A horizontal watercolor brushstroke with a color gradient from orange at the top to blue at the bottom, serving as a background for the title.

# Romans

A circular watercolor laurel wreath composed of green and blue leaves, framing the central text.

Good News  
that Changes  
Everything

*A Bible Study by*

MELISSA SPOELSTRA

Romans



# Romans



Good News  
that Changes  
Everything

*A Bible Study by*

MELISSA SPOELSTRA

Abingdon Women  
Nashville

**Romans**  
Good News that Changes Everything

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# About the Author

**Melissa Spoelstra** is a popular women's conference speaker (including the Aspire Women's Events), Bible teacher, and author who is madly in love with Jesus and passionate about studying God's Word and helping women of all ages seek Christ and know Him more intimately through serious Bible study. Having a degree in Bible theology, she enjoys teaching God's Word to the body of Christ, traveling to diverse groups and churches across the United States and also to Nairobi, Kenya, for a women's prayer conference. Melissa is the author of the Bible studies *Elijah: Spiritual Stamina in Every Season*, *Numbers: Learning Contentment in a Culture of More*, *First Corinthians: Living Love When We Disagree*, *Joseph: The Journey to Forgiveness*, and *Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World* and the books *Dare to Hope: Living Intentionally in an Unstable World*, *Total Family Makeover: 8 Practical Steps to Making Disciples at Home*, and *Total Christmas Makeover: 31 Devotions to Celebrate with Purpose*. She is a regular contributor to the Proverbs 31 First Five App and the Girlfriends in God online daily devotional. She has published articles in *ParentLife*, *Women's Spectrum*, and *Just Between Us* and writes her own regular blog in which she shares her musings about what God is teaching her on any given day. Melissa lives in Pickerington, Ohio, with her pastor husband, Sean, and their four kids: Zach, Abby, Sara, and Rachel.

## Follow Melissa:



@MelSpoelstra



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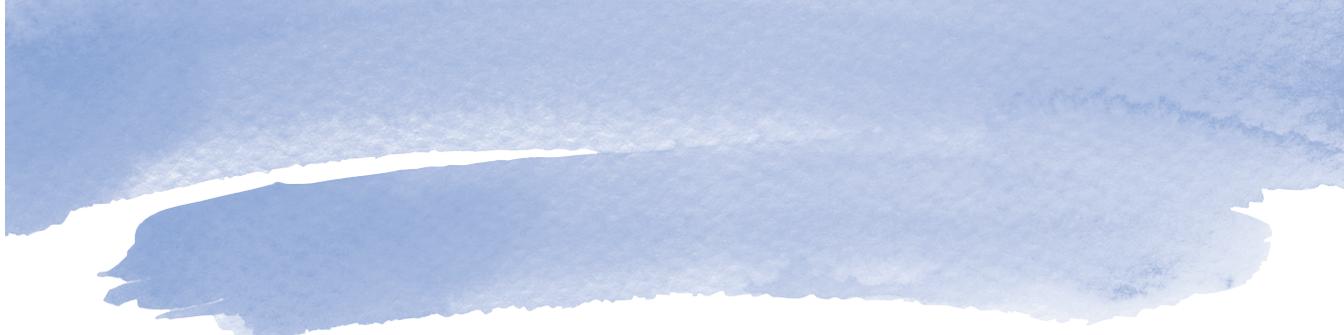


@Author MelissaSpoelstra

Her blog

MelissaSpoelstra.com

(check here also for event dates and booking information)



# Introduction to This Study

Bad news surrounds us. It comes through our computer and television screens with reports of natural disasters, violence, and tragedy. We encounter it in doctors' offices, strained relationships, and home or car repairs. And when those we love receive bad news, it compounds our personal pile of woes.

All of this bad news can overwhelm us and cause us to plead with Jesus to return . . . like today! In the midst of our complicated lives, we can drift toward cynicism, fear, or despair. As followers of Jesus, we need constant reminders that through all of our trials, we carry treasured good news for a broken planet.

Sin separates us from God, but Jesus came and laid down His life to reconcile us with God (2 Corinthians 5:18). Through Him we can have a relationship with the Creator of the universe. This is the gospel, which literally means "good news." As we study Romans over the next six weeks, we will mine the richness of this good news. The truths we will explore won't necessarily provide a quick fix for all the bad news in our lives, but they will give us perspective to reframe the bad news and remind us of our hope for the future.

This letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome has been a source of spiritual transformation and renewal throughout church history, impacting the lives of important leaders such as Saint Augustine, John Chrysostom, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Karl Barth, and many others. In fact, Luther acknowledged its power for all of us when he said, "We can never read it or ponder over it too much, for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes."<sup>1</sup> When we read and study this timeless letter, we cannot help being affected personally.

So, I invite you to join me in rediscovering the good news in your life through Paul's Letter to the Romans. Whether this is your first time through its pages or you've been a student of its truths for decades, get ready for transformation in your thinking, attitudes, and actions. Warren Wiersbe has said, "If you are tired of all the wrong things in your life, in the lives of others, and in this world, then Paul's epistle to the Romans is the book for you."<sup>2</sup>

Digging into Romans will require more than a cursory skimming. We cannot swallow the information whole or choke it down. We will want to chew on it. This will mean thinking and meditating on it, questioning it, discussing it alongside other believers, and



even memorizing some of it. Only then will we be able to properly digest its contents and perhaps encounter the spiritual renewal that so many before us have detailed in their studies of Romans.

So much has been written about Romans that I wondered whether more needed to be said. As I wrestled through this question, I resonated with one commentator who writes, “Each new generation deserves a fresh hearing of this ancient masterpiece.”<sup>3</sup> As we read the Bible today, we ask different questions from different angles; so we need to continually revisit the truths found in Paul’s longest letter. My prayer is that this study will help you do just that, bringing great hope and spiritual renewal into the practical realities of your own life.

Each week in our study we will cover two to three chapters of Romans. We will be highlighting significant concepts regarding the good news about six topics: faith, hope, daily life, God’s plan, relationships, and eternity. I don’t know what bad news you have received this week, but I do know that as we make this journey together, we will continually find good news to encourage and transform us.

## Options for Study

Before beginning the study, I invite you to consider the level of commitment your time and life circumstances will allow. I have found that what I put into a Bible study directly correlates to what I get out of it. When I commit to do the homework daily, God’s truths sink deeper as I take time to reflect and meditate on what God is teaching me. When I am intentional about gathering with other women to watch videos and have discussion, I find that this helps keep me from falling off the Bible study wagon midway. Also, making a point to memorize verses and dig deeper by looking at additional materials greatly benefits my soul.

At other times, however, I have bitten off more than I can chew. When our faith is new, our children are small, or there are great demands on our time because of difficult circumstances or challenges, we need to be realistic about what we will be able to finish. So this study is designed with options that enable you to tailor it for your particular circumstances and needs.

### **I. Basic Study.** The basic study includes five daily readings or lessons.

Each lesson combines study of Scripture with personal reflection and application (boldface type indicates write-in-the-book questions and activities), ending with a suggestion for talking with God about what you’ve learned and a “Big Idea” or takeaway from the lesson. On average you will need about twenty to thirty minutes to complete each lesson.



