

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO ROMANS



THE NEW TESTAMENT

A Daily Study of the Book of Romans

Week 1

Day 1: The Gospel's Power and Purpose

Verses for Today

Romans 1:1-7 (ESV)

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Historical Context

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter around 57 A.D., likely from the city of Corinth. At this point, Paul was a seasoned missionary, but he had never been to Rome. The Roman church was a diverse and bustling community of both Jewish and Gentile (non-Jewish) believers. It wasn't founded by any single apostle but likely began when Jewish converts from Pentecost (Acts 2:10) returned home.

Paul's letter serves several purposes: he wants to introduce himself and his specific understanding of the gospel, unify a church that may have had tensions between its Jewish and Gentile members, and use Rome as a home base for a future mission trip to Spain. The opening verses (1-7) are a standard Greco-Roman letter opening, but Paul packs them with a dense summary of the entire gospel message. He immediately establishes his credentials—not based on his own merit, but on God's divine call.

Connections to Scripture

Paul is masterful at weaving the Old Testament into his theology.

- **"servant of Christ Jesus" (v. 1):** This was a title of honor in the Old Testament, used for great leaders like **Moses** (Deuteronomy 34:5) and **David** (Psalm 89:20). Paul places himself in this prophetic lineage, but his master is the risen Christ.
- **"promised beforehand through his prophets" (v. 2):** Paul immediately grounds the gospel in the Hebrew Scriptures. He argues that Jesus is not a radical break from the past, but the fulfillment of everything God had been planning. This connects to prophecies about a coming king from David's line (**2 Samuel 7:12-16**) and a suffering servant who would save his people (**Isaiah 53**).
- **"descended from David according to the flesh" (v. 3):** This establishes Jesus's human, royal credentials as the promised Messiah, fulfilling the Davidic covenant.

- **"declared to be the Son of God...by his resurrection" (v. 4):** The resurrection is the ultimate proof of Jesus's divinity. Peter makes the same point in his sermon at Pentecost (**Acts 2:32-36**), declaring that the resurrection proves Jesus is both "Lord and Christ."
- **"among all the nations" (v. 5):** This echoes the promise God made to Abraham that through him, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (**Genesis 12:3**). Paul saw his mission to the Gentiles as the direct fulfillment of this ancient promise.

Differing Views

The phrase **"declared to be the Son of God in power...by his resurrection"** (v. 4) has been a point of theological discussion.

- **Adoptionist View:** Some early groups interpreted this to mean that Jesus was a mortal man who was "adopted" as God's Son at his resurrection. This view is considered a heresy because it denies Jesus's eternal pre-existence and divinity.
- **Orthodox View:** The vast majority of Christian theology understands this verse differently. The Greek word for "declared" (*horisthentos*) doesn't mean *to become* something new, but *to be publicly demonstrated, appointed, or installed*. Jesus was always the eternal Son of God (John 1:1). The resurrection, however, was the climactic, powerful event that publicly **vindicated and demonstrated** that truth to the entire world. It was his inauguration to a new level of messianic authority at the right hand of God.

Application for Today

1. **Your Identity is in Christ:** Before you are an employee, a parent, a spouse, or a citizen of a nation, you are "called to belong to Jesus Christ" (v. 6) and "loved by God" (v. 7). This is your primary identity. When other parts of your identity feel shaky or unsatisfying, this one remains secure.
2. **The Gospel is Reliable:** Your faith isn't based on a new fad or a clever philosophy. It is the fulfillment of God's promises stretching back thousands of years. The story of Jesus is the climax of the story of the entire Bible. This gives us confidence and assurance.
3. **The Resurrection is Everything:** The resurrection isn't just a historical fact; it's the power source of the Christian life. It proved Jesus was who He said He was, and it guarantees our future hope and provides present power to live a new life.

Daily Challenge

Think about how you typically introduce yourself or how you define yourself in your own mind. Today, consciously re-frame your identity. Before you start your work or daily tasks, pause and say to yourself, "I am loved by God. I am called to be a saint. I belong to Jesus Christ." Go through your day with this as your foundational identity and see how it changes your perspective on your challenges, successes, and interactions.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for setting me apart for Your purpose, just as you set Paul apart for the gospel. Thank you that this good news was not an afterthought but Your plan from the beginning, promised through the prophets. Help me to find my truest identity as Your child and a servant of Christ. Let the power of His resurrection shape how I live today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2: The Theme of the Gospel

Verses for Today

Romans 1:8-17 (ESV)

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but have been prevented so far) in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Historical Context

In this section, Paul expresses his deep and prayerful love for a church he has never met. His repeated desire to visit them underscores the importance of Rome as a strategic center for the Christian mission. However, these verses are more than just travel plans. Verses 16-17 are the theological core of the entire letter, a concise thesis statement for the grand argument that will follow.

Paul's declaration, "**I am not ashamed of the gospel**," was a bold, counter-cultural statement. In the Roman Empire, which prided itself on military might, imperial honor, and sophisticated philosophy, the Christian message of a crucified savior from a minor province was often seen as foolishness and weakness (as Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 1:23). Paul's eagerness to preach this message in the very heart of the empire demonstrates his absolute confidence in its divine power.

Connections to Scripture

- **"I am under obligation" (v. 14):** Paul felt a divine compulsion to preach the gospel, stemming from his commissioning by Jesus on the road to Damascus (**Acts 9:15**), where he was specifically called to be an apostle to the Gentiles.
- **"to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (v. 16):** This phrase acknowledges that the gospel message came through the Jewish people and was first preached to them, honoring their place in salvation history (**John 4:22**). However, it powerfully affirms that salvation is now available to all people equally through faith.
- **"The righteous shall live by faith" (v. 17):** This is a direct quotation of **Habakkuk 2:4**. This Old Testament verse becomes the foundational text for Paul's entire argument in Romans. It was a revolutionary concept for many, arguing that a person's right standing before God is not based on meticulous law-keeping or heritage, but on faith. The same verse is quoted in **Galatians 3:11** and **Hebrews 10:38**, highlighting its crucial importance in early Christian thought.

Differing Views

The phrase "**the righteousness of God**" (*dikaiosynē theou*) in verse 17 is one of the most significant theological concepts in the Bible, and its precise meaning has been debated.

- **A Quality of God:** Some view this as referring to God's own character—His justice, moral perfection, and faithfulness to His covenant promises with Israel. In this sense, the gospel reveals that God is a righteous God who keeps His word.
- **A Status from God:** This view, championed by Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, sees "righteousness" as a legal status that God gives, or *imputes*, to believers. It is a perfect righteousness that is not our own but comes *from* God through Christ. When God looks at a believer, He sees the righteousness of Jesus.
- **An Activity of God:** Others see it as God's powerful, saving action. It is the activity of God intervening in the world to put things right and to save people.

These views are not necessarily contradictory. The most robust understanding is that the gospel reveals God's own **righteous character** (His quality), which moves Him to provide a **right legal standing** (His gift of status) for sinners through His **saving work** (His activity) in Christ.

Application for Today

1. **Be Encouraged by Mutual Faith:** Paul, the great apostle, longed to visit the Romans to be *mutually encouraged* by their faith. No Christian is an island. We are designed to be strengthened and built up by the faith of others, regardless of our or their spiritual maturity.
2. **Overcome Gospel Shame:** We live in a world that often sees Christian faith as outdated, foolish, or intolerant. It can be tempting to be quiet or "ashamed" of the gospel. Paul reminds us that this message is the very "power (*dunamis*, where we get 'dynamite') of God." Be confident that the gospel is not weak; it is the most powerful force for transformation in the universe.
3. **Live by Faith:** Verse 17 says righteousness is revealed "from faith for faith." The Christian life begins with an act of faith, is sustained daily by faith, and grows as our faith deepens. It's not about achieving perfection on our own but about continually trusting in the perfection of Christ.

Daily Challenge

Identify one area of your life where you feel a sense of shame or hesitation about your faith. It could be at work, with certain friends, or even online. Instead of hiding, ask God for one specific opportunity today to be "not ashamed." This doesn't mean being confrontational, but simply not hiding that aspect of your life—perhaps by mentioning you went to church, offering to pray for someone, or simply speaking with kindness and integrity that flows from your faith.

Prayer

Father God, thank you that the gospel is Your explosive power to save. Forgive me for the times I have been timid or ashamed of what You have done for me. Fill me with boldness and an eagerness to share the good news. Help me to trust You more deeply today, to live by faith, and to rest in the perfect righteousness that I have been given in Jesus. Amen.

Day 3: The Ungodliness of Humanity

Verses for Today

Romans 1:18-32 (ESV)

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Historical Context

Having declared his thesis—that salvation comes through faith in the gospel—Paul now begins his grand argument by first establishing why the gospel is necessary. He starts by diagnosing the universal human condition, beginning with the Gentile (non-Jewish) world. His core assertion is that all people are under the just "wrath of God." This wrath isn't a capricious, human-like anger, but God's settled, holy opposition to sin and evil. The fundamental sin, according to Paul, is not the long list of behaviors at the end of the chapter, but the root cause: humanity has **willfully suppressed the truth** about God that is plainly visible in creation.

Connections to Scripture

- **General Revelation (v. 19-20):** Paul argues that creation itself testifies to a Creator. This idea, known as general revelation, is found throughout the Bible. **Psalms 19:1** famously declares, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."
- **The Original Sin of Idolatry (v. 21-23):** The downward spiral begins with a failure to worship. Man "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images." This is the essence of the sin of the golden calf in **Exodus 32** and is a constant critique of the Old Testament prophets. **Jeremiah 2:11** asks, "has a

nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit."

- **"God Gave Them Up" (v. 24, 26, 28):** This repeated phrase describes a terrifying aspect of divine judgment. It's not just an active punishment but a passive one, where God removes His restraining grace and allows people to plunge into the natural consequences of their rebellion. This echoes **Psalm 81:12**, where God says of a rebellious Israel, "So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels."

Differing Views

The interpretation of verses 26-27 is a significant point of contention in the modern church regarding homosexuality. It's important to understand the main scholarly approaches.

- **The Traditional Interpretation:** This view understands Paul to be describing all homosexual acts as "contrary to nature"—meaning, contrary to the created order established by God in Genesis. The acts are seen as a clear and primary example of humanity's rebellion and departure from the Creator's design. In this view, the condemnation is universal for all same-sex sexual activity.
- **Alternative Interpretations:** Other scholars propose different readings. Some argue that Paul is not condemning loving, committed same-sex relationships but is instead condemning the exploitative and often pederastic homosexual practices that were common in Greco-Roman culture. Others suggest the context of idolatry is key, believing Paul is specifically addressing cultic prostitution associated with pagan temples. A further view focuses on the word "natural," suggesting it may refer to a person's individual disposition rather than a universal design, thus condemning heterosexuals who engage in homosexual acts, but not homosexuals themselves. These views seek to understand Paul's words within a more specific historical and cultural context.

Application for Today

1. **Acknowledge the Root Problem:** This passage forces us to see sin not as isolated mistakes but as a symptom of a deeper disease: the failure to honor and thank God. The root of all sin is idolatry—serving the creature rather than the Creator. We must ask ourselves: what "creature" (our job, our reputation, our comfort, our desires) do we serve?
2. **Cultivate Gratitude:** The first step downward was that "they did not... give thanks to him." A thankful heart is the antidote to a foolish, darkened heart. Cultivating a daily habit of gratitude to God for both creation and salvation keeps our hearts rightly oriented toward Him.
3. **Recognize Our Desperate Need:** This is a dark passage, but its purpose is to show us the depth of our need for a savior. Before we can appreciate the good news of grace, we must understand the bad news of our condition. We are all "without excuse," which makes the gospel of forgiveness and righteousness an astonishing gift.

Daily Challenge

Today, practice the discipline of gratitude as an antidote to foolish thinking. Set three alarms on your phone for morning, midday, and evening. When each alarm goes off, stop for just 30 seconds and name one specific thing you see, feel, or have experienced that you can thank God for. Speak the thanksgiving out loud, even if it's just a whisper: "God, thank you for..."

Prayer

Creator God, your power and divine nature are clearly seen in the world you have made. I confess that my heart is prone to wander and to worship created things rather than You, the Creator. Forgive me for my pride and my ungratefulness. Thank you for not giving me up completely to my sin, but for revealing Your

righteousness in Jesus. Pull my heart back to you today and help me to honor and thank you in all things. Amen.

Day 4: The Hypocritical Judge

Verses for Today

Romans 2:1-16 (ESV)

¹ Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury... ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law... ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Historical Context

After describing the downward spiral of Gentile society, Paul masterfully turns the tables. He addresses the moral person (including his fellow Jews) who would have been nodding in agreement with chapter 1. He says, in essence, "You who judge them are guilty of the same things." Paul's point is that no one can stand before God on the basis of their own moral superiority. He dismantles self-righteousness by showing that God judges impartially, based not on knowledge but on deeds, and He even judges the "secrets of men"—our hidden motives and thoughts.

Connections to Scripture

- **Judging Others (v. 1):** Paul's argument is a direct echo of Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged..." (**Matthew 7:1-2**).
- **God Shows No Partiality (v. 11):** This is a foundational principle of God's character throughout the Old Testament. **Deuteronomy 10:17** states, "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe."
- **Law on the Heart (v. 15):** The idea that God's moral law is innately known even by those without the Scriptures is a form of general revelation. This is distinct from, but related to, the promise in **Jeremiah 31:33** where God says of the new covenant, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts."

Differing Views

A key point of discussion is verse 14-15, which says some Gentiles "do by nature what the law requires," showing that "the work of the law is written on their hearts." Does this mean people can be saved apart from the gospel? The overwhelming consensus of historic Christian interpretation is **no**. Paul's point is not about salvation but about **accountability**. The fact that Gentiles have an innate moral conscience means they know right from wrong and are therefore justly condemned when they violate it. Their conscience makes them "without excuse" (like in Romans 1:20), it does not save them.

Application for Today

1. **Look in the Mirror Before Pointing the Finger:** The human tendency is to see the sins of others with 20/20 vision while being nearly blind to our own. This passage forces us to examine our own hearts before we critique others.
2. **Don't Mistake God's Kindness for Approval:** Paul warns against presuming on God's patience. God's kindness in not judging us immediately is not a sign of His approval of our sin; it is an act of grace meant to give us time to repent.
3. **God Sees the Heart:** We may fool others with our external morality, but God judges our "secrets." Authenticity and integrity of the heart are what matter to Him.

Daily Challenge

Think of one person or group whose actions have prompted a judgmental attitude in your heart recently. Before you pray for *them* to change, pray for *yourself*. Ask God to reveal any "secret" hypocrisy in your own heart related to that same issue and to lead you to repentance.

Prayer

Father, forgive me for my judgmental heart. I have presumed upon your kindness and have been quick to see the faults in others while ignoring my own. Thank you for your patience, which is meant to lead me to repentance. Cleanse the secret places of my heart so that I might stand before you not in my own righteousness, but only in the righteousness of Christ. Amen.

