

How to Make the Best Use of This Teaching Guide

Leading a class in studying the Bible is a sacred trust. This *Teaching Guide* has been prepared to help you as you give your best to this important task.

In each lesson, you will find first “Bible Comments” for teachers, to aid you in your study and preparation. The three sections of “Bible Comments” are “Understanding the Context,” “Interpreting the Scriptures,” and “Focusing on the Meaning.” “Understanding the Context” provides a summary overview of the entire background passage that also sets the passage in the context of the Bible book being studied. “Interpreting the Scriptures” provides verse-by-verse comments on the focal passage. “Focusing on the Meaning” offers help with the meaning and application of the focal text.

The second main part of each lesson is “Teaching Plans.” You’ll find two complete teaching plans in this section. The first is called the “Discovery Plan,” which emphasizes discovery learning techniques; and the second is called the “Discussion Plan,” which provides questions and suggestions for dialogue about the Scriptures. Choose the plan that best fits your class and your style of teaching. You may also use and adapt ideas from both. Each plan is intended to be practical, helpful, and immediately useful as you prepare to teach.

The major headings in each teaching plan are intended to help you sequence how you teach so as to follow the flow of how people tend to learn. The first major heading, “Connect with Life,” provides ideas that will help you begin the class session where your class is and draw your class into the study. The second major heading, “Guide Bible Study,” offers suggestions for helping your class engage the Scriptures actively and develop a greater understanding of this portion of the Bible’s message. The third major heading, “Encourage Application,” is meant to help participants focus on how to respond with their lives to this message.

As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. You might use one or more of the following methods:

In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents in their *Study Guides* and on the first page of each lesson.

- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
- If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
- Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org on the Resources for Adults page.
- Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

Here are some steps you can take to help you prepare well to teach each lesson and save time in doing so:

Start early in the week before your class meets.

1. If your church's adult Bible study teachers meet for lesson overview and preparation, plan to participate. If your church's adult Bible study teachers don't have this planning time now, look for ways to begin. You, your fellow teachers, and your church will benefit from this mutual encouragement and preparation.
2. Overview the study in the *Study Guide*. Look at the table of contents, and see where this lesson fits in the overall study. Then read or review the study introduction to the book that is being studied.
3. Consider carefully the suggested Main Idea, Question to Explore, and Teaching Aim. These can help you discover the main thrust of this particular lesson.
4. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. Using your Bible in your study and in the class session can provide a positive model to class members to use their own Bibles and give more attention to Bible study themselves. (Each

writer of the Bible comments in both the *Teaching Guide* and the *Study Guide* has chosen a favorite translation. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translations chosen, of course.)

5. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the Bible comments in the *Study Guide*. The Bible comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible. Read also the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and you can also use them in the class session itself. Continue your Bible study with the aid of the Bible comments included in this *Teaching Guide*.
6. Review the "Teaching Plans" in this *Teaching Guide*. Consider how these suggestions would help you teach this Bible passage in your class to accomplish the teaching aim.
7. Consider prayerfully the needs of your class, and think about how to teach so you can help your class learn best.
8. Develop and follow a lesson plan based on the suggestions in this *Teaching Guide*, with alterations as needed for your class.
9. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

Premium Adult Online Bible Commentary. Plan to get the additional adult Bible study comments available online. Call 1-866-249-1799 or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Adult Online Bible Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. The price of these comments is \$6 for individuals and \$25 for a group of five. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Adult Online Bible Commentary* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

Premium Adult Online Teaching Plans. An additional teaching plan is also available in electronic format (PDF) by calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these plans for an entire study is \$5 for an individual or \$20 for a group of five. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Adult Online Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

FREE! Downloadable teaching resource items for use in your class are available at www.baptistwaypress.org. Watch for them in the “Teaching Plans” for each lesson. Then go online to www.baptistwaypress.org and click on “Teaching Resource Items” for this study. These items are selected from the “Teaching Plans.” They are provided online to make lesson preparation easier for hand-outs and similar items. Permission is granted to download these teaching resource items, print them out, copy them as needed, and use them in your class.

IN ADDITION: Enrichment teaching help is provided in the *Baptist Standard*, which is available at www.baptiststandard.com. The *Baptist Standard* is available online for an annual subscription rate of \$10. Subscribe online at www.baptiststandard.com or call 214-630-4571. A free ninety-day trial subscription is currently available.

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Romans: A Gospel-Centered Worldview

How to Make the Best Use of This Teaching Guide

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Writers for This Teaching Guide

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LESSON 1

The Gospel is Powerful

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 1:1–17

BACKGROUND

Romans 1:1–17

MAIN IDEA

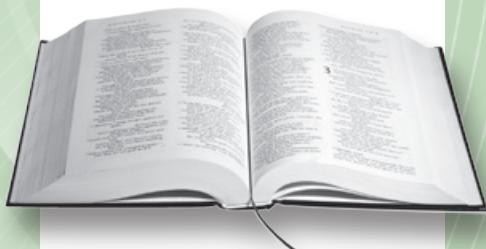
The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How has the power of the gospel been revealed?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to comprehend the revelation of the gospel and its power



BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

Paul completed his three missionary journeys and sat down in the city of Corinth in A.D. 57, across from Tertius, his writing secretary (Romans 6:22), to dictate the letter we now call Romans. Paul would soon be on his way to Jerusalem and feared his fate might be martyrdom (15:31). The Book of Acts records Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea and his appeal to Rome. The appeal was finally heard, and Paul would make his first visit to the city of which he was a natural born citizen (Acts 22:28). His purpose, as described in Romans, was to establish an anchor church in the west that could enable him to expand the Christian mission to Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28).

As one begins to read Romans, a growing sense of the importance of the gospel becomes evident, along with Paul's passion for bringing it to the people living in Rome. The Roman church was comprised of a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, since many Jews had been expelled by an edict of Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49. Among those expelled were Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2). Paul mentioned them by name in his letter to the Romans, indicating the edict had been lifted at that time and that they had returned to Rome. There they would host a house church that would support Paul's ministry (Rom. 16:3).

Paul stated that he had tried to go to Rome previously but was "prevented" (1:13) and, for this reason, wrote a letter to the Romans instead. The letter was meant to establish a relationship with the Roman church in hopes that Paul would be able to build a base in Rome for future mission work. Undoubtedly, Paul wanted to write Romans to explain the gospel and to set the record straight regarding what he believed. The result of Paul's effort is his Epistle to the Romans.¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

Paul, Christ, and the Roman Church (1:1–6)

1:1–2. In these verses, Paul introduced himself as an apostle, a term meaning “one who was sent out.” God commissioned him to bring the gospel to Gentiles. Ironically God sent a Jew to Gentiles. A prominent Jewish man before his conversion, Paul would tell a Gentile world that God had a longstanding plan to save all people. At every turn, this gospel would be challenged, especially by those who wanted to maintain the “Jewishness” of the Christian faith. Those Jews argued that Gentiles needed to conform to Judaism in order to be “righteous” before God, a misunderstanding of the gospel.

1:3–4. Paul identified Christ Jesus as the Son of God who in his “earthly nature” was a physical descendant of David (see also 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:9; 89:27). By his resurrection, Jesus demonstrated his power over death and confirmed his lordship. Paul maintained that Jesus possessed both an earthly and divine nature. By using the phrase “was appointed” (Rom. 1:3), Paul did not imply that Jesus’ divinity was brought about by the resurrection, as later heretical views (including adoptionism) would claim. Rather, Paul’s idea was that Christ’s resurrection revealed his identity and confirmed his deity; the One who was human was also divine.

The word used for “power” (*dunamis*) is also used in Acts 1:8, where it described what enabled the apostles to become witnesses by the Holy Spirit. Paul used the same word in his letter to the Thessalonians, saying his message came to them not just in “word” but “power” (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

1:5–6. Paul described himself as a “servant” who was called to be an “apostle” to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). The word “servant” (*doulos*) can be translated “slave,” a word Paul used often when describing himself. Because of the radical transformation in his life, Paul understood the debt of love he owed to Christ. In using this term, he was confirming his submission to the authority and lordship of Christ.

The Church at Rome (1:8–17)

1:8–10. It was no exaggeration for Paul to describe the reputation of the Roman church as famous. News traveled quickly in the ancient world, even across great distances. Sailors, soldiers, and merchants brought a regular flow of information from one city to another. One event in particular may have helped spread the message of the Roman church: the expulsion of Jews from the capital city of Rome in A.D. 49 because of the spread of Christianity among the Jewish communities. The Book of Acts seems to corroborate this explanation when it mentions that “Aquila and Priscilla” came to Corinth from Rome, because of the expulsion dictated by Claudius. Both Aquila and Priscilla were Christians before coming to Corinth. This means that Christianity had already arrived in Rome before Paul came to Corinth, which was between A.D. 51–52 (Acts 18:2).

One reason Paul said he wrote his letter to the Romans was because he wanted to expand his mission westward. A western expansion would require building an anchor church somewhere on the edge of the western empire. No place was better than Rome. After all, “all roads lead to Rome.” Eventually Paul hoped to take the gospel all the way to Spain, but he would need to have supplies and support nearby. Just as Paul relied on his relationship with his anchor church in the east—the church of Antioch—he would have to rely on the churches in Rome. It was always Paul’s intent to take the gospel to places it had never been proclaimed, so that he would not be building on “someone else’s foundation” (Rom. 15:20).

1:12. Paul stated that he wanted to be “mutually encouraged” by the Roman church. This was a reference borrowed from the culture of Paul’s day. At that time, a benefactor provided financial support to the lower classes, and in turn, those people paid back the benefactor in honor and support. This created what is known as a “patron-client relationship.” This is *not* the kind of relationship Paul wanted. Paul did not want to be seen as their benefactor. Instead, he wanted to develop a *reciprocal* relationship of mutual encouragement and support. Paul provided the Roman churches with a clear presentation of the gospel, and would ask them to partner with him in his mission and ministry. Frankly, he needed their financial support to accomplish his missionary task. He needed a reciprocal relationship, and he was making that clear in his letter from the beginning.

1:13–15. Paul’s visit to Rome had been delayed. Any number of factors could have caused the postponement: the impossibility of sea travel during the winter months; the needs of other churches demanding attention; or simply the travel costs. In spite of all of that, Paul wanted to come to Rome to preach the gospel to “all people.” This was the mission God had given him.

1:16. This verse has been called the heart of the Book of Romans. Here, Paul stated that he was not ashamed of the gospel. The use of the negative (“not ashamed”) is emphatic. Undoubtedly, the message of a crucified Redeemer was a major stumbling block in converting Jews and Gentiles to Christianity. Someone who had been crucified was considered an object of scorn and ridicule. However, Paul turned that idea on its head. Instead of being embarrassed in preaching the message of a crucified Messiah, he was emphatically not ashamed. By using the negative, he affirmed the gospel, gloried in the power of the cross, and confirmed his honor to proclaim it.

1:17. The phrase “the righteousness of God” is one of the most important concepts in Romans. Many interpreters see in this term a forensic image borrowed from the courtroom. God, the righteous judge, announces that the guilty are freed on the basis of “the righteousness of God.” While the terms “righteousness” and “justification” are used throughout Romans, they are both translated from the same Greek word. Paul interpreted this phrase (“the righteousness of God”) based on the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, where the prophet explained that God makes a person righteous on the basis of faith (Habakkuk 2:4), not on the basis of good works.

Focusing on the Meaning

The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). The word “everyone” reminds us that the gospel of Jesus Christ includes both Jews and Gentiles. God’s plan is to reach the entire world with his message of salvation.

By describing the gospel as salvation for *everyone*, Paul showed what God was doing in sending Christ as the sacrifice for sin; God was saving

us, not on the basis of our good deeds (which are nothing but filthy rags according to Isaiah 64:6), but on the basis of what Christ has already done for us. Our response should be to believe in Christ (Ephesians 2:8–10). In other words, what saves a person is not what they *do* but what God has already *done* in Christ Jesus.

Amazingly, this gospel is available immediately to all people who believe. The gospel is so powerful that even right now, at this moment as you read this, God has the power to save. God can work in the life of even the most hardened sinner. Consider the amazing story of John Newton, the author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*, whose life was forever changed as he experienced the power of the gospel. On his gravestone is written this epitaph that shows how the life of Newton, a slave trader, was changed into that of a lifelong pastor:

John Newton, Clerk,

Once an infidel and libertine,
A servant of slaves in Africa was,
By the rich mercy of our,
Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
Preserved, restored, pardoned,
And appointed to preach the faith he
Had long laboured to destroy . . .²

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Before class enlist a man to present the monologue, “Timothy’s Testimony.” (A copy of the monologue is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Timothy’s Testimony (Based on Acts 20:1–6)

We all have someone in our lives who deeply influenced us—changed us—helped us find our calling. For me, Timothy, that person is Paul of Tarsus. For six or seven years I’ve been traveling with Paul and his team, learning as we go. Paul enlisted me in Lystra when he needed help for the journey through the mountains. I had no idea where we were headed—at that point Paul didn’t know either—but God led us northwest to Troas, and across the sea to Macedonia and Greece.

On that trip, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in jail. They healed a slave girl, preached on Mars Hill in Athens, started churches, and were run out of just about every town we visited. We walked, rode, sailed, and eventually did it all over again. Not much grass grows under your feet when you travel with Paul.

So here we are in Corinth again, waiting out the winter for spring sailing weather. For days Paul has been writing a letter to the Christians in Rome. He hasn’t been there yet, but he hopes to visit them soon. All of us want to go with him, but we need to go to Jerusalem first to take a love offering to the suffering Jewish believers there. Paul says it is important that we Gentiles help our Jewish brothers who brought us the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We were set to sail to Jerusalem for Passover in a couple of days, but Paul’s friends got wind of a plot to harm him on the pilgrim ship sailing out of Cenchrea. That changed everything. Now we are leaving tomorrow to travel back north and catch a later ship from another port.

The Roman letter? Oh, yes—Paul gave that to a trusted believer in Cenchrea who will be traveling to Rome soon. She will protect it and see that it gets to the believers there. Paul says it is the most important of all the letters he's written.

Keep us in your prayers. We have a long road ahead.

2. Invite learners to look at the Table of Contents page of their *Study Guide*. Explain the importance of studying Romans and developing a Christian belief system using the article, “Introducing Romans: A Gospel-Centered Worldview.”

Guide Bible Study

3. Give a copy of the following quiz to each person. Encourage the class to work in pairs to define keywords from today's lesson. After three minutes, discuss their answers. (Answers: D, C, A, E, B) (A copy of this quiz is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Keywords in Romans Chapter 1

(Match the words in column 1 with the correct definition in column 2)

_____ Calling	A. God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life
_____ Power	B. Both Jews and non-Jews
_____ Salvation	C. The force that raised Jesus from the dead
_____ Gospel	D. God's invitation to join him in his work
_____ Everyone	E. The message of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus

4. Call on a volunteer to read Romans 1:1–7 and explore the passage with these questions:
 - What was Paul's calling and assigned task? (1:1, 5)
 - Compare Paul's calling and ours: How are they similar or different? (Add insights from the sidebar, “Calling” found in the *Study Guide*.)
 - How did Paul describe the gospel? (1:2–4)

5. Divide the group into two teams. Direct Team One to search Romans 1:8–15 to discover reasons why Paul wanted to go to Rome. Direct Team Two to search Romans 15:23–29 to find more reasons Paul wanted to go to Rome. Enrich their findings with information from the section, “The Gospel’s Powerful Motivation” found in the *Study Guide*.

Encourage Application

6. Write “Empowered or Ashamed?” on a dry-erase board or poster. Invite members to read together out loud Paul’s strong declaration in Romans 1:16–17. Ask, *Why are people ashamed of the gospel today?* Challenge the class to take time this week to begin to formulate a Christian worldview based on these two verses, and come prepared to share their thoughts and questions in your next meeting.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Prepare (or ask a class member to prepare) a simple visual for the Romans study. Secure a wall map of today’s world. Cut out from brown paper an eighteen-inch cross. Tape the cross to the center of the map. On a separate piece of paper write, *Romans: A Gospel-Centered Worldview*. Overlay that paper on the center of the cross. Add lesson titles weekly by printing each title and Scripture passage on a strip of paper.
2. Write on a strip of paper today’s lesson title and Scripture and tape it to the theme visual. Ask, *What gets you excited about life?* List responses on a large sheet of paper (sport, hobby, parenting, money, music, their mate, sharing Jesus, etc.) Ask, *How do you share your passions with friends and others?* State that this study of the Book of Romans will help us develop and share our passion about Christ with others in our world.

Guide Bible Study

3. Invite someone to read Romans 1:1–7 and use the following questions for discussion:

- What is the difference between being a *servant* of Christ and being an *apostle* for Christ? (Share information from the sidebar article, “Apostle” found in the *Study Guide*.)
- What is the gospel, and why is it important?
- Do you feel God has called you to do something related to the gospel?

Encourage responses, and enrich the answers with details from the *Study Guide* section entitled, “The Gospel’s Powerful Call.” You can also find an excellent definition of the gospel in “Implications and Actions” toward the end of this lesson.

4. Ask a person to read Romans 1:8–15 as class members listen for clues to Paul’s relationship to the believers in Rome. Ask the following questions:

- Had Paul been to Rome and founded the church there?
- What caused him to want to visit them? (Compare Paul’s response in Romans 15:23–29.)

List Paul’s four motivations for wanting to preach in Rome (these can be found in the section “The Gospel’s Powerful Motivation” in the *Study Guide*): 1) People need the gospel; 2) Love for God compels; 3) The gospel changes lives; 4) Paul embraced the obligation. Ask, *Which of these four motivates you most to want to share Jesus with your world?*

Encourage Application

5. Suggest that members highlight Romans 1:16–17 in their Bibles, and note that these verses summarize the theme of the book. Explore further by asking:

- What people groups in our world need to hear and receive the gospel? (children, grandchildren, homebound, handicapped, street people, prisoners, neighbors, non-English speakers, work associates, friends on social media, etc.)

- Discuss situations and circumstances that might cause believers to be ashamed, afraid, or silent about their faith.
- How have you seen the power of the gospel in the life of someone who believed and received it? (Find good illustrations of God's activity in *The Baptist Standard* online (www.baptiststandard.com, or in *Common Call* magazine.)

6. Pass around a stack or two of sticky notes. Challenge each person to take a sheet and jot down the initials of three people with whom he or she would like to share Jesus. Also direct them to write down the reference "Romans 1:16–17." Encourage class members to put their notes on their bathroom mirrors as a daily prayer reminder. Explain that this Romans study will help them gain courage to share Jesus more freely.

N O T E S

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–7 are from the New International Version (1984 edition).
2. Wikipedia, "John Newton," accessed Dec 23, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Newton#mediaviewer/File:Grave_stone_of_John_Newton.JPG

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 1:18–32

BACKGROUND

Romans 1:18–32

MAIN IDEA

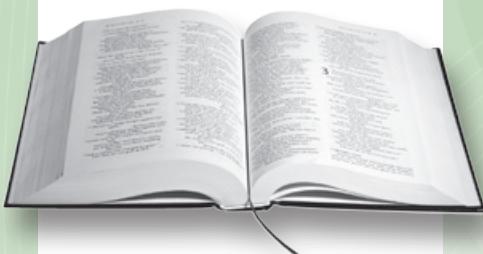
Ignoring God allows
sin to flourish.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What are the causes and
results of ignoring God?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to identify
the causes and results
of ignoring God



LESSON 2

Exchanging God's Truth for a Lie

BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

Paul wrote Romans while staying in the city of Corinth. Corinth was known for its pagan temples, but it was especially known for one specific temple—the temple of Aphrodite. In Aphrodite’s temple, worshippers practiced cult prostitution. In other words, they worshiped their deity by having sexual relations with prostitutes, something Paul possibly referenced in Romans 1:25. This odd mingling of sexual immorality with pagan worship—then rampant throughout the ancient world—was the result of idolatry.

What is to blame for this strange occurrence? According to Paul’s logic in Romans 1:18–32, human ignorance was the culprit. Humanity has chosen to ignore the truth about God and in doing so, ignore the true God. This has resulted in people turning to forbidden practices. Since people did not worship the true God, they did not care about what he wanted them to do. Worshipping the wrong gods resulted in the wrong practices. Imitating false gods resulted in sexual sin and sordid actions. In this way, ignoring God allowed sin to flourish.

What is the consequence of humanity’s refusal to worship the true God? In answering this question, Paul’s tone changed drastically from the opening section on the “good news” of the gospel (1:1–17). He announced the bad news of the wrath of God (1:18). Paul would show what happens in a person’s life when he chooses to abandon the proper worship of God and exchange him for something inferior (1:18–32).

Interpreting the Scriptures

1:18. The term “wrath” as used in Romans 1 does not describe the emotion of an angry person; it describes the right and righteous reaction of a holy God to the presence of sin. We misunderstand the nature of wrath because in our human interactions, we have experienced an angry person responding out of intense emotion. That is our only understanding of wrath. By announcing the wrath of God, Paul was also proclaiming the righteousness of God.

Wrath is God's righteous reaction and a natural consequence of the presence of sin. God's wrath comes to those who have sinned, and those who did so knowingly. They are therefore without excuse. By describing God's wrath in the present tense (saying it is "being revealed"), Paul did not intend to preclude a future judgment. Elsewhere, Paul described God's wrath in the future tense (1 Thessalonians 1:10), but even now God's wrath is expressed.

1:19–20. The existence of God is evident in creation. Paul stated as much in several speeches in the book of Acts, including at Lystra (Acts 14:15–17) and Athens (Acts 17:22–31). God's revealing himself in creation is sometimes called "general revelation" as opposed to "special revelation." General revelation is sufficient to make God known, but insufficient to bring a person to the saving knowledge of the gospel through the atoning work of Christ.

1:21–23. Paul explained that although human beings knew God, or knew of God's existence because of creation, they did not glorify God. Humanity knows there is one true God but chooses not to turn to him. This willful defiance has caused sin to flourish. This happens, in part, because when a person ignores God, his heart becomes darkened and he is open to even more evil. His thinking becomes "futile," a term used elsewhere for idol worship (Acts 14:15). That person becomes "foolish," meaning willfully disobedient, not just ignorant.

Collectively, humanity has exchanged the truth of God for a lie. People have worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator, which is idolatry. Instead of glorifying God, human beings have worshipped images of humans and animals (Rom. 1:23). Readers would remember the sin of Nebuchadnezzar who created a golden image for all to worship (Daniel 3). Alternatively, Paul's audience may have thought of the imperial cult, dedicated to worshipping the Roman emperor himself.

Idolatry also involved the worship of animals. This reference to animals would have caught the attention of the Jewish audience in particular. Their ancestors were guilty of this form of idolatry. While Moses received the commandments on Mt. Sinai, the nation of Israel created a golden idol to look like an animal—a golden calf—and then worshipped it as a god (Exodus 32:1–35).

1:24–25. God “gave them over” to their own desires; Paul mentioned these words of doom three times (1:24, 26, 28). These sinful choices brought about inevitable consequences. Paul understood that God was willing to take his convicting hand off of people who repeatedly choose to ignore him. He gives them what they want—a life without his interference. Without his intervention, human beings are free to do what they want, but they will also suffer the consequences.

1:26–27. Paul described one consequence of ignoring God: shameful desires take over. Therefore, he had no problem describing homosexual behavior as the degradation of life brought on by unchecked lust. The modern reader must understand that homosexual behavior was widely practiced in the Greco-Roman world, and in some cases homosexual behavior among men was regarded as superior to heterosexual relationships. However, in the Jewish Torah, homosexual behavior was a forbidden practice (Leviticus 18:22). Although many Roman people practiced homosexual behavior, it was not entirely without its critics. Some Roman moral philosophers condemned it as unnatural.

