

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

Week 7 | Jesus Gives Salvation and Spirit | Romans

Just before Christ's ascension, Jesus commissioned His followers to take the message of the *gospel* throughout the world—even to the ends of the earth. The good news of salvation spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire, and communities of faith sprang up in many cities. Both Jews and Gentiles were hearing about Jesus and receiving new spiritual life through faith in Christ.

During the early decades of Christianity, some of the apostles wrote letters of instruction—*epistles*—to believers in various churches. These letters of instruction provide deep wisdom for us. They reveal God's purposes for His people and for His creation. Many of them were written to address a particular situation that was an ongoing problem for the church receiving the letter. Others are more general in nature, serving to illuminate the glory of the saving work of Christ.

The letter to the Romans is one of the most theologically rich books of the New Testament. It was written by the apostle Paul to the churches in Rome, the capital city of the vast Roman Empire. In this carefully written letter, Paul systematically explains the *gospel* of Jesus Christ—the good news regarding salvation and the power of God that enables God's people to live transformed lives.

Note: Our Bible study lesson this week is structured differently than the other lessons in our study. The book of Romans is a tightly argued book, and in this lesson we will make our way through Paul's argument, summarizing his points as we go. Although Paul's reasoning is clear, the book is not an easy one to comprehend with a casual reading.

In the ancient world, the term *gospel* referred to an announcement of a great victory—usually a military or political victory. It was a message of *good news* for the people for the people who heard it—a message that would bring great joy.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul explains to a cosmopolitan multi-cultural city how the death and resurrection of Jesus provides salvation for *all* who respond in faith—not just for Jews, but for Gentiles as well. This is good news; this is *gospel*. The book of Romans teaches us what *the gospel* of Jesus Christ is all about. The book of Romans teaches us what it means to be a Christian—what it means to be *embraced* by God through faith in Jesus.

The book has *four major segments* which build on one another to develop a glorious picture of God's grace and power in the salvation provided through faith in Jesus Christ. We may divide the book this way:

- In Chapters 1-4 we learn that mankind is hopelessly unrighteous, but *the gospel* reveals that there is a *righteousness from God* that is *received* through *faith* in Jesus. It's not a righteousness we attain; it is a righteous standing before God that is credited to us as a free gift.
- Chapters 5-8 explain that the spiritual life imparted through faith creates *a new humanity* that is being empowered and *transformed* by God's Holy Spirit.
- Chapters 9-11 show that this *transformed spiritual life* is a *fulfillment of the Old Testament promises* to Abraham in the book of Genesis.
- Chapters 12-16 challenge the church to *live before God in worship and in unity*.

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Let's look at some of the key teachings in this book.

Section 1: Chapters 1-4

Summary: *Mankind is hopelessly unrighteous, but the gospel reveals a righteousness from God that is received as a gift through faith in Jesus*

1. **Read Romans 1:1-7.** What is the subject—the focus—of the gospel message? (Romans 1:2-4)
2. **Read Romans 1:16-17.**
 - a. The gospel is a message of good news. What is the purpose of the gospel? (1:16)
 - b. What does the gospel reveal to us, according to Romans 1:17?
3. *For deeper thought:* **Read Romans 1:18-21 and Romans 1:29-32.** We tend to think of “wrath” as being a fierce, emotional anger; but that is not how we are to understand God's wrath. In Scripture, the term “God's wrath” refers to God's uncompromising opposition to all that is evil. Using this Scriptural definition of the term “wrath,” describe how God may have both steadfast love and wrath toward mankind.

God's people Israel—the Jews—have taken great comfort in the fact that God gave His Law (Torah) to Israel, and the Jews try to live according to the commands of the Law. Even so, Paul writes that it is not only ungodly Gentiles who are under the wrath of God, but also the Jews have fallen short of the righteous life that God requires of His people.