Day 5: Religion Isn't Enough

Verses for Today

Romans 2:17-29 (ESV)

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God... ²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision... ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Historical Context

Here, Paul speaks directly to his Jewish audience. For a first-century Jew, their identity was built on three pillars: their ethnic heritage, the gift of the Torah (the Law), and the sign of the covenant (circumcision). They saw these as markers of their special status with God. Paul systematically argues that these external markers are worthless if not accompanied by internal reality and obedience. In a shocking reversal, he concludes that a true Jew is one whose heart has been changed by God's Spirit, regardless of their ethnicity.

Connections to Scripture

- **Blaspheming God's Name (v. 24):** Paul quotes from **Isaiah 52:5** and **Ezekiel 36:22** to show that the hypocrisy of God's people brings dishonor to God's name among outsiders. This is a recurring warning in the Old Testament.
- **Circumcision of the Heart (v. 29):** This is not a new concept invented by Paul. He is drawing directly from the Old Testament prophets who called for an inward reality, not just an outward ritual. **Deuteronomy 30:6** promises, "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart... so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart..." See also **Jeremiah 9:25-26**.

Application for Today

1. **Check for Spiritual Hypocrisy:** Paul's questions are piercing for us today. Do we who teach our children about honesty, ever lie? Do we who speak against gossip, engage in it ourselves? This passage calls us to a radical consistency between our beliefs and our behavior.
2. **Beware of External Markers:** For Paul's audience, it was circumcision and the law. For us, it might be baptism, church attendance, a daily quiet time, or identifying with a certain denomination. These things are good, but they are not the *source* of our right standing with God. They are worthless if our hearts are far from Him.
3. **True Faith is a Heart Issue:** A true Christian is one "inwardly." God is after a transformation of the heart, performed "by the Spirit." Our goal is not just behavior modification but heart transformation.

Daily Challenge

Identify one external "religious" activity you regularly practice. Today, before you do it, pause and pray specifically that God would "circumcise your heart" in relation to it. Ask Him to make it an act of genuine, inward worship rather than just an outward ritual you perform.

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for the times I have boasted in my religious activities while my heart was far from you. Thank you for making it clear that you desire truth in the inward parts. Circumcise my heart, by your Spirit. Remove my hypocrisy and make me a person whose praise comes from you, not from men. Amen.

Day 6: God is Always Faithful

Verses for Today

Romans 3:1-8 (ESV)

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! Let God be true though

every one were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged."

⁵ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸ And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

Historical Context

Paul uses a style of argument called a "diatribe," where he anticipates his opponent's questions and answers them. He has just seemingly dismantled any special status for the Jewish people. The logical question is, "Then what was the point of being God's chosen people?" Paul affirms their advantage was real and significant: they were the custodians of God's revelation, the "oracles of God" (the Old Testament). He then tackles a more difficult question: Does human sin somehow highlight God's goodness, and if so, how can God judge it? Paul dismisses this as absurd, affirming God's absolute truthfulness and right to judge.

Connections to Scripture

- **Entrusted with the Oracles (v. 2):** God's special revelation was given through Israel. As **Psalm 147:19-20** says, "He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation."
- **Let God Be True (v. 4):** Paul quotes **Psalm 51:4** (David's psalm of repentance) to make his point. Even in our sin, God's character and judgments are shown to be perfectly true and just.
- **God's Faithfulness (v. 3):** The theme of God's unwavering faithfulness, despite His people's unfaithfulness, is central to the entire biblical narrative. **2 Timothy 2:13** makes a similar point: "if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself."

Application for Today

1. **God's Word is a Precious Gift:** We, like the Jews, have been entrusted with the oracles of God in the completed Bible. We must never take this for granted. It is a profound privilege to have and know God's revealed Word.
2. **God's Faithfulness is Unshakable:** Our failures, doubts, and sins do not change the character of God. He remains true. His promises remain in effect. This is an incredible comfort. Our security rests on *His* faithfulness, not our own.
3. **Reject Twisted Logic:** Paul's opponents were twisting the gospel of grace into a license to sin ("do evil that good may come"). We must be on guard against any reasoning that uses God's goodness as an excuse for our sin. God's grace should lead to gratitude and holiness, not presumption.

Daily Challenge

Choose one promise from the Bible that you know well (e.g., John 3:16, Romans 8:28, Philippians 4:13). Spend a few minutes meditating on the fact that its truthfulness depends entirely on God's character, not on your feelings, circumstances, or personal performance today. Rest in His absolute reliability.

Prayer

Faithful God, thank you that you are true, even though everyone else may be a liar. Thank you for your unshakable faithfulness, which does not depend on me. Forgive me for the times my unfaithfulness has

dishonored you. Thank you for the incredible gift of your Word. Help me to treasure it, and to live by its truth today. Amen.

Day 7: The Verdict Is In: All Are Guilty

Verses for Today

Romans 3:9-20 (ESV)

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Historical Context

This section is the dramatic climax and summary of Paul's entire argument from 1:18 onward. He acts as a prosecutor, leveling the final charge against all humanity. To prove his case, he unleashes a powerful chain of quotations from the Old Testament, drawing from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. His conclusion is devastating and universal: **everyone**, regardless of heritage or morality, stands guilty and "accountable to God." He ends with a final, crucial statement on the purpose of the Law: it doesn't save anyone; it simply reveals the full extent of our sin.

Connections to Scripture

Paul's "string of pearls" is drawn from all over the Old Testament, demonstrating that this is not a new idea but the consistent testimony of Scripture:

- **Psalm 14:1-3 & Psalm 53:1-3** (verses 10-12)
- **Psalm 5:9** (verse 13a)
- **Psalm 140:3** (verse 13b)
- **Psalm 10:7** (verse 14)
- **Isaiah 59:7-8** (verses 15-17)
- **Psalm 36:1** (verse 18)

By quoting their own Scriptures, he leaves his Jewish audience with no room to object.

Application for Today

1. **Find Humility at the Foot of the Cross:** This passage is the great equalizer. It demolishes all pride, self-righteousness, and sense of moral superiority. In our natural state, "none is righteous." This shared diagnosis should lead us to be humble and compassionate toward others, not judgmental.
2. **Stop Trying to Justify Yourself:** Verse 20 is one of the clearest statements in the Bible: "by works of the law no human being will be justified." We cannot make ourselves right with God through our own efforts, rule-keeping, or good deeds. Trying to do so is like trying to climb to the moon on a ladder.
3. **Understand the True Purpose of the Law:** God's law is good. Its purpose is to act like an MRI, showing us the disease of sin inside us. It provides the diagnosis that makes us run to the Great Physician for the cure.

Daily Challenge

Reread the poetic descriptions of the sinful human condition in verses 10-18. It's easy to read this as a description of "other people." Humbly pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you just one way that one of these descriptions is true of your own heart. The goal is not to wallow in guilt, but to fuel your gratitude for the grace that is about to be revealed in the next passage.

Prayer

Holy God, your Word is true. In my own self, I am not righteous. My heart turns aside, and I do not always seek you. Thank you for your Law, which stops my mouth and removes all my excuses. I stand before you as guilty and accountable. Forgive me. I abandon all attempts to justify myself and I rely completely on your mercy. Amen.

Week 2: The Gift of Righteousness

Day 8: The Bomb-Blast of Grace

Verses for Today

Romans 3:21-31 (ESV)

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Historical Context

This is the theological heart of Romans and perhaps the entire Bible. After three chapters of proving the universal guilt of humanity, Paul begins verse 21 with two of the most hopeful words: "**But now...**" He reveals God's solution. A righteousness *from God* is now available, completely apart from our own law-keeping. He introduces several crucial terms:

- **Justified:** A legal term meaning "to be declared righteous."
- **Grace:** Unmerited, unearned favor.
- **Redemption:** A marketplace term meaning "to buy back," as in freeing a slave.
- **Propitiation:** A sacrificial term meaning that the death of Jesus satisfied the just wrath of God against sin.

Connections to Scripture

- **Propitiation (v. 25):** The Greek word used here (*hilasterion*) is the same word used in the Greek Old Testament for the **Mercy Seat** on the Ark of the Covenant (**Leviticus 16:14-15**). This was the place where the high priest would sprinkle blood on the Day of Atonement to cover the sins of the people. Paul is declaring that Jesus is the ultimate Mercy Seat.
- **All Have Sinned (v. 23):** This famous verse summarizes the conclusion Paul has just drawn from the Old Testament, echoing passages like **1 Kings 8:46**, "there is no one who does not sin."

Application for Today

1. **Embrace Your Righteousness as a Gift:** Your right standing with God is not something you achieve; it is something you receive. It is "a gift" (v. 24). You can't earn it, and you don't deserve it. This truth should free you from the exhausting treadmill of trying to be "good enough" for God.
2. **Understand God is Both Just and Justifier:** How can a good judge let guilty people go free? Paul's answer is the cross. At the cross, God did not ignore our sin; He punished it fully in the person of His Son. Therefore, He remains perfectly "just" while also being the "justifier" of those who trust in Jesus.
3. **Let Go of Boasting:** If salvation is a free gift, then there is absolutely no room for pride or boasting. We contributed nothing to our salvation except the sin that made it necessary. This truth should destroy all pride.

Daily Challenge

Try to explain the gospel to yourself in just a few sentences, using the key words from this passage: **justified, grace, gift, redemption, faith**. The goal is to internalize this core truth. For example: "Even though I have sinned, God declares me righteous (justified) as a free gift by his grace. He bought me back (redemption) through the death of Jesus, and I receive it all simply through faith."

Prayer

Father, I am overwhelmed by the truth that I am justified by your grace as a gift. Thank you for the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Thank you for putting Him forward as the propitiation for my sins. Because of the cross, you are both just and my justifier. I have nothing to boast in except you. All my hope is in this gift. Amen.

Day 9: Abraham, Father of Faith

Verses for Today

Romans 4:1-12 (ESV)

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...

⁹ Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

Historical Context

For any Jew, Abraham was the ultimate example of a righteous man. A common Jewish belief was that Abraham was righteous because he kept the law before it was even given. Paul directly confronts this by going to the source: the book of Genesis. He makes a brilliant argument by showing from their own Scripture that Abraham was declared righteous in Genesis 15, long *before* he was circumcised in Genesis 17. Therefore, his right standing with God was based on faith, not on a work (circumcision). This makes Abraham the father of *all* who have faith, whether Jew or Gentile.

Connections to Scripture

- **"Abraham believed God" (v. 3):** This is a direct quote of the foundational verse, **Genesis 15:6**. This is one of the most important verses in the Bible for understanding the doctrine of justification by faith.
- **Faith vs. Works (v. 4-5):** Paul lays out a clear distinction that echoes throughout his writings. If you *work* for something, the payment you receive is a wage, your due. If you simply *believe* a promise, what you receive is a gift. Salvation is a gift, not a wage.

Differing Views

How does Paul's statement that we are justified by faith "apart from works" square with **James 2:24**, which says, "you see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone"? This has been a source of debate for centuries. The best reconciliation is to see that Paul and James are using the word "works" to mean different things and are arguing against different errors.

- **Paul** is using "works" to mean "works of the law" done to *earn* a right standing with God. He is fighting against legalism.
- **James** is using "works" to mean the good deeds that naturally *result from* genuine faith. He is fighting against a dead faith that has no evidence.
- In short: Paul says faith is the *root* of salvation. James says works are the *fruit* of salvation.

Application for Today

1. **Salvation is For the "Ungodly":** Verse 5 is a stunning statement. God justifies the "ungodly." We don't have to clean ourselves up before we come to God. We come to Him in our ungodliness, and in His grace, He declares us righteous through our faith in Him.
2. **Your Faith is What Matters:** Abraham was counted righteous simply because he believed God's promise. Faith is not a "work." It is resting and trusting in the work of another.
3. **Rituals are Signs, Not Sources:** Circumcision was a sign and seal of the righteousness Abraham *already had* by faith. Likewise, Christian practices like baptism and communion are signs of the grace we have received by faith; they are not the source of that grace.

Daily Challenge

Think about your spiritual life. Are there ways you are subconsciously treating your good deeds (prayer, bible reading, serving) like "work" to earn God's "wages"? Today, consciously reframe those activities. See them not as work to earn God's favor, but as joyful responses to the gift of righteousness you have already received by faith.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the example of Abraham. Thank you for the truth that you justify the ungodly, which means you justify me. Help me to stop trying to work for what you have already given freely as a gift. May my faith in your promises be counted as righteousness today, and may my life be a joyful response to your incredible grace. Amen.

Day 10: Faith in the God of Resurrection

Verses for Today

Romans 4:13-25 (ESV)

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void...

¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations... ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Historical Context

Paul continues his argument using Abraham as the model of faith. He emphasizes that Abraham's faith was not a vague hopefulness. It was a rugged, specific trust in a God who specializes in the impossible: giving life to the dead (Abraham and Sarah's "dead" bodies) and creating out of nothing. Paul then masterfully connects Abraham's faith in God's life-giving power to our faith in the ultimate act of life-giving power: the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Connections to Scripture

- **Father of Many Nations (v. 17):** A quote from **Genesis 17:5**. Paul shows that this promise is fulfilled not just through ethnic Israel, but through the global family of faith.
- **Abraham and Sarah's Age (v. 19):** Paul is referencing the narrative in **Genesis 17-18**, where Abraham and Sarah's physical inability to have children is highlighted, making God's promise seem impossible from a human perspective.
- **Raised for our Justification (v. 25):** This is a profound theological statement. Jesus's death paid the penalty for our sins ("delivered up for our trespasses"). His resurrection was God the Father's public declaration that the payment was accepted and sufficient. It is the divine receipt that proves our account has been settled.

Application for Today

1. **Hope "Against Hope":** Abraham's situation was hopeless from a human perspective. Yet he hoped in God's promise. Christian hope is not wishful thinking; it is a confident trust in God's power and promises, even when circumstances scream the opposite.
2. **Don't Stare at Your Inadequacies; Stare at God's Promise:** Abraham did not "weaken in faith when he considered his own body." He was aware of the problem, but he chose to focus on the promise and the power of the Promise-Giver. When faced with our own limitations, we too can choose to focus on God's ability.
3. **The Resurrection is Your Guarantee:** The same power that brought Isaac from Sarah's dead womb and brought Jesus from the tomb is the power that secures your salvation. Your justification is as certain as the historical fact of the resurrection.

Daily Challenge

Identify an "impossible" situation in your life or the life of someone you know—a broken relationship, a financial dead-end, a persistent sin, a health crisis. In prayer, acknowledge that it is "as good as dead" from your perspective. Then, like Abraham, give glory to God, declaring that you believe He is the one "who gives life to the dead" and is able to do what He has promised.

Prayer

God of Abraham, you are the one who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist. Forgive me for wavering in unbelief. Today I choose to believe your promises over my circumstances. Thank you for delivering Jesus for my sins and raising him for my justification. Because he is risen, I am declared righteous. Help me to live in the power and confidence of that truth. Amen.

Day 11: The Secure Results of Justification

Verses for Today

Romans 5:1-11 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.

Historical Context

Having spent four chapters establishing *how* a person is justified (by faith alone), Paul now shifts to describe the wonderful *consequences* and *benefits* of being justified. This is not abstract theory; these are the lived realities for every believer. The primary result is a change in our relationship with God: the state of war is over. We now have peace *with* God, access to His grace, and a secure hope for the future, a hope so strong that it can even change our perspective on present suffering.