1:28–32. Paul described the process of a life spiraling downward in sin. A person’s mind becomes depraved as he rejects God and his ways. This results in all sorts of inappropriate behavior. The list of sins Paul gives here is similar to other vice-lists in the New Testament (Galatians 5:19–21; 1 Timothy 1:9–10; 1 Peter 2:1; 4:3). Paul provided an extensive list of sins, long enough that every reader would realize that they were guilty of sin. No matter how good a person may try to be, all of us have sinned—Jews and Gentiles alike. This final point may have come as a surprise to a pious Jew, who believed that only Gentiles would face God’s judgment. Paul said Gentiles were not the only ones who would be condemned.

Focusing on the Meaning

Few of us have ever seen the practice of idolatry, worshipping an actual statue, but it regularly occurred in the pagan Roman Empire of Paul’s day. However, we would be mistaken to conclude that idolatry does not take place today. In the Bible, idolatry is more than just making statues

for worship. It is the human, sinful proclivity to deny the reality of the true God and replace him with a substitute. This is an issue for us today.

Who could deny that culture's materialistic pursuit of more sex, possessions, and power is not a form of idolatry? Do we not pay homage—even worship—our pop stars and our music icons? Do we not gather around our TVs to crown the next *American Idol*? Although these forms of idolatry may be subtle and less recognizable than a golden statue of Zeus perched atop a Greek temple, idolatry today is just as real.

The litany of sins listed in Romans 1 is not exhaustive. Rather, it illustrates the innumerable ways in which people rebel against God and worship their own gods. Paul was not singling out a certain act as particularly sinful, but rather listing multiple sins as a consequence of the entire world choosing to abandon the true God and worship idols. That Paul listed so many sins should remind readers today that *any* rebellion against God is sin, not just the “big” sins that people commit. It is a reminder that all of us have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and have no room to judge another person's sin as more heinous or worthy of judgment. This passage is a sobering reminder of what happens when a person rejects God and pursues his own desires.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Secure a recording or download the song, “All Over the World,” by Steve Green and David Hamilton. (Several recordings are available on the Internet.) Play the song as background music while members gather. Call the group to listen to the song. During the song, write this question on the board: *Why do some people on every continent seek the true God and believe, while others choose to ignore evidence that he exists?* Allow a few minutes for members to share their thoughts.

Ask members to read these Scriptures that speak to that question: Psalm 19:1–4a; Psalm 8:3–4; and Psalm 148:1–5. Summarize by presenting today’s “Main Idea” and “Question to Explore.”

Guide Bible Study

2. Direct someone to read Romans 1:18–20. Ask: *How much can a person know about God if he or she has never heard the gospel?* Follow their responses with this testimony from a missionary to a remote people group in the mountains of Mexico.¹

Animistic people are often dissatisfied with the “gods” they have been taught to worship: the moon, the ocean, the spirits. Some begin to seek another way. Some seek out a Christian to report a vision or dream God sent to guide them to truth. Others hear by word of mouth of a missionary who has God’s truth, and travel to find him. When people begin to see clues about God in the natural world, and when they listen to the Holy Spirit’s work in their hearts and minds, God makes a way for them to connect with the truth of the Bible and find salvation through Jesus.

Discuss further: *What about people who live in our culture who are being taught views that glorify false religions, atheism, humanism, hedonism, and the like? Will God judge them because they deny (or do not seek) his truth?*

3. On a markerboard or poster, create a two-column chart: (1) Why people ignore God; and (2) Results of ignoring God. Direct half of the class to search Romans 1:21–25 and find reasons Paul gave for why people ignore God. Direct the other half to search Romans 1:26–32 to discover what happens when people choose to ignore God. Direct a representative from each group to list their findings in the proper column on the board. Allow about five minutes for the search.

As Team 1 reports, enrich their answers with material from the *Study Guide* section, “Six Causes of Ignoring God.” As Team 2 reports, be prepared to suggest additional answers from the *Study Guide* section, “The Results of Ignoring God.”

Encourage Application

4. Return to last week’s Scripture, Romans 1:16–17. Re-read Paul’s strong affirmation that the good news of salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection is God’s way to bring salvation to everyone in our world.
5. Give the two teams a tear sheet. Challenge them to list elements of a gospel-centered worldview. Questions that could help are: *How are Christians to view the world? How could the gospel change our world? What is our part in that process?* After a few minutes, call on groups to share their responses. Assure them that future lessons will help them clarify the process of developing a gospel-centered worldview.

Ask, *Can our authentic living out of God’s truth help people understand the gospel and desire to have a relationship with him?* Explain. Close in prayer, asking God to embolden class members with the desire to share the gospel with others.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Print the title and Scripture reference of today's lesson on a strip of paper, and tape it to the study theme visual created last week. Read aloud to the group the "Introduction" at the beginning of this week's *Study Guide* material. Invite discussion with these questions:
 - Why do you think some people choose to live as if there is no God?
 - Do you feel most people who ignore God do so as a conscious choice, or is it a matter of neglect or ignorance?
 - What are some of the effects of a person's ignoring God? (See the sidebar, "Dangers of Ignoring God" in the *Study Guide*.)

Direct members to think of a person they know who is living as if there is no God, and to keep that person in mind as they study today's lesson.

Guide Bible Study

2. As a class member reads Romans 1:18–23, write numbers 1 through 6 down the left side of a markerboard or poster. Invite the group to search these verses for six reasons why people may choose to ignore God. Make sure their answers match the information found in "Six Causes of Ignoring God" in the *Study Guide*. Explore further with these questions:
 - Which of these reasons seems most to fit the person you are thinking about today?
 - Do you ever find yourself tempted to ignore God for any of these reasons? Explain.
3. Say: *Causes are linked to effects, and our choices bring us consequences.* Ask, *Why does the perfect holiness of our God require him to impose consequences when we live outside his will?*
4. Explain that Paul listed twenty-three possible consequences of ignoring God in Romans 1:24–32. Ask the class to search the passage and find the three verses in which Paul said, "God gave them over"

(verses 24, 26, and 28). Explain the term “passive judgment.” (God sometimes allows people to continue to live without him and suffer the consequences they bring on themselves, as opposed to his bringing active judgment, or punishment upon them.)

5. Lead a search of Romans 1:24–32, using the following questions:
 - In verses 24–25, What three things does God allow people to do?
 - In verses 26–27, Find the result of choosing a life of sexual deviation.
 - From verses 28–30, Describe how personal relationships can be affected when a person ignores God.
 - From verse 31, What character traits can result from living outside of God’s decrees?
 - In verse 32, How do these law-breakers influence others?

Encourage Application

6. As time allows, discuss one or both of these case studies. (A copy of these case studies is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Case Study 1: Trevor is a teenager who attends your church and professes to believe in Christ. However, he hangs out with friends who use filthy language and cut classes; his Facebook page is full of sexually suggestive pictures and quotes. He stays at odds with his parents who pray for him to live a life of obedience to God’s word. How might Trevor be helped to see that his lifestyle denies God even though he claims to be a Christian?

Case Study 2: Suzanne and Mike used to bring their children to your church. In fact, all of them are on your membership roll. Now that the family is grown and out of the house, Suzanne and Mike spend weekends at their lake house or traveling in their RV. Their children are not raising their families in a church. Bible study and worship seem to have no place in their current lifestyle. Who could help this family see that they are choosing to live as though there is no God and gently challenge them to return to him?

Direct a time of silent prayer, encouraging class members to pray for the person they thought about at the beginning of the class. After

a few minutes, voice a prayer that class members will have opportunities to share Jesus with their lost friends in coming days.

N O T E S

1. From a recent telephone conversation with Bible scholar and translator Dr. Joseph E. Grimes of Wycliffe Bible Translators.

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 2

BACKGROUND

Romans 2

MAIN IDEA

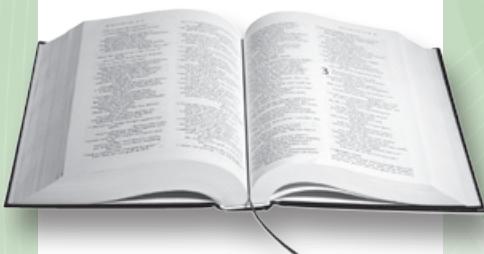
The remedy for judgment
is obedience, not
religious heritage.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do we trust our religious
heritage to save us from
God's judgment?

TEACHING AIM

To convince adults that
obedience to God (not
their religious heritage)
is the remedy for his
righteous judgment



LESSON 3

Appearance vs. Obedience

BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

The context of this passage is the Day of Judgment—the day when every person, Jew and Gentile alike, will be judged on the basis of their actions. As Paul had already shown in Romans 1, Gentiles will be judged on the basis of their sins and will be without excuse (1:18–20). In this chapter, he turned his attention toward Jews, who assumed they were in a position of privileged status for at least three reasons.

First, some Jews assumed privilege because their ethnic background could be traced to Abraham. However, God would not accept them just because Abraham was their father (Luke 3:8). Rather, they would be judged based on whether or not they had done “the will of God” (Matthew 7:21), which was to live by faith.

Secondly, some Jews claimed privilege because of circumcision. However, Paul recognized circumcision for what it was. Circumcision was a superficial act intended to remind Jews that God expected a circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29; Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6). Therefore, a Jew would not be privileged on Judgment Day based only on an external demonstration or identification.

Thirdly, some Jews claimed privilege because God chose to give the law to the Israelites through Moses. However, the law does not make a person right with God; it actually does the opposite. It points out how a person is not right with God. Therefore, Jews will not receive privilege on Judgment Day; they will be held to a higher standard because they knew the law and knew better than to sin (Rom. 3:20).

Paul struck down the Jewish misconception that religious heritage would protect them on the Day of Judgment. No one will be privileged because of his or her religious background. As many preachers have noted, going to church does not make you a Christian, any more than living in a garage makes you a car. Being a Jew by birth or heritage does not guarantee God’s favor.

Interpreting the Scriptures

The Judgment of Jews (2:1–11)

2:1–2. Paul began this chapter in an argument with a hypothetical opponent. Here the opponent was a Jew who claimed privileged status before God on the basis of circumcision and the law. Jewish readers listening to Paul’s argument in Romans 1 would have nodded in agreement about Gentiles being “sinners” who deserve judgment (1:18–32). However, they would have recoiled with shock when Paul turned the tables on them, insisting a Jew has no advantage over a Gentile. Jews are sinful, too, and have failed to live up to God’s standard of righteousness. On Judgment Day, God will not show favoritism toward the Jewish person. He will not say, “I see you have committed quite a few sins. Oh, wait a minute, you are a Jew; don’t worry about it.” Jews will have to answer for their sins just as Gentiles will.

2:3 Paul was a Jew whose heritage was steeped in Judaism. This meant Paul understood the strong feelings Jews had about their religious heritage. He knew the Jewish tendency toward self-righteousness (Philippians 3:4–6). He also knew the Jewish claim to privilege, and saw it for what it was: a slippery slope toward false security.

2:4. Three terms in this verse require explanation. The term “tolerance” carries the idea of holding back wrath; the term “kindness” means God has given people ample opportunity for repentance (2 Peter 3:15); the term “repentance” means a “change of heart” reflected in a person’s life through a change of actions, made possible only by God’s grace.

2:5–6. While it is difficult for self-righteous people to repent (Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4), a day of reckoning is coming in which God will hold each person accountable (Hebrews 9:27). Because God’s judgment is impartial, Jews will be held to account right alongside Gentiles.

2:6–11. The structure of these verses is known as a *chiasm*, which is a reverse parallelism in verse 6 and 11, 7 and 10, and 8 and 9. These verses teach that by persistence in doing good deeds a person could *possibly*

receive eternal life. However, Paul was not teaching a works-based salvation (Rom. 3:20; Ephesians 2:8–11). Rather, he was emphasizing that God will not show favoritism to Jews. The word “favoritism” (Rom. 2:11) is a term meaning “receiving the face.” Thus, God’s judgment will not show leniency to the “face” of a Jew or a Gentile, that is, he will hold every person accountable for his or her sin.

A Stricter Judgment (2:12–16)

2:12–13. Having been trained in the law, Jews will be judged for sinning against it, but Gentiles will not be judged on the basis of the law. Furthermore, hearing the law is insufficient to be declared righteous. A person must *follow* the law (see James 1:22) in its entirety. Thus, a Jew who thinks his attempts at obedience will make him acceptable before God is wholly mistaken. The law sets God’s standard, and no Jew (or Gentile) will ever meet this standard, no matter how much he tries, because the standard is God’s holiness.

2:14–15. God will judge Jews on the basis of knowing but disobeying the law. He will judge the Gentiles on the basis of their moral awareness. Gentiles have an innate sense of right and wrong. Gentiles—non-Jews without God’s law—still acknowledge universal moral norms (like murder or theft), so God will search their conscience as the basis for his judgment. In other words, no one has an excuse for disobedience.

Privilege Brings Responsibility (2:17–24)

2:17–18. Paul again used the word “you” in the singular in these verses. The word “you” referred to a hypothetical Jew who believed he had an advantage over Gentiles and would be privileged before God on Judgment Day for his possession of the law (3:1–2). Paul showed how the Jews’ belief backfired. Possession of the law does not make for privilege, but for responsibility. A Jew who possesses the law is without excuse for breaking it. For this reason, God will not give special treatment to a Jew. God will judge a Jew even more severely.

2:21. Paul’s questions pointed out inconsistencies between Jewish theology and behavior. He pointed out that Jews, even though they have the

law that tells them not to sin, commit the same sins as Gentiles. What is worse, Jews' actions bring dishonor upon the name of God, whom they are supposed to be representing (see Isaiah 52:5).

2:22–24. In verse 22, Paul referred to the particularly heinous crime of robbing temples, an accusation he experienced personally. The charge had been leveled against him at Ephesus (Acts 19:37). Here, he may have been referring to Jews who refused to pay the temple tax and were accused of robbing the temple in Jerusalem. On the other hand, since Paul compared robbing temples to idolatry, he may have had in mind those Jews who were melting down temple idols to sell the metal. Because idols were made of gold or silver, there was quite a profit to be made.

A Circumcision of the Heart (2:25–29)

2:25–27. Circumcision was one of the most venerated symbols of Judaism. This was due in part to its history, going back to Abraham (Genesis 17:9–13). Circumcision was also important because most Jews lived outside the land of Israel, so circumcision had become one the most distinguishing marks of an Israelite. It had become the cherished mark of national identity. About two centuries prior, the practice had been outlawed. The Syrian despot named Antiochus IV Epiphanes had outlawed circumcision and made it a capital offense. The result was a war known as the Maccabean Revolt. The outcome was not only Israel's national independence, but also Israel's renewed fervor for the practice of circumcision.

2:28–29. Although Judaism venerated circumcision, Paul spoke candidly to his Jewish reader. Circumcision without fidelity was of no value before God on Judgment Day. Other Jews might be impressed by the marks of the flesh, but God is not. God required Jews (and non-Jews) to possess a circumcised heart (Rom. 2:28–29; Jeremiah 9:25–26).

Focusing on the Meaning

In this section of Romans, Paul dismantled the cherished Jewish view that God would show particular favoritism toward them because of their

religious heritage as the nation of Israel. Simply because they were the guardians of the law and the people of the “circumcision” did not earn them privileged status related to sin and its consequences. Paul cut to the heart of the matter in verse 28, saying a Jew must be circumcised in their heart, not just physically.

The idea of a privileged position before God on account of religious heritage is just as relevant today as it was in Paul’s time. On my first trip to Israel, I met a Jewish man who told me he did not follow the Jewish religion, but insisted that this in no way made him less of a Jew. He said that no one could tell him he was not a Jew, because he was born a Jew and his father fought in the Six-Day War. His view was not unlike what Paul described—a person who believed he was a Jew on the basis of his religious heritage.

This attitude is rampant among professing Christians, too. Consider the myriad of people who call themselves Christians on the basis of their religious background. Someone else might say that her parents were Christians, so she is a Christian. Someone might even think, “I am not a Muslim, a Jew, or an atheist, so I must be a Christian.” This kind of superficial understanding of faith is what Paul was addressing in this passage. One day, all people will give an account of their life and their faith before God, not on the basis of superficial religious heritage, but on the basis of a personal relationship with Christ.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Bring a costume mask to class. Enlist someone to read the sidebar “Hypocrite” from the *Study Guide*, which begins with the story of Stanley Ipkis. Instruct the volunteer to wear the mask while reading the first paragraph, but remove it to read the second paragraph.

Give everyone a white paper plate and a crayon. Direct them to draw on the back of the plate a face with an expression symbolizing how they would like the world to see them. Take a few minutes for volunteers to explain what they drew. Ask, *How hard is it to show the world your true self? How hard is it to match your “outside self” with your “inside self”?* State that today’s lesson is all about living for God authentically and obediently.

2. Print a “caution sign” from your computer. On it, write: “Be careful—the judgment you pass on others, God may pass back on you.” Share the “Quick Read” statement from the *Study Guide*. Tape the sign to a focal wall. Explain that in today’s lesson from Romans 2, Paul spoke harshly to people who pass judgment on others and place their faith in their religious heritage rather than righteous living.

Guide Bible Study

3. Create two columns on a dry-erase board or poster. Title one column, “How to Be a Hypocrite.” Lead the group to search Romans 2 and find ways people demonstrate hypocrisy. Some possible answers are:

- 2:1 Judging others’ sins while excusing our own
- 2:21 Teaching one thing while doing another (compare James 3:1)
- 2:22 Pretending to be pure while harboring lust (compare Matthew 5:27–28)
- 2:23 Presenting a façade of spirituality

2:27 Depending on rituals for salvation rather than having a changed heart

Supplement their findings with information from “Appearance: How to be a Hypocrite” in the *Study Guide*. Other information can be found in the last paragraph of “Judgment for a Lack of Obedience” as well. Ask, *Which of these demonstrations of hypocrisy do you see today?* Discuss this problem as time allows.

Conduct an informal debate. Designate half the group as Pro (supporting the statement) and half the group as Con (disagreeing with the statement). Write on the board, *Resolved: That people always know when they are violating God’s laws*. Instruct both teams to read Romans 2:12–16 and “Judgment for a Lack of Obedience” in the *Study Guide*. Then direct the teams to formulate a list of “proofs” for their stand for or against the resolution. Have them number their proofs from strongest to weakest.

Allow five minutes for group preparation; then call groups to alternate presenting their strongest proofs, with the Pro Team presenting first, and the Con Team rebutting. Continue through three rounds of proofs and rebuttals (or about six minutes of debate).

4. State that humanity has always searched for ways to be certain of God’s acceptance. Jews believed that circumcision made them acceptable to God as his chosen ones. Ask the group to listen as you read Romans 2:25–27, and think of rites and actions that today’s Christians may use to assure themselves of favor with God. (Find help in “Implications and Actions” in the *Study Guide*.)

Encourage Application

5. Draw attention back to the dry-erase board. Label the second column “How NOT to Be a Hypocrite.” Direct the group to brainstorm ways believers can live authentically and truthfully. One way to approach the list is to state a positive action that counteracts the negative actions in the first column. For example, “Judging others’ sins while excusing our own” could become, “Loving people in a non-judgmental way.” For more help, read the sidebar “How NOT to Be a Hypocrite” in the *Study Guide*.

6. Suggest that everyone take the mask made earlier and write across the face, “Be Real.” Close with prayer for God’s help in living authentically and obediently.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Pose this question: *How much does our heritage—where we have come from spiritually—matter to God?* Then choose one of these case studies for discussion. (A copy of these case studies is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Case Study 1: Sam is Baptist to the core. His father was a Baptist deacon, and his grandfather was a Baptist minister. Sam has belonged to Baptist churches all his life. Sam is also an aggressive businessman, so he frequently works on Sundays and is not very faithful to attend worship. When taxes are due, he finds convenient loopholes for his tax returns; when the offering plate is passed, he makes excuses about the church wasting God’s money. If you ask Sam he’ll tell you, “Hey, God doesn’t care about the small stuff. He doesn’t need my money. He knows who I am.” What is Sam showing others by his lifestyle?

Case Study 2: Main Street Church has a proud history. They are the biggest financial contributors and have the largest membership in the association. Traditionally, Pastor Jim of “Old Main” has had a strong voice in the association’s budget and where the money goes. Several ethnic pastors have recently requested that the association appropriate money to establish a soup kitchen ministry for the needy in their neighborhoods. Pastor Jim prefers that they put the money into a city-wide evangelistic campaign. Whose voice should carry the most weight in the budget decision?

2. Summarize by stating that in Romans 2, Paul chided Jews who felt their ethnic and spiritual heritage gave them privilege with God. Read this lesson’s “Introduction” from the *Study Guide*.

Guide Bible Study

3. Direct the group to listen to Paul's words in Romans 2:1–4 as a volunteer reads them aloud. Ask, *Recall the list of sins in last week's lesson (1:29–31). Which sins might Christians commit? Do you think there is a laxness about sin in today's church? Explain. In what ways do we believers sometimes excuse our sins and ignore God's commands when convenient? (gossip; harboring anger and jealousy; telling "little white lies," etc.)*
4. Tape four sheets of paper on the wall. On each sheet, write one of the following words: the law; obedience; conscience; judgment. Direct the class to read silently Romans 2:12–16. Work as a group and define these key words from the passage. (Use the definitions below as necessary.)
 - The Law: The standard by which God will judge all people. No one is able to keep it fully.
 - Obedience: What God desires of us; what God will reward. (Romans 2:7.) Obedience is the test of true faith.
 - Conscience: Part of God's natural revelation—what all people innately know about right and wrong. God's Law written on our hearts (conscience).
 - Judgment: God's response to our sinful thoughts, intents, and actions; God will reward or punish accordingly.
5. Paul used the example of circumcision to show that outward acts only have meaning if they reveal a changed, obedient heart. Baptism is a similar act. Read Romans 2:25–27, substituting the word "baptism" for each of the word "circumcision." Ask the class to think of other actions by which people might try to find favor with God.

Encourage Application

6. Challenge learners to recommit themselves to living obediently to God in response to their love and commitment to him. Read 1 Samuel 16:7 and close in prayer.

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 3:21–31

BACKGROUND

Romans 3:21–31

MAIN IDEA

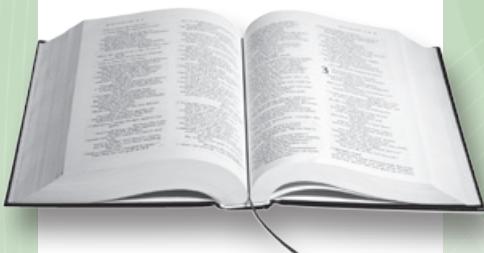
We are made right with God
by faith in Jesus Christ.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What do we trust in to
make us right with God?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to resolve
that faith alone makes
them right with God and
to encourage them to place
their total trust in Christ



LESSON 4

Justified by Faith

BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

What do we trust in to make us right with God? Some people trust in themselves and their good works to make them right with God. Others put their trust in their religious background. Some believe that because they grew up in a religious family, they are in good standing with God. However, Paul's letter to the Romans clearly states that every person will be found unworthy in the eyes of God because everyone has sinned (3:23). Everyone falls short of God's standard of righteousness. That is the bad news, but the good news is that God has made a way for us to be declared righteous despite our sin.

We can be made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ. The offer of God's righteousness is made available to "all who believe" (3:22), regardless of ethnic or religious background. The basis for this righteousness is the sacrifice of Christ, the shedding of his blood (3:25). Paul explained that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is the means by which a person can receive redemption and justification (3:24–25). The extraordinary act of Christ on the cross is retroactive. It even affects sins before the crucifixion took place—the sins committed beforehand and "unpunished" (3:25).