At the end of each week, you will find a Weekly Wrap Up to guide you in a quick review of what you've learned. You don't want to skip this part, which you'll find to be one of the most practical tools of the study. This brief exercise will help your take-aways from the lessons "stick," making a real and practical difference in your daily life.

When you gather with your group to review each week's material, you will watch a video, discuss what you are learning, and pray together. I encourage you to discuss the insights you are gaining and how God is working in your own life.

**2. Deeper Study.** If you want an even deeper study, there is a memory verses for each week (you'll find a memorization exercise at the end of each lesson) plus optional "Digging Deeper" articles available at [abingdonwomen.com/Romans](http://abingdonwomen.com/Romans). These articles are second level, more academic looks at some of the themes we didn't have the space to tackle in the regular flow of the study (for example, circumcision, baptism, essentials and nonessentials, and so on).

**3. Lighter Commitment.** If you are in a season of life in which you need a lighter commitment, I encourage you to give yourself permission to do what you can. God will bless your efforts and speak to you through this study at every level of participation.

Take time now to pray and decide which study option is right for you, and check it below.

- 1. Basic Study**
- 2. Deeper Study**
- 3. Lighter Commitment: I will \_\_\_\_\_.**

Be sure to let someone in your group know which option you have chosen to do so that you have some accountability and encouragement.

## **A Final Word**

Will you join me in taking a posture of listening and learning as we approach this powerful book packed with good news? Let's ask God to do a mighty work in and through us as we study so that we might be inspired with a spiritual renewal that spreads to those around us!

*Melissa*



# Introductory Background

## Authorship and Date

The apostle Paul's authorship of the book is largely undisputed (Romans 1:1). He likely wrote this letter to the Romans while visiting the church at Corinth.<sup>1</sup> Most scholars agree that Paul wrote the letter somewhere between AD 55 and 58, on his third missionary trip.<sup>2</sup>

Paul's scribe who wrote down the actual words of the letter was named Tertius (Romans 16:22).

## Purpose

Paul stated in his letter that he was planning to bring a financial gift to the church in Jerusalem before visiting the church in Rome, with later plans to bring the gospel to Spain.

Opinions differ on the exact purpose of the letter. While we will not go into detail about the many theories, here are a few representative views of various Bible commentators:

- Paul's letter explains justification by faith for the purpose of encouraging unity between the Gentiles (non-Jews) and Jewish believers.<sup>3</sup>
- The theme is salvation by faith, which brings life.<sup>4</sup>
- Romans is about the righteousness of God.<sup>5</sup>
- The letter is Paul's "official doctrinal statement" intended to introduce him to the church in Rome and win their support for evangelism to the nations.<sup>6</sup>

It seems that Paul did not have one overriding motive in writing his letter but several, as we see throughout the sixteen chapters. We cannot discuss Paul's motive or purpose without mentioning the debate among scholars regarding the individual versus corporate nature of this letter to the church at Rome. Many have highlighted the concept of a personal relationship with God found within its chapters. Luther's question, for example, was, "How can a sinner get right with a wrathful God?" Critics of this focus on the individual emphasize the corporate mindset of society during biblical times. I appreciate one commentator's view that both individual and corporate themes are interwoven in the letter, highlighting how the gospel or good news impacts people personally and in group contexts.<sup>7</sup>



## Key Verse

*For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”*

(Romans 1:16-17)

## Audience

Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church, which probably met in as many as five house or tenement churches (Romans 16:5, 10-11, 14-15). One commentator suggests that the total attendance would perhaps have been a few hundred since a large house church could accommodate fifty people for worship.<sup>8</sup>

## Relevance

Romans is dripping with references to the Hebrew Scriptures, which comprise a large part of our Old Testament—fifty-seven times Paul quotes from them. This shows us continuity between the Old and New Testaments and highlights Christ’s fulfillment of both the law and prophecies. We glimpse Christ as the Jewish Messiah who offers His grace to all—including Gentiles.

The theological and practical importance of the book for every Christian is captured in some of the descriptors it has been given. Contemporary commentators refer to Romans as:

- The Christian Magna Carta<sup>9</sup>
- The first systematic theology of the Christian faith<sup>10</sup>
- The chief part of the New Testament<sup>11</sup>
- Paul’s magnum opus<sup>12</sup>
- Paul’s spiritual trumpet<sup>13</sup>
- The Constitution of Universal Christianity<sup>14</sup>
- The most important of Paul’s writings<sup>15</sup>

Wow! I hope these references of significance don’t cause you to think that Romans is too lofty to be accessible. Throughout our study I believe you will resonate with the truths we’ll discover about God and people. My prayer is that you will personally encounter the good news that changes everything in your life!

Week 1

# Good News About Faith



**Romans 1–3**

## **Memory Verse**

*<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. <sup>17</sup>This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”*

*(Romans 1:16-17)*



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## DAY 1: THE POWER

---

As we begin our study through the letter to the Romans, I wonder what images today's title conjures up in your mind. Perhaps you are feeling powerful. I feel this way when I exercise self-control with chocolate, check things off my to-do list, or finish an extended time of prayer. Others of you might read the word *power* and question why a sense of powerlessness seems to pervade your life.

I can think of times when I've felt powerless. When my daughter cried herself to sleep because her hair was falling out in seventh grade due to the autoimmune disorder alopecia, I wished there was something I could do to make it better. When a friendship remained fractured after many repair attempts, I wanted a formula to fix it. Other times my inability to stick with a healthy eating plan, budget, or spiritual discipline reveals my struggle with self-control. Anyone else with me on this?

As we crack open the letter to the Romans, we will find reminders that we serve a powerful God who has good news for the people He created. This good news truly has the power to change everything in our lives. It may not erase all of the bad news or the powerlessness we feel in response to it, but God's good news can help us embrace His power and reframe our difficulties in light of that.

Before we dig into the text, take a moment to consider your spiritual posture right now.

**Are you resigned, indifferent, curious, expectant, or something else? Ask God to prepare you for our study and to show you His heart through His words in the Letter to the Romans. Pray silently or out loud, or write your prayer below:**

Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the longest and most theological of his letters. Many of his other letters were written from prison or during times of personal duress, but Paul penned his letter to the church at Rome during a season of relative calm in his life while in Corinth during his third missionary journey (sometime between AD 55 and 58).<sup>3</sup> At this point in Paul's ministry he had been preaching about Christ for almost twenty-five years. He had a wealth of experience in church planting and had had to apply his theology in practical ministry. He wrote Romans at a time when he could reflect on his beliefs and share with the Roman Christians the important truths that would prove

### Scripture Focus

Romans 1:1-17

### Digging Deeper

What exactly did Paul mean when he called the believers in Rome "saints"? How does this word apply to believers today? Check out the Digging Deeper article for Week 1, "The Saints," to find out (see [AbingdonWomen.com/Romans](http://AbingdonWomen.com/Romans)).