Connections to Scripture

- **Peace with God (v. 1):** This fulfills the promise of the Messiah who would be the "Prince of Peace" (**Isaiah 9:6**). This is not just a subjective feeling of tranquility, but an objective state of reconciliation. The hostility between us and God has been removed.
- **Hope in Suffering (v. 3-4):** The idea that trials can be a source of spiritual growth is a consistent New Testament theme. **James 1:2-4** says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." See also **1 Peter 1:6-7**.
- **God's Love Poured Out (v. 5):** The giving of the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, like in **Joel 2:28**, "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

Application for Today

1. **Stand in Grace:** Because you are justified, you don't just get occasional visits to God's grace; you "stand" in it. It is your new permanent location and environment. You live and breathe in the atmosphere of God's unmerited favor.
2. **Reframe Your Suffering:** This passage gives us a powerful framework for enduring hardship. God uses suffering not to punish us, but to produce something beautiful in us: endurance, then proven character, then a deeper, more resilient hope.
3. **Grasp the Magnitude of God's Love:** God didn't wait for us to get our act together. He demonstrated His love for us at our absolute worst: "while we were still sinners," "weak," "ungodly," and "enemies." If He loved you then, how much more can you count on His love now that you are His reconciled child?

Daily Challenge

Take a moment to reflect on a current or past suffering. Instead of asking "Why is this happening?", ask God, "What are you producing in me through this?" Walk through the steps in verses 3-4. Can you see any ways this trial has produced endurance? How has that endurance forged character? How has that character given you a more solid hope?

Prayer

Father, thank you for the peace I have with you through Jesus. Thank you that I can stand in your grace today. Help me to rejoice, not in my sufferings themselves, but in the hope you are building in me through them. Pour your love into my heart afresh by your Holy Spirit, and let me be overwhelmed again by the truth that you loved me even when I was your enemy. Amen.

Day 12: Two Men, Two Destinies

Verses for Today

Romans 5:12-21 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many... ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

²¹ so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Historical Context

Paul now zooms out to a panoramic, salvation-history perspective. To explain the massive scope of what Jesus accomplished, he contrasts Him with the only other person who has affected all of humanity: Adam. This passage introduces the concept of "federal headship" or representation. Adam acted as the representative for all humanity, and his sin brought condemnation and death to all. Christ acts as the new representative for a new humanity, and his act of righteousness brings justification and life to all who are united to him by faith. Paul's repeated emphasis is on the "much more" of grace. What Christ did is far more powerful than what Adam did.

Connections to Scripture

- **Adam's Sin (v. 12):** Paul is referencing the account of the Fall in **Genesis 3**, where Adam's disobedience introduced sin and its consequence, death, into the created world.

- **Two Adams (v. 14):** Paul calls Adam a "type of the one who was to come," meaning Jesus. This idea of the "second Adam" is also found in **1 Corinthians 15:45**, "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."

Differing Views

The primary theological discussion around this passage concerns the doctrine of **Original Sin**. How exactly is Adam's sin transmitted to all humanity?

- **Pelagian View (Heresy):** Taught that Adam was merely a bad example and that people become sinners only when they choose to sin themselves.
- **Augustinian View (Traditional):** Argues that all humanity was seminally present "in Adam," so we all participated in his sin. We inherit both a corrupt nature and a guilty legal standing before God because of our connection to him.
- **Federal Headship View:** Argues that Adam acted as our legal representative. When he sinned, his guilt was legally imputed (credited) to all those he represented, just as Christ's righteousness is imputed to those He represents.

Most orthodox theology holds to a combination of the Augustinian and Federal Headship views.

Application for Today

1. **Know Who You Are In:** By birth, every human is "in Adam," part of a family defined by sin and death. By faith in Christ, you are transferred into a new family, "in Christ," which is defined by grace and life. Your identity is no longer determined by Adam's failure but by Christ's success.
2. **Appreciate the "Much More" of Grace:** Paul stacks up the comparisons to show that grace isn't just a patch for sin; it's an overwhelming victory. The gift is not like the trespass. Christ's obedience is far more powerful than Adam's disobedience. Let the scale of God's grace amaze you.
3. **Let Grace Reign:** Sin once reigned in your life like a tyrant, and its end was death. Now, through Jesus, grace reigns as a benevolent king, and its end is eternal life. Today, consciously choose to live under the reign of grace, not the tyranny of sin.

Daily Challenge

The key takeaway is that one person's actions can have massive consequences for others. Consider your own actions today. How can one act of obedience, one word of grace, or one act of love on your part bring life and blessing to those in your sphere of influence (your family, your workplace, your community)?

Prayer

Father, thank you for making this so clear. I confess that I was born in Adam, under the reign of sin and death. But I praise you that through faith in Jesus, I have been transferred into his family, to live under the reign of grace. Thank you that your grace is so much more powerful than sin. Help me to live today as a citizen of your kingdom of grace, reigning in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Day 13: Dead to Sin, Alive to God

Verses for Today

Romans 6:1-14 (ESV)

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin... ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions... ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Historical Context

Paul now confronts the logical (but wrong) objection to the doctrine of abundant grace he just taught in chapter 5: "If more sin brings more grace, shouldn't we sin more to get more grace?" Paul's answer is a horrified, "By no means!" His argument is that this question misunderstands what happens at conversion. When we trust Christ, we are spiritually united with him. Paul uses the imagery of baptism to explain this union. Just as baptism pictures a burial and resurrection, we were spiritually buried with Christ (our old life died) and raised with him to a completely new kind of life. To go on living in sin would be as absurd as a resurrected person trying to go back to living in their grave.

Connections to Scripture

- **Baptized into His Death (v. 3):** This spiritual reality is pictured in the physical act of baptism. Paul makes a similar argument in **Colossians 2:12**, "...having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."
- **Walk in Newness of Life (v. 4):** This is another way of describing what it means to be a "new creation" in Christ, a central theme for Paul (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).

Application for Today

1. **Know Your New Identity:** The key to fighting sin is not just trying harder; it's knowing who you are. You are no longer "a sinner" who needs to try and be good. You are a "saint" (a holy one) united to Christ, who needs to live in accordance with your new identity. Your old self was crucified. It's a past-tense, completed event.
2. **"Consider" Yourself Dead to Sin:** The word "consider" (or "reckon") is an accounting term. It means to count something as true and to act on that basis. You must actively, daily, count it as a fact that sin's power over you has been broken.
3. **You Are Not Under Law, But Under Grace:** This doesn't mean the law is bad. It means your relationship with God is no longer that of a law-breaker to a judge, but of a beloved child to a gracious Father. This new relationship is what breaks sin's dominion over you, not merely trying to follow rules.

Daily Challenge

The core command is to "consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God." Pick one specific, recurring sin you struggle with. Each time you are tempted by it today, stop and say this truth out loud or in your heart: **"In Christ, I am dead to this sin. It is part of my old life, not my new one. I am alive to God."** Act on the basis of that fact.

Prayer

Father, thank you that my old self was crucified with Christ. Thank you that I have died to sin and have been raised to walk in newness of life. Help me to truly know this and to consider it a fact. I declare today that I am dead to sin and alive to you in Christ Jesus. Do not let sin reign in my body, for I am not under law but under your glorious grace. Amen.

Day 14: Slaves to Righteousness

Verses for Today

Romans 6:15-23 (ESV)

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Historical Context

Paul asks his rhetorical question again, but in a slightly different way. He shifts from the metaphor of death/life to the metaphor of slavery. In the Roman world, nearly everyone was either a slave or had been a slave. A person was defined by their master. Paul's logic is simple and powerful: **everybody serves a master**. You are either a slave to sin or a slave to God. There is no neutral ground, no ultimate autonomy. The "freedom" offered by sin is a deception; it's a slavery that leads only to death. True freedom is found in becoming a "slave of God," which leads to sanctification (holiness) and eternal life.

Connections to Scripture

- **Slave to Sin (v. 16):** Jesus used the exact same logic in **John 8:34**, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."
- **Wages of Sin is Death (v. 23):** This famous verse connects back to the very beginning. God warned Adam in **Genesis 2:17** that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit, he would "surely die." Sin earns a wage, and that wage has always been death.

Application for Today

1. **Choose Your Master:** You don't get to choose *if* you will be a slave; you only get to choose *who* your master will be. Every day you are presenting the members of your body (your eyes, your hands, your mind, your time) in service to a master. Is it sin, or is it righteousness?

2. **Obedience is a Joyful Obligation:** Modern culture recoils at the idea of being a "slave" to anyone. But Paul presents it as a joyful transfer of allegiance. We have been liberated from a cruel, destructive master (Sin) and have been willingly enlisted in the service of a loving, life-giving Master (God).
3. **Contrast the Payoff:** The end of verse 23 presents the clearest possible contrast. Sin pays a wage: death. God gives a gift: eternal life. One is earned and deadly. The other is a gift and is life itself.

Daily Challenge

"Present your members as slaves to righteousness." Today, be very practical about this.

- **Your Eyes:** Consciously choose to look at things that are pure and good, rather than things that fuel sin.
- **Your Tongue:** Present it in service of encouragement and truth, not gossip or slander.
- **Your Hands:** Use them to serve someone or to do your work with integrity.
- **Your Mind:** Offer it to God by focusing on what is true and honorable (**Philippians 4:8**). Make one conscious choice in one of these areas to actively serve righteousness.

Prayer

Thank you, God, that I have been set free from sin and have become a slave to you. I was once a slave to sin, but now I joyfully present myself to you as a slave to righteousness. Help me, by your Spirit, to offer my eyes, my ears, my hands, and my mind in service to you today. Thank you for the free gift of eternal life, which is so much greater than the wages of death I had earned. Amen.

A Daily Study of the Book of Romans

Week 3: The Struggle and The Spirit

Day 15: Married to Christ, Freed from the Law

Verses for Today

Romans 7:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? ² For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. ³ Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

⁴ Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵ For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that

which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Historical Context

After establishing that we are dead to sin (chapter 6), Paul addresses our relationship to the law. To explain this complex point, he uses a simple analogy: marriage. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. Death ends the contract, freeing her to marry another. In the same way, Paul says, **our union with Christ in his death means we have "died to the law."** We are released from our old, captive relationship to the law as a means of earning righteousness. This frees us to enter a new, life-giving "marriage" to the risen Christ, a relationship that produces spiritual fruit.

Connections to Scripture

- **The Church as a Bride:** The idea of God's people being "married" to Him is a powerful theme. In the Old Testament, God speaks of "betrothing" Israel to Himself (**Hosea 2:19-20**). In the New Testament, the church is called the bride of Christ (**Ephesians 5:25-32, Revelation 21:2**).
- **Fruit for God:** Paul's goal of "bearing fruit for God" echoes Jesus's teaching in **John 15:5**, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

Application for Today

1. **Your Relationship is a Union, Not a Contract:** Your walk with God is not about meticulously following a list of rules in "the old way of the written code." It's about a living, dynamic relationship with the risen Christ. Your obedience flows from love for Him, not fear of the contract.
2. **Freedom Leads to Fruitfulness:** True spiritual fruit doesn't grow in the soil of legalism. It grows in the soil of a grace-filled union with Jesus. When you understand you are free from the law's condemnation and belong wholly to Christ, you are empowered to "bear fruit for God."
3. **Serve in the "New Way of the Spirit":** The Christian life is not a self-powered effort to follow an external code. It is a Spirit-powered life, lived from the inside out.

Daily Challenge

Identify one area of your Christian life that feels like a dry, legalistic duty (e.g., prayer, reading, giving). Today, consciously reframe it. Instead of thinking, "I *have* to do this," think, "I *get* to do this because I belong to Christ, and this is how I enjoy my relationship with Him." See if that changes your attitude and experience.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for dying to the law on my behalf. Thank you for releasing me from the old contract of sin and death. I rejoice that I now belong to You, my risen Savior. Help me to stop trying to serve you in my own strength according to a written code, and instead to live and serve in the new, life-giving way of the Spirit, bearing fruit that brings you glory. Amen.

Day 16: The Law Is Good, But Sin Is Deadly

Verses for Today

Romans 7:7-12 (ESV)

⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Historical Context

Paul immediately defends himself against a potential misunderstanding. If the law "aroused" our sinful passions (v. 5), does that mean the law itself is sinful? "By no means!" he declares. Paul clarifies the law's true function. The law is like a doctor's diagnostic tool or a brilliant light switched on in a dirty room. It doesn't *create* the problem (the sin, the dirt), but it *reveals* the problem that was already there. He uses the example of the commandment against coveting. He didn't know the full extent of his covetous nature until the law clearly defined it, and in a perverse way, the prohibition actually made the desire stronger. The fault lies not with the good law, but with the power of "sin" that dwells within.

Connections to Scripture

- **"You shall not covet":** Paul quotes the tenth commandment from the Ten Commandments in **Exodus 20:17** and **Deuteronomy 5:21**.
- **The Purpose of the Law:** Paul's teaching here is consistent with what he writes elsewhere. In **Galatians 3:19**, he asks, "Why then the law?" He answers, "It was added because of transgressions..." The law was given to define, expose, and even provoke sin so that humanity would see its true condition and need for a savior.

Application for Today

1. **Don't Blame the Standard:** When we feel guilty or fall short, it's easy to resent God's standards or wish they were lower. Paul reminds us the problem isn't the standard; the standard is "holy and righteous and good." The problem is the sin within us. God's commands are for our good.
2. **Appreciate the Law's Diagnostic Power:** Be thankful for the Bible's clear commands. They are a grace from God. Like a medical test that detects a hidden disease, the law reveals our fatal spiritual condition, which is the first step toward seeking the cure.
3. **Recognize the Deceptiveness of Sin:** Sin is personified here as a cunning enemy. It "seizes an opportunity," "produces" evil desires, "deceives," and "kills." We must be aware that sin is an active, deceitful power, not just a passive list of mistakes.

Daily Challenge

Read through the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) today. For each one, instead of just thinking about whether you've kept it externally, do two things: 1) Thank God that He has provided this good and holy standard for human flourishing. 2) Humbly acknowledge that sin in your heart makes you fall short of this standard, and thank Jesus for fulfilling it on your behalf.

Prayer

Holy God, thank you that your law is good and your commandments are righteous. Forgive me for the times I have resented your standards. Thank you for using your law to show me the sin that dwells in my heart. I

confess that sin deceives me and leads me to death. Thank you for not leaving me there, but for providing a cure for the disease your law diagnosed. Amen.

Day 17: The Inner War

Verses for Today

Romans 7:13-25 (ESV)

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Historical Context

This is one of the most intensely personal and debated passages Paul ever wrote. He describes a profound internal struggle, a civil war within himself. He "delights in the law of God" in his mind, but finds another principle—sin in his "flesh" (his human nature)—waging war and often winning. The passage culminates in a cry of agony ("Wretched man that I am!") followed immediately by a cry of faith-filled relief ("Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!").