This redemption and justification for all people fulfills the promise that God made to Abraham. God promised Abraham that he would be the source of blessing for all nations (Rom. 3:28–29; Genesis 22:18). Paul made clear that God's actions do not nullify the law set forth in the Old Testament. Rather, God's actions uphold the law because they do exactly what God always intended the law to do (Rom. 3:31).

Interpreting the Scriptures

3:21. The phrase "Law and the Prophets" was a common way to speak of the Old Testament writings. Having already given the bad news that both Jews and Gentiles will stand to face the full wrath of God on Judgment

Day (1:18), Paul further stated that no one would be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law (3:20).

Now for the good news: in Jesus Christ, a new era in salvation history breaks forth. Through the sacrificial death of God's appointed Messiah, the wrath of God has been poured out on Jesus. All sinners, Jew and Gentile, can be declared righteous in the eyes of God (3:25–26). Because of Christ, there is a way to be made right with God that doesn't involve keeping the law perfectly (3:21).

3:22. God's judgment is impartial. Both Jews and Gentiles will be judged and will be found lacking. God's redemption is also impartial. Both Jews and Gentiles can be justified in the eyes of God by faith in Jesus. The opportunity to believe is extended to every person because everyone has sinned.

3:23. The phrase "all have sinned" reminds the readers that both Jews and Gentiles will be judged by God and found guilty of rebellion against him. The term "sin" in this passage refers to an archer "missing the mark." It is thus failing to do what one aims to do—to live up to God's standard.

The phrase "fall short of the glory" comes from the athletic world of Paul's day. It was used when runners failed to finish a race. In Romans 3:23, it refers to the failure of Adam (and subsequently the entire human race throughout history) to live up to God's standard of perfection (because he is perfect). God will judge all living beings and will find them lacking, having fallen short of his standard. Thus, everyone will suffer wrath unless God finds another way to save his creation.

3:24. The term "justified" is borrowed from language used in a courtroom. Thus, Paul changed metaphors from the judge of the games (race) to a judge in a court. The judge (God) has announced the verdict—"not guilty." But he does not stop there. The judge also provides the means of redemption.

The term "redemption" was used to refer to a slave whose ransom was purchased for the purpose of being set free. For the Jew, this image was familiar because the entire nation of Israel collectively was redeemed out of Egyptian slavery. That redemption was wrought in part by the blood of a Passover lamb (Exodus 20). God has not simply let the guilty go free

because such an act would violate God’s holiness. God is a just God, so there must be a reckoning for our actions. However, in the courtroom of his judgment, God himself has taken the punishment for us.

All of this is done by God’s grace. The word “grace” (Greek *charis*) means a “gift.” God, who requires perfect obedience, has taken our punishment and set us free by his grace—the gift of his Son’s sacrifice on the cross. Through Christ, God did for the whole world what he did for Israel in the Old Testament. He freed them from slavery.

3:25–26. The term “sacrifice of atonement” is sometimes rendered “propitiation.” The term is borrowed from the world of temple sacrifice, where an offering was used to “satisfy” (i.e. propitiate) the wrath of a deity. However, the term also referred to the “mercy seat” which sat atop the Ark of the Covenant and was used during the Jewish holy day called the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). On it, the priests poured out blood as atonement for the sins of the entire nation of Israel (Leviticus 16; Exodus 25:22).

Jesus took the punishment for our sin by shedding his blood as a sacrificial offering (Hebrews 9:21–22). In this way, Christ’s death covers our sins—both the past and the present (Colossians 2:13)—and makes possible the forgiveness of our sins while never compromising the character of God. In his letter to the Romans, Paul suggested that God anticipated the cross long ago; after all, the event was foreshadowed in the Passover (Exod. 12:13).

3:27–28. Since salvation comes by grace apart from the law, it leaves no room for human boasting about good works. There is no place for pride or bragging about religious heritage. The only way to be justified is by faith alone.

3:29–30. Monotheism—belief in the one true God—was one of the central doctrines of Israel’s religion (Deuteronomy 6:4–6). Paul affirmed this belief in the one true God (Rom. 3:30) but declared emphatically that God is not merely the God of Israel but the God of Gentiles as well. This statement reminded the reader of God’s faithfulness to his promise to Abraham to bless all nations (not just Jews) through Abraham and his lineage (Gen. 12:3). It reminded the Jews that God has always intended

to use Israel as a means of blessing all the nations. This is one more reason a Jew should not take pride in ethnic identity as an advantage over a Gentile.

3:31. Paul ended this section with a rhetorical question: “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith?” He answered his own rhetorical question by writing, “Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.” Just as Jesus said he did not come to “destroy the law but to fulfill it” (Matthew 5:17), Paul explained that the law both upholds God’s standards and anticipates the coming Messiah.

Even though Adam (and the rest of humanity) failed to live up to God’s standards, God has remained faithful. God kept his word to Abraham. Despite Israel’s failure, God has blessed “all nations” (even Israel) by sending the Messiah to all people. He offers both justification and redemption for everyone who would put their faith in Jesus, who was appointed to be the means of their justification (1:16–17).

Focusing on the Meaning

One reason some people do not grasp the good news of the gospel is because they misunderstand the righteousness of God. Until people understand both God’s righteousness and their own sinfulness, they will not fully appreciate the gospel message.

In August of 1513, Martin Luther came across the phrase “in thy righteousness deliver me” while reading Psalm 31:1. Luther believed that God’s righteousness meant God would condemn sinners. He did not understand how God’s righteousness could “deliver,” as the psalmist said. All of that changed for Luther, however, after reading the book of Romans. Luther described the moment he came to his new realization:

I had greatly longed to understand Paul’s letter to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, “the righteousness of God,” because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and acts righteously in punishing the unrighteous . . . Night and day I pondered until . . . I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is the righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith.¹

This moment would be a turning point not only in Luther's life, but also in countless other lives. Luther's epiphany would usher in a new epoch in Christian history, as the Reformation was born out of the proclamation of justification by faith alone. Only by this faith can we be declared righteous in the eyes of God on the Day of Judgment.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Wrap a large box with gold foil paper and tie it with a red bow. Set it in front of the group. Write this question on the board: *What do we do to receive God's gift of salvation?*
2. Duplicate this matching puzzle for the group to work on at the opening of class. Suggest that members work in pairs or small groups. (Answers are: 6, 8, 5, 7, 3, 2, 4, 1.) (A copy of this puzzle is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Romans 3 Matching Puzzle

Match the definitions at left with Bible terms on the right.

1. Standing free of sin before God	<input type="checkbox"/> Law
2. Being purchased, free from judgment	<input type="checkbox"/> Atonement
3. Right or clean living before God	<input type="checkbox"/> Faith
4. The undeserved favor of God	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvation
5. The act of trusting God for salvation	<input type="checkbox"/> Righteousness
6. God's written standard of perfection	<input type="checkbox"/> Redemption
7. God's free gift of eternal life through Jesus	<input type="checkbox"/> Grace
8. Jesus' death to cover/pay for our sin	<input type="checkbox"/> Justified

After a few minutes, discuss the correct answers. Note that these terms are related and the definitions often overlap.

Call on someone to read the "Introduction" to today's lesson found in the *Study Guide*.

Guide Bible Study

3. Explain that you will read Romans 3:21–26, stopping after each key word to call for its definition (righteousness, Law, faith, justified, grace, redemption, atonement). Ask the group to supply definitions from the puzzle each time you pause in the reading.
4. Guide the group to paraphrase what Paul is saying in Romans 3:21–26. Prompt with these questions, asking members to refer to the verse in the passage that supports their answers.
 - Does God have a plan for rescuing us from the penalty of our sin? (3:21)
 - Can we be saved by keeping God's Law—his standard of perfection? (3:21)
 - How are we made righteous or clean before God? (3:22, 25)
 - Why is it necessary that we be made right with God? (3:23)
5. Call on someone to read Romans 3:27–31 aloud. Continue with these questions:
 - If we could earn salvation through actions like baptism, giving, attending church regularly, or singing in the choir, what would our testimonies of faith sound like? (3:27)
 - Why was it important for Paul to emphasize that both Jews and Gentiles receive salvation in the same way—through faith in Jesus' death on the cross for us? (3:29)
 - Is Paul saying that we don't need to live obediently as believers because we cannot earn salvation by keeping the law? (3:31) What is his intent?
6. Invite someone to read Paul's amazing testimony of when he realized that he could not attain God's salvation by keeping the law (Acts 22:2–16).

Encourage Application

7. Explain that most of us did not have a "Damascus Road" salvation experience. Most Christians come to faith by a gentler path. Hold the gold-wrapped gift you prepared, and invite several volunteers to tell when and how they realized their need to receive Jesus by faith.

Emphasize that it is by *believing*, and not by works of keeping the law, that we receive God's free gift of salvation.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Ask the class to name ways people sometimes try to attain salvation and forgiveness through their works. (*baptism, making pilgrimages, giving sacrifices, paying penance, gifts of philanthropy, hoping their good actions “outweigh” their bad, obedience to the law, etc.*)

Ask, *Why are these actions—some of them good in themselves—not enough to earn salvation for us?* Read from the *Study Guide* the “Question to Explore” and “Study Aim” for this lesson.

2. In advance, invite a guest to share a testimony of how and when he or she came to faith in Jesus as Savior. Interview the person by using these questions:

- How did you come to realize that you had a sin problem and needed salvation?
- Who taught you that God's plan of salvation comes through believing in the sacrificial death of Jesus?
- How and when did you make a personal decision to receive Christ as your Savior?
- How has being a Christian affected the way you have lived your life?

Guide Bible Study

3. On a markerboard or poster, list three words: Revealed, Received, Restored.

Call on a volunteer to read Romans 3:21–22 as the group considers a definition for *righteousness*. Ask the group to listen to the sidebar article, “Righteousness” (in the *Study Guide*) as you read it. Then ask, *How did God REVEAL his plan for making us righteous?*

4. Continue by inviting someone to read Romans 3:23–24. Call on someone else to read the sidebar article, “Sin” from the *Study Guide*. Ask, *Since we are all sinners and cannot reach God’s standard of perfection, how do we RECEIVE salvation?*
5. Call on another volunteer to read Romans 3:24–26. Define and discuss these three key words:
 - **Justification** means being pardoned or acquitted of our sin before God.
 - **Redemption** shows that God bought us back, or *RESTORED* us by the blood sacrifice of Jesus.
 - **Atonement** happens when one person pays the debt for another’s sin.

Refer back to the three key words you listed on the board, summarizing how God revealed his plan of salvation; how believers receive salvation; and how God restores people to a right relationship with him.

6. Read Romans 3:27–31. Then ask a class member to read the following case study for discussion. (A copy of this case study is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

James was raised to believe that he could work for his salvation by keeping certain requirements, such as attending church faithfully, making confession regularly, taking Holy Communion, keeping the Ten Commandments, and giving generous gifts. Recently a friend showed him Romans 3:21–24, and explained that salvation is a free gift that comes to us when we believe in the sacrificial death of Jesus for our sins. We cannot earn it by our works. Now James is confused. Are all his good works useless before God? Should he stop trying to please God with good deeds? How would you respond to his questions?

Encourage Application

7. Write on the board, “The Roman Road,” and list these verses: Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Romans 5:8; and Romans 10:9–10. Lead the group to find and highlight these passages in their Bibles.

Encourage members to jot these references onto an empty page of their Bibles (usually in the back) so they will be easily available when they have opportunity to talk to someone about Christ. Remind the class of the three people they listed on a note at the end of Lesson One—the people with whom they would like to share Christ.

8. Invite a class member to help you demonstrate how to use these four verses to lead a friend to faith in Christ as Savior. Set the scene with one of these suggestions:

- Suppose you and I are at coffee break or at the gym one day, and I tell you about something happening at my church.
- You ask me why I go to church so much, and I tell you that it is because Christ has changed my life.
- I ask if I could share how I came to believe in Christ, and you consent.
- I grab my Bible and begin to explain “The Roman Road” to you. (Do that now.)
- Afterward, I ask if I can pray that God will help you give your life to him in faith.

Encourage members to be praying for opportunities to share Christ this week. Close the class with prayer.

NOTES

1. Lewis William Spitz, *Luther's Works*, vol. 34, *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1960), 336ff.

LESSON 5

A Faithful Example

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 4

BACKGROUND

Romans 4

MAIN IDEA

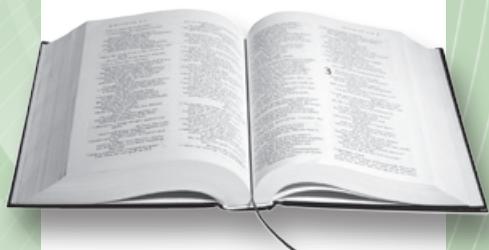
Abraham's life serves as an example of the necessity of faith.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can we follow Abraham's example of faithful living?

TEACHING AIM

To equip adults to recognize that faith has always been the means of a right relationship with God and to choose to follow the example of Abraham



BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

In Chapter 3, Paul argued eloquently that, “a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28). By this, Paul meant that when someone repents (turns away) from sin and receives the free gift of salvation in Christ, God the Father justifies that person, that is, proclaims that person “not guilty.” This declaration is not based on the good things the person has done, but rather on the basis of what the sinless Christ did in dying on the cross for humanity’s sin. This is the crux of the gospel message.

Paul knew that many of his fellow Jewish Christians would think justification by faith contradicted what they believed about how Abraham, their ancestral father of faith, had gained right standing with God. Paul then proceeded to point out that justification by faith applied to Abraham as well and, in fact, has always been the way in which God operates with humans.

People struggle to understand that their salvation is not dependent on their goodness. It is natural to reason that something as important as salvation ought to come as payment for some hard work on our part. Otherwise, salvation would mean nothing because it cost us nothing. However, the Bible clearly states that salvation comes at a tremendous cost, but Christ paid that price on our behalf. He shed his precious blood on the cross at Calvary to make salvation available to all, and a person needs to do only one thing to receive this salvation: accept that gift by faith.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Abraham: Justified By Faith (4:1–5)

4:1–3. Abraham is the spiritual father of all believers. Many Jews viewed Abraham as the forefather of all Jews, and of all Jews *only*. In contrast, Paul pointed out that Abraham was the forefather not only of the Jews, but of *all* believers. Many Jews believed that what made Abraham right

with God was his obedience, especially when God told him to offer Isaac on the altar (see Genesis 22). Paul stressed that Abraham's faith made him right with God, not his obedience. If Abraham's good works of obedience had made him right with God, then Abraham would have reason to boast. But boasting is out of place, even for Abraham. In order to support his point, Paul quoted Genesis 15:6: "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

4:4–5. Paul used the illustration of "works" and "wages" to communicate the concept of righteousness by faith. He explained that someone who works earns wages. In such a case, those wages cannot be described as a gift because they are earned. In a similar way, salvation is a gift to those who trust God, not payment earned. On the basis of that trust, God declares the person justified, or not guilty. God accepts the person as if he had never sinned, even though the person had sinned. The person does not become sinless, but rather is declared righteous by a merciful God who has accepted the full payment for sin offered by Christ on the cross.

David's Declaration of Justification (4:6–8)

4:6–8. In this section, Paul used another Old Testament hero of the faith to support his point. He referred to David's declaration of God crediting righteousness not based on works. David exclaimed that those "whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered" (Psalm 32:1) are blessed because the Lord did not count their sins against them (Ps. 32:2). The word "covered" does not imply the intent to deceive someone. Rather, it refers to the deliberate choice of God to pardon and forgive because of Christ's sacrifice.

Justification by Faith for the Circumcised and Uncircumcised (4:9–12)

4:9. Paul knew the question that would crop up in the minds of his readers: What role does circumcision play in a person's relationship with God? The Jews prided themselves on the fact that they were the circumcised. It was the seal or symbol of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants (see Gen. 17).

4:10. Paul proposed the question as to when, in relation to the time of his circumcision, Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Did God credit Abraham with righteousness before or after he was circumcised? Paul stated emphatically that God declared Abraham righteous *before* he was circumcised, not after. Paul pointed to Genesis 15:6, where the writer recorded that Abraham's faith in God led to a right relationship with him. Abraham was circumcised when he was ninety-six-years-old (see Gen. 17:1, 24). God credited Abraham's faith as righteousness well over a decade before Abraham was circumcised. Faith, not circumcision, was the basis of Abraham's righteousness.

4:11–12. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham. Paul pointed out that circumcision came as a seal of the righteousness Abraham had already been granted because of his faith. Therefore, Abraham is the father of *all* who believe. Abraham is the father of uncircumcised (Gentile) believers who have God's righteousness credited to them in exactly the same way it was credited to Abraham. Abraham is also the father of all circumcised (Jewish) believers—those who are not only circumcised as Abraham (physically), but who also walk in the faith that Abraham had before circumcision. The emphasis is on faith—circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29)—not on the physical act of circumcision.

Justification by Faith, Not by the Law (4:13–14)

4:13–14. If circumcision does not make a person right with God, then does following the law bring about righteousness? In these verses, Paul pointed out that the law did not promise Abraham that he would be the heir of the world; rather, the promise came because of his faith in God. If those who lived by the law were given the promise of salvation because of their obedience, then faith would have no value and would be emptied of its meaning. If their faith had no value, then the promise that hinged on that faith would also be worthless.

The law brings wrath because it shows us that we are accountable to God and reveals our sinfulness (3:19–20). Paul would later tell the Romans that the law defined sin. For instance, we would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, "Do not covet" (see 7:7). The law enables us to see that we cannot achieve righteousness on our own; it

points us to the Savior, the only one who can give us that righteousness (see Galatians 3:19–25).

The Promise through Faith to All of Abraham's Offspring (4:16–17)

4:16–17a. Paul re-emphasized that God's promise to Abraham came by faith in order to show God's unmerited favor as the source of righteousness, not anything a person does. That guarantee of the promise of righteousness by faith extends to all Abraham's offspring (both Jew and Gentile) so that he would be the father of all believers.

Hope for All through Faith (4:17b–25)

4:17b–19. Abraham believed in God, who gives life to the dead. God even raises the dead, for he is the giver of life. Abraham hoped against hope. He believed in God when God told him that his offspring would be as innumerable as the stars in the sky. At the time Abraham had no children, and even more significantly, he and Sarah were very old. His body was as good as dead (in the sense of procreation) and Sarah's womb was dead, too. Sarah had gone through menopause long ago. These facts stared Abraham in the face; yet, he believed God's promise.

4:20–21. Abraham did not weaken in his faith and trust in God, even though that would have been the natural thing for him to do. Logically, who would ever believe that two senior citizens could produce a child, much less an entire generation? In the face of such opposition, Abraham's faith was strengthened and he gave glory to God, because he was certain that God had the power to fulfill what he had promised.

4:22–25. Paul taught that believers should personalize what is said about Abraham. God credited Abraham's faith to him as righteousness, and in the same way, our faith in the sacrificial death of the Messiah will be credited to us as righteousness. Only God can make sinners righteous. We must believe in God the Father who raised our Savior Jesus Christ from the dead—he who died for our sins but was raised back to life so that God could declare us righteous.

Focusing on the Meaning

Faith has always been the means to a right relationship with God. However, human beings—Jews as well as Gentiles—have often thought that their character, morals, or accomplishments could be enough to place them in a right relationship with God. Paul argued against such foolish thinking, reminding his readers that faith has always been the basis of a right relationship with God, even for Abraham, a revered patriarch of the Jews.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews also noted, “and without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Those who insist on injecting human effort into the salvation plan simply do not grasp how impossible it is for a human being to work toward worthiness. Depending on your goodness to attain a right relationship with God is as impossible as trying to swim across an ocean. You may be a better swimmer than your neighbor or even the best swimmer in history, but if you try to swim across an ocean, you would drown as surely as someone who cannot swim at all.

God’s righteousness is beyond our reach, no matter how good we think we are. It is never enough to be nicer than your coworker or even nicer than most people. God does not grade on a curve. James put it clearly, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10). Isaiah painted the picture for us: “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away” (Isaiah 64:6). Anyone who understands the problem of sin and the character of a holy God would also understand why it is impossible to achieve a right relationship with God based on our own efforts.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. On a markerboard or large sheet of paper, draw a picture of a checkbook register. Include columns for the date, transaction description, deposits, and withdrawals. You can add other columns such as “code” or “balance.” Put in several lines. Lead the class to fill in fun examples of transactions, including the amount of deposits or withdrawals. Examples might include a deposit of \$8,000,000 for winning a sweepstakes or a check to a jewelry store for \$50,000.

After a few minutes of this exercise, ask, *What if this checkbook recorded our sins as withdrawals and our good deeds as deposits?* Lead the class to fill in the lines accordingly. For example, a deposit might be going on a mission trip. A withdrawal might be cheating on your taxes. Ask, *Do you think the good deeds will cover the balance of the sins in order for us to be reconciled as “righteous”?* Then say, *In today’s lesson, we will explore the concept of good deeds versus faith as it relates to righteousness.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Give out the following list of Scriptures regarding Abraham’s life from which to create a timeline: Genesis 12:1–3; Genesis 12:4–7; Genesis 15:1–3; Genesis 15:4–6; Genesis 17:1–8; Genesis 17:9–10; Genesis 17:23–24; Genesis 21:1–5. After each person reads their Scripture, ask for a summary of the events and write them on the board. Explain that you will refer to this timeline later in the lesson.
3. Call on a class member to read Romans 4:1–8 aloud. Review these verses using information from “Works Won’t Work” in the *Study Guide*. Point out on the timeline when God credited Abraham with being righteous. Ask: *When did God’s people receive the law?* (with Moses on Mount Sinai.) *Why is this fact important when thinking*

about Abraham being justified by works? (the law came much later, long after Abraham was considered righteous.)

Call on a member to read Romans 4:9–12. Ask, *Why do you think Paul chose Abraham to illustrate his point? Can you think of other Bible figures who showed that their righteousness before God was based on their faith, not their works?* Ask, *In what way is Abraham father to Jews? In what ways is Abraham father to Christian believers?* Direct the class to look back at the timeline. Point out when Abraham was circumcised. Explain that Abraham was declared righteous before his circumcision, not after.

4. Ask a class member to read Romans 4:13–17. Focusing on verse 15, ask the class to imagine an uncharted desert island. Two castaways are there. One is a county sheriff, and the other is a criminal who has somehow managed to bring a handgun and a bag of narcotics with him. Ask, *Can the sheriff arrest and punish the man with the handgun and bag of narcotics? Why? How does the concept of “law” apply in this situation? How does this scenario illustrate the truths of Romans 4:15?*
5. Prior to the lesson, ask one of your class members to share how Romans 4:18–25 is significant to them. Encourage him or her to read “Faith Just Right” in the *Study Guide*. Read Romans 4:18–25 aloud. Then ask your class member to share his or her testimony. Summarize this passage using information in the Bible Comments from this *Teaching Guide* and additional insights from the *Study Guide*.

On a markerboard or poster, create three columns: Works; Circumcision/Religious Symbols; and Law/Religious Behavior. Direct the class to think of present-day examples of each of these. Ask, *If our faith saves us, regardless of our human weaknesses, does that mean we can act sinfully expecting no consequences? Are some sins in your past just too awful for God to forgive? Why? What does this passage tell you about our God’s forgiveness?*

Encourage Application

6. Divide the class into pairs or very small groups. Give them a copy of the following case study. (A copy of this case study is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

At lunch, your friend Terry tells you about some serious personal sins dating back to high school that are overwhelming. Terry doesn’t believe God can forgive these sins, and is afraid to even go to church to possibly face God’s wrath. What would you say to Terry that could provide comfort and hope? Which of the verses or concepts from Romans 4 do you think might be helpful as you talk to Terry?

