) so the gospel had been clearly proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles. Is it possible then that Israel did not understand or know about God's plan to include the Gentiles as part of his covenantal family? No. Paul dismisses this excuse by citing three verses from the Old Testament (Deut. 32:21; Isa. 65:1, 2) that make it clear that Israel's knowledge of the Scriptures should have given them some sense of God's overall plan.

3. What responsibility do Christians have today in spreading the gospel?

4. What can we learn from Romans 10:14-21 about how the gospel reaches people?

Romans 10:17 demonstrates that faith originates as a response to a divine initiative (cf. Gal. 5:6). Paul specifically connects faith to hearing and the "word of Christ." The word "hearing" is the same word translated as "report" in verse 16. Thus Paul is saying that in order for people to come to faith in Christ they must first hear the good news of what God has done for the human race in Christ.

Paul's argument has made it clear that God is not at fault in Israel's failure to accept Jesus as the Messiah. God has kept his promises and fulfilled his word. Although the fault lies with Israel, Paul believes there is still hope for Israel to respond to the gospel.

5. What encouragement did Paul find in the story of Elijah that there was hope for more Jews to turn to Jesus? What lesson can we learn from this when we are tempted to think that there are few who are really faithful to God today?

Paul believed Israel's rejection of the gospel would only be temporary. Once the "full number of the Gentiles" had responded to the gospel, all of Israel would be saved.

6. What does Paul mean by the "full number of the Gentiles"? Is God waiting for a specific number of Gentiles to turn to Christ? Does "all" Israel being saved literally mean the entire nation of Israel today? And what attitude should Christians have toward the "nation" of Israel?

7. Paul also believes that some Jews will turn to Christ out of jealousy. Is jealousy a valid motivation? Why or why not? Consider also Phil. 1:15.

Overcoming Evil with Good

Lesson 12 – December 16 – 22

How should the Christian life be lived?

Now that Paul has finished his explanation of the gospel, he turns his attention more fully to the way life should be lived in light of it. Paul follows this basic pattern of gospel presentation followed by ethical exhortation in all his letters (Gal. 5:13-6:10; 1 Thess. 4:1-5:22; Col. 3:1-4:6; Eph. 4:1-6:20). This is Paul's way of essentially saying, "Become what you already are in Christ." The ethical life of the gospel is not to be a burden of things a believer has to do to become a part of God's family. Believers are called to live godly lives because in Christ they are already part of God's family.

Before Paul begins to list specific ways that the Christian life should be lived (12:9-21), he first describes the Christian life as a "sacrifice" offered in a temple. Sacrifices offered in ancient temples were considered to be both holy and the legal possession of the gods. Paul draws on this common understanding to emphasize that a believer's entire life also belongs to God and should be dedicated for holy use. This fundamental fact should be the basic principle for determining how to live life as a follower of Jesus (12:2-3).

Questions for Discussion:

1. Romans 12:1-2 includes a response from both the body and the mind. Why are both these aspects of the human life important in our relationship with God? Can you think of any groups in Christianity that focused too much on one of these aspects with disastrous results?
2. If we are transformed by the renewal of our minds, how does that take place in a practical sense? Is this something we do, or that God does? And how often does it need to occur?
3. Paul explicitly mentions love twice at the beginning of Romans 12:9-21. In what sense does love play a role in each of the traits mentioned?
4. How can we learn to hate evil without hating the evildoer?
5. All the qualities in Romans 12:9-21 fall into two categories—things we should do, and things we are specifically told not to do. Do we really need to be told what not to do? Explain.
6. Since God has ordained the local authorities, is it valid for Christians to assist local government by taking up arms as either a soldier or a law enforcement officer?
7. Paul's instruction to submit to the local authorities is easier to follow when law and justice rule the land. But how does it apply when corruption and cruelty are the reality instead? Does this passage rule out involvement in civil revolt? What about non-violent civil disobedience?
8. Romans 12 and 13 is packed with practical advice on how to live the Christian life. In your opinion, what is the most significant insight in these chapters?

Christian Living

Lesson 13 – December 23 – 29

What should Christians do when they don't agree?

Having emphasized the supremacy of love in the Christian life (12:9-10; 13:8-10), Paul now begins to wrap up his letter by providing examples of how love should be manifest within the body of Christ when there are differences of opinion. It is important for us to note that Paul's counsel does not pertain to differences about the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith (cf. Gal. 1:6-9). He is specifically concerned with disagreements that arise in the "gray" areas in the Christian life where more than one perspective is equally valid (cf. 1 Cor. 11:16).

1. When Scripture is not explicit on an issue, on what basis should Christians decide what is right and wrong? And do Christians always need to agree? Consider Rom. 13:8-10; 14:15-19.

The difference in opinion dividing the "weak" and the "strong" in Romans 14 is related to food. The issue Paul has in mind was not whether Christians should follow the dietary laws given to the Jews in the Old Testament. This cannot be the case because Jews were not prohibited from eating all forms of meat—only animals God designated as unclean. While the issue is not entirely clear in Romans, it seems that the issue was either related to believers who abstained from eating meat because they could not know for sure whether it had been properly slaughtered according to Levitical law (Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14; Acts 15:20, 29), and/or the fear that the meat being sold in the market place had come from sacrifices made in pagan temples. The latter was a particular problem Paul had already encountered among believers in Corinth (1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:14-33).

Although Paul disagrees with the position of the "weak in the faith" in regards to meat (14:14), he chooses to surrender his own rights in order to not cause a fellow believer to stumble in faith (cf. Rom. 14:20-21; 1 Cor. 8:13).

2. Why should Christians seek to please their neighbor instead of themselves? See Rom. 15:3-4

3. When we talk about exercising our freedom it typically means the right to do the things we want to do. Technically speaking, freedom also involves the opportunity to wave our rights at times. Spiritually speaking, when might the exercise of our personal rights equal a wrong?

4. Paul obviously values the importance of unity in the church. Why is unity so important?

In Romans 15:30-33 Paul asks the Romans to pray for him. As it turns out, Paul's request to be delivered from the "unbelievers in Judea" was not ultimately granted. Shortly after writing Romans, Paul returned to Jerusalem where he was nearly killed by the Jews and then thrown in prison for several years. Finally, after appealing to Caesar, Paul's desire to travel to Rome became a reality—only it was as a prisoner to be judged by the emperor.

5. In light of Paul's circumstances, what principles can we gather from Paul's brief instructions regarding prayer?

6. Romans concludes with a rather lengthy list of Paul's friends. What indication do you see of diversity in the list? What does this list of friends tell us about the nature of Paul's ministry and Paul's view of ministry (notice, for example, the women on the list—particularly the deacon, Phoebe)?

7. Reflecting on all we have studied and discussed this quarter, what, in your opinion, stands out the most for you in Romans?