Differing Views

The central debate is: **Who is the "I" Paul is describing?**

1. **His pre-Christian self:** Some believe Paul is describing his life as a Pharisee, sincerely trying to please God through the law but constantly failing.
2. **A generic, non-Christian person:** Others see this as a description of any person trying to live morally without the help of the Holy Spirit.
3. **His Christian self:** This is the most common view throughout church history. It holds that Paul is describing the normal, ongoing struggle that every believer experiences. Even after conversion, indwelling sin remains and continues to "wage war" against our new nature, a conflict that will not end until we are glorified.

Connections to Scripture

- **Flesh vs. Spirit:** This internal war is described in similar terms in **Galatians 5:17**: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."

- **Delighting in the Law:** The psalmist expresses the same heart attitude in **Psalm 119:97**: "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." Paul's new nature truly loves God's standards.

Application for Today

1. **The Struggle is Normal:** If you experience this inner conflict, you are not a failed Christian. The mark of a true believer is not the *absence* of this struggle, but the fact that you *hate* your sin and *delight* in God's law. The unregenerate person may sin, but they do not have this internal war over it.
2. **The Problem is Indwelling Sin:** Notice how Paul distinguishes between "I" and "sin that dwells within me." Your new, true self in Christ wants to obey God. The struggle comes from the remnant of your old nature, the "flesh."
3. **Let the Struggle Drive You to Christ:** The "Wretched man!" cry is not a cry of final despair; it's what drives Paul to the answer: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ!" The daily awareness of your own weakness and struggle should make you daily more grateful for your Savior.

Daily Challenge

Think of one specific area where you feel the struggle of verse 19: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." Instead of just feeling guilty, follow Paul's pattern. First, cry out to God in honest frustration about the struggle. Then, immediately follow it by thanking God through Jesus Christ for the deliverance that is already yours.

Prayer

Wretched person that I am, I confess this struggle is real in me. I delight in your law, Father, but I find sin waging war in my members. I do not do the good I want to do. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God! Deliverance is found through Jesus Christ my Lord! Thank you that the battle is real, but the victory is secure in Him. Amen.

Day 18: The Great Declaration: No Condemnation

Verses for Today

Romans 8:1-4 (ESV)

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Historical Context

Chapter 8 is the triumphant answer to the desperate cry at the end of Chapter 7. It is the Mount Everest of biblical theology. Paul begins with the single greatest declaration of the believer's security. The Greek construction of verse 1 is emphatic: "Nothing of condemnation now!" For the person "in Christ Jesus," the guilty verdict has been overturned, the court case is closed, the sentence has been canceled. Why? Because on the cross, God did what the law could never do: He didn't just condemn the sinner, He condemned **sin itself** in the flesh of His own Son. Jesus absorbed the full condemnation so that we never would.

Connections to Scripture

- **No Condemnation:** This truth echoes Jesus's own words in **John 3:18**, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned," and **John 5:24**, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."
- **A Sacrifice "for sin":** The phrase "for sin" in verse 3 alludes to the sin offerings of the Old Testament (**Leviticus 4**), where an animal would be sacrificed as a substitute to atone for the people's sin. Jesus is the ultimate sin offering.

Application for Today

1. **Live in Freedom, Not Fear:** Condemnation is a feeling of guilt combined with a fear of punishment. This verse demolishes both for the believer. Your past, present, and future sins were all paid for and condemned in Christ. You are now and forever free from God's condemning judgment.
2. **Distinguish Between Conviction and Condemnation:** The Holy Spirit *convicts* us of sin to lead us to repentance and restoration (a hopeful action). Satan *condemns* us to crush us with guilt and shame (a hopeless accusation). Learn to recognize the difference. God's voice leads to life; the accuser's voice leads to death.
3. **Christ Fulfilled the Law For You:** The goal of the law—a righteous life—is fulfilled in us, not by our own striving, but as we "walk... according to the Spirit." The Spirit empowers us to begin living out the righteousness that is already ours in Christ.

Daily Challenge

Identify one specific thing that you feel guilt or shame about before God. It might be a past sin or a current struggle. Now, read Romans 8:1 out loud three times, inserting that specific issue. For example: "Regarding [my past mistake], there is therefore now no condemnation for me, because I am in Christ Jesus." Let God's declaration silence the voice of the accuser.

Prayer

Father, thank you. I am speechless at this truth. Thank you that there is now no condemnation for me because I am in Christ Jesus. Thank you for doing what the law could not do, by sending your Son to condemn sin in the flesh. I receive your verdict of "not guilty." Help me to live today in the joy and freedom of that reality, walking according to the Spirit. Amen.

Day 19: The Mind of the Spirit

Verses for Today

Romans 8:5-11 (ESV)

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you,

although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Historical Context

Paul explains the practical difference between the person in the struggle of chapter 7 and the person in the freedom of chapter 8: the indwelling Holy Spirit. He describes two mutually exclusive mindsets, two ways of viewing the world. The "mind set on the flesh" is the default human orientation—self-centered, hostile to God's authority, and leading to death. The "mind set on the Spirit" is the new orientation given to every believer—God-centered, submitted to Him, and leading to life and peace. The definitive mark of a true Christian, Paul says, is that the Spirit of God dwells in them.

Connections to Scripture

- **Set Your Mind:** This concept is crucial for Paul. He tells the Colossians, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (**Colossians 3:2**). What we choose to think about directs the course of our lives.
- **The Spirit as a Guarantee:** The Holy Spirit dwelling in us is described as the "down payment" or "guarantee" of our future inheritance, including the resurrection of our bodies (**2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13-14**).

Application for Today

1. **Your Mind is the Battlefield:** Your spiritual state is directly connected to your mental focus. What you set your mind on determines whether you experience life and peace or spiritual death. You have a choice.
2. **You Have the Spirit!:** If you are a Christian, you are "not in the flesh but in the Spirit." This is your new reality. The Spirit of God lives in you. This truth should give you incredible confidence and power to overcome sin.
3. **Your Future is Secure:** The same Holy Spirit power that raised Jesus's physical body from the grave is alive in you right now. That Spirit is the guarantee that one day, God will also give life to your mortal body. Your ultimate future is resurrection life.

Daily Challenge

Take a five-minute "mindset inventory." For the past 24 hours, what have you *really* been setting your mind on? Worries? Ambitions? Entertainment? Resentments? Be honest. Then, for the next five minutes, intentionally "set your mind on the things of the Spirit." You can do this by reading a Psalm, putting on worship music, praying, or meditating on a verse from today's passage. Feel the difference between the two mindsets.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank you for dwelling in me. I confess that my mind is so often set on the things of the flesh. Forgive me. Today, I choose to set my mind on you. Fill my thoughts with that which leads to life and peace. Help me to live in the reality that I am not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, and thank you for being the guarantee of my future resurrection. Amen.

Day 20: Adopted as Children, Heirs of God

Verses for Today

Romans 8:12-17 (ESV)

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Historical Context

Paul moves from the reality of the indwelling Spirit to the relationship the Spirit creates: adoption. In Roman culture, adoption was a serious legal act. An adopted son was given the full rights, privileges, and name of his new father, and his old life (including all its debts) was legally canceled. This is the picture Paul uses. We are not just pardoned criminals; we have been brought into God's family as full sons and daughters. This gives us the incredible privilege of addressing the sovereign God of the universe with the intimate Aramaic term "Abba," a word of warm affection and trust, similar to "Daddy."

Connections to Scripture

- **Abba, Father:** This is the same intimate term Jesus himself used when praying to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane (**Mark 14:36**). The Spirit gives us the same intimate access to the Father that Jesus had.
- **Heirs of God:** Paul develops this same idea of adoption and inheritance in **Galatians 4:4-7**: "...God sent forth his Son... so that we might receive adoption as sons... So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

Application for Today

1. **Your Relationship is Familial, Not Transactional:** You are a child of God, not just a servant or a subject. This means you can approach Him with confidence and intimacy, not with fear and trembling. He is your "Abba."
2. **You Have a Secure Inheritance:** As a child of God, you are an heir. Your future inheritance of glory is as secure as Christ's because you are a "fellow heir" with him. Your future is unimaginably bright.
3. **Suffering is Part of the Inheritance:** Paul adds a crucial condition: "provided we suffer with him." Sharing in Christ's inheritance also means sharing in his path of suffering. This doesn't mean we seek out suffering, but that we should expect it as part of the journey toward glory.

Daily Challenge

Pray at least once today, and when you do, begin your prayer by saying "Abba, Father" out loud. Use that intimate name. Let the reality that you are speaking to your loving Daddy, not a distant cosmic force, change the way you pray. Share what is truly on your heart as a beloved child would.

Prayer

Abba, Father! I am in awe that I can call you this. Thank you for not giving me a spirit of slavery and fear, but for adopting me as your own child. Thank you that Your Spirit testifies with my spirit that I belong to you. Help

me to live like a true child and heir today, trusting in your love and looking forward to the glorious inheritance you have promised, which I share with Christ. Amen.

Day 21: A Groaning Creation, A Glorious Hope

Verses for Today

Romans 8:18-27 (ESV)

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved...

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Historical Context

Having mentioned suffering, Paul now puts it into cosmic perspective. He paints a picture of a world that is not as it should be. Since Adam's fall, all of creation has been in "bondage to corruption" and is "groaning" like a woman in labor. We as believers also "groan" inwardly, longing for our final redemption. But this groaning is not one of despair; it is a groaning of hopeful expectation. Paul then reveals an amazing truth: we are not alone in our groaning. The Holy Spirit Himself groans within us, taking our weak, wordless prayers and translating them perfectly according to the will of God.

Connections to Scripture

- **Creation Subjected to Futility:** Paul is referencing **Genesis 3:17-18**, where God curses the ground because of Adam's sin, introducing thorns, thistles, and toil.
- **The Pains of Childbirth:** The Old Testament prophets often used the metaphor of labor pains to describe the suffering that would precede the coming of the messianic age and the new creation (**Isaiah 26:17-19**, **Micah 4:9-10**).
- **Firstfruits of the Spirit:** The "firstfruits" was the first portion of the harvest offered to God, which was a promise and guarantee of the full harvest to come (**Leviticus 23:10**). The Spirit's presence in us now is the "firstfruit" of the full glory and life to come.

Application for Today

1. **Your Suffering is Real, But Temporary:** This passage gives us permission to "groan." It acknowledges the deep pain and brokenness of this world. But it puts that suffering in perspective: it is nothing compared to the glory that is coming.

2. **Creation is Waiting For You:** In a beautiful reversal, creation is not waiting for God to act, but for the "revealing of the sons of God." Our final glorification is the trigger for the liberation of the entire cosmos. This gives us an amazing sense of dignity and purpose.
3. **You Are Never Helpless in Prayer:** Have you ever been so weak, tired, or overwhelmed that you didn't know what to pray? This passage is an incredible comfort. The Holy Spirit takes your weakness—even your silent groans—and intercedes perfectly for you.

Daily Challenge

Take notice of the "groaning" today. You might see it in a news headline about a natural disaster, feel it in your own body's ache or weakness, or sense it in a friend's struggle. Instead of letting it lead to despair, consciously reinterpret it through the lens of this passage as the "pains of childbirth." Then, offer a simple prayer: "Come, Lord Jesus. And Holy Spirit, intercede for me."

Prayer

Father, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed. I groan with creation, waiting for my full adoption, the redemption of my body. Thank you that in this hope I was saved. And thank you, Holy Spirit, for helping me in my weakness. When I don't know how to pray, thank you for interceding for me with groanings too deep for words. I trust you. Amen.

A Daily Study of the Book of Romans

Week 4: God's Sovereign Plan and Unbreakable Love

Day 22: More Than Conquerors

Verses for Today

Romans 8:28-39 (ESV)

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ... ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Historical Context

This passage is the triumphant climax of everything Paul has taught from chapter 1 to chapter 8. He lays out what is often called the "Golden Chain of Salvation" (vv. 29-30), an unbreakable sequence of God's actions that stretches from eternity past to eternity future. This assurance of God's sovereign purpose leads to a series of bold, rhetorical questions to which the answer is a resounding "Nothing!" Paul concludes with one of the most powerful and poetic declarations of the believer's absolute security in the love of God.

Connections to Scripture

- **All Things Work for Good (v. 28):** This principle is illustrated in the life of Joseph, who told his brothers who had sold him into slavery, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (**Genesis 50:20**).
- **Foreknew and Predestined (v. 29):** The concept of God's sovereign, foreordaining plan is rooted in the Old Testament. God tells Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (**Jeremiah 1:5**).

Differing Views

Verses 29-30 are central to the historic debate on predestination between Calvinism (Reformed) and Arminianism.

- **The Reformed (Calvinist) View:** Holds that God's "foreknowledge" is not just intellectual foresight, but a relational "fore-loving." Based on His own sovereign will and purpose, God actively chooses (elects) specific individuals for salvation, and His call is irresistibly effective, leading certainly to their justification and glorification.
- **The Arminian View:** Holds that God's foreknowledge is His ability to see the future. He looks ahead, foresees who will freely choose to place their faith in Christ, and on the basis of that foreseen faith, He predestines them for salvation. The ultimate decision rests on human free will.

Application for Today

1. **Trust God's Purpose in All Things:** Verse 28 is not a promise that life will be easy or that only good things will happen. It's a promise that a sovereign and good God is weaving *all* things—the good, the bad, and the ugly—into an ultimate good for those who love Him.
2. **Know That God is For You:** Meditate on the logic of verse 32. If God has already given you the greatest possible gift (His Son), why would He withhold any lesser gift that you truly need? You can trust His generosity.
3. **Rest in His Unbreakable Love:** Your relationship with God is not fragile. It cannot be broken by your circumstances, your failures, your doubts, or even by demonic powers. You are eternally secure in His powerful love.

Daily Challenge

Read the list in verses 38-39 again. Now, make your own list. What specific things are you afraid might separate you from God's love or disrupt His plan for you? (e.g., "my financial anxiety," "my past mistakes," "my health issues," "my struggling relationship"). Speak them out loud and then declare Paul's conclusion over them: "None of these things can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Prayer

Oh God, I am speechless. If you are for me, who can be against me? Thank you for not sparing your own Son. I am convinced that nothing—absolutely nothing—can separate me from Your love. Help me to live in the unshakable confidence and conquering power of that truth today. Amen.

Day 23: A Heart of Anguish

Verses for Today

Romans 9:1-5 (ESV)

¹ I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Historical Context

After the soaring heights of chapter 8, chapter 9 begins with a sudden, dramatic shift in tone. Having just celebrated his unbreakable union with Christ, Paul now expresses a sorrow so profound that he would be willing to be "cut off from Christ" if it would mean the salvation of his fellow Jews. This is not just a theological problem for Paul; it's a deep, personal heartbreak. He lists Israel's eight incredible privileges to emphasize the tragedy: why would the people who received every possible advantage from God be the very ones to reject their Messiah?

Connections to Scripture

- **Willingness to be Accursed (v. 3):** Paul's cry echoes the heart of one of Israel's greatest leaders, Moses. After the people sinned with the golden calf, Moses prayed, "But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written" (**Exodus 32:32**). True spiritual leadership is marked by this kind of sacrificial love.
- **Israel's Privileges (vv. 4-5):** Paul lists the unique blessings God gave to Israel, which form the entire story of the Old Testament: their adoption as God's son (**Exodus 4:22**), the glory of God's presence (**Exodus 40:34**), the covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic), the law from Sinai, the temple worship, the promises of the Messiah, and the patriarchs.