7. If time permits, reconvene the small groups and allow them to share any significant insights. Conclude by leading the class to read through the sidebar, “Applying this Lesson to Life,” in the *Study Guide*.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. On a large sheet of paper or a markerboard, draw a simple balance scale. Label one plate “Good Deeds” and the other “Bad Deeds.” Distribute paper and pens. Invite the class to imagine or to write down on the paper what they would put on each side of the scale from their own lives. Ask some prompting questions, such as, *What about some of the words you say? What about some of the things you do or neglect to do? What about the thoughts that run through your head?* Ask, *Do you think your good deeds will cover the balance of the sins in order for you to be reconciled as “righteous”?*

Read the second paragraph of the introduction in the *Study Guide*. Ask the class, *What are some examples of how we have a “quid pro quo” attitude toward religion or toward God?* Then say, *In today’s lesson, we will explore the concept of good deeds versus faith as they relate to our righteousness before God.*

Guide Bible Study

2. In advance, prepare a mini-lecture about Abraham, including the main points of his life and a brief character description. You might ask a class member to prepare the information. Be sure to limit the time of the mini-lecture to no more than three minutes.
3. Read Romans 4:1–8. Summarize the information in the *Study Guide* under “Works Won’t Work.” Read the following from the *Study Guide*: “The Jewish people believed erroneously that Abraham achieved his standing before God because of his obedience to God on the mountain. Some religious people believe the same thing today: that only through obedience to God can a person be made righteous.” Ask, *How do people today try to be righteous by their obedience, either in Christianity or in other religions?* Point out that these other religions all focus on salvation by works; Christianity is the only religion where salvation comes by faith.
4. Call on a class member to read Romans 4:9–12. State that for the Jews, circumcision was (and is) the symbol of the covenant between God and men of faith. Ask, *Is there a similar symbol for Christians?*
5. Call on a class member to read Romans 4:13–17. Ask, *Why do you think it’s hard for people to realize that salvation is not based on works, and that one does not get into heaven based on the good things they do? Do you think it’s harder for some people to accept this than for others? Why?*
6. Read Romans 4:18–25. Read the Sidebar, “Credited as Righteousness” in the *Study Guide*. Explain the five pillars of Islam, actions that all Muslims must faithfully complete in order to please Allah: confession of faith; ritual prayer five times a day; giving a percentage of income; fasting; and pilgrimage. Lead a discussion with questions such as, *Do you see anything wrong with any of these practices? Do you know anyone who practices these regularly? Which of the practices would be appropriate for Christians? Does observing these practices help or hinder Christian faith? What does our lesson from Romans teach us about righteousness and these kinds of practices?*

Encourage Application

7. Summarize the last paragraph under “Implications and Actions” in the *Study Guide*. Ask: *How have you found freedom from past sin in Christ? How can a person who still feels guilt for past sin experience the peace and assurance that God has already forgiven him?* As time allows, use the questions at the end of the *Study Guide* to discuss further application of this lesson. Conclude with a prayer of thanks for God’s grace and his response to our faith.

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 5:1–11

BACKGROUND

Romans 5:1–11

MAIN IDEA

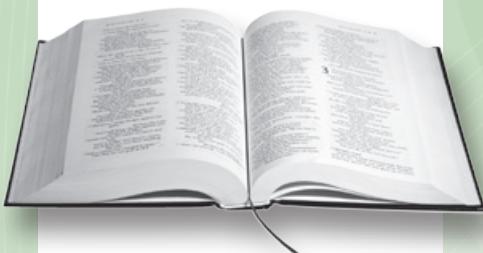
God's love, demonstrated in Christ's sacrifice, is the source of our hope.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Would you be willing to die for an enemy?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to grasp the depth of God's love and to encourage them to experience the hope and joy he provides



LESSON 6

Rejoice in Hope

BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

Paul had taken time to explain the necessity of faith in order to be declared righteous by God. Circumcision and the law—what most Jews depended on, were incapable of making anyone right before God. Because of Abraham’s faith, God declared him righteous. His life demonstrated the need for faith in order to be made right with God—for Jews and Gentiles alike.

In Romans 5, Paul turned his attention to what faith in God produces in the believer. He emphasized that faith produces peace with God, joy, and hope. To have faith in God is to believe in him and his word; it means to trust in the person of Jesus Christ and the work that he has done to give us salvation. Faith involves—or should involve—a total commitment and complete surrender to him as Lord. Anyone who has surrendered his life to the Lord in this way experiences peace with God—a state of spiritual calmness—instead of spiritual turmoil or hostility with God.

Joy, which accompanies peace with God, is an inner state that is not dependent on circumstances. Hope is the trust or confidence in God who controls the future; it carries with it the idea of certainty that God will do what he has promised. The peace, joy, and hope described in Romans 5 cannot be experienced apart from faith. Paul said that a life lived for God naturally produces these traits. They describe the abundant life Christ came to give to all those who would believe in him (see John 10:10).

Interpreting the Scriptures

Rejoice in Peace (5:1–2)

5:1. All those who have been justified by faith—but *only* those who have been justified by faith—have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. They live in a spiritual state in which there is no hostility between them and God. On the other hand, those who have not been

justified by faith are alienated from God by sin (see Ephesians 2:13–18). Such people do not have peace with God. They are to be classified as the wicked, and Scripture declares that the wicked cannot experience peace (see Isaiah 48:22; 57:21).

5:2. The only way a person can gain access to this peace with God is through Jesus Christ, and a person can only obtain it by faith in him. On the night of his arrest and the eve of his crucifixion, our Lord said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). In turn, this peace with God gives us hope of the future glory of God that we will all experience. Believers have the confidence that we will share in God’s glory in the future and for eternity.

Rejoice in Hope through Suffering (5:3–5)

5:3. Paul also challenged believers to rejoice in the midst of suffering. If Paul had never experienced suffering, or if his suffering had not been clearly documented in the Bible, this statement would have caused many people to reject him and his message. Because of his experiences, however, no one could dismiss him on the basis of hypocrisy. Contrary to the health-and-wealth gospel popular in some Christian circles today, Paul asserted that conversion does not mean a problem-free life. Suffering often accompanies the Christian life.

Paul explained that we as believers can rejoice in our sufferings because we know what they can produce. Suffering produces perseverance—and much more. Consider two people undergoing the same suffering. One person may be totally devastated by it, while the other person may grow from it. The difference is spiritual perspective. When you go through difficult circumstances and trust that God is in total control of the situation, you can come away stronger than before.

5:4. Paul stated that perseverance produces character. In other words, perseverance in one situation can enable you to persevere through similar and even more difficult circumstances later on. Withstanding adversity and excelling in such situations strengthens your faith muscles, so to speak. Someone who has built such reliance and trust in God can hope in what God has in store for him or her.

5:5. A Christian’s hope relies on God, not on any earthly institution. Because hope lies in God alone, Paul could declare that hope does not disappoint us, for God never disappoints us ultimately. God brings to pass whatever he promises. God the Father, through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, has poured out his love into our hearts. That love holds us up despite circumstances that do not make sense and challenge our resolve. While we will not see God’s plan in its entirety this side of heaven, we can cling to hope until our faith is ultimately realized.

Rejoice in Christ (5:6–8)

5:6–8. In this verse, Paul pieced together a series of facts. First, Christ died in our place for our sins. Second, when Christ died for us, he did not die for godly people, but for ungodly people (which is all of us). Third, Christ died for the ungodly while we were still powerless. Fourth, Christ died at just the right time for the ungodly.

Paul demonstrated how mind-boggling this act of grace was. In a huge understatement, he said, “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man” (5:7). For the sake of argument, Paul allowed for the possibility that someone might die for a good man, as remote as that possibility may be. Everyone would agree that dying for a loved one or dear friend is the highest demonstration of human love. Set against this example, Paul declared that the love of Christ surpasses even the strongest display of human love, because he died for us while we were still sinners. God loved us so much and wanted so much to bring us close to himself that he was willing to die for us.

The Effect of Hope in Christ (5:9–11)

5:9. Because Christ’s blood covers our sins, God the Father sees that blood instead of our sins, and that puts us in a right relationship with him. We can have great confidence in the fact that through Christ we will be saved from God’s wrath. Our confidence does not lie in our own righteousness or our own ability to navigate the storms of life, but in the God who saves us and keeps us.

5:10–11. When we were God’s enemies, Christ’s sacrificial death reconciled us to God. Christ put us on right terms with God, and he restored

the Father-child relationship we were supposed to have from the beginning. Since Jesus has reconciled us to God, we have reason to rejoice in God. We also have every reason to hope in what God can do in us, among us, and through us, and we can look forward to our participating in his glory for eternity.

Focusing on the Meaning

Peace seems impossible to achieve in this world. Not only do we hear of rumors of wars, but we also see them on the news every day. Hardly a day passes without hearing about two groups at war with each other somewhere on this planet. While peace talks take place in different parts of the world, many of them seem powerless to find any lasting resolution. People seem determined to wound and harm each other with weapons and words. Is peace even possible?

Paul would declare emphatically, yes! Peace is possible. By being reconciled by faith in Christ, not only can we experience peace, we can also know real hope in the midst of our struggles. We can hope in the future when God reigns over all. Until then, we as believers continue to grow in the faith that first allowed us to believe in Christ for our salvation. Developing our spiritual muscles, we continue to trust in the God who saved us. We persevere through trials and can even find joy in the midst of them. That joy is not found in the circumstances themselves, but in knowing that a future glory awaits. We understand that this world is not our home, and the suffering we experience now is nothing compared to what waits for God's children in the future.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Ask the class if anyone ever had to go to the principal's office as a kid because of bad behavior. Ask, *How did it feel? Were you scared? Was the principal as scary and judgmental as you expected? Were you guilty of what you'd been accused of? What was the result? Did this experience color your impression of authority figures, including God? How?* State that today's passage will help us understand how God feels about us, even when we were God's enemy.

Guide Bible Study

2. Ask a class member to read Romans 5:1–4. State that this passage challenges us to rejoice when we are suffering, and to be hopeful even in the worst of life's circumstances. These are opposite of the way most people think and act. Ask, *How do people react in the midst of suffering? What are some ways we can learn to rejoice and be hopeful during difficult times? Do you think Christians get better at dealing with crises as they mature? Explain.*

Prior to the lesson, ask someone from your class who has endured suffering and yet remained hopeful, to speak to the class. At this time, introduce the person (if necessary) and allow him or her to share about experiencing God's faithfulness, grace, hope, and joy in the midst of suffering.

3. Read Romans 5:5–8. Invite the class to think of a time they showed love to someone through a sacrifice, that is, by giving up something they valued. They could also think of a time when someone showed love to them through a sacrifice. Ask the class members to describe the memory. Ask, *How did these acts of sacrifice impact your relationship with the other person(s)?*

Ask, *How would you define time?* Summarize the information about time as explained in the *Study Guide* under “The Working of Love.” Ask, *Do you think you are an enemy to Jesus? Why or why not?*

4. Call on a class member to Read Romans 5:9–11. Ask, *Can you think of an experience when you reconciled with someone? How did you feel about the person before and after the reconciliation? What brought about the reconciliation? Did one person make the first move? Why? What was similar and what was different from God’s reconciliation with sinners?*
5. On a markerboard or poster, make two columns. Label one “Enemy of God” and the other “Beloved of God.” Invite the class to suggest words or phrases that describe the status and feelings associated with each of these descriptions. Also ask, *How does one become an enemy of God or beloved of God? Can a person feel like God’s enemy even though they are not?*

Encourage Application

6. Recall the opening exercise, and encourage the class to call out feelings that might be associated with going to the principal’s office. Then ask the class to think about a wedding. If your class has married couples, ask them to think about how they felt on their wedding day. If class members are single, direct them to think about how friends might have felt on their wedding day. Ask, *How would you describe your feelings and emotions when you first saw your spouse on your wedding day?* Allow a few moments for comments. Then say, *The Bible frequently uses the image of a bride and a groom to describe the unconditional love and joy that comes when someone is justified and reconciled to God through faith in Christ.*
7. Hand out paper and pen to each person and ask everyone to write down one or more issues in their life with which they are struggling. After a minute or so, encourage the class to take a few moments to meditate on the fact that they are deeply loved by God. Ask, *How does knowing that God loves you give you hope for your situation?* You can take answers, or simply allow people to think and write answers on their papers.

8. End by reading aloud the paragraph in the *Study Guide*, “Implications and Actions.” Close in prayer.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Ask the class to think of famous feuds or enemies in history or in literature. Some examples might include: the Hatfields and McCoys; the Montagues and Capulets (in *Romeo and Juliet*); the families in Mario Puzo’s *The Godfather*; Cain and Abel, Captain Ahab and Moby Dick; Batman and the Joker. Ask, *How would you define or describe a feud? How do these feuds usually end?* State, *Humans have been feuding with God since the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Today’s passage will show the measures God took to end the feud and provide reconciliation to humanity.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Call on a volunteer to read Romans 5:1–4 aloud. Lead a discussion using the following questions. Supplement answers with information from the *Study Guide* under “The Witness of Grace.”
 - Are there times when suffering does not lead to perseverance, character, and hope?
 - Do you consider perseverance, character, and hope as positive outcomes that are worth the suffering required to produce them?
 - Does believing that suffering leads to a positive outcome help us when we are going through painful, difficult times?
 - Do you think the perseverance, character, and hope you gain through suffering are long-lasting or temporary?
3. Read Romans 5:5–8. Group the class into small groups and direct them to answer the following questions that have been written down on sheets of paper:
 - Who would you consider to be an enemy (in the past or present)?

- Can you think of a time when you did something beneficial for an enemy?
- What does this passage tell us about the likelihood or difficulty of humans dying for the sake of an enemy?
- What do these verses tell us about God's love for us as sinners?

4. Call on the class to read Romans 5:9–11. Prior to the lesson, invite a volunteer to study this section of Scripture and be prepared to explain it in class. Supplement the explanation by using information from the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* and information from the *Study Guide*.
5. Reread Romans 5:1–11. Direct the class to circle in their Bibles and count the number of times the words love, hope, peace, and joy/rejoice appear in the passage. Read the following from the *Study Guide*: “Peace is the result of being declared righteous, allowing us to stand face-to-face with God with no fear of his wrath or rejection.” Ask, *Is this how you would define “peace?” We think of rejoicing as a response to something good. Do you think that is what Paul means in verses 3 and 11?*

Encourage Application

6. Recall the discussion about feuds and enemies. Say, *One of the key points about a feud among humans is that both sides are hateful to each other.* Ask, *What does today's passage tell us about how the relationship between God and humanity is different from human feuds?* Explain that our “feud” has been one-sided: God has always and continually shown love toward humanity. Read Romans 5:8 again, then invite the class to recite John 3:16 aloud. Ask: *How are these verses connected?*
7. Ask, *Why do you think some Christians struggle with assurance that they are saved? Have you ever felt you weren't experiencing God's love? Why? How did you deal with this feeling?*
8. As a class or in small groups, discuss the Case Study in the *Study Guide*. Then close in prayer, thanking God for making you his friend through Jesus Christ.

LESSON 7

Brought From Death to Life

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 6

BACKGROUND

Romans 6

MAIN IDEA

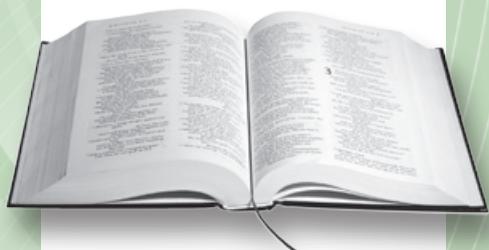
The gospel provides a path to life, not an excuse to sin.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do we use the grace provided by the gospel as an excuse to sin?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to evaluate if they ever use the grace provided by the gospel as an excuse to sin



BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

Near the end of Romans 5, Paul described Christ as the “Second Adam.” Paul explained that through Adam’s sin of disobedience, he brought the condemnation of death. This death was spiritual as well as physical, for humanity became spiritually separated from God (spiritual death) and became subject to physical death. In contrast, Christ brought justification—provided humanity a right standing with God—that results in eternal life.

In concluding that chapter, Paul wrote, “The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Romans 5:20). So, just as sin had reigned and brought about death, grace could now reign through the righteousness of Christ to bring people eternal life (5:21). He was saying that the law revealed sin for what it was. The law made sin evident. The law was the standard by which human behavior was judged as righteous or sinful.

As we learned in previous weeks, the law does not produce righteousness in and of itself. It merely shows us that we are accountable to God, and it reveals our sinfulness (3:19–20). The law told us what sin was. For instance, we would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, “Do not covet” (7:7). The law enables us to see that we cannot achieve righteousness on our own, and it points us to our Savior, the only One who can declare us righteous (see Galatians 3:19–25). The more people recognized sin for what it was, and the more they understood the demands of the law, the more they realized their need of Jesus Christ. Thus Paul could say, “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Rom. 5:20). The greater the comprehension of one’s sinfulness, the more grace was needed.

To begin Romans 6, Paul asked a question that anticipated a mistake that could be easily made as the logical conclusion to Paul’s statement in Romans 5:20. Paul’s answer to his own question was quite clear. He left no room for misunderstanding.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Embrace Grace, Shun Sin (6:1–2)

6:1–2. Paul wanted to make sure he was not misunderstood and so he asked, “Since grace increased when we sinned more, then shouldn’t we keep sinning so we can experience more grace?” Stated differently, Paul was asking, “Are we supposed to sin more and more so we can experience God’s forgiveness more and more?”

Paul was emphatic in his answer—by no means! In other translations, his answer underscored the emphasis: God forbid! Perish the thought! May it never be! Paul explained that believers have died to sin and could not possibly live in sin any longer. The believer has become a new creation altogether (2 Corinthians 5:17). He has seen how bankrupt the sinful life is and has given Jesus control of his life. In Galatians 2:20, Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

For a person to receive the love of Christ and live in sin again would belittle the grace of God—his unmerited favor—and would take God’s forgiveness for granted. Although salvation is free, it is not cheap. Salvation cost Jesus his precious blood as he died for us on the cross at Calvary. Paul called God’s favor a “surpassing grace” (2 Cor. 9:14) and salvation an “indescribable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15). Continuing in a life of sin would be egregious.

The Symbol of Baptism (6:3–4)

6:3–4. Paul appealed to the double symbolism of baptism. In New Testament times, baptism was always performed by immersing a person in water. The very term “baptism” comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means “to dip, to submerge, or to immerse.” The Bible tells how Jesus came “out of the water” after having been baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (see Matthew 3:16), and how the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip the Evangelist came out of the water (Acts 8:39). Baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. It also symbolizes that the “old man,” or the pre-salvation life of a person has died and has been buried, and that the “new man,” or the person

who has been saved by faith in Christ, has been resurrected to lead a brand new life in Christ.

6:5–6. Through the act of baptism, a person declares that his or her old self (old, sinful way of living) has died just as Christ died on the cross; his or her new, redeemed self has risen from the dead just as Christ did. The sinful nature in the believer should be kept so dormant that it is as good as dead, crucified along with Christ. Such a person is no longer a slave to sin and has been freed from sin. Saying no to sin and yes to Christ is a life-long process, not an automatic, overnight change.

Living for the Lord (6:8–14)

6:8–9. Dying with Christ means to live for him here on earth as well as in heaven. That is why Paul would say, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Since Christ has been raised from the dead, he will never die again. He has demonstrated his authority over death. Death has no power or control over Christ. Our Lord spoke of his control over death in John 10:17–18 when he said, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

6:10–11. The Bible emphasizes that Christ died for our sins “once for all” (Hebrews 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10, 12, 14; 1 Peter 3:18). Having risen from the dead, Christ now lives to God and with God the Father forever. Paul challenged believers to mimic Christ and consider themselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus, living for God at all times.

6:12–14. Believers should not let sin control them by going after evil desires. Furthermore, believers should not hand over their bodies to sin, to be used as tools of wickedness. Instead, they are to give themselves over to God, realizing that God has brought them from death to life. They should allow their bodies to be used as tools of righteousness. Christ, not sin, is the master of the believer’s life. The believer does not live under the dictates of the law, but rather under the grace (unmerited favor) of God. Such a life seeks to please him and not the former, sinful self.

Slaves to Righteousness (6:15–18)

6:15–16. In these verses, Paul made sure not to be misunderstood to say that believers can sin freely since we are not under law but under grace. Just as he had said in verse 2, he repeated emphatically, “by no means!” Paul pointed out that if you obey someone, then that person is your master, and you are that person’s slave, a reference his audience would immediately understand. Likewise, if you obey sin, then you are a slave to sin, but if you obey God, you are a slave to righteousness.

6:17–18. Paul thanked God for the Roman believers, because although they were at one time slaves to sin, they were now wholeheartedly determined to obey God. They had been set free from sin and had become slaves to righteousness. Contrary to what many people think, spiritually speaking, every person is a slave to *something*. Either you are a slave of sin or you are a slave of righteousness. No one can serve both, and to abandon faith in God is to embrace slavery to sin.

The Benefits of Obeying God (6:19–23)

6:19–20. Paul told the Roman believers that just as they used to give over parts of their bodies in slavery to sin, they should now give over their bodies in slavery to righteousness to attain more and more holiness. Paul reminded them that they did not care about righteousness when they were slaves of sin. Paul then asked them to recall any benefit from their lives of sin. There was no benefit, for they were now actually ashamed of what they used to do, since those deeds resulted in spiritual death.

6:22–23. Paul encouraged the believers in Rome to understand that they had been set free from sin and had become slaves of God. A life surrendered in obedience to God resulted in many good benefits, none of which would cause them shame. Surrendering to God through Christ leads to eternal life. The wages or payment of sin is death. This death is both physical and spiritual. The sin of Adam and Eve brought about both physical and spiritual death, the latter being separation from God. Death is the just payment for sin, but the gift of God is the opposite: it is eternal life. In Christ Jesus our Lord, we receive eternal life. It is given freely; we simply need to receive it.

Focusing on the Meaning

Suppose you go to your best friend and say, “Because of how much I love you, I’ll forgive you of anything you do to me.” And suppose your friend asks you, “Did you say ‘anything’?” You respond, “Yes, I mean anything.” Suppose your friend begins to insult you vehemently, but then says to you, “You’ll forgive me, right?” The following week, he deliberately takes a golf club and bashes your brand new car. Every week, your friend deliberately provokes you to test the limit of your forgiveness. Yet he tells everybody that you are his best friend. What would you conclude about the love your friend has for you?

It does not take a genius to figure out that this so-called “best friend” is no friend at all. That friend claims to love you, but everyone can see that those are empty words. This friend has misunderstood and taken advantage of your forgiveness, using it as an excuse to provoke you to anger.

This illustration highlights the silliness of such an approach to God’s grace and forgiveness. To interpret Romans 5:20 as an excuse to sin against God with abandon is to show that you neither know nor love God, despite what you may say.

Jesus said, “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:20), and he gave what can be viewed as a warning, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Jesus knew that loving obedience marks a genuine relationship with him. Let us lead our lives understanding fully the tremendous gift of salvation and how undeserving we are of it. Let us lead grateful lives of obedience to God and not take for granted his unmerited favor.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Ask if anyone is familiar with the old TV show, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Invite the class to try to describe the lifestyles of rich and/or famous people and how these differ from their own lifestyles. After some lighthearted discussion, ask, *Is your lifestyle different now compared to when you were younger? How is it different?* Allow time for comments. Then state, *In today's lesson, we will see what Paul taught about the change in spiritual lifestyle for people who are saved through faith in Christ.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Read Romans 6:1–11. Ask if anyone has experienced a major change, such as joining a new company, going to a new school, or rooting for a new sports team. Then ask those who have made such a change if they were able to change their allegiance and loyalty completely. Allow for comments. Stress that when people are saved by faith in Christ, they make a change that is even more drastic, as Paul noted in these verses. Ask: *What illustration did Paul use to show that a person undergoes a radical change at conversion? What do you think Paul meant when he said that our old self was crucified with Christ?*

On a markerboard or poster, draw a simple figure of a person, with arms, legs, fingers, and feet as well as facial features. Ask, *What are some examples of how we offer the parts of our body to sin, as instruments of wickedness?* Encourage the class to come up with ways that each body part can be offered as an instrument of wickedness. Write words or phrases on the board with arrows pointing to the respective body parts. Then, draw another figure with the same features. This time, encourage the class to come up with ways that each body part can be offered as an instrument of righteousness.