### Extra Insight

Paul's letters are often referred to as epistles. An epistle is a letter, especially a formal one.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally thirteen letters are ascribed to Paul, though only seven of the thirteen are undisputed in authorship.<sup>2</sup>



## Extra Insight

The word *gospel* is the Greek noun *euangelion* and means good news.<sup>4</sup>

foundational for church life. Knowing where Paul was in his life and ministry will aid us as we seek to interpret a letter that was intended for a specific audience during a particular time in history.

In order to cover the entire book in six sessions, we will not be able to study every verse in depth. Instead we will look for key ideas and themes that best help us understand and embrace the good news that changes everything.

In the very first section of Romans, we will find a greeting that was typical of ancient letters including a sender, recipient, and personal welcome.<sup>5</sup>

### Read Romans 1:1-7 and identify each of these elements:

Sender (1:1)	
Recipients (1:7a)	
Summary of Greeting (1:7b)	

### Fast Facts about Paul and the Roman Church

- Paul wrote more in his introduction to the church in Rome than in any other letter's opening words, likely because he didn't plant the Roman church and needed to spend more time developing an acquaintance.
- Paul had never visited the church at Rome at the time that he wrote this letter.
- We don't know for certain how the Roman church began, but some commentators suggest Roman Jews present at Pentecost (Acts 2:10) could have returned home to Rome and started the church.<sup>6</sup> Others mention that it may have been started by the partners in ministry that Paul met in other regions, who later traveled to Rome.<sup>7</sup>
- Paul eventually did make it to Rome, but he came in chains when he appealed to Caesar after his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 28:11-17). He lived under house arrest with a guard but was able to interact with believers in his home in Rome.

This is Paul's longest introduction of any letter perhaps because he felt he needed a greater introduction since he wasn't readily known to the congregation. Paul didn't plant the church at Rome and had never been able to visit it. We don't really know how the Roman church began.

### How did Paul describe himself in verse 1?



By calling himself a servant or slave (*doulos*) of Christ, Paul emphasizes his humility in belonging to Christ; but he tempers that with authority when he says he has been chosen by God to be an apostle. Right off the bat, he mentions the good news promised by the prophets. In this way, Paul establishes that God's new plan isn't so new. In fact, it is a fulfillment of the original plan to save us.

**Skim back through verses 1-7 and look for the word *power*. According to verse 4, whose power is it, and how was it used?**

*The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.*

*(Romans 8:11)*

**Now read Romans 8:11 in the margin, and describe how this power relates to a believer in Christ:**

If you are a follower of Christ, the Holy Spirit resides within you, giving you the same power that raised Jesus from the grave. When I think about all the difficulties in life, that truth encourages the socks off me. People I love get diseases, conflicts in relationships are inevitable, and events beyond my control abound. However, I am not a victim of my circumstances. I have the power of God living inside me to help me through all the brokenness in this world.

I hope the reality of the Holy Spirit's power in your life sinks deep into your soul today as you consider any area of your life where you have been feeling powerless. You have resurrection power living inside you. Now that is some good news for this day!

**Write a brief sentence of thanks to God for this power:**

**Read Romans 1:8-15 and jot down three thoughts or questions that stand out to you. (There are no right or wrong answers here; you can be as general or specific as you'd like.)**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Your responses might be totally different from mine, and that is okay! Here are a few of my thoughts:

- Paul mentions the good news in both verse 9 and verse 15, giving a sense of its priority for the letter.
- The faith of the Roman church was being talked about all over the world. Wow! What would it be like if our faith had that kind of impact today?
- Paul's prayer life, heart to serve, and intensity to spread the good news both convicts and inspires me.
- Paul wanted to encourage others but also recognized his own need to be encouraged. I want to admit my own spiritual needs more readily.

Okay, so I broke the rules and wrote four instead of three. So many rich truths are packed into these verses!

**Take a few moments and reflect on how these verses impact you personally. Ask the Lord what truths from Paul's words you most need to hear right now and what action steps you can take in response. Write them below:**

Now we are going to camp out on our memory verse for the week. Believe me, these are worth committing to memory!

**Take a moment to write Romans 1:16-17 in your own words below:**

We find good news in the fact that we can't earn God's love. He makes us right in His sight through faith alone. Theologians refer to this as *justification*. People often explain this word by suggesting we think of it as "just as if I'd never sinned." I like that, don't you? Paul uses judicial terms claiming that we are declared innocent even though we committed the crime of sin because justice was satisfied through Christ.

Let's take a moment to define the words *faith* and *power* found in these verses.



**Faith is the Greek word *pistis*.<sup>8</sup> Read the Extra Insight for a biblical definition of faith based on Hebrews 11:1, and then define faith in your own words below:**

**How do you want to grow in faith over the course of this study? Write any thoughts that come to mind below:**

**The Greek word for *power* is *dunamis*.<sup>9</sup> What English word do you think might be derived from this word (what sounds similar)?**

The English derivative is *dynamite*. Dynamite has sheer power to change a landscape. In the same way, the good news about Christ has the power to change the landscape of your life. It can transform your thinking, attitudes, and perspective. It can change our circumstances at times, but we can be sure it most definitely will change us.

**Have you experienced God's life-changing power in your life recently or in the past? If so, write briefly about it here:**

Whether or not you have seen the “dynamite” power of the good news of Jesus recently in your life, how would you like to see His power working in your life in the days and weeks ahead? Here are a few ideas to get you thinking, but don't limit yourself to these. Is there . . .

- a sin you'd like to overcome?
- a new thought pattern you'd like to embrace?
- a spiritual discipline you'd like to be more consistent in practicing?
- a sense of peace you'd like to maintain in a difficulty?

## Extra Insight

*Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.*

*(Hebrews 11:1)*

**The good news about Christ has the power to change the landscape of your life.**



Write some thoughts below:

The good news about Jesus is powerful. No matter where you may feel powerless today, I pray you will go forward through this day with a great sense of His presence and the same power that can raise the dead to life!

### Talk with God

*Lord, I need Your power. Help me to see You for who You are. You are all-knowing and all-powerful. Show me the places where I've been trying in my human effort when I need to rest in You. I long to understand and embrace what it means for Your Holy Spirit to be living in me. Help me to hear Your voice today. Amen.*

### Memory Verse Exercise

Read the Memory Verse on page 14 several times, and then fill in the blanks below as you recite it:

<sup>16</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ *not* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ *news* \_\_\_\_\_. *It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.*  
<sup>17</sup>*This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."*

(Romans 1:16-17)

#### Extra Insight: Important Concepts in Romans

Today we looked at the idea of *justification* in Romans 1:16-17. It's one of several important concepts we will consider in our study. Here's an overview of these terms and their meanings:

**Justification**—"Justification is a legal matter. God puts the righteousness of Christ on our record in the place of our own sinfulness."<sup>10</sup> Justification is an act, not a process, and no one can change it.

### Big Idea

Through faith in Christ we receive God's power!



**Reconciliation**—Reconciliation means “change” or “exchange.” “Reconciliation involves a change in the relationship between God and man or man and man. It assumes there has been a breakdown in the relationship, but now there has been a change from a state of enmity and fragmentation to one of harmony and fellowship.”<sup>11</sup>

**Sanctification**—“Sanctification is the process whereby God makes the believer more and more like Christ.”<sup>12</sup> Sanctification is not a one-time act but a continual process that may change from day to day.