Application for Today

1. **Let Your Theology Create Compassion:** Paul's deep understanding of God's love for him (chapter 8) didn't lead to arrogance, but to a broken heart for those who didn't share it. Does your knowledge of God make you more compassionate and sorrowful for the lost, or more judgmental?
2. **Privilege is Not a Guarantee:** Israel had every spiritual advantage imaginable, yet they stumbled. We can grow up in the church, know the Bible, and have every Christian resource, but unless we personally embrace Christ by faith, these privileges mean nothing for our salvation.
3. **Pray with Sacrificial Love:** Paul's love was so great he was willing to trade his own salvation for that of his people. While we cannot do that, we can ask God to give us a measure of that same sacrificial love for our friends, family, and neighbors who are far from Him.

Daily Challenge

Think of one person or group of people in your life who does not know Christ. Instead of just a quick prayer for their salvation, spend five minutes trying to feel what God feels for them. Ask God to break your heart for what breaks His. Let a genuine sense of sorrow and anguish fuel your prayer for them today.

Prayer

Father, give me a heart like Paul's. Break my heart with the things that break yours. Replace my indifference and judgmentalism with great sorrow and unceasing anguish for those who are cut off from Christ. Thank you for the incredible privileges you have given me in the gospel. May that not lead to pride, but to a desperate, loving desire for others to know you too. Amen.

Day 24: God's Sovereign Choice

Verses for Today

Romans 9:6-18 (ESV)

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or evil, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ... ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy... ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

Historical Context

Here Paul begins his difficult but crucial answer to the question, "Has God's promise to Israel failed?" His answer is **no**, because God's promise was never meant for every single physical descendant of Abraham. From the very beginning, God's plan operated by **sovereign choice**. He chose Isaac over Ishmael. He chose Jacob over his older twin brother Esau, *before they were even born*, to show that His choice is based on His own purpose and mercy, not on human merit or works. Paul's point is that God's election has always been the principle by which He builds His family.

Connections to Scripture

- **Isaac and Ishmael (v. 7):** Paul quotes **Genesis 21:12**, showing that from Abraham's two sons, God chose one to carry the covenant promise.
- **Jacob and Esau (vv. 12-13):** Paul quotes **Genesis 25:23** ("The older will serve the younger") and **Malachi 1:2-3** ("Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated").

- **Pharaoh (v. 17):** Paul quotes **Exodus 9:16**, where God tells Pharaoh that He raised him up for the very purpose of demonstrating His power to the world through the exodus.

Differing Views

This passage is a focal point of the Calvinist-Arminian debate regarding divine sovereignty and human will.

- **The Reformed (Calvinist) View:** Argues that this passage teaches God's **unconditional election** of individuals to salvation. God's choice of Jacob over Esau, before they had done anything good or evil, is seen as the model for how God chooses individuals for salvation based solely on His mercy and purpose, not on any foreseen quality or action in them.
- **The Arminian View:** Argues that Paul is speaking of **corporate election**, not individual salvation. God chose the nation of Israel (descended from Jacob) over the nation of Edom (descended from Esau) for a specific historical purpose. The phrase "Esau I hated" is interpreted in the Semitic sense of "loved less" or "rejected for the covenant role," not that God condemned the individual Esau to hell. Pharaoh's hardening is seen as God's judicial response to Pharaoh's own prior self-hardening.

Application for Today

1. **Salvation is a Work of Mercy:** Regardless of your specific theological view, the main point is clear: salvation "depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (v. 16). Our salvation is not a human achievement; it is a divine gift. This should produce profound humility.
2. **God's Purposes Cannot Fail:** Paul's starting point is that "the word of God has not failed." The apparent failure of Israel did not surprise God or derail His plan. We can have confidence that God's ultimate purposes in the world and in our lives will also not fail.
3. **Wrestle Humbly with Difficult Truths:** This passage is challenging. It confronts our modern sensibilities about fairness and autonomy. The correct response is not to dismiss it, but to approach it with humility, asking, "God, what are you teaching me about who You are?"

Daily Challenge

Today's challenge is one of posture. Read verses 14-18 again, slowly. As you read, consciously humble yourself before the mystery of God's sovereignty. Instead of trying to make God fit into your box of what seems fair, simply confess, "God, you have mercy on whomever you will. You are God, and I am not. I trust you."

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, this truth is difficult, and it challenges my pride. Forgive me for thinking that my salvation depends on my own will or effort. Thank you that it depends entirely on your mercy. I confess that I do not fully understand your ways, but I trust that you are just and merciful. Help me to rest in your sovereign purpose. Amen.

Day 25: The Potter and the Clay

Verses for Today

Romans 9:19-29 (ESV)

¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made

me like this?" ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,'"... ²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah."

Historical Context

Paul anticipates the ultimate human objection to divine sovereignty: "If God is in control, how can we be responsible?" Instead of providing a philosophical answer that neatly resolves the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, Paul rebukes the questioner. He asks, "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?" He uses the well-known Old Testament analogy of the potter and the clay to assert God's rights as Creator. He then argues that God's purpose in this sovereign plan has always been to display the riches of His glory on "vessels of mercy," which, he shows from the prophet Hosea, includes Gentiles as well as a remnant of Jews.

Connections to Scripture

- **The Potter and the Clay:** This is a powerful and common metaphor in the Old Testament for God's absolute sovereignty over His creation, particularly Israel. See **Isaiah 29:16**, **Isaiah 45:9**, and especially **Jeremiah 18:1-11**, where the potter reshapes a marred vessel according to his will.
- **Calling the Gentiles:** Paul quotes **Hosea 2:23** and **Hosea 1:10** to show that God's plan to include the Gentiles was not a last-minute improvisation but was part of His prophetic plan all along.
- **A Remnant Saved:** He then quotes **Isaiah 1:9** to show that God's plan also included the preservation of a faithful remnant from Israel.

Application for Today

1. **Embrace Your Creatureliness:** The core message of the potter analogy is to know your place. We are the clay; God is the Potter. We do not have the right to cross-examine our Creator. Humility and trust are the only appropriate postures.
2. **Marvel at Being a Vessel of Mercy:** While God's sovereignty can be intimidating, Paul's focus is on its glorious result: God's desire to "make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy." If you are in Christ, this is you! You are an object of His mercy, prepared beforehand for glory. Let this truth sink in and produce overwhelming gratitude.
3. **See God's Hand in Your Salvation:** Your salvation was not an accident. You were called by God, whether Jew or Gentile, as part of His eternal plan to display His mercy.

Daily Challenge

Find a quiet moment today and visualize yourself as clay in the hands of a master potter. Surrender your own agenda, your worries, and your demands. In prayer, tell the Potter, "Have your way with me. Shape me into a vessel that brings you glory." Consciously yield control of your life to His loving, sovereign hands.

Prayer

O Lord, you are the Potter, and I am the clay. Who am I to answer back to you? I surrender my questions, my demands, and my will to you. Thank you, thank you, thank you for making me a vessel of your mercy, which you prepared beforehand for glory. Shape me, mold me, and use me for your purposes. Amen.

Day 26: The Stumbling Stone of the Gospel

Verses for Today

Romans 9:30-10:4 (ESV)

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

¹ Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Historical Context

Paul now summarizes the great irony: the Gentiles, who weren't even trying to be righteous before God, found righteousness through faith. Meanwhile, Israel, who passionately pursued righteousness through the law, failed to find it. Why? Because they pursued it the wrong way—through works, not faith. In doing so, they stumbled over the very one who could save them. Christ, who should have been their cornerstone, became a "stumbling stone" to their pride. Paul reiterates that this was not due to a lack of sincerity—they had "a zeal for God"—but their zeal was "not according to knowledge." They tried to establish their *own* righteousness instead of humbly receiving the righteousness *from God*.

Connections to Scripture

- **The Stumbling Stone (v. 33):** Paul combines two prophecies from **Isaiah 8:14** ("a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling") and **Isaiah 28:16** ("a precious cornerstone... whoever believes in him will not be put to shame"). Jesus is both. For those who believe, He is the foundation of their salvation. For those who rely on their own works, He is an obstacle to their pride. Peter uses this same imagery in **1 Peter 2:6-8**.
- **Christ is the End of the Law (v. 4):** The Greek word for "end" (*telos*) can mean both "termination" and "goal/fulfillment." Christ is both. His coming brought an end to the law as a system for earning righteousness, and He is the perfect fulfillment of everything the law pointed toward.

Application for Today

1. **Check Your Zeal:** It is possible to be passionate, sincere, and zealous for God, and still be completely wrong. Sincerity is not a substitute for truth. Our zeal must be "according to knowledge," grounded in the true gospel and not in our own ideas or efforts.

2. **Submit, Don't Establish:** The core of our sinful nature is the desire to "establish our own" righteousness—to prove our worth and earn our way. The essence of faith is to "submit" to God's righteousness—to humbly receive the free gift offered in Christ.
3. **Don't Stumble Over Jesus:** For many, the idea that we can't earn our way to God and must simply trust in Christ is offensive. It wounds our pride. Christ confronts our self-sufficiency. You must decide if He will be your Cornerstone or your Stumbling Stone.

Daily Challenge

Take an honest inventory of your spiritual life. Is there any area where you are "seeking to establish your own" righteousness? Perhaps by comparing yourself to others, by meticulously tracking your spiritual disciplines, or by feeling you need to "do more" to be accepted by God. Consciously repent of that effort and "submit" to the free righteousness that is yours in Christ.

Prayer

Father, forgive me for my zeal without knowledge. Forgive me for every time I have tried to establish my own righteousness instead of humbly submitting to yours. I confess that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. He is my only hope. I believe in Him, and I know I will not be put to shame. Let Him be my cornerstone today. Amen.

Day 27: The Simplicity of Salvation

Verses for Today

Romans 10:5-13 (ESV)

⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that "the person who does the things shall live by them." ⁶ But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Historical Context

Paul contrasts the two kinds of righteousness. The righteousness from law (quoting Leviticus) requires perfect performance. The righteousness from faith, however, is not a difficult, far-off quest. Paul brilliantly re-interprets a passage from Deuteronomy where Moses says the commandment is not hidden up in heaven or across the sea, but is near, in their mouths and hearts. Paul applies this to Christ. We don't have to ascend to heaven or descend to the abyss to find Him; the message of faith is right here, available to us now. This leads to the beautiful simplicity of the gospel call: confess and believe.

Connections to Scripture

- **Righteousness by Law (v. 5):** Paul quotes **Leviticus 18:5**. This was the principle of the Mosaic covenant: perfect obedience leads to life. But as Paul has already shown, no one can achieve this.
- **The Word is Near You (v. 8):** Paul is quoting and interpreting **Deuteronomy 30:11-14**. He sees this passage as ultimately pointing to Christ.
- **Everyone Who Calls... Will Be Saved (v. 13):** Paul quotes **Joel 2:32**, a powerful Old Testament promise of salvation. Crucially, Paul applies the title "the Lord" (which in Joel refers to Yahweh) directly to Jesus, a clear statement of Jesus's divinity.

Application for Today

1. **Embrace the Simplicity:** Don't overcomplicate the gospel. Salvation is not a complex intellectual puzzle or a series of difficult spiritual feats. It is as simple and as near as a heartfelt belief and a sincere confession.
2. **Believe in the Heart:** True faith is not just intellectual assent. It is a deep trust and reliance in your "heart"—the core of your being—that God really did raise Jesus from the dead, vindicating him as Lord and Savior.
3. **Confess with the Mouth:** Saving faith is not a silent, secret thing. It naturally leads to an outward confession that "Jesus is Lord," which means submitting your entire life to His authority.
4. **"Everyone" Means Everyone:** The promise is for "everyone who calls." There are no other prerequisites or barriers. Jew, Greek, rich, poor, male, female—the ground is level at the foot of the cross, and the offer is open to all.

Daily Challenge

Read verses 9 and 10 out loud again, but make them personal. Say, "Today, I confess with my mouth that Jesus is Lord, and I believe in my heart that God raised him from the dead, and I am saved." Let the simplicity and power of that declaration be the foundation for your whole day.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that you have made the way of salvation so wonderfully simple and near. I don't have to climb to heaven or descend to the abyss. The word of faith is in my mouth and in my heart. Today, I confess again that you are Lord. I believe in my heart that God raised you from the dead. Thank you for bestowing your riches on me as I call upon your name. Amen.

Day 28: How Will They Hear?

Verses for Today

Romans 10:14-21 (ESV)

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

¹⁸ But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have. For "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." ¹⁹ But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." ²⁰ Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me." ²¹ But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

Historical Context

After establishing that salvation comes to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, Paul lays out the logical chain that fuels Christian mission. If salvation requires belief, and belief requires hearing the message, then someone must be *sent* to preach that message. He establishes the absolute necessity of evangelism. He then returns to the question of Israel. Was their failure because they didn't hear the message? No, Paul says, quoting Psalm 19, the message has gone out. Their problem was not a lack of hearing, but a lack of obeying. He quotes Moses and Isaiah to show that Israel's disobedience and God's subsequent turning to the Gentiles were predicted in their own Scriptures.

Connections to Scripture

- **Beautiful Feet (v. 15):** A quote from **Isaiah 52:7**, originally describing the messenger who brought news that the Babylonian exile was over. Paul applies this to anyone who brings the good news of salvation in Christ.
- **Faith Comes from Hearing (v. 17):** This is a summary of the principle. The "word of Christ" is the content of the message that must be heard.
- **Their Voice Has Gone Out (v. 18):** Paul quotes **Psalm 19:4**. Originally about the testimony of creation, he applies it to the widespread preaching of the gospel.
- **God's Words to Israel (vv. 19-21):** Paul quotes **Deuteronomy 32:21** and **Isaiah 65:1-2** to show God's proactive seeking of the Gentiles and His patient, persistent call to a rebellious Israel.

Application for Today

1. **You Have a Role to Play:** The gospel spreads through a chain, and every believer is a link. You might be a "sender" (through prayer and giving) or a "preacher" (by sharing your faith), but you are part of the process. Faith comes by hearing, so we must speak.
2. **Value the Preaching of the Word:** Verse 17 is a powerful reminder of the importance of the preached Word. Listening to sermons, podcasts, and the reading of Scripture is not a passive activity; it is the primary means by which God creates and strengthens faith.
3. **Don't Confuse Hearing with Obeying:** It is possible to hear the gospel message many times—to grow up in the church, to know all the right answers—but to never truly obey it with heartfelt faith. The responsibility lies with the hearer to respond.

Daily Challenge

Today, be the answer to Paul's question. How can they hear without someone preaching? Choose one action to be a "beautiful feet" messenger.

- **Send:** Pray specifically for a missionary or pastor by name, or give a financial gift to a missions organization.
- **Preach:** Share a testimony, a Bible verse, or a simple explanation of the gospel with someone, either in person or online.
- **Invite:** Invite someone to a church service or event where they will hear the Word of Christ preached.