3. Read Romans 6:12–23. Note the passage indicates that people are either slaves to sin or they are slaves to righteousness. Ask, *What does it look like to be a slave to righteousness?* Ask, *Can people gain any benefit from a sinful lifestyle? What are the negative effects of sin or a sinful lifestyle?* Then ask, *What benefits can people gain from a lifestyle of righteousness? Are there negative effects of righteousness?* Use information from “The Spirit-Empowered Life” in the *Study Guide* to supplement the discussion.

Note that the phrase in verse 2 and in verse 15 translated as, “by no means!” is one of the strongest ways in the Greek language to express the negative. Ask, *How would we phrase this strong negative in our own terms?* If you like, write down appropriate suggested phrases on the board. Then write above the list of phrases, “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” and “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Point out that a person who lives in sin in order to increase grace grossly misunderstands and misappropriates God’s mercy and grace.

Encourage Application

4. Divide the class into three small groups. Give each group one of the following three scenarios. Instruct each group to discuss the scenario and be prepared to share their thoughts with the whole class. Allow about five minutes for discussion; then call for presentations. (A copy of these scenarios is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Scenario One: A long-time friend has been a Christian for many years. However, over lunch, he has confided in you that he is being tempted to engage in an inappropriate relationship with someone who is married. What can you tell your friend about resisting temptation?

Scenario Two: You have been mentoring someone who recently came to Christ and was baptized a few months ago. This person has struggled with substance abuse and is discouraged that they have not overcome their addiction yet. What hope and encouragement can you give this person based on this passage from Romans?

Scenario Three: Your high school class is planning a reunion in Las Vegas. The invitation to the event indicates that there will be plenty of opportunity to overindulge in eating, drinking, shopping, gambling, and other “vices,” assuring that “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” What wisdom from this passage can you give yourself as you contemplate this invitation?

5. Highlight the information in the questions and case study in the *Study Guide* and encourage class members to use it to reflect on this week’s discussion. Then close in prayer, thanking God for his grace and asking him to help you live as changed people.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Invite the class to think for a moment about habits. State that everyone has habits, either healthy or unhealthy. Observe that some negative habits are dangerous and some can be very difficult to break. Lead a discussion with questions such as, *What are some examples of positive and negative habits? Have you ever felt “enslaved” by a poor habit? Have you ever broken a bad habit? If so, how did you manage to discontinue that habit?* Then state, *Sin can enslave people, which is worse than a bad habit. Today’s lesson will show us that through our faith in Christ, we overcome our enslavement to sin.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Read Romans 6:1–5. Use the information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* to explain the verses, specifically the illustration of baptism. Ask one of the class members to read aloud the sidebar on baptism (also in the *Study Guide*). Invite the class to share their own experiences with baptism. (Be sensitive to people who may come from a different Christian tradition.) Explain that Baptists believe that baptism is an outward, physical symbol of an inner, spiritual conversion.

3. Prior to the Bible study, enlist a volunteer to share how Christ has changed his/her life. Ask him/her to share how he/she died to sin and became alive to God. Ask the volunteer to read Romans 6:6–11 and tell his/her story.
4. Call on a class member to read Romans 6:12–14. Then read Genesis 4:7 (or as much of the story found in Genesis 4:1–9 as you need to familiarize the class with the story of Cain and Abel). Note that Cain had the ability or the option to master sin, but sin won out in Cain’s life, or as Romans 6:12 puts it, sin reigned in Cain’s body so that he obeyed its evil desires. Then read Romans 6:14. Ask, *What does this verse—and this passage—tell us about whether sin masters us or we master sin? How can a person’s life be a weapon for righteousness?* Using the information from the section “Just Say No” in the *Study Guide*, talk about using your gifts and abilities for righteousness.

Read Romans 6:15–23. Ask the class to imagine two different bosses (or coaches). One is strict, harsh, and judgmental. The other is compassionate, kind, and forgiving. Both are crystal clear that they expect you to perform at the very top of your capability. Ask, *Who would prefer the harsh boss or coach? Who would prefer the compassionate coach or boss? Why? Which one would bring out your best performance? Which one would cause you to try harder to keep from messing up? What would be the end result of working for the harsh boss? The kind boss?* Allow the class to discuss what it means to align one’s life with Christ.

Encourage Application

5. Ask, *Do you think we are ever able to completely quit sinning this side of heaven?* Allow some responses. Then lead a discussion by asking, *Has anyone ever studied a foreign language or some kind of complicated skill? Do you ever completely learn something, or do you continue to improve? Is learning a language or skill a fair comparison to learning how to stop sinning? Why or why not?* State that everyone struggles with the temptation to sin. Ask what lessons people can

share about how to keep from giving in to temptation. Be sure to mention Bible study and prayer and allow plenty of time for sharing.

Call attention to the questions under “Implications and Actions” in the *Study Guide*. Encourage the class to reflect on these questions this week. Then close in prayer.

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 8:1–17

BACKGROUND

Romans 8:1–17

MAIN IDEA

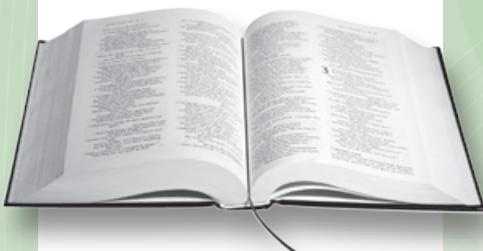
Surrendering to the Holy Spirit provides life, peace, and affirmation of our adoption by God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What are the characteristics and benefits of living a Spirit-controlled life?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to identify the characteristics and benefits of living a Spirit-controlled life



LESSON 8

A Spirit- Controlled Life

BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

The framed painting on the wall sometimes needs adjustment because it tilts a little. Evidently, a fan propels gentle air across the room, moving the painting slightly over time. Gentle winds move things, and everyone knows what a strong wind like a hurricane can do.

The Greek word *pneuma* may be translated “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit,” depending upon the context. Jesus helped Nicodemus understand the work of the Holy Spirit by calling attention to the wind. Jesus said, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

The wind has a certain sovereignty and mystery as it moves. The Holy Spirit is like the wind, only much more so. Our efforts do not generate the Spirit’s activity; the Spirit acts upon us only as he wills. The Spirit is part of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Just as God and Jesus act, so the Holy Spirit acts upon the cosmos and humanity to achieve God’s purpose. We can explain to a small degree the mystery of three being one, but we cannot fully understand it. Like the wind, it is mystery. The movement of the Spirit, nonetheless, is around us and in us if we belong to Jesus.

In Romans, Paul unfolded the new way of existence in Christ. As he explained this new existence, he talked about the action and work of the Holy Spirit. What the Spirit does is good (just as God is good), acting to deliver, guide, and benefit us. Those who are in Christ are led by the Holy Spirit, giving shape and direction to the life that God desires for his people. As the main idea of this lesson emphasizes, the Holy Spirit provides life and peace and affirms our adoption by God as his children.¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

A Life of Peace in the Spirit (8:1–3)

8:1. To condemn is to judge someone as being guilty and deserving of the consequences of that guilt. In light of Paul’s discussion in Romans 7, two things condemn: One is sin, and the other is the law that illuminates the sin. Sin brings guilt. The law stands over someone, pointing out the failure to meet its demands, keeping a person in a state of guilt. However, Jesus declares believers not guilty, so that no reason exists for any condemnation. Since there is no condemnation, then it is useless for anyone to carry the guilt that expects condemnation. Judgment and condemnation do not describe those who accept his forgiveness and dwell in the Spirit.

8:2. “In Christ” was one of Paul’s favorite expressions. In this context, Paul meant a state of existence in which one lives. To be a citizen of the U.S. is to live in a real place in which real living takes place. To be “in Christ” is to move from an alien existence (away from God) to a new place of living (in right relationship with God) and to a new identity. It is a new citizenship. The “law of the Spirit of life” rules those who are in Christ, whereas the “law of sin and death” rules those apart from Christ. In this discussion, Paul shifted from a focus on the Mosaic Law to focusing on the Spirit. The law of the Spirit decrees that no guilt and no condemnation can exist in this new citizenship in Christ, thus establishing an existence of peace for believers.

Life Received in the Spirit (8:3–11)

8:3. The term “walk” refers to a person’s lifestyle or the way one lives. The term “flesh” can refer to human flesh (skin) or to the existence in which a person lives. Some translators render the term as “sinful nature,” a translation with which one must be cautious in application. A wrong application occurs when people view themselves as having two natures, a good one and bad one.

Think again of the wind as an example. The wind is all around a person, but it is also in a person. In the same way, the Spirit is all around and also in a person. Hence the total person, not a part of a person, lives

in the Spirit. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, a person in Christ is a “new creation,” not a partially new creation. Thus, “flesh” is that life apart from God in which the total person lives. Christ came as a human being, condemned sin by living and dying for each person, and gives life in the Spirit to those who turn to him. While his followers are not perfect in this new life, the Spirit in and around us is perfect. As a person sins, the Spirit constantly brings death to sin so that guilt and condemnation are removed through Christ’s forgiveness.

8:4. The law demands that those who break the commands of God are guilty and deserve condemnation as a “just requirement.” The law has no power to deliver a person from guilt, although it condemns sin and demands justice. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, those who walk in the Spirit no longer carry the condemnation and demand for justice against them. Christ takes the condemnation on himself and justifies—declares not guilty—those who have accepted him as Savior.

8:5. Those who set their minds on satisfying the sinful self will think, act, and feel in the old way of life. That life is detailed in Galatians 5:19–21: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” In stark contrast, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).

8:6–10. Only death reigns in the realm of the flesh. The phrase, “Though the body is dead,” refers to the reality that everyone dies. This condition came to humanity because of sin. The human mind in the flesh is “hostile to God” and cannot keep God’s commands; this results in death. A person who sets his mind on the Spirit walks with Jesus, who takes away the death sentence and gives life in the Spirit. Hence, life and peace are in the Spirit.

Children of God (8:12–17)

8:12–13. People belonging to God through Christ owe nothing to the flesh. That is, the flesh has no reign over those in the Spirit. Of course,

the flesh cannot force someone to live its lifestyle, nor does the Spirit force anyone to live the lifestyle of the Spirit. Each person must *choose*. Paul certainly wanted people to know that choosing the lifestyle of the flesh was choosing a lifestyle of death. The “deeds of the body” indicates a lifestyle characterized by the absence of the Holy Spirit.

8:14–15. Those who live in the Spirit have special status: they are children of God. This is much more than a simple title. Children of God live an existence animated by the life of God in the Spirit. Being a child of God also means being “adopted.”

In the Roman culture of Paul’s day, an adopted child shared the same status and legacy as a biological child. Slaves did not have rights as a member of the family household; nor did they expect any inheritance. A slave could be replaced. Not so with the adopted son or daughter in Christ, as evidenced by the privilege of calling God “Abba, Father.” “Abba” was an address of relational intimacy used by both young and adult children. Speaking to human parents as “Dad” or “Mom” is a contemporary similarity, and it points to the closeness that the Heavenly Father has with his children through the Holy Spirit.

8:16–17. Believers live in great assurance because they are children of God. This status is received by faith as a gift, and those who belong to Christ share his inheritance as his children. However, believers will still suffer in this life. Suffering with Christ brings believers into such a shared identity with him that they are also glorified with him.

Focusing on the Meaning

The Spirit-controlled life leads to peace, freedom, and the assurance that we are the children of God. Our responsibility is to submit to the Spirit in us and to live in the Spirit. A Spirit-controlled life is difficult to visualize. Perhaps we can picture it with an illustration. Like players belong to a football team, we are a part of God’s team. We have in us—in our minds, emotions, and commitment—the culture, the plays, the responsibilities, the camaraderie, and the unity in the Spirit, just like a football team. Pushing the allegory a bit further, Jesus (as the coach) designs the plays and teaches the players how to play. He has taught and lived his

teachings and invited us onto the team. The Spirit not only helps us to understand how to live, but he also empowers us to play the game to its conclusion.

The game of life is being played every day, and bruises and injuries are part of the game, just as they were when Jesus came to live among us. We suffer as we play, but Jesus wins. Jesus' team has never had a losing season, although it may appear differently by some measures of winning. Jesus' death looked like ultimate defeat, and yet is the greatest victory ever won.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Prior to class beginning, place a copy of the handout “The Flesh vs. The Spirit” in the seat of each learner. (A copy of this handout is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

The Flesh vs. The Spirit Romans 8:5–12

Read the verses related to “the flesh” and describe the thinking, attitude, and behavior of those controlled by the flesh. Then read the verses related to “the Spirit” and describe the thinking, attitude, and behavior of those controlled by the Spirit.

Life Areas	Led by the Flesh	Led by the Spirit
Head (their thinking)	Romans 8:5:	Romans 8:5:
Heart (their attitude)	Romans 8:7:	Romans 8:12:
Hands (their behavior)	Romans 8:7:	Romans 8:12:

2. Begin the class with a partnering-in-prayer exercise. Direct learners to listen to your instructions before they take any action. Instruct learners to:
 - Move closer to another person.
 - Share a specific request for prayer.
 - Allow your partner to pray for you; then pray for the specific request of your partner.
 - Stop praying when you hear the teacher start to pray.

Take about five minutes for this time of prayer. At the end of this time, pray for God's blessing and guidance during today's lesson.

3. Using the board or a flip chart, lead the class to name benefits that may come with employment (employee benefits). Do not allow learners to explain their answers at this time. Curb any negative discussion or comparison of benefits between companies. Ask: *How are these benefits favorable to us?* Inform learners that today's lesson is intended to help us identify the benefits of living a Spirit-controlled life.

Guide Bible Study

4. Direct learners to gather in groups of three to four. Enlist a volunteer to read Romans 8:1–4. Summarize these verses. Instruct learners to discuss Paul's use of the following words and phrases:
 - “condemnation” (verse 1)
 - “in Christ Jesus” (verse 2; compare with John 5:24)
 - “law” (verse 2)
 - “sin offering” (verse 3)

After a few minutes, call groups together and allow them to share significant insights from their discussion. Use information from “Living Freely” in the *Study Guide* to supplement their information.

5. Direct learners' attention to the handout “The Flesh vs. The Spirit” (see Step 1). Enlist a volunteer to read Romans 8:5–10. Summarize these verses (use information from the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* and other material from the *Study Guide*). Direct learners to groups with new members. Instruct them to read the verses related to “the flesh” and describe the thinking, attitude, and behavior of those controlled by the flesh. After they have written down their descriptions, allow time for group discussion.
6. Enlist a volunteer to read Romans 8:11–17. Keep learners in their groups. Direct their attention back to the handout “The Flesh vs. The Spirit.” Instruct them to read the verses related to “the Spirit” and describe the thinking, attitude, and behavior of those controlled by the Spirit. Allow time for group discussion after they have recorded their descriptions.

Encourage Application

7. Distribute the handout “Benefits of the Spirit-Controlled Life.” (A copy of this handout is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Benefits of the Spirit-Controlled Life

There are at least eight benefits of the Spirit-controlled life highlighted by Paul in Romans 8:1-17. Read the verses below and identify the benefit.

1. _____ (Romans 8:1)
2. _____ (Romans 8:2)
3. _____ (Romans 8:6)
4. _____ (Romans 8:9)
5. _____ (Romans 8:9,11)
6. _____ (Romans (14-15))
7. _____ (Romans 8:16)
8. _____ (Romans 8:17)

Key: 1.) no condemnation; 2.) freedom from the law of sin and death; 3) life and peace; 4) in the Spirit; 5) indwelt by the Spirit; 6.) adopted by God; 7.) witness of the Holy Spirit; 8.) heirs of God

8. Remind learners that today’s lesson was intended to help them identify the benefits of living a Spirit-controlled life. Inform learners that there are at least eight benefits to a life controlled by the Spirit. Direct them to read the verses on the handout and identify the benefit in the blank provided next to the verses. End class with prayer.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Prior to class, place a copy of the lesson outline in the seat of each learner. Class members will fill in the blanks on the handout as you lead the lesson. (A copy of this outline is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

LESSON OUTLINE *A Spirit-Controlled Life* **Romans 1:1-17**

Surrendering to the Holy Spirit provides life, peace, and affirmation of our adoption by God.

- I. Living Free by the Spirit in Christ (8:1-4)
 - A. The **Promise** of freedom (vv. 1-2)
 - B. The **Purpose** of freedom (vv. 3-4)
- II. The Spirit-Focused Life (8:5-10)
 - A. Its **Results** (vv. 5-8)
 - B. Its **Requirement** (vv. 9-10)
- III. The Spirit-Empowered Life (8:11-17)
 - A. Enjoys the **Presence** of the Holy Spirit (v. 11)
 - B. Experiences the **Power** of the Holy Spirit (vv. 12-13)
 - C. Exists as the **Possession** of the Holy Spirit (vv. 14-17)

2. Begin class with prayer. Then use the following illustration to begin:

Adam-12 was a police drama television show that ran from September 1968 to May of 1975. It featured two officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), veteran Pete Malloy and his partner, rookie Jim Reed. At some point in each episode, Malloy and Reed received an all-points-bulletin (APB). It was an alert from a police command station to officers, instructing them to detain or

arrest a particular person. It included a description of the targeted individual. Malloy and Reed would use this report of features, traits, and characteristics to help them identify the person of interest.

Point out that in a world marked by false teaching and misguided people, believers need to know what an authentic Christian looks like. Explain that Romans 8:1–17 gives us not only the characteristics of one who is led by the Holy Spirit, but also the benefits of the Spirit-led life. The aim of today’s lesson is to identify those characteristics and benefits.

Guide Bible Study

3. Read Romans 8:1–4. Summarize these verses using information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments from this *Teaching Guide*. Instruct learners to write the word “promise” in the first blank under the section “Living Free by the Spirit in Christ” (Point IA). Discuss Paul’s use of the word “condemnation” and the phrase “in Christ Jesus” in verse 1. Also explain the term “law” in verse 2. Ask learners: *How can we have confidence in the promise of no condemnation? How should we respond to this promise?* Read the case study in the small sidebar in the *Study Guide*. Call for answers on how to give Jim hope.
4. Instruct learners to write the word “purpose” in the second blank under this section in the outline (Point IB). Call on a class member to read verses 3–4. Discuss “law” and explain the meaning “sin offering.” Point out how the phrase “in order that” in verse 4 indicates that the goal or purpose of believer’s freedom is to allow them to meet the requirements of the law.
5. Ask a volunteer to read Romans 8:5–10. Summarize these verses using information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide*. Instruct learners to write the word “results” in the first blank under the section “The Spirit-Focused Life” (Point IIA). Explain the contrasting results of those whose minds are focused on the sinful nature and those focused on the Spirit. Ask the following questions: *How does focusing on the sinful nature result in death? How does focusing on the Spirit result in life and peace? What are some practical ways to avoid focusing on the sinful nature?* Instruct learners to write the word “requirement” in the second blank under

the section “The Spirit-Focused Life” (Point IIB). Ask, *What requirements do you see in these verses?*

6. Direct learner’s attention to the “The Spirit-Empowered Life” section of the handout (Point III). Call on a class member to read Romans 8:11–17. Summarize these verses using information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide*. Instruct learners to write the word “presence” in the first blank under this section (Point IIIA). From verses 9–11, describe how the presence of the Holy Spirit proves that believers belong to Christ.
7. Instruct learners to write the word “power” in the second blank under this section (Point IIIB). Reread verses 12–13 and describe the concept of “obligation” using information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide*. Discuss how the misdeeds of the body can be put to death. Ask, *What are some ways we practice misdeeds of the body? What are some practical things we can do to put those practices to death?*
8. Instruct class members to write the word “possession” in the third blank under this section (Point IIIC). Reread verses 14–17. Discussed what is meant by “adoption.” Explore the connection between sharing Christ’s suffering and his glory. Use information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide*. Ask, *How do these verses give you encouragement and hope? What does it mean for you to be able to call God your Father?*

Encourage Application

9. Group the class into small teams and give each team a sheet of paper and a pen. Direct the teams to create two columns, one labeled, “Characteristics” and one labeled, “Benefits.” Say, *At the beginning of the lesson, I said that the point of this lesson was to identify the characteristics and benefits of living a Spirit-controlled life.* Allow the class to work in groups to complete the sheet by listing the characteristics and benefits of the Spirit-controlled life as indicated in Romans 8:1–17. After a few minutes, call on groups to share their answers. If you have time, discuss the answers to the questions under “Implications and Actions” in the *Study Guide*. Point out the large

sidebar in the *Study Guide* and encourage the class to read it as time allows this week. Conclude class with prayer.

NOTE S

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 8–10 are from the New Revised Standard Version.

LESSON 9

God is For Us

FOCAL TEST

Romans 8:18–39

BACKGROUND

Romans 8:18–39

MAIN IDEA

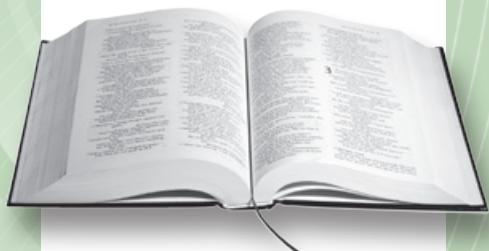
God works for the good
of those who love him

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do we really believe
that God is for us?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to conclude
that God is truly for
them, regardless of
their circumstances



BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

The presence of evil and suffering in the world God created often raises questions about God's sovereignty and control. Consider the words of Psalm 22:1, the same words Jesus uttered from the cross (Matthew 27:46): "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?" In the next chapter, David described God as the Great Shepherd who cares deeply for his people (Psalm 23). How do you make sense of the pain, decay, and evil in the world, especially in light of God's great act of love in Jesus?

Similar questions resided in the church at Rome. The culture surrounding Paul and his fellow Christians was pessimistic about the created order and humanity's situation within it. The church at Rome knew suffering of many kinds. Christians were a minority and separate from much of Roman culture. They became the focus of rumors and prejudice. Only a few years separated Paul's letter to the Romans from a terrible persecution against Christians in that same area.

Paul wrote Romans around A.D. 57, and by A.D. 64, much of Rome burned, and Nero blamed Christians for starting the fires. Strong evidence existed that Nero had the fires set to burn up run-down parts of Rome, and then blamed Christians in order to protect himself from the anger of the existing power structure. Horrible persecution fell upon Christ's people, including being crucified and set on fire. When Paul wrote Romans, the intense persecution had not yet taken place, but the storm clouds hovered over Jesus' people. Thus, Paul challenged his readers with the truth that "God is for us."

Interpreting the Scriptures

God is for Us in Glory and Freedom (8:18–21)

8:18. Christians at Rome wanted God to do his work to bring humanity and creation to the restored condition for which they hoped and longed. First, Paul spoke to them of God's "glory." Glory is the manifestation of

the true nature and reality of things. For example, to say that Jesus is the glory of God is to say that Jesus himself is the very character and nature of God, the very reputation of God.

8:19–21. Evil and suffering do not represent the true nature and reality of God. Yet, God’s glory works through suffering as God uses even pain to reveal the glory of the children of God. Creation is in a state of futility. “Futility” is a word that reflects the state of creation in its imperfection.