**Redemption**—“Finding its context in the social, legal, and religious customs of the ancient world, the metaphor of redemption includes the ideas of loosing from a bond, setting free from captivity or slavery, buying back something lost or sold, exchanging something in one’s possession for something possessed by another, and ransoming.”<sup>13</sup>

**Salvation**—“Salvation is a broad concept. It includes the forgiveness of sins, but involves much more, because its basic meaning is soundness or wholeness.” It unites justification, reconciliation, sanctification, and redemption together.<sup>14</sup>

---

## DAY 2: THE GREAT EXCHANGE

---

I remember one of those moments when I needed some reassurance. My circumstances were screaming foul with what I knew to be true about God’s promises. Have you ever been there? I asked God if He could send me a tangible reminder that He is real. I remember praying something like, “Could you just write your name in the sky so everyone can have a sign of who you are?” As I sat still for a few moments, I looked up at a beautiful cobalt blue sky full of puffy clouds and laughed at my question. He made that sky, and it screamed of His existence. The words of Psalm 19 invaded my mind:

*The heavens proclaim the glory of God.*

*The skies display his craftsmanship.*

*Day after day they continue to speak;*

*night after night they make him known.*

*They speak without a sound or word;*

*their voice is never heard.*

*Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,*

*and their words to all the world.*

(Psalm 19:1-4a)

### Scripture Focus

Romans 1:18-32



**God has written His existence in the sky. What are some glimpses you've seen of God in creation recently?**

**Read Romans 1:18-20, and note below how God has revealed Himself to the world according to this passage. How are His attributes described?**

**God's visible creation helps make His invisible qualities known.**

We read in these verses that God's visible creation helps make His invisible qualities known. This is called natural revelation. And in verse 18 we read that when we suppress these truths found in the created world, God "shows his anger from heaven." That may conjure up ideas of someone lacking self-control, yet we know the fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). The Greek word for anger is *orge* and might better be translated "wrath." It is the response of a holy God toward sin (not the sinner) rather than the anger of an emotional person.<sup>15</sup> God's wrath against sin is revealed just as His salvation through Christ is revealed. We can't appreciate the good news of salvation without the bad news about sin.

**Read Romans 1:21-25 and answer the following questions:**

**People knew God, but what two things did they not do in response to their knowledge of God? (v. 21)**

**What happened to their thinking when they didn't glorify or thank God? (v. 21)**

**Instead of worshiping God, what did they worship? (v. 23)**

**What did they trade the truth of God for? (v. 25)**



Can you see the progression here?

Knew God but didn't worship or thank Him



Thought up foolish ideas about God



Minds became dark and confused



Claimed to be wise but became fools



Worshipped idols instead of God



God allowed them to follow their own desires

This entire picture can be described as a great exchange—the truth about God for a lie. It starts in the mind and culminates in actions. Specifically, we see idolatry and sexual sin presented here.

**How have you seen the progression that leads to this great exchange of truth for a lie played out in the world? You may give a general answer or a specific example.**

Now let's bring this a little closer to home as we look at our own minds and hearts.

**Read Romans 12:2 in the margin, and write below how we can keep from being conformed to this world:**

Our thought lives are secret places. It is here where we alone process the world around us and the feelings inside us. This includes our fantasies, judgments, worries, and self-talk. In our minds we make excuses, justify ourselves, and begin to suppress truth if we aren't careful. If we long to be transformed in our actions, it must start with the renewing of our minds. Sin affects our thinking before it affects our attachments and actions.

What is going on in your secret place lately? When it comes to your thought life, how can you relate personally to the progression we see in these verses? We all exchange God's truth for lies at times, so we need to ask the Holy Spirit

*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.*

*Romans 12:2 (ESV)*



to help us see our blind spots before they lead us down dangerous paths. Active sins often begin with small, subtle thoughts that progress to actions when left unchecked.

**Take a moment to write a prayer below asking the Lord to reveal any area of your life where you might be suppressing God's truth:**

We read in Romans 1:24 that God handed them over to their own sinful desires. We will find the same Greek verb, *paradidomi*, in verses 26 and 28, which means “to give into the hands (of another)” or “to give over into (one’s) power or use.”<sup>16</sup> Different Bible versions translate it different ways:

- “Gave them up” (ESV, KJV, NKJV)
- “Gave them over” (NASB, NIV)
- “Abandoned them” (NLT)

**Take another look at Romans 1:24-25. How do you interpret what it means to say that God “gives over” or “abandons” people in response to them exchanging truth for a lie?**

**The whole of Scripture shows a God who is loving and holy.**

The whole of Scripture shows a God who is loving and holy. He offered up His only Son as payment for the sin of the world in order to make a way to restore our relationship with Him. This is the great exchange that comes to my mind when I think about God. He exchanged His Son to redeem us. I must admit that the idea of a God who abandons His creatures when they get off track causes me to pause and ask questions—as it should, because God doesn’t abandon us when we mess up. These verses have a different meaning. It helps me think of it in terms of a good and loving parent.

When a child is disobedient, a loving parent never stops loving the child or desiring a relationship with the child. But if the child refuses that relationship, choosing to disobey and ignore the parent, then the parent must practice tough love, “abandoning” the child to the consequences of his or her choices. The same is true of God when we refuse His loving correction.

Scripture shows us that God’s holy nature demands that He react to sin (see Isaiah 57:15, Proverbs 8:13, 2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Thessalonians 4:7). If we aren’t careful, we can warp our understanding of the Christian faith when we fail to



understand God's holiness and hatred of sin.<sup>17</sup> In a culture that downplays sin and seems to glorify the acceptance of all behavior, I find my own soul forgetting about God's hatred of sin. Yet the Scriptures also tell us of the patience and mercy of God (see Exodus 34:6; Psalm 145:8; Micah 7:19; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). So what I see in these verses is a God who loves us and offers Himself but doesn't force Himself on us. If we consistently rebel against His way, He allows us to go down that course even though He sent His Word, prophets, and even His own Son to show us a better way.

As we read the last part of Romans 1, I invite us to have soft hearts. Rather than judging others, let's ask ourselves, "Lord, where have I sinned against you? How can I turn from my sin and follow you with a whole heart in light of all you have done in forgiving me through the blood of your Son?" Let's take the posture of King David, who said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; / test me and know my anxious thoughts. / Point out anything in me that offends you, / and lead me along the path of everlasting life" (Psalm 139:23-24).

**Read Romans 1:26-31, and then write verse 32 below:**

God says that sin is serious, yet we do it anyway. It says even worse than sinning is encouraging others to sin. This last verse puts us in a position where we desperately need the help of the Holy Spirit.

**What are some ways that we might encourage those who sin—  
whether knowingly or unknowingly?**

I wonder if sometimes our bad example, our ignorance, and either our silence or our verbosity can be a disservice to those around us. At the same time we must guard vigilantly against judgment, self-righteousness, and pride, knowing that we all struggle against sin. Don't you just want to be done with sin?