Prayer

Father, thank you for those who were sent to preach the good news so that I could hear and believe. Forgive me for taking this message for granted. Give me a burden for those who have never heard. Make my own feet "beautiful" by giving me the courage to bring the good news to someone in my life. And strengthen those you have sent throughout the world. Amen.

A Daily Study of the Book of Romans

Week 5: God's Mysterious Plan & Our Response

Day 29: The Unbroken Promise

Verses for Today

Romans 11:1-10 (ESV)

¹ I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? ³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." ⁴ But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵ So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

⁷ What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened...

Historical Context

Paul directly addresses the painful question that flows from chapters 9 and 10: Has God's covenant relationship with Israel been permanently broken? His answer is a thunderous "By no means!" He offers two proofs:

1. **His own life:** Paul himself is a Jew, a clear sign that God is still saving Israelites.
2. **The doctrine of the remnant:** He reminds his readers of the story of Elijah, who felt completely alone in his faithfulness. God corrected him, revealing that He had secretly preserved 7,000 others. In the same way, Paul argues, God has always preserved a "remnant" of Israel, chosen not by their merit but by His grace. The majority may have been hardened, but God's promise to His people has not failed.

Connections to Scripture

- **Elijah and the Remnant (vv. 2-4):** Paul retells the famous story from **1 Kings 19:9-18**. Elijah's despair is a powerful parallel to Paul's own anguish, and God's answer to Elijah is God's answer in Paul's day as well. The faithfulness of God does not depend on the majority.

- **Hardened Hearts (vv. 7-10):** Paul quotes from **Deuteronomy 29:4** and **Isaiah 29:10** to show that Israel's spiritual blindness was a prophesied reality, a divine judgment on their unbelief.

Application for Today

1. **God is Always Faithful:** God has not, and will not, abandon the promises He made to His covenant people. His faithfulness is the bedrock of our hope.
2. **Don't Judge by Outward Appearances:** Like Elijah, we can sometimes look at the state of the church or the world and fall into despair, thinking we are alone. This passage reminds us that God is always at work, preserving a people for Himself, even when we can't see them.
3. **It's All by Grace:** The remnant was "chosen by grace." Our salvation, our inclusion among God's people, is never based on our works or merit. It is a free gift from start to finish.

Daily Challenge

Think of a situation that discourages you spiritually—perhaps a decline in your church, a nation that seems hostile to the gospel, or a family that rejects faith. Instead of focusing on the negative, pray and thank God that He is sovereignly and graciously preserving a remnant that you cannot see. Ask Him to help you trust in His hidden work.

Prayer

Faithful God, thank you for not rejecting your people. Thank you for always preserving a remnant chosen by grace. Forgive me for the times I despair when I look at the world around me. Help me to trust in your unseen work and your unbreakable promises. I praise you that my salvation rests on your grace, not my works. Amen.

Day 30: The Olive Tree

Verses for Today

Romans 11:11-24 (ESV)

¹¹ So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you... ²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.

Historical Context

Paul continues to explore God's purpose in Israel's stumbling. It was not for their final destruction, but for a redemptive purpose: to open the door for the salvation of the Gentiles. To explain this, he uses the powerful analogy of an olive tree.

- **The Root:** The patriarchs and God's covenant promises to Israel.

- **The Cultivated Branches:** The people of Israel.
- **The Broken-Off Branches:** Unbelieving Israelites.
- **The Wild Olive Shoots:** Gentile believers.

The Gentiles have been "grafted in" to the tree, sharing in its life and nourishment. Paul uses this analogy to deliver a stern warning to Gentile Christians: Do not become arrogant. Your place on this tree is entirely dependent on faith, and you are supported by the Jewish "root," not the other way around.

Application for Today

1. **Avoid Spiritual Pride:** This is a direct warning against a kind of anti-Semitism that can creep into the church. As Gentile believers, our faith has Jewish roots. We have been graciously grafted into the long story of God's people. Our attitude toward Israel should be one of humility, gratitude, and prayer.
2. **You Stand by Faith Alone:** Your position in God's family is not a right; it is a gift maintained "by faith." The moment you begin to think you have earned your place or are superior to others, you place yourself in danger. "Do not become proud, but fear" (a reverent fear, a holy awe).
3. **God's Redemptive Purpose:** God is a master at bringing good out of bad. He used Israel's trespass to bring riches to the whole world. This should give us confidence that He can work redemptively even in the failures and sins of our own lives.

Daily Challenge

Take some time today to appreciate your spiritual heritage. You can do this by reading a story from the Old Testament (like David and Goliath, or Daniel in the lion's den) and consciously reminding yourself, "This is my family's story. I have been grafted into this." Let it cultivate a sense of gratitude for the "root that supports you."

Prayer

Father, thank you for grafting me, a wild olive shoot, into your tree. Forgive me for any pride or arrogance in my heart. Help me to remember that I do not support the root, but the root supports me. I stand by faith alone. I pray for the people of Israel, that you would provoke them to jealousy and bring about their full inclusion, for your glory. Amen.

Day 31: The Ultimate Doxology

Verses for Today

Romans 11:25-36 (ESV)

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Redeemer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; ²⁷ "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."...

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Historical Context

Paul concludes his long argument about Israel by revealing a "mystery"—a truth previously hidden but now revealed by God. Israel's hardening is not permanent. It will last until God has saved the full number of Gentiles He intends to save. After this, God will move again in a powerful way, and "all Israel will be saved." Contemplating this vast, mysterious, and merciful plan of God that spans all of history and includes both Jew and Gentile, Paul can no longer just write theology. He bursts into a doxology—a spontaneous hymn of worship and praise—celebrating the infinite wisdom and sovereignty of God.

Differing Views

The phrase "**all Israel will be saved**" is widely debated. The main interpretations include:

1. **A future mass conversion of ethnic Israel:** This view suggests that at the end of time, there will be a widespread revival and turning to Christ among the Jewish people.
2. **The complete number of elect believers:** This view interprets "all Israel" as the one, true Israel of God, composed of the complete number of elect Jews and elect Gentiles together.
3. **Every Jew who has ever lived:** This is a minority view (universalism) and is not widely held as it contradicts other parts of Scripture.

Application for Today

1. **Trust God's Mysterious Plan:** God's plan for history is far bigger and more complex than we can imagine. There will be aspects of it that remain a "mystery." Our role is not to have all the answers, but to trust the all-wise God who does.
2. **Let Theology Lead to Worship:** The goal of studying Scripture and theology is not to win arguments or puff up our minds with knowledge. The proper end of all deep thought about God is to be brought to our knees in worship and praise, like Paul is here.
3. **God is the Source, Sustainer, and Goal of Everything:** Verse 36 is one of the most comprehensive statements about God in the Bible. Everything originates *from* Him, is sustained *through* Him, and exists *for* Him. This truth should put all of our own plans, worries, and ambitions in their proper perspective.

Daily Challenge

The challenge today is simply to worship. Read the doxology in verses 33-36 out loud, multiple times. Personalize it. Let it be your own prayer. Put on a worship song that celebrates God's greatness. Spend five minutes just adoring God for His unsearchable wisdom and inscrutable ways.

Prayer

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are your judgments and how inscrutable your ways! Who has known Your mind, Lord? Who has been Your counselor? For from you and through you and to you are all things. To you be glory forever. Amen.

Day 32: The Only Logical Response

Verses for Today

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Historical Context

This is the great turning point of the letter. After eleven chapters of glorious, dense theology about the gospel, Paul says, "**Therefore...**" This is the pivot point. Based on everything God has done for you—all the "mercies of God" you have just read about—this is how you are to live. The only logical response is total surrender. Paul uses the language of Old Testament worship but transforms it. Instead of bringing a dead animal to the altar, we are to bring our living selves, our entire bodies, to be a "living sacrifice." This is not a one-time act but a continuous state of being. And this outward surrender begins with an inward change: the renewal of our minds.

Connections to Scripture

- **Living Sacrifice:** This is a stark contrast to the sacrifices of dead animals required by the Old Testament law (**Leviticus 1-7**). Christianity requires the sacrifice of our living, breathing, everyday lives.
- **Renewal of the Mind:** The concept of inner transformation is central to the New Covenant. **Ezekiel 36:26** promises, "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you." See also **2 Corinthians 3:18**.

Application for Today

1. **Worship is a Lifestyle, Not an Event:** Your "spiritual worship" is not limited to singing songs on Sunday. It's what you do with your body—your hands, your feet, your eyes, your time, your energy—every moment of every day.
2. **You Become What You Behold:** You are either being "conformed to this world" (pressed into its mold) or "transformed by the renewal of your mind." There is no third option. The world is constantly shaping your thinking through media, culture, and values. You must actively counter this by saturating your mind with God's truth.
3. **Transformation is an Inside Job:** True, lasting change doesn't start with behavior modification. It starts with a renewed mind. When you begin to think differently, based on God's truth, your actions and desires will naturally follow.

Daily Challenge

Choose one specific "pattern of this world" that you feel is pressing you into its mold (e.g., the world's pattern of consumerism, anxiety, comparison, or sexual ethics). Find one specific truth from Scripture that counters that pattern. Write that truth down and intentionally meditate on it throughout the day, asking God to use it to "renew your mind."

Prayer

Father, in view of all your mercies, I present my body to you today as a living sacrifice. It is all I have, and it is the only logical response to your grace. Please do not let me be conformed to the patterns of this world. Transform me from the inside out by renewing my mind with your truth, so I can know and do your good, acceptable, and perfect will. Amen.

Day 33: One Body, Many Gifts

Verses for Today

Romans 12:3-8 (ESV)

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Historical Context

What is the first result of a renewed mind? Humility. Paul's first command in this practical section is to have "sober judgment" about ourselves. This sober judgment recognizes that we are part of a larger whole: the body of Christ. To illustrate this, Paul uses the analogy of a human body. A body has many different parts (eyes, hands, feet), each with a unique and vital function. Likewise, the church is one body, and each member has been given different spiritual gifts (*charismata* - grace-gifts) to serve the whole. No one is self-sufficient, and everyone is essential.

Connections to Scripture

- **The Body of Christ:** This is one of Paul's favorite metaphors for the church. He develops it in great detail in **1 Corinthians 12:12-27** and **Ephesians 4:1-16**, emphasizing both the unity and the diversity of the church.
- **Spiritual Gifts:** The lists of gifts here, in 1 Corinthians 12, and in Ephesians 4 are representative, not exhaustive. They are divine empowerments given by the Holy Spirit for the "common good" (**1 Corinthians 12:7**).

Application for Today

1. **Know Yourself, Humbly:** Sober judgment isn't thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less. It's having an accurate assessment of the gifts God has given you without pride (thinking you are the most important part) or false humility (thinking you have no part to play).
2. **You Are Needed:** You are not a spectator in the church; you are a vital organ in the body of Christ. The body is handicapped without the unique function that God has gifted you to perform.
3. **Use What You've Been Given:** Spiritual gifts are not trophies to be displayed; they are tools to be used. The emphasis in this passage is on *doing*. If you have a gift, *use it* to serve others and build up the body.

Daily Challenge

Look at the list of gifts in verses 6-8: prophecy (speaking God's truth), service, teaching, exhorting (encouraging), contributing, leading, showing mercy. Which of these sounds most like you? Don't worry about finding your official "spiritual gift." Just pick one that resonates. Then, find one small, specific way to use that gift to serve another person today.

Prayer

Father, thank you for making me a member of the body of Christ. Forgive my pride and help me to think of myself with sober judgment. Thank you for the gifts you have given me by your grace. Show me how to use them today—not for my own glory, but to serve others and to build up your church. Amen.

Day 34: Love in Action

Verses for Today

Romans 12:9-16 (ESV)

⁹ Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; seek to show hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

Historical Context

Having established the principle of using our gifts in humility, Paul now gives a rapid-fire list of practical exhortations that show what a "living sacrifice" looks like in the nitty-gritty of daily community life. This is not a random list; it is a portrait of "genuine love" (*agape*) in action. These short, punchy commands cover our inner attitude, our work ethic, our relationship with fellow believers, and our response to outsiders. This is the new mindset of chapter 12:1-2 fleshed out in real-world scenarios.

Application for Today

1. **Love is a Verb:** Genuine love is not a passive feeling; it's a series of active choices and behaviors. It "abhors," "holds fast," "contributes," "seeks," "blesses," "rejoices," and "weeps."
2. **This is a Spiritual Check-up List:** Reading this list is like a spiritual diagnostic. Which of these commands comes easily to you? Which ones are a real struggle? The areas of struggle are the areas where we most need to apply the "renewal of your mind" and rely on the Spirit's power.
3. **Community is Essential:** So many of these commands are impossible to obey in isolation. We *need* each other to practice patience, show honor, rejoice, weep, and live in harmony. This is a call to deep, authentic Christian community.

Daily Challenge

Choose just one command from this list that you know you need to work on. Write it down where you will see it throughout the day. For example:

- "Outdo one another in showing honor."
- "Rejoice with those who rejoice."
- "Be constant in prayer." Make it your specific mission to put that one command into practice at least once today, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you do it genuinely.

Prayer

Lord, let my love be genuine. Fill me with your Spirit so that I can truly love others with brotherly affection. Help me to be patient in tribulation, constant in prayer, and to rejoice in the hope I have in you. Give me the grace to bless those who persecute me, to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep. Make me a person of genuine, active love. Amen.

Day 35: The Christian's Response to Evil

Verses for Today

Romans 12:17-21 (ESV)

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Historical Context

Paul concludes this chapter on practical love by addressing one of the most difficult situations: how to respond when we are wronged. The world's response is retaliation ("an eye for an eye"). The Christian's response is to be radically different. We are forbidden from seeking personal revenge. Instead, we are to entrust the situation to God's justice and actively do good to our enemies. Paul quotes Proverbs to give a startling image for this: feeding our enemy is like heaping "burning coals on his head." Most scholars believe this isn't a secret way of getting revenge, but rather a metaphor for causing intense shame that can lead to repentance.

Connections to Scripture

- **Love Your Enemies:** Paul is directly applying the difficult teachings of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (**Matthew 5:44**).
- **Vengeance is Mine:** Paul quotes directly from **Deuteronomy 32:35**, reminding believers that justice is God's prerogative, not ours.
- **Burning Coals:** This is a quotation from **Proverbs 25:21-22**.

Application for Today

1. **Relinquish Your "Right" to Revenge:** The desire for vengeance is a powerful human instinct, but as Christians, we are called to surrender it. We must consciously hand over the scales of justice to God, trusting that He will repay and make all things right in His time.
2. **Peace is Your Goal:** While peace with everyone may not always be "possible" (because it depends on the other person too), it must be our aim. "So far as it depends on you," you are to be a peacemaker.
3. **Good is More Powerful Than Evil:** Paul ends with a powerful principle. You can't fight evil with more evil. The only thing that truly overcomes the darkness of evil is the light of proactive, creative, and unexpected good.

Daily Challenge

Is there someone in your life who has wronged you? Someone you are holding a grudge against? Today, take two steps. First, in prayer, consciously "leave it to the wrath of God." Verbally tell God that you are relinquishing your right to be angry and that you trust Him with the situation. Second, think of one concrete, positive action you could take toward that person (even if it's just praying a sincere prayer for their blessing) and do it.