God allowed the results of Adam and Eve’s rebellion (Genesis 3), which resulted in the imperfect state. Even then, God subjected creation in “hope.” In other words, God has a purpose even in the futility. He will bring all of creation—even humanity—to restoration. We often use the word “hope” to mean wishful thinking. However, in the New Testament, hope is the assertion that something is beginning to take shape and nothing will stop it from completion, like a house that no one can stop from being completely built. Nothing will stop God from setting creation free from its bondage and decay.

8:22–25. Both believers and creation itself “groan” in the midst of the imperfections brought by sin. Both wait for redemption. Redemption means to be freed from slavery or from bondage. Those who have Christ’s salvation are the “first fruits” or the first to experience God’s restoration, even though they will not be fully restored until Christ returns. Since hope refers to the certainty of God’s purpose, Christians can wait with patience for the restoration’s completion.

God is for Us in Prayer (8:26–27)

8:26. In addition to the glory, freedom, salvation, and hope God gives to show that he is for us, he is for us as we pray. The Holy Spirit is present and at work with us. Without that presence we cannot know what to pray for in keeping with the purpose of God. The word “help” in this verse means to “come to the aid of” or “assist.” We need supernatural help in prayer for both rescue and restoration.

8:27. In Jewish thought, the term “heart” referred to the core of the person, the place of the will, thoughts, and emotions of a person. God knows us, and the cooperation of God and the Spirit keeps us from

praying for what is contrary to his will. If people seek God, the Holy Spirit will help them seek the eternal purposes of God for themselves, others, and the rest of creation.

God is for Us in All Things (8:28–31)

8:28. We know that God does not “work” all things. God does not cause evil, for example. The sense of the statement here is that God works in all things to bring out the good, including good from our tragedies and failures. The events that bring suffering are not eternal, people are. Yet humanity disrupted God’s purpose for them and creation through rebellion, which results in our groaning and creation’s groaning as we move toward God’s restoration.

8:29. Paul spoke here of the final result of God’s saving work. Those who are in Jesus, “conformed to his image,” are the saved ones. Paul was not saying that God predetermines (a word different from the word predestination) which individuals will be saved and which will be damned. Also, Paul spoke in a corporate sense rather than an individual sense. Just as God decided ahead of time that anyone who was a part of obedient Israel (a corporate people) was to be included in his people, so anyone who belongs to Jesus will be his people.

For example, a football team is predestined (the destiny of) to play a game next weekend. When players are invited to join the team, and they choose to do so, then those persons become a part of the “predestined” who will play when the weekend arrives. “God so loved the world . . .” (John 3:16) means that God invites everyone to become a part of his people, but a person must accept the invitation to believe in order to be saved and become part of those who are predestined. Those who do so are being justified (declared not guilty of sin) and glorified (conformed to Jesus’ image).

God is for Us in His Love (8:31–39)

8:31–34. Having established that God is working his glory (for the true nature and purpose of things) for the redeemed and creation, Paul asked the obvious question: “If God is for us, who is against us?” It doesn’t matter who or what is against us if God is for us! No higher authority,

no higher court, or no higher power exists above him. For this reason, nothing can reverse his justification and glorification of his people and the restoration of his creation. God gave his Son for all of humanity so that some might be saved. Since he went to those lengths for salvation, he will hold nothing back; he will supply everything else we need in this life and the next.

8:35–39. God's giving up his son for humanity was an act of unconditional, unmerited, and unlimited love. God acted for us out of his initiative. Such love is far greater and truer than any other kind of love that we could ever experience. God's love was expressed in the death of Jesus on the cross. We were on our way to certain execution because of our rebellion, but Jesus came and took our place that we may be liberated.

Can this love be taken from us? Paul spoke of a number of things that might indicate that God's love is absent. He acknowledged that suffering is a reality, and that believers are "sheep to be slaughtered," a reference to persecution and martyrdom. However, in Jesus, believers are more than conquerors. *Nothing* can separate us from God's love in Christ. Even death does not conquer this love. Jesus, the love of God incarnate, was raised from the dead, and so are those who turn to him in faith. Love is a living relationship; you cannot have a relationship with a dead person. God conquered death in Jesus which allows for an ongoing, never-ending love relationship with him.

Focusing on the Meaning

The answer to the big question of why God allows suffering and evil is too big for us to comprehend because we are finite beings with limited knowledge. We can find some answers, and we should, but ultimate solutions will elude us on this side of heaven. The loss of a young man on the battlefield can be chalked up to evil and the disastrous decisions of human beings, but in the light of a majestic and all-powerful God, why would a good and loving God allow this to happen? The blame falls on human beings and their rebelliousness, not on God. God gives us freedom to choose and have dominion (Ps. 8:5–6), but we must suffer the consequences. In a world of sin, the innocent suffer.

Paul told his audience that God is for his people even in the midst of their groaning. He takes the suffering and brings good out of it. He turns it into glory and into liberation from decay. Suffering and death are not the last word, because Jesus is the “resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Jesus’ death and resurrection are the greatest evidences of the love of God for us. Nothing can separate us from that love—not evil, not suffering, not death.

How can you look to God in your suffering and see that God is for you? Look for God’s many blessings and provisions. Also understand that suffering does not equal defeat; God turns it into victory for his people and creation. Even suffering can be redeemed for God. Again, witness Jesus, who turned his suffering into victory. God works in all things “for good for those who love God.” (8:28).

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Begin the class with a partnering-in-prayer exercise. Direct learners to listen to your instructions before they take any action. Instruct learners to:
 - Move closer to another person.
 - Share a specific request for prayer.
 - Allow your partner to pray for you; then pray for the specific request of your partner.
 - Stop praying when you hear the teacher start to pray.

At the five-minute mark, pray for God's blessing on today's lesson. Ask God to show everyone in attendance the depth of his love for them.

2. Prior to the lesson, ask a class member to share a story about how God has worked in their life in a specific and favorable way. Ask the person to share how he/she knew that God was working even in difficult circumstances and how he/she knew God was still working for their good. After the story is shared, explain to the class that today's lesson is intended to help them see that God is truly for them, regardless of their circumstances.

Guide Bible Study

3. Direct learners to gather in groups of three or four people. Direct their attention to the "Discovery Questions" handout. (A copy of this handout is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.) Instruct learners to read Romans 8:18–21 and discuss answers to the questions related to this passage (Part 1). After a few minutes, allow some groups to share their answers with the entire class. Supplement their information with information in the *Study Guide* under "Glory: Nothing Compares."

Discovery Questions

Romans 8:18–39

Part 1: Read Romans 8:18–21 and discuss answers to the following questions.

1. What marks the present existence of believers? (v. 18)
2. What do creation and believers have in common? (vv. 18–21)
3. What can believers and creation look forward to? (vv. 21)

Part 2: Read Romans 8:22–25 and discuss answers to the following questions.

1. What are believers waiting for? (vv. 22–23)
2. What does it mean that believers were “saved in hope”? (v. 24)

Part 3: Read Romans 8:26–30 and discuss answers to the following questions.

1. How does the Spirit help believers? (v. 26)
2. What does it mean that the Spirit intercedes according to God’s will? (v. 27)
3. What does it mean that God works for the good of those who love Him? (vv. 28–30)

Part 4: Read Romans 8:31–39 and respond to the following statement.

1. List ways God has demonstrated his love for believers. (vv. 31–39)

4. Keep adults in their groups. Instruct them to read Romans 8:22–25 and discuss answers to the questions related to this passage (Part 2 of the handout). Remind them that they can look for hints under the section “A Chorus of Groaning” in the *Study Guide*. Allow groups to share their answers with the entire class. Supplement their findings with information from the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide*. Ask, *How does a Christian’s perspective of suffering differ from people of other religions? (Hindu, Islam, Buddhist, etc.) How do people with no faith foundation make it through times of suffering?*

5. Again, keep adults in their groups. Direct them to read Romans 8:26–30 and to discuss answers to the questions related to this passage (Part 3 of the handout). Allow groups to share their answers. *When you struggle, do you take solace in knowing that both the Holy Spirit and Jesus are interceding for you? Explain. How can knowing that they are interceding change your perspective on your suffering?*
6. Enlist a volunteer to read Romans 8:31–39. As a group, summarize the passage, asking the class for responses to the statement under Part 4 of their handout. Utilize information in “God Is For Us” (found in the *Study Guide*). Ask, *When you are struggling, is it easy for you to remember that God is for you? How do you tend to feel when you are struggling? How can the church play a role in your life when you are suffering? Since nothing can take away God’s love, why do people struggle with believing that God is for them and that he loves them faithfully?*

Encourage Application

7. Place a large piece of paper on the wall. On it, draw a cloud. Direct learners to close their eyes. Instruct them to take three deep breaths and to exhale slowly. Then, instruct them to think about the lesson; also have them think about their life and identify ways in which God has worked on their behalf. Then allow class members to open their eyes.
8. Share with learners that in the world of technology, a “cloud” is used to store data that can be easily retrieved at any time from any place. Distribute markers. Instruct adults to record on the poster instances when God worked in their lives. Allow a few adults to share their stories. Ask, *How can others’ stories encourage you? How can your story encourage others?*
9. To end the class, recite together the following statement: *God is for me.* Repeat this several times. Encourage the class to remember this statement and to ask God to help them believe it fully. Close in prayer, thanking God for his working in the lives of those present.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Begin class by asking learners to share their favorite childhood superhero. Ask why class members chose those particular heroes. Inform learners that today's lesson is based on Romans 8:18–39, and is designed to help them see that God is for them, regardless of their circumstances—that he is their hero.

Guide Bible Study

2. Use a board or flipchart to display the lesson passages according to the following outline:
 - Glory: Nothing Compares (8:18–21)
 - A Chorus of Groaning (8:22–25)
 - The Spirit's Wordless Prayers (8:26–30)
 - God Is For Us (8:31–39)

Explain that you will be referring to this outline during the session. Tell class members that they can follow along in the *Study Guide*, as these points mirror those in the guide.

Call on a class member to read Romans 8:18–21. Ask, *When you were growing up, what comparisons did you make with others?* (grades, height, weight, boyfriend/girlfriend, car, etc.) *How do adults make comparisons? What would make Paul say that our suffering is not even worth comparing to the glory that believers will eventually experience?* Highlight the first point in the outline on the board (or flipchart). Remind class members that Paul had experienced intense suffering and yet could confidently proclaim this truth. Ask, *How do you picture this future glory? How does this future give you hope in what you are going through right now? Allow adults to share their answers.*

3. Direct the class to name things that groan or reasons why people groan (floorboards, woman in labor, a bad pun, being subject to a dictator, etc.). Then call on a volunteer to read Romans 8:22–25. Call on three people to read the three paragraphs under "A Chorus of

Groaning” in the *Study Guide*. Highlight the second point in the outline on the board (or flipchart). Ask, *How can creation—something without a mouth or vocal chords—groan? Have you ever been moved to groaning?* Talk about a time in your life when you groaned inwardly. Give class members a chance to share their experiences. Ask, *How can groaning be a good thing for us as believers?* (This deep sighing is a sign that this world is not our home; it’s a reminder that we are made for heaven, not earth)

4. Read Romans 8:26–28. Highlight the third point in the outline on the board (or flipchart). Using information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide*, explain how the Holy Spirit intercedes for believers. Ask, *When you think of the Holy Spirit praying for you, what pictures or thoughts come to mind? Does knowing that the Holy Spirit is praying for you make any difference when you are suffering? Why or why not? Why can the Holy Spirit pray more effectively than you or I could? What helps you to pray “in accordance with the will of God” like the Holy Spirit does?*
5. On the bottom of the outline you created on the board, write the following: God is for _____. Direct the class members to read the statement silently, putting their names in the blank space. Ask, *On a scale from 1–10, with one being “not at all” and ten being “completely,” how much do you believe that statement?* Allow class members to respond. Generate discussion by asking why class members chose a particular number. Read Romans 8:31–39. Ask, *How many of you know this passage well? Why? How might knowing these verses make them seem less rich in truth?* Direct attention back to verses 38–39. Ask, *Can you think of anything that Paul failed to include in this list?* Discuss the all-encompassing nature of the list and its significance. Ask, *If these verses are true, why do you think so many believers live as if they are not true for them?*

Encourage Application

6. Direct class members to read the case study in the *Study Guide* (in the sidebar). Instruct class members to break into groups and to discuss a possible solution to the case study. To close the Bible study,

encourage members of each group to share one truth they learned in today's Bible study. Close in prayer.

LESSON 10

God's Choice and Our Responsibility

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 9:1–8, 10:1–21

BACKGROUND

Romans 9–11

MAIN IDEA

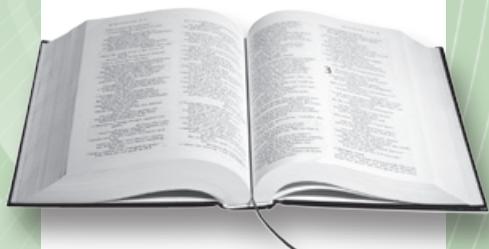
God chose to reveal himself through Israel, and everyone who chooses him will be saved.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What is the difference between hearing the gospel and responding to it?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to understand that the proper response to the gospel is individual trust and confession, not a reliance on religious heritage



BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

Most Bible scholars agree that both Jews and Gentiles composed the membership of the church at Rome. Romans 9–11 forms a unique section as Paul continued to discuss God’s salvation in Jesus Christ. In these chapters, he spoke about a dispute regarding Jewish and Gentile salvation. Consequently, one of the major underlying subtexts of Romans is the matter of election, which refers to God’s choosing a people for himself. Jewish Christians considered themselves to be God’s chosen people by virtue of Old Covenant promises, so Gentiles could not become God’s chosen people as well.

This controversy created tension in the church. Should Gentiles (non-Jews) come to Christ through the Old Covenant first by becoming Jews before they became believers? To do so, they had to adopt Jewish law, be circumcised, and be loyal to Israel. Gentiles believed they could come into Jesus’ church just as they were, without reference to national or ethnic identification as an Israelite. Has God, then, contradicted his choice of the Jews as his special people? Can both Jews and Gentiles be chosen people? Paul set out to resolve such issues by explaining God’s sovereignty, Jewish history, and the sacrificial role of Jesus the Christ as Savior.

In these chapters, Paul discussed the Jews and Gentiles as two groups rather than individual people. Jews are one group; the Gentiles are another. Ephesians 2:11–22 gives a clear example of people as corporate entities. In Christ, God created “one new humanity in place of the two” (Ephesians 2:15). Anyone can choose to join this new humanity by choosing to follow Jesus. If someone does not choose Jesus, then he or she is not one of the chosen. Everyone, however, is invited to choose Jesus. Humanity’s responsibility is to respond to the salvation Christ offers.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Where Caring Hurts (9:1–5)

9:1–3. Paul was a passionate person. He was especially zealous about his people, fellow Jews. The fact that so many of them did not become followers of Christ gave him “sorrow and anguish in his heart” (9:2). The Greek translation of the word “heart” indicates that his pain for fellow Israelites involved Paul’s will, thought, and emotions. His concern for them consumed him. His sorrow and anguish were unceasing. He thought about the eternal state of his fellow Jews all the time. Because he understood that they would go to hell without accepting Jesus as the Messiah, and because he loved his people so much, he wished to take their place. He was willing to sacrifice himself as one separated from Jesus so that the Jews might know Jesus as Savior. The Jews rejected Jesus, and Paul could not choose for them.

9:4–5. The Israelites had extensive revelation given to them. From the Israelites, from one of their own people, came Jesus the Messiah. As Messiah, he is Israel’s true king and hence “over all” (9:5). A king personifies and exemplifies his people, and yet ethnic Israel largely refused to identify with Jesus. Thus, even with the law, covenants, promises, and God’s seeking of a relationship with them; the Jews rejected the chance to be God’s people through Jesus.

Family of Faith, Not of Blood (9:6–8)

9:6–8. Who comprises the true Israel? Is it not those whose lineage can be traced back to Abraham? No. Even before Christ came, true Israelites were those who belonged to the promise of salvation—those who chose to walk with God in faith. Paul gave two examples. First, the promise of Israel came through Isaac rather than Ishmael (Genesis 17:15–22), although both were sons of Abraham. Second, true Israelites are the people of promise rather than people of ethnic identity with Abraham. Paul used the term “Israel,” to refer to a people-of-God identity instead of ethnic, political, or national identity. Who are the children of promise? Since all the promises of God are now fulfilled in Jesus, and since Jesus is the one who fulfills the promise, those who choose to turn to

Jesus are the true Israelites. The church established in Christ is the Israel of God.

By Faith Alone (10:1–13)

10:1–4. Paul certainly did not give up on his fellow Israelites. He witnessed to Jews even as he served as an apostle to the Gentiles. He knew that his fellow Jews had a hunger for God. The term “zeal” (10:2) expresses intense enthusiasm, eagerness, or desire for something. The Jews’ knowledge about God and his plan was incomplete and inaccurate, which led to their misdirected zeal. They thought their righteousness had already been established because they were chosen people and because they followed God’s law.

God’s righteousness, however, is based upon a person’s relationship to Christ. The law pointed to the future Messiah, but many Israelites misunderstood their relationship to the law and their status as the chosen people. They failed to see Christ as the culmination and fulfillment of the law (Matthew 5:17). By his sinless life and sacrifice on the cross, Jesus covers the sin that the law illuminates. He establishes a right relationship with God for everyone who believes in him. To believe involves investing one’s life—one’s thinking, feeling, and actions—in Jesus; it is not mere intellectual assent.

10:5–8. Paul recounted how Moses told the Israelites that the commandments were not in heaven or across the sea where one would have to go and search for them (Deuteronomy 30:11–14). Rather, God’s law was very near—in the mouth and heart. In other words, righteousness came by hearing the spoken words of God and committing to him with the heart. So where can one find and hear these words? There is no need to search in heaven, because Jesus came to us. There is no reason to go to the depths because Jesus was raised from the dead.

Jesus came to us as a human to share life with us and to establish righteousness in himself through his death and resurrection. He lives in us as the Messiah the Old Testament prophets foretold. Quoting from Deuteronomy 30:14, Paul told his Jewish brothers and sisters that the word is available and imminent. The word comes to us as the proclaimed Jesus. Jesus is the “Word” (John 1:1–4) who has come to humanity.

10:9–13. Whoever confesses (that is, acknowledges that Jesus is Lord) and believes in their heart (to faith place one's life in the living Christ) will be saved. In confession and belief, one is justified, or declared free from guilt. The phrase “will not be put to shame” means that God will honor a person's confession and belief. Nothing can cause God to take back his salvation, for he is God and he keeps his promises. The Lord is generous, meaning that he does not hold back from those who call on him, whether Jew or Gentile. “Everyone” is an inclusive term, so whoever calls on Jesus in confession and belief will be granted righteousness by faith.

Israel's Choice of Rejecting

10:14–17. Why had Israel failed to believe? Perhaps someone asked, “How can they believe in him if they have never heard? How can they hear if there is no preacher? And how can someone proclaim to them if no one is sent to do so?” Hearing and believing were foremost in Paul's answer when he quoted from Isaiah 52:7. The message had come to the Jews as it had come in Isaiah's time. Someone with “beautiful feet” brought the “good news” (10:15). Paul made the case that most Israelites had heard but had rejected the good news.

10:18. Paul strengthened his argument that the Jews had heard the good news by quoting from Psalm 19:4, which dramatically emphasizes that the message had gone out into the entire earth. The disciples, early apostles, Paul, and other early believers proclaimed the gospel to Jews and Gentiles and to the ends of the earth. Thus, the Jewish people in Rome had no excuse for rejecting Jesus as the promised Messiah.

10:19–21. Perhaps the Israelites did not understand the message, someone might suggest. To refute that idea, Paul quoted Deuteronomy 32:2, making the point that other nations heard and responded even when Israel did not. The Gentiles, Paul asserted, responded to the gospel message when so many Israelites failed to do so. He further supported his argument with a quote from Isaiah 65:1–2. Even non-Israelites who did not seek God found him. In the meantime, God reached out with open hands to a people who constantly rejected him, always willing to accept anyone who would come to him in faith. Anyone who hears the gospel

and rejects it (like the Jews) is counted the same as the Israelites of Paul's day—outside of salvation. God does not want this result. He invites all to hear, confess, and trust Jesus for eternal salvation.

Focusing on the Meaning

This lesson challenges believers to understand how faith alone makes a person right with God. We are challenged to proclaim the good news to others so that they may come into right standing with God. From this lesson, we can affirm that God called the Israelites in the Old Testament to be his people. He also called others who were not Jews, because Israel was to be a “light to the nations” (Isa. 42:6). The term “Israel” refers to the true people of God, the people of the “promise” (Rom. 9:8), rather than an ethnic or national/political identity.

We can also affirm that in the New Testament (New Covenant), God calls all people to himself through Jesus the Christ. Anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior belongs to the people of God. People who are “in Christ” comprise the “new Israel.” The Old Covenant is not replaced; it is fulfilled and completed in Jesus. If we are believers in Jesus, we are of his church, his people, and we are the Israel of God.

Paul desired passionately that his fellow Israelites would hear the word of Jesus and be saved. He saw the Gentiles becoming the people of God, just as they were, through faith in Jesus. He wanted to see the whole of Israel do the same thing. Just like Paul, believers are called to be passionately concerned about and witness to our brothers and sisters who stand outside of faith in Christ. God has done this great work in history in Christ to save anyone who calls on the Lord for salvation. Just hearing the good news of God's salvation in Christ is not enough to become a part of the people of God. Faith—trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior—is necessary. Everyone is invited to make this choice.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Begin the class with a triangle prayer exercise. Direct learners to get into groups of three with at least one person with whom they have not prayed recently. Instruct learners to share a specific request for prayer. After the first person shares, the group should bow and the other two group members should pray. Then the second person should share and the group should repeat the process. Each person will pray for two others. After a few minutes, pray for God's instruction and for the learners to have receptive hearts during today's lesson.
2. Distribute paper and pens to the class and direct the class to list their top 10 favorite songs of all time. Direct learners to gather in groups of three to four people. Instruct them to discuss their song lists with the other group members. Allow a few learners to share their song lists with the entire class. Inform learners that you will return to the song lists later during the class session. Then explain that today's lesson is designed to help them understand the proper response to the gospel.

Guide Bible Study

3. Prior to class, gather a variety of art supplies, such as construction paper, poster board, markers, scissors, glue, and so forth. Using information from the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* and additional material from the *Study Guide*, discuss how Romans 9–11 fits into the overall organization of the book of Romans. Group the class into three teams. Distribute the "Discovery Questions" team assignments below to each team. (A copy of these team assignments is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Team 1: Read Romans 9:1–9 and discuss answers to the following questions. Use “God Revealed” in the *Study Guide* for help. Then use the supplies to present your information in a creative way.

- How did Paul describe his affection for Israel? (9:2–3)
- What advantages did Israel have, according to Paul? (9:4–5)
- How does Israel’s history demonstrate the fulfillment of God’s promises? (9:5–8)
- What does Israel’s history teach people today about belief?

Team 2: Read Romans 10:1–13 and discuss answers to the following questions. Use “Imperfect Vessels” in the *Study Guide* for help. Then use the supplies to present your information in a creative way.

- Why does Paul refer to his readers as “brothers?” (10:1)
- What is the content of Paul’s prayer? (10:2–3)
- What were some of Israel’s shortcomings and acts of disobedience that we have committed? (10:1–4, 16)
- What is the distinction between righteousness based on the law and righteousness based on faith? (10:5–13)
- According to Paul, what do Jews and Gentiles have in common? (10:9–13)
- What does it mean to “call on the name of the Lord?” What does that look like in a person’s life?

Team 3: Read Romans 10:14–21 and discuss answers to the following questions. Use “An Imperfect Analogy” in the *Study Guide* for help. Then use the supplies to present your information in a creative way.