During a recent move, I ran across some of my college journals. As I read through my prayers written over twenty-five years ago, I was a little discouraged that I still struggle with some of the same issues I was praying about back then. Selfishness, laziness, lack of self-control, and prayerlessness have been persistent issues in my life. I see some growth for sure, but the battle against sin is never-ending. The moment I think I've conquered some area of life, I become prideful about it; and that can lead to . . . sin!



**Would you take a moment to be honest about some of the perennial battles with sin you face? Write a few of them below in admission that you struggle against sin like everyone else:**

I can't wait until we get to the part in Romans that reminds us one day we will shake off these dying bodies and finally be free from living on a planet cursed by sin. For now, we need God's wisdom. Let's remember that He is serious about sin and wants us to turn from it—not willfully partake in it and encourage others to do the same.

As we end, let's review the three major concepts we covered today.

**Check the concept that resonates with you most strongly, and contemplate the questions that follow it. Make notes in the margin if you want.**

\_\_\_ **God's natural revelation in creation (Could the Lord be calling you to get out in nature more often and appreciate His handiwork and glorify Him? How could you practically implement this in your daily/weekly routine?)**

\_\_\_ **The renewing of your mind (What have you been thinking about most lately? What are some ways you could be more intentional with your thought life?)**

\_\_\_ **Your sin habits (Where may you be exchanging God's truth for a lie when it comes to your behavior? How can you rediscover in your mind and heart God's holiness?)**

We are only in Day 2 of our study and already we're mining some deep and rich truths. As you begin to apply them in your life and see their value, I hope you'll be even more motivated to continue our exploration of Paul's Letter to the Romans.

### **Talk with God**

*Lord, I need You. Break the power of sin in my life. Give me victory as I seek to turn from my sins and turn toward You. Help me to hate sin the way You do, remembering that You always love me. If You tell me something isn't good for me, give me the grace to believe You and accept Your way. Amen.*



## Memory Verse Exercise

Read the Memory Verse on page 14 several times, and then fill in the blanks below as you recite it:

<sup>16</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ God \_\_\_\_\_,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Jew \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>17</sup>*This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."*

(Romans 1:16-17)

## Big Idea

God reveals Himself through creation and invites us to follow His way rather than give in to sinful desires.

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# DAY 3: THE SECRET LIFE

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This season in my life has been filled with watching high school football games under Friday night lights. I love being in the stadium, people-watching, and of course cheering for our home team. I notice an “us” against “them” construct at a sporting event. We want to win, and the other team is the enemy. However, we have to be careful of not carrying this kind of thinking out of the stadium and into other areas of life. We can find ourselves labeling people according to generational, political, moral, socioeconomic, or even religious categories, which tends to cause us to make judgments and set ourselves apart as right. I can even find myself doing this as I’m studying Romans, labeling the people in biblical times as “them” and the modern church as “us” and forgetting that we have similar struggles and victories.

**Can you think of some “us” against “them” divides that you have witnessed in conversations, on social media, or through movies or television? List one or two labels that come to mind below:**

We have different approaches to many things in life, but we must guard against overfocusing on distinctives rather than commonalities. While we can

## Scripture Focus

Romans 2:1-16

## Extra Insight

Paul’s references to Jews are directed to the descendants of Israel. The patriarch Jacob’s name was changed to Israel by the Lord, and his twelve sons were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. *Gentile* is the term used of anyone who was not a Jew by birth.



acknowledge our different choices or backgrounds, we need to be careful about writing a narrative of all people who worship, vote, or parent a certain way. We'll see Paul recognizing the "us" against "them" construct today in Romans 2, and we will need a little background information to help us understand the tone and direction of this segment of his letter.

The Roman church was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Roman Emperor Claudius expelled all of the Jews from Rome in AD 49.<sup>18</sup> This would have caused an exodus of 40,000-50,000 people of Jewish descent, including Jews who converted to Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Six years later Claudius died, and his edict was lifted by his successor Nero, allowing Jews to return to Rome in AD 54.<sup>20</sup> Paul's letter was likely written not long after the return of the Jews to Gentile churches. He wanted to draw them toward one another, which makes sense as we understand they were coming together after a separation that affected leadership responsibilities and church culture. You can imagine how this infected the church with "us" against "them" thinking that needed to be dispelled. Paul is the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles, so he is able to offer instruction while holding clout with both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Keep these historical facts in mind as we discover several key themes today regarding sin, judgment, and favoritism. These are inner life issues that take place in the hearts and minds of all people—those in Paul's day as well as in ours. God addresses these areas because they are the birthplace for attitudes and actions.

**Read Romans 2:1-4 below and circle the pronouns you find:**

***<sup>1</sup>You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. <sup>2</sup>And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. <sup>3</sup>Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? <sup>4</sup>Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?***

Did you happen to notice that there is a change from "they" and "them" in chapter 1 to "you" in these verses? As we saw in yesterday's lesson, Paul talked in chapter 1 about people who had abandoned God. He then encouraged the church at Rome to stop pointing out the sins of others and take a hard look at themselves.



**Look again at verse 4. What did Paul say is intended to turn them from their sin?**

Paul had been preaching the gospel for at least twenty-two years, so he had grown to anticipate the people's tendency to self-righteously think of others with worse sins rather than consider their own.<sup>21</sup> I wonder if you can relate. When you hear sermons, read Scripture, or attend a conference or retreat, do you ever think "so and so needs to hear this part"? (Like maybe your friend or husband or someone whose relation to you ends in "in-law"?) We all have a tendency to focus on those who, in our minds, are "worse" than we are. This keeps us from addressing our own sin issues. Paul points out that God's kindness is meant to cause us to repent, not to take advantage of His grace. This will be an important posture for us as we study Romans. As we study, let's commit now to attempt as best we can to look and listen for ways that we can change personally rather than think of others who need to change.

**Write a sentence of intent below stating your desire to respond to God's kindness rather than condemn others as we study:**

This next section may seem to fly in the face of Paul's good news that God makes us right in His sight by faith alone. But let's not forget that the title of this week's study is "Good News About Faith"!

**Read Romans 2:5-11, and write below any questions or comments that come to mind:**

**The first question that comes to mind for me is, "Is salvation a result of a person's good works or by faith alone?" How would you answer if someone asked you this question?**

I hope after reviewing our memory verse for the past two days, you will recall that Romans tells us that salvation is accomplished from start to finish



**We are declared innocent because of our faith in Christ, not by anything we have done to earn it.**

*<sup>8</sup>God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. <sup>9</sup>Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. <sup>10</sup>For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:8-10)*

by faith. So how are we to understand verse 6 that says, "He will judge everyone according to what they have done"?

I have read many commentators' opinions on how to understand this verse and others like it. What we must remember is that we will be judged by our works. All of us will be found guilty since none of us lives and acts in full accordance with God's law except for Christ. So we will be judged by what we have done, and all of humanity will fail that standard. But that is what makes the good news so good! Christ came and died for us to pay the penalty of our sin and save us from death and destruction. We are declared innocent because of our faith in Christ, not by anything we have done to earn it.

Of course, this doesn't mean we shouldn't do good things.