Prayer

Father, it is so hard not to want revenge when I am wronged. Forgive me for my vengeful thoughts. I hear your word: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." I leave that person and that situation in your hands. Give me the supernatural grace to not be overcome by evil, but to actively overcome evil with good. Help me to love my enemy today, for your glory. Amen.

A Daily Study of the Book of Romans

Week 6: Living Out the Gospel

Day 36: Submission to Authorities

Verses for Today

Romans 13:1-7 (ESV)

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Historical Context

Writing to Christians in the heart of the Roman Empire—a pagan, and at times hostile, regime—Paul's command to "be subject" is radical. He grounds this command not in the moral quality of the rulers, but in the sovereignty of God. Paul argues that all authority, even that of a pagan emperor like Nero, is ultimately instituted by God. Its God-given purpose is to maintain order, promote good conduct, and restrain evil. Therefore, for a Christian, submitting to the government is a way of submitting to God's ordained structure for society. This includes practical duties like paying taxes and showing honor.

Differing Views

A crucial question is whether this submission is absolute. What should a Christian do when the government commands something that directly contradicts God's law (e.g., to worship an idol, to deny Christ, to call evil good)? The rest of Scripture provides the answer. When the apostles were commanded to stop preaching about Jesus, their reply was, "We must obey God rather than men" (**Acts 5:29**). Therefore, the principle is that Christians are to be the best and most submissive of citizens in all things, *unless* the state commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands.

Connections to Scripture

- **Jesus and Authority:** Jesus affirmed the principle of God's sovereignty over earthly rulers when he told Pontius Pilate, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above" (**John 19:11**).
- **Peter's Parallel Teaching:** The Apostle Peter gives almost identical instruction in **1 Peter 2:13-17**, urging believers to "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution," including the emperor.

Application for Today

1. **Your Citizenship is a Spiritual Act:** How you conduct yourself as a citizen—obeying laws, paying taxes, showing respect—is part of your worship. It is a tangible way to honor the God who has instituted authority for our good.
2. **Adopt a Posture of Respect:** Our default attitude toward government and leaders, regardless of their political party or personality, should be one of respect and prayer, not cynicism and rebellion.
3. **Trust God's Sovereignty:** Even when governments are flawed or corrupt, we can have peace knowing that they are ultimately accountable to God and are operating within the bounds of His sovereign plan.

Daily Challenge

Think about your honest, unfiltered attitude toward a specific government official you dislike or disagree with. Does it align with Paul's command to show "respect" and "honor"? Today, your challenge is to pray for that person by name. Ask God to grant them wisdom, to help them promote good and restrain evil, and to guide their decisions.

Prayer

Sovereign God, I acknowledge that there is no authority except from you. Forgive my cynical and rebellious heart. Help me to be subject to the governing authorities you have placed over me, not just to avoid punishment, but for the sake of a clear conscience before you. I pray for my leaders today. Please give them wisdom and guide them, so that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity. Amen.

Day 37: The Royal Law of Love

Verses for Today

Romans 13:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall

love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Historical Context

After discussing our duties to the government, Paul transitions to our duty to one another. He frames it as a "debt" we can never fully repay: the debt of love. He then makes a profound statement about the nature of God's law. He shows that all the commandments that deal with our relationships (the second half of the Ten Commandments) are essentially summaries of the one great command to love our neighbor. If you truly love someone, you will not steal from them, lie to them, or covet what is theirs. Love is the principle that animates the entire law.

Connections to Scripture

- **Jesus's Great Commandment:** Paul is echoing the teaching of Jesus himself. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus said to love God and then added, "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (**Matthew 22:37-40**).
- **The Sum of the Law:** Paul makes this same argument in **Galatians 5:14**: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Application for Today

1. **Love is Your Guiding Ethic:** In complex situations where the rules aren't clear, the law of love is your compass. The guiding question should always be: "What is the most genuinely loving thing I can do for this person right now?"
2. **Love is More Than a Feeling:** Paul connects love directly to the commandments. This shows that biblical love is not a sentimental, abstract feeling. It is rugged and practical. It does what is best for the other person, protecting their life, their purity, their property, and their reputation.
3. **You Have an Unpayable, Joyful Debt:** Think of yourself as being in a permanent, joyful debt of love to everyone you meet. You can never say, "I've loved enough." This mindset will transform your interactions from obligations into opportunities.

Daily Challenge

Look again at the commandments in verse 9. Instead of viewing them as negative rules ("Don't do this"), reframe them as positive opportunities to love your neighbor today.

- Instead of "do not murder," how can you **promote and protect the life and well-being** of someone?
- Instead of "do not steal," how can you **respect and be generous** with what belongs to others?
- Instead of "do not covet," how can you **rejoice and be content** with what someone else has? Choose one and act on it.

Prayer

Father, thank you for summing up all your commands in the beautiful and simple principle of love. Fill my heart with your supernatural love for the people around me today. Help me to see every interaction as an opportunity to pay down the joyful debt of love I owe. May my love do no wrong to my neighbor, and in this way, may I fulfill your law. Amen.

Day 38: Wake Up! The Day is Near

Verses for Today

Romans 13:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹ Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Historical Context

Paul injects a powerful dose of urgency into his instructions. He uses the metaphor of night and day. "The night" is this present evil age, characterized by darkness and sleep. "The day" is the age to come, which will dawn with the return of Christ. He tells the Romans that it's nearly morning; it's time to "wake up" from spiritual lethargy. This urgency should motivate them to decisively "cast off" the sinful deeds that belong to the night and to "put on" the armor of light, which he defines ultimately as putting on the character of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. (Historical note: These verses were instrumental in the conversion of St. Augustine in 386 A.D.)

Connections to Scripture

- **Light and Darkness:** This is a common biblical metaphor. **Ephesians 5:8** says, "for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." **1 Thessalonians 5:5** says, "For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness."
- **Armor of God:** Paul develops the "armor" metaphor more fully in **Ephesians 6:10-18**. Here, the "armor of light" is the holy character of Christ.

Application for Today

1. **Live with Urgency:** Do you live with the awareness that time is short and the return of Christ is drawing near? This reality should shake us out of spiritual laziness and motivate us to live each day with purpose and holiness.
2. **Be Decisive with Sin:** Notice the active, decisive verbs: "cast off" and "make no provision." We are to treat sin like dirty clothes from the night before, throwing them off with resolve. And we are not even to plan for or create opportunities for our fleshly desires to be gratified.
3. **Clothe Yourself with Christ:** Getting dressed in the morning is a daily routine. Paul uses this as a spiritual metaphor. Every day, our conscious act of faith should be to "put on" the Lord Jesus—to seek to live in His strength, display His character, and depend on His righteousness as our only covering.

Daily Challenge

The command is to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." As you physically get dressed this morning, make it a spiritual exercise. With each article of clothing, pray to be clothed with an aspect of Christ's character. For example: "As I put on this shirt, may I be clothed in Christ's righteousness." "As I put on these shoes, may I walk in Christ's path of obedience."

Prayer

Lord, wake me from my spiritual sleep! Forgive me for my lethargy and for living as if I have all the time in the world. I know the night is far gone and the day is at hand. Today, by your grace, I cast off the works of

darkness. I choose to put on the armor of light. I put on you, Lord Jesus Christ, and I will make no provision for the flesh. Amen.

Day 39: Welcome, Don't Judge

Verses for Today

Romans 14:1-12 (ESV)

¹ As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² For one person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind... ¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God... ¹² So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Historical Context

Paul now addresses a specific source of tension within the diverse Roman church: "disputable matters" (or "opinions"). These were not core doctrines of the faith, but areas where sincere Christians could disagree. The two examples he uses are:

1. **Eating Meat:** Some believers, likely with a pagan background, felt free to eat any meat. Others, called "weak in faith," would only eat vegetables, possibly to avoid meat that had been offered to an idol or that wasn't considered kosher.
2. **Observing Days:** Some Jewish Christians likely continued to observe special Sabbath days or festivals, while Gentile Christians felt all days were alike.

Paul's instruction is revolutionary. He tells the "strong" (those with more freedom) and the "weak" (those with a more restrictive conscience) not to despise or judge one another. Why? Because each person is a servant of God and is accountable to Him alone.

Application for Today

1. **Distinguish Between Doctrine and Opinion:** We must be united on the core truths of the gospel (the "majors"). But we must learn to give grace and freedom on the non-essential "minors" where Scripture is not explicit.
2. **Stop Judging Other Christians:** It is an act of supreme arrogance to pass judgment on another person's servant. That believer belongs to God, not to you. Your job is to welcome them, not to be their judge. That role is already filled.
3. **Focus on Your Own Accountability:** You will not give an account to God for your brother's choices in disputable matters. You will give an account for your own. This should lead us to focus on our own walk with God rather than obsessing over others'.

Daily Challenge

Identify a modern "disputable matter" where you have a strong opinion (e.g., worship style, Bible translation, political candidate, schooling choice for kids). Now, think of a specific Christian you know who holds the opposite view. Your challenge is to pray for them, thanking God that He has welcomed them, that they are His servant, and that He is able to make them stand. Release them from your judgment.

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for my judgmental heart. Forgive me for despising my brothers and sisters who have different convictions than I do on disputable matters. Thank you that you have welcomed them, and help me to do the same. Remind me that I will stand before your judgment seat, not to give an account for them, but for myself. Help me to live in peace and unity with my fellow believers. Amen.

Day 40: Love Over Liberty

Verses for Today

Romans 14:13-23 (ESV)

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...

²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

Historical Context

Paul now directs his instruction primarily to the "strong" believer—the one whose conscience allows for more freedom. He agrees with them in principle ("nothing is unclean in itself"). However, he argues that exercising your Christian "right" or "liberty" is not the most important thing. The most important thing is love for your brother or sister. If exercising your freedom in front of a "weaker" believer would cause them to violate their own conscience (and thus sin), then love demands that you willingly limit your freedom for their sake. You should never let something as trivial as food or drink destroy a person for whom Christ died.

Connections to Scripture

- **Stumbling Blocks:** Jesus gave a stern warning about causing others to stumble: "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (**Matthew 18:6**).
- **Parallel in 1 Corinthians:** Paul gives the same extended teaching in **1 Corinthians 8**, concluding with the powerful personal statement, "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (**1 Corinthians 8:13**).

Application for Today

1. **Love Trumps Liberty:** Your personal freedom is never the ultimate value in the Christian life; love is. The guiding question is not, "Do I have a right to do this?" but rather, "Will this action build up my brother or potentially tear him down?"
2. **Protect Your Brother's Conscience:** A believer's conscience is a sacred thing. To encourage someone to do something they believe is wrong is a serious act of spiritual harm. We must be sensitive to the consciences of those around us, especially new believers.
3. **Focus on the Kingdom:** Don't get bogged down in arguments about trivial matters. The Kingdom of God is not about these external things; it's about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Keep the main thing the main thing.

Daily Challenge

Think of a specific area where you enjoy Christian liberty (e.g., in your entertainment choices, your use of social media, your view on alcohol). Now, consider if there is a person in your life (a child, a new believer, a Christian friend with a more restrictive background) for whom your freedom in that area might be a stumbling block. What would it look like to lovingly and willingly limit your freedom for their sake?

Prayer

Father, forgive me for the times I have flaunted my freedom and failed to consider my brother. Thank you for the liberty I have in Christ, but help me to value love for my brother even more. Grant me the wisdom to know when to restrain my freedom so that I might build up others and never cause another to stumble. May my life be characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Day 41: Welcome Others as Christ Welcomed You

Verses for Today

Romans 15:1-6 (ESV)

¹ We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." ⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Historical Context

Paul summarizes and concludes his argument from chapter 14 with a powerful principle. The "strong" have an *obligation* to patiently support the "weak." The goal is not self-pleasing but neighbor-pleasing, for the specific purpose of building them up in their faith. And who is the ultimate model for this? Christ himself. He did not live to please himself; He lived a life of self-sacrifice, absorbing the reproaches meant for God. Paul's ultimate goal for the church is that their mutual upbuilding and harmony would result in unified, corporate worship that glorifies God.

Connections to Scripture

- **The Mind of Christ (v. 3):** Paul's statement that "Christ did not please himself" is a perfect summary of his teaching in **Philippians 2:3-8**, where he calls believers to have the same humble, self-emptying mindset as Jesus, who "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself."
- **Christ and the Psalms (v. 3):** Paul quotes **Psalms 69:9**, a psalm of lament, and applies the suffering of the psalmist directly to Jesus. The early church saw Christ as the fulfillment of the suffering and triumphs described in the Psalms.

Application for Today

1. **Maturity Means Serving, Not Self-Pleasing:** The sign of spiritual strength is not demanding your own rights and freedoms, but patiently and willingly shouldering the burdens and "failings" of others.
2. **The Goal is to Build Up:** The purpose of pleasing your neighbor is not to be a people-pleaser. The goal is specific: "for his good, to build him up." Your words and actions in the church community should always be aimed at strengthening another person's faith.
3. **Unity is for God's Glory:** Why is it so important to live in harmony? Verse 6 gives the answer. So that "with one voice" we can glorify God. Disunity disrupts and dishonors the worship of God.

Daily Challenge

The command is to "welcome one another... as Christ has welcomed you" (v. 7). Take a moment to reflect on how, specifically, Christ welcomed you. He welcomed you when you were weak, sinful, and his enemy. He welcomed you unconditionally. Now, think of one person in your church or social circle you find difficult to welcome. What is one specific way you can extend Christ's kind of welcome to them this week?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are my ultimate example. You did not please yourself. Forgive me for my selfishness and my desire to have my own way. Give me the strength to bear with the failings of the weak and to seek only to build others up. Grant me and my church the grace to live in such harmony that we can, with one voice, bring glory to you, our God and Father. Amen.

Day 42: The God of Hope

Verses for Today

Romans 15:7-13 (ESV)

⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." ¹⁰ And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." ¹¹ And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." ¹² And again, Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Historical Context

Paul brings the main body of his letter to a beautiful conclusion. He circles back to his central theme: the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the gospel. He commands them to welcome one another, showing how Christ's ministry served both groups. Christ served the Jews to prove God's faithfulness to His Old Testament promises. The result of that faithfulness was that the door was opened for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy. To prove this was God's plan all along, he provides a final chain of Old Testament quotes. He then closes with a magnificent prayer-blessing (a benediction) for the Roman believers.

Connections to Scripture

- **A Chain of Prophecies:** Paul masterfully pulls from all three sections of the Hebrew Bible to show that Gentile inclusion was always God's plan:
 - The Law: **Deuteronomy 32:43** (v. 10)
 - The Prophets: **Isaiah 11:10** (v. 12)
 - The Writings: **Psalms 18:49** (v. 9) and **Psalms 117:1** (v. 11)

Application for Today

1. **Embrace God's Global Heart:** The unity of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation is not an optional extra to the gospel; it is central to God's purpose in history and brings Him great glory.
2. **Our God is the "God of Hope":** This is a beautiful title for God. In a world full of despair, our God is the source and foundation of all true hope.
3. **Joy, Peace, and Hope are Spirit-Powered:** Notice the mechanics in the final blessing. We are filled with joy and peace *in believing* (through faith), with the result that we *abound in hope*. And what is the engine driving the whole process? The "power of the Holy Spirit."