- What did Paul say about hearing the gospel? (10:14–15)
- Why would Paul use the word “beautiful” to describe feet?
- According to Paul, did the Israelites have any excuse for not responding to the word of God? Why? (10:16–18)
- In these verses, how did Paul describe the Israelites? Why? (10:19–21)
- Why is it important to learn from the Israelites’ example?

Allow several minutes for the teams to complete their work. Instruct each team to read its verses and present its information. Supplement the presentations by asking the questions from each team’s assignment.

Encourage Application

4. Direct learners' attention back to their Top 10 song lists. Vote to determine the most popular list. As a group, work together to write a song based on the Main Idea of the lesson: *God chose to reveal himself through Israel, and everyone who chooses him will be saved.* Don't worry so much about the rhythm. Focus on the lyrics, and if you have time, go back and work on making the words and music sync. As an alternative, you can enlist a musician in your church to complete this activity before the lesson and then present the song as a summary of the lesson.
5. Close in prayer.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. To open the Bible study, read the following story:

Ripley's Believe It or Not! was a documentary television show based on the newspaper panel series and radio broadcast of Robert L. Ripley. It introduced audiences to amazing phenomena that stretched the limits of the imagination such as sword swallowers, glass-eating people and a man who lifted weights with his hook-pierced tongue. The show ran from 1949–50, 1982–86 and 1999–2003.

Although Ripley's name is synonymous with the extraordinary, incredible, amazing, mind-blowing and mind-boggling, he was not the first to introduce an amazing feat or fact. Long before Mr. Ripley, God introduced to the world the most remarkable, amazing, mind-blowing and mind-boggling experience known to humanity. He introduced the plan of salvation through Jesus.

Guide the class in an opening prayer. Encourage the class to ask God to help them understand the truths from today's focal passages.

Guide Bible Study

2. Use a board or flipchart to display the lesson passages according to the following outline:
 - God Revealed (Romans 9:1–9)
 - Imperfect Vessels (Romans 10:1–16)
 - An Imperfect Analogy (Romans 10:17–21)
3. Use information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments from this *Teaching Guide* to summarize the three major sections in Romans, explaining that Romans 9–11 falls in the middle of this theological discussion. Then enlist a volunteer to read Romans 9:1–9. Explain how God revealed himself to Israel throughout its history as a nation. Ask, *What is the significance of God's revelation to Israel for Israel? What is the significance of God's revelation to Israel for other people groups? How is God's revelation to Israel important to you and me?* Point out Paul's passion for his people. Ask, *Have you ever seen someone else demonstrate this kind of love for lost people?* Explain.
4. Call on a class member to read Romans 10:1–16. Point out the Jewish responsibility for rejecting God's way of righteousness (10:1–4). Describe the distinction between righteousness based on the law and righteousness based on faith. Explain the term "confess" and describe its relationship to belief in the salvation process. Ask, *How would you define "saved" based on these verses? What are some specific ways that people today demonstrate righteousness based on rules rather than faith? How can we avoid or overcome the tendency to become self-righteous in our attitudes and actions?*
5. Enlist a volunteer to read Romans 10:17–21. Summarize these verses. Discuss the difference between the way the Gentiles responded to the gospel (Isaiah 65:1) and how the Jews responded (Isa. 65:2; Jeremiah 35:17) to the gospel. Point out that each group of people had a choice to make, and for people today, the choice still remains. People must choose to accept the gospel or reject it.

Encourage Application

6. Distribute paper and pens to each person. Direct the class to write down vertically the letters to the word “gospel.” Inform class members that they are going to develop an acrostic using the word “gospel.” Each word should somehow relate to the message of the gospel and the need to respond to it. For example, an acrostic that highlights the gospel might be:

- G** — God initiated a relationship with the people he created
- O** — Open to all
- S** — Salvation can only come through faith in Christ
- P** — Perfection is what the law demanded, and what people couldn’t attain
- E** — Each person must choose
- L** — Love motivated Christ to die for you

Inform learners that they may work in teams or help each other during this activity. After a few minutes, allow several of the class members to share their acrostics. Reiterate the fact that every person must choose whether or not he or she will accept the offer of forgiveness through trust in Christ. Point out that refusing to decide is a decision itself. Close in prayer.

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 12:1–21

BACKGROUND

Romans 12:1–21

MAIN IDEA

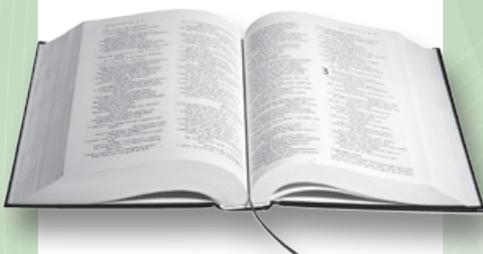
Our response to the gospel should result in a lifestyle of worship.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can I pursue a lifestyle of worship?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to offer themselves to God as living sacrifices, exercising their spiritual gifts in love



LESSON 11

A Lifestyle of Worship

BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

“I have a previous obligation,” the lady replied after I invited her to the new member tea at my house. She talked about her busy schedule, her weary body overloaded with meetings, and her phone overwhelmed with calendar appointments and personal obligations. Hurry, worry, and busyness seemed to drift through her mind, out of her mouth, and into my ears. Her obligations impacted her calendar. But what obligations affect the heart?

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he began by explaining why he wrote: his obligation to deliver the gospel of which he was not ashamed (1:14–16). Paul’s language, “I am bound,” “I am eager,” and “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” all speak of duty bred from passion and love for the Savior.

Paul also knew Roman culture demanded both an adherence to Roman law and duties or obligations. Children, parents, citizens, merchants, government workers, consumers, and religious leaders all lived under the obligation to perform their duties. Each person fulfilled obligations, keeping the Roman world functioning in a smooth fashion. To refuse obligations produced tension and conflict.

The same applies for us today. Each day you have obligations: to arrive at work on time; to pay your mortgage, rent, or automobile payments; to make an appointment such as a meeting at work, at the dentist, or to deliver your automobile to the repair shop. The same applies for most people every day in every city in every country.

In Romans 12, Paul introduced new obligations for Christ followers with the word “therefore,” indicating a connection to what he had written previously. Paul introduced the importance of worship as a means of encouraging the peace of God, healthy relationships, and humble service through Christ. Paul pursued a lifestyle of worship. He strived for personal transformation and renewal through Christ and challenged the church to do the same.¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

Worship as a Living Sacrifice (12:1–3)

12:1. Paul introduced the primary obligation of the Christian: offering one's body as a "living sacrifice," that is an act of worship before God (12:1). Public, ritual, and ceremonial sacrifices thrived in Rome. For example, a Roman general and his army entering the city after a military victory would culminate the occasion in a ritual sacrifice in a pagan temple. Paul revolutionized the idea of sacrifice by introducing the idea of a *living* sacrifice, that is, giving one's life to God over and over for him to use as he wills.

In worship, believers celebrate God's mercies. Worshippers draw near to God in remembrance of all he has done in the past and all he promises to do in the future. This correct understanding of God's work in the world and in individual lives results in a deep trust in the character of God, which then gives believers the confidence and faith necessary to offer their lives to him daily as an act of worship. Every day becomes another chance to express thanks to God and demonstrate trust in God to use believers as he desires, knowing that his goodness and sovereignty direct them.

12:2. This act of living, daily worship focuses on a consistent relationship with God and submission to him rather than being conformed to the pattern or mold of the world. Believers are transformed (12:2). "Transformed" comes from the Greek word *metamorphosis*, highlighting an internal change with external results. Think of a caterpillar spinning a woven chrysalis and emerging as a beautiful butterfly. Worship transforms your heart (internal) to motivate Christian action (external). Daily worship makes a difference as it changes you from the inside out.

12:3. A renewed mind results in a lifestyle both of worship and service. Worship spawns service. Service renews worship by reminding us of God's grace, Christ's humility, and the importance of each person working in unity and purpose in the church (12:3–5). Paul warned against haughtiness or pride (12:3). The Greeks and Romans exhibited their self-assurance through hubris, an arrogance worse than pride. Worship does not invite haughtiness, arrogance, or puffed-up pride, but humility

in the shadow of the cross and in the joy of service. Christ has set the example for us to follow.

Grace, Gifts, and the Body (12:4–8)

12:4–8. Paul indicated that grace-gifts come to individuals, saying, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us” (12:6). The word “gifts” comes from the Greek word *charismata*, which is where we find the root of the word “charisma.” If you think of charisma, you might think of a person’s “personality.” Thus, in a sense, God’s grace (*charis*) leads us to use our gifts according to each person’s personality, with the goal of building up the body of Christ.

Paul also explained that in building the church two things must be kept in mind: 1.) Each member has value in God’s kingdom and his church; and 2.) No person should be undervalued, because God uses all kinds of people to accomplish his work. This message was in stark contrast to the surrounding Roman culture. Rome hailed pride (“I am smarter than you”), competition (“I am stronger, more powerful than you”), and comparison (“I am better than you”).

Using our gifts can be an act of worship, as we care for and encourage others in the body of Christ, the church (12:4–5). Paul applauded humility that produced service that is beautiful and pleasing in God’s eyes. God graces people with Spirit-led abilities to prophesy, to serve, to teach, to encourage, to give, to lead, and to show mercy in the spirit of cheerfulness (12:6–8). Paul moved from worship as sacrifice (12:1–2), to worship as service (12:3–8), and on to worship as specific acts of love (12:9–21).

Sincere Love (12:9–21)

12:9. In this section of Scripture, Paul focused on the practical application of worship, sacrifice, and the use of spiritual gifts. These verses speak of Christian ethics that are applied primarily within the body of believers. However, these same ethics should also be applied when believers interact with the non-Christian culture. Paul first mentioned love (12:9). Love holds the church together; it adheres the people to God and to each other. The word Paul used for love was not a reference to

human love (*eros*) or friendship (*phileo*). Rather, he used the word *agape*, which indicated a sacrificial, unconditional love.

12:10–12. This love is expressed in practical actions that Paul outlined in the remaining verses of the chapter. He challenged believers to hate evil and cling to what is good (12:9). He told believers to practice brotherly love toward each other (12:10). In today's vernacular, we might understand this as treating others as family, demonstrating the love and honor reserved for family. Paul also spoke of developing and keeping one's spiritual fervor even in difficult times by choosing to be joyful in hope, holding up under the load of affliction, and praying persistently (12:11–12).

12:13–18. In verses 13–18, Paul focused on how believers should treat those with whom they may not have a deep relationship. He told the Roman Christians to practice hospitality by serving as a host to guests and to share with those in dire need (12:13). Going a step further, believers are called to bless even their enemies, a true sacrifice of love. Paul also told Christ followers to rejoice in times of joy (even when you don't feel like celebrating), and to mourn with the grieving (12:14–16). Believers must not repay evil with evil (because Jesus did not) and seek to live at peace with all people if possible (12:17–18).

12:19–21. In verses 19–21, Paul outlined how to treat one's enemies. Bluntly stated, Paul told the believers to refrain from seeking revenge. (12:19) Rome operated as a vengeful, violent society. Against this backdrop, Paul encouraged his readers to let God handle justice in his time. In fact, rather than seek revenge, believers are called to serve their enemies by caring for their physical needs, such as food and drink (12:20). This difficult response to one's enemies was the ultimate example of overcoming evil with good (12:21).

Focusing on the Meaning

Worship inspires Christ-like character, which in turn produces Christ-like service. Worship exalts God, humbles self, values each person in light of Christ, and celebrates God's grace. This worship is expressed in

serving the body of Christ and the world at large. Paul's challenge to the Roman Christians echoed the commands of Jesus. In the Book of Mark, Christ said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30–31). In Luke, Jesus challenged his followers to love their enemies, to bless those who curse them, and to pray for those who mistreat them (Luke 6:27–29). At least one disciple took the lesson to heart—the Apostle Peter noted, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8–9).

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Before the lesson, tape a large sheet of paper to a wall. As adults arrive, distribute markers and have the class members write down the names of people whose lifestyle is famous or infamous. After everyone has had an opportunity to respond, review the answers. Ask, *What would you think it takes to qualify as “famous” or “infamous?” Is either one of these a good trait? Explain.*
2. Say, *As we move into the exhortation chapters of Romans, chapters 12–14, Paul immediately challenges us to live a certain lifestyle—as a devoted Christ-follower. There’s no television show that focuses on people with that kind of lifestyle, unlike many of the people we just talked about. However, we are going to create the script and sequencing for one. Open in prayer.*

Guide Bible Study

3. Prior to the lesson, gather lots of art supplies for this activity, such as poster board, markers, glue, scissors, construction paper, and so forth.

Explain that you will need three leaders who will be willing to think creatively and direct a team. Allow for volunteers (or enlist leaders if nobody speaks up). Encourage your class to have fun with this learning assignment. They may prefer other methods, but we all need to try some new things. Divide the class into three equal teams, each paired with a leader. Give each team the following Scriptures and sections from the *Study Guide*:

Scene 1 Team: Romans 12:1–2 and “Worship Through the Renewing of Our Minds”

Scene 2 Team: Romans 12:3–8 and “Worship by Exercising My Spiritual Gifts”

Scene 3 Team: Romans 12:9–21 and “Worship by Loving Others Sincerely”

Give each team a copy of the following instructions. (A copy of these instructions is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

- a. Create a “title” for your scene.
- b. Describe graphics or pictures that could illustrate your scene. Why did you pick these pictures?
- c. What Christian lifestyle is presented in these verses? How can a Christ-follower develop this way of life? Make a list of the necessary action(s). This is your “script.”
- d. Every drama involves conflict and resolution. What conflict is present in your verses? How could you resolve it?
- e. Be prepared to share your “scene” with the larger group. Feel free to be creative. You can use the art supplies provided to draw a storyboard or even create some props to illustrate your scene.

4. Allow teams several minutes to work. Bring teams back together. After reading the Scripture passage assigned to them, allow each team to share their scenes. Make sure each team shares its answers to each question. After each team presents its scene, supplement their work with information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments from this *Teaching Guide*. You can also use questions in the Discussion Teaching Plan to help facilitate examination of the Scripture.

Encourage Application

5. Ask, *Of the two ways of living—the famous/infamous lifestyle or the Christ-follower lifestyle—which do you think is more difficult to achieve and maintain? Why? What is appealing in each lifestyle? What is the drawback to each lifestyle? Do you think many Christians try to live both kinds of lives? Why or why not?*

6. Hand out 3x5 note cards to each member. Ask the class to record at least one truth that stood out to them during the Bible study, perhaps an attitude they need to change or a character trait they need to ask God to change in them. Direct the class to put their note cards in their Bibles this week as a reminder to pray about what God showed them. Then close in prayer. Call attention to the sidebars at the end of the *Study Guide* and encourage the class to read and reflect on them this week.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Direct the class to answer this question: What is love? Encourage them to think about whether love consists of actions, feelings, attitudes, or a combination of the three. After a few minutes, say, “*I Love You*” is not just something we say, it’s something we do. When Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” He replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37–38). Ask, How do we show God we love him? What are things we can do? In other words, how do we literally obey this commandment? List their responses on the board.
2. Say, *One of the ways we express love to God is in our worship. Romans 12 talks about a lifestyle of worship. As we read the Scripture, watch for all the ways the Apostle Paul challenged Christ-followers to live a lifestyle of worship.*

Guide Bible Study

3. Have a volunteer read the first heading in the *Study Guide*, followed by Romans 12:1–2. Ask, *What instruction did Paul give in these verses? What do these verses mean? How can we accomplish this command?* Use information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* to explain the concept of “living sacrifices.” Ask: *Would you say this verse is optional or required for*

the Christ-follower? Why? How would you explain being a “living sacrifice” to a new Christian?

Enlist a class member to reread Romans 12:2. Ask, *What do you think Paul meant when he challenged believers to be transformed by renewing their minds? What everyday illustration might explain this?* Use the Bible Comments from this *Teaching Guide and Study Guide* information to supplement the discussion and clarify any confusion. Say, *Transformation is like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. How would you describe the “transformation” that happens when a non-believer becomes a Christian?*

4. Call on a volunteer to read the second heading in the *Study Guide*, followed by Romans 12:3–5. Ask the following questions. Supplement answers with information from the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* and material from the *Study Guide*.
 - What specific instructions can you find in these verses?
 - What does it mean to “think more highly of yourself than you ought?”
 - How does this commandment relate to the commands in verses 1–2?
 - What is the difference between “not thinking of yourself too highly” and “thinking poorly about yourself?”
5. Ask a volunteer to read Romans 12:6–8. Present a short lecture on what Paul was saying and how these verses relate to the first part of the chapter, as well as the verses that come after. Ask: *What do these verses have in common?*
6. Direct a class member to read the third heading in the *Study Guide*. Instruct the class to read Romans 12:9–21 silently, counting the number of things Paul tells us to do. Ask, *How many different commands did you find?* (There are at least twenty, depending on the translation). Direct the class to call out the different commands in these verses. As they do, write them down on the board or a large sheet of paper.

Encourage Application

7. Ask, *Which one of the commands in this chapter stood out to you? How can God expect so much from us as his followers? Which one of the instructions is the hardest for you to follow? Why?* Point out that each of these actions creates harmony and fellowship in the family of God, but they also point back to the first two verses of the chapter. Explain that how we treat others can be an act of worship, just like singing a hymn or raising our hands. Those who cannot love others demonstrate that they have not experienced God's transforming love.
8. Close in silent, directed prayer. Lead the class to pray silently for the following, giving them about 10–15 seconds for each item:
 - For God's help and guidance
 - To see one way to become a living sacrifice for Jesus
 - For God to give you opportunities to serve him and his church
 - To have a right understanding of others and yourself in God's family
 - To give you the opportunity to make a difference for Christ in a person's life
 - To be faithful in prayer
 - To practice hospitality
 - To forgive those who may have hurt you or a loved one
 - To overcome evil with good
 - That Christ will help you live a life of worship

Close out the prayer time, asking God to help your church to practice a lifestyle of worship every day of the week. Encourage the class to read and reflect on the sidebars in their *Study Guide* during the week.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 11–13 are from the New International Version (1984 edition).

LESSON 12

Civic Responsibility and Neighborly Love

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 13

BACKGROUND

Romans 13

MAIN IDEA

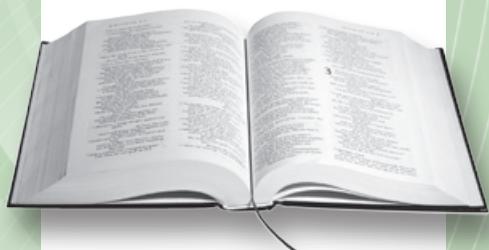
Gospel-centered living includes submitting to governmental authorities and loving your neighbors.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What are my responsibilities to the government and to my neighbors?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to recognize and embrace their responsibility to submit to governmental authorities and to express love to their neighbors



BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

“I voted.” The Facebook post showed a picture of a lady wearing a red, white, and blue shirt with a sticker attached to her lapel, indicating that she had voted in a recent election. Voting in our country is considered both a right and privilege. People in many other countries do not enjoy the honor of choosing their government officials.

Another Facebook post caught my eye: a coconut crème pie with meringue glittered with coconut. The savory picture came with a comment asking for prayers for a friend: “I am taking this pie to her. She has not been feeling well.”

While these two stories may seem disconnected, they both illustrate topics Paul addressed in his letter to the Romans—relating to the government and relating to one’s neighbors. This letter seems to answer questions that the Christians might have been asking as they sought to live out their newly found faith: Should I pray for government leaders? How should I treat my neighbors, especially if they refuse my faith and act mean toward me in return? What should a Christian make of Roman power, government, oppression, occasional brutality, and the emperor Nero?

Near the time of this writing, Nero reigned as the emperor of the Roman Empire. His tenure was marked by violence on several occasions. He boasted of his greatness and craved attention from his constituents, manifested by his acting on the Greek stage. If you read history, some researchers suggest Nero himself might have burned Rome, blaming Christians, and then persecuting them. Not everything Nero did as emperor proved malevolent, but the tension he created throughout Rome produced a cautious and skeptical approach toward government as well as individuals.

Read Romans 13 in the context of Jesus answering two questions in Luke’s Gospel: “Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (Luke 20:22); and “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). What is due Caesar (government officials)? What does a neighbor deserve? Keep in mind the privileges and duties (obligations) of the Christian as you study this chapter.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Civic Duty of Submission (13:1–2)

13:1. The average citizen did not vote in first-century Rome like in America today. However, each citizen still held civic duties and obligations. Roman politicians like the lawyer Cicero (prior to Paul's day) pointed out such responsibilities. Paul introduced the civic responsibility of the Christian—to submit to governing authorities (13:1). Notice the plural use of the word. In doing so, Paul set forth the importance of national submission to the emperor, as well as regional submission to a political official known as an *equite*, who rode a horse through an area and monitored peace. The plural usage also implied submission to local authorities such as a tax collector. “Render to Caesar his due” had widespread implications not just on the national level, but on the local level as well.

13:2. Consider, though, a leader like Nero. Why would Paul tell Christians to submit to him? Keep in mind that Paul probably wrote this letter during the early years of Nero's reign, before he carried out his acts of violence. Paul would have had little reason to challenge Nero's authority at this point. Note also that Paul used the generic term “authorities” and did not specify particular people in office. Likely, Paul had in mind the *office* of the person in authority, not the *person* specifically. This is further supported by his understanding that God is ultimately in control over leaders, whoever they are (13:2). Believers submit to authorities (under most conditions) because ultimately, they are submitting to God.

Several other places in Scripture highlight the relationship between believers and government leaders. In his letter to Timothy, Paul encouraged believers to pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1–3). The writer of Hebrews encouraged obedience and submission to leaders as a way to help leaders (Hebrews 13:17). Peter also encouraged submission (1 Peter 2:13–14) as well as honor (1 Pet. 2:17).

Does this mean that believers should never participate in demonstrations of civil disobedience? No. Does this mean believers must agree with all that government officials promote? No. However, believers can disagree in a respectful and honorable manner. The way in which believers conduct themselves, especially in areas of hotly-debated matters of

public policy, speaks volumes to non-Christians who need to see biblical principles lived out. Such an example is found in the actions of Peter and the apostles. When told to stop preaching and teaching about Jesus, Peter and the other apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). The disciples followed Christ and remained faithful to him, while disagreeing with government officials. The disciples acted in respectful ways and even endured the consequences without slander or malice.

For the Good of the People (13:3–5)

13:3–5. Romans 13:3–5 indicates that God places leaders in authority for our good. Those leaders function to protect individual citizens and society as a whole. They are not in office to create fear and panic with their leadership. However, those who rebel against the authority and civil laws incur judgment and penalty on themselves (13:4). In other words, if you choose to lie, steal, or cheat, you will suffer the legal consequences of such actions. Following the commands in these verses might seem difficult in a godless, pagan culture devoid of Christian values. You can refer back to verse 1, where Paul asserted that “there is no authority except that which God has established” (13:1). Paul understood that ultimately, all power and authority must submit to God. Believers can submit to leaders because God is in control, his plan will be fulfilled, and he will do all he wills (Isaiah 46:11).

Give What is Due (13:6–7)

13:6–7. The adage often goes, “There are only three things certain in life: death, taxes...and change.” Paul lived in the hope of eternity, but he also recognized the importance of acting honorably and responsibly while still on earth. Thus, he reminded the believers in Rome to pay their taxes. In fact, Paul said Christians have an *obligation* to pay taxes. Taxes fund services such as protection, administration, and maintenance of civil structures and roads. In Paul’s mind, paying taxes would be yet another way to demonstrate the balance between following Jesus and honoring the government as well.