**Read Ephesians 2:8-10 in the margin. Why are we created anew in Christ Jesus?**

**Which comes first—our salvation or our good works?**

The only way we can escape judgment from sin and have the power to do good in life is through faith alone. When we believe God's Word and turn away from our sin in faith, the outworking of that in our life will result in doing good works. The order is crucial here!

It's not... Do good works → then God will save us.

Rather, it's... Believe God's good news by faith → which results in good works.

In the midst of Paul's letter to the Roman Christians with its emphasis on doctrine or belief, we don't want to lose sight of the grace of God. As we try to balance God's justice and mercy, we must remember that mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). We must always look for God's heart and not get tripped up on isolated phrases.

**Now read Romans 2:12-15, and label each statement with a "J" if it pertains to the Jews or a "G" if it pertains to the Gentiles:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **1. When they sin, they will be destroyed even though they never had God's written law. (v. 12)**



- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. They have God’s law and will be judged by it when they don’t obey it. (v. 12)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. They don’t have God’s written law, but they prove they know it by obeying it. (v. 14)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. God’s law is written on their hearts, and their conscience either condemns them or tells them they are doing right. (v. 15)

**Why do you think Paul distinguishes between Jews and Gentiles so much in this chapter?**

Paul is trying to bring both groups together and help them see that God truly doesn’t practice favoritism. He wants them to remember that they are all equal—in consequences of sin and judgment and in grace through faith.

**What would you identify as Paul’s main message from Romans 2:1-15?**

**Now read Romans 2:16 and paraphrase it below:**

Paul seems to sum up his message succinctly in this verse. He clearly states that everyone is going to be judged, and no one is able to do enough to warrant salvation. We all must humbly come to God in faith, confessing our need for Him and our inability to be good enough in our human strength. Paul is undercutting those who depend on their limited obedience to the law for salvation. He wants the Roman church to get away from the Jew versus Gentile categories as an “us” against “them” construct. He wants them to see each other as people who recognize their need for God and turn to Him in faith—no longer seeking to live for themselves but coming together in pursuit of God.



## How can we in the church today acknowledge distinctions while still focusing on commonalities?

God made us unique with different personality types, backgrounds, and gifts. We should celebrate our differences without mentally categorizing people with an “us” against “them” construct. It is often in our thoughts and heart attitudes that favoritism takes place. That is the place where Christ looks, so we must evaluate our secret lives.

**Take some time to reflect on your private thought life. Where has favoritism, judgment, or shame crept in? Write a brief prayer below inviting God into the secret places of your heart and mind:**

Remember, it is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance. Don’t let these verses about judgment bring any shame! They are meant to convict us but never condemn us (Romans 8:1). May we all focus on the Lord’s patience and kindness as we seek to grow deeper in our faith through our study of Romans.

### Talk with God

*Lord, I need You desperately. Help me to lay down my microscope and pick up my mirror. Change me in my secret places so I can love and serve from a place of humility and authenticity. Amen.*

### Memory Verse Exercise

**Read the Memory Verse on page 14 several times, and then fill in the blanks below as you recite it:**

<sup>16</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ **God** \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_ **Jew** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. <sup>17</sup>**This** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ **right** \_\_\_\_\_ **sight. This is accomplished**

### Big Idea

In the secret places of our hearts and minds we invite Christ to help us view others, ourselves, and God correctly.



*from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."*

**(Romans 1:16-17)**

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## DAY 4: A CHANGED HEART

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What kind of gear, gadgets, or stuff do you tend to gather? Is it sports equipment, clothing, or home decor? Clutter is my enemy, and I like to keep things pretty simple. Someone recently described my decorating style as "sparse." I'm not sure if that was a compliment, but I'll own it. I mean, I love a delivery box at my door like the next girl, but mine are usually filled with household items or commentaries. Then it hit me: if I collect anything, it is commentaries. Right now I'm staring at a stack of them, and it makes me happy just to be near the words written by great theologians of the past and present.

### **Scripture Focus**

Romans 2:17–3:8

**Okay, it's your turn. What is something you collect, or what paraphernalia for a hobby or interest do you get giddy to purchase?**

Where am I going with all this talk about stuff? Today we will delve into Paul's teaching that gets at the heart of our faith. He helps us see that we can overfocus on the stuff of our spirituality to the point that we miss the heart of it. It would be like a runner who got so excited about his or her specialized watch, shoes, or fanny pack that the actual running became ancillary to the gear. This can happen to the best of us. It certainly happened to some of the Jews who got caught up in the laws and rituals and lost sight of the God behind it all. This would be tantamount to us worshipping the Bible rather than the God who inspired it.

As we study today, we are going to focus on three key statements: 1) Take a Look (2:17-24), 2) Give Up (2:25-29), and 3) Get Real (3:1-8). Let's get started!

### **Take a Look**

Before we read Romans 2:17-24, I want to help you understand something about Paul's style. He is using an ancient debating technique known as diatribe in which "the proponent of a position anticipated opponents' criticisms by raising those points before they did."<sup>22</sup> You'll see Paul's use of irony and argument as he seems to know what the audience might be thinking as he is writing.



**Go ahead and read Romans 2:17-24, and write below how the Jews Paul was writing to saw themselves (vv. 17-20):**

**Now list what Paul accused them of doing in verses 21-24:**

**What irony is highlighted in verse 23?**

Paul seems to be saying, “Take a look in the mirror of God’s law and see yourselves. You are boasting, but you’ve failed to see your own sins because of your pride and condemnation of others.” In verse 24 Paul refers to Isaiah 52:5 where the prophet speaks of deliverance. They were headed into exile to Assyria because they failed to show the surrounding nations God’s nature. Instead the people around them blasphemed God because of their poor example. They needed to take a look and grow in self-awareness. Here Paul hits right at the heart of the disconnection between what we teach and how we live.

God’s Word is a mirror. We need to regularly “take a look” so we can see clearly where we need to realign with God’s heart and mission. We don’t want to get so caught up with the letter of His Words that we miss the spirit of them. We would never want those around us to be turned off to our God because of our lack of self-awareness. God has called us to be a light to those around us just as He entrusted the Jews with His message.

**Take a few minutes now to “take a look” in the mirror of God’s Word. Ask God to reveal any areas where your profession and your practice are inconsistent. Jot a few notes below regarding places where you need to take a closer look to see yourself more accurately:**

## **Give Up**

My tendency after I have taken a look and seen the incongruity in my prayer life, the way I treat my family, or my attitude toward poverty is to start working



a plan to fix it. (Anybody with me?) But the next section of Scripture reminds us that rather than trying to work this out in our own strength, God calls us to give up. Yep, you read that right.

**Read Romans 2:25-29 and write below how God defines a true Jew:**

Paul didn't launch into a diatribe style here, talking about working harder at serving God in anticipation of potential questions or objections. Instead he tells them that the only way to God is a change of heart that is produced by the Spirit. If the law was a major distinctive of the Jews, then circumcision was a close second; and many had placed unwarranted confidence in this practice.

**What are some Christian practices or traditions that people sometimes elevate above the heart behind it?**

Our traditions and ordinances are beautiful things meant to point us to spiritual truths. Communion, baptism, praise music, Bible translations, or even the crosses used to adorn our churches can be twisted into pride issues that cause us to war with each other rather than point to Christ.