4. **Read Romans 2:17-24.** Summarize Paul's rebuke to the Jews in Romans 2:17-24.
5. **Read Romans 3:9-18.** *Both Jews and Gentiles fail to live righteous lives*
 - a. What does this teach you about the condition of fallen men and women? (3:9-10)
 - b. What does this passage say about God's evaluation of our speech (vs. 13-14) and our actions (15-17)?
 - c. How does God describe the essence of our fallen condition? (3:18)

The first three chapters of Romans teach that all humanity is by nature trapped in sin, and because of our sin, we are separated from God. We need to be *rescued* from our enslavement to sin. Our best efforts will never achieve the righteousness we need to be *reconciled* to God.

If this were the end of the story, our situation would be hopeless, but this is *not* the end of the story. The next paragraphs announce some very good news. God Himself has taken the initiative to provide a solution to our problem of sin. God provides a way to enable us to be *reconciled* to Him and *rescued* from our slavery to sin.

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6. Read Romans 3:21-28 *God grants us the righteous standing we cannot earn*

- a. According to Romans 3:21, what has God revealed to us?
- b. How does this come to us (verse 22)?
- c. To whom does it come? (verse 22)?

There are several terms in this section that need to be sorted out and defined. Use this list as a reference as you read.

Grace: a gift freely given by God out of His boundless goodness; a gift given that is *not* earned.

Justified: to be *justified* is to be declared (or accounted) righteous.

Redemption: the act of obtaining release (or *rescue*) by payment of a ransom.

Sacrifice of atonement (propitiation): this refers to the Old Testament sacrifice offered by the High Priest each year to pay for the sins of the people. A *sacrifice of atonement* imparts forgiveness of sin.

7. Read again Romans 3:21-28.

- a. What does vs. 23 tell you about mankind's condition?
- b. What has God done for those who believe? (vs. 24)
- c. What did God provide to pay the penalty for our sins? (vs. 25)
- d. What characteristic does God demonstrate by this provision? (vs 26)

In the Old Testament, God made firm, covenant promises to Abraham, and Paul points out that Abraham himself was declared *righteous before God* on the basis of Abraham's *faith*, not on the basis of a good life. **Read Romans 4:13, 20-25** to see this affirmation.

The first four chapters of Romans teach us some very good news. Although we are by nature sinners, unable to attain the righteous life that God requires, God has provided Jesus as the sacrifice that pays the penalty for our sin. Jesus is the sacrifice that enables us to be *reconciled* to God and *embraced* into His family. We are justified (declared righteous) through *faith in Jesus*; we are *justified* when we trust that Jesus' death and resurrection have made us right with God. This is the gospel message.

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Section 2: Chapters 5-8

Summary: *The spiritual life imparted through faith
creates a new humanity that is being transformed by God's Holy Spirit*

One might object to this gospel by challenging the justice of it. How does this *declaration* of righteousness address the ongoing practical problem of sin? How does faith in Jesus enable God's people to live in a way that pleases God? Paul answers these objections in Section 2 of the book of Romans. The answers to these questions give us a stunning picture of the glory of God's *transforming power* in our lives.

Section 2 of Romans (chapters 5-8) teaches us that faith in Jesus imparts a new spiritual life. This new spiritual life results as we are being *transformed* by the Presence of God's Holy Spirit.

8. **Read Romans 5:1-2.** *We have a new status because of Jesus' death and resurrection*
 - a. What two benefits come to us as we believe in Jesus? (5:1)
 - b. How does our experience of life change (list two aspects)? (5:2)
9. **Read Romans 5:6-11.** *God demonstrates His love for us*
 - a. What was our condition when Jesus died for us? (5:6, 8, 10)
 - b. What does God demonstrate in this event? (Romans 5:8)
 - c. Do we have to be fearful of being judged by God at the end of life? Why or why not? (5:9-11)

Romans 6 teaches us about our *new identity* in Christ. We have moved from one realm to another, from one family to another, from life under one authority to live under another authority. We have new life. We have a new status. We are, in fact, *a new humanity*. We are no longer *enslaved* to sin; we are on a path toward *freedom* from sin.