Paul aimed for consistency in the Christian walk. He encouraged believers to show honor for God, honor toward people (including civil

authorities), and mutual respect and honor to everyone (13:7). “The little things make a big difference,” an old basketball coach used to say to me. Little things done daily in duty—such as showing honor and respect—do make a difference to God, the community, and those around you.

One Constant Duty: Love (13:8–10)

13:8–10. Playing off the theme of debts and payments, Paul challenged the believers to live debt-free except in one instance: the debt of loving others. In other words, you never stop owing people love. While this verse has been used to indicate that believers should have no financial debt, the context does not support this idea (although other verses in the Bible speak to debt). In actuality, Paul appealed to the Ten Commandments and Jesus’s words to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31; 13:9; see also Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

The Ten Commandments provided a no-nonsense guide for demonstrating love on a practical, yet community level—don’t commit adultery; don’t murder; don’t steal; and don’t covet. Quoting Jesus, Paul summarized a Christian’s duty: “love your neighbor as yourself” (13:10), because in doing so, you will fulfill God’s law. Loving one’s neighbor not only benefits the person, but it also makes the community harmonious.

Walking in the Light (13:11–14)

13:11–14. Paul utilized the last verses of this chapter to contrast darkness and light, unholy activities and holiness, and impure desires and holy desires. Paul obliged Christians to resist dark deeds, such as drunkenness, orgies, immorality, and dissension. These actions are in opposition to the way of love discussed in previous verses. In contrast, Paul commanded believers to put on the armor of light (as if preparing for battle) by putting on Christ. This means demonstrating the character, attitude, and virtues of Jesus Christ. Believers stand in contrast to the world as God’s light in them pierces the darkness around them. Where God’s love builds community, God light blesses the community.

Focusing on the Meaning

One often-missed aspect of Roman culture was the distinction made by differences in Roman clothing. For example, a man wearing a purple-striped toga was considered more important than an average man wearing a white toga. A rich woman distinguished herself from poorer women by wearing what was known as a *diastola* (literally, “difference”). A person wearing purple silk trumped a cloaked person wearing linen and wool. A Roman soldier distinguished himself by wearing armor.

How interesting that Paul talked about unity, not individual differences. He emphasized the larger community when he wrote about Roman authorities, government, and tax collection. He highlighted the key to healthy community when he challenged believers to love others—even those outside the Christian faith. Paul downplayed distinctions and differences, and instead exalted Christ-like love.

Paul commended holy living in simple actions. Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself. Submit to authorities. Fear God. Honor the King. Love the brotherhood. Put off darkness. Put on light. Clothe yourself with Christ.

One lady, who was a member of a church I served as pastor, took these verses seriously. She organized prayer meetings on the local town square to pray for the nation and community. She organized food distribution to poor neighborhoods. She worked tirelessly to remove bad influences from the community. She epitomized the admonitions to love God and love your neighbors; to put on the armor of light. We would do well to follow her example.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. To open the Bible study, read the case study from the sidebar in the *Study Guide*, but do not call for response. Say: *Talking politics at church is tough because we are so passionate about the direction of our country, and we often hold strong opinions. If two people happen to hold different opinions, the conversation can become very heated, even ruining friendships or family ties.* Ask, *Why do most people avoid talking politics at church?* Point out that places of worship are not called “sanctuaries” by accident; they are a place of refuge and hope, not anger-filled debates.
2. Point out that today’s Scripture speaks about a Christian’s response to the government. Set some basic ground rules, asking class members not to refer to specific political figures or political parties. Also ask the class to remember to honor Christ in their conversations. Open in prayer.

Guide Bible Study

3. Point out the “Question to Explore,” found at the beginning of this week’s content in the *Study Guide* (What are my responsibilities to the government and to my neighbors?) Form small groups. Assign each group one of the following perspectives. If you have more than three groups, you can assign their perspectives to more than one group.
 - Roman Christians, a small group of struggling and persecuted believers
 - Our country’s founding fathers around 1775, prior to the Revolutionary War
 - Devoted Christ-followers in America today

4. Direct each group to read Romans 13:1–7 and answer the following questions that you have written out on a large sheet of paper or dry-erase board. Remind groups to answer from the perspective of the group given to them.
 - What makes these words difficult to obey? What is the biggest hurdle(s)? Why?
 - How do you feel about governing authorities?
 - What is government doing that would cause concern?
 - What two questions would you want to ask Paul about the text?
 - What is the best “take away” for you? Pick one verse to read to the group that summarizes your perspective and needs. Be prepared to share why the group chose this verse.
5. Allow approximately fifteen minutes for discovery. Then call the class back together. Read Romans 13:1–7 aloud and call for the Roman Christian group to respond to the first question. Then call on the other groups to share, reminding the class about the perspectives being presented. Repeat the process for the rest of the questions. Ask, *How did this study from different perspectives in time increase your appreciation for what Paul wrote? Do you think believers today struggle more with obedience to these verses than the early church? Explain.*
6. Call on a class member to read Romans 13:8–10. Using the information from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments from this *Teaching Guide*, summarize these verses. Then ask, *Why do you think Paul wrote about loving neighbors just after talking about government? The Study Guide contains a quote that says, “Love without a moral framework is only sentimentality. Morality without love is legalism and hypocrisy.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain.*
7. Ask a volunteer to read Romans 13:11–14. On the board, create two columns, one labeled “Deeds of Darkness” and the other “Armor of Light.” Direct the class to call out deeds of darkness that are listed in the Scripture, along with others that may not be listed. Then direct the class to call out actions that would demonstrate that a person has put on the armor of light. Then ask, *What do you think Paul meant when he told the Roman Christians to clothe themselves with Christ?*

Encourage Application

8. Give each person a notecard and a pen. Direct the class to reflect on the lesson and complete the following sentences by writing their responses on the notecards:

- When it comes to honoring my government, I need to _____.
- When it comes to loving my neighbors, I need to _____.
- When it comes to preparing for my Savior's return, I need to _____.

Give class members a few minutes to pray silently and to complete the activity. Then close in prayer, asking God to help your class live as children of light in a dark world. Encourage class members to work through the questions under "Implications and Acts" in the *Study Guide* as they have time this week.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Say: *A wise old preacher said two things should never be discussed at church: business and politics.* Ask, *Why do you think he said that?* Point out that this lesson will break that rule as you dive into Romans 13. Encourage class members to keep an open mind and heart throughout the lesson. Also encourage them to be respectful and honorable in their speech and treatment of others during (and after) the Bible study.

Guide Bible Study

2. Direct the class turn to Romans 13 while writing the following on a dry-erase board or tear sheet: "I am Responsible for Honoring My Government." Use the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* and material from the *Study Guide* to present a brief lecture on the background of this chapter, using the following points.

- Paul was not naïve about the Roman government's abuse of power.
- Paul's personal experience included unjust beatings and imprisonment.
- Paul knew that Rome was also responsible for Jesus' crucifixion.
- Paul knew that the Roman system of taxation was subject to abuse.

Say: *With this in mind, watch for specific instructions the Apostle Paul gave concerning our attitudes and actions toward government authorities.*

3. Have a volunteer read Romans 13:1–7. Ask, *What are the specific instructions in verse 1? With the abuse that Paul knew existed, how do you think he could write those instructions? What are some of Paul's reasons for honoring governmental structure?* Encourage class members to read verses 2–6 again for answers. Use information from the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* and *Study Guide* information to supplement their answers. Ask, *What was Paul's advice concerning taxes? What was Jesus' response concerning taxes?* (See Mark 12:17 as necessary.) Ask: *How do you think our culture today is similar to, or different from the culture in which Paul wrote? Do you think this Scripture is more difficult to put into practice today?*
4. Point out that Paul was NOT giving a blank check to the Roman government or any government to abuse power or the people under its care, such as Hitler did in World War II. Also point out that we are called to honor and respect our government, but some situations require civil disobedience. Ask, *What might be some situations in which Christians might need to oppose the government?* Point out that such defiance is the exception, rather than the rule. Say, *If believers disobey the government, we must have a good reason for doing so; we must also be prepared to accept the consequences.*
5. Have a volunteer read Romans 13:8–10. Ask: *What struck you as you read these verses?* Use material from the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* to discuss these verses. Ask: *Why would a debt of love never be paid in full? (v. 8) How does loving other people fulfill the Ten Commandments?* Take a couple of minutes to turn the Ten Commandments into positive principles for relationships. For example, "Do not covet" could be restated as "Be happy"

for God's blessings in your life" or "Share in others' joy when God blesses them." Then point out that love will never cause harm to someone else (Rom. 13:10).

6. Read Romans 13:11–14. Conduct a brief lecture on these verses. Ask, *How would a Christian identify deeds of darkness? What does it look like to "put on Christ?" Why do you think Paul talked about Christ's imminent return in the same chapter as obeying government?* Point out that understanding the brief nature of our time here on earth should give us the proper perspective in relating both to the government and to our neighbors. It also gives us motivation to ditch the deeds of darkness and live as light.

Encourage Application

7. Have someone read aloud the Case Study in the sidebar. Discuss possible solutions. Ask, *Why do you think politics and religion have become so enmeshed over time? What do you do when you disagree with a fellow believer about political and governmental policy and actions? How could government and politics keep people from knowing about Christ?* Point out that just after Paul wrote about the government (vv. 1–7), he wrote about loving other people (vv. 8–10). Perhaps the Roman Christians needed to remember that whatever political views others hold, God still calls his followers to love others as he did.
8. To close in prayer, ask the class to form pairs. Direct the pairs to pray that God will help them respect authority, love their neighbors, and put on the armor of light in a dark world. After a few moments, voice a group prayer.

FOCAL TEXT

Romans 14:1–21

BACKGROUND

Romans 14

MAIN IDEA

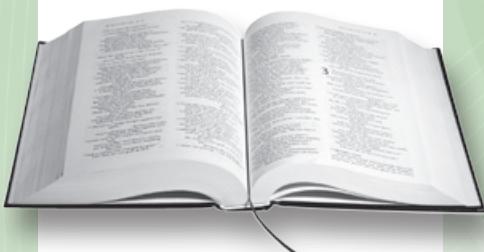
Christians should seek harmony with other believers rather than insisting on their preferences.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Does insistence on my preferences lead to disharmony in my church?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to pursue harmony with other believers instead of insisting on their preferences



LESSON 13

Personal Preference or the Pursuit of Harmony?

BIBLE COMMENTS

Understanding the Context

Boundary lines have long separated opposing sides: the Berlin Wall divided East and West Germany; the Mason-Dixon Line separated the North and South; and the line along the back seat of the car that separates the space between two children on a trip!

When you read Romans 14:1–21, imagine that a line has been drawn. The “strong” Gentile Christians stood on one side, while the “weak” Jewish Christians stood on the other. Each side held opinions about what was the proper expression of Christian devotion. The Gentiles felt a sense of freedom in Christ and refused to follow the dictates of Jewish culture. The Jewish believers followed Christ but had not completely let go of their Jewish principles. The Gentiles tended to drift toward their pagan, Gentile ways. The weak drifted toward their Jewish legalistic rules.

Imagine the Wednesday night meal at your church as people walk through the food line and choose their tables based on their preferences. Each group overhears the others making verbal judgments, gossiping, and criticizing the others’ practices of faith. Frustration builds. Anger and condemnation fly in caustic words. Tension heightens. Conflict explodes from the fray. Paul then steps in and says, “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way” (14:13). Romans 14 offers both an invitation and a challenge to the strong and the weak to serve Christ in harmony and unity.

Interpreting the Scriptures

The Strong and the Weak (14:1–8)

14:1–4. Paul appealed to the strong to accept the weak in the faith. He challenged the strong to avoid judging the weak about secondary issues

that are not central to the gospel (14:1). Most of these non-essential, disputable issues centered on Jewish law. The Jewish Christians (weak) ate only kosher meat or vegetables, refused wine, and practiced a Sabbath day of rest each week (14:2, 5–6). They kept the commands they learned in their religious upbringing. The strong (the Gentiles), who did not share that same history, ate almost any meat, drank wine, and celebrated banquets with food the Jews considered unclean (14:14–17).

One historical element often goes overlooked when studying this Scripture passage. In A.D. 49, Emperor Claudius ordered the Jews to leave Rome (see Acts 18:2). Consequently, the church in Rome became a mostly Gentile congregation. About ten years after Claudius's decree, a new emperor allowed Jews to come back into the city; Christian Jews returned to the church as well. Anti-Semitism (prevalent at the time) and personal preferences kept the Gentiles in control of ecclesiastical matters.

The Jews in the church practiced their faith as they had been taught: observing sacred days like the Passover; participating in festivals; eating only clean foods; and keeping Sabbath days each week according to Jewish law. Also, as a part of their religious faith, they abstained from eating “normal” meat that could be purchased at the Roman marketplace. They refused to eat it for two reasons. First, Jews only ate kosher (clean) meats—those not forbidden in the Old Testament. Second, some meat bought at the marketplace had previously been used in pagan sacrifices. The Jews avoided all things pagan.

14:5–6. On the other hand, the Gentile Christians considered each day as equal (14:5), ate any meat, did not care how it had been used previously, and gave thanks to the Lord for it (14:6). Both the Jewish and Gentile Christians believed they were practicing their faith in a way that honored and glorified God. Both sides, however, acted stubbornly and judged and condemned their Christian brothers (14:10). Paul's subtle use of “brother” five times in Romans 14 highlights the believers' unity and commonality, rather than their differences. He was reminding believers that as members of God's family, and as brothers and sisters in Christ, they should live and serve in harmony and unity. He asked each side to beware of and to walk away from their personal, petty preferences.

Christ Welcomed You (14:9–18)

14:9–18. How should brothers and sisters in the faith treat each other? Paul looked to the cross for the answer. He reminded his readers that Christ died on the cross for **all** people. Even though Christ accepted anyone who trusted in him—Jew or Gentile—early Christians continued to condemn and judge each other (14:10). Paul set forth clear, direct instruction: stop judging your brother (14:13). He also told them to avoid those activities that would cause someone else to stumble. In other words, he told believers to refrain from doing something if it confused or led someone else astray.

Paul challenged both the Jews and the Gentiles to love each other and to make sure not to cause distress (14:15). He reminded the church that the kingdom of God is not focused on minor issues like eating and drinking and special days; rather, it is focused on “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17). Paul wanted the believers to treat each other in a Christ-like manner. He directed them toward peace rather than condemnation. He understood that in light of the cross and the joy produced by the Holy Spirit, personal preferences must take a back seat to the essential elements of the faith.

Conflict Resolution: God’s Family, God’s Peace (14:19–21)

14:19–21. In the final verses of this chapter, Paul set forth an overarching principle for believers to put into practice: do whatever leads to peace and edification. The word translated as “edification” is *oikodomē*, a word that can mean “to build up;” it is used synonymously with “encouragement.” The idea here is to urge each other to grow in holiness. To do that, the believers needed to let go of preferences in regard to minor things like food, drink, and other non-essential issues (14:19–21).

Paul even told the believers not to eat meat or drink wine if it would cause someone else to fall. That is, believers should stay away from activities and situations that could entice someone else to sin. An event or situation (like drinking wine) may not cause you to sin, but if it could tempt another person to sin, then avoid it. The spiritual growth of other believers takes precedence over individual preferences. God’s family members must lay down their rights and their personal agendas for the sake of Christian unity.

Selfish ends undermine God's righteousness. Selfish motives create dissension and discord. Selfish preferences heighten tension and cause conflict. However, when Christ came, he "made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14). The cross of Christ promotes unity. The church should be a place of peace. Words and acts of Christian love should build up God's people in righteousness, peace, and joy.

Focusing on the Meaning

Jesus' treatment of the weak provides an example for Christians to follow. Christ demonstrated compassion toward the poor, the weak, and the needy. Christ had sympathy for the crowds (Mark 9:36). Jesus bent his knee to serve others, most starkly illustrated by washing the disciples' feet (John 13). Jesus humbled himself to the lowest extreme when he died on the cross (Philippians 2:5–11) in order to bring peace between God and humanity.

Paul reminded the church about bending the knee, serving others, and taking on menial tasks to build up God's family. Paul's solution for the dissension in the church at Rome included the imagery of the cross, Christ's example of humility, and sacrifice as an element to promote God's peace. Roman society itself promoted *pax romana*, or "Roman peace" by force, coercion, and domination. By way of contrast, Paul exhorted the family of God to discover Christian peace through encouragement, mutual respect, and humble service to brothers and sisters in Christ.

Unfortunately, the church today does not always follow Christ's example or Paul's exhortation. All too often, petty differences and foolish arguments arise in Christian circles and the church. The centrality of the gospel can get lost in periphery issues—the color of the carpet, worship style, the cost of a new building. Each conflict, important in the minds of those who draw the battle lines and solidify their opinions, should be resolved with compassion for others, in mutual edification, in service, and in humility as shown by Christ. Conflict is inevitable. However, believers can choose how they respond to it. They can destroy God's work by majoring on minor things, or they can pursue peace and harmony.

TEACHING PLANS

Discovery Plan

Connect with Life

1. Before the class, place a large tear sheet on a focal wall and gather several markers. On the tear sheet write, “What are the essentials of becoming a Christian?” As adults arrive, direct them to answer that question by writing their responses on the sheet. Explain that they don’t have to write out the entire salvation process, but just core beliefs and actions. After a few minutes, review their findings. Be sure to point out any non-essentials for salvation according to Scriptures. Ask, *How do you think people from other faith backgrounds (or no faith at all) would answer that question?*
2. Point out that just like the early church, the church today must contend with differences of opinion and preference. Explain that this Bible study will provide instruction on how to balance personal preference with maintaining harmony within the body of Christ.

Guide Bible Study

3. Group the class into small groups. Instruct groups to read Romans 14:1–9 and the section “Don’t Quarrel Over Disputable Matters” (in the *Study Guide*). Then give groups one of the two assignments below, giving more than one group the same assignment if necessary. (A copy of these assignments is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org.)

Team A: Pretend you are a Christian in the Roman church who doesn’t see anything wrong with eating meat, drinking wine, and not observing holy days (the “strong”). Answer the following questions:

- Why is it OK to eat meat, even meat sacrificed to idols?
- Why do you see no harm in drinking wine?
- Why do we no longer have to observe Old Testament holy days?

- How do you feel about those in the church who continue to follow Old Testament customs and regulations?
- What was Paul’s admonition? Why do you think he spoke about it?
- How will you change your actions and attitudes based on Paul’s instructions?

Team B: Pretend you are a Christian in the Roman church who still follows Old Testament customs and regulations, including kosher food, wine, and observing holy days (the “weak”). Answer the following questions:

- Why is it important to you that all Christ-followers obey the Old Testament regulations?
- Why is it not OK for you to eat meat sacrificed to idols?
- Why do you observe other Jewish laws now that you are a Christian?
- How do you feel about those in the church who do not think they need to follow the Old Testament regulations?
- What was Paul’s admonition? Why do you think he spoke about it?
- How will you change your actions and attitudes based on Paul’s instructions?

4. Allow teams time to work. Call on Team A to share its findings and (allow other Team A groups to give their additional input.) Then repeat the process with Team B. Supplement the groups’ work with information in the *Study Guide* and the Bible Comments from this *Teaching Guide*.
5. Call on someone to read Romans 14:7–12. Direct adults to name issues that might be considered disputable matters in the church today. Some of these issues are in the *Study Guide* under the section “Stop Judging One Another.” As the class calls out their ideas, write them down on the board or a large sheet of paper. Group adults into pairs and direct the pairs to choose one of the disputable matters listed. Instruct them to think about and discuss the two (or more) sides of the issue they chose. Then, direct the groups to look at the sidebar “Command or Conscience” in the *Study Guide* and use the questions listed to determine (if possible) whether or not the issue is addressed in the Bible. After several minutes, call on a few pairs to

share the issue they discussed and the conclusions they came to, if any.

6. Direct class members to read Romans 14:13–21. Then ask, *How would you summarize Paul’s instruction in these verses? Why do you think Paul talked about the kingdom of God amidst his discussion about stumbling blocks, judgments, weaker believers, and conscience? How can a person walk in the freedom Christ offers while not creating a stumbling block for a person who is less mature in the faith? How did Paul address this possibility?*

Encourage Application

7. Ask, *How do you know the difference between a “disputable matter” and a matter essential to the faith? How can our mistaken beliefs about what the Bible says actually harm the local church and individual Christians?* Spend a few minutes talking about possible misuses or abuses of Scripture. Point out that this lesson focused on three principles for believers to follow: 1) Don’t Quarrel Over Disputable Matters; 2) Stop Judging One Another; and 3) Act in Love. Also point out that these are the subheadings in the *Study Guide*. Direct the class to think about the following three questions as you provide time for quiet reflection. Also direct them to pray as they feel led.

- How have I been quarrelsome over a non-essential matter?
- Whom have I judged because their beliefs were different than mine?
- How could I act in love toward someone whose beliefs differ from mine?

Provide as much time as possible for reflection and prayer. Then close in prayer.

Discussion Plan

Connect with Life

1. Say: *Learning to live with another person in a marriage relationship is challenging. For those who are married (or have been married), which did (or does) your spouse prefer?*
 - Toilet paper roll on the dispenser: Over the top, or under?
 - Toothpaste: squeeze from the end, or squeeze the middle?
 - Dirty dishes: immediately in sink or immediately in dishwasher?
 - The bed: make the bed daily or leave it un-made?
 - Lights: Leave lights on when leaving a room, or turn lights off?

Summarize the following information from the *Study Guide*:

Marriage requires compromise. It's not "his way" or "her way" but finding "our way" together. Insisting on having things "our own way" causes conflict in churches, too. We all have our own preferences about the style of music, color of carpet, and temperature of the sanctuary. Demanding personal preferences at the expense of others' needs leads to conflict. Our goal is not to have it our way. Our goal is God's way. In church life, as in marriage, we need to lay aside our preferences and work together for harmony. We will look at how to seek God's way in church while still allowing for individual freedom.

Guide Bible Study

2. Call on a class member to read Romans 14:1–9. Ask the class to identify the problems and questions Paul might have been trying to address when he wrote this part of his letter. Allow the class to search the section "Don't Quarrel over Disputable Matters" in the *Study Guide* for help. Point out that the heart of the conflict stemmed between two different approaches to living out the Christian life. Ask, *Why do you think Paul identified some people as "weak" and others as "strong"?*
3. Have volunteers read Romans 14:7–12 from several different translations. Discuss the different nuances that the translations provide.

Ask members to identify the directives from Paul found in these verses. Ask, *Why do you think we are so quick to judge each other? Why do you think we look down on others whose views are different than ours?* How can you determine whether an issue is a disputable matter? How could you determine how best to respond to disputable matters? Point out the sidebar “Command or Conscience” in the *Study Guide*. Choose a matter that might be disputable in a church, a non-essential issue that might cause conflict. As a group, walk through the questions in the sidebar to evaluate how believers might respond.

4. Call on a member to read Romans 14:13–21. Using information from the Bible Comments in this *Teaching Guide* and other material from the *Study Guide*, provide a short lecture on these verses. Ask, *How would you summarize what Paul was trying to say about debatable matters?* Reread Romans 14:21. Point out that our preferences take a back seat to the building up of other believers and the church in general.

Encourage Application

5. Read aloud and discuss the Case Study in the sidebar of the *Study Guide*. Talk about possible ways of handling the situation. Ask, *Without telling where, what are some other non-essential issues that you've seen or heard about that have caused conflict in other churches?* Briefly discuss how believers could respond biblically in those situations.

Point out the three subtitles in the *Study Guide*: “Don’t Quarrel Over Disputable Matters;” “Stop Judging One Another;” and “Act in Love.” Ask, *Which of these three commands would help our church the most? Which is most difficult for you to practice personally?* Allow adults to respond. Then close in prayer, asking God to direct you as individuals and as a church body to focus on keeping harmony rather than insisting on personal preferences.