This is why, after taking a look, we need to give up. We give up on our efforts to be righteous apart from faith. We give up trusting in the sacraments, practices, people, buildings, or ministries that surround our faith, putting our trust in Christ alone. This is the good news about faith. We don't just start with faith and then work at living for God with effort.

**Is there an area where you have been trying to follow God in your own strength? Where is the Lord calling you to give up? Write a prayer below admitting your need and asking the Holy Spirit to change your heart in that area:**

## Get Real

So we have learned that God's law is a mirror and we need to take a look. It also reminds us that we can't fulfill its requirements by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and trying harder. Now let's discover how God's law calls us to get real!

## Extra Insight

Circumcision is the removal of the foreskin of a male child, which happened eight days after birth in Jewish culture. It was a sign that the whole nation was dedicated to God (Genesis 17:10).

**The only way to God is a change of heart that is produced by the Spirit.**

## Extra Insight

Theologians came up with a term to describe how the Jews entered their covenant with God by faith and then tried to stay in the covenant by obeying the law. It is called covenantal nomism.<sup>23</sup>



**Read Romans 3:1-8 and write below what is revealed about God's character:**

Paul used a verse from the Hebrew Scriptures to substantiate his point. At the end of verse 4 Paul quotes Psalm 51:4. David wrote this psalm after he was confronted about his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, and he was agreeing that God's judgment was right. Paul is showing that God remains faithful even when humans are not.

God is faithful and true. His law was never intended to save but to reveal our inability to fulfill it. When we discover the futility of our attempts at obedience to the law, it brings us to God, aware of our need to believe Him by faith. But here is another point where Paul headed the reader off at the pass. Using the logic that our unfaithfulness points to God's grace, he knew objections would surface saying that we should sin more to highlight God's grace. In Romans 6:1-2 he laid it out even more clearly: "Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?" Another parental metaphor may be helpful here.

**Even if you aren't a parent, imagine someone you love is in your care. You don't want this person to obey and make wise choices to earn your love. You already love her or him to pieces. What, then, would your motive be for wanting your loved one to do right things?**

As a parent, I greatly desire for my children to choose wisely because I love them. I know that God's way leads to life and sin brings suffering. God loves us, and He has connected faith and faithfulness. When people believe God from a place of authenticity, positive changes happen that lead to life. Out of a transformed heart comes a transformed life.

God used the law to help His people get real about their lives. He wants us to get real about ours too.

**Turn back to Romans 2:29, and write below one of the marks of a person with a changed heart:**



Any other people pleasers out there? God says one of the ways we can test the state of things in our hearts is to look at where we seek praise. As we get real with the Lord, we discover that He is truly our audience of One.

**Take a moment to record below any truths that stood out to you from our three areas of study today:**

**Take a Look:**

**Give Up:**

**Get Real:**

Like those Paul is addressing in these verses, we have similar tendencies toward turning toward symbols, practices, and human effort to prop ourselves up. We have to constantly evaluate where the affections of our hearts lie. My prayer today is that as we grow in faith, we will grow in faithfulness.

### **Talk with God**

*Lord, I want to understand the way You are calling me to take a look and see myself from Your perspective. Show me where I need to give up striving and turn toward You. Help me to get real about who You are. You are the truth, and You are always faithful. I want to be like You and to seek approval from You rather than look for validation in the eyes of people. Thank You for the good news about faith today! Amen.*

### **Memory Verse Exercise**

**Read the Memory Verse on page 14 several times, and then fill in the blanks below as you recite it:**

<sup>16</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ **God** \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_ — **Jew** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. <sup>17</sup>**This** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Big Idea**

God's law helps us take a look, give up, and get real as we seek to understand the good news about faith.



\_\_\_\_\_ right \_\_\_\_\_ sight. This \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

*As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."*

**(Romans 1:16-17)**

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## DAY 5: BAD NEWS AND GOOD NEWS

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### Scripture Focus

Romans 3:9-31

Has anyone ever asked you if you want the good news or the bad news first? My husband loves to start conversations that way. I always want the bad news first. I want to get the dread out of the way so I can fully appreciate whatever the good news might be. Paul operated in the same way when it came to the good and bad news. He starts with the bad stuff. In order for us to appreciate this good news about Christ, we first have to understand the bad news about sin. Paul has taken the time to be sure the Roman church doesn't trust in themselves—either in their heritage as Jews or in their lack of the law as Gentiles—as a way to excuse their depravity. He wants them to understand they are all on a level playing field when it comes to sin problems. No one has an edge over another. Basically, we are all a hot mess.

**Read Romans 3:9-20 and summarize the point Paul wants to drive home in one sentence:**

Sin entered the world when our great-great-great-(and a whole bunch of other "greats") grandparents Adam and Eve chose to give in to temptation and disobey God's instructions. They passed down the tendency toward sin so that now everyone is born knowing instinctively how to do it. We all battle the flesh or sin nature, and the law reveals our inability to live according to God's instructions. Praise God that through Christ we can experience victory and obedience to God!

Once again Paul turns to the Hebrew Scriptures to prove his point about sin.

**Read the following passages and underline any phrases or statements that correspond with the verses we just read from Romans 3:**



<sup>1</sup>*Only fools say in their hearts,  
“There is no God.”  
They are corrupt, and their actions are evil;  
not one of them does good!*

<sup>2</sup>*The Lord looks down from heaven  
on the entire human race;  
he looks to see if anyone is truly wise,  
if anyone seeks God.*

<sup>3</sup>*But no, all have turned away;  
all have become corrupt.  
No one does good,  
not a single one!”*

**(Psalm 14:1-3)**

*Their tongues sting like a snake;  
the venom of a viper drips from their lips.*

**(Psalm 140:3)**

*Their mouths are full of cursing, lies, and threats.  
Trouble and evil are on the tips of their tongues.*

**(Psalm 10:7)**

*Their feet run to do evil,  
and they rush to commit murder.  
They think only about sinning.  
Misery and destruction always follow them.*

*They don't know where to find peace  
or what it means to be just and good.*

*They have mapped out crooked roads,  
and no one who follows them knows a moment's peace.*

**(Isaiah 59:7-8)**

Paul didn't come up with his illustrations for sin on his own. He drew them right out of the Hebrew Scriptures. Did you notice the references to body parts in these passages? Sin is associated with the tongue, mouth, heart, and even feet.

## **Extra Insight**

Paul was a Jewish scholar who studied under a prestigious rabbi named Gamaliel before he met Christ on the Damascus road. His breadth of understanding in the Scriptures helps him speak with authority.



**What is your reaction to the strong language used here regarding sin?  
Write any thoughts or questions that come to mind from these verses:**

Okay, we have waded through the bad news pretty thoroughly. What we find is that because sin entered the world through the choice of Adam and Eve, we are prone to sin. Our problem is not just a knowledge issue, or Jesus could have come and given us more knowledge. Only a Savior paying the penalty can free us from sin. If there was another way, why would God sacrifice his own Son? The sacrificial system of the Israelites reveals that only a perfect blood sacrifice could atone for sin (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). Jesus Himself said that He is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

So, sin is the bad news. It's important to temper this message about sin with the recognition that we are made in God's image and have great value as His beloved creation. That's why He sent His Son to save us from sin. So although the bad news of sin can be discouraging, it brings us to God and some very good news!