10. **Read Romans 6:11-14.** *We no longer the people we once were.*
 - a. Describe in your own words how this passage challenges us to live.
 - b. What argument does Paul give in vs. 14 for why we need no longer live under sin's authority?
 - c. *For personal reflection: Read Titus 2:12-14.* How does God's grace work in our lives to shape us into people who reject sin's authority in our lives? Have you seen that process in your own life?

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Romans chapter 8 teaches us that God has given us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, to give us a new power—the power (and desire) to live for God. Through the Holy Spirit, God's people of faith have been *transformed* into a *new humanity*.

11. Read Romans 8:1-18

We live a Spirit-transformed life

- a. In what way is every Christian believer connected with God? (8:9)
- b. What should be our response to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives? (8:5-6, and 8:13)
- c. What astonishing privilege is revealed in 8:14-16?
- d. What is our ultimate future? (8:17)
- e. *Personal reflection:* Think about your personal experience of love for your children. How does that enhance your understanding of God's love for you as His precious child?

12. Read Romans 8:28-39

God is carrying us on a path to glory

- a. Verse 28 refers to God's inexorable purpose for His people of faith. What is that purpose? (8:29)
- b. What is our assured destiny, as given in verse 30?
- c. Contrast what you have read in Romans 3:23 with what you learn in Romans 8:17 and Romans 8:30.
- d. *Personal reflection:* Read again Romans 8:38-39. What is your response to this assurance?

Section 3: Chapters 9-11

Summary: This transformed spiritual life
is a fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Abraham

As we read through the book of Romans, we may ask how this glorious gospel of grace in the New Testament connects with God's Old Testament promises to Abraham and to the nation of Israel. Chapters 9-11 reflect on how the progress of salvation history has unfolded. Romans 9-11 affirms that the coming of Jesus fulfills many promises given to Israel. The offer of salvation through faith in Jesus is extended to Jews as well as to Gentiles.

Although the inclusion of Gentiles in the offer of salvation may have been a surprise to the Jews of Paul's day, God's plan to bring blessing to all nations was always a part of the Old Testament promises.

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- 13. Read Romans 10:8-13.** In this passage Paul refers back to the Old Testament, to a summary statement of God's commands given to Israel in Deuteronomy 30. Paul says that the command to Israel in Deuteronomy 30:6 and 30:12-14 is fulfilled in Jesus and received through *faith*. What must Israel do to be saved? (Romans 10:9)

Section 4: Romans 12-16

Summary: *God challenges the church to live before God
in worship and in unity*

14. Read Romans 12:1-2.

Present yourself as a living sacrifice

- a. According to the imagery in verse 1, what should our response be to God's abundant mercy on our behalf?
- b. *Personal reflection:* What do you think it means to live as a living sacrifice to God? How would that be an act of worship? As you consider this challenge, share with your group any insights you discover.
- c. *Personal reflection:* How is conformity to the pattern of this world damaging to your soul? In what way might you be able to resist this temptation to worldly values?
- d. *Personal reflection:* What practical steps can you take to promote the renewing of your mind? (vs. 2)
- e. What does this passage teach about knowing and living according to God's will? (12:2)

15. Read Romans 12:9-21 and Romans 13:9-10. *The mark of the Christian is the life of love*

- a. *Personal reflection:* How does the description of love in 12:9-21 challenge you?
- b. How does Paul summarize the life that pleases God? (13:9-10)

The churches in Rome were composed of both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, and their ethnic and cultural differences would naturally tend to divide them. God's purpose, however, is that they would be a unified body of believers—that they would be committed to one another and would display genuine love for one another.

As you close your study for this week, take a moment to thank God for His grace in our lives, and to contemplate God's gift of the sacrifice of His Son and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

You have been saved by the free gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus

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