Daily Challenge

Verse 13 is a prayer for you. Read it slowly two or three times. Turn it into your own personal prayer. Ask the God of hope to genuinely fill you with joy and peace as you trust in Him today. Ask Him to cause you to "abound in hope" by the power of His Spirit, so that hope overflows from you to others.

Prayer

May you, the God of hope, fill me with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit I may abound in hope. Thank you, Father, that my hope is not in my circumstances but in your character. Let your hope overflow in my heart and life today. Amen.

A Daily Study of the Book of Romans

Week 7: The Heart of the Mission

Day 43: A Pioneering Apostle

Verses for Today

Romans 15:14-21 (ESV)

¹⁴ I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. ¹⁵ But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. ¹⁸ For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; ²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

Historical Context

As Paul begins to close his letter, he shifts to a more personal tone, explaining the purpose and scope of his own apostolic ministry. He assures the Romans that he is not writing to them because they are deficient, but to "remind" them of the truths of the gospel. He describes his unique calling as a "minister...in the priestly service of the gospel," framing his evangelistic work among the Gentiles as a holy offering he presents to God. He defines his life's ambition with a pioneer spirit: to preach the gospel only in places where no one else has gone before.

Connections to Scripture

- **Priestly Service (v. 16):** Paul uses the language of Old Testament priesthood to describe his gospel ministry. Instead of animal sacrifices, he is presenting sanctified Gentile believers as an "acceptable offering" to God.
- **A New Frontier (v. 21):** Paul quotes **Isaiah 52:15** to ground his pioneering ambition in Scripture. He sees his ministry as the direct fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that the message of God's salvation would reach those who had never heard.

Application for Today

1. **See Your Work as Worship:** Paul saw his life's work as a priestly service to God. Whatever your vocation, you can view your work—when done with integrity and for God's glory—as an act of worship, an offering you present to God.
2. **Embrace a Pioneering Spirit:** Paul's ambition was to take the gospel where it had never been. While most of us are not apostles, we can adopt this mindset. Where is the "unreached" territory in your life? It could be a neighborhood, a workplace, a social circle, or a family where the name of Christ is not known or honored.
3. **God's Power, Our Obedience:** Paul takes pride only in what *Christ* has accomplished *through* him. He was the vessel. It was Christ who brought the Gentiles to obedience by the power of the Spirit. This is a model for all Christian ministry: we labor, but the power and the results belong to God.

Daily Challenge

Identify your personal "Illyricum"—an area or group of people in your life that is unreached with the gospel. You don't have to plan a complex strategy today. Simply name that place or person before God and pray, "Lord, make it my ambition to bring the good news here. Show me how."

Prayer

Father, thank you for the example of Paul's ambition. Forgive me for being content to stay where it is comfortable. Give me a heart for the places and people who have never heard the name of Jesus. Use me as your instrument, by the power of your Spirit, to bring the good news to an unreached corner of my world, so that those who have never been told may see. Amen.

Day 44: The Strategic Heart of a Missionary

Verses for Today

Romans 15:22-29 (ESV)

²² This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my way there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. ²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷ For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. ²⁸ When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Historical Context

Here we see the missionary strategist behind the theologian. Paul lays out his travel plans, revealing his long-held desire to visit Rome. His ultimate goal is to reach the then-known "ends of the earth"—Spain. He sees the established church in Rome not as a final destination, but as a strategic base that can support and "help him on his way" to this new frontier. Before he can do that, however, he must complete a crucial mission: delivering a financial collection from the Gentile churches (Macedonia and Achaia) to the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, a tangible sign of the unity he has been preaching.

Application for Today

1. **Generosity Unites the Church:** Paul saw this financial gift as more than charity. It was a powerful symbol of unity. The Gentile believers, who had received "spiritual blessings" from the Jewish church (the gospel itself), were now sharing "material blessings" in return. Our generosity toward other believers, especially those in need, is a beautiful expression of our shared life in Christ.
2. **Be a Launching Pad, Not a Cul-de-Sac:** Paul saw the Roman church as a base for further mission. We should see our own churches and small groups this way. Is our community a comfortable holy huddle, or is it a strategic launching pad that equips and sends people out to serve God in the world?
3. **Long-Term Vision, Present-Day Faithfulness:** Paul had a grand, long-term vision (Spain), but he was focused on the immediate, faithful task in front of him (Jerusalem). We should dream big dreams for God's Kingdom, but that vision must translate into faithful obedience in the present moment.

Daily Challenge

Paul's plan was to be "helped on his way" by the Romans. Today, find one tangible way to help a ministry or missionary on their way. This could be by sending an encouraging email to a missionary you know, committing

to pray for your pastor's sermon preparation, or making a financial contribution to a ministry that is taking the gospel to a new frontier.

Prayer

Lord, give me a strategic heart for your mission. Help me to see my church and my resources not as my own, but as tools to be used to launch the gospel into the world. Show me how my "material blessings" can be a service to those who have blessed me spiritually. Give me a grand vision for your Kingdom, and the grace to be faithful in the small steps today. Amen.

Day 45: Strive Together with Me in Prayer

Verses for Today

Romans 15:30-33 (ESV)

³⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹ that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³ May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Historical Context

The great apostle, the spiritual giant Paul, ends his travel plans with a display of profound vulnerability and dependence. He urgently appeals to the Roman believers to join him in prayer. The Greek word for "strive together" (*sunagōnizesthai*) is an intense athletic term, meaning to agonize or struggle alongside someone. Paul knew his trip to Jerusalem was fraught with danger. He identifies two specific threats: physical danger from the unbelieving Jews, and social/spiritual danger that the Jewish Christians might reject the financial gift from the Gentiles. He knows his success is not guaranteed; it depends on God's will, which is why he so desperately needs their prayers.

Application for Today

1. **Prayer is a Team Sport:** Paul did not see prayer as a solitary activity. He believed in the collective power of believers "striving together." We need to pray *for* each other and *with* each other. Intercessory prayer is one of the most vital ministries in the body of Christ.
2. **Vulnerability is a Strength:** Even the strongest leaders need prayer. Paul was not afraid to admit his need and his fears. Being vulnerable and asking for prayer is a mark of spiritual maturity, not weakness.
3. **Pray Specifically:** Paul doesn't just ask for general "travel mercies." He asks them to pray for two very specific outcomes. Specific prayers allow us to see specific answers and give specific praise to God when He acts.

Daily Challenge

Who in your life is facing a "trip to Jerusalem"—a difficult, risky, or challenging situation? "Strive together" with them in prayer today. Don't just say "I'll pray for you." Stop right now and pray for them with specific, focused requests, asking God for deliverance and success in their situation. Consider sending them a text to let them know you've just prayed for them.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the privilege of prayer. Forgive me for my prayerlessness and for trying to handle things on my own. I lift up my brothers and sisters who are facing trials today. I strive together with them now, asking for your deliverance and your blessing on their behalf. Help us as a church to be a community that truly agonizes together in prayer for one another. May the God of peace be with us all. Amen.

Day 46: Honoring the Co-Workers

Verses for Today

Romans 16:1-5a (ESV)

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ² that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house.

Historical Context

Romans 16 is not an unimportant appendix; it's a window into the life of the early church. Paul begins his personal greetings by commending Phoebe. She was likely the person who carried this very letter to Rome. The words used to describe her are significant: she is a "servant" (Greek *diakonos*, from which we get "deacon") and a "patron" (a wealthy benefactor who provided support and protection). He then greets Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila, a husband-and-wife ministry team who were close partners with Paul, had taught the great Apollos, and hosted a church in their home. These opening greetings highlight the crucial and prominent leadership roles that women played in the early church.

Application for Today

1. **Recognize and Empower All Members:** The church is at its best when all of its members—men and women—are empowered to use their gifts in service and leadership. Paul highlights Phoebe, Prisca, and Aquila as essential "fellow workers." We must be a community that actively recognizes, honors, and makes room for the contributions of all.
2. **The Home is a Center for Ministry:** The earliest churches did not meet in special buildings; they met in homes. Prisca and Aquila's home was a hub of worship, fellowship, and mission. This reminds us that our homes can and should be powerful centers for hospitality and ministry.
3. **Ministry is a Team Effort:** Paul's language is full of partnership: "our sister," "fellow workers." He did not see himself as a solo superstar but as part of a wide and diverse team. The Christian life and mission are designed to be lived in community.

Daily Challenge

Paul commends Phoebe and greets Prisca and Aquila for their specific contributions. Today, identify one person in your church who serves faithfully, perhaps in a role that is often overlooked. Your challenge is to commend them. Send them a text, email, or card that says, "I see your work for the Lord, and I thank God for you."

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the examples of Phoebe, Prisca, and Aquila. Thank you for a church built on the faithful service of all your people. Help me to honor and support my brothers and sisters in their ministry. Show me how I can use my home as a place of hospitality and worship. Forgive us for the times we have hindered the gifts of others, and help us to be true fellow workers in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Day 47: A Family Portrait

Verses for Today

Romans 16:5b-16 (ESV)

Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹² Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Historical Context

This long list of names, while seemingly tedious, paints a beautiful portrait of the church in Rome. It was not a monolithic bloc, but a diverse tapestry of individuals. The names are a mix of Greek, Latin, and Jewish, indicating a multi-ethnic community. Some names were common for slaves, while the "family of Aristobulus" and "family of Narcissus" likely refer to Christian slave-servants within the households of powerful Roman aristocrats. Paul greets men and women, highlights those who "worked hard," and mentions some who were his "fellow prisoners." This was a real community of diverse people, united by their shared identity "in the Lord."

Application for Today

1. **The Church is a Diverse Family:** God is building a family made up of every kind of person imaginable. Our local churches should strive to reflect this diversity, welcoming people regardless of their ethnic, social, or economic background.
2. **Faithfulness in Obscurity is Noticed by God:** Most of the 26 people named here are never mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. They were ordinary, faithful people. Yet their names are recorded forever in Scripture. This is a powerful reminder that faithful, hard work for the Lord, even when it is unseen by the world, is seen and valued by God.
3. **Personal Relationships Matter:** Paul didn't just have a ministry strategy; he had deep, personal affection for his co-workers. He calls them "beloved" and remembers specific details about them. Genuine Christian ministry is always personal.

Daily Challenge

Read through the list of names again slowly. Let the diversity and humanity of the early church sink in. Then, look around your own church on Sunday. Make a point to greet someone you don't know well, especially someone from a different background than you, and learn their name. Remember that they, like Epaenetus and Junia, are part of your eternal family.

Prayer

Father, thank you for this beautiful family portrait. Thank you that your church is made up of so many different people, all united in Christ. Help me to love and appreciate the diversity within my own church. Thank you for the example of these ordinary saints who worked hard for you. Help me to be faithful in the small things, knowing that you see and value my service. Amen.

Day 48: A Final, Urgent Warning

Verses for Today

Romans 16:17-20 (ESV)

¹⁷ I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸ For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. ¹⁹ For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Historical Context

After his warm and personal greetings, Paul's tone shifts abruptly and sharply. He issues one final, urgent warning. He commands the Romans to "watch out for" and "avoid" false teachers. He gives a clear profile of these individuals:

- **Their Action:** They cause divisions.
- **Their Message:** It is contrary to the apostolic doctrine the Romans had been taught.
- **Their Master:** They serve their "own appetites" (their desires for gain, power, or prestige), not Christ.
- **Their Method:** Smooth talk and flattery.
- **Their Victims:** The "naive" or unsuspecting. He encourages the mature Romans to be "wise" in discerning good from evil and ends with a powerful promise of God's ultimate victory over Satan.

Application for Today

1. **Protect the Church's Unity and Doctrine:** Unity is precious, but it should never be preserved at the cost of sound doctrine. Paul is clear that those who teach things contrary to the core gospel message are a danger to the church and should be avoided.
2. **Be a Discerning Listener:** False teaching often sounds appealing. It is full of "smooth talk and flattery." We must not be naive. We need to be "wise as to what is good," constantly comparing what we hear with the truth of Scripture.

3. **Be Innocent as to What is Evil:** While we need to be wise in recognizing evil, we are not to become experts in it. We should not dwell on, entertain, or become fascinated by evil. Our focus should be on what is good, pure, and true.
4. **Victory is Certain:** Even in the face of spiritual warfare and false teaching, our hope is secure. The "God of peace" is also a warrior God who will ultimately crush all evil.

Daily Challenge

How "wise as to what is good" are you? Today's challenge is to sharpen your discernment. Take a statement you have recently heard from a sermon, podcast, or Christian book and actively compare it with Scripture. Ask: "Does this align with the doctrine I have been taught in God's Word?" Practice being a noble Berean who examines the Scriptures to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11).

Prayer

Lord, make me wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. Protect me and my church from those who would cause divisions with false teaching. Give me a discerning spirit to recognize smooth talk that serves selfish appetites rather than you. Thank you for the promise that you, the God of peace, will soon crush Satan under our feet. Amen.

Day 49: To the Only Wise God Be Glory Forever

Verses for Today

Romans 16:25-27 (ESV)

²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Historical Context

Paul concludes his masterpiece with a final, magnificent doxology. This hymn of praise serves as a perfect summary of the entire letter. He celebrates the God who is powerful enough to strengthen His people. And what is the basis of that strength? The gospel. Paul describes this gospel as a "mystery" that was hidden in past ages but is "now disclosed." This mystery—that Jews and Gentiles would be united as one people through faith in the crucified and risen Messiah—has now been made known to all nations, fulfilling the Old Testament prophetic writings, for the ultimate purpose of bringing all people to the "obedience of faith." All of this leads to the only possible conclusion: glory to the only wise God, forever.

Application for Today

1. **God is Able to Strengthen You:** The Christian life is not about your ability, but His. The same God who has the power to save you has the power to strengthen and sustain you. Your stability rests on His ability.
2. **The Gospel is a Revealed Mystery:** You are living in the age of revelation. You have access to the "mystery" that the Old Testament saints longed to understand more fully. Do not take this privilege for granted. The gospel is the climax of God's story.

3. **The Goal is the Obedience of Faith:** The purpose of the gospel being revealed is not just to give us information, but to bring about transformation—a life of joyful trust and obedience to God.
4. **All for God's Glory:** This is the ultimate purpose of everything. Your salvation, your growth, your life, the history of the world—it is all designed to culminate in praise "to the only wise God... forevermore."

Daily Challenge

You have finished the book of Romans! Your challenge today is to reflect and worship. Look back over your notes or simply think back on the past seven weeks. What is the single biggest truth or theme that has impacted you from this study? Turn that truth into a personal prayer of praise, echoing Paul's final words: "To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."

Prayer

Now to you, O God, who are able to strengthen me according to the gospel—thank you! Thank you for revealing the mystery that was kept secret but is now made known. I pray that my life would be an expression of the obedience that comes from faith. To you, the only wise God, be all the glory, all the honor, and all the praise, forevermore through my Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.