Let's camp for the rest of the day on the good news.

**Read Romans 3:21-31 and write below how you would explain the message found in these verses to a person who had never heard it before:**

I remember sharing this message with a neighbor sitting in a restaurant. Her daughter had attended a backyard Bible club at our home and had responded to this message in faith. I felt the Holy Spirit nudging me to explain what had been taught to her daughter and how she had responded. When I told my neighbor about everyone being a sinner and faith in Christ being the only way to God, she said this: "So you are saying that I could be a good person my whole life and try to do what's right and not believe in God, and some rapist or murderer could choose to believe in Christ by faith and he would go to heaven and I wouldn't."

Ouch. How would you have answered that?

I said this, "My understanding of what God says in His Word is that forgiven people go to heaven rather than good people. How would you know when you have been good enough?" My friend thought that all sounded pretty crazy to her.



However, later that year after we had more conversations and she read a book I shared with her, she told me that this faith stuff was beginning to make more sense to her.

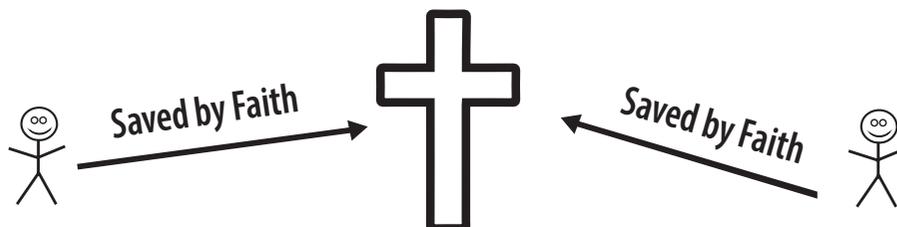
I share this to say that I realize these words may not sound like good news to everyone—at least not at first. If that’s you, I want to encourage you to hang in there through our study of Romans. Keep asking questions, being honest, and seeking God. He can handle every doubt or hang-up we have.

Romans 3:23 reminds us that we all fall short of God’s glorious standard apart from Christ. If we were all standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon trying to throw our “goodness” rock to reach the other side, we all would fail to get it across. There are some really amazing people who have lived incredible lives for God. I’m thinking Mother Teresa could hurl her “goodness” rock a pretty good distance. But no one could make it all the way to the other side. The chasm is too great. But in Christ, our faith is enough!

Paul wanted the Romans to be clear on what God had done and how it impacted their lives in every way. *It is the good news that changes everything.* Christ’s death and resurrection bridges the gap between a Holy God and sinful people. He even helped them understand how those who lived before Christ were affected by this good news.

### What do we learn in Romans 3:25-26 about those who lived in the past?

The old covenant wasn’t a mistake that God scrapped when it didn’t seem to work out. From the start, the first covenant foreshadowed and pointed to Christ. Before the promised Messiah, the Christ, stepped out of eternity and into time, men and women believed by faith in His coming, and righteousness was credited to them.



We have the benefit of hindsight to believe with even more knowledge and understanding of the promised Messiah. In this passage Paul used metaphors germane to the original audience such as the courts, commerce, and religious system:



**Courts:** In Romans 3:24, Paul used judicial language in saying that we are “declared” righteous, which is referred to as justification. The penalty of sin had been taken away.<sup>24</sup>

**Commerce:** When he speaks of redemption in Romans 3:24 it means “to liberate by paying a price.” . . . In Paul’s day the [word] referred to the way in which people could pay money to buy the freedom of slaves or prisoners of war.<sup>25</sup>

**Religious System:** In Romans 3:25 Paul also uses a religious term, *propitiation*, referring to the cover of the Ark of the Covenant in the temple.<sup>26</sup> The readers of this letter would have associated the word *propitiation* with the sacrificial system where the blood of an animal represented the cleansing of sin through blood. These sacrifices were shadows that hinted at the sacrifice of Christ.

**Let these metaphors sink in as you think of your own life. Even if you are not feeling innocent, free, and worthy today, God says you are.**

**Take a moment to write your name in the blanks below:**

\_\_\_\_\_ has been declared righteous even though

\_\_\_\_\_ has done wrong.

\_\_\_\_\_ is freed from slavery to sin.

**God’s wrath is satisfied through the blood of Christ so**

\_\_\_\_\_ can freely enter the most holy place to spend eternity with God.

**Write a brief prayer of response to the above statements asking the Lord to help you see yourself the way He sees you:**

**When we live in the light of God’s love for us, our faith spurs us on to love freely.**

When we live in the light of God’s love for us, our faith spurs us on to love freely. God’s message to us in Romans 1–3 is not:

- Try harder.
- Work more.
- Earn your way.
- Clean yourself up.



It is two simple words: *Have faith.*

So this is where we start—believing that we all fall short of God’s glorious standard and need a Savior. We believe that Christ died for our sins. By faith we come to God and choose to follow Him. Perhaps this is the first time you are hearing this good news. If so, that is amazing, and I pray these truths will continue to soak in as we continue our study in Romans. Or perhaps you’ve heard this good news before—maybe for years; maybe even as long as you can remember. Our journeys of faith may look very different, but the object of them is the same. Our faith is in Christ alone.

### Talk with God

*Lord, I need You. Thank You so much for the cross where Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice for sin and declared us righteous. Thank You for this good news about faith. Help me to stop doing and start being who You say that I am. Amen.*

### Memory Verse Exercise

Read the Memory Verse on page 14 several times, and then fill in the blanks below as you recite it:

<sup>16</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ **God** \_\_\_\_\_,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ — **Jew** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_<sup>17</sup>**This** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ **right** \_\_\_\_\_ **sight. This**  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ **As** \_\_\_\_\_, “ \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_.”

(Romans 1:16-17)

### Weekly Wrap Up

Review the Big Idea for each day, and then write any personal application that comes to mind.

*Day 1: The Power*

**Big Idea: Through faith in Christ we receive God’s power!**

**Personal Application:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Big Idea

While we find bad news in sin’s power to separate us from God, we rejoice that Christ died to satisfy the penalty of sin and bring us back into fellowship with God.



*Day 2: The Great Exchange*

**Big Idea:** God reveals Himself through creation and invites us to follow His way rather than give in to sinful desires.

**Personal Application:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Day 3: The Secret Life*

**Big Idea:** In the secret places of our hearts and minds we invite Christ to help us view others, ourselves, and God correctly.

**Personal Application:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Day 4: A Changed Heart*

**Big Idea:** God's law helps us to take a look, give up, and get real as we seek to understand the good news about faith.

**Personal Application:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Day 5: Bad News and Good News*

**Big Idea:** While we find bad news in sin's power to separate us from God, we rejoice that Christ died to satisfy the penalty of sin and bring us back into fellowship with God.

**Personal Application:** \_\_\_\_